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RETHINKING FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS IN THIRD-GENERATION NIGERIAN WOMEN'S FICTION

Third-generation Nigerian female writers' representation of gender in local spaces through the rethinking of family relationships reflects a development and change from the first and second generation female writers Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, and Ifeoma Okoye. In a comparative analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), Unoma Azuah's *Sky-High Flames* (2005), Sade Adeniran's *Imagine This* (2007) and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), a distinct pattern emerges of the young girl-child / woman character developing into a matured, strong womanist. As female characters challenge their familial relationships, they develop their sense of personhood, reclaiming wholeness, authority and female subjectivity, changing prescribed roles and structures.

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The butterfly [...] is colourful; beautiful; flies from flower to flower [...] They begin life as a maggot [...] gradually they change, little by little, day by day. Until one day, *kpam*, ugly maggot has changed into a butterfly!

Ogo Akube-Ogbata, *Egg-Larva-Pupa-Woman*

The works of third-generation Nigerian women writers Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Unoma Azuah, Sefi Atta and Sade Adeniran reconstruct previous notions of women in stereotypical and subjugated positions, charting the growth of female characters and the ways in which female protagonists emerge into agency and independence. Their writings provide a composite portrait of emerging Nigerian women that are educated, career-oriented and strong-willed,

while being wives, mothers and daughters, a combination that replaces the idea of domesticity that has long governed the construction of women in Nigerian literature. Third-generation Nigerian female characters capture the change from female characters in first and second generation Nigerian women's writings. Their female metamorphosis and self-actualization begins from adolescence, marking a shift from earlier representations of female characters.

This article will analyse works of third-generation Nigerian women writers, and the ways in which young female characters empower themselves through the rethinking of family relationships. In the narratives, Adichie's *Kambili*, Azuah's *Ofunne*, Atta's *Enitan* and Adeniran's *Lola* are young girls who grow into independent, spirited and self-assertive women. The use of a young protagonist as a prevalent technique is significant in implying the centrality the female character's perspective takes in the works of these writers, highlighting the way in which the protagonists seek agency at an early age. A comparative analysis of these third-generation writers works' will depict the varying approaches used by female characters to redefine previously understood notions of family relationships.

For this article, I locate this discourse within the framework of womanist theory expounded by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi and Alice Walker. Using womanist theory, I showcase resilient female characters challenging traditional structures, changing mindsets and practices of Nigerian society in order to dismantle female oppression, thereby offering a fundamental affirmation of the Nigerian woman's quest for agency and self-determination. There are various epistemological positions in which women's writings may be viably situated. They include an accretion of theories such as African feminism, stiwanism (from STIWA: Social Transformation Including Women in Africa), and Africana Womanism, which all ultimately conglomerate towards expressions of various scholars' stances. Particularly confounding to this discussion is the location of African feminist theory within African women's writings. Although African feminist theorists like Carol Boyce Davies and Susan Arndt articulate African feminism as a theory that combines feminist concerns with African concerns, the viability of African feminism is challenged by Africana womanist theorist Clenora Hudson-Weems, who articulates the impossibility of amalgamating feminism into African concerns, as feminism was "conceptualized and adopted by White women [and] involves an agenda that was designed to meet the needs and demands of that particular group" (Hudson-Weems, 47). Although

debatable, this perspective cannot be overlooked and we find first and second-generation African women writers like Nwapa, Aidoo, Emecheta and Bâ themselves being defensive and indignant whenever they are referred to as feminist.

Thus, embedded within the African female struggle for self-articulation, womanhood and empowerment is the greater battle to define evolving ideologies and theories. As such, Ogunyemi and Walker's womanist theory can be applied to third-generation Nigerian women's writings as a line of inquiry to examine the challenges post-independent Nigerian female characters face, the process of empowerment and growth they experience from an adolescent age and the ways in which commonalities emerge in these texts. Similarly, African womanism's commitment to Nigerian society also addresses the effects of colonial rule transmitted to post-independent Nigeria, demonstrating the female characters' refusal to accept ideals of physical aggression and intellectual domination. Although Alice Walker's womanist theory draws on the African-American experience, we find her definition of womanist theory useful in providing a wholesome definition of the female quest for womanhood and empowerment. We find Ogunyemi herself conceding the usefulness of drawing on African American black writings in *Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English* (1985) as they share similar aesthetics in establishing the female subject. Moreover, it is relevant to use Walker's and Ogunyemi's discourse of womanist theory concurrently as their definitions overlap, implying a general concern for the development and self-definition of the Black female subject.

Third-generation Nigerian writers herald the arrival of a generation that continues Nigeria's rich literary heritage. The role of third-generation Nigerian female writers is particularly burdensome as they question the myths swallowed and fed by their mothers under oppressive Nigerian patriarchal strictures. They redress misconceptions of women's allotted role within the domestic sphere, encouraging women to see beyond the roles as "wives", "mothers" and "daughters" to build an individual identity for themselves. Interestingly, young female characters like Lola Ogundele (*Imagine This*, 2004), Enitan (*Everything Good Will Come*, 2005), Kambili (*Purple Hibiscus*, 2004) and Ofunne (*Sky-High*

Flames, 2005) are used to depict the growth of Nigerian women towards agency and self-determination from an early age, in a form of *Bildungsroman* in Nigerian literature. Lola, Enitan, Kambili and Ofunne are Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta's *Efuru*, *Dora*, *Agnes*, *Rose*, *Nnu Ego*, *Kehinde* magnified and fully realized: responsible, courageous, audacious, willful and whole. They embody Alice Walker and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi's definition of womanist characteristics that enable them to work towards asserting their independence in their various experiences and family relationships. Through these characters, third-generation female writers unmask the socio-cultural strictures of Nigerian society and create new spaces for young Nigerian women to inhabit.

Third-generation women writers draw from the legacy of their foremothers, trailblazers who went against the grain in their actions and their writings to challenge prevailing notions about what women could or could not do. Nigerian critic Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie contends that there is a need for the Nigerian woman's personhood to be recognized, "a concept of her as a person first, and a person herself [...] [rather than] an appendage to someone else- a man [...] claimable by herself and without a reference to anybody else" (140). In *Purple Hibiscus*, *Sky-High Flames*, *Everything Good Will Come* and *Imagine This*, Adichie, Azuah, Atta and Adeniran's Kambili, Ofunne, Enitan and Lola are used as platforms to construct the development of the Nigerian female personhood from the early years of adolescence "unapologetically central to the realist representation of a recognizable social world", rather than appendages attached to their male counterparts as seen in Nwapa and Emecheta's early works (Bryce, 49). This validates the significance of third-generation Nigerian female writings to the African literary canon, highlighting the growth and transformation of young female Nigerian characters by repositioning female representations. In challenging patriarchal dominance and analyzing the "absent" mother, these female writers display the process of empowerment female characters experience. This process of reproducing and reassessing Nigerian individuality reflects womanist characteristics of fluidity, self-definition and agency, depicting the rise of the young Nigerian female character.

Challenging Patriarchal Dominance

The representation of the dominant male has long governed the Nigerian literary canon in texts such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* (1961) and Ben Okri's masterpiece trilogy *The Famished*

Road (1991), *Songs of Enchantment* (1993) and *Infinite Riches* (1998) where the patriarch of the family decides the family's daily actions and holds the power to influence their thoughts. More often than not in texts such as the above, the male character is not only the central exponent but also the antagonist who dominates other people. Daughters are often depicted as commodities rather than persons, taken under their father's authoritative wing until the time comes to pass on that responsibility to their husbands. The works of third-generation Nigerian women writers portray female characters challenging two forms of domination, one perpetuated by the father figure and the other by the husband who continues the practice of subjugation and female subordination. The challenge involves a process of metamorphosis where female characters experience conflict between their expected passive obedience and their search for individual agency and personhood. This metamorphosis is in line with Walker and Ogunyemi's womanism, which theorises the key elements and experiences faced by women of African descent in developing their empowerment and female identities. Ogunyemi highlights that the philosophy which distinguishes womanist theory is "the dynamism of wholeness and self-healing that one sees in the positive integrative endings of womanist novels" (28). This is an important component towards integrating and understanding third-generation women's writings, in which Kambili (*Purple Hibiscus*), Ofunne (*Sky-High Flames*), Enitan (*Everything Good Will Come*) and Lola's (*Imagine This*) struggles and triumphs epitomize the reformulating of contemporary Nigerian female representations.

In the texts of third-generation woman writers, masculine authoritarian power is exposed as a tool to manipulate female characters into actions and decisions desirable to the father figure. The young female character's response to the father figure / patriarch in the family usually begins with undue admiration. It is the experience of some act of violence, the recognition of unfair treatment and the search for self-agency that causes the female character to evolve. In *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), Adichie highlights the god-like admiration Kambili holds for her father, Eugene Achike. She vies for her father's admiration, her almost obsessive desire to please her father is also seen when she comes out second place in her class exams feeling "stained by failure" (Adichie, 39). However, there is a complex correlation in the novel as Kambili's need to please her father also stems from fear. Adichie describes the twisted psychological power held by the father figure that moulds the female character's mind not only into fearful obedience but also undue admiration. The psychological power held by the

patriarch of the family is also seen in Unoma Azuah's *Sky-High Flames*, where Ofunne is forced into a position of compliance for marriage, so that her bride-price may absolve her family from debt despite her desire to continue her education, become an independent woman and eventually marry a husband of her choice.

The Nigerian female characters' process towards empowerment can be paralleled to the metamorphic process of womanist theory where "the young girl inherits womanism after a traumatic event [...] or after an epiphany or as a result of the experience of racism, rape, death in the family, or sudden responsibility" (Ogunyemi, 28). It is in learning to cope within this experience that the female character develops a sense of agency and personhood. This search for female identity can also be linked to the *Black Feminist Statement: The Combahee River Collective* (1982), where the quest for independence is locked within the process of oppression and the concept of identity politics. Black women theorists like Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith, authors of the feminist statement, reject pedestals and female subjugation to suggest that women should create their own identities. This idea moves beyond reclaiming stolen freedom but rather explores the idea of developing a sense of one's own distinct individuality. Power then is transmitted from the hands of the oppressor to the subject, which leads to agency and self-identification.

This process of transmission is seen in *Purple Hibiscus* when Kambili challenges her father's domination after her exposure to the liberated lifestyle led by her Auntie Ifeoma and Amaka. Auntie Ifeoma and Amaka are womanists who are audacious, willful and courageous, unlike Kambili who trembles at the mention of her father. Kambili is Alice Walker's Celie in *The Color Purple* (1983), who needs to develop an independent spirit. Kambili like Celie "[explores] the difficult path of someone who starts out in life already a spiritual captive, but who, through her own courage and the help of others, breaks free into the realization that she, like Nature itself, is a radiant expression" (Walker, ix). Kambili's brutal beating after trying to salvage her grandfather's painting begins what Ogunyemi describes as the female characters' metamorphosis towards being a womanist "after a traumatic event" (Ogunyemi, 72). Kambili's acknowledgement of her father's weaknesses challenges his dominance over her and begins her process towards self-empowerment. This act of realization is also seen in Sade Adeniran's *Lola (Imagine This)*, who, after receiving a brutal beating from her father after her brother's Adebola's death, begins to see her father's lack

of paternal responsibility. An interesting parallel can be drawn between the way in which both these female characters curl up into fetus positions on the floor when they receive beatings from their fathers. During her cruel experience, Kambili “lay on the floor, curled tight like the picture of a child in the uterus” (Adichie, 210). On the other hand, Lola “rolled up into a ball on the floor while the strokes kept on landing” (Adeniran, 122-23). Adichie and Adeniran clearly imply the process of returning to their childlike state and rising from such a traumatic event, with phoenix-like qualities which give these young female characters strength to break away from the patriarchal hold and instead discover an identity separate to their former selves, completing the process of transmission, placing power and decision-making into their hands.

The second form of patriarchal dominance challenged in the writings of third-generation women is the husband-wife relationship. In Nigerian society, the father’s assumed responsibility and dominance over his daughter is transferred to her husband, who becomes her new figure of authority. This is a binding theme in Unoma Azuah’s *Sky-High Flames* and Sefi Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come*. However, unlike most of Nwapa, Emecheta and Okoye’s heroines, Azuah’s Ofunne and Atta’s Enitan are fully realized young female womanist characters who do not accept their subjugated and silenced positions. They do not allow their lives to be governed by their husbands but instead break away from their marital ties in pursuit of their ambitions which epitomize their identities. Ofunne and Enitan are Emecheta’s Nnu Ego realized and Kehinde magnified because of their outrageous, courageous and willful behavior. Unlike Emecheta’s infamous female character Nnu Ego who lives her life devoted to her husband and children, only to die alone on the wayside, Ofunne and Enitan do not allow themselves to be governed by the dictates of their tradition. Although Ofunne marries Oko Okolo out of her obligation towards her parents, when she loses her baby to syphilis she contracted from his promiscuity, she chooses not to return to Oko or remarry. Similarly, Enitan chooses to leave her husband Niyi when he forbids her from getting entangled with Nigerian politics. Ofunne and Enitan reposition the Nigerian husband-wife relationship in their stand against their husbands. They refuse to allow decisions to be made on their behalf. As such, third-generation women writers give importance to the dignity and personhood of the young Nigerian woman.

The rethinking of the Nigerian husband-wife relationship in this generation’s writing continues to challenge the mother Africa trope. Mineke

Schipper and Florence Stratton respectively subvert the placing of women on pedestals to embody images of nation and tradition dictated by masculine definitions. Instead of allowing the female subject to be constructed according to a masculine vision, third-generation female writers rebuke the trope's exploitation of female identification with tradition. By challenging the male figures of authority in their lives Ofunne and Enitan do not allow themselves to be calcified through traditional dictates of patriarchal supremacy but rather create spaces of independence for themselves. Although both Ofunne and Enitan are wives and mothers, they do not create an identity for themselves based on their motherhood. Rather, the desire to participate in the public realm beyond their cultural and social circle encourages them towards individual mobility and agency.

Kambili, Ofunne, Lola and Enitan challenge the masculinist conceptualization of female identity in their relationships with their fathers and husbands. Although the challenging of these understood family ties involve the severing of particular relationships, third-generation female characters do not willingly accept the private domain of domesticity allotted to them. Standing against patriarchal dominance is seen clearly in the texts as one of the key factors that lead towards the empowerment of young female characters.

The "Absent" Mother

The "absent" mother is a key element in third-generation women's writings. Representations of the mother-daughter relationship are complex in nature. While Alice Walker and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi's womanist theory highlights the importance of female presence in helping young women towards achieving their sense of agency and self-identification, the figure of the mother in third-generation writings is "absent". Although the Nigerian mothers in the novels, Beatrice (*Purple Hibiscus*), Constance (*Imagine This*), Mama Ofunne (*Sky-High Flames*) and Victoria (*Everything Good Will Come*) may not necessarily be physically absent, they are emotionally absent in their spiritual connectivity with their daughters. However, this severance of maternal ties does not render the female characters void but instead equips them with emotional fortitude to achieve their sense of empowerment. Young third-generation female characters instead "fearlessly pull out of [themselves] and look at and identify with [...] the living creativity" despite the lack of support received from their mothers (Walker, 237).

Before addressing the absent mother-daughter relationship, some discussion needs to take place to understand the psychology of absence in third-generation Nigerian mothers. Kambili's mother Beatrice, throughout most of the text, is physically and emotionally blind towards the abuse of her husband. She spends her days polishing her *étagère*, symbolically attempting to live in an idealized world while avoiding the reality around her. Lola's mother Constance leaves her father because of his abusive ways, abandoning her children to regain some semblance of dignity and personhood for herself. Ofunne's mother, Mama Ofunne, parrots her husband's wishes for Ofunne's marriage on the basis of traditional Igbo family obligation. Enitan's mother Victoria is unable to show her daughter the love of a mother because she is consumed with grief for her deceased son. These generations of mothers are second generation women, very much like those in Emecheta's novels, who find themselves immobile and shackled within the patriarchal dominance propagated by tradition and culture. They are a generation of women who have internalized this form of living as a norm as a result of colonial displacement, experiencing a triple colonization.

However, it would be a limited assessment to say that all these women remain within an oppressed position. Beatrice poisons her husband when she awakens to the reality of her family's abuse, symbolized by the smashing of the *étagère* in the text. Although Constance abandons her children, she finds the strength to leave her abusive relationship, rather than continue to live within it, as would many women in her culture. Despite the fact that their actions seem extreme, mothers in third-generation novels do take some form of action to liberate themselves. Yet this is done at expense of their relationship with their daughters.

The strained mother-daughter relationship in third-generation writings seems to redefine Walker's womanist manifest in *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens*, which argues that young women, as daughters, should draw strength and courage from their mother's heritage as well as imitate their brave actions to define their life. In the case of third-generation female characters, it is other maternal figures, either female members of their family or other women figures in their community, that fill in the gap which is left void by the "absent" mother, as will be discussed below.

The lack of maternal interaction between mothers and daughters within the text is a key factor that motivates third-generation Nigerian Igbo female characters towards self-empowerment. The recognition of their mother's inability

to take action, coupled with their own desire for change, stirs them towards mobility. In each of these texts, there are defining moments in their relationship with their mothers that trigger change within these young Igbo female characters. These moments either fuelled by rage or realization, act as navigation points for change in the female characters' lives. Thus, when Kambili regains consciousness in the hospital, she resents her mother not only for her inability to stop her father's abuse but also for the excuses she creates for him afterwards. Kambili "wished [she] could get up and hug her, and yet [she] wanted to push her away, to shove her so hard that she would topple over the chair [...] it was hard to turn [her] head, but [she] did it and looked away" (Adichie, 213-214). Finality is reflected in Kambili's action as she turns her head away from her mother. It is at this moment that Kambili seems to emotionally sever her ties from her mother's physical and emotional baggage, to work towards her own empowerment. This process of empowerment may not involve drastic actions or reactions but rather a psychology of willfulness and conscious decision-making.

This similar pattern of empowerment can be traced in Unoma Azuah's *Sky-High Flames*. Ofunne decides to leave Oko when she finds out her baby has died from the syphilis she contracted from him. Although her mother tells her in the hospital that her marital problems with Oko can be settled through a communal discussion between both their families, Ofunne "[resolves] in the hospital to leave Oko for good and never to set [her] eyes on him and his parents" (Azuah, 160). Like Kambili, Ofunne's trigger point is when she realizes the impact of her dysfunctional marriage to Oko. She refuses to listen to her mother propagate the idea that she may still be able to have another child with Oko, telling her mother "'there is no child, and if there is, it might as well die. I want nothing of that man,' [she] said and walked ahead of her [mother]" (Azuah, 160). As Kambili physically turns her head away from Beatrice, Ofunne walks ahead of her mother, leaving behind the shackling cultural inheritance held by her mother to pursue a future she intends to carve out for herself. Just as Ogunyemi has defined a young girl's growth into a womanist through experiencing a traumatic event, this example illustrates the womanist theory that there are trigger points in the young female characters' lives that act as defining moments leading them towards their process of empowerment. This usually happens towards the last portions of the novel where the female character has an encounter with her "self". This is a prevalent pattern in third-generation female writings, indicating the female character's resolve to dictate her own future as

opposed to allowing it to be dictated for her.

The binary construct in the mother–daughter relationship sets one generation of women apart from the other. However, a clear indication of this difference spurs young third-generation female characters to seek independent identities for themselves. Their motive is to ensure that they do not fall into the same trap as their mothers. While the mother-daughter relationships in these texts reveal ambivalence, other female characters in the lives of these young female characters spur them towards agency. Aunty Ifeoma and Amaka are examples of strong Igbo female characters that influence Kambili to develop her personhood. In learning how to cook *orah* soup in Aunty Ifeoma’s kitchen, Kambili develops a sense of voice and the strength that lies within articulation as she speaks up to her cousin Amaka, beginning her own process of empowerment. This development can be linked to the “kitchen table” metaphor in womanist theory where women gather on equal footing to engage in dialogue and have problem-solving conversations that eradicate domination and subordination. Layli Philips articulates this idea of the “kitchen table” as “the womanist perspective on dialogue [...] an informal woman-centred space [...] people share the truths of their lives on equal footing and learn through face-to-face conversation [...] applied to problem-solving situations, the relations of domination and subordination break down in favour of a more egalitarian, interpersonal process” (xxvii).

For Ofunne, Sister Dolan helps her find a job in school to pay her tuition fees when her father is unable to do so anymore and also inspires Ofunne, “[nurturing] her talents [...] [because] she’s very promising” (Azuah, 87). Also in the text, Azuah invokes the feminine presence in Igbo spirituality as a source of emotional strength for Ofunne, who encounters an apparition of Onishe in the form of an Igbo woman as a response to her pleas “to cure [her] of the [syphilis] Oko gave [her], complete [her] education and become a teacher” (Azuah, 161). Thus, it is these various forms of feminine figures other than their mothers that help these young Igbo characters towards their self-actualization.

Female Metamorphosis and Self-Actualization

By drawing on the figure of the young girl-child / woman, Nigerian women writers offer a complex account of the hybrid spaces these female characters can locate themselves within, countering patriarchal repression and feminine submission. The traumatic events experienced within the patriarchal dominant

relationships and the trigger points experienced within the “absent” mother-daughter relationships lead female characters towards self-identification and womanhood. In the wake of their realization, a paradigm shift can take place from the roles played within their family relationships either as obedient daughters or submissive wives, to a new emphasis on personhood (Ogundipe-Leslie).

The words and actions of the young female characters represent an independence and maturity, a Nigerian female metamorphosis towards their identities. Kambili is a fully realized Igbo womanist as she shows independence in making her own choices, in her love for Father Amadi and her silent memory of her father. “I no longer wonder if I have a right to love Father Amadi; I simply go ahead and love him [...] I have not told Jaja that I offer Mass for Papa every Sunday” (Adichie 303-06). Kambili has developed into a young Igbo woman who has learned to tap into the fullness of her emotional flexibility and feminine strength. A similar motif can be traced in the development of Lola Ogunwole, Enitan Taiwo and Ofunne. Lola Ogunwole decides to leave her extended family in Nigeria after the death of her father to carve out a new life for herself in London. Enitan Taiwo explains that her decision to leave her husband is very much tied to the lesson she learned from her mother’s own submissive life. She reasons, “I was lucky to have survived [...] One life was gone and I could either mourn it or begin it again [...] to revive myself. This was the option I chose” (Atta, 333). Ofunne at the end of the text wants to “complete [her] education and become a teacher (Azuah, 161). Each of the decisions made by the female characters involves a separation from patriarchal obligations in family relationships. This allows the female subject to make individual choices and decisions, which are fully realized womanist representations of female subjectivity.

The structure of these novels is important in the depiction of emerging independent Igbo women as the endings of each of these texts signify the beginning of the lives of young third-generation female characters. Third-generation women writers structure their narratives differently, suggesting that the female character’s metamorphosis towards self-actualization is only the beginning of their journey as a womanist. Each of these novels end on a positive note, reflecting a new beginning. These female characters are portrayed as beginning independent, self-determined lives at an early age, so that Lola, Kambili, Ofunne and Enitan transform previous depictions of Nigerian female

characters. They are the actualised vision of Nigerian women writers – a depiction of courageous, willful and strong womanists.

Purple Hibiscus concludes on a redemptive note with Kambili deciding “[...] I’ll plant ixora so we can suck the juices of the flowers.” I am laughing [...] Above, clouds like dyed cotton wool hang low, so low I feel I can reach out and squeeze the moisture from them. The new rains will come down soon (Adichie, 307). The text closes with imagery of flowers and gardening, the nexus of womanist theory, “traditionally universalist [...] the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every flower represented [...] womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender” (Walker, xi-ii). Walker’s fourth component of womanism associates the theory with a strong reference to the colour purple, a reflection of vibrancy, strength and creativity. Adichie aptly titles her novel with a reference to a purple hibiscus. As the purple hibiscus blooms within the textual progress of *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili grows into a self-actualised character. In *Sky-High Flames*, the text ends with Ofunne’s desire and ambition, “‘No, no!’ I shouted. ‘You and father have had a good part of my life, whatever is now left of me is mine.’ [...] *I was going to start all over again. I would go back to school*” (Azuah, 162-63). The emergence of the female character’s personhood is italicised for emphasis. Ofunne’s experiences are used as a basis for self-reconstruction. The concept of beginning is an interesting concept explored by the Nigerian writer, creating new spaces for changes in female characters’ lives despite their challenges.

Atta and Adeniran’s text reflect identical suggestions to Adichie and Azuah’s. Lola writes in her diary that “I don’t know what the future holds; all I do know is that when it is the turn of a man to become the head of a village, he does not need a diviner to tell him he is destined to rule. The time has come for me to start my life. THE BEGINNING” (Adeniran, 331). Enitan dances for joy and liberation. “‘Tell him,’ I said. ‘Tell him, *a ada*. It will be good. Everything good will come to me.’ [...] Nothing could take my joy away from me. The sun sent her blessings. My sweat baptized me” (Atta, 335-36). Like Kambili and Ofunne, Lola and Enitan’s narratives conclude on a note of affirmation. Images of nature like the sun, rain and flowers are used to capture the potential and abundance that lies ahead in these female characters’ futures. The female quest for empowerment, agency and self-identification is achieved at the end of the text, allowing the newly developed female personhood to lead a life filled with new opportunities.

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