



Navigating diaspora: An experience of female characters of African descent in selected novels by African females writers



Review article



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Abstract

The emigration of female characters of African descent in Adichie's *Americanah*, Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*, Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* from Africa to Europe and the United States of America is initially filled with hope for their perceived utopian world. Leaving what was their home for the better part of their lives, places they would easily identify with, to alien borders in which they would have to restart their lives excited them. This feeling results from a state of 'double consciousness', described by postcolonial theorists as a perception of the world divided between two antagonistic cultures. The female characters' perception of the first world as ideal counters their perception of Nigeria, Ghana and Cameroon as homes which have not provided a sense of fulfilment to their lives, thus prompting emigration from their respective indigenous homes to the first world. This paper entails an analytical discussion of the relationships among female characters of African descent and other characters as a way of negotiating their stay in diaspora. This paper is guided by concepts of Sisterhood as argued by Rosezelle and bell hooks; and concepts of postcolonial theory including unhomeliness and othering as articulated by Bhabha and Spivak.

Keywords: Africa, diaspora, emigration, female characters of African descent, migration, sisterhood



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Public Interest Statement

Introduction

Shared or similar experiences among women often result into intense attachments among them. In the selected texts, all the female characters of African descent emigrate from Africa to Europe and the USA believing that they would prosper. However, their notion of prosperity gets thwarted as their new spaces predispose them to pain, abuse and psychological torture, hence a very conducive environment for their objectification. Their abilities to find each other during these difficult times enable them emerge as stronger and wiser decision makers. As Oniwe puts it, this is a demonstration of 'perhaps inadvertently, how these African women, like the perennial phoenix, manage to emerge with human integrity and agency from their deprived subject position' (29). Indeed, in the selected texts, these protagonists establish strong relationships both with each other, and with other characters that enable them manoeuvre the hardships they go through in diasporic spaces.

Female Bonding: Relations among Female Characters of African Descent in Diaspora

Over time, it has been declared that women transcended men in the capacities of tenderness, morality, consideration for others, and willingness to forgive (Cott 163). This is reflected in the selected texts, as more often than not, these female characters of African descent's interactions with each other are a demonstration of love and unity for each other. In unity of purpose, the female characters their have it in their power not only to free themselves but to subdue their oppressors. Their determination and perception of each other as Sisters, even though not necessarily related by blood, aids in their disentanglement from objectification.

The heart of a woman is best understood by a fellow woman. This notion forms the basis of this section's argument, that the female characters found it easy to understand each other basing on their commonalities including their African origins, immigrant status and accountability to their men. These women, as Walker states in "My Mother's Garden", entered loveless marriages, without joy; and became prostitutes, without resistance; and became mothers of children, without

fulfillment (402). Their realization of this emptiness leads to their laying down of strategies on how to navigate their misfortune.

Adichie's *Americanah* has several instances of sisterhood amongst female characters. To begin with, Aunt Uju is a pillar on which Ifemelu leans. When Ifemelu emigrates from Nigeria to the USA, Aunt Uju hosts her at her house in Flatlands, Brooklyn. Even though Ifemelu sleeps on the floor, Uju who had been subdued by America based on her ragged physical appearance (110), ensured Ifemelu got the best she could offer (108). Uju secures her friend, Ngozi's social security card for Ifemelu just so she could work and earn some money to supplement her partial scholarship. When Ifemelu moves to Philadelphia, she falls in love with Curt, a white man and a relative to her employer. She talks to Aunt Uju about him and even visits her to introduce Curt. When she cheats on Curt and they break up, she talks to Aunt Uju, who outrightly tells her that she had messed up a worthwhile relationship, since Curt was a gentleman who genuinely loved Ifemelu, protected her from potential racist attacks and helped her secure a well-paying job through which she acquired an American passport.

Ifemelu, in turn, is also Aunt Uju's confidante. When she meets Bartholomew, she introduces him to Ifemelu, and asks for her opinion. Despite Ifemelu's disregard towards Bartholomew and his bossy ways, Aunt Uju proceeded with the relationship, with the hope of securing her citizenship through their marriage. However, life becomes unbearable with him and eventually she quits this relationship, a move that was a huge relief to Ifemelu who wanted her Aunt to live as comfortably as a woman of her stature. Aunt Uju also complains to Ifemelu about the racist comments she gets at work, her son, Dike's strange behaviours and her personal fears concerning Dike's knowledge of her being his father's mistress. In spite of Aunt Uju's seniority in relation to Ifemelu, their close relationship enables her to open up to Ifemelu for consolation whenever she got bogged down by the prevailing circumstances. In spite of the aunt-niece relationship, Aunt Uju and Ifemelu got emotional reprieve from each other, especially on relationship matters. They had learnt to trust each other's opinions as women, thus deriving strength from each other.

Ginika, Ifemelu's childhood friend from Nigeria, who had moved to America aids in the search for institutions and scholarships for Ifemelu and eventually succeeds. When Ifemelu reports to the institution in Philadelphia, Ginika receives her and sensitizes her on which words not to use so she doesn't appear racist, like 'fat' for example, and to life in general and the challenges she was likely to face as a female of African descent, some of which she, Ginika did not experience as she was of mixed race. Ginika also helps Ifemelu to secure a job as a nanny to a white family which paid her 'under the table' as she did not have a work permit. She also talks Ifemelu out of her depression after she had a sexually exploitative relation with a rich white coach who needed a personal aide to 'relax him' for a hundred dollars a day. As a fellow Nigerian woman who had arrived in America earlier than Ifemelu, Ginika becomes very resourceful to Ifemelu's settlement

at the University in Philadelphia. She empathised with Ifemelu, re-assuring her that she was not to suffer alone.

At the salon, Aisha, a Senegalese woman who is braiding Ifemelu's hair has two Nigerian, Igbo boyfriends, intends on marrying any of them for her 'papers', but they were unwilling to marry a non-Igbo woman. Aisha therefore wants Ifemelu, who is also an Igbo, to talk either of them into marrying her, so that she could at least attend her mother's burial in future. Aisha had not attended her father's burial because of her status as an illegal immigrant. Ifemelu was hesitant at the beginning, but eventually gives in to Aisha's requests after she saw how deeply Aisha's circumstances had affected her. Ifemelu decided to play the role of a 'match-maker' for Aisha, a total stranger with whom she had interacted for just a day. As a fellow woman of African descent, having come from different African states did not deter Ifemelu from lending a helping hand. Instead, Ifemelu empathised with the situation a fellow female was going through.

Before cutting her hair, after the hair relaxer that was used on her hair caused massive hair loss, Ifemelu talked to a Kenyan lady, Wambui, who assured her that she would still remain beautiful in short hair. Wambui introduced Ifemelu to a website in which short haired black women gave their experiences with short hair, the products they used and how important it was to feel confident in natural kinky hair, and to avoid relaxers which would easily predispose one to cancer. When Wambui read Ifemelu's first piece of writing, she was so impressed that she advised Ifemelu to start off an online blog spot, which would later become an income generating activity for her. Wambui plays a major role in restoring Ifemelu's confidence in herself. From Wambui's reactions in class regarding racism, to her position as a leader in the association of Black students, the respect Ifemelu had for her as a person enhanced her trust in Wambui's word. Wambui helped nurture self-appreciation in Ifemelu, which in turn led to Ifemelu spreading her confidence to fellow female characters in America and the rest of the world through her blog entries.

Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* also has female characters of African descent being their sisters' keepers, including Neni, Anna, Fatou, and Betty. Neni, has her circle of female friends of African descent. She talks to them about her plans of ensuring Jende does not return to Cameroon with her and the children after he had been denied American citizenship. This was because to Neni, 'America was synonymous to happiness' (312). Fatou, who had been a hairdresser in America for 26 years, advised Neni to stand by her husband as it was the norm with African women. She tells Neni that she was ready 'to stop and go back home' (357) but her husband Ousmane was reluctant. Fatou expressed her disappointment in her children who referred to themselves as American, despite having two West African parents. She also expressed concern over her lonely parents in West Africa to whom money was sent through her relatives. She was also envious of the kind of life Neni would live when back in Limbe, Cameroon, on their return.

In spite of her lengthy stay in America, Fatou was still rooted in her traditional African culture of being supportive of the man's decision and forfeiting what she felt as a woman, just so

the man could retain his position as the 'Head' of the family for a peaceful marital coexistence. This she believed, if Neni embraced, would save her a lot of squabbles with Jende, thus advised her so.

Betty, who had been 'trying in America for 31 years' (315), on the other hand tells Neni that it was better to suffer in America than in Africa. Betty insisted that Neni should go against the African way of revering her husband and command him instead. She even proposed that Neni should divorce Jende and marry her, Betty's cousin, for 'papers' (319), which Neni actually suggests and Jende immediately dismisses. Betty, unlike Fatou, had embraced the American culture, thus did not support patriarchy. She believed that a woman of African descent should not always listen to the man, following his decisions blindly, rather she should equally make decisions that she felt were beneficial and stand by them.

Anna, the Edwardse's house manager who was also of African descent instantly became friends with Neni when she got employed by Cindy in one of her houses. On discovering that their boss's wife, Cindy was abusing drugs, Neni discussed with Anna and together they plotted on how to disclose that to Clark Edwards. However, Neni was unable to do it. Later, when Jende got fired on Cindy's instructions, Neni, with Anna's help, accessed the Edwardse's mansion to see Cindy in an attempt to recover Jende's job as Clark's chauffeur. But when Neni blackmailed Cindy upon her refusal to reinstate Jende, Anna took Cindy's side, as she was bent on retaining her job. She insisted on knowing what Neni did to anger Cindy so bad, felt sorry for Cindy but Neni never felt guilty as she only wanted her husband's job to be reinstated so he could take care of his family. Through Anna, it is evident that one female character of African descent did not have to fully agree with another, particularly when it was a matter of losing one's job, and on humanitarian grounds. She openly expressed her disappointment in Neni's blackmail which eventually contributed to Cindy's death.

Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* has Mara, the main character and Akobi's wife; Vivian, Osey's wife and Kaye, her Madam, all indigenously from Ghana. Mara had been smuggled into Germany from Accra. On arrival, she was picked by Osey who took her to his house and left her with his wife, Vivian, who was very kind to Mara. When Akobi exposed her nakedness to Osey after the 'domestic rape' in Osey's bathroom (84), for instance, Vivian consoled Mara in a sisterly tone thus:

You don't need to feel ashamed, Mara,' Osey's wife said unexpectedly. I was surprised. Firstly, because she had noticed that this whole careless sex show was a fraction too new and too much for me; and secondly, because the tone in which she spoke was totally different from what I was used to all these days I had been living with her. This tone was somehow big-sisterly. So I lifted up my head and my eyes fell upon her face and I said meekly, 'It's the first time he's done it with me within the hearing distance of others. And I don't like it.'

She stood there for a while, staring at me. Then she rushed to me and gathered me in her arms. 'Oh Mara, oh my God,' she said, and just continued holding me close (p. 85)

Mara realised that both her and Vivian were helpless women whose passports had been confiscated and were at the mercies of their men in a foreign land, who controlled both their actions and finances, and were even capable of dictating their breaths (90). Vivian continued checking on Mara, and sending her clothes even after she moved in with Akobi and his German wife Gitte, while pretending to be Akobi's 'sister' (109). Having similar experiences endeared Mara and Vivian to each other, with Vivian using her experience with Osey while in Germany to cushion Mara's emotions as she got accustomed to the new way of life away from home.

On being made the 'property' of Pompey, a sex club owner, by Akobi and Osey, Mara found a trusted friend in Kaye, Pompey's wife who disclosed to Mara that 'she realised her naivety, and recognised herself in her' (116). Just like Mara, Kaye in her earlier years in Germany, had been blackmailed into prostitution by her boyfriend, who took all the money she earned for a whole year and a half (117). Kaye helped Mara craft a plan to save for her redemption from Akobi and Osey thus: 'Our plan was put into motion. I didn't reduce my daily customers to one as Kaye had told Pompey. I increased them to seven. It wasn't without risks of course, but with the experienced Kaye as my accomplice, all risks were worth taking and seemed conquerable' (120). After accumulating enough cash, Kaye organised Mara's marriage to a German man at a fee, enabling her to eventually secure her five year German resident's visa (12).

Kaye was Mara's source of inspiration and liberator. She used her personal experience to help a Sister regain her independence. It would only take a female character of African descent who had gone through terrifying ordeals in the hands of a male character of African descent to help another out of similar circumstances. As a sister, 'she soothes the troubled heart, chastens and tempers the wild daring of the hurt mind restless with disappointed pride or fired with ambition' (Cott 165).

Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* has four female characters of African descent who have found themselves together in a Belgian brothel, having similar experiences and problems thus addressing each other as 'Sisters'. Sisi, a Nigerian, is a graduate, who prior to her entry in Belgium was jobless and disillusioned. Her real name is Chisom. While working at the brothel, she met and fell in love with Luc, a Belgian man. She was murdered by Segun, a Nigerian man on attempting to escape her job as a prostitute. Efe, also a Nigerian, prior to her entry in Belgium had been pregnant for a wealthy man called Titus, who disowned her as soon as she conceived. She gave birth to a son and moved to Belgium in search of money, leaving her son with her sister in Ghana. Later she becomes a 'Madam', an owner of a brothel in Belgium. Joyce, whose real name is Alek, is a Sudanese who fled the war, met Polycarp, a Nigerian, in a refugee camp, moved with him to

Nigeria but left her due to external pressure from his mother. Eventually he sent her to Belgium to be a 'nanny' only to find herself in a brothel. She later relocated to Nigeria and opened a school. Ama, the fourth 'sister', a Nigerian was repeatedly raped by her stepfather in her childhood. On reporting him to her mother, she was sent to Mama Eko, and later immigrated to Belgium. She ended up loving the secular world more. Later she moved back to Nigeria after opening a Boutique.

Having been victims of Dele, a human trafficker, they had all lost their identities on arrival in Belgium, thus having new names with changed passports. They were treated as animals, with their lives and bodies up for sale. They had been turned in prostitutes and properties of their 'Madam' Kate, and Oga Dele, to whom they had to pay thirty thousand Euros for their 'jobs'. During their rare free times, they shared stories of their pasts and how they found themselves in Belgium, only to realise that they were all victims of Dele. They consoled and rebuked each other but stuck together as sisters, with their main goal being to clear Dele's debt and regain their personal and economic spaces. This devaluation of black womanhood, as Bell Hooks explains, 'occurred as a result of the sexual exploitation of black women during slavery that has not altered in the course of hundreds of years' (53). It still continues to date as expressed in the selected texts.

In all the four texts, as illustrated above, the female characters of African descent become 'Sisters', with or without blood ties while in diaspora spaces. Their shared tribulations bonded them hence they drew strength from each other. They became each other's source of comfort and critics. In their own ways, each of them in their contexts watched out for their sister's well-being. This sense of connection is in agreement with Rosezelle's description of "Sister" as:

Sister," a people's history, struggles, victories and power. "Sister," a sense of familial tie where there is no blood, women trusting, celebrating, loving and being bound to other women....When a people are bastardized, raped, and fragmented from their families, they have to create family. Then it is a political act to call those who are not your blood, but who are your people "brother" and "sister." ...It is a political act of saying "I am connected to you." In this context, "brother" and "sister" become a way of redeeming, of respect, of resistance (p. 39).

This sense of connection described by Rosezelle morphs into strong bonds as these female characters of African descent retain their ties even after parting ways on regaining their personal and economic spaces, whether back in Africa or in different cities of the First World. Additionally, bell hooks argues that the idea of 'sisterhood' which bears an implication of oppressions shared by all women "should make way for that of *solidarity*", enabling women recognize "the multiplicity of oppressions and support struggles not directly indicated by one's own lived experience" (Bryson 230).

Relations between Male and Female Characters of African Descent

Having common African roots, the immigrant female characters share their lives' experiences with immigrant male characters both while in Africa and in diaspora spaces. They are either married, cohabiting or even having basic friendships with the male characters which impact on their lives both negatively and positively. In most instances, the male characters facilitate the relocation of the female characters, albeit with different motives including educating them, marrying them or turning them into sex workers. These male characters insist on controlling their female counterparts both physically and economically while in Africa, Europe and The USA. Noteworthy, all the female characters in the selected novels share their experiences with each other, thus the realisation of the striking similarities from the circumstances under which they emigrated from their various African countries. A majority of them realise that being on the receiving end of oppression, they occupy the position of "the inferior half" hence a relatable view of the alien world (Collins 70). The following subsections are a discussion of these relations in the African space, the USA and European spaces.

Relations in Africa

African countries have been presented as patriarchal in the selected texts. The African male characters have an upper hand in decision making, majorly over key events and lifetime decisions like marriage and relocation. The African male characters are also viewed as superior to the African female characters, n that even when they commit atrocities to the females, they get away with it, and the woman carries the blame. The female characters are treated as victims of their own actions and appendages to the male characters.

In *On Black Sisters' Street*, for instance, passengers in a vehicle where Ama is shout at a woman who is defending a poor woman with a baby saying: "...everybody knew that men could not control themselves, it was in their nature...Dogs!...It was up to women to make sure they did not put themselves in a position where they would be used" (139). Mara in *Beyond the Horizon* is given to Akobi by her father, regardless of her personal opinion over marriage. She has been socialised to believe that every decision made by an African man over a woman must not be contested. Kandiyoti explains that "under classic patriarchy, girls are given away in marriage at a very young age into households headed by their husband's father" (278), a state that renders them subordinate to all the men around them. She thus accepts to be married off at a tender age, and obeys everything her husband, Akobi instructs her to do. When battered, Mara braves it, viewing it as a correctional measure. In this regard, she is 'the other', thus treated like so.

Neni in *Behold the Dreamers* while in Cameroon, gets pregnant at a tender age for her boyfriend, Jende. Neni's father sends Jende to prison until the fine he demanded gets paid to the last coin. Jende remains supportive and committal towards Neni and their son. When he relocates to the USA, he struggles to reunite with Neni and their son, and he succeeds in having them

immigrate. While Neni's father is a typical example of a patriarchal African man, making decisions over females and younger male's lives which have to be followed to detail, Jende is quite the opposite. He is enlightened, thus owns up to his mistakes as a man and offers solutions.

Sisi/Chisom, Ama, Efe and Joyce in *On Black Sisters' Street* have individual experiences with male characters of African descent, but all of them have a common encounter with Dele, a smuggler. Chisom had a Nigerian boyfriend called Peter, a hardworking teacher who was awarded a 'Teacher of the Year' Award by the Commissioner for Education, among other accumulated incremental achievements, yet he still lived a poor life (Unigwe 27). Therefore, when Chisom met Dele at a hairdresser's, and he proposed to give her work in Belgium where he had plenty of connections, for thirty thousand Euros, she did not hesitate leaving Peter and taking up the opportunity (Unigwe 33-35). Despite Dele's sexualization of Chisom's body, she still went for his offer, which she thought would grant her a better life as compared to the jobless graduate she was in Nigeria (Unigwe 43-44).

Efe had a bitter experience in Nigeria too. At sixteen, she was lured into sex behind her father's flat by a rich, experienced forty five year old man called Titus who promised her "New clothes. New shoes. Heaven. Earth. And everything else she fancied between the two as long as she let him have his way" (Unigwe 49). Titus deserted her as soon she told him of her pregnancy (Unigwe 59), leaving her in the hands of her quarrelsome father (Unigwe 62). On delivering her son, Lucky, Efe took him to his Titus, but his wife insulted and threw her out in front of Titus. After this ordeal, she had no option but to fend for herself, her sister and son. Efe perceived herself as "damaged goods" (Unigwe 75), thus losing interest in a decent life with a man. Eventually she found a cleaning job at Dele's office, He enticed her by giving her huge bonuses at holidays and complimenting her for her looks (Unigwe 80). In due course, he organised for her relocation to Belgium at a fee of thirty thousand Euros (Unigwe 81). Efe imagined that she would be rich and even acquire a Mercedes-Benz out of the proceeds of the 'Sales' work Dele had secured for her in Belgium (Unigwe 84).

Ama had a horrible childhood, in which at the age of eight, her step father, Brother Cyril who was an assistant pastor, began raping her (Unigwe 131-132). For days on end, he continued raping her, reminding her of the fifth commandment in the Bible that states "Honour thy father and thy mother" (Unigwe 132), until she started her period (Unigwe 145). Ama's mother never believed her word, instead slapped her when she confronted her step father, and knelt before him, begging for clemency (Unigwe 147-148). Ama was then sent away to her Aunt, Mama Eko in Lagos, this being her mother's way of shielding herself from being thrown out of the house by her husband (Unigwe 151). This experience made her wish to go abroad, where "people walked around all day well dressed and doing nothing more strenuous than carrying a handbag...She imagined being in Monaco, all rich and grown up, without the huge menacing presence of her father, drinking and smoking in defiance of her father's rules, shaking and twisting to the Devil's

music" (Unigwe 134-135). Her long awaited moment soon came when she met Dele her auntie's canteen (Unigwe 113), who proposed that she takes up a job as a sex worker in Antwerp, which she accepted (Unigwe 168-169). Dele also 'sampled' Ama sexually before helping her with the relocation. The mistreatment she had received from her step father was pivotal in her decision, as she saw no need to remain beautiful for any man. To her, men became tools through which she would achieve her goal of independence.

Joyce whose real name is Alek is of Sudanese origin. At fifteen years of age, she got repeatedly gang raped during a war that broke out in Southern Sudan (Unigwe 191). Her entire family was also killed, thus she ended up in a refugee camp where she met Polycarp, a Nigerian soldier of the African Union Peacekeeping Force (Unigwe 197). They moved to Lagos together when Polycarp got deployed there. Polycarp later declined to marry Alek, stating that his parents wanted him to marry an Igbo girl, not a foreigner because he was the first born (Unigwe 225). He took Alek to Dele, who changed her name to 'Joyce' and relocated her to Belgium for sex work. Polycarp had betrayed her, thus her urge to play life's game and win eventually (Unigwe 231).

In Adichie's *Americanah*, Ifemelu, the main character while in Nigeria, fell in love with Obinze in their teenage-hood. Their relationship lasted for a long time till Ifemelu relocated to The USA for her undergraduate studies. While in Nigeria, they were known to each other's families, shared intimacies and had mutual attachments. They supported each other's decisions and remained true to each other. Ifemelu's aunt, Uju, on the other hand had an affair with a Major General, who was a married man. Uju was a mistress who relied fully on Major financially. To put her in check, Major never gave her money, instead he paid all the workers in Uju's mansion, bought all the household needs and paid for the services rendered to Uju outside her house. His untimely death led to Uju's relocation to The USA to escape his relative's fury on her for being his mistress.

Relations in Alien Territory

Emigration of the female characters in the selected texts has been influenced and/or facilitated by male characters, who are the beneficiaries of this relocation. While the female characters are excited with the relocation, highly expectant of good fortunes, they end up disillusioned. It is notable that these female characters' relations with their male counterparts in alien territory differs greatly with their relations with the male characters of European and American origin.

Change of physical and geographical spaces led to major changes in the relations of the male characters and female characters of African descent. In *Beyond the Horizon*, Mara, on arrival in Germany, instantly ceases to be Akobi's wife, turning into his 'sister' and a prostitute. Akobi only has a sexual relationship with Mara once in a while in the absence of his German wife, Gitte. Mara is not accorded any respect at all as the mother of Akobi's children, but is made to work while Akobi took the salary.

Jende in Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* treats his wife Neni with a lot of respect while in New York. He allows her to study, even pays her fee and supports her ambitions of being a Pharmacist. When she conceives their second child, he is reluctant to allow her walk long distances and do the heavy duties where she worked, until after delivery. However, when he lost his job and could not secure citizenship, his life became too much of a struggle, turning him into a violent husband.

Uju in Adichie's *Americanah* finds herself in a financially one-sided and draining relationship with a Congolese man, Bartholomew. This is an instance of classic patriarchy, which as Kandiyoti explains, is a form of passive resistance by women, which "takes the form of claiming their half of this particular patriarchal bargain- protection in exchange for submissiveness and propriety" (283). Uju was persevering in the beginning, with the hope of attaining citizenship through him but gave up when she realised that he was only with her for his personal financial gain, but offered no form of security for her and her son. With Kweku, a Ghanaian man, however, Uju experienced love and happiness again. Ifemelu cuts her links with Obinze, her long-time lover after a while in America as a result of being ashamed of her job that involved sexually pleasing a white coach. She later opts to move on with a white American, Curt, and later Blaine, a Black American professor of Yale University.

Relations between Female Characters of African Descent and Male Characters of European and American Descent

In comparison to the relations between female and male characters of African descent, the relations between of female characters of African descent with male characters of European and American descents in the selected texts are warmer and friendlier. It is observed that the male characters of European and American descent are presented in the texts as understanding, and keen on the establishment of personal and economic spaces for these female characters. Unlike the male characters of African descent's perception of these female characters as the other, these male characters of European and American descent perceive them as counterparts and lovers. They therefore treat them with respect, ensuring to protect them from any form of discrimination.

Sisi in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* gives up on her job as a sex worker to settle with Luc, a Belgian. Initially, she doubts his sincerity but over time, she realises that his pursuits were genuine. For the short period they were together before she was murdered, Sisi experienced happiness and self-confidence, which she had not achieved with Peter, her Nigerian lover, nor Dele, the Nigerian agent. Through Luc, Sisi achieved self-satisfaction, respect and confidence for herself. She realised that sex work was not the only way out of poverty, but it was instead an agency that enslaved the female African immigrant.

Ifemelu in *Americanah*'s relation with Curt, an American was that of overprotection and concern. Curt always felt the need to protect Ifemelu from racist remarks, appreciated her African features and kinky hair. He was overly proud of her and her achievements, helped her secure a

more decent job through which she acquired her citizenship. In spite of their split after Ifemelu's infidelity, Curt kept secretly sending her money to support her blog. This is an expression of goodwill, as compared to Sisi's case whereby she was killed for going back on her word. Ifemelu also had a relationship with Blaine, a black American, after breaking up with Curt. Blaine also connected emotionally with Ifemelu, often supporting her blog and pursuits. Blaine, though not in support of her relocation to Nigeria, still allowed her leave but maintained their friendship.

Conclusion

The alien spaces presented various challenges to the female characters, pushing them to negotiate their survival. While in Africa, these female characters were not accorded autonomy owing to them being perceived as appendages to the male characters. This influenced their willingness to emigrate, hence their struggle to survive in alien spaces. Their pursuit's success largely depended on their relations with other characters, who from the discussion either negatively or positively impacted on the protagonists' stay in Diaspora.

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