

Literary Writers and the Subaltern: (Mis)-representation of Some Marginal Groups in Selected Contemporary African Novels

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Abstract

Dominant literary conversations like post-structuralism have crowned the literary writer as an impartial and reliable voice for the voiceless in oppressive cultural settings. Since the marginal group is weak and cannot speak for themselves, the intellectual is given express authority to articulate their issues. Emerging voices have nonetheless questioned the author's eligibility to speak for the marginal groups. Given the diversity typical of the marginal group, these voices doubt the author's ability to perfectly represent it. This article extends the conversation that the literary writer lacks the capacity to speak for the marginal group because of their heterogeneity. Using the postcolonial concept of representation, the article overturns the literary writer's articulation of issues affecting marginal groups in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nuruddin Farah's *Close Sesame*, Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* and Zukiswa Wanner's *London, Cape Town, Joburg*. The ideas of Gayatri Spivak will form the theoretical basis of interpretation. One major finding of the study is that the author cannot perfectly represent the marginal groups without silencing some of them.

Key Words: Post Colonialism, Representation, The Subaltern, Spivak

Introduction

Literary writers speak for marginalized groups in many societies in which dominant groups sanitize injustices that relegate and dehumanize those in the out-group. Writers like Charles Dickens and Fyodor Dostoevsky supposedly spoke for the oppressed and poor in their societies. Similarly, feminist writers such as Virginia Wolf and Alice Walker have been accepted

as formidable defenders of women's rights against violation by men. They allegedly speak for all women to deconstruct men's deluded maxims about women. In his study of feminist writers in Africa, Adjei asserts that: "Feminist writers present a situation in which women are victims of physical and psychological violence and men the perpetrators of the same (48). Indeed, Nawal El Saadawi's *God Dies by the Nile* depicts men as sex perverts, brutes, rapists and perpetrators of diverse acts of violence against women.

Migrant authors like Safi Abdi express the plight of immigrants in the face of foreign cultures. Those immigrants that strive to assimilate by choosing the middle spaces end up disillusioned or with psychic collapse. Abdi therefore refers to immigrants as the excluded lot: "The immigrant will never be accepted by the host community. He or she is an unbranded cow among branded herd" (256) to refer to their futile craving to make a home away from home. Political novelists such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o present African political elite as greedy and callous. Ndigirigi Gichingiri interprets the names of Thiong'o's characters in *Devil on the Cross* and observes that the name "Gitutu" (one of the leaders), refers to "a big Jigger" and "Gataanguru," (another leader) means "a belly infested with tape worms" (100) that produce a bloating effect.

These authors speak for the marginalized groups or so they claim to, but to what extent are their representations true? Spivak questions the notion of representation in literary studies. She asserts that "poststructuralists crown the intellectual as a transparent medium through which the voices of the oppressed can be represented" (68). She contends that the colonized "subaltern" subject is irretrievably heterogeneous. She asks, "[c]an this difference be articulated? And if so by whom?" (68). In other words, to what extent do feminist, migrant and political writers represent the heterogeneous or different women, immigrants and citizens. There are women who do not see patriarchal traditions as oppressive at all. Furthermore, African culture is diverse – not all African cultures are oppressive to women. There are immigrant characters who find host nations a paradise they would never wish to leave. There are characters that view the so called "greedy leaders" as pragmatic and development conscious. For Spivak, a literary writer may either misrepresent some women, immigrants, and citizens or in the attempt to give them voice silence the rest. An attempt to give the oppressed women a voice will silence those who love the culture. Similarly, the migrant author's attempt to speak for those immigrants who love mother cultures will silence those that love host nations. In the same way, the political novelist silences those characters that love the ruling regime by speaking for revolutionaries that demand change. Spivak gives the British example that in an attempt to

speaking for oppressed Indian widows by banning *Sati* rite end up silencing the Hindu culture. Her burning question is whether literary writers can avoid this. If they cannot avoid it then is their representation plausible? Apparently, the subaltern cannot speak; therefore, the intellectual or writer remains the medium by which they speak.

This article extends the conversation that the literary writer lacks the capacity to speak for the marginal group because of their heterogeneity. Using the postcolonial concept of representation, the article interrogates the literary writers' presentation of marginal groups in Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nuruddin Farah's *Close Sesame*, Chikwava's *Harare North* and Wanner's *London, Cape Town, Joburg*. The ideas of Spivak forms the theoretical basis of interpretation.

Radical Feminist Writers and Possible Misrepresentation of Women in African Fiction

This section interrogates possible misrepresentation of women by radical feminist writers with reference to Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. The section begins with a synopsis of the novel and then turns to the analysis of those characters that are silenced by the novelist in the Igbo society.

Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* is the story of Nnu Ego and her internal conflicts that possibly stem from her cultural landscape and devastate her psyche. Born to Agbadi and Ona, Nnu Ego has a happy childhood without any sign of insanity until she gets married. Barrenness instigates her mental instability. As soon as her husband Amatukwu realizes that she is unable to conceive, he marries another wife and she conceives within the first month of arrival. Nnu Ego isolates herself and suffers constant fits of depression. In prayers and tears, she asks her *chi* to give her children. Proud of his fertility and fortune, Amatukwu begins discriminating against her. For example, he forces her to work on the farm as the fertile wife remains at home in the pretext of looking after the baby. The narrator asserts that Amatukwu keeps ordering Nnu Ego "about as he would any farm help," (31). The community of Ibusè prizes children and designates childless women as "the other". Nnu Ego's assertion that it is not her fault to be childless confronts Amatukwu's indifference and callousness and she descends into depression. One day, Amatukwu catches her pleading with her co-wife's baby to send its friends from where it came. He assaults her and accuses her of witchcraft. Her father Agbadi takes her away and offers animal sacrifices to appease Nnu Ego's *chi*; eventually, her hysteria gives way and her beauty is restored. Agbadi finds another husband for Nnu Ego: Nnaife, an ugly neighbour that many girls had rejected.

The cultural differences between Nnaife and Nnu Ego play out and threaten to ruin the marriage. Whereas Nnaife has adopted some western values and taken jobs traditionally reserved for women, Nnu Ego is an Igbo conservative who believes that such jobs as washing clothes are purely meant for women. Consequently, Nnu Ego is depressed and her attempts to advise the husband to search for a dignified job are an exercise in futility. Worse still, when she conceives, Nnaife gets worried of being expelled from the church because they did not marry there. Nnu Ego comes to birth and is happy to bring forth a bouncing baby boy, Ngozi. Unfortunately, the baby dies. Nnu Ego runs to the market wildly and threatens to take her life. As the story, unfolds, Nnu Ego's infertility gives way and she has a number of children. His sons, Oshia and Adim get educated and work in the United States and Canada respectively. Whereas her daughters send her financial assistance, her sons do not even write to her. Oshia gets married to a white woman and does not even care to tell his mother. Nnu Ego is so devastated by this and her mind degenerates. She wanders her way in the village in Ibuse and tells people that she has a son in "Amerlika," (253). One day after wandering the whole night, she lies down by the roadside thinking she has arrived home. Nnu Ego runs mad and then passes away few days later.

Throughout this heartrending story, Emecheta presents Nnu Ego as a victim of patriarchal oppression. The madness she suffers and reduces her longevity at the end of the story apparently stems from the patriarchy entrenched in her society. Even her sons, Oshia and Adim, being men, succeed in their careers in the United States and Canada respectively, but consign her to the periphery of their worlds because she is a woman. All men among others Nnu Ego's father, Agbadi, are callous, brutal and murderers. Citing Mariama Ba, Zaynab Alkali, Ama Ata Aidoo and Calixthe Beyala, Adjei observes that Emecheta, like the other feminist writers present a situation where men are reduced to worthless, irresponsible physically grotesque images, wicked husbands, drunkards, rapists, exploiters, predators, monsters, sexually depraved, perverse and evil (49). She describes Nnaife's physique as "... short, the flesh of the upper arm danced as he moved among his friends, and that protruding belly! Why did he not cover it?" (44). The women characters in the novel are beautiful, especially the heroine, Nnu Ego. In the bedroom, Nnaife is presented as sexually depraved akin to a rapist. The heroine Nnu Ego says she "knew why horrible-looking men raped women, because they are aware of their inadequacy. This one (Nnaife) worked himself into an animal passion. She was sure he had never seen a woman before" (44). Like Nnu Ego's father, Agbadi, Nnaife takes his brother's wife as a second wife and demonstrates his depravity by having sex with her in his wife's presence

(139). The patriarchal culture in the novel is therefore singled out as the prime cause of Nnu Ego's failure.

The genesis of the slave woman that Emecheta points out as Nnu Ego's cause of madness is tied to patriarchal oppression. Agbadi makes love to his lover, Ona in the presence of his first wife, Agunwa. She gets terribly depressed and dies of a broken heart. According to tradition, she has to be buried with her slave woman. The slave woman is hacked and her corpse added to Agunwa's grave (20). When Nnu Ego is born, the *dibia* asserts she has the self of the slave woman, a curse that will cause her madness. In Emecheta's view, had Agbadi been strait-laced, the slave woman would not have been brought about in his lineage. It is shocking even to the neighbours when they get hint of Agbadi's act of "giving pleasure to another woman in the same courtyard where she slept," (18). Idayi says that their sighs during copulation "kept all of us awake" (19).

Other literary scholars reject Emecheta's suggestion that Nnu Ego fails because of the patriarchal cultural landscape. Holmes argues that since Nnu Ego fails both at Ibuze village and Lagos, there is more than social and political oppression at play. She writes: "It then becomes arguable that Nnu Ego's decisions play a role in her life's outcomes" (3). In other words, Holmes implies that it is erroneous for radical feminists to blame men for women's failures. Women, like other persons, have personal faults that expose them to failure. Ward observes that Nnu Ego has so many personal weaknesses and is doomed to fail (85). Nnu Ego's failure largely manifests through emotional weaknesses that result in depressions, suicidal tendencies and madness at the end of the novel. To what extent does Emecheta represent women in the Igbo society? If indeed patriarchal oppression is the cause of insanity in women in this society, why is it that other female characters maintain their emotional stability and sanity? Does Emecheta therefore speak for such women?

Spivak holds that the marginal group is heterogeneous and indeed there are other women such as Ona, Nnu Ego's mother; Adaku, Nnu Ego's co-wife; Kehinde, Nnu Ego's daughter, Ato, Nnu Ego's neighbour; Amatokwu's second wife and Igbonoba's wife. These women are under the same cultural regime as Nnu Ego, but neither get depressed nor run mad as a consequence of patriarchal oppression as Emecheta suggests.

Ona, Nnu Ego's mother, does not view polygamy as patriarchal tendency to abuse women as Emecheta suggests. She falls in love with Agbadi and makes love with him in his first wife's courtyard. According to radical feminists, "man is enemy, exploiter and oppressor of woman" (Frank 14) but in this context it is erroneous to claim that Agbadi is his first wife's enemy; Ona is

the enemy. Neither is she submissive or subservient as is expected of women under patriarchal oppression. The narrator observes that because Ona's father had no sons, "she had been raised as a son" (15). Moreover, Ona is not a victim of male oppression; she is audacious and fights back when men harass her. The narrator says she was a woman "who had the audacity to fight with her man before letting him have her" (18). Nnu Ego becomes the fruit of her illicit affair with Agbadi. Throughout her life with her lover Agbadi, Ona neither exhibits symptoms of chronic depression nor madness. How does Emecheta speak for women such as Ona? She is extremely different from Nnu Ego; so is her father from other men. Whereas other men want sons to perpetuate the family lineage, Ona's father wants his daughter to perpetuate his bloodline. Spivak asks "[h]ow can this difference be articulated?" (67). It is evident that Emecheta silences Ona in her attempt to speak for the "marginalized women" such as Nnu Ego.

Adaku is Nnu Ego's co-wife who was a third wife to her husband's late brother. As a third wife to the dead brother, offers herself to be inherited by Nnaife. Her decision to travel from the village, Ibuze to Lagos, where Nnaife lives to become his second wife suggests that Adaku appreciates the polygamous aspects of her culture. To show her respectful attitude for polygamy, the narrator says "she was very ambitious....and she made sure she was inherited by Nnaife" (131). On the contrary, Ego-Obi, the second wife to Nnaife's dead brother refused to be inherited not because she hated it, but she was badly treated for her infertility when the husband passed away (130). Adaku goes to Lagos and is very much willing to be the second wife to Nnaife. She calls Nnu Ego "senior wife" from the first day of arrival. Worse still, Adaku does not mind that Nnaife resides in a single room with one iron bed. She makes love with Nnaife on the only bed as Nnu Ego listens to "the giggles, laughs and cries" (139) on the cold floor. How does Emecheta speak for Adaku, a woman that Western feminism incorporates in the marginalized group? Nnu Ego dislikes her, which contradicts Frank's assertion that man is enemy of woman.

When Nnaife leaves to fight in the Second World War, Adaku does not mop in self-pity, but starts a business and it picks up. She also makes friends who are equally successful in life. One of these friends is Ignoboba's wife. The narrator says:

She was related to Adaku and like Adaku was doing very well in her business. This woman had added good fortune to marry an older man who had not qualified to be sent to war, and her husband was one of Ibuza's fairly prosperous people. What was more? This woman unlike

Adaku had many children, boys as well as girls – in short; she had everything any woman could want (182).

Ignoboba's wife is a female character in the same cultural and physical setting as Nnu Ego. The reader does not find any elements of patriarchal oppression driving her to madness as Emecheta suggests in relation to Nnu Ego. She is neither in abject poverty nor fragmented by oppressive circumstances. How does Emecheta speak for her? Holmes is possibly correct to suggest that Nnu Ego's personal weaknesses result in her failure. She decides to avoid business just because when she tried once, her first born died. She shuns any elements of modernity that other characters like Adaku and Nnaife adopt to fit in the modern Lagos.

Another woman that is quite different is Ato, Nnu Ego's childhood friend. In spite of the patriarchal setting she has been raised in, Ato is a very cheerful and happy person. When she gets news of Nnu Ego's chronic depression, she visits her in Lagos and Nnu Ego is surprised. She thinks, "[h]ow dare Ato look so happy, laugh with such naturalness as though she did not know that her Ngozi had died?" (79). To Nnu Ego, setback has to be followed by long months of grumbling and melancholy; on the contrary, Ato believes sorrow has to be accompanied by acceptance, optimism and determination to succeed in spite of challenges. She reprimands Nnu Ego to stop mopping in self-pity and rise up to make love with Nnaife to have another child. Throughout their conversation, Ato does not show any bitterness towards men, but signs of a happy woman. How does Emecheta speak for Ato?

In her paper, "Under Western Eyes" Chandra Mohanty rejects the universality of the theories of Western feminists and categorization of the third world woman as a monolithic subject. Mohanty feels that the assumption that third world women are a coherent group (ignoring social factors) is problematic. She adds that the model of men as oppressors is not a universal model (338). Indeed, women and men in *The Joys of Motherhood* are not the same; whereas Nnu Ego experiences gender otherness at Amatokwu's home, Ona and Ignoboba's wife are happy. Although Agbadi is sexually voracious, and oppressive, Ignoboba is not. This is what Spivak refers to as the heterogeneity of the marginal group, which writers such as Emecheta cannot articulate.

Radical Political Writers and Possible Misrepresentation of Citizens in African Fiction

This section interrogates possible misrepresentation of citizens by literary writers of political novels with reference to Farah's *Close Sesame*. The section begins with a synopsis of the novel and turns to analysis of those characters that are silenced by the novelist in the Somali society.

Farah's *Close Sesame* is the story of Deeriye, a patriot who leads his clan against Italian invasion. A neighbouring sultan defies the Italian orders to appoint paramount chiefs and when the Italian administrator storms the sultan's home to demand answers, a young Somali wrestles with the officer's white bodyguard and a stray bullet discharges and accidentally hits the bodyguard, killing him within thirty minutes of the incident. Deeriye's clan gives the young man asylum, but a Somali traitor informs the Italian administration. Incensed by this, the Italian administrator storms Deeriye's home and demands that they surrender the young man or face the consequences. Deeriye is not given time to explain; the Italians flounce away and an evening later, they poison the wells. As the animals die, the Italians use bazookas to shoot the rest of the animals to cripple Deeriye's clan economically (41). Shocked by the colonialist's callousness and military superiority, Deeriye's psyche collapses and he starts having hallucinations. The narrator writes, "[t]his was the first time Deeriye had crossed the known tactile world into one in which he could have visions [...] hear prophecies" (41). With other elders like Rooble, Deeriye is detained and his psychological condition deteriorates. His late wife, Nadiifa, visits him in prison to tell him the state of his children at home. Soon after independence, a highhanded general overthrows the government and perpetuates the cruelty and ethnocentric policies of the Italian administration. Deeriye and his clan are relegated and his son, Mursal decides to lead an underground movement to overthrow the regime. Although Mursal and many other young men like Mahad (the son of the man who killed the Italian police officer) look up to Deeriye for guidance, his psychological illness and preoccupation with religion are a barrier to effective leadership. He criticizes healthy persons and normal human milestones such as marriage and only values prayer and visions. Deeriye is so vulnerable to fear, that it hinders his ability to lead. When his son Mursal is killed, he now realizes the importance of fighting the regime and plans a lone wolf attempt at the General's life. He is brutally murdered.

Throughout the novel, Farah speaks for the marginalized Somali citizens that are allegedly oppressed by the Italian colonial administration and post independent Somali dictatorial regimes. Deeriye therefore distinguishes

himself as a defender of the marginalized group right from the first incursion of the colonial power in his community. Farah apparently singles out political and racial oppression as the cause of Deeriye's failure to fight the Italians. The generalization here is that colonialists are oppressors that relegate Africans and subject them to mental ill-health including religious fanaticism and prophecy typical of Deeriye. Could Deeriye, like Nnu Ego, have acquired this sickness from personal faults? In her analysis of *Close Sesame*, Moolla observes that "infinite self-reflexivity fragments the self." This fragmentation of the self is ambiguously represented as both pathological and liberatory" (253). In her opinion, Deeriye is already fragmented by individualism and cannot mobilize others to fight the colonialist. His love for prayer is an attribute he may have acquired as a devout Muslim and should not be blamed on colonialism. Nonetheless, Moolla casts doubts on Deeriye's brand of Islam:

In spite of Deeriye's spiritual and religious leanings, he is physically unable to participate in the collective dimension of the expression of the Islamic Faith. In the course of the entire novel, Deeriye is only on one occasion able to perform prayers in a mosque even though Islam highly encourages congregational prayers five times a day everyday...the mosque does not come into focus of the novel in any specific way. (191)

Moolla suggests that Deeriye's brand of Islam is so individualistic that it falls short of the true Islam in which the faithful maintains real touch with fellow Muslims. Moreover, the marginalized community in *Close Sesame* is heterogeneous (according to Spivak) and by speaking for patriots and revolutionaries, Farah silences other voices in the Somali community that view colonialism differently.

There are characters that embrace colonialists and view them as worthy allies and therefore obey the decree to appoint stipended chiefs. The Italian colonial administration rewards these Somali collaborators by paying them monthly allowances and segregates those who resist its policies. Cigaal and his clan are such an example. In his reflections, Deeriye says:

Cigaal: Once a collaborator of the Italians, a betrayer of friends, some of whom were said to have died under torture later; Cigaal: whose eyebrows merged like an alley into a road, over the bridge of his nose; Cigaal, although thrice a Xaaji, a wicked man; his only son, a good for nothing young man who had been convicted of every imaginable felony, including rape of a minor; his daughter, the cause of a great deal of gossip (75-76).

In this sentence, Cigaal and his clan have always rejected the stance held by Deeriye and other revolutionaries and worked with the colonialist because of their different opinion of the Italians. Deeriye reveals that Cigaal has betrayed friends to the Italians possibly because he feels they have brought positive impact in the lives of Somalis.

Another such an example is Deeriye's clansman, Haj Omer who supports the Italians right from their first appearance in Somaliland. He betrays the clan by informing on the young man who kills the Italian and the clan suffers the painful consequences. The colonialists reward him; he is crowned a stipended chief, which sows stigma between his followers and Deeriye's. The narrator says, "Haj Omer was a traitor, we resolved to excommunicate him, but the Italians and subsequent national governments kept him on the payroll" (183). During the clan meeting, Waris drives Haj Omer's son away for their history of collaboration and betrayal of the community.

Post-independence Somali governments perpetuate Italian totalitarianism and highhandedness that are at variance to Deeriye's ideology of humility and service to the people. A general overthrows the government and Deeriye and his family disapproves his style of leadership. Paul Zeleza observes, "[i]n Farah's Trilogy, the ruthless General is not an arbitrary superficial presence...but an embodiment of the articulation between traditional despotism and modern state terror" (23). Zeleza suggests that the General's dictatorship is terribly severe because it is entrenched in the traditional "patriarchal family" and clan system.

While Deeriye stands as a revolutionary, Stipended chiefs like Haj Omer and Cigaal support the dictatorship thereby dividing the Somali community ideologically. There is Deeriye, his son Mursal, Mahad, Mukhtaar, Ahmed, Jibril, Koschin, Medina, Samater, Sicilian and Willie, on one hand and Cigaal, Sheikh Ibrahim, Yassin, Haj Omer's son and the General on the other hand. Mukhtaar is Sheikh Ibrahim's son who differs with his father and takes Mursal's and Mahad's ideology. Cigaal is Deeriye's neighbour, described as, "[a] collaborator of Italians, a betrayer of friends, some of whom were said to have died under torture later" (75) who hails from the General's clan and thereby supports the regime. Cigaal's clan is firmly behind the General and supports him fully during Mahad's assassination attempt. Mnthali associates the General with ethnocentrism by asserting, "[w]hat really matters to him is a kinship system, which dates back to nomadic times. His policies are built around Machiavellian manipulation of the clan structure of Somalia." This suggests that before the advent of colonialism, the politics of polarity existed in the Somali society. The General favours and stands by certain clans against others; Mnthali mentions the Marehan, Ogaden and Dulbahante (53), his own

clan, his wife's and his son in law's clans respectively. Deeriye sees Cigaal running in and out of the house possibly readying himself for a gun battle against the Deeriye's for allegedly plotting a coup against their "man." It is apparent that Cigaal understands the cultural context of his community rather than conforming to the status quo. Given the ethnic tensions among clans, one has to support their clan to increase chances of his own survival. According to Gundel, the clan in Somalia remains collectively responsible for actions of its individual members (7). Both Deeriye and Cigaal have to defend the interests of their clans. This is why Sheikh Ibrahim (Mukhtaar's father) supports the General against Deeriye and expects his children to do so without question. Deeriye says:

A father can beat his son to madness in full public view and the son is expected not to raise a hand but to receive the beating in total silence. The son is not allowed to question the wisdom of his parents' statements, must never answer back, and never raise his voice or head. A daughter is not, of course, expected to refuse or challenge her material worth: she is worth as much dowry as she can obtain for her parents - not more or less than that. (131)

Sheikh Ibrahim therefore demands that his children adopt his perspective to support the dictatorship without question. Adults in this society have rights to cause endemic violence in the family and even kill their sons, but the child should receive the abuse passively. The daughter should be sold at any price as dictated by parents. Deeriye surprises the reader further when he asserts, "[i]t is the prerogative of the parent what to do with the life and property of an offspring," (132). The child is the other and the parent in Mukhtaar's society has the power to kill him or her. It is not news when Sheikh Ibrahim provokes a fight and clobbers Mukhtaar to death (137). This ordeal comes after a series of conflicts that the father had instigated to assert his traditional authority over the son.

Given that the marginalized Somali society that Farah speaks for in *Close Sesame* holds divergent views towards colonialism and the autocratic regime, how does he articulate this difference? His attempt to speak for Deeriye and fellow revolutionaries silences divergent voices like Cigaal, Haj Omer, Haj Omer's son and Sheikh Ibrahim. If he decides to speak for these collaborators then revolutionaries like Deeriye, Mahad, Mursal, Mohamed Somali and Samater will be silenced.

Migrant Writers and Possible Misrepresentation of Immigrants in African Fiction

This section interrogates possible misrepresentation of migrant characters by writers of migration literature with reference to Chikwava's *Harare North* and Wanner's *London, Cape Town, Joburg*. The section begins with a synopsis of the novels and then delves into the analysis of those migrant characters that are silenced by the novelist in different parts of the world.

Chikwava's *Harare North* is a story of a nameless immigrant who commits crimes by killing political opponents in Zimbabwe and flees to England. The narrator, a diehard supporter of the ruling party, ZANU PF joins the Green Bombers – a rag tag militia - to attack and frustrate members of the opposition party. At the peak of the ideological otherness, he kills an opposition supporter and has to run away from authorities. On arrival in England, the narrator is segregated on the basis of his race, social status and nationality, which possibly affects his psyche. His cousin Paul refuses to come for him after he is detained on arrival. At Paul's house, his wife Sekai segregates him and he has to stay in the toilet. When he joins his friend, Shingi, the narrator is shocked to witness the squalour in which Zimbabwean immigrants live. Shingi sleeps on the floor of the living room with Farayi and the kitchen has a heap of dirty dishes. Their caretaker, Aleck, though proud and avaricious, is a British Buttock Cleaner – the only available job for uneducated immigrants. At this house, the narrator exhibits damaging interpersonal relationships by resisting discrimination. When Shingi rummages through his suitcase without his permission, he grabs his foot and tries to pierce it with a screw driver. When Aleck exploits him by charging lofty rents for someone else's house, he reacts violently and everyone abandons him. Aleck, Farayi, Tsitsi and Shingi reject his company and the narrator only remains with the memory of his mother. Jobless and with no family to turn to, the narrator's psyche collapses and the novel ends when he is mad, wandering half-naked in Brixton.

The major assumption is that the migratory experience subjects characters to racial, economic and political strands of otherness that drives them to insanity. Using the major character, Chikwava takes Charles Tembi's perspective that "migrancy is homelessness...displacement and psychological alienation" (24). In the writer's mind's eye, a return to Africa could be sole solution to the character's predicament or risk death and madness. Stuart Hall contends that the return to Africa is neither haven of peace nor panacea to restoration of one's identity. He writes, "[c]ultural identity is not a fixed essence at all lying unchanged outside history and culture... it is not once-and-for-all. It is not a fixed origin on which we can

make some final and absolute Return" (395). Hall questions Edward Brathwaite's yearning to recover a lost Africa because with the fluid nature of cultural identity, the original Africa is no longer there. Although Chikwava and Wanner tend to support the narrative of return, Hall's argument apparently carries the day because the dreams of African characters who return are not fulfilled but hybrid characters that appreciate cultural mix succeed.

Chindora describes the narrator's experience as the state of abjection, defined as "forms of existence" that compel one into "shame, disgrace or debasement, rendered beyond the limits of the live-able, denied the warrant of tolerability, accorded purely a negative value" (174). Tembi expounds that the narrator is an "object" because he is dislocated by upheavals at home to live as a beggar in England (173).

Some literary scholars however reject the narrator's craving for a return to Africa as a solution to the immigrants' predicament. Chigwedere observes that the narrator suffers because of his tendency to stick to the culture of his mother nation. She suggests that to exist in a foreign nation, "[re]-configuration of identity then becomes a necessary survival strategy; in such a case, hybridity when an individual is caught between two cultures" (138). In other words, the host nation is not to blame as such, but the narrator's unwillingness to adjust to the new environment. There are a number of characters who adopt the hybrid strategy and do not disintegrate to madness as is in the narrator's case.

The character Aleck likes his diasporic experience and has adopted elements of Western culture in spite of being Zimbabwean. While the narrator is celebrating his first salary, Aleck says that he misses English dishes like granadilla, Fanta, freetzits, rock buns, sadza and fish-head (94). Although in the narrator's opinion the tendency to maintain social distance is self-importance, Aleck has acquired a British attribute in England. As a self-appointed landlord, he maintains social distance from immigrants, which is characteristic of the British administrative skills he has experienced in England.

When the narrator arrives at the residence, Aleck arrives from work and struts to his room without greeting him possibly to maintain his position as a senior member of the house. Aleck then calls the narrator and he stands there wondering what will happen; Aleck takes time sending messages on his mobile phone. The narrator says [sic], "[i]t's like those days in school when the headmaster call you to his office" (42). On the wall of his room is just one portrait of his that probably signifies his alienation from others and his

indigenous African culture that is communal. Aleck's is a Western skewed hybridity that craves English traditions without changing his true African identity. In an argument with the narrator, Aleck reveals his dislike for Africa and her leaders. He opines that African presidents are dictators that cling to power and have their critics tortured, properties torched and women raped (123). Unlike the narrator, it is apparent that Africa is not a place Aleck wishes to return to.

As the reader later gets to learn, Aleck is neither a landlord nor a shop attendant. He is a caretaker of the squat, which his English friend left him in charge (120). Aleck's ability to forge strong friendships with the host community is an element of hybridity, which Bhabha singles out as the most suitable strategy for immigrants in a foreign nation (1). Aleck is a care worker in an elderly home, a despised job referred to in derogatory terms as "British Buttock Cleaning," but as long as it enables him to remain in the West, he is happy. He does not entertain a fantastic dream of a heroic return to Africa like the narrator. Consequently, Aleck has no ill feelings for the host nation like the narrator, which enables him to maintain his sanity throughout the novel.

Paul, the narrator's cousin is another hybrid character that avoids the narrator's dislike for the West and craving for mother Africa. Paul has a bachelor's degree in urban planning and his wife, Sekai has had English learning and secured a job as a nurse in the foreign nation. When the narrator reaches their home, he feels out of place because of the new culture Paul and Sekai have adopted. First is Sekai's expectation for the narrator to pay his fare to the house (5). African culture rejects such treatment for family guests. When the narrator gives Sekai groundnuts from Zimbabwe, she rejects them saying they are possibly contaminated by germs (7). The narrator is shocked because that contravenes African generosity. When Paul arrives from work, he does not spend time to have a warm conversation with his visitor, the narrator. He just greets from a distance and goes straight to the bedroom (7). The narrator is left to watch the television alone until he retires to bed. He is also surprised by Paul's willingness to stick to a childless monogamous marriage for ten years; the wife only plays with a dog instead of children (7). Whenever the narrator talks about Zimbabwe and how government is pulling down ancestral graves, Paul is totally unwilling to listen to him (75). This suggests that Paul has his vision in the Western nation and has forged new interests and relationships with the host community. In spite of sterility in marriage, he is able to face new challenges and maintain his sanity. Nevertheless, the narrator's hold on an imaginary mother culture signified by his mother's cardboard suitcase eats into his sanity.

Chikwava's emphasis on the difficulties of the migratory experience and its potential to turn immigrants into lunatics tends to silence a number of characters who view host nations as the place of their true purpose in life. His focus on conservative characters like the narrator, silences liberals like Aleck, Paul, Sekai, Shingi and the old man from Tulsa Hill Estate.

Wanner's *London, Cape Town, Joburg* is the story of two immigrants: Germaine and Martin. Although black, Martin is raised by an Irish foster father and has to migrate to South Africa to give his mulatto son a happy life in a black South Africa. His white British wife accompanies him to Cape Town and later, Johannesburg. Wanner avoids a linear plot and adopts flashback plot structure; the novel starts with the demise of Zuko, Martin and Germaine's only child. Zuko commits suicide and as the reader seeks to understand the cause, they are taken through a long-drawn-out flashback to arrive at it. Ball and Little observe that the use of flashback confirms how the character's life has been disrupted (175). Wanner suggests that racial otherness in the host nation has disrupted characters' lives. Among these disruptions is the ordeal Martin experiences on a stroll with his adoptive father; they meet a white person who shouts, "[t]hat is an Irish man with his little Monkey" (139). He therefore detests the possibility of his son, Zuko experiencing this racial otherness and migrates to South Africa.

In his review of the novel, Ndivo observes that many "socio-political and economic problems befall immigrants" (para, 4) in the context of departure rather than the return. Ndivo does not consider Martin within the trajectory of return perhaps because he has stayed in England since childhood. Such a perspective that sets aside Martin's reasons for leaving England is erroneous as it treats him like most economic immigrants the world over. Martin believes that being black, he and his son Zuko will be happy in Africa. It is however difficult to believe Wanner's suggestion after careful investigation of migrant characters in her work. On the contrary, most characters are happier in host nations than their nations of origin. Germaine, the heroine of the novel is not as happy in England as South Africa. After her marriage, she gets inconvenienced by her mother who has little regard for her privacy. She apparently overstays her welcome and Germaine asks, "[m]um when are you leaving?" (135), but her mother insists that she is enjoying life in their home. Germaine counters:

When Zuko was born, Martin's mum came through for a month. As soon as she left you came here and you have been here for two months. Mum, we really need our space and I'm sure Gianni misses you. And I'm not trying to be mean and we love you and the fact that

you love Zuko so much but we really need our space and I've got to do some work and the room you are using is my work room (136).

Aside from the mother's violation of Germaine's privacy, there is very limited physical space in England for her to carry on with ceramics. She musters courage and candidly tells the mother to leave. But when she goes to South Africa, Martin's mother, Sindiwe respects their privacy. Germaine says of her, "Sindiwe respected our privacy and wouldn't come into our bedroom, but she had this habit of standing at the door when she wanted something..." (153). Unlike Germaine's mother who has to be reminded of the daughter's privacy, Sindiwe (Martin's mother) wakes up one morning and says, "I am sure you children need some time alone to acclimatize" (153). Germaine is happy to enjoy her marriage without having to confront a parent in the mother nation. The working space in her host nation is cheap and spacious. Her brother in law, Liam, finds a rent free spacious room at Gugulethu, Cape Town, where she starts her work with a good number of women. Unlike England where Germaine teaches fine art to meet her own needs (46), in Cape Town, she mentors a group of African women thereby giving back to society (170).

Martin migrates from England to South Africa with hopes that his ancestral mother nation will offer greater opportunities for his son, Zuko. Traumatized by one incident in which one white man made racist comments about him (139), Martin makes a fateful decision that brings his son to ruin. In other words, Martin and his son Zuko are happier in their host nation, England than their mother nation. A punch line that characterizes Martin's life in London is "I am happy in the world and I want everyone to be happy" (58). He declares this after he starts courting Germaine, a White girl and therefore a member of the dominant group. His attempts to court Soraya, a member of his minority group had ended in a terrible break up after she returned to her mother nation (Arabia) and married an old man (109). Martin's work place exhibits the warmth of bonhomie, candour, openness and intelligent conversations on ideology:

It's Monday. We worked on Saturday till late. I drank too much yesterday and am hung over. So, what are you so happy about, O' Malley? One of my colleagues, Stuart asks and the others lean in for gossip. It's Monday. The sun is shining. I'm in the greatest city in the world, and it looks like soon it will be time for the conservatives and John major, what is there not to be happy about? (82-83).

Mike, Hindley and Stuart contribute to the conversation and it goes smoothly until he makes snide references towards Tara. Director Graham who has come in orders Stuart to apologize, which he does. Tara gives an open rejoinder describing Stuart as “sexist” and “stupid” (84). Martin portrays Londoners as people that are transparent and friendly. In spite of his difference of colour, no one relegates him at the office.

When he arrives in South Africa, the work place differs from London in ways that do not just curtail his ascent in career, but also frustrates him. Martin says, “[i]t is madness to discover that the one place where I have been made to feel my race the most is the place where the majority of the population looks like me” (180). Whereas Directors like Graham are qualified for their jobs, Manager Jaco in South Africa “hasn’t finished high school” (181) but had a vocational training unrelated to banking. When he starts his marketing job of bringing to the bank wealthy clients, all of them are rejected until he unearths the cause of his plight through Michelle: racism. All the managers that rejected Martin’s clients including Mr Oothuizen retract their earlier decisions when Michelle asks them to account for their action (182). Over lunch, she recounts her experience of how she was made to “run around doing almost nothing” (182) until in a party she came along with her black husband. One of the directors asks, “Mrs Michaels, is that your husband? ... forgive me, we thought you were colored” (183). She is promoted and handed greater responsibilities after they know that she is not mixed race. Black people are favored in South Africa and biracial people relegated.

Socially, Zuko is not happy with experiences in the so called mother nation. In his personal journal, he says that the decision to migrate to South Africa separates him from his friends in England (240). He also reveals that he is haunted by images of violence he has seen on television in South Africa. He sees the graphic image of a man being lynched during the xenophobic attacks in the country (239). It is in this very mother nation that Martin confronts the saddest moments of his life. It is while in his supposed paradise – the ancestral land, that he says, “[a] part of me has been ripped apart, stepped on, thrown into the rubbish bin. And just when I think I am almost fine...my son and heir is dead and it is all my fault” (6). Zuko commits suicide and Martin descends to the lowest stave of his family life. He is guilty and as much as he probably singles out negligence as his mishap, the return to the ancestral land is the true culprit. Before taking his life, Zuko reveals that he has been sexually abused by Martin’s elder brother, Liam. In the suicide note, he writes of the uncle:

I loved him as much as I loved my own father and mother. He was the person I ran to when I was angry with my mum for yelling at my dad and then yelling at me on Saturday. I felt safe with him and then on Saturday it happened... the bedside clock said 4.43 when he walked in. It was as if he was in a daze. He got in bed with me. I tried to move away but he pinned me down. ...I tried to struggle and I tried to scream. But he was pressing my head in the pillow and I knew no one else was in the house with us. Then he pushed my bum open and put his dick in me. I have never felt such pain. (332)

There are no such melancholy passages in Zuko's journal in England before Martin decides to migrate to his mother nation. The Black people he hopes will give his son endless possibilities turn out as agents that terminate his very existence. Liam, the sex pest is Martin's elder brother, richer and influential member of the ruling party. Even after Zuko reports the ordeal to Martin, he is too powerless do anything. In the same way, his biological father, Mtishali comes up with a scam called "Goldstreet" and defrauds Martin of all his savings (318). This is the contrary to his foster Irish father who raised him up with amazing affection (47).

Finally, Liam, Martin's elder brother migrates to South Africa under the illusion that his motherland is a haven of peace. He hates England with claims of racism and in his youth he gets into numerous fights with white colleagues; his teachers describe his as "aggressive and angry" (140). Liam even decides to learn his African language Isixhosa and returns to South Africa to achieve his dream happiness. It is ironical to learn that he falls in love with a Boer lady in South Africa possibly because of his exposure to European ways of life in England. He even changes his name to Swart Makoena; "Swart" being an Afrikaan name meaning "black" and "Makoena" his mother's maiden name (140). Liam unconsciously reconstructs his European self that had dominated his formative years. Conversely, his dream of happiness in the ancestral land starts disintegrating or changing for the worst. Martin describes Liam's wife, Jenny as "vicious" (140). Germaine sums up the marriage as a "a sordid tale of a gold-digging woman who married a man, had children with him, and then after wards tried to get him arrested on trumped-up charges because she'd found another lover - an older, richer man" (157). Liam describes the ordeal singling out race as the cause of his predicament. The reader is compelled to ask if his migration to South Africa is of any worth if the racism he fled in England ruins his marriage. Does Liam experience the paradise he aspired for in the return?

Such a dream is only realized through his absurd acts such as kissing Germaine on her lips under the mask of African culture. When Martin arrives

in South Africa with his white wife, Germaine, Liam, “[k]isses Martin on the mouth and his wife on the lips” (122), and tells Germaine, “[y]ou are wife of both of us. You married my little bra and in the event of the death, it’s my duty to take care of the wife my brother left behind” (123). Liam’s utterance sounds reasonable in the guise of African culture; however, other men in the cultural setting do not kiss visitors as he does. For example, Mtishali, Martin’s biological father does not greet visitors by kissing them on the lips. Moreover, Liam’s adopted son, Mxolisi is described as having “sweetest, saddest face,” (124). The reader is led to interrogate why the so called “sworn bachelor” is living alone in the house with a boy with “sweetest face?” Later, Zuko says in his personal journal, “[i]s this why Mxo ran away?” (332). Zuko suspects that Liam used to exploit Mxolisi sexually. The scandal at Liam’s house in Johannesburg confirms that Liam becomes a sex predator in his ancestral land. Zuko is terribly shocked when the Uncle his family trusts “rapes” him.

All migrant characters in Wanner’s novel do not find peace and identity in the return to their mother nation. Liam ends up marrying a white woman and changing his father’s name at the gate of his African home. But characters that move away from home and embrace a hybrid existence like Germaine experience a fairly peaceful existence. Does Wanner therefore speak for all migrant characters?

Conclusion

Although poststructuralists crown the intellectual as the voice of the voiceless or marginal groups, it is apparent from the foregoing discussion that he or she may silence some members of the marginal group because of their inherent idiosyncrasies. Whereas feminist writers claim to speak for women as a marginalized group, the women have different personalities and hold diverse opinions about Igbo culture in Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood*. It is interesting how Ona, the heroine’s mother is aggressive and courageous, two attributes reserved for men in patriarchal societies. Emecheta therefore fails to speak for Ona and other aforementioned women. In the same vein, political writers like Farah who speak for marginalized Africans during colonialism and socialist dictatorships silence those citizens who collaborate with the powers that be such as Cigaal and Haj Omer. Finally, migrant authors like Chikwava and Wanner that speak for immigrants who miss their motherland and dislike the migrant experience silence hybrid characters that yearn to prosper and settle in the host nation. Worse still, characters in Wanner’s *London, Cape Town, Joburg* are happier in their host nations than in mother nations. Martin’s migration to his mother nation results in acts racial and age othering that bar his career growth and lead to the termination of his family lineage. Zuko would possibly not have died prematurely had he remained in

England. Liam, the sex predator, likewise never finds happiness in his mother nation except in sex crimes. To reiterate Spivak's views, it is difficult for the writer to "articulate the differences" in the marginal group.

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