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Beautiful dreams: Deconstructing discourses of redemption in Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* (1995), Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* (2009), Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* (2016)

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Abstract
This paper entails an analysis of how in their different particularities, Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*; Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* and Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* explore the underbelly of notions informing the discourse of a redemptive West for Africans located at the margins of globalisation. The analysis locates Chimamanda's *Americanah* and Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* within the racialised polity in the USA, in the midst of either a global economic meltdown or individual inability to access the fruits of globalisation because of the fact of race or immigration status. It also explores how choicelessness in the job market in Europe informs the radical choice of persisting at the social and economic margins of Europe despite the harsh realities and outcomes in this choice. This paper demonstrates that the questions of place at particular moments in history force a revision of initial fantasy about the notions of the redemptive West. This textual analysis is informed by the postcolonial theory, as articulated by Robert Nichols and Homi Bhabha and their postulations on identity, 'othering' and 'in-between spaces'.

Keywords: African descent, diaspora, female characters, home, identity, immigrants, the West

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Public Interest Statement

Guided by the 'Othering' concept of Postcolonial Theory, articulated by Homi Bhabha, this paper presents an exploration of the pitfalls of the popular emancipatory discourse that the main characters in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* and Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* fall in and out of love with, in view of their encounter with the experience of migration to the Western metropolises.

1.0 Introduction

Lovely things, I thought much about you in childhood.
Before I had you I wanted you dearly
For you are so beautiful and have all my love.
Oh! How beautiful you are and perfectly shaped,
How clean you are and well kept,
I marvel you shine with such brightness . . .
I would never have thought you could cause me so much pain.
(A poem written by a Ugandan schoolboy addressing his shoes, circa 1950). (Qtd in Desai, viii)

The epigraph above has been used to structure the analysis of how utopias of hope slip to dystopias of frustration and how these "so beautiful" places of imagination "cause so much pain" in the reality woven in the narratives under study. In *Americanah*, *On Black Sisters' Street*, *Beyond the Horizon* and *Behold the Dreamers*, the idea of migration, emigration and immigration is the unifying leitmotif. However, return migration is underscored only in Chimamanda's *Americanah* and Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*. In Ama Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* and in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters Street*, the narratives vacillate between the key characters' choice either to return or to settle in the various countries in the West into which they immigrate. This paper explores the pitfalls of the popular emancipatory discourse that the main characters in the four texts fall in and out of love with, in view of their encounter with the experience of migration to the Western metropolises. In their different particularities, these texts explore the underbelly of notions informing the discourse of a redemptive West for Africans located at the margins of globalisation. The first section of this paper locates Chimamanda's *Americanah* and Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* within the racialised polity in the USA, in the midst of either a global economic meltdown or individual inability to access the fruits of globalisation because of the fact of race or immigration status. The second section explores how choicelessness in the job market in Europe informs the radical choice of persisting at the social and economic margins of Europe despite the harsh realities and outcomes in this choice. In the two sections, as demonstrated below, the questions of place at particular moments in history force a revision of initial fantasy about the notions of the redemptive West.

2.0 Literature Review

Gilles Deleuze states that "the highest aim of literature is to leave, escape, cross the horizon and enter another life". True literature, he states, "is the kind of literature that does not conform to or confirm the codes of the established state of things, is 'rhizomatic' literature. The rhizomatic novel sets things in motion, puts things, systems and thoughts to flight" (Deleuze and Parnet, pp. 74-5). Like the rhizome operates with multiplicity and indeterminacy, violating any logic of unified meaning or being, rhizomatic literature, therefore, is decentered hence lending itself to various interpretations. Rhizomatic literature also allows for readers to travel, not physically but imaginatively through

fiction. The authors' thoughts too are decentered, as they can write about Africa while residing in Europe or The United States of America and vice versa. Even though the texts under study can be read from other angles like academic and sociological, this reading concentrates on the aspect of emigration as presented in the selected texts.

Igor Maver asserts that the "Other" is only acceptable when it remains so, without becoming intrusive and "demanding its specifying cultural difference to be accepted by the majority of the population" (p. xi). The desire to lead parallel lives by some groups would clash with tolerance and coexistence, hence the necessity of accommodating those living alongside each other.

The fictionalised diasporic experience demands as much attention as the lived one. As Avtar Brah writes, those "constructed and represented as indigenous" should pay utmost attention and participation to the material and the imaginative spaces of diaspora (p. 209). Such imaginative possibilities, Shackleton states, "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 border logic of race and illiberal nationalism is superseded by the common recognition of political and ethical equality" (p. 4). This illustrates the urgent need to listen to how the narratives explore this "border logic of race and illiberal nationalism" and help in interrogating how such is constructed, and how migrants navigate situations that symbolize the "social and material environments"

These amplified mobilities have usurped the traditional conceptions of "home" in terms of fixed space in particular geographies with fixed borders. As Homi Bhabha notes, the figure of the migrant is "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" (p. 320). Coming to terms with such figuration is disruptive to both migrant and host. This does not necessarily result to negative outcomes as this reading will show, but it also highlights the enriching potential to both parties. Between migration and settlement is a space where social interaction plays out. The question of home as a place where one can be rooted or uprooted also arises.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Robert Nichols defines the term "postcolonial" as the state in which one finds oneself "after" formal colonization. Postcolonialism, he explains, is "predominantly concerned with questions of identity, representation, hybridity, diasporas, migration, etc., than with direct anti-colonial struggle" (p. 116). Such are the questions that are key to this research as it involves the diasporic issues experienced by both the female characters of African descent in the selected novels and actual women of African descent who have relocated to Europe and The United States of America in pursuit of greener pastures. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* states that "subject positions - of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation - that inhabit any claim to identity in the modem world" have been brought to the fore by the movement away from "the singularities of 'class' or 'gender' as primary conceptual and organizational categories". To him, "What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences" (p. 1). The liminal spaces therefore are key to identity formation among transnational female characters of African descent under study. Being African, female, young and having emigrated from Africa to the west predisposes them to cultural differences leading to adverse change of tact for survival in their new environments.

2.2 The mirage of the "American Dream": Adichie and Mbue's narrative rendition of the immigrant experience

"…she would begin the blog post "Sometimes in America, Race Is Class" with the story of his dramatic change, and end with: *It didn't matter to him how much money I had. As far as he was concerned I did not fit as the owner of that stately house because of the way I looked. In America's public discourse, "Blacks" as a whole are often lumped with "Poor Whites." Not Poor Blacks and Poor Whites. But Blacks and Poor Whites. A curious thing indeed*" (*Americanah, p.* 166)

"I have told you what they told me. You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do if you want to succeed." (*Americanah, p.* 119)

The determination to achieve dignified lives gives these two texts the narrative drive that hooks the reader to follow the lives of the female characters as they journey to different places where they hope for the realisation of their dreams. *Americanah* is set in Nigeria, The USA and England; and *Behold the Dreamers* is set in Cameroon and the USA. Within these texts, local migration, which is the movement from rural to urban centres, is initiated by the limiting rural life which offers limited chances for self-actualization. Through the institution of marriage, both physical and social mobility is enabled, though not without the bottlenecks that marriage sometimes comes with. In Adichie's *Americanah*, Nigeria symbolises both an African setting and indigenous home for all of the African characters. Ifemelu, the protagonist, is born and raised in Lagos, until she later relocates to Nsukka for her undergraduate studies, a decision that elated her father who said that it was heartening that "she would go to university in Igboland, since she had lived her whole life in the west [of Nigeria]" (Adichie, p. 89). Relocation thus becomes a forceful determinant for Ifemelu's self-reliance, as she would independently own her own time and determine the friends to relate with.

Writing on the "the colonial influences in Nigeria', Maria Duckham in her thesis entitled '"Americanah-eye-zed" Identity and Transformation of the diasporic subject in *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie' notes that "*Americanah* is a novel that is embedded in the political and cultural heritage of Nigeria" (p. 4). Locating this narrative within the historical particularities of place, Adichie's deft weaving of the narrative allows the yoking of the present situations of the characters to the larger issues of globalisation and immigration, and the discontents that both globalisation and immigration produce together and separately. For instance, numerous strikes that interfere with the university academic calendar in Nigeria elongates the years undergraduate students take to complete a course. The narrative setting of some episodes in the 1990's links with the prevalent discontents wrought by the effects of the Structural Adjustment Programmes that had been deemed conditional for the Third World countries if they were to get funding from the Bretton Woods Institutes namely, The IMF and the World Bank. Introduced in Nigeria in the late 1980's, Abah Danladi notes that the SAP apparatus was:

> a neo-liberal economic reform initiated by the Bretton Woods Institutions; World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which negatively led to the collapse of African economies including Nigeria. The objectives of SAP were intended to restructure and diversify the productive base of the economy and curtail dependence on oil, achieve fiscal and balance payment viability and improve efficiency through private-led development. The strategies for the realization of SAP by government were through adoption of realistic exchange rate policy, devaluation, rationalization of tariff regime to aid diversification, trade and payment liberalization, commercialization and

> privatization of public sector enterprises among others. (p. 2)

These seemingly innocent adjustments eventually led to the economic downturn of many public institutions since, as Charles Harvey observes, "The largest and most important parastatals remained almost everywhere in government ownership and this included the key utilities which continued to provide inefficient and expensive services to the private sector" (p. 142). The quotes above provide the backdrop against the university strikes in *Americana* and the consequent desire by many to move to the West. For Obinze as for Ifemelu, the academically static environment actually "conditioned" the aspiring Nigerians to head West. Having moved to London for a better future which becomes a nightmare, as he is later deported from Britain, as a son of a University professor, Obinze is unable to explain to people in London why he had to emigrate in the first place. Instead, he quietly muses:

> They would not understand why people like him, who were raised well-fed and watered but mired in dissatisfaction, conditioned from birth to look towards somewhere else, eternally convinced that real lives happened in that somewhere else, were now resolved to do dangerous things . . . none of them starving . . . but merely hungry for choice and certainty (Adichie, p. 276).

The narrative tone is not judgemental to those dying to immigrate. Through Obinze's mother, for example, seeing the effects of SAP on university employees is enough to legitimize emigration even as an illegal immigrant. She says: "I understand the students' grievances, but we are not the enemy. The military is the enemy. They have not paid our salary in months. How can we teach if we cannot eat?" (Adichie, p. 91). Lack of pay led to numerous strikes by lecturers, rendering studies retrogressive rather than progressive. The students bristled with the "known and the unknown" (Adichie, p. 91), with unwanted breaks and inadequate finances for transportation back to their homes.

For Ifemelu, going to America for university education is the right thing if she has to escape from time wastage, and poor quality education in Nigeria. In the context of SAP, at the time, Ajadi Timothy Olugbenga notes:

> Those that see education as investment are becoming more aware of the economic and non-economic benefits of education and discovered that public universities are unable to deliver their services as expected due to poor performance as a result of shortage in staff needs, funds, physical facilities etc. Resources needed for the provision of qualitative university education has been on the decline since the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the late 1980's by Ibrahim Babangida's led graduands [who] are half-baked. Despite this, the demand for university education keeps going up (pp. 20-21).

Olugbenga's sentiments are a clear indication of the Nigerian students' thirst for education and future employment, and their encountered disappointment in the public universities. In *Americanah*, a good number of Ifemelu and Obinze's coursemates relocated to America and England in search of both education and economic fulfillment. They either enrolled in various institutions, like Ginika and Ifemelu, secured jobs like Obinze or got into marital 'transactions' like Emenike and Obinze to remain in foreign land.

The overbearing dissatisfaction due to strikes dominates Ifemelu's mind as she feels the

possibility of deferring her dreams:

> She was "restless, antsy; every day she listened to the news, hoping to hear that the strike was over…Her mother asked if she wanted to join the sewing class at church, to keep her occupied, and her father said that that this, the unending university strike, was why young people became armed robbers (Adichie, p. 91).

Unable to withstand academic stagnation in the Nigerian education system, Ifemelu makes her decision to heed Aunty Uju's advice of applying for a scholarship so as to complete her studies in America. Though reluctant, Obinze convinces her to take up the challenge saying: '"You should do it, Ifem. . .You have nothing to lose. Take the SATs and try for a scholarship. Ginika can help you apply to schools. Aunty Uju is there, so at least you have a foundation to start with" ' (Adichie, p. 99). The rationale to emigrate is crafted through the juxtaposition of the present dystopian reality in Nigeria vis-a-vis the utopian reality of America etched in Ifemelu's dreams of students who hold notebooks which are miraculously wear and crease free.

Through simple acts like broken social links and unfulfilled love, the narrative is able to link the daily lives of local Nigerians to discontents of globalisation. Emigration, being an aspect of globalisation bears both fulfilment and discontents. As she chases the 'American Dream', Ifemelu's social links are broken. She loses touch with her peers in Nigeria, and Obinze, the love of her life. Obinze also feels the effects of unfulfilled love when he also relocates to London, and tries to attain English citizenship through an organised marriage. The fact of emigration is the sole cause of their separation. Despite having multiple partners, both Obinze and Ifemelu feel unfulfilled thus eventually rekindling their love at the end of the novel.

Prevalently, from this point, the narrative is focalised through Ifemelu, who the narrative uses as the interpretive voice to render the discontentment with the harrowing experiences in the USA that are in sharp contrast with the utopian dream that motivated her emigration. Notably, Ifemelu's decision to relocate is however informed by her discontentment with the unsatisfactory education and economic situation in Nigeria. She thus is hopeful for reprieve in the USA which she does not experience eventually.

At the core of this experience is the question of belonging. Ifemelu is thrown into identity politics which mark her as the "Other" in The USA. She discovers that she is black for the first time and this places her in the lowest rung on the ladder of privileges and rights. Being an immigrant places her "out of place" as she is made to feel that she does not belong. This situation is mainly felt by most immigrants to the first world hoping to attain that magical life. As Avtar Brah notes, though immigrants get "in" the first world, they are not "of" the first world and thus they begin their journey to the American Dream as inferiorized subjects whose achievement can rarely surpass certain levels (p. 188).

Aunt Uju, the mistress of a now dead military general, comes to The USA to give birth to her son, Dike. Strategically she positions her son into USA citizenship by the fact of being born in America. After General's death, she loses her privileges in Nigeria and uses her son's citizenship to gain entry to The USA thereby escaping persecution by General's relatives. It is in New York that Ifemelu finds her struggling to fit into an unyielding system that has fixed structures of identification premised upon colour and class. In Nigeria, Uju as a mistress, 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. For Uju therefore, America

offers her an opportunity to be self-reliant and raise her son without having to rely on any man. She therefore takes a course in Pharmacy which she thought would pay enough to retain her classy life in New York. But her envisioned idea of the 'American Dream' is crushed by racialized identity politics which are bifurcated by the black/white dyad. Uju faces rejection in her line of duty because of her colour. Whites decline her services as a pharmacist despite her training and attainment of her license to work at the pharmacy. The few who saw her "thought they were doing her a favour by seeing her" (Adichie, p. 172). In this regard, she is 'othered' in the words of Said.

The dream life she had envisioned for her son Dike, starts to crumble because of the inescapable social atmosphere he lives in. Uju no longer loves the Flatlands, the black dominated Brooklyn neighbourhood, for fear of her son, Dike getting spoilt by other ill-mannered black kids. An incident in which Dike was found with a girl in a closet at Miss Brown's observing each other's private parts enhanced Uju's fears. She tells Ifemelu: "All those wild children with no home training, he is learning rubbish from them. I've decided to move to Massachusetts at the end of this term" (Adichie, p. 142). As the American Dream becomes a mirage in Brooklyn, she makes her decision of relocating to Massachusetts, which to her is a much better place because it is white-dominated and has better equipped elementary schools.

Signalling an identity crisis, the narrator presents Uju as a character who is always on the move, always trying to root herself in an unaccommodating society. She finds herself struggling to opt out of a financially one-sided, draining relationship with a Congolese man, Bartholomew, whose arrogant and self-centred personality exemplifies typical patriarchy. Her resistance to domination, 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" (p. 283). Persevering at the beginning, with the hope of attaining citizenship through him, she gives up when she realises that he was only with her for his personal financial gain, but offered no form of security neither for herself nor her son. She has to struggle to make ends meet, working two jobs and studying to improve the quality of her and her son's lives. Eventually, she acquires her licence to practise medicine, secures a job thus significantly improves the quality of their lives as a result of personally controlling her finances. With Kweku, a Ghanaian man, Uju experiences love and happiness again. At this point, despite the struggle, Uju's stay in America pays off both academically and emotionally, with the exception of the racial prejudice she experiences from white patients at her place of work.

Ifemelu's arrival in the USA completes her vision of a utopian society which she had yearned for. Her idea of America mirror's Adichie's own from a tender age. In *The Danger of a Single Story* Adichie observes that:

> When I began to write at about the age of seven, stories with pencil illustration that my poor other was obligated to read, I wrote exactly the kind of stories I was reading. All my characters were white and blue-eyed, they played in the snow and, they ate apples and they talked a lot about the weather, how lovely it was that the sun had come out. Now, this despite the fact that I lived in Nigeria. I had never been outside Nigeria. We didn't have snow, we ate mangoes, and we never talked about the weather, because there was no need (n.pag).

Like Adichie, Ifemelu arrives in America with "a single story" about America as heaven. Ifemelu's first encounter with America immediately rattles her, a foreshadowing of things to come, and which

she does not take note of. To begin with, on her reception at the airport, Ifemelu noticed Uju's coldness and raggedness, unusual of her Nigerian look (Adichie, p. 104). Secondly, in the night at Aunt Uju's kitchen, Ifemelu sees a fat cockroach and gets surprised at its presence in her earlier perceived wonderland. She however lets it go, labelling it an 'American cockroach'. Had it been a 'Nigerian cockroach', she would have killed it instantly. In addition, Uju offers her a blanket to sleep on the floor, a common occurrence while visiting her grandmother in Nigeria, but she had not envisioned this in mighty America. She wonders: "-but this was America at last, glorious America at last, and she had not expected to bed on the floor" (Adichie, p. 106). Had Ifemelu paid attention to these selected instances, she would have been expectant of the struggles that lay ahead of her in America.

Later on, interactions with America make her, for the first time, realize that she is an African from Nigeria. Prior to her relocation, her Africanness and origin were not issues that interfered with her belonging. In The USA, however, race was considered important as it dictated the treatment one got from the predominant race. Ginika, her friend who is of mixed race had mentioned to Ifemelu that she had a slightly easier time in the USA because she was not purely African, like Ifemelu. Ifemelu also realized that her Nigerian accent gave her away, thus she found it intimidating when after introducing herself on campus, an American clerk drags her speech with the assumption that Ifemelu could not understand her if she spoke in the American accent. Noting that language is a marker of identity, and accent in the USA may interfere with her pursuit of the American Dream, Ifemelu then decides to learn and master the American accent so as to fit in. She also privately studies the history of America to decipher the origin of racial identification and American culture. This new knowledge consoles her and as she reads, "America's mythologies began to take on meaning, America's tribalisms-race, ideology and region –became clear". This gave her the confidence to speak in class, the courage to disagree with professors without a "scolding about being disrespectful but an encouraging nod" (Adichie, p. 136).

As Ifemelu wades through the identity crisis generated by inability to root herself in America despite her efforts, memories of her life in Nigeria become a constant refuge. The narrative renders this through a "non-linear" back and forth plotting that signals both the present frustrations and the romantic love of promise which was broken by the frantic rush towards the American Dream. The constant reference to her now lost relationship with Obinze signifies the discontents of migration, which brings to Ifemelu the feeling of having lost both the past and the present. Eric Maritim notes:

> [The]love story between the two central characters, Ifemelu and Obinze Maduewesi, constantly morphs into stories of the difficult experiences of migration and settlement in contexts where their expectations are not always met and where there are already established prejudices against them as black migrants (p. 58).

Though she excels academically, she still feels she has no roots in America yet she is torn between it and her Nigerian identity. As Boyce would describe this position, Ifemelu occupies 'that in-between space that is neither here nor there' (Nayak, p. 8). To placate her disrupted sense of being, she tries various strategies to enhance her sense of belonging. At first she connects with Obinze through the telephone and emails. After cutting connections with Obinze, 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. Ifemelu's relation with Curt was uncomfortable to her as she later reveals, since he always felt the need to protect her from racist remarks. Regardless, Curt constantly appreciates her African features and kinky hair. He

is overly proud of her and her achievements. He helps her secure a more decent job through which she acquired her citizenship.

Eventually, Ifemelu appropriates the cyberspace as an accomplice in claiming her space in the USA. Through her blog, "she engages not only in deconstructing the notion about other nationalities but also in similarly treating an externally imposed national Nigerian identity" (Maritim, p. 58). Essentialising Ifemelu as fragile and in need of protection, Curt kept secretly sending her money to support her blog in spite of their split after Ifemelu's infidelity. Still struggling to find roots in America, Ifemelu gets into 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 to leave but maintained their friendship. In her pursuit of the "American Dream", Ifemelu realises that her ability to fully settle in The USA as a fulfilled woman is indeed a mirage, prompting her decision to relocate to Nigeria in the end so as to find her purpose and fulfilment.

The "American Dream" defined as 'that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement' (p. xii) by Adams James in his book titled *The Epic of America* remains an illusion to Ifemelu and Uju in *Americanah* and Neni in *Behold the Dreamers* as they lack deserved opportunities due to their race and origin despite their qualifications, a far cry from what they had accepted in America.

2.3 Degraded Womanhood: Corporeality in Darko's Beyond the Horizon and Unigwe's On Black Sisters' Street

The headlines scream of abandoned babies, brutalized and murdered women: wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, girlfriends, of ritual executions, of incest and rape, of sale of children, of child labour and of a general degeneration of society into one of oppression and violence. (Denkabe and Yitah, p. 283)

The two novels above conjoin the idea of migration and embodiment. This section demonstrates how corporeality- the physical female body in this case- is figured as an agent of retrieving and reconstructing womanhood which has been degraded in the process and experience of migration. This section is interested in the narrative mechanics of such retrieval and reconstruction. *Beyond the Horizon* employs the first person narration, where the voice of Mara intimately recounts the harrowing experience of migration to Europe. This immigration transforms her understanding of the self as an agent of mapping the course of her life away from the dehumanising reliance on others who actually are agents of degrading her womanhood. In *On Black Sisters' Street,* an omniscient narrator is the mediating optic through whom the experience of being a migrant woman from Africa is rendered.

The two narrative positions differently use the idea of devalued womanhood and its reclamation as the pivotal strand through which the complexity of migration to "European Heaven" is questioned. As the focal characters grow in an Africa constrained by patriarchal notions of what being a woman should be, these characters take the reader through a journey in search of self-realization outside the constraining spaces in Africa. The harrowing accounts of their search is rendered through the experiences that their bodies undergo. These bodies become either the agents of emancipation or agents of further entrapment. Theirs are bodies on the move, telling the moving stories about transition from objectified womanhood to a reconstructed selfhood through time and space.

This reading goes beyond H. Porter Abbot who argues for the centering of characters and their actions in delivering the story, to illustrating how both the characters and their actions constitute the narrative discourse. Mainly, the two works deliberate on the experience of migration through the

multiple subjectivity of women as wives, mothers, children, sisters, cousins, mistresses, sex workers, caretakers among others. In all these aspects, "womanhood" has been variously degraded but it is through the moment of migration that the womanhood is recuperated from subjection to agency. As such, the spatial diametrics of disabling Africa and enabling European diaspora are questioned.

The protagonists in *Beyond the Horizon* and *On Black Sisters' Street* have similar predicaments in that their pursuits for independence and success, which lead to their emigration to a perceived magical first world, end up in disarray when they find themselves in dungeons, with their bodies being the bargaining points with their bosses. These protagonists' womanhood is degraded in Africa and diaspora, but the novels' plots allow them a chance to make lifetime decisions at the end of the process. Through what Goesser Assaiante refers to as "the corporeal dimension of human existence" thus: "Hamann urges human subjectivity to orient itself within the corporeal, reveling in its profane, yet divinely granted, existence. There is a recuperative joy to be found in the body, reflected in the gustatory, tactile, acoustic, and sexual metaphors found throughout his work" (p. 3), the experience of migration focuses on female characters at home, work, domestic and alien spaces. These experiences have major effects on their lives, actions and inaction. Their resilience, struggle for survival and individual strengths enable them overturn their degradation and stagnation.

The idea of corporeality is central to unraveling the various thematics in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, including migration, patriarchy, sexual violence, globalization and citizenship. All of these thematics are interrogated through the bodies of Mara and other women as they relate with their day-to-day lives. For example, activities that relate to home as espoused by Somerville derive their significance from their embeddedness to corporeality. For Somerville, the home is the "center of family life; a place of retreat, safety and relaxation, freedom and independence; self-expression and social status; a place of privacy, continuity and permanence; a financial asset; and a support for work and leisure activities" (pp. 227-228). Mara's corporeality and the images that accompany it demand of the reader to pay attention to her experiences as etched on her body. When the reader first meets her, she is reflecting about her life in Germany revealed by the body she sees in the mirror she is holding:

> I am sitting here before my large oval mirror. I like oval things… I am staring painfully at an image. My image? No! – What is left of what once used to be my image…I fear what I see when I look at myself. I shiver at the sight of my sore cracked lips which still show through the multiple layers of the glossy crimson paint I apply to hide them… several bruises and scars left generously there by the sadistic hands of my best payers, my best spenders…Small was my little finger…It's bent. Its bone's been displaced and it looks weird… (pp. 1-2).

This passage, coming on the very first and second pages, is crucial not only because it inaugurates the story in corporeal terms, but it also centers the body as a text which complements narrative rendition. Though the passage comes at the beginning of the text, technically it is at the very end of the plot since it shows the culmination of a tortuous journey of being a migrant in Europe. Through the passage above, the narrative situates the body, and deformed materiality as witnesses of the harrowing experience of migration to the woman who owns it. For Mara, migration to Europe has deformed her being to the point that she only sees "What is left of what once used to be my image". Devaluation of womanhood is thus cast through the difference between the present body image and the image that "used to be".

The body is an important avenue of understanding the degradation of Mara's womanhood in

the different stages of her life, from her days as Akobi's wife in Ghana, to her days as a prostitute in Germany. As Kimani Kaigai demonstrates, "the symbolism of the body" is an instrumental narrative resource since "bodies act as instruments of socialization and as sites for the construction of different subjectivities" (p. 9). In this regard, therefore, it is important to pay attention to the institutions within which these bodies circulate and the processes that culminate the degradation of womanhood.

The institution of marriage is one such institution within which Mara's body is central. From the outset, Mara's function as a wife only makes sense insofar as her body satisfies her husband's sexual needs. Mara does not see any problem in serving Akobi's needs:

> Many things that happened in my marriage appeared to me to be matter-of-course things that happened in all marriages and to all wives. . ., it was natural, too, that when he demanded it, I slept on the concrete floor on just my thin mat while he slept all alone on the large grass mattress since, after all, mother had taught me that a wife was there for a man for one thing, and that was to ensure his well-being, which included his pleasure. . . I regarded my suffering as part of being a wife, and endured it just as I would menstrual pain (Darko, pp. 12-13).

The effect of Mara's unquestioning normalisation of suffering is registered through the pains that the body feels after nights on the cold floor or the beatings and "bad treatment" that just like her menstrual pain, she "would have wished it wasn't there" (p. 16). While Asempasah and Christabel read Mara's "complicity in her shameful state in Germany" (p. 162), as well as in her marriage, this reading looks at the body not only as the key locus of enacting devalued womanhood, but also as the sphere in which reversal of such degradation is made possible.

Although Mara does not yet know, her migration to Germany is only made possible by the use to which her body can be put to in order to generate money for Akobi and his friend Osey. In fact, when Osey comes to receive her at the airport in Germany, her bodily looks are enough for Osey to tell Mara that she was not "a bad looking chicken" (p. 66). Her body thus appraised as consumable, Mara encounters her first instance of devaluation as a married woman when Osey intrusively questions her about what her body "underneath" is clothed in. When she seems befuddled, Osey grimly asks her if he should look underneath for her. Significant here is the way in which her dignity as a woman is degraded when "without warning Osey suddenly shoved his hand into [her] sweatshirt from below" (p. 65).

The degradation of Mara's womanhood has its roots in the family under patriarchal patronage. The family institution, normalises what Nancy Lagreca refers to as "retrograde notions of woman hood" (p. 2). These notions derive from rigid traditions whose definition of womanhood is structured around power hierarchies that unquestionably places men as authorities that women must respect. For instance, Mara points out that she saw her mother "worship" and obey her father "daily" regardless of whether his judgement is right or wrong (Darko, p. 14). As Mama Kiosk, Mara's friend in the city cautions, Mara's husband Akobi "is one of those men who have no respect for village people . . .Tradition demands that the wife respects, obeys and worships her husband" (Darko, p. 13). So when Akobi buys new clothes for himself without buying his wife any, Mara's reaction of marvelling at the beauty of the shirt and not questioning why she does not get new clothes simply "because he is the man" (Darko, p. 13) is to be understood from the familial roots that demand an unquestioning womanhood. Later on Akobi goes to work impeccably "smart" in "pencil-striped grey trousers, snow-white shirt, thin black tie and sharply pointed Beatles boots" (Darko, p. 25) while Mara sells

eggs in "shabby clothes" which she describes as "my old faded clothes, my crude thick-soled rubber-tyre slippers" (Darko, p. 25). When she later runs to her village because of her husband's violent treatment of her, even while pregnant, her impoverished state invites empathy from the reader. She is "barefoot" and "a pair of slippers, even crude ones, was a luxury" (Darko, p. 28). The cultural logic driving this subjection of the woman is based on the perceived precarity and weakness of the woman who must be meek and submissive to the man, who in return should take "care, good care of the wife" (p. 13) as the recompense.

Under such demeaning notions of women and womanhood, Mara, now as a married woman, must look up to her husband to chart the course of her life. Even before she moves to Europe, Mara is already used to marital violence. She is physically beaten and sexually demeaned. She has come to terms with the uncertainty of "whether Akobi would stop beating" her or whether he would buy her "some new clothes" or even "resume giving [her] chop money" (Darko, p. 16). Regulated this way, Mara should question her arranged relocation to Europe under the conniving hand of Akobi, but she does not. Contrary to the liberating potential that Mara sees in her migration, she actually ends up in a worse off existence when her husband forces her into selling pleasure in brothels while Akobi takes the money she makes. In Europe, her status as a wife is eroded by having her body become the apparatus of making money for her husband.

In conclusion, therefore, the wounds that are etched on her body remind her of the gruesome nights with customers who claw her back as well as those others that deform her body by biting off her fingers. In the end, when she decides not to return home, it is because prostitution has degraded her womanhood while her body's deformity bears witness to the demeaning work she has to do to survive. Europe has indeed enhanced her dehumanisation as a woman.

3.0 Conclusion

Through an exploration of embodied subjectivity, this paper has looked into the complex way that migrant subjectivity of women is caught up between personal dreams and the attendant nightmares in the pursuit of a better life in the West. Having common African roots, the immigrant female characters share their lives' experiences with immigrant male characters both while in Africa and in the diaspora. 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 women's bodies are used by the male characters to facilitate the relocation from Africa to the West though with different motives including educating them, marrying them or turning them into sex workers. These male characters insist on controlling the bodies of the vulnerable women. The women are controlled both physically and economically while in Africa and Europe. It is noteworthy that all the female characters in the selected novels share their experiences with each other, making the use of narrative as a cathartic instrument of highlighting the striking similarities of the circumstances under which the women emigrated from their various African countries. Their stories show how the majority of women are on the receiving end of both bodily and material control by malevolent forces of global capitalism.

While the female characters are excited with the relocation, highly expectant of good fortunes, they end up trapped into sexual slavery. Germany, Belgium and The USA respectively are perceived as escape routes by the protagonists from their supposedly miserable lives in Ghana and Nigeria. Their perception of Ghana and Nigeria as locations of existential dislocation, pushes them to relocate to Europe which, to them is a location of promise. By the time some of them untangle themselves from enslavement, their bodies have already borne the blunt side of the West.

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