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BILDUNGSROMAN WRITING BY WOMEN IN AFRICA AND IN THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

AMOS DAUDA BIVAN

STUDENT NUMBER: 3900154

SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR NKOSINATHI SITHOLE

Co-SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR HERMANN WITTENBERG

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A dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor Philosophiae in the Department of English, University of the Western Cape

SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR NKOSINATHI SITHOLE

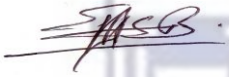
Co-SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR HERMANN WITTENBERG

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis, "*Bildungsroman* writing by women in Africa and in the African Diaspora", is my original work and has not been submitted in any form for any other degree. I have given due credit to the sources I consulted.

Name: Amos Dauda Bivan

Student number: 3900154

Signed: 

Date: August 2, 2023

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all women, sisters, and friends who have experienced violence, oppression, or marginalization on some level.

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The short telephone conversation between me and Professor Ogaga Okuyade in October 2017 on the *Bildungsroman* genre ignited my passion for my interrogation of the women's brand of the genre, which I have explored for four years. Along the way, a number of people, scholars, and colleagues made important contributions to the development of the thesis. Professors Nkosinathi Sithole and Hermann Wittenberg, my supervisor and co-supervisor, have given me useful feedback and advice at every step of the way in writing this thesis. Dominic James Aboi of the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria and Sunday Otse of the Benue State University gave me constructive criticisms when my intellectual lens became blurry at some point. Paul Adamu's painstaking proofreading of my thesis draft is highly appreciated. Timothy Marcus, the Registrar of the Kaduna State College of Education Gidan-Waya, Kafanhan, Nigeria, and Barrister Chris N. Unchenna have been wonderful and detribalized senior colleagues that have given me all the encouragement and support needed throughout this intellectual voyage. In every step of the way, I have had the unflinching support of my family, Deborah, Doreen, Marble, Ayok, Tehila, and loved ones, who have constantly encouraged me to persevere even when I had nearly given up due to health issues. The Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) of Nigeria, my sole sponsor, is profoundly appreciated for sponsoring my study at the University of the Western Cape. Others who have helped this good cause in different ways and are too many to name such as Ibrahim Maitala, Dr. Friday Alaji, Dr. Ayuba Mamman, Dr. Grace Ayuba Mamman, I.D. Bawa, Lucy Shamma, Zephaniah Jatau, Katung Kwasu and Rita Bala are also very much appreciated. Above all, I will always be grateful to God for giving me life and for healing me when I had some health challenges during this journey.

ABSTRACT

The *Bildungsroman* has from inception traditionally been a male-dominated genre, but a number of significant women-authored novels written in the 20th century disrupt these established patterns. The thesis demonstrates how women authors of African descent are deconstructing, reappropriating, and reimagining the *Bildungsroman* genre to create space for black women protagonists in various geohistorical contexts. The thesis employs a critical framework that draws on concepts from Helen Tiffin's idea of counter-discourse narratives, as well as discourses on feminist criticism more generally. *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, *The Colour Purple* by Alice Walker, *Maru* by Bessie Head, *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Beyond the Horizon* by Amma Darko, and *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie are among the novels by African and African-American women writers analysed for this study using such frameworks. As opposed to the individualistic male protogonists of traditional *Bildungsromane*, the texts examined in this thesis are found to demonstrate a sense of sisterhood instead of male heroic self-actualisation. Instead of the *Bildungsroman's* typical story arc, which involves the development of a European young male character into adulthood these novels exemplify collective female experience.

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INTRODUCTION

The *Bildungsroman* is an important Western literary genre that has influenced literature all over the globe. It initially emerged in German literature in the 18th century. Due to its concentration on that specific genre, this thesis carefully investigated the *Bildungsroman's* different strands, from the conventional to the feminine version of the genre. It has also examined the ways in which female writers have altered the *Bildungsroman* to suit their own needs. In the chapter that follows, postcolonial literature is carefully explained, along with recent examples of the genre as it is being repackaged and refashioned by black women writers in the US, Africa, and some fragments of the diaspora. But first, some fundamental concepts are jotted to lay the foundation for that analysis. In foreign languages, the *Bildungsroman*—possibly the most common literary genre in Germany—is often referred to by its German name. It often depicts a young man leaving his small-town background to seek his intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual potential in a big city. This novel setting enables the growth of wisdom and maturity in either a friendly or hostile setting. The genre's founding work, Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre (*Wilhelm Meister's Apprentice*, 1796) by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1794–1796), (Curran, J. V., & Curran, J. V. 2002) is often cited as preeminent example.

The *Bildungsroman's* precursors were the picaresque and religious memoirs. The essay on the novel by Christian Friedrich von Blanckenburg is where the *Bildungsroman* was first recognised as a literary subgenre (1774). The genre's name was given by Karl Morgenstern in 1803. Hegel mocked it by claiming that its typical protagonist is ultimately a "Philistine like everybody else" in a statement from *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807) that is commonly quoted. Wilhelm Dilthey established *Wilhelm Meister* as the genre's precursor by officially defining the *Bildungsroman* in his biography of Friedrich Schleiermacher, which was published in 1870 (Golban 2017).

Herder, Goethe, Schiller, and Humboldt all endorsed *Bildung* in the eighteenth century as a humane concept of natural growth and the fulfilment of human creativity via active involvement with the outside world. In actuality, only skilled, middle-class men had access to it. Developing one's inherent talents and integrating into a broader community are the main goals of *Bildung*. The effect of social or cultural factors cannot be separated from the complex blend of human behaviour known as *Bildung*. The model of autonomy and the requirements of assimilation often clash. As a result, Golban (2017) agrues that there are many similarities amongst the *Bildungsroman*, the *Erziehungsroman* (a book of learning), the *Entwicklungsroman* (a book of growth), and the entrance narrative. Other masterworks of the genre include Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914), Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage* (1915–1946), Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (1924), and *Günter Grass's Die Blechtrom*.

After reviewers started paying close attention to the genre in the latter half of the 20th century—among them Martin Swales, Jeffrey Sammons, Franco Moretti, and Todd Kontje—the name "*Bildungsroman*" began to be used more often. In recent years, however, scholars like Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, and Susan Fraiman have reexamined the idea of *Bildung* in terms of race and gender, focusing on the possible stories of the female, black, and post-colonial *Bildungsroman*, like Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915), *The Member of the Wedding* by Carson McCullers from 1946, *Sula* by Toni Morrison from 1973, and *The Black Album* by Hanif Kureishi from 1995 all come to mind (Leung 2019). However, the *Bildungsroman's* initial emergence and subsequent growth in English Victorian fiction were likewise constrained by an exclusively male growth, and it was not until the rise of creative modernism, in which

authors like Virginia Woolf adapted the genre for their specific purposes, displaying its ability to depict the developmental paths of women.

The Bluest Eye (1973), *The Color Purple* (1983), *Maru* (1971), *Nervous Conditions* (1988), *Beyond the Horizon* (1995), and *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) are among the works Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Bessie Head, Tsitsi Dangarembga, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, respectively used to appropriate the *Bildungsroman* genre for their African and African transnational fictions. In order to support and elaborate on the thesis' justification for its claim by the six (6) key texts, Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* (1973) and Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1991) will also be quoted. The women writers' adoption of the *Bildungsroman* tradition, as used in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), emphasises the commonality of their own experiences. These interactions have continued to be a turning point in women authors' work, continuing the form of the repurposed *Bildungsroman*. Woolf extensively discusses the function of the female character in her development process by recognising the absence of the female figure from the central narrative of the *Bildungsroman*. The term "appropriation" is taken from Ashcroft et al. (2000) to describe how post-colonial communities adopt elements of colonial civilization that could be useful to them in expressing their cultural and social personalities, such as language, writing styles, film, theatre, and even ways of thinking and argumentation like rationality, reason, and investigation (Ashcroft et al., 2000). In order to "articulate" their socio-cultural identities as women in literature and society, the women authors have adopted the *Bildungsroman* genre as "modes of thought and argument."

The term "post-colonialism" refers to the study of how colonisation has affected civilizations and societies. The word "post-colonial," as it was first popularized by historians after World War II in phrases like the "post-colonial state," required a distinctly sequential connotation, identifying the time after liberation. However, literary critics have been using the phrase to the diverse cultural legacies of imperialism in the late 1970s. Although research on

the dominating influence of representation in colonised countries had already started (Ashcroft et al., 2000, p. 168), to thrive, it is without a doubt to stress that postcolonial theory examines socio-cultural and political issues as well as ethnic and national identities that are part of the colonial dichotomy includes the "coloniser" and the "colonised," the "centre" and the "periphery," the "Orient" and the "Occident," as presented in the various perspectives of the theory's well-known proponents, including Edward Said, Gayatri C. Spivak, Homi Bhabah, Franz Fanon, and with the release of Edward Said's major text, *Orientalism* (1978), in the late 1970s, this idea gained widespread attention. The postcolonial text has created a place for the expression of the voices of the Others in literature and culture, including women, lesbians, queers, homosexuals, and bisexuals, as a result of these binaries becoming literary critique tropes. To explain the intricate interaction seen between the foregoing paradigms, postcolonial philosophy engages with and draws on poststructuralist ideas like deconstruction. The term "post-colonialism" is now used in a range of circumstances, such as the investigation and examination of imperial territorial conquests, the major entities of European imperialisms, the dialectical activities of territory… in European colonialism and opposition of such subjects and maybe most pertinently, the divergent reactions to certain infiltrations and their modern cultural colonial legacies across both political and cultural terms. While historically focusing on the creative output of such societies, its application is more common in terms of history, politics, sociology, and the economy assessments as these fields continue to examine the effects of European empire on global society (Ashcroft et al., 2000).

It is important to note that academics have debated and continue to argue the words "post-colonial" and "postcolonial" alone without a hyphen. The word "post-colonial" is used here to denote some form of civilization that has been impacted by imperial powers from the beginning of colonialism to date, following Ashcroft et al. (1989, p. 2) in *The Empire Writes Back*. It has to be acknowledged that independence has not addressed this issue, as all colonised

states are indeed exposed to one degree or alternative to blatant or delicate types of neo-colonial rule (Ashcroft et al., 2003). Ashcroft et al. and the author of this research believes that there exists a continuum of fixations across the evolutionary context, which began with European territorial expansion. To paraphrase Fanon (1961), "postcolonialism" (without the hyphen) is a discussion and rhetoric that examines individuality, acculturation, class, race, sex, gender, and the subjugation of women while focusing on the suffering of the dispossessed, the "Other," the oppressed or suppressed, and the depraved of the earth. This study follows in the legacy of fictional critique by examining how women authors have utilised the *Bildungsroman* art form as an instrument for reimagining and challenging the frameworks established by powerful race, traditions, male privilege, class, gender, and sex. This thesis focuses on the oppressed, the "Other," the voiceless or silenced, including African and African-American women. Bhabha (1994), succinctly argues that postcoloniality;

> is a salutary reminder of the persistent 'neo-colonial' relations within the new world order and the multi-national division of labour. Such a perspective enables the authentication of histories of exploitation and the evolution of strategies of resistance.… Beyond this however, postcolonial critique bears witness to those countries and communities – in the North and South, urban and rural – constituted, if I may coin a phrase 'otherwise than modernity (Bhabha 1994, p. 6).

As shown by postcolonial and feminist critique, this research as a whole is also a response to the "neo-colonial" relations erected in the emerging international order that have consistently placed women, especially women of African origin, at a deficit. According to Ashcroft et al. (1989), postcolonial theory and feminist theory have a lot of similarities, both historically and in terms of their main concerns. Earlier feminist model, such as initial nationalist post-colonial scrutiny, decided to seek to reconfigure the frameworks of male

hegemony by, for example, replacing a female legacy or belief system with a male-dominated canon. Both feminist and postcolonial discussions aim to restore the underprivileged in the face of the dominant. However, similar to postcolonial critique, feminist criticism has drifted away from certain straightforward shifts and toward a questioning of shapes and patterns, exposing the presumptions behind such classical formulations and trying to undermine them. A canon is generated by a variety of interpretations and literary premises legitimated in the prioritising structure of a "patriarchal" or "metropolitan" understanding of "literature," as both feminist and post-colonial scholars have done with the classic texts (Jones 1985). This opens up the prospect of rebuilding the canon rather than merely replacing it via an "exchange of texts," as both ideologies acknowledge that changing the canon entails more than simply changing the works that have been given legitimacy (Ashcroft et al. 1989, p. 173). According to Said (1978), in *Orientalism*, the post-colonialist perspective he holds looks at the privilege of once disenfranchised or misinterpreted social populations to communicate with and portray individuals in contexts described, democratically and academically, as typically rejecting them, overthrowing their denoting and portraying features, and circumventing their historical fact (Said 1978). Women's traumatic events and belittlement in societal structure and in scholarly representations are challenged in one way or another by European feminist thinkers like Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Kate Millet, Juliet Mitchell, and Ellaine Showalter, as well as their post-colonial or third world counterparts like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The summary of these women also will include women writers of African descent like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Bessie Head, Tsitsi Dangarembga, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, among others, who, in the scope of this research, have also contributed their perspectives to the revision and reimagining of women's experiences by themselves.

I agree with Ashcroft et al. (1989) that modern post-structuralist theories of language and culture have unmistakably laid the groundwork for the creation of ideologies of imperialist

discussion (Bhabha, Spivak, Jan Mohammed, etc.). These analysts have attempted to provide strategies for overturning the symbolic framework of imperialism and revealing how it operates to silence and repress the colonised person (Ashcroft et al., 1989). In relation to this research, the dominant hierarchical discourse has suffocated and estranged the woman as the "colonial subject." Spivak has attested to the reality that there exist no place from which the subaltern (sexed) body may speak, notably in her stories of the dual subjugation of colonised females and her study of the suppression of the subdued native citizen in the shape of the "subaltern" lady (Spivak 1985c: 122). By extrapolation, the silence of the subaltern woman encompasses the entirety of colonial society as well as the silence and muffling among all native people, whether they are male or female (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p. 175). “Can the Subaltern Speak?” by Spivak is an example of an imperative revolt against the dehumanisation, oppression, censorship, and maltreatment of the world's poorest people: girls and women, those who are seen as the "Other," who ought to be represented and spoken for by the favoured in society. Spivak explains that because the proletariat has no past and cannot communicate in the framework of imperialist reproduction, the oppressed as a female is far more completely in the shadows because she is aware of this social disparity (Spivak 1988). The female authors under investigation, nevertheless, have subverted the forms and modes of disclosure of the *Bildungsroman* by revealing the norms that uphold the entrenched male structure's established structures and destabilising them via their literary writings. African-American women authors, like their African women counterparts, are committed to challenging the male-dominated sociological and creative constructs of women as meek, subservient, and inactive individuals who serve exclusively male agenda of depicting women in society, as advocated in this thesis.

In this research, I hold the view that postcolonial assumptions should be used as a counter-discourse. According to Tiffin (1987), counter discourse is “a process by which the imperialist writer reveals and deconstructs the essential assumptions of a particular classical

work by producing a "counter-text," modifying, sometimes metaphorically, its systems of authority" (1987, p. 22). As a counter-discourse, I argue that these selected works represent a departure from the classic *Bildungsroman*, which exclusively focuses on European males of the middle ages and higher classes. The procedure of being and realising identity is frequently infinite and undefined in their desire for friendship and sisterhood, and I also examine how the female protagonists in the selected texts bargain and renegotiate their extremely complicated personalities as female and black protagonists in their ancestral homes and transnational settings.

The *Bildungsheld's* (the German word for the protagonist) unresolved tension is best shown by Joseph Slaughter's study of the *Bildungsroman* and the human rights discourse, *Human Rights, Inc*. (2007), which analyses *Nervous Conditions* as a dissident *Bildungsroman*. The protagonist of *Nervous Conditions* is, according to Slaughter, not easily "incorporated" into any societal group, in contrast to the traditional *Bildungsroman*, where the protagonist is ultimately "incorporated" into society. This motif reveals the inequalities, rifts, and marginalisation within her society. In addition to being specific to Dangarembga's neurological conditions, the perspective discussed above is equally relevant to the other works selected for this research. This absence of inclusion, according to Slaughter (2007), is a common element in several postcolonial *Bildungsromane*. His assessments of the *Bildungsroman* subgenre in postcolonial literature are crucial to this investigation. With a focus on Spivak's (1988) assertion that women are in a twice-removed position in society's hierarchical structure, as articulated in “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, this research draws upon Slaughter's concept of the postcolonial *Bildungsroman*, which is grounded in postcolonial theory. As my research will demonstrate, women definitely talk and have a say in these *Bildungsromane*.

Research on African and African-American women's *Bildungsromane* as a "counter discourse" has been scarce, according to initial findings. While the quantity in interest in the

African and Afro-American female versions of the *Bildungsroman* over the last two decades is high, this study on counter discourse, which serves as the primary theoretical approach for this study, adds to this body of research. It draws on research from publications like *Human Rights, Inc*. (2007) by Joseph Slaughter, *Unsettling the Bildungsroman: Reading Contemporary Ethnic American Women's Fiction by Bolaki,* and *Narratives of Becoming: Hybrid Identity and the Coming of Age in Caribbean Women's Literature* by Vella Lianne.

Unarguely, Nigerian academics seem to have given little to no attention to the *Bildungsroman* genre up until about two decades now, when authors such as Egodi (2007) and Okuyade (2011), among others, began interacting with it. They seem to think that because the main characters are often children, it is not a good genre for writing on the continent. This study aims to fill a gap in *Bildungsroman* studies by emphasising theories other than counter-discourse more. This study asserts that women writers have used the *Bildungsroman* genre as a hegemonic literary challenge to confront concerns and issues that directly effect black women in crossbred and elastic nations, such as North and South America, Southern Africa, and West Africa, respectively. This assertion is made despite the inadequate attention given to the *Bildungsroman* art form in the interpretation of women writers of African ancestry.

This research finds expression in the ways that each protagonist pursues her femininity and starts reinventing herself as she enters maturity, which are the characteristics most suitable for the explanation of sisterhood and friendship. At this stage of coming to maturity and independence, the protagonist heads towards completing her transformation towards self-discovery of herself as she enters maturity, which are the characteristics most suitable for the explanation of sisterhood and friendship. When each character attains this stage in her development with the aid of the experiences of other women, who have led her and altered her consciousness, retold from a stream of accumulated sisterhood, the manifestation of sisterhood is appropriately observed. This assertion is shown in this study's chapters 3, 4, and 5, which

emphasise details that foster friendship and bring women together rather than those that split them. The primary goal of this project in essence, is to encourage sisterhood among and amongst women of African descent via the depiction of women conversing constantly in accordance with the principles of women's *Bildungsromane*, where the women are either acting as sisters, cousins, or friends to other women.

Thesis Overview

The argument is broken down into the following six chapters: An introductory chapter to the study, in which the purpose and objectives of the study are clearly stated, is followed by Chapter One, which gives a broad summary of the historical background behind the *Bildungsroman* genre, the *Bildungsroman* written by women, the *Bildungsroman* in Africa, the *Bildungsroman* written by women of African descent, African-American women, and postcolonial *Bildungsroman*. The genesis and evolution of the critical theories used for this research are examined in Chapter 2. It is believed that these ideas have significantly contributed to the study as a counter-discourse. The chapter discusses the development of black feminism, black feminist theory, the spread of black feminism, womanism as a component of black feminism, the universality of black feminism, and postcolonial and counter-discourse theories. The counter-discourse is primarily discussed in the context of how it works in tandem with black feminism and the other strands of feminism. Through an intertextual and relational reading that highlights the parallels and contrasts between the selected texts, Chapter Three examines works by Toni Morrison and Alice Walker as classic *Bildungsroman* novels written by African-American women. Chapter Four examines some Southern African Women's *Bildungsroman* literature by Bessie Head and Tsitsi Dangarembga from a relational and inter-textual perspective in order to understand the different interactions that exist in both Head's *Maru* and Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. The two primary examples of female-authored West African *Bildungsroman* are examined in Chapter 5. This section compares the readings

of *Beyond the Horizon* by Amma Darko with *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The conclusion of sisterhood and friendship among women of African descent is then explored in chapter six. This section provides a chapter-by-chapter breakdown of the thesis' issues and demonstrates how the novels used in this study promote sisterhood and friendship among and between coloured women, as well as serve as a forum for counter-discourse debates.

In the end, Chapter 6 mostly responds to the following questions as a way of conclusion this study: Are the main characters of any of these novels integrated into any society at the story's conclusion? How do counter-discourses in these novels connect to marginalised positions? Are there communities of women or friendships (however atomized) that emerge as alternatives to incorporation, giving impetus to the narrative and meaning that the protagonist is not entirely solitary in her development? Do the protagonists' perceptions of other characters change over time? The main point of the conversation and chapter that came before it was the debate about sisterhood and friendship from local to transglobal areas of contact among women of multi-ethnic or racial origins. This has roots in black feminism, African feminism, and counter-discourse theory.

CHAPTER ONE
THE HISTORICAL DIMENSION OF THE *BILDUNGSROMAN* GENRE

Introduction

This chapter outlines the historical evolution of the *Bildungsroman* genre with an emphasis on the conceptual clarification of the word "*Bildungsroman*" and its different strands. The several varieties of *Bildungsromane* that are covered here span from their conventional Germanic beginnings to the appropriations of African-American women authors. In this chapter, the counter-discourse theoretical framework for this research is examined together with other relevant theories and reading tools like African feminism and womanism. While underutilised in *Bildungsromane* discourses, counter-discourse theory is also discussed in this chapter as a useful tool for illuminating the branch of the *Bildungsroman* written by women authors, which is anchored on the tropes of sisterhood and friendship, as seen in the texts taken for this reading. Here, it is explained how the standard *Bildungsroman* differs from its female authors' variations.

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1941), a German philosopher and sociologist, used the term "*Bildungsroman*" in an 1870 biography of Friedrich Schleiermacher. After the popularity of his 1906 book, "Poetry and Experience," he used it more widely. *Wilhelm Meister* and *His English Kinsmen* by Susanne Howe Buckley was the first scholarly publication on the topic (1930). Prior to the 1950s, none of Dilthey's works had been translated. Jerome Hamilton Buckley's *The Season of Youth: A Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (1974) was not released until the 1970s. The work, which offers a relatively wide taxonomic description of the genre, became the primary source for the British novel's study of genre of development. A *Bildungsroman* is a text that, in Buckley's words, displays everything but dual or triple of a certain set of traits, including: infantile, the struggle of centuries, provinciality, the larger community, self-consciousness, estrangement, suffering from affection, looking for a job, and having a practical ideology (Buckley 1974).

The *Bildungsroman* genre was established with the publication of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1796) by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Since the "maturation" and "development" of the characters entailed effective social integration, acculturation, and conformity, the *Bildungsroman* emerged in the nineteenth century as a Western genre appropriate for the "civilising" objectives of the period. However, Mendible (2011) said that the so-called "novel of education" was opposed on all sides during the 20th century. The genre's heuristic value, conceptual limitations, political purpose, and adherence to dominant identities were all criticised by critics. The *Bildungsroman*, often mocked or scorned for its ambiguity and ideological closure, has sparked attention once again in recent years. Modern critics questioned the genre's ingrained thematic and technical traditions and placed it in dialogue with other literary models. One such critic is Mendible. A genre that had long perplexed critics was "unsettled" by feminist, postcolonial, and immigrant literature, which created new forms of the genre by altering it to fit various situations and ideologies (Mendible 2011, p. 1).

The current research also joins critics who are contesting the *Bildungsroman's* thematic and generic conventions in a critical discourse with other literary genres. According to Miles (1974), "there exists in the confessor (protagonist) a painful consciousness of change and progress that exactly sits at the centre of the *Bildungsroman*" as one of its distinguishing characteristics (Miles 1974, p. 981). According to Rosowski (1983, p. 49), the protagonist of the conventional *Bildungsroman* is raised with the expectation of learning "the art of life." In their 1983 collection *The Voyage In: Fiction of Female Development*, Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland provide a feminist criticism of the genre. According to Ogaga Okuyade's comments, the volume's preface deals with the conventional definition of the *Bildungsroman* and expresses disagreement with Buckley's apparently innocent taxonomy definition of the *Bildungsroman*, which excludes female experience from the genre. Okudaye (2011) criticises Jerome Buckley's (1974) anatomy of the conventional *Bildungsroman*, that:

In a small rural community or on the outskirts of a large city, a reasonable child grows up. The cultural standards there, both social and intellectual, limit his creative freedom. His father in particular continually rejects his imaginative inclinations or fancies, is hostile to his objectives, and is quite resistant to the novel concepts he has learned from independent reading. Even though his early schooling was not wholly inadequate, it may nevertheless have been unpleasant since it might have presented options that weren't realistic for him given his current circumstances. Because of this, he sometimes leaves his family at a very young age (along with the relative innocence) and journeys to the city by himself (in English novels, usually London), is where his actual "education" starts, not only in terms of career preparation but also—and frequently more crucial—in terms of his first-hand exposure to city life. The latter includes at least two romantic relationships or erotic interactions, one of which is degrading and the other exalting, and calls on the hero to reconsider his values in this and other ways. He has transitioned from adolescence to maturity when, after much soul-searching, he determines what type of adjustment to modern life he can honestly make. He may go back to his previous home after finishing his initiation to demonstrate with his presence how successful he was or how intelligent his choice was (Buckley 1974, pp. 17–18).

The quotation above demonstrates that the traditional *Bildungsroman* is defined primarily in terms of males, with women relegated to the periphery as the "Other" in the men's imagined representation of the civilization ruled by men. The usage of pronouns such as "he" and "his" and the term "hero" support opponents' claims that Buckley's contribution is male-centered and leaves out the perspectives of women from the *Bildungsroman* genre. The purposeful (re)exclusion of the female voice and experience, especially that of women of African heritage, has been discovered and addressed in this work. One may argue that this masculine pronoun is generic. However, given the *Bildungsroman's* male viewpoint, one may disagree. It might also be claimed that, in certain instances, the non-treatment of the girl or

woman as a *Bildungsheld* in the traditional *Bildungsroman* served to purposely stifle women's voices and experiences. This is mostly due to the *Bildungsroman's* historical focus on males and how they were treated. Women's feelings were not completely ignored, but it did indicate that the authors of the time focused too much on the male characters. Until recently, female authors avoided writing about women because they were preoccupied with the men, not because women were less interesting than men.

The thesis' earlier portion does not support Buckley's gender prejudice regarding the idea of a *Bildungsroman*. It is crucial to emphasise that realism began to flourish in England and France throughout the nineteenth century (Herrero 2017). It was not lost on anybody that reality and the conventional *Bildungsroman* overlapped. In reality, important realist novels like Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* (1869) and Dickens' *David Copperfield* (1849–1850) and *Great Expectations* (1860–1861) emphasise the growth of the main characters. It is true, however, that these works did not exclusively focus on the formation process. In response to the conventional *Bildungsroman*, Buckley addresses the aforementioned issue and proposes an extra-adaptable paradigm. An index of topics that ought to be brought into account when determining whether a text qualifies as a *Bildungsroman* was given by Buckley. Therefore, as Dickens and Flaubert show in their works, topics like childhood, the struggle of ages, personal development, and estrangement, tribulation by love, the quest for vocation, and a working philosophy might also be used to portray the growth process (quoted in Boes 2006). In Buckley's critique of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, he demonstrates how the *Bildungsheld's* growth is logically structured: after leaving home, the *Bildungsheld* encounters various types of developmental and romantic crises, which prepare him for finding a career and developing a mature philosophy of life. Additionally, the *Bildungsroman* has been denationalised as a result of the addition of fresh subjects and the acceptance of other European works into the canon; as a result, authors who are both men and women now write in this style. The study of

the *Bildungsroman* novels by the women authors covered in this thesis was made possible by the closing of the gaps between realistic novels and the traditional *Bildungsroman* by engaging the counter discourse theory.

Herrero (2017, p. 4) claims that other modernist literary works, such as Franz Kafka's *Amerika* (1927) and James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), are likewise organised similarly to the classic *Bildungsroman* in order to further highlight the genre's adaptability. The *Bildungsroman* is occasionally fiddled with to include themes like powerful political ideals, ethnic heritage, and the desire for purpose in life, like these dual texts and the six texts under study closely reflect. However, they present variables in the conventional aesthetic preconditions of the genre. Additionally, Joyce and Kafka are successful in laying the groundwork for the *Bildungsroman's* later central themes, which include the postcolonial world, immigration, the search for establishing one's own personality and being formed in non-traditional fields like the arts (Kunstlerroman), as in both *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Amerika*. The aforementioned demonstrates the genre's adaptability and how it has been transformed by other creative creations as well as academic definitions or discussions.

According to Fritz Martini's 1961 archival study, Karl Morgenstern (1770–1852), a little-known Romantic critic, coined the word "*Bildungsroman*," not Dilthey. Two lengthy lectures on the subject were delivered by Morgenstern, a professor of aesthetics at the University of Dorpat (today's Tartu in modern-day Estonia), in 1819 and 1820. Shortly after, his views were forgotten for the next 50 years (Martini 1961, pp. 1–25). Following this discovery, it was noted that academics including Jeffrey Sammons and Marianne Hirsch, among others, began to wonder why a particular genre rose to prominence very early in the nineteenth century but only received a permanent name from a critic who was promptly accused of misapproriation for nationalist propaganda at the beginning of the twentieth century. The most influential English appearance of the *Bildungsroman* canon is found in a well-known

essay by Sammons (Mystery, 1981, pp. 229–246), who argued that the idea of the narrative of development as a continuing genre is a serious deception. This reaction by German literary scholars to delink the *Bildungsroman* canon from nationalist propaganda reveals its most powerful English appearance. Sammons points out that the genre only saw a short time of success during the Romantic era and that it was already headed for the intellectual history trash heap when Morgenstern first characterised it. Sammons maintains again that the loss in academic interest in the genre that the word "*Bildungsroman*" fell into throughout the nineteenth century parallels the drop in common usage of the term, which would later be revived by Dilthey. However, a number of authors in the 19th century, including Dickens and Flaubert, were searching for a "legitimately German" creative form that could be contrasted with the enormously popular realism novels of France and England. The debates surrounding the origins and historical development of the term "*Bildungsroman*" have been resolved by Sammons' epistemological assertion on the disuse and obscurity of the *Bildungsroman* genre, which was only later revived by Dilthey and his successors. Martini argues in 1961 that the concept of "*Bildungsroman*" was coined by an obscure Romantic scholar, Morgenstern, and not by Dilthey.

The *Bildungsroman* genre was and continues to be open to many interpretations, historical developments, and definitions, as the previous sentence made clear. However, in order to create a counter-discourse and recreate their tales in their own voices, the women authors had to carve out a place for themselves inside and around the genre. For instance, Fashakin (2015) contends that there are several explanations of the fictional kind known as the *Bildungsroman* in her feminist analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, which is a *Bildungsroman*. According to her, it may be described as "a novel of personal growth or education" or as a text whose fundamental theme is the moral, mental, and cognitive growth of a generally young chief character (Fashakin 2015). As discussed previously in the opening

chapter of this research, *Bildungsroman*-like novels reflect a fresh protagonist's evolving trajectory, or general growth, from infancy to adulthood. The *Bildungsroman's* protagonist was originally modelled after a male hero since men have traditionally dominated the genre and women are commonly underrepresented in it. Even the largest definitions of the *Bildungsroman*, according to the authors, assume a variety of social possibilities that are exclusively open to males. Women were therefore unable to assume a position within the traditionally designated genre. Because societal restrictions affect men and women differently, social environment exploration is not a feature of female development (Abel et al., 1983, p. 42). Women were both hampered by social stratification and constraints, as well as given the freedom to explore various literary genres in order to better understand how women perceive society. For instance, the literary giants of English literature were Jane Austen and Anne Bronte. Unlike Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847), which combined moral realism and Gothic elements, and Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), which is a novel of intensely imagined depictions of passion and hate set on the Yorkshire moors, Jane Austen's works were typically associated with "country house novels" or "comedies of manners" with fairy tale elements. The *Bildungsroman* genre subsequently evolved out of several literary genres, particularly with the works selected for this research.

It should not be inferred from Sammons' objection to Boes' rearticulation of the German concept of the *Bildungsroman* that he would want to use the word in Buckley's vaguely taxonomic meaning. However, Sammons (1981, p. 36) does not hold back when he dismisses Buckley's work as "arrogantly provincial" in a follow-up to his diatribe published 10 years later ("*Bildungsroman* for Nonspecialists," Sammons 1981). Given the conflicting, oppressive traditions and the almost meaningless flexibility of the genre, Amrine (2020) suggests that literary scholars completely abandon the name "*Bildungsroman*" from their lexicon. However, this research disagrees with Amrine's recommendation to give up on the *Bildungsroman* idea

and its application to literary studies and other fields. Despite the conflicting repressive traditions and flexibility, "*Bildungsroman*" is still a relevant literary notion that may be used in discussions and exchanges among scholars. The *Bildungsroman* really has a lot of significance and reach in a lot of modern postcolonial writing, as my thesis would demonstrate.

The Female *Bildungsroman*

Although there is not much consistency in their approaches or structures, it is clear from this section that female writers, both in the study areas and internationally, have transformed the *Bildungsroman* genre by recounting their experiences. However, as will be discussed later in this section, the majority of female *Bildungsromane* have demonstrated Okudaye's (2011) four fundamental qualities. Boes (2006) debates that in the years before the publication of her book, interest in twentieth-century *Bildungsroman* studies had gradually changed in favour of post-colonial and minority literature. As a result, it was shown to be both naive and incorrect for critics to believe that the genre had faded throughout the modernist era. In reality, post-colonial, marginal, multi-cultural, and migrant fiction throughout the world still very much embraces the novel of formation. Furthermore, it is false that the *Bildungsroman* plot's diachronic shape, which depicts the plot's thematic evolution, is excessively intransigent to allow for avant-garde investigation. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1983) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), as well as *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), demonstrate how the form may be changed to include modernist and postmodernist literary approaches.

According to Okuyade (2011), the genre's versatility gives female authors plenty of chance to explore their femininity and feminist agenda and start a process to resolve the gender conflict. When Felski (1989, p. 131) refuses to declare the *Bildungsroman*, which places a strong focus on integrative development, to be inherently patriarchal, she defies feminist critique. She rejects the commonly referred "novel of awakening," whereby the main character becomes egotistical and retracts from community seclusion through the stable guardedness of

the personality, and praises the revolutionary praxis of women becoming aware of their individuality as a potential force that may oppose societal and cultural norms. On the other hand, Fraiman (1993) suggests that the process of female development is "not a single route to a clear goal but the continual negotiation of crossroads" (Fraiman 1993, p. X). The texts featured in this thesis have argued for female characters' friendship or solidarity within these contexts of never-ending brokering at crossroads in most instances, as shown in this research.

The protagonists of the texts designated for this reading, including Pecola, Sula, Margaret, Tambudzai, Mara, Kambili and Kainene, are all subject to never-ending negotiations at various phases in their development, as I will show in subsequent chapters. Okudaye claims that the female *Bildungsroman* has four unique qualities, which I go into greater depth about below. I draw on these qualities in my analysis of the novels I chose for my thesis. This is largely done to demonstrate how the *Bildungsroman* tradition, which predominantly emphasises European males of the middle and upper classes, has changed in favour of one that is more inclusive and values the voices and involvements of women.

The four characteristics of the women's *Bildungsroman* are defined by Okuyade as follows: the character's first awakening, when she realises that her current state of affairs restricts her goals for the future and starts to show inclinations of bitterness and dissatisfaction for it in the hopes of transcending it. This causes the main character to reflect on her gender, social standing, and personal beliefs. The main heroine also develops a sense of self via her interactions with a group of women who help and encourage her as she strives to be independent in a patriarchal culture. The character receives moral direction from this network in the face of gender discrimination. Thirdly, as she transitions into maturity, the heroine examines her femininity and starts to redefine who she is. The character completes her transition or voyage of self-discovery in the fourth and final phase, when she achieves a degree of maturity and independence. The female mentors who have helped the character get to this

point are women (Okudaye 2011). It should be emphasised, nevertheless, that not all *Bildungsromane* adhere to this model exactly; some do so more precisely than others. The *Bildungsroman* is a genre of "formation" or "education" which illustrates and documents the progression of the protagonist from infancy via numerous experiences, typically including a mystical experience, development, and the understanding of the protagonist's role in the world. This concise description of the genre makes it simple for readers to remember the structure of the *Bildungsroman*. Felski on one hand avows that between the feminist *Bildungsroman* and its male counterpart, there are significant differences. The female *Bildungsheld* fights to achieve a level of self by acquitting herself from matrimonial subservience and reliance, unlike her male hero who is at liberty to engage on his expedition for self-discovery. Furthermore, the male *Bildungsroman* principally focuses on the *Bildungsheld*'s childhood and adolescence, while the female alternate is broader in scope. As such, the hero's mission terminates early in manhood, then the heroine's voyage lingers into mid-age.

Ellis (1999) argues that the challenges faced by female protagonists in female *Bildungsromane* are distinct from those faced by male protagonists in male *Bildungsromane*. These challenges include the power disparities between men and women and societal dynamics, which endanger the protagonist's female character's ability to forge a solid sense of self. In this way, the female protagonists discover, just like their male counterparts, that compromises between who they want to be and who others want them to be are necessary if they are to succeed in society. In order to pursue self-discovery in her community within this space of compromise, the female *Bildungsheld* thus finds a friend or sister who helps her navigate life's ups and downs. According to Ellis (1999), the heroine of a *Bildungsroman* typically starts out "see[ing] herself as an autonomous agent who should have control over herself and define her own pace in society," but as the female protagonist matures through the story, she then realises that, because of her milieu, she has an internalised prescriptive frame

of mind regarding who she is and ought to be in her society based on her gender and other factors. As a result, the female protagonist ultimately becomes objectified, which hinders her pursuit of freedom. According to Ellis, it is interesting to note that the female protagonist first makes an effort to rebel against the restrictions placed on her right to self-determination before coming up with a reasonable solution. According to Ellis, "the only way that women may maintain some freedom and autonomy while being a necessary component of society is by working within the expectations established by the prevalent male perspective." Contrary to the presumption made above, every female *Bildungsheld* in the texts under discussion has rebelled and declared her femininity in opposition to the type of "independence" patriarchy has forced upon her. According to Deroo (2015), the female *Bildungsroman* is a framework that offers women the ability to criticise the traditional society that places restrictions on them from inside the same structure that previously excluded their voices, even though the female protagonist must deal with the disappointment of not capable to become fully independent. I would actually like to emphasise how the *Bildungsroman* writing by women has demonstrated how these authors have all used the genre to resist the prevailing narratives and discussions championed by their male counterparts and incorporate their own "voices" into the works. Despite the limited successes they have listed, they have been successful in accomplishing this. All that matters to them is that their voices are heard loud and clearly. Due to the unique characteristics of female maturation, women's *Bildungsroman* has changed the notion of *Bildung* and, consequently, the conventional meanings of the form. Women's *Bildungsromanne* have frequently incorporated important, previously male-defined themes.

By stating that the feminist *Bildungsroman* chronicles a tale of growth in the direction of intelligible selfhood via a procedure of migration into a larger group, Felski concludes his discussion of the female *Bildungsroman* (Felski 1989). According to the aforementioned claim, the female protagonists in the novels chosen for this research adhere to the same genre tropes.

The self-awareness of Morrison's Pecola, Dangarembga's Tambu, Darko's Mara, Adichie's Kambili, and other authors has increased. They may go from a relatively small town or an isolated area to a city or community that is more metropolitan. Felski claims further that "a female community mediates women's connection to society" (Felski 1989, p. 141). In this thesis, I propose that a female community in which Head interacts with Dikeledi as a coworker is equivalent to the situations of Darko's Mara and Mama Kiosk. In this sense, Head's incorporation into society is similar to that of Darko's Mara. One may argue that this group of sisters, friends, and other women serves as an inspiration to women like Pecola, Margaret, Tambu, Mara, Adichie, Sula, and others. Thus, in this research, this experience serves as a platform for the development of sisterhood and companionship within women, particularly those of African ancestry.

According to this notion, the *Bildungsroman* subgenre has provided female authors with a platform for their work, allowing them to retell the challenges as well as other experiences women encounter in literature and culture in their own voices. By interacting with other forms of the genre as well, the female authors have defied the established tradition of modifying the genre to fit their goal in every manner imaginable in this act of retelling.

The *Bildungsroman* in Africa

Although there are certain areas of agreement among the various historians' interpretations of the *Bildungsroman* in Africa, I definitely agree with Stratton that the genre's racial and gender sensitivity themes are equally important. The African *Bildungsroman*, which is traditionally set in the colonial era, is examined in detail in Mickelsen's article "The *Bildungsroman* in Africa: The Case of Mission Terminée" (1986). Mickelsen claims that the *Bildungsroman* primarily scrutinizes the clash of values in which a young évolué fights to accomplish an equilibrium between the civilising training of the imperial influence and the customary ethos of his forefathers (Mickelsen 1986). Undoubtedly, this is the case at Mission

Fini. Traditional descriptions of the protagonists in the earlier iteration of the African *Bildungsroman* place them in either a missionary or a colonial school, where they are introduced to the opportunities that modernity and education in the West provide them. Western education emphasises the "I," that is independent and does have the right to govern themselves, and is thus strongly individualistic. More often than not, this kind of education is distinguished from more conventional ones, like unofficial elders patterning to storytelling, traineeship, and also most formally, jungle education (Mickelsen 1986). Informal schooling focuses more on protecting collective identities than personal ones. The *Bildungsheld* yearns for formal education in most African *Bildungsromane*, which demonstrates how the use of the pronoun "us" by African characters and protagonists promotes a sense of collective identity as opposed to the ego-centric and individualistic tendencies advanced by the European use of the first-person personal pronoun "I." This is a "embarrassing loss of innocence" or "traumatic shedding of illusions," (Moolla 2016, p. 33). According to Moolla, this pitiful and erroneous portrayal of the African *Bildungsheld* has traumatised and alienated them in addition to robbing them of their innocence. This is further shown by Amoko's assertion that "the African *Bildungsroman* concentrates on the development of young characters in an uncertain environment" (Amoko, 2009, p. 200). One of the knock-on consequences of the "traumatic shedding of illusions" and "embittering loss of innocence" that young African characters experience in a fluid and hybridised environment is often this sense of ambiguity.

I also agree with Smit's (2009) assertion that both the European and the African *Bildungsromane*, which were especially produced during the time of colonial control, have a number of characteristics with respect to the "stages" of growth and the core of the genre. It is important to note that there is a dialectic link between the person and society in both European and African *Bildungsroman*, which is mostly portrayed in the protagonist's interaction with other family members. A fundamental element of the African *Bildungsroman* is the extended

family. The key distinction is that the African protagonists of the first and sometimes second generations had to bargain with two societies: colonial society and indigenous culture. With their European or African-American peers, this isn't always the case. The person becomes conscious of the constraints imposed by their culture since society plays a significant role in identity development. An individual develops a deeper knowledge of their place in the current social order as they attempt to balance their own wants and aspirations with those of society (Smit 1999). The protagonist's contacts with their society—in this example, the African and Western value systems—leave them divided between two irreconcilable realities, which in turn helps them comprehend their position.

However, as *The African Child* by Camera Laye (1953) demonstrates, for the African protagonist during the colonial period, recognising one's function within the larger society did not always imply being at peace with one's allotted duty. The characters, however, grow aware of their own ignorance, the seeming ignorance in their community, and the "limitations" and "inhibiting" nature of their African culture, traditions, and beliefs as they continue with their secondary education. They have an existential crisis as a result of this realisation, which makes them understand that they have been at war between the European and African cultures and civilizations with which they are intertwined. As a result, the ensuing existential crisis is typically characterised by a profound feeling of loss as well as estrangement from one's ancestors' traditions and practises. Because they are not members of either, the protagonist of the African *Bildungsroman* is unable to integrate or reflect the cultural practises and beliefs of their community, unlike those of the European *Bildungsroman*. In contrast to the examples from Europe, the conflict between the person and civilization in the African *Bildungsroman* is also a manifestation of the conflict between African modernity and African traditionalism, which is expressed through group identity, conventional epistemological beliefs, and the

primacy of ancestor tradition (Smith 1987). The following and succeeding chapters have all shown how well these conflicts are depicted in the novels chosen for this research.

On the other hand, African authors like Camara Laye in *The African Child* (1953) and Ngugi in *Weep Not, Child* (1964) reinvented the *Bildungsroman* in African terms to depict the acculturation process as it was felt by colonised male subjects, as noted by Stratton (1994). Stratton also claims that African women authors changed the genre by emphasising gender as a development concern in addition to race (Stratton 1994, p. 105). Her words go against an African literary tradition "to which the mere concept of female growth is foreign" by accomplishing this (Stratton 1994, p. 107). In relation to the diasporic environment, Lima (2012) notes that it seems odd that so many writers from post-colonial cultures have chosen the *Bildungsroman*, "a genre which incorporates inflexible presuppositions about when and how individuals develop," in order to "bring a new self into existence" (Lima 2012). The main focus of this part is Stratton's dissident and antagonistic voice against an African *Bildungsroman* that is incompatible with the feminine growth that this research is so fond of. An African *Bildungsroman* in which "people" refers to both male and female protagonists and is described as gender sensitive and free of strict presuppositions about when and how people grow.

The African *Bildungsroman* is essentially a narrative of becoming that is quite often set both within and outside of African society. It reflects the schism between their African society and the larger world, which frequently separates them from their African identity and leaves them in a state of dissonance and memories. The genre therefore serves as an example of the process of becoming, which is characterised by a dialectic balancing act between personal preferences and societal norms, expectations, and values. According to Dilthey (1985), who made this claim in a *Bildungsroman*, a regular growth is noticed in the person's experience, every single phases has inherent worth and is furthermore the foundation for an advanced level.

His guiding books were *Hölderlin's Hyperion* (1797–1899) and Goethe's Wilhelm Meister's *Apprentice Years* (1795–96). Dilthey argues that the 19th-century *Bildungsroman* must be clearly contrasted from the pragmatist creatives produced in England and France because it is a creation of social settings that are unique to the German princedoms. According to Dilthey (1985), the construction of novels during the Romantic period in German states that portrayed protagonists who were self-involved and individualistic and showed less interest in and commitment to larger social change was influenced by despotic institutional authority and a lack of an appropriate public space. The African *Bildungsroman*'s lead character does not always get to be an epitome, a sign, as Moretti (1987) contends in relation to the European *Bildungsroman*, or the theme of allegory in his or her particular social order. This is a key distinction between the African *Bildungsroman* and the classic *Bildungsroman*. In other words, despite the fact that it can appear possible to interpret the African protagonist as a symbol of modernity, the African *Bildungsroman* often challenges such an overly straightforward reading of its protagonist (Moretti 1987). In this scenario, the central character of the African *Bildungsroman* may be seen as a metaphor for modernity engaged in an ongoing dialectic struggle with both African and Western society.

I then make the case that the discrepancy between the representational and philosophical value systems of the European and African main characters is what causes the paradigm shifts in the African *Bildungsroman's* treatment of the interaction between the self and society. It is significant to note that African modernity continues to be propelled by the same dynamism and instability that define modernity in the West. According to Moretti, the best metaphor for illuminating the parallels between the dynamics of the *Bildungsroman* (in general) and the modern era that gave rise to it is youth, which is seen as the physical embodiment of modernity. The *Bildungsroman* perfectly encapsulates modernization due to the conflicting structural components of clear, but erratic, progression that it incorporates inside

its story. According to Moretti, youth [...] obtains symbolic primacy and the grand tale of the *Bildungsroman* comes to life because of the need for modernity rather than youth in Europe (Moretti 1987).

It is reasonable to concur with Smith (1987) that modernism [in Africa] is fragmented and incoherent, while it is a more consistent and illuminating ideology in the West. Thus, it could appear dangerous to apply Moretti's concept to the [African] situation. In Africa, the *Bildungsroman* has just developed into a technique of understanding the numerous ways by which the numerous modalities of African civilization enlighten Ghana's, Nigeria's, South Africa's, and Zimbabwe's dicey and fragmented national concepts and social systems. In contrast, the *Bildungsroman* in the Europe is deployed as a technique for comprehending the functioning of innovation as a state thought (Smith, 1987). The African *Bildungsroman* is considerate of African sensitivities and worldviews by taking into account the contentious place of womenfolk in civilization.

The *Bildungsroman* by Women of African Descent

The distinctions between men's and women's *Bildungsromane* are discussed by Feng (1999), as the formation of a distinctive, non-Western *Bildungsromane* tradition developed by ethnic women. Her theory delineates the challenging *Bildung* of minority women in a society pervaded by race, class, and sex/gender discrimination" and is not restricted to the *Bildungsroman* of white women (Deroo 2015). In doing so, she acknowledges that authors of other races have viewpoints distinct from those of white women. Feng calls for the acknowledgement of the *Bildungsroman* of all ethnic women, even if her research concentrates on Asian-American women authors like Maxine Hong Kingston and African-American women writers like Toni Morrison. She asserts vehemently that ethnic men experience what W. E. B. Du Bois (2007, p. 8) refers to as "double consciousness," which refers to African-American males' struggle to balance their study in European academic institutions with their African

culture. Ethnic women, who are non-white and female, and who are more beyond the margins of the negligible groups, experience triple or even multiple consciousnesses (Deroo 1986). For black female authors, the *Bildungsroman* stands for the establishment of a space for communication with others, with society, and with parts of one's own otherness. According to Feng, the primary issue that ethnic women authors of colour must solve in their *Bildungsroman* is the ongoing conflict between (efforts at) decisiveness and mental seclusion (Feng 1999). The majority of women of African origin have this ambivalence of self that is a result of the conflict between assertiveness and psychological disengagement because of the socio-cultural norm that is widespread in their environment and society. The way it appears in their creative work shows how the writer and their culture are inextricably linked.

Deroo (2015) contends that the "ambivalence" of selfhood that Feng identifies in ethnic women contrasts with the "coherent self," which she previously described as Mickelsen's main need in the *Bildungsroman* (Feng 1999, p. 17; Mickelsen 1986, p. 418). Unlike earlier *Bildungsroman* models, Feng asserts that ethnic women "engage in an endless negotiation of their contradictory multiplicity" rather than representing "a unified identity" (Feng 1999, p. 41), where female writers inscribe the ambiguity and indecision regarding indigenous female uniqueness as replicated in their narrative style as a counter-discourse. Her incapacity to advocate for "a single identity" is often unrelated to how diverse African culture is. In light of this, Feng asserts that several multicultural women discuss their education in a fragmented style, with recurring emergences of suppressed regional, cultural, and individual recollections of history from the untamed, animalistic territory (Feng 1999). In their *Bildungsromane*, ethnic women authors exorcise their pasts and either celebrate or admit their ambivalence. The work of racism, sexism, and classism in all social structures at each and every echelon, both past and present, is revealed through ethnic women's narratives, according to Feng (1999, p. 19). Indeed, Deroo (2015), pp. 10-11, claims that the *Bildungsroman* resurfaces injustices, inequities, and

sufferings experienced by indigenous women from an individual to a broader, societal context. The novels in this thesis have proposed and supported some practical routes away from the patriarchal and racial webs that have physically and mentally ensnared women of African descent worldwide. They have done more than just write about and describe the realities of ethnic women.

This illustrates how black women's collective knowledge and individual experiences of black women's writing cross borders, as articulated by O'Neale in 1982. According to O'Neale's study, "Race, Sex, and Self: Aspects of *Bildung* in Selected Novels by Black American Women Novelists," the black female *Bildungsroman* originated from the need to accurately depict black female characters. According to O'Neale (1982), black American women authors have already been striving to make the story more congruent with the real black experience in this nation. O'Neale does not, however, explain why black women authors choose to use the *Bildungsroman* from the European tradition to convey these experiences rather than inventing a new genre specifically for this reason. On the other hand, LeSeur (1986) provides a response to this query in *Ten Is the Age of Darkness*: *The Black Bildungsroman* (1995), where she makes the case that modern black writers do not aim to examine the indigenous currents of those experiences rather than becoming the mainstream of European or American literary experience at their disposal in order to communicate, frequently to educate, interpret, and reveal the varied experiences of four hundred years of suffering. In the 1960s and 1970s, this emerging black literary movement was known as "black aesthetics," "black arts," "black consciousness," or "cultural nationalism." This "new" black literature set itself apart from earlier works by focusing on the developing discussions among black people about their history and culture. Part of that objective has been achieved through the adoption of the *Bildungsroman* as a form (Deroo 2015). I contend that in order to express their realities, black women authors also use the *Bildungsroman* genre from the European tradition. Ellis' justification as to how white

women writers employ the *Bildungsroman* to add their own words lends credence to LeSeur's defence of how the *Bildungsroman* is assumed by using black authors to express their own growth and perspectives, as is also the case with women of African descent as pictured in the novels examined in this study.

African-American Women and the Postcolonial *Bildungsroman*

In the texts under consideration for this study, women of colour are coming of age by resisting oppressive boundaries, as well as by constructing mixed spaces and borderland subjectivities that challenge fallacious arguments entrapped in the past or present, population movement or trauma, and native or foreign frames (Mendible 2011). Bolaki (2012) suggests indigenous female characters whose "*Bildung*" procedures interweave family, historic, and ideological components into a current American reality in opposition to a tradition of future-focused, autonomous heroines in American fiction. African-American and West Indian writing are the focus of LeSeur's study, while Feng works on African-American and Asian American literature. It is important to avoid lumping together any *Bildungsroman* models that differ from the norm. Nevertheless, considering these frameworks in connection to one another clarifies the postcolonial *Bildungsroman's* structure.

According to Gruesser (2005), taking into consideration postcolonial writing by African-Americans on a similar perspective, will disregard the profound cultural distinctions between works of literature produced by black majorities in sovereign countries and those produced by black minorities in strong, affluent white countries. However, he thinks that creating "conduits through which ideas and critical methods might travel" would aid in the development of analyses in both academic domains (Gruesser 2005, p. 2). The postcolonial paradigm advocated by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures* (1989) serves as the major foundation

for Gruesser's study. According to Gruesser, the release of this text aided in the development of postcolonial studies, and his study draws on its concepts.

Gruesser creates a historical-theoretical framework for postcolonial writing and African-American writing in an effort to draw connections between the two genres of literature. According to Ashcroft et al. (1989), white settlers who are segregated from metropolitan culture impose the English language and culture on the colonised people throughout the colonisation process. The colonised do face "linguistic displacement and cultural denigration," while not being physically relocated (Ashcroft et al. 1989, p. 7). According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1989), rather than "colonialization," the deportation and slavery of Africans is a "consequence of colonialism" (Ashcroft 1989, p. 10). In this view, he goes one step further and argues that, in a way, Africans in North America were also colonised since they were driven from their homeland, their language, as well as their tradition, and compelled to live side by side with white people. A colonizing phenomenon which has received insufficient attention in both literary and real-world settings.

Gruesser is intrigued by the socio-historical perspective that *The Empire Writes Back* takes on postcolonial literature. He argues on the concept of "hybridity," which describes the intricacy of a situation when two cultures, each with a more dominant culture, come into touch. According to Gruesser, the concept of hybridity appears in postcolonial literature and "counterbalances the negative implications of displacement and its concomitant identity crisis" (Gruesser 2005, p. 7). According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, there is no "one-way process" in which the coloniser completely represses the colonised people (Ashcroft et al., 2003, p. 8). Postcolonial culture is unavoidably a hybridised phenomena featuring a dialectical interaction between the "grafted" in their desire to create or recreate an independent local self, European cultural institutions and an indigenous ontology, they claim (1989). The battle between imperial authority and local culture is shown, along with a vision that varies from

colonial ideology, by postcolonial authors in their works, while also making it apparent that they were shaped by the colonial experience. In contrast to postcolonial writing, African-American literature lacks the same feeling of "double vision" (Du Bois 2007, p. 8). However, the "double consciousness" of W.E.B. Du Bois, which theorises the conflict between white institutions and African history, has an impact on African-American authors. Although this cannot be compared to the hybrid framework used in postcolonial literature, it is only fitting that we extensively use Du Bois to understand the difficulties experienced by African-Americans and, by implication, their women. In his book, Du Bois (2007) makes the case that the "Negro is a type of seventh son who was born in America with a veil and second sight but no genuine knowledge. Through the disclosure of the different world, he may see himself. It is indeed rare to experience a dual conscience, to perceive oneself through the lens of another person, and to evaluate one's personal soul in the context of a society that bemoans and belittles you with amusement. One is always conscious of his double identity as a Black American: two souls, two concepts, and two completely different strivings coexist inside one dark body, which is only kept from fracturing by its persistent tenacity.

I contend that this dual awareness pushes black women and African-Americans farther away from representation and acknowledgement. Due to this dual consciousness, African-Americans are made to feel inferior by white people. The character of Pecola, whose attractiveness is solely decided by whiteness, as would be covered in chapters three and six, eloquently captures this feeling in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. African-Americans must thus work hard to preserve their sense of self-worth and to achieve full awareness. Gruesser urges a conversation across postcolonial studies and African-American literature studies because of this (Deroo 2015).

LeSeur's research, for instance, is centred on how African-American and West Indian authors employ the *Bildungsroman* genre to introduce previously unaddressed racial and

gender issues. She notes that African-American and West Indian authors often draw inspiration from their personal experiences for their *Bildungsromane*: African-American and West Indian authors of childhood literature differ in that the former tend to use firsthand story to create an effective opposition that is almost exclusively regarding race, slavery, as well as the White institution while the latter writes *Bildungsromane* to reflect on childhood roots and gain insight regarding self and home (LeSeur 2005). The novels chosen for this research, which are a mixture of works by African-American and African writers, all employ personal experience in one way or another to communicate the authors' displeasure with patriarchy, racism, slavery, history, gender, and sexuality concerns.

LeSeur does not address *Bildungsromane* written by African authors, although some of the traits she addresses in relation to African-American and West Indian *Bildungsromane* are present in the novels examined in this research. For instance, all six pieces of literature being examined here discuss topics pertaining to childhood origins, personal experience, racism, patriarchy, and the white establishment. Deroo's approach exemplifies how bridging the gaps between different literary studies highlights the *Bildungsroman's* capacity to communicate personal stories while also addressing ethnic and feminist groups' concepts of healing and progress (Deroo 2015). As was previously stated, this is also true of the texts that were chosen for this research. The "needs and sensibilities of the women in my family were not considered a priority or even legitimate," complains Dangarembga's Tambudzai of her own experience. "That was why I was in Standard Three in the year that Nhamo died," I said (NC p. 12).

Conclusion

In the preceding discussion, I demonstrated that the *Bildungsroman* by women of African descent, as well as the African-American and Postcolonial *Bildungsroman*, all intersect and capture the agency as well as the repressed experiences of women of African descent

worldwide. I adopt Okuyade's features of the female *Bildungsroman* on pages 20–21 to underpin the tropes of sisterhood and friendship among women of African origin, entrenched through the networking of women in this thesis, which finds expression through the *Bildungsroman* genre, as a space for reversing the role of women in literature and society.

CHAPTER TWO
COUNTER-HEGEMONIC DISCOURSE

> Black women have long operated at a disadvantage. Now you as the storyteller are going to shape the future (Head in Mackenzie 1989).

Introduction

In postcolonial discourse, this chapter examines the formation and growth of critical ideas that resulted in the occurrence of counter-discourses. Additionally, it investigates how these ideas and movements have influenced how readers understand the works chosen for this research as examples of counter-hegemonic discourse. All six of the chosen novels demonstrate by alaigning with Bolaki's arguement, that the "scarred and moribund body" is no longer "passive or static but constantly transforming, paradoxically asserting its wholeness through its narrative performance of fragmentation" (Bolaki 2011, p. 235). I avow that these theories and movements all contributed in varying degrees to the reading of the selected novels as counter-hegemonic discourse.

As a consequence of the Civil Rights movement in the United States, new disciplines of knowledge (such as ethnic studies) were developed, bringing the perspectives of the disadvantaged and dispossessed into the social domain of knowledge. These many new "studies" also offered a different justification for knowing: education to liberate one from the subjective and epistemic colonisation of the mind (Tlostanova & Mignolo 2012, pp. 193–194 in Baker 2012, p. 4).

This explains the emergence of several concepts and ideologies, such as "STIWANISM" (social transformation including women), black feminism, womanism, counter-discourse, counter-hegemonic discourse, and post-colonial theory. I observed in this chapter the growth as well as the extension of black feminism, womanism, and its strands, to mention just a few of the ideas and movements that have all contributed to the discourses around it as a counter-hegemonic and resistance discourse. Bizzini (2006) asserts that literature

has the potential to be a formidable vehicle for enacting not just a politics of resistance but also for encouraging the active growth of a politics of social change even if such transformation is slow and difficult to complete altogether. However, after years of agitation, many feminists' Afrocentric ideological subgroups, like the campaign for African-American women's universal voting rights, eventually yielded some positive results. Bizzini (2006) agrees with the conclusion that hegemonic discursive practises play a critical role in the definition and representation of the expatriate subject, as critics have clearly shown.

In this thesis, I argue that the role intellectuals play in creating counter-hegemonic discourses cannot be disregarded when analysing the discursive practises that have moulded our worldview. Writers like Virginia Woolf, Antonio Gramsci, Simone de Beauvoir, Marcia Landy, and Stuart Hall are just a few examples of them. For example, Hall (1996) claims that hegemony refers to a situation in which a temporary coalition of specific social groups may exercise complete social power over the lesser communities, not only through coercion but additionally by accruing and shaping approval to make the totally dominant classes' authority seem somewhat legitimate and real.

Male privilege as well as its depictions construct unequal temporary coalitions throughout literary works as well as the sociocultural context in Africa and beyond that influence governing ideologies of hegemonic masculinity on the women of African descent at home and in the immigrant community, something which comes out on top and forms mutual agreement of its power. In light of this, counter-hegemonic includes any agitation or vehement resistance carried out by the oppressed subject against dominant beliefs or ideologies as well as sociocultural restrictions. By changing the location and functions ascribed to women from "object" to "subject" of socio-cultural and literary discourse, the literary works of the female African-American and African authors covered here serve as a tool for challenging restrictive hegemonic cultural norms.

The Head epigraph that opens this chapter offers a jumping-off point for discussion of black feminism, womanism, and other feminism-related topics that are important to this research. This is especially true for the experiences and narratives of women of African descent, which can only be told by African women, who are both the storytellers and the future-shapers. This highlights the central idea of the counter-hegemonic discourse of the thesis, which I further examined in the chapters that came after. The research examines some of black feminism's many elements, current movements, and flaws and shortcomings in the following section.

Black feminism is simply based on the experiences of women of African origin on the continent and beyond, as well as the dual challenges of racial and gender oppression. This is due to the inherent differences between African-American women's historical and social circumstances and those of other women of African descent and white women. The aforementioned does not diminish the universality of women's subordination and experiences. This explains why women authors from all over the globe, regardless of the racial, social, cultural, or geographic backgrounds of the women in question, tell tales that are similar to one another regarding women's experiences. The worst situation is that of women of African ancestry, who are victims of patriarchy, sexism, classism, and the horrors of slavery, in addition to xenophobia, both at home and in the diaspora. All women are exposed to concerns like domestic and gender violence, rape, incest, and so forth. The white woman is not the only one who oppresses and takes advantage of black women; African males, white (Euro-American) men and women, and women of colour all do. I discuss the black feminist space as a literary and ideological discourse in the next section of my thesis, beginning with how it came to be.

The Emergence of Black Feminism

Black feminist organisations were more well-known in the 1960s and 1970s as a rejoinder to the many difficulties that women of African descent had while living in exile and

in their various efforts to integrate into European society. The specific reasons for the growth of black feminism have been highlighted by a number of writers, including Patricia Hill Collins, Bell hooks, Barbara Smith, Barbara Christian, and Alice Walker. In her important essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," Alice Walker discusses how "the political, economic, and social limits of slavery and racism have traditionally stunted the creative lives of black women" (1983, p. 1). According to Smith's paper "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" (1982, p. 3), there are several obstacles standing in the way of black feminism's growth. The fact that "we have been entirely denied not just literacy but the most fundamental hope of a healthy human life for most of the time we have been in this country" is the most crucial of these, in Smith's opinion. The second point Smith makes is in reference to the feminist criticism of literature written by white women. She claims that these books weren't always seen as the artistic expression of an underrepresented group (Smith 1982). Smith continues by contending that, there is no political power that can offer them with strength or support when it comes to studying black feminist issues through inquiry into our past, literature, and culture. No political power demands the least bit of consideration and courtesy from people who write or talk about our lives, according to this statement. She cites the reason as follows, that there is not an established corpus of black feminist political theory which premises may be utilized in the study of black women's art. White women are, of course, unprepared to cope with the complexities of racial politics when they analyse black women's work. The politics of sex, race, and class are thus significantly connected components in the works of black writers, making a black feminist approach to literature very important. The black feminist also stressed that until the citations from several critics that follow show that, in the absence of a black feminist critical perspective, publications by black women are not only misconstrued but also destroyed as a consequence, among other things (Smith 1982), The other objection Smith raises is the absence of a nonconformist voice with which to express the ire of black female writers who feel shut

out by the new canon and the new black feminist perspective. Then the last factor is the horrendous exploitation of black women and the subsequent crackdown. While black women were troubled by racial injustice, white women were also troubled by some of the tensions that black women were (Smith 1982, p. 2).

Moody (2011)'s remarks that they were encouraged in the same breath to keep quiet, both for the goal of becoming womanly and to render less obnoxious in the eyes of white people, perfectly captures black feminism. Black women had to deal with sexism as well as racism, albeit this act of chauvinism was more common among black males. Black males contributed to the subjugation of black women by disseminating prejudices about them. Black stereotypes and symbols originally emerged in early 20th-century films, illustrating how popular culture media has continued to feed and cultivate these prejudices. The portrayals of the black figure in the movies were exploitative and dehumanising. Bogle outlines five significant racial stereotypes that appeared in movies in his 1973 book *Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammies, and the Bad Bucks: An Interpretative History of Blacks in American Films: the Toms, the Coons, the Tragic Mulattos, the Mammies, and the Bad Bucks*. These names serve as examples of how the lives of these black women have been undervalued, and both white people and black males are equally to blame for this oppression.

Not to mention, many men from the so-called "Third World" have felt threatened by women's organisations and have attempted to retain their dominance by disseminating rumours and myths about the women's movement and asserting that the movement did not apply to women of colour. Black women have been "kept from their own independence" by "Third World" males, according to Smith, who has discovered five such beliefs. The misconceptions that black women are already emancipated, that racial prejudice is the primary (or only) kind of repression they face, that feminism is solely about man-hatred, that women's struggles are

exclusively political, and that people of colour must deal with the "larger struggle" are just a few examples.

However much longer will Africa's beautiful women be forced to sacrifice their brains and skills beneath the pressure of iron kettles and pots? was a question Maria W. Stewart presented in 1831. Stewart (1832), who became an orphan at the age of five and was forced to work as a domestic servant in a clergyman's house, made a concerted effort to put together discrete fragments of schooling when and wherever she could. This early American black thinker anticipated a broad range of subjects addressed by her black feminist forebears since she was the first American woman to talk openly about politics and publish her work. Maria Stewart urged African-American women to reject the conventional notions of black women that were prevalent in her day and stressed that racial, gender, and economic discrimination were the major causes of black women's poverty. In a speech from 1833, Stewart said, Like King Solomon, who placed neither nail nor hammer to the temple yet achieved prominence, so also have the white Americans gotten themselves a name, while in actuality, we have been the major foundation and support. Stewart said that this is unfair since we have pursued the shadow while they have obtained the substance, earned the benefits despite our efforts, and planted the vines while they have reaped the fruit (Labovitz 1986). The aforementioned claim amply supports the agitation of educated African-American women like Stewart, who were denied rights. Stewart dared to question the societal norm that had held them in a condition of ongoing enslavement, accidentally becoming a spokesperson for the many quiet women of her day. As I will explain in the following chapters, the women author I researched for my thesis battled patriarchy and other pervasive beliefs such as racism and sexism.

Black Feminist Theory

Before the 1980s, black feminism did not produce a groundswell in academia (Breines 2006). The Steward example, which was previously discussed, demonstrates how black

women's awareness and intellectual innovation have persisted for centuries both within and beyond the ivory tower. According to King (1988), black women have been feminists since the early 1800s (King 1988). Black women have always battled injustice and persecution, despite years of lacking adequate acknowledgment and records. Theoretically, black feminist theory emphasises speech, action, and resistance. It developed out of a need to be acknowledged and heard. This concept is centred on the oppression, perceptions, and visibility of black women. Additionally, it is centred on how black women build their own experiences and knowledge to empower themselves.

Studying intersectionality is essential to understanding the realities of black women. It plays a significant role in black feminist theory as well. The position of a black woman in American society is one that is rich with distinction, as several academics of colour have pointed out. One of the first women to write about this incident was Anna Julia Cooper, who states, "One may contend that the black woman today holds a particular place in our country." Her viewpoint appears to be one of the least certain and obvious of all the components of our society at a time when everything is uncertain and changeable. Both her gender dilemma and the racial issue she faces have an unacknowledged or underappreciated component (Cooper, 1988).

Cooper emphasises how a black woman's life is unique from a black man's or a white woman's since it is affected by both her gender and her race. She also asserts that because of their particular status in society, black women are placed at the bottom of the social scale. Cooper's first statement that there is a "woman's issue and a racial problem" still holds true in black feminist ideology (1982, p. 135). However, throughout time, the approaches used by black female philosophers to characterise black women's standing in society have changed. Literature has evolved as a counter-discourse based on the various intersections of women's experiences, deconstructing the stereotype of the woman as a despised social position. Women

have always felt inferior to men and society, but thanks to these female writers, they now feel empowered and have a voice.

Beale (1970) asserts that putting black women in a position of servitude is the fault of the capitalist economic system (Guy-Sheftall 1995). From Reconstruction until the 1960s, the majority of African women worked primarily in domestic and service roles (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2006). In contrast to racism (from whites) and sexism (from black men), many black feminists in the 1960s and 1970s developed Marxist conceptions of economic exploitation to illustrate classism as an additional kind of subjection influencing the lives of black women and the aspirations of black feminist philosophy. The works of the Combahee River Collective (1977) are one example of this. By seeing race, class, ethnicity, and gender as a system of linked oppressions, an intersectional framework that considers black women's unique and shared history and status as such is better able to represent it (Collins, 1986). In contrast to a single generic, homogeneous image, it is critical to emphasise that there are several forms of black femininity that are representational of race, ethnicity, class, and gender. The works selected for this study are from many regions of the globe, including Northern and Southern America as well as West Africa and Southern Africa. They demonstrate the many connections between the lives of African women and African women in America.

The struggle to live in two conflicting worlds—one white, affluent, and dictatorial, and the other black, exploited, and coercive—has been a part of the black woman's existence throughout American history due to the interaction between white supremacy and male dominance (Cannon 1985, p. 30). One of the causes of this history of resistance is that black women are more likely to be attacked at work, on the street, at home, and in the media. The heritage of resistance against the violence that permeates American society's institutions unites African-American women, notwithstanding disparities caused by historical time, age, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, skin colour, or ethnicity. That large, bright, promising,

fatally beautiful class... so full of promise and possibilities, yet so sure of destruction; often without a father to whom they dare apply the loving term; often without a stronger brother to espouse their cause and defend their honour with his sword, writes Anna Julia Cooper, a well-educated black woman scholar (Cooper 1892).

Due to this type of situation, Cooper and other middle-class black women in the United States founded a powerful club movement and other community organisations (Giddings, 1984, 1988; Gilkes, 1985). A key work by King (1989), *Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousnesses*, advances black feminist theory on the intersectional paradigm. Guy-Sheftall said that the author's creative essay was a crucial contribution to black feminist theory since it characterised the true nature of black womanhood and went beyond the triple jeopardy notion (Sheftall 1995). King advises using an additive model of triple jeopardy as opposed to an interactive, multiplicative one. In her critique of research and theoretical development for black women, he also attacks the race-sex, dual model—the three interconnected control systems that include racism, sexism, and classism. The processes are best represented by an interactive approach, which I have named myriad jeopardies. The word many describes both multiplicative interactions between oppressions as well as numerous, concurrent oppressions. To put it another way, the comparable formula is racism times sexism times classism (King 1989). King's writings shed further light on the unique place of black women in American culture. Her idea gives other women of colour, such as Chicana feminists and Native American women, a platform to communicate their complex struggles in combination with the more general parts of black feminist philosophy (Garcia, 1989; Mihesuah, 2003). The voices of enslaved and oppressed women, regardless of colour, class, or sexual preference, would be plainly heard in this shared area for multidimensional agitations.

Another significant aspect that affects how differently African-American women react to typical obstacles is their sexuality. Black lesbians have described homosexism as a kind of

oppression, and the difficulties they encounter in homophobic cultures have influenced how they view commonplace occurrences (Shockley 1974; Lorde 1982; Clarke et al. 1983; Barbara Smith 1983; Williams 1998) Smith says, "God, I wish I had one friend here," referring to how being a lesbian influenced her perspective on one of her closest friends' wedding. Someone who understood me and could empathise with how I feel about pretending to be a decent, heterosexual, black "girl" from the middle class (Smith 1983, p. 172). Beverly Smith believed that her buddy was being forced into a type of bondage, even if the majority of others in attendance merely regarded the wedding as a joyful occasion. Black women in the US also have different ethnic backgrounds and citizenship statuses inside the US nation-state. Black Puerto Ricans, for instance, are a particular example of a group that combines the categories of race, nationality, and ethnicity. Black Puerto Rican women thus have to navigate a distinct set of challenges that come with being racially black, possessing a certain kind of American citizenship, and being of Latino descent. But once again, I want to stress that the emphasis of my thesis is primarily on African-American women and the initiatives that have helped steer their future in a new direction. The main focus of this research is not to reiterate arguments in favour of or against black lesbian women. As described in the sixth chapter of this thesis, the emphasis is more on the similarities than the differences that exist among women of African origin. Such is the oppression and inequality shown by racism, classism, and patriarchy, among other things. My hypothesis does not entirely rule out the possibility that black feminism also campaigns against sexual and racial inequality. Black lesbians have pointed to the bias in favour of male-female sexuality as the only kind of connection that exists in literature and culture as a form of oppression against bisexuals and other groups, among other things. *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker and Morrison's *Sula*, for example, both accurately depict this feeling among black lesbians. The sisterhood and friendship that this idea promotes, however, are not based on heterosexism.

Black women have a variety of viewpoints, which must be emphasised given how these traits influence how various individuals approach the same issues. For instance, as seen in the works under consideration, Mainini, Lucy, and Maiguru all negotiate their situations as women rather differently in *Nervous Conditions*. There is not a defining or famous black woman whose life experiences are seen as ordinary, typical, and real. An essentialist understanding of a black woman's viewpoint overlooks differences among black women in an endeavour to achieve impossible group unity. It might be more accurate to say that there is a collective worldview of black women, one marked by tensions caused by opposing solutions to the same problems. The viewpoint of this black lady rejects essentialism in favour of democracy because it values inclusion and recognises the diversity of oppositional knowledge formation. Because black feminist thinking both emerges from within and seeks to explain black women's perspective on experiences connected to overlapping oppressions, it is crucial to emphasise the variety of this group's viewpoints.

But the main focus of this thesis is also to describe the variety of experiences these women have had and to examine the sisterhood and friendship among women of color. It also draws attention to the connections between their oppressions and conflicts as well as the variety of their perspectives and ways of life. And it demonstrates how these women overcame all challenges to raise their voices in defiance of and above the oppression and injustice they had to endure.

Black Feminists Literary works

This subsection exemplifies how fiction and literary works embrace feminist theory and practice. Despite being oppressed, American black women have persevered in doing research and ensuring that their ideas are heard. Many people have struggled tenaciously to be heard, including Toni Morrison, Barbara Smith, Mary McLeod Bethune, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Sojourner Truth, and a large number of others. African female writers like Ama

Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta, and Ellen Kuzwayo have used their platforms to address significant issues impacting black African women (James 1990). Similar to Maria W. Stewart's earlier work and that of black women internationally, African-American women's intellectual work tries to further the activism of black women.

"Black Feminism" is a feminist movement that opposes the racism and sexism that black women experience. On the other hand, another moniker for black feminism is black womanism. It continually criticises the racism and ethnocentrism of institutions and actions run by white people, including all manifestations of feminism. According to Smith (1987), black feminists want not simply to reclaim and reaffirm the lives of black women and question the presumptions of dominant cultures but also to develop analytical methods for identifying the manner in which race and gender are embedded in society's structure. According to Smith, this complicated their criticism. According to the main and secondary sources investigated in this research, this is clear in both feminist literary theory and fiction.

Black feminism grew significantly in the West throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The nineteenth-century American abolitionist movement is where black feminism first emerged. Black women received inspiration and strategies from the abolitionist movement, which was primarily formed to abolish slavery, in their fight against sexual discrimination. Grimke's "Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women" (1838), which criticised the oppressive social order and presented demands for women's rights, were published in Germany. Grimke had a far more extreme view of feminism than Mary Wollstonecraft and other liberal feminists. Revolutionary feminism was required to combat racism, sexism, capitalism, and other forms of political injustice, as well as racism and patriarchy. The socialist feminism and left-leaning activities that the black feminist movement frequently drew its inspiration from prevented women of colour from supporting progressive causes. Black feminists emphasise the idea that all forms of white feminism must identify and condemn

imperialism's transgressions. Leading black feminists such as Audre Lorde, Gloria Joseph, Alice Walker, and Gloria Hull have criticised the notion that feminism originating from a white perspective will address issues faced by women around the world. According to me, the literary pieces and other sources cited in this thesis support the feminist school of thought that contends that black feminists' experiences and agitations are distinct from those of their white counterparts. Therefore, I concur with the powerful black feminists who asserted that examining the actions of white women in the past cannot provide a solution to the issues that women face today.

According to Smith (1986, p. 27) in "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," feminism is the political theory that fights for the liberation of all women, including white, economically advantaged, heterosexual women who are not from the working class, poor, disabled, or lesbian. Anything less than this ideal of complete liberation is not feminism but rather feminist self-promotion. In the words of Alice Walker, "black women, especially those most marginalised by race, caste, and class to have their voices heard and their histories read" have been made possible by a number of authors, including Zora Neale Hurston, Nikki Giovanni, Audre Lorde, Sonia Sanchez, Toni Morrison, Toni Cade Bambara, Maya Angelou, Jamaica Kincaid, Gloria Naylor, and a host of others (Walker 1983). Other female authors in this research, such Bessie Head, Tsitsi Dangarembga, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, were represented by this group of women.

Through a variety of literary genres and oral traditions, it is possible to accomplish this feat of assisting marginalised women in having their voices heard and their histories read. Afrocentric literature about black feminists has its roots firmly planted in African culture and customs. As a result, they rely on the independent orality, culture, and communal activities as well as the religion, morals, and language of black communities. And specifically, these authors are influenced by the societal relevance of motherhood and female bonding as they are shown

in the texts under consideration. Black feminist literature initially took the form of autobiography to examine the injustices of a patriarchal, servitude society in which white women were just as oppressive as white men. African-American women's writings deviate from white feminists' writings due to a common history of racial and gender domination as argued earlier. The domination and struggles of African-American women and the broader African-American community under a sexist, classist society are expressed in these texts through the *Bildungsroman* genre. Though the African women from the continent might have different experience from that of their African-American counterparts as are however discussed or captured in this elsewhere.

The legacy of coloured women's clubs, which emerged as a mental and social reaction to the ills of broader society, is one way that later black feminism presents itself. Some worldwide publications, such as Schultz (2019) *No More Fun and Games: The International Journal of the History of Sport*, have documented these atrocities against women. *The Third World Women's Alliance* (1968), Azalea: A Magazine by Third World Lesbians (1980), and a "Literary Quarterly" published by *The Salsa Soul Sisters* (The Sisters) all addressed the issues facing lesbians, womanists, and women of colour. *The Black Women's Manifesto* (1970), whose publication aimed to combat both racism and capitalism, as well as the *Third World Women's Alliance* (1970), Azalea: A Magazine by Third World Women, “The Sisters”, the first black lesbian organisation in the United States, are now known as African Ancestral Lesbians United for Societal Change. These literary works were associated with a few feminist organisations that were established to address a number of particular issues, including sterilisation abuse, equal access to abortion, health care, childcare, the rights of the disabled, violence against women, rape, battering, sexual harassment, welfare rights, lesbian and gay rights, ageing, police brutality, labour organising, anti-imperialist struggles, anti-racist organising, and nuclear disarmament. The movements and organisations of literary authors as

well as the many feminist organisations have all made significant contributions to the current discussions and debates on black feminism as well as feminist movements and ideas. Despite how hydra-headed their needs and struggles have been identified, they have been able to overcome some of the most difficult obstacles in their path due to the flood of literary works that have allowed them to express their protests and demonstrations against male dominance and other societal problems that affect women.

These authors explicitly address racism, sexism, patriarchy, domestic violence, and other concerns in their literary works since most women of African origin suffer from these problems in a male-dominated society. Black feminism did not thrive as much as it was anticipated, despite the tireless efforts of its authors and critics. For instance, hooks (1984) argues that even though Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) is credited with inspiring the modern feminist movement, it is written as if black or working-class women do not exist. According to hooks, white feminists' writings include racism, and as a consequence, female bonding is challenging in the face of racial and cultural diversity. Wallace (1979), a well-known black feminist, challenges her own people to fight against all forms of oppression: We exist as women who are black who are feminists, each stranded for the moment, working independently because there is not yet an environment in this society remotely congenial to our struggle—because, being on the bottom, we would have to do what no one else has done: we will (Wallace 1979) hooks calls for particular measures to secure the success of the black feminist movement, while Wallace (1979) waits for a favourable atmosphere for the establishment of the feminist movement. hooks covers a variety of subjects in her book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984), including the objectives of the feminist movement, the role played by males in the feminist fight, the applicability of pacifism, female solidarity, and the nature of revolution. In light of this, this thesis explores the ways in which sexual orientation, ethnicity, and racial disparities do not prevent women of colour from

connecting with or showing solidarity with one another. As seen in Head's *Maru*, Margaret, a Masarwa, is able to discover a sister in Dikeledi, a Motswana, thanks to their relationship, much as Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* shows sisterhood and friendship solidarity between Mara, a Ghanaian, Kaye, and Gitte, a German woman, all of whom live in Germany.

Brown (1992), a participant and later commander of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in the 1960s, highlights the sexism shown by Panther males in her autobiography. Overall, despite the fact that black women intellectuals have fought for the freedom to speak as both women and African-Americans, historically these women have not held prominent roles in black organisations and often struggle to articulate black feminist views inside them (Giddings 1984). In *Dear Ijaewele*, or in her *feminist manifesto Fifteen Suggestions*, Adichie (2017) raises concerns about this kind of feminism-lite (conditional female equality) when she writes,

> Beware the danger of what I call feminism lite." It refers to the notion of female equality with restrictions. Please disregard this completely. It is an empty, conciliatory, and worthless notion. Feminism is similar to being pregnant. You are either or you are not. Either you favour complete equality between the sexes or you choose not to. Feminism Lite's notion that males are innately superior but are nevertheless supposed to "treat women well" is more alarming. No. No. No. The foundation for a woman's well-being must be much more complex than only male goodness (Adichie 2017, p. 10).

Regarding what women expect from men and what they want from society, the aforementioned quotation speaks for itself. Women in general and most modern U.S. black feminist thinking represent black women's growing readiness to challenge gender inequity among black civil society to a considerable degree, not only in modern times. "I used to feel

that women couldn't speak out, since when district gatherings were being conducted at my house... I didn't even feel like being able to convey to them what I had in mind," says Septima Clark in describing this change. But as time went on, I realised that women used to have a lot more to say and that it was incredibly valuable. Thus, we began to converse, and we have done so often ever since. (Brown 1986).

Womanism as Filament of Black Feminism

The aforementioned early feminist groups, in my view, were headed by white middle-class women who pushed for social reforms like women's suffrage while mostly neglecting black laborers, who had also endured some of the harshest kinds of oppression in American history. Since she represents the oppressed gender in the oppressed race, she has had to deal with both the servitude of white masters and black masterly males. In American literature, she has often been portrayed as a sensual set figure or a big, classy, and elegant caregiver. The situation is different in African literature where the woman is viewed as a second class citizen at the mercy of the man who controls her destiny due to patrirchy.

Such egregious simplifications are employed by both white and black authors. Adichie's (2017) statement that there are several women in the world who are uncomfortable with other women supports this type of underrepresentation exists, and to deny it is to give anti-feminists a needless opportunity to attempt to undermine feminism. Because of the neglect of mainstream feminism, black women are banding together under a separate flag that even rejects the lexicon of the white race. Walker refers to this as "womanism," which is an ideology quite different from white "feminism" like Showalter's. Black women endure a distinct and more severe kind of oppression than do white women, according to Walker (1983) and other womanists. The term womanist first appeared in Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983), in which the author attributes the word's origin to the black folk expression of mothers to female children thus:

> You acting womanish,' that is, like a woman ... usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous, or willful behaviour. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one ... '[A womanist is also] a woman who loves other women sexually and/ or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility ... and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/ or non-sexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female... Loves music. Loves the moon. Loves the spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the folk. Loves herself. Regardless. Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender (Walker 1983, pp. 34-35).

It is hardly shocking to learn that Celie, played by Walker in *The Color Purple*, is a lesbian. This explains a lot of her prior remarks about her style of womanism in the paragraph before this one.

I conclude from the sentence cited above that black womanism portrays a balanced image of black femininity and embraces blackness, black heritage, and the ambitions of black people. Walker created the term "womanism" because feminism required a new phrase to fully and accurately express its complexity. Walker writes in the "New York Times Magazine" in 1984 that she does not choose womanism because it is "better" than feminism. I chose it because I prefer the sound, feel, and fit of it; because I truly value the spirit of the women (like Sojourner) the phrase keeps calling to mind; and also because I discuss the old ethnic-American lifestyle of attempting to offer the community a different word whenever the old word it employs fails to describe the properties and transform that merely a new phrase could in fact assist it even more completely (Walker 1984, 94). Despite Walker's statements to the contrary, she implies that the womanist/black woman is stronger and superior than the feminist/white

woman in her definitions of womanism (for example, "womanist is to feminism as purple is to lavender"), as affirmed below:

> Women who are calling themselves black feminists need another word to describe what their concerns are. Weems in like manner asserts that women of African descent who embrace feminism do so because of the absence of a suitable existing framework for their individual needs as African women, therefore she suggests and defines African womanism as “an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is foregrounded in African culture, and therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs and desires of African women. It critically addresses the dynamics of the conflict among mainstream feminist, the black feminist, the African feminist and the African womanist (Weems 2004, p. 229).

In my study, I am not supporting one kind of feminist ideology over another, as Walker indicated above. As an alternative, I am seeking a middle ground between all feminism philosophies that preserves sisterhood and friendship solidarity and is devoid of any feeling that excludes black or women of colour’s histories and experiences. In contrast, according to Ogunyemi (1988), the black womanist would comprehend that while discussing womanism and other feminisms, she must integrate racial, cultural, regional, economic, and political aspects in addition to her awareness of sexual challenges. Walker's concept is accepted by Williams (1986), who agrees with it. Naturally, Black women must have faith in society as a whole to live up to the book's expectations and principles. Black womanism promotes integration and believes in the "wholeness" of black culture; it rejects the idea that black society may be divided along sexist lines. Black womanism also refers to the idea of a sisterhood that was developed by Fran Sanders, who asserted:

> I am not and never have been a sister to any man except my brother, Danny, and I feel that the whole thing is about to go too far. It seems positively incestuous. I mean, how does one make the transition from brother to the lover if need be? Do I suddenly see this man who has previously been addressing me as a sister as a potential lover? Not hardly! ... Better to see the woman as a woman and treat her accordingly, while at the same time trying to upgrade the quality of the relationship (Sanders p. 45).

Womanism is an alternative philosophy to feminism. The pieces in Womanism, which focus on the black female situation, describe the challenges caused by racism, classism, and sexism. According to hooks, who approaches the issue from a slightly different angle, racism is ubiquitous in the writings of white feminists, reinforcing white supremacy and obviating the possibility of women coming together politically across racial and ethnic divides. According to writers who identify as womanists, racial and socioeconomic injustice are intrinsically related to sexism and sexual oppression. Numerous womanist writers see racial and economic persecution as being even more serious than sexism. This is because the womanists believe that in order to free black women, the rest of the race must also be freed.

Feminists thus encourage cooperation with their masculine colleagues. Womanism differs from feminism, which is largely a separatist ideology, in that it has this characteristic (Weems 2004). Womanism differs from feminism in that it recognises and fights against the three types of discrimination that black women experience: racist, classist, and sexist. Feminism, on the other hand, primarily focuses on sexist oppression. As Walker had stated in the past, womanism therefore explains how the requirements of black women vary from those of their white counterparts. Additionally, womanism diverges from feminism in respect to how it wants to remove the oppression of women by recognising and appreciating the role performed by men in the liberation movement. This undeniable proof suggests that womanism

has its origins in a black civilization that emphasises the value of family and explains the origins of womanism.

I contend that a number of black feminist, such as hooks' "Black Feminism: Historical Perspective," Sherley Anne Williams' "Some Implications of Womanist Theory," Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi's "African Womanist: Reclaiming Ourselves," Hudson Weems (1998), Walker, and these many African womanist authors may have somewhat different definitions of "womanism." However, there are several similarities. First of all, African-American women's experiences are mostly what the word "womanism" refers to. However, today's detractors use the phrase to refer to an ideology that encompasses all black and non-black or clolured women's experiences. Some opponents still use the word "black" to refer to anybody who is non-white after realising how flexible the term is. Though the term "non-white" is quite heterogenous and multifaceted in antrure. However, it is certain that womanism is very pertinent to all of the circumstances faced by black women worldwide. Second, the development of ideology and theory is a result of America's history of prejudice and injustice. Third, lesbianism is included in certain sections of black feminism via womanism, which implies that lesbianism is a realistic and acceptable way for women to eliminate their oppression. As a result, prominent African-American female authors like Toni Morrison and Alice Walker advocate for lesbianism in their writing. For instance, Walker sees lesbianism as a means of fostering female kinship. Walker, like her black counterpart Morrison, has advocated for the development of strong sisterhood bonds among black women through lesbianism because black women are more self-aware than white women. Walker's declaration that I am worried about spiritual survival and the continued existence of my people in an interview with John O'Brien in 1994 is a reminder of the aforementioned issue. Beyond that, however, I am dedicated to examining the repressions, insane behaviours, allegiances, and victories of black women (O'Brien 1994, p. 75). The situations of Celie's abuse in *The Color*

Purple and Pecola's abuse in *The Bluest Eye* have all served as reminders that women's oppression and subjugation, regardless of culture, class, or sexual orientation(s), are a global phenomenon. Their struggles also serve as a reflection of the plight of black women everywhere. My focus in this research is on the characteristics that African-American women share rather than those that separate them, including lesbianism (which serves as a foundation for black women's solidarity and bonding). This thesis relates to the oppression, marginalisation, patriarchy, racism, classism, sexism, and other experiences that every other girl or woman has. The foundation for female-female connection and cohesion, which is at the core of my thesis, was concisely articulated in this research.

I take exception to the assertion that "Feminism has not advanced as much for African women as it has in recent years because of how significant heterosexual family and marriage institutions are. Lesbianism is a non-issue for the majority of ordinary Africans, claim Mary Kolawole and Joseph Adeleke (1996, p. 231), since it is a manner of self-expression that is completely alien to their worldview. Is lesbianism the end of heterosexuality or a step toward what black women earlier declared they detested as also being pro-white civilization and in certain respects deviant amidst blacks? asks Adeleke. Can one still see marriage and family as also being absolutely fundamental to black women in light of this new development, such as heterosexual unions and family structures? Adeleke (2000) argues that a new set of ideas must be developed to specifically address the experiences of African women in Africa in order to address these issues, which call into question the position of womanism within the framework of the African female experience." My stand is that a lot of transformations have taken place in Africa to be specific. Lesbianism today has become a serious issue and challenge in African. In some climes it is legalized, while in others, it is vehemently opposed by some government and persons. According to the submission by Byrne and Imma (2019), the intense critical resonances and interactions between the #BlackLivesMatter movements in the US and South

Africa further alter the traditional founding myths for young Black queer feminist-led resistance.

In response to this never-ending discussion, which is unsatisfied by Black Feminism and Womanism notions, Acholonu (1995) and Molara Ogundipe-Leslie offer the titles "Motherism" and "Stiwanism." Acholonu established the idea of motherism as an African alternative to feminism that is focused on the importance of motherhood in the experience of African women in her 1995 book, *Motherism: An Afro-Centric Alternative to Feminism*. Ogundipe-Leslie presents Stiwanism as an alternative in her book *Recreating Ourselves* (1994). The goal of stiwananism, according to Ogundipe (1987), is "social change, including women," and he asserts that this is the case in Africa. This is about attempting to create a harmonious society rather than trying to engage in conflict with males, flip roles, or treat men the way women believe men have been treating them for centuries. In order to change the social structure of the continent, men and women must share responsibility and a desire in doing so. The new expression is a fantastic representation of what African women like me desire to see. For African males, the term "feminist" seems to be a warning. According to some, the term is dominant either explicitly or implicitly. Others believe it is dangerous to place so much attention on women. Unless they have extremely strong personalities, some people who really wish to improve the lives of women could feel ashamed to be called "feminists" (Ogundipe 1987, p. 231).

I contend that each of these methods may contribute in some way to the definition and formulation of an indigenous African gender theory. However, as native African gender ideas, neither Stiwananism nor Motherism have attained widespread recognition or appeal. On the other hand, Ebunolouwa (2009) remarks on the need of critical theory for African female authors. Thus, African writers and critics must create and/or synthesise an indigenous African theory in order to correctly contextualise and recognise the distinctive characteristics of their

experience in gender discourse. According to Mary Evans (Evans 1983, p. 225), the implication is that African will be referred to as "headless chickens," which alludes to a practise devoid of theory, if they are unable to produce an appropriate theory for the purpose of showcasing an authentically African gender discourse. Chickens without heads scramble about aimlessly till they ultimately die (Ebunolouwa 2009, p. 232).

In a similar vein, Clenora Hudson-Weems' (2006) book "Africana Womanism" aims to critically engage with white feminism, black feminism, and African feminism while incorporating the diverse histories and experiences of African-Americans. She asserts that American feminism reorganised the belligerent battles of the first African-American women activists into a number of sociopolitical goals. She further asserts that current Africana womanism calls for a fresh set of rules that might help Africana women everywhere. However, Hudson-Weems' plan oversimplifies the idea of the black world's unity and misses the inextricable links between gender-based sexism issues and wider institutional structures of power in her belief that these issues can only be resolved in African cultures.

As Wilson-Tagoe (2010) claims, it is not surprising that Chikwenye Ogunyemi would later research a distinctively African womanism that focuses on the African particularities overlooked by Hudson-Weems and black American feminism. *Africa Wo/Man Palava: The Nigerian Novel by Women*, Ogunyemi's second work on womanism, has a very different emphasis than her first book, in which she, like Hudson-Weems, attempted to posit a unified black womanism. In that article, "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English" (1985), she went beyond the fundamental categories of gender and sexism in feminism to pinpoint a system of global economic and power structures that serve to obstruct the advancement and self-actualization of both black men and black women. The ultimate power-related issue, "How can we distribute equally the world's riches and accompanying power among the races and between the sexes?" is, according to her, more

directly addressed by "the politics of black womanism" than by "the politics of white sexual Women" (Ogunyemi 1985, p. 25). Ogunyemi's womanism in this context invests in a particular idea of womanhood that arises from a girl's self-discovery as a woman at a crucial time in her life and is firmly founded in the historical role of black women as stewards of their race. A womanist writer is one who is concerned with "the black sexual power tussles as well as with the global power structures that imprison blacks," according to this description (Wilson-Tagoe 2010, pp. 133–134).

This study recognises and values the suppressed experiences that African women have both at home and in the immigrant community, the inequality to which they are all subject, as well as discrimination based on race and gender, among other things. In the light of the discourse that have come before, I would conclude this section by saying that however, the thesis encourages finding a point of agreement where sexual preference, race, and ethnicity are all unimportant, enabling all women of African descent to interact freely. All forms of discrimination are highlighted by their common humanity. For instance, Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* may be used to exemplify the aforementioned claim through the words of Mara, a woman who is subjected to abuse by her Ghanaian husband, Akobi, and who sets out to find a solution as to how to end the male chauvinist act avows, "'Gitte is not the reason,' I stressed to Kaye, 'his dream is the reason. Gitte is as much a victim of it as I am.'" (BH p. 116). Mara's plight inadvertently becomes Kaye's and Gitte's, as it is depicted in my analysis of the novels engaged with in chapter five of this thesis.

The Universality of Black Feminism

While highlighting the differences between women's movements across the globe, men and women have protested the oppression of women across boundaries. Such initiatives demonstrate that the battle for women's rights is acknowledged as a global movement with the goals of putting an end to violence against women, combating sexism, and enhancing the

opportunities and choices open to women. Odim (2001) observes that, despite the legacy of upper- and middle-class biases in North American and European feminism practices, radical white feminists who understood the connections between class and gender existed. Even though the early radical feminism of the 1960s lost a large portion of its initial membership, the movement was often described as being anti-racist and anti-imperialist. The superiority-based American and European forms of feminism are still there, but they are evolving due to severe critiques of women across the globe. Since it includes women from different social groups and geographical locations, such as Australia, Ireland, and Eastern Europe, the term "white women" is really inadequate. Women who connect with multiple ethnic origins are also disregarded (Odim 2001).

In my thesis, I contend that this research aims to bridge the gender gap that has existed for a long time by promoting sisterhood and friendship among women, particularly those of African and African-American origin. Miles (1994, p. 5) describes "transformative feminism" as an inclusive alternative to those feminist programmes that attempt to empower just a small number of women via equitable access to previously established spheres of power in an effort to further this goal. Miles (1994) contends:

> Transformative feminists from all parts of the world challenge the dominations of class, race and colonialism as well as gender; they present feminist perspectives on the whole of society and not just selected "women's issues;" and they reject the assumptions and value judgments underlying the "modernization" project which is being imposed by the West to the detriment of the whole of nature and most of the world's people in all regions (Miles 1994, p. 5).

It is crucial to recognise that black women in the United States have similar struggles to those experienced by women of African descent throughout the black diaspora, but with

somewhat different expressions. This context is then placed inside the transnational and global settings. Diaspora describes the experiences of people who were forced to migrate away from their own nations as a result of slavery, colonialism, imperialism, and other factors (Funani 1998). According to the diasporic theory, black women in the United States and other people of African descent immigrated to the Caribbean, South America, North America, and Europe from communities in Africa. Because of this, opinions of African-American women follow a clear pattern of dispersion that is connected to the country's forced immigration and subsequently, slavery (Pala 1995). A diasporic framework should not be used to judge the authenticity of persons of African heritage in relation to an imagined African standard since it is not normative. Instead, assessments of black women are placed within the context of shared international concerns by black diasporic frameworks.

From an all-encompassing perspective on women's humanity, the thesis promotes not only the recognition of black women's rights, but also a worldwide consensus to recognise and preserve their rights as significant contributions to their societies. When he claims that the societal interpretation of diversity, from the minority viewpoint, is a complicated, on-going dialogue that seeks to legitimate cultural hybridities that develop in periods of historical upheaval, Bhabha (1994) adds weight to this. In this regard, it is important to comprehend American black women's interpretation of black feminism within the framework of American nation-state politics. At the same time, U.S. black feminism as a social justice initiative has a lot in common with similar social justice initiatives promoted not only by other racial/ethnic groups in the United States but also by women of African heritage in a variety of nations (Takaki 1993). This concept asserts that while women of African ancestry are diverse everywhere, the difficulties they encounter may be similar, which emphasises the necessity for sisterhood and solidarity among them in the framework of an intercontinental Black women's awareness movement (McLaughlin 1995). Additionally, I contend that women experience

persistent socioeconomic problems such as poverty, violence, reproductive disorders, a lack of education, sex work, and illness susceptibility on a global scale (*The Human Rights of Women*, 1998). By highlighting these and other similarities among women of African ancestry while highlighting what is unique to African-American women, the experiences, attitudes, and practises of African-American-women are placed in a transnational, black diasporic framework.

This thesis combines global south feminism, different types of feminism, and black feminism. I concur with Chandra Mohanty's 1986 article, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," as well as the works of other supporters of Third World Feminism. In her paper, Mohanty argues against academic works and professors who have fabricated universal, basic, and uniform stereotypes about Third World women, denying their historical and geographical diversity. Mohanty does allow us to think about common struggles without assuming that all female employees face the same things. The most significant aspect of this study is that it refrains from making ignorant, generalised statements about women in the Third World or in Africa. Instead, it emphasises learning from their own experiences and structures these concepts using black feminism. It is this learning space that the *Bildungsroman* novels writing by African and African-American women have all presented in this thesis. The different histories and backgrounds of African and African-American women are vividly depicted for a better appreciation for advocating friendship and sisterhood among women of African descent.

In the same manner, Byrne, and Imma, (2019) argued in “Why Southern Feminism?” that 'Third World' nations and those in 'the Global South' are connected by a single aspect of their social structures, namely the economy. The histories and realities of current imperialist practises, which make the conditions and locations of the lives and experiences of those most exploited by capitalism a source of potentially transformational common epistemologies, may

be erased and fragmented by these terminology and definitions. It is reasonable to anticipate conceptual convergence among feminists from the area, which includes all of Africa, the Indian subcontinent, the majority of South American nations, several former USSR republics, and numerous island governments. The thrust of this study's thesis is the promotion of "conceptual convergence" that acknowledges the sensibility of feminists from all parts of Africa, the Indian subcontinent, and most of South American countries, among others, for unity among women of African descent, through friendship and sisterhood bond.

In addition, I concur with Byrne and Imma (2019) that as we "move the centre of our thinking away from the European metropole," to use Ngugi wa Thiong'o's terminology (1993), we practise what M. Jacqui Alexander refers to as "pedagogies of crossing," or "the reciprocal investments we must make to cross over into a metaphysics of interdependence" (2005:6). As Southern feminists, we must show how the Global South is diverse and adaptable via our decolonial studies and modes of activity in order to respond to a decentred multiplicity of places. We must not let our yearning for connection or the fetish of academic transnationalism conceal the fact that many women and persons who identify as gender non-conforming in the postcolonial place great value on the local in the global South. The diversity among the many African areas of the global south and South American nations, as well as among women of African origin, is not undermined by this concept, which yearns for a common ground among them.

It is apt to maintain in line with the aforementioned arugment that feminist critics and pioneers in gender studies such as Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyèwùmí (1997) to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) have drawn on their postcolonial perspectives to have forewarned us of the perils of classifying people by their gender universally throughout place and time. However, there is a chance that Southern feminisms might get so ingrained in their respective local politics and indigenous knowledge systems that they become incomprehensible to one another. The fear of

this outcome underscores the need for a compromise among all women of African origin as reiterated in this theis.

As a result, I agree with Byrne and Imma (2019) that it is manifestly counterproductive if feminists from other areas cannot grasp one another's circumstances or concerns because feminism, as a worldwide theoretical and practical movement, is opposed to patriarchy in all forms. However, as Zimbabwean feminist Nancy Kachingwe (2017) puts it, Black African feminists have been advocating for a feminism that would be "special to the continent." African feminists such as bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, and Audre Lorde have influenced some of these forms, while others owe their existence to Alice Walker's womanism. Though they do not originate from the region, these thinkers have made significant and diverse contributions to feminism in the Global South. Despite this, they write persuasively and eloquently about the necessity for Black feminists to collaborate across borders in order to overthrow white supremacist patriarchal capitalism.

As I wrap up this portion of the thesis, I will once again agree with Byrne and Imma (2019) that it's important to analyse, rethink, and record the potential and constraints of feminist solidarities as a Southern enterprise. The US's #BlackLivesMatter movement and South Africa's Fallist movement have important critical resonances and exchanges that undermine the traditional founding myths of young Black queer feminist-led resistance. Therefore, even though we argue that Southern feminisms can benefit from a critical shift away from a Northern orientation, it is abundantly clear that "there are Souths in the geographic North" (Mahler, 2017: n.p.) from the ongoing scholar-activist exchanges in the expansive landscape of Global Black feminisms over the years.

The recent debate on the universality of black feminism is pertinent to this study since it elaborates on how women of African descent throughout the globe share many aspects of existence. However, it is appropriate to argue that African women's experiences are not

obviously the same as those of African-American women. Contexts and histories also differ and have an impact on women's experience. The novels under research demonstrate that these women experience violence and abuse, poverty, racism, classism, and being denied the opportunity to get an education, as I have already said in this study and will expand on in the next chapters.

Counter Discourse as a filament of Postcolonial thinking

This chapter has so far looked at some of the theoretical and historical origins of feminism and its many branches since this is a crucial foundation for my analysis of the feminine *Bildumgsroman*. The other half of the chapter will examine the second important set of critical ideas that informs my assessment of the novels: the postcolonial shift in critical theory and literature, as well as associated counter-discursive activities. According to Harris' idea, the operation of post-colonial counter-discourse is dynamic, not static: it produces textual techniques that continually "devour" its "own biases" while also exposing and undermining those of the dominant discourse (Harris 1985). The writings that are the subject of this thesis have successfully shown this in several ways. All have altered the viewpoint via the growth of textual and intellectual interactions that help in absorbing, exposing, and removing biases meted out towards the dominant or "Other." Some have taken an extreme stance, while others have adopted a less radical one.

Important to keep in mind is that post-colonial counter-discursive approaches require laying out hegemonic discourse, comprehending and exposing its theoretical underpinnings, and demolishing these assumptions from the cross-cultural viewpoint of the imperially subjugated "local." For instance, Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* overtly challenges British dominance over people, places, cultures, and languages (1966, p. 23). The text creates its own hybridised reality with a perspective that is provisionally authoritative but deliberately

constructed as such because it tries to demonstrate how the viewpoint is arbitrary and how meaning is thus generated culturally. According to Tiffin (1987), counter-discourse is

> …a process whereby the postcolonial writer unveils and dismantles the basic assumptions of a specific canonical text by developing a 'counter-text' … altering, often allegorically, its structures of power … Counter discourse seeks to deconstruct significations of authority and power exercised in the canonical text, to release its stranglehold on representation and, by implication, to intervene in social conditioning (Tiffin 1987, p. 22).

Therefore, Tiffin's explanation of counter-discursive strategies is significantly used in the theoretical framework of this research. I will argue that the *Bildungsroman* is a "counter-discourse" that significantly references the traditional *Bildungsroman* while reinterpreting it in terms of today's culture. The texts in this research, which were written by women of African ancestry, deconstruct the prevailing narrative of the "traditional *Bildungsroman*" as a consequence. The theory provides the framework for examining all of the "basic assumptions" about the *Bildungsroman* genre put forward by the "significations of authority and power exercised in the canonical text" (Tiffin 1987, p. 20). Beyond the actual historical experience of colonialism, postcolonial theory examines other manifestations of colonialism. These include sources of dominance that are supported by social norms, cultural practises, and linguistic power as well as more covert forms of hegemonic control that, even when they are hard to spot, have a big impact.

I have given great attention to how the authors have portrayed their female characters engaging in discussion with their male counterparts in light of the prevalent social realities in the settings of the texts I have selected for this research. This takes into account how males behave toward the female characters in society as shown in the chosen novels. The aforementioned texts provide as inspiration for Obafemi's (1994) postulation, which helps with

the analyses of these works. Therefore, in terms of how feminist criticism is seen, the treatment of women's objective conditions, sociocultural products, and content related to the complexities of the macro experience in society will be our key area of concern.

I attest that each and every female character in the texts we are studying re-enscribed the woman's true human consciousness in defiance to reactionary patriarchy and imperialism, which double-undo her in all spheres of life. Since the 1960s, when only a small number of African women writers had produced any works, the field of their writing has evolved substantially. The majority of female writers and literary critics have used the *Bildungsroman* genre to deconstruct, appropriate, assert, and re-inscribe a first-hand portrayal of African womanhood, sisterhood, and friendship in order to correct the earlier misrepresentation and re-presentation of women by their male counterparts as docile, subservient, and silenced objects in male hegemonic literature.

Women writers and critics like Flora Nwapa, Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta, Bessie Head, Tsitsi Dangarembga, and Helen Chukwuma, as well as Micere Mugo, Nawal El Saadawi, and Abena Busia, have all contributed their voices to a form of literary commitment through the appropriation and re-inscription of the place of women in literature, as discussed in the preceding section. These African women writers have addressed and corrected the tradition of challenging the pre-existing norms, conventions, and standards set by the male-dominated society in their literary works.

I will say it again; the *Bildungsroman* subgenre has developed into a potent medium or vehicle for challenging gender discrimination. When this occurs, women writers from all ethnic, socioeconomic, and cultural origins always use gender as a tool for social mobilisation (Kolawole 1997, p. 120). Because of this, African women's writing is not a "solitary fetish," as Kolawole claims. The *Bildungsroman* subgenre uses it as a tool to express the collective

consciousness of women. These female writers and critics have no qualms about using this literary position to challenge gender stereotypes.

Even while most male authors have created a world of heroic male characters, Kolawole notes that women have also consciously developed that embody and represent African women in their creative works. As the authors became more aware that the bulk of early character types are tragic heroines who oppose the social order and lose their lives in the process, they created these fictitious female characters in reaction. Examples of such heroines include women who find themselves in circumstances that lead to social upheaval, are characterised by interpersonal conflict, a fight between tradition and the forces of modernity, as well as Westernization (Kolawole 1997). It is clear from the literary texts examined in this research that female fictional characters are now often used to illustrate how women are positioned in both literature and society.

In order to support the aforementioned, Bungaro (2004) asserts that pioneering African women writers have questioned and opposed the neglect of their work. African women writers have constantly mainstreamed very strong female characters to reflect their displeasure with the present system, despite what may seem like neglect on their side. This response and similar ones are blatant efforts to change, weaken, or disrupt the language that is controlled by males. In an insightful piece titled "Female Authors, Male Critics," Ojo-Ade draws attention to a critical imbalance and apparent lack of impartiality in the evaluation of the works of female African writers as well as in the representation of gender in African fiction written by males (Ojo-Ade in *African Literature Today*, Vol. 1983). *New Women's Writing in African Literature*, ALT 24, which celebrates the rapid growth of African women's writing, draws on the works studied in *Women in African Literature Today*, ALT 15, which was released two decades earlier (1987, pp. xi-xii). In reiterating the aforementioned discussion, Bungaro (2004) claims that they have gradually but unmistakably used their creations as weapons to occupy spaces that

have been dominated by males for an inordinate length of time and to silence them. She goes on to add that writing in this sense acts as a non-violent but powerful weapon in the struggle against the dominance of male myths since it involves both the creation of alternatives and the accurate documentation of what is really present.

In addition, I believe that African women writers are actively engaged in finding new ways to articulate their experiences as well as modifying the structures of male-centric ideas and languages. One of these forms is the women's *Bildungsroman* genre, which emerged in the 1960s as a counter-hegemonic discourse after the woman had been "silenced" in men's hegemonic literature. However, this pattern finally altered when women authors stood up for their right to publish and speak out against male chauvinism. Early writers like Toni Morrison, Bessie Head, Alice Walker, Flora Nwapa, and others were vocal in mainstreaming the position of women, but the male writers' dominant voice continued to overshadow the female voice's apparent trickle, which was not harnessed along the now-dominant theme of women's equality with men and social empowerment.

The research agrees with Tiffin (2006, p. 1) that the effect of European discourses had a significant role in shaping the daily realities of the colonised people. This is evident when examining the *Bildungsromane* authored by women in Africa and the African diaspora as a counter-hegemonic discourse. Without a doubt, African women face this reality as a result of the social and literary constructions of their identities and mandated roles by male domination. However, Tiffin contends that modern literature, philosophy, and art from post-colonial cultures need not only be augmentations or adaptations of European patterns. It is a part of the processes of creative and literary decolonization because, as Said argues, the dominant European discourses are moulded by post-colonial appropriation and radical disintegration of European norms. The connection between the *Occident* and the *Orient* is one of power,

dominance, and complicated hegemony to varied degrees (Said 1979, p. 45). In this manner, Said (1979) continues to contend that:

> the imaginative examination of things Oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, then according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments and projections (Said 1979, p. 50).

The aforementioned assertion, in my view, serves as inspiration for this research on *Bildungsromane* written by women as a counter-hegemonic dialectic. This research intends to challenge Western notions about what is superior about people of African origin and to offer a voice to women who are building new ways of representation and communication about their challenges. By repurposing and remaking the *Bildungsroman* genre to represent and express the experiences of women writers, in this instance women of African heritage, female authors are basically deconstructing it. Women are now the "storytellers" who will change the future, as Head (1989) argues in the chapter's headline.

I contend that women authors have the urge to construct or recreate autonomous local identity (Tiffin 1987) for African women and women of African origin via their literary works. Similarly, to decolonization, the discussion surrounding the female *Bildungsroman* as a counter-hegemonic discourse is a procedure, not really the arrival; it provokes a continuing dialectic among dominant social centre right systems and peripheral suppression of them (Tiffin 1987). This dialogue will eventually result in what, in Wilson Harris' formulation, is the evolving of textual strategies that continuously "consume" their "own biases" at the same time as they expose them by tearing down and exposing the hegemonic discourses that were created by male dominance and female sexism, the feminist texts examined in this thesis have

been successful in shifting the prevalent and prevailing narrative. Regardless of the philosophical perspective one views this discussion from, particularly within the postcolonial counter-hegemonic discourses, both the phallocentric and the gynocentric appear to be continuous counter-hegemonic discourses.

The Debate on Sisterhood and Friendship among Women

It is expedient to aver that connections among women are particularly crucial for African-American women who have realised that sisterhood and friendship among women are sources of support and strength given their shared history and experience. The impact of motherhood, sisterhood, and friendship on every aspect of their lives is significant. It is important to emphasise that, as was said previously in this thesis, the feminist movement among white women and the black civil rights movement have largely eclipsed the struggles of black women for freedom and equal rights. hooks says that white women were not truly dedicated to uniting with black women and other groups of women to combat sexism in her critique of this scenario. They were particularly concerned with highlighting their predicament as white, affluent women (hooks 2000). This explains why American white women who were fighting sexism, classism, and racism did not defend the rights of black women. This terrible trend has intensified and brought out the connections that black women already have. The sisterhood and friendships of black women were found to be essential for putting an end to the three-fold oppression they endured. Black feminist academics like bell hooks, Patricia Hills Collins, Boyce Davies, Elizabeth Abel, and Audre Lorde are just a few of those who have recognised the significance of female friendship in forming women's identities and, subsequently, the black communities in which they live. In establishing a theory of female friendship, I want to depict the world as women have imagined it to be and as many women have constructed it. Abel et al. concur that female companionship is crucial. In feminist philosophy, both the causes that keep women in subjugation and those that keep them alive

must be considered. A female friendship theory aims to mould, articulate, and materialise the ways that women have supported one another and themselves (Abel et al., 1983).

Reiterating that the word "sisterhood" is controversial and under debate by academics is stating the obvious. In "Ties that (Un)bind: Feminism, Sisterhood, and Other Foreign Relationships," Oyewumi (2001) makes the case that the word "sisterhood" refers to political solidarity among women's activists. A number of feminist academics and African literary critics have criticised the term "sisterhood" as a loaded phrase that women outside of Western/white culture cannot use to promote their cause and agency. Because of this, males and African literary critics have shield away from using sisterhood as a metaphor to describe how patriarchy oppresses women equally.

However, this theory does not hesitate to refer to the most pervasive kind of oppression that sisters and women experience under patriarchy, female sexism, or "sisterarchy," as a "sisterhood." Evaristo claims that the concept of sisterhood is all-inclusive and takes into account all different kinds of sisterhood, and this research supports her claim. Evaristo (2019) unifies the many strands and voices of sisterhoods, sexual groupings, friendships, and the human family as she states it in the dedication to *Girl, Woman, and Other*: "For the sisters & the sistas & the sistahs & the sistren & the women & the womxn & the wimmin & the womyn & our brethren & our bredrin & our brothers & our bruvs & our men & our mandem & the LGBTQI+ members of the human family" (Evaristo 2019, p. 7). "Sisterhood" is a phrase that may refer to a group of women who are tightly tied, who pool their financial and emotional resources, and who are impacted by political, cultural, and social institutions, in addition to being a term that is connected to families. Because women used to form bonds based on their material circumstances, economic opportunities, political rights, and class advantages, these factors defined and often limited female bonding in the past. Black women in the United States see sisterhood as a method to share their experiences and learn from one another. It is clear that

female relationships matter to black women as a source of knowledge and a place to talk about their challenges.

Black women's "experiential" networks and organisations were created specifically to bring about social change and reforms, and they often had a wider impact. However, the concept of sisterhood as an official part of the political agenda had not been articulated publicly until the rise of second-wave feminism. A collective female identity founded on the notion that all women, regardless of class or ethnicity, are equally vulnerable to sexist oppression was the aim of second-wave feminism. In contrast to the reformism and individualism of the first generation of feminists, second-wave liberationists claimed that they were fighting for the radical and communal "liberation" of all "women" from their patriarchal oppressors. So, the idea that sisterhood does not have to be exclusive motivates the effort to unite all women and create a shared female identity. It might be a useful tool for the political advocacy of women (Anantharaj and Thiruppathi 2019, pp. 53–54). As postulated by Evaristo (2019) in *Girl, Woman, Others* and consequently encouraged in chapters three, four, and five in that manner, this becomes the platform for bonding, or a place for exchanging information, experiences, and ordeals, regardless of their sexual orientations, socio-cultural origins, or political backgrounds.

In this way, the fight to abolish male supremacy and give all women the power they deserve, regardless of their backgrounds, became philosophically based on female solidarity. This thesis examines this assertion by discussing the novels that were selected for this research. Second-wave white feminists also promote sisterhood and friendship among different white feminist organisations to lessen divides and promote coherence. They were able to unite them under a common political programme intended to reform society. Mainstream second-wave feminism was able to highlight global female exploitation and advance women's standing in both the public and private spheres as a result of their united efforts. One of the challenging features of feminism, as emphasised by Higgins (2006), is the notion that it is the responsibility

of relatively well-off feminists to advocate for the interests of all women. The aforementioned actions are consistent with this theory. In 1991, Mohanty said that women are believed to be an already established, cohesive group with equal interests and aspirations, independent of social, ethnic, or racial location. Higgin (2006) concurred with this statement. The rationale given above emphasises the common interests of women of different racial or ethnic origins without downplaying their social standing, personal preferences, or other traits. But according to hooks (2000), many middle-class feminist authors rarely analyse whether or not their stance on women's reality is genuine to the lived experiences of women as a group. Additionally, they are ignorant of how much their perspective is prejudiced owing to race and class (hooks 2000). The revolutionary or "liberation" context of the anti-Vietnam War protests, Black Power, May 1968, and the division of the world between the east and west is largely responsible for the emergence of second wave feminism. During this time, women were at the vanguard of the movement that they felt could change the world.

Then, in the depths of the Great Recession, the Third Wave of Feminism appeared, coinciding with a period of introspection and uncertainty about one's capacity to make any significant changes in the world. Some young and spirited women felt it was no longer important for them to push the feminist agenda, despite the fact that few Western countries were able to achieve some degree of success in both the legal and professional realms as a consequence of some of the aforementioned accomplishments. Despite the fact that there is still a gender imbalance in the workplace between men and women and that violence against women is on the increase worldwide, relatively few women hold key roles in politics and the workforce.

Odim (2001) identifies that women who do not share the privileges of middle-class feminists “articulate a women’s struggle that while fighting sex discrimination internally and globally, recognizes that many of those things that oppress them are part of inequitable and

exploitative global order which the elimination of sex-based discrimination will not eradicate" (Odim 2001, p. 113). Nzegwu's (2003) poem on "Sisterhood," is pertinent to support this conversation of the discrimination that exists between the women folks.

white sister told me
all women are one
united in de face
of chau'vism.
… I looked up
from my chore
on the kitchen floor
where, new found sister
had ordered me to be
on knees to scrub the floor clean
for the pittance she paid:
on knees
to scrub the floor clean
for sisterarchy
Nkiru Nzegwu (in Oyěwùmí 2003 vii-viii)

This poem highlights the significant differences between women that are seen in the racial, linguistic, and international labor markets. "A white sister taught me that all women are one and united in the face of chauvinism [sic]", according to the poem's opening words (vii). Unfortunately, as clearly seen above, a black woman is shown in the poem's last words "on knees/to scrub the floor clean/for sisterarchy" (viii).

Evaristo's integration of the various strands and voices of sisterhoods, sexual groups, friendship, and the human family as captured in the dedication for *Girl, Woman, and Others*

seeks to address this gap in sisterhood as orchestrated by "sisterarchy" or female misogyny together with patriarchy as much as globalization as well. Evaristo's synthesis of the diverse threads and voices of sisterhoods, sexual groups, friendship, and the human family as captured in the dedication for *Girl, Woman, and Others*, underscores the need to promote sisterhood as opposed to "sisterarchy" or female misogyny together with patriarchy. Can sisterhood still be global? The foregoing was a very fundamental question raised by Jouve in Third Wave Feminism (Jouve 2004, p. 199). Sisterhood and friendship among women can still be global undermining the diverse bottlenecks encountered by women of African descents and the various brands of feminists' movements of the second and third feminist waves.

Women continue to make up the majority of the world's impoverished, and they continue to experience slavery as well as political, economic, and religious persecution throughout the Third World (as in Sudan). Women are still being raped in combat all around the globe (as in Bosnia, Chechnya, or the various African wars). In all these ways, third-wave feminism can and does continue the struggle that previous generations began. There is a strong need to think about the new patterns that are evolving and how they should affect our sense of priorities, especially considering that they are riddled with paradoxes. Feminists may now join in new "global" forums for debate, political protest, and commerce, for instance, thanks to the significant advances in information and communication technology. Nevertheless, the technological gap between those in the North who have access to it and those in the South who do not has become greater (Jouve, 2004).

I contend that women may still create powerful links of solidarity among themselves on a worldwide scale, despite some of the inherent difficulties mentioned above. By encouraging agitation when required, conversation, and negotiation of the feminist agenda to advance their mission of creating female solidarity. It is possible that this would not always be possible, but as the proverb goes, "small drops of water" can become an enormous ocean. In

addition, I contend that feminism should be seen as a dialectic and a place for (re)negotiating gender relations in order to achieve gender parity that respects and takes into account variety in all its forms. This might be strengthened by adapting the Oshindoro-inspired graphical representation of unity in diversity. The first picture here was taken during a wedding send-off in Nigeria, while the second picture was capture during a choir day sing-song service of ECWA Nassarawa Gwong, in Plateau State of Nigeria as illustrated below;

Fabric are seen in the images above, as an illuminating object in the rethinking of gender relations because of its materiality. An actual place for rethinking gender conversation is an item of clothing. Clothing has deeper significance and may help us think about gender

identification and disidentification (Oshindoro 2020). The ladies in the aforementioned images all wore identical costumes that had the same colour, style, and grandiose, which is why they are so remarkable. Their consistency in clothing colour and style communicates their cohesion, togetherness, and sense of community. The many uses of fabric are considered in opposition to this point of view: The homogeneous samples reveal an overarching logic of friendship while concealing the complex perceptions and understandings of group identification. Even though the ladies in the various examples wear identical outfits, their preferences for headbands and sewing styles varies. Even in situations when head ties match, people's methods for tying them and the styles that they incorporate into their clothing are not necessarily same (Oshindoro 2020).

Women's diversity and togetherness serve as the main themes of this thesis. Despite this homogeneity, however, each person's sense of fashion and propensity for contemporary clothing vary widely, playing a significant role in how the members choose to dress. Despite the popular perception of similarity in clothes, each person's overall appearance always differs, generating uniqueness in uniformity, according to Chikwenye Ogunymi, this individuality is created by carefully chosen accessories and poise of carriage (Ogunymi 1996). This shows that feminist discourse can be looked at from different points of view, just like the different styles of fabric, or "aṣọ ẹbí," in Yoruba and "anko," in Hausa, worn by the women and ladies in the pictures above.

It has been suggested that the usage of sisterhood as a paradigm is debatable. Sisterhood, like the word feminism, has to be reexamined in light of the fact that, although having strong ties to a particular culture, its intended application is ultimately transglobal, according to Oyewumi (2009). The essence of this research is highlighted by the word "sisterhood's" intended transnational applicability. On the other hand, Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" from 1988 elaborates on the inescapable inferiority complex that women

have been forced to contend with by taking the back seat. Thus, a sense of kinship based on their position, such as sisterhood, may be harnessed on the basis of being seen as inferior to males or underrepresented in a patriarchal system. The postcolonial defence of Spivak's idea of the subaltern emphasises an all-encompassing relationship based on sisterhood. According to Spivak, the subaltern has experienced gender injustice, as well as perhaps being inaccessible or underrepresented in the legal system. The relationship between the protagonists and an older sister, cousin, or friend—who is either oppressed, abused, or discriminated against by men or society—is the most significant aspect of the six novels; this relationship also reveals the trans-national or universal sisterhood or friendship they share. The same point is made more clearly by Oshindoro (2020), who asserts that African and African-American women share issues that go beyond the fact that they have often experienced marginalisation and oppression as women. Their call for a truly black and African solution to African gender problems unites them together in solidarity as women of colour of African descent who should sculpt out a revolutionary praxis for themselves, especially as their unique preferences oftenly go unsecured and their experiences unrecognised under a universal coalition with feminism. Their common African heritage provides them both with a glimmer of hope as they fight for their lives as women and as human beings. African women do not have to deal with racism, in contrast to African-American women who suffer from the twin catastrophes of racism and sexism (Oshindoro 2020).

Similar to sisterhood among women, this relationship may have a sexual or androgynous connection as well as serve as a forum for the exchange and appreciation of their shared wisdom and experiences. There may not be any mother-daughter or family chemistry here. Despite its benefits, female friendship has certain drawbacks, although Hasanthi (2016) claims that it is energising and satisfying. Although the dynamics of female friendship are always shifting, they revitalise women in any situation. The biggest benefit of female bonding

is the opportunity it provides for women to confide in one another about their actual emotions, goals, concerns, and desires.

Conclusion

I posit that literary works that subject and objectify women of African descent have unintentionally adapted the *Bildungsroman* genre as a forum for counter-discourse and discursive confrontations with the dominant male hegemonic discourses and the construction of women in society by an orthodox patriarchal configuration. This research does not downplay the importance of female friendship or the diversity of women's experiences. Instead, it mostly concentrates on the things that all women, particularly African and African-American women, have in common. According to Susan Arndt's "image of aggressive women," the solidarity or link between and among the women in this research is not based on animosity against men. Radical feminism, which encourages hate for males, penis envy, refusing to accept African customs, and rejecting marriage and femininity, is sometimes associated with feminism by aggressive women (Arndt, 2005).

In light of this, the analysis of a few *Bildungsromane* written by female authors in the following chapters shows how these texts "write back" to the *Bildungsroman* tradition by spotting and opposing prevailing narratives that represent the colonized. These writings serve two purposes: they critique mainstream literature while also altering some passages to support the decolonization objectives of female friendship and sisterhood.

This thesis demonstrates that, like modernism, female writers of *Bildungsroman* resist clear-cut narratives, conventional notions of realism, and established social and religious beliefs (Rayment, 2017). It sparks a rebellion,

> … from established rules, traditions and conventions, fresh ways of looking at man's position and function in the universe and many (in some cases remarkable) experiments in form and style. It is particularly concerned with

> language and how to use it (representationally or otherwise) and with writing itself (Cuddon, 1999, p. 516).

The Western *Bildungsroman*, which emphasises an individualistic, self-centered development tale, is essentially the target of this thesis, which is a critique of it. This research argues that since there is considerably greater social and community engagement in the genre's Counter-African or African-descent forms, society as a whole, not just the *Bildungsheld*, must grow and develop as a whole. In other words, it is a structural criticism since, unlike how they are portrayed in literature, the issues that maintain women (or black people) in their positions have a longer colonial past, racism, and oppression. Thus, the de-indivisualizing tendency in black female *Bildungsromane* is revealed by the strong presence of sisterhood and solidarity between women as they work to re-imagine the conditions for emancipation, self-development, and growth in their communities—not just for themselves but for everyone whose full potential to selfhood is oppressed. The *Bildungsromane* works written by women of African heritage are utilised in this study to illustrate the variety of topics that may be covered while discussing sexuality.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICISATION OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN CHARACTERS IN TONI MORRISON'S AND ALICE WALKER'S TEXTS

"It's not everything you talk, Maccomy, but…" Davies (1994, p. 152).

Introduction

The two major texts under comparison in this chapter are *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker alongside Toni Morrison's *Sula*. These texts are considered iconic for their rich tapestry of metaphors layered in symbolic representations, their adept critique of white supremacy deeply entrenched in the scheme of beauty and belonging, and their challenge to patriarchy perpetrated by both white and black men. They are also examined for their profound literariness weaved in creolized African-American English and their elicitation of global ovations as canonical African-American texts. The texts' in-depth probing into the far recess of the history of the African-American female characters in a highly racial and patriarchal society reveal essentially the sociocultural hurdles that make and mar African-Americans' receptivity, perception and struggle for the equality of sexes and the races. The texts also reveal the depressing character of the times, the in-between-wars torn epoch and the denudating effects of the Great Depression, which represent dark stains in the historical consciousness of African-Americans in the United States of America.

The traumatizing Post War era of the 1970s and the period of the Great Depression of 1929 in the United States form the period of Toni Morrison's and Alice Walker's literary attempts to interrogate the historical imbalances of the American society to the African-Americans generally, but the black woman in particular. Morrison in particular takes up the habitual self-loathing in an attempt to demystify the underlying racial forces that inform and designate African-Americans as second class humans.

This age long exclusion of black in the scheme of things is not merely confined to a point in history and location in the West. Being black generally, but particularly being a black

woman, has exacted tremendous burdens and sufferings on the African-American woman in particular. The relational experiences of Pecola and Celie are representative in all ramifications; as their different levels of enlightenment which spark the struggle and recovery of Pecola's black humanity on the one hand; and the unearned self-stigmatization and loathing. This experience remains the function of her absolute lack of enlightenment and realization as a *Bildungsheld*.

Toni Morrison's and Alice Walker's works explore the themes of black feminism, friendship and sisterhood, which is very cardinal to this study's exploration of friendship and sisterhood through the *Bildungsroman* genre, hinged on the counter discourse. In the novels *The Bluest Eye, Sula* and *The Color Purple*, the women urgently seek to comprehend their identity within the purview of their predominant black communities, as they interact with other marginalized women. This chapter showcases how this identity is either inhibited or achieved in the aforementioned texts. With regards to both Morrison and Walker, according to Miles (2015), a woman's self-actualization seems crucial for the upkeep of her community. Both authors are sure that black women's supportive interactions with one another, as shown in the works under consideration, enhance the self-fulfillment process. The prosperity of the black woman as well as her society depends on this mirroring form of connection, which is mostly caught between two peers rather than having to be present in mother-daughter relationships.

In this chapter, and the next ones (four and five), Flockemann's (1992) work, particularly her chapter two; "Not-quite insider and not-quite outsider" is instrumental in setting the stage for my analysis. Hence, I find her use of "the protagonist's relationship with a slightly older sister, cousin or friend which establishes a dual narrative focus, "not-quite inside and not-quite outside" (Flockemann 1992, p. 56), as another angle for my analyses of the aforementioned chapters. Feng (1999) on the other hand uses the term "double *Bildungsroman*," as a similar word to the "dual narrative focus." Feng avows that it is possible

to see Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* as a dual *Bildungsroman* in which Claudia's account of *Bildung* is used to contrast Pecola's. According to Feng, Morrison used a variety of fictional perspectives to achieve the results of narrative fracturing in *The Bluest Eye*. The rhetorical interruption that characterises modernist and postmodernist literature is reflected in this form of narrative fragmentation. This kind of fragmented writing, which also embraces the storytelling tradition in Afro-American culture, is what Susan Willis refers to as "the four-page formula" for black women authors. The two characters are compelled to face the repressed as a result of previous events creeping into the present.

The Bluest Eye tells the tale of Pecola Breedlove, a black girl who wants blue eyes but also experiences her father's rape. The first-person narrator, Claudia MacTeer, seeks to reenact the incident in a flashback because she is consumed with remembering Pecola's disaster. As a result, the work also includes Claudia's tale in addition to Pecola's. As a result, it is also a story about the maturation of girls who are constantly under the watchful eye of dominant views and do not have positive images of themselves reflected in the looking glass of traditional civilization. Therefore, in order to understand the political message Morrison etched into her mournful poem, the reader must deconstruct the shards of the girls' personal, cultural, and racial experiences. Morrison emphasises racial segregation, but she also highlights the contrasts and similarities between two black girls to illustrate the complicated effects of racism, sexism, and classism on black girls' adolescent development. By challenging cultural and racial norms, as was already said, Claudia lives to recount the narrative as a counter-discourse to the classic male *Bildungsroman*. In essence, Morrison deconstructs the narrativization of the *Bildungsheld's* integration seen in the male *Bildungsroman* rather than just exposing the racial dynamics in the Afro-American growing tale. According to Grewal (1998), the eleven-year-old black girl Pecola Breedlove confesses in the novel *The Bluest Eye* her wish to have blue eyes since she feels ugly and is seen as such by the bulk of the characters. The ideal of beauty

that her peers aspire to is represented by Shirley Temple, a white child actress with appealing blue eyes. The novel begins with a somewhat parodic depiction of the ideal white family, with Dick and Jane, their adoring parents, and their gorgeous dog and cat. They live in a fantastic and happy house. As the hegemonic force of an ideology centred on the supremacy of "the bluest eye," the dominant culture uses the Dick and Jane text to duplicate its hierarchical power structure (Grewal 1998, p. 2).

Sometimes within Claudia's first-person account, the voice is split between Claudia as a young kid and a somewhat adult Claudia. The novel's exterior structure depicts a grown-up Claudia who looks back on one of the most important years of her life and tries to exorcise the memory of her misery by recreating what it was like. Morrison's recourse to a third-person storyteller further breaks down this outer framing. (Feng 1999). This dual focus as argued by Flockemann (1992) functions in a number of ways, in the writings of black women detailing the processes of decolonization, it serves as a tactic for bridging the uneasy and difficult connection between insider and outsider, self and other. Finally, this dual focus can be read in relation to the revisionary tropes associated with writing by black women from Africa and the diaspora. It also provides scope for exploring the processes of psycho-social identification in the construction of a gendered subjectivity during times of historical transition (Flockemann 1992).

The dual focus serves as a convenient space for the interface between the two characters; a slightly older sister, cousin or friend which establishes a dual narrative focus that culminates into sisterhood and friendship among women of African descent. The dual focus is a deviation from the *Bildungsroman* norms, where the traditions of the Western *Bildungsroman* which focuses on a young man's "first physical awakenings, dramatic adolescent conflicts and later reconciliation with family, religion, educational systems or national community" (O'Neill

1982, p. 25). The foregoing points are subverted in a variety of ways, including the shift from male to female protagonist. Stratton (1994) identifies an aspect of African female novels of development that has some bearing on the dual focus referred to here. She describes this as the "paired women" device used by writers such as Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Mariama Bá and, more recently, Dangarembga, when two female characters (sisters, cousins, co-wives, or best friends) are placed in close proximity to one another in a family or social setting and who, in their reaction to male dominance, are the opposite of each other, one passively surrendering, the other vigorously opposing (Stratton 1994, p. 97). The examples she gives are generally mature women, but what is pertinent to this discussion is the application of such a device to young protagonists entering a colour-coded class hierarchy in a society in transition, where adolescence becomes metonymic of the processes of psycho-social as well as political transformation.

In the novel under study, there is an instance when Morrison talks of the relationships between her mother's acquaintances, who shared their lives around the kitchen table, and the neighbourhood she grew up in. Morrison's imaginative universes include the depth of such in-home conversations and shared experiences. Sula, Milkman, Frieda, and Claudia all listen in on the conversation between the ladies. Even Violet and Alice Manfred speak about their problems in the kitchen. Assata Shakur claims in "Women in Prison: How We Are" that women "named each other sisters out of a sentiment rather than as a product of a movement... They shared what little they had while supporting one another through hard times. (Smith 1983, *Home Girls* xxi).

The foregoing reveals how slave women encourage one another at their places of work. Hence, it becomes essentially the only place of them coming together without any form of misgiving and restrictions from the slave masters. For most women of African descent at home

and in the diaspora, their places of work duos for recreation and leisure purposes, where women bond together and discuss issues that primarily concern them.

On the one hand, Pecola's family history, her naivety and her subservient black perception of herself as a black girl works against her attainment of an ideal personality. On the other, Celie, a child-wife who lives in the squalor of the southern country, separated from Nettie, denied the warmth of family, does transcend the social barriers that tend to snuff life out of her. While it is important to view the duo in the light of their individual strength of character, having a relatively similar form of challenges, both as African-American women, sexually abused, thrown into squalor, and confined to menial mention, it is equally important to reflect on why what crushes Pecola does not destroy Celie. While Celie grows in faith that births her vision and recovery through progressive intimacy with God, Pecola stumbles and remains stuck to a fate concluded and completed in self-resignation– the fate that African-Americans must see things and themselves from the lenses of white people's. Pecola dies when she cannot see herself from within herself but from the vantage of an outsider. Du Bois (2007, p. 45) lends weight to this view when he argues that some African-Americans are unable to see themselves except through the eyes of others, through a veil – the white gaze and "[measure their] soul by the tape of a world" that looks on with contempt. Unlike Pecola who gets mad in her quest for blue eyes, Celie despite all odds perspires with passion.

Abel (1983) cites Sula and Nel as two instances of a specific kind of relational self-definition. In other words, it is because of their relationship that the two can recognise one another. By creating relationships with others who represent and reflect important elements of who they are, friendships help women clarify who they are through the intimacy of knowing them. Examining the challenges experienced by Sula, Nel, Celie, Sofia, and Shug as black bodies who encounter institutionalised racism is crucial to this theory. The sexism that these women encounter in this environment is interrelated because black women who are seeking

wholeness usually have to traverse a barrier or gap caused by various "isms" functioning in concert. The politics of sex, race, and class have a significant impact on the works of black women authors, claims Smith in her 1977 article "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" (Smith 1977, p. 170).

Miles (2015) raises an important point about how the three novels (*The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, and *The Color Purple* by Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, respectively) treat their subjects: all black women experience racial disenfranchisement at the hands of white America, their own black husbands, and occasionally one another. According to hooks, the double blockade of racism and sexism prevents black girls from reaching their full potential. She must fight against the idea that she, her body, and her existence are disposable (hooks 1984). All of the novels examined here challenge the idea that women are disposable. Black feminist authors utilise their literature to refute the idea that black women's wounded bodies are disposable (Miles 2015). Undoubtedly, this is the goal that the novels in this thesis want to accomplish by using the *Bildungsroman* subgenre as a platform for their creative explorations. The research is founded on the *Bildungsroman* analytical paradigms, which are outlined below; specifically, a review of character development as a result of a complex phenomenon covering the interplay of the socio-cultural and political contexts of the concerned individuals.

The following few paragraphs on the connection between Sula and Nel provide a vivid analysis and demonstration of this relationship. Nel gains confidence as she escapes her mother's controlling grip. Despite the fact that her parents had succeeded in wiping down to a dull glow whatever glitter or sputter she had, she learns to love and accept herself just as she is (*Sula* p. 83). Nel's relationship and sisterhood with Sula provide her with the independence, compassion, and acceptance she longs for from her parents. She looks stunning around Sula because she doesn't feel pressured to "pull her nose," as she would around her mother Helene. (*Sula* p. 55) Additionally, her connection with Sula has altered her outlook on life and beauty

while also enhancing her confidence in her overall appearance—"smooth hair no longer intrigues her" (*Sula* p. 55). Because of her friendship with Sula, Nel is able to appreciate her blackness and the distinct beauty that comes with being black. Nel therefore finds her voice in Sula's company, something she never does in that of her mother, where she never finds it. According to Morrison's texts, female friendships are founded on shared interests and complementary skills. It suggests that black women alone might help each other if they had a symbiotic connection. The relationships between Eva and Mrs. Suggs, Hannah, Patsy and Valentine, and Nel and Sula are noteworthy friendships that are highlighted throughout the text. In addition, Morrison's novel *Sula* shows how female friendship amongst black women can be mutually energising and nutritious for the women involved, even when there are conflicts. Eva relies on Mrs. Suggs and Mrs. Jackson for support after Boy Boy leaves her and their children. Despite having comparable financial circumstances to Eva, they help her out. Without a shadow of a doubt, Mrs. Suggs cares for Eva's three children while she is gone working to pay the bills. When she returns to the bottom, she gives Mrs. Suggs praise and prizes and reclaims her kids. In the novel, Valentine, Patsy, and Hannah have a superficial relationship. It is restricted to a discussion of ideas and a little time spent together. The only special relationship in the text is the one that develops between Nel and Sula from their early childhood into maturity.

In this chapter, the *Bildungsromane* by women serves as a counter-discourse, focusing on the iconic texts that are important in setting the tone for the dialogue on sisterhood and friendship among women.These three texts—*The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, and *The Color Purple*—present an emotional sense in which the intensely charged patriarchal and racial restrictions are reminiscent of a period when the Great Depression and the American Civil War era devastated the country and negatively impacted the fertile imagination of freedom left by provinciality.

These writings make it clear that racism and patriarchy are two phenomena that encourage estrangement, self-abdication, and the naturalisation of women's subjectivity.

Oluyomi Oduwobi et.al, (2016, p. 393) regard *Bildungsroman* as a portrayal of the confluence of slavery, migration, race, gender, development, and the African identity in a neo-slave narrative at the level of social understanding of the factors that shape the person. Exploring *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, and *The Color Purple* in relation to other texts—such as *Bildungsroman* writing by women and postcolonial, neo-slave narratives—is informative from an intertextual perspective. The shared objectification of the whole of displacement is the underlying basis for the correlative subtlety between the researched texts and *Sula*. First, against all black people, but particularly black women, from whom she derives her foggy sense of self and pedestrian view of humanity. Because the women authors in these works engage in revisionism of European historical and fictional records, which is regarded as "essential and inevitable," these writings can be read as a postcolonial examination of Eurocentric lowly representations of blacks (Tiffin 2006, p. 99). These novels fall under the umbrella of what Tiffin (1987, p. 100) calls the "canonical counter-discourse," since the authors take a variety of *Bildungsroman* characters and British classic literature and pervert them for postcolonial ends. The female authors' goal is to undermine and recreate the *Bildungsroman* tradition within a counter-discursive postcolonial discourse, not to replace it. The literary portrayal of "Black Earth" as an unavoidable historical moment, from which great authors like Toni Morrison and Alice Walker have taken inspiration, is used to establish the credibility or integrity of the work. *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* by Toni Morrison are considered instances of *Bildungsromane* by female writers in the following section.

By reinscribing the role of women in literature and society, the women author whose works this research examines have succeeded in dismantling the prevalent male hegemonic narrative. They have achieved this by contesting the intellectual and cultural supremacy of

males in societal structure over their female counterparts and by utilising the counter discourse as a springboard to challenge and invert the conventional portrayal of women in literature and culture.

Reconfiguring Toni Morrison's Novels in the Light of the Female *Bildungsroman*

Black, which objectifies ugliness or subpar or inferior stock, is superimposed by a hierarchical power system in which white is adored and persistently stuck at the top. The Shirley Temple theme is used by the American school system to normalise the superiority of whites over blacks. Pecola longs for Shirley Temple's signature blue eyes because she embodies the ideal of Western beauty and its standard. This desire is a result of the widespread acceptance of this hypothesis, especially among black people. According to Bloom (2010), the Shirley Temple image—the young kid with blue eyes, golden hair, and a happy grin—was promoted in the 1930s by the "dream-making Hollywood machine," which aimed to influence people's buying and entertainment choices. Similar to the Jane character in the primer, Shirley Temple was a model child in every sense. Temple, a young actress who performed lively song and dance sequences in various 1930s films, typically in association with African-American musician Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, rose to fame as a renowned child performer (Bloom 2010, pp. 34–35).

The Shirley Temple character in the Primer in Morrison's film alludes to a kind of cultural brainwashing that favours "whiteness" in the United States of America. Every American youngster is raised with white supremacy and has it instilled in their minds from an early age. Blacks who get this grooming come to accept their inferior position. Contrarily, Dick and Jane represent the hegemonizing philosophy of white hegemony, which conceptualises blue eyes as the ultimate white marker of cultural acceptability and belonging. Dick and Jane, who are both whiteness symbols, thereby aid in moulding a child's outlook and personality from infancy to maturity.

Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is a bold critique of white supremacy, which is systematically naturalized early in childhood of pupils' lives as demonstrated in the aforementioned text. Women's *Bildungsromane* attempt to bring to the forefront a counter narrative that exposes the underbelly of white male hegemony. Ogunyemi (1977, p. 13) sees these black characters as standing in juxtaposition to this dominant identity, the major black protagonists are shown as a diverse group of people living in three levels of families: Geraldine's, a parody of the imagined white family; the MacTeers; and the Breedloves, who are at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale.

It is satirical to intone that Cholly Breedlove together with his family does not foster love as his name denotes. There are no traces of love or an iota of hope emanating from anywhere for the overburdened, hopeless, and segregated family. Ironically, the Breedloves are the epitome of the failed and good for nothing microcosms of the experience of the African-Americans. The snowballing fracas stuck between Cholly and Pauline, caused by their debased financial position renders their home an incompetent and ineffective site to raise children with a positive and a high level of self-esteem.

Pecola's self-crushing image does not only come from her poor background, nor from the trauma of incest but a deeply perceived sense of inadequacy - her perceived "ugliness" which puts her off everywhere she goes. The reality of her perception comes to her when Maureen Peal meets her with the question "Pecola? Wasn't that the name of the girl in *Imitation of Life*? You know, the picture show. Where this mulatto girl hates her mother 'cause she is black and ugly' but then cries at the funeral. . . My mother has seen it four times" (Morrison 1970, pp. 67-8). According to Schwartz (1996), the girl's name in *Imitation of Life* was actually Peola: Pauline's "conflated name is interesting . . . The name with the 'c' has some suggestion of Latin *peccatum* (mistake, fault, error)" (Schwartz 1996, pp. 122-

123). Understanding the story requires concentrating on Pecola as a "mistake, fault, or error," and guilt is often seen as the primary feeling, particularly when incest is viewed as the work's core theme. A connected complex of anxieties that explains the novel's emotional effect on a broad range of readers may be found if we go further, beyond the humiliation of sexual assault and beyond anger as the scapegoat. […] Morrison claims that the novel's opening lines are, "Quiet as it's kept," are conspiratorial. 'Shh, don't tell anyone else,' and 'no one is allowed to know this.' It is a secret between us and a secret that is being kept from us" (Bump 2010, p. 153).

Perhaps, the foregoing underscores why Pecola's rape becomes a secret she kept away from her after an attempt at telling her that she was raped by her father. Pecola experiences sexual assault from both a thoughtless stranger and her own father, adding to her already intense feelings of being ugly. All of these then cause her to experience trauma that deflates her sense of self and ego, which leads to her searching for blue eyes and the ensuing spiral into lunacy. Mambrol (2017) asserts that a history of sexual seduction in infancy was accountable for the neurotic symptoms identified by feminists and psychoanalysts in patients in his view of Sigmund Freud's Trauma Theory (Mambrol 2017, p. 1). According to Mambrol, a one-to-one articulation of the link between the exterior and internal worlds is eventually replaced by an understanding of the impact of trauma that embraces a more sophisticated paradigm of awareness and unconscious functioning. He contends that several social concerns led to the development of trauma theory in the 1960s, including the recognition of the prevalence of violence against women and children, including rape, battering, and incest, the discovery of post-traumatic stress disorder, and the realisation of the psychological scars left behind by torture and genocide (Mambrol 2017).

A quick comparison of Pecola's and Sula's formative experiences in *The Bluest Eye* demonstrates how *Bildungsromane* by women differ and are the polar opposite of a typical *Bildungsroman*. Here, the psychological and moral development of the *Bildungsheld* from either infancy or adolescence to maturity is shown. By doing so, the authors of the novels under consideration here demonstrate how the narrator, who occasionally serves as the protagonist, tells their story, frequently from the first-person narrative point of view, without titling it after the *Bildungsheld*, as is customary in *Bildungsromane* such as Emma, Jane Eyre, and David Copperfield. The majority of the female authors in the works under study have defied this pattern by choosing to use titles other than those of their heroines, such as *The Bluest Eye*, *The Color Purple*, *Nervous Conditions*, *Beyond the Horizon*, and *Purple Hibiscus*. The only exceptions to this rule are Morrison's *Sula*, which adheres to it, and Head's *Maru*, which uses a male character's name as a title even though it might be argued that Margaret is the major character. Both Pecola and Sula experience severe limitations at the family level, including forced marriage-related family separation, molestation, displacement, and dehumanisation. Black ladies in American culture are subjected to oppressive limitations that have a profound physical and psychological effect on their psyche. Pecola deals with rape, incest, forced marriage, and estrangement from parents, siblings, and kids as powerful metaphors for comprehending the tangled destiny of the black woman. For instance, Pecola is split up from her parents, her brother Sammy, and herself at a very young age, even before she has her first period.

Morrison's *Sula* features Nel, who succumbs to peer pressure and displays the same traits that she originally finds annoying in her own mother. In the slave story, Morrison's feeling of detachment from the prevailing social order is parallel to the alienation that Nel and her mother experience and confront, whether as girls or adults (*Sula* pp. 102–103). Similar to how the writers of the slave tales attempted to incorporate their stories into dominant or popular

Bildungsroman attitudes, the women in each story attempt to integrate themselves into the dominant social order. The interactions amongst the women, as shown in this thesis, have a significant role in the encouragement they get. Celie, for example, forms their first sisterly bond with her younger sister Nettie. Nettie is "the talented one," in contrast to Celie, whom her father never approves of. Nettie is able to continue her education, but Celie is compelled to stop, despite the fact that she spends the whole day reading, studying, practising her handwriting, and attempting to get us to think (TCP, 17). The two sisters, however, look out for and care for one another. Nettie tries her hardest to convince her father; she even arranges for their teacher to talk with him. Celie tries to protect her sister Nettie from Pa's brutality and the miserable life she was unable to escape on her own. When Celie marries Mr. _____ and moves in with him, Nettie runs away from her stepfather. She urges Celie to stand up for her rights in life and gives her advice on how to avoid letting oneself be wrongfully abused by others.

In *The Bluest Eye*, there are certain characters who go from ignorance to wisdom. Pecola's perception of reality is surrounded by complete darkness, as though she is unable or unwilling to leave her conventional embryonic cyst and welcome the potential and light that change provides. The seeming refusal of Pecola and her mother is a metaphor for how black people cling to dread and opt to stay inside a familiar but false construct because it is secure and comfortable instead of coming out of the cave and facing the harsh light of the sun. Thus, the majority of the characters in the texts are internally colonised. Through the figure of Pecola, Morrison explores how a helpless youngster internalises and adopts harmful racial prejudices that have the power to obliterate them. Due to her dislocation, Pecola has nowhere to go or develop. Pecola is unable to bloom because she was put in unnourishing soil, similar to how the marigolds perished because Claudia planted them too deeply (BE p. 5).

Pecola's dislocation is completely irreversible as a result of her ignorant resignation caused by her total lack of illumination. She falls short in both her attempts to mature and comprehend the racist view of racial supremacy. She uncritically adopts racial stereotypes that undermine the authenticity and vision of her African-American culture. Celie, who despite every circumstance learns wisdom through her inward probing of her awareness, contrasts with Pecola, who harbours self-hatred and afterwards visits Soaphead for fictitious relief.

Nuanced Conversations around the Notions of Race, Racism, Sexism and Survival in Alice Walker's Novels

Alice Walker is an accomplished African-American writer with many books to her name. These include; volumes of "Poetry Once" (1965), *Revolutionary Petunias* (1973), *Goodnight, Willie Lee, I'll See You in the Morning* (1979), Horses *Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful* (1984), *You can't Keep a Good Woman Down* (1973), In *Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women* (1981), *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), *Meridian* (1976), *The Color Purple* (1982), *The Temple of my Familiar* (1989), *Processing the Secret of Joy* (1992), and *By the Light of My Father's Smile* (1998). The following are her nonfictional texts: *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983), *Living by the Word: Selected Writing* (1973-1987), *Warrior Marks: Female Genital Mutilation and the Sexual Blinding of Women* (1993).

Female bonding is achieved for the characters in Walker's *The Color Purple* when the women face the marginalization they feel through two different sources: white members of the public and black males who desire to control the lives of the women they father or married. For instance;

> It is in work that the women get to know and care about each other. It was through work that Catherine became friends with her husband's other wives. This friendship among women is something Samuel often talks about. Because the women share a husband but the husband does not share their friendships, it makes Samuel uneasy. It is confusing, I suppose. And it is Samuel's duty as a Christian minister to preach the bible's directive of one husband and one wife. Samuel is confused because to him, since the women are friends and will do anything for one another—not always, but more

> often than anyone from America would expect—and since they giggle and gossip and nurse each other's children, then they must be happy with things as they are. … Their lives always center around work and their children and other women (since a woman cannot really have a man for a friend without the worst kind of ostracism and gossip) (CP p. 77).

Of particular interest for this study is *The Color Purple* which happens to be a revolutionary text exploring the themes of gender disparity, racial inequality, sexism, and domestic abuse. The struggle of black women for self-identity, self-esteem, and liberation is espoused in the novel. The novel is written in an epistolary form, where Celie, the protagonist, writes letters to God, Nettie writes to Celie, and Celie to Nettie. The letters help the reader understand the injustices that women are subjected to at the hands of men in the United States of America and Africa. Thirty years of Celie's life from 1910 to 1940 in South America are documented in the novel. Walker is able to express in the 91 letters the consequence of dominance on the state of mind of the main characters, together with the resilience demonstrated by the characters' inner *Bildungs* (growth) and the eventual success achieved by Celie.

It is worth noting that Celie is able to stay alive in every step of the way against all odds thanks to a network of black women who contribute to her self-discovery, namely: Nettie, her sister from whom she is long separated; Sofia, who happens to be her stepdaughter in law; and Shug Avery, her husband's mistress. It is this solid relationship of sisterhood and friendship with these women that rebrands Celie's life and emancipates her physical and spiritual being. Their strong and positive character traits serve as an excellent role model for Celie's breakthrough. These women are always there for one another; they defend the defenceless among them, and speak for the voiceless. The bond of sisterhood and friendship is evident

when Nettie sends letters to Celie and lets her know for the first time that her two children, whom she had lost just when they were just born, now stay with Nettie in Africa and get a good education. This news provides strength to Celie, and the reader is made to realise that Nettie always provides hope in Celie's life. Celie is also aware of the important role Nettie plays in her life and considers her a perfect model of a girl. She describes her to Shug as: "Smart as anything. … Talked real well too. And sweet. There never was a sweeter girl. Eyes just brimming over with it" (Walker p. 101).

In *The Color Purple,* Celie, Shug, Sofia, and Nettie are each allowed to achieve self-autonomous and emotionally healthy and fulfilling lives. Celie's poignant faith and later recovery in the face of debilitating racial and gender challenges have objective correlations with the vision and faith of Alice Walker herself. Celie's eventual triumph is to inspire a constructive awareness of the black woman's capacity to transcend generational hurdles through gut informed by awareness and that well-managed trauma could result in self-recovery. El-Saffar (1985) avers that Celie views the Spirit as a source of power. With Shug's love and the knowledge that she and Nettie are not the offspring of the man they had believed they were, Celie may now confront Mr.- To prevent Celie from traveling to Memphis with Shug, he threatens her with everything in his arsenal of insults (El-Saffar 1985, p. 2).

It might surprise Mr. - that Celie has grown from being lily livered to a bold and courageous woman that could confront him with: "Until you do right by me . . . everything you even dream about will fail. I give it to him straight, just like it come to me. And it seem to come to me from the trees. . . Every lick you hit me you will suffer twice, I say. Then I say, You better stop talking because all I'm telling you ain't coming just from me. Look like when I open my mouth the air rush in and shape words" (TCP. p. 187). Celie's company with Shug Avery no doubt births her recovery from a dumb, intimidated African-American woman, into a fearless and bold advocate of change who now speaks out.

El-Saffar (1985) further posits that; “Spirit also dwells in naming even as Mr. – becomes “Albert” when he ceases to be Celie’s oppressor and becomes her friend. Similarly, Squeak, Harpo’s wife after Sofia leaves him, also undergoes a name change. Celie asks her one day, “What your real name? . . . She says, Mary Agnes. Make Harpo call you by your real name, I say. Then maybe he see you even when he trouble” (CP p. 4). Later, when she decides to go to Memphis with Shug and Celie, she affirms her name: "Listen Squeak, say Harpo. You can't go to Memphis. That's all there is to it. Mary Agnes, say Squeak. Squeak, Mary Agnes, what difference do it make? It makes a lot, say Squeak. When I was Mary Agnes I could sing in public" (CP p.183).

According to El-Saffar (1985), writing by Celie and Nettie also involves carefully and gradually reworking and recreating. Their narrative is about gradually erasing the misleading impression via labours of love and care, replacing false pictures with genuine ones, and replacing falsehoods with the truth. This is precisely what all the novels studied here do, and is at the heart of counter discourse that I am particularly interested in. Celie, unlike Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*, does not express any disdain for being African-American, despite the fact that she seems overpowered by her psychological pain and socio-cultural constraints. The many letters Celie has sent to God show her voyage across time to reclaim what is rightfully hers. Writing, according to El-Saffar (1985), helps Celie avoid ultimate destruction. El-Saffar asserts further that her writings have the effect of converting her from object to subject, but not to the audience, nor to any figure in her daily life, nor to anybody with the authority to judge her. They document not just the happenings in her life but also the process through which she learns to appreciate herself as a person who can love and be loved. (El-Saffar 1985).

Celie's ability to imagine transformation is shown by the fact that she writes to God and never to a man. She learns that the God she often writes letters to is not a white man—in fact,

it is not any man at all—but rather a part of her. Celie's penchant for writing to God over time had the cumulative effect of causing her to know herself, which would eventually cause her to become the subject of metamorphosis. Celie is upset; the knocks she takes test but do not break her faith. She survives it all and comes out a stronger, more determined woman. According to Saffar, as her literary career progresses, God manifests for her and she spiritualizes for him, coming to the realisation that she is not just a poor, abused black woman with a ground lower than the earth but rather a component of God and all that is. Although the author dedicates the work to "the spirit, without whose support neither this book nor I would have been created," the novel unites spirit and matter via Celie's understanding (El-Saffar 1985). Celie learns that she is a part of God and that He is a part of her, thus she is His. Her inner strength and comfort come from this awareness. She thus makes more of an effort to write to God. Despite the fact that not all of Celie's letters are read by God, as Shug learns, a collection of unread letters from Celie's sister is found when Nettie rejects Mr. After that, Nettie receives Celie's letters and replies, even though she rips up many of them out of concern that Celie would not get them. The sisters develop their faith via writing, even if many of these letters are intercepted and never read, as Nettie once remarked: "I wrote a letter to you almost every day on the ship coming to Africa. But by the time we docked, I was so down that I tore them into little pieces and dropped them into the water. Albert [Mr.] is not going to let you have my letters, so what use is there in writing them? That's the way I felt when I tore them up and sent them to you on the waves. " "But now I feel different" (CP p. 78). The spouse known only as "Mr." is abusing Celie sexually and physically as she struggles to survive as a child-wife. She defeats gender discrimination, marginalisation, and demotion with a dash of optimism and a persistent reliance on knowledge. When Lorde says, we must all recognise that it is our obligation to seek out the words of women, read them, share them, and contemplate how pertinent they are to our own lives, she is referring to this (Lorde 1984). After undergoing surgery to remove a cancerous

breast tumor, Lorde makes the aforementioned claim. Lorde discovers that her silences were what she "most regretted" as she came to terms with her own mortality (Lorde 1984, p. 41). This silence is broken by literature created by black women that represents their perspectives and gives them a platform to respond to the societies that have attempted to marginalise black women. It is important to note that not all women are subaltern, and the authors of these writings most definitely are not. It is evident that some of the female authors under study here have changed that picture since they have developed female protagonists like Celie who can successfully challenge patriarchy. In Walker's story, some of the subaltern characters confront or push others to speak out or fight back; other subalterns change their minds. "You got to fight them, Celie, she [Nettie] say. I can't do it for you. You got to fight them yourself. I don't say nothing. I think bout Nettie, dead. She fight, she run away. What good it do? I don't fight, I stay where I'm told. But I'm alive" (CP p. 22). But, as shown above, Celie is able to stand up against patriarchy later on in the novel.

Outside of her voyage and her encounter with God—whom she learns via her conversation with Shug is neither a white man nor does he have the blue eyes of a white man—Celie may find her profound quest for her image elsewhere. Celie and her black peers are seen as underdogs by racism and sexual discrimination because the white man's blue eyes and white hair contrast with blackness, which is reviled and degraded.

The African-American Women's *Bildungsroman* Novels in Inter-Textual Conversation

Toni Morrison's and Alice Walker's novels are apt interrogatory expeditions into the historical rhetoric of white supremacy that deflates and subjects the black woman. Matus (1998, p. 1) states that "… Morrison challenges Western standards of beauty and demonstrates that the concept of beauty is socially constructed." Matus (1998) goes on to state that, Morrison's portrayal of pride in becoming black goes beyond merely presenting good pictures of blackness; rather, it emphasises the harm that black women protagonists endure as a result

of how femininity is created in a racially segregated society (Matus 1998). The sort of femininity theorized in Morrison's novel is nearly irredeemable, insufficient, doubly crushed, first by the self of her protagonist and then by the society. In *Sula,* Sula the protagonist is erratically unpredictable. She negates the ethics of friendship with Nel by engaging in immoral affairs with Jude, the husband of Nel, her childhood friend. Sula breaks all the norms and conventions of her community because she considers them to be "rigid norms for women" (McDowell 1988, p. 83). This and many unwarranted behaviours as well as her indifference to the feelings of others, eventually lead to her ultimate destruction, just like Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* is by all estimations doomed, reaching the height of her destruction through an uninformed desperation that cascades in self-loath when she ends in madness. It does appear that even Morrison could not redeem Pecola. This is also the case with Sula, whose voice remains unheard, and her conquered perception of self and racial identity are stillborn. Gurleen Grewal posits that, merely reversing perceived 'ugliness' to beautiful blackness "is not enough, for such counter-rhetoric does not touch the heart of the matter: the race-based class structure upheld by dominant norms and stereotypes" (Grewal 1998, p. 1).

When read as a corpus, the novels provide a visual portrait of how African-American women are seen as the underdogs of their gender. Further presented in the texts' theses is the exclusionary framework that entrenches, passively accepts, and naturalises the existentialist clash between gender parity and colorism. Both Toni Morrison and Alice Walker place the externalist forces of white hegemony and of blacks themselves, who are accused of internalising the stereotype of white standards of beauty and authenticity, as infallible, as a consequence of the black woman's subjectivity. Morrison and Walker's have made it quite evident that they connect freedom with masculinity and manhood with men's unrestricted access to women's bodies. Both groups have received societal conditioning that supports patriarchal endorsement of rape as a legal means of preserving male power. For men of all

ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds, the development of masculinity is influenced by this intersection of sexuality and masculine power within patriarchy.

Black feminists may establish a literary space in which the value of friendship and the ways in which it affects black women's lives are portrayed. Sula expresses the alienation of black women from Western culture and offers an example of how to confront that culture in order to counter black women's positions in society. It is a relational novel in intertextual conversation with *The Bluest Eye* and *The Color Purple*, along with the other selected novels. In light of this, the texts in this thesis, such as Walker's "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," communicate about black women and give us their own experiences by creating a secure setting in which they may see themselves as strong, empowered, and endowed with agency. Given their contrasting positions of influence over the two main protagonists in *The Bluest Eye* and *The Color Purple*, Soaphead and Shug Avery represent a contrastive phenomenon. Soaphead stands for secrecy, dishonesty, bondage, and ignorance, while Shug signifies wisdom, power, beauty, attractiveness, love, and liberation. The development or demise of the personalities of the two significant individuals, Soaphead and Shug, is predictively informative. Pecola dies because she looks up to Soaphead, who purposefully withholds the truth from her. As a result, Soaphead stands in for the secret that Pecola is not allowed to know and for which she must be made to toil endlessly and fruitlessly while wearing a blindfold. The magical wand that freed her from the mental captivity the world had put on her was Celie's. Celie's declaration, "For the first time in my life, I feel absolutely right" (Walker, pp. 60–61), perfectly encapsulates the thrill, freedom, revelation, and healing she experiences. The distinction between a Pecola with a capital "C" and one without, Peola, is a telling representation of the well-ingrained stereotype that African-American women are fake, inferior, and beneath the rank of men.

The two novels harp on the African-American woman who is exploited and displaced by colour differential and gender inequality. Toni Morrison lays bare overbearing black

patriarchy against the black woman as Breedlove rapes his daughter and Cholly further complicates Pecola's ruin. Pecola's ruin resides within her consciousness; she loathes her blackness and wishes for bluest eyes more than anything else. Morrison and Walker individually present graphic pictures of the lives of their representative characters that have much in common, covering their everyday lives, fears, twisted aspirations, dashed hopes, struggle against the tides of a crushing white supremacist norm. *The Bluest Eye* and *The Color Purple* are each deconstructionist historicism that looks back at the African-American story as a by-product of the distorted historical biases and racial and gender inequality. The grim experiences of Pecola, Claudia, Nettie, Celie and others are the visible outgrowth of a deep seated gender and racial animosity of white against black and of both black and white males against the female black.

A *Bildungsroman* by an African-American woman writer serves as the moral yardstick for the analyses of the works as a counter-hegemonic discourse. In essence, *Bildungsroman* extends beyond a personal character investigation into a systematic examination that considers the melting process that creates or marries character from childhood to maturity. It illustrates how a character is formed by their social milieu, cultural receptivity, and overall socio-political environment, as well as how they overcome or are overwhelmed by those problems. To put it another way, the female *Bildungsroman* trope is distinguished by a focus on a character's unique social and physical environments, the ideological makeup of their country or national consciousness, and how the interaction of these factors affects how they see themselves in relation to others, which is quite different from how the *Bildungsroman's* characters by men view themselves from a personal level. A useful biography that deals with the character's self-discovery (if any is accomplished), desertion, and disappointment is the *Bildungsroman* interfaced with black feminism. It also makes mention of the prospect of repentance and salvation. On the other side, there is self-hatred, identity loss, and even self-destruction. The

Bildungsroman, according to Rellihan (2005), is a novel that follows the protagonist's social and psychological development as he grows from childhood to adulthood, though experts sometimes disagree on the genre's specifics. The protagonist's coming of age is typically represented by this adaptation, which may entail having to give up on erroneous goals since finding and accepting one's position in society is essential to this maturing process.

Despite the relative differences in the times they live in, Morrison's and Walker's main characters have a lot in common and a lot that sets them apart. Celie lives between the wars, and both periods are characterised by the purposeful denial and persecution of black people in the United States. Pecola experiences the Great Depression, which causes great hardship for all people, but notably black people. On the other side, Pecola and Celie serve as opposing phenomena for dismantling hegemonic power. While Pecola exemplifies submission to the aggressive tendencies of white supremacists' strutting, that confronts, smashes, and shapes her into self-hatred and submissive capitulation, Celie was unable to be cowed into a mindless conformist by the dominating white culture that caused her dread. When Celie experiences a transcendental vision, it strengthens her determination. She then utilises this drive to fight back against the oppression of black women. She does this by her relentless candour. “He beat me when you not here. . . For being me and not you” (TCP, p. 66). Celie starts to feel more confident in her ability to communicate clearly and assertively. Her perception of who she is change. Unlike when she avers early in *The Color Purple* that “I don’t know how to fight” (TCP, p. 17). Nettie wants to express her wish for Celie to obtain life experience; she also wants her sister to continue to defy tendercies of male domination as the next excerpt captures it: “You’ve got to fight and get away from Albert. He ai’nt no good” (TCP, p. 107). Celie's problem is overcome by familiarity with the secret and freeing reality of her background and by extensive information about her rights as a person and a woman, as depicted in the foregoing paragraph. With the help of her relationship with Shug and her

correspondence with God, on the other flip, Celie gains a fresh sense of optimism that helps her rise beyond boredom and lack, and find enlightenment and self-recovery as a tenet of *Bildungsroman* trope written by women.

On the other hand, because of her love of learning, Celie gradually gains the strength to face her servitude as a wife to a man she only knows as Mr. While Celie revives her discoveries and resilience, which maintain and refresh her vision for change, Pecola dies from an inability to become like her Other. In actuality, Celie's letters to God have a revitalizing effect that helps her overcome despondency. Pecola, on the other hand, continues to develop from Peola to Pecola, hence her status is unaltered. She could only see decline; she could not envision restoration as portrayed in the following conversation. Pecola's dialogue with a Priest in the church depicts her predicament. Pecola: "I cannot go to school no more. In addition, I thought maybe you could help me?" Priest: " Help you how? Tell me do not be frightened" Pecola: "My eyes" Priest: "what about your eyes? Pecola: "I want them blue" (BE, p. 172). Celie, on the other hand, develops as a result of the pictures she conjures up in her prayers to God in her letter, "long as I can spell Go-d I got somebody along" (TCP, p. 18). and her bond with other women such as, Neittie and Shug as presented earlier in this section.

Unarguably, Pecola's trauma pushes her into a fixation with blue eyes, a manifestation of the height of her surrender as is depicted in the next statement; "Adults, older girls. Shops, Magazines, newspapers, window sign –all the world had agreed that a blue – eyed, yellow haired pink – skinned doll was what is every girl child treasured." "Here they said this is beautiful, and if you are on this day "worthy" you may have it" (BE, pp.20 -21). Pecola internalises a negative picture of herself as a result of being black in a culture that only values doll-like Shirley Temple types with blonde hair and blue eyes, seeing Pecola as unattractive and unimportant. "Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she

had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time" (BE, p. 44).

Pecola feels whole since she is a black lady with a hyphen who is instantly "remade" or "recreated" in the perspective of the white idea of beauty. She expresses intense animosity against her Africanness, black aesthetics, and physical attributes as a result of her incapacity to facilitate her transition from subjectivity to self-assertion and to realise an authentic identity of black beauty and self-pride. Pecola's low self-esteem is just a byproduct of the lengthy isolation of her African-American culture in the void of self-hatred and self-forgetting. She just is a product of her environment which exudes hatred and does not question what many Black people have come to see as normal. In *The Bluest Eye*, Geraldine, who thinks she is a white lady, is highly abrasive with Pecola, a black girl. Geraldine reprimands Pecola as if she were white after misinterpreting Pecola and accusing her of killing a cat. She makes Pecola feel bad not just for murdering her pet but also for being ugly. She yells at Pecola, "Get out," "You nasty black bitch," demonstrating her superior attitude as a white person with her vocabulary. "Get out of my house" (BE, p. 90).

The Bluest Eye, according to Bloom (2010), joined the rising discourse regarding sexual assault against women when it was published. The Black Arts Movement and the women's rights movements increased the publishing opportunities available to black women. Black women wrote more about black male abuse of black women, incest, rape, and insanity than ever before. The issue of rape has been prevalent in the writing of socially conscious black female writers (Bloom 2010). *The Bluest Eye* is Morrison's modest attempt to rewrite the African-American woman's story. Instructively, the opening glee of the text is intriguing, and probes into an 'agenda' best perceived to be a damning secret: "Shh, don't tell anyone else,' and 'no one is allowed to know this.' It is a secret between us and a secret that is being kept from us" (BE, p. 1). The secret is a thing feared and dreaded. According to Morrison, the thing

to fear was the thing that made her beautiful, and not us [African-American]. For Bump, "[t]he problem is that the girls – Pecola, Claudia and Frieda - like many readers, do not know how to direct their anger at the *Thing* (Bump 2010, p. 152). To Pecola, Claudia, and Frieda, the thing to fear was the thing that made Maureen beautiful; the thing that made her to be accepted even by her teachers, and, the thing that gives her the socio-economic edge (BE, p. 74). Colour difference becomes the 'thing,' that guarantees unequal economic and gender access to power and acceptance between Maureen and Pecola. While the former has a high esteem of herself because the society accords her all necessary respect and rewards, the latter's colour is denigrated and she thus has to work her way to acceptance by becoming like the former.

To get away from her sad existence, Pecola has the delusion that she would get blue eyes. It had occurred to Pecola at some point that if her eyes—those eyes that contained the images and recognised the sights—were different, that is, beautiful, she would be changed as well, according to Morrison (1970). If she had a new appearance and was more attractive, maybe Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove would change as well. "Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola," they would remark. We can't act inappropriately in front of their attractive eyes. (BE, p. 40).

Pecola's pursuit of blue eyes has led to her descent into madness. According to Morrison, such a sad event is directly related to erroneous perceptions of acceptability and beauty. This error of judgement is not even nearly restricted to Pecola; it also affects her hosts, Claudia and Frieda, who are envious of Maureen because they acknowledge that she is more prosperous than they are. In fact, Maureen has a sparkle about her that none of them have. The central concern of *The Bluest Eye*, according to Christian (1985), is how the standardised Western ideas of physical appearance and romantic love impact not only the black women in Lorain, Ohio, but also how the black community values them. All of the adults in the novel experience varying degrees of influence from society's acceptance of the natural order's

inversion. By adopting Western standards of beauty, the black community automatically disqualifies itself from being the carrier of its own cultural values.

The aberrant gene of a social misfit, which runs through many female characters in the novel, might be compared to the socially internalised construct of the white prescription of beauty that black women sheepishly embrace. Pecola, in particular, suffers greatly as a result of her low socioeconomic status, her black race and gender, as well as her temporality in the American social environment with no iota of sympathy or empathy. Together, these factors combine to create an innate defeatism, thus; “They were disgusted, amused, shocked, outraged, or even excited by the story. But we listened for the one who would say, "Poor little girl," or, "Poor baby," but there was only head-wagging where those words should have been. We looked for eyes creased with concern, but saw only veils” (B, p. 190).

According to Bouson (2001), Pecola is "a victim not just of racial shame but also of her damaged and paralysing family," and this is her "rooting" and "flowering". There are more direct and intimate adversaries inside the African-American community and family, even though the racist white culture is the ultimate "enemy" that humiliates and traumatises African-Americans (Bouson 2001, p. 217). The biggest undoing of African-Americans is their victim-blaming mindset, which fuels their low self-esteem, weakened sense of human dignity, rejection of social justice, and restricted economic standing. The Great Depression "worsened the already dire economic status of African-Americans," according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica Ultimate Reference* (Romer 2003). African-Americans sometimes got far less support than Whites during the early stages of public assistance programmes, and some philanthropic organisations even prohibited Blacks from using their soup kitchens (1932). Lack of resources, a collapse in law and order, sexual assault, illness, and despair are characteristics of national catastrophes. Black people did experience a great deal of hardship and denial throughout the terrible consequences of the Great Depression and the aftermath of the war.

Pecola, Celie, and Nettie are exemplary examples of the cast-iron destiny of a normal black woman, who has no control over who she marries or when, and who is, above all, dehumanised to the point of incest. Celie and Pecola, in strength or weakness, are in pursuit of a vision for better personalities and society. And this leads to the new discovery of Celie who now has a voice; Celie gradually transforms into a woman she can be proud of, with respect, love, honor, and her own house, as she announces in front of everyone listening, "I'm black, I'm pore, I may be ugly, and I can't cook." a voice is saying to someone listening. But I'm here (TCP, p. 214). Celie's rebirth encourages her to exercise her psychological and sexual freedom.

After coming to believe in her own inner power, Celie begins writing letters to her sister instead of only to God, much like Margaret in *Maru*, who uses her paintings to fight racism and sexism. According to Linda Tate (1996), who said that the key to her change rests "in the capacity to take control over identifying oneself, name oneself," this "self-transformation" is accomplished through discovering one's own potential" (p. 131). "I am very pleased," Celie says in a letter to Nettie from Memphis. "I got love, I got employment, I got money, I got friends, and I got time. And you are still alive and will soon return home with our kids" (TCP, p. 221). This is Celie's first time signing a letter.

The women protagonists discussed in this study have always attempted to find peace, acceptance and freedom, however, they are constantly challenged by a patriarchal, misogynist, racist and gender biased society. This explains why Pecola's frantic attempt to fit in and be seen as attractive is a representation of the typical black household. The narrator observes and secretly "worships" Maureen in the same manner as Pecola does, despite the fact that she is obsessed by this yearning for white women's racial beauty. The guilt of sexual assault and Pecola's dread of being ugly undermine her life and family.

Pecola experiences pain on a daily basis. Her father initially sexually assaults her, and the resultant incest leads to the death of the child. Pecola’s rape is vividly captured where both

Cholly's inebriated condition and memory of tickling his wife's foot are contributing causes to the rape. " He at any rate, *Cholly, Pecola's father*, was the one who loved her enough to touch her, envelop her, give something of himself to her, but his touch was fatal, and the something he gave her filled the matrix of her agony with death. Love is never any better than the lover is. (BE, p. 204) (My emphasis).

She then moves in with Soaphead (the preist), whose trick on her exacerbates her worry, dread, and feeling of incompleteness, which eventually leads to madness. Only when she is mad can Soaphead hypnotise her into having blue eyes. As a result of the aforementioned, Pecola develops a passion for blue eyes, for which she sets off on an adventurous, foolish quest. The preference of white people for blue eyes as a symbol of attractiveness is frequent. It is reasonable to assume that Pecola's infatuation with blue eyes stems from the ideals of beauty held by her culture. Pecola has the illusion of getting the blue eyes to escape from the miserable life. Morrison (1970) writes: "It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights-if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different. If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they'd say, "Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes". (BE, p. 40).

According to Williams (2010), Morrison sets up her story in *The Bluest Eye* such that Claudia, an adult, narrates Pecola's death while she considers the events of her adolescence. In the narrative, Claudia assumes the narrator's position and assumes the persona of the artist, using words to investigate the effects of internalised racism and to affirm her own resistance to self-hatred and white western conceptions of beauty. *The Bluest Eye*'s major emphasis is the father's rape of a young black girl, but there are several additional hierarchical levels of dominance and submission, as well as episodes of greater and smaller rapes, woven throughout the narrative. Enslavement is the root cause of Pecola's rape and the complete ruin of her

person. Morrison examines and deconstructs this social structure as it is ingrained in the lives of the black community via the critical voice of Claudia and an impersonal narrator who develops throughout the novel, using the *Bildungsroman* genre for its narrativization thus;

> All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed. And all of our beauty, which was hers first and which she gave to us. All of us--all who knew her--felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. Even her waking dreams we used--to silence our own nightmares. And she let us, and thereby deserved our contempt. We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength (BE, p. 205).

Pecola's black community has like the white perceived and treated her in a bad light, they viewed themselves better than Pecola in all ramifications of life as painted in the above excerpt. So, for Pecola, having blue eyes represents succeeding in the endeavour she thinks will provide the solutions to her problems. In his letter, Elihue Micah Whitcomb, better known as Soaphead Church, challenges God and offers advice. His religion is centred on his selfish nature. He uses his well-known psychic healing abilities to deceive Pecola into becoming a slave to white supremacy despite hailing from a mixed-race household. Pecola's visits caused Soaphead to use her to poison his ailing dog, tricking her into believing he was acting out of sympathy. The reality of Soaphead's deception is that he not only uses Pecola and those like her to his advantage but also capitalises on her desire to further his own goal—the dog's death. Much as the Western conception of beauty is meant to demean black women, the whole narrative involving Soaphead helping Pecola achieve blue eyes is a lie. Pecola is duped by Soaphead into thinking that if the dog acts strangely, it is a sign from God that the next day,

her eyes will turn blue. Soaphead views God as a resource that may be used to one's advantage when dealing with the ignorant and credulous masses. Then Pecola has hallucinations and talks to a made-up friend about the blue eyes she thinks she has. Claudia, the narrator, claims to have seen Pecola after the baby was born and died, flapping her arms around like a bird trying to fly.

Conversely, Celie's friendship with Shug Avery leads to self-recovery, but Pecola's dubious fascination with blue eyes helps her put herself into a condition of mental illness. Celie is united with the essential idea that "God is within you and inside everyone else" by Shug Avery. God created you before you were born. It can only be found by those who peek within. And sometimes it simply appears without your knowledge or even when you're not seeking it. I believe that most people give in to trouble. (BE, p. 177). Despite the fact that Pecola's friendship with Claudia and Frieda shows some resistance to Maureen Pearl's racism or "whiteness," the relationship between the three women remains immature. Pecola's interactions with Soaphhead don't lessen her anxiety; they only increase it. Celie, on the other hand, finds redemption via her friendship with Shug and the letters she writes to God, replacing her previous position and boredom with a renewing that works like magic to bring about a change of status, recuperation, and complete femininity.

The fact that Pecola is not ultimately destroyed in the novel is Sula's saving grace. Claudia's designation as the voice of survival by Morrison keeps the echoes going. Unfortunately, not even Claudia comes close to realising the full potential that would lead to the generational shift Morrison seems to be advocating. The reader nonetheless learns hints about the prospect of the black woman's eventual salvation via Claudia's narrative. This trend is distinctive not just to Morrison's works but also to the other novels examined in this thesis, as Slaughter convincingly shows in the first chapter of this thesis. Sometimes, the *Bildungsheld* is not completely assimilated into society. The characters in the novels face marginalisation from time to time, which they overcome (with varying degrees of success) by carving out a

place for themselves in the world. For instance, Sula, who is unfamiliar with life outside of the Bottom, travels, enrols in college, engages in sexual activity with men, makes her own decisions, and picks her own path because she is determined to avoid dying "like a stump" like "every coloured woman in this country" and instead go "down like one of those redwoods." Having realised she "certainly did exist in this world," she intends to terminate her life (*Sula* p. 143). Sula spends her whole life trying to find a method to accomplish what she is forbidden from doing because of her "otherness," which is quite similar to the quests recounted in slave tales (Miles 2015, p. 10).

As in the case of Sula, the acceptance of the dominant narrative of white supremacy that is firmly ingrained in black consciousness continues to be the downfall of blacks. Black people have an obvious load of complexes that they struggle to overcome but that are stubbornly ingrained in a symptomatic ambivalence toward self-hatred. This issue is still one of the reasons why black people despise themselves. The same motive drives Cholly's rape of Pecola. Walker uses *The Color Purple* to expose the socio-cultural evil that denies the humanity of black women by, however impolitely, calling a spade a spade. Pecola and Sula, the protagonists, show complexity as a counter-discourse that is destructive rather than restorative. Pecola passes away, leaving Claudia to discover through her mistake the risks of perception distortion brought on by enforced white supremacy. Despite how sophisticatedly outspoken Claudia looks, no character in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* realises the goal of a complete and redeeming understanding that the African-American woman is fully autonomous, free from all hues and shapes of gender and racial labels of being the victim. Pecola deludes herself into thinking that her dream has been fulfilled by the novel's conclusion, but only at the expense of her sanity. Because Pecola is not given any means of escaping her reality, she is sentenced to a destiny worse than death. Instead, she relocates to "the edge of town, where you can see her

even now." This ending is typical of *Bildungsroman* writing by women in Africa and in the African Diaspora.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how the *Bildungsroman* written by African-Awomen varies as a counter-discourse and how its examination of colonialism may be influenced by the white male or Western hegemonic narrator. The hitherto unaddressed issues of race and gender are introduced by these African-American women authors, who draw inspiration for their *Bildungsroman* from their personal experiences. As was shown in the first chapter of this thesis, African-American novelists often use their own lives to write powerful protests that are almost always about race, slavery, and the white establishment.

Morrison and Walker, the authors of *The Bluest Eye* and *The Color Purple*, two of the most well-known novels discussed in this chapter, use their works to refute Buckley's argument that male authors of *Bildungsroman* novels left out the perspectives of women. Through these texts, Morrison and Walker have created a literary space in which to challenge the history and tendency in literature that has dominated and marginalised women. The novels discussed in this chapter have established a literary space where black women's perspectives may be investigated and heard. This duty to re-inscribe and re-narrate the woman's tale, seen and heard through a woman's eyes and ears, has been met by the texts via the use of counter discourse and black feminist reading tools by refusing to counter the phrase "It's not everything you say, Maccomy, but..." (1994, Davies, p. 152). These iconoclasts have mastered the art of speaking out instead of keeping quiet—of expressing themselves no matter what. The texts by two Southern African women authors are discussed in the chapter that follows as a counter-discourse tool for female bonding and sisterhood.

CHAPTER FOUR

SOUTHERN AFRICAN WOMEN'S *BILDUNGSROMAN*

> The most important thing that fiction does is it lets us look out through other eyes, and that teaches us empathy- that behind every pair of eyes is somebody like us. - Gaiman (2015).

Introduction

This chapter's primary focus is the interaction between Bessie Head's *Maru* (1971) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), two novels by Southern African women writers. These novels show that Bessie Head started her writing career and became one of the most well-known female writers on the continent ten years before Tsitsi Dangarembga published her first novel. In this chapter, I look at the two works I just mentioned as *Bildungsroman* texts written by women on sisterhood and friendship, as well as examples of counter-discourse. I address some of the points made in the first chapter of the thesis, such as the fact that the *Bildungsheld* have a variety of female role models who influence their development to the point where they can challenge patriarchy and that the protagonists in these texts are not entirely solitary in their development. I do this by combining the novels and contrasting their intersections and contradictions. I argue that in both *Maru* and *Nervous Conditions* the female protagonists succeed because of the help they get from their female friends and sisters, and that both texts' depictions of these women and other female characters are different from those in male novels, where women are oppressed and limited to the roles established by patriarchy. We see that under pressure, even women who initially behave in a submissive manner, like Maiguru, change and fight patriarchy. There are various instances in which Margaret defies patriarchal preconceptions of a woman, despite the fact that she seems powerless and mute throughout the whole novel.

In African countries, gender norms—both traditional and contemporary—are strongly rooted. One may play a traditional, religious, or political role in society depending on their gender. This is especially seen in literature and theatre, where demeaning female roles are often selected. The way male fiction authors define female roles, assigning women demeaning and menial jobs like housewives, mothers, prostitutes, and so on, lends credence to this idea. This claim is supported by Kolawole's (2000) claim that the majority of early literary portrayals of women were one-dimensional. As in Soyinka's 1962 novel *The Lion and the Jewel*, women are stereotypically portrayed at this early stage as "jewels" for the lions' affection. They are often portrayed as mysterious elderly ladies of frivolous "abiku" or "Ogbanje" who have been sent from the outside world to chastise their family, although this is only true when their spirituality is overstated. As seen in films such as *Fragments* (1969) and *Why Are We So Blessed* (1972), early Armah heroines were either moral or monetary seducers. The two works by Armah that followed it, *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) and *The Healers* (1979), along with Soyinka's *A Season of Anomy* (1973), made a little improvement in how men saw women. Their portrayals are still unclear. Through these idiosyncrasies, the six female authors of this thesis have questioned the conventional roles of women in a society that is mostly male and challenged masculine discourse about women. They do this by reworking or changing "typographic castings of women" in literature and culture, in contrast to how men used to write about women.

According to Uwakweh (1995), the male hegemony of the *Bildungsroman* genre was evident up until the 1970s since the bulk of African *Bildungsromane* were written by men. As a result of colonial reinforcement of the gender gap, the African male became the chosen inheritor of formal European education, whereas the female was unfavourable due to her gender and her duty was limited to domesticity. Harrow (1994) points out that this genre (*Bildungsroman*) serves as a platform for later African novelists in addition to noting that "the European impact on African culture is highlighted in L'Enfant Noir through Laye's dilemma

over choosing to complete his education rather than become a goldsmith like his father" (Harrow 1994, p. 35). It is significant to note that some of the novels discussed in this thesis have the characteristics Harrow identified as typical, such as a clearly stated starting point, a point of view centred on a narrator, a defined space incorporating the protagonist's relationships with others (family), and the use of the first-person narrative viewpoint. The woman's goal is an addition to the man's, even if the primary character in a man's *Bildungsroman* desires to get an education, a profession, and other things. The imbalance in traditional African communities—which was partly caused by the gender problem as well as colonialism—has been addressed by a growth in creative activity by women since the 1970s. Contemporary African nations are still plagued by the effects of these two pressures on women. From the 1970s to the present, both in the socio-political and literary arenas, there has been a shift in how women are depicted in literature and society. In both traditional and modern African societies, the subaltern is more and more likely to speak out against different kinds of oppression and even pick up weapons to fight against it.

According to Uwakweh (1995), "The African Woman's *Bildungsroman*" is an attack on patriarchal gender construction, which values maleness as superior and values femaleness primarily as a sign of continuity. As a consequence, it is a tool for illustrating the development of women. Throughout their youth, girls experience a range of hidden frustrations that may sometimes take the form of self-defining actions. These behaviours may be expressed in fury and try to defy social norms. The *Bildungsroman*, written by women, challenges the African male literary tradition, in which the concept of feminine progress is unfamiliar, because it presents women as being, by definition, energetic, active, and evolving (Stratton 1994, p. 107). Similar to this, Uwakweh (1995) argues that the female perspective has largely debunked the passive, dependent, and marginal roles that are attributed to women in male *Bildungsromane*, as well as the societal myths that encourage gender prejudice and provide false representations

of African femininity. Consequently, the abundance of novels coming out of Africa is proof of the popularity of this genre among female writers (Uwakweh 1995, p. 11). With the publication of *Maru* and *When Rain Clouds Gather* by Bessie Head in the late 1960s, this custom was started. Tsitsi Dangarembga published *Nervous Conditions* in 1988, more than 20 years after *When Rain Clouds Gather*, and the two writers here are from Southern Africa. Uwakweh asserts that, as in the male coming of age novels, the heroine's education is an important concern for the African women's writer. It becomes a site of tension and struggle as the heroine tries to get better education as a way to gain independence. Because of the heroine's gender, such goals sometimes generate rifts with her family. Gender clearly plays a role in the conflict that exists between the heroine's educational objectives and the obligations that society has placed on her. The underlying paradox is often the subject of the writer's creative inquiry (Uwakweh 1995, p. 11).

Above all, it is vital to note that African novels about development show how patriarchy shapes gender identity and how the female heroine uses that gender identity as a battlefield. This is accomplished by reinforcing the place and function of women in literature and society by developing female characters who seek intellectual growth as a pathway to self-realization. The friendship between Tambudzai (Tambu) and her cousin Nyasha in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* is founded on an understanding of their respective social disparities as well as their shared yearning for company. While her brother is provided educational opportunities at the mission school operated by her British-educated uncle Babamukuru (uncle) and his wife Maiguru, Nyasha's parents, Tambu, who is aware of her own intellectual ability, feels unfairly stuck at the peasant family homestead. Tambu is only allowed to attend school with her cousin Nyasha following the passing of her brother. When Tambu recalls her journey from the homestead to mission school, she says that Nyasha makes her remember her younger self: "In the years since I went back to school, I had grown content to let events pass me as long as they

didn't interfere too deeply with my plans, but the way Nyasha dealt with problems reminded me of the intensity and determination with which I had lived my early years" (NC, p. 116).

Nyasha's growing sophistication and intellect astonish Tambu. However, despite her "Englishness," she is far from possessing a "privileged vantage point." Nyasha is compelled to choose between the English and Shona value systems as a result of her "in-betweenness," which ultimately causes her to experience "self-alienation," "rage," and "despair." She mostly does this because neither system makes sense to her. This is shown by her after-England fascination with making clay pots that are only used for adornment. However, when Tambu tells her narrative—which is also the story of all the important women in her life, including her illiterate mother—and as she witnesses Nyasha's breakdown, she gets the chance to comprehend how she fits into the patriarchal Shona family structure.

Tambu and Nyasha are sisters, but not because of a shared ancestory or a civil rights march. Rather, they are related because women have experienced oppression in patriarchal societies and have shared experiences. The sisterhood of these black women, which they share and depend on when no one else can be trusted, is strong.

The Tension between Race and Gender in the Novels of Bessie Head

In 1969, *When Rain Clouds Gather*, Bessie Head's first novel, was published. Two years later, in 1971, *Maru*, the subject of this chapter, was made available. Head is ranked with writers like Ayi Kwe Armah, Peter Abrahams, Beti, Oyono, Ezekiel Mphalele, and Camera Laye as one of the great African writers who set the bar on the continent. However, Head was among male African writers whose emphasis was more on colonialism than gender discrimination, and as we will see later in the chapter, there are certain characteristics of her writing that suggest she was influenced by these renowned male African writers. Although Head's first novel may have had a convincing ending, Meisel (2013) adds that her later works are more of a teasing out of thematic strands that are growing more and more obsessive to her.

The novel *Maru* discusses racism, love, problems with power, good and evil, and the supernatural. Numerous intimate details may be found in the text, such as Head's apparent sympathy for little Margaret.

The historical repression of the Basarwa people, sometimes known as the Bushmen by the colonisers, served as an inspiration for *Maru*. The story describes Margaret's experiences as a Masarwa lady and as a kid, from birth to maturity. One reason *Maru* is a suitable match for this research, which is interested in counter-discussions regarding women's roles in society as the dominant and quiet group, is because Margaret is one of the women who has been silenced and dominated. According to Ogwude (2002), *A Question of Power* is Head's semi-autobiographical *Bildungsroman* because it begins with the details of the main character's birth, follows the South African socialisation processes, discloses the events that led to her writing career and humanistic worldview, and then reveals the philosophical development of the character into a universal personality (Ogwude 2002, p. 117). In contrast to *Maru, A Question of Power* (AQP) has received extensive study from various academics as a *Bildungsroman*. In spite of the fact that AQP can be read as a *Bildungsroman*, I contend that it is not the best choice for my research because it does not focus on counter-discourses tropes of sisterhood and friendship. In contrast, Margaret in *Maru* is surrounded by female characters, including Margaret Cadmore Sr. and Dikeledi, who support her on her journey of self-discovery. Mma Mompati, a female character from AQP, is a perfect example of female treachery, while Dan is the definition of masculine tyranny. It should be emphasised that, as was previously stated in the study's opening chapter, certain *Bildungsromane* adhere to this paradigm (of including men and women) more closely than others. *Maru*, according to Odhiambo et al. (2013), encapsulates the core of her artistic work and is interwoven with a general desire for a study into the mystery of bias in humans. They emphasise that AQP might be considered a key location for piecing together the threads of her turbulent life narrative. However, *A Question*

of Power and *When Rain Clouds Gather* must be briefly examined if we are to comprehend the evolution of Head's fictional works. The third novel by Head, *A Question of Power*, is an autobiographical account of her descent into madness that has been significantly fictionalised. It is a piece of autobiographical writing. The nightmare world of *A Question of Power*, which is also an autobiographical picture of a period of extreme stress and misery, heavily relies on dreams and, in the words of Head's academics, relates to her own breakdown and mental illness (Lionnet 1993).

Head, like her main character Elizabeth, makes it abundantly clear that she is insane. Due to her gender, race, and socioeconomic position, Elizabeth is already a liminal person who is also an exile after leaving South Africa for Botswana. Her liminality is associated with madness. If the white, Western, heterosexual, male person has been held up as the peak of the healthy and normal, then a black female body would be the perfect place to seek its opposite madness.

> Madness is subversion, you are subverting a norm. You are going at it from an angle that will leave other people not knowing how to deal with you. And in that there is power." -Kiguli (2019).

It is only reasonable to claim that it is crucial to clarify the meaning of lunacy. "Madness" in this sense refers to a departure from the usual or standard to an odd or unconventional manner of conducting oneself. Being insane, neurotic, or psychotic are the polar opposites of this. Solovieva contends that if there is no sanity, there is no craziness to support the aforementioned. These two abstractions may collide, as will be shown in more detail, but it is crucial that the definition preserve this dualism (Solovieva, 2020, p. 128). Only a world of struggle, a world of conflicting minds, can produce madness (Felman 1975).

This hypothesis suggests that "madness" might be seen as a counter-discourse. By fictionalising or presenting upsetting memories, it can be used to investigate female hegemony

counter-discourse. According to Flockemann (1999, p. 4), the concept of madness serves as a "social metaphor" to highlight the body's pervasive disease caused by colonial history. It is interesting that Head's work (AQP) may be interpreted both philosophically and literally. She wants her audience to understand that colonialism and its lingering effects, which plagued her twice because she is black, different, and a woman, are what she wants them to take away from her story.

The use of madness as a theme and literary device is possible. In the context of this research, madness may be seen as both a literary cliché and a discursive technique. It has, however, recently been associated with female authors' literary works that challenge socio-political discursive hegemonies. Exploring that familiar triad, madness, sexuality, and radical identity takes place on this platform (Bosman 1990). The texts discussed here are *Bildungsromane*, written by women as a sort of resistance to patriarchal systems, racism, gender inequality, and discursive hegemonies. I contend in this thesis that madness is a type of counter discourse. This madness might be thought of as "the other side of the tale," which women are not permitted to speak about or debate but instead opt to do.

The use of the marriage of a Masarwa (Bushman) lady and a Motswana man as a manufactured remedy to the issue of black-on-black racism in Botswana has received the majority of the negative attention surrounding Maru. In *The Tragic Life* (1990), Cecil Abrahams and Daniel Gover both make reference to the fairy-tale ending, despite the fact that the path leading to Maru and Margret's marriage is rocky and fraught with issues brought on by power imbalances, racism, sexism, and tribalism, and the marriage does not signify a happy ending. According to Guldimann (2003), there is a more fruitful way to interpret the ambiguity that *Maru*'s conclusion repeatedly generates as a sign of a far more nuanced interaction between race and gender than the joyful ending can account for. Paying attention to literary elements that explain this confusion will show that *Maru* is a radical subversion of the romance genre

rather than having a romantic conclusion (Guldimann in Sample 2003). There are several ways to interpret Head's *Maru* in terms of the gender intersections that African-American women must deal with.

The novel *Maru* will be shown to be an excellent example of a *Bildungsroman* built on counter-discourse and sisterhood among women, even if it seems that *Maru* is more interested in racial concerns than gender discourses. Margaret is shown as a Masarwa woman who is oppressed first and a woman who is subjected second, although the latter is by no means secondary. An identity issue that Margaret is now experiencing may be linked to her early years. Despite being adopted by Margaret Cadmore Sr., individuals and children continued to abuse her during her time at the mission school., due to the fact that she is a member of the Basarwa tribe. She instantly adopts the victim persona and maintains it throughout her life. She "has no weapon of words or personality, just a perpetual quiet and a countenance that conveys no emotion" since she is a bushman (*Maru* p. 17). *Maru*, according to Head, "addresses the topic of racism because the terminology used to exploit Basarwa people, the manner in which they are exploited, and the contrast between black and Basarwa in Botswana is so perfect." (Head 1989, p. 11) In *Maru*, Head seeks liberation from a colonial past as well as from the racist, sexist, and power-seeking instincts of the African male, according to Goddard. (Goddard 2000). *Maru* is pertinent to this research because of her "sexist and power-seeking inclinations," according to the author.

Black or coloured women in *Maru* have a double sense of helplessness—first as women and second as people of color. In traditional African culture, women are marginalised and degraded to the position of outcasts, but they do not endure the same kinds of mistreatment. This claim is accurate since, as Koul (2017) contends, the inhumane treatment of a Masarwa lady named Margaret serves as the central theme of Head's *Maru*. A unique perspective on the politics of race and gender in a postcolonial country, as well as the role of the postcolonial

woman in determining the destiny of her culture, is provided by the way the story's themes evolve in *Maru*, according to Koul. Bessie Head rejects every racial bias that results in racial injustice. She acknowledges that this evil predated the white man's use of it against people of other races in Africa, saying that "it was present before the white man became generally despised for his mental view" (*Maru* p. 11). Margaret endures excruciating psychological torment since, like all other victims of discrimination, she is a powerless victim of her race. The narrator's description of her in the following extract captures her helplessness:

> What was a Bushman supposed to do? She had no weapon of words or personality, only a permanent silence and a face which revealed no emotion, except that now and then an abrupt tear would splash down out of one eye. If a glob of spit dropped onto her arm during playtime hour, she quietly wiped it away. If they caught her in some remote part of the school building during playtime hour, they would set up the wild giggling dance: since when did a Bushy go to school? We take him to the bush where he eats mealies pap, pap (*Maru* p. 13).

The above qoutation relates directly to Margaret's voicelessness, which permeates the whole narrative and defines her. She has "no weapon of words" with which to protect herself or fight back, thus she is unable to respond verbally to the youngsters who are mistreating her. She does indeed remain silent forever; nowhere do we witness her mustering the strength to confront her captors on her own. Head permits her to endure her anguish "without expression," and the fact that she can only scream out with one eye shows that she is struggling against the tears. The fact that the tear is sudden further proves that she was not expecting it; otherwise, she would have attempted to stop it. She can only weep in silence, or silently, as it is described in the text, since her silence is so deeply ingrained. "If a glob of spit landed into her arm during playing," as suggested, may indicate to the kids really spitting on her, but she chooses to think

of it as an accident and merely quietly wipes it. This creates the perception of a woman who is entirely wordless and without agency—the silent subaltern. At this point in Margaret's life, it is Margaret Cadmore Sr. who avails herself to defend and support her: "What the damn, blasted hell is going on here?" she shrieked. "I'll have you expelled, do you hear? I want no more of this nonsense!" (*Maru*, p. 11). Through this support and protection from Margaret Cadmore Sr., Margaret the protagonist of the novel (or is she?), is able to finish school and go on to study further and obtain a teaching certificate.

When she is appointed a teacher in Dilepe, the question of her race assumes a disturbing prominence: "'Excuse the question, but are you a Coloured?' Mr. Seth, the Principal of the school asked her." (*Maru* p. 30). The mere fact that this question has to be asked, and the assumption that she had to be a Coloured shows that there is something wrong. It is thus not surprising that her answer, that she is a Masarwa, makes the Principal fret for the whole day, and from then onwards he refers to her as a Masarwa (she is no longer a human being). He seems worried by what appears to be an extraordinary friendship between Margaret and Dikeledi, who, in his eyes, is royalty of royalty.

This friendship reveals the sisterhood bond that exists between the two women who are not related biologically nor racially. Their bond as sisters and friends transcends racial and cultural boundaries, and it begins as soon as they meet and in a short time develops to a point where it seems as if they had known each other for years: "[I]n the course of two days they had fallen into a relationship of wonderful harmony" (*Maru* p. 28). This relationship is also characterized as one that has "… no tension, restraint, or false barriers people usually erect towards each other" (*Maru* p. 28). In Dilepe, Dikeledi assumes the role of supporting and protecting Margaret which Margaret Sr. played while Margaret Jr was still at school. Dikeledi had run the school for some time. She was the only person who did not understand backstabbing as portrayed in the novel. The following extract is a testimony to the demonstration of

Dikeledi's and Margaret's friendship as well as sisterhood; "She walked into Margaret's classroom during the lunch break. They had fallen into the habit of eating lunch together. … "Why did you keep quiet?" Dikeledi asked, pointedly at Margaret. Dikeledi swung one leg on the table. "It's funny how we agree in feeling," she said. "I saw the little girl too. She put her hand to her throat when I shouted at them. I kept looking at her because her mouth went dead white" (*Maru* p. 36).

Margaret Sr.'s and Dikeledi's relationships with Margaret Jr. resonate with Buckley's (1974) point about motherhood/sisterhood, womanhood/friendship among women in women's *Bildungsromane*. Buckley claims that in these novels the central character attains the level of self-realisation through her relationships with a network of women, in the form of mothers, sisters and friends who guide and support her in becoming self-dependent in a male-controlled society. Margaret attests to this postulation when in her conversation with Dikeledi, she asserts that;

> But I am not ashamed of being a Masarwa," the young girl said seriously. "Let me show you something." She opened her handbag and took out a small, framed picture. "My teacher made this sketch of my mother the day she died … "I am not like you, Margaret," [Dikeledi] said. "I am afraid to protest about anything because life easily overwhelms me, but you are right to tell anyone that you are a Masarwa (*Maru* p. 17).

While Margaret is one of the most inarticulate, majority of the subaltern women who are timid, cowed, and voiceless in the face of racism and patriarchy, at least, through the friendship and sisterhood she receives from both Margaret Cadmore and Dikeledi, she is able to attain this self-realization and confidence with regards to her own identity. The confidence displayed here is clearly the work of Margaret Cadmore, and the congratulatory words mentioned in the second part of the extract are really significant coming from Dikeledi, whom

we are told is a "drastic revolutionary" (*Maru* p. 51) and in many instances we see her 'protesting' against injustices meted out against Margaret Jr.

But one could say that, despite Margaret's self-awareness and confidence in her Masarwa identity, the text *Maru* is not that different from novels written by men because Margaret is always shy and does not speak up. It is interesting that even the title of the novel is taken from the male character and not a woman, Margaret. This is not to fault Head as someone who failed to advance the status of women. The fact that she published novels at a time when the African literary field was dominated by men is no small feat. Clearly, she had to fight to be taken as seriously as the male writers. This made her care much more about racial issues, which were also important to the male writers of the time.

However, even though Maru has all the power and Margaret is powerless and voiceless, there seems to be a subtle struggle between the two for prominence in the text. Another way to look at the novel *Maru* is as a male text that has been usurped by women, specifically Margaret. It is in this manner that the text can be seen as reshaping or challenging male representation. Also, in spite of her quietness and powerlessness, Margaret seems to wield an amazing power over the three most prominent men: Dilepe, Maru, and Moleka. Even vocal women like Dikeledi do not wield this kind of power, as the following extract reveals:

> Alone now, [Moleka] slowly raised his hand to his heart. How was it? Something had gone 'bang' inside his chest, and the woman had raised her hand to her heart at the same time. It was not like anything he had felt before. Dikeledi was the nearest he'd ever come to loving a woman and yet, even there, Dikeledi made his bloodstream boil by the way she wore her skirts, plainly revealing the movement of her thighs. With Dikeledi it was a matter of the bloodstream. And what was this? It was like finding within himself a gold mine he'd not known was there before. Yet he could have sworn he was totally

> unaware of the woman until she spoke. Something in the tone, those soft fluctuations of sound, the plaintive cry of one who is always faced with the hazards of life, had abruptly arrested his life. With Dikeledi it was always distractions. She was too beautiful, physically. With the woman there were no distractions at all. He had communicated directly with her heart. It was that which was a new experience and which had so unbalanced him (*Maru* p. 23).

In this extract Moleka is still shaken by the encounter with Margaret, after he had taken her to the old library. We witness the impact she has on him, and the emphasis is placed on the difference between Margaret and Dikeledi. Moleka is not sure what hit him. For the first time in his life he has felt the hard beating of the heart, 'bang', which completely changes not only his heart but his personality. What is happening to him is so new that in order to try and make sense of it, he compares Margaret's impact on his life to that of Dikeledi. He understands perfectly what it is with Dikeledi: it is her physical beauty, and the way she wears her short skirts, all which make his bloodstream boil, which means she turns him on. In other words, he is physically or sexually attracted to her.

But not so with Margaret. She is not as beautiful as Dikeledi, so with her it is not a physical or sexual distraction/attraction. That the tables are turned and the power is on the side of Margaret is evidenced by the fact that Moleka is not just 'arrested' but has his whole life arrested by Margaret, and he is also 'unbalanced'. He thinks that it has to do with the tone of her voice and what he calls a 'plaintive cry' which still shows Margaret as passive and powerless, and he explains this in terms of her hard upbringing. Whether Moleka's suppositions are correct or not is immaterial. What is important for this chapter and this thesis is that even though Margaret hardly speaks, when she does speak her words have a great deal of power, as we are told that he was 'totally unaware of the woman until she spoke.' The difference between Dikeledi's looks and Margaret's speaking is that Dikeledi only distracts him sexually, and

Margaret's words are likened to him finding within himself a gold mine he had not known was there before. This means there is a spiritual awakening of some sort and it changes his life completely: "'I have come to the end of one road,' He thought, 'and I am taking another'" (*Maru*, p. 24). While in a similar example relating to Maru, it is summed up in the following words:

> Then Maru too turned and looked at the sky, while his friends collected the last object in the house. What would the future be like? He couldn't tell, but at the moment he felt as if he had inherited a universe. He turned to the woman standing silently beside him, and said: "We used to dream the same dreams. That was how I knew you would love me in the end (*Maru*, p. 101).

Gender, Resistance and Cultural Pressures: A Reading of Tsitsi Dangarembga's Texts

The 1988 novel *Nervous Conditions*, which is set in colonial Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), describes a household that is infiltrated by Western culture, blackness, and masculinist rule. It also shows severe struggle and uncertainty. Tambu, the first-person female protagonist-narrator in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, is described by Austen (2015) as moving from a rural, impoverished hamlet to the commencement of an upper high school, where she has a considerably more promising future than her family. Dangarembga, according to Craps and Beulens (2008), reworks the clichés of the traditional *Bildungsroman* in ways that relate to alternative *Bildungsroman* models. [...] Dangarembga blurs the borders between autobiography and fiction while altering the *Bildungsroman's* conventional formal and thematic restrictions in order to create a response against racism, colonialism, and patriarchy (Craps and Beulens, 2008).

It is important to note that Dangarembga makes her argument by using the trauma tale as a literary trope. There is also a link with the community and the Zimbabwean way of life in an attempt to extend the scope of her *Bildungsroman* and establish a common pool for feminist

experience that motivates change in postcolonial Zimbabwean women. The emphasis is on Tambu's difficulties entering the first level of formal education as a female student in postcolonial Zimbabwe. Tambu's advantage thus hinges on her autonomous reading in the "diverse and exotic library" that her mentor-cousin Nyasha has provided for her. Also brought up by Nyasha is Tambu's openness to "attempt new things, her insistence on alternatives, and her drive to convert the present into the future" (NC 1988, p. 178).

Dangarembga, according to Kolawole (2000), integrates women issues with broader socioeconomic ones. This study views Tambu's exclusion as the price she must pay for her education. In *Nervous Conditions,* Dangarembga is separated into two characters: Nyasha, who is both urban and well-versed in European culture by the time we first meet her, and Tambu, who truly grows up in a rural environment (although one that has been uprooted owing to settler colonialism). In her own biography, "An Interview with Tsitsi Dangarembga" by Rooney (2007), Dangarembga asserts that Nyasha and Tambu are her closest resemblances. Dangarembga employs the technique of a fictional alter-ego whose real parents are illiterate in order to depict "traditional" living in deeper and more morally ambiguous terms than is often the case in other literary works (an uncommon background for any African literary character).

Therefore, we see Tambu following her route to individual growth within an extended family, the structure of which is inferred from Tambu's actions and the kinship relationships denoted by untranslated Shona phrases like Baba mu kuru (big father or uncle), Maiguru (big mother or aunt), etc. The author acknowledges the economic and particularly gender limits these partnerships have on her while also expressing some positive feelings for the social comfort of these relationships and the environment in which they are most at home. Therefore, Tambu's decision to leave the homestead for the mission school run by her uncle Babamukuru is made possible by the passing of her brother Nhamo. Hence the novel's startling first line: “I was not sorry when my brother died,” (NC, p. 1) becomes clearer.

In *Nervous Conditions*, it is Nyasha who from the very beginning opposes the cultural and societal norms and restrictions imposed on women. This act of opposing all the restrictions meted out on women is in itself a form of counter discourse. For instance, Nyasha engages in a constant rebellion and aggression against patriarchy represented by her father Babamukuru:

> Babamukuru was shocked. "What! What is this you are saying, this nonsense you dare to put in my ears! Tambudzai. Leave the room. I want to settle this matter with her." "I wasn't doing anything wrong!" insisted Nyasha. The atmosphere in that room was growing hostile, the communication tangential. Voices were rising and threatening to break" (NC, p. 115).

Babamukuru is obviously surprised when Nyasha responds to him. Babamukuru wishes to reject Nyasha's conduct as simple "nonsense" (or madness?), which is not worthy of being heard by him or "put in [his] ears," which demonstrates how selfish he is, managing to make everything about him. Nyasha's behaviour is in direct opposition to patriarchy and threatens it. Intriguingly, Babamukuru expects that this settlement would include his hitting Nyasha, so he is doubly shocked and enraged when Nyasha not only speaks back at him but also fights back. As a result, he tells Tambu to leave the room so that he may "fix" this problem with Nyasha. Nyasha sets herself apart from the other women in the narrative at this point because, despite the fact that Lucia beats a man named Takesure, he in no way embodies patriarchal authority the way Babamukuru does.

The subaltern is now contesting the innate male predominance present in African communities via Nyasha's revolt and talking back to and against the status quo. Nyasha develops into a spokesperson for her silent cousins, sisters, and other women in Zimbabwe, Africa, and throughout the globe. Nyasha's actions upset the status quo and are an example of counter discourse. They are also important for Tambu, who, as she tells us, becomes more reserved and quiet after she arrives at the mission:

> I had grown much quieter and more self-effacing than was usual, even for me. Besides Nyasha I was a paragon of feminine decorum, principally because I hardly ever talked unless spoken to, and then only to answer with the utmost respect whatever question had been asked. Above all, I did not question things. … Babamukuru thought I was the sort of young woman a daughter ought to be and lost no opportunity to impress this point of view upon Nyasha. Far from being upset by these comparisons, she would agree that, apart from being spineless (which she thought could be corrected,) yes, I was an exemplary young lady" (NC, p. 157).

This 'quietness' and the sense of 'self-effacing' Tambu confesses to is quite unlike the Tambu whose character is well known from the homestead; but it is more akin to the real voiceless subaltern in the text: the servant Anna. As we will see in the course of this chapter, perhaps through Nyasha's influence, Tambu regains her voice and talks back to patriarchy.

While Tambudzai's educational ambition suffers because Nhamo is preferred over her due to gender inequality masterminded by patriarchy which is entrenched in the Zimbabwean society, she does not accept her situation as inevitable or natural. She is very much aware and critical of the injustices which prevent her from attaining her objective:

> The needs and sensibilities of the women in my family were not considered a priority, or even legitimate. That was why I was in Standard Three in the year that Nhamo died, instead of Standard Five, as I should have been by that age. In those days I felt the injustice of my situation every time I thought about it, which I could not help but do often since children are always talking about their age. Thinking about it, feeling the injustice of it, this is how I came to dislike my brother, and not only my brother: my father, my mother- in fact everybody (NC, p. 12).

As someone rooted in patriarchy and its tenets, Tambu's father is opposed to her going to school and he advises that she prepares herself to master the art of home keeping; a socially constructed duty of a woman: 'Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables' (NC, p. 15). As far as patriarchy is concerned, the best that can happen to Tambu is for her to get a husband, and the best she can do is to be a good wife who can cook for her husband. As such, education would be wasted on her, and it will be a waste of time and resources to educate her. As her father states later on, 'meet a young man and I will have lost everything' (NC p. 30). Tambu further reflects on her father's position regarding her education:

> He did not like to see me over absorbed in intellectual pursuits. He became very agitated after he had found me several times reading the sheet of newspaper in which the bread from magrosa had been wrapped as I waited for the sadza to thicken. He thought I was emulating my brother, that the things I read would fill my mind with impractical ideas, making me quite useless for the real tasks of feminine living (NC, pp. 33-34).

But Tambu does not share this vision for her life. She challenges it and fights it with all she has got. Tambu's foremost undertaking in her quest for education is cultivating a maize farm, which serves to show that she is unwilling to let circumstances brought to her by gender inequality and racial prejudice to define her future. Her father's confiscation of the donation for her school fees, which she earned in Umtali from an old white lady, does not make her give up on her desire for education and liberation. When she finds out that Nhamo has been stealing her maize, she finds him and attacks him:

> They told me I took off from the *pada* like a dog after a buck. I remember at one moment playing *pada*, the next Nhamo and I rolling about in the dirt of the football pitch, a group of excited peers egging us on. They said I went straight

> for my brother and brought him down in a single charge. The element of surprise was on my side. I sat on top of him, banged his head into the ground, screamed and spat and cursed (NC, p.23).

So Tambu's quietness and self-effacement as witnessed in the beginning of her stay at the mission is something new, and it is something that does not stay with her all her life. Her transformation culminates in her standing up against Babamukuru, whom she views as a saint when she first arrives at the mission, and slowly realises his fallibility through observing his actions and learning from Nyasha:

> 'Don't take me at all. I don't want to be in your stupid wedding,' I wanted to shout. Instead I said quietly and politely, 'Very well, Babamukuru. That will make things much easier for everybody.'…I found I could speak again and speak I did, although my heart was racing and my voice when it came was high and thin. 'I'm sorry, Babamukuru,' I said, 'but I do not want to go to the wedding' (NC, pp. 168-169).

At first, there is a conflict between what Tambu wants to say and what she actually says. She agrees to do what her uncle orders her to do, and at this point she is still concerned about being 'polite' and she speaks quietly, because what she is saying is the opposite of what she wants. As a polite girl, it does not matter what she wants. What matters is what her elders want. What Babamukuru wants, what patriarchy and colonial discourse wants. But later on she regains her voice and is able to talk back to Babamukuru, to patriarchy. The transformation that we witness taking place in Tambu is similar to that which happened in Maiguru, who at first is submissive and allows Babamukuru to control him, but later on stands up to him:

> Yes, she is your brother's child. But when it comes to taking my money so that you can feed her and her father and your whole family and waste it on ridiculous weddings, that's when they are my relatives too. Let me tell you,

> Baba Chido, I am tired of my house being a hostel for your family. I am tired of being a housekeeper for them. I am tired of being nothing in a home I am working myself sick to support. And now even that Lucia can walk in here and tell me that the things she discusses with you, here in my home, are none of my business. I am sick of it Babawa Chido. Let me tell you, I have had enough! (NC, p. 174).

Characters like Maiguru begin in the novel as mute, obedient women who perform the roles that patriarchy has set for them, but as the work goes on, they start to speak out and express their desires. If one were to wonder why Maiguru is suddenly speaking back to her husband/patriarchy when she had previously accepted her inferior status, the explanation may be as simple as the fact that patriarchy has caused her so much pain that she is no longer able to tolerate it. She emphasizes her exhaustion by using the word "tired" three times in the aforementioned statement. She also makes two references to being "sick," the first of which is in reference to her unacknowledged role in the home, where she is required to work at the school alongside her husband and then return home to serve him as his wife, while the money she makes is taken and spent on "ridiculous" or "senseless" things like Tambu's parents' wedding.

In the second instance, she refers to herself as "sick" to convey the idea that she is just unable to keep quiet any longer and that, if she does, she would combust or die. The last epigraph, which states that "The State of the Native is a nervous condition," is similar to Fanon's climax at the opening of *The Wretched of the Earth*, which states that "The Condition of the Native is a neurotic condition":

A neurotic condition known as the "naitive" state was established and maintained among colonized natives by settlers with their permission. [Note that in my translation of

Sartre's text, "with their permission" is highlighted in italics and "native" is surrounded by quotations from Sartre] (1961, Fanon, p. 17).

The sickness in the novel can be shown in the aggressive opening statement: “I was not sorry when my brother died.” This looks like a sheer madness or sickness not to feel some form of sympathy or empathy over the demise of one’s younger brother. Second, is the emotional and mental sickness of Mainini’s mother, Nyasha’s state of depression and anorexia as well as Tambudzai’s melancholia state as aptly depicted in the novel *Nervous Conditions* is worth stating here. It is suggesting that all this tiredness is adding up and it is causing her to be sick. The life she has to live under patriarchy is not of happiness but of sickness. It is dis-ease. As she maintains later on: ‘No, they are not,’ Maiguru retorted recklessly, ‘but if they are not good things to be said, then neither are they good things to happen. But they are happening here in my home…And when I keep quiet you think I am enjoying it. So today I am telling you I am not happy. I am not happy anymore in this house’ (NC, p. 175). Interestingly, this talking back is not the most radical thing Maiguru does, but she also leaves her husband and children, if only for a week, an action which proves to have more impact on Babamukuru.

An Inter-textual Reading of Bessie Head’s and Tsitsi Dangarembga’s Novels

Maru and *Nervous Conditions* are instances of the *Bildungsroman* subgenre since they both examine the girl-child experience from infancy to maturity. This supports Felski's (1989) assertion that female writers of *Bildungsroman* are historically developing an awareness of their gender as a force that may be opposed to societal and cultural norms (Felski 1989, p. 131). The realization of this postulation is typically found in one of the tenets of the women's *Bildungsroman*. According to Buckley, in these novels, the main character develops self-awareness through her relationships with a network of other women, who mentor and support her as she learns to be independent in a patriarchal society. The texts analyzed in this chapter make this clear. Margaret Cadmore Sr. plays this significant part in Margaret's defence and

growth, and Nyasha has affected Tambu in several ways and educated her in *Nervous Conditions*. This network provides the character with moral guidance in the face of gender adversity as highlighted in the opening chapter of this study. And as the character reaches a point of maturity and independence, she concludes her transition or journey of self-discovery or the inability to achieve self-actualization. It is obvious that the character only reaches this pinnacle with the help of the women who have guided her.

But the issue at stake here is beyond an individual agitation or rebellion; it is a communal one; it is for all the sisters, together with all strands of sisterhood and friendship. Tambu moves from the "silenced-object" role associated with women in patriarchal society, to the "vocal-subject", which in some way is a form of counter discourse; where the docile and muted women are able to challenge the obnoxious patriarchal system that has rendered them voiceless and inconsequential in male dominated society and other climes of life. Again, Maiguru who begins her role as an obedient wife to her husband, eventually has to speak out. While Margaret on the other hand is depicted thus, "I was surprised," she replied, quietly. "They used to do it to me when I was a child but I never felt angry. Before you came in, I thought I had a stick in my hands and was breaking their necks" (*Maru*, p. 36).

Through the prism of childhood, Dangarembga and Head explore the dilemma faced by many African girls, thereby exposing the vicious cycle of conflict identified as 'the expectations of tradition and extended family on one hand and their own individual feelings on the other' (Veit-Wild 1987, p. 177). This is vividly demonstrated by Tambu's uncle as well as her father's behaviour and comments towards her and her cravings for education in the following statement: "Tambudzai's sharpness with her novels is no use because in the end it will benefit strangers" (NC, p. 56). Uwakweh (1995) asserts that education is critical to female independence. Socially, and often symbolically, it transports women beyond the reach of traditional shackles. In the women's *Bildungsromane*, women's education challenges

patriarchal expectations, sometimes placing the heroine in the role of an iconoclast. This is so obvious in the case of Margaret where it is decried that; "…Leseding school was so fortunate to have so many first class teachers like Mistress Dikeledi and the new mistress [Margaret]" (*Maru* p. 39). And on the other hand, it is Tambu who equally excelled in her academic pursuits. As Babamakuru states, "No do not thank me. It is Tambudzai who worked hard for that scholarship" (NC, p. 186). In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu's story demonstrates the oppressive facets of patriarchy and the psychological schism it creates within the female child in particular. Education inevitably is the basis of conflict between Tambu, her brother and her father, and so forth. It is the trajectory of this childhood experience of sexual prejudice in education that she recounts in the novel. This position is summed up right in the opening of the novel:

> Therefore, I shall not apologise but begin by recalling the facts as I remember them that led up to my brother's death, the event of my brother's passing and the events of my story cannot be separated, my story is not after all about death, but about my escape and Lucia's; about my mother's and Maiguru's entrapment; and about Nyasha's rebellion- Nyasha, far-minded and isolated, my uncle's daughter, whose rebellion my not in the end have been successful (NC, p. 1).

While Head narrates the racial segregations suffered by Margaret, Dangarembga faults patriarchy, colonialism, religion and western education, by creating a situation in which women are considered inconsequential when it comes to education and in the case of Margaret, Head blames racism as the bane Margaret Jr. suffers in school as a Bushman (Masarwa). While Tambu laments being in standard three when her brother died, instead of standard five where she should have been, and attributes this to gender inequality, Margaret does not pass through this kind of experience because she is raised by Margaret Cadmore Sr., who incidentally is the

Principal of the school she attends, and is thus in a position to protect her from those who bully her for being a Masarwa.

Margaret's relationship with Mrs. Cadmore does not reflect a child-parent relationship, but rather, a "semi-servant" one. The occasional kisses on her cheeks, a bedtime story or her nature walks were the only factors that distinguished her from the other servants. The young Cadmore never authoritatively requests any stuff from Sr. Cadmore, rather, she thankfully acknowledges whatsoever was given to her. Consequent upon this experience, young Margaret agonizes from a severe nonexistence of mother-daughter relationship. As such, there is "a big hole in the child's mind between the time that she slowly became conscious of her life in the home of the missionaries and conscious of herself as a person" (*Maru* p. 15). Unlike Tambu, Margaret has no physical knowledge of who her parents are, where they live or come from, except what the Principal, (Margaret Cadmore Sr) has related to her. Her educational experience is different compared to what Tambu has experienced in her early life. The tension of female education that Tambu passes through is completely absent in Head's *Maru*. Margaret suffers more of a racial problem in her school than a gender one. Where Tambu blames patriarchy, asserting that in her family women are insignificant, Margaret blames tribalism, racism and being without parents as the major bane she encounters early in life, as she does not have any family except Margaret Cadmore Sr.

Both texts explore the experiences girl-children in their respective environments. Tambu is eight (8) years old when the story in *Nervous Conditions* starts, and Margaret is seventeen (17) years when her childhood experience is re-enacted in *Maru*. In *Maru*, Margaret suffers from some forms of socialization gap in school, where she is not seen socializing with any student, nor with anyone at home. However, in *Nervous Conditions* Tambu socializes very well with other students; even when she could not continue with her studies and later resumes: "The girls were pleased to see me, to have me with them again. It was just like the old days"

(NC, p. 22). On the other hand, Tambu finds Nhamo's displays of male superiority obnoxious. For instance, Nhamo has distinct views about male privileges and female inferiority and does not fail to demonstrate his authority over his sisters. It is also interesting how his parents and society at large reinforce gender identity. Tambu recounts that when Nhamo comes home from the mission school, fowls are killed for him even though the family rarely indulges itself in such a luxury. Again, her uncle Babamakuru's expectations of his daughter, Nyasha, differ from that of his son, Chido. Despite his academic background, his views on conventional feminism align with that of the wider community. This causes confrontation between both the father and his disobedient daughter, which escalates, thus allowing Tambu more insight into female problem as she observes:

> … and thinking how dreadfully familiar that scene had been, with Babamukuru condemning Nyasha to whoredom, making her a victim of her femaleness, just as I had felt victimized at home in the days when Nhamo went to school and I grew my maize. The victimization, I saw was universal. It didn't depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition. It didn't depend on things I had thought it depended on. Men took it everywhere with them. Even heroes like Babamukuru did it. And that was the problem. You had to admit Nyasha had no tact. You had to admit she was altogether too volatile and strong-willed. You couldn't ignore the fact that she had no respect for the way all conflicts came back to this question of femaleness. Femaleness as opposed and inferior to maleness (NC, pp. 115-116).

Galloway (2000) draws an illuminating parallel between Margaret in his essay and Nora Helmer in Ibsen's play "A Doll's House" in his piece, "*Maru* and the Intricacies of Cultural Prejudice." Margaret grew up in a setting remarkably similar to Nora's. Nora explains to her husband, "Pappy taught me his perspective on things while I was at home, so I had the same

opinions." And since he would not have liked it, I hid the fact that I disagreed with him. He called me his "doll-child," and we played together much as I did with my dolls (Galloway 2000, p. 92). Due to her belief that genetics have no real importance, Margaret Cadmore Senior trains her daughter Margaret in a similar way. Galloway thinks that Nora Helmer's predicament at the start of the play is much more individualised than Margaret's situation at the conclusion of the novel. In a very nasty manner, Maru tells her, "I merely married you because you were the only woman in the world who did not want to be noteworthy. However, despite what I've stated in the past, I don't value you" (*Maru*, p. 5). Margaret can never be relied upon to slam the door in protest, in contrast to Dikeledi in *Maru* who eventually does so. Despite Maru's adoration, it appears that she has been "brutally denied" her own freedom. In line with the aforementioned viewpoint, it is significant to notice that Maru compares his wife to yellow daisies in the novel's opening scene, despite the fact that the comparison occurs chronologically later in the novel. This difference demonstrates Margaret's objectification in a primarily patriarchal society. She was fed and cared for by Maru in Dilepe society before being transported away and planted in a strange garden site, much like the yellow daisies. (*Maru*, p. 93).

This reveals how, in contrast to Dikeledi, women in *Maru* are not objectified and often have a voice. The representation of Margaret, who has suffered more disadvantages due to her colour than gender, is the worst-case scenario. Despite the fact that this is Margaret's story, Bessie Head did not emphasise gender or female concerns in *Maru*, as racism did. Head finds it difficult to concentrate on ladies because of her status as a Masarwa lady.

At the end of *Nervous Conditions*, Tambudzai is also imagining how she could have resisted or fought back like Margaret thus:

> I was young then and able to banish things, but seeds do grow. Although I was not aware of it then, no longer could I accept Sacred Heart and what it represented as a sunrise on my horizon. Quietly, unobtrusively and

> extremely fitfully, something in my mind began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed, bringing me to this time when I can set down this story (NC, p. 208).

Margaret could not own the story; she remains voiceless almost throughout the novel. Most of the time, she does not have a voice or a stand. We do not see her perspective because Maru has taken over her story. Maru makes all the plans to marry her, but we do not see her speaking. She is voiceless and is not allowed to express herself. However, like Tambudzai, Margaret sometimes imagines herself trying to fight back and free herself from racism especially when she expresses herself thus:

> I was surprised," she replied, quietly. "They used to do it to me when I was a child but I never felt angry. Before you came in, I thought I had a stick in my hands and was breaking their necks. I kept on thinking: How am I going to explain her death? I thought I had killed a little girl in the front desk who, was laughing, because I clearly saw myself grab her and break her neck with a stick. It was only when you started shouting that I realized I was still standing behind the table. I kept saying, 'Thank God, thank God! I haven't killed anyone' (*Maru*, p. 36).

And dramatically, Margaret in *Maru* talks back through a pictorial way when at the request of Dikeledi to patriarchy personified in Maru, when she would paint down some imagery from her subconscious imagination as avers in the following conversation thus;

> Dikeledi picked up the last picture. The outline was very clear, even though the faces and arms and bodies were blacked out. She followed the silhouete of the taller person with her eye, then raised her hand to her mouth to stifle an exclamation of surprise. It was unmistakably that of her brother, Maru.

She turned an uneasy glance on Margaret, who stared back at her quietly with no change of expression.

"You frighten me," she said, her eyes wide and startled. "Why?" Margaret asked surprised.

"Do you always see things like that? Dikeledi asked.

"Yes" she said. "I drew all the pictures from my mind. I first see something as it looks but it looks better when it reappears again as a picture in my mind. The only difference with those three pictures was that they were new. I had not seen them before" (Maru, p. 84).

Conclusion

Head's and Dangarembga's novels in this chapter have not only shown us how "fiction does let us look out through other eyes and teaches us empathy—that behind every pair of eyes is somebody like us," as echoed by Neil Gaiman, but it has also demonstrated how the interaction between the understudied novels exemplifies sisterhood and friendship among women. Through the characters of the two stories, Margaret and Tambu, it is made abundantly obvious how the counter discourse has assisted women in their quest for independence and self-actualization by fostering sisterhood and solidarity. In a sense, Tambu's narrative is representative of all the oppressed black women who remain mute in the face of racism, sexism, and classism. As she passionately exclaims, "But the tale I have recounted here is my own story, the story of four ladies I loved and our men... " (NC, p. 208). Margaret's story is also Dikeledi's, just as Tambudzai's story is also the story of the other four women. A sort of counter-hegemonic discourse is the account of patriarchy, racism, gender inequality, sexual objectification, culture, and tradition in postcolonial Southern Africa as recounted by a woman and seen from her perspective. With this idea in mind, the next chapter of the study will look at how Amma Darko and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's works deal with similar ideas.

CHAPTER FIVE
WEST AFRICAN WOMEN'S *BILDUNGSROMAN*

> Most certainly my trials as a woman writer are heavier and more painful than any I have to go through … You feel awful for seeing the situation the way you do, and terrible when you try to speak about it. … Yet you have to speak out, since your pain is also real.
>
> - Ama Ata Aidoo

Introduction

This chapter explores two examples of the *Bildungsroman* written by women from the West African literary region: *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *Beyond the Horizon* (1995) by Amma Darko. In this chapter, I look at how female West African *Bildungsroman* authors have successfully redirected the notion that female protagonists are weak and inconsequential. The writers have reconstructed the female character from a minor position to an important one by changing her from a quiet and silent figure to a loud and sometimes aggressive one. In contrast to the *Bildungsroman* subgenre's concentration on the never-ending or the never-arriving, Darko and Adichie define their interaction with it as the process of rising from silence to having a voice via their literary works. Mara in Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* and Kambili in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, two of the characters in the works discussed in this chapter, are both shown as being voiceless from the outset in the face of the daily oppression and violence against women they encounter. Additionally, I have looked at how patriarchy and domestic violence are depicted as symbols for female victims of such abuse to unite in sisterhood or friendship, both at home and abroad. I will contend that female friendship and sisterhood may be understood as a kind of liberation and a tool for women who have experienced oppression or silence to speak up.

It is important to highlight that Aidoo's depiction of African female writers' wishes to "speak out" or describe the experiences of African women is true. In the early days of African

literature, which was mostly created by men, women authors and characters were ignored. According to Laure Clemence Cakpo-Chichi Zanou et al. (2017), Purwarno adopted the stance that anything fragile and weak was a woman. In order to support his claims, Purwarno uses a few particular passages from the text, such as the following: "After learning of Nwoye's conversion to Christianity, Okonkwo wonders how he, who is referred to as "a burning inferno," could "have spawned a kid like Nwoye, degenerate and effeminate." (TFA, p. 108). On the other side, he believes that his daughter Ezinma "should have been a male" and wishes she "were a boy" (TFA, p. 122). (TFA, p. 44). Ngugi wa Thiong'o, on the other hand, started his literary career at a time when African literature was making an effort to rebel against the sway and supremacy of European culture. His modern education and the predominance of men in his social environment had an impact on his early works. If an African woman is not taking care of the children in the home, doing housekeeping, or making the bed every night for "sexual pleasure," some of Ngugi's works do not allow for her existence.

Because they give women significant parts in their tales and give them the chance to articulate their own struggles against patriarchy, the two novels covered in this chapter have changed the situation in which women are often represented as being meek and frightened. Female writers have to speak out as a kind of resistance since men authors used to dominate African literature and advance masculine interests in society.

Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* as an Example of Feminine Subjugation, Abuse and Resistance to Patriarchal Authority

The main character, Mara, in Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, narrates her experiences growing up in Naka village and her journey to maturity. Mara's story of being married off to Akobi as a young lady and the vivid picture of environmental ruin she describes are a clear parallel to the 1960s and 1980s and the appalling incompetent leadership and waste of public funds that led Ghana into the unfavorable situation of underdevelopment. Mara describes how, when she was very young and without her permission, her father married her off:

> Once before I started to walk my road all on my own, I believed my mother. But that was before I was given away to this man who paid two white cows, four healthy goats, four lengths of cloth, beads, gold jewellery and two bottles of London Dry Gin to my family, and took me off as his wife from my little African village, Naka, to him in the city. I remember the day clearly. I returned from the village well with my fourth bucket of water of the day when mother excitedly beckoned to me in all my wetness and muddiness, dragged me into her hut and breathlessly told me the 'good news'. 'Your father has found a husband for you,' she gasped, 'a good man!" (BH, pp.3-4).

This experience clearly demonstrates the helplessness women are subjected to in the face of partrirchy in Africa, with no voice of their own in matters that affect them directly in a society where men decide their lots. She also tells of her ordeals in Accra and Germany, using the *Bildungsroman* genre as a space for her narrativization. Mara is shown to be a person and an object of trade in the capitalist systems of Africa and Europe, as Akobi and Mara discuss in their conversation:

> There is a certain job that almost all the African women here do. But you are still a little too green for it, so we need a little more time to prepare you for it.' 'What job is that?' I asked. 'When the time comes for you to do it, I will tell you,' he said. 'Meanwhile we'll fix you up with something else while we prepare you.' 'The very next week I found myself working as a housemaid for a German family. I worked three times a week and sometimes at weekends if the Madam demanded it. Akobi took the money I earned, as payment for the roof he and Gitte had provided over my head, for my food and transport, for the investment in my trip from home, and for the cost of setting me up for my coming big job (BH p. 106).

The aforementioned excerpt clearly illustrates how Mara, an African woman living in Germany, is objectified by her Nigerian husband, who is now wed to Gitte, a German lady. The African lady in this situation is similarly shown to be subordinate to the German woman. Here, Mara fills the dual roles of housekeeper and provider for her husband and his German wife. She is required to pay back all of her out-of-pocket payments for Akobi, her husband, and Gitte, as well as other utility bills. The next portion of this thesis will reveal Mara's introduction to complete objectification and enslavement as a tool for financial gain. Darko here presents the gory picture of the sexual exploitation and abuse of women by men as Mara asserts:

> Something was in the wine I had drunk. It made me see double and I felt strange and happy and high … so high that I was certain that I could fly free. Then suddenly the room was filled with people, all men, and they were talking and laughing and drinking. And they were completely naked! There must have been at least ten men for what I saw were at least twenty images. Then they were all around me, many hairy bodies, and they were stripping me, fondling me, playing with my body, pushing my legs apart, wide, wide apart. As for the rest of the story, I hope that the gods of Naka didn't witness it (BH, p. 111).

It is the above exploitation and abuse of women that Darko captures in her text as a form of writing back to the male dominated world through the *Bildungsroman* genre. Because of this, according to Chasen (2010), Darko's historical narrative illuminates the actions and processes that are sacred to Mara's growing understanding of her predicament across international boundaries. As a result, Darko's remarkable spirit of resistance, which manifests itself at the conclusion of the story, is seen as a crucial component of her feminism because it demonstrates her attempt to give the oppressed female persona some measure of dignity and

reject the doomsday predictions made for her by the men in her life. In this case, it is clear that the men are to blame for Mara's sad state of disappointment. As this episode clearly depicts;

> The situation was this: the three of us were watching a video film that showed me completely naked, with men's hands moving all over my body. Then some held my two legs wide apart while one after the other, men, many men, white, black, brown, even one who looked like Chinese, took turns upon me. All this was captured clearly on the video film. And this was what Osey and Akobi blackmailed me with so that I agreed to do the job at Peepy" (BH, p. 115).

This is also the reason why reviewers like Nzegwu (2003) have described one of the novel's qualities as "the subversive," as in the horrific, the breaking of entrenched beliefs, and the unflinching recounting of Mara's experience. This is how Frias (2002, p. 6) argues that Darko's story is a reconstruction of the African prostitute narrative, as Mara is able to find herself by achieving emotional and financial independence via a display of some inner power. While Mara's rediscovery in *Beyond the Horizon* is not complete, she is nevertheless able to make some progress in her battle to regain her scarred dignity, which is beyond the point of recuperation, much as Tambu and Nyasha are eternally anxious. Through the use of a flashback method, Mara laments her inability to regain her damaged self and image as follows: "I am staring painfully at an image. My image? No! – what is left of what once used to be my image" (BH, p. 1).

In the novel *Beyond the Horizon*, Mara is compelled to leave her husband Akobi, who profits from her prostitution by transferring all of her earnings into his account. Mara decides to be resistant after becoming frustrated and bored with her life in Germany. Mara is able to rediscover herself and achieve financial and emotional independence when she opposes patriarchy, as we shall discuss further on in this chapter.

The Tension Within and the Emerging Voice(s) of Feminity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* perfectly fits within the scope of Goodman's "male-female double *Bildungsroman*." And in a sense, this goes against the ideal *Bildungsroman*. As a result, Goodman's androgynous (a fusion of both female and masculine features) notion is rejected in favor of Fraiman's (1993) model of "counter narratives" in the novel of development by British women authors, which underlines the discrepancies and incompatibilities among the ideal male classics of progress. According to Feng (1999), at the core of both Goodman's and Fraiman's theoretical frameworks is a critique of the socially imposed gender differentiation. The life story of the young Kambili is portrayed in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. This story, which depicts aspects of Nigerian reality, has been compared to General Sani Abacha's totalitarian dictatorship from 1993 to 1998. Eugene's mistreatment of his wife and children in the novel is seen as a metaphor for the tyranny and brutal treatment women endure in patriarchal nations like Nigeria.

Jaja, whose real name is Chukwuka, is 17 years old, while the narrator, Kambili, is 15 years old. Due to their upbringing's protective religion and the fact that they have only had a minimal amount of contact with the outside world, both have become reclusive. In order to fully achieve her *Bildungsroman* ambitions with *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie contextualises the background against which Kambili and Jaja experience the defining physical and psychological changes of their young lives (Onukaogu and Onyerionwu 2010). Her writing talent is lauded above, and Adichie's original work (*Purple Hibiscus*) amply proves this. She is able to offer her characters the appropriate roles and speech in her endeavour to reframe the woman's experience as a counter-discourse.

According to Onukaogu and Onyerionwu (2010), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's literary success is partly a result of her skill in depicting young characters, especially teenage

or adolescent ones, the passionate way she tells their stories, and the technique by which she re-codifies and transforms the common and recognisable details of these lives. Her success may be traced to the fascinating manner in which she weaves each episode around her characters, the engaging ways in which she centres the narrative and dramatic action on them. Another aspect of her popularity is her ability to successfully unite people of many ages, socioeconomic classes, and races in their identification with these young Nigerian characters. For their enormous contributions to the canon of literature, *Purple Hibiscus*, for instance, has garnered a great deal of praise. It has received this kind of acclaim for the reasons mentioned above, which account for a part of their success. The novel is often seen as being basically the tales of Kambili due to the exceptional character development in it. *Purple Hibiscus*, is often described as *Bildungsroman*-focused in reviews and has a broad range of resonances. *The Boston Globe Review* (2007) stated that Adichie's ability to capture a little girl's heart was so charming that her writing finally transcended the limitations of its setting and was as intimate and real as Eudora Welty's Mississippi. For *The Hartford Courant*, Kambili's tone is polite and unpretentious, and he keeps it that way. It may also be at times hilarious, full of youthful ardour, and heartbreakingly sad (Quigley 2021). Adichie focuses much of her story on Kambili and Jaja, who are basically Eugene and Beatrice Achike's adolescent children.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie recounts the story through a female protagonist, Kambili, as opposed to her brother Jaja, in an attempt to uphold women's rights and combat male-dominated social discourses. A woman is thus best prepared to tell her own story. This was done on purpose since a boy, whose voice is heard throughout the whole novel, is often the protagonist of a *Bildungsroman*. Additionally, in a typical text by a woman author, the stories about women often start when the protagonist is an adult, married, or about to get married, and from that point on, her self-development is driven by her frustrations with her life, frequently with a controlling husband in a failed marriage [as is clear in Amma Darko's *Beyond the*

Horizon]. On the other side, Adichie enables Kambili, the young female protagonist, to have her growth impacted by her personal circumstances. Her family, education, and little encounters with other members of society have formed her viewpoint and how she reacts to circumstances. Her father, Eugene, intimidates Kambili and disregards her viewpoint. He would not let her grow up because he does not want her to challenge his authority and sense of right and wrong. At his house, timetables for Kambili and her brother Jaja have been made, and nothing is done without Eugene's consent. Even simple actions like turning on the television or stereo need their father's permission. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie recounts the story via a female protagonist, Kambili, as opposed to her brother Jaja, in an attempt to uphold women's rights and combat male-dominated social discourses.

By making the protagonist a girl, Adichie allows the character to grow via her many experiences throughout the text. This is done in order to give her a voice towards the conclusion of the narrative. This contrasts with Beatrice, her mother, and other weak female characters from early works by women writers, such as Nnuego in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). These are considered to be mature women who have absorbed the self-defeating docility that is the core of patriarchal rule and has consigned African women to forced humility, "meekness," unassertiveness, and quiet suppression. Adichie argues in favor of girls attending school because she is aware that it is still the best way for women to breathe and to get the understanding necessary to restore their lost consciousness. In addition to being brilliant, Kambili is shown to be at the top of her class. Kambili is considered to have had her first crush as a teenager, which contrasts with what is thought possible in many traditional African civilizations. As the young lady comes to grips with her inner sentiments and falls in love with a priest, Father Amadi, Adichie lets the reader experience some of her private moments (PH, pp. 183-185). Even at such a young age, the author shows that a girl has the freedom to express her sexuality in a safe manner and not have it suppressed because of her

gender. Kambili has a feeling of "waking" up, which means acknowledging her limits, like any female heroine in a *Bildungsroman*. The psychological, cultural, and religious bounds of Kambili are best described as an eerie silence, as will be shown later. Her search for a voice is usually the most significant component of her shift or rite of passage. She has to develop her voice and go beyond her regional restrictions (Okuyade 2011).

The occasion known as "Breaking Gods, Palm Sunday" (PH, p. 11) serves as the catalyst for Kambili's silence to be broken. Specifically, during their first and second trips, Aunty Ifeoma sparked her desire for individual independence. The narrative of Kambili begins at this point, as she informs her audience of what transpired on this particular Palm Sunday that enabled her to speak after a protracted time of quiet. She was able to demonstrate her life experience thanks to this one event. She has the chance to speak up because of what happened on Palm Sunday. If this one occurrence had not happened, Kambili would not have been able to tell her life narrative at all. Adichie depicts this pivotal moment when the events of Palm Sunday challenge Eugene's autocratic and patriarchal rule (PH, p. 14). It is appropriate to reiterate that even though the female protagonists being studied in this chapter are silenced by in one way or another, they are not silent in their aspirations and desires to re-inscribe or counter the general discourses that have consigned them to the margins of a male-dominated society. Although the novels support the general idea that women are suppressed, they are not entirely mute. As seen in the next section, they have been quite outspoken in "saying the unsayable" as a kind of counter-speech.

There are several instances of women banding together in Adichie's novels to combat the impacts of patriarchy or to support one another in overcoming difficulties brought on by males. Ifeoma becomes friends with her sister-in-law Beatrice in *Purple Hibiscus* and tries to save her from a harsh marriage. Ifeoma gets along well with the female coworkers, and long before she is let go, she is informed of the list of disloyal professors. She is so close with the

female pupils that they even tell her about their engagement. Sisi, who later gives Mama the poison that kills Eugene, is close to Beatrice. This is an instance of a woman supporting another woman who is under oppression. Sisi is now married after Eugene's passing, but she still devotes a lot of time to training Okon, the new family steward. Kambili also develops a close relationship with Mama, and at one point claims:

> Silence hangs over us, but it is a different kind of silence, one that lets me breathe. I have nightmares about the other kind, the silence of when Papa was alive. In my nightmares, it mixes with shame and grief and so many other things that I cannot name, and forms blue tongues of fire that rest above my head, like Pentecost, until I wake up screaming and sweating (PH p. 305).

The aforementioned is meant to commemorate the independence that mother and daughter experienced after their father's passing. This family may benefit from some independence that allows them to breathe thanks to the enveloping stillness. It is also possible to analyze Kambili's support of her mother through her difficult time as a widow as a cliché of female bonding. Kambili emerges as a persona who demonstrates resilience in the face of difficulty and acts as a model for the urgently required transformation.

Adichie uses these episodes to advance the idea of bonding among women that can overcome problems of oppression and exploitation occasioned by patriarchy and restrictive mothering.

These relationships are advantageous and support women in navigating challenging situations. Women may address their most urgent issues, even domestic ones, in female partnerships. Kolawole (1997) asserts that womanism places a strong emphasis on female solidarity and group action as components of the struggle for equal rights for all women. Adichie thus encourages collective effort to considerably assist underprivileged African

women. African women have traditionally joined together to pursue a path that attempts to challenge injustice and oppression. It is admirable that the women in Adichie's writing collaborate to accomplish a common goal since there is power in numbers. Adichie seems to advise women to bond together because there is strength in numbers and there are higher chances of success, even though this does not negate the existence of female misogyny, sisterhood among women, or instances of conflict and disagreement between and among women, as in the case of Olanna and her mother-in-law, among other instances highlighted in the novels under study.

A Relational Reading of Amma Darko's and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Novels

According to Fashakin (2015), the goals of the spiritual and psychological quests of the male hero and female heroine clearly differ by gender, which needs to be acknowledged and realised in a proper (re)definition of the *Bildungsroman* genre. There are central threads in the male and female *Bildungsromane*, including such interactions with family and friends, official and informal training, gender and romance, and the ultimate strategy of self-development. The topic of gender and sexual inequality is one of the most significant differences between the male and female *Bildungsromane*. Labovitz (1986, p. 44) highlights the fact that patriarchy plays a significant role in the women's *Bildungsroman*, as well as the heroines' negation of male power. As a result, "... the theme of gender equality is one sharply raised in the female [sic] *Bildungsroman* alone" (Labovitz 1986, p. 25). In the female novel of development, gender equality is amajor concern. The male protagonist starts to move up the social ladder, while the female protagonist rebels against the way society is set up and the wrongs it does.

The women's *Bildungsroman* has effectively supported the notion that story-tellingfor African women offers a forum for discussing or rewriting the imbalanced place and function of women of African heritage in society. In reaction to the "erroneous characterization" of women by their male counterparts as being inferior to males in all aspects of life, these female

authors have revised the portrayals of their female characters. These stories considerably aid in the revival of women's re-narrativization through their connections to the *Bildungsroman* genre or autobiography. For example, the frightened and submissive Kambili is starting to feel the advantages of independence as her thoughts alternate between two perspectives:

> I did want to talk to papa, to hear his voice, to tell him what I had eaten and what I had prayed about so that he would approve, so that he would smile so much his eyes would crinkle at the edges. And yet, I did not want to talk to him; I wanted to leave with Father Amadi, or with Aunty Ifeoma, and never come back (PH, p. 272).

Darko, Adichie, and the other four women authors discussed in this research have all expressed this subordination in their works, along with the horrifying image of women's oppression and the agonizing experiences of women being treated like objects of commerce by males. Women have had a transnational and transcultural experience up to this point. Therefore, every woman, at home and abroad, has a fair part in this act of male chauvinism. Tambu's claim effectively summarizes it as follows: "The victimization, I saw, was universal. It didn't depend upon poverty, on lack of education or on tradition. … Men took it everywhere with them. … [W]hat I didn't like was the way all conflicts came back to this question of femaleness. Femaleness as opposed to and inferior to maleness" (NC, p. 118). Mara's statement about Gitte, the German lady who is Akobi's wife in Germany further supports this argument thus: 'Gitte is not the reason,' I stressed to Kaye, 'his dream is the reason. Gitte is as much a victim of it as I am' (BH, p. 116). The demand for sisterhood and friendship is consequently rooted in this research against the background of the pervasiveness of women's victimization and oppression. In the sixth chapter of my thesis, I will demonstrate how these and other texts encourage solidarity among women of African origin who have all experienced the same kinds of abuse or harm.

Eugene in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, and Akobi in Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, is what manhood is described as, if a man's authority is regarded as reclaiming manhood. Women are reduced to or assigned a marginal position under this system. Therefore, they start promoting the notion that the inferiority ascribed to women is just a patriarchal presumption rather than a concrete basis, and that their biological makeup does not render them inferior to males. African women should not put up with this inaccurate image any longer. The emergence of singers, authors, and artists demonstrates the rebirth of female empowerment. This is clear from the six novels written by women of African descent that were looked at for this research. However, the African woman's autobiography has a certain uniqueness that stems from the fact that she has long been seen as being publicly silenced (Davies 1991). The two novels we are considering in this chapter, in my view, also support this, as they are both written in the *Bildungsroman* style.

The reader would not be able to see or feel Eugene's home's absence of noise since it is so obvious. Because of the limited use of her tongue, Kambili often stutters while attempting to express herself, which prompts her classmates to look at her with familiarity that is tinged with contempt. She is known as a "backyard snob" since she struggles to control her mouth in front of the class (PH, p. 53). After the final bell rings, she rushes to her father's waiting car without saying goodbye to her classmates before the driver drives her home, worsening her position. Her peers see her actions as aristocratic haughtiness. They don't know that she has a timeline written in her heart that governs and regulates her existence (PH, p. 148). Like her mother Beatrice, who is presented as a modest, pious woman in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili is characterized as one of the subalterns. The subaltern, or those without a voice, are seen as the least powerful people, claims Spivak (Sharpe, 1989). According to Sharpe (1989 p. 19), the word "subaltern" refers to individuals who are in the lowest economic and social position. This definition is taken from Spivak's article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Contrary to

Sharpe's assertion, it is important to emphasize that not all women are subaltern subjects, and this is true with regard to the texts under consideration. These stories' female characters, some of whom have college degrees and do not come from the worst socioeconomic areas, "cannot be reduced to [their] class and cast position," in Sharpe's words (1989, p. 3).

In *Beyond the Horizon*, Mara, who is Akobi's wife, is likewise presented as a quiet, obedient wife. When she arrives in Germany and learns that her husband has another wife, she decides to remain silent but is forced to live in an awkward apartment with him while posing as his sister. Both are portrayed as obedient housewives who are ready to help their husbands. Eventually, Mara and Kamibili break through their barriers of quiet and begin speaking up in both public and private situations, not just for themselves but also for other women. Kambili alternates between Ifeoma's apartment, which is a place of freedom and positive contact, and her own house, which is a location of authority, dread, and isolation.

Mara also makes it from the home in Ghana where she was reared by Mama Kios to the home in Germany where she immigrated. In order to understand what she and other people stand for as humans, Kambili must leave a peaceful environment like her house. The main character, however, joins society in an unconventional manner, alternating between the quiet confines of her house and the neighborhood's social center. This kind of transformation is also shown in Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*. The main heroine, Mara, cycles between the tranquility of her home and the social situations, constantly renegotiating who she is in each.

Kambili's experience in Nigeria during the military coup and tyranny is akin to this. A parallel may be drawn between the use of force on Kambili's mother in an effort to silence her and the evil Nigerian government's attempts to repress its citizens by imposing authorised cruelty. Because he had written a critical editorial of the government for the *Standard daily*, Eugene's editor, Ade Coker, was brutally killed in a mail explosion and had his corpse mutilated. This evil deed is a horrific example of how vicious society can be. According to

Smit (2009), the national-political realm and the question of voice in Kambili's growth are inextricably linked.

The aforementioned hypothesis illustrates how female authors have difficulties expressing both concerns about a feminine self and an African self in their artistic works. This claim is in line with what Showalter (1995) refers to as "double-voiced discourse," which has a "dominant" and a "muted" narrative arc and requires readers and critics to "keep two different oscillating texts concurrently in view." In other words, although the surface text adheres to the African (Black) autobiographical mold in which the self serves as the transmitter of the communal voice, the often buried or abbreviated text deals with the woman self within the framework of a continuing narrative of a woman's experience. This is also true in *Bildungsroman*e written by women, which flips and contrasts the female role from one of being "dominated" to one of being an "honest, balanced, and objective picture of women in art and society," or from being a "muted tale" or "truncated book."

The justification that self-revelation contradicts the patriarchal culture's concept of women gives the debate of African Women's *Bildungsroma*n, as well as autobiography, more depth. Women's autobiographies in Western society are referred to by Spacks (1977) as "selves in hiding," and she notes that even in the autobiographies of women who have accomplished great things by international standards, there is a propensity to escape and/or deny their unique selves. Mason (1980) claims that women produce works in which the self is validated in connection with another: either spouse, community, friend, or God, to justify their "excursions into autobiographical writing" (Mason 1980, pp. 268–269). In women's literary works, this trend appears to be an undeniable truth. Typically, their writings are about their spouses, friends, society, or paranormal creatures.

The process of authoring a semi-autobiographical *Bildungsroman* satisfies a variety of personal aspirations for African female authors. She has been able to use it to process difficult

events, express herself verbally and in writing, reflect on the status of women and the impoverished, provide for her family and herself, and most importantly, to create. Slaughter (2007), on the other hand, claims that the autobiographical self of the African woman is less of a self that is always on the verge of being but never arrives. With her being "in a continual process of being but never arriving," the female heroine of Slaughter's postcolonial *Bildungsroman* struggles to fit into society. Here, a moving self is clearly intent on "arriving" at the destination. The significance of autobiography to the African woman writer as she transitions from silence to voice, a "woman-conscious" self prepared to share her private life with the world, is what autobiography means to her (Slaughter 2007, p. 289). These traumatic experiences push the women in these texts from the "silent" to the "vocal" position, where they can speak for themselves and for society as a whole.

Fashakin (2015) claims that in recent years, women's literature in Africa has drawn more and more attention. As a result, gender studies rule the literary world, and the portrayal of women in works written by men sparks a lot of heated discussions. As a result, a literary canon emerges in which female authors, in contrast to the previous works by male authors as suggested above, offer a re-presentation of the female experience by portraying a distinct picture of women in their works. Aidoo (1996) asserts that "women authors write about women because when we get up in the morning and look into the mirror, we see women" in support of the case for the significance of women's writing about the female experience in literary works (Fashakin 2015, p. 1). Many female authors attempt to emphasize their femaleness or femininity and individual experiences in their novels, often emphasizing power disparities between men and women in the process. As a consequence, female academics and activists have established a literary canon with the intention of integrating gender and feminism into both theory and critique. This aims to replace a custom that female critics like Showalter see as overbearing and macho. Whether the issues are the portrayal of sexual difference,

(re)shaping masculinity, developing feminine ideals, or the exclusion of female voices from the literary canon, Showalter (1985) asserts that gender has become an analytical concept (Showalter 1985, p. 1). This demonstrates that women's literature focuses primarily on women and all that affects them, as well as fighting against anything that goes against this and oppresses or silences them. By challenging the customary roles that males assign to women, particularly in Africa, Darko makes this point extremely clearly. For instance, when Gitte, Akobi's German wife, requests that he prepare food for them (Gitte and Mara);

> To this, Akobi got up lamely and went into the kitchen. My mouth fell open. I was shocked. Akobi to cook for me?" … "So Akobi, this my own dear husband Akobi who back home used to reproach me if I was a minute late with his food; who many a time landed me knocks on my forehead with his knuckles if I fetched him too little or too much water in the bowl for him to wash his hands before or after eating; this my very own Akobi it was who, upon his white wife's commands, trotted into the kitchen. Seconds later, the clattering of pans and spoons told me that he had commenced his assigned task (BH, p. 97).

Mara becomes uncomfortable and nervous about this radical reversal of gender roles. She begs Gitte if she would be guided on how to use the gadgets in the kitchen so that she can take over the cooking, but Gitte emphatically says "No!" (BH, p. 98) to that request.

Fashakin (2015) correctly notes that Nwapa (1966), Emecheta (1981), Dangarembga (1988), Mugo (1988), and Aidoo (1977) are just a few examples of the plethora of African female authors who have made an effort to reinterpret women in more favourable positions apart from their subjugated status. In a similar vein, de'Almeida (1994) believes female writings to be the tool to smash the ideologies that uphold injustice and oppression. As a result, Nfah-Abbenyi (1997) describes their texts as strengths that exist both within and outside of

which they change. Many African literature scholars, including Stratton (1994), Steady (1988), Ogundipe-Leslie (1987), Emenyonu (2004), and Onyeronke (2009), agree that works by African women writers are rarely discussed and rarely given space in canon formation, making much of African literature appear male-centered.

African women have been indoctrinated to envision the world from a patriarchal perspective. It is this orientation of viewing the world from a male perspective that the women writers being studied in this thesis have all debunked in their representation of their female characters from childhood, adolescence, to adulthood. It is commonly known that the idea of childhood is a social construction (Fashakin 2015), which analyses how childhood personae are rebuilt in *Purple Hibiscus*. Thus, the social standards of a specific society have an impact on how a kid develops their sense of self. This means that distinct gender roles will undoubtedly play a part in the socialisation of females. This is due to the girl's often romanticised role as a creature whose purpose is determined by the presence of another, whether husband, father, or extended family, and those whose core is the home or household. Since these duties are defining traits of a successful woman, this is often done with the purpose of transforming the girl into a great wife or mother. As a result, she adopts an attitude of submission, dependence, control, and subordination toward the male folks. Consequently, feminist works deliberately analyse literary representations of gender and girlhood. The source of this is the sex-role stereotyping of children into certain behavioural patterns seen to be acceptable. Men are often portrayed as heroes and protagonists in many macho stories, whilst women are frequently assigned to domestic tasks. It follows that it is evident that patriarchal values still dominate a significant number of forms in children's literature, despite the fact that childhood is generally understood to be a social construction. Thus, the social standards of a specific society have an impact on how a kid develops their sense of self. This means that distinct gender roles will undoubtedly play a part in the socialisation of females. This is due to the girl's often

romanticised role as a creature whose purpose is determined by the presence of another, whether husband, father, or extended family, and whose centre is the home or household. Since these duties are defining traits of a successful woman, this is often done with the purpose of transforming the girl into a good wife or mother. As a result, she adopts an attitude of submission, dependence, control, and subordination toward the male folks. Consequently, feminist works deliberately analyse literary representations of gender and girlhood. The source of this is the sex-role stereotyping of children into certain behavioural patterns seen to be acceptable. Men are often portrayed as heroes and protagonists in many macho stories, whilst women are frequently assigned to domestic tasks. It is evident that patriarchal attitudes still dominate a significant number of children's book genres. As was previously said, Darko's character Mara finds it difficult to accept this gender role reversal.

The main character in the ideal children's text with a feminist message should be powerful regardless of gender, claims Trites (2010). In a feminist children's text, the child's sexuality does not pose a long-term obstacle to her development. A protagonist in a successful feminist children's text will be aware of his or her agency and voice, embrace a more androgynous expression of gender, and combine both stereotypically feminine and masculine traits into a harmonious whole. Although there may be gender-related problems, s/he eventually triumphs over them (Trites 2010, p. 41). The children's book's feminism criticises social classification or hierarchy. A perfect piece of children's literature would include a discussion of intersexual or asexual gender expression by Trites. Above all, the heroine of a feminist children's book is presented objectively, regardless of her sexual inclinations or leanings. What matters is their ability to recognise their "agency and voice." It is simpler to see the sexual features of the dynamic forces since literary works written by women writers often include a girl-child protagonist as the narrator. In the novels included in this study, every girl-child protagonist travels along a similar path. The girl-child who is the protagonist assumes the

position of the story's narrator in order to free herself from the role of being an object or subject under the condition of being the topic of literature.

Due to the authors' inclusion of the gender perspective in their analysis, the *Bildungsroman* is the main focus of feminist criticism, making the writings of women authors a groundbreaking critique of the genre. Fiction concerning female development often starts after the protagonist is older, or in some instances, is already married and/or has given child, with a few noteworthy exceptions. The male *Bildungsroman*, however, usually begins in childhood. She is angry with how things are and this acts as inspiration for her self-improvement. Second, most female characters, like Mara in Darkos' *Beyond the Horizon*, get their formal schooling far later in life than the male protagonist does. Critics assert that even women who are actively engaged in formal education "do not considerably extend their choices, but instead learn to solidify their feminine caring obligations rather than to take a more active role in the formation of society" (Abel et al., 1983). The heroine still has a position in the household as a consequence of the evident division between the sexes in terms of formal education and social status. Thirdly, the male protagonist often has the option to leave home in quest of an independent living in the city, but the female protagonist frequently does not have this choice. Even if she is given the chance to travel or leave her home, she does not have the same drive for independence as her male counterpart. By the time the male hero has completed his spiritual and psychological journey, he is a mature man who has decided whether to accept the world as it is or, alternatively, to flee or rebel against it. The female protagonist, in contrast, does not have the same choices as the male protagonist since her only choice is to concentrate on her inner life rather than engage with society. Additionally, the cost of psychological development could include a loss of social life or other negative consequences (Abel et al., 1983).

In the *Bildungsroman*, female characters are often shown as being in a disadvantageous situation with little or no options when it comes to making decisions in society. The female protagonist is not as involved in her community as her male counterpart often portrays. She often experiences limitations. *Beyond the Horizon* by Amma Darko is a notable example of the *Bildungsroman* genre written by women of African descent. After a brief flashback in the first few pages, Darko's main character begins telling her story on page 3 thus: “All I did was to grin helplessly because I clearly remembered the same good news as this that mother had given my older sister two years before. Found, too by father. And my sister was now a wreck" (BH, p. 3-4). Unlike Kambili, Mara has never been to school; Mara, were you never in school? she asked. "No," I said (BH, p. 88). Without any official schooling, a voice, or even the chance to meet her spouse, let alone to be heard. That explains why she was married off from the community without a second thought. Only her mother took her inside her hut and frantically broke the "good news" to her. She gasped, "Your father has found a suitable man for you to marry!" (BH, p. 4). Adichie's heroine, however, is a teenage girl who is enrolled in school and who is not yet married. One of the rare exceptions to the rule that female protagonists often start their stories after they are older, married, and have given children is Darko's protagonist. As a result, the heroine of Darko's story feels unsatisfied with her existence as it is, which inspires her to improve herself. Mara and Kambili, two subalterns, have shown capable of confronting the powerful in their own way. They were successful in defending the rights of women. Both have had the ability to speak out against injustices and oppressions that are meted out to both men and women. Despite how helpless they may seem, they do speak back, as was previously mentioned and is captured in the following words as another way, Mara, the female protagonist talks back;

> Our men brought us here and we are at their mercy. There was a change going on inside me, and Akobi was not seeing it and was still handling me

> like the poor lowly wife of yesterday. At the same time, he was asking me to pretend to be something that I wasn't. And all this in the presence and under the watchful eye of the keen observer- his wife, my rival. My husband Akobi didn't consider me sensitive and intelligent enough to understand and feel this emotional burden he was placing on me. If he thought me so numb, dumb and naïve that he could take my feelings and emotions for granted, then how come at the same time he assumed me capable of convincingly playing the role on which his whole fate depended? (BH, p. 90).

Conclusion

Insummary, the novels under study have gone beyond their boundaries, as women writers that have taken the risks, to say the unsayable which fits into a pattern of postcolonial counter discourses. An instance where the women writers take advantage of their privilege as writers who equally undergo these horrible experiences of the awful dehumanization and objectification of women would equally decry that: "Yet you have to speak out, since your pain is also real" (Showalter, 1995). So real as depicted in each and every of the novel taken for this exposition. The concept of universal or transnational as well as transcultural sisterhood and friendship will be explored in a more detailed term in the next the chapter, which is the penultimate chapter of this thesis. Though it is evident that Darko's and Adichie's women are silent, but it is worthy of note that they are not absolutely silenced, hence; they have been "saying the unsayable" as a form of resistance or counter discourse. The women know when and how to break or counter the "muted" or "dominant" story to a balanced and objective representation of women in society. In the next chapter, I will tease out the intertextual relationships between and among the novels studied in this thesis, by this, I hope to show how a para-textual as well as relational reading offers space for feminist discourse, leveraging on

Bildungsroman genre together with autobiographical texts crafted by women writers of African descent; for the most part in relation to sisterhood and friendship among women.

CHAPTER SIX
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

If we don't tell our stories, hailstones will continue to fall on our heads,

Thrown by fathers for the children to see – for we are not good women,

Thrown by Imams, by a judge's decree – for we are not good wives,

Thrown by other women in our husbands' lives

As they come in the morning cradling his children

Calling us witch, barren, bitch

And we find something to tie the chest with;

Challenging words to hurl back in battle,

And partners to hold us anyway,

Through the things we struggle against. (Sani Baat "Throwing Voice")

In the verses above, the Wolof oral tradition of the Senegalese Sani Baat is translated as "throw in." The many texts that the female authors involved with this thesis have produced are a collective mechanism for them to "throw in" their "voices" towards their male counterparts. They represent a deconstruction of racist and patriarchal ideologies and are a component of the resistance discourse or counter discourse. This has caused a disturbance in the conversation. The female authors examined for this thesis were able to introduce an epistemic distortion into *Bildungsroman* discourses by promoting sisterhood and friendship among and among women of color. Thus, as the women authors have equally and collectively proven in their literary works, Siga Fatima Jagne views this disruptive rhetorical tactic as a method of bringing the speaker, in this instance, the women writers to the epic centre of a discourse. Due to this, both African and African-American women authors now have access to the canon of literature.

Therefore, the last chapter of this research provides a summary of the key topics raised throughout this dialogue. It is highly appreciated that the six female authors of African ancestry in this research used a variety of strategies to provide women a voice against the oppressive systems of racism, patriarchy, feminism, sexism, and other things. Toni Morison, Alice Walker, Bessie Head, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Amma Darko, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie are some of these authors. Their investigation of racial and gender issues, in which they overthrow male chauvinism or violently and uninvitedly "throw in" their "voice," is made possible by education and, principally, by the support of other women via various literary genres. The novels being analysed also advocate for social and educational reforms that would empower female writers and literary critics to challenge the myriad structures that oppress, segregate, and mute the voices of women. The only thing that makes this possible is their engagement with various feminist movements, which tap into men and women's common desire to end racism, patriarchy, and sexism, among other problems. The female leads in the novels stand in for a rising number of women who are not satisfied to whine about racial and gender injustices but are prepared to take a stand and fight patriarchy with all they have. This has been made possible by their interactions with powerful female characters who are able to challenge the status quo and dismantle obstacles caused by patriarchy, racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, and other biases by speaking up about their own experiences and saying what is unsayable. The epic centre of the inquiry of their courage in confronting the hydra-headed issues ailing women in society has been the counter-discourse conversation. In this inquiry, theoretical components from Western and African feminist movements as well as black feminism, womanism, and stiwaninism are utilised.

The combination of the different threads and voices of sisterhoods, sexual groups, and friendship has equally served as the catalyst that propels solidarity among women through friendship and sisterhood as a very formidable force in combating all forms of oppression

against women in society. This postulation is explicit in the women writers' depictions of their protagonists, where their *Bildungshelds* are either not assimilated into society, or are partially left on the margin. Morrison's Pecola, Walker's Celie, Dangarembga's Tambu, Darko's Mara, and Adichie's Kambili are not exceptions to this assertion. These characters mostly revolt in their quests for self-actualization or realization in society, thus their lack of integration into mainstream society. This lack of absorption is typical of many postcolonial *Bildungsromane,* as I have pointed out earlier. In *Maru*, for example, Margaret starts out without a voice or words, but she finds her voice and becomes part of Botswanan society and, by extension, the Masarwas when she marries Maru:

> When people of the Masarwa tribe heard about Maru's marriage to one of their own, a door silently opened on the small, dark airless room in which their souls had been shut for a long time. The wind of freedom, which was blowing throughout the world for all people, turned and flowed into the room. As they breathed in the fresh, clear air their humanity awakened. They examined their condition. There was fetid air, the excreta and the horror of being an oddity of the human race, with half the head of a man and half the body of a donkey. They laughed in an embarrassed way, scratching their heads. How had they fallen into this condition when, indeed, they were as human as everyone else? They started to run out into the sunlight, then turned and looked at the dark, small room. They said: "We are not going back there (*Maru* p. 103).

This investigation would not be possible without Slaughter's critique of the *Bildungsroman* genre in connection to postcolonial literature. This research demonstrates how most of these characters are not integrated into any culture by the conclusion of the story, with the exception of a few who are partly or entirely fused. This research has connected with

Slaughter's idea of the postcolonial. Another person who is integrated into her society via the reunion that takes place at the conclusion of the novel is Celie from *The Color Purple*;

> After a while, she say Celie. I say Nettie. Little bit more time pass. Us look round at a lot of peoples knees. Nettie never let go my waist. This my husband Samuel, she say, pointing up. These our children Olivia and Adam and this Adam's wife Tashi, she say. I point up at my peoples. This Shug and Albert, I say. Everybody say pleased to meectha. Then Shug and Albert start to hug everybody one after the other. Me and Nettie finally git up off the porch and I hug my children. And I hug Tashi. Then I hug Samuel (CP p. 206).

Morrison's Pecola and Sula, are a classic example of Morrison's protagonists not being integrated into any societal group as the narrator's voice iterates:

> However, a problem lies in the central chamber of the novel. The shattered world I built (to complement what is happening to Pecola), its pieces held together by seasons in childtime and commenting at every turn on the incompatible and barren white-family primer, does not in its present form handle effectively the silence at its center: the void that is Pecola's "unbeing." It should have shape- like the emptiness left by a boom or a cry. It required a sophistication unavailable to me, and some deft manipulation of the voices around her. She is not seen by herself until she hallucinates a self. And the fact of her hallucination becomes a kind of outside-the-book conversation (BE p. 211).

Darko's Mara in *Beyond the Horizon*, is another example of a character who is not integrated or fully incorporated into any societal group, as she is seen lamenting her state in the following lines: "I have issued instructions to them to find a small cement house in town

which I can buy for my two children, so that when I sink too deep beyond help, they will at least have a decent place to lay their heads. Material things are all I can offer them. As for myself, there's nothing dignified and decent left of me to give them "(BH p. 140). On the other hand, Kambili, finds her voice at the end: "We should go to Nsukka when Jaja comes out," I say to Mama as we walk out of the room. I can talk about the future now (PH pp. 309-310). However, Kambili is also not fully incorporated into the societal group in her milieu. Though patriarchy is dethroned or literarily killed within their society, that does not make a complete society. Hence, a gap is created by the absence of the male (Eugene) figure in the novel. Kambili regains her freedom of speech and other rights after patriarchy is challenged.

Thus, the marginalised women in these novels, such as Pecola, Celie, Tambu, Margaret, Mara, and Kambili, together with the other female characters as portrayed in this study, are related to resistance and counter discourse through the presentation of the binary, or the opposite of the meaning and power of the dominant discourse. It is inevitable that the communities of women, such as sisters, cousins, and friends, in the novels under study emerge as alternatives to incorporation. Or are in some endless negotiations, giving impetus to the narrative and meaning that the protagonist(s) is not entirely solitary in her development. The various protagonists are surrounded by the sister(s), a woman, or a female friend(s) from their community or society. For example, Celie and Sofia are portrayed as friends who depend on each other for help in the novel, as argued earlier in this study. Sisterhood and friendship with Sofia put Celie on the path of self-realization, independence, strength, and courage.

Shug is the most prominent female character who helps in Celie's emancipation process. Celie's mentor Shug is the one who leads her on her journey towards finding her long repressed selfhood, as it is the case with Mara and Mama Kiosk in Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, Kambili and Aunty Ifeoma in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Margaret Cadmore Jr., in *Maru* and Tambu and Nyasha in *Nervous Conditions*. Shug is the most 'liberated' of the female characters

in the *Color Purple*. Kambili also forms a strong bond with Mama, especially after the death of Papa. Kambili supports the mother in her trying period of widowhood and can also be analysed as a trope of heralding female bonding. Kambili emerges as a character who shows tenacity in the face of adversity and serves as an inspiration for the much-needed change.

Mara's bonds with Mama Kiosk and Kaye in *Beyond the Horizon* are not based on essentialized categories but rather on shared experiences and mutual understanding. Mara does not initially rebel against Akobi's confiscation of her income because she does not know how to claim her traditional rights. She only did that after Mama Kiosk came into her life as a sister and friend. The same goes for Margaret Cadmore and Dikeledi in Head's *Maru* and Mara and Kaye in Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*. However, all their bonds were not because of blood relations or equal rights marches. They are sisters because they have been treated unfairly in a patriarchal or racial setting, which is something they have both experienced and lived through.

This sisterhood is empowering to these black women who share life and trust in each other when nothing else can be trusted. Since understanding the nature of women's friendships is important in analyzing the "sisterly" relationships in Morrison's fiction as one of the iconic texts. This, ultimately, is what this thesis has achieved, among other things. The female characters studied, in one way or the other, have become replicas of themselves. As such, it has become difficult to separate the interconnection of the bonds that exist among them. The degree of the bond pictured here shows that the women are psychologically connected in their feelings and thoughts. This goes to stress that the bond of sisterhood among women of African descent could take any form but is not limited to blood relations. The protagonists in the texts selected for this study are equally confronted with endless negotiations of crossroads on their paths to growth and development. This thesis has shown that almost all of the protagonists look up to other female characters in different ways.

Given the above, we have deployed different terms such as sisterhood, friendship, among others, to showcase solidarity among women; and how female writers explore female characters to forge helpful relationships to ameliorate their situation as they tackle the problems of racism, classism, sexism, and patriarchy, and so forth. This is done by using counter-discourse to change the way men talk about and show women in literature and society. This is the theory behind the *Bildungsroman* genre, which female writers of African ancestry have used.

In Chapter One, the term *Bildungsroman* is presented as a theoretical narrative with many dissenting voices. Initially, the term is akin to a kind of metamorphosis, whether societally imposed or self-imposed, but preferably a little bit of both, in order to fit into a cosmic order of survival for males in their journey to adulthood. Over the years, this approach to the treatment of this genre has long been dismissed by feminists as a traditional approach to *Bildungsroman* because it exclusively puts men in its narrative or in the spotlight. In a world that is already known to be dominated by men, feminist writers have been adding their voices to the many biased ideas for a long time, making them part of the culture.

Thus, the traditional *Bildungsroman* approach, which is the classical; the modern *Bildungsroman* approach, which is a deconstruction of the classical or traditional; and the post-modern *Bildungsroman* approach that focuses on the changes that take place worldwide, such as the speedy pace of life and technological development. But this research only envisages the possibility of a third. On the whole, these *Bildungsroman* approaches can be classified into two types, namely, male-defined and female-defined. Of particular concern to this work, however, is the traditional version of *Bildungsroman* and how it has been appropriated by women of African ancestry. Because of this, novels like *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, *Maru* by Bessie Head, *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Beyond the Horizon* by Amma Darko, and *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie are

used to show how women's *Bildungsromane* is a shift from the *Bildungsroman* tradition, which only focuses on European middle- and upper-class men.

The second chapter is a review of the literature on the various theories, schools of thought, postulates, and propositions that support the existence of gender-related patriarchy, such as Black Feminism and Womanism. Using the six novels listed above, this study supports counter-hegemonic discourse based on postcolonial counter-discourse theory. Chapters three and four reveal the African-American and Southern African Women's *Bildungsroman* within literary discourses in order to contextualize the *Bildungsroman* and its African-relatedness. In each instance, *Sula* and *The Color Purple*, written by Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, *Maru*, written by Bessie Head, and *Nervous Condition*, written by Tsitsi Dangarembga, are mentioned. The systemic exclusion of women and people of color is reflected in the first two texts. When contrasted to white supremacy in America, the two novels objectify inferior or inappropriate stock and share themes with postcolonial Southern African novels about patriarchy, racism, gender inequality, sexual objectification, and culture. The latter two texts, regrettably, creep the preceding alarmingly into the readers' brains and sub-consciousness.

In chapter five, the study makes an effort to review the work of West African female authors that is both an expression and a reflection of the West African Women's *Bildungsroman* in order to further domesticate the *Bildungsroman*. Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) and Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* (1995) are two essential writings that vividly describe the terrible experiences of the horrendous dehumanization and objectification of women. So, it might seem like the idea that these female authors were able to, to put it mildly, say what couldn't be said and show what couldn't be imagined makes a case for this type of *Bildungsroman* that has been around for a long time. In chapter six, it is finally suggested—or better yet, assumed—that the sisterhood that results from friendship between women explains why approaching *Bildungsroman* from a woman's perspective first became popular (along with

many other such movements and counter narratives in favor of women), and how it has further cemented itself within literary dialogue. Therefore, women occasionally have comparable experiences at home and in the diaspora, such as racism, ethnocentrism, patriarchy, and sisterarchy, among others, independent of their social space of existence or clime. In response to this, they have bonded, are bonding, and will continue to do so because they are united in the struggle against oppression and dominance committed by their male counterparts in what has been determined, in the numerous texts sampled in this work, to be a case of social disequilibrium against a particular gender. Total liberation is the goal and aim of these feminist authors.

The six novels chosen for this study are exemplary in this chapter and demonstrate how the combined arguments are convincingly woven to prove not only the merit of the assertion made, but also the appropriate selection of the books under study in a relational and intertextual conversation with the secondary text like *Sula*. This is accomplished through interacting with the postcolonial tendency toward rejection and sometimes reversing colonial practices and worldviews shown in the studied literature. It is important to note that Evaristo's prior postulation, which undermines the sexual inclinations and biases of women of African origin, calls for sisterhood and friendship among them. Since sexuality is a natural phenomenon rather than a socio-cultural construction and prescription of gender, its duties, or socio-cultural functions, the strength of the sisterhood argument is essentially grounded in sexuality.

Unarguably, Sisterhoods and friendships between African-American and African women are not only possible, but also incredibly gratifying and significant. Although it has been argued elsewhere in this thesis that African–American and African women have different social and historical backgrounds, these disparities nevertheless, could actually improve their interconnectedness as demonstrated by the texts under study. Both African-American and African women have unique perspectives and experiences to share, and by being open and

empathetic with one another, they may develop strong friendships. Friendship and sisterhood are not constrained by cultural or historical origins as already demonstrated in this study in Amma Darko's novel between Mara (a Ghanaian) and Gitte (German). They are based on a shared set of values, mutual respect, and genuine care for one another. By appreciating their similarities and respecting their differences, African-American and African women may form lifelong friendships. These relationships must be entered into with an open mind and the willingness to advance together as the women, sisters and friends in the novels deployed for this study have all vividly demonstrated.

It is worth reiterating that building relationships and sisterhood takes effort from both parties as the mosaic of novels for this study have proven. It is about finding something in common, having meaningful conversations, and being friends through good and terrible times, which the protagonist and their friends, sisters and other women helpers have showcased.

It is just stating the obvious that when African-American women's novels and southern African women's literature are compared to that of west Africa, while other African sub-regions are ignored, it might result in a limited grasp of the many experiences and narratives found in African Women writing on the continent. By excluding them, we run the danger of losing out on the unique voices, cultural idiosyncrasies, and diverse perspectives that the many African sub-regions have to offer, and this remains a gap in this study. I therefore, suggest that for further study in this area, it is crucial to adopt a more receptive attitude towards African Women *Bildungsroman* literature and acknowledge into the breadth and depth of storytelling found across the whole continent.

By juxtaposing *Bildungsroman* writing by women from other countries or regions, this thesis has analysed various points of view, cultural influences, and literary traditions crafted by women writers. This study draws attention to the influences of cultural, historical, and social

factors on *Bildungsromane* writing by women as well as the parallels and differences across diverse civilizations. And by reading works from other countries such as South Africa, Zimbabwe, Ghana and Nigeria, or regions, such as, Southern Africa and West Africa alongside North and Southern American women writers, the reader may have a greater understanding of how literature reflects and affects civilizations as well as how it evolves under different conditions. Furthermore, it has allowed this study to engage in a cross-cultural research and examined universal themes and motifs around *Bildungsromane* by women writing in Africa and in the African diaspora on the tropes of sisterhood and friendship among women of African descent. In essence, this intellectual exercise has enhanced my analysis of the novels deployed for this study and broadened my point of view on how the dynamics of women's friendships is crucial to analysing the "sisterly" relationships in the six works of fiction written by women.

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