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SHAPING WORLDVIEWS: AN ANALYSIS OF POST-SECULAR FEMINIST POETRY  
OF THE DIASPORA

BY

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research study explores Post- Secular Feminism as found in diaspora poetry. It illustrates that worldviews are shaped through intersectionality as presented in post-secular feminism under a thematic analysis of: Religion, Home and Exile, Hurt and Healing, Mother, and Self-love. The five themes intersect one another and make post-secular feminism clear. The aim of the study was to explore how identity is shaped in nine anthologies of six select diaspora poets: Upile Chisala, Yrsa Daley-Ward, Rupi Kaur, Warsan Shire, Nayyirah Waheed and Ijeoma Umebinyuo. It subsequently looked at the influence of social media and how the poets' popularity is exposed and relates to their worldviews.

The study was carried out using the post-secular feminist framework. Post-secular feminism places emphasis on the oppression of women within their religious spaces. To a large extent this oppression is as a result of intersectionality. Intersectionality is the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. Thus, the select poets are oppressed in more than their religious spaces and poetry is their escape from this oppression.

In the poetry studied for this research, post-secular feminism shapes worldviews. There is a clear link between post-secular feminism and the shaping of worldviews which the poetry reveals. This then illustrates that identities are shaped through intersectionality.

Through close reading and analysis of the poetry, exploration of identities and worldviews transcend the rigid classification of identities, while attempting to forge a new space for social transformation and post-secular feminism to exist.

## DECLARATION

I, **FALLON ALICIA STRAUSS** hereby declare that the work contained in the thesis, entitled **SHAPING WORLDVIEWS: AN ANALYSIS OF POST-SECULAR FEMINIST POETRY OF THE DIASPORA** is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university or other higher education institution for the award of a degree.

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## APPROVAL

The thesis of Fallon Alicia Strauss is approved as fulfilling partial requirements for the award of the degree of Masters of English and Applied Linguistics by Namibia University of Science and Technology.

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31 October 2019

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Date:

Professor Sarala Krishnamurthy

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

First and foremost I am grateful to God, for the ability, the passion and granting me the opportunity to undertake and complete a Master's degree. All praise and glory.

I would like to thank five very important people that have stood by me, every day of this degree. My parents: Da and Ma, "baie baie dankie." You have taught me the value of education and have made sure I never stopped. To my brother, Emcole Strauss, you have no idea how much you have pushed me to want this bad enough. Thank you. The fact that we have done our Master's together has been an honour. To my husband, Tuko, for being around to listen and helping me parent when the degree took up all my family time. To my daughter (my study partner) and unborn son, I thank you; I would not be crazy enough to want a Master's degree if it was not for you.

My gratitude is extended to Professor Sarala Krishnamurthy, my supervisor; for her advice and continuous assistance throughout this degree and belief in my love for poetry. She has been an excellent supervisor and her passion for English is inspiring.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to:

SHILOH- EZARA

My forever ladybug and study partner

and

all 'coloured' people who were never given the opportunity to study.

## AUTHENIFICATION OF THE THESIS

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of the study

Habermas defines Post-Secular as the idea of modernity perceived as failing and, at times, morally unsuccessful, so that, rather than a stratification or separation, a new peaceful dialogue and tolerant coexistence between the spheres of faith and reason must be sought in order to learn mutually. In this sense, Habermas insists that both religious people and secularist people should not exclude each other, but to learn from one another and coexist tolerantly. There are a number of debates which then bring feminism into this sphere and Post-Secular Feminism then exists- the exclusion or even oppression of females in their given religion. Post-Secular Feminism has been a recent area of study and is now being used in sociology, political theory, art studies, literary studies, and, education to name a few.

This study will look at *Shaping Worldviews: An analysis of Post-Secular Feminist poetry of the diaspora*. The poets of the diaspora are Upile Chisala, Yrsa Daley-Ward, Rupi Kaur, Warsan Shire, Ijeoma Umebinyuo and Nayyirah Waheed. . The reason these six poets' poetry will be used in this study is because all six have gone through the diaspora and religion is an evident thread in their poetry and the women are found to be both religious and spiritual. The six poets often write short quote-like (micro poems) poetry that is thought provoking and resonates long after it has been read. Another reason these six poets will be looked into is because all these women build self-esteem and seek to find an identity through their poetry. Post-Secular Feminism can then be used in order to determine how worldviews are shaped.

#### Upile Chisala

Upile Chisala is a 24 year-old Malawian storyteller, currently living in South Africa. Chisala is skilled in African Studies, Medical Anthropology, Sociology, US Immigration, and Women's Studies and these are strong elements found in her poetry. She is an arts and design professional with a Master of Science focused in African Studies from University of Oxford. She is currently a MSc in Medical Anthropology student, awaiting graduation.

Chisala self-published her two anthologies, *soft magic* (2015) and *nectar* (2017) featured on Huffington Post, Essence, ThandieandKay and Okay Africa.

#### Yrsa Daley-Ward

Yrsa Daley-Ward is a 35 year-old poet, model and actor of West Indian and West African heritage who was born in England. She is known for her debut book, *Bone*, as well as for her Spoken Word

poetry. Her memoir, *The Terrible*, was published in 2018. Daley-Ward is known for her short poems on topics such as identity, race, mental health, and femininity. She is also known for being vocal on topics of depression, and for her poem entitled "Mental Health," which was published in her book *Bone*; first self-published in 2014, and subsequently reissued by Penguin Books in 2017.

#### Rupi Kaur

Rupi Kaur is an Indian (Punjabi) born Canadian poet, writer, illustrator, and performer based in Toronto, Canada. She started drawing at the age of five when her mother handed her a paintbrush and said—"draw your heart out", and, thus her work has strong art elements and her poetry is accompanied with self-drawn, beautiful minimal illustrations; Rupi views her life as an exploration of that artistic journey. After completing her degree in Rhetoric Studies she published her first collection of poems *milk and honey* in 2014, this internationally acclaimed collection sold well over a million copies gracing the New York Times bestsellers list every week for over a year and has since been translated into over thirty languages. Her second collection '*the sun and her flowers*' was published in 2017.

In 2013, she began sharing her work under her own name on Tumblr. She took her writing to Instagram in 2014 and began adding simple illustrations. Rupi has performed her poetry across the world; her photography and art direction are warmly embraced as she explores a variety of themes ranging from love, loss, trauma, healing, femininity, migration and revolution. When she is not writing or creating art, she is travelling internationally to perform her Spoken Word poetry, as well as hosting writing workshops.

#### Warsan Shire

Warsan Shire is a 31 year-old Kenyan-born Somali writer, poet, editor and teacher, who was migrated to Britain at the age of one and is currently living in Los Angeles, USA.

*Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth*, 2011, was her first published work. Shire has read her poetry in various artistic venues throughout the world, including in the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, North America, South Africa and Kenya. Her poems have been published in various literary publications, including Poetry Review, Magma and Wasafiri. Additionally, Shire's verse has been featured in the Salt Book of Younger Poets (Salt, 2011) and Ten: The New Wave (Bloodaxe, 2014) collections. Her poetry has also been translated into a number of languages, including Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Swedish, Danish and Estonian and has won multiply awards.

In 2012, she recorded the Spoken Word album “*warsan versus melancholy (the seven stages of being lonely)*” and posted it on Bandcamp. She also shared an earlier work on Tumblr and later Instagram and gained popularity from there. In 2016, Shire was featured on Beyoncé’s *Lemonade* album and feature film as the writer behind most of the work and became even more popular.

Ijeoma Umebinyuo

Ijeoma Umebinyuo is a Nigerian poet living in the USA. She is the author of *Questions for Ada*, her first published collection of prose poetry and she also does TEDx talks. Her writings have been translated to Portuguese, Turkish, Spanish, Russian and French. In 2016, Ijeoma Umebinyuo was named one of the top ten contemporary poets from sub-Saharan Africa by wrtivism.org.

Nayyirah Waheed

Nayyirah Waheed shares no biographical information about herself; her history, who or where she currently is. Her work on social media and her two published books *salt.* and *nejma* speaks for themselves. Another reason she does not share her identity could be because of her religion; Waheed is an Islam poet. Waheed is well known for her micro poetry that is known to be minimalistic and touching, she is found to be very popular on all social media platforms. Waheed is a social media sensation in the poetry world and many magazines and online articles praise her.

## **1.2. Statement of the problem**

The diaspora often leads to identity crises and the select poetry will reveal these worldviews through a Post- Secular Feminist analysis. This study tried to look for commonalities in the diasporic experience and the patterns found in the select poetry. There has been research done in Post- Secular Feminism in other fields but there seems to be little to no Post-Secular Feminist research in literature especially of diaspora poets.

## **1.3. Research objectives**

With the dominance and return of Post- Secular in all spheres of life, there is urgency in literature as well. The main objective of this study illustrates and explores in depth a key theoretical and aesthetic debate in the poetry of Upile Chisala, Yrsa Daley- Ward, Rupi Kaur, Warsan Shire, Ijeoma Umebinyuo and Nayyirah Waheed; revolving around Post-Secular Feminism and how identity is shaped in their poetry.

All six poets have made their poetry popular on social media such as Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr and found a strong following by doing this. Another objective of the study was to look at the influence on the exposure of poetry through new media influence.

#### **1.4. The significance of the research**

The purpose of this research was to explore and understand Post-Secular Feminism in diaspora poetry and how it shapes similar worldviews. Identity emerges throughout the poetry and somehow shapes these worldviews. This study will then create awareness of Post- Secular Feminism as not many people (scholars) are aware of it. This study will also create awareness of poetry made popular on social media platforms and lastly it will contribute to Post- Secular Feminism as found in literature.

#### **1.5. Delimitations**

This research made use of a qualitative desktop study and focused on the poetry collections of Upile Chisala, Yrsa Daley-Ward, Rupi Kaur, Warsan Shire, Ijeoma Umebinyuo and Nayyirah Waheed only as their writing styles and themes are very similar and thus there is a urgency in creating their own identities.

#### **1.6. Limitations**

This research focused on the printed collections of the six select poets even though they are found to be extremely popular on social media platforms. The poetry found in the analysis can also be found on the poet's social media pages but this was limiting because there are poems that were fitting to the themes but not used.

#### **1.7. Definition of technical terms**

##### **Secular**

Secularity is the state of being separate from religion, or of not being exclusively allied with or against any particular religion.



### **Post- Secular**

Post-Secular refers to a range of theories regarding the persistence or resurgence of religious beliefs or practices in the present. The "post-" may refer to after the end of secularism or after the beginning of secularism.

### **Diaspora**

A diaspora is a scattered population whose origin lies in a separate geographic locale. In particular, diaspora has come to refer to involuntary mass dispersions of a population from its indigenous territories, most notably the expulsion of Jews from Israel (known as the Jewish diaspora).

### **Intersectionality**

The interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **2.1. Literature Review**

This study focused on post-secular feminism in contemporary diasporic women's poetry, thus the literature analysed focuses on the diaspora, post-secular feminism and the writings of the select poets. The introduction to post-secularism and post-secular feminism literature is also discussed in the theoretical framework.

Individual worldviews are often shaped in many ways and influenced by multiple factors. The diaspora for one is often closely related to religion. This review introduces the diaspora and the intra and interplay of religion and its return and how poetry, strongly finds roots in this. Religion can then be referred to as the post-secular by many scholars and oppression of women is almost found in all religions; thus this study focuses on feminist theology and places emphasis on a particular feminist theory- intersectionality. Intersectionality is complex and allows for the worldviews of this study, then to exist. The study deals with Islam, Christian and Sikh poets and thus these three religions are the key focus of the study. Post-secular feminism is a somewhat old phenomenon with new terms and new introductions. Literature, more specifically poetry has hardly been researched in this context and especially in the writings of Upile Chisala, Yrsa Daley-Ward, Rupi Kaur, Warsan Shire, Ijeoma Umehinyuo and Nayyirah Waheed.

In some monotheistic religion disciplines, arguments are straightforward and contributors agree easily; in spite of this, there are few arguments or contradictory viewpoints that the review will address. However, this review excludes the enlightenment and modernity periods even though these movements influenced post-secularism to a great extent. In order to make the arguments in this study about the exclusion of religion more concrete, the review analyses how the idea of intersectionality has been employed in feminist theology much earlier than in other fields of feminist studies.

#### **2.1.1. The Diaspora**

Diaspora is a term often used to describe the scattering or migration of the Jews outside their traditional homelands. It is said that Jesus was a Jew and was crucified amongst other reasons for this; in 70-74 CE, Zealots were massed destructed by the Roman governors, resulting in the scattering of the Jews. Kruger (et al) describes this period of scattering as the most tiring in its history and later resulting in the Holocaust between 1941- 1945. Definitions also include the relocation of a collective group of people due to religious reasons. According to dictionary.com

(2018), the origin of the word diaspora is that in the term originates from the Greek diasporá, meaning “a dispersion or scattering,” found in Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible (Deuteronomy 25). It should be noted that the diaspora, both in the past and in recent years has a close relation to religion and the two cannot be separated. Diaspora hence refers not only to a movement from one place to another, but also to the transition that implicates a paradoxical, multi-layered dehoming and rehoming process.

According to Steven Vertovec, as stated by Pritoma (2013), there are three meanings of diaspora. They are ‘Diaspora as a social form’, ‘Diaspora as a type of consciousness’ and finally ‘Diaspora as a mode of cultural production’ and these forms are the fundamental structure of the general understanding of diaspora. In the paper he argues that the people facing emigration and exile mainly face the diaspora of consciousness as they mostly go through massive conscious change with the change of their surroundings. Psychological implications are not always evident and many migrants struggle for years, to come to terms with leaving their birth place, and, even if professional help is sought, it does leave its mark. This holds true, considering, through the process of leaving home, the diaspora brings forth displacement and isolation that can be voiced and bare the reason for turning to creativity and what it has to offer. The diaspora brings to mind various assumptions and images, depending on who views it and from where. It can be the positive site of achieving an individual identity, or, a negative site of fear and anxiety of losing one’s identity. Pritoma (2013), points out that the diaspora gets affected by various aspects of modern life such as: culture, space, time, language, histories, people and place. What makes the diaspora different than the other forms of travel is its massive impact on travellers; these travellers are known as migrants. Migrant people depend on the ‘others’ land but they form new communities that are a mixture of their tradition and the newly acquainted foreign cultures. Even though the poets assimilate into their new homes and recapture themselves they do not necessarily want to fit in.

Since the early 1990s, the concept of diaspora has propagated into migration studies and gradually been appropriated by many migrant groups, who describe themselves as ‘diasporas’ in relation to political mobilisation and self-portrayal. In recent years, intellectuals and activists have increasingly begun to utilise the term ‘diaspora’ to describe themselves: we have witnessed the emergence, James Clifford notes, as stated by Vertovec (1999), of, “Diasporic language which appears to be replacing, or at least supplementing, minority discourse”(p. 1). As the term has proliferated, its meaning has been stretched to accommodate the various intellectual, cultural and political agendas in the service of which it has been enlisted. This has resulted in what one might call a “diaspora” diaspora, Brubaker (2005), a dispersion of the meanings of the term in semantic, conceptual and

disciplinary space. According to Zhang (2004), modern diaspora disrupts the apparent closure of home and generates transnational, trans local communications and communities. The poignant expression of worldly homelessness, however, is not a denial of the hope for home, but rather an assertion of re-homing desire in the age of the global diaspora. Home has developed on constantly changing configurations of diversity and unity and, henceforth, become increasingly contingent on the interaction of different cultural passages (Kristeva 1991, p.30). And there seems to be no place like home anymore- even home has become increasingly unhomey. Said (1984, p.49) confirms this by saying, "To make a substitute home in a foreign land points to an "unhealable rift" forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home."

As Said (2000), commented in *Reflection on Exile*, about the exiles of Jews, Palestine and Armenians as universal phenomena of exile people, he says all this exile population for the same pain and suffering in religion and nationalism is later described as migration and that makes the theory of exile applicable for any migration and diaspora generation; these then also become one of the themes that will be used in the study. Even more so the universal oppression of women and those that find themselves in the diaspora. Said (2000), talks about the territory beyond not belonging and 'us'/'outsiders' conflict, a place where people are united because of their banishment. The post-colonial 'otherness' (outsider- us versus them) can now be referred to the women in the diaspora. And just beyond the frontier between 'us' and the 'outsiders' is the perilous territory of not-belonging; this is to where the women originated from, their homes and the diasporic exile they currently call home. According to Alvi (2012), diaspora literature involves an idea of a homeland, a place from where the displacement occurs and narratives of harsh journeys undertaken on account of economic compulsions.

The diaspora then lends its hands to much more than immigrating; it intersects with narratives of gender-based violence, abuse and tragedy, absent fathers, family affairs, pain-hurt, colonialism, cultural exploitation, alienation, sex, emotions, tragedy, power, self-love, pride, independence, education, nature, and so forth. All these narratives are addressed in diaspora writing and it is what the poetry of the select poets are made up of. All these themes are common amongst women of colour and often literature in this context would be referred to as Black Women's diaspora literature and all intersecting experiences should be respected and not thought of as homogenous. After relocating themselves in a new society and culture, diasporans must face various political, economic, and cultural forces that threaten their sense of home as a fixed, pure, and closed structure, which has been re-worlded from its original territory by their border-crossing experience. The complexity and ambivalence associated with redefining and revising home in relation to diaspora discourse

present a challenging topic for our discussion, since the very term "diaspora," as we use it today, indicates not only a condition of "out-of-country" displacement, but also the mishmash "out-of-culture," "out-of-language" and "out-of-oneself" experiences. As R. Radhakrishnan explains with reference to M.H. Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, "both the home country and the country of residence could become mere 'ghostly' locations," since "The home country is not 'real' in its own terms and yet it is real enough to impede Americanisation, and the 'present home' is materially real and yet not real enough to feel authentic" (1996, p. 207). In this sense, diasporans have to reverse home constantly in a "ghostly" negotiation between fact and fantasy.

Many times the diaspora is closely related to secular and post-secular societies and the realities that then create worldviews, which in turn is the theoretical framework of the study. The women of this study then fall into line of diaspora literature.

### **2.1.2. Diaspora Literature**

The six select diaspora poets poetry that will be analysed are Upile Chisala, Yrsa Daley-Ward, Rupi Kaur, Warsan Shire, Ijeoma Umebinyuo and Nayirrah Waheed. Upile Chisala is a Malawian storyteller that lives in the United States of America, Rupi Kaur an Indian poet and artist living in Canada, Warsan Shire is a Somalian-Kenyan poet and writer living in the United States of America, Ijeoma Umembinyuo is a Nigerian poet living in the United States of America, Nayyirah is an African poet based in the United States of America and Yrsa Daley Ward is a Jamaican/Nigerian poet, writer, actress and model living in the United Kingdom. All six poets started writing at an early age and used other art mediums to express themselves, such as acting, drawing, photography, modelling, lending creativity to music and much more. Art like their poetry was a way to deal with the diaspora and the question of belonging and can be seen in the light of art therapy and as a catharsis.

#### **Upile Chisala**

Upile Chisala is a Malawian storyteller that moved to America to further her studies but now lives in South Africa. Chisala self-published her two anthologies, *soft magic* (2015) and *nectar* (2017); she has also been featured on Huffington Post, Essence, ThandieandKay and OkayAfrica.

#### **Rupi Kaur**

Rupi Kaur is an Indian (Punjabi) born Canadian poet, writer, illustrator, and performer based in Toronto, Canada. After completing her degree in Rhetoric Studies she published her first collection

of poems *milk and honey* in 2014 and her second collection *the sun and her flowers* was published in 2017.

Yrsa Daley-Ward

Yrsa Daley-Ward is a poet, writer, model and actor of West Indian (Jamaican) and West African (Nigerian) heritage who lives in England. She is known for her debut book, *Bone*, as well as for her Spoken Word poetry. Her memoir, *The Terrible*, was published in 2018.

Warsan Shire

Warsan Shire is a Kenyan-born, Somali writer, poet, editor and teacher, who migrated to Britain at the age of one and is currently living in Los Angeles, USA. *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth*, (2011), was her first and only published work.

Ijeoma Umebinyuo

Ijeoma Umebinyuo is a Nigerian poet living in the USA. She is the author of *Questions for Ada*, her first published collection of prose and poetry. She also does Tedx talks.

Nayyirah Waheed

Nayyirah Waheed shares no biographical information about herself; her history or where she currently lives, however she is an African poet now living in America as far as social media has revealed. Waheed's work on social media and her two published books *salt*. and *nejma* speak for themselves and Waheed chooses not to reveal her physical appearance to the world.

The six poets no longer live in their birth countries and often write about this separation from home and what belonging means to them. Diaspora literature has links or common threads and even more so for online poets with strong social media followings.

A direct result of this race for speed that dominates life across the globe is the emergence of the migrant-the involuntary passenger-in-transit between cultures, for whom homelessness is the only home "state." (Chow, Writing Diaspora)

All six poets have been writing since an early age and all made their introduction into the poetry world on social media platforms such as Tumblr and Instagram. The six diaspora poets 'poetry deals with identity and the multi-layered facets that go hand in hand with this. For African women (colonised women), storytelling is a lifeline, a treasured source of guidance, knowledge, healing and

Chisala, Kaur, Shire, Umebinyuo, Waheed and Daley-Ward, who possess this audacious command over their stories, that one can readily recognise their own power, her own 'soft magic'.

In literature as well as in popular media, diasporans are often presented as strangers from elsewhere who, without a sense of belonging, never feel at home in a new country yet are unable to return to their homeland. As Chambers observes,

To come from elsewhere, from "there" not "here," and hence to be simultaneously "inside" and "outside" the situation at hand is to live at the inter sections of histories and memories, experiencing both their preliminary dispersal and their subsequent translation into new, more extensive arrangements along emerging routes. (Chambers 1994, p. 6)

Diaspora, which opens up new spaces for cross-cultural negotiation, creates a tension between two localities and a kind of spatio-temporal duality. While "most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home," diasporans and exiles "are aware of at least two, and the plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions" (Said 1984b, p. 170-72). There is a constant traveling along "the emerging routes," diasporans have to revise home as a journey through "simultaneous" mediation of different cultural dwellings; thus one should not view home as static. There are also groups of non-Western diasporans who attempt to disaffiliate from their old home cultures; and their desire to "pass" in a white dominated society indicates the impact of acculturation upon diaspora communities. In history, different nations and cultures often regarded one another as "savage" or "barbaric"; and this mutual demonisation is based on the assumptions that home should be a familiar and unadulterated territory of belonging and that one would meet foreigners or barbarians only beyond the boundaries of one's home-range. In the age of modern diaspora, however, the situation has changed; "If we were to expand our definition of home to think of the nation as a home, then we could recognise that there are always encounters with others already recognised as strangers within, rather than just between, nation spaces" (Ahmed 1999, p.340). The demand of identification, according to Homi Bhabha (1994, p. 45), entails the representation of the subject in the differentiating order of otherness, "and" is always the return of an image of identity that bears the mark of splitting in the 'Other' place from which it comes. The experience of diaspora produces a shift in perspective or more so; a hole in time through which different cultural temporalities and re-configured against the spatial dislocation occur and seem to be true for many diaspora poets. For non- Western diaspora poets, home must be performed in a process of trans-relation among fragmented memories, which feed them the sounds, colours, and smell of a home that seems to be coincident with the totality of the experience lived and yet to be

lived. By examining the writings of women poets, we will gain a deep insight into the politics of home that has been complicated by the issues of gender, domesticity, and sexuality, more so intersectionality or post-secular feminism. Diaspora across different political, economic, and cultural systems, according to Bell Hooks, requires the pushing against oppressive boundaries set by race, sex and class dominations (1989, p. 15).

Unlike their male counterparts, women diaspora poets normally experience a twofold pressure caused not only by the experience of dislocation but also by the patriarchal values implicated in the ideology of home. It is essentially important to understand that diaspora women poets confront double challenges in their struggle to subvert the patriarchal conventions and, at the same time, to reverse home in relation to their diaspora experience. The study of diaspora women poetry will help us discern the deep connection between women's sense of home and their desire for freedom and independence. Careful reading of the poems written by female diaspora writers reveals that their works, on the one hand, represent their attempt to break the constraints inherent in their sex roles, and on the other, reflect their longing for self-fulfilment and freedom beyond the "oppressive boundaries" of home. Literary creation is one of women's self-empowering devices- that is, a rehoming (Zhang, 2004), practice that empowers women to assert positive identity, to gain a sense of satisfaction and achievement, and to have a feeling of "being at home" in their own voice. The voice of women diaspora poets has become increasingly noteworthy in recent years, and their writing articulates strong negotiating power in the English language (not in their native tongue). Actually, for both female and male diaspora poets, writing in English implicates empowerment, since the command of English itself is associated with power and control; and one of the notable themes of diaspora writing is about reversing home in English which, in fact, must be remoulded so as to express the specificity of their cultural experience.

In an interview with Chisala, Damola Durosomo (2018) describes her poetry as a voice that allows for internal confrontation to take place; allowing her trauma to be laid bare and an unexpected courage to appear in return. Chisala confirms that it is her Malawian upbringing that brought about the art of her storytelling. The diaspora brought about her need to write again to clarify all ignorant assumptions about Africa and black women. This then is true for all six poets. In the interview Chisala states that black women need to be celebrated and need the reinsurance that they are enough and that is what her poetry deals with - feminism and life as a diaspora poet. Chisala like the other five poets address the issue of healing a lot because to the readers this brings solace.

These are a few comments as found on *Goodreads* and *Amazon* (2018):



Upile is a gift. Her words are like the honey she speaks of - soothing, assuring and sweet.

(Fay Chipso, July 05, 2018)

I have never loved a collection of poetry more in my entire life. (Hannah, June 09, 2016)

Warsan Shire writes poems about tough and difficult situations and circumstances.

Particularly those that deal with refugees are something I feel everyone should read at some point just to realise that parents don't put their kids in life-threatening situations and on overpopulated, dangerous boats unless they have absolutely no other choice but to flee their home. (Cathy, May 10, 2016)

So breath taking I read it straight through twice. I'm sure I'll be rereading this when I'm heartbroken, when I need to be resilient, when I need to remind myself to be soft as well as tough, when I need to forgive myself. (Amanda, December 31, 2016)

What can I say, I am in love. With a pain, she says I should not let overstay. This collection of poems is breathtakingly beautiful. How can someone write so beautifully about pain, healing, about diaspora blues, and of course, about mother? (Preethi Krishnan, December 09, 2016)

I read it four times and I am pretty sure I will be re-reading it again and again. you just don't get tired of reading these words. (Sarah, August 09, 2016)

you don't need to write a novel to tell a story. yrsa daley ward knows this. she can tell you a story in 50 words. make her point in 20. make me cry in eight. (Angeline Lee, September 17, 2015)

Despite the amazing reviews found in magazines, newspapers, on social media and as book reviews there seems to be no academic research done on the six poets and their writings. The brilliance of their poetry is surely appreciated and loved by many as it is contemporary and the style is different

than the traditional male dominated poetic style, found all over the world. However, there is also criticism about the poets and their writing:

I read this in a bookshop. I wanted to give it zero stars. It's not poetry. It's shamefully derivative and doesn't employ any poetic devices except for the most clichéd - and not to positive effect. Random line breaks and sentence fragments are used because it is what is expected of a poem, but the author doesn't seem to understand that in poetry, these serve a purpose and must contribute to the poem's larger meaning. The allusions and metaphors are misplaced and nonsensical. "Milk and honey" is a phrase that has been used for hundreds if not thousands of years: there is nothing new or interesting or creative or poetic in this book. It reads like a 13 year old's diary. This book is for people who have never read poetry outside of school, and that's too bad. I feel sorry for them because they are missing out.

I found her most powerful quotes were when she did not hide behind imagery and comes out and says what she truly feels (like in *Diaspora Blues*, *First Generation* and *Homeland*, so beautiful). But the writing seemed to me like a watered down (slightly clichéd) mashup of Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche and Warsan Shire. Some of the lines and organization seemed forced and repetitive (she says thunder in veins a lot), which is a shame because she covers such important topics and it takes away from a lot of the feeling she's trying to portray. In the first half of the book I really wanted her to excavate more about the cultural ramifications and reasons for all she talks about. She gets into that in the second half of the book a little more, which I definitely appreciated. For the most part though, her writing is pretty raw which is what kept me reading until the end.

These are also just a few of the criticism that finds itself on social media pages. What readers do not understand is that the poets are young, contemporary women that have most of their readers on social media platforms such as Instagram. When writing for a social media crowd the poetry is much shorter, what some refer to as micro-poems and the audience doesn't spend hours wrapped up in

between pages. Thus, the six poets use these platforms and their pages well; using powerful words and short lines to express their innermost thoughts.

Chisala, Kaur and Shire's first collections are all self-published as they knew at the time that their poetry had to be read. Thus, a lot of critics and reviews on Amazon, Goodreads, Instagram and Twitter over the years find the six poets poetry to be a form of therapy as many share the same sentiments. Even though the poetry can be subdivided into themes, the basis is post-secular feminism and the poets do share a lot about their religions and how important their religions are to them and how it gives them a sense of belonging.

### **2.1.3. Religion and Secularism**

Religion plays an important role in modern society; religion is not destined to decline because religious symbols are the medium through which people relate themselves to the conditions of their existence (Bellah, 1970). Religion can be narrowly defined as an abstract concept and all one has to do is ask whether God features or not. If this is the case then Judaism can be a religion but Taoism unfortunately cannot occupy a space according to this definition. However, many people in modern society find ultimate meaning in life without using the word "God" at all. Ultimately, the belief in God can be expressed as a common human search for inclusive and transcending meaning. Religion reconciles a human being to him-/herself and to the world. According to Kruger (et al) humans have a deep-seated need to experience themselves and their surroundings as coherent wholes. Chaos, discord and alienation are experienced profoundly disturbing and in a sense, experiences such as disease, death, hostility, natural disasters and social catastrophes lie at the base of religion. Religion is the urge to attribute meaning to events or occurrences. If people see some form of coherence in what happens, they tend to understand. A lot of history's chaos is owed to religion even if the history books don't state it in so many words. This chaos has become a cosmos; human answers emerged from an effort to tame this confusion. The intense search for belonging and personal identity is closely related to the search for identity of the cosmos. All in all, the role of religion may be called comprehensive integrating.

After the shift from the Enlightenment to Modernity in the 19th century, religion took the back seat; secular states then became a reality. Thus, religion has been adapting to the changing world in its own way. Amidst these ongoing debates on secularisation and counter-secularisation, the prominent German philosopher Jürgen Habermas introduces a new concept to explain religion in contemporary times: post-secularism. Habermas tries to develop new conceptual tools to analyse the seemingly unexpected return of religion, i.e., religious revivalism. For Habermas, the age of post-secularism

does not entail the rejection of the ongoing secularising process and also not a return to the medieval theological predominance.

Bernasconi, (2009) and Moyaert, (2014) as stated in Staudigl and Alvis argues that religion cannot be undone or unthought-of as it leads to exposure to even more religious talk but also to the foundational fact that reason and faith appear inextricably intertwined (especially in their joint uses of technology), with reason (perhaps in some cases) constituting religion as its 'originary supplement'. There are various arguments that post-secularism lingers between sociological facts and philosophical theories. This can be true to some extent because religion stems of from philosophy and affects every single person in society; it is something that exists and cannot be ignored. Many a times, who we are is based on what religion we belong and ascribe to and what we choose to practice. However, religion still has the power to domesticate society to a higher morality. The first secularisation thesis was put forward by Bryan Wilson in his book *Religion in secular society* in 1996. He argued that in Western society religion was less central in public life than it had been in previous centuries. Secularisation was the process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions lost social significance. Secular theorist pointed out that measuring 'religiousness' presents many problems; scholars like Jose Casanova blame the Western society for secular states, mainly Britain.

Secular first referred to Christianity, however, Islam and the East had a large influence and religious diversities started to pick up in the post-secular; a new visibility of religion. Philip Blond (2002), talks about Post-Secular philosophy in a number of essays about theology and philosophy in a cultural domain in the late 1990's; but dates back to the 60s to explain the secular first. This picks up in France because there was and still is a large number of Islam followers in Europe (Ward, 2015), ironically where a lot of feminist contributions were also made. Multiculturalism then allows for a type of intersectionality and religion takes a forefront. The select poets belong to the Christian religion, Islam and the Sikh religion and numerous scholars and thousand articles contribute to this but unlike arguments, religion is mostly set in stone.

There are only three religions that apply to this study; Islam, Sikhism and Christianity. Two poets, Shire and Waheed are Muslim, Kaur is Sikh and Chisala, Daley-Ward and Umebinyuo are Christians. Only these three religions are referred to when addressing the study and looking at the analysis of the poetry.

### 2.1.3.1. Islam

Jawaad (1998) wrote about the rights of women in Islam and as she divides these rights into chapters, it becomes evidently clear that they are no different than majority of all other religious domains. There has been conflicting messages by secular feminist that declare the Islamic system as cursed for women under its laws, portraying Islam as an oppressor rather than as a liberator and leading their women to Western secular alternatives. Fundamentalists depict Muslim women in images totalling unappealing to any inquisitive mind. Islam is often automatically perceived as a patriarchal and oppressive space for women. Theoretically women have the same rights as men according to the Quran and the Islamic laws, however, these rights are not always practiced. The declines of the first caliphate lead to the position of women deteriorating. Examples would be: no participation in a public life, withdrawal from society, no education, no divorce regardless of adultery or abuse, no solo travelling, no leadership positions and no working outside of their homes. These laws obviously form repression and rebellion and women run to Western secular societies to seek comfort and this approach in turn would lead to a doomed failure. The authentic Islam way does give women rights even when society does not depict these rights; Islam women like Aisha (the wife of the founder of Islam), Khadija (philanthropist and true believer of Islam), Fatima (youngest daughter of Prophet Muhammad) and Umm Salama (most influential wife of Muhammad) are true inspirations and even in today's world women can achieve the freedom and respect they deserve. Patel (2018) would like to clarify that a Muslim women does not equal brown-veiled women and often the Muslim women rejects feminism as it in itself is an oppressive force that just like the men strip their agency and free will. The Quran emphasises that righteousness is identical amongst women as it is amongst men. It clearly and consistently affirms this equality (Hassan, 1991).

In 2017 Saudi Arabia lifted its ban against women driving and Malala Yousafzai won a Nobel Peace Prize in 2014 for her fight to fair education and for all girls under the Taliban rule in Pakistan. There is progress for the girl child and women and someday there will be no fear associated with fair rights. However, white feminism does not cater for other females except for themselves. Muslim women will have to define the terms of their own rights and how they see the world; this is reiterated by Margot Badran (2005), who notes that "Islamic feminism is built upon Quran-centred discourse." (p. 6)

The question still remains, who speaks for the Arab/ Muslim women? Most possibly the Arab women herself; be it the peasant in Algeria, a doctor in Cairo, a secretary in Beirut, students in Syria, workers in Baghdad or a veiled women in Saudi Arabia; the Arab women carries a large load. If the Muslim woman is not white, she is immediately marginalised or definitely oppressed. Muslim

women share a common fate; a life of renunciation, of captivity, during which she will have to atone for her sin of having been born a woman in a hyper-male society where the ever-present feminine remains synonymous with shame and threat (Salman, 1987). However, one needs to take into mind that intersectionality also exists within the Arab woman's world; each face different struggles and challenges and not all "rules" are the same for all especially in different parts of the world.

However, as the world at large knows this does not automatically imply equality in practice. Even though the Islam women's voice is being heard, the world doesn't always listen and organisations such as **Arab Women's Solidarity Association International** are fighting daily for the rights of the Islam women.

### **2.1.3.2. Sikhism**

Closely associated with Islam is Sikhism; it was founded by Guru Nanak (1469- 1538). Sikhism's monotheism came from Islam and the style of its devotion from Hinduism. Nanak referred to one God, or the sovereign creator as the True Name, kind and merciful in nature. On the other hand, Nanak retained the Hindu belief in karma and the transmigration of souls. Sikhism is a classic example of a syncretistic religion, which is a religion that is a combination of two very original sources – Islam and Hinduism. Early Sikhism was a "quietistic religion" (Kruger 2009), all members bore the name of Singh (lion), took certain vows and were transformed into a forceful body of renowned warriors. For centuries, the status of women in India (where majority of Sikhs reside) was being systematically downgraded. The caste system, economic oppression, denial of right to property and inheritance, a false sense of impurity attached to menstruation and child birth, deliberate deprivation of education led to the deterioration of women's position in society. This was further justified by religious sanctions as was done by Manu, the Hindu law giver. Woman was referred to as a 'seducer', 'unclean', and a 'temptress'. She was denied the right to preach or to participate in other religious rites. Manu went to the point of declaring that the service of the husband by the woman is considered to be equal to the service of God; a woman remaining the underdog as far as male presence is concerned, even in the Sikh religion.

Guru Nanak writes:

"from the woman is our birth, in the woman's womb are we shaped; To the woman we are engaged, to the woman we are wedded; The woman is our friend and from woman is the family; Through the woman are the bonds of the world; Why call woman evil who gives birth

to kings and all? From the woman is the woman, without woman there is none". (SGGS, p. 473)

The Guru reprimands those who consider women as inferior to men. He sees them as active partners in advancing goodwill, general happiness and the collective moral values of society. This declaration definitively requires women to be placed in high esteem. Guru Nanak openly chides those who attribute pollution to women because of menstruation and asserts that pollution lies in the heart and mind of the person and not in the cosmic process of birth. One very significant fact about a Sikh woman is that a Sikh woman is born with the surname *Kaur* and dies with the same surname. Thus, allowing her to keep her identity throughout her life.

"If pollution attaches to birth, then pollution is everywhere (for birth is universal). Cow-dung (used for purifying the kitchen floor by Hindus) and firewood breed maggots; not one grain of corn is without life; Water itself is a living substance, imparting life to all vegetation. How can we then believe in pollution, when pollution inheres within staples? Says Nanak, pollution is not washed away by purificatory rituals; Pollution is removed by true knowledge alone". (SGGS, p.472).

However, just like in Islam and Christianity, women do not have the same rights even religious rights as that of a man. Although with varied biological functions (and we delight in those biological differences), one isn't superior to the other, in no given sphere of life.

#### 2.1.3.3. Christianity

Is it only religion which needs to learn from liberal secular discourse? Habermas (2008), answers that both the secular and religion need to re-examine themselves in order to learn from each other, especially for the secular to recognise their historical roots in religious discourse. According to Habermas, in the post-secular society, citizens have already adjusted to the changing situation in order to have a "reasonably expected disagreement" between religion and the secular (Habermas, 2009). Habermas (2010), goes on to say, any exclusion of the religious from the public sphere runs the risk of forfeiting the secular teleology of disengaged reason, which then is true. Research of the post-secular wishes to unveil new constellations of faith and reason beyond the all too narrow confines of rational assimilation on the one hand, and the claim for unconditional hospitality for the religious other on the other hand, which leads to diversity. Developing this understanding is

important for this study since the same factors that influence behaviour in general also impact religious behaviour and interpretations as well. (Richter et al., 2005) The idea of the mind has a long history, as philosophers, theologians, and social scientist have debated whether the mind exist, if the mind can be reduced to the brain, what are the characteristics of the mind, and a host of other questions. For this study, mind can be defined as the factor that motivates us to think, feel, and act in a certain fashion and these motivators are often very complex. Whatever is part of our reactive, reflective, social, or physical mind may have impact on the outer world. Thus, the spiritual mind is the thread that holds together and connects a person's other mind; it is also the matrix in which people are immersed. As Richer et al. (2005) states, ones personality is ultimately underlined by a dynamic, reciprocal relationship between personality and religion. What the mind believes and conceives lends to the personality and a person's personality and experience strongly influence how he or she understands and lives out her of his religion. Thus, it will be evidently clear that the select poets writing is influenced by their religion- what this means to them and more so in a post-secular feminist world.

The private personal space is then questioned because religion mostly happens behind closed doors. Habermas (2008) argues that the practice of faith also withdrew into more a personal or subjective domain. There is interchange between the functional specification of the religious system and the individualisation of religious practice. Even the state and politics come into play, so that all citizens have equal rights regardless of religious preferences or even secular viewpoints; it would be fair to assume and want all to live cohesively. Clearly, Habermas's new affirmation of the relevance that religious ideas and ethics have for contemporary political debate marks a major transformation in his thinking. One has to welcome this more inclusive view of religion as a potentially emancipatory political and cultural resource, a resource that can open up and enhance rather than retard public discourse, and energise the creation of more deliberative and more participative social institutions. Looking back to modernity and society and the public reason, impartial and non-existent self-actualising, autonomous facilitated by the formation of the liberal democracy, these were not neutral or even universal but rather gendered.

#### 2.1 4. Post-Secular Feminism

The current debates and contributions to the post-secular have overlooked the extent to which, as a concept or epoch, the post-secular may be gendered. Gender externalisation should take place



beyond domestic, familial and affective relationships and self-actualisation is somehow regarded as governed by nature.

Women may be the guardians of the world of affect and sensuality-along with that of reproduction- but the advancement of reason is a male task. If men are to attain to the highest exercise of reason, they must abandon the world of nature, embodiment and emotion, which are the preserves of women as befits their roles as carers and nurturers (Graham, 2012). Biologically, women are the nurturers and even society has defined the women as the weaker sex. Gender inequality has proven to be much more intractable than anticipated. In several arenas women's capabilities and quality of life have worsened, not improved; legislative reform is not matched by changes in political, economic or even religious realities to enable women to use new laws; gains in one sphere have produced new, detrimental forms of gender inequality; women everywhere are having to fight to get their voices heard, despite new emphases on democracy, voice and participation. (Cornwall et.al., 2007)

In the Christian faith the women is seen as a partner for a man- made from his rib, a provider and often very courageous. Islam is often seen as a religion of men and in traditional Judaism, where women are for the most part seen as separate but equal. Women's obligations and responsibilities are different from men's, but no less important (in fact, in some ways, women's responsibilities are considered more important). Yet, women of faith have historically played a pivotal role in challenging gender inequality, and they continue to defy stereotypes in politics, the workplace, and houses of worship. Graham (2012) continues her argument that women would disrupt the public sphere if they participate in the public realm. Thus, the Enlightenment wove gendered narratives into the relationship of reason and the public virtue and good citizenship. It can be said that feminism emerged as a movement of modernity and, despite these critiques; it shares the core principles of the enlightenment. Women must therefore take a position on everything whether it is nuclear warfare, war between two countries, ethnic and communal conflict, political, economic and development policies, human rights and civil liberties or environmental issues, despite their religious faiths. (Bhasin and Khan as stated in Miles, 1984)

Simone de Beauvoir (2009) suggested that women are “other” to men’s normative being, but they must seek transcendence from such objectification. de Beauvoir challenges the idea that women is other to male identity, the antithesis. Ruddick quoted in Krishnamurthy (2016), points out that “we have learned from confronting racism and sexual bigotry that we cannot make our differences disappears” (p. 111) and disagrees with de Beauvoir in her statement that woman and men are different. de Beauvoir’s concentric lines of argument framed within the existentialist discourse about the inward and outward implications of being a woman in a world devised by the masculine mind has glued the fragmented selves of my dispersed persona back together. Hence, much of the second wave feminism was secular as a primary source of control of women, of the defence of their roles as natural and God- given, thus there are major gender divisions and subordinate status to men. The inescapable themes of spirituality appear in much post-colonial feminist and womanist thought. For many women, the post-secular does seem to leave them between ‘a rock and a hard place’, basically between religion and the multi-cultural domains of society and who they are as the self.

Take the veiled Muslim woman who brings her religious faith into her public civil identity and is targeted and demonised as irrational fundamentalism yet when Christians cover up, they are not questioned as much. Graham (2012) adds that the human spirit of autonomy colludes with racist and Islamophobic politics to deny Muslim women the right of self-determination. The Christian nun is allowed to cover up just like the veiled Muslim women but the discrimination is far less for the Christian that brings her identity to the public sphere as well. Why then does the Western society give these voices and labels to the covering up of a woman? Both men and women should have the freedom to choose what to wear; be it due to religion or even as a fashion statement.

Thus, intersectionality should be introduced to this study as the poets, who they are and what messages they send are to a large extent intersected. Kimberlé Crenshaw, as stated in Vuola (2017) coined the term in 1989, and, has been explicitly present in feminist theology since the early 1970s but it is now used in sociology, education, anthropology, psychology, political studies, law and literary studies, health studies and social work and many other (sub) disciplines dealing with social inequalities and identities as stated in Lutz (2015). Scholars like Katharina Walgenbach (2010), Kathy Davis (2008) and, Klinger and Knapp

(2003) agree with Crenshaw but go even further and say it is more than a theory, it could be considered as a paradigm shift. However, intersectionality is a heuristic device and method and could explain a lot if used correctly in assisting in over-lapping and co-constructing visible and invisible inequality. The most obvious method would be to cross-question and analyse the categories or themes that appear in the fore-front; both narrator and analyst should be explored. Although intersectionality builds on a rich literature of feminists of colour about multiple oppressions and double consciousness, it does not merely repeat that women of colour are multiply oppressed. And at the same time it does not imply that all situations are intersectional to the same extent. Miles (1984), agrees that feminism can be criticised by the following: gender oppression due to class, race, colonial and other oppressions and thus immediately presuming white, middle-class women's reality is every women's reality and in return accepting patriarchal myths that industrialisation and urbanisation have meant increased equality and liberty for women and that 'third world' women are therefore, more oppressed and their liberation will involve moving closer in condition to 'first world' women. This then once again brings in context the importance of using intersectionality to analyse the work of the select poets.

Just as there is diversity among individual women, based on their intersecting axes of age, race, ethnicity, class, marital status, sexual orientation, religion, or other characteristics, there is diversity across countries in their national-level gender inequalities based on intersecting axes of transnational, regional, cross-cutting, and unique national issues that structure gendered differences and concerns (Bose 2011).

Feminist theologians stressed the significance of the interstructuring of gender, class, colonialism, race, and ethnicity, to emphasise their practical and theoretical cooperation with liberation and feminist theologians from the global south. Feminism should be looked at through multiple lenses; no two women have the same struggles even when they are from similar backgrounds or even from the same religions. Feminism then has different definitions and viewpoints for different people. Nash (2008) defines intersectionality as a notion constituted by mutual reinforcement vectors of race, gender, class and sexuality as a primary tool to combat feminist hierarchy, hegemony and exclusivity. One then questions how any sphere of life is not intersected; in order for one to exist surely the other then must also exist, ultimately making each human 100% unique. In Thorpe's (2018) feminist essay

collection, feminism is addressed and discussed from every possible angle and it justifies the intersectionality and why every being to some extent is feminist. To many women, the concept of intersectionality seems foreign and has little bearing on their lives, but feminism touches on issues as wide-ranging as motherhood, sex and race and all these co-exist. In the past there was the idea that feminism meant one thing, and now there is much more awareness that it means many things, and there are many types of feminisms. Bryson (1999) agrees by mentioning that the world often forgets that people are members of more than one social group, and have therefore contrasted the experiences of women with those of workers or ethnic minorities as if women have no class or ethnic identity. This broadening of the concept of feminism has strengthened the movement, because it commits to recognising difference as an opportunity to build solidarity. Intersectionality provides a unique lens of study that does not question differences; rather, it assumes that differential experiences of common ground and for intersectional theorists, marginalised subjects have an epistemic advantage, a particular perspective that could lead to a just society. Intersectionality is the perfect aid to the post-secular feminist framework as it responds to critiques and the issue of identity politics. Crenshaw (1989) speaks about multi-burdens for women that construct their complex identities. This in turn then leads to multiple dimensions of social categories of analysis. McCall (2005) adds to this but in particular talks about the black women as a marginalised subject for intersectionality and identity complexities. One should keep in mind that black women's traumas cannot be wholly addressed by the existing doctrinal structure. Crenshaw focuses on the black women because often they are 'multiply burdened', but in order to examine and analyse these burdens one then has to weigh it against privileges. This remains an interesting question, how oppression and privilege live side by side. While some scholars have used notions of identity (Wing, 1990) used poetry, (Williams, 1989) used narrative and (Matsuda, 1987) used epistemology as a method of disrupting race- or-gender logic. Adrien Wing's work exemplifies the literary devices to describe black women's experiences and describes the experiences as 'multiplicative'- meaning multiply each part of a woman by any other part and so it continues. Generally, intersectional literature has excluded an examination of identities but not of multiple vectors of power and thus making intersectionality's most significant contribution that of identity. Chang and Culp note that it is easy to speak of race, gender, sexuality, class and have all these operate symbiotically, cosynthetically,

multidimensionally or interconnectedly but then prescribe how to intervene in all this. The obvious intervention would be literature and more so poetry, as it allows for layers to be taken down and catharsis to take place.

“With identity thus reconceptualised, it may be easier to ... summon the courage to challenge groups that are after all, in one sense, 'home' to us, in the name of the parts of us that are not made at home. ... The most one could expect is that we will dare to speak against internal exclusions and marginalisation's, that we might call attention to how the identity of 'the group' has been centred on the intersectional identities of a few. ... Through an awareness of intersectionality, we can better acknowledge and ground the differences among us and negotiate the means by which these differences will find expression in constructing group politics.” (Crenshaw 1991, p. 1299)

This can then be used to critically interrogate poetry; intersectionality can sort out paradoxes and strengthen its explanatory power.

In the development of the feminist movement, one of the most dramatic political shifts was from a desire to overcome difference to its promotion. Integration or interracialism as a goal migrated toward difference and an embrace of identity that precluded togetherness. This was a disturbing process but, in retrospect, probably inevitable. Postwar young people, especially whites, knew very little about racism and sexism. They have to separate to learn who they were in race, class, and gender terms constructed by American society. Just as identity politics divided the society that created such politics in the first place; they divided the movements (Breines as quoted in Hesse- Biber, 2012).

Multi oppressions are assigned to women and the one cannot be separated from the other; however, most theorists of intersectionality do not even mention religion. Intersectionality is a broad way of theorising gender in relation to these other differences and constructions of identity and the self, showing how a variety of oppressive structures - such as sexism and racism, influences these. Religion has rarely been mentioned among these differences, and even less so as an empowering factor in spite of the insistence of religious feminists from different parts of the world. That is why one needs to remember that it is not possible to talk of all women as one. This is true as there is always the double burden as a women and women face situations which men do not have to face as often; such as, sexual harassment

at the work place or creating a home for a man and children and the reproductive role is portrayed as a women's biggest liability.

Several feminist scholars of religion have pointed out this omission. For example, according to Elizabeth Castelli (2001):

(. . .) if 'women' has long been recognized as too abstract a category to be useful for analysis, religion has rarely been included in the litany of qualifiers (race, class, culture, ethnicity/nationality, sexuality) by which 'women' becomes an ever more marked and differentiated category. Yet, feminist scholars who intervene in the academic studies of religion have often drawn attention to the complicated role that religion has played in identity formations, social relations, and power structures. 'Religion' as a category often cuts across other categories by which identities are framed (gender, race, class, etc.), and it often complicates these other categories rather than simply reinscribing them.

Anthropologist Saba Mahmood (2005), who has done fieldwork among conservative Muslim women in Egypt, expresses a similar view:

Over the last two decades, a key question has occupied many feminist theorists: how should issues of historical and cultural specificity inform both the analytics and the politics of any feminist project? While this question has led to serious attempts at integrating issues of sexual, racial, class and national difference with feminist theory, questions regarding religious difference have remained relatively unexplored.

Deeper explanations on how exactly religions could and should be understood and applied in intersectional analyses are still up for questioning and further research. Religion is a complex phenomenon and has been downplayed in feminist theory and, fields that do have religion as their focus, such as feminist theology and more broadly, feminist studies of religion have not been recognised as key fields of feminist theorising, where intersectionality was first recognized (Vuola, 2017). Think of brown and black women as double or even at times triple oppressed due to skin tones and white surnames or levels of education or even lifestyles. Feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether (1975), possibly the most influential feminist theologian of all time, wrote:

... any women's movement which is only concerned about sexism and no other form of oppression, must remain a women's movement of the white upper class, for it is only this group of women whose only problem is the problem of being women, since, in every other way, they belong to the ruling class. ... Thus it seems to me essential that the women's movement reach out and include in its struggle the interstructuring of sexism with all other kinds of oppression, and recognise a pluralism of women's movements. (Ruether, 1975, p. 125)

Already in 1975, Ruether was aware of oppression or more so the double/triple colonisation of the woman of colour; at a time when many countries were still fighting for independence and the cry for colonisation to end. This oppression often came with poverty and even variations of patriarchal dominance. Women of all races and colour used religion in order to fight this oppression. Women negotiate with their religious communities and identities in multiple ways in everyday life, such as gender, body, and materiality- that is, ordinary human (male and female) ways of living and reflecting on their religiosity.

A post-secular society must make space for theorising in a sophisticated or meaningful way about the role of religion (Christianity, Islam and Sikhism) in women's lives and contextualisation of the relationship between religion, culture and gender. These contextualisations are evident in poetry of the select poets and their worldviews and an emphasis of this is found in the identity of each.

## 2.2. Theoretical Framework

The chosen theoretical framework which will largely influence and shape this study is post-secular feminism. The six select poets are all of the diaspora; this diaspora cannot be separated from religion and its existence in both the public and private spheres. Post-secular feminism deals largely with the oppression of women in their given religions; in this study it is Christianity, Islam and Sikhism. Post-secular feminism also largely depends on intersectionality and so does this study; it is the basis of the analyses and connects the poets to what they are and what has shaped them. This section introduces post-secular feminism and introduces other contributions to this recent novel framework.

According to Mozumder (2011, p. 130), "Post- secular is defined as the continued existence of religious communities in an incessantly secularising environment". In order to understand the post-secular, one first needs to understand the secular. Secular can be defined as anything that has no religious or spiritual basis or does not pertain to it and relate to worldly things. Inglehart and Norris (2004) define 'secularism' as "the death of religion" and C. Wright Mills summarised this process:

"Once the world was filled with the sacred –in thought, practice, and institutional form. After the Reformation and the Renaissance, the forces of modernization swept across the globe and secularization, a corollary historical process, loosened the dominance of the sacred. In due course, the sacred shall disappear altogether except, possibly, in the private realm." (p. 5)

For long periods this was a norm; no one had to explain or justify their ways and rebel against tradition. The notion of the post-secular, suggests that we have left a secular era behind; implying a tectonic shift in the zeitgeist. The secular can be dated back to the 80's or 90's and it is often ambivalent; when the religious aspect was neglected and religion is not being appealed to, as such. The belief that religion was dying became the conventional wisdom in the social sciences during most of the twentieth century. There was a decrease in weddings through the church, baptisms and any ceremonies by the church and this became a trend. In the 1960s there were intense theological debates; the second Vatican council, the myth of God incarnate, it was also the time of critiquing permissive societies; especially the public sphere. It is then that the secular emerged- especially in France and Britain. This was considered as the religious crisis of the 1960s and the turn towards the secular was obvious. There was a decline in numbers of congregation attendance, especially in the Roman Catholic Churches, a decline in worshippers and the significance of priests and nuns were no longer prominent. Multitudes started questioning religion, what it stands for and why it exists, causing less baptisms, confirmations and church marriages. The largest decline was in the Christian religion as opposed to other religions. It is during this crisis that secularism was birthed. Sexual freedom, new sexual identities, gender changes and woman rights was the reason behind this crisis and it took years for humanity to adapt back to post-secular ways because too many factors influenced decision making and religion as a whole during this time.



Women leaving church as often as men changed feminist studies and is seen as important because of women's role in family religion and inculcating values for the next generation and in later years the novel idea and movement of post-secular feminism.

Jürgen Habermas' recognition of the "post-secular" and in coining this new term in the late 1990's, has impacted the debate concerning the role of religion in the public sphere as it the increasing captivity of religion to the personal arena. People seek inclusion and recognition in the public sphere precisely on the basis of their 'faith' conceived at least in part in the epistemological sense. The gain in popularity of post-secular terminology comes in the wake of the postmodern, the postcolonial, and the post-national and is now centre-stage in critical social theory (McLennan, 2010). Post-secular can be understood as a spectrum of concerns and endless possibilities (intersectionality), including Charles Taylor's monumental appeal to transcendence in *A Secular Age* (2007) alongside Michel de Certeau's radical-orthodox theology (Ward, 2000).

Many scholars would concur that there really is something qualitatively different about the post-1970s era, enough to warrant a new term that differentiates the modern era (roughly defined as the period encompassing 1770–1970) from the postmodern. The development of postmodern discourse is instructive for making sense of the post-secular, insofar as postmodernism can be read in at least two different ways. In one reading, postmodernism claims that modernity is over and hence that we live in a "postmodern" era; in another view, postmodernism insists that the universalistic claims associated with modernity can no longer be sustained without objections. The concept of religion is but a secret weapon of Western hegemonic universalism according Asad (2003), creating multi-disciplinary and innovative viewpoints. The question of the post-secular poses two lines of inquiry (just like modernity): first, determinations about the state of religiosity in the world; second, understanding the new ways that social scientists, philosophers, historians, and scholars from across disciplines are and are not paying attention to religion. In other words, the question is: Which world has changed—the "real" one or the public one? (Gorski, P.S, et al. 2012) the post-secular must wrestle with the radicality of faith in a God, for if it wants to provide a framework distinct from modernity, then it must overcome its inheritance of the tendency to associate God with the 'objective truth', for this removes any and all necessity for God as such, making God irrelevant.

It can be said that modernity failed or was unsuccessful. Both secular and religious people can co-exist and learn from each other, creating an even ground. Scholars however have proclaimed a triumphalist post-secularism (Milbank 1990), others, such as Gauchet (1997), Dupuy (2013), and Asad (2003) have shifted attention to how religion is interwoven into the tapestry of the secular than what we tend to realise. Asad (2003), deduces how the secular is neither continuous with the religious that supposedly preceded it; not a simple break from it and that the concept of the secular cannot do without the idea of religion. Even when secular people and societies proclaim that they are non-religious, religion exists even when it is not around. A lot of the human existence is owed to religion, especially thoughts and morals and religion needs to be explained from out of our own historical situation and worldviews and facts. Habermas as stated in Jones (2010), defines the post secular as: "So, if all is to go well both sides, each from its own viewpoint, must accept an interpretation of the relation between faith and knowledge that enables them to live together in a self-reflective manner."

Nevertheless, that doesn't mean one can forget modernity and the denial of God or a God; postmodernity produced the post-secular. The world in the twenty-first century has witnessed multifarious speculations attached to the fear of the increasing and re-introductory role of religion, especially the issues of the rise of religious extremism and militant Islam, to mention a few. Mozumder (2011) adds that, apart from the rise of religious extremism or militancy, the increasing religiosity of people all over the world is reported by numerous studies and news reports. It is generally agreed that religion is not declining or at least not losing its influence in modern life, unlike classical modernisation and secularisation theories. Post-secularism is a new-awareness to an existing phenomenon.

### 2.2.1. Post-Secular Feminism

Post-secular feminisms explores both the potentials and pitfalls of post-secular feminisms, with some authors arguing that a contextually grounded praxis is possible, while others make a strong case against post-secular feminism as theory and practice (Deo, 2018). It deals with feminist theories to a certain extent and at the same time with feminist theology. Feminist theology is a movement found in several religions, including Buddhism,

Christianity, Judaism, and New Thought, to reconsider the traditions, practices, scriptures, and theologies of those religions from a feminist perspective. It cannot be denied that post-secularism is indeed needed in order to bring some form of just order back to reality and obviously religion has severe ramifications on women in general. Braidotti R. (2008) and Butler J. (2008), among others, turn all the feminist debate into this critical appreciation. Braidotti attempts to pull feminism into a positive religious and spiritual light for all religions not only the Christian but also the backward Islam run rampant and the liberated West. Post-secular feminism in its novelty allows the long standing feminist dissatisfaction with the division between the state/public/men and religion/private/ women and this can promote and establish a new thought system and ultimately a better way of life.

Post-secular feminism allows for the role of religion in women's lives and can make women's experiences of religion fruitful and less patriarchal in context. The years of neglect of religion in women studies and feminist studies can be found in feminist readers, anthologies, revealing incidences where feminist theological reflection and women's religious or spiritual experiences are generally absent. Feminism in general just like post-secular feminism can be praised for its inclusive range of subject and thus it's strong stance of intersectionality; gender theory in theology and glances of feminism in religion was the onset of post-secular feminism. Llewellyn and Trzebiatowska (2013) notes that post-secular feminism is a multidisciplinary approach by making use of literary, cultural, social scientific, psychology, anthropological, historical and philosophical methods and methodologies to shape change for religious women. It is of keynote importance that one understands that religion intersects other identity categories and like other categories can be subdivided. All six poets of this study are women of colour and this intersects with their diaspora, this also intersects with their online poetry success and the use of micro poems with common threads and themes; connecting them not only in this study but to a forth wave online feminist movement.

"Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being." (de Beauvoir as cited in Changfoot, 2009). The post-secular turn challenges European feminism because it makes manifest the notion that agency, or political subjectivity, can be conveyed through and supported by religious piety, and may even involve significant amounts of spirituality (Braidotti, 2008). Religion remains

relevant in this context because individuals continue to engage with religious ideas and experiences in order to make sense of their lives, even when increasingly they do so outside the context of religious institutions.; for example the select six poets using their poetry to express their religious or spiritual views in regard to their lives. Butler, (2008), reinforces this:

“If religion functions as a key matrix for the articulation of values, and if most of the people

make a political error in claiming that religion ought to be overcome in each and every instance.”

As always a combination of cultural and historical factors must be examined in all cases in order to determine what, if any, role religious justifications play. Wangila, (2007) emphasises the power religion really has:

“Because religion is one of the most powerful institutions for perpetuating sexism and patriarchal authority, it also has the potential to address the very problem of oppression. Religion can be a powerful instrument to deconstruct oppressive social stereotypes and to work to transform attitudes and social behaviour.”

Religion can be mobilised as a tool for any social, cultural or political artifice, be it feminist or not. Religion in itself is not a force that can liberate, or dominate at a whim but like any other social phenomenon, is dependant of the relations of time and place. The general empowerment of women of colour in this century and during this online feminism allows for the importance and relevance of post-secular feminism. Women of different skin tones- races and ethnicities have various challenges. Black women such as S. Truth, M. Stewart, and A. J. Cooper and men like W.E.B. Dubois addressed these challenges in the 19th century. As a theoretical paradigm, intersectionality is unique in its versatility and ability to produce new knowledge. This versatility can be found in the poetry of Chisala, Daley- Ward, Kaur, Shire, Umebinyuo and Waheed and is the key focus of the study.

### 2.2.2. Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw, as stated in Vuola (2017) coined the term, 'intersectionality', in 1989, and, has been explicitly present in feminist theology since the early 1970s but it is now used in sociology, education, anthropology, psychology, political studies, law and literary studies, health studies and social work and many sub disciplines. Scholars like Walgenbach K. (2010), Davis K. (2008) and Klinger and Knapp (2003) agree with Crenshaw but go even further and say it is more than a theory, it could be considered as a paradigm shift. However, intersectionality is a heuristic device and method and could explain a lot if used correctly in assisting in over-lapping and co-constructing visible and invisible inequality. The most obvious method would be to cross-question and analyse the categories or themes that appear in the fore-front; both narrator and analyst should be explored. Although, intersectionality builds on a rich literature of feminists of colour about multiple oppressions and double consciousness; it does not merely repeat this but extends and elaborates on this. And at the same time it does not imply that all situations are intersectional to the same extent. Miles (1984), agrees that feminism can be criticised by the following: gender oppression due to class, race, colonial and other oppressions and thus immediately presuming white, middle-class women's reality is every women's reality and in return accepting patriarchal myths that industrialisation and urbanisation have meant increased equality and liberty for women and that 'third world' women are therefore, more oppressed and their liberation will involve moving closer in condition to 'first world' women. This then once again brings in context the importance of using intersectionality to analyse the work of the select poets.

Just as there is diversity among individual women, based on their intersecting axes of age, race, ethnicity, class, marital status, sexual orientation, religion, or other characteristics, there is diversity across countries in their national-level gender inequalities based on intersecting axes of transnational, regional, cross-cutting, and unique national issues that structure gendered differences and concerns (Bose, 2011). These intersected axes in each of the six poets, gives a base of analyses and each axe should be considered when analysing the poetry. Intersectionality allows multiple and complex constellations of alterity and its implications for social structures, forms, processes and differentiated identities and realities to take place, (Lewis, 2013). This gives a clear cut understanding that all elements of the poet will be used when analysing the poetry and that nothing is untouched and unleashes a feminist critical inquiry.

According to Davis (2008), intersectionality is popular because of four characteristics. Firstly, it addresses a fundamental concern of feminism; it does this in new and exciting ways and simultaneously appeals to generalists and specialists. Lastly, it is ambiguous and incomplete and

allows infinite exploration to take place. "...intersectionality offers endless opportunities for interrogating one's own blind spots and transforming them into analytic resources or further critical analysis" (Davis 2008, p. 77).

The reason why Post-secular Feminism is the chosen framework is because it is a novel framework and concept to both feminist/gender studies and religious studies. It is an interesting approach to literature as it is not common and opens doors for further research especially in regard to poetry. Post-secularism gives a very modern and ambivalent view to approach to the poetry of the select poets and allows for it to an honest reflection and analysis to women's issues that are not allows dealt with when do poetry research. When doing literature it is difficult to find religious frameworks to analyse from and post-secular feminism is the perfect blend of two prominent fields of study and could provide the best in regard to the objectives of this study.

Post-secular Feminism looks at the oppression of woman in their religious spaces and how intersectionality.

## Chapter Three: Research Design

### 3.1. Research Design

This research study was a qualitative desktop study of six select poets with a total of nine poetic collections. The qualitative desktop study was an external desktop research as nine anthologies were used, as well as the internet- the poets have large online followings.

Using post-secular feminism, the researcher explored and analysed the writings of the select poets. The study was concerned with the diaspora poets and post-secular feminism as found in their poetry, with strong emphasis on intersectionality. The analysis is divided into five themes: 1. Religion, 2. Home and Exile, 3. Hurt and Healing, 4. Mother and 5. Self-love; which was interrogated and understood, in regard to post-secular feminism.

The five chosen themes are connected to post-secular view points and ideally shaped the identities of the poets in the best possible way. The poets tend to write and express their views on religion with zeal and take to heart what their religions hold sacred. The study largely addressed post-secularism, thus, an important theme was religion and was the first analysed. Home and Exile and Hurt and Healing deal largely with the diaspora and where the poets seem to find themselves. At times the diaspora creates ambivalence and displacement among the poets and ultimately shapes their worldviews. The poets dedicate a lot of poems to their mothers or to their absent fathers and this shaped how they saw love, romance and how marriage should be viewed. Lastly, the self-love theme is critical to the analysis and the research and was chosen as the last theme.

The five chosen themes will reflect the main objective and lead to a rigorous research study by answering the research questions and fulfilling the main objective.

### 3.2. Data Analysis

The data, - meaning the select poems are found in nine poetry collections (to explore, analyse and understand) by six poets in total. The poetry collections are *soft magic and nectar* by Upile Chisala, *Bone* by Yrsa Daley-Ward, *milk and honey* and *the sun and the flowers* by Rupi Kaur, *Teaching My Mother to Give Birth* by Warsan Shire, *Questions to Ada* by Ijeoma Umebinyuo and, *salt. and nejma* by Nayyirah Waheed. It was a textual thematic analysis of the poetry; exploring and analysing post-secular feminism and the worldviews continuously shaped.

### **3.2.1. *soft magic. and Nectar* by Upile Chisala**

*soft magic.* is the debut collection of prose and poetry by Upile Chisala. This book explores the self, joy, blackness, gender, matters of the heart, the experience of diaspora, spirituality and most of all, how to survive. *soft magic.* is a shared healing journey that was published in 2015 and consist of 122 pages. *nectar* is the second collection of poetry and prose by Chisala published in 2018, consisting of 278 pages. It is a guide through a beautiful process of blooming starting with some poems on self-love and how the words transform the poet's experiences, followed by acknowledging all the fruit of these experiences. Chisala's hope is that these poems on growth encourage readers to sow and to make changes in the lives of others. Chisala's hope is to tell stories from the margins and through her work help others and herself come to terms with the past, celebrate the present and confidently dream beautiful futures.

The poems are not as expressive as the other five poets work and don't play around much with poetic devices and fancy vocabulary; it is basic and straightforward poetry that deals with everyday issues. Both the prose and poetry are not lengthy and are like diary entries of thoughts or affirmations at times. There has been a lot of acclaim on Instagram and Twitter, especially since it is about black woman and the appreciation thereof.

### **3.2.2. *Bone* by Yrsa Daley-Ward**

A poignant debut collection of 160 pages of autobiographical poems about the heart, life, and the inner self of Yrsa Daley-Ward, self-published in 2014 and later republished in 2017. Brutal and authentic, the poems and prose takes the reader on an emotional roller-coaster and becomes self-reflective the more it is read. The honesty and diction portrays the chosen themes for the research well and exemplifies modern day poetry brilliantly. Daley-Ward creates aching and intense work that illuminates life's interior emotional movements with nuances and ingrained imagery. Not only is she a modern poet but also knows very well how to use social media (Instagram) to her advantage. Most of *Bone's* work is structured in flowing prose blocks, or as spaced-out lines that drift down the white space of a page. What the collection lacks in diversity of form, it makes up for in the layered ingenuity of its narratives.



### **3.2.3. *milk and honey* and *the sun and her flowers* by Rupi Kaur**

*milk and honey* is Kaur's debut collection, published in 2015. The book is divided into four chapters, and each chapter serves a different purpose; deals with a different pain and heals different heartaches. *milk and honey* takes readers through a journey of the most bitter moments in life as Kaur writes about survival, the experience of violence, abuse, love, loss, and femininity. *the sun and her flowers* was published in 2017. With the second collection Kaur continues to explore a variety of themes ranging from: love, loss, trauma, healing, femininity, migration and revolution and follows the same style of divided chapters as her first collection. Kaur writes without punctuation and accredits this to her Punjabi background and at the same time, there are commonalities found in her writing and style by Warsan Shire and especially by Nayyirah Waheed. Kaur also uses illustrations drawn by herself alongside a lot of her poetry. Just like Yrsa Daley-Ward she is an active social media poet and uses it to her full advantage.

### **3.2.4. *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth* by Warsan Shire**

Warsan Shire published her only poetry collection (considered as a pamphlet) consisting of 38 pages in 2011. She is the veteran poet amongst the six select poets and their work. She made a name for herself on Tumblr and become famous before she published any of her work. Her poetry is much lengthier and has more depth than the other five poets' work. Shire writes mostly about the immigrant experience, being a refugee and Islam in the pamphlet. Her poetry is nostalgic and the other five poets take inspiration from her themes and her writing. Her poetry is much more literature appropriate (academic) than the others can be considered. She easily covers the chosen themes in far less pages and has powerful writing and style. Warsan Shire holds multiple awards because of *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth*.

### **3.2.5. *Questions for Ada* by Ijeoma Umebinyuo**

*Question for Ada* is a 248 page poetry collection published in 2015. Umebinyuo also writes about the diaspora, colonisation, hurt from childhood, the girl child and appreciating the fact that she is black. Her poetry is also micro- quote like and can be translated or mistaken for affirmations. She has a strong fan base but having come after Shire and Waheed, one often wonders if the writing and expression is authentic and true to Umebinyuo. Her self-love poetry is the strongest and she truly

celebrates being African and coming from Nigeria. Her writing is both intimate and raw and has unconventional ways of telling a full story in a few words.

### **3.2.6. *salt.* and *nejma* by Nayyirah Waheed**

*salt.* was Nayyirah Waheed's debut publication in 2013, consisting of 275 pages. Waheed is very private and lets her poetry speak for itself, with no internet presence at all. Just as the other poems in this study she, too, writes about the diaspora, colonisation, hurt, men, toxic relationship with her mother and Islam. Her poems are breviloquent and authenticity is found in every poem. Her strongest pieces are of the diaspora and colonisation that she is very expressive about; she also easily writes about not belonging and her faith. She portrays anger through her writing that is not easily found in the other five poets. Her second anthology, *nejma* was published in 2014 and holds 172 pages. *nejma* is a watered down version of *salt.* but is still very heart provoking and a clear example of modern poetry and the power it holds.

### 3.3 Ethical Clearance



NAMIBIA UNIVERSITY  
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

#### FACULTY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (F-REC)

#### DECISION: ETHICS APPROVAL

Ref: S022/2019  
Student no.: 211109665

Date Issued: 13 August 2019

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#### RESEARCH TOPIC

Title: **Shaping worldviews: an analysis of post-secular feminist poetry of the diaspora**

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Dear Ms Strauss,

The Faculty of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee (F-REC) of the Namibia University of Science and Technology reviewed your application for the above-mentioned research. The research as set out in the application has been approved.

We would like to point out that you, as principal investigator, are obliged to:

- maintain the ethical integrity of your research,
- adhere to the Research policy and ethical guidelines of NUST, and
- remain within the scope of your research proposal and supporting evidence as submitted to the F-REC.

Should any aspect of your research change from the information as presented to the F-REC, which could have an effect on the possibility of harm to any research subject, you are under the obligation to report it immediately to your supervisor or F-REC as applicable in writing. Should there be any uncertainty in this regard, you have to consult with the F-REC.

We wish you success with your research, and trust that it will make a positive contribution to the quest for knowledge at NUST.

Sincerely,

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## Chapter Four: Post-secular feminist analysis of select poetry

This chapter analyses the poetry of the six select poets in their collections: *soft magic*, *nectar*, *Bone*, *milk and honey*, *the sun and her flowers*, *Teaching My Mother How To Give Birth*, *salt*, *nejma* and *Questions to Ada*. The aim is to reveal the identity of the poets through their poetry and how they shape their worldviews considering the themes: 'Religion', which shapes the post-secular feminist views, 'Home and Exile', 'Hurt and Healing' which reveal the diaspora and brings forth how generational pasts, anger and healing shape the poets. The chapter also examines the -theme of 'Mother' which reveals early opinions on the world and manifestations around her and lastly, 'Self-Love', which rounds off the poets as whole beings finding love in themselves.

The worldviews present in the poems will be explored to show how they have shaped the identities of the poets. The poets have been arranged alphabetically under all themes, as the study makes use of thematic analysis to draw out the intersectional contrast of worldviews and identity. These are the nine published poetry collections of the poets:

### 4.1.1. *soft magic*. and *nectar* by Upile Chisala

*soft magic*. is the debut collection of prose and poetry by Upile Chisala. This book explores the self, joy, blackness, gender, matters of the heart, the experience of diaspora, spirituality and most of all, how to survive. *soft magic*.<sup>1</sup> is a shared healing journey that was published in 2015 and consist of 122 pages. <sup>2</sup>*nectar* is the second collection of poetry and prose by Chisala published in 2018, consisting of 278 pages. It is a guide through a beautiful process of blooming starting with some poems on self-love and how the words transform the poet's experiences, followed by acknowledging all the fruit of these experiences. Chisala's hope is that these poems on growth encourage readers to sow and to make changes in the lives of others. Chisala tell stories from the margins and through her work help others and herself come to terms with the past, celebrate the present and confidently dream beautiful futures.

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<sup>1</sup> *soft magic*. is the title of Upile Chisala's first published work, it is written in lowercase and has a period after magic.

<sup>2</sup> *nectar* is also written in lowercase and is the second published work by Chisala.

#### **4.1.2. *Bone* by Yrsa Daley-Ward**

A poignant debut collection of 160 pages of autobiographical poems about the heart, life, and the inner self of Yrsa Daley-Ward, self-published in 2014 and later republished in 2017. Brutal and authentic, the poems and prose takes the reader on an emotional roller-coaster and becomes self-reflective the more it is read. The honesty and diction portrays the chosen themes for the research well and exemplifies modern day poetry brilliantly. Daley-Ward creates aching and intense work that illuminates life's interior emotional movements with nuances and ingrained imagery. Not only is she a modern poet but also knows very well how to use social media (Instagram) to her advantage. Most of *Bone's* work is structured in flowing prose blocks, or as spaced-out lines that drift down the white space of a page. What the collection lacks in diversity of form, it makes up for in the layered ingenuity of its narratives.

#### **4.1.3. *milk and honey and the sun and her flowers*<sup>3</sup> by Rupi Kaur**

*milk and honey* is Kaur's debut collection, published in 2015. The book is divided into four chapters, and each chapter serves a different purpose; deals with a different pain and heals different heartaches. *milk and honey* takes readers through a journey of the most bitter moments in life as Kaur writes about survival, the experience of violence, abuse, love, loss, and femininity. *the sun and her flowers* was published in 2017. With the second collection Kaur continues to explore a variety of themes ranging from: love, loss, trauma, healing, femininity, migration and revolution and follows the same style of divided chapters as her first collection. Kaur writes without punctuation and accredits this to her Punjabi background and at the same time, there are commonalities found in her writing and style by Warsan Shire and especially by Nayyirah Waheed. Kaur also uses illustrations drawn by herself alongside a lot of her poetry. Just like Yrsa Daley-Ward she is an active social media poet and uses it to her full advantage.

#### **4.1.4. *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth* by Warsan Shire**

Warsan Shire published her only poetry collection (considered as a pamphlet), consisting of 38 pages in 2011. She is the veteran poet amongst the six select poets and their work. She made a name for herself on tumblr and became famous before she published any of her work. Her poetry is much lengthier than the other five poets' work. Shire writes mostly about the immigrant experience, being

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<sup>3</sup> *milk and honey and the sun and her flowers* are the titles of Rupi Kaur's collections, all written in lowercase.

a refugee and Islam in the collection-pamphlet. Her poetry is nostalgic and the other five poets take inspiration from her themes and her writing. Her poetry is much more literature appropriate (academic) than the others can be considered, as she makes use of poetic devices. She easily covers the chosen themes in less pages than the other poets and has powerful writing and style.

#### **4.1.5. *Questions for Ada* by Ijeoma Umebinyuo**

*Question for Ada* is a 248 page poetry collection published in 2015. Umebinyuo too writes about the diaspora, colonisation, hurt from childhood, the girl child and appreciating the fact that she is black. Her poetry is also micro- quote like and can be translated or mistaken for affirmations. Her self-love poetry is the strongest and she truly celebrates being African and coming from Nigeria. Her writing is both intimate and raw and has unconventional ways of telling a full strong in a few words, making it concise, authentic and exact.

#### **4.1.6. *salt. and nejma* by Nayyirah Waheed**

*salt.* was Nayyirah Waheed's debut publication in 2013, consisting of 275 pages. Waheed is very private and lets her poetry speak for itself, with no internet precise at all. Just as the other poems in this study she, too, writes about the diaspora, colonisation, hurt and men, a toxic relationship with her mother and Islam. Her poems are breviloquent and authenticity is found in every poem. Her strongest pieces are of the diaspora and colonisation that she is very expressive about; she also easily writes about not belonging and her faith. Her second anthology, *nejma* was published in 2014 and holds 172 pages.

## 4.2 Religion

Religion plays a substantial role in the six women's lives, as they are often made to feel less not only by their religion but more so by society and men. Religion provides guidelines and comfort in times of difficulty and through their poetry one can see which poets hold fast and is not shaken as easily by outside factors. Three of the select poets (Chisala, Daley-Ward and Umebinyuo) speak of their Christian faith, whereas the Sikh (Kaur) and Islam (Shire and Waheed) emerge as more prominent figures in the poetry of the other three ladies. Through the poetry of the six poets one can pick up what religion means to each and how it shapes each one's identity. Religion is a central part of these poets' identity, portraying a post secular feminist view and also a large part of the intersectionality of the poets. It showcases how the six poets live within their religious beliefs and how these spaces define them and how oppression can take place within themselves and the societies they live in.

Sometimes 2 AM looks like rushing to God and asking for

the hurt to stop.

*Upile Chisala*

God is known to be all encompassing, omnipresent, despite circumstances or reason. Rushing to God at 2 AM or using this as a simile to compare hurt to God is powerful because it gives the illustration that there is a 2 AM prayer or begging to God. It is less about God and more about the pain being felt. Christianity is a monotheistic religion, thus it is often found that Christians believe their God to be the only God. The use of the word 'sometimes' is repeated in other poems by Chisala and this could indicate that God is around sometimes for her as opposed to all the time.

Sometimes my mother wakes up before God.

*Upile Chisala*

Chisala compares God; as a Christian woman this would seem worrisome. God cannot be compared. She compares God to her mother; taking the authority from God and placing her mother on a pedestal. She uses a metaphor to compare her mother and God. Her mother was there for her when she needed God (God was asleep) and her mother tends to be awake at her beck and call. A large part of who Chisala writes about is extended to a mother figure as opposed to any other human figures or even existential beings. Be it late into the morning hours, having one's mother awake means the world to a daughter and especially if the daughter needs her mother due to heartbreak or pain. Thus, the comparison is strong and the poem is a tribute to her mother.

## to the elders

I cannot find the god you serve

and i have been known to stay out all

night, searching.

*Yrsa Daley-Ward*

The poem has a religious aspect but is not entirely religious. It goes to show how the elders place a moral religious compass in the young and how important it is to a certain society. The lowercase of god also shows the insignificance Daley-Ward show to god and her religious faith. Daley-Ward grew up in an extremely religious home and had to attend church with her grandmother regularly so a slight disregard to God comes from a deep place as it was forced upon her and she no longer believes the same things the elders do.

The pastor makes twenty-four

references to hell

in the sermon at church and forgets

to talk

about love.

*Yrsa Daley-Ward*

Given Daley-Ward's background of growing up in an extremely religious house (her grandparents were Seven Day Adventist), she would have attended church a lot. The "world" so easily preaches about hell and can quote bible verses when it suits them- the society, yet they so often forget about God's love or love in general and the poet mentions this as a cause for concern. Love is natural and love is universal, yet religious people always seem to forget it is a central part of religion; and preach all around it making lay men and women disconnect from it and soon only hear the 'bad' sermons. To omit love so easily would have to say something about the religion and its people (followers) but also excludes certain parts and people from it because to all believers agree with the doctrines of their religion. Omitting love from the religious equation then omits the LGBTQ individuals , which Daley-Ward falls under, it omits loving though neighbour as though self (Christianity) because you find fault in skin tones and these intersectionality's cannot go unnoticed.



my god

is not waiting inside a church

or sitting above the temple's steps

my god

is the refuge breath as she's running

is living in the starving child's belly

is the heartbeat of the protest

written by holy men

my god

lives between the sweaty things

of women's bodies sold for money

was last seen washing the homeless man's feet

my god

is not as unreachable as

they'd like me to think

my god is beating inside us infinitely

*Rupi Kaur*

Kaur has a form of understanding of God and religion; not only that of her own Sikh religion as she mentions churches and temples and makes the reference of washing holy men's feet and prostitution. However, she refers to God as 'my god' showing the new ageism, moving away from old doctrines and having emphasis placed on 'my'. Often one is made to believe God is found only in the Gurudwara (Sikh temple), in holy scriptures but Kaur says no, 'my god' can be found everywhere and is in us all infinitely; that even the broken, the starving, the dying, all are welcome and matter.

the name kaur  
makes me a free woman  
it removes the shackles that  
try to bind me  
uplifts me  
to remind me i am equal to  
any man even though the state  
of this world screams to me i am not  
that I am my own woman  
and i belong wholly to myself  
and the universe  
it humbles me  
calls out and says i have a  
universal duty to share with  
humanity to nurture  
and serve the sisterhood  
to raise those that need raising  
the name kaur runs in my blood  
it was in me before the word itself existed  
it is my identity and my liberation

*~kaur*

*A woman of sikhi*

*Rupi Kaur*

Kaur is the female surname given to all Sikh women, meaning princess. Kaur holds this high and says it is what defines her even before she came into existence. Kaur mentions that the surname makes her a free woman but if the surname comes from the religion unlike other religions, is it not the religion that allows for this freedom? She mentions equality to that of a man, given by the state and that patriarchy exists in the world that makes the woman less, which is true of post-secular feminism. But Kaur's surname (religion) has given her rights and the liberation even before she had to ask for it.

A God as woman as me

My sins as painful as hers.

*Ijeoma Umebinyuo*

All six poets use God and religion as similes and metaphors to themselves, their pain or even their art. Umebinyuo refers to god as a woman, which intersectionality often does, even more so feminists; they never want to accept the male view of God. That she compares her sins and says that God sins too and this is painful as well.

I told the priest

“My God is a black woman.”

He poured holy water on me

and scheduled me for an exorcism.

*Ijeoma Umebinyuo*

Umebinyuo once again refers to God as a woman, this time a black woman which defies all dogmatic views. One wonders how she self-proclaims God to a specific gender, a set skin tone or is she merely referring to her own God my using the pronoun- 'my'. Telling this to a priest in all Christian denominations is taking it a step too far, 'he' will bring out all religious guns like holy water (Catholic) and exorcism. To the society (especially African) and to men, religion is a white man's idea. Exorcism is the religious or spiritual practice of evicting demons or other spiritual entities from a person, or an area that is believed to be possessed as is most commonly done among catholic community and this could indicate Umebinyuo is catholic or at least is aware of its practices.

my mother gave me islam.

my father gave me the god of absence

and here i am.

a religion made of myself.

Nayyirah Waheed

Waheed mentions her religion (unlike most of the other poets), she mentions it freely and openly so that the reader is made aware of how her mother raised her. She was raised by her mother in a world where the father usually insists that the family follows the religious doctrines. Just like all the other poets she avails to the reader that her father was absent and this absence made her a religion all on its own. She draws a conflicting paradigm, between the absence of her mother's religion and her father's god, resulting in the self, as a place of faith.

there is a god in writing.

a soft. roaring. unconditional. home of a god.

who prays to me.

Nayyirah Waheed

Waheed uses lowercase in her poetry, be it a stylistic feature or her choice to place emphasis on all words. She even lowercases god as if he/she are just a common noun like all other things. There is a plurality to god in her work. Placing god in the nuance of the verb but also making god multiplicity. To her, writing is far more important than god. Her writing is soft and loud, it is her refuge and she has made it her home, her religion and her form of prayer. It is an extension of her 'a shadow' therefore it is separate yet apart of her, it has a dichotomy of being lesser yet equal.

islam. is still in my life.

we are old soulmates.

who could not work out the knots against skin.

who could not believe in each other. while believing in ourselves.

who could not make each other happy. without.

making each other a sadness.

who

were born to each other. and never fell in love.

but still sip tea.

share our hands.

touch hearts.

every now and then.

--- tea

Nayyirah Waheed

The poem is titled 'tea', because sharing tea is often done as a sign of familiarity or even that of peace and relaxation between people. Even though Waheed doesn't agree with Islam and its ways, it never worked out between the speaker and Islam. She has accepted it as part of her and her religion find a common ground sometimes. Through this poem she admits having difficulties with Islam even though it is her old soulmate and does one ever part from a soulmate?

Since Post-Secular Feminism is essential the basis of the study, it is fitting to have it as the first theme as it set the grounds for all other themes that intersect religion and the oppression the six poets face and deal with. Religion is both celebrated and questioned simultaneously as the poets seek and create an identity of their own. However, religion is a threshold that forms part of who the poets are and something they can never let go off.

### 4.3. Home and Exile

Home can be many different places to some and to others it solely depends on who you share a space with; however, all six poets are part of the diaspora and consequently home has a similar meaning to all. A land, people and customs they left behind for various reasons become part of who they are. Four of the poets are originally from Africa- Malawi, Nigeria, Kenya/Somali and one that writes about Africa but never mentions the exact location; one poet from India now making a home in Canada and the sixth living in England but from Nigerian/Jamaican descent. All have been exiled from home by choice or circumstances and have felt the wrath as foreigners and their poetry provided a place of safety. They have used their writing as a means of therapy as they get to express themselves and the world is their audience. The poets find different ways of coping with the diaspora; they turn to the religions and find solace in celebrating who they are and where they come from.

Sadly,

when the ocean is your border you must make do.

Home is far

and your hunger for it

might make your bones ache.

So you study supermarkets

till you know where to find

goat meat

and cassava

and peanut flour

and okra

and dried fish

and pumpkin leaves,

food that jogs the memory,

after all

you must make do.

I am sorry home is far

and you're hungry for it

and the stubborn ocean won't disappear.

*Upile Chisala*

The ocean separates continents and Chisala has been separated from Africa just this way and has to find coping mechanisms to survive the diaspora. One carries home with one wherever one goes even when it hurts and the load is heavy. One studies the familiar things around you, the 'home' even in supermarkets or find things that remind one of home, as home (roots) can never truly be removed. One has to make do with the diaspora or exile whether it was by choice or life threw upon one's path. Chisala mentions the ocean as the border and the reason for the separation but nothing can justify what home means to the poet. This is also one of the few of Chisala's longer poem; it could be that she has more to say about her diaspora than other parts of her life.

you were born balancing languages on your tongue.

your family is several borders living under one roof,

bickering in the blood.

darling,

wherever you find yourself

you are foreign.

*Upile Chisala*

The diaspora makes exile feel like exile no matter what. No matter how much of home one tries and make of it, the various languages, the many homes, the colonisation in the blood, one will remain the foreigner. You born a foreigner, you live as a foreigner and you remain one even when returning home.

you split the world

into pieces and

called them countries  
declared ownership on  
what never belonged to you  
and left the rest with nothing

*-colonise*

*Rupi Kaur*

Europe colonised the entire world and the ramifications of this never disappeared. Kaur is an Indian living in Canada and speaks of the exile the world has undergone or still partakes in. Europe separated the world into pieces and took ownership (stole) from natives all around the world. Europe stole land and resources and found ways to sell it back to the natives of the land, however, they did not come empty handed, they came with 'new' materials to trade off. The impact was felt by all six poets as all write and express themselves in regard to this topic, often showing anger and vulnerability. Such a powerful poem that could be used to teach generations about colonisation and the emptiness it left behind.

perhaps we all immigrants  
trading one home for another  
first we leave the womb for air  
then the suburbs for the filthy city  
in search of a better life

some of us just happen to leave entire countries

*Rupi Kaur*

Kaur's whole family moved to Canada for a better life so they are immigrants and have to endure the life chosen by them. In this poem she says not only are diasporans immigrants but perhaps everyone is foreign. All humans constantly trade one home or life for another; leaving the comfort of mother's wombs to grow. It is not something new, except that the poet has reinvented herself multiple times. She underwent a metamorphosis- from womb to Earth and from India to Canada- immense changes. Everyone wants a better life and that too is what immigrants search for except the diaspora makes you leave entire countries and continents; leaving home behind.



## **Conversations About Home (at the Deportation Centre)<sup>4</sup>**

Well, I think home spat me out, the blackouts and curfews like tongue against loose tooth. God, do you know how difficult it is, to talk about the day your own city dragged you by the hair, past the old prison, past the school gates, past the burning torsos erected on poles like flags? When I meet others like me I recognise the longing, the missing, the memory of ash on their faces. No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark. I've been carrying the old anthem in my mouth for so long that there's no space for another song, another tongue or another language. I know a shame that shrouds, totally engulfs. I tore up and ate my own passport in an airport hotel. I'm bloated with language I can't afford to forget.

\*

*Warsan Shire*

Shire makes one understand the diaspora a little better, making it part of who she is, part of her intersectionality. The intersectionality between exile, her being a woman and her being Muslim makes this poem so powerful, so relevant and so true. Shire's country-home forced her to leave because of the war, dragged her past old buildings and dead bodies. "No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark."-p. 24, people don't voluntarily leave home, especially if there is war; war makes refugees out of innocent ordinary men and women. It has to be extremely dangerous- comparing it to a mouth of a shark before one decides to leave. The global Somali diaspora has many of its natives scattered all over the world as all had to leave due to the civil war, according to talks done by Warsan. Not only the disasters impact of the war but also famine and war has left Somalis seeking better livelihoods. The anthem from her motherland has never allowed space for any other anthem and even when home doesn't want you, it is all you want. The foreign concepts and ideas are forced upon her and despite this she cannot forget her motherland and its beauty.

## **Ugly**

Your daughter is ugly.

She knows loss intimately,

carries whole cities in her belly.

---

<sup>4</sup> Conversations About Home (at the Deportation Centre) is part of Warsan Shire's collection and may read as prose.

As a child, relatives wouldn't hold her.  
She was splintered wood and sea water.  
They said she reminded them of the war.

On her fifteenth birthday you taught her  
how to tie her hair like rope  
and smoke it over burning frankincense.

You made her gargle rosewater  
and while she coughed, said  
macaanto girls like you shouldn't smell  
of lonely or empty.

You are her mother.

Why did you not warn her,  
hold her like a rotting boat  
and tell her that men will not love her  
if she is covered in continents,  
if her teeth are small colonies,  
if her stomach is an island  
if her thighs are borders?

What man wants to lay down

and watch the world burn

in his bedroom?

Your daughter's face is a small riot,

her hands are a civil war,

a refugee camp behind each ear,

a body littered with ugly things

but God,

doesn't she wear

the world well.

*Warsan Shire*

Once again society depicts women's beauty by an outside appearance- physical beauty, by opening the poem with the declaration, the statement: "your daughter is ugly". The daughter's beauty can be compared to the war-the colonialism; the African legacy. That the war and the daughter carry simultaneous (terrible) imagery, a reminder of the war; when was a baby or, more so, a daughter told she is ugly, unless, this daughter is a product of the war- maybe the mother was raped by one of the soldiers or the men part of the colonisation- the men from her own country. Both the mother and daughter are accustomed to the loss but extensively it is the loss of the community, the loss of Africa; as Africa carries "whole cities in her belly". Despite all the negative words relating to both the daughter and the war, she is resilient and strong; "but God doesn't she wear the world well". Despite all the rituals the daughter performs, and all the warnings from her mother, the isolation from family members and men not desiring her, she stands tall and the poem ends on a positive note. Society, patriarchy and colonisation cannot bring her women down no matter what.

### **For the foreign-educated returnee**

The day your education makes you roll your eyes at

your father, the day your exposure makes you call your  
own mother uncivilized, the day your amazing foreign  
degrees make you cringe as your driver speaks pidgin,  
English, may you never forget your grandfather was a  
farmer from Oyo State who never understood English.

*Ijeoma Umebinyuo*

Africans, often study abroad; this is true for two of the poets- Chisala and Umebinyuo. Umebinyuo uses this poem as a form of advice to the educated returnee, not to forget where they come from and where their roots truly lie. Education can be an exile on its own as it separates one from the 'uneducated' and one returns home eventually- one should not look down on those that helped raise you up despite their levels of education- as the African proverb goes; "it takes a village to raise a child". This then does not only include the nuclear family but extends itself far and wide to the whole community. Rolling your eyes, calling your mother uncivilised or cringing at a local are all signs of disrespect; especially in an African context, that Umebinyuo was raised. By doing this the poet loses part of their identity, as she feels inferior towards those that raised her. Not only is this part of their identity but reveals how this identity has been shaped by elders, (the village) her roots and by being African. Imagine your grandfather not having understood English and now you mock those that cannot speak as fluently as you do or comprehend and articulate as clearly as you do.

### **aching hearts// missing home**

At the embassy,  
they never warned us about days  
America will feel so lonely  
we will gather our mother tongue,  
hastily swallowing words  
that remind us of home to keep warm

*Ijeoma Umebinyuo*

The title expresses exactly what this poem is about; the longing and void for home simultaneously. When applying for a visa, there are no warning of emigrating elsewhere you about what is- the pros and cons of the world out there; they just sell you the dream of milk and honey and how good life is

on the other side. Yet, America is cold and lonely (for an African) and all you will have left is your mother tongue to keep you warm. America has visualised itself so well to the world, that it now sits on a pedestal but surely immigrants are not immediately or ever welcomed with open arms. Umebinyuo is a black female from Nigeria –very likely to have some form of an accent and not the typically model look-alike and these physical features will distinguish her and she would have to find warmth from fellow Nigerians. These can be quite an adjustment in the diaspora.

### **Diaspora blues**

So,

here we are

too foreign for home

too foreign for here

never enough for both.

*Ijeoma Umebinyuo*

By far Umebinyuo's more familiar work, encapsulating majority of what the diaspora is for the six poets- too foreign for anywhere. Home finds you foreign because you left it behind and you can no longer relate to old familiarities and both you and home are no longer the same. "here"-exile finds you foreign because you do not belong to it either as you are an outcast and cannot really integrate into it, so for home and here you will never be enough. Not being enough could lead to self-worth being discounted and shaping who you become and how you then view the world around you.

### **irony**

they invite you

to come view

artifacts

stolen

from your

ancestors

in their museums

as their

“experts”

explain

your ancient

Benin

kingdom

*Ijeoma Umehinyuo*

Once again, anger and resentment towards ‘them’ as they manipulate the native by using experts to explain basics to the indigenous people; mentioning the stealing and placing it in their museums to delude the African to believe it is not truly theirs. The West have mastered this well and even believe they can fool ‘you’ by using Africa against Africans- making the African believe they are stupid and this is not the only way they do it. They take minerals, rework it elsewhere and sell it back to Africans against a 100% profit and Africans buy into this. They truly have mastered the art of manipulation.

*both.*

*i want to stay.*

*i want to leave.*

*i am three oceans away from my soil.*

---lost

*Nayyirah Waheed*

Waheed is the only poet that does not disclose her identity but speaks of Africa and Islam with passion, so when she mentions three oceans away, one takes it she has immigrated to America (as three oceans separate the two continents). Wanting to stay in a place that provides opportunities and maybe a better livelihood and wanting to return; is a predicament, some form of ambivalence that creates a lost identity and is found to be a large part of Waheed’s intersectionality. Since her physical identity is hidden and she writes with such vigorous passion about home she creates an ambivalent persona for herself. One is unsure who she truly is, as she has multiple layers that intersect and create who she truly is.

white people are not chinese.

because they are born/live in china.

white people are not indian.

because they are born/live in india.

white people are not african.

because they are born/live on a continent they

murdered their way into.

-there is no such thing as a white african | colonial blood myths | a revisionist history

*Nayyirah Waheed*

The anger in this poem is subtle but precise as the speaker makes the message loud and clear. She resents the fact that non-black people have the audacity to believe they should be called black or even African for that matter. The white- Europe has colonised various parts of the world and they- the colonisers are made to feel like they do not belong anywhere but in Europe (the West), some form of oppression that takes place in regard to this. For even if they were born in China, raised in India or live on the African continent; they still do not truly belong. They have stolen from the world, murdered and enslaved indigenous people, as retold countless times in history lessons and books and the world has not forgotten these and treats them as the outsiders now. Not being wanted by natives, goes to show they are the foreigners (of the world) and surely not only in the eyes of the poem/poet.

Africa does not need your tears.

Or

your prayers.

Or

your money.

Or

your t-shirts.

Or

your telethons.

Or

your hands ever so lovingly placed

on her buttocks.

Your mouth at her breasts.

Your fists in her eyes.

She wants you to stop pissing in her face

and

calling it water.

*Nayyirah Waheed*

Africa would not be in need of anything if the colonisers didn't destroy her; she was perfectly fine with all her riches that span from corner to corner. Now the world mocks Africa by constantly asking for aid yet the world created the mess. If the colonisers could only leave Africa with all her resources and return what rightfully belongs to her, she would need none of them. Showing sexual and physical abuse Africa has been through and that she now wants you to stop disrespecting her and mistaking the disrespect (pissing) for a basic necessity like water. The pissing shows disrespect, shame and humiliation and links Africa to the slave mentality.

why can we never

talk

about the blood

the blood of our ancestors.

the blood of our history.



the blood between our legs.

---blood

*Nayyirah Waheed*

Blood commonly represents hurt and pain, it is often not addressed; just like colonisation, history and menstruation, that is also never addressed. It is part of the daily lives of women (particularly African women); parallel imagery and common grounds of blood. Both menstruation and colonisation share a common thread- the blood, which is taboo all over the world. Patriarchal worldviews do not allow for discussions about the blood even amongst women that share this blood. Society rarely provides safe spaces for women to address this matter and freely talk about it. Waheed has this unforgiving nature when writing about the blood.

Home and Exile is intersected by Hurt and Healing as various aspects of the diaspora has caused part of the hurt the poets have experienced. The healing process is long and continuous and for as long as the poets are part of the diaspora they will have to learn to heal.

#### 4.4. Hurt and Healing

The hurt caused by multiple factors intersecting and the diaspora's distress creates turmoil but the poets find healing or give hope to their own healing. Healing from absent fathers, motherlands left behind, being in unwanted spaces, sexual lingering by unwanted men or family members and healing in order to create an identity for themselves. These poets are both religious and spiritual at the same time and use the two intertwined and as part of their healing and their intersectionality.

Intergenerational trauma and the thing inside you  
that says enough is enough,  
Father/ Mother/ Grandmother/ Grandfather, Whoever,  
your demons aren't welcome in my house.

*Upile Chisala*

At one or other point, one gets fed up and enough is enough and often healing comes from broken childhoods. Chisala speaks of intergenerational trauma that has been passed down for generations and has never been dealt with and that she will no longer allow any of it around here. Chisala understands that the trauma is not singular, but rather her ancestral past; a collective memory of these traumas- it may have become custom, tradition a way of life that her family has become accustomed to. She doesn't care who of her elders it is but she will not allow any of these demons around her. Healing trauma can be a double edge sword, where Chisala ends it, may be where she inflicts the wounds of a new generational trauma.

**bone**

From One

who says, "Don't cry.

You'll like it after a while."

and Two who tells you thank-you

after the fact and can't look at your face.

To Three who pays for your breakfast

and a cab home

and your mother's rent.

To Four

who says,

"But you felt so good

I didn't know how to stop."

To Five who says giving your body

is tough

but something you do very well.

To Six

Who smells of tobacco

and says "Come on, I can feel that

you love this."

To those who feel bad in the morning yes,

some feel bad in the morning

and sometimes they tell you

you want it

and sometimes you think that you do.

Thank heavens you're resetting

ever

setting and

resetting.

How else do you sew up the tears?

How else can the body survive?

*Yrsa Daley-Ward*

The speaker/poet shows what sexual abuse looks and feels like from a multitude of encounters. This poem is titled, 'bone', just like the title of the anthology. Not only is it a sensitive topic but more so, it is a taboo all across the world and Daley-Ward breaks it down in numbered steps by various perpetrators. Men (rapist) often view women as just another specimen and the poet uses this in the poem to shed light how easily rape comes around. Using not only words but money and manipulation to abuse women, playing mind games with them so that they need healing. Women go through sexual abuse at some point or another and thank the heavens for those that never have to. This poem is sexual, it is misogyny and it is violence, it is something the world should be telling and preventing in all its corners. Even though this is a painful poem and abuse of man and its power, it doesn't end the anger but has rather found ways to heal; by resetting itself and moving on as a survival tactic.

perhaps

i don't deserve

nice things

cause i am paying

for sins i don't

remember

*Rupi Kaur*

Kaur shows us the black and white behavioural thought of reward and punishment. The illusion that because one is a sinner and one keeps sinning, one will not be forgiven and has to accept what life hands you, is what keeps many holding on to hurt. A secondary understanding of this poem could be, paying for the sins of a forefather, where there is no recollection of the sin but the acceptance that life has dealt is lot. The sins are part of the past, past of memories erased yet still lingering around so that you cannot move on and heal. And the inability to dissect reason for why suffering is needed. Forgiveness is out of reach and that one doesn't deserve to move on and be angry, so one find reasons to hold on; you tell yourself how bad you are and that no good can come from you and you believe this with all you are.

### **When We Last Saw Your Father**

He was sitting in the hospital parking lot  
in a borrowed car, counting the windows  
of the building and guessing which one  
was glowing with his mistake.

*Warsan Shire*

Men should not be called fathers when all they did was aid in human life; surely it takes much more to be called a father, as seen from a feminist point of view. That the voice in the poem is that of a single mother and the pain associated with a father to her children is hurtful and surely many can relate. The anger in this voice is very evident. The closest the "father" came was to the parking lot and the word mistake is the best way to describe his child. That is the kind of hurt children cannot heal from. She would not have known about this if she was not told by her mother and this goes to show what influence a mother has on the voices and identities of their children.

*i*

The morning you were made to leave  
she sat on the front steps,  
dress tucked between her thighs,  
a packet of Marlboro Lights  
near her bare feet, painting her nails

until the polish curdled.

Her mother phoned—

*What do you mean he hit you?*

*Your father hit me all the time*

*but I never left him.*

*He pays the bills*

*and he comes home at night,*

*what more do you want?*

Later that night she picked the polish off

with her front teeth until the bed you shared

for seven years seemed speckled with glitter

and blood.

*Warsan Shire*

It is amazing how our mothers teach us to tolerate bad behaviour from men such as our fathers or our husbands. They set this bar, allowing to be stepped on by men, showing us this as an example. As if paying bills and giving one a roof over their head is enough to stay in an abusive relationship; women not only find reasons to stay even when all the signs (red flags) are there to leave. The imagery is cosy, painting toe nails, smoking cigarettes as if the abuse over the phone is a casual affair and should not be paid too much attention to. The speaker is male, the voice says he was made to leave and at the end he beat her up again that the bed was covered in blood and glitter just as it has for the past seven years.

### **Inheritance**

Where did you get those big eyes?

My mother.

And where did you get those lips?

My mother.

And the loneliness?

My mother.

And that

broken heart?

My mother.

And the absence, where did you get that?

My father.

*Warsan Shire*

Children inherit from their parents and their parents; mostly worldly possessions and often genes are passed down as well. We do not speak of characteristics passed down but we get to blame hurt – undealt hurt on our parents; as if it is the poet's fault her father did not stay. All physical features are attributed to her mother, the loneliness and hurt as well but the biggest pain the poet has is the absence and that solely belongs to her father.

### **Survival**

I have always wondered

how women who carry war

inside their bones

still grow flowers

between their teeth.

*Ijeoma Umebinyuo*

Umebinyuo speaks of women who carry wars- pain and suffering; as if a war could possibly be the worst thing to carry and still find time to grow from that as a wonder but that is the power a woman holds. A woman makes the world wonder how she does what she does despite all odds being against her. How no hurt and no pain, not even the war can stop the growth and the flowers that blossom from woman time after time. That's what women do, they survive and make the most from the bad, they choose to hurt and heal.

## **Pain**

Forgive me, father

but sometimes my god

is a woman

sitting on the kitchen floor

her hands

holding her legs

screaming for help

without making a sound

Forgive me, father

but sometimes my god

is a woman

calling me on the phone

begging me to call her

“beautiful”

because her lover forced

ugliness into her soul/

Forgive me, father

but sometimes my god

is a woman



crying in the shower

begging for another god

to lift her burden.

Ijeoma Umebinyuo

'Forgive me father', sounds like a confession at a catholic church and if one asks enough forgiveness all the bad will be forgiven and one can to an extend move on. This is what is expected when one confesses but in reality this is not always the case. The poet gives reasons or justifies her 'sins' and asks for forgiveness repeatedly. In all stanzas the poet explains that her god is a woman and that her ordinary acts may not be as holy as that of a male counterpart that the pain the woman goes through, God cannot even fix. Her pain through physical and sexual abuse, her pain through unworthiness and tears no God can really mend and healing will not ever really take place.

sometimes

i smell my parents

on my words.

and i weep.

*Nayyirah Waheed*

Waheed's greatest passion is her writing, she easily compares it to everything; her religion, her diaspora and her parents. Here she expresses that her writing, her poetry are reflection of her parents and one doesn't know if the weeping is happiness or sadness. Having read of her other poems one knows that this weeping is hurt and the smell of her parents on her words are not a good thing.

apologize to your body.

maybe

that's where the healing begins.

---starting

*Nayyirah Waheed*

The body is easily taken for granted as if it will last forever. We eat junk and complain of stomach issues later or listen to loud music and do not understand when our hearing disappears. Humans

never apologise to their bodies and nurture the body back to what it was before, all the hurt and maybe if one starts there, everything will make more sense and healing can start. The poet draws out the agency within the person hurting, to infer that you can offer forgiveness to yourself and healing might follow. There is a surety of the apology, where the forgiveness should be directed. However, the centrality of 'maybe' shapes the poem, it sketches the ambiguity of healing; as if the poets is suggesting a different method to see which will work. Maybe this maybe that.

Hurt and Healing expresses all the turmoil the poets have faced and how challenging the suffering of these have been for them. How they have dealt with all this and how they faced battles unknown to the outside world. Setting aside the hurt to face 'Mother' as the next theme showcases how their identities are shaped and how their mothers played a part in prior themes and to 'Self-love' as the last theme.

#### 4.5. Mother

A mother is given the privilege and opportunity to bestow life not only to offspring but also to society at large. A first home for her children and often a sole provider for years to come; mothers teach children the basics and are refuges from the earliest memories. Often, mothers can make or break the lives of those around them. To the six poets, their mothers played an important role, often as single parents providing homes in foreign lands and the greatest part of who the poets became. The poets' mothers shaped them to a large extent and contributed to their identity and views on the world. Many people struggle with complex family dynamics and toxic mothers are at the centre of these dynamics. The lack of maternal warmth and validation warps their sense of self, makes them lack confidence in or be wary of close emotional connection, and shapes them in ways that are both seen and unseen.

Mother,

Tell me about rebirths. Tell me how people drop layers of  
hurt and grow new skin and grow out of old habits that  
were breaking them. tell me about forgiveness, about  
choosing yourself over the damage.

I want to know how to plant seeds, I want gardens not

graves.

*Upile Chisala*

Chisala is asking "her mother" for advice to being a better person; to blossoming and not dying but rather finding ways to stay alive. She is asking how to shed layers (like insects and animals do) and leave bad habits and behaviour behind so that she can reinvent herself. Healing from all the hurt is what she is asking her mother for; her mother being the first person to run to, her mother- her adviser.

my father gave me math.

my mother gave me magic.

As we know, these poets' mothers play a massive role in who they are, or, strive to be. The poem expresses that the father gave her math, meaning he gave her logic and sense of numbers and reasoning and her mother gave her so much more than numbers but rather magic, which to some is beyond this earth. So she is allowed to use logic and magic to love as these two balance each other out.

my mother tells me she raised herself.

see.....

she has always been both sunshine and rain for me,

I am in awe of how she survived and became a flower

with neither.

(for my mother, the strongest woman I know.)

*Upile Chisala*

It is evidently clear that Chisala places her mother on an extremely high pedestal. Rain and sunshine are parallel, not necessarily opposites but after the rain the sun does come out symbolising a joy after pain. For the mother having to raise herself means there was no one she could depend on or no one to help her along her way and despite this she made it. The mother has always been both joy and pain or to some both rain and sunshine are a sign of growth and vitality. Chisala's mother has been exactly that, the necessities to growth. Yet, her mother became a flower without the basics; she bloomed and survived.

### **Mum**

Mum. Where are you

I hope that there is Tia Maria and

Coca-Cola

and people don't talk too loudly when

you're trying to sleep.

I hope you have a daughter with a

plan and dream

and sons who aren't on first-name  
terms with the police.

I hope you have your pick of a few  
good men  
and none of them know how to  
cheat.

Mum, where are you... I hope that  
there are men who don't  
stare at you for too long  
and grandmas who aren't sick  
I hope that they don't scream because your mother left  
and tell you,  
you ain't shit  
I hope you don't bathe old men  
for a living  
who call you nigger bitch

Mum, where you are, I hope God  
comes down and shows you what  
goes where  
and doesn't shout because you're far  
too tired to care.

I hope that there's someone to tease

The knots out of your hair.

I hope that good is good and right is

right and fair is fair.

*Yrsa Daley-Ward*

'mum'<sup>5</sup> is an interesting poem as it is if the poet is speaking to her mother through a prayer or casually over the phone. She speaks of all the things, hopes and dreams she has for her mother for a better life and that God is by her side. That the mother's life is easier and she is at ease. She repeats "where are you" and "I hope", indicating her mother is no longer with her, her mother could have passed away or left her behind. The imagery suggests that her mother was wild or treated as less often, by shouts and name calling. She brings some of her or her mother's background in by mentioning "Tia Maria", a local rum from the Caribbean. She has hopes and dreams for her mother, for a better life, despite all her mother has been through and somehow the question turns into a plea. Most importantly she hope for her mother, goodness, righteousness and fairness above all else.

when my mother was pregnant

with her second child i was four

i pointed at her swollen belly confused at how

my mother had gotten so big in such little time

my father scooped me in his tree trunk arms and

said the closest thing to god on this earth

is a woman's body it's where life comes from

and to have a grown man tell me something

so powerful at such a young age

changed me to see the entire universe

---

<sup>5</sup> mum is the title of the poem.

rested at my mother's feet

*Rupi Kaur*

Men believe and societies at large believe men are powerful beyond measure but no man can bring life into this world, no man is that powerful. Once again a metaphor comparing God to women, more so to a mother, that nothing else is this close to God except a woman with child. Even the father's "tree trunk" arms that symbolise strength and having the ability to raise her high would never be able to compare. The entire universe was rested at the mother's feet and she had all the responsibility of the world.

I struggle so deeply

to understand

how someone can

pour their entire soul

blood and energy

into someone

without wanting

anything in

return

*~I will have to wait till i'm a mother*

*Rupi Kaur*

Society at large says both parents are needed to raise a child/children but only a mother can comprehend what it truly means. The mother being centre stage because she is the life giver and many a times is the first and sole provider to a baby and toddler. It is only later in life that stronger bonds are formed between father and child. Barren women and sterile men hope and dream to comprehend what this poem describes- the complete handing over of oneself to an offspring; even women that have not birthed and raised a child yet cannot comprehend the magnitude of this. A mother can pour all of herself into her child or children and still ask for nothing in return; her sacrifices are unmatched. This is not only found to be true for Kaur but four of the poets writes amount this competently as well.

Mother says there are  
locked rooms inside all  
women, kitchen of love,  
bedroom of grief,  
bathroom of apathy.  
Sometimes, the men,  
they come with keys,  
and sometimes the men,  
they come with  
hammers.

*Warsan Shire*

Shire says 'mother' uses women and compares it to her a house, describing room by room. This is not only a statement of what women are but some form of advice; expressing love, grief and apathy. Even though the poem speaks of love it also says that some men are good enough to use keys but others come with hammers-knocking down doors, which could imply sexual assault. This in itself is a sort of warning, even though you as women can be it all some men will still come break down those doors.

the first time i met my mother.

i knew she was not mine.

*Nayyirah Waheed*

The poet is an enlightened being, understanding the separation of the material world from the immaterial belonging; that, the very essence of where she comes from and who she is, is then an illusion. Or the more plausible- a distorted dissociated sense of self, an unfulfilled love given to her by her mother. A child automatically takes their mother as their property, having heard this voice from inside the womb and this entitlement comes as an automatic response. You are an extension of your mother. Waheed shows a lost identity, a removal of the self, a broken bond between mother and daughter, a distance that does not reflect love or interest. The essence of the poem is in 'belonging' perhaps her mother could claim her as property, but not she, her mother is not her property The poet says since the first time she met her mother she knew, one is confused if this is



from birth itself or when she could finally recall that this is her mother. And even if this was her mother she was never truly hers to begin with. This could contribute a lot as to who the poet or child ended up being and shaping the identity or lack of identity (Waheed is very private).

mothers who leave.

for no other reason.

than

children are water in their throat.

-drown

*Nayyirah Waheed*

Just like the poem before, the mother is not the speaker/poet's. One is not accustomed naturally, to mothers leaving, more so when the child is the reason they leave. What has an innocent life done to the mother for her to feel like she is drowning and has to leave? Can the mother be considered as selfish for just leaving? The identity of the child once again is shaped by the mother and her projections of and showcases that toxic mothers do exist.

cruel mothers are still mothers.

they make us wars.

they make us revolution.

they teach us the truth. early.

mothers are humans. who.

sometimes give birth to their pain. instead of

children.

---hate

Nayyirah Waheed.

There is often praise associated with mothers and the roles they play in the lives of their children but not for Waheed, all poetry dedicated to her mother, reflects a bad mother. She says that cruel mothers can still be considered as mothers even if they are associated with wars and bring about revolutions. Mothers give birth to their pain; the imagery of war and birth could indicate rape and this could be the pain the cruel mother has to live with forever. And somehow this pain is inflicted upon the child from an early age and they are made aware of this truth.

Bless the daughters who sat,  
carrying the trauma of mothers.

Who sat asking for love  
and not getting any,  
carried themselves into the morning

Bless the daughters who were given the role of  
motherhood before they became women.

Bless the daughters who raised themselves.

*Ijeoma Umehinyuo*

The blessing of these daughters comes across as curses; curses because all the blessings bestowed upon them are not for daughters but for much older women. The daughters have to deal with trauma, love, mothering themselves and growing up before their time. Meaning the mother wasn't really there, wasn't really around and the daughters had to make a life for themselves. All the roles that is given to a mother was given to these daughters; making them more of mothers than their own mothers.

Your mother was your first mirror.

Tell me,

didn't she carry herself well enough

to make you feel like a God?

Ijeoma Umebinyuo

A mirror reflects and so does a mother, in this case Umenbinyuo questions if this reflection of the mother was enough to make you feel like a god. Sylvia Plath has a poem titled 'Mirrors' and the two poems connect and address a mother's reflection so well. That each day the mother appears, rewards and loves and at the same time reflects her own projections through the mirror. It is her reflection that places a lot of pressure and weight on the child, for it is she that has to make her children feel like gods and goddesses; it is her responsibility. The first warmth, first voice, first opinions all come from the mother and she imposes these on her child, be they wrong or right and the child swallows all this up.

### **Confessions**

Mother,

I have pasts inside me

I did not bury properly.

Some nights,

your daughter tears herself apart

yet heals in the morning.

Ijeoma Umebinyuo

A confession that a mother will probably never really get to hear, because confessions are revealed in closed off rooms and here it is for the world to read. Children take on their own hurt and make do with it and by not sharing this with the mothers (or anyone else) they hold onto it and never bury it properly. "Your daughter tears herself apart", is an immense load and amount of hurt that the daughter has to deal with alone. This could be that the mother wasn't around or chose not to be around for her daughter; leaving her daughter to deal alone.

the first time i met my mother.

i knew she was not mine.

Nayyirah Waheed

The poet is an enlightened being, understanding the separation of the material world from the immaterial belonging; that, the very essence of where she comes from and who she is, is then an illusion. Or the more plausible- a distorted dissociated sense of self, an unfulfilled love given to her by her mother. A child automatically takes their mother as their property, having heard this voice from inside the womb and this entitlement comes as an automatic response. You are an extension of your mother. Waheed shows a lost identity, a removal of the self, a broken bond between mother and daughter, a distance that does not reflect love or interest. The essence of the poem is in 'belonging' perhaps her mother could claim her as property, but not she, her mother is not her property. The poet says since the first time she met her mother she knew, one is confused if this is from birth itself or when she could finally recall that this is her mother. And even if this was her mother she was never truly hers to begin with. This could contribute a lot as to who the poet or child ended up being and shaping the identity or lack of identity (Waheed is very private).

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for no other reason.

than

children are water in their throat.

-drown

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There is often praise associated with mothers and the roles they play in the lives of their children but not for Waheed, all poetry dedicated to her mother, reflects a bad mother. She says that cruel mothers can still be considered as mothers even if they are associated with wars and bring about revolutions. Mothers give birth to their pain; the imagery of war and birth could indicate rape and this could be the pain the cruel mother has to live with forever. And somehow this pain is inflicted upon the child from an early age and they are made aware of this truth.

The mother theme shows two sides- the positive and loving side and the negative and toxic side of what the poets regard as motherhood. It also displays the shaping of the worldviews that the poets have expressed through their poetry. It exploits and gives an understanding of both sides and then allows for self-love to step in. After the three prior themes of hurt the last theme of self-love rounds off the analysis to make it whole and complete.

#### **4.6. Self-Love**

Loving oneself sets a tone for how the world sees one and how they ultimately act towards one; you allow yourself to be placed on a pedestal or have the world stump on you. Self-love could go hand in hand with self-care, as caring for others and oneself is a form of love. Self-love is an act of acceptance and the somehow that is human nature of your own well-being and happiness. Self-love is the prerequisite for complete immersion in the abundant flow of light and love in the world around us and surely this too shapes the poets' identities.

Can't I just be a black woman that loves herself in peace?

without having to explain why my skin

(be light honey or molasses)

is a dream?

is a crown?

Can't I just be a black woman that loves being a black

woman?

Without having to be sorry

or humble

or polite about it

Damn it!

Who else has to justify loving themselves like this?

Who else has to fight for the right to call themselves a

blessing?

Goodness,

can't I just be a black woman that loves herself in peace??!?

*Upile Chisala*

Black women at times are seen or portrayed as the minority. This can be seen on social media, in the news, in politics and often in history. Black women have been carrying themselves well; unapologetically with intention and celebrating themselves to the highest levels. Often others try and dim their light so they speak out against prejudice and shine brighter than usually. Black women- the goddesses that they are, no longer holding back but loving themselves fully - their black skin, the oppression to men, their hurt and healing and finding their identity. No one else has to justify or stand up for themselves like the black women has to and celebrate themselves as much.

I want to think that God smiles

when a black woman

is brave enough to love herself.

*Upile Chisala*

It surely is a brave thing when a black woman loves herself; being oppressed and silenced into thinking less of herself for years. It is a brave thing because there are so many black women that haven't learned to love themselves yet. And to think God smiles when they do so should be something magically for black women; they are finally accepting themselves.

**q**

If you

were married to yourself

could you stay with yourself?

My house

would be frightening and wild.

*Yrsa Daley-Ward*

A rhetorical question but a thought provoking one as such; would one be able to live with oneself, more so marry oneself? Daley-Ward says her house would be frightening and wild, maybe as she is or that she is a paradox still trying to live with her own identity and the thought of marry herself would be frightening and wild.

### **The good work**

I was raised pulling food  
out of earth. I know where  
joy comes from  
and how to make it.

*Yrsa Daley-Ward*

The poet was raised in difficult times and in extreme circumstances doing hands on labour that she knows all so well. She could have been raised in plantations so she is aware of the amount of work that goes into pulling food from the earth or she saw her parents doing all this work. She knows that this can bring joy and that she knows exactly where and how to find this joy.

it is a blessing to be the colour of earth

do you know how often

flowers confuse me for home

*Rupi Kaur*

For eons, people of colour were made aware of their skin tones and are often treated as less for it. Despite this, they came from the same Gods as all other racial groups, so celebrating their own tones is a victorious act. Not only did they go through slavery and apartheid they are still fighting to be heard and seen as equal. Kaur expresses the blessing that this skin is and how easily happiness confuses her for a home. That goodness and joy find a home in this skin tone that others would say is a curse.



i am water

soft enough

to offer life

tough enough

to drown it away

*Rupi Kaur*

The metaphor, “i am water”, is a powerful one as water is considered to be a very powerful element on its own or in relation to the other three elements; as it can offer life and drown life within a second. Comparing oneself to water says exactly how powerful one thinks or believes oneself to be. That they too can be soft enough to offer life- carrying life within the womb (surrounded by amniotic fluid) and nurturing plants, animals and humans with a basic necessity like water; at the same time being powerful enough to drown this life. To see oneself this way could be a sign of acceptance and worthiness.

if you are not enough for yourself

you will never be enough

for someone else

*Rupi Kaur*

Self-love is a form of acceptance that could take some many years to reach, others are lucky that they are raised in praise and they do not let life’s trials get them down. one should first love yourself before you can love anyone else; because you know and understand yourself better than anyone else. So, you have to be enough for yourself first and then only you can attempt to be enough for others.

Document the

moments you

feel most in love  
with yourself-what  
you're wearing  
who you're around,  
what you're doing.

Recreate and repeat.

*Warsan Shire*

It is rare for Shire to write about self-love but it would be something automatic for any poet as poetry is an outlet and a voice for the poets. Documenting good and feel good memories is essential to self-love so one can repeat and recreate those moments when you need it most.

You are beautiful

like yourself

*Ijeoma Umebinyuo*

Beauty lies in the eye of the beholder but Umenbinyuo states that you can and are only as beautiful as yourself, incomparable to anything and anyone but yourself.

i am mine.

before i am ever anyone else's.

---in

*Nayyirah Waheed*

Waheed makes it clear that one belongs deeply to oneself first and foremost and then others can have parts and pieces of you. It takes not only maturity to understand this but also a deep untouched love for yourself.

i am taking a bath.

i am washing a war from me.

*Nayyirah Waheed*

Part of self-love is letting go of all life's troubles like the hurt and what comes from it. Refugees are aware of what the war holds and repercussions to it, so to wash it from one's skin is a giant step. It indicates new life and the urge or ability to move on from the past and start loving oneself.

you.

not wanting me.

was

the beginning of me

wanting myself.

thank you.

--the hurt

*Nayyirah Waheed*

We as humans are often confused by the notion that others are obligated to love us if we are in a relationship but how do they do this if we are unable to love and accept ourselves fully. A break-up means hurt and rejection but Waheed is thankful for this because if it was not for this she would have never been able to want herself. This rejection was the beginning of her own want, her own love and acceptance and she is thankful.

Self-love reflects an internal part of the poets that is less obvious and taken for granted in comparison to their other works of poetry. Self-love expresses their own identity without necessarily taking into consideration the outside factors. It rounds the analysis off and completes the post-secular worldviews of the poets.

## Chapter 5: Findings and Recommendations

The six diaspora poets own a unique 'outsider –within' worldview due to the hybrid position they occupy in both their foreign and home societies. All six poets inhabit intersectional roles of race, religion, the diaspora and sexual abuse or hurt in the midst of the various cultures they exist in. This creates the poetical 'third space' found to be true in from the post-colonial scholar Homi Bhabha.

This 'third space' allows for other intersectional positions to come forth and create inclusive spaces rather than exclusion towards the poets. The poets as foreigners/migrants/ refugees constantly fear the discussions surrounding their identities or lack there off. The diaspora identity is often linked to loss- personal loss to the losing of a nation creating a set type of worldview.

All five themes used in the analysis are found to be obvious in the anthologies and have an impact on the poets and their worldviews are shaped by these. Religion lies close to all six poets because it is seen being repeated throughout their collections. Post-secular feminism deals largely with the exclusion of women within their religious spaces and the oppression in these spaces and makes religion a central theme to the study. The poets are not necessarily excluded but this exclusion and oppression is found in the other themes. They regard God to the same level as their mothers and even use metaphors to compare them to hurt and pain. Another interesting discovering is that the poets step away from the doctrines of religion and create novel ideas around God and who 'she' ultimately is. All three religions; Sikhism, Islam and Christianity are monotheistic- solely believe in one God or that there is only one God. Yet, Warsan Shire a Muslim speaks of God and not of Allah. Nayyirah Waheed seems to acknowledge being Muslim but have a sort of difficult relationship with what is means to be Islam. The Christian poets make reference to God as a black woman, making her more relatable and compares God to hurt and pain and more so to their mothers that they have placed on pedestals. All six poets talk of religion as much more loving with fewer rules, and more encompassing than they were raised to believe.

Another extremely vital theme to this study is that of home and exile. All six poets are part of the diaspora, be it due to studies, war or families seeking better lives. Home holds a sacred place and more so for the poets that have been through war, Shire and Waheed which are also both Muslim. The obvious questions show up; why would God make us go through this or what did we do to deserve this? The poets are foreign to what they now call home not only because of their brown and black skins but even because of their languages and their outside appearances. They are made to feel foreign; they are reminded how far they are from home and how they will never belong. The poems express anger and dismay. Nayyirah Waheed in particular writes a lot of anger poems about

the colonisers and how they stole and robbed the natives and they are the ones that should not belong. Mostly importantly the poets express their hurt from being away from home, the emptiness that the diaspora has given them and that nothing can be done about the pain.

Healing is an emotional internal struggle and the poets have to come to terms with the hurt caused by the past and how they move on from it. The poets speak of the diaspora and the colonisers that have caused hurt especially for Nayirrah Waheed. All poets speak of sexual abuse of some sort and there is deep pain associated with this. The writing process brings some form of healing but this can never be enough. It also allows for there to be a voice to this pain. Broken childhoods that include absent fathers, is also part of the hurt and the healing the poets go through and this affects them to a large scale. Not only absent fathers that seem to be part of the hurt but the separation of their parents that has brought the survival of the poets.

There seems to be equilibrium between good and bad mothers found in the poetry of mothers. There is the ideology that mothers are the centre of universes to their children and being more available than God are found to be everything in all its essence. Then the opposite is found to be true for one or two poets; that toxic mothers exist and their children are not always a joy to them. There are a multitude of lessons that can be learnt from the mothers: forgiveness, magic, obviously love, dedication to motherhood, absent and cruel mothers. 'Mothers' is a tender and fragile theme for the poets as their mothers play an important role in their lives. It does shape who they have turned into as their mothers was an extension of themselves first and foremost before they had any children. Their parenting skills became a reflection on which their daughters turned out to be and how they view the world and how their worldviews are shape.

The last theme is Self-love. Self-love shapes identities because it dictates how one views and chooses to love yourself. The poets express this less than the other themes and in the form of micro poetry. It does conclude that however good or bad many relationships and parts of the poets, they ultimately choose themselves, heal and love themselves fully.

The poetry awakens the assumptions we have of the diaspora and life within its realm and rather brings a new reality to the reader, a better understanding of what truly leads to families having to leave home and create a new home in a completely foreign land.

It is recommended that a closer analysis on intersectionality is carried on fewer poets as to include their poetry on social media as well. This will contribute to the evolving world of new media and the way modern poetry is addressed.

## **Conclusion**

In this research I sought to cross-question and understand post-secular feminism as displayed in the select diaspora poetry under the five themes: Religion, Home & Exile, Hurt and Trauma, Mother and Self-love. The theoretical and aesthetics of the worldviews were debated and the significance of the identities were not only analysed but also discovered. This study can be situated in both feminist and post-secular (religious) studies and adds to the large world of literature studies.

Despite the personal experiences expressed through the poetry of the six poets and the worldviews emerging from these; each poet has created an identity for herself. This concludes that a post-secular feminist world does exist even though it is not obvious to the naked eye. It is also true women (the six poets) are often forced into situations that would normally deny them the right to express their truth giving less room to their identity and social standing within their foreign spaces, both individually and collectively as women of the diaspora. The voices in the poetry therefore speak about the oppression found in the diaspora and about marginalisation within religious spaces; and how intersectionality for each poet allows for them to exist within their own spaces.

This study has successfully demonstrated that worldviews are shaped based on past and present experiences; expressing the effects religion, oppression, trauma and the diaspora has on individual identities. The study does recognize that there are areas of further research in the field of post-secular feminist poetry and suggests that specific poets and their work are selected and analysed.

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