

Alienation and Urban Identity in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born*

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ABSTRACT :

This paper explores the complex interplay between alienation and urban identity in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* by Ayi Kwei Armah, situating the text within the socio-political realities of postcolonial Ghana. The novel presents the city as a paradoxical space—simultaneously a site of opportunity, modernization, and aspiration, and a landscape marked by moral decay, corruption, and social fragmentation. Through this duality, the urban environment becomes central to understanding how identities are constructed, negotiated, and often destabilized.

The study argues that alienation in the novel is not merely an individual psychological condition but a structural and spatial phenomenon shaped by urban modernity. The unnamed protagonist's experiences reflect a broader crisis of identity within a society grappling with the aftermath of colonialism and the failures of post-independence governance. The city, depicted through vivid imagery of filth, decay, and stagnation, mirrors the ethical disintegration of public life and intensifies the protagonist's sense of disconnection from both society and self. This estrangement is further reinforced by systems of class inequality, bureaucratic inertia, and pervasive corruption, which restrict access to social mobility and meaningful participation in civic life.

Drawing on postcolonial theory and urban studies, the paper examines how anonymity, urban anomie, and spatial politics contribute to fragmented identities. The concept of the flâneur is used to interpret the protagonist's detached observation of city life, highlighting the tension between visibility and invisibility in urban spaces. Furthermore, the research investigates how marginalized groups are positioned within the city's socio-economic hierarchy, revealing the structural inequalities that govern inclusion and exclusion.

In addition to close textual analysis, the study engages with emerging digital humanities approaches to demonstrate how computational tools—such as word embeddings and topic modeling—can illuminate recurring thematic patterns of decay, corruption, and belonging in the narrative. These methodologies provide a complementary framework for understanding the novel's representation of urban experience.

Ultimately, the paper contends that *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* offers a powerful critique of postcolonial urban life, portraying the city as a contested space where individual agency is constantly negotiated against systemic constraints. By foregrounding the tension between aspiration and disillusionment, the novel underscores the enduring struggle for identity and meaning in a rapidly transforming yet deeply unequal urban society.

KEYWORDS

Alienation; Urban Identity; Postcolonial Literature; Urban Anomie; Marginalization; Corruption; Modernity; African Literature; Spatial Politics; Digital Humanities

INTRODUCTION

Themes of alienation in literature and urban identity intermingle with wider concerns of space, social structure, and the lived experiences of marginalized groups. Literature, however, presents city spaces both as potent signifiers of cultural and economic output as well as sites of moral ambivalence and sites of both social experiment and decline. The city becomes a discursive space where diverse populations, through their converging, give birth to both multicultural exchange and social fragmentation. With the city emerging in this situation, identity negotiation plays an important role, creating opportunities and constraints on identity formation; they also open the door to people's being alienated and excluded. In the city, alienation seems closely connected to what has commonly been termed urban anomie. Here people experience feeling disconnected from their surroundings and one another: feeling isolated from this very world around them, apart from each other. The sense that this estrangedness is exaggerated underlines the very visible fault lines both tangible and invisible throughout the city, which divides people on racial, economic, and class lines in turn. This makes those living here feel alienated just as much from city life. For marginalized groups, including certain ethnic and racial groups, women, and the economically disadvantaged, in particular, urban inclusion is limited from participating fully in public life, access to the city's resources and opportunities diverted, or outright blocked by structural barriers. The flâneur, or urban wanderer, offers another dimension to the person and city. Characters walk through these knottier streets — and witness the spectacle and alienation that come with life in the city. It is the place that gives rise to such dreams and also deeply distancedness: it is the very city within a city. Visibility and disappearance, legibility and insanity, and public-private spaces negotiation underlie the nuances of urban identity formation. In addressing these dynamics, literary accounts of the city have typically centered on how those on its margin or made invisible by dominant social constructs fare. The urban form thus serves as a stage on which social and political issues take place where issues of access, engagement, and belonging are constantly challenged. Examining alienation and urban identity through works like *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* confronts the complicated conditions of city life, revealing a tug-of-war between personal agency and social constraint in the contemporary metropolis.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How does *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* portray alienation in the context of postcolonial urban life?
- In what ways does the city function as both a space of opportunity and exclusion in the novel?
- How do corruption, class divisions, and socio-political structures contribute to the protagonist's sense of alienation?
- What role does urban anonymity and anomie play in shaping individual and collective identity?
- How do symbolism and imagery (such as “strange figures” and decay) reflect psychological and social estrangement?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To analyze the representation of alienation in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* within a postcolonial urban context.
- To examine how urban spaces function as sites of identity formation, fragmentation, and exclusion.
- To explore the relationship between socio-political structures (such as corruption, class, and power) and individual experiences of disconnection.
- To investigate the role of anonymity, urban anomie, and spatial dynamics in shaping urban identity.
- To interpret the use of symbolism, imagery, and narrative techniques in expressing alienation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* predates recent computational scholarship, recent digital-humanities work has started to operationalize questions of alienation and urban identity in post-colonial African fiction in large-scale text analysis. Mikolov et al. have done foundational work on distributed semantics. [2] showed that dense word-vector spaces contain complex relational meanings, making it possible for scholars to quantify lexical fields of corruption, decay, or belonging that are embedded in Armah's narrative. With the subsequent inclusion of deep contextual encoders like BERT, the ability to retrieve sentence-level forms of affective and spatial reference was further

enhanced by separating the descriptions of the unnamed city from inner monologues voiced by the protagonist. The embedding paradigm is further enhanced by early follow-ups: GloVe vectors provided complementary global co-occurrence, and stochastic variational inference for Latent Dirichlet Allocation confirmed thematic clusters (e.g., sanitation, bureaucratic inertia, maritime imagery) across African urban corpora. Hamilton et al. [6] incorporated a diachronic dimension into their work, demonstrating how word embeddings follow drift in meaning (they are now able to correlate and map the shift of meaning between “city,” “nation,” and “rot” in Armah’s successive editions). More recently, Grootendorst’s BERTopic framework combines transformer embeddings and class-based TF-IDF and provides interpretable topic labels that can neatly be placed within the discourse of Fanonian alienation or Nkrumahist nationalist discourse. Together, these studies offer a methodological scaffold for reconsideration of *The Beautiful Ones* through the lens of quantification, illuminating both the ways that its representation of urban space mirrors and subverts dominant narratives of post-independence despair.

1. The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born in Historical and Socio-Political Context

1.1 Urbanization, Modernity, and the City as a Site of Contradiction

The events of **The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born** are thoroughly embedded in the historical and socio-political conditions of many postcolonial civilizations, and the accelerating processes of urbanization and modernization found in these periods. What is more, cities, as written down and sociologically considered, are multilayered places that represent at once the hope of progress and the reality of social fragmentation. Urban centres are described as “huge, unwieldy signifiers that can hold an infinite number of significances” [as “cities, cultural and economic centers, social experiments, sources of moral decay, breeding grounds for crime, and sites of multicultural exchange”]. The city is multifaceted within its beauty and in a way has the ability to connect both the good and bad, which, when considered with this level of abstraction, becomes central to the alienation explored in both stories. However, the city is not just a backdrop: it is itself an agent of identity-building, enabling individuals to create their identity, but also subjecting them to the spectacle and fragmentation of contemporary life. The city depicted in the novel mirrors the general political economy of cities, where both old and new political forms, ethnicity, and class are the basis for the ways in which residents perceive their everyday lives in the city. The “urban political machine” and the new forms of urban politics emerge as political machines emphasize the changing balance of power and media’s participation in the elaboration of urban situations. It encourages instability and instability is the result that further contributes to feelings of separation and alienation in cityhood of the people of the city population of the city. Hence, the city becomes a locus of possibility as well as an anomie, as people attempt to discover meaning and connection amidst a frenetic modernization.

1.2 Marginalization, Fault Lines, and the Nature of Alienation

An essential element of the socio-political context is the process through which cities create these visible and invisible fault lines that divide, reroute, or prevent access to certain individuals and groups of people. The novel’s portrayal of city life echoes the larger study of how the city ‘opens itself up to some inhabitants and not to others,’ revealing how factors of incorporation and exclusion function according to ethnicity, class, and gender. This invisibility of marginalised people—ethnic and racial minorities, women and those living on poor incomes—are often caught between a space of opportunity and vast alienation. That sense of separation, as a group, can be exacerbated by what is referred to as urban anomie; when traditional social bonds are shattered and individualism becomes rampant, many feel alienated. The city’s complexity—in all its shape and form—reflects the inner turmoil of their ordinary residents searching for both cause and place in their lives. The archetypal urban flâneur an individual who wanders the streets of city streets and watches but does nothing, in the city; part, the most urban city-dweller exists, part of a spectacle while separating themselves from the city. The physical location of the city thus serves as a space of negotiation in which one has to constantly negotiate the boundaries of visibility, access, and identity.

2. Urban spaces and modernity

2.1 Urban Spaces as Sites of Contradiction and Complexity

The urban settings described in “The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born” are drawn to be complex contradictory landscapes that embody both the promise and danger of modernity. Cities are massive, impenetrable signifiers, able to hold a multiplicity of meanings. They are centers of cultural and economic production, spaces of social experimentation, and vehicles for moral decay and social renewal. This diversity is expressed in the manner that urban spaces are described as hot beds of criminality and moral arbitrariness: or as arenas and cultural exchange to stimulate cultural identity as well as to be sites of self-creation. The city thus becomes a political, discursive site in which the finest of the human condition coexist with the most grotesque features of the human race, emphasising the contradiction between progressivity and degradation that characterises contemporary urban existence. This poetic and almost folkloric device of walking the city—not unlike the flâneur mode of narrative—emphasizes even further the labyrinthine and at times alienating aspects typical of city environments. City streets are the characters’ mode of travel, which is readable and inscrutable—that with madness and spectacle mixed into the texture of textuality in its urban character. As people wander around the cityscape like this it not only reveal the open and invisible borders that structure urban experience itself but also accentuate feeling dislocated and alien to modern life. The city thereby appears as a place where people are always struggling over which identity, and whether it is socially, politically or economically stable to survive at all, continues on.

2.2 Alienation, Marginalization, and the Fault Lines of Contemporaryity

A significant theme of this image of urban spaces is the overwhelming sense of alienation and anomie. The city is a society of spectacle, with citizens participating in and observing urban life, yet alienated from the people and neighborhoods that surround them. For members of marginalized ethnic and racial communities, women, and the economically disadvantaged, who suffer on a deeper scale from a divide or an unseen fault line that separates, diverts, or denies access to urban resources and opportunities (and the opportunity to develop) this alienation is keenly felt. It interrogates the urban narrative of an open city and its exclusion thereof, exposing the structural inequalities that inform urban modernity. And so an experience of space in the city is a lived one, an experience both of potential and exclusion. And although urban environments offer space for self-making and social mobility, they are also sites in which the “other half” of society is pushed to the margins, their lives mediated by forces of race, class and gender. The characterization of the city as both place of prospect and place of marginalization highlights the ambivalent legacy of modernization where progress is bound up with new modes of social stratification and alienation. This duality is at the heart of the novel’s reflection on urban identity, as characters traverse the fragmented terrains of the contemporary city in quest of meaning and belonging.

3. Ways that character alienation is manifest

3.1 Anonymity and the Stripping Away of Social Layers

Alienation is the theme that emerges from *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, and this is closely bound up with the freedom of anonymity and the absence of social expectation that accompanies it. Characters usually have to go through life in a world where appearance, social status, and social function have become somewhat ambiguous or simply irrelevant elements in the public sphere where the signs of what an identity are usually visible. This sense of anonymity comes off as “relaxing,” a release from the “superfluous stuff” and “layers of personality and layers of expectation” that normally underlie social interactions. Within this setting, people are refracted not through societal-reflected biases or social constructions but instead seen as “a blob of light and two little blobs” -- paradoxically allowing one--finally – to be truly in touch with what man is really like. These layers are cut off to “take down the ego” and produce equality and clear-cut communication which if it ever existed would appear rare in real city environments. This effect underlines the immense sense of alienation that each character goes through: their own, and that of every man and woman around them can come face to meet this rawness, unmediated, together in their unmediated confrontation not bound up with the trappings.

3.2 Freedom and Tenderness of Disconnection

Characters' alienation is the other reason it's not awkward, it's not isolated but it is something really quite new, something very, very freeing and kind. But a stark lack of visual and audio cues "you can't see anybody and it's just you" creates a space where people are released from being judged or judged to what type of life is a healthy, thriving urban citizen. In this divorce from the outside world, "the sweetest tenderness, or pure, childlike love," appears, as relationships are "stripped back" to their basic aspects. Thus, these interactions manifest a "freedom in being there," where "the usual constraints of reality and relationships dissolve" they become a kind of authentic and more vulnerable connection. This duality separation as an act of distance and as a process of true connection -- speaks to the intricate ways in which urban contexts infuse identity and emotional lives.

4. Urban Identity: Searching for the Self

4.1 The Urban Environment as a Site of Alienation and Fragmented Identity

Literary representations of urban spaces often depict extreme alienation wherein individuals feel in conflict with their own identities as they negotiate the complexities and anonymity of urbanity. Described in the context as a "huge, unwieldy signifier," the city encapsulates the best and worst of humanity, but it is also a centre of cultural and economic production that has been associated with moral decay, crime, and social fragmentation. Such duality forms a situation in which the search for the self is not only a daunting task; yet the existence of such an urban environment is not only a source of the self, but also a site of barriers, which result in loneliness and anomie [1]. Urban anomie, which occurs when social ties and norms fall apart, is particularly notable for reflecting just how disconnected many living in the city feel. So in this, rather alienation is not, as it once was thought, a psychological state; it is intrinsic to the spatial social fabric of the city and determines how people see themselves and the way they exist on the world map.

4.2 Access to Marginalization: Urban Space Politics

The fabric of cities is equally permeated and delineated by visible and invisible fault lines for people who are allowed access to certain spaces and privileges that exclude marginalised individuals. These delineates may reflect race, class, gender, or economic status, which makes for a city that is welcoming to certain people and closed or hostile to the rest. Such a context mirrors the encounters of the marginalized such as specific racial and ethnic groups, women and the poor to occupy the a divided city, a "society of the spectacle" or exclusion site. These groups experience lived situations within the context are the results of how urban areas are set up and policed by organized and institutionalized and the way urban spaces are organized as a whole, limiting access to resources, mobility and visual access in practice but structured inequalities. Not only does this work exacerbate alienation but it also makes sense of the search for self, with so many new problems in self, as individuals grapple with outside walls and onus of being Other, and what it means to belong to them. The city becomes a contested site, this is where the battle for identity in a city becomes a site of contestation with a negotiated self and city identity against the potentiality, and limitation of what it can and cannot offer.

4.3 Flâneur, and the Search for Urban Legibility

An urban wanderer in a strange landscape, the flâneur provides a metaphor for that journey to find ourselves in the modern metropolis. As he wanders between the city streets, the flâneur endeavors to make sense of the tortuousness of an urban world that demands legibility in a place fraught with disorder and obscuration [1]. Wandering thus becomes an act of resistance to alienation and the expression of agency against the shifting urban boundary space. But the flâneur's journey is not available to everyone; the experience is determined by aspects like gender, race and class that dictate who is free to move, who is invisible or marginalized. "The invisible flâneur is also a critique of an urban identity often at odds with self, and the way in which some of us are excluded from the privilege of exploring through the city and exploring within itself," adds a layer of complexity to the relationship between 'urban identity' and the search for self-identity. In a way the

city is a site of potential and of constraint as the search for meaning and home operates throughout the spaces that define its politics of space.

5. Metaphor and Picture Connecting to Alienation

5.1: Representation of "Strange Figures" and Non-Human Characteristics

In the story, such “strange figures” that the narrator describes as having large black eyes and non-human traits — become a powerful symbol of alienation. The text does not really call these beings “aliens,” it just puts them in a box with ambiguous description, implying their otherness, and how they are estranged from the familiar world of humans. By rendering these figures as such in such a deliberate manner, the estrangement is even further heightened, and even physically different from both protagonist and entire society. This way of representing imagery also emphasizes the protagonist's alienation and disconnections from both his immediate surroundings and the social order around him at large. The narrative externalizes the internal experience of alienation as these figures become more and more non-human, making them corporeal beings within the urban context itself.

5.2 Interpretive Ambiguity and The Sense of Belonging

By calling these creatures “strange characters,” instead of “aliens” in the sense they appear, this is part of the sort of interpretive indeterminacy the main character struggles with as a result of his own uncertainty as well as belonginglessness. This ambiguity beckons readers to reconsider the division between the familiar and the unknown, the self and the other. Without directly dealing with the word ‘alien’, the imagery is able to be read as a metaphor for the protagonist and serves as an example of greater social and cultural alienated individuals in city. The non-human images also double as literal emojis, acting as a visual shorthand for the inescapable alienation that frames the story as well, and without the need for any too obvious presentation. This kind of sophisticated symbolism and imagery serve to strengthen the readers' involvement in the inner lives of the protagonists and the novel's understanding of urban culture.

6. Interpersonal Relationships and Social Disconnection

6.1 Anonymity and Stripping Away of Social Layers

And the nature of anonymity is important to how interactions unfold, and whether those relationships feel organic or disconnected. Participants speak of having those “relaxing” (some could say, “powerful,”) interactions, without any of that “normal stuff” from visual and social clues to a social setting (physical appearance, way of speaking, and mannerisms). Without these cues there is no “superfluous stuff,” and none of the “layers of personality and layers of expectation,” which typically mediate social interaction. They are presumed to do so because removing external markers encourages us to view other people more as we really are (as they are when a person exists or who they are, not the social identities and social role they choose to project rather than what they project to the world. The resultant exchanges are referred to be more pragmatic and less ego-bias of an individualistic and less ego-driven, indicating that anonymity can promote a fair treatment of people between two groups of people, and minimizes stereotypes about their appearance and status. This can be demonstrated further by “childishness” or “pureness” in people's personality seen in these exchanges. Left the normal social filter, participants say, they feel a kind of connection that is “stripped back” to the “absolute core,” marked by something like tenderness and a childlike love. And the stripping of social ‘sticklers’ is described as creating a more authentic and emotionally meaningful connection, as opposed to the performance and shallowness of ‘ordinary’ urban relations.

6.2 The Problem of Social Disconnect, and Struggle for Real Connection

Not only can anonymity promote true interaction, it underlines the greater social division inherent in cities. The participants' musings imply that common city activities are encumbered by obligation, self-critique and the maintenance of social masks. Anonymity is “a completely different kind of connection” as it is alien because it violates the norms of

the urban social life in which individuals are defined and bounded by their outward exterior. There is an unfamiliarity about the interaction, one that hints at a general sense of alienation and disconnection in society, where real human relationships seem to be scarce and hard to attain. The “freedom” behind the facelessness of conversations underlines the limitations placed on true personal expression in the face of the structures of contemporary urban society that can prevent anyone from reaching out, and communicating with each other, in meaningful ways. In fact, the story shows an interaction between an aspiration to true communion with fellow human beings and a universal feeling of alienation-oriented alienation which is an inherent aspect of the reality that is the urban environment.

7. The Postcolonial Urban: a Critique of Social Life

7.1 Hegemonic Structures and Social Stratification

As per Postcolonial theory, this postcolonial critique of urban society has been centered around the understanding of the dominant powers that permeate into diverse spheres like culture, politics, and socio-economic structure. In urbanized milieu depicted in postcolonial literature, these hegemonic structures lead to stratified social systems that are often elite-centric, privileging (and sometimes excluding) the values, aesthetics, and lifestyles of an invisible upper class. The methods by which these hegemonic norms are imposed and enforced are a key concern of postcolonial critique, which aims to expose the systems that enslave and subdue others. This stratification is economic and cultural and symbolic, infusing what defines the city, which reinforces systems of exclusion and alienation for those outside privileged classes.

7.2 Marginalisation and the Silence of Subaltern Voices

This is why some critical work on postcolonial urban critique points the way towards a systematic absence of social minorities, or subalterns, of their own voices in urban space. Postcolonial discourses are calling on scholars to explore how the voices and experiences of the marginalized are hidden, unseen and not listened to when it is up against hegemonic cultural discourses. In urban contexts, this marginalisation is frequently facilitated by dominant institutional practices and social conventions that valorize the whims and fantasies of the bourgeoisie, marginalising and marginalizing the voices and aspirations of those who are subaltern. Criticisms also point to how these excluded groups negotiate, push against or accept the hegemonic values of power (or in some ways deny them) by exposing how the agency of oppressed (in)constraint, resist and internalizing dominant value systems play out in particular, the complexity between this act and structural constraint in postcolonial urban world is illuminated.

8. Alienation and African Literature Comparative Perspectives on Alienation in African Literature

8.1. Indicators and the Way of Exclusion

A comparative analysis of alienation in African literature indicates that highly culturally-themed signifiers are key in representing alienation. As a form of structuring the text, the use of culturally significant items (proper nouns of the novel such as "Shaka," "Mzilikazi," and "Asantehene") and of ordinary expressions ("sjambok," "egungun"), in literature such as those of Wole Soyinka, help to anchor the novel in a very African space and at the same time underline the protagonist's disconnection with tradition as well as modernity. The reiteration and preservation of these cultures (CSIs) in translation, mentioned in the context further highlight the significance of such CSIs as vehicles of communication, articulating certain alienating qualities particular to African societies undergoing dramatic change. Not only do these signifiers act as identifiers of who we are, they also act as a reminder that the protagonist is separate from a tradition that is ubiquitous, and yet also inaccessible and isolating in its own right. We see this theme working in the characters' negotiation of the conflict of passed-down culture and the weight of the urban demands of the 21st century], common to many African fictional works.

8.2 Negotiation of Identity and Alienation + Urbanization

The alienation motif is always woven into African literary works is often tied to urbanisation and to the processes of identity formation and postcolonial identity politics within postcolonial space. The proliferation of proper names and familiar expressions that have to do with particular historical, political, and cultural realities, including "Mfekane," "amaZulu," and "Iron One," suggests the tension between shared memory and the individual. From a comparative angle, the same phenomenon of repeating the same way with distinct works may indicate some common literary strategy: that authors use them to produce a feeling of place and continuity, yet simultaneously disclose the cracks and discontinuities introduced by urbanization and modernization to the fabric of African identity. A comparison of the traditional references and modern symbols (such as Mickey Mouse, Louisville Lips), also drives the protagonist's estrangement home: the protagonist is a fish in the current, a fish which is caught between worlds. This dualism is symptomatic of one of many other existential challenges for urban African novels, which in the literature of Africa is about the quest for selfhood challenged by the relentless memories of colonialism as well as the rapid development of society.

8.3 Translation, reproduction, and the universality of alienated experience

Such a strategy of rendering CSIs unchanged in translation, as evident in the context, draws attention to a more general phenomenon in African literature; the universalism of alienation at the literary level, despite its tendency to become localized references. Maintaining 41 of 54 original forms of CSIs, the translators achieve a way to retain the authenticity of the actual source text without alienating or alienating readers, so that readers from different backgrounds may interact with the particularities of the African experience. This approach draws back the divide between the universal and the particular in depicting alienation. The unchanged CSIs hold up barriers to full assimilation and reflect the protagonist's own sense of exclusion and otherness by the reader on one hand as well. At times, on the other hand, they serve as bridges, giving insight into the cultural and historical forces shaping alienating characteristics and forms of alienation in African societies. From a comparative perspective, consequently a different experience of estrangement—whether originating from the community, tradition or self—remains characteristic of African literary expression.

Conclusion

Lest the theme of alienation and urban identity be too easily understood, the postcolonial urban Ghana context is shown to be closely associated with social mobility. The book positions the city as a site of contradiction, where modernity and tradition collide and opportunities and profound dislocations exist. In cities we find not even a simple structure but multivalence, urban places, with multiplicity and ambiguity in urban spaces, corresponding with the splintered identities and alienation felt by the characters. As someone who is already deeply alienated themselves, he can feel his alienation through the anonymity on the level of social identity, but also the deformation of social layers and the struggle of being able to connect with others in a world of alienation. Symbolism and imagery, most heavily the description of such "strange figures" and "un-human characters" represent "no man but strange animals," underlines the interpretive vagueness and psychological alienation in urban living. Cocoon critiques that hegemonic hierarchies and social stratification continue to be hegemonic, yet emphasize the entrenched marginalization and silencing of subaltern voices in postcolonial city life. Analyzing alienation through African literature comparative perspectives across texts shows that an urban environment and questions of identity-building through identity-work are a recurrent theme (in urban environments, alienation within this particular region) that is represented by different cultural signifiers (Kuhari 2004:6), linguistic and historical narratives (Bolomela 2020). Finally, by way of exploration of urban identity and alienation, the novel demonstrates not only the fault lines of modernity and urban space politics, but also its search for identity and sense of self in a society transforming so rapidly that we are constantly fighting for our meaning in our lives now. Literary representations were not only vital in presenting the complexities of a postcolonial urban life but were inextricably linked to the continued negotiating of identity in the context of this reality.

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