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**Exploring cyberfeminism and technology as recrafting tools of the girl child's image and identity in
Where the Lion Stalks and When You Dance with the Crocodile, and Americanah.**

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Declaration

I, **Luise Shikongo**, registered student number 215100344, hereby declare that the work contained in the thesis, exploring cyberfeminism and technology as recrafting tools of the girl child's image and identity in *Where the Lion Stalks* and *When You Dance with the Crocodile*, and *Americanah* 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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Abstract

This research is an exploration of cyberfeminism and technology as recrafting tools of the girl child's image and identity in *Where the Lion Stalks and When You Dance with the Crocodile*, and *Americanah*. Hence, the study applied the Literary theory of cyberfeminism to the selected texts. This study posited that using technology can empower the girl child to narrate her individual experiences and the collective experiences (discrimination, oppression, abuse, and trauma) of other women. Using the selected texts, the study showed that the girl child deconstructs stereotypical ideas that still exist in various parts of Africa portraying technology as a complex phenomenon for women and cyberspace as a dangerous platform for women especially the girl child.

The main objective of this study was to explore cyberfeminism and technology as recrafting tools of the girl child's image and identity in selected female authored texts. The sub-objectives were: Firstly, to interrogate how the girl child utilises technology to conscientise society on issues affecting women in the selected female authored texts. Secondly, to explore how cyberspace recrafts the girl child's image in the selected female authored texts. Thirdly, to examine how technology empowers the girl child and reconstructs her identity in the selected female authored texts.

This research employed a qualitative research design and found that, in the three selected texts (*Americanah*, *When you Dance with the Crocodile and When Lion Stalks*), the girl-child protagonists (Ifemelu and Helena) have no position to voice the issues encountered in a patriarchal and Marxist society because it is prohibited. To this end, it is revealed that through the use cyberspace as a platform to vocalise issues that affect women in the present and in the past, as well as in Africa and in the diaspora. Moreover, the study discovered that Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and Muller's (2012) *When you Dance with Crocodile and Where the Lion Stalks* (2016) depicts the girl-child redefining and liberating her image using cyberspace and technology. As Ifemelu use her blog she is able to affirm her stance and cultures thus creating her own image as opposed to allowing herself to get diverted into a foreign culture. Thus, with re-emphasis, she gains support from the online community. Lastly, the findings revealed that Adichie focused attention on the facet of cyberfeminism which deals with the cybernetic identity formation as a novel way of mediating a sense of self. The cyberspace created by technology in Adichie's novel facilitated an alternative space for the girl child to find self-expression. Identity formation seemed quite crucial as it encompassed several traits, one of which centred on the hair.

Key words: Cyberfeminism, Cyberspace, Technology, Girl-child, Identity, Image, Americanah, When you Dance with the Crocodile, Where the Lion Stalks.

Contents

Declaration.....	ii
Retention and Use of Thesis	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background to the study.....	1
1.3 Statement of the problem	6
1.4. Research objectives and Research questions	6
1.4.1 Research objectives	6
1.5 The significance of the research	7
1.6 The delimitation of the research	7
1.7 Definition of technical terms	7
1.8 Conclusion.....	8
CHAPTER TWO	9
LITERATURE REVIEW	9
2.1 Introduction	9
2.2 The girl child figure in African literature	9
2.3 Technology as a conscientising tool for issues affecting women	11
2.4 Cyberspace recrafting the girl child’s image	13
2.5 Technology empowering the girl child and reconstructing her identity	14
2.6 Research gap (s)	16
2.7 Theoretical framework	17
2.7.1 Introduction	17
2.7.2 Feminism fused with technology	17
2.7.3 Cyberfeminism	18
2.7.4 Cyberfeminism tenets.....	20
2.11 Conclusion.....	30
CHAPTER THREE	32
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	32
3.1 Introduction	32
3.2 Research design	32
3.3 Procedures	32

3.4 Content analysis	32
3.5 Ethical considerations	33
3.6 Conclusion	33
CHAPTER FOUR	34
PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS.....	34
4.1 Introduction	34
4.2. Summary of Adichie’s <i>Americanah</i>	34
4.2.1 The girl child’s use of technology to conscientise society on issues affecting women in <i>Americanah</i>	35
4.2.2 Cyberspace recrafting the girl child’s image in <i>Americanah</i>	41
4.2.3 Technology empowering the girl child and reconstructing her identity in <i>Americanah</i>	44
Commentary on Muller’s <i>When you Dance with the Crocodile</i>	48
4.3.1 Commentary on Muller’s <i>Where the Lion Stalks</i>	48
4.3.1 The girl child’s use of technology to conscientise society on issues affecting women in Muller’s selected texts	49
4.3.3 Cyberspace recrafting the girl child’s image in Muller’s texts	56
4.5 Conclusion.....	61
CHAPTER FIVE	63
5.1 Introduction	63
5.2 Summary of findings and conclusions.....	63
5.2.1 Exploring technology as a conscientizing tool for the girl- child.....	63
5.2.2 Cyberspace recrafting the girl child’s image in the three texts	64
5.2.3 Technology empowering the girl child and reconstructing her identity in the three texts.....	65
5.3 Recommendations	65
References	67

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a comprehensive outline of the research as much as it serves as the introduction to the study. It further describes the background of the study and statement of the problem. It outlines the research objectives and states the significance of the research. The delimitation of the research and technical or key terms are also defined.

1.2 Background to the study

Cyberspace and technology in literature studies have been largely regarded as a male domain. Although gender issues have been a subject of scholarly reflections for some time now, the interface between gender and technology in African literary studies has not been given the attention it deserves. Even though the use of technology and cyberspace have skyrocketed across the world as well as in various parts of Africa in the last decade, there is insufficient research conducted with a focus on issues in feminism merged with technology as an identity recrafting tool. Likewise, modern day African literary texts have recounted very little on technology as a recrafting and conscientising tool of the girl child's image and identity. Moreover, cyberfeminism and technology as identity construction tools of the girl child remain under-examined in African texts, much less African female authored texts. Premised on the cyberfeminism framework, this study examines the connection between the girl child figure and technology in selected texts namely, Erna Muller's *Where the Lion Stalks* and *When You Dance with the Crocodile*, and Chimamanda Adichie Ngozi's *Americanah*. Paterson (as cited in Brophy, 2010) states that the internet is a platform that offers the opportunity to swoop, modify, or alternatively forget about the physical nature of patriarchy burdening women. As such, the link between technology and feminism charts new territory in literary studies. Hence, the study argues that the concept "women is a socially constructed category which can be altered by women, using technology and the accompanying concepts of coding and inscription" (Volschenk, 2009).

Contemporary cyberfeminists such as Sadie Plant and Cornelia Sollfrank saw cyberspace as inherently liberating, citing its ability to transcend traditional gender and feminist politics' boundaries and constraints e.g., gender roles. In this view, cyberfeminism is not a single feminist movement with a united political or theoretical purpose. According to Flanagan and Booth (2002), cyberfeminism refers to "a periodic, tactical, conflicting set of theories, debates, and actions" around gender and digital culture. Hence, when discussing gender and digital culture or technology, the term "cyberfeminisms"

encompasses a wide range of theoretical and political positions that cyberfeminists take. Daniels reinforced the work of Flanagan and Booth (2002, n.p) stating that:

Cyberfeminism is not an isolated theory neither is it a feminist movement with a clear call to action. However, Cyberfeminism denotes different theories, formal discussions and customs on the interconnection between gender and technology. Hence, the term cyberfeminism (s) is more accurate as it suggests several distinct theoretical and political positions in terms of digital components and the internet.

Female Cyberfeminists believe that by appropriating and controlling virtual technology in ways that continue to represent their identities, they may empower themselves. Additionally, McMillan (2016) observes that cyberfeminism is a feminist philosophy that examines how gendered bodies and relationships affect technology and our interactions with it (McMillan, 2016). Concurring, Daniel (2009, p.102), notes that it is more of a collection of theories and practices than a "clearly stated political goal". Despite this, cyberfeminism has a logical rationale, specifically, an interest in how digital technologies "enable women to participate in new forms of expressions.

Several academics such as Milford (2015) among others, have claimed that media portrayals of femininity may interact with identity performance, frequently sending contradictory messages about what it means to act as a "female" online. Technology is frequently regarded as a manly pursuit (Mohanty & Samantaray, 2017). The two scholars argue that one of the reasons why there are less female internet users than male users is the masculinisation of computer culture. Furthermore, there is a gender disparity. Seemingly, males spend more money on technology design and manufacturing. In view of this background, cyberfeminism intends to combat patriarchy by reversing and challenging the masculinisation of computer culture.

According to Mohanty and Samantaray (2017), the male's dominance in the employment and growth of internet cyberspace correlates to exchange and/or swap of information, communication, engaging in recreational activities, and participating in conversations on social forums, as well as doing business and conducting research. Women can utilise not only accepted but also exploited internet to negotiate and redefine themselves within existing societal structures and extend the internet space beyond the masculine. Hence, this study's argument that cyberspace and the internet are both consumers and producers by women operating like social capital and enabling the women to forge cyber-social networks and communities to facilitate their identity and image.

Using the selected texts, the study further argues that women are becoming emancipated from the old patriarchal power structures that encircle and envelop them as technology advances and full

society access to information technology becomes more ubiquitous (Mohanty and Samantaray, 2017). The study further posits that gender roles are breaking down, and social conceptions of what it means to be human, feminine, and masculine are in flux. Technology empowers women to communicate their ideas to create innovative ideas that are reasonable, imaginative, and realistic to succeed. Furthermore, cyberfeminism uphold that information and communication technology help women to break free from the constraints and classifications that formerly limited their activities and identities. This e-media can be recoded, redesigned, reprogrammed to meet women's needs and desires to change the feminine condition ((Mohanty and Samantaray, 2017).

The consequences of becoming a woman include a specific type of vulnerability when young girls begin to embrace the persona of femininity. Attempting to embrace femininity and leaving behind childhood growing sexuality contains the risk of being a victim of sexual abuse, in addition to pushing the navigation of identity development. Image and identity are explored in literature in ways that show they are both a substantial concern for adolescent females and a vital aspect in the formation of their self-perception (Baldwin, 2012). The dread and fragility of the transition from childhood to womanhood are depicted in literature, which serves as a point of connection for readers who are going through the process.

Throughout history, stereotypical representations have vilified and dehumanised Black women (Muhammad & McArthur, 2015). Black girls have a complex dual relationship to both Black culture and the mainstream culture because of racial notions. In their daily encounters, Black women must deal with this dichotomy. This "double jeopardy" of being both Black and female in society has continued to create and reinforce a culture satiated with derogatory representations of Black women and girls. Thus, it is of paramount importance to explore cyberfeminism and technology as recrafting tools of the girl child's image and identity in *Where the Lion Stalks* and *When You Dance with the Crocodile*, and *Americanah*.

The current study intends to demystify how the girl child creates a space for herself using various technology and digital spaces to discuss societal issues affecting women such as gender roles expectations, the subjugation and constant scrutiny as she manoeuvres through the patriarchal society and the culture shock experienced in a world alien to her. Through the eyes of the girl child, readers are not only acquainted with a foreign society and an unfamiliar societal problem haunting the girl child's image, but readers also witness how she reconstructs and affirms her identity with the aid of technology. The study's argument is that technology empowers the girl child to demolish boundaries and beliefs that controlled her participation in technology, identity, and image for the past century. Using the same logic, Jenkins' (2019) study argued that, without an identity, people cannot

achieve agency, autonomy, or a rich inner life. Hence, with reference to this study, one's identity is not a singular entity; it is multi-layered, complex, and ever changing. Apart from our unique biological make up, cognitive capacities and personalities, our identities are socially, culturally, and institutionally assigned meaning that we are never left untouched by state institutions, society, and social and cultural practices; identity is always constructed (Stephan, 2013).

The study sheds light on the positive attributes of cyberspace which can recraft the girl child's image. It explores this cyberspace liberating space which is deviated from the scrutiny lens of societal standards. Effortlessly, the girl child embodies the character and identity that has always inspired her, while her experiences are displayed as a lesson for the larger society. The study validates how technology can be used to conscientise society on issues affecting women, and how the girl child makes a conscious effort to use technology as represented in the literary texts to reconstruct her collective and individual identity and deconstruct her capabilities. Arguably, the girl child portrays that cyberfeminism has been thriving since its inception and the perpetual influx of women in cyberspace prompts women to unveil gender notions that limit them in the physical world.

Fischer, Rodriguez Mosquera, Van Vianen, and Manstead's (2004) study discovered that the creative works on gender roles perpetually distinguish stereotypical roles between males and females. The male continues to be portrayed as assertive and a goal getter while the female is depicted as a caretaker and overtly compassionate. Butler (as cited in Chen, 2016) has reinforced this perception by noting that the fluidity of gender disparities is incapable of being constant in every individual. Given this view, gender identities are not predated, instead, they are constructed and standardised by daily repetitive traditional practices. Similarly, Stephan (2013) argues that cyberspace contributes to the destruction of one's identity and the distribution of personal information as data is anonymously collected online without the user's awareness, hence, the concept cybersecurity. On the contrary, Achebe (cited in Stamp, 1989) defines technology as frame of mind not a collection of objects, stating that, several women and children in Africa are negatively impacted by the misuse of technology in their communities. However, Stephan (2013), has a completely different view, asserting that these spaces offer safety from the physical violence which serves as a primary concern for most women in traditional African societies.

The girl child figure is often depicted in narratives as innocent but conscious of her surroundings as she is often speaking out against the harsh cruelty of the patriarchal society (Stephan (2013)). The girl child is often enmeshed in a society that perpetually constructs and deconstructs her identity and self-image in every possible way, hence, this study's argument that technology and cyberspaces can enable the girl child to escape the oppressive rules of her society. Cyberspace and technology in the context

of this study represent digital games and information communication technologies and various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram among others, and various blogging platforms. Notably, the internet is at times celebrated as a space where individuals are free to choose their image and behavioural conduct. In this space, the girl child often diminishes widely perceived stereotypes such as fragility and weakness, rather portraying her as resilient and equally capable (Kangira, 2009) and (Chitando, 2016).

One of the main debates which formed the foundation of cyberfeminism claimed that technology is stereotypically developed for male consumption and thus only men have the skills and mental capacity to handle these developments, hence, the reason why they are often more involved than their female counterparts (Hawthorne & Klein, 1999). Similarly, feminism fused with technology investigated how new developments of technology were mass-produced with social and cultural features suited for the male. According to Kember (2003), “cyberfeminism may be defined in relation to its origins in the feminist theory which engaged with the emergent technologies of information revolution” (p. 177). Cyberfeminism as derived from the third wave of feminism recognises that various technologies and cyberspaces offer an opportunity for global cyberfeminism discourses.

Moreover, Hawthorne and Klein (1999) state that cyberfeminism is a theory which confirms the diverse power structures governing the perception and inequality between women and men in digital spaces. Advancing this thought, Butler (as cited in Kippie, 2019) states that the girl child has a complex and disputed position in society, and online spaces advance her position further. This fact is reinforced by Baer (2016) who observes that feminist movements thrive online as it offers a transformational awareness of feminist issues in the public space, at the same time enabling different types of intersectional discussions. Concurring, Hawthorne and Klein (1999), and Plant (1997) claim that digital technologies offer an opportunity for women to be liberated. Significant to this study, technology is a tool to re-assess inequalities; it is a conscientising tool and a liberating tool (McAdam, Crowley & Harrison, 2020). Hence, the study posits that using technology can empower the girl child and narrate her individual experiences and the collective experiences (discrimination, oppression, abuse, and trauma) of other women.

The study depicts how women shatter silences, speaking up on societal issues affecting them such as rape, forced prostitution and racial disparity. Hence, in the study, digital spaces are perceived as a conscientising tool (Gillis, 2004). Arguably, the girl child’s involvement in digital spaces implies her involvement in the global feminist movements (Daniels, 2009). As such, technology should be continually interrogated and re-conceptualised for the girl child’s involvement. According to Wacjman, technology is essential for women to challenge gender stereotypes in a traditional

patriarchal society (cited in Consalvo, 2003). Since cyberspace reveals feminist issues, this study intimates that it would be detrimental to discard women out of any cyberspace platform (Milford, 2015).

1.3 Statement of the problem

Modern day African literary texts have recounted very little on technology as a recrafting and conscientising tool of the girl child's image and identity. This study explores the experiences of the girl child in three selected texts and how the girl child uses technology as a conscientising tool for several societal issues affecting her.

Literature has long been thought to play an important role in the development of female gendered identity. This position shapes and sometimes distorts how men perceive women in our culture, but it may also affect how women define themselves. Given that young children are greatly influenced by literary texts, such texts are regarded as one of the most important sources for teaching children life lessons such as the disparities between male and female roles (Hussein & Ali, 2021). For youngsters, the major characters serve as role models and definitions of masculinity and gender. Hence, children's texts and their pictures constitute a cultural resource for youngsters to acquire social standards (Doughty & Thompson, 2011).

As such, by using the selected texts, the study intends to show that the girl child deconstructs stereotypical ideas that still exist in various parts of Africa portraying technology as a complex phenomenon for women and cyberspace as a dangerous platform for women especially the girl child. Chunga and Kangira's (2016), and Isaacs' (2016) studies have briefly discussed the role of technology as an empowerment tool for the girl child. However, both studies have not discussed how the girl child recrafts and reconstructs her identity using technology, thus, creating a gap. This study posits technology as a liberating tool, reinforcing that women, especially girl children can use technology and cyberspace as an emancipation tool from the limiting beliefs of their society; enabling her to break silences that continue to diminish their identity and image.

1.4. Research objectives and Research questions

1.4.1 Research objectives

The main objective of this study is to explore cyberfeminism and technology as recrafting tools of the girl child's image and identity in selected female authored texts. The main objectives were further subdivided into the following sub-objectives which are:

- To interrogate how the girl child utilises technology to conscientise society on issues affecting women in the selected female authored texts
- To explore how cyberspace recrafts the girl child's image in the selected female authored texts.
- To examine how technology empowers the girl child and reconstructs her identity in the selected female authored texts.

1.5 The significance of the research

This study is a contribution to the African scholarly knowledge of cyberfeminism using the three texts: Erna Muller's *Where the Lion Stalks* and *When You Dance with the Crocodile*, and Chimamanda Adichie Ngozi's *Americanah*. Through this study, the researcher displayed how the selected texts set the interconnectedness between women, technology, and cyberspace. This research is also evidence that African authors have used young female cyborgs as a representation of African women's experiences. The texts depict that Africans are closing the gender digital gap as negatively depicted in the west. This study is also a reference point for future scholars (local or international) interested in cyberfeminism studies or the investigation of cyborgs in fictional studies.

1.6 The delimitation of the research

This study focuses on three African female authored texts: Erna Muller's children's books *Where the Lion Stalks* and *When You Dance with the Crocodile*, and Chimamanda Adichie Ngozi's *Americanah*. The three texts were chosen as they have a common theme which supports the objectives of this study, and they accentuate significant problems in feminism. This study explores cyberfeminism and technology as recrafting tools of the girl child's image and identity in the selected female authored texts, hence, cyberfeminism forms the framework of this study.

1.7 Definition of technical terms

Cyberfeminism - The belief that women should take control of, create online spaces and appropriate the use of cyber technologies to empower themselves (Gajjala, 1999)

Cyborg -A figure which questions established patriarchal boundaries of identity but, most importantly, provides women with different ways of thinking on how our world could be ordered through inexhaustible narratives by women (Volschenk, 2009)

Feminism - Feminism is a theory based on the principle of equality of women and men both in social and economic field (Koç, 2015)

1.8 Conclusion

This section was an introductory chapter to the study *Exploring cyberfeminism and technology as recrafting tools of the girl child's image and identity in selected female authored texts*. It highlighted the problem statements, research objectives, research questions, significance of the research, and delimitation of the research and defined the technical terms. The subsequent section represents the literature review.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the literature relevant to the current study's focus. The subsections defined in this study are the girl child figure in African literature, technology as a conscientising tool for issues affecting women, cyberspace recrafting the girl child's image and technology reconstructing and empowering the girl child's identity. This chapter is guided by the three objectives of the study.

2.2 The girl child figure in African literature

In African Literature, the girl child has been portrayed with multiple identities. While in some texts she is portrayed as a naïve subject with unequal opportunities to the boy child, in others, she is the heroine of the story: brave, resilient and does not conform to the patriarchal standards of her society. Eko (as cited in Okuyade, 2015) states that novice writers often narrate their journey to adulthood hence several of these narratives are categorised as coming of age texts. Hence the dominance of the child figure in African literature is not accidental but is creatively used to highlight the development of the continent since the girl child's development corresponds to the country's development. Authors strategically create a child figure fulfilling the role of a protagonist and with all its naivety and innocence, postcolonial issues such as poverty, identity loss and reconstruction of identity, forced migration, violence, pain, HIV/AIDS, poverty, trauma and desperations are unveiled (Okuyade, 2015). Hence, the African child takes on the role of an adult in real life and this is genuinely depicted in literature. Hron (2008) reinforces this view by stating that:

The child-figure in African literary texts is "intrinsically enmeshed" in a traditional society and somehow struggles with their cultural and social identity. It is then clear that the child's search for identity is interlinked to societal issues which are a result of colonialism, often displayed through different forms of oppressions, violence or corruption.

Concurring, Kurth-Schai (as cited in Pasi, 2015) also states that from a young age, children are required to take full responsibilities as adults at the expense of their will, while being excluded from significant social and political engagements. Pasi (2015) interrogates how the girl child in Mahachi-Harper's *Echoes in the Shadows* is a victim of various forms of abuse, trauma, and silences and how she is silenced and de-oracised by the patriarchal society and those in position to protect her, for example, the mother. In the novel, the girl child is portrayed as having no identity, and all her experiences only

push her to wreckage as they do not build her inner strength or empower her. The girl child's experiences of countless physical and emotional dehumanisation shape the trajectory of her life when dealing with the larger society. The current study acknowledged the dangers of traditional practices when imposed on innocent children which enslaves them to all forms of inhumanely experiences such as rape, abuse, and child-centred marriages.

This view is further supported by Muriungu and Muraya (2014) who states that children are often exposed to traditional stories which cement the African patriarchal practices which disadvantage women. These narratives train girls to be submissive under male superiority. In an article (Kurth-Schai, 1997) in which they reviewed an east African novel *Shida the Street Boy* by Ruth Makotsi, Muriungu and Muraya (2014) reveal that the patriarchal society is responsible for the rape and resultant pregnancy of the girl child. They also show how she is denounced by the father and subsequently forced into prostitution. The article also reviews Henry Kamundi's *My Mother's Voice* representation of the girl child's experiences after Kenya's 2007 elections. The analysis also shows how the on-going violence and raids make girl children victims of rape, HIV infection and the resultant trauma.

In another study, Mohammed (2012) examines the "*Maternal oppression of the girl-child in selected novels of Buchi Emecheta*" in which the mothers take the role of the patriarchal society, that of the fathers and uncles. Although mothers overprotect their daughters, the girl is not offered the same opportunities as the boy child, hence the inequality. Mohammed (2012) argues that to save herself, the girl child often must search for a male saviour to satisfy her mother's desires while diminishing her own dreams and ambitions. This saviour tends to take advantage of her in every way. In the current day and age, especially in the African society, the girl child is often in close connection with her mother hence, that relationship if not well managed has an ability to manipulate the former as she is less experienced, emotionally fragile and to a certain extent, she has the mother on a pedestal.

Nadaswaran (2011) in *Rethinking Family Relationships in Third Generation Nigerian Women's Fiction*, analyses Kambili's character and her relationship to her mother. The analysis reveals that Kambili feels empowered after spending time with Auntie Ifeoma and her daughter, Amaka. She then gathers the strength to deviate from her mother's submissive life in quest for a self-defined identity, and ultimately fulfilment. Furthermore, Okuyade (2015) in *Negotiating growth in turbulencescapes: Violence, secrecy and growth in Goretti Kyomuhendo's Secrets No More* asserts that the girl child protagonist progresses throughout the entire novel seeking a "positive maternal figure" however, the husband is the only individual to take up that role. In essence, the above literary texts horn on traditional practices which disempower the girl child. This is also depicted in Dangarembga's *Nervous*

Conditions, in which Tambu, the girl child is denied access to education and is only expected to learn tasks around the house that can increase her chances of being somebody's wife.

Kangira's (2009) paper, "The girl-child is not a hen that wants to be a cock: A short survey of the portrayal of the girl-child in Stephen Alumenda's selected children's books" likewise debunks the negative stereotypes of the African female protagonist in children's novels. Kangira (2009) concludes that the girl child is "active, assertive, intelligent and independent". The author Alumenda of the said children's book uses his voice to challenge the patriarchal society and crafts the girl child as dignified and equally capable of accomplishing anything if empowered the same way as the boy child. In addition, another paper by Chitando (2016), "The girl child's resilience and agency in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*" depicts the narration of the girl child—that of Darling and her friends as resilient despite the difficult situations they encounter which include extreme poverty and hunger, Chipso's pregnancy, Darling's father returning home as an HIV/AIDS patient, and the effects of Operation Murambatsvina. Darling, the protagonist, finds comfort and joy in the moral support of her friends as they discuss their dreams. To a certain extent, they also unburden their survival strategies by laughing at the oppressive circumstances they find themselves. Darling is portrayed as knowledgeable and conscious of the political systems in the country and their ramifications on the economic status of most residents. In this respect, the author diminishes any naivety of the girl child.

Similarly, Chunga and Kangira (2016) in their article, "An exploration of the portrayal of the girl child in Erna Muller's *It All Goes Wrong* and *When You Dance with the Crocodile*" illustrate how African children's literary texts have shifted from the stereotypical narrative which reinforces victimhood in the African society. While they acknowledge that girls are victims of the patriarchal society and racial communities, they also show that in the modern era, girls are empowered by the same tools that greatly disempower them which are education and technology. Supporting this view, the girl children in Muller's texts are presented as heroines and assertive. They do not silence their desires; however, they take the conscious effort to partake in activities that are of deep interest to them despite the negative opinion of the male figure. Reflecting on the objectives of this study, Chunga and Kangira (2016) focus on the girl child's education but at a very superficial level. Hence, this study further enhances the girl child debate by interrogating how she conscientises society on issues affecting women, and how she recrafts her image and reconstructs her identity using technology.

2.3 Technology as a conscientising tool for issues affecting women

The prevailing issues affecting the girl child in most African societies today are forced early child marriages, rape and the silencing attached to activities such as prostitution, racial disparity and gender discrimination amongst others (Okuyade, 2015). In another study, entitled "#SayHerName: a case

study of intersectional social media activism,” Brown, Ray, Summers and Fraistat’s (2017) investigated how women accessed various social media platforms and digital technologies to improve real-life agency geared towards rectifying societal issues. Initiatives set on various social media platforms using hashtags and retweets such as the #SayHerName amplify protests on discriminations against black women. The study underscores concern such as police and non-police brutality against women and transgender individuals as victims of state-sanctioned prejudice and brutality. Similarly, Baer’s (2016) study *Redoing feminism: Digital activism, body politics, and neoliberalism*” highlights that Twitter’s #YesAllWomen 2014 campaign was used to accentuate the all-pervasiveness of sexism and oppression against women. In this study, several women posted personal experiences of discrimination, oppression, distress and trauma, underlining, the notion that: ‘yes, all women are victims of sexual abuse’.

Another study by Mclean, Maalsen and Prebble (2019) argues that social media spaces are vital tools for “feminist revitalisation.” These spaces function as uniting forces for the global feminism society to promote principles of social change. Baer (as cited in Mclean, Maalsen & Prebble, 2019) adds that technology and digital spaces enable the intermingle of personal stories and shared modalities over state and international borders, voicing gender suppression and all other concerns at a global scale while bridging the gap between several feminist groups. Thus, it can be deduced that digital spaces have offered women of all races, personality, and creed a platform to speak out and support each other despite the various boundaries. Following the same line of thought, this study argues that the internet is a liberating force. For example, blog spaces are used as an empowerment tool for women in all parts of the world and are a growing phenomenon in African states. Significantly, Brophy (2010) caution that women should not regard virtual spaces as a substitution for their lived experiences but instead, such spaces should augment their lives. However, this does not mean that online spaces surpass offline (reality) spaces, rather, the two solidify each other.

Isaacs (2016), in her study entitled “*Mediating women’s globalized existence through social media in the work of Adichie and Bulawayo*” analyses how the girl children, Ifemelu in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* and Darling in NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names* use various social media platforms and the internet to interrogate digital spaces as defined by their social class and diasporic experiences. Darling’s usage of skype, the telephone, and the calling card brings her in proximity with her friends and family back home in Zimbabwe. Isaacs (2016) observes that using skype reconnects Darling with her origins despite the obvious distance and barriers. Ifemelu on the other hand is unable to talk about her obvious racial disparities when she is with her white boyfriend. The silences on the topic in this relationship causes the subsequent breakup and later prompts her to create a blog. She feels that the blog gives a voice to discuss the troubling issue and she begins to

identify herself as “The Blogger. Further, Isaacs (2016) notes that although, the Black girl child’s experiences in the diaspora are highlighted through social media, they are however, multidimensional and affect both male and female children. The current study further enhances this argument by examining the challenges encountered by the girl child in an African context and how technology is used as the conscientising tool.

2.4 Cyberspace recrafting the girl child’s image

Cyberspace offers a voice to marginalised persons, visibility, and group representation. It is perceived as an autonomous space which provides autonomous citizenship, hence those with internet access are thought to be “living a double life” (Ortiz et al., 2019). This study further advances this argument by claiming that through cyberspace also known as social media in the context of this study, the girl child attains a more liberated image. In a different study, Kippie’s (2019) examined how three South African-coloured women of different social class use social media to represent their image. Results from the study show how the first coloured woman- Monroe, chooses to use her sexuality to break into the male dominated industry in a subtle way. She uses this as a strategy for self-definition and portrays her self-image as “sexy” although not to the extent of an aggressively undignified image. The second woman, Baker compartmentalises her image online based on a classy social media influencer brand which was moulded at the commencement of her profession. She is traditionally a South African Muslim woman and embraces the societal duties and expected norms. But subsequently submits to the Islamic dress code, culture and religion when she suits best, thus validating the need for modesty and complete dedication to one’s tradition, in that, creating her own image. In Windvogel’s case, there is no clear-cut gender and thus the character only complies with the ideals of lesbianism, gayism, and transgender. In this, Windvogel perceives sexual freedom, regains mind and body agency and deconstructs beauty standards (Kippie, 2019).

In their Liu and Suh’s (2017) study *Self-Branding on Social Media: An Analysis of Style Bloggers on Instagram*. The study concludes that social media channels function as highly ideal tools for self-branding and therefore could result in refined creativity, self-expression and offer an opportunity to create new career routes for women.

There is a cumulative trend of users on social media platforms advertising their products to acquire followers and for monetary profits. Additionally, bloggers are becoming popular, as mostly young-adult females posting pictures of their garments and other fancy belongings for likes, validation and comments. Some of these bloggers become popular and influential on and off these digital spaces and they are

etched into a life as a public figure, with options for a self-defined image and no trace of culture and tradition (Liu & Suh, 2017).

MacCallum-Stewart (2008) states that the notion that several games are intended for male youth elucidate the prevalence of stereotypical and at times belittles the representations of women. Hence, videogames enable players to depict “their own embodiment as alternative beings” in a greater way as opposed to other media. Black girls have a double layer to fight, first that of the race disparity and how it affects them negatively at most times and that of being a female. In terms of the latter, it is often an issue on beauty standards, the perfect body image, skin tone and the texture of their hair. Black girls are at times labelled as angry or too assertive, better known as loud. There is also a “misconception of naturally curly black hair known as dirty, unclean, unkempt, and messy” (Robin & Crystal, 2016). Hence, with the use of various cyberspace platforms, she deconstructs such misrepresentations. This study intends to trace how the girl child does the same in the selected texts.

Rosewarne (2005) and Ibrahim’s (2015) concur that cyberspaces function as an instrument to mirror a desire to capitalise and beautify an individual’s self-identity. Women share identities of themselves online through images mostly known as selfies: these selfies often depict a certain identity whether sexy, adventurous, smart, humorous, or wealthy. Hence, the more this identity is frequently posted online, the higher the likelihood of endorsement from others (Gray, Norton, Breault-Hood, Christie & Taylor, 2018). A completely different view is depicted in the study of Murray (2015), as he states that the invention of selfies signifies a radical change to repossess the female body, which is intended to exude femininity and freedom in one’s sexuality, honour women’s history, discard unnatural and harmful beauty standards advertised through various channels and encourage body positivity. This perception rejects assumptions that selfies (self-defined identities) are superficial egotistical activities

2.5 Technology empowering the girl child and reconstructing her identity

Male and female are socially constructed depicting a system of traditions, culture, principles, gender roles and mannerisms. Historically, these various aspects have been linked to the classifications of male and female. For that reason, societal gender categorisation is not only based on sexual organs, but it is ultimately also connected to socially and “culturally constructed gender categories” (Chen, 2016). As a result, despite who the person is, their gender identity is reconstructed the minute they come in society.

Additionally, women are not compared to men as their gender identity is co-dependent and interconnected to men and their lineages (Moskowitz, 2011). Hypothetically, with the rise of technology and digital spaces, the re (construction) of gender identity is made possible. Fisher (1997) also states that innovative technology for instance online games and social media is the most overused

form of voicing one's yearnings to escape the restrictions of the physical body and the problems of humanity, at the same time providing an opportunity to reconstruct online gender identities.

Hence, the influx of gender identities online originates from the categories revealed by the person's social, cultural, and historic background as well as the representations in various media and the person's direct social experiences (Chen, 2014). Therefore, as an individual (re) constructs or imitate a specific gender identity on a digital space, this specific self could also come with etched cultural values. Cyberspace also enable individuals to take on various forms of identity. For instance, in digital spaces, identities can be undefined and changeable and the nature of interaction is at times in anonymity enabling an individual to be recognised based on their words as opposed to bodily indicators such as age, ethnicity, attires and pattern or manner of speech (Madge, & O'Connor, 2005).

Winn's (2010) study, *Betwixt and Between': Literacy, Liminality, and the Ceiling of Black Girls* proved how various technologies and initiatives such radio waves, playwriting and performance art helped restore confidence and reconstruct identities for various teenagers of colour. Creative performance in the above study has been discovered as a power tool to deconstruct society's expectations of these youths, challenge stereotypes, persist, remain optimistic and reflect on the harmful system that continued to imprison women. These programs offered girls specifically, a sense of liberty and a platform to express and rewrite their narratives.

Likewise, Muhammad's (2012) study, *Creating Spaces for Black Adolescent Girls to Write it Out!* Outlined that their experiment with a five-week writing course provided a platform for black teenage girls to narrate their experiences and voice their inner tensions. They are also a tool to consider other "burgeoning identities" by writing and revolting against wrong perceptions that have been widely spread. Oosterink (2019) through his paper, *arriving at Your Own Door: Transnational Identity Formation in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah* analyses how Ifemelu's character is shaped by her experiences and consequent agency in the United States. The paper is nearly a replica of this study; however, its focus is not technology and its effects on female agency. The study examined various ways through which Ifemelu is involved in discovering herself and constructing her identity. She notices that a single narrative as imposed on most immigrants only represses the other in order to assimilate them into an alien identity. She decides to embrace her differences and otherness enabling her to connect to an online African hair movement group. She decides to start blogging, which offers her financial stability and social connections to affect the decisions of those in her social circle and narrate her identity. Her blog is presented in anonymous, hence, she can authentically represent herself and her unaltered worldviews without any fear of security or offence. This study thus intends

to examine how technology is used to recraft the girl child's image, in this case Ifemelu's image, reconstruct her identity and conscientise society on various issues affecting women.

Nadaswaran (2011), states that black feminists e.g., Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith in their movements, encourage women to avoid placing men on a pedestal as it results in their subjugation, instead, they should build their own identities. In this case, they are not trying to regain their freedom, the aim is to create a self-defined, original being. When that is achieved, the oppressor's power is diminished, causing intentional agency and individualism. Famous examples of from a girl child in an African literary text is Kambili of *Purple Hibiscus*. During the traumatic experience when she is beaten by her father, Kambili "lay on the floor, curled tight like the picture of a child in the uterus" (Adichie, 210). The literal meaning is a rebirth, she reverts to her child-like form to gather the mental strength and character to shatter the patriarchal dominion of her father over her life. Subsequently, she then embodies power over herself and a different identity from the former, meaning has created a self-defined, original being.

2.6 Research gap (s)

So far, no digitally archived studies have analysed Erna Muller's *Where the Lion Stalks*. Chunga and Kangira's (2016) article has explored Erna Muller's *When You Dance with the Crocodile* from an African feminist literary theory to investigate how the girl child is depicted in a patriarchal society. This article defined the girl child as innocent, a victim of child trafficking, slavery, and sexual abuse. Chunga and Kangira's (2016) article concluded that the girl child has been empowered through the narrative which although aligning with the objectives of this study, leaves a gap that is filled by the current study. It appears no study has analysed Erna Muller's *When You Dance with the Crocodile* from a cyberfeminist perspective.

Notably, several studies have been conducted on Chimamanda Adichie Ngozi's *Americanah*. For instance, Oosterink's (2019) study investigated "Transnational Identity Formation in *Americanah*". The study depicts how Ifemelu, goes through the process of self-discovery and self-construction to alter her past and future narrative. Most studies in this category have analysed *Americanah* from a pure feminist perspective (Koskei, 2014), Intersectionality perspective (Bonvillain, 2016), Afropolitan feminism lens (Tetteh-Batsa, 2018) and black feminism perspective (Norwood, 2018). The reviewed literature proves that no study has conducted a cyberfeminist analysis of the three novels under study, hence, this study aims to close this gap.

2.7 Theoretical framework

2.7.1 Introduction

Cyberfeminism which forms the foundation of this study confirms the diverse power structures governing the perception and inequality between men and women in digital spaces (Hawthorne & Klein, 1999). The founders of cyberfeminism, Donna Haraway, Plant and Matrix saw an opportunity in leveraging technology to eliminate all forms of oppression experienced by women in a traditional patriarchal society (Hawthorne & Klein, 1999). Before the inception of cyberfeminism, feminism fused with technology investigated new developments of technology and how they affected women socially and culturally. The main discussions which enabled the conception of cyberfeminism stated that technology is stereotypically developed and suitable for male and only men have the skills and mental capability to handle these developments (Consalvo, 2003). Hence, this study's argument that the internet (cyberspace) is centre stage for feminist issues, and women especially the developing girl child cannot be excluded from these new developments (Milford, 2015).

2.7.2 Feminism fused with technology

Cyberfeminism has feminism and technology as a point of departure. The focus is on modern day technology, examining the link between gender identity as constructed by cultural boundaries and women's access to technology (Munro, 2013). The theory of feminism is dynamic and an ever-changing movement fighting against the oppression of women in all areas while supporting women's equal rights. To date, the theory has been stretched to a greater capacity defying a singular explanation of it. These expansions include three different waves and several branches of feminism. Lai, Klt-chun and Cheung (as cited in Mulyaningrum, Yusof, Ahmad, & Sahib, 2007) define feminism as a concept striving for equal representation of men and women in all aspects, namely, politics, economics, social and culture settings.

Feminism as a movement started in the nineteenth century and was fully developed in the twentieth century. The first wave of feminism with the headship of Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir was an advocate for women's suffrage, rights to vote and rights to ownership of property (Selden, Widdowson & Brooker, 2005). Woolf's main argument on feminism is that gender boundaries which define a person's identity is set by society but, these pre-constructed notions can be confronted and changed. In a patriarchal society, an individual is not born a woman rather, it is the society that constructs an individual's womanhood hence their identity (Selden, Widdowson & Brooker, 2005). Similarly, Simone de Beauvoir claims that women's position in society is "defined and differentiated with reference to men and never vice versa, she is the subsidiary, the inessential when compared to the essential. He is the subject and the absolute, she is the other" (Okpala, 2016, p. 4). Hence, African

women have been ignored and their concerns overlooked, suppressed, and known merely as accessories to men and not as individuals unattached to any dualism.

The second wave of feminism started in the early 1960s stretching to the late 1980s. As a continuation of the first wave, it advocated for women's rights in all aspects of their lives. It aimed to liberate women from negative stereotypes of confinement to reproduction, female sexuality, and the perception of women as the weaker sex (Selden, Widdowson & Brooker, 2005). The third wave of feminism stretched from the late 1980s to 2010. It responded to the failures of the first and second wave feminisms establishing various groups such as radical feminism, black feminism, and socialist feminism (Munro, 2013). In 1985, Donna Haraway began the cyberfeminism movement in her seminal essay "A Manifesto for Cyborgs; Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s". Cyberfeminism was thus derived from the third wave socialist feminism claiming that the various technologies in society and the cyberspace affect women on a social level and offer an opportunity for global cyberfeminism discourses. Digital spaces are therefore promoted as a conscientising tool, an aspect missing in the first and second wave (Gillis, 2004). Thus, Munro (2013) postulates that:

Modern day feminism is defined by its multiple objectives, considering the diversity of scholars with different ideologies and the constant debates within the movement, the feminist theory is greatly dependent on the digital spaces, technology and the internet (p. 24).

Spender (as cited in Hawthorne & Klein, 1999) states that feminism has a core objective to interrogate societal norms of behaviour and most importantly, the unfair treatment of women does not go unnoticed neither is it left to reoccur, hence, every issue that is questioned by feminists is equally questioned by cyberfeminists. A feminist scholar, Judy Wacjman, argued that technology needed to be continually interrogated and re-conceptualised by women, and that women ought to be more active in technological areas as equally as men (Wacjman as cited in Consalvo, 2003). The fusion of feminism and technology therefore forms a cyborg, a fearless figure who does not confine herself to the limitations set by patriarchy.

2.7.3 Cyberfeminism

Cyberfeminism recognises the manner in which technology silently plays a role in creating feminist discourse and calls women to acknowledge its effect, celebrate its uses, and be wary of its negative implications. Millar (as cited in Hawthorne & Klein, 1999) defines Cyberfeminism as:

A women-centred approach which aims to advocate and empower women through their involvement and usage of new information and communications technologies.

A few cyberfeminists perceive these newly introduced technologies as inherently liberating and are convinced that their introduction will eliminate male superiority in this sphere as women are distinctively fit and suitable for any digital era.

As indicated above, the term cyberfeminism as a fusion of cyber and feminism was coined from Donna Haraway's essay. As a literary theorist, Haraway firstly reacted to the flaws found in a traditional society mostly occurring as dichotomies such as mind/body, men/women, human/machine, white/black and concluding that one mostly exists as the less inferior to the other. Haraway then used the term cyborg as an awareness and political activism tool. The cyborg signifies a hybrid or fused form of being, a more multidimensional, undefined, and fluid identity that liberates one from societal oppressions (Haraway, 2006). The metaphor of a cyborg inspires women to narrate personal stories on their self-image, social and political ideologies and "to challenge oppressive gender structures, disassemble restrictive categories of gender and question what a woman ought to be" (Volschenk, 2009). The objective is to eliminate the inequality of women in different social issues which include technology, social class and economic positions; and recraft them into cyborgs.

In the early 1990's, Sadie Plant, expounded the work of Haraway. Plant (as cited in Mulyaningrum, Yusof, Ahmad, & Sahib, 2007) was the first to observe that women have functioned as drivers in a patriarchal society, hence the link between women and technology. She further states that feminists in technology aim to propose, criticise, and use digital spaces and innovative technology for issues affecting women (Consalvo, 2003). Hawthorne and Klein (as cited in Stephan 2013) also note that cyberfeminism as a developing theory in the field of feminism intends to diminish the power differences that persistently discards women out of the masculine led digital spaces.

Another major group, VNS Matrix media artists group based in Australia were the first to use and apply the term cyberfeminism (Hawthorne & Klein, 1999). Julianne Pierce, a member of the VNS Matrix media artists group described the context in which they first used the term cyberfeminism:

We began using the term cyberfeminism around the same time it became popular in other parts of the world.it was coined from terms such as cyberpunk which were overused during the same era..... It embraced gender and identity politics, allowing fluid and non-gendered identities to flourish through the digital medium (Everett, 2004, n.p).

Cyber has been prefixed to create different terminologies, for example, cyberspace, cyberbanking, cybersurveillance, cyberfeminism, among others. It is derived from a Greek word, KIJ~Ep, that means 'governor' or 'gubernatorial'. Originally, it means to steer, but in this study, it entails navigating

through the internet (Plant, 1997). Since its conception in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the theory has continually evolved, and to date, several branches of cyberfeminism have been coined. Hawthorne and Klein (1999) state that cyberfeminism is a theory which confirms the diverse power structures governing the perception and inequality between women and men in digital spaces. The theory thus advocates to alter the norms that perpetually subjugate women. As in the feminist theory, women and technology are the frontrunners in cyberfeminism.

Daniels (2009) further highlights an imperative point by stating that any digital space is a haven for women, away from the harsh treatment and prejudice they experience on a day-to-day basis. This echoes Nourai-Simone's (2014) ideas in her book, *On Shifting Ground: Muslim Women in the Global Era* which state that digital spaces are an emancipation tool for educated Iranian girls. Through these spaces, the girls are true to themselves. They deviate from forced identity ideologies that are constructed on the basis of tradition and customs, and they are momentarily removed from Iranian guidelines of behaviour in their setting whether at home, school, and work or leisure spaces. Additionally, digital spaces offer anonymity which aids in reconstructing an identity of one's choice. At this point, Nourai-Simone's (2014), argument is reinforced by Virginia Woolf's concept of: a woman should have a room of her own as it is in that room that she constructs her identity and when a woman is offered a room of her own, she has the ability to participate in issues affecting other women on a more zealous and personal level, hence, beautifying global feminism. In this case, Nourai-Simone also breaks down any negative connotations attached to Daniel's (2009) statement on global feminism.

Pitts (as cited in Daniels, 2009) adds that, women do not only construct new identities using their preferred digital spaces, they also authentically represent, empower and reaffirm their fellow women. Furthermore, Calvert and Terry (1997) state that to change the narratives prompted by inequality, feminists have leveraged the modern-day technology and cyberspace. Gajjala (as cited in Milford, 2015) reinforced the idea of inequality in cyberspaces by stating that early cyberfeminists scholars limited inequality in cyberspaces to the lack of "equipment, wiring and technical training" (p.55). In this regard, technology gives voice to the voiceless women and educates the patriarchal society on the beauty and resilience of womanhood.

2.7.4 Cyberfeminism tenets

Despite various philosophers defining cyberfeminism differently, there is a consensus that it involves gender and technology. The presuppositions of this study are derived from Haraway's (2006) republished essay, *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late 20th*

Century” and ‘Plant’s (1997) contributions. These tenets or presuppositions are crucial for this study as they set the foundation for the analysis of the selected texts. The study uses the tenets to show that women are not only empowered using technology, or with the aid of technology, but they join forces to alleviate stereotypical structures that suppress their voices and identity.

Firstly, cyberfeminism interrogates the dualisms set by society such as “mind and body, animal and human, organism and machine, public and private, nature and culture, men and women, primitive and civilized” (Haraway, 1987). A culture highly immersed in technology interrogates these dualisms as the meaning of most dualism for instance organism vs machine remains vague and socially constructed while in men vs women, the former is considered superior to the latter. Moreover, these dualisms have a way of limiting the identity of the subjects upon which they are imposed. As new technology is developed, the gender roles and stereotypes attached to them are questioned and discarded at individual level because women can form self-defined identities and self-defined images.

Secondly, Haraway (as cited in Volschenk, 2009) states that, “Women have been made out to be the other in theory concerned with identity and gender” (p.13). Thus, for women to eliminate the negative stereotypes, and reconstruct boundaries of identity and gender, they should embrace technological advances, live in harmony with technology and participate in cyberspaces. Significant to note is Duffy and Pruchniewska’s (2017), claim that online space perpetually expects women to portray femininity and all its stereotypes, hence, if not careful, women would confine themselves to these standards, diminishing their self-individualism. Individuality enables women’s to attain their ultimate solution to change their narratives and amplify their voices. Similarly, technology also liberates women from the silences imposed on them by the patriarchal society, shattering power hierarchies and the lack of genuine representations of the girl child.

Thirdly, Feminism has no unitary meaning as it would be a diversion to essentialism. Haraway (1987) encourages women to reject essentialism and set coalition with technology as the foundation of their discussions. Women should recraft themselves into cyborg figures (fluid, self-defined, infinitive) and should not depend on essentialists’ identity to define them. Instead, “Women ought to utilize the cyborgian concept of agency to construct new categories of what it means to be human (race), and what it is to be a woman (gender)” (Volschenk, 2009, p.15). As such, it is better for women to take on the cyborg identity as their own since this identity is perpetually being developed, is eternal and has several inscriptions. Technology also enables the concept “woman” to be constantly developed, as it is a becoming, with no beginning and end.

On the contrary, Henry and Powell (2015) argue that Donna Haraway’s concept of the metaphoric cyborg refers to a “cybernetic organism [which is] a being with both human and machine-like qualities

that is both a fictional creation and a real-world organism” (p.8). This view is however disputed by Haraway (1987) who states that the woman cyborg is a mechanism that can be used to transverse the naturalised’ conventional or normative gender roles as much as it is a “crucial tool for recrafting women’s bodies” (p. 90). What this means is that the devices that are used as communication technologies can serve as tools to create social meaning whereby women’s lived experiences are comprehensively reconstituted and re-ordered using traditional configurations of social relations. As argued by Haraway (1987, p. 21), technologies engender “fresh sources of power.” In other words, technologies are a new way that girls appropriate to empower themselves. On a similar note, it is argued that technologies are pivotal in collapsing “at the boundary between human and machines is blurring in cyberspace” (Henry & Powell, 2015, p.8). Given the above arguments, this study explores how cyberfeminism and technology can be employed as tools for recrafting the image and identity of the girl child in the focal texts.

Adding to the foregoing assertions, Faulkner (cited in Henry & Powell, 2015) proposes seven ways in which technology can be considered to be gendered which include:

(1) designers of technology are predominantly men; (2) the workplace reflects and reinforces the interconnection between masculinity and technical skill; (3) technological artefacts are often materially and symbolically “male” or “female”; (4) popular and cultural images of technology are strongly associated with “hegemonic masculinity”; (5) technical knowledge is often gendered; (6) technical practice is often gendered; and (7) gender identity is often premised on technology (p.8).

From the foregoing, it is clear that technology has become a space where gender wars are silently fought with men seeking to maintain their dominance over women. The images of women and in particular of girls are those of disempowered people that have to answer to the beak domineering men. Deviating from this line of scholarship, the texts selected for this study contest or challenge the imaginaries of girls that present them as hapless, docile and fragile. This is in line with Henry and Powell’s contention that “some postmodernist feminists view technology alternatively as a potential source of empowerment for women” due to the fact that “new technologies dismantle traditional constructions of gender and sexuality which become increasingly irrelevant, and/or multiple, diverse and shifting” (2015, p.8). On the same note, this study argues that far from being the ‘Other’ of new technologies, girls are represented as individuals who are actively involved in recreating their sense of self or self-identity that transgress the traditional presentations as the inferior that is at the mercy of powerful men.

The overarching presence of technologies in contemporary society has ramified different facets of humanity in a number of ways. Notably, modernity today has and continues to impact the lived experiences of women particularly, the girls. This is in line with the views of Henry and Powell (2015) who assert that even though “there is currently a lack of empirical data on the prevalence of online forms of sexual violence and harassment, and as such little is known about the gender of victims and perpetrators, or the causes of these behaviours, it can still be suggested that Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence (TFSV) is a gendered phenomenon for three interconnected reasons” (p.5). It is against this background that there is a need to contribute to scholarship that focuses on cyberspace as an area that has a pervasive influence on human lives especially the girls who form part of this study. According to Henry and Powell (2016, p.6) the effects of the cybernetic conducts are pervasive as they are gendered due to the fact that women and girls are more likely to experience harmful and negative effects as a result of the prevalence of old-fashioned myths and social expectations concerning sexual norms and expectations for women. It is in line with this thinking that cyberfeminism and technology are vital tools that girls can turn in order to reconfigure the traditional images and identities assigned to them by powers-that-be especially with the online platforms. It is on this note that “regardless of the gender of the perpetrator (or indeed the victim), a key factor underlying the perpetration of sexual violence is the social and structural context of gender hierarchisation” (Henry & Powell, 2016, p.6). Thus, this study explores how cyberfeminism and technology can serve as tools that girls can employ to recraft their identities and images of girlhood in ways that disturb the traditional conceptualisation of femininity and masculinity.

In their article, Drouin, Ross and Tobin (2015) argue that current studies support the theoretical thinking that explicitly states that even though women and girls are not the exclusive victims of violence, they are usually the focal points of online digitalised sexual violence. This is backed up by research on ‘sexting’ which tend to indicate that young women are more likely than young men to post erotic images of themselves using their mobile phone or through other channels due to the peer pressure or persuasion and coercion from their male partners (Ringrose et al. 2012). On a similar note, Citron and Franks (2014) posit that a number of studies show that girls and women are usually the main victims of the non-consensual circulation of explicit images online which represents what is known as ‘revenge porn.’ In concurrence, ABS (2013) observes that studies persistently indicate the ubiquitous nature of sexual violence even in offline situations where girls and women are mainly the victims of intimate violence, sexual violation or harassment as compared to men or boys. It is against this background that the current study delves into the way girl characters in the focal texts are depicted as transgressors that appropriate technologies as a tool to negotiate their sense of self as well as owning the images of themselves.

In Milford's (2015) article on '*Revisiting Cyberfeminism: Theory as a Tool for Understanding Young Women's Experiences*' arguments are that "early cyberfeminists conceptualized cyberspaces as fundamentally liberating, theorizing their capacity to move beyond the traditional binaries and limitations of popular gender and feminist politics" (p.55). Moreover, cyberspaces provide a leeway or an avenue that can be used to debunk or challenge the traditional patriarchal power structures, colonial hegemonic inclinations as well as the modern day commercialised and mobilised technologies of cutting-edge capitalism denoting a 'brave new world' (Milford, 2015, p.55).

Furthermore, Milford (2015, p.74) posits that it is also crucial to begin to consider the positionality of subalterns such as young women within the narrative of cyberfeminist. As a theoretical lens, it can be argued that cyberfeminism has often side-lined the lived experiences of girls and women specifically those who are objectified by racial policies as well as marginalised by socio-economic conditions of the societies in which they reside. Significant to note is that, as the underprivileged section of the society, girls are usually omitted from the metanarratives that are represented in virtual technology since they lack access to non-gendered sexual images. It is in this context that this study explored how cyberfeminism and technology enables girls to reconceptualise their own images and identities in literary texts. As Milford argues:

Cyberfeminisms must entail a commitment to the erasure of ideologies of colonial domination that run through Western culture. It is critical not only to ensure that discourse about cyberfeminisms is accessible to all girls and women — not only a privileged few — but also to recognize and reinforce the everyday cyberfeminist acts that girls and women engage in as they navigate an increasingly seamless online/offline existence (2015, p.74).

From the foregoing citation, the notion of cyberfeminism provides an important lens that can be used to unpack the representations of girls and girlhood in works of literature. Put differently, this theory can provide a vista through which to view cybernetic images and identities of girls in the selected texts.

2.8 Review of Literature related to *Americanah*

Different scholars have argued that identity formation can take place in a number of ways as exemplified in Adichie's (2013) novel, *Americanah*. In their article, Ucham and Kangira posit that in the novel, *Americanah*:

The first example of identity formation as it relates to the Afropolitan is when Ifemelu has to form an identity when she arrives in America because Americans did everything differently from what she was used to. Their speaking sounded as if they constantly used the exclamation

mark, they had a lot of shower gels but no sponge in their showers and this in itself made her feel like a foreigner (2015, p.47).

Of essence is that Afropolitan is a unique identity that is reflective of the hybrid cultural of Afropolitan who group of migrants are who find themselves in American unable to fit jigsaw of the mainstream American culture. Rather than imbibing the strange and dominant culture of the place they find themselves in, the migrants design an alternative form of culture as captured by the notion of 'Americanah' which is a corrupted version of the name 'American.' Thus, Afropolitan serves as some form of identity formation linked to the lives of the migrants in America.

Selasi (cited in Ucham & Kangira, 2015, p.50) contends that the Afropolitan needs to create "an identity along three levels, which are national, racial and cultural and the evidence shows that the identity formation that these Afropolitans go through in their personal lives is either indirectly or directly linked to nation, race and culture." As demonstrated in this study, Afropolitan as depicted in the text, *Americanah* is an identity that black girls have to negotiate within a context where they are total strangers. Such an identity allows them to negotiate a sense of selfhood that counters the metanarratives of identity politics. Additionally, it should be underscored that as an integral part of the process of identity formation, the Afropolitans ultimately acquire an accent that is either British or American (Selasi, 2005).

In an article on *Americanah*, Khan (2019) posits that the text delves into "the subtle matters which are not about only colour but those about everything such as: language, fashion for black girls, identity conflict and most importantly gender issue" (p.14). It is the images and identities of girls that this study explores in an attempt to reconfigure the way cyberfeminism and technology are theories that can be employed to comprehend the process of identity-formation. In other words, the images of immigrant black girls serve to illustrate the options that young women have over whether they should embrace the American accent or devise new ways of expressing their peculiar sense of self. Additionally, Khan (2019, p.23) contends that "Adichie's *Americanah* depicts struggles of an African woman as an American immigrant in 21st century". The struggle in which the protagonist is involved mirrors the process that the black woman's identity is affected by the position she occupies in history as well as in the present-day world. This is aptly captured by the African immigrant, Ifemelu, the protagonist in Adichie's text who is depicted through "the struggle [that] African black female immigrants [endure] in adapting to the new accent of language and culture of the West" (p.23). As a result, this text presents a new form of identity that resolves around Afropolitans who are the new generation of African immigrants.

On a different note, Ndaka (2017, p.103) argues that Adichie's novel can be read as a "cataloguing of experiences." On the other hand, Aribisala (2013) states that the same text can be viewed as "anecdotes that defy the fabric of coincidence" which eventually creates a plot that looks "like an excuse for the venting of opinions" (Maslin, 2013). However, this study concurs with the fact that this "polyvocality is strategically tooled to trouble the silences concealed in the pursuit of propriety and nuance," thereby culminating in a situation where silence is seen "as regulating and structuring gendered and interracial relationships in ways that maintain social hierarchies" (Ndaka, 2017, p.103). In *Americanah*, the reconfiguration of the girl identities and images of girlhood through silence or the act of silencing allows for the transcendence of borderlines that define boys/boyhood and girl/girlhood. This current study draws upon these ideas of identities and images of girls who are presented in the selected texts. On this note, Adichie depicts language as overlapping with silence or with the act of silencing because in *Americanah* silence is presented "as both disingenuous and reactionary when it relates to the black, female migrant" (Ndaka, 2017, p.103). Further, silence in this text represents how patriarchy keeps women and girls in positions of subservience by denying them the opportunity and the right to speak. However, through the appropriation of cyberspace and technology, the lead female character in *Americanah* is able to disrupt this silence in order to mediate her own sense of selfhood and the images of her girlhood.

Also focusing on Achidie's *Americanah*, Idowu-Faith (2014, p.23) surmises that "the latest novel from the award-winning writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, is a melting point for different subject matters like race, skin colour and identity, love and romance and hair politics." Of importance is that Achidie's novel blends the thematic issues of love, skin pigmentation, race, romance and identity individual or collective entities. In addition, Idowu argues that "Adichie conceives of them (the themes) as the combinatorial complexity that define the ordinary day-to-day experience in migratory life" (2014, p.23). In the process, it should be underscored that Adichie engages the notion of migration as a vista through which a melange of themes that blend at the core of the text can be comprehended in a way that shows how identity can be mediated in cyberspace. Even though, *Americanah* can be regarded as an appropriate literary representation of migration and displacement, it is mainly a text that complicates the images and identities of black girls in a strange land.

In her thesis on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's works, Di Laurea (2016, p.10) posits that the notion of identity frames the story narrated in *Americanah*. In other words, in her novel, Adichie depicts the process of self-determination and construction in the context of transnational and postcolonial spaces in which the protagonists are situated. In this process, the novel remarkably draws attention to specific ways in which the protagonists both view and are seen doing either femininity or masculinity (Di Laurea, 2016, p.10) and "often critically thinking about gender stereotypes and reacting to them in

the different cultures they experience” (p.10). This is clearly depicted in the character of Ifemelu who, as the protagonist in the text *Americanah*, is continually mediating her racial and gender identities in both the United States of American and her home country of Nigeria as aptly captured in the way her sexual life in her adolescence and adulthood is depicted in the novel. In this regard, the reader is exposed to the instances that reveal how the protagonist disrupts the normative practices of womanhood or girlhood. It is against this backdrop that the current study is foregrounded since the aim is to explore how girls engage the cyberspace and technology as tools with which to recraft their own set of identities and images of girlhood in the context of the text under study.

Supporting the foregoing assertions, Bonvillain (2016, p.6) points out that in *Americanah*, Adichie presents a situation where the racial configurations of both England and America are satirised and concurrently unravel the unique barriers that include gender, race and nationality. The female protagonist has to mediate her Nigerian identity as an obstacle that she has to overcome prior to attaining a transnational identity. Precisely, through the characters of Ifemelu and Obinze, Adichie demonstrates how identities can be formed based on the individual’s lived experiences in the context of migratory social positions and geographical displacement. In other words, the process of constant migration affects the way one defines him or herself as well as the images that are formed around the concept of selfhood. This emanates from the fact that migration opens an individual’s world to other worlds which, in turn, expands the way one experiences different environments or how one interacts with new cultures. This is evidenced by how Ifemelu and Obinze’s exposure to the power configurations of different societies is fundamental in defining the position that individuals occupy as determined by the position or hierarchical social categories.

2.9 Review of literature related to *When You Dance with the Crocodile*

It is important to underscore the fact that there is a dearth of scholarship that focuses on the Namibian literary corpus, and in the study’s context, Erna Muller’s children narratives. It is for this reason that this study seeks to unpack the discourses of images and identities of young women in the selected texts written by Namibians. Among the very few studies on the literary canon of Erna Muller, is the thesis by Chunga (2015) which contends that *When You Dance with the Crocodile* constructs a close relationship between Helena and her father, Dr Amadhila, although depicts Helena to be independent, as evidenced by how Helena resists the protective position of her father by dismissing the idea that computer games can be detrimental. As such, Helena clearly shows that computer games are simply games as she does not contemplate the type of the game and the underlining dangers that can result from playing the games. According to Chunga (2015), Helena in *When You Dance with the Crocodile* is interested in seeking adventure and compassion through interacting with technology. It is the

cyberspace that allows Helena to mediate her sense of self. Furthermore, Chunga (2015) points out that:

In *When You Dance with the Crocodile* the plot also revolves around the urge for the girl-child to care for others. Helena cannot stand seeing another girl, hungry, thirsty and trapped for days without any help. She takes it upon herself to provide that help because she cares. There is no relationship of any sort between her and Ruth (the trapped girl). Helena is perfectly comfortable with her life, but she has the burning desire to get out of her comfort zone and face danger just out of care and concern (p.69).

Given the above, this current study explores the notion of cybernetic space as a tool that enables girls to negotiate their own set of identities and images of girlhood. This allows them to reconstitute the meanings of images of girlhood and identity.

On the other hand, Muller's other novel, *Where the Lion Stalks*, has neither been analysed by academics nor been part of the scholarship on the Namibian literary canon, particularly, children's literature. A perusal of the internet and other academic sources of information such as the library revealed no research work on the said text. As such, this study is among the first to use this text in a literary study. As such, the dearth of literary reviews on this text propelled the researcher contribute to the scholarship of Erna Muller's children literature.

2.10 Influence of technology on the girl child's identity and image

With the increasing footprint of new technologies in the lives of human beings, it is no small wonder why identity formation has greatly been affected by such technologies. In this light, Mascheroni, Vincent and Jimenez (2015, n.p.) suggest that social network sites and mobile communication play a pivotal role "in the process of self-presentation and emancipation, providing 'full-time' access to peers and peer culture." It is in this context that the selected texts suggest ways that can be engaged by girls to challenge the dominant gender differences and sexual violence against girls and women. It is on this note that girls, rather than boys, are considered to be more prone to peer pressure and mediation. As noted by Mascheroni, Vincent and Jimenez, this behaviour is "aimed at increasing one's popularity online or [indicating] 'a certain type of girl'" (2015, n.p.). Of importance is that the girls who tend to post such erotic photos elect to abide with a sexualised stereotype in order to be socially accepted by their peers which in turn influences their identities. What this implies is that technology shapes the images of girls through the reaction of their peers as captured by the way such images trend.

In the process, peer sanctions have a great impact on the formation of identities of girls, that is, their sense of self is affected. Such a situation paves way for what is now popularly regarded as cyberspace identity. This type of selfhood is subject to the way the girls tend to “identify with the pressure to always look “perfect” in their online pictures” (Mascheroni, Vincent & Jimenez, 2015, n.p). However, the current study explores how girls in different contexts or settings employ cyberspace and technology to recraft their identities and images of themselves in ways that counter the metanarratives on girlhood. The cyberspace has and is increasingly becoming a space where women and girls could contest the way they have been presented especially at the coercion of men and as result of peer pressure. Subsequently, girl characters in the texts selected for this study are seen to be contesting, subverting or disrupting the discourses on how their images have been constructed and how they have been defined, thereby giving them control and power to mediate their own sense of selfhood.

Adding to the foregoing views, Jenkins (2019) points out that cyberspace identity refers to how an online user decides to self-represent him/herself in cyberspace. In other words, it should be pointed out that “cyberspace identity is anything but simple” due to the “sheer number of different cyberspace platforms, each with their own system structures and communities, [making] it incredibly complicated” (Jenkins, 2019, p.9). As a result, cyberspace identity denotes an all-encompassing view of the users’ image of themselves online. Furthermore, Jenkins (2019) notes that cyberspace identity comprises “all types of electronic self-representation, from Tinder to Tomb Raider... to email” and it “represents times where users are alone, on some electronic device, and at times where they are connecting with others through any form of computer-mediated communication” (p.9). It is for this reason that an understanding of cyberspace identity is vital in situating the online images of girls which help mediate their own identity or identities by subverting the hegemonic tendencies that characterise electronic interactions. Thus, using the texts such as *Where the Lion Stalks, When You Dance with the Crocodile* and *Americanah*, this study explored cyberfeminism and technology as recrafting tools of the girl child’s image and identity.

In furtherance of the foretasted, Martin (2014, pp.47-48) observes that Haraway (2006) regarded the new technologies that blended organic and non-organic origins as creating various opportunities for transgression and rethinking of varied issues such as gender. Precisely, the new technologies that define contemporary societies are responsible for engendering new rhizomes of understanding or being whereby the less naturalised traditional symmetries could become a reality (Martin, 2014). In other words, the human and the machine can blend together to transverse the borderlines that exist between the two. On this note, Bell (cited in Martin, 2014) argues that “cyborgs are irreducible, ‘instead of either/or, they are neither/both’ [since the] cyborg disrupts a modernist view of the self as

ordered, rational and complete” (p.47). Put differently, cyborgs represent a form of identity that transcends easy categorisation normally denoted by the gender binarism of man/woman, he/she or femininity/masculinity. As stated by Haraway, the “cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints” (1991, p.154). Such an understanding is important in framing the discussion of use of cyberfeminism and technology as recrafting tools of the girl child’s image and identity.

Moreso, Sunden (2003) reconfigures the cyborg that was proposed by Haraway (2006) by suggesting another concept of ‘she-borg’. Sunden (2003) points out that:

Arguing for a she-borg is to form a feminist perspective sensitive to bodies, texts and materialities in various cyberspaces. Instead of claiming that online worlds are dislocated utopias where everything is possible, or that the use of technologies has little to do with local communities of ‘real’ women, I argue for a cyborgfeminist perspective that problematizes every separation of the imaginary from the political, and does so in a sense that does not erase the material of the virtual (p.188).

It is in line with the foregoing views that this study endeavoured to situate the concept of girlhood through the lenses that are provided by the theory of cyberfeminism and mechanisms offered by new technologies. By situating the study within cyberfeminism and technological spaces, the researcher was able to unpack how the portrayals of girlhood and how gendered the cybernetic images are. Hence, when the concept of female cyborg is deployed to girlhood and/or girls it can expand the way femininity is viewed both within the context of the literary works and in real human societies. Thus, in the analysis of the selected novels in this study, ‘teenage’ girls, are positioned in such a way that they engage technologies as tools to mediate their own identities as well as images of their girlhood (Martin, 2014). The long and short of it is that cyberfeminism and technologies are some of the new ways that female subjectivities engage in order to disturb binaries of gender, identities and images of girlhood.

2.11 Conclusion

Cyberfeminism as a theory is a fusion of feminism and technology. The theory posits that women and the girl child as a socially constructed phenomena can empower themselves by firstly assuming the role of a cyborg, becoming technologically literate and voicing their concerns in cyberspaces. This section reviewed literature related to the study and identified research gaps. It also discussed cyberfeminism theory and its tenets. Through the selected texts, the researcher validated how

technology can recraft the girl child's image, reconstruct her identity and conscientise society on issues affecting her.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research design or the methodology of the current study. The methodology aids readers and future researchers to trace and validate the findings of this research, enabling them to understand the basis of this study's conclusion and recommendations.

3.2 Research design

This research employed a qualitative research method. Qualitative research is a method of exploring and understanding the meaning attributed to societal and anthropological problems by people or a community (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study adopted a phenomenological research as the qualitative approach to inquiry. Creswell and Creswell (2018) define it as "a design of inquiry in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants" (p.55). This study explored the experiences of the girl child in the three selected texts and how the girl child uses technology as a conscientising tool for several societal issues affecting women.

3.3 Procedures

The researcher read through the female authored texts to assess the use of technology by the girl child. The texts used in this study were selected based on the relevance of the theoretical framework to the text. Cyberfeminism as the theoretical framework and its paradigms as presented in chapter two were considered in the analysis of this research. Hence, the texts in this study, (Erna Muller's children's books: *Where the Lion Stalks*, *When You Dance with the Crocodile* and Chimamanda Adichie Ngozi's *Americanah*) were selected and analysed following the three research objectives. To answer the following; how the girl child utilises technology to conscientise society on issues affecting women in the selected female authored texts, how cyberspace recrafts the girl child's image in the selected female authored texts and how technology empowers the girl child and reconstructs her identity in the selected female authored texts.

3.4 Content analysis

This study employed qualitative content analysis to analyse the effect of technology on the girl child's image in the three texts. Content analysis is a research method which allows the qualitative data collected in research to be analysed systematically and reliably so that generalisations can be made from them in relation to the categories of interest to the researcher (Haggarty, 1996). The collected data was clarified based on the tenets and groundworks of cyberfeminism.

3.5 Ethical considerations

The researcher requested for ethical clearance from the NUST research committee before embarking on the study. The three selected texts: Erna Muller's *Where the Lion Stalks*, *When You Dance with the Crocodile* and Chimamanda Adichie Ngozi's *Americanah* are available as print in libraries and as e-versions, eliminating any direct interaction with human participants. This research acknowledged all sources consulted through the in-text citations and the reference list within the boundaries of APA Referencing Style.

3.6 Conclusion

This section described the research methodology of the present study, that is, the qualitative research design. It also defined content analysis and explained how it was used as a data collection tool. This chapter also highlighted the procedures and content analysis for the three texts namely, Erna Muller's *Where the Lion Stalks*, *When You Dance with the Crocodile* and Chimamanda Adichie Ngozi's *Americanah*.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses Adichie's *Americanah*, and Erna Muller's two novels, *When You Dance with the Crocodile* and *Where the Lion Stalks*. The analysis focuses on the relevance of technology in conscientising society on women's concerns, images of girlhood and empowerment and reconstruction of identity of the girl child. The analysis is based on the analysis of the three selected texts in response to the objectives of the study. The objectives of this study are as follows:

- To interrogate how the girl child utilises technology to conscientise society on issues affecting women in the selected female authored texts
- To explore how cyberspace recrafts the girl child's image in the selected female authored texts.
- To examine how technology empowers the girl child and reconstructs her identity in the selected female authored texts.

4.2. Summary of Adichie's *Americanah*

Americanah (referred to as AM thereafter) is the one of the novels written by the award-winning Nigerian writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The novel focuses on two young lovers, Ifemelu and Obinze, who decide to leave their homeland of Nigeria. While Ifemelu migrates to the United States on a study scholarship, Obinze leaves for the United Kingdom to seek greener pastures. However, the two young lovers' decisions to go abroad is not motivated by factors such as war, natural calamities or poverty, but emanates from a desire to find new lands to grow as they faced lack of opportunities. In her novel, Adichie (AM, p. 276) describes this condition as the "lethargy of choice-lessness." Besides, the novel tackles topical topics that include identity, love, romance, race, hair politics and skin pigmentation.

Commentary on Adichie's *Americanah*

The novel opens with the scene where the protagonist Ifemelu's hair is braided in a hair salon out of Princeton town in Trenton. This salon provides a context for the story as flashbacks are used to narrate the story in chapters that make up the novel. The protagonist, Ifemelu is a Nigerian woman who is in her thirties, who decided to migrate to the United States on a university scholarship to study. After enduring a horrendous period of unpleasant experiences and revolting jobs, she created a blog and started writing very successful posts concerning the questions of race and what it meant to be black

in the United States. She decides to call her blog “Race-teenth or various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes by a Non-American Black” (p. 4). The bulk of the chapters are narrated from the first-person narrative by Ifemelu herself, whereas other sections of the novel are told from the point of view of Obinze. Ifemelu and Obinze were childhood lovers especially during their schooldays.

However, when she migrates to America, their love relationship ended suddenly as Ifemelu decided to sever the bond that the two had. The situation was partly necessitated by the fact that Obinze was denied an entry visa into the United States following the regulations which were introduced in the wake of the 9/11 bombings. As a result, Obinze decided to leave for the United Kingdom. In the United States, Ifemelu has love affairs with different men without the prospect of starting a family of her own. At one time she was in a relationship with a white man and at the same time was involved with an African American. In addition, Ifemelu encountered a difficult time of transitioning from her African attachments to being an immigrant. In America her life had to change drastically to fit into the society she finds herself in, although she still feels attached to Nigeria which is her home country. To be assimilated into the American way of life, she had to readapt her Nigerian way of life to the new conditions of migratory life. Thus, the novel focuses on three thematic concerns such the quest for self-identity, race and segregation. After staying in the United States for thirteen years, Ifemelu yearns to return to her home country. She decided not to continue her stay in America, so she made a decision to discontinue her successful blog and to give up the migrant life that she had made for herself and goes back to Nigeria.

4.2.1 The girl child’s use of technology to conscientise society on issues affecting women in *Americanah*

This section of this chapter focuses on how *Americanah* depicts the utilisation of technology by the girl child to conscientise society on the issues affecting women particularly young women. This novel features a young female protagonist who employs technology in form of the internet specifically the blog to unravel issues that form part of women’s experiences. Through the character of Ifemelu, Adichie allows the reader to be aware of how technology impacts the experiences of women, specifically young girls in the contemporary societies. In *Americanah*, blogging is the main aspect of technology that is employed as a mechanism for societal conscientisation. It is on this note that blogging creates an unfettered space in form of cyberspace that allows the blogger who is a young

woman to invade and expropriate the male-dominated field in order to articulate or voice issues that affect women in America and Nigeria.

As part of her attempts to chronicle hers and other black women's life experiences in the United States, Ifemelu decides to create a blog. She aptly names her blog as *Raceteenth* or *Various Observations About American Blacks* (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black. The title of the blog spells out the main challenge that Ifemelu chooses to cover as a determiner of her experience, that is, race. Added to that, she states that her blog is based on her 'various observations' on issues pertaining to American Blacks whom she refers to as 'those formerly known as Negroes'. What emerges from this naming of the blog which is a nomenclature denotes that race is the major factor affecting the lives of black Americans. Thus, one of the issues that affect black women is their skin colour which represents their race. In addition, the hair politics also underlines the racial experience of black women as they are socialised to dislike their hair. Through her blog, Ifemelu, engages her readers on the subject of hair politics as represented by the hair salon where she does her hair. However, far from being merely a place where black women go to have their hair done, the hair salon offers stories that Ifemelu brings to life through her blog.

The blog is of paramount importance as Ifemelu employs it to conscientise society on issues affecting women. One major issue that is flagged on the blog is the way race negatively affects the girl child, particularly the migrant. The experience of the migrant in the United States gives Ifemelu the content that enriches her blog. Besides, the space offered by the blog enables Ifemelu to share and interface her own experience of race in America as a young woman with African roots. As a result, she posts some of the incidents of how racism affected her and how the blog serves as a tool to deal with issues of race as a black young woman. In one post, she writes: "Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I'm Jamaican or I'm Ghanaian. America doesn't care. So, what if you weren't "black" in your country? You're in America now" (p. 220).

The foregoing post underlines the realities of black migrants whose experiences become homogenised as if being black was one blanket term for anyone and everyone with skin pigmentation that is referred to as 'black.' In another post, Ifemelu talks about an incident that takes place at a dinner party that she was invited to with her African American boyfriend. The hosts, a French couple, discussed the subject of race after which Ifemelu remarks: "I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America. But we don't talk about it" (p. 291). Ifemelu notes that in her country, she was not actively made conscious of being black because she was simply a Nigerian national, but is made aware that she is black the moment she finds

herself in America. Despite the fact that the subject of race was not something that people in America openly discussed, a migrant becomes race conscious upon coming to America. To this effect, she writes in her blog that: “lot of folk– mostly non-black-say Obama is not black, he’s biracial, multiracial, black-and-white, anything but just black. Because his mother was white” (p. 337). It is on this note that Lentin (2014, p. 1265) posits that the election of Barack Obama as the first black American President did not stop the impact of racism on socioeconomic inequalities which is something that has been variously contested. Highlighting such issues on her blog gives Ifemelu a voice and choice. The blog becomes a speaking platform that enables her to discuss race issues freely, thus empowering her.

Naturally, there is an inclination to elevate the white race above that of the black as shown by the way people tended to ignore the former American President’s black origins choosing to treat him as if he was white like his mother. In her blog, Ifemelu delves into how the issue of ‘passing of’ as white was something that blacks born in inter-racial marriages used to their advantage. Whilst this problem of colour was not publicly acknowledged, it marked the experiences of the black migrants like Ifemelu and the challenges they encountered in America. Thus, silencing issues about race did not mean that this it was not a facet of the American way of life. In this regard, technology becomes an avenue that enables a blogger like Ifemelu to talk openly about this thorny and sensitive issue in no-holds-barred fashion.

Upon her return to Nigeria, Ifemelu once again engages technology in form of cyberspace to continue her quest to tackle issues that affect young women or girls in Nigeria. She records the debate that she and other patrons of the Nigeropolitan club had, comparing cities such as Lagos and New York. She blogs that: “Lagos has never been, will never be, and has never aspired to be like New York, or anywhere else for that matter. Lagos has always been undisputably itself...” (AM, p. 421). The problem as raised in his blog was not necessarily about the geographical texture of the two cities, but race was the salient problem that differentiated Lagos from New York. In New York, one encounters the deep-seated and seething nature of race which is not the case in Lagos. It is on this note that Hallemeier (2015, p. 232) contends that “*Americanah* presents an alternative, utopic vision of global power in which the United States stands as a foil to the promising future of late Nigerian capitalism.”

Another posting on her blog which revealed how Ifemelu used technology to conscientise society on issues that affected women centred on the kinds of illnesses that afflicted black women. In this blog, she writes about a Kenyan woman’s visit to her personal doctor who diagnosed her with what he described as panic attacks. Ifemelu writes:

'On the Subject of Non-American Blacks Suffering from Illnesses Whose Names They Refuse to Know.' ... she refused to accept the diagnosis of panic attacks because panic attacks happened only to Americans. Nobody in Kinshasa had panic attacks. It was not even that it was called by another name, it was simply not called at all. Did things begin to exist only when they were named? (Adichie, 2013, p. 158)

Similarly, Ifemelu had also refused to accept the same phenomenon when Ginika told her "I think you're suffering from depression" (AM, p. 157).

From the passage, it seems there are illnesses that black women did not know about or which they chose to remain in the dark about as they did not believe they could suffer from such illness. As noted from Ifemelu's posting, one such illness that the Kenyan women did not believe could affect her was pain attack, noting that it only afflicted the Americans. In addition, Ifemelu also believed that "depression only happened to Americans. She was not suffering from depression" but was merely tired (AM, p. 157). Hence, the blog conscientises black women on health issues that are not spoken about in black communities. Significantly, this blog post highlights that illness seemed to be clarified according to race as the belief was that some diseases were race specific.

There are a number of incidents that expose Ifemelu to racism in the United States. One such incident took place on a train journey where she sat next to a dreadlocked white man. When she informs him that she runs a blog known as Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black, the man remarks that "race is totally overhyped these days, black people need to get over themselves, it's all about class now, the haves and the have-nots" (AM, p. 4). He claims that the main issue affecting people in America is not race but the class system. Ifemelu takes the race debate to her blog on the internet which she uses to bring forth instantiations of how racism afflicts young women. As intimated elsewhere, the title of her blog hints that the main issues that afflict women are those that ensue out of racial configurations that the protagonist encounters daily as a young black woman in United States of America. From her blog posts, it is clear that black women are doubly oppressed on account of being women and as blacks.

Focusing on Ifemelu's blog, the text reveals how the internet provides a space which allows the reader to have a peek view of the experiences of black female migrants' encounters with racism. This struggle to define oneself starts at the level of the language question. Like other immigrants, Ifemelu is forced to adapt a new accent and acclimatise to the Western culture in order fit into the American society. This new breed of African immigrant is commonly referred to as Afropolitans. The term Afropolitan

not only denotes a new generation of African immigrants, but represents a new form of identity that ensues out of failure to fit into the mainstream American society.

The title of the novel, *Americanah*, points to Ifemelu's quest for a unique identity when she finds herself in the United States on an academic scholarship. The blog treads on the subject of race unapologetically through the title of the novel which decentres the question of identity from mainstream debates. The word 'Americanah' is a corrupted version of 'American' which would ideally be considered a politically correct identity for those who reside or were born in the United States of America. Put differently, 'Americanah' counters any identity that thrives to be anything that is not American. Since the migrants especially black ones do not fit or fail to fit into the mainstream American society, they have to mediate their own form of identity which is denoted by the word 'Americanah.' This new identity is necessitated by the migrant's experiences in the United States. Ifemelu encounters instances where she faces silencing practices that are meant to mute her identity as a speaking subject. In one such instance, she posts on her blog about a "dreadlocked white man who sat next to her on the train," and whose dressing and appearance resembled the prototype of a "social warrior" (p. 4). Arguably, the above dismissive attitude from a white man depicts how the 'other' is still treated in the 21st century and portrayed in the western world, hence diminishing their identity.

Furthermore, the blog represents the virtual site which Ifemelu uses to create a cyberspace that transcends the constrained landscape of interracial relationships and discourses. By depicting the cyberspaces in the form of a blog, Adichie seeks to demonstrate how heterogeneous identities can be mediated beyond the traditional public and private spaces. In other words, Adichie's novel uses the blog as a cyberspace or an alternative space for the politics of identity to be unravelled and to disrupt racial and patriarchal spaces. It is in this context that Idowu-Faith (2014, p. 2) argues that Adichie's novel focuses on the "international migration theories ... to chart a new migration story where return migration is the quintessential closure." The implication here is that the migrant's story is hinged on mediating a set of identities that are not warped in the stasis of race or patriarchy. In fact, the notion of migration illustrates the elasticity of identity. Hence it can be argued that:

[Adichie's novel] trenchantly represents migration as unequivocally gendered, explodes and disperses the mythical romance with the nation, disrupts and shifts epistemic and discursive centers by manipulating the subject/other and the observer/observed positionalities, and gives an incisive and self-reflexive portrayal of the hydra-headedness of racial pathologies (Idowu-Faith, 2014, p. 2).

However, it is this flexibility that is represented by migratory migration that is encapsulated in cyberspace which is far from being constrained by geographical boundaries as it can be accessed anywhere, anytime. As a result, blogging deviates from the proclivity of treating identity as something fixed by and within time-scape, and treats it as something that defies confinement. On this point, Ifemelu's cybernetic identity allows her to unmask racial and gendered myths around girlhood. Thus, cyberspace affords a sense of polyvocality which represents multi-voices through the followers that Ifemelu has on her blog.

In *Americanah*, technology plays a prominent role in Ifemelu's life whilst she is in America. Even when she decides to return to her home country, she engages technology to find reasons to support her decision for a symbolic return. By surfing the internet, Ifemelu is able to contextualise her return migration as a common way of life for the Nigerians:

[Ifemelu] scoured Nigerian websites, Nigerian profiles on Facebook, Nigerian blogs, and each click brought yet another story of a young person who had recently moved back home, clothed in American or British degrees, to start an investment company, a music production business, a fashion label, a magazine, a fast-food franchise (AM, p. 13).

From the citation above, it is clear that technology has become a source of information as Ifemelu is able to establish that there is always a constant influx of Nigerians returning to Nigeria after spending many years in foreign countries. Thus, Ifemelu is persuaded to return to Nigeria despite the fact that she had obtained American citizenship. The ulterior motive for Ifemelu to move back to Nigeria is because she longed to resolve her love affair with her first love, Obinze. On her return to Nigeria, she created another blog which calls 'The Small Redemptions of Lagos.'

The novel also contests the circumscribed ways in which Ifemelu is allowed to relate by placing her voice within certain interactive social spaces whose nature and constitution rupture hegemonic discursive closures. As a girl child, Ifemelu is constrained by inhabiting spaces denoted by patriarchal structures which made her invisible and passive. However, technology creates an unlimited space known as cyberspace which permits a person to mediate a cybernetic identity. This identity is defiant to the traditional form of defining one's sense of selfhood. This point is captured by Ifemelu who, with a host of other characters, disrupt the notion of girlhood that is characterised by vulnerability, inactiveness, indiscernibility and submissiveness. As such, technology equips Ifemelu with the means to contest the patriarchy configurations of ownership of women as well as racism. Hence, blogging is used by Ifemelu to unpack those issues that stifle the voices of women and girls. Arguably, Ifemelu's

voice can be regarded as challenging girlhood identities that are defined by patriarchy as inconsequential.

4.2.2 Cyberspace recrafting the girl child's image in *Americanah*

This section examines how the girl child's image is recrafted using cyberspace. The study argues that Helena in Muller's texts, and Ifemelu in Adichie's text are depicted as contesting the images of girlhood that are circulated and recycled by society by appropriating cyberspace. An analysis of the images of the girl child in the three texts reveals that identities are not fixed but constantly changing, always being redefined or remarshalled. The identity of the girl child demands fervent attention from scholars. In Adichie's text, the image and identity of the girl child and how they are crafted using cyberspace form the crux of the discussion in this section.

The text showcases how Ifemelu struggles to define herself in a land that seems hostile to her race.

Technology is increasingly becoming an important tool that the girl child can employ to empower and reconstruct her identity as evidenced in the primary texts. Ifemelu is constantly in search of her identity in this case, grapple with her identity is captured by the first sentence that opens Adichie's *Americanah*, "She could pretend to be someone else, someone specially admitted into a hallowed American club, someone adored with certainty" (p. 4). This is evidenced by the fact that she decides to become a blogger and an activist on racism. Blogging offers her an opportunity to appropriate technology to empower herself as well as reconstruct her identity in a racial environment. As such, her blog creates a platform that enables her to vent out her despair and the lived experiences as an African immigrant in the United States. Though she encounters various instances of racism due to her skin colour, the novel shows how technology allows Ifemelu to disrupt the race narrative through her posts on her blog which provide an innovative way to confront a dated problem.

Dawkins, (2010, p. 10) argues that separating the issue of race from class "trivialises and invalidates Ifemelu's lived experiences of racial exclusions, hierarchies and privileges in its claim of a post-racial society." In other words, blogging enables Ifemelu to disrupt the racial myths especially those that affect women premised on a privileged position of racial relations. In the text, a number of instances demonstrate different ways that are used to mute the identities of the black female migrant such as Ifemelu. As such, the black, migrant woman is at the receiving end of racial inequalities. Ifemelu's blog gives voices to the black female migrants in order to explode the image of the girl as voiceless and powerless, and at the mercy of racial disparities.

Additionally, According to Ndaka (2017, p. 102), *Americanah* “depicts the female genitalia as repulsive, shameful and forbidden”. Young girls are taught to create a distance between themselves and their genitals as evidenced by the way Ifemelu’s mother talks to her about this subject. Ifemelu’s genitalia are imaged as something that can only be captured by the word “unsayable” which reveals how girls are socialised to be silent on issues that relate to their sexuality. Ifemelu’s mother instructs her wary of her body. Her mother shows how the girl child is brought up is such a way that she has to be view her body as something she should be detached from as it denotes a shameful thing. Such an image of the girl’s body creates dispossess the girl the rights to her body thereby paving way for the male-dominated society to control and possess the female body.

Additionally, Ifemelu recalls an instance where her mother ordered her to “scrub between [her] legs very well, very well” (p. 128). This expression was used to refer to Ifemelu’s genitalia without saying the word to her face as if it was an abomination. On different occasions, Adichie’s protagonist makes the reader to be aware of this control of female bodies and the suppression of their sexualities. Of importance is that Ifemelu’s genitalia like of any other girl of her age was deemed to be something “unsayable.” Even though her mother believes she has a duty to educate her daughter on her sexuality, she struggles to refer to genitalia by the actual name choosing to use euphemisms. When she is set to depart from her home, a mother was expected to educate her daughter on the revulsion and disgust that surrounds the woman’s body.

On the other hand, Obinze’s mother adopted a different strategy on the subject of sexuality on the day she fought Obinze and Ifemelu regarding their sexual consummation. She calls Ifemelu to her bedroom and advises her on the subject of sex, abstinence and love (p. 72). She chooses to be open about female sexuality where Ifemelu’s mother chooses to be silent on this subject of the female body. The redefining of the girl’s sexuality affords her the opportunity to reclaim her sexual identity. Thus, sexual identity enables the girl child to define her wholistic identity. What this means is that through the use of cyberspace, Ifemelu is able to erase the taboos that make a girl’s body be treated as something to be ashamed of. In fact, she makes it possible to openly discuss the topic of sex without the inhibitions that prevented her mother to openly discuss this topic with her. Blogging about sex counters the metanarrative on sexuality denoted by her mother’s noticeable silences on the subject.

The point to note here is that young girls are taught to accept the shame that surrounds the subject of their sexuality. In the other words, sexuality is a topic that attracts silence, shame and censure among young women or girls. Traditional mothers find it difficult to broach the subject of sexuality. Similarly, writing about the *Mary Okurut’s Invisible Weevil*, Odiemo-Munara observes that female

genitalia morphs from “the shameful whose real name they should never say” but should call it “koko [which] actually meant animal” (2012, p. 102).

The images of girls or young women are constrained by patriarchal strictures and social conventions. Significantly, Ifemelu writes on her blog about numerous incidents that reveal her awareness on the strictures that the body of the girl child is put under by patriarchy. In fact, female sexualities are always depicted as under some kind of erasure bodies and the blog seeks to trouble such representations of the female corporeal.

For these reasons, cyberspace provides a platform to revise the narratives that negatively create images of the girl child as a person who should be ashamed of her sexuality. Adichie uses the subject of feminine sexuality to disturb the images that surround the way girls are socialised into womanhood. Put differently, cyberspace is used to articulate conversations about subversive feminine sexualities and deviant relationships. While such issues are not openly discussed or even mentioned in a male-dominated society, cyberspace tends to equalise the girl-child to her counterparts as much as it removes the taboos that surround topics that relate to female sexuality, let alone pluralised female sexualities. A good example of subversive sexualities is depicted through the character of Aisha (the African woman braiding Ifemelu’s hair in the novel) who confesses to Ifemelu that she was having an affair with “two Igbo men because “Igbo men take care of women real good” (p. 15). This statement is replete with sexual insinuations which is a subject that is taboo to girls like Ifemelu who grow up in conservative families. Aisha’s confession is illustrative of how the taboos surrounding feminine sexualities are troubled or disturbed in this text. This is because Aisha is unspoken the social taboos but not confessing to having two lovers by actually being involved in a sexual relationship that society would regard as an act of immorality. It can be argued that Aisha’s ideas on sexuality challenge what is considered normative sexuality. As such, she recrafts the traditional sexual image that depicts feminine sexuality as moral-bound. This act of recrafting the girl child’s image of sexuality is achieved by extricating or rescuing such an image from the spectrum.

Therefore, the cyber identities in Adichie’s text fits into what Selasi (2005) describes as Afropolitan which a form of identity denoted by the ability to articulate issues unequivocally as depicted by the female protagonist in *Americanah*. In addition, Di Laurea (2016, p.10) states that the notion of identity frames the story narrated in *Americanah*. Thus, the theme of identity was based on how the texts of this study created settings of the stories and how such settings were accessed by the characters.

4.2.3 Technology empowering the girl child and reconstructing her identity in *Americanah*

At the centre of Adichie's *Americanah* is the quest for identity in contexts marked by patriarchal and racial inequalities. From the onset, the girl-child is often disempowered due to the circumstances she is born and raised, this predicament sometimes follows her until adulthood. Most often, she re-empowers herself as soon as she is educated and well-versed with technology. This transition thus has a positive ripple effect on her self-identity and capabilities. In *Americanah*, as soon as Ifemelu is well-versed with technology, she uses this tool as a platform to discuss and find solutions to an issue that had a negative impact on her self-perception (identity).

The text is littered with instances of how the girl child identity is mediated through technology. This study argues that identity entails being in a position that allows one to be a speaking subject which denotes empowerment. In the United States of America, Ifemelu's Afropolitan identity, for instance, enables her to negotiate a sense of selfhood that deviates from her Nigerian girlhood. This transformation is triggered by the fact that the American way of living was structurally different from her Nigerian background which had formed her concept of self. She noticed that the American accent sounded different as they used an exclamation mark to punctuate their speech. Even a mundane act like bathing appeared weird since a lot of shower gels were used yet she was used to the sponge in the showers. Trivial as this may sound, it was a cultural shock that resulted in Ifemelu feeling like an alien. This meant that she had to reconstruct her identity by navigating through the mendacity of things one encounters in the day to day living. Such changes shaped and informed her lived experience of what it meant to be in America. This is form of miscegenation or hybridity underlines the Afropolitan cultural matrix she had to adopt despite the fact that at first it seemed weird.

Despite her accomplishments in English proficiency, Ifemelu is tested when a student on campus corrects her pronunciation of certain words. Although in Nigeria she had excelled in English and was the leader of the school's debate society, her accent was deemed not good enough in America. Hence, she is compelled in the "following weeks, as autumn's coolness descended, she began to practise an American accent" (p. 134). In other words, Ifemelu had to reconstructs her identity even at the level of accent so as to fit into the American society. This meant negotiating a new identity in the course of her life in America. To this effect the African Students Association advises her to acquire an American accent as a way to stop or prevent instances where the people ask her to repeat herself every time, she said something. Ifemelu also noted differences between American and African students that, "Americans were taught, from elementary school, to always say something in class, no matter what. ...They never said "I don't know" (p. 134). This does not only instil a sense confidence in Ifemelu, but it enables her to assimilate and negotiate her own set of identities. She writes about her own

experience that she “spoke up in class, buoyed by the books she read, thrilled that she could disagree with professors and get, in return, not a scolding about being disrespectful but an encouraging nod” (2013, p. 136). This was something she could not think of doing in Nigeria, hence, she was now in a position to articulate her views unreservedly which is an attribute of what Selasi (2005) calls Afropolitan identity.

Subsequently, in Adichie’s novel, although migration defines one’s sense of self, it also allows for reinterpretation as well as a reinvention of identity in a nation that tends to trivialise the effects that racism on the migrants. Even so, Adichie uses her protagonist to demonstrate how migration can be challenged as Ifemelu is elevated and empowered through her successful blog. In essence, it is the power of technology that empowers Ifemelu to be one of the most successful migrant bloggers in America. Thus, in Adichie’s novel, technology is a critical tool that enables Ifemelu to reinvent her identity and by extension leads to the empowerment of the girl child in a society that considers her to be powerless.

Ifemelu’s Afropolitan identity was characterised by a number of traits, specifically the feigned accent. It is this accent that the Nigerian returnees use to show that they have been to the United States. In other words, to set themselves apart from the rest of the Nigerian population, the ‘have-beens’ speak their English that resonates with the way it is spoken in the United States. However, when Ifemelu goes to back to Nigeria, she decides to drop her feigned American accent. Thus, to redefine and reclaim her Nigerian identity:

Ifemelu decided to stop faking the American accent on a sunlit day. ... It was convincing, the accent. She had perfected, from careful watching of friends and newscasters, the blurring of the t, the creamy roll of the r, the sentences starting with “So”, and the sliding response of “Oh really”, but the accent creaked with consciousness, it was an act of will. It took an effort, the twisting of lip, the curling of tongue. If she were in a panic, or terrified, or jerked awake during a fire, she would not remember how to produce those American sounds. And so she resolved to stop (p. 173).

Furthermore, to support her decision, she questions:

Why was it a compliment, an accomplishment, to sound American? She had won: Cristina Tomas, pallid-faced Cristina Tomas under whose gaze she had shrunk like a small, defeated animal, would speak to her normally now. She had won, indeed, but her triumph was full of air. Her fleeting victory had left in its wake a vast, echoing

space, because she had taken on, for too long, a pitch of voice and a way of being that was not hers. And so she finished eating her eggs and resolved to stop faking the American sound (p. 175).

From the foregoing examples, it is not lost to the reader that the migrant's identity as a black American was accentuated through accent. For the migrants, sounding like an American was an accomplishment. However, for Ifemelu, her return to Nigeria was an opportunity for her cease speaking with an American accent so as to hold on to, re-affirm, and re-assert what defined her as Nigerian. For Ifemelu, it was important to adopt Americanah as the accent which was meant to fix her identity within a time experience that marked or denoted her stay in America. Put precisely, Americanah is marked by an accent that is different from the American accent but is nowhere nearer to the Nigerian English accent. It is, therefore, an accent that shows one's experience of residing in a cultural milieu that is reliant on an exclusively American accent.

The creation and managing of a blog come with high stakes as noted in Ifemelu's successful blog. It is noted that the blog, speaking commitments and running condo would have allowed her to amass some wealth. Besides, she held a Princeton university fellowship which also provided a source of steady income. In addition, she was involved in a romantic relationship with an African American, Blaine. Despite all these personal achievements, Ifemelu decided to leave for her home country, Nigeria which meant leaving behind what was her American dream as her aunty Uju says:

"You are closing your blog and selling your condo to go back to Lagos and work for a magazine that doesn't pay well," Aunty Uju has said and then repeated herself, as though to make Ifemelu see the gravity of her own foolishness (p. 13-14).

For Ifemelu, it was worthy leaving behind everything she had managed to achieve within a short period of time as she was convinced that returning to Nigeria was the best decision. Having stayed for thirteen years in America Ifemelu's choice to return to her country of origin amply portrays her as an empowered subjectivity. Unlike her childhood lover, Obinze who is forced to leave the United Kingdom after failing to acquire citizenship, Ifemelu managed to accomplish a lot in America including acquiring American citizenship. As an empowered subject, Ifemelu has the freedom of choice and is invested with agency which makes her depart on her own terms. Arriving in Nigeria, she proclaims that: "I'm really home. I'm home" (p. 411). Such an utterance revealed that she was in Nigeria because it was her choice to be in a place where she was used to the operation of things. She writes in her blog prior to returning to Nigeria that: "I recently decided to move back to Nigeria" (p. 19). Despite her sense of nostalgia and sadness when she lands in Nigeria, Ifemelu experiences "a beautiful sadness

for the things she had missed and the things she would never know” (p. 388). Through her interaction with technology, Ifemelu returns to Nigeria greatly transformed.

However, returning to Nigeria after some time in the United States meant that her identity had to undergo some important re-adaptation and readjustment in order for her to be fully reintegrated into her homeland. In Nigeria, she decides to create and run another blog which she uses to negotiate her sense of selfhood. When she becomes an established blogger in Nigeria, Ifemelu is able to share posts on various topics or issues that appeal to her followers in the country. They are able to relate to the issues addressed by the posts on her blog. This is manifest when the reader is told that: “she was at peace: to be at home, to be writing her blog, to have discovered Lagos again. She had, finally, spun herself fully into being” (p. 475). What should be underscored here is that technology empowers her to discuss topics that would not be possible in the mainstream space that are dominated by men.

Against the backdrop of a successful stay in the United States, Ifemelu decided to retrace her steps back to Nigeria. The reader is told that her reason for going home was that:

It had been there for a while, an early morning disease of fatigue, a bleakness and borderlessness. It brought with it amorphous longings, shapeless desires, brief imaginary glints of other lives she could be living, that over the months melded into a piercing homesickness. She scoured Nigerian websites, Nigerian profiles on Facebook, Nigerian blogs, and each click brought yet another story of a young person who had recently moved back home, clothed in American or British degrees, to start an investment company, a music production business, a fashion label, a magazine, a fast-food franchise. She looked at photographs of these men and women and felt a dull ache of loss, as though they had prised open her hand and taken something of hers. They were living her life. Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil (p. 6). ...there was no cause; it was simply that layer after layer of discontent had settled in her and formed a mass that now propelled her (p. 7).

Ifemelu finds peace but most importantly, reconnects with her roots and restores her Nigerian identity. She discards her American identity which was rooted in her blog. However, despite the controversy that the blog attracted, this study concludes that the blog enabled her to use technology to take a stance and voice her uniqueness.

Hewett (2005, p. 75) argues that Adichie’s success is based on her creation of a public and online persona, deftly handling the “transnational intertextuality” adding nuance and focus to migration,

gender, race and silence. The point to note here is that Ifemelu created an online persona to explore the racial relations in the United States of America especially as they affected young black women. As such, Adichie reflects on the changes in girls' roles, their perceptions of themselves and their relationships with other women that nurture strong sisterhoods. In the process the girl protagonist, Ifemelu, is equipped with agency that permits her to tell her own story which counters the metanarratives produced by patriarchal and racial structures such as the Nigerian and American societies, respectively.

Commentary on Muller's *When you Dance with the Crocodile*

Muller's *When You Dance with the Crocodile* (referred to as WDC thereafter) narrates a story of an eleven-year-old girl, Helena, who lived with Sam who was her brother and Dr Amadhila, her father. Helena's mother had died in a car accident. Her father is a well-known computer expert who is responsible for acquiring, screenings as well as conducting tests on the suitability of computer games designed for children. He has to conduct experiments using his daughter in order to assess the suitability of such games on the children in Namibia as well as in the entire region. Because her father, Dr Amadhila, constantly travels abroad, Helena longs to spend time with him deliberating on different computer games. The story begins with Dr Amadhila discussing a new computer game that he has just brought home. This new computer game is described as dangerous for children. At times, Helena feels that her father is controlling when it comes to computer games as he considered some to be too dangerous for a child of her age. She gets an opportunity to play the newest game when her father leaves her alone to attend a neighbourhood watch meeting to discuss the rising crimes in the community. All goes wrong as the game takes her back into time-scape. She is joined by her brother who also plays the same game to rescue her. Their disappearance into time-scape necessitates Dr Amadhila and the developer of the game, Mark, to launch a rescue mission to bring Helena and her brother back to the present. Thus, the greater part of the scenes in the story revolves around Helena's and Sam's encounters with a century old society and the attempts by her father and Mark to rescue them.

4.3.1 Commentary on Muller's *Where the Lion Stalks*

The novel *Where the Lion Stalks* (referred to as WLS thereafter) is a sequel of Muller's *When you Dance with the Crocodile*. The events in the story are a follow-up of what happened in the first novel where Dr Amadhila and his daughter, Helena destroy the dangerous game by burning it. However, after returning from a remote past, Sam hears the pleading voice of Ruth, the girl that Helena had rescued calling for him. Sounding real and terrified, Ruth's voice compels Sam to launch a team including his school mates, Danny and Alexander to join him on a dangerous expedition. It appears the dangerous

game had been reactivated which leads Sam to discover that the originator of the game, Mark, had kept a copy of the game. After getting the CD, Sam and his friends play the game which result in Sam and Alexander being sucked into the wormhole to a time a hundred or so centuries back. It is through the efforts of Mark and Helena that Sam and Alexander do not remain stuck in the past.

4.3.1 The girl child's use of technology to conscientise society on issues affecting women in Muller's selected texts

This section analyses Muller's *When You Dance with the Crocodile* and *Where the Lion Stalks* to show how the girl child utilises technology to conscientise society on issues that affect women. The analysis focuses on how the girl child uses her knowledge in computers to address issues that affect women which can be traced back into time. The two novels feature the girl child, Helena, who is presented as a computer boffin. Helena expertly uses computers to save her brother and Ruth. She plays numerous computer games that her father brings home from his trips and helps her father to assess their suitability for children. The opportunity to use technology to unpack the issues that affect women occurs when Helena in *When You Dance with the Crocodile* feels compelled to rescue Ruth who is in danger and is stuck in the past. To do so, Helena defies her father's orders not to use the computers in his study without his permission. *When You Dance with the Crocodile* also shows how Sam (Helena's brother), attempts to rescue her after being taken back to ancient history era. Both novels show how technology in the form of a computer-generated game is used to conscientise both boys and girls on dangerous games still present in the current day and age, the importance of computer skills and computer language, e.g., programming, coding to manoeuvre in the future.

The opening of this novel underscores the centrality that technology has on the lives of Amadhila's family. This is revealed earlier through Dr Amadhila's credentials. He has a doctorate in computer science and his work involves identifying computer games that were bad for children in Namibia and the rest of southern Africa. The dangerous computer games were not be sold in the region at all" (p.1). While this information establishes the credentials of Dr Amadhila as a computer expert, it is the exposure and training that his daughter, Helena, acquires from him that is of utmost importance and how she uses it to conscientise the society on the practices that affect women.

In *When You Dance with the Crocodile*, the reader is informed that: "[s]he was trained by her father...the cleverest man in computers in the whole of Namibia" (WDC, p.1). At a tender age of eleven, Helena is already a computer savvy as she is able to expertly use the computer unaided. It is in this context that the omniscient narrator says: She was eleven and knew computer games, and a

lot more than most children about computers ...” (WDC, p.4). Again, this training equips Helena with the knowledge that helps her to navigate the World Wide Web effectively as an adult computer user. For instance, she is able to express her views concerning the new computer game which had an image of “crocodile on the home page” and which “eyed Helena with a sly grin, showing sharp teeth with blood dripping down to form pool at the bottom of the screen” (WDC, p.1). Ruth tells Helena that the game is “gross” because there is “[t]oo much blood [a]nd crocodiles don’t bite their victims outside the water. They drag them under to drown them” (WDC, p.1). Such an assessment from an eleven-year-old girl is important in the quest to educate the society about womanly issues in the cyber space.

The occasion to play the dangerous game in *When You Dance with the Crocodile* presents itself to Helena when her father is invited to attend a neighbourhood watch committee that is meant to address the spate of crime in the community. Left alone Helena decides to play the dangerous game without her father’s approval. The computer game contains pictures where “there is a person who...is in a difficult or frustrating situation” (p.3). Despite the warnings that the game is dangerous, Helena decides to play it in the absence of her father and brother. When she clicks the mouse, the caption reads “Experience real-life adventure. Danger lurks everywhere. Continue to play if you dare” (p.5). On the computer screen, one is presented with three options on which to click on based on how difficult the assigned tasks are.

In *When You Dance with the Crocodile*, Dr Amadhila instructs his son, Sam to go home to take care of his sister, Helena. By the time, Sam arrives home, Helena had already vanished into the past after clicking the ‘Play’ icon. The dangerous game takes Helena back into the distant past to a place that is geographically located between Zambia and Angola. In order to go back in time, Helena travels a wormhole, and she is taken to a remote place in terms of time or historical period. Dr Amadhila describes wormholes as “tunnels for high-speed space and time travel” (p.4). The reason she is sucked through the wormhole is that she wanted to rescue a trapped girl called Ruth. The picture shows Ruth who has fallen into some kind of a manhole designed to trap wild animals. Helena managed to get to the place where Ruth was trapped in a manhole. However, when she tries to rescue Ruth, she fails on her first attempt, and she has to temporarily leave the trapped girl as she goes to seek help from the men whom she finds around the corner. However, the men decide to abduct both Ruth and Helena. Given this background, it can be argued that Helena uses technology to conscientise society on the oppression of women and child trafficking as depicted by the girl that Helena intended to rescue.

In *When You Dance with the Crocodile*, after being abducted, Helena and Ruth join the other children who are in chains and destined for a slave trade. The children are depicted as commodities that the men intend to trade off to the slave traders in Angola. Thus, both child trafficking and slavery are

amply demonstrated in the text. It is through the computer game that oppression against women and children is exposed. Of importance is the fact that in order to extricate Ruth and herself from the quagmire that they found themselves in, Helena has to creatively think of something. It is technology that Helena has to turn to in order to disentangle them from the dangerous situation.

Significantly, in both texts, the same technology that brought Helena into the past is used when they are abducted. She has to find the weakest link in the group of men who captured them by enticing the youngest men in the group. She uses a wristwatch that she had to persuade him to unchain her and Ruth. They are set free when the young man agrees to be given the wristwatch and they disappear into the night. It becomes apparent that the dangerous game had tasks that needed to be accomplished as part of the rules of the game. By escaping from their captors, Helena successfully completed the first of the three tasks.

Furthermore, in *When You Dance with the Crocodile*, technology becomes even more useful as the two girls navigate through the dangers that lurk in the night. In order to keep the predators at bay in the jungle that is festering with danger, Helena utilises the 7H device. The 7H was a smart phone like device that her father had brought with him during one of his trips. One of the functions of the device was to provide light that allowed the two girls to find their way back to a place of safety, that is, Sesheke which is Ruth's home village. It can be argued that the light provided by the 7H symbolically represents the way technology enables women to find their freedom in the midst of societal burdens that constrain their femininity, further liberating them from bondage, slavery and patriarchy. Working as a team, Ruth's role is to find their way in the jungle whilst Helena utilises the 7H device to irradiate their way. This represents the bonds of sisterhood that allows them to work together to face the dangers of the night as well as stay alive in a dangerous jungle with captors who could still track them down.

in the jungle in *When You Dance with the Crocodile*, the two girls are pursued by a dangerous predator in the form of a hyena. They try to navigate their way that has snakes lurking somewhere and have to deal with hunger and thirst. Significantly, the predators that the girls had to deal with depict the greater issues that define the lived experience of women and girl children whether in the distance past as depicted by Ruth's society or in the contemporariness of Helena's society that is driven by innovative technology. In the present, Ruth also represents the GPS as she is able to find her way even in the darkness of the night. Thus, Ruth is empowered to navigate difficult circumstances in the same way as her male counterparts, hence, diminishing the fragile stereotypical image imposed on the girl child. This clearly demonstrates the importance of technology in highlighting the issues that affect women which can also be resolved by forging bonds between or among women.

In addition to the foregoing, the issues that affect women are graphically captured by another incident that Helena and Ruth encounter in *When You Dance with the Crocodile* at the banks of the Zambezi River. The two girls encounter a woman named Maddy who appears to be a victim of gender violence. Since the two girls look hungry, Maddy decides to give them some food, but avers that they immediately depart after eating the food. The food offered was ostensibly meant to prevent them from falling victim to her abusive partner, Zakes which is a clear demonstration of the violence that afflicts women and girl children dating back to time immemorial. It is technology that allows the girl child to exhume the history of abuses that women have and continue to be subjected. On this note, Muller's novel locates the source of women abuse to the distant past, but more so, shows that the historiography of gender violence dates back to centuries gone by. This shows gender abuse is a lingering problem that women have been exposed to and continues to form a greater part of their lived experience. In this way, Zakes typifies the traditional victimiser who believes that women are objects to be used, owned and discarded. What is interesting is that the 'gun' is used to represent and assert man's power over women and other men. As such, the gun is a symbol of power that men use to perpetrate violence on women as evidenced by Zakes' character. Zakes appears in the scene before the girls get the opportunity to escape. Once more Helena has to use technology as an escape plan that would allow them to be free once again. Helena discovers that the Masubia guards are terrified of magic which is a chance that she exploits to devise an escape plan. She decides to blend different sounds on her 7H so as to hypnotise the guards. The guards agree to take them to Sesheke which is Ruth's mother village, but they are caught by Zakes and hauled back to the camp.

When Helena, Ruth and Maddy's attempt to escape from Zakes, they are heavily punished and are assigned do most of the chores around the camp. The omniscient narrator says: "Zakes was making them pay for their attempt to escape by forcing them to work for hours. [Helena] and Ruth had to sweep the whole clearing, fetch the wood for the fires, clean and watch everything in the camp. Except his rifle. That he kept with him all the time" (2012, p.88). Maddy's hands were tied as a form of punitive action. It is evident that patriarchy as embodied by Zakes punishes women to control and claim ownership of their bodies. Similarly, Joao in *Where the Lion Stalks*, is abusive considering the way he treats Ruth who eventually saves his life and nurses him when he was attacked by a lion. However, what must not be lost in Zakes' case is that this incident magnifies the suppression of women by men as they to confine them into a state of servitude. The way both Zakes and Joao treat women could be symbolic of the way women are treated in the contemporary society of Namibia.

In *When You Dance with the Crocodile*, the village of Sesheke depicts a place of sanctuary that the three women thrive to reach. The second plan succeeds when Helena uses the sounds from the 7H device to imitate the roar of the lion which scared the Masubia guards. In addition, the escape plan is

successful because Helena distracts Zakes and takes his gun which is tantamount to dispossessing him of the masculine symbol that defined his power. Though Helena cannot use the gun, Ruth is able to use it to shoot at Zakes as she tells him; “I can shoot as well as any other man...Move again and I will kill you” (p.89). Arguably, Ruth’s ability to use the gun demonstrates the power and agency that is invested in women. Agency allows Helena and Ruth to escape once again from another dangerous situation and they also managed to free Maddy as well.

Interestingly, technology is used as a conscientising in settings that are separated by a timespan of over a century. As a result, technology seems to bridge the gap between the two settings of Namibia and a place located between the Zambezi River and Angola. Thus, despite being in a different time-scape with her, Helena is able to communicate with him via the internet. She utilises the 7H device to establish connectivity with her father and sends messages to be rescued:

The 7H felt warm in her hand. If her dad or Mark tried to make contact, they would do it through this devise. The receiver was in her hand. It was extremely sensitive, she just knew; better than anything she had ever seen. She would it up. She switched on everything —internet, GPS, email—although she couldn’t believe a message would reach her. [...]. I’m so sorry, dad, she said to him in her mind. I disobeyed you. Forgive me. Come and get me, dad. You opened my eyes to the wonder of electronics, do not forsake me now (WDC, 2012, p.82)

The above passage illustrates how technology fulfils an important role in highlighting issues that affect women in different physical and time spaces. However, it is important to note that not only men are seen as the perpetrators of violence, but women are also depicted as violators. One such woman is Paramount Chief Lewanika’s elder sister, who is the powerful Queen Mukwai of Naloto. She was a cruel ruler who entertained herself by watching someone being thrown into a crocodile-infested river and being torn to pieces. When Sam follows Ruth after playing the game and getting sucked by a wormhole, he ends up in an African village in which he is sentenced to be fed to the crocodiles after “vomit[ing] all over the Mukwai’s dress” (WDC, p. 30). The queen has a horde of servants who perform even the simplest of the tasks such as serving her tea. They have to pass the cup, the sugar and everything else in a single file. Such an oppressive system is spearheaded by a woman even on other women as a show of her power. The point to note here is that technology allows the reader to get a purview of how women are not simply victims, but are also victimisers. By using technology in the form of a camera, Sam is able to escape sure death that awaited him after offending Queen Mukwai.

Another instance in *When You Dance with the Crocodile* that demonstrates how the girl child uses technology as a tool to conscientise society on issues affecting women is evident in how Helena’s time

travel allows the reader to have a glimpse of the condition of women back in the day. Women could easily fall prey not only to wild predators but even to human predators. On their way to Sesheke, Helena and Ruth encounter Maddy on the banks of the Zambezi River. As mentioned earlier there is a clear sign that Maddy had been abused by Zakes, a man who had enticed her to leave her employment to pursue a dream of riches. Her character represents those women who fall prey to men who turn out to be the worst abusers. It becomes Helena's mission to rescue her and return a sense of personal dignity and self-worth in Maddy. This is in line with the rules of the game which required her to successfully complete her three assigned tasks before she could return home. It can be surmised that the three tasks that she had to accomplish exposed the unfavourable conditions of women which she had to resolve successfully using technology.

On a similar note, in *Where the Lion Stalks*, Muller constructs an empowered protagonist with invested agency which denotes the capacity to act independently. Once again, Helena displays a sense of selfhood that is based on her ability to exercise computer knowledge in a way that works to rescue her brother, Sam. She assists Mark to bring back Sam and Alexander who had been sucked by the wormhole and taken to a distant past. She is able to communicate with Alexander after internet connectivity by sending messages to his mobile phone. Also, to help her brother deal with the news that Ruth had died in the jungle beyond Kwando, she writes:

Sam, the bearers I met when I went through the wormhole believed lots of things that were false. They believed earth=flat and were more afraid of magic than a gun. R u very very sure ruth is dead? (WDC, p.99)

From the foregoing, it is clear that the message is written using computer language which shows that Helena was conversant in computers. This message depicts Helena as a source of strength for her brother who was affected by the news that Ruth had possibly died in the forests beyond Kwando, an entrepot of trade. She also advises her brother not to believe everything he has heard thereby encouraging to launch a mission to search for Ruth. Besides, she is able to handle Alexander's mother after she came looking for her son at the Dr Amadhila's residence. She expertly diffuses what could have been a potentially difficult situation. Her father who was on another trip had grounded Sam after the incident in *When You Dance with the Crocodile* where he had failed to take care of his sister leading to her disappearance into the past. In this way, Helena uses technology to highlight the caring and bold spirit of the girl child as she thrives to rescue her brother. Despite being dubbed 'A Dangerous Game,' Helena seems adamant that the game could not scare any child out there. A significant point to note is that despite her father's reservations, the computer game presented an opportunity for the girl child to uncover womanly concerns and to empower her. In short, the computer games extend

beyond being mere games to an accessory that the girl child in the two texts effectively uses to magnify the issues that form part of the lived experienced of women.

Thus, in both texts, Muller depicts the innocent and naive girl child transforming into a strong and powerful character as shown through Helena and Ruth. What prompts Helena in *When You Dance with the Crocodile* to play the dangerous game is her desire to rescue a girl in the computer game who appeared to be trapped. However, when she fails to help the trapped girl, she goes looking for help only to invest her trust in men, who unbeknown to her are the slave traders looking for human merchandise to sell off at the slave markets in Angola. The reader is told that: "She had to help that poor girl. Helena knew it was only a game, but the urge to help someone was nearly too strong to resist. There was nothing wrong with helping someone..." (p.9). This genuine belief that she was providing her assistance to someone in need depicts her innocence. Even though such innocence might appear to have echoes of naivety, it is the motive behind that shows how forging ties between girls or women is a viable solution to deal with violent, oppressive and degrading systems of power. Such a situation nullifies the initial decision that the child may have taken innocently since the good motives behind the act show a humanely spirit that is premised on the need to help rather than purely an act of mischievous conduct.

Similarly, in *Where the Lions Stalks*, what drives Sam to play the game is that he clearly hears Ruth's cry for help one night when he sneaks into their home through a hole in the fence. The omniscient narrator says:

Crossing their lawn, a loud scream stopped him in his tracks. "Heeeelp!" The scream, coming from afar, carried by the wind, sucked up by a wormhole, reverberated through the tunnel to Mark's computer that blasted it out at full volume.

Sam went blank with shock. He trembled. It was Ruth's voice. If he could only do something to help! Ruth would become the food of bloodthirsty crocodiles within a day. He had to go through the wormhole again" (WLS, p.11).

According to Haque, Saeed, Siddique and Iqbal (2020, p.3104), "Cyborgs have distorted the distinctive line between fact and fiction, real and virtual, body and brain, and humans and machines." This view on cyborgs is shown when Sam plays the dangerous and forbidden game to rescue the girl who was in trouble and who he believed was Ruth. Ruth happens to be the same girl that the reader first meets in Muller's first book, *When You Dance with the Crocodile*. Though, Sam is a boy, it is important to note that technology that comes to the rescue to unpack the issues that affect women or girls depicted through the computer game character, Ruth. In this computer game, Ruth finds herself in a dangerous

situation as she is detained at the orders of a very powerful, yet evil Queen Mukwai on the accusations of theft in *Where the Lion Stalks*. As a form of punishment, she was supposed to be thrown into the river, a spectacle that would be watched and enjoyed by the queen and the Naloto villagers.

The pertinent issues that can be gleaned from this situation include the counterproductive actions of the queen who instead of being at the forefront in the battle to free women from all types of oppression, she is seen entrenching oppressive practices. Ruth was said to be the most beautiful girl in the kingdom when in fact the queen wanted that accolade to be given to her. In order to remain as the undisputed village belle, the queen orchestrates an incident that sees Ruth being accused of theft. She is sentenced to die in the crocodile-infested Zambezi River, but is spared this ordeal by a timely intervention of Chief Lewanika who was against this cruelty that saw his elder sister killing people at the slightest provocation. Even though it is not entirely the girl child's utilisation of technology that conscientizes the community in *Where the Lion Stalks* on issues affecting women, there can be no denying that it is Helena who sets the precedence that sees her brother embarking on a mission to rescue the same girl that she rescued in Muller's first text. In other words, by playing the game, Sam takes the reader back to the time dominated by oppressive societies, unjust laws and dangerous surroundings. At the centre of this story is the unjust law of Queen Mukwai who is predisposed to settle matters by instantly killing the offender or by throwing them in the river as some kind of a bizarre entertainment.

In *When You Dance with the Crocodile*, Sam unintentionally vomits on the queen dress after being forced to drink bitter milk, while in *Where the Lion Stalks*, Ruth's cardinal sin is to be more beautiful than the queen. Trivial as these reasons appear, they both attract what is certainly a death sentence. In *Where the Lion Stalks*, it could be argued that Muller empowers and reconstructs the identity of the girl child using technology as a tool to mediate different identities that counter the metanarratives on girlhood. In essence, in both texts, Muller disturbs the borderlines that constrain the position of women by ushering in the world of technology where the girl child is depicted as a democratic citizen. It is for this reason that this section uses the terms empowerment and reconstruction of identity to refer to the narratives that demonstrate how technology plays a crucial role in the life of the girl child.

4.3.3 Cyberspace recrafting the girl child's image in Muller's texts

In both *When You Dance with the Crocodile* and its sequel, *Where the Lion Stalks*, Muller takes the reader into the computer game that is known as a dangerous game which takes anyone who plays it back in time. The dangerous game was the brainchild of a computer boffin, Mark who "likes dangerous experiments" (p.4). This in line with the contention that from a tender age, children are required to

take the full responsibility as adults at the expense of their will, while being excluded from significant social and political engagements (Kurth-Schai as cited in Pasi, 2015). Urged by the desire to rescue a young girl who is entrapped, Helena plays this dangerous computer game which transports her to an African village set in 1859. When she clicks the mouse of the computer screen in her father's study, it is the image of the girl in the picture that drives her need to play the game. The narrator says:

She scrolled down to the last picture. The one of the girl. She was the same age as Helena, or perhaps just a year older. There was something in her face, the fear in the dark eyes, that touched a chord inside Helena (2021, p.5).

It can be gleaned from the above quotation that there is a sisterly bond between Helena and the girl in the computer game as the girl's face 'touched a chord inside Helena.' It is this sisterly bond that drives Helena to play the dangerous game despite the clear warnings such as "A Dangerous Game...Play at own risk" (WDC, p.1) and "Experience real-life adventure. Danger lurks everywhere. Continue if you dare" (WDC, p.8). At the same time it can be argued that the image of the trapped girl is an extension of the condition of girlhood as young women are entrapped by patriarchal strictures that prevent them from attaining independent statuses in their communities. Thus:

The girl was caught in a trap. She was right down at the bottom of a human-made hole, large enough to catch an animal. Around the hole there was high dry grass that effectively hid the trap from anyone approaching it. Further back there were thorn trees. No sign of any other living being all around. (p.9).

Furthermore, we are told that:

She had to help that poor girl. Helena knew it was only a game, but the urge to help was nearly too strong to resist. There was nothing wrong with helping someone, was there? If one really had to make use of a wormhole in this game — something she very much doubted --- then this guy Mark, who was so clever, could bring her back again, couldn't he? (p.9).

The computer game allows Helena to mediate a transcendental form of identity. Moreover, depending on how difficult the assigned task is, the game provides options to click on such as "*Difficult, very difficult, extremely difficult or diabolically difficult*" (p.10; original emphasis). The same game is present in *Where the Lion Stalks* as Sam and Alexander are transported into the past with the sole purpose to save a girl in distress. On this note, it can be argued that Muller is wading into gender stereotypes that denote girls as in need of male intervention in times of need.

In *When You Dance with the Crocodile* and *Where the Lion Stalks*, Muller demonstrates how the cyberspace enables the recrafting of the girl child's image. The recrafting is a process that entails subverting the images that have traditionally been used to represent the girl child. Using cyberspace afforded by a computer-generated game, Helena revises the dominant image that depicts boys as more adventurous than girls. The sheer act of playing a dangerous is evidence of how adventurous Helena was. What is vital about Helena's adventure is that she attains the heroine image as she rescues both Ruth and Maddy from unpalatable situations. While this is a computer-based game, Helena finds herself all alone in a strange environment without help from the real world which forces her to be reliant on her ingenuity and innovative use of the technology tools at her disposal. In the process she has to recraft the image of a damsel in distress as she has to extricate herself from the situation she is in as well as rescue the girl trapped in a manhole.

Even when she gets the opportunity to escape from the captors alone in *When You Dance with the Crocodile*, she chooses the option of taking Ruth with her as part of her deal with Luis. The image of girl child that emerges here is an empowered and courageous person who sacrifices herself to rescue another girl in need of help. Despite the nature of the problems, she encounters in *When You Dance with the Crocodile*, Helena remains resolute in overcoming the difficulties. This represents a transformed Helena who defies the traditional narrative that paints girls as the victims of violence; girls who are irrational, passive and powerless. If anything, she is depicted as a defiant girl. Such an image revises the way society produces and consumes images of girls who can only be seen and not heard.

In *When You Dance with the Crocodile*, the girl child effectively employs the cyberspace to redefine the image of childhood as the return to the present depends on Helena. After her brother travels into the past to look for her, he has no access to technology that can establish connectivity between the present and the past. On the other Helena had travelled with the 7H device which enables her to send to and receive emails from her father and Mark. Without the 7H both Helena and her brother would have been trapped or warped in the past. In other words, Helena possesses the technological means that would enable her, Sam and Mark's protégé, Matsimela to travel back to Windhoek, Namibia, where they live. On the same note, in *Where the Lion Stalks*, the image of the girl-child contests the prevailing images of helplessness, vulnerability and passivity that society peddles. In short, the cyberspace in Muller's texts is a platform that affords the girl-child the opportunity to rewrite image of girlhood. As such, through the virtual or cyberspace settings in her texts, Muller creates transcendental identities as her characters are transported to a different historical period and setting. This tallies with Milford's (2015, p.55) contention that "human-machine mergers made possible by

technology were imagined as facilitators of 'post-gender worlds' and virtual spaces were initially envisioned as utopian sites of unrestricted, transcendent emancipation from gender-related constraints".

In *When You Dance with the Crocodile* and *Where the Lion Stalks*, technology and invention create an enabling environment for the processes of empowerment and reconstruction of identity to be plausible. In addition, Muller incorporates the language of computers into the human language so as to remain within the realm of computer technology. Given this context, Volschenk (2009, p.15) argues that "[w]omen ought to utilize the cyborgian concept of agency to construct new categories of what it means to be human (race), and what it is to be a woman (gender)."

In a male-dominated society, it is the boys who are expected to show interest in computer games, but Helena invades this cyberspace and makes her mark as a young computer boffin. In other words, she is far much confident in using computers than other children of her age. As such, it is through the computer games that Helena's identity and empowerment is presented in the text, *When you Dance with the Crocodile*. On the other hand, her brother uses technology to empower and enable another young girl, Ruth, to mediate her own identity.

Muller depicts Helena as playing a crucial role in the rescue missions in both novels. Hence, this study argues that the girl child uses technology to empower herself. This enables her to rescue the other children that find themselves stuck in a dangerous past. She negotiates a sense of self that defies passivity, docility and invisibility; attributes which traditionally defines girls and women. She has a strong presence in the field of computer technology as demonstrated by how she works together with Mark to bring back Sam and Alexander in *Where the Lion Stalks*.

Thus, in both texts, Muller demonstrates how technology is pivotal to Helena's project of empowerment and reconstruction of identities. She is equipped with a sense of agency that allows her to be proactive especially in the world of technology which is usually a preserve of boys and adults.

Since all aspects in Muller's texts takes place in cyberspace, there is a reconstruction of cybernetic identities that challenge the conventional identities. The computer game labelled as dangerous creates a cyberspace that allows the girl-child to be in control of her body and to oversee her destiny. For instance, Helena attests that due to their overprotective nature, adults tend to perceive that there is danger prowling ubiquitously even where there is no such danger. The next example of empowerment and reconstruction of identity of the girl-child in Muller's texts is captured by the

creative use of technological-bound devices by the girl child. Helena has to find creative ways to use a technology instrument like the 7H device. Hence, women have the ability to use technology when offered the chance. As such, her sense of selfhood is expressed by successfully completing the computer assigned tasks as determined by the dangerous game. This means that she has to prove herself by courageously overcoming the obstacles using the technological inventions. What should be stressed is that the identity of the girl-child can neither be fixed in a state of stasis nor be marked by singularity. The character of Helena in both texts complicates the notion of girlhood, treating it as a problematic term that cannot be used to define all the girl-children. Hence, both Ruth and Helena illustrate the complexity of girlhood. Even though they have agency, they exercise it differently and for different purposes. While Helena uses technologically bound devices to navigate their way through the jungle in *When You Dance with the Crocodile*, Ruth uses her natural training as a tracker to find her way in the thicket in *Where the Lion Stalks*. Both are trained by their fathers, but the teaching of Ruth's father is replicated in the modern GPS device that Helena as a computer boffin is exposed to. Subsequently, it can be surmised that both girls creatively use advanced technology and what might be considered a rudimentary form of technology. Putting the same point differently, both girls can expertly interpret the world around them.

In *When You Dance with the Crocodile* and *Where the Lion Stalks*, Muller reconstructs the girl child subjectivities by creating a girl protagonist who is computer savvy. Significantly, in both texts, Helena represents how girl child victims of oppression or subjugation use technology to make their voices audible. The young girls work together to challenge the prevailing patriarchal practices that seek to disempower them. The girls rally behind each other against the oppressors and violators as evidenced by the cooperation between Helena and Ruth. As such, girls formulate inventive ways of collaborating with each other within these imagined or existing patriarchal strictures to empower themselves and reconstruct their identities. In *Where the Lion Stalks*, this web of collaboration is further demonstrated when Sam and Alexander embark on a dangerous expedition to rescue Ruth. The combination of the efforts of Sam, Alexander and the nephew of Chief Lewanika, Dimdimbara as well as the San women, successfully rescues both Ruth and Joao, the man who wanted to acquire diamonds. Thus, there is a subversion of the patriarchal practices as Joao remained alive as a result of the astuteness and protection that he obtained from Ruth despite his earlier intentions to lead her to certain death by the lions.

The chapter depicted that female characters in Muller's novels destabilise what is considered a masculine adventure. Although Helena and Ruth are part of the dangerous adventures, they manage to survive partly due to perseverance and valour. Thus, Helena can be said to influential disrupting the

social norms and practices that oppress women and girls. Significantly, technology creates a cyberspace that strengthens female agency and enhances female empowerment. This is evident in how Helena uses the computer-generated game to forge a network of girls and women who are at the receiving end of societal oppressive systems that are designed to confine women to positions of subjugation.

4.5 Conclusion

In describing the gendered nature of technology Faulkner (cited in Henry & Powell, 2015) uses phrases such as male designers of technology, the interconnection between masculinity and technical skill, are often materially and symbolically “male” or “female”, technological artefacts, link between popular and cultural images and hegemonic masculinity among others. In the wake of this backdrop, this study argues that Adichie and Muller’s texts challenge the gender inequalities that have invaded the world of technology through the creation of female protagonists who are computer savvy and technologically conscious. Subsequently, both Adichie (2013) and Muller (2012;2016) complicate the concept of girlhood and images of the girl child showing that they are not unilateral. This means that there are as many images of girlhood and girlhoods as there are girls out there. In the three texts under study, cyberspace and cyberfeminism attest to the multifarious nature of identity.

The aim of this chapter was to analyse the use of technology as recrafting tools of the girl child’s image and identity in Muller’s *Where the Lion Stalks* and *When You Dance with the Crocodile*, and Adichie’s *Americanah*. This discussion was premised on cyberfeminism as an overarching theoretical framework to explore issues at stake in the three texts. The main concerns discussed in the three texts comprise empowerment, identity and the image of the girl child. Thus, this chapter discussed what the findings yielded in relation to cyberfeminism. The next chapter presents the summary, conclusions and recommendations that emerged from this study.

In *Where the Lion Stalks*, technology as evidenced by the computer-generated game is engaged as a tool for empowering the protagonists through an act of reconstructing one’s identity. Even though the story in *Where the Lion Stalks* is focalised through a fourteen-year-old Sam who is Helena’s brother, it is technology that serves as a tool for empowerment and a means for identity reconstruction. This allows the protagonists to acquire a sense of self that is based on the ability to creatively employ technology to resolve problems that date back into time. By collapsing the divide or gulf between the past and the present and allowing for gap to be plugged, technology is seen to be fulfilling an important role in restoring girls’ identities.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this research was to explore the concept of cyberfeminism in three literary texts, *Americanah* (2013), *When You Dance with the Crocodile* (2012) and *Where the Lion Stalks* (2016). The study was necessitated by the need to analyse cyberfeminism and technology collectively. The study sought to address the following objectives:

- To interrogate how the girl child utilises technology to conscientise society on issues affecting women in the selected female authored texts.
- To explore how cyberspace recrafts the girl child's image in the selected female authored texts.
- To examine how technology empowers the girl child and reconstructs her identity in the selected female authored texts.

The study used cyberfeminism and technology as overarching concepts to explore how they can be employed as recrafting tools of the girl child's image and identity. Thus, the researcher examined how cyberfeminism and technology are used as conscientising and empowering tools in the selected literary texts in this study.

5.2 Summary of findings and conclusions

5.2.1 Exploring technology as a conscientizing tool for the girl- child

The first research objective posed by this study was to interrogate how the girl-child utilises technology to conscientise society on issues affecting women in the selected female authored texts. This study has shown technology is a tool which gives voice to the girl-child. As such she is positively empowered to create an awareness for women in her circle who are experiencing the same issues. In the three selected texts (*Americanah*, *When you Dance with the Crocodile* and *When Lion Stalks*), the girl-child protagonists (Ifemelu and Helena) find themselves in communities and households which depict the use of technology by girls as dangerous. Moreover, they have no position to voice the issues encountered in a patriarchal and Marxist society because it is prohibited. To this end, it is revealed that through the use cyberspace as a platform to vocalise issues that affect women in the present and in the past, as well as in Africa and in the diaspora.

The study concluded that both Adichie and Muller engage technology, as noted by Hawthorne and Klein (1999), to eradicate various forms of oppression encountered by women in a traditional patriarchal society. In *Americanah*, it was revealed that Ifemelu uses her blog to tackle the migrant experiences of the black girl child. The blog allows her to reflect on the inequalities based on their skin colour which she would not otherwise have done in the physical world. As a result, she can receive support and comfort from other women and be liberated by technology. Additionally, Muller's *When You Dance with the Crocodile* and *Where the Lion Stalks* revealed how Helena rescues a girl and a woman as well as boys from difficult situations. Therefore, all the above examples support the fact that Helena is a technologically empowered girl who mediates a collective but not necessarily homogenous identity for her gender. Both, Adichie and Muller are unequivocal in their representation of their lead female characters and show how issues that affect women are graphically captured using technological accessories.

In the selected texts, the writers focus on areas such the life experiences of girls both in the diaspora and in Africa, the cultural practices that affect women and establishing novel ways to think about the girl child's identities. Additionally, this study revealed that women and the girl child are the leading players in cyberspace.

5.2.2 Cyberspace recrafting the girl child's image in the three texts

The second objective that this study aimed to explore how cyberspace recrafts the girl child's image in the selected female authored texts. The study discovered that Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and Muller's (2012) *When you Dance with Crocodile* and *Where the Lion Stalks* (2016) depicts the girl-child redefining and liberating her image using cyberspace and technology. As Ifemelu use her blog she is able to affirm her stance and cultures thus creating her own image as opposed to allowing herself to get diverted into a foreign culture. Thus, with re-emphasis, she gains support from the online community.

Both Ifemelu and Helena are not convinced to comply with foreign ideals e.g., Hair beauty standards for the former character and gender behaviour for the latter character, in doing so, they regain control in recrafting their images. As such, both characters recreate their own image by not complying with racial and gender stereotypes.

To this end, the selected texts have proven that cyberspace can recraft a girl-child's image in any form. It can be stated that with cyberspace, the girl-child is in control of her image since there are no structures and standards to be obeyed within that space.

5.2.3 Technology empowering the girl child and reconstructing her identity in the three texts

The last objective of this study sought to examine how technology empowers the girl child and reconstructs her identity in the selected female authored texts. The findings revealed that Adichie focused attention on the facet of cyberfeminism which deals with the cybernetic identity formation as a novel way of mediating a sense of self. The cyberspace created by technology in Adichie's novel facilitated an alternative space for the girl child to find self-expression. Identity formation seemed quite crucial as it encompassed a number of traits, one of which centred on the hair. In defining oneself as an *Americanah*, the issues of the hair and hair salon featured prominently in *Americanah* (2013). Through the relation that girls/women had with their hair, it was observed that identity can be negotiated using the one's hair and the space of the salon. Thus, identity is a theme that is extensively depicted in *Americanah* (2013), *When You Dance with the Crocodile* (2012) and *Where the Lion Stalks* (2016) through the female characters who engage technology to negotiate a set of identities that rewrite the dominant discourse of girlhoods as invisible, passive, docile or submissive. Subsequently, the researcher concluded that Adichie's text, *Americanah* (2013) captures the traits of cyberfeminism which were expressed through the girl child's cyber tic identity.

The findings of the study of Adichie's novel and Muller's two texts, *When You Dance with the Crocodile* and *Where the Lion Stalks* reveal the feminist project of the writer, albeit, cyberfeminist one due to the 'dominance of technology in the two texts. As such the researcher noted that in both texts the girl child enters the world of technology via the computer games where she mediates a set of cybernetic identities that complicate the conventional girlhood. The researcher also concluded that Adichie's and Muller's novels highlight what Muhammad's (2012) refers as "burgeoning identities" which involve writing and revolting against wrong perceptions that have been widely spread. The researcher concluded that *Americanah* (2013), *When You Dance with the Crocodile* (2012) and *Where the Lion Stalks* (2016) relate to identity which one of the major themes discussed in these texts.

5.3 Recommendations

The findings of this study showed that cyberfeminism is a theory that can be examined in literature just as it is in information communication technology. As such the researcher recommends the following areas for further investigation:

- Further research to be conducted of other novels in order to establish if similar attributes of feminism will be found in other texts.
- An examination of whether cyberfeminism can purposefully be used to explore the writing of male writers specifically in Namibia in order to complicate the issues of representations of the girl child as well as the boy child using cyberspace as an alternative and emerging space to negotiate identities.

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