**GENDERED EXPERIENCE OF MIGRATION IN WEST AFRICA FICTION: EXPLORING AFRICAN FEMALE PROTAGONISTS IN CONTEMPORRY LITERATURE**

**Abstract**

This study investigates a few texts written by four female West African authors who explore the concept of home as it is viewed through the prism of migratory narratives. Conceptually, it is a depiction of human migration frequently used to explain how people discuss and comprehend the departure of migrants, including their motivations, the challenges they encounter while migrating, and how they are seen in their new environment. Chika Unigwe's on *Black Sisters'* *Street* (2009), Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* (1995), Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), and Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* (2016) are among the works that examine how the experience of migration is gendered in addition to being complicated by issues of citizenship, class, and race. Emigration, arguably one of the major cultural forces of the twenty-first century, has been highlighted to show how disruptive it can be for migrant women and the people they are closest. The study broadens the critical horizon of these narratives by suggesting that the destabilizing experience of migration can be read as embodied in the texts, expanding the critical lens of earlier black female writers of the past century. This is in contrast to the numerous feminist analyses of these works that already exist. This study analyses the protagonists in the selected works by authors to demonstrate how subjectivity is problematically impacted by the dynamics of home and diaspora. It uses textual analysis as a methodology to gather, arrange, analyse, and evaluate information about the gendered aspects of migration as it is expressed in the four texts that were the subject of the study. Even though each text has been the subject of numerous studies, this study brought them all under one methodological scrutiny which expanded their semantic potential by highlighting a novel "way of reading" and pointing to additional key opportunities for interacting with migrant experiences. The study allows for additional critical examination of books that discuss emigration from Western Africa, Africa in general, Latin America to Asian nations and all other nations that suffer from emigration. It also goes into greater detail about how both male and female writers have disenfranchised male characters of African heritage in the West.

***Keywords:*** *African authors, prism of migration, citizenship, emigration, cultural forces, feminist, diaspora*

**Introduction**

Humans are able to make both temporary and permanent housing decisions. Their ability to travel allows them to choose between returning to their former residences or staying in a new location. Migration, according to Heine de Haas, is "a function of people's capabilities and aspirations to migrate within given sets of perceived geographical opportunity structures" (2). Globalization has made state borders less strong, which has led to labor movement across borders. To combat vices like terrorism and crime, strict measures have been imposed on recently admitted immigrants as a result of the immigration wave in the West. The high number of African women who migrate for domestic labor can be explained by the fact that private recruiting agents help women find work in an attempt to get through these tedious visa acquisition procedures.

Africans have long been migrating to Europe, America, and other African countries because, as John Arthur explains, "From time immemorial, they have wandered throughout Africa for purposes of trade, to look for work, to improve upon their lives, or escape from the harsh and unforgiving economic and political morass at home"(vii). The growth of transnational border crossings and global migration are characterized by the voluntary or involuntary movement of "skilled and unskilled population, especially, from the emerging economies of Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, and the former Soviet Republics to the advanced industrialized countries in the West, particularly the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Canada and Australia” (Arthur vii).According to Arthur, the most frequent cause of migration from African nations to the West is weak economies. As a result, migration continues in the hope that the alternative home will offer a long-term remedy for the intolerable conditions that lead to the departure from the native home.

Igor Maver opines, "it is important to acknowledge, so it seems, that living in a diasporic space today fundamentally signifies the forging of a new identity and a new overseas, hybrid subjectivity." This statement is a pointer to the unavoidable nature of new identity development in diaspora. (x). Nevertheless, Maver points out that "it should be borne in mind that diasporic space is a category which encompasses not only those who have migrated and their descendants, but also those who have been constructed and represented as indigenous to a geographical location" (x). Since the natives of their new home continue to hold the title of original proprietors, it follows that the immigrants will inevitably become "the other."

The various forms of diaspora that are multi-layered, even within the sub-units, make the process of changing one's identity in the new spaces difficult. It frequently entails imaginatively reimagining oneself. Maver goes on to note that the diaspora's members fall into the following categories: In these contested in-between spaces, all diaspora distinguish themselves from one another and participate in the process of creating the dichotomy of "Us vis-a-vis the others." The challenge, of course, is figuring out how to distinguish between the former and the latter, as binary constructions are obviously out of date today. What does one identify with? With "Home," which paradoxically is a location of no return but also occupies a legendary site of desire in the diasporic imagination and subjectivity?

As a consequence, migrants must decide whether to embrace a new identity in which their original homelands continue to exist only in their imaginations or to break completely with the past. The struggle to fit in at the new place involves a moral decision in this problem. As liminal subjects, there is a chance that migrants will ultimately decide whether to return to their home countries and change their lives or to stay and face the existential challenges in the new country and thereby avoid mockery from their ancestral home's residents. The issues that Africans in the diaspora experience are influenced by their gender, race, and class. But when it comes to the politics of migrant identity and identification, the race issue is given more weight. The black-white dichotomy, for example, is fundamental to the interactions between immigrant and host communities in Canada and America although white as host/hostess is also highly contestable. The result of these deeply rooted racialized relations is explained by John Darden as follows:

A racial hierarchy that treats groups differently based on skin color has been established and maintained by Whites, the dominant group in Canada and the United States, in order to preserve their superior position and competitive advantage. Individuals with lighter skin tones or those with more white-like characteristics are typically subjected to less severe treatment and prejudice in employment, housing, and education. Racial stratification and differential disadvantage have resulted from numerous racial (visible) minority groups experiencing social, geographical, and economic repercussions as a result of this unequal treatment (quoted in Frazier John et al 4). It is evident that when confronted with the overwhelming odds of these racial compartmentalization’s, whose results contradict the original rationale of migration (to improve one's future), migrants turn to erasing any indications of non-belonging that would further entrench their marginalization. As a guarantee of a higher position in the hierarchy, this circumstance frequently leads to innovative (albeit self-destructive) negotiating strategies like skin lightening and outward "beautification." The "racist fetishizing of white skin" is the causal source of such survival strategies, to paraphrase Ann McClintock's *Imperial Leather: race, gender, and sexuality in the colonial battle (184).* Therefore, in an effort to emphasize "visible signs of class leisure and wealth," African migrants who are already burdened by the baggage of a color so negatively defined tend to eliminate any indications of "racial and class disgrace... [that] a sun-darkened skin" (176).

However, this is more than simply a superficial alteration. As the texts under study show, it facilitates the easier flow of embodied labor, and the benefits derived from such bodily/color appeal to both the diasporic self and the dependents back home. These strategic color upgrades, which differ from industry to industry in their methods, are seen by the migrants as an absolute requirement. As an example, McClintock cites the long-standing usage of skin-lightening soaps by immigrants to urban areas as a means of redefining oneself in line with racial reality and prevailing ideas of color aesthetics. According to her, "From the outset, soap took shape as a technology of social purification, inextricably associated with the semiotics of imperial racism and class denigration" (212). Therefore, changing one's skin tone may appear to be a sign of degeneration and self-hatred on the surface, but it actually contributes to the politics of regeneration that are necessary for survival in unfamiliar environments.

Even after the official end of colonialism, migrants nevertheless have to deal with the lingering ghost of colonial politics, which still shapes their sense of citizenship and belonging as former

colonized people. As a non-citizen who is legally classified as belonging to somewhere else, the migrant is either destined to work in low-wage, labor-intensive industries or, as the texts demonstrate, engage in unlawful underworld activities based on gender. For example, women in the texts appear to be disproportionately affected by their migrant status in order to support themselves and their dependents in their home countries. Despite having a university degree back home, some are compelled to become prostitutes after failing to find lucrative work they had hoped for. The only comfort such women receive from society's moral judgment is that necessity truly shapes their trajectories.

In order to gain confidence in their new surroundings, African immigrants work hard to develop a new identity. The reality that the host cultures have little or no shared history with the homes they have left behind confront migrants as they arrive at their destinations. Three facts exacerbate this "enigma of arrival," as Naipaul refers to it in a book of the same name. This ghost of arrival is focused on from three fronts: firstly, is what it is like to be a Black African in a world where negative discourses about Africa are prevalent. Secondly is the reality of being a Black immigrant in a nation with a large white population, where immigrants have had to deal with being treated as second-class citizens. Thirdly, is being a woman, a black woman, and an immigrant are make the examination of this study. These realities revolve around the "crisis of identity" discussions, which are encapsulated in Frantz Fanon's article "The Fact of Blackness" in *Black Skin, White Masks* and W.E.B. Du Bois' "double consciousness" in *The Souls of Black Folk*. The "human capacity rooted in language to know 'who's who' (and hence 'what's what')," according to Richard Jenkins, is identity. Additionally, it "entails understanding who we are, understanding who others are, understanding who others believe us to be, and so on: The human world and our roles within it, both as individuals and as members of collectivities, are mapped out in multiple dimensions (5). Therefore, this self-awareness is the only possible way to enable human agency in any setting.

Relational definitions of identity are provided by Charles Taylor. According to him, identity as a comprehension of our true selves must be established by the other (34). This fits in nicely with Jenkins's assertion that "socialization" and "embodiment" play a crucial part in identity creation. He explains:

*[i]individual identity highlights distinction that is distinctively embodied. People identify themselves and are identified by others in ways that set them apart from other people via primary and subsequent socialization, daily interactions, and institutionalized labeling procedures. However, similarity is also a necessary component of individual identity. For instance, selfhood is a means of discussing how certain embodied humans are similar or consistent over time (Jenkins 102).*

Drawing from Jenkins, therefore, individual identity can only be meaningful when self-interacts with the other. He goes on to explain that collective identification “evokes powerful imagery of people who are in some respect(s) apparently similar to each other. People must have something intersubjectively significant in common no matter how vague, apparently unimportant or apparently illusory before we can talk about their membership of a collectivity” (102). This point is important to this study because it highlights the role of “borders” and “exclusion-inclusion,” two terms that are essential when examining the nature of identity formation as narrated and also quite helpful in comprehending migrant narratives. Jenkins quickly adds that "establishing the criteria for membership of any group of objects also entails drawing a line, beyond which nothing belongs" (102). This is significant for this study because, as told by female authors who have left Africa themselves, it frames the examination of "Sisterhood" into a kind of bonding among female characters of African origin in the diasporic sphere, in their battle for agency and belonging.

Studying how literature interrogates the underlying concepts of emigration, globalization, diasporic experience, identity change, race, class, and gender is necessary because these ideas are increasingly being trapped in literary imagination. Four African women authors are the subject of this study; their works fictionalize the relationships between African-American female characters in diasporic settings. Despite their differences in technique, all of these books share the common goal of challenging diasporic subjectivity, in which these weak African female characters are subject to their masters' and mistresses' whims.

The novelists are: Amma Darko, who won the 2008 "Ghana's Book Award," the nation's highest literary honor; Chimamanda Adichie, a well-known and multiple award-winning Nigerian novelist; Imbolo Mbue, a Cameroonian up-coming writer; and Chika Unigwe, who has won prizes such as the "2003 BBC Short Story Competition," the "Commonwealth Short Story Competition," and the $100,000 prize money of the 2012 "Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas NLNG" sponsored Nigeria Prize for Literature. Since all these authors address the effects of emigration primarily of female characters of African descent from their native African countries to Europe and the United States of America, as well as the disillusionment they experience upon arrival, both in their narratives and the very fact that they are conscious authors this selection serves a purpose.

The authors of these narratives shed light on a multifaceted and problematic diasporic subjectivity because, as Dominguez Pilar Cuder notes elsewhere, "the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present" (98), and the meaning of these stories in the "now" must take into account, to use Cuder's words, "the diverse conditions under which Black people struggle to survive on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean" (58). By concentrating on how these writers examine the intricate issues associated with the emigration process, this study offers fresh perspectives on West African diasporic women writers.

Migration and emigration are among the main cultural phenomena of the twenty-first century. Humans are moving abroad more frequently to work, study, or settle down permanently as a result of growing globalization. Certain elements inevitably come into play when people from different geographic backgrounds come into contact with one another. Social, political, cultural, economic, and religious differences between one's home country and the new one are only a few of the many variances that cause new experiences and difficulties. Literature unavoidably reveals these encounters as a mirror of society. Through the stories of migrant African female characters who cross borders voluntarily or under duress, this study explores how four chosen primary texts by Amma Darko, Chika Unigwe, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and Imbolo Mbue illustrate the intricacies of diasporic life. Although there are many studies on immigration, female characteristics of African heritage have received less attention.

Therefore, this study shows how emigration is emphasized to show how disruptive it can be in the lives of migrant female characters and those they are close. Another important area of concern was how Europe and the US are seen as societal settings that allow the connections between the female characters of African heritage.

**The problem statement**

This study investigates the numerous problems immigrant female protagonists face both in the diaspora and at home. It specifically dwells on black female protagonists from West African authors as earlier mentioned in the introductory part of this paper because they are women, black, whether they should stay in their new homes or go back to their previous ones and how they generally device coping mechanisms. In a nutshell, it is about how they are ‘sublternised’ and how they wriggle out of it from these racialized and patriarchal systems.

**Objective of the study**

To investigate how African female protagonists in the selected works' fictional worlds experience migration on a gendered slate.

**Research question**

Do African female protagonists in the selected works’ fictional worlds experience migration on a gendered basis?

**Justification of the study**

The works that are being examined take part in a relevant discussion on what it means to be simultaneously Black, a woman, and a migrant. Although there are many critical studies on these texts, this study aims to close a critical gap by juxtaposing these female protagonists. This was done in order to highlight the difficulties that black migrant women face in forming their identities in the twenty-first century, where "the problem of color-line" persists a century after DuBois so sharply foresaw that it would be a problem of the twentieth century.

The multicultural lifestyles of migrant women are influenced by a variety of variables. These include (but are not restricted to) race, age, country of origin, duration of stay, and migration motives. The way that cultural and social differences among diasporic women of African heritage shape and reshape their lives as immigrants is of much concern. West African natives make up the majority of immigrant women of African heritage in both Europe and the US. West African writers' selection of works was based on the resonance in their voices as black women writers of the twenty-first century who articulate migration, albeit from distinct narrative viewpoints. The illocutionary intensity of these immigrant voices makes them important.

The process of writing and hearing these stories stems from the "realization of the fundamental importance of narrative to the organization of human experience and our understanding of how lives are lived," as Cate Watson reminds us. Because it incorporates various modes of knowing and being, the story is closely related to identity issues. The need to examine the many perspectives of women of African origin in the diaspora motivated the reading of the four primary texts already mentioned. African women attempt to leave Africa for Europe and the United States of America in the hope of escaping poverty and misery, as emigration to these countries has been a widespread occurrence in Africa in recent years. Through their works, literary scholars contribute significantly to the sensitization of the dread of this relocation, allowing these ladies to learn about what to expect in the West and prepare accordingly. Therefore, the study's greatest beneficiaries are African women who plan to immigrate to the West.

**Scope and delimitations of the study.**

This study examines the relationship between identity and emigration in transnational fiction written by contemporary African women authors, namely Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* (2016), Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* (1995), Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* (2009), and Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* (2013). Native to West African nations, these authors eventually immigrated to Belgium, Germany, and the United States of America. The reading of these authors collectively for this project concentrates on how the diasporic experience is portrayed and how the experiences of female characters of African heritage are mirrored through this portrayal. Therefore, the experiences of the migrant female characters from West Africa are the exclusive focus of this study. Despite being the subject of this study, the four authors are not the only female writers who have left West Africa. Nonetheless, it was decided that these chosen works were reasonably representative of migration fiction from West Africa. Since there are more African immigrants in the West, this study concentrated on the West African region. West Africans make up 44.2% of all immigrants from Africa in the United States, according to the Migration Policy Institute's (MPI) tabulation of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2019 ACS.

**Literature Review.**

Gilles Deleuze asserts that "to depart, escape, cross the horizon, and enter another life is the highest aim of literature." According to him, true literature "is the kind that does not conform to or confirm the codes of the established state of things, is 'rhizomatic' literature." The rhizomatic novel launches systems, ideas, and objects into motion (Deleuze and Parnet 74-5). Like the rhizome, which defies the logic of a single meaning or being by functioning in multiplicity and indeterminacy, rhizomatic literature is decentered and hence open to multiple interpretations. Readers of rhizomatic literature might likewise travel not literally, but imaginatively through fiction. Since the writers can write about Africa while living in Europe or the US and vice versa, their ideas are also decentered. This reading focuses on how emigration is portrayed in the chosen works, even though the texts can be interpreted from various perspectives, such as academic and sociological.

*Beyond the Horizon*, Darko notes, "came out at a time when migration, prostitution, and exploitation were hot topics." This work is still relevant now because of the great amount of mobility that is occurring at the time, from Africa to Europe and the United States of America. Emigration means creating a "home" away from home, a process that immigrants must go through despite its difficulties, such as the fact that they are very different from the locals in their new places. According to postcolonial theorists, this places the immigrants in the "outsider" position, sometimes known as the "Other." For there to be peaceful coexistence in the diaspora, the immigrants must adopt this stance.

Only when the "Other" stays that way, without being invasive and "demanding its specifying cultural difference to be accepted by the majority of the population," is it acceptable, according to Igor Maver (xi). It is necessary to make accommodation for people who live together because some groups' wish to live parallel lives without conflict but with tolerance and coexistence.
Although diaspora and migration are not new to Africa, Colin Palmer explains that:

*‘modern African diaspora’ as a population group “that consists of the millions of peoples of African descent living in various societies who are united by a past based significantly, but not exclusively, upon “racial” oppression and the struggles against it; and who, despite the cultural variations and political and other divisions among them, share an emotional bond with one another and with their ancestral continent; and who also, regardless of their location, face broadly similar problems in constructing and realizing themselves’ (Butler 31).*

It is clear from the preceding passage that this definition disavows the idea that the bulk of Africa's peoples, who are currently outside the continent's borders, have a persistent desire to immigrate there, even though some native Africans do want to return. It is also evident that diasporic individuals have a constant connection to Africa as their home. According to Mark Shackleton's remark regarding all diasporas, the female characters of African heritage in the chosen texts under study have either relocated to the West "through choice or compulsion" (ix), making them a true mirror of contemporary events. This concept is unclear, as the texts under study examine the potential for "return migration," or the actual return to and settlement in Africa.

Just as much attention should be paid to the fictionalized diasporic experience as to the real one, according to Avtar Brah, people who are "constructed and represented as indigenous" had to provide the material and creative spaces of diaspora, their full attention and involvement (209). Shackleton argues that these creative possibilities "can be fed back into the social and material environments of community and society as tentative utopian designs for progressive social transformation in which the common recognition of political and ethical equality supersedes the border logic of race and illiberal nationalism" (4). This demonstrates the pressing need to hear how the stories examine this "border logic of race and illiberal nationalism" and aid in challenging its construction, as well as how migrants deal with circumstances that represent the "social and material environments”.

Although migration has been a part of human history for generations, post-World War II modernism has made it easier for both individuals and groups to relocate. "Mass migration, mass displacement, globalized finances and industries" constitute "the distinguishing feature of our time," according to Salman Rushdie (425). Due to the constant pace of mass migration and worldwide movement, this stance has been centralized in contemporary literary and cultural studies. Rushdie's assertion is supported by historical occurrences such as the fall of the British Empire, World War II, and the large-scale exodus of former colonies to the West. In contrast to the lives of the female protagonists of African heritage in their home countries, this study focuses on emigration to the West seeking economic stability, education, and a higher quality of life.

Sten Pultz Moslund describes the "traffic of illegal immigration as a consequence of the growing maladjustment between the developed and the underdeveloped regions of the globe" as the outcome of the disparity between the numbers of people who are willing and determined to migrate and the legal restrictions governing the acceptance of migrants. He continues by saying that the "increased speed and capacity of modern means and modes of communication and transportation, such as international air travel, telephones, satellite TV, and the Internet" (1) have significantly improved people's mobility. Due to globalization, the entire planet is now constantly changing. Moslund describes it as "the grand spectacle of a virtual surge of people flowing across the surface of the globe: refugees, exiles, expatriates, international vagrants, guest workers, immigrants, wanderers of all kinds crisscrossing the planet and all its national, ethnic, cultural, social, and linguistic borders" (2). In the chosen books, the female protagonists of African heritage have experienced life disruptions as a result of being "uprooted" from their ancestral homelands. But as this study demonstrates, their lives take a turn for the worst, leading to disillusionment and eventual return or contemplation of returning to Africa.

Traditional ideas of "home" in terms of a fixed location within specific geographical areas with set borders have been supplanted by these magnified mobilities. "The "borderline" figure of a massive historical displacement... a figure who is supposed to be in a state of uprooted, nomadic, transnational, and transcultural fluidity," as Homi Bhabha puts it, is the migrant (320). Both the host and the migrant experience disruption as they come to terms with such figuration. As this reading will demonstrate, this does not always lead to unfavorable results; rather, it emphasizes the potential for mutual enrichment. Social contact takes place in the area between migration and settling. It also raises the question of whether home is a location where one can be rooted or uprooted.

Rushdie's concept of "imaginary homelands" challenges the idea that one must assign oneself to tangible, geographically based homes. A "home of the mind" is what he imagines. Rooted, he contends, "[w]e act like trees and talk about roots. Examine your feet. There won't be any twisted growths emerging through the soles. The conservative concept of roots is meant to keep us where we are. (5–6). Given that the majority of the female characters in this research are migrants who suffer from the displacement that comes with relocation, this remark is crucial. They struggle to "root" themselves in their new surroundings because they were "uprooted" from their homes.

According to this study, which reads through Rushdie's concept of "Imaginary Homelands," we must "re-route" our understanding of diaspora through the history that has influenced the diasporic experience today rather than "uproot" it from the constrained boundaries of home and away, Africa, and the West. This is important because it contextualizes the study not only within the framework of African female writers' migrant narratives, but also, as Cheryl Sterling suggests, within a framework that is in dialogue with other works that intentionally express "articulations of Africanness and blackness, and incorporates their quest for rootedness in Africa but also places them in the unified oeuvre of diaspora space" (2). In the Western language of modernity, Sterling continues, these discussions "reconceptualize to include the history of enslavement, racism, and the engagement of Black peoples with practices of nation building, citizenry, and modernization" (2).

Today's literary creativity has been significantly influenced by migration and movement. People who are migrants reveal that humans are "essentially creatures of movement rather than settlement." Moslund, 3. According to Edward Said, "it is no exaggeration to say that liberation as an intellectual mission... has now shifted from the settled, established, and domesticated dynamics of culture to its unhoused, decentered, and exilic energies, energies whose incarnation today is the migrant, and whose consciousness is that of the literary and artistic figure in exile, the political figure between domains, between forms, between homes, and between languages" (403). What Moslund calls "contemporary literature of migration" (3) is the outcome of this. Interestingly, all of the authors of the chosen works for this study voluntarily left Africa. Although their tales are not all depressing, this study shows that their heroes/heroines, even after their time in the West, cherish their homes in Africa.

The migration novel, according to Søren Frank, thematically addresses globalization processes as well as national, cultural, and personal identities. History and geography are key to these theme areas. The characters in migration literature, he adds, always "deal with migration" in different ways, ranging from the experience of migration and the uncertainty of displaced identities as "destructive, agonizing, and painful" to the experience of migration and displacement as "productive, fascinating, and appealing." However, the migration novel generally operates from the perspective of "rewriting... identities in order to evoke their impure and heterogeneous character" (18-19).

**Additional studies on the texts under study**

The relationship between race and migration is that of alienation in *Americanah,* according to a number of reviewers. Ifemelu, the main character, claims that she discovered she was African upon landing in America, illustrating how race is portrayed in the book as an American fixation (Adichie 292). When Ifemelu arrived in Lagos, the situation was inverted, and she no longer recognized herself as African (Adichie 475).

*Americanah* is an examination of the ways in which migration shapes racial identity, according to Yogita Goyal. Nigerians' comments regarding racialization in the United States and the United Kingdom, which connects it to class and gender, also spark a discussion. In addition to deftly challenging American views of Africa, it places racial issues in a global context. However, the African female characters and their experiences in America are the focus of this study.

In her critique of *Americanah* and *Ghana Must Go*, Karen Amaka Okigbo points out that Americanah portrays Nigerian African immigrants as more educated than the local Black population. As demonstrated by Ifemelu, the main character, she links this to the reality that African immigrants primarily leave their home countries in pursuit of education. This motivation for migration is what leads to differences in the experiences of African immigrants and native Blacks. But if this drive for achievement is allowed to continue unchecked, it eventually has a detrimental effect on romantic and family ties.

Sarah De Mul explores how black womanhood involves women's battle to reinvent themselves and their transnational worlds, as well as to re-describe themselves in the face of social pressures and cultural boundaries in *On Black Sisters' Street*. She points out that the book does more than only portray Black women as exotic and sexualized, as is the case in European perceptions.

In her *Beyond the Horizon* analysis, Mary Ellen Higgins examines the possibility of transnational or transcultural women's solidarity, concentrating on her Ghanaian heroine, Mara, and her German "sister-in-law"/cowife, Gitte (Darko 22). She also looks at the abuse of women in the transactional sex economy and the current injustices in Ghanaian men-women relationships both locally and abroad. She comes to the conclusion that the text contributes to local and international discussions on the mistreatment of women in the transnational sex trade by exposing both internal and international violence against Ghanaian women.

In her review of *Behold the Dreamers*, Harys Bremana Sitepu focuses on the American dream as a concept designed to stifle African immigrants who come to the United States in search of better life. Sitepu comes to the conclusion that the characters are oblivious to the injustices that are happening to them because of the promises of the American dream. They eventually come to understand that the American Dream is a myth that has been employed to keep them in inferior roles during their time in the country.

The review indicates that diasporic and migrant studies have received scholarly attention, with a generalization of the experiences of both men and women. Instead of establishing themselves in their new locations, this research focused on the problems that African American female protagonists face as they sought a new identity and space. Women of African heritage find it easier to target one another for their personal development and prosperity because it would be difficult to advocate for African men in these new settings.

**Research Methodology.**

***Research Design***

For this study, which focuses on Amma Darko’s Beyond the Horizon (1995), Chika Unigwe’s on *Black Sisters’ Street* (2009), Chimamanda Adichie’s *Americanah* (2013), and Imbolo Mbue’s *Behold the Dreamers* (2016), a qualitative research design was required because individual objectives required a more in-depth and independent analysis of the primary texts.

***Sampling Techniques and Size***

Purposive sampling was used to choose the novels that were the subject of the study: *Beyond the* *Horizon*, *On Black Sisters' Street*, *Americanah,* and *Behold the Dreamers*. The main sources of information for this study are these primary writings, all of which are authored by African women writers. Additionally, secondary sources such as reference materials, journals and newspaper articles, provided useful information which enhanced the texts' quality in utilization of immigrant female characters of African heritage to illustrate the complexities of the migratory experience.

***Data Collection methods***

Through careful reading of the materials being studied, data was gathered qualitatively in order to draw findings, interpretations, inferences, and potential recommendations. The data collection procedure involved gathering pertinent information from the primary texts and applying it to the research. Furthermore, the study was informed by secondary data concerning African women's emigration to the West from the library and the internet, as depicted in the chosen texts.

***Data Analysis***

Data analysis was carried out with particular objectives in mind. Analysis of qualitative data was done on the information gleaned from primary sources. Concluding remarks were drawn from the aggregate of the data that was analyzed. Thematic analysis was also used, which entails analyzing and classifying the primary and associated topics. In order to provide a well-informed foundation for the research, the chosen literary works were thoroughly examined and analyzed in accordance with the postcolonial theoretical tenets put forth by Bhabha, Said, and Spivak.

**Findings**

Displacement is defined as a type of un-homing that breaks the bond between individuals and their surroundings (Sarah Westin).

*ain’t no one never gonna write about your life but you. Once you’re dead, you never existed, baby, so get to it. (Qtd in Caronia p. 19 )*

The second epigraph above, which is taken from Nancy Caronia's "Resisting Displacement," is a witty observation about the ability of diaspora to uproot migrants and the necessity for women to write about the experience of being "un-homed" in order to counteract the psychological effects of that displacement. This chapter's readings examine how the experience of the unhomely diaspora is gendered through written works. Adichie, Mbue, Unigwe, and Darko, who are African migrants in Europe and North America, examine how writing can be both a source of much-needed self-remaking and a means of regaining the agency that has been lost due to cultural and physical confusion.

In Adichie's *Americanah*, Ifemelu, a Nigerian girl who was born and reared there, leaves her life-long love, Obinze, behind to pursue higher education in the United States. In order to make ends meet while in the United States, she takes on odd jobs, such as transactional sex work. She becomes psychologically unstable due to her existential issues, which results in her having unsuccessful relationships with several sexual partners in addition to her breakup with Obinze. She eventually returns to Nigeria to begin a new life with Obinze.

The novel *Behold the Dreamers* by Mbue tells the tale of Jende and Neni, a couple who leave Cameroon for the United States in pursuit of a better life. While his wife Neni takes on the role of nanny for the Edwards family, Jende secures his ideal position as Mr. Edwards' chauffeur at Lehman Brothers Executive. However, the Edwards family and Lehman Brothers Company go bankrupt due to a global financial catastrophe. The Jendes travel back to Cameroon after being left without a means of support. Mara, a Ghanaian woman, is married to Akobi at a young age in Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*. He takes advantage of his wife's physique for sex and ignores her at home. Akobi utilizes the money he makes from smuggling Mara into Germany and using her as a commercial sex worker to help his lover Comfort. After much effort, Mara manages to separate herself from Akobi. She chooses to send money to her mother to care for her two children rather than move to Ghana because of the stigma attached to her profession.

Four women Ama, Sisi, Efe, and Joyce are smuggled into Belgium by Dele, a Nigerian human trafficker who deals with the illegal emigration of women from Nigeria to Belgium for sex labor, according to Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*. These ladies tell tales of love, relocation, and fear. Dele, the common factor, a malevolent human trafficking agent who trafficked them all is discovered after Sisi's murder. What ties the four sisters' tale of vulnerability in Europe together is the "narrativization of the trafficked body" (Ligaga 74).

Notwithstanding their disparate narrative structures, the four novels share three common themes: the first is the cultural and physical uprooting of female characters from their homes in Africa, despite the filthy conditions; the second is what V.S. Naipaul refers to as the "enigma of arrival," which is the socioeconomic turmoil and disillusionment that face migrants from formerly colonized countries upon realizing that their aspirations for self-improvement in Western metropolises were actually predicated on an exaggerated ideal of the West. The potential for return trips to Africa to establish homes away from the "unhomely" West forms the basis of the third thematic congruence among the four works. Since these trips are presented as either real or symbolic, this reading insists on the "possibility of return journeys."

These characters, who are "un-homed" are displaced from Africa for whatever reason, are read in a process known as "homing-in." It entails an emotional and physical quest for a sense of attachment to people and places. These texts examine several homing-in techniques in differing depths. Developing relationships with characters who have already immigrated is one example. The key to their settling down is the bond between these characters and particularly those from Africa. Because the female characters leave Africa for various causes and at different eras, each new immigrant gains knowledge by hearing about the experiences and tales of their forebears. The choices that the protagonists make are greatly influenced by these tales. Diaspora space, as Brah eloquently describes

*…….is the intersection of borders, diaspora, and dislocation as a site where political, cultural, psychological, and economic forces converge. Even though these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of tradition and purity, it is where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed, or disavowed; where the permitted and the prohibited constantly interrogate; and where the accepted and the transgressive subtly mix (205).*

Brah's remark highlights the difference between "diasporic space" as the social and "diaspora as a geography." Social connection made possible by the diasporic space influences migrants' decisions. In this sense, the diaspora space is occupied by everyone, regardless of status, including native-born people and immigrants. Each immigrant must eventually create a plan for self-establishment after being exposed to the many personalities, backgrounds, and in-come sources in the same area.

These female characters are still "un-homed," but they are "homing-in" to the diaspora despite creating homes in strange places. In order to reach a state that post colonialists, following Emmanuel Levinas, have defined as the "feeling of not being at home even in one's own home" (Qtd in Tyson 422), un-homed subjects must negotiate cultural differences and conflicts. This requires striking a balance between the awareness that one is physically at "home" and psychologically at home somewhere else. According to the narratives examined here, crises occur when people are unable to physically transform from Africans to Europeans and Americans, but they have started to perceive themselves as "Europeans" and "Americans" on a psychological level. Indeed, aside from their outward characteristics, these female characters are no longer considered "Africans" by their relatives and friends in Africa because they are clearly liberated. Conversely, they continue to be Africans in the eyes of the native inhabitants of the diasporic areas. These place these female characters in an ambiguous psychological limbo. The idea that the West is "unhomely" is persistent. With a strong desire to establish new residences, they thus battle to progressively fit in the new places. As a result, homing in for the un-homed turns into an ongoing search, the outcome of which dictates whether to stay or go back.

The term “in-homing” was previously used to refer more to the process of negotiating for friendly spaces away from the spheres of origin than to the act of relocation or arrival. Once the intertwining of cultures has been negotiated, the diaspora space can be successfully transformed into a home. Brah’s questions about home point to this process of negotiation: “When does a location become home? What is the difference between ‘feeling at home’ and staking claim to a place as one’s own?” (190). “Feeling at home” necessitates delicate negotiation with the indigenous people’s cultures because upfront inclusivity is primarily elusive. As Brah rightly points out, diaspora places are “contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure” (190). However, with agreements that are intersectional in form, areas of social exclusions such as gender, race and class might be transformative. According to Gilroy:

 *The idea of space itself is changed when it is viewed less in terms of antiquated ideas of place and fixity and more in terms of the ex-centric communication circuitry that has allowed scattered populations to communicate, engage, and even synchronize important aspects of their social and cultural lives (211).*

Therefore, the issue of home is inextricably tied to the manner in which inclusion or exclusionary practices are carried out. Individual circumstances of migration and homing-in must be negotiated because these processes are also subjectively experienced. The political and emotional problems that the female characters in the selected texts face as they attempt to break free from the social norms around belonging in the host countries are shown through analysis.These migrant women's reception is supported by existing concepts of masculinity and femininity. For example, men view migratory women as less valuable than their female counterparts. Therefore, despite the fact that both male and female migrants are viewed as marginal individuals in the host countries, the female migrants' sense of subalternity is exacerbated by an internalized gendered bias. as "subalterns," a term Spivak adopts from Antonio Gramsci to describe oppressed people or, more broadly, people of lower status. The male characters' sexual exploitation, battery, and psychological manipulation of these female characters in the chosen texts violates their physical, psychological, and emotional spaces, which speak to deeply held ideas of gendered power. The situation is not final because, as the texts show, these female characters struggle to defend themselves at first but eventually find a way to get out of this predicament.

This study thus, analyzes how gendered politics play out in the process of homing-in for the female migrants and how migrant female in the texts strategically employ essentialized concepts of femininity as formidable objects in the toolkit for bargaining for a home abroad.

**Discussion.**

In order to contextualize the working thesis, "Emigration in selected transnational fiction by African women writers: A study of female characters of African descent," one of the tasks was to provide background information. A literature review, theoretical framework, research methodology, research objectives, research questions and assumptions, study justification, study scope and delimitations, and the problem statement were also included in this chapter. As a guide for the study, the research proposal document was the source of the chapter.

Several findings were clear from the study. First, despite the disparity in narratives, the investigation that emerged from the first goal of the study of the gendered experience of migration among female characters in the fictional worlds of the chosen texts revealed that the four novels *Behold the Dreamers, Americanah, On Black Sisters' Street, and Beyond the Horizon* shared important thematic areas. These included: the possibility of returning to Africa to establish homes away from the unhomely West; the socioeconomic upheavals and disillusionment that face migrants from formerly colonized African nations upon realizing that their dreams of self-improvement in diasporic havens are merely fantasies that do not materialize; and, third, the physical and cultural displacement from their homes in Africa. A more thorough examination revealed that the four texts' main themes were subject constitution, identity construction, and the ways in which these two are gendered in space and time.

Though "homing-in" is the goal of migrant women, domination by masculine authority becomes an obstacle. To overcome this obstacle, women have used the very subjected bodies to break free and arrive at their goals. These characters have used strategic essentialism and sisterhood to transform the unhomely situations in the diaspora into friendly spaces that can facilitate the process of homing-in. The chosen texts considered in this chapter suggest that the subjection of women, their bodies, and agency by patriarchal power is not unrestricted and unquestionable. In their own unique ways, they decide whether to stay elsewhere or immigrate to Africa. These women settle in by taking use of the opportunities that diasporic spaces provide. Therefore, Ifemelu, Ama, and Neni all move while being more conscious of themselves as women and human beings deserving of respect and dignity and capable of moving forward, whereas Mara and Uju stay overseas. Compared to before they interacted with the diasporic space, these women now possess greater agency and control over their lives and bodies.

Their decision to return to Africa or remain elsewhere is made in their own special ways. Utilizing the chances that diasporic places offer, these women establish themselves. When Mara and Uju remain abroad, Ifemelu, Ama, and Neni all move while growing more aware of their identities as women and human beings who are worthy of dignity and respect and who are able to move forward. These women now have more power and control over their bodies and lives than they did during their interactions with the diasporic sphere. In the next chapter, the ways in which African female diasporic characters reinvent themselves in their new settings are examined.

**Conclusion**

According to the results of the critical analysis of Adichie's Americanh, Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*, Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, and Unigwe's on *Black Sisters' Street*, it is clear that emigration is a 21st-century phenomenon that cannot be ignored. The four authors, through their fiction, depicted situations they have experienced, whether they have lived in the diaspora at some point in their lives, remained in the diaspora, or lived in both Africa and the diaspora, as Adichie bring us to the intriguing realization that emigration is a significant challenge for African women who focus more on the movement than the real conditions in the West and Gulf states.

Postcolonialists like Homi Bhabha attribute this to colonial legacies, such as mimicry, where Africans strive to be like their colonizers in order to achieve greatness. Emigration presents a challenge to African nations because, although it is a medium of exposure to Africans, a good number of them remain in the diaspora voluntarily or unintentionally, thereby benefiting the diasporic states to which they pay taxes rather than their countries of origin, where they only deal with their human trafficking agents and immediate families. They believe that the colonizer is still superior in terms of appearance, which is why Africans choose to lighten their skins (like Efe in *On Black Sisters' Street*) to make themselves appear more attractive; environment is also another factor, which is why Africans decide to leave the third world and its "filth" behind and enjoy the beautifully developed world (like Mara in *Beyond the Horizon*); and behavior, which includes giving up their native African languages in favor of American and English accents for their own gratification (like Ifemelu and Uju in *Americanah).*

## Another legacy of colonialism that the protagonists dealt with was self-hatred. They hated themselves and their customs, and they hated their native places. Uju in *Americanah* does not want Ifemelu to speak Igbo to her children. Dike did not need to study Igbo since Uju believes it is a language that should only be used in emergency situations. Relocating to the West, where their alleged good luck may be discovered, is their quick fix for this issue. They realize that, as much as they would like to, they will never be able to emulate the Westerners, and to their dismay, the West does not provide solutions to their issues. According to Frantz Fanon's theories in *The Wretched of the Earth*, despite the imitation, the native eventually realizes the stark difference and realizes that he cannot be truly white or white enough for the colonizer to treat him as an equal. As a result, he returns to studying his own culture in a romantic and joyous manner.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following suggestions for additional essential research were made:

1. There may be novels that deal with emigration from Western Africa to Asian states, even though this study has focused on female protagonists of African heritage, specifically those from West Africa, moving to Europe and the USA. To determine whether identical circumstances are obtained, comparative research might be carried out.
2. The states of East and Southern Africa also experience emigration to the West. It would be interesting to compare the factors that drive emigration from the West African states to the West with those that drive emigration from the East and South African states to the West.
3. Studying how Easterners and Westerners behave in Africa would also be fascinating. For example, more Chinese males are working on government projects in Kenya. Thus, even within their own borders, do they continue to view Africans in general and African women in particular as the Other? How have these topics been addressed in the writings of novelists and literary scholars like Yvonne Owuor in *The Dragonfly Sea*?
4. It is possible to do a comparative critical examination of the disenfranchisement of male characters of African origin as they are portrayed in books by both African male and female authors.

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