

ATILIM UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
ENGLISH CULTURE AND LITERATURE PH.D. PROGRAM

**A DECONSTRUCTIVE READING OF THE NIGERIAN SUBALTERN:
ZAYNAB ALKALI'S *THE STILLBORN*, BUCHI EMECHETA'S *KEHINDE*
AND SEFI ATTA'S *EVERYTHING GOOD WILL COME***

Ph.D. Dissertation

Yakut Akbay

Ankara – 2017

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Supervisor
Prof. Dr. Gülsen CANLI

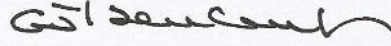
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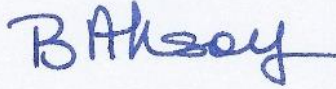
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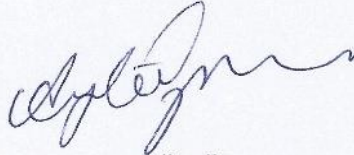
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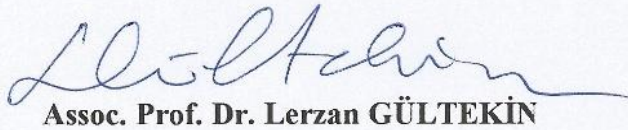
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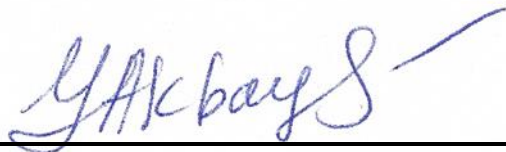
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Yakut AKBAY



ÖZ

[AKBAY, Yakut]. [Zaynab Alkali'nin *The Stillborn*, Buchi Emecheta'nın *Kehinde* ve Sefi Atta'nın *Everything Good Will Come* Eserlerindeki Nijeryalı Alt Sınıf Kadınlarının Durumunun Yapıbozucu Açısından Okunması], [Doktora Tezi, Ankara], [2017].

Bu çalışmanın amacı Gayatri Spivak'ın kadını özne olarak ele alan alt sınıfa yönelik karamsar yaklaşımının tüm alt sınıf kadınlar için geçerli olmadığını göstermektir. Alt sınıf kadının durumu, Nijeryalı kadınların yapıbozucu yaklaşım kapsamında irdelenmesi ile incelenecektir. Bu amaçla, Derrida'ya ait temel kavramlar, örneğin, fallogosantrizm, différance, düşünüm ve palimpsest, alt sınıf kadınların hayatını etkileyen kültürel unsurların incelenmesine uygulanacaktır. Ayrıca, ikinci ve üçüncü romanlar bağlamında kullanılacak olan Homi K. Bhabha'nın taklit, kendileme ve belirsizlik kavramları Nijeryalı alt sınıf kadınlarının durumunu kavramsallaştırmak amacıyla çalışmada kullanılacaktır. Nijeryalı kadın yazarlar tarafından yazılan romanların yapıbozucu okunması temelinde bu çalışma Nijeryalı alt sınıf kadının ne derece değişiklikler geçirdiğini ortaya çıkaracaktır. Bunu yaparken de değişik kültürel çevreler bünyesinde, Nijeryalı alt sınıf kadının kendisi ile ilgili farkındalık, kendine güven ve sonrasında kendini gerçekleştirmesine götüren yol izlenecektir. Böylece çalışma, Nijerya kültüründe geleneksel kadın kavramını yeniden tanımlamayı mümkün kılacak, Afrika Feminizmi olarak bilinen yerel kadın kuramının da geçerliliğini gösterecektir. Çalışma Spivak'ın alt sınıf kadının aksine, Nijeryalı alt sınıf kadının erkek egemen toplumda kendine alan oluşturabileceği sonucuna varacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Afrika feminizmi, alt sınıf, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, Jacques Derrida, sömürgecilik sonrası, yapıbozuculuk

ABSTRACT

[Akabay, Yakut]. [A Deconstructive Reading of the Nigerian Subaltern: Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn*, Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*], [Ph.D. Dissertation, Ankara], [2017].

The aim of this research is to defamiliarize Gayatri Spivak's pessimistic approach regarding the condition of the subaltern as a female subject. The position of the female subaltern will be examined in terms of the Nigerian woman within the framework of deconstructionist approach. To this end, Jacques Derrida's major concepts and neologisms, such as phallogocentrism, différance, ellipsis and palimpsest will be commonly applied in the study of particular cultural aspects affecting the development of the subaltern woman. In addition, Homi K. Bhabha's post-colonial concepts such as mimicry, appropriation and ambivalence will be incorporated into the study of the second and third novels to conceptualise the position of the Nigerian female subaltern in terms of cultural difference. A deconstructive reading will reveal to what extent the Nigerian female subaltern has undergone changes. It will be performed within different cultural contexts tracing the trajectory of the subaltern that ultimately leads her to self-realisation, self-reliance and subsequent self-attainment. The study will prove the validity of the vernacular female theory known as African feminism, which will make it possible to redefine the traditional concept of womanhood within Nigerian culture. The research will conclude that as opposed to Spivak's subaltern, the Nigerian subaltern carves out her own space from which she can speak for herself in the male-dominated society.

Keywords: African feminism, deconstruction, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, Jacques Derrida, post-colonial, subaltern

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INTRODUCTION

In most African countries, women are faced with a great barrier of self-realization. This is particularly experienced in the sociocultural sphere where women are the quiet members of both their community and homes. Nigeria is one of African countries where women are compelled to attain self-fulfilment in order to be recognized as equal members of society. This research examines the transition that Nigerian women have undergone since declaring independence from Great Britain in 1960. Accordingly, the project reveals how this process has taken place and to what extent it has affected women in the Nigerian society.

The research applies the concept of the subaltern developed by Gayatri Spivak. Although the term 'subaltern' was first introduced by the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci, the study will specifically be limited to Spivak's subaltern, i.e. only the subaltern as a female subject will be focused on. Spivak has performed a gendered analysis by looking at the situation of Indian women. The misrepresentation of Indian women by the male-dominated discourse leads Spivak to the pessimistic conclusion that "there is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 307). Since both Indian and Nigerian societies are patriarchal in nature, this makes it possible to adopt the concept of the subaltern as a female subject in order to examine the position of women within Nigerian cultural context. The aim of the research is to defamiliarize Spivak's pessimistic approach regarding the condition of the female subaltern in terms of Nigerian women arguing that the subaltern can speak. The study will make use of Derrida's deconstructionist ideas as well as Homi K. Bhabha's post-colonial concepts that are incorporated into the research to conceptualise the position of the contemporary female subaltern in terms of cultural difference.

It is worthwhile to note that a deconstructive reading of the Nigerian subaltern in the selected literary texts will promote a deeper understanding of Nigerian women's writing as well. In this respect, the research seeks to fill the gap created by the male-dominated literary tradition that pervaded both colonial and postcolonial literatures

produced on the African continent. Within this context, women were described in terms of binary oppositions to whom male writers attributed exclusively negative qualities. They were generally regarded as dependent, voiceless and vulnerable, which made them appear 'doubly colonized'. Being seen as inferior to men both physically and intellectually, their main functions were to bear children and take care of the family. Such false characterizations and limitations imposed on women subsequently led them to questioning their position in society, which has also found its reflection in literature paving the way for the creation of Nigerian female stories or herstories. By means of literature, Nigerian women try to reconstruct, or rather, reconfigure their identities misrepresented by the patriarchal discourse. This serves as a feasible response to male-authored literatures by establishing the authentic image of Nigerian women. Hence, the emergence of African women's writing is necessary to resist meanings of womanhood provided by men. Through their personal experiences, female writers have tried to portray assertive female characters who, in the process of searching for their true identity, attain self-awareness and ultimately gain recognition in their communities.

African women play an important role in the development of education and literature. Their initial art was verbal and didactic making a notable contribution to oral literature. They transmitted the mores and values of their society to the next generation by way of vernacular stories, speeches, songs and satires that have largely provided the material for modern African literature (Taiwo 1). However, despite their preeminence in the oral tradition that has shaped the lives of countless generations, their recognition in terms of the written literature is not always forthcoming (Busby xiii). Margaret Busby asserts that what is regarded as African Literature, usually written in European languages, has a recent history dating from the 1950s with the publication of works such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (xiii). Busby also expresses her pessimistic approach regarding the absence of women from most early anthologies of African writing. While male writers initially focused on the theme of colonization by Western powers, women, in addition, had to struggle against colonization by their own men and the traditional norms by which formal education was reserved exclusively for men (xiii).

In her interview with the Nigerian writer Adeola James, Ama Ata Aidoo comes up with a different perspective regarding African female writers. She asserts that African women's writing largely depends on critics' recognition since it is the critics "who put people on pedestals or sweep them under the carpet, or put them in a cupboard, lock the door and throw the key away" (qtd. in James 11). The author criticises the double standard of the society privileging male-authored literature. Subscribing to Aidoo's views, Adeola James expresses her dissatisfaction with African male writers for grudging acknowledgment of female writing (5). She illustrates her viewpoint through African woman writer Bessie Head, whose exceptional contribution to literature was recognized posthumously. This biased attitude shows that female writers have to overcome many obstacles in order to receive serious attention in the male-dominated literary world.

Due to the complexity of African studies, which makes it difficult to carry out a consistent survey into the heterogeneous cultures of the continent, the research will be limited to a particular country. This approach may lead to a more coherent and systematic study into the culture of post-independent Nigeria considering its diversity as well. The first chapter of the research covers Jacques Derrida's deconstructive criticism. His trajectory is explained through a number of texts in which he explored contradictions and binaries by suggesting his own ideas, concepts and neologisms. The most prominent of them are phallogocentrism, dissemination, *différance*, rebus, aporia, trace, ellipsis, arcanum and palimpsest. These concepts are explored in Derrida's foundational texts: *Of Grammatology* (1967), *Writing and Difference* (1967) and *Dissemination* (1975). Subsequently, the research makes use of these concepts to explain the meanings of certain signs and sign processes conveyed through sounds, words, images, symbols, metaphors, ellipsis and other devices. The theoretical framework of the research also expounds Homi K. Bhabha's key concepts, such as appropriation, ambivalence and mimicry in terms of cultural difference. Further, the concept of the subaltern as a female subject is dealt with in Spivak's famous article "Can the Subaltern Speak?". At the end of the essay, Spivak remains unconvinced that the subaltern woman can find a successful method to make herself heard by the 'centre'.

The second chapter of the research provides historical, social and cultural background of Nigeria. In addition, the role of female writers in Nigerian literature and the influences that have helped to shape their consciousness are discussed at length. In this respect, the role of Flora Nwapa, the first Nigerian woman to write a full-length novel recreating life and traditions from a woman's viewpoint, is undeniable. She is known as the first woman novelist to be published in the English language in Great Britain. She achieved international recognition with her novels *Efuru* (1966) and *Idu* (1970). In her novels, she deals with the themes of marriage, mother care, family life, the position of women in traditional society and orders in tribal communities (Taiwo 47). Since Nwapa represents the first generation female writers, her pioneering views in literature have been followed and developed by other Nigerian women novelists such as Zaynab Alkali and Buchi Emecheta. Emecheta admits to being heavily influenced by Flora Nwapa considering her a source of inspiration in her literary career. However, with her fiction, Emecheta takes her legacy further by establishing much stronger female characterizations. She paves the way for the emergence of second-generation female writers who create a new image of a contemporary Nigerian woman by redefining her role in society.

The third chapter is based on a deconstructive reading of the Nigerian female subaltern in the following novels: Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn* (1984), Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* (1994) and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005). Since the novels are set in different cultural contexts, the position of the female subaltern will be examined in terms of the milieu within which she lives. In the first novel, which is set within both rural and urban Nigeria, the study explores the role of traditional and modern values in shaping the vision of the female subaltern. It also aims to reveal the significance of urban reality in the female subaltern's self-realisation. In the second novel, the research looks into the impact of cultural difference on the growing awareness of the female subaltern that ultimately helps her become a self-reliant person. The study of the third novel examines how the self of the female subaltern is shaped in relation to her native culture. Since the research aims to recreate the image of the Nigerian woman in the novels under consideration, any kind of generalization concerning other Nigerian or African post-colonial novels will be avoided.

During the research, the female subaltern will be handled from the viewpoint of African feminism, otherwise known as womanism. Since its introduction to African literature, this concept has been misunderstood and regarded as part of Western feminism. The study will clarify why Nigerian female writers, such as Zaynab Alkali, Buchi Emecheta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, dissociate themselves from Western feminism. To this end, the study will shed light on the vernacular female perspective, which will make it possible to better examine the condition of the Nigerian subaltern woman. African feminism will be treated from various dimensions, such as womanhood, motherhood and sisterhood. These female attributions will be accentuated as significant cultural aspects empowering the female subaltern against the repressive forces of Nigerian culture. Ultimately, the study will reveal how the Nigerian female subaltern carves out her own space from which she can speak for herself in the male-dominated society.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

1.1. Derrida's Deconstruction as a Critical Approach

The critical approach known as deconstruction is often dated to 1966 – the year in which the French philosopher Jacques Derrida read a paper titled “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” at a conference on structuralism at the Hopkins University in Baltimore, which was later published in his book *Writing and Difference* (Rorty 166). In fact, the lecture intended to popularize structuralism, a type of analysis that interprets elements of language as something embedded in larger structures (166). However, this text has marked the starting point for post-structuralism defining the fundamental principles and concepts of deconstruction (166). It is also noteworthy that Jacques Derrida never identified himself with a common movement (166).

Derrida starts his speech by reflecting “perhaps something has occurred in the history of the concept of structure that could be called an ‘event’” (*Writing and Difference* 351). Trying to give a specific name to that ‘event’, the author argues that it involves changes in structuralism, structure, or rather, the structurality of structure (353). In fact, the speech exposes the weaknesses of structuralism. Derrida asserts that all of Western thought since Plato is based on the idea of centralisation, which is a structural policy in which decision-making authority is concentrated at the top of the hierarchy (353). Derrida equates the Western tradition of logocentrism with his concept of the metaphysics of presence and argues that history of logocentrism is one vast metaphysics of presence in which “all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the centre have always designated an invariable presence” (353). Through this concept, Derrida explains that logocentrism emphasizes the desire for immediate access to meaning privileging presence over absence (353). Within this context, structuralists believe that all things have underlying structures. Since structuralism depends upon structures, and structures depend upon centres, Derrida calls into question the very idea of a stable centre. He accuses structuralist discourses

of privileging the centre, which does not only organize the structure but above all, ensures that the organizing principle of the structure limits what might be called the play of the structure (352).

By bringing up the key features of structuralism, Derrida reveals the inconsistencies existing in this approach. He points out that the centre prevents the transformation or substitution of the elements that constitute the parts of a larger structure (352). This points to the fact that while the centre tries to govern the structure, it escapes structurality (352). This attitude contradicts the structuralist perspective by which the meaning is defined relationally through other elements in the structure and the centre is supposed to be at the centre of the totality (352). Thus, the centre appears to be both within and outside the structure, thereby refuting the classical thought that the centre belongs to the totality. Derrida infers that “the centre is not the centre” and that “the totality has its centre elsewhere” (352). It follows that there is no centre and that the centre is not a fixed site; rather, it serves as a function by which an infinite number of sign-substitutions come into play (354). This is the moment when “in the absence of a centre or origin, everything [becomes] discourse” making room for play (354). Accordingly, the signified becomes undistinguishable from the signifier and the play becomes a play of signification (354). As a result, signs, that is, words can have any meaning in a boundless, infinite play.

Derrida refers to Lévi-Strauss' *The Savage Mind* to explain how bricolage operates within particular structure paving the way for deconstruction. Lévi-Strauss explains that the bricoleur is someone who uses ‘the means at hand’, that is, the instruments he finds at his disposition despite their heterogeneity (qtd. in *Writing and Difference* 360). Derrida maintains that every discourse is bricoleur and that the engineer who is opposed to bricoleur should be the one who constructs the totality of his language, syntax, and lexicon (360). In this sense, the engineer is a myth (360). The author argues that the analysis of bricolage can be applied to literary criticism since it is “critical language itself” (360). It becomes a metaphor for philosophical and literary critiques, illustrating Derrida's previous argument regarding the necessity of using the language at hand.

For Derrida, there is nothing to be studied beyond philosophy and it is a realm that cannot be completely deconstructed (364). Instead, the author proceeds to deconstruct empiricism. The author believes that this doctrine leads to totalization of language, which he strongly opposes (365). While totalization constitutes a menace to the discourse that Derrida attempts to formulate, nontotalization, instead of limitations, offers the concept of play (365). Moreover, in view of the fact that language excludes totalization, the meaning-making process becomes the play of substitutions (365). As a result, the totality of language loses its validity and usefulness, which enables signs or words to acquire any meaning (365). Hence, the author criticizes Levi-Strauss' structural views based on empirical evidence that suggest only a sample of sentences to study the grammar of language since it is impossible to build the totality of language in order to study its grammar (365). This movement of play, as Derrida argues, permitted by the lack or absence of a centre or origin, is the movement of supplementarity (365). The author also adds that this supplementary nature of the signifier is floating thus it offers temporality (365).

Derrida concludes that there are thus two ways to interpret structure: while one seeks to decipher a truth or an origin avoiding play, the other, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism (370). These two ways are irreconcilable, nevertheless, together, they share the field called the social sciences (370). The first way was dominant throughout human history; the second way is only emerging and yet to be determined (370). However, for now, as Derrida argues, "we are only catching a glimpse" of what can be called unnamable and formless (370).

With "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", Derrida's work began to gain international prominence. In 1967, the author published three books, of which the book *Of Grammatology* is considered a foundational text for deconstructive criticism. The English translation by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak was first published in 1976. In the first part of the book, the author introduces the problem of language arguing that it has never been simply one problem among others (*Of Grammatology* 6). Throughout the Western philosophical tradition, writing has been considered as merely a derivative form of speech or a representation of the spoken language (6). However, Derrida believes that this attitude is changing (6). He argues

that gradually everything gathered under the name of language is transferred, or at least summarised under the name of writing (6). The concept of writing is no longer derivative or auxiliary; moreover, it is beginning to go beyond the extension of language (7). This leads Derrida to the idea that the advent of writing paves the way for the advent of the play (7). Hence, the author calls for a new science – grammatology, which would be a new critical approach (7).

Demonstrating the transference of language in general into writing, the author shows that writing has come to dominate the method of linguistic analysis. He criticizes Ferdinand de Saussure¹ for remaining in the logocentric tradition in his linguistic analysis of the meaning (30). With his influential book, *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), Saussure founded the major concepts within structural linguistics thereby contributing to the development of meaning making in language known as semiotics.

According to Saussure, the sign consists of two components: signifier and signified (*Course in General Linguistics* 16). He regards signifier as sound-image, which is tangible represented by written symbols, whereas signified is an abstraction standing for concept, which is studied by means of signifier (15). In doing so, Saussure makes a clear-cut distinction between signifier and signified, which Derrida applies in his deconstructive analysis to reveal the inconsistencies between speech and writing. Basing his ideas upon Saussure's paradoxes, Derrida makes his own inference regarding the origin of language. Since speech is dependent on writing and the latter manages to usurp the function of the spoken word, Derrida reveals how inner meaning merges with outer representation or "representation mingles with what it represents" (*Of Grammatology* 36).

Derrida asserts that "in this play of representation, the point of origin becomes ungraspable"; accordingly, there is no longer a source, a spring or an origin, since "what is reflected is split in itself" (36). He puts forward that the reflection "splits what it doubles" (36). The author embarks on the idea of usurpation and claims that it has

¹ Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) a Swiss linguist and semiotician whose "ideas laid a foundation for many significant developments both in linguistics and semiology in the 20th century" (Robins 199).

always existed in the relationship between writing and speech. Referring to various sources, particularly to Rousseau and Saussure, Derrida argues that the displacement of speech by writing is a result of people's forgetfulness. He calls this process usurpation by which writing functions as a means of improving memory thereby supplanting the spoken word (37). Derrida proposes elaborate research into a critique of the relationship between speech and writing pointing out that the role of writing must not be underestimated (39).

Having exposed the inconsistencies regarding the binary relationship between writing and speech, Derrida introduces the term 'trace'. Trace is one of the most important concepts in Derridean deconstruction. By launching this term, he passes to the next step of deconstruction. Here, once othered by Derrida becomes part of an entirety, which means that the author eliminates binary opposition and creates an entity in which both inside and outside are indistinguishable. In this case, writing that has previously been regarded as something exterior becomes an indispensable part of language. Derridean trace is "unmotivated but not capricious" (46). He puts the trace before the entity and suggests that "there is neither symbol nor sign but a becoming-sign of the symbol" (47).

Derrida furthers his definition of the sign by asserting that "from the moment there is meaning there are nothing but signs" and "[we] think only in signs" (50). The inclusion of the play in meaning making amounts to ruining the notion of the sign, which points to the absence of the transcendental signified (50). This leads to the destruction of the concept of the metaphysics of presence that guarantees an unarguable meaning for a text (50). In this respect, writing is seen as a play within a language (50). Derrida suggests replacing semiology by grammatology: "I shall call it grammatology... Since the science does not yet exist, no one can say what it would be; but it has a right to existence, a place staked out in advance. Linguistics is only a part of that general science...; the laws discovered by grammatology will be applicable to linguistics" (51). The fact that grammatology will have its boundaries separated from linguistics has its advantages. On the one hand, it will enable writing to counter logocentric repression and the dependence upon linguistics (51). On the other hand, it will liberate semiology from the field of linguistics since the latter is organized to be

the centre and telos of semiology dominating it as the master-sign (51). Derrida argues that in spite of being more general and more comprehensive than linguistics, semiology is seen as a branch of linguistics.

Derrida asserts that inverting the order of binary oppositions that favours speech over writing and placing writing in the centre will not serve the purpose of the deconstructive approach. Since neither the word 'speech' nor the word 'writing' is adequate to expose the play of differences in meaning making, rather, both speech and writing are a play of difference (56). Thus, Derrida develops the concept of deconstruction by inserting a non-existent form of writing that he calls arche-writing (56). Emphasizing the necessity of this concept, he also explains that he could not have called it simply writing since writing stands for vulgar concept and could not have imposed itself historically being "destined to signify the most formidable difference" (56). Derrida virtually stands for the rights of writing by presenting its miserable situation to which it was exposed historically by supposedly posing danger to the living speech and threatening its presence (57). At this point, he reminds of the importance of his concept called trace that signifies the absent part of the sign's presence (57). He describes this as the need to show that every present bears the trace of an absent which defines it (57). Therefore, in meaning making, the signifier can be neither wholly present nor wholly absent (57).

Derrida deconstructs the vulgar concept of writing by the concept of arche-writing. By doing so, he excludes the concept of experience, which he considers most unwieldy here since it belongs to the history of metaphysics (60). As experience has always designated the relationship with a presence, whether that relationship had the form of consciousness or not, he suggests using it under erasure or, as he puts it, "sous rature" (60). For him, it is the only way to escape empiricism and the naïve critiques of experience at the same time (60). He claims that the concept of experience leads to naïve objectivism and thus, a transcendentalism, which he puts into question (61). On the other hand, by devising the concept of the trace, he aims at doing away with the Western philosophical thought that rests everything upon the centre or origin. According to Derrida, origin does not exist at all, which means the trace is the

disappearance of origin (61). In this case, both writing and speaking are put under erasure. He indicates this concept by drawing an X through them (61).

According to Derrida, the trace is the *différance*, which brings forth both appearance and signification. Derrida points to the meaning of this word originated from the French verb 'différer' meaning both 'to differ' and 'to defer' (65). By this, he challenges the concept of immediacy and presence of meaning implying the instability in language and the fact that meaning in language is always different and deferred (65). Further, Derrida introduces another term, 'the hinge' or 'la brisure' closely related to the above-mentioned relationship between signified and signifier. Borrowing the term from the French critic Laporte, the author explains how he decided to apply this concept in his work. The hinge is a single word evoking difference and articulation at the same time, which points to double meaning (66). It shows that a sign, which is the unity of a signifier and a signified, cannot be produced within an absolute presence (66). This term definitely avoids the metaphysical absolutes of presence and absence (66). The author believes that the concepts of present, past, and future – the metaphysical concept of time in general – cannot adequately describe the structure of the trace (67). He points to the impossibility of immediate presence, which always carries the trace of the past (67). In this respect, the hinge functions as a bridge between past and present, or as Derrida describes, the "folding joint of a shutter" that holds while dividing (65).

Having analysed the relationship between grammatology and linguistics, Derrida infers that the former is a positive science since the primary aim of grammatology is the untangling of logocentric preconceptions embedded in philosophical texts (74). Dealing with the history of writing, the author holds nineteenth-century scholars responsible for a heavy heritage of illusions and misunderstandings concerning the theory of the written sign (75). Derrida suggests rereading what has been confused for us (75).

Dealing with the relationship between speech and writing, Derrida suggests another concept borrowed from Rousseau's philosophical texts called supplementarity. He grasps the fact that *suppléer*, *supplément*, in French has two

meanings; it means both an ‘addition’ and a ‘substitute’ (146). The logic of supplement distorts the neatness by which the metaphysical binary oppositions are arranged. In other words, speech and writing are no longer opposed, nor are they identical. Writing is both added to speech and replaces it. In this way, Derrida also problematizes the identities of both speech and writing implying that one cannot exist without the other. Derrida’s reading shows how the doubleness of the concept ‘supplement’ in Rousseau’s text creates ambiguity (149). It becomes impossible to put a clear-cut line between speech and writing since the shadow presence of the other meaning, or as Derrida puts it, penumbra, is always there to undermine the distinction (149). As a result, the text becomes a play of presence and absence or a play of differences. From this point, Derrida asserts that since deconstruction emerges out of warring forces of signification within the text itself, “there is nothing outside of the text” (158).

Derrida’s another major book is *Dissemination* published in 1975. In this book, the author blurs the boundaries between philosophy and literature to carry out a study arguing that language has always been haunted by the instability in meaning. This book is particularly important in the sense that it contains a number of concepts that have recently been applied in literary criticism while performing a close reading of literary texts. One of the prominent neologisms introduced by Derrida in *Dissemination* is phallogocentrism, by which he criticises Western metaphysics for focusing exclusively on the male perspective. Phallogocentrism refers to the system of two thoughts: phallogocentric and logocentric. Phallogocentrism is formulated as a concept synonymous with logocentrism based on the prioritizing of speech over writing (*Dissemination* 90). In this respect, Derrida’s concept of phallogocentrism is applied to literary texts to criticise the tendency of subordinating the feminine to the masculine through the power of language.

The dichotomized idea of pharmakon is one of the central issues dealt with in *Dissemination*. Derrida asserts that as it stands for both a poison and a healing medicine, there appears the play of differences that Plato tries to stop and repress by

insisting on only one meaning. Since Derrida's discussion of the *Phaedrus*² focuses upon the translation of the single word 'pharmakon', the author underlines how vital the undecidability between poison and remedy can be. The fact that there is no fixed meaning gives rise to the play of differences in the Derridean sense. Accordingly, this infinite play of differences leads to dissemination, instability and continual movement of the meaning of a particular word (138).

Derrida introduces also the eponymous term called dissemination, which stands for the dispersal of meaning and provides a play of signification that undermines the central or ultimate signified in a text. It is characterised by supplements and substitution games that are multiplied ad infinitum (268). In the process of interminable substitution, dissemination also represents the affirmation of undecidable ambivalence and doubleness of meaning (268). Through the concept of dissemination, Derrida draws the analogy between writing and dissemination. He argues that writing is similar to dissemination, in the sense that it is also a wasteful scattering of words without meaning. Writing acts as an image, semblance or representation of speech. Derrida calls it 'simulacrum' or 'a faint trace' and explains the position of writing as opposed to logos or speech. Writing is equated with the qualities of dissemination having weak and superfluous seeds that give rise to short-lived produce; whereas logos or speech has strong and fertile seeds engendering necessary and long-lasting produce (150).

The author concludes his essay by reminding of the ambiguous relationship between such binaries as a philosopher and a sophist, inside and outside, good memory and evil memory and states that the marginalized sides of the aforementioned binaries serve as supplements to the favoured sides. Hence, Derrida overthrows binaries, offering, instead, a structure in which all elements are intertwined and subject to repeated analysis. As a result, the so-called purity is disrupted by the exterior factor, that is to say, writing, which always penetrates into speech functioning as a

² The *Phaedrus*, written by Plato, is a dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus. The whole dialogue is performed through direct speech (Ferrari 2). The dialogue mainly deals with the discussion on love and the art of rhetoric (2).

complement. This attitude confirms the author's belief in the idea that "il n'y a pas de hors texte", translated from French as "there is nothing outside of the text" or "there is no outside-text" (*Of Grammatology* 158).

Derrida suggests that the text consists of infinite layers containing illusory presence never really arriving in the present. For him, "everything happens in the intertext and in the final analysis what happens is nothing" (*Dissemination* 335). Thus, it is always possible for a text to become new since "the blanks open up its structure to an indefinitely disseminated transformation" (345). Derrida infers that the more we try to conceptualize the term 'dissemination' the more elusive it becomes. His ideas of dissemination and *différance* lead him to the plural logic of *aporia*, which he elaborately deals with in his eponymous book. Derrida asserts that any way of reading texts excludes certain possibilities regarding them literally impossible. In this respect, his concept of *aporia* paves the way for something that is not necessarily negative, rather, it is 'the event of a coming or of a future advent' (*Aporias* 8). He argues that due to *aporia*, "no context is absolutely saturable or saturating" and "no context can determine meaning to the point of exhaustiveness;" therefore, "the context neither produces nor guarantees impassable borders" (9). Derrida's *aporia* undermines rhetorical foundations in philosophical and literary texts generating a state of puzzlement and perplexity.

Examining the relationship between written and spoken language, Derrida comes up with another concept called 'palimpsest', which etymologically comes from an Ancient Greek word 'palimpsestus', which means 'scraped again' (*Merriam-Webster* 834). It is defined as a document (a parchment or tablet) that is wiped clean in order to be used again (834). In addition, it denotes "something having usually diverse layers or aspects apparent beneath the surface" (834). Derrida adopts the idea of palimpsest in order to examine the relationship between the reinscribed text and the so-called original text inferring that one is the trace or *différance* of the other (*Margins of Philosophy* 211). In this respect, the concept of palimpsest will be applied to a deconstructive reading of the Nigerian female subaltern to conceptualise her position within a particular cultural context.

Derridean deconstruction has made revolutionaries in various fields as well as literary criticism. Owing to this postmodern approach, literary texts as well as the canonized have been revisited and reinterpreted paving the way for the exploration of new arguments in literature. Deconstructive reading of literary texts first focuses on the binary oppositions upon which both the privileged and the marginalized sides are constructed. It explains how these opposites are related and why the privileged is always favoured. Next, this critical approach temporarily subverts the hierarchy through a deconstructive reversal and views the repressed side as central. In the final step, both sides of the opposition are described in a play of difference with an unstable meaning. This perspective also employs a wide range of language devices and branches of linguistics as well as the terms and neologisms introduced by Jacques Derrida, such as phallogocentrism, dissemination, ellipsis, rebus, différance, arcanum, pharmakon and palimpsest. All these concepts will be widely employed in the study of the selected literary texts.

1.2. Homi K. Bhabha's Key Concepts Within Post-Colonial Studies

Homi K. Bhabha is one of the most important thinkers in the influential movement in cultural theory called post-colonial criticism (Huddart 1). His work develops a set of challenging concepts that are central to post-colonial theory, such as hybridity, mimicry, difference, ambivalence (Huddart 1). Borrowing some ideas belonging to deconstructive and poststructuralist approaches, the author applies them in his key text *The Location of Culture* to rethink the traditional views of cultural identity in the process of decolonisation. He describes them as the restrictive concepts disallowing the articulation of cultural difference (*The Location of Culture* 55). Instead, he comes up with flexible and controversial ideas regarding the theory of cultural difference by introducing new concepts within the frame of post-colonial criticism, such as ambivalence, interstice, liminality, enunciation and the Third Space.

Bhabha underscores the notion of cultural difference rather than cultural diversity in the revision of colonial history (49). He regards it as a more accommodating attitude in the articulation of culture that makes it possible to build the concept of cultural identity (50). On the other hand, he argues that cultural diversity is

based on empirical and pre-given knowledge, whereas culture is not pre-given, on the contrary, it must be uttered (50). For this, he introduces the term 'enunciation', which is the act of utterance of cultural difference (50). In order to clarify this concept, the author refers to Fanon by reminding his words concerning the time of liberation, by means of which he challenges the so-called constant principles acting as safeguards during the colonial period (51). He asserts that these tenets are undergoing radical changes that will ultimately lead to occult instability (51). Since Bhabha's enunciation regards culture as something uncertain and undecidable, the signifiatory boundaries of culture are also called into question by which "meanings and values are (mis)read or signs are misappropriated" (50). According to Bhabha, cultural enunciation is the place of utterance problematizing the division of past and present, tradition and modernity at the level of cultural representation (51). These binaries are intertwined in that in signifying the present, for instance, something is repeated or interpreted in the name of tradition or pastness (52). He implies that colonial histories and cultures urge us to transform our perception of cultural identification and cross-cultural relations and negate the homogenizing effects of cultural signs (52). Thus, the author defines enunciation as a mediator standing between binary oppositions. Bhabha opposes the unity or totality of cultures, which is the discourse created to explain the nature of colonial period. He asserts that cultural system is not unitary and sufficient in itself (52). To clarify this argument, the author equates his concept of cultural enunciation with Derrida's *différance* of writing. In the Derridean sense, *différance* ensures the production of meaning as well as the fact that meaning is never simply mimetic and transparent (53). Similarly, the enunciation of culture takes place in the Third Space, which makes the structure of meaning ambivalent and destroys that misrepresentation of cultural purity and integrity (54). Since this enunciatory position ensures that cultural signs and symbols have no primordial unity or fixity, they can be subjected to repeated interpretations and appropriations (55).

In his essay titled "Interrogating Identity", Bhabha reviews Fanon's approach to the issue of self and other asserting that Fanon speaks from the area of ambivalence where 'black skin' and 'white masks' is not a neat division, rather, it is a doubling image of "being in at least two places at once" (64). Therefore, Bhabha seeks to make

corrections to Fanon's views since the latter's definition of the colonial identity as the colonialist Self and the colonized Other is not adequate (64). Instead, he suggests dealing with the issue from the liminal position or liminality (64). This concept of in-betweenness stands against the Manichaeic tendency in Fanon's work (79). In fact, Bhabha's views on cultural difference evoke Derridean deconstruction particularly in his definition of identity. He argues that for identification, identity is not a finished product describing it as "the problematic process of access to an image of totality", whereas the image "marks the site of an ambivalence" (73). Its representation is split between presence and absence by which the appearance of reality is deferred (73). Bhabha does not subscribe to Fanon's polarized views regarding the colonized and the colonizer since such approach does not offer hope for reconciliation of this binary opposition (88). According to Bhabha, Fanon's disavowal of the Other aggravates the process of identification as a result of which identity and aggressivity are twinned (88).

Another aspect of colonialism that Bhabha examines with particular care is the discourse of stereotypes. In his essay titled "The Other Question", Bhabha seeks to provide a clearer explanation of what he calls a theory of colonial discourse. He argues that one of the significant aspects of both colonial and post-colonial discourses is their attitude towards "the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness" (94). However, fixity is a paradoxical mode of representation. On the one hand, it stands for rigidity and unchanging order, on the other, it implies disorder and repetition (94). Similarly, the stereotype is a form of knowledge and identification that straddles both sides signifying what is already known and something that must be repeated to ensure its currency (95). This discrepant attitude leads to the challenging of the idea of fixity rooted in Eurocentric narratives. Thus, to recognize the stereotype as an ambivalent mode of knowledge and power, one should call into question the unchangeable and rigid relationship between discourse and politics, since to judge the stereotyped image based on pre-given political norms means "to dismiss it, not to displace it" (95).

It becomes obvious from the aforementioned assertions that Bhabha provides dual explanation of the concept of the stereotype within the colonial discourse. Subsequently, Bhabha implies that this perspective should be replaced by regarding

all forms of colonial identification as modes of differentiation (96). In doing so, Bhabha tries to redefine the concept of the stereotype within the colonial discourse. The author asserts that the difference of colonial discourse is an apparatus of power activating both “the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences” (100). Bhabha makes use of Derrida’s concept of play to explain how this dichotomy functions within the colonial system. On the one hand, the colonized are constructed as the other; on the other, the objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types in order to justify colonisation and to establish systems of administration (101). Thus, in accordance with colonial construction, the colonized is “at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible” (101). This paradox reveals the fact that the fundamental difference of the other is disavowed. Through such reasoning, Bhabha implies that the concept of otherness, in much the same way as the stereotype, is not static, on the contrary, it is prone to change.

In his essay titled “Of Mimicry and Man”, Bhabha deals with another concept introduced within the colonial discourse called mimicry. The author starts the essay by quoting from Jacques Lacan, who argued that that “the effect of mimicry is camouflage” which is “not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background” (qtd. in *Location of Culture* 121). By this quotation, Bhabha sets out to rethink the concept of mimicry. He claims that the discourse of English colonialism “often speaks in a tongue that is forked, not false” (122). For this, he regards mimicry as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge (122). Bhabha argues that colonial mimicry is “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (122). By this argument, he implies that reforming and civilizing the Other, the colonizer still preserves a sense of difference (122). Thus, Bhabha regards mimicry as another ambivalent concept created by the colonial discourse. Since the discourse of mimicry is built around ambivalence, it must constantly produce slippage for the sake of difference, which is itself a process of disavowal (122). This indeterminacy leads Bhabha to the idea of deconstruction by which mimicry becomes “the sign of a double articulation” (122). On the one hand, mimicry functions as a strategy of reform

and discipline that constructs the ‘Other’; on the other, mimicry appears as the sign of difference giving rise to insurrection on the part of the colonised, which poses a threat to colonial power (123). Due to this incompleteness, the colonized becomes almost the same as the colonizer but never quite corresponds with the system governing both of them.

Homi K. Bhabha’s ideas are mainly based on deconstruction and post-structuralism. In this respect, such concepts as mimicry and hybridity, which the author rethinks and re-evaluates, appear to be slippery and elusive. His arguments question particular values of the colonial discourse suggesting instability and disavowal. This attitude leads to undecidability, which produces ambivalence challenging the narrative of Eurocentrism. Ultimately, Bhabha offers no solution for the issue of cultural difference since he finds any kind of polarization dangerous. Bhabha’s post-colonial concepts are widely applied in literary criticism to reconsider the tenets of colonial histories and cultures.

1.3. Spivak’s Concept of The Subaltern

The concept of the subaltern³ has gained particular prominence in post-colonial theory since the Indian scholar Gayatri Spivak reviewed the issue in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. Spivak is preoccupied with several points concerning the notion of the subaltern suggested by the Subaltern Studies Group. She problematizes the stratification grid describing colonial social production at large proposed by Ranajit Guha (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 284). Since Guha uses people and subaltern as synonymous terms to each other, Spivak questions the position of the subaltern and asks what taxonomy can fix such a space (285). She points to the fact that since the subaltern subject does not belong to a particular social group, then “the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced” (287). She goes on to add that “in the context of colonial

³ The concept of the subaltern was first adopted by the Italian philosopher and politician Antonio Gramsci to describe the social groups who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes (Gramsci 52). Further, subalternity was adapted to post-colonial studies to refer to the state of subordination in South Asian society in terms of class, caste and gender (Guha 1). The founder of the Subaltern Studies Group Ranajit Guha, categorised subaltern classes as social groups representing the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those who have been described as the elite (8).

production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak” and “the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (287).

The author argues that the question of ‘woman’ seems more problematic by arguing that “if you are poor, black and female, you get it in three ways” (294). Hence, Spivak develops a gendered analysis of the subaltern by examining the situation of Indian women and their representation in Western discourses. She focuses on a particular context where ‘sati’ or widow sacrifice may choose to burn herself on the husband’s funeral pyre (297). She describes this tradition as “the rite that was not practiced universally and was not caste- or class-fixed” (297). The abolition of this rite by the British has been generally understood as a case of “white men saving brown women from brown men” (297). Against this is the Indian nativist argument regarding this rite as a parody of the nostalgia for lost origins interpreting this act as “the women actually wanted to die” (297). According to Spivak, these two statements merely justify each other. Squeezed between the two discourses, the subaltern is unable to raise her voice since “there is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak” (307). Instead, she is (mis)represented by the discourse of the male-dominated West and the male-dominated East. Nevertheless, by this argument, Spivak does not intend to show the subaltern as a passive subject, rather, her critical approach aims to question the system within which she cannot speak but is spoken for or silenced. Nearer the end of the essay, Spivak highlights the importance and usefulness of Derridean deconstruction that she has applied to remap the concept of the subaltern. She concludes the essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” by reiterating her pessimistic standpoint that “the subaltern cannot speak” (308).

CHAPTER TWO

NIGERIAN CULTURE AND WOMEN'S WRITING

2.1. A Brief History of Nigeria Since 1960

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country and the world's eighth largest oil producer (Falola, *A History of Nigeria* 158). It is dubbed as the 'Giant of Africa' (158). The population of Nigeria is over 140 million (158). Its capital city, Abuja, is located near the centre of the country (Harmon 113). Although it is not Nigeria's largest city, Abuja was designated the capital in 1991, succeeding the much larger port city of Lagos (113). The country is divided into more than 30 states and a federal capital territory (115). Nigeria's constitution, which was formed in 1979, provides for a president (115). However, "the constitutional system has been violated with repeated military coups and presidential ousters" (115).

Until 1960, Nigeria was under Britain's colonial rule. At that time, it was divided into northern and southern protectorates that were ruled differently (Falola, "History and Politics, Northern Nigeria" 51). This division led to continued conflict and rivalry between the regions in present-day Nigeria (52). The northern protectorate was governed through a system of Indirect Rule by indigenous emirs (52). However, despite ending the slave trade, they continued cooperating with the British colonial authorities (52). In contrast, the southern protectorate rejected Indirect Rule and embraced Western values, education, and religion (52). The northern and southern protectorates were joined in a uniform Nigeria in 1914 (52). Then in 1954, Nigeria became a federation divided into the northern, eastern, and western regions, each of which represents the cultural, religious, and political differences of the dominant ethnic groups (52). The Northern Region became self-governing in 1959 (52).

The election that determined the make-up of Nigeria as an independent country and a republic was held in 1959 (Falola, *A History of Nigeria* 156). Subsequently, on October 1, 1960, Nigeria became a fully sovereign state in the British Commonwealth (156). Tafawa Balewa, the first prime minister of an independent Nigeria, "thanked

the British for their cooperation and the nationalists for their relentless work over the course of many decades” (156). It was a glorious moment for Nigeria after 100 years of struggle for the ideals of freedom and democracy since the country gained political independence (156). However, economically it was still dependent upon European firms that controlled the export economy (157). Thus, the country’s political independence was accompanied by the continuing economic dependence (157). Further, the discovery of petroleum fuelled the political and economic problems of the newly independent country (157). In the following decades to come, this resource was enough to make Nigeria a strong and wealthy state but paradoxically, it brought about institutional corruption (157).

As a result of the oil boom, Nigeria shifted from its traditionally agriculture-based economy to oil-dominant economy which has extremely been affected by fluctuations in oil prices (Siollun 2). However, since Nigeria’s oil resources were mainly located in the southern region, this also divided the country on ethnic and religious lines (2). The majority of the population living in the southern part of Nigeria consisted of Christian communities who bitterly resented that the oil revenues of their region was used to develop non-oil producing areas (2). Another major problem, which had remained unresolved since independence, was the issue of national identity. In fact, the area known as Nigeria was formed by the British colonial administration in 1914, thus the people within the borders of Nigeria were known to the world as Nigerians (Falola, *A History of Nigeria* 158). However, this identification was not enough to designate the name of the nation whose lives were centred upon local communities living in the area for hundreds and thousands of years (158). Since the demographic structure of the country was not homogenous to develop a unified national identity, the constitutions of the 1950s put emphasis on power holding at the regional level (159). As a result, the largest ethnic groups in each region – the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo came to dominate their respective regions and compete for power at the federal level (159). Therefore, when Nigeria gained its independence in 1960, it was in fact a state without a nation (159).

Nevertheless, the issue of national identity and consciousness was on the agenda of artists and scholars of the country who sought to build a unique Nigerian culture

through their art and literature (159). All these efforts aimed to promote a strong central state and national economy focused on the development of the country as well as on bringing Nigerians together for the sake of political and cultural unity regardless of differences (159). However, official corruption, electoral manipulations and ethnic conflicts dominated the conduct of politics in the First Republic, which existed from 1960 to 1966 (159). In this respect, ethnic and religious groups feared that any region that came into power would exploit it to better itself at the expense of the rest of the country (13). These apprehensions led to widespread violence and military coups (13). Despite all the efforts to reduce the tensions, in 1967, the Igbo-dominated Eastern Region declared itself the independent Republic of Biafra (13). This act led to the bloody conflict known as the Nigerian Civil War or the Biafra War which lasted from 1967 to 1970, ending in reincorporation of Biafra into Nigeria (13). The war, claiming the lives of more than two million people, was also discussed in the works of Nigerian writers. Chinua Achebe brings up the issue of genocide perpetrated against the Igbo community, strongly believing that artists are obliged to speak for their history, people and beliefs. Remembering those days, the author writes in his memoirs that the Biafran war changed the history of Africa (160). He points to the importance of teaching the young generation their history in order to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past (160).

2.2. Nigerian Ethnic Groups and Cultures

Nigeria has a large and diverse population consisting of more than 200 different ethnicities (Falola, *A History of Nigeria* 4). However, there are three main ethnic groups making up the majority of the population. The Hausa people live in the northern part of Nigeria and constitute roughly 21 percent of the population, whereas the Yoruba people, who live in the southwestern part of the country, make up 20 percent, and respectively, the Igbo people live in the southeast area accounting for nearly 17 percent (4). These multiple ethnic groups shape the culture of Nigeria. Despite the fact that there are more than 250 different indigenous languages spoken in Nigeria, English has been the official language of the country since 1960 (4). On the other hand, there is another language commonly used by Nigerians called Pidgin (4). Being a combination of indigenous languages and English, Pidgin has developed throughout

hundreds of years due to the contact with both British traders and subsequently colonial authorities (4).

There are two major religions in Nigeria, Christianity and Islam, both of which are practiced by nearly half of the population of the country (Phillips 57). Christianity prevails in the southern part of the country, while Islam in the north (57). Some Yoruba and almost all the Hausa and Fulani people are Muslim (57). Describing the influences of Islam in the country, Douglas Phillips states that this religion affects almost all aspects of life in the recent years (57). This fact is particularly reflected in the increase of fundamentalist beliefs and practices of the Muslims living in the northern part of Nigeria (57). In this sense, the execution of traditional Islamic law – Sharia serves as an example by which the practitioners are strictly held to the teachings of Islam (57). This law also requires severe punishments, such as whipping for engaging in pre-marital sexual relationship as well as cutting off hands for theft (57).

The imposition of these practices also affects Christians living in the same area who believe that they are treated unfairly by the Islamic courts (57). Although Nigerian Constitution gives precedence to Nigerian citizens regardless of their religion, most Muslims believe that Sharia law is as important as the constitution, which means that the conflict between Sharia law and the constitution of Nigeria will extend into the future (59). There are also indigenous religions and animist beliefs practiced by nearly 10 percent of the population mainly by the Igbo and Yoruba population in the southern part of the country (57).

Culturally, Nigerian people are influenced both by their local traditions and values and lifestyles adopted from the West (Falola, *A History of Nigeria* 6). Even though Nigerian patriarchal culture puts emphasis on extended family structure and kinship relationships, there is an increasing focus on smaller nuclear families in urban areas (6). In addition to this, polygamy is still commonly practiced in the country, whereas monogamous marriage is prevalent among Christians and the educated elite (6). Alongside the traditional forms of entertainment, such as indigenous musical styles such as juju and palm-wine music or the telling of stories, there are also modern media forms such as television and Nigeria's home-grown movie industry, known as

Nollywood (6). In this respect, it is believed that in the cultural sphere, Nigeria has been more successful in adapting Western values to their indigenous traditions than it has been in politics (6).

2.3. The Role of Female Writers In Nigerian Fiction

The literary contribution of African as well as Nigerian women is based upon the traditions dating back to oral literature that played a vital role in the shaping of cultures and nations. Indeed, African women are considered highly influential as the guardians and transmitters of their traditional values and customs (Umeh, “Finale: Signifyin(g) the Griottes: Flora Nwapa's legacy of (Re)Vision and Voice” 114). This attitude is encapsulated in an old African proverb, “the language given to us at birth is the mother’s tongue” (114). Accordingly, these traditional values are instilled in young generations through prayers, lullabies, proverbs, riddles, folksongs, the use of which has been “effectively didactic and highly instrumental in molding the African personality” (114). With the use of nursery rhymes, stories and songs, women not only contributed to folk literature but also laid the groundwork for the establishment of written form of literature. The oral heritage transmitted by women also paved the way for the emergence of African fiction. On the other hand, incorporating folktale narration, proverbs and anecdotes into novels, they also sought to revive their culture misrepresented by the colonial discourse. However, because of social and economic reasons, women were not able to transfer this to the art of novel writing. A Nigerian novelist Buchi Emecheta mentions some of these difficulties arguing that in order to create literature, she must have time and space since for most of the Nigerian writers neither the time nor the space is available (qtd. in Taiwo 1). The main drawback of this, as Emecheta points out, is the lack of financial support by the government of the country doing very little to encourage their literature (1).

Furthermore, the image of the African woman created by the male novelists also needs to be re-examined. In this respect, pointing to the false representation of African women in literature, Maryse Condé believes that it is worthwhile “to study what they have to say for themselves when they decide to speak” (qtd. in Nnoromele 178). Similarly, exploring the situation of African women writers, Margaret Busby argues

that the context within which they live and patriarchal arrangements of their societies make them different from their counterparts elsewhere in the world (xvi). Both publicly and privately most women have even less time than their Western counterparts to write because their time is often spent on their husbands, children, older relatives and visitors (xvi). Busby also reflects the views of other women writers who are aware of their socially educative role. They strongly believe that as female writers they have moral prerogative to point the way to others and educate the spirit since “they are closer to human suffering through the experiences of motherhood and womanhood” (xvi). In this respect, the role of Buchi Emecheta is undeniable since her outspokenness even “launches attack on the male tradition” (xvii). Emecheta suggests that “the way to address the ailments of many African nations would be to put women in positions of power” (xvi).

Indeed, African women’s writing helps to change opinionated views and prejudices related to women in the past. Kolawole also believes that “because literature is an imitation of reality, it is one of the major avenues of decoding African woman’s yearnings and encoding her alterity” (204). In terms of their culture, they are correcting “the African world of male heroism presented by male writers” (204). In this respect, most female writers believe that their voice in literature is generally subsumed under the repressive influence of their male counterparts, who have been brought up to take women for granted. According to Adeola James, “our problem is that we have listened so rarely to women’s voices, the noises of men having drowned us out in every sphere of life, including the arts. Yet women too are artists, and are endowed with a special sensitivity and compassion, necessary to creativity” (6). The author voices her disturbance through the excerpt from Bessie Head’s short story collection, *The Collector of Treasures*:

The ancestors made so many errors and one of the most bitter-making things was that they relegated to men a superior position in the tribe, while women were regarded, in a congenital sense, as being an inferior form of human life. To this day, women still suffered from all the calamities that befall an inferior form of human life. (qtd. in James 5)

The above quotation reveals the socio-historical background of African women's position in the male-dominated society demoting them to a peripheral status. In this respect, African female writers strongly believe that women must not readily accept the roles assigned to them by the patriarchal system within which they live. Therefore, in present day Nigeria, women writers call into question the social issues directly concerning women of their communities, such as bride price, polygamy, fertility, male child preference, widow inheritance and favouring boys over girls in traditional families.

Gaining recognition in the male-dominated literature was not a sudden event. In this regard, the legacy of Flora Nwapa that laid the foundations of today's Nigerian female novel is undeniable. She was the first Nigerian woman to write a full-length novel, who "arrived on the literary scene at a time when it was almost completely dominated by men" (Taiwo 47). It took some time for her works to be recognized as merit to Nigerian literature. At first, she was received with mixed feelings; some admired her works whereas others regarded Nwapa as an imitator of the male writers (47). However later, it was discovered that the novels she was writing had a meaning penetrating into the depth of Nigerian traditions. Nwapa also wrote short stories and stories for children and was the first Nigerian woman to be a publisher (Killam and Kerfoot 221). She is known best for her two novels, *Efuru* (1966) and *Idu* (1970), in which the author describes the problems of women in traditional society from different perspectives, particularly in relation to their ability to bear children (221). Nwapa questions not only imposed Western values but also the traditional beliefs of her own community such as the glorification of motherhood (Parekh xix).

Flora Nwapa's first novel *Efuru*, published in 1966, was the first novel written by a Nigerian woman and the first novel in English by an African woman writer (Parekh xix). The eponymous heroine of the novel, *Efuru*, struggles with the issue of infertility in Igbo community. When she finally conceives and has a baby, the child dies of a fever. Having gone through two unhappy marriages, she ultimately dedicates herself to the mother of the lake, a goddess who also has no children but is beautiful, wealthy, and wise, like *Efuru* herself. The author extensively employs dialogue as a literary device to convey the daily life of women in Igbo society. Thus, the novel is

comprised of conversations, primarily between women, gossiping, feeling sympathy for each other and coming up with various solutions to problems. Nwapa injects the oral traditions into the novel and skilfully handles them to give voice to the issues related to women of her society.

Nwapa's characters are strong and independent women making their own decisions who assertively question the conventions of their community. In her novels, Nwapa implies that marriage should not be an obstacle to female self-fulfilment (Umeh, "Finale: Signifyin(g) the Griottes: Flora Nwapa's legacy of (Re)Vision and Voice" 117). Marie Umeh notes that by launching a female literary tradition, Nwapa established an authentic image of the African woman (117). It is also noteworthy that while Nigerian male writers, such as Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka describe female characters as dependent and submissive, Nwapa's women are capable of protecting themselves from humiliation and degradation (117). Nwapa's name in the Nigerian literary canon has served as a source of inspiration for her literary followers, such as Buchi Emecheta, Zulu Sofola, Mabel Segun, Ifeoma Okoye, Zaynab Alkali and Eno Obong, who further developed the authentic characterization of African womanhood (121).

In terms of contemporary women's literature, there are a number of writers representing third-generation Nigerian literature, such as Sefi Atta, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Yejide Kilanko and Nnedi Okorafor, who have made their mark both at home and abroad. Inheriting the literary tradition of their predecessors, they have expanded and enriched Nigerian women's literature by depicting much stronger and assertive female characterizations. In this respect, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie ascribes three commitments to the female writer, who ought to be a writer, a woman and a Third World person (10). She asserts that the female writer's biological womanhood is embodied in all three attributes (10). Ogundipe-Leslie lays out the main principles of these commitments by stating that the female writer has to promote justice through her art, through her vision to stand for what she believes and through her own truth yet being certain of this truth (10).

The contribution of Nigerian female writers to the development of African literature is undeniable. Through their literary works, they seek to heal the image of the African woman misrepresented and marginalised by male-authored literary tradition. Apart from this, they criticise the blind reliance of male critics on the male-manipulated literature ignoring the fact that their canon excludes female writers. They also express their disappointment at the fact that such women writers as Bessie Head and Flora Nwapa, who made considerable contributions to the development of African literature, remained unrecognised during their lifetime. Against this background, Nigerian female writers struggle to gain literary recognition and acceptance to the literary canon. They believe that their authentic image of the African woman will subvert the tradition of male writing relegating women to the subaltern position of the culture.

CHAPTER THREE

A DECONSTRUCTIVE READING OF THE NIGERIAN SUBALTERN AS A FEMALE SUBJECT

3.1 Exposure to Urban Reality as the First Step towards the Awakening of the Subaltern in Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn*

The first section of this chapter is based on a deconstructive reading of the Nigerian female subaltern in Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn*. The study adopts Spivak's concept of the subaltern to examine the position of the Nigerian woman within her native culture. Set within both rural and urban Nigeria, the novel explores the role of traditional and modern values in shaping the vision of the female subaltern. The study also aims to reveal the significance of urban experience in the female subaltern's self-realisation. In this respect, the tensions caused by modernisation and the position of women in Nigerian patriarchal society constitute the frame of the study. Even though modernisation is set against tradition, they are inextricably interwoven in the novel since the former is described as part of rural life introduced by the incursion of technology and other conveniences. In this regard, the research deals with both the changes perceived as modernisation as well as the disruption brought in its wake.

Zaynab Amina Alkali (1950 –), a novelist, short story writer and educator, was born in Tura-Wazila community of Borno State, Nigeria (Whitsitt 178). She completed her graduate education at Bayero University, Kano and received a doctorate in African literature (178). She worked as principal of Shekara Girls' Boarding School, Kano, an assistant lecturer at Bayero University, and senior lecturer in English and coordinator of English and general studies at Modibbo Adama College, University of Maiduguri (178). After twenty-two years of university work, she took a three-year break and worked for the National Primary Health Care Development Agency in Abuja (178). In 2009, she was appointed dean of the Faculty of Arts at Nasarawa State University, where she teaches creative writing and African literature in English. In his forties, Alkali's father converted to Christianity but in the early 1960s Alkali herself became a Muslim (178). However, she feels that both Christianity and Islam have influenced

her own spirituality (178). In 1971, she married Dr. Mohammed Nur Alkali, director-general of the Nigerian Institute of Political and Strategic Studies (178). They have six children.

Alkali usually sets her stories in rural areas of northern Nigeria to explore how communities come to terms with rapid social changes that penetrate into their daily lives. The author also expresses a strong belief in the necessity of female education, which is reiterated in most of her novels and short stories. Regardless of the general attitude of the society towards women, commonly referred to as the weaker sex, Alkali urges her counterparts to attain the highest peak of intellectual development (qtd. in James 29). She also criticises the image of African women in the male-dominated literature arguing that except for very few examples, women are generally ignored by male writers (29). Moreover, she is certain that “some male writers would have done away with women characters if they could” (30).

By exploring women’s worlds through their fantasies, dreams, and inner conflicts, Zaynab Alkali has introduced a fresh voice and a new dimension to women’s writing in Africa in the early 1980s (Ugbabe 13). The author skilfully employs them to build the structure of her narratives. In this sense, as Marie Umeh argues, Alkali takes after her literary predecessor Flora Nwapa (“Finale: Signifyin(g) the Griottes: Flora Nwapa's legacy of (Re)Vision and Voice” 121). Her characters are generally independent-minded and self-reliant women who ultimately develop a strong sense of self (Ugbabe 13).

Among Alkali’s novels are the Association of Nigerian Authors award winner for prose fiction in 1985, *The Stillborn* (1984), and *The Virtuous Woman* (1987), both of which depict the condition of women in patriarchal African cultures (Killam and Kerfoot 30). Zaynab Alkali is also the author of a collection of short stories titled *Cobwebs and Other Stories* (1995/1997) and is co-editor of *Vultures in the Air: Voices from Northern Nigeria* (1995) (30). Further, in 1997, she won a prize for the best short story of the year (30). In 2000, after teaching at the University of Maiduguri for twenty-two years, she moved to the National Primary Health Care Development Agency in Abuja (Ugbabe 16). Her paper “Female Muslim Perspectives on an African Future”

was commissioned by Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main and presented on 9 December 2002 (16). In 2003, she became a professor of African literature and creative writing at the new Nasarawa State University in Keffi, where she also held the post of deputy vice chancellor for administration for four years, combining this role with the post of Dean, Faculty of Arts (17). She is currently the dean of the Postgraduate School (16). Alkali's novels and stories touch upon the themes closely related to women's issues, such as friendship, empathy, and sisterhood that "exist between women—cousins, co-wives, sisters, or a stepdaughter and stepmother" (17). Her works have been translated into German, French, and Japanese.

Alkali's debut novel *The Stillborn*, published by Longman in 1984, earned her recognition as the first female novelist from Northern Nigeria. The novel won the Association of Nigerian Authors Award for the best novel of the year and was hailed as "lone female voice from the north" (15). In *The Stillborn*, Alkali is concerned with the life of the Hausa people constituting one of the largest ethnic groups in West Africa. Therefore, before embarking upon the study of the novel, it would be worthwhile to provide some information about this Nigerian ethnic group. The term 'Hausa' is used to refer to both the language and the people living in the northern part of Nigeria (Pellow 111). Hausa is a Chadic language related to Arabic, Hebrew, Berber and other Afroasiatic language families (111). It is one of the most common languages spoken on the African continent (111). It is also the language of trade (111). The Hausa nation evolved as a result of immigration and conquest (112). It incorporates many different peoples united by a common language and adherence to a common religion, Islam (112). Due to the extensive involvement with trade and Islam, the Hausa people maintain strong relationships with other communities living in Nigeria (112). Agriculture is considered the major economic activity of the community (112). Hausa society is patriarchal in nature, therefore, ideal marriage is virilocal and polygynous by which a man is allowed to have more than one wife (113). The custom of paying a bride price is also commonly practiced among the Hausa (113). It is given by the groom's family to the bride, respectively, a dowry for the bride is provided by her family (113). Inheritance rights are determined in accordance with Islamic law making a woman's inheritance rights subordinate to those of men (113). Moreover, women are

excluded from extra domestic discussion and decision-making (113). Both within the household and in the public domain patriarchal authority is dominant (113).

The Stillborn touches upon the themes of contemporary Nigeria from the authentic perspective of a woman raised in traditional norms and values of the male-dominated society. By employing the third-person point of view, the author penetrates into the thoughts and feelings of the characters. The novel is also rich in dialogues, flashbacks and dreams exposing or foreshadowing particular events in the novel. The protagonist Li, a thirteen-year-old girl, returns home after completing her primary education. Being restless and impulsive by nature, she finds the atmosphere in her father's compound suffocating (*The Stillborn* 3). The household regards Li's independent spirit as impatience and stubbornness (4). She is expected to perform the usual household chores as every young girl does – sweeping the compound, fetching water from the stream and firewood from the neighbouring area and washing dishes. However, “she was dreaming of a paradise called the ‘city’. A place where she would have an easy life, free from slimy calabashes and evil-smelling goats. She looked down at her coarse hands and feet. One of these days she would be a different woman, with painted nails and silky shining hair” (55). Later, she meets Habu Adams, a young man from the village whom she plans to marry and settle in the city. They would live in a big European house full of servants. However, after they marry, when she is fifteen, Habu abandons her in the village. Four years pass. Finally, she goes to the city to find her husband. She discovers that he has failed to become a doctor and is, instead, a salesperson. Moreover, he lives with another woman. The city holds nothing for Li except frustration and despair. The spontaneous and spirited girl becomes a grim and sober-minded woman. “It destroys dreams,” she says of the city (94). One day Li dreams that her father's home has burned down; she hurries back to the village and finds that he has died of an illness. She is pregnant and gives birth to a daughter, Shuwa. Her father's death leaves her ‘the man of the house,’ a position for which she has been psychologically preparing herself. She has become bitter and resentful by witnessing the experiences of her sister, Awa, and her friend Faku, whose lives have been ruined by their repressive husbands. She knows that she has to find her own happiness, and at twenty-nine, she completes her studies at the Teachers' College. She

becomes a successful teacher, but an emotional bond with Habu prompts her to return to him in the city. A car accident has left him with crutches and regrets. At the end of the novel, Li is at his side, supporting him. “This is no time to crawl. It is time to learn to walk again,” she says (105).

In *The Stillborn*, Alkali portrays the lives of three female characters who do not only differ in their fates but also in their views and expectations. In doing so, the author introduces a female writer’s perspective touching upon the themes directly related to women’s issues. This first-hand approach has largely been ignored by the male-authored literature. In this respect, Alkali’s views closely coincide with her Nigerian female counterparts. To illustrate, in one of her interviews, Emecheta argues that “men don’t have time to put things like that into books, because they think they are writing something important. Even if you don’t tell me the name of the writer, I can always tell writing done by a woman. Maybe she has eyes to see more, where men are too blind to see” (“Feminism with a small ‘f!’” 182). Indeed, male writers’ handling of women’s issues is overly superficial and partial since it is based on their judgment rather than examination (182). Within this discourse, Zaynab Alkali may be considered a female writer who seeks to recreate women’s roles thereby making up for the negligence committed by the African male authors.

The Stillborn is considered a coming-of-age story since it is concerned with the physical, psychological and spiritual growth of the main character. The protagonist Li is portrayed as a round character undergoing a particular development throughout the novel. Li’s movements from the village to the city takes place as a repeating and returning journey. In this respect, the research will reveal how with each shifting social role, from a daughter to a wife and later to an educated single parent, the main female character makes a further step towards self-fulfilment as a result of which she becomes ‘the man of the house’.

The novel opens when the central character Li, being a thirteen-year old girl, who is returning to her village after finishing her primary education. It is considered the only education appropriate for girls in the Hausa community. In fact, the restricted access to education is one of the significant factors in Nigeria affecting women’s

position in society. The bottom line of Nigeria is still illiterate, which means that there is need to create a literate population, “a population which can respond more effectively and efficiently by simply being able to read” (Pittin 340). Alkali, as an advocate of social reform, underscores the importance of female education throughout the novel. She strongly believes in self-fulfilment of Nigerian women attained through education since literate women help to educate the children, which is aptly reflected in the Nigerian catchphrase: “Educate women and you educate a nation” (340). Pittin closely examines the position of women in the Hausa society pointing to gender inequality that stems from patriarchal cultural norms. In the Hausa system, girls are mainly involved in domestic labour as well as the care of younger siblings, whereas boys are spared for education in the hope of subsequent access to waged labour or higher education (351). For girls, education is regarded as a “temporary diversion before entering into marriage, childbearing and home- and farm-based subsistence production” (351). Thus, girls are denied the right to proceed further, that is, to higher schooling.

This criticism is also valid for Li, who is brought up in the traditions of the rural patriarchal community. She is well aware that she cannot transcend the physical and ideological boundaries within which she is situated. Thus, she is shackled by the conventions of her culture that make her appear as a female subaltern. This mood is observed at the very beginning of the novel when Li is returning home. After a seven-year long primary education in the neighbouring village, Li, on her way home, “felt alone, although she was among her age-mates” (*The Stillborn* 1). She wonders if something is wrong with her. “Feeling numb in both legs, she tried to ease them, but could not” as if “something or someone was sitting on them” (1). Forcing her mind to think about more pleasant things, “for a moment she thought of her parents and a dark shadow crossed her mind, threatening to dampen her happiness” (1). These sad feelings of homecoming are followed by an elaborate description of the village.

The village is depicted as “large and unequally cleft in two by a long narrow stream, almost hidden by its bushy banks” (2). The smaller side of the village is less crowded thus appears to be quiet and deserted consisting of “farmland and a few scattered mud huts” (2). However, on the opposite and larger side, “flourished a long

stretch of fruit trees, richly dressed in green” (2). Since the larger part of the village is more populated, it “lay sprawled in clusters of thatched mud huts” (2). The use of such words as ‘flourished’ and ‘green’ stands for liveliness and development of the village. On the other hand, peace and quiet dominating the smaller part of the village, suggest the innocent and natural state of the idyllic rural life cherished by the villagers for centuries. However, the image of village ends with a range of hills, at the base of which there are the European quarters known as the Hill Station (2). The houses in complete contrast to those in the village are “built of stones and roofed with asbestos” (2). The gigantic view of modern houses evokes an uncanny feeling, which the author develops by providing a further description: “Built on a much higher plane and facing the rest of the village, they [the houses] had assumed the look of an overlord. This advantageous position was further heightened by a thick overgrowth of trees that shrouded the houses, giving them the desired privacy” (2).

This description reveals the dichotomy between modernisation gradually permeating the rural life and tradition. The author points to the fact that modernisation is gaining ground by becoming an authority in the rural domain. Even the generator in the village “lent its light only to the Hill Station and the Memorial Hospital” and “a visitor at night was apt to think that only these two places existed in the village” (2). The author also contrasts the sound of the generator with the rustic voices of the villagers. By going to sleep and getting up by the sound of the electricity generator, the villagers are slowly being adjusted to the way of life introduced by modernisation. In this respect, Chikwenye Ogunyemi argues that by describing rural and modern houses in stark contrast to each other, Alkali favours tradition over modern values. Ogunyemi supports her argument by decoding the connotative meaning behind Alkali’s description. She explains that “Hill Station is noted for its stone houses, a mark of its unresponsive nature” and “its asbestos poisons the environment, while its generator shatters the peace of the quiet village” (307). Ogunyemi infers that the contrasting images representing modern and traditional values form the core of the novel, in which the former gradually encroaches on the latter, ultimately corrupting it (308). Indeed, the whole portrayal of the rural image is set off against modernisation that has started to take over the established norms by penetrating into the village as an

outsider. The process of usurpation taking place in the rural area may be regarded as a “dangerous supplement” to tradition because it is replacing the norms of the rural community (*Of Grammatology* 149). This attitude is explained with the fact that the village life with all its rituals and traditions has been cherished for many centuries and the communal norms within which the rural people reside have been handed down from generation to generation.

In fact, even the houses in the village suggest that tradition has been able to stand the test of time despite the creeping effects of modernisation. They also stand for the symbol of the dominating patriarchy in the Hausa society. Alkali recreates this way of life pointing to the adherence of the rural people to their cultural values. In this respect, the anthropologist Deborah Pellow describes traditional village compounds as “walled or fenced”, containing “an entrance hut, an open shared cooking and work area, a hut for the compound head, and separate huts for each of his wives” (112). Similarly, in the novel, providing the description of Baba’s compound, the author underscores the immanence of tradition. Baba, being the head of the family, lives in a big compound possessing the attributes of a farmer who is surveying his farm (*The Stillborn* 8). His compound, “maybe only second in size to the chief of the village”, is divided into three parts with his hut standing in the middle (8). Accordingly, the other members of the family reside on the left and right sides of the compound. This position is quite advantageous for the patriarch of the family, since he is able to exert control over the whole household.

The rural conventions and the household principles established by her autocratic father make Li feel suffocated after spending a few weeks at home. In the compound of her father, she feels trapped and unhappy (3). She already misses “the kind of life she had lived at the primary boarding school, free and gay” (3). However, her younger siblings are too young to understand the restrictions and the older ones too dull to react (3). They all take the household rules for granted. Li is aware that she has to pose as a traditional subaltern and abide by the norms of her community. However, she abhors the ‘don’ts’ that have heavily outnumbered the ‘do’s’ (3). Her rebellious nature does not allow her to blindly accept and obey these rules. She considers them stupid and unnecessarily rigid (3). Nevertheless, as a subaltern, she has to suffer the silence

complaining that this way of life is worse than a prison (3). In this respect, the signifiers ‘suffocating’, ‘trapped’, ‘unhappy’ ‘restrictions’ and ‘prison’ connote patriarchal oppression relegating women to the subaltern position.

On the other hand, Li’s elder sister Awa takes the norms of her society for granted. As compared to rebellious and dissatisfied Li, Awa is submissive and respectful having the typical qualities of a traditional subaltern. She aspires to marry Dan Fiama, a headmaster in the village primary school, and as a subservient subaltern, to bear children and look after the household chores since “marriage, children and a productive life in one's husband's home is the goal, the dream, and the reality for many Hausa women” (Pittin 1). In fact, it is true for most parts of Africa where “a girl’s life is one long preparation for the useful role she is expected to play in society”, which “pertains mainly to marriage and child-bearing” (Taiwo 2). Moreover, when she is engaged to a man, his relatives expect her to abide by the traditions and norms of their family (2). Within this period, every detail of her manners is carefully observed and noted by the family of her prospective husband (2). After marriage, she is supposed to play the role of a submissive housewife, which means that women in African traditional societies have no social status without getting married and the only way to be recognized is to attach themselves to men; otherwise, they face mockery and gossip. In this respect, Awa represents a typical Hausa girl who is devoted to the conventions of her community. Unlike Awa, Li does not readily accept the social roles of tradition and criticises her sister for blindly performing the so-called duties dictated by their oppressive father. Awa serves as a foil to Li, which is clearly illustrated in the following juxtaposition:

Awa had a mortal fear of Baba, a fear which made her humble and submissive beyond reason. Awa would never dream of disobeying their father. She often wondered where Li got the nerve to look their father in the face. Li, for her part, could not help feeling irritated by her senior sister and excluded her from many of her exploits. (*The Stillborn* 13)

Li disapproves of Awa's subservient attitude towards her father and adds that if she goes on this way, she "will stay at home and die an old woman" (14). However, Awa adopts her father's new faith, which consolidates her position as a traditional female subaltern. She is unable to understand that by doing so, she discards the beliefs and values with which she has been brought up. This attitude is harshly derided by Li, who believes that the faith adopted by her father restricts her freedom in every sense. The argument that takes place between the two sisters in the first chapter exemplifies how their views differ on the issue:

'Li, you have nothing to complain about,' Awa retorted. 'Would you rather be in one of the heathen homes?' 'Oh! Big sister, you kill us with laughter,' Li replied. 'Those people you call heathens may not have embraced anybody's religion but they have their own ancestral gods.' 'Don't talk like that Li. Are you also a heathen?' Awa demanded. 'Let me be a heathen,' Li said more seriously. 'I'd be much happier. At least I could go ease myself without having someone breathing down my neck demanding to know where I have been to.' (3)

On the other hand, Awa's brother Sule is depicted as the only male character who is rather critical of outdated values embedded in tradition. His first words in the novel "it's a rotten life" prefigure the fates of the main characters as well as Awa's, of whose submissiveness he does not approve either. Through Sule, the author defamiliarises the traditional male-constructed discourse based on patriarchy and women's subordination. Sule is aware that the traditional community to which he belongs is responsible for the inferior subaltern status of women. In this respect, by condemning the system that creates obstacles in women's self-realisation, Sule serves as the author's mouthpiece:

It is a rotten life! Look at you, eighteen years old, still at home, single. Not allowed to go out at all except to the market, the riverside, the prayer house and the school. Even then, you are always watched. I tell you, if this continues, ten years from now

you'll still be right here performing the same chores; fetching water and teaching a group of dirty children. Not to talk of being bossed by a cruel headmaster at school and an irate father at home. The only difference will be, you'll be ten years older and much more frustrated. (4)

Another female character, Faku, yearns for the city life. Her dreams of moving to the city makes her different from Awa, who is not concerned about urban life at all. Faku is aware of the fact that this dream can come true only by marrying somebody who will take her there. However, Li's motives for marriage are different because she aspires to rise above the traditional structure imposed by her community and ultimately attain self-fulfilment. However different their motives might be, conjugal life and social changes triggered by modernisation become the catalysts in the lives of these female subalterns leading to substantial transformations.

Having met Habu in the cultural dances, Li gets impressed by his confident and attractive appearance. "He was tall, several inches taller than Li, and a shade darker. He was healthy-looking, almost robust" (17). The author also delivers some information on particular customs of her community according to which a woman is not supposed to show interest in a man on their first meeting (18). On the other hand, the seriousness of a man "would only be determined by how well he took a rebuff and how persistently he pursued his woman" (18). However, Li "was not playing to the tune of a traditional courtship" (18). As the conversation proceeds, Li's warm manners help "to establish a more cordial atmosphere" (19).

Li is aware that if she continues to live on her father's terms, she will not be able to achieve her goals. Thus, it is not the customs that she rebels against but her father's domestic oppression. With so many restrictions imposed by him, Li assumes that the only way to escape from this 'prison' is to marry Habu and move to the city. Her daydreams of the city, which she calls 'paradise', start to take shape after she meets Habu (55). They are also embellished by exaggerated images of "a big European house full of houseboys and maids" (55). Li virtually loses touch with reality when she dreams of "the luxuries the city could offer" (57). She is unaware that "her feet barely

[touch] the ground” (55). In this respect, being completely unfamiliar with urban life, Li creates her own myth of the city full of wonderful and exciting things where young people are “eager and ready to enjoy life to the fullest” (57).

In fact, the young people who are tired of the norms and restrictions of their community regard the city as the place where they can live freely without any obligations. Besides, the city, standing for modern values, offers new opportunities for them. On the other hand, the villagers hold pre-conceived conception regarding modern values associated with urban life. Their phallogocentric attitude marginalizes the city labelling it as a “garment of perversion and debauchery” and “a dress of corruption” (*Of Grammatology* 35). In fact, they are concerned that modernisation will eventually usurp traditional values entailing degeneration. Thus, the elements of modernisation become “seductive” leading “desire away from the good path” (151). However, the rural community refuses to admit the fact that “usurpation has already begun” (37). In the Derridean sense, the villagers believe that this “dangerous supplement” called modernisation penetrates into rural way of life ultimately destroying its tradition (149). Thus, they are longing for bygone values, which Derrida describes as a “nostalgia for origins” (*Writing and Difference* 369). In *The Stillborn*, when the villagers get frustrated at the changes their children have undergone in the city, they directly ascribe it to modernisation, which, as they believe, corrupt their children ultimately making them behave rather unconventionally. Thus, modernisation appears to be a ‘dangerous supplement’ to tradition. However, it should also be mentioned that the generation gap is not the main theme in the novel. The major concern of the novel is to explore to what extent social changes caused by modernisation affect the rural life. The villagers’ views of the city are conveyed through particular dialogues making up the discourse of the rural society. Gossip, complaints, accusations and judgments about other people are described as part of tradition. In addition, certain values stand for the product of supremacist patriarchal system. It is implied that these beliefs complicate the adaptation of modern values to everyday life since they are suffused with a strict definition of masculinity. To illustrate, when Audu, one of the villagers, complains of insomnia, another villager, Manu tells him to stop complaining since “people with sons in the big city have no

problems”, to which Audu responds by telling the story of his son’s emasculation caused by the city:

Don’t talk to me about my son in the city! The city may be big but not my son. Like a woman, he cooks for the big men in the city... It is what breaks my sleep and adds years to my years. To think my son has turned into a woman! ... What have I done to deserve all this? Look at his age-mate, Fiama, a good mallam and a good farmer. (*The Stillborn* 49)

This excerpt implies that men are supposed to possess exclusively manly qualities, which emanates from the imposition of particular stereotypes on both male and female. In this respect, the author focuses on the signification of the signifier ‘big’ repeatedly used in the context suggesting more than one signified. On the one hand, it stands for the city, metaphorically described as a source of opportunities for young people where they explore their potential, on the other hand, ‘big’ implies the strict model of masculinity insinuated by tradition. Similarly, within this discourse, women are expected to preserve their so-called ‘womanhood’, that is, being a good housewife, which is aptly described in the following illustration: “Like your son, the city is changing my daughter. The last time she came, there was no womanhood left in her. She slept until the smallest child was up and the laziest animal had gone to the fields for grazing” (*The Stillborn* 50).

The concept of womanhood emphasized in the excerpt is based upon the traditional discourse regarding women as subaltern members of the society. The female characterization within the vernacular tradition of African literature has been revised and expanded by various scholars. In this respect, Stephanie Newell argues that the male and female perspectives on the issue do not concur. She illustrates her argument through a Senegalese poet Senghor, who states that in traditional African society the woman is “the giver of life, the source of the life-force and guardian of the house”, also, “the depository of the clan’s past and the guarantor of its future” (40). Newell does not subscribe to this idea by asserting that Senghor is interested in mythological beliefs and processes outside the stream of history, rather than the status

of women in the ‘real’ world of power inequalities, work, and motherhood (41). Thus, the author dismisses Senghor’s views as patriarchal and unrealistic (41). Likewise, in the above excerpt, Alkali implies that womanhood is the discourse serving exclusively the interests of patriarchal societies, thereby being the product of male-authored literature. In doing so, Alkali also alludes to African male writers who tend to think that writing is solely a male responsibility. Florence Stratton is also critical of this bias in the male-dominated literature expressing her resentment:

Masculinity is the unmarked form, the assumption being that writing is a male activity... Femininity is the marked form. In other words, the naming is gendered— ‘Grace/Miss/ Mrs Ogot’— to show a deviation from the norm. The convention therefore not only marks the woman writer for her gender; it also rebukes her for transgressing the norm by daring to take up the pen. Even more insidiously, it names her not a writer but a woman, the implicit message encoded in the naming being that it is marriage/motherhood that is her true vocation and not writing. (60-61)

There are also other literary devices employed by Alkali setting rural way of life against modern values. In this regard, the author skilfully employs a narrative technique known as rebus. It serves as one of the effective ways of description, which Derrida explains as a pictographic script called *mise-en-scène*, where voice is circumvented; instead, there is a pictorial composition. (*Writing and Difference* 304). Thus, the scholar suggests that rebus is another way of representing words in literary texts. In *The Stillborn*, rebus is employed through various visual images forming Nigerian rural setting. One of the striking illustrations serves the description of rural marketplace, by which Alkali vividly reconstructs the life and atmosphere of the village with all its routines, traditions and people. They provide a real sense of the rural

lifestyle. The description of the Tuesday market during harmattan⁴ is particularly impressive:

The road to the market suddenly seemed to spring into life. Already a few commercial lorries had arrived from some neighbouring villages, bringing goods from the cities. Women, bent almost double under their loads, walked slowly and answered greetings with a wave of the hand. Donkey owners, with mouths muffled under headcoverings, swore and beat their animals. Naked children, their bellies protruding and shining from the early beancake, chased and shouted at each other. (28)

The account of the Tuesday market goes on with the bustling cacophony of the vendors and the drummers “beating their drums with extra vigour to ward off the cold” (28). The rural descriptions set against modern realities display the texture of the village life with all its vividness and vitality.

Chapter Four is particularly notable in terms of the issues that the author lays out to illuminate major social concerns of traditional rural society from both male and female perspectives. In this regard, Alkali is aware that third-person viewpoint would only reflect a single vision. Thus, the author deviates from a conventional style of an omniscient narrator by including a diversity of viewpoints through the extensive use of dialogues, otherwise known as Derridean ‘bricolage’, which is a “critical language itself” (*Writing and Difference* 360). For Derrida, ‘bricolage’ becomes a metaphor for philosophical and literary critiques, making it possible to use the language at hand. Accordingly, the bricoleur is someone who uses ‘the means at hand’ (360). Alkali enhances her literary scope by applying various narrative techniques as bricolage. The author also makes use of free indirect speech, by which the author’s voice is mingled with the voice of the character. In this sense, the main character Li is invested with an

⁴ Harmattan is a cold, dry wind that blows south and southwest off the Sahara Desert between November and March. As it passes over the desert, especially between December and February, it picks up dust particles. In northern Nigeria, the harmattan dust can create a lingering haze in the air and reduce visibility. (*Historical Dictionary of Nigeria* 147).

ability to observe and make inferences of what she sees and experiences around her, which also makes it possible to consider her an alter ego of Alkali.

From the very beginning of the chapter, the author makes a clear-cut distinction between the male and female characters by describing Li, Awa and Faku as fetching firewood from the hilltop, while Habu, Garba and Dan Fiama lie in wait to scare them. Metaphorically, this depiction foreshadows the subsequent change that each character will undergo under certain circumstances. In this passage, the author also conducts a deconstructive reversal of the binary between male and female. Alkali inverts the hierarchy in which men are associated with reason and power whereas women are emotional and weak. Instead, the main female characters Li, Awa and Faku are portrayed as practical and hardworking while the male characters Habu, Dan Fiama and Garba are irresponsible and unambitious. The analysis of each character is mainly performed through Li's perspective. She abstains from making any comments throughout the conversation and carefully observes Garba "wondering what kind of life he led in the city" (44). The author implies that Garba's appearance also tells of his contradictory personality:

Li looked at Garba and tried to guess his age. It was hard to tell. Although he was obviously older than any of them, he had a deceptive figure, stocky and athletic... Garba at once plunged into a tireless account of the pleasures of the city... He talked endlessly, often punctuating his one-sided conversation with a boisterous laugh at his own vulgar joke. Li observed that he was attractive in a coarse way. He would have been good-looking but for his large square nose and wide weak mouth. He had a deep-throated laugh that came in gasps. (44)

At the beginning, Garba is presented as the only character who has firsthand experience of city life. In the village, Garba is known as both "a stranger" and "the son of the soil" (43). This dichotomy stems from Garba's background and a different way of life he has in the city. The signifier 'strange' is used to imply that Garba is an outsider, which makes him undesirable in the village. In a flashback, Li remembers the

villagers' stories about Garba, who has been brought up by a prostitute mother in the city. He returns to the village on the death of his father, who had been a waster leaving a lot of debt. However, nobody knows what brings Garba to the village. The villagers assume that he takes after his father "up to his fingertips" and since it is "contagious", they try to protect their children from his bad influence (44). In addition, the fact that Garba has been brought up in the city is another reason for ascribing his bad habits to his "rootless" background (52). Li's elder sister Awa is also disturbed by Garba's arrival to the village and warns her brother to stay away from him:

'He came roaring in on a motorbike, disturbing the entire school... he smoked a lot and swore a lot..., 'Awa protested. No one bothered to remind her that some of the villagers did a lot more smoking and swearing than the stranger... 'Indeed, the son of the soil without parents'... 'He looks bad company for you'... (43)

On the other hand, despite Garba's urban life, the young men of the village prefer to call him "the son of the soil" (43). They listen to his stories about the city with rapt attention. Believing that he still represents the values of his rural community, they disapprove of the villagers' negative attitude labelling Garba as 'a stranger'. Sule insistently points out that Garba is not a stranger but "the son of the soil" and even though he was brought up in the city, he was born in the village (43).

Garba describes the city as the place where you can gain access to free women, easy money and idle living (43). Since he is aware of the obligations imposed upon the young people in the village, he avoids them by preferring to follow a supposedly modern lifestyle. While sharing his experiences of the city life, Garba judges as an expert boasting about his extensive knowledge of modern values:

I did not live in the city for nothing. I know a bit about the world, more than our fathers who were born and brought up in this small village. There are a lot of things about the city I cannot talk about, simply because such things have no place in the village. But you

are young and will soon go out into the world. Only then would you learn from time and experience... Some day you will find out I was telling the truth. (45)

The author deals with the customs that are still valid in rural areas, one of which is the bride price. It is a custom practiced in most rural parts of Nigeria, according to which a bridegroom is supposed to give a sum of money or other valuables to the family of the bride. However, most young bachelors in rural areas do not welcome this tradition because they find it difficult to accumulate enough savings to pay the bride price. In this respect, Garba relevantly remarks that “getting married is not expensive in the city” (44). He goes on adding that a man can live with a woman of her own free will without having to pay anything (44-5).

Alluding to the issue of bride price, Buchi Emecheta recounts her own situation when she was young and literally put up for sale. She states that she comes from a place where a woman is paid for (qtd. in Ngcobo 151). She resentfully remembers that while her family could not afford to pay for her education, which she accomplished with the help of scholarships, they readily bargained for her as people do in the bazaar when it came to the bride price (151). Moreover, by proudly declaring that she has English education, they pushed up her bride price (151). Due to these debasing aspects of local cultures by which women are treated as commodities, Emecheta infers that “women are the money. I agree with the missionaries. We are being sold. So we have to abolish that before we start being independent” (151).

Another issue dealt with in the novel is polygamy, which is a cultural practice prevalent in most parts of Nigeria. Alkali’s innovative approach consists in the fact that she performs a re-vision of this practice from both male and female perspectives. Traditionally, polygamy is regarded as part of tradition that serves the interests of the male-dominated Nigerian communities. In this respect, Garba favours polygamy by stating that in the city a man “can acquire many wives without slaving for them”; rather, they all slave for him (*The Stillborn* 45). He furthers his account by adding that “in the city you do not have to live together in the same house” and that he has a friend who “keeps four women in four different areas of the city” but “none of them knows

the others exists and they all slave for him!” (45). Ignoring the presence of the women, Garba boasts about the opportunities that the city offers to men (45). However, his views on both tradition and modernisation are rather contradictory. On the one hand, he favours polygamy judging as a typical male representative brought up by the values of a traditional patriarchal society. On the other hand, by stating that in the city, a man “can acquire many wives without slaving for them”, he deviates from the concept of the traditional polygamous marriage because polygamy is the practice, wherein a man marries many wives and provides for them equally (45). In the Derridean sense, Garba’s attempt to adjust tradition to suit his needs may be interpreted as a supplement to the existing system. In terms of supplementarity, Garba’s situation may be described as a lopsided perception of both traditional and modern values, which he prefers to call the virtues of city life or, as he puts it, “civilisation” (*The Stillborn* 56). It becomes more prominent in his debased attitude towards women and in his attempt to customize tradition to his urban lifestyle regarding it as modernisation. However, it is impossible to designate Garba’s assumed values as either traditional or modern since they serve exclusively his own interests. Such attitude aptly typifies Garba’s phallogocentric approach, which exposes how patriarchy favours the masculine in the construction of meaning.

Florence Stratton asserts that before the advent of women’s writing in African literature, this approach was never dealt with by male authors and “[the] exclusion of patriarchy as a determinate historical, social, and political condition has a number of interrelated consequences for current theories of African literature” (171). Being deeply concerned about this injustice, Stratton also points out that in the construction of a literary tradition, women’s writing is customarily excluded (171).

However, Alkali examines this issue from a different viewpoint in that she calls into question particular values of the society that have been regarded as absolute and indisputable truth in the male-dominated society. Within this discourse, the author defamiliarizes male and female perspectives, particularly in terms of the characters’ perception of marriage. In this respect, the ‘city wisdom’ propagated by Garba is condemned by Awa, Habu and Dan Fiama since what he regards as modern values do not correspond to those of the rural tradition. Awa instantly reacts to Garba’s account

of married life in the city by calling it prostitution rather than marriage (*The Stillborn* 45). Moreover, Dan Fiama does not approve of Garba's approach to polygamy stating that in the traditional polygamous marriage "each woman looks after herself and her children, while the man keeps a common barn" (45). Dan Fiama believes that Garba's perception of polygamous marriage "kills manhood", and it is "no way to live" (45). Habu, on his part, expresses his indignation by asking Garba how a man can love all of his wives at the same time (45). These views demonstrate solidarity between male and female perspectives within a particular rural discourse which makes it possible to eliminate the gender barrier and remove the traditional binary between men and women established by African literary tradition. This leads to Derrida's technique known as *sous rature*, by which both sides of the binary opposition come under erasure producing a play of differences (*Of Grammatology* 60). The effect of *sous rature* is achieved through an overlapping opinion of the young people regarding Garba's remarks of marriage and the practice of polygamy. However, regardless of gender, this solidarity is the result of various reasons pertaining to the same subject. On the one hand, this condition may be explained on the grounds of moral values that are informed by the customs of rural community, which means the young people feel obligated to accept the norms of their society without questioning. In this sense, Dan Fiama's life story presented in the middle of the conversation explains why the young members of the village are so committed to their traditional values:

Suddenly the headmaster felt ignorant. What did he know about love, that much talked-about word in the village? True, he had been married. His thirteen-year-old bride, who had died in childhood a few years ago, had been his father's choice. The headmaster had cared a lot for the fragile girl. He had looked after her well when she was ill, thus earning his good reputation as the most loving husband in the village. Yet, whatever he had felt at the time, love or compassion for the child-bride hadn't prevented him from taking his pleasures elsewhere. (*The Stillborn* 45-46)

This excerpt also implies that since the young members of the rural society cannot come against their tradition, they use it as a tool to disguise their true

personality. Similarly, though Dan Fiama carries out the obligations of his tradition by marrying a young wife and posing as a traditional family man, he continues to live a hedonistic life. The author criticises such approach ironically adding that despite his hypocritical attitude, Fiama does not consider himself “a suitable candidate for polygamy” since such women as Li, Awa and Faku “could render a man impotent” (46). Awa is also disapproving of polygamous marriage. However, she does not endorse this practice simply because children of different mothers dislike and distrust each other and co-wives are constantly vying jealously for the husband’s favour, which creates a tense atmosphere at home (46). In this sense, her views are similar to Garba’s phallogocentric attitude since neither are concerned about how polygamous marriage affects a woman and her feelings. This fact suggests that Awa has internalized her position as a female subaltern assigned by her community.

The author’s sarcastic attitude is also verbalised through Garba’s views related to education when addressing Habu, Garba states that “book learning has ruined [him]” and that “it is a good thing [his] old woman never sent [him] to school” (45). The author criticises Garba’s inability to understand the fact that what he propagates as modern values is in fact a product of lack of civilisation just as the idea of polygamy that is firmly rooted in tradition. This concept is also associated with phallogocentric attitude for it favours the masculine over the feminine. From traditional viewpoint, polygamy is considered the state of having more than one wife. However, this definition is only the misconception assumed by the communities where this custom is practiced; whereas theoretically, polygamy denotes the ability of a person, regardless of sex, to marry more than one spouse, which means that it can equally be practiced by men and women (Merriam-Webster 900). On the other hand, considered linguistically, it would be more precise to define the state of having more than one wife as polygyny while having more than one husband as polyandry (900). Nevertheless, as the communities within which this tradition is enforced are male-dominated, to think otherwise is practically impossible, which means that the idea of polygamy serves exclusively the interests of patriarchal societies.

Another female character, Faku comes up with another perspective on polygamy. As a female, she is expected to disapprove of the practice of polygamy

since it is degrading to women. On the contrary, she does not see anything wrong with that, particularly concerning Garba's views. She resorts to polygamy as salvation to improve her living conditions. Thus, she assumes the role of a traditional subaltern who takes her position as the status quo:

She would like to be Garba's only wife. What woman wouldn't? But if the man could afford to feed a dozen other wives, who was she to object? For her, polygamy wasn't the point at all. The point was that once she married, living alone with her mother was over. They would no longer have to work their fingers sore to feed themselves or mend the leaking roof, because someone else would be responsible. She did not seem to have taken in Garba's gibe about women slaving for men. (*The Stillborn* 46)

When Faku underlines the requirements of polygamous marriage in which "a man cares for his family, feeds and clothes them", she does not speak on her own behalf; rather, she speaks in the name of her tradition (46). In this respect, Nigerian writer Buchi Emecheta harshly derides the submissive nature of Nigerian women that makes them accept their position as female subalterns. Since the author has firsthand experience of male oppression and patriarchy, she firmly believes in achievement through personal effort. Emecheta asserts that "we [women] are on the lowest rung. Men did not put us there, my sisters, I think sometimes we put ourselves there" (180). Therefore, she urges African women to change their attitude toward themselves so that to gain recognition in the male-dominated society.

Alkali, on her part, tries to shed light on the circumstances labelling Nigerian women as the subaltern members, which also prevents them from taking active roles in various spheres of life. Likewise, Faku's 'urged-by-necessity' situation is explained through a brief glimpse back at her childhood. Her father dies when she is only six years old but the death of her father is not the only tragedy befallen on their family. Three years later, her two brothers drown in a flood and she is left alone with her mother. On top of all, such ill fortune is regarded by the villagers as a sign that the family is cursed and her mother is labelled a witch by the villagers. As a result of these

circumstances, Faku decides to marry Garba, who, as she believes, is the only person offering the prospect of escape from prejudices and misjudgements of rural culture. Obviously, the author does not put blame on Faku for her misguided views; rather, her criticism is directed at the society that pushes women to loveless and polygamous marriages.

Li is concerned about Faku's wrong decisions and does not want her friend to be involved in a relationship with the man who has a shady background (*The Stillborn* 46). Preoccupied with Garba's shady background and old age, Li is unable to understand Faku's choice ultimately inferring that "the body grows fat on what the heart desires" (47). Alkali's employment of vernacular proverbs and wise sayings serves as another Derridean bricolage to suit certain circumstances and to interpret the complexities and obscurities of life. Li's frequent reference to proverbs shows that despite a tendency to rebel against certain customs of the traditional community, she has a deep respect for her cultural heritage, a virtue that her grandfather has instilled in her. To some extent, Li relies on the truthfulness of the lived experience echoing the faith of her ancestors. Though implicitly, the above-given proverb also explains Li's intentions concerning her own future because, like Faku, Li is eager to achieve her goals by settling in the city. Therefore, she does not judge her friend assuming that "this is what Faku really wants" (47).

Even though phallogocentrism sets forward the masculine in the construction of meaning, it is remarkable that sometimes the author herself makes use of this discourse to attribute particular masculine qualities to the female characters. For instance, when Li sees Garba among other young men of the village, she "[lays] her cutlass on the rock and [glides] towards them menacingly" (39). Garba is a man "whom she [has] heard a lot about in the village", nevertheless, for Li, he is a stranger. Challenging the young men to physical combat, she calls them cowards (39). Awa watches her sister with keen interest and sees masculine traits in her (39). Moreover, Dan Fiamma calls Li "a brave he-woman", to which Li sarcastically responds: "More than you think" (40). Ogunyemi thinks that Li's masculine qualities speak for her androgynous nature (313). She adds that Alkali attempts to create a utopian vision of Nigeria where "the men are overly authoritarian, weak, absent, or reckless", whereas the women are virilised she-

men or ‘he-women’ (308). Ogunyemi’s perspective may be considered a new outlook on the study of African female characters; nevertheless, Li does not fully fit in with this definition. The incident with Garba shows that Li only feigns courage, in fact, she possesses typical female characteristics. Her pretentious masculinist pose is soon replaced by a sense of fear:

Although the joke had been a costly one, it was also funny. She could not confess to them that as she stood there with the cutlass raised high above her head, her shadow, as our people would say, had fled, leaving her empty trunk. In another minute, she could have dropped with sheer fright. (*The Stillborn* 40)

In fact, empowering the subaltern female characters, the author deliberately resorts to the qualities conventionally associated with masculinity. This attribution better explains the position of the female subaltern serving as a foil to her own status in the patriarchal society. In addition, instead of creating a female image based on the androgynous ideal, Alkali explores the position of Nigerian women through a vernacular female theory known as womanism. This is an emerging model of female discourse emphasising various aspects of womanhood. Ogunyemi explains womanism in the African context:

[W]omanism is a black outgrowth from feminism. Womanism is black centred; it is accommodationist. It believes in the freedom and independence of women like feminism; unlike radical feminism, it wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stand. (60)

The concept of womanism also serves as a counter discourse to the negative image of women depicted in male-authored works. At this point, feminism would be a relevant approach to the above-stated issue; however, the term ‘feminism’ has a negative connotation in African society. Loflin explains that “many African women writers disdain the term ‘feminist’, which has come to be narrowly defined as a

Western idea of strict gender equality, or even a synonym for an anti-male stance” (42). The author implies that Western feminism is un-african and irrelevant to African society in general. Similar to the aforementioned view, Kolawole points to the fact that cultural difference or otherness of African women has been manipulated not only by patriarchal structures but also by Western feminists who situate them “in marginal or liminal social positions” (204). To this end, African womanism “embodies a set of values that reconstructs a more accurate, a more valid and a more authentic wholesome African feminine consciousness and actions” (204).

Hence, the concept of womanism has emerged as a distinctive vernacular discourse to recreate the position of African women. Alice Walker is credited with coining the term ‘womanist’. By introducing this neologism to social theory, Walker aimed to give voice to the issues deeply rooted in the racial and gender-based oppression of black women. In her essay titled “Womanist” (1983), she comes up with various interpretations of this term. She states that a womanist is characterized by womanish qualities, such as “outrageous, audacious, courageous or wilful” (Walker 19). A womanist is a woman who “loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually” and who “appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength” (19).

Womanism has recently been the focus of numerous scholars, who have created a particular framework for this discourse making it different from Western feminism. In this regard, Layli Phillips describes womanism as “a social change perspective rooted in Black women’s and other women of colour’s everyday experiences” (xx). It also involves the problem of ending all forms of oppression for all people (xx). Further, the author argues that womanism is not feminism and illuminates the difference between the two terminologies as follows:

Womanism does not emphasize or privilege gender or sexism; rather, it elevates all sites and forms of oppression, whether they are based on social-address categories like gender, race, or class, to a level of equal concern and action... Because Black women experience sexism, and womanism is concerned with sexism,

feminism is confluent with the expression of womanism, but feminism and womanism cannot be conflated, nor can it be said that womanism is a 'version' of 'feminism'. (Phillips xxi)

Thus, Phillips believes that since womanism is much more comprehensive than feminism, it would be more sensible to differentiate between the two concepts. Indeed, womanism is not limited solely to gender issues; rather, it is a wide-ranging female discourse serving as a basis for African women writers to cover socio-economic, political and cultural aspects of African societies. Considering the aforementioned views on womanism as well as the issues it encompasses at large, it is worthwhile to note that for Alkali, womanism is more relevant to the study of the vernacular female subaltern. In this sense, the spirit of womanism is also embodied in the main character Li. Alkali strongly believes that the betterment of the position of African women will considerably contribute to the welfare of society. To achieve this, the author reiterates the role of education, which is manifested in Li's willingness to improve herself. In this respect, the fact that she has obtained her primary education outside the village is an important step towards her self-awareness. Moreover, this subsequently helps in shaping her outlook concerning the alliance between male and female. She regards marriage as the relationship in which neither side is superior to the other, rather, one complementing the other thereby forming a union based on mutual compromise and self-realization. This attitude is aptly described in Li's dreams intended to change her life: "She was going to be a successful Grade I teacher and Habu a famous medical doctor, like the white men in the village mission hospital" (*The Stillborn* 55). It is obvious that Li's vision of conjugal relationship is suffused with the cooperative ideal based on mutual aid and self-education.

The subaltern position of the female characters Li, Awa and Faku gains prominence in their conjugal relations with their partners Habu, Dan Fiama and Garba respectively. Their aspirations are clearly manifested in the initial dreams. Faku is determined to marry Garba and settle in the city. Thus, overwhelmed by the city fever, she cannot wait to leave the village. Also, the city is Faku's escape from the pressure of the suffocating conventions of her community. She even "expressed great pity for the two sisters whom she believed would never be privileged to see the city lights"

(56). Faku is not disturbed by Garba's shadowy and insecure background. Moreover, she does not mind marrying a man who has another family in the city. The mind-set imposed by the tradition of her community does not allow her to question her position and her ignorance only adds to this condition. On the other hand, Awa is not concerned with the city, which is aptly stated in her response to Faku that "[they] need not go to the city. The city will come to [them]. The government will soon take over all schools and hospitals. That means rapid development" (56).

Awa's confidence emanates from her cultured background. She believes that she may as well achieve her goals by staying in the village because she is aware of the influence of advancing modernisation in rural parts of the country as well. Another interesting point is the fact that although Li does not invest her plans in staying in the village, both she and Awa have similar aspirations concerning their future in that their dreams relate to their prospective husbands' achievements as well. Li wants Habu to become a doctor, whereas Awa is sure that Dan Fiama will be the first principal in the village school. In fact, the efforts of mutual self-actualisation within a particular institution is one of the peculiarities expressed in Alice Walker's formulation of womanism by which she defines womanist as "traditionally universalist" since she is "committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female" (19).

However, as compared to Li, Awa builds her dreams upon the complete dependence on her partner Dan Fiama, which means that she does not intend to make any significant changes regarding her position as the subaltern. Discussing her plans with Faku, Awa states that when Dan Fiama becomes the first principle, he "promised [her] an important position in the school" and she "will be head of the Adult Education Classes for older women", to which the author sarcastically adds "big words, noble intentions" (*The Stillborn* 56-57). Awa's enthusiastic manner is accompanied by rebus, that is, visual images of traditional rural setting where she feels "intoxicated by the drums, the full moon and the freedom of the night" (57). Such strong characterization of rural images implies that the effect of tradition on Awa is tremendous. Unlike Awa and Li, who care deeply about the future of their prospective husbands, Faku is uninterested in Garba's achievements; rather, she is preoccupied with the idea of

settling in the city as soon as possible. This attitude prefigures further developments in Faku's life as a result of which she becomes a social feminist.

The suspense in Li's life since her husband's departure for the city discourages her from the goals she has endeavoured to achieve. "Her mind went back over the last four years when her life and her hopes had been different from what they were now" (56). All the dreams about "the qualified doctor, the Grade I teacher, the big European house full of servants" remained as dreams, though "the future was in their hands" (57). In the passage where Li is described as waiting for Habu, the manner of anticipation is emphasised by the recurrent use of the signifier 'still' that suggests various connotations: "Four years later, Li, a young woman of nineteen, sat still on a mat, her legs crossed in a meditative position... Now four years later, here she was, still in the village, still waiting for Habu... She was still waiting..." (56-57). The signifier 'still' is disseminated in the passage indicating various signifieds producing *différance*. In its literal meaning, 'still' describes Li's position, which is calm and quiet. However, the effect of *différance* consists in its metaphorical meaning, which implies Li's state of inaction towards the circumstances that delay materialisation of her dreams. This pun of signification aptly describes Li's helplessness.

Due to Habu's irresponsible attitude and empty promises, Li becomes an object of ridicule among the villagers teasingly gossiping behind her back: "What kind of husband keeps a bride waiting for four years? Either he has got himself a city wife or he is impotent" (*The Stillborn* 60). The villagers finally assume that Li's husband, "a good-for-nothing stranger", has abandoned her (63). In Habu's absence, Li has the time to think over the decision that she has made by marrying him. She is frustrated at her husband's failure because he becomes a travelling salesman instead of a doctor. Giving way to despair, Li feels that her dreams are shattered:

Who was he that had married her, opened up the dam of her desire and then left her for years to burn? Truly, Habu was nothing. Just another passing stranger, who had come to her when she was ripe for love and deceived her. The villagers were right after all. Habu was a good-for-nothing stranger who wore a tattered shirt and

washed out shorts that had lost their seat. Yes, he had fanned the flame of her love, but she was determined to quench its embers.
(63)

Li is not a passive character who submissively bows to the inevitable. It is mainly due to her ambitious and rebellious personality that she refuses to accept the role that fate offers her. Eventually, Li puts an end to her vain anticipation by asking: “How long can a woman wait for a man?” (63). This rhetorical utterance epitomises Li’s silent rebellion against tradition that relegates the woman to the subaltern position. She gives voice to all the female subalterns who are obliged to remain silent to the circumstances making them inferior and passive members of the society. Ogunyemi believes that “[Li] is neither playing the role of the victim, nor, paralyzed with the binary opposition of the centre-periphery model, does she consider women as passive creatures waiting to be inscribed upon” (7). On the contrary, “Nigerian women are not standing still but are already on the course, participating in the discourse without waiting for a formal invitation” (7). In this respect, Li is well aware that she needs to exercise her faculties elsewhere:

She experienced an intense desire to escape from them all. To run away from the pressure at home, from the constant advances of other men and the mockery in the eyes of the villagers. Could she not run away to a distant place, anywhere with anybody? (*The Stillborn* 63)

Considering Li’s relationship with the household members, it is worthwhile to note that the relationship of father and daughter is particularly complicated. On the one side, there is a rebellious, impulsive and fidgety daughter, on the other, a traditional family man and a parent “who is never tired of playing god with his children” (24). Baba is stern and autocratic with his imposing household rules depicted in stark contrast to Li, whereas Li is unmanageable, which does not characterise her as a submissive female subaltern. Being aware of this, Baba fails to impose his domination upon Li as he does on other female members in the family. In this sense, an event that happens when Li is only eleven years old significantly influences the relationship

between father and daughter. Li has a dream in which she prefigures her father's accident. Baba has newly converted to a new faith and is preparing to join the prayer meeting in the next village. Li begs her father not to go there since she senses that something wrong is going to happen. Bursting out laughing, Baba mockingly calls his daughter 'child of the devil' and 'prophetess' dismissing the dream as ungrounded (9). Baba also adds that "[Li's] dreams at night are simply what [Li] thinks about during the day", being completely unaware how deep he has hurt his daughter. He simply disregards the case labelling it 'the work of the devil' (10). As a result, Li feels 'cheapened in his eyes' since she has always relied on her father's words as the ultimate truth (10). However, what he has said about dreams being reflections of earlier thoughts does not sound right to her. She is sure that she does not hold evil in her but one thing is clear to her that something bad is going to happen. She has had such dreams before and whenever she felt a weird sensation, it always happened (10). Indeed, the dream materializes and an accident befalls Baba. This notorious event affects him to such an extent that "since then he had always felt extremely uneasy in her presence" (9). He starts to avoid confrontations with Li deep down believing that she has mysterious powers. He still hates to admit it even to himself that her fearless and piercing eyes can "see through his soul; assessing, judging and condemning him, weighing his strength against his weakness" (9).

Baba is the patriarch of the family madly obsessed with discipline. Although he has converted to a new faith, he has not internalized its tenets, in that he continues to exert classical methods of upbringing on his children particularly based on corporal punishment. One incident causing Baba's anger illustrates his typical patriarchal attitude towards his children. Overlooking her father's strict rules in the household, Li goes out at night to date Habu, who she has met in the cultural dances. The next morning Baba calls all the children to find out the culprit. Li's elder brother Sule covers for Li by taking her blame in order to defend her from the fury of their father. As compared to subservient Awa, Sule is critical of the way his father handles the household issues, therefore, Li feels more comfortable confiding in Sule. Sule's confession catches Baba unawares for he has suspected Li of disobedience, which is aptly stated as follows: "[Baba] might be a short-sighted bigot, but he was no fool"

(20). Therefore, he is in doubt about the truthfulness of Sule's story regarding the previous night:

Baba knew that someone was lying somewhere along the line. What worried him now was, what was he to do with this man-child? He was a man now and it wasn't just his age, but what he stood for. He could beat Awa easily if she erred, no matter how old she was, but not Sule, his firstborn male child. And to beat a man for going out to dance at night was outrageous. He decided to give him a chance to apologise. That way both could salvage their pride. (23)

Indeed, this excerpt is considered one of the striking examples in the novel attesting to Baba's traditional stance, which contradicts his efforts to adopt a new culture. The author exposes the fact that in the Hausa society men are accustomed to regard women as their inferior or subaltern. By the same token, staying loyal to the principles of the male-dominated society, Baba applies double standards favouring his male children over his daughters. Not surprisingly, considering punishing Sule for his disobedience, Baba faces a dilemma because he is his first male child cherished by the family. Thus, the prerogative of being a male child exempts Sule from his father's harsh penalties.

In fact, male child preference is prevalent among Nigerian communities. It is one of the main issues commonly treated by African female writers including Buchi Emecheta. In her internationally acclaimed essay "Feminism with a Small 'f'", she states that in many parts of Africa "only one's enemies will go out to pray for a pregnant woman to have a girl-child" (179). Since most people prefer a man-child, the prayers go as follows: "You will be safely delivered of a bouncing baby boy, a real man-child that we can and make jolly with whisky and beer" (179). Moreover, the pregnant woman does not protest at these prayers because she also wants to have a man-child, who "will not be married away, but will stay in the family home and look after his mother when she becomes weak and old" (179). Based on her firsthand knowledge of the female issues in Nigeria, Emecheta argues that in most African

societies the birth of a son enhances a woman's authority in the family (179). On the other hand, "a girl-child is conditioned into thinking that being the girl, she must do all the housework, she must help her mother to cook, clean, fetch water and look after her younger brothers and sisters" (179). If she complains, she is sharply reminded by her mother that she is a girl who is going to be a woman (179). In this respect, for Baba it is easier to punish Awa because she "had a mortal fear of [him], a fear which made her humble and submissive beyond reason" (*The Stillborn* 13). She is devoted to Baba's principles and the traditions of her own community by making a perfect traditional subaltern. At some points, Awa even serves as a mouthpiece for her father's stern principles. In the above incident, Awa is rather satisfied with her father's decision regarding Sule's disobedience. She refuses to accept her father's pullback since she is "in a different frame of mind" (24). When her father gives up punishing Sule and drops the whip, she considers this attitude as an "impotent gesture" (24).

Although Baba is the patriarch of the family, he harbours contradictory views that makes it difficult for him to establish his self-identity. Trapped between the two worlds, Baba is unable to identify fully with either the tradition of his ancestors or the requirements of his new belief. In the Derridean sense, he is supposed to integrate the newly acquired faith into his tradition. However, he does not make the slightest attempt to do this. Thus, Baba is considered a flat character since he does not undergo any substantial change throughout the novel.

The person who is best aware of Baba's state of confusion is Kaka. He observes changes in his son since he has adopted a new faith to which he is completely alien. He attributes his son's strange behaviour partly to his unhappy childhood because after the death of his wife, Kaka remarries and Baba spends his childhood in the shadow of his stepmother. She is believed to be responsible for his fragile constitution (8). Therefore, Kaka thinks that she has been "the root of all his troubles and of his son's too" (25). However, "deep down in his heart, he knew [Baba's stepmother] wasn't the only reason for his son's abnormal behaviour. Other things helped to confuse his sense of moral values" (25). Kaka describes his son's predicament as "the quest for modern living coupled with a foreign culture, a thing that was sweeping the whole community like wildfire" (25). In this respect, Baba's situation can be characterized as aporia,

which is observed in his attempt to embrace the new belief and its values still feeling related to the tenets of his own community.

Baba's state of aporia is particularly noticeable in the upbringing of his children. Kaka disapproves of his son's attitude towards his children and cannot "close his eyes to the constant beatings that took place at the slightest pretext in the name of discipline" (*The Stillborn* 25). However, Baba just shrugs off by saying: "What has come over the children of today? They are not only rebellious but completely immodest" (23). By doing so, he avoids acknowledging the essence of his own ambivalent situation. This implies that despite Baba's conversion to a new faith entailing modern values, he remains narrow-minded whereas Kaka, despite his extremely traditional attitude, appears to be more open-minded, particularly regarding the issues of the young generation.

Kaka's wife, Grandma is another female character, who largely differs from the rest of the women in the novel. She is described as "shrewd and dominating who has driven three other wives from the household" (8). It is even rumoured that she has been divorced three times by Kaka, but each time she refused to leave (8). Every mishap is blamed on her presence in the household (8). On the other hand, the fact that Grandma is never named in the novel suggests that she is another representative of tradition. However, she can hardly be regarded as a traditional subaltern, which constitutes another contradictory element in the novel. Moreover, as a female character, grandma belies Spivak's subaltern as well. This is clearly illustrated in her attitude towards the men in the village, who "not daring to walk in the old woman's direction", know very well that whenever she is in a bad mood, she can extend her insults to the menfolk in general (53). This time, her scornful attitude is directed to the whole village. To add vividness to Grandma's monologue, the author employs tirade⁵ that serves as Derridean bricolage:

Men of this village... listen to my words. I was married fourteen times in the eastern part of this land. I left for this part because I

⁵ Tirade is a long speech, usually "vehement, abusive and censorious" (Cuddon 725).

could find no lion among them. The village was filled with red monkeys, black monkeys, jungle pigs, wild cats, toothless dogs and lame cocks. Did I know, gods of my fathers, that I was coming to meet a worse pack? This village is full of lizards, snakes, worms and by the gods of my ancestors, cold slippery fish. And the women? A pack of domestic donkeys with no shame. When they are not under the whip of their wizard husbands, they are busy plotting witchcraft. (53)

Investigating the development of Nigerian women, Catherine Coles states that “the patriarchal nature of Hausa society, the pervasive notion that women are subject to control by men and the seclusion of women have given rise to a view of Hausa women as largely powerless relative to men and entirely lacking any authority in the public realm” (12). Moreover, research findings confirm this male dominant – female subordinate image of Hausa society (12). On the other hand, the author argues that Nigerian women are not limited to a single, subordinate status and the fact that they gain influence over other individuals is due to prestige granted to them “from the bearing and socialization of children, seniority accorded through age and generation” (13). Thus, even if Hausa women are not supposed to inhabit the public sphere, they play an important role in the private realm of their communities based on particular tenets. In this sense, grandma is considered the senior woman in the compound being able to control and influence the lives of others. Not surprisingly, she is portrayed as a ferocious and abusive woman who “has ruled father and son with an iron hand” (*The Stillborn* 8). In some ways, grandma can even serve as a model for Li, who also strives to be independent and rely only on her own efforts. However, given the social changes taking place in the country, there are more opportunities for Li to achieve her ambition than there were for grandma since they did not even exist when she was young.

As compared to the other household members, Li has rather distant relationship with her mother. She is a shadowy character described as a traditional female subaltern constantly humiliated by her husband. Besides, Li knows that her mother is not happy in her marriage to Baba (13). Li’s mother comes from a different community and culture, which puts her in the position of an outsider. Moreover, Baba’s rudeness only

adds to this situation. Her background becomes a good excuse for him to insult her in front of the whole household:

A heathen woman can only have heathen children. Why I married you is what I can never understand. There were many believing women in my village, but I had to end up marrying from a heathen village. And even after I have civilised you, you still believe like heathens. Of course, the lion cub takes after its mother (13).

Li can never confide in her mother in the way that Faku can in hers getting surprised at “how close Faku must be to her mother to talk with her about intimate things” (33). She does not perceive her mother’s deep pain since Mama never reveals this to anyone in the household. For Li, her mother constitutes another example of a traditional female subaltern who prefers to suffer silently. Only much later in the novel, having gone through particular experiences, Li’s thoughts regarding her mother considerably change.

One of the remarkable points in the novel is the fact that the village remains anonymous throughout the novel. It serves as a microcosm of typical Nigerian rural life with all its rituals and traditions. It is also a symbol of the past and ‘home’ of the ancestors. In this regard, traditional values of the community are best preserved and treasured by Kaka, the eldest member of the family and community. Kaka closely observes the events happening in the village. He does not welcome the innovations introduced to his community and is opposed to his son’s and the villagers’ adoption of modern values. He is also opposed to most things in the compound, especially his son’s attitude towards the household people. However, he has no authority to change anything. He is allowed to stay in the compound only on condition that “he refrains from questioning or interfering with the family’s lifestyle” (25). Thus, he stays but lives a different life, unknown to most members of the family. In fact, Kaka is a character representing the old generation. He is already an old man when the story begins and at the time of his death, twenty years later, he becomes “the ancient one” and “the last of his kind” (101). He is the voice of tradition that is dying out with him and he cannot and does not want to keep up with the changes brought about by

modernisation. Kaka has reservations about the feasibility of anything innovative introduced to his village. Moreover, he remains loyal to his outdated methods and ideas believing in their validity. To illustrate, he refuses to accept advances made in modern medicine explaining his views as follows: “How can a stranger know the diseases of the people? What does he know about the wrath of the gods of my ancestors? Let those that are beginning to go funny in the head swallow white clay for medicine and have their stomachs slit open for a cure” (25). Instead, when he feels sick, Kaka prefers the services of the village herbalist.

However, despite being extremely devoted to his traditions, Kaka is a contradictory character. On the one hand, he lives a secluded life worshipping the old gods and offering sacrifices to them in the cave behind the Hill Station; on the other, he promotes understanding between different traditions even if he is not part of them. For instance, whenever there is a Christian or Muslim festival in the village, he attends both diligently (25). Nevertheless, however hard Kaka tries to preserve his traditional values, he is aware that the process of modernisation has already started and even the only man alive “who is trying to keep the village clean” is not able to prevent this from happening (25). Another inconsistency regarding Kaka is expressed in his attempts to interfere with his son’s mad obsession with discipline. He cannot remain silent to the constant beatings taking place “at the slightest pretext in the name of discipline” (25). Eventually, Kaka decides to speak to his son in spite of the warning to keep quiet. He believes that “children shouldn’t be caged, for if the cage got broken by accident or design, they would find the world too big to live in” (25). He particularly observes this in Li’s behaviours, who has already grown out of this cage.

Kaka is the only person who tries to curb Li’s rebellious character by constantly advising her to train her impatient and reckless temper. However, Li is preoccupied with the dreams of the city life and her love for Habu. Kaka does not believe that her relationship with Habu will last and tries to protect her from the future frustration: “‘You mustn’t do that my mother. That will be the death of me.’ Or, ‘I cannot prevent you from doing that, mother, but prepare my shroud first. I may not live to see the end of it.’ Li would usually give way with a grudging ‘That ancient one will cheat me out

of this life” (55). However, despite Li’s hardnosed character, Kaka never gives up mentoring her.

Through Kaka, the author also introduces the virtues of the local community in that he instils patience in Li emphasizing its importance in life. He believes that “you never lose by being patient” (64). Subsequently, Li understands the moral of this wise saying with the benefit of hindsight. For Li, Kaka is also a reliable person in whom she can confide her secrets. Besides, there is a strong affinity between Li and him. Comparing her father with her grandfather, Li often wishes Kaka were her father and wonders, “how such a warm-hearted man could have a lukewarm son like Baba” (13). Kaka, for his part, is especially fond of Li because she reminds him of his own mother:

At five feet four inches, with skin the colour of brown earth, a graceful neck and a slender body, Li reminded the ancient one of his own mother. Li’s great-grandma had been the village beauty during her time... When Li was born, Kaka had taken one look at her and burst into tears. Those bright eyes that peered at him from behind a forest of kinky hair and the brown-earth skin were those of his dear mother. (13)

Alongside Li’s resemblance to his mother, Kaka also admires her determination and courage because she is the only female member in the household who dares to raise her voice against Baba’s sickening discipline and authority. Not surprisingly, when Baba’s health worsens, Kaka hails Li as ‘the man of the house’ (63).

The use of dreams is another important aspect in the novel. Pointing to the significance of this aspect in the development of the main character, Nigerian scholar Okereke asserts that Li’s dreams “add a supernatural dimension to her already unconventional character, thereby making her special and placing her ahead of the other female characters” (101). Indeed, throughout the novel, the author regularly employs dreams as a leitmotif to convey an underlying message by means of particular metaphorical representations. In addition, dreams foreshadow and at the same time influence the course of events. In this sense, by endowing the main character with the

ability to prefigure the future, the author aims to convey particular messages. She achieves this effect by making the extensive use of repetition in dreams. It is obvious in the narration of the first dream through the recurrent use of the signifier 'strange' in 'a strange feeling', 'a strange compound in a strange village', 'strangely quiet', and the signifier 'dust' in 'people sitting in the dust' and 'some had dust in their hair and on their faces' (*The Stillborn* 10). With each repetition, the signifier acquires a new signified, both denotatively and connotatively, thus becoming a pun of signification.

The recurrent use of the signifiers 'strange' and 'dust' are remarkable in that they perfectly describe the consequences of Baba's false decisions. He is trying to initiate into a new culture and despite Li's warnings, he goes to another village to practice his newly acquired belief. As a result, the disaster that happens to him proves the fact that he is not yet welcomed by the community whose faith he has accepted. Thus, taken metaphorically, the village symbolises a new culture or faith and the repetition of the word 'strange' coupled with 'village' and 'compound' stands for the foreignness and remoteness of this belief. Additionally, the word 'dust' recurrently used in the passage, also stands for various connotations. The appearance of the people who were covered in dust making them completely unrecognizable and strange gave Li the feeling as if she was in the graveyard. Thus, the word 'dust' suggesting a negative meaning signifies an obstacle preventing Li from seeing clearly and making sense of the place and the people surrounding her. However, while in Li's dream 'dust' is a sign of an imminent disaster, though at the beginning of the novel, the author explains that in her community, a dusty appearance is "a respectable sign of having come from a faraway land" (2). This play of signification made possible by way of *différance* demonstrates the author's ability of using various literary devices in the narration.

It is also observed that particular events taking place in the story are not completed evoking the theory of omission known as ellipsis. In terms of Derrida, ellipsis is something invisible or missing in texts and this undeterminable lack completely redoubles the book (*Writing and Difference* 373). In *The Stillborn*, the details of the accident that befalls Baba are left out, invisibly completing this lack with the dream previously narrated by Li. Thus, the omitted episodes are invisibly

completed through Li's dreams. Ellipsis is also observed in another dream by which Li prefigures her father's death:

On reaching the village, she found her ancestral home deserted and all the huts in a state of ruin. Some of the walls were crumbling, others had their roofs and doors caved in. Bushes had grown around the compound and it was almost impassable. Wall geckos and spiders assailed her as she tried to go further in. She called but not a single person was there. Although the huts were in ruin, all were still standing except for her father's. She moved to the spot where her father's hut had once been and saw a heap of red soil. (*The Stillborn* 74)

Li's dream, which subsequently comes true, serves as a metaphor for the consequences of Baba's faults that he has refused to acknowledge until the end of his life. Even the last days spent in hospital do not recuperate his autocratic attitude towards his daughters. Li learns from her uncle that her father died yearning to see only his son Sule, which confirms that he makes no concessions in his patriarchal stance. Therefore, 'a heap of red soil' that is left of his hut metaphorically explains that not only does the ancestral home collapse but also all the values and tenets to which Baba has insistently clung for many years.

Indeed, the author utilizes dream motif as an effective narrative tool. Examining Zaynab Alkali's novel, Christine Loflin argues that Alkali's incorporation of dreams into the novel is innovative, in that, it gives the novel a superficial similarity to the magic realism of Latin African fiction (41). Loflin also points out that this approach has become a trend among younger African writers to "move away from the standards of Western realism to reflect the lived realities of African people" (41). On the other hand, Brenda Cooper, examining the plots, themes and narrative techniques of Western African novels, infers that "the mingling of magic and reality arises out of postcolonial, unevenly developed societies where modern and ancient, scientific and magical views of the world co-exist" (36). She regards this approach as an attempt to merge uneven and conflicting forces since "the societies in such writings are in transition, uneven,

the product of different cultures, stages of economic development and undergoing transformation” (36). In this respect, the transitional period in literary sphere makes it possible for the female writers to put their own female characterizations against the stereotypes of male-authored works. Therefore, by bringing together reality and dreams, Alkali, as a female writer, tries to reconcile the clichéd binaries created by the male-dominated literature.

The binary between tradition and modernisation becomes more obvious when Li finally takes the initiative to join her husband in the city. This time the author points up the positive side of tradition expressed in the goodwill of the rural community:

The news of her journey had already spread in the village. People would stop her on the way to ask when she was leaving and what job her husband did in the city. They would then fish into their pockets or untie the knotted end of their wrappers and bring out money ranging from two pence to two shillings – to aid her on her journey. At home, various food items and household articles, some of which were no use at all, were brought in. (*The Stillborn* 67)

This episode illustrates that certain values, having stood the test of time, become the heritage of a society and are handed down from generation to generation. They also contribute to the formation of collective identity based on the principles of solidarity, cohesion and social responsibility. Similarly, in the novel, a shared sense of belonging to a particular community is demonstrated through such traditional virtues as cooperation and mutual support. On the other hand, the author implies that the society’s complete reliance on tradition makes it difficult to perceive changes brought about by modernisation. Hence, when Habu’s younger brother, who is supposed to take Li to the city, insists that “the loads [are] not worth the money he [will] have to spend to carry them to the city” and that “many of the articles [are] useless in the city”, the villagers do not understand it and feel insulted (67). On the literal level, this incomprehension points to the ignorance of the villagers about the city; whereas metaphorically, it stands for the conflict between rural and urban life, which ultimately

makes them assume that their daughter “would be in a strange city among strange people” (67).

In fact, the author exemplifies a dichotomous perspective by which tradition serves as a pharmakon for the villagers’ conception of modernisation. Accordingly, tradition stands for both ‘remedy’ and ‘poison’ (*Dissemination* 70). The beneficial aspect of tradition consists in its commonly held beliefs and customs the preservation of which fosters cultural and communal unity of rural people. On the other hand, a strict adherence to tradition has harmful effects upon rural communities since it prevents them from making an impartial judgment about changes brought about by modernisation. As a result, resisting any new ideas and values, rural people remain tradition-bound and obstinately prejudiced.

Li’s life in the city is described through her own consciousness by way of flashbacks. After urban exposure, Li makes certain inferences from her observations and firsthand experience in the city by means of which the author reiterates rural-urban differences. It is strange for Li to sleep and wake through “the noises of people and vehicles and the bright lights continued long into the night” because she “came from a place where only cockcrow signalled the coming of the dawn” (*The Stillborn* 69). At this point, the signifier ‘strange’, frequently repeated throughout the novel, gives way to another signified thereby producing an effect of différance. The connotation suggested by the signifier ‘strange’ implies that the reality of the city life does not live up to her expectations. This play of signification functions as a Derridean metaphor, otherwise known as an “operative concept” in a literary text (*Writing and Difference* 7). Moreover, to highlight the contrast between Li’s daydreams and the reality she has encountered in the city, the author applies juxtaposition, a rhetorical device by which the implied operative concept of strangeness gains more prominence:

For four years, she had yearned to be in her husband’s house. She had dreamt of the moments when she would cook his meals, wash his clothes ... Such moments were rare now. The meals she cooked remained uneaten as his homecomings became later and rarer. And whenever he was at home, the former lion of the village

was as unapproachable as an angry god... She remembered the first day in the city. At first, she was pleasantly surprised to see the change in Habu. He was much taller and more robust, his clothes were clean and fitted him well. Li felt proud of him... She longed to talk openly and touch him, but it seemed that Habu wasn't feeling a similar emotion. (*The Stillborn* 69)

A disquieting feeling of strangeness is soon replaced by a sense of disappointment and humiliation as Habu violently reacts to the food and utensils she has brought from the village calling them "useless articles" and "cast-offs" (69). Li realises that she "[has] lost her man to the city" and "the man lying on the other side of the room [is] a well-dressed stranger who [does] not talk to a village woman" (70). Li's observations regarding the changes in Habu reaffirm the villagers' views of modernisation, which they directly associate with the city. Similarly, Li's traditional side comes to the fore when she blames the city for Habu's indifference. Trying to make sense of her husband's estranged attitude toward her, Li feels nostalgic for her "boyish man with an incredible smile and a mischievous twinkle in the eye" (70). She suffers silently by asking herself, "Where is my man? Where is that proud, self-confident, half-naked lover that defied the laughter of the villagers and walked the length and breadth of the village just to see me?" (70). Li also longs for her village where everything is "God-given" (70). In the Derridean sense, Li experiences 'nostalgia for origins' that stems from the clash of traditional and modern values (*Writing and Difference* 369). This explains the reason why Li ascribes the changes in Habu to the new values acquired in the city.

Hajiya, the owner of the house, becomes the only confidante in the city who "knew all about Li's problems" (*The Stillborn* 71). With the inclusion of this minor character, the author points up particular issues concerning Nigerian women. In this respect, the importance of potency and fertility focused in Hajiya's story is particularly relevant in contemporary Nigeria. When Li complains that Habu treats her as "he would treat a dog, with disgust", Hajiya consoles her by telling her own life story (71). She marries at a very young age but since she cannot procreate, her husband remarries several women with whom he has many children. Hajiya experiences a deep emotional

pain with every birth in the family and polygamy only adds to her state of childlessness:

I married at the age of thirteen and for thirty years, I prayed... for a child. My husband lost no time in marrying other wives who promptly gave him eleven sons and four daughters... but I had to be patient and stay. I was more like an older sister to my husband and a mother to the younger wives. You would have thought I should have a respectable position in the family, but more often than not, I was pushed to the background because I had no child.

(72)

Alkali points out that the plight of a woman is even more desperate in her society especially if she is left on her own. In this regard, investigating the concept of motherhood in her society, Laretta Ngcobo states that fertility is important to African families since “[a] man sees it as a sacred duty towards his whole lineage” (142). Therefore, it is a taboo and a shame if a man fails to immortalise the ancestors (142). As a result, childlessness is associated with women, and otherwise is unthinkable (142). Further, the author illustrates her point through a common African belief explaining why infertility is generally attributed to women:

Central to many African beliefs is that there are three states of human existence – the land of the unborn, the land of the living and the land of the ancestors and the dead. Belief has it that the children of any given family are always there waiting for the mothers to come and rescue them from oblivion and bring them to life in the land of the living. Failure therefore, to 'rescue' the children is a sorrowful capitulation and a betrayal. In cases of childlessness, people do not think of and share the couple's or woman's agony – rather, they hear the echoing cries of the unborn children that she (the mother) will not 'rescue' and bring to life.

(Ngcobo 142)

Through this mythic illustration, Ngcobo clearly demonstrates the fact that a woman is the first suspect when things go wrong. Hajiya finds herself in a similar situation when she is held responsible for infertility. Bereft of the role of motherhood and pushed to the background, she feels marginalised and estranged at her husband's home. She cannot find her place in the family thereby exercising her position from the periphery. As a result, she is reduced to a permanent state of subalternity. In this sense, Hajiya is the archetype of all the women who are burdened with fertility rites enforced by their patriarchal communities. As a female writer, Alkali is able to relate to the plight of such women as Hajiya. Moreover, Hajiya serves as a mouthpiece for all African female writers who put women's issues high on the agenda. She expresses her womanly feelings when she confesses to Li that "it is painful and hard when you have no man or child to hug" (*The Stillborn* 73). It is worth noting that by exposing Hajiya's vulnerability to both polygamous marriage and infertility, the author implies that the male authors have deliberately excluded this major factor from their phallogocentric literature.

Faku is another female character who is exposed to urban life and tries to adapt to her new life. By marrying Garba and settling in the city, she believes that she achieves her ultimate dreams. However, her firsthand experience regarding polygamous marriage proves her wrong. The reality Faku has to face in the city turns out to be rather different. When Li visits her childhood friend in the city, she finds it hard to believe how "this near-stranger could be her friend Faku" (77). Before meeting her, Li has wondered how Faku would look after almost six years: "Fat? Modern looking? Rich and sophisticated?" (76). "As soon as Faku smiled, her once beautiful dimples, now wider and deeply set into a thin haggard face" (77). Li hardly recognises her friend "famished in body and no doubt famished in soul" (77). Faku has one child and lives with Garba's eldest wife, who has nine children. Since she is the eldest wife and has many children, she is referred to as "the mother-of-the-house" and "the master of the house" (79). In addition, due to the same fact she is the only one who knows everything about the household as well as her husband's secret business, of which Faku is completely unaware. In terms of domestic authority, Garba's elder wife is similar to Li's grandmother since in terms of power both are granted to determine

younger women's positions in the private realm. In this regard, Faku, who marries Garba in the hope of a better life, is subject to double oppression by both her husband and his elder wife.

Li observes Faku's co-mate and senses something she does not like about the woman. "Something about her eyes, probing, or was it the intimidating way she asked questions?" (78). She lies to the woman by introducing herself as Faku's sister in order to support her friend. The motive that drives Li to such an act shows her ingenuity and pragmatic approach to her tradition. Li is well aware that "in a polygamous home, the number of relatives a woman has is important, so is her background" (78). More importantly, the solidarity between Li and Faku is another virtue emanating from tradition. This illustrates the fact that even though Li and Faku are not blood-related, they are closely linked with an emotional bond called sisterhood. Li's anxiety about Faku's state is also reflected in her dream:

This time she was crossing a desert land and saw from a distance the shape of a woman tilling the land. As she moved closer, the shape became that of Faku. She tilled with all her strength, but the land was dry and remained unyielding. The dust that rose enveloped her until she was one with the earth. Li stopped and watched her for some time. At last, she said, 'The land is no good, Faku. It is barren. You are wasting your energy for nothing.' But Faku did not pay attention to her. She continued to till desperately. Li turned and left her friend still tilling. (80)

There are several signifiers describing Faku's relationship with Garba and her attempts to save the marriage. To illustrate, the words 'dry' and 'unyielding' connote Faku's choice regarding her partner, for which Li believes that Faku struggles in vain. Despite Faku's persistent endeavours, the place she decides to settle is 'barren', which means she is not in the right place to achieve her goal. It is evident that the dream metaphorically represents Faku's futile efforts. However, she continues to believe that there is hope and before Li's departure for the village, she asks her to say to her mother that "the land is still brown and unyielding" and "not until it is covered with green will

I [Faku] come to the village” (80). This message implies that Faku does not intend to return to the village until she achieves her goals in the city.

Faku refuses to open up to Li, therefore, when Li asks if she is truly happy, Faku gives an evasive answer: “By God, I am enjoying my life in the city! Isn’t the city what you and I always wanted?” (80). Li, on her part, does not believe in her best friend’s pretensions. Li supports her judgment about Faku by a wise saying that “happiness shows itself in the flesh and the face of a person” (79). By this, she implies that Faku is hiding the truth posing as a happily married woman. Within this context, the author’s employment of proverbs and wise sayings serve as bricolage to describe Faku’s situation. Also, in terms of rhetoric, these aphorisms represent traditions and values in which Li and Faku have been trained. Opposing Li’s remark with a repartee that “some people grow fat on unhappiness”, Faku insinuates that there are values that are subject to change. (79). By doing so, Faku also customizes the catchphrase previously used by Li as: “the body grows fat on what the heart desires” (47). It can be argued that in Faku’s statement, the effect of *différance* suggests two connotations. On the one hand, it implies that Faku learns from her own experience, on the other, she learns to take responsibility for her own actions. Indeed, despite living a life of a traditional female subaltern, Faku deals with challenging situations, thereby developing into a strong female character. Therefore, she never blames her husband or her co-mate for their unfair attitude towards her. Years later, Li would remember visiting Faku in the city: “She knew where she was going, but Garba could not understand. He failed to fill that vacuum in her life. I saw her in her moments of dire need. She was uncomplaining but her whole body spoke of the hurt in her soul. I knew then she had to leave to survive!” (100). In this respect, Okereke argues that through Faku’s wrong decision, Alkali in fact makes her point that a “woman can never achieve self-realization through a male-defined destiny” and that “security for woman in marriage is an illusion” (110).

However traditional Faku might initially seem, her social awareness and zest for independence follow her everywhere even in a polygamous household, which she has favoured before marriage. Subsequently, she breaks up with her husband mysteriously disappearing in the city. The author does not provide any information regarding Faku’s

later life. Thus, in terms of Derrida, Faku's further life is inexplicable and unknowable like arcanum (*Of Grammatology* 76). Similarly, the villagers regard Faku's mysterious disappearance as arcanum assuming that she has become a fallen woman. This prejudice supports Derrida's argument about interpreting anything unknown within the framework of traditional assumptions. In this respect, Audu's remark that "in the village whatever remains secret has not yet happened" suggests that each 'arcanum' has its explanation in their tradition (*The Stillborn* 50). For the same reason, people living in rural areas tend to think that unmarried or divorced women in the city accept the one traditional image for an independent woman, that of prostitution. Laretta Ngcobo explains the reason of this common belief as follows:

... when [women] get to the cities, for the first time in their life, their physical labour is unacceptable. Women in the African cities find that for the first time nobody really wants their labour... Women leave the country situation hoping to find employment in the cities and live independently at last, but what they find is that nobody wants their labour. The only means of survival is that old offering, the only lesson they ever learned was to offer themselves. (qtd. in "Feminism with a small 'f'" 182)

Faku's escape from the village results in her unfair and groundless exposure to rural gossip and pressures. While living in the village, she is branded "bad seed" and her family "cursed" (*The Stillborn* 52). Therefore, her unknown life in the city only adds to the villagers' misconception to assume that she has become a fallen woman. The author harshly criticises these negative sides of rural tradition. To do so, she ironically chooses an extremely traditionalist male character Kaka, who believes that "bad words are nothing but wasted air" and that "tomorrow the gossip will shift to another family" (62).

Li returns to the village on her father's death. Instead of Baba's compound, she finds "the dead ashes of the fire hearth" (82). In fact, Awa has urged Li in her urgent letter to come and see for herself that "[their] father's compound is in ruins" (82). Having seen for herself what her family home has turned into, Li sadly calls it "a house

without a man” (82). Cringing with shame, she has remembered the ambitions due to which she left the village five years ago:

Surveying the compound once more, she made a mental picture of what she intended to do with it after she had completed her course at the Advanced Teachers’ college. A mighty modern building to house everybody, old and young. A regular monthly income to educate the small ones and keep the old ones warm and well-fed... But Awa’s urgent letter had been the reason for her return to the village before her goals had been reached. (82)

After the birth of her daughter, Shuwa, Li waits “to be fetched by her husband as the custom [demands]” (83). However, “he neither [comes] to console the family nor to acknowledge the birth of their firstborn” (83). Being unable to cope with the situation, Li falls into a deep void of hopelessness and despair. She dresses extravagantly frequently visiting cultural dances and festivals. With the increasing number of suitors, she feels extremely flattered that she can still command men’s attention. Her name comes easily to men’s lips and “in her new glory she was oblivious to everything” (83). Li’s conduct characterised by her tradition as social stigma poses a threat to the women of the village. As a result, she is labelled as an “unsaddled horse”, “the vulture that isn’t anybody’s chicken” and “rich man’s plaything” (84-85). This scandal brings disgrace on the entire family. Therefore, Awa and her mother beg Li to go back to her husband, to which Li instantly responds that “the day a woman begins to woo a man has not yet come and if it has, it will not begin with me” (83).

As a reaction to male critical and literary discourse that valorises and idealizes womanhood and motherhood within the conventional framework, Alkali ironically refers to Li’s situation as “the peak of her womanhood” (83). Womanhood acts as a leitmotif deliberately employed by the author to criticise the fact that it does not go beyond its traditional conception thereby serving the interests of phallogocentric literature. Alkali is well aware that in African traditional societies a woman enters the peak of her womanhood when she assumes the responsibility of a wife and a mother. Similarly, Ngcobo points out that to express her womanhood to the full, every woman

in Africa is encouraged to marry and get children. (141). In this respect, women writers feel obliged to challenge the accustomed perception of womanhood created by the male-dominated literary tradition. Alkali's acerbic criticism made through irony is an allusion to lopsided views of African male writers. In fact, she strongly believes that womanhood is not limited solely to the roles of a wife and a mother.

Having re-examined her position, it dawns on Li that "all these years she had waited for a man who cared nothing about her" and who kept her waiting for a man "like a dog waiting for the bone from its master's plate" (*The Stillborn* 85). Frustrated at her dreams about Habu and a happy marriage life, she realizes that a husband never "makes for a guardian or a father" (85). She is determined to "go back into the world and make an independent life for herself" (85). This decision marks a turning point in Li's life, by which Alkali challenges the traditional male discourse that characterises women as passive in their response to male domination and deprives them of agency. In fact, female agency has become a highly topical issue in contemporary Nigerian literature. Agency is defined as "the ability to act or perform an action" (Ashcroft 6). In this respect, Alkali creates a strong female characterisation able to withstand the pressures of her community. Reinspecting her relationship with Habu, Li decides that she must abandon the role of a traditional subaltern and make the most of her potential. With Li's determination, the story reaches its climax. It becomes particularly obvious when the author empowers the female characters by performing a deconstructive reversal of gender roles. Within the realms of gender deconstruction, Alkali explores the major concerns of the traditional society.

Li intends to be the most educated woman in the village (*The Stillborn* 85). She is aware that only then will she assume the role of the 'man of the house' in her father's compound (85). In fact, as the first woman novelist from Northern Nigeria, Alkali strongly believes that education is a key path to women's empowerment (Ogunyemi 307). However, various cultural and social values only contributed to gender disparity in education. For instance, one of the prevalent cultural views is that it is better for the woman to stay at home and tend to her family instead of attending school. In fact, there are a number of restrictions imposed on women's access to education. According to Obasi, Nigerian tradition attaches higher value to a man than a woman, whose place is

believed to be the kitchen (165). In this sense, traditional patriarchal practices promote the long-held belief in male superiority and female subordination, which is also reflected in the schooling system that privileges men to the detriment of women (165).

Even though Alkali is aware of gender disparity existing in education, she still believes that a woman must strive for achievement through personal effort. The author's ideas are propagated through her alter ego Li, who decides to better herself without relying on her husband, which is aptly epitomised in her statement that "a woman who takes a husband for a father will die an orphan" (*The Stillborn* 85). Having completed her high school education, Li visits her village home where she discovers significant changes taken place in her absence. Awa's dreams of becoming a traditional wife of an exemplary husband proves illusory. From Awa's accounts, Li finds out that modern values have dramatically affected the entire community. Awa's husband, Dan Fiama, who was supposed to be the principle of the village school, has turned into "a drunken fool who comes home from time to time to harass their mother [Awa] for drink-money" (87). The government takes over the school and an unknown man is brought to take Dan Fiama's place, which comes as a complete shock to Awa who has expected to see at least a white man in charge. However, as she explains, "this time a brown man... not the white people we are used to in the village" (87). In the meantime, Dan Fiama is pushed into the junior classes to teach. Thus, socio-economic changes have impinged upon the conventions of rural life transforming the position of the men as well. As a result, most of them "have grown too stiff in the waist to till their ancestral lands so they were content to sweep the offices and run errands, jobs their women and small children do at home" (87). Dan Fiama's masculinity has also been undermined due to this changeover in the village. He feels humiliated and unable to cope with a very low position in the new social order. To relieve his broken pride, he alienates himself from the society by becoming an irresponsible alcoholic. Not surprisingly, his community does not approve of his behaviour since he has always served as a model.

By deconstructing the gender binary, Alkali also explores the negative impact of traditional culture and its imposition on both men and women. Dan Fiama serves as an example to illustrate the fact that in traditional societies men also suffer from cultural

prejudices and misjudgements, let alone women. His flaw consists in his weakness to stand the tension between traditional values and modern realities. Through this social trauma, the author discloses the failings of the whole society, which has recently been the focus of other Nigerian female writers as well. In her acclaimed essay “We Should All Be Feminists”, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie provides an in-depth explanation to this issue aptly diagnosing the situation of such men as Dan Fiamu:

We do a great disservice to boys in how we raise them. We stifle the humanity of boys. We define masculinity in a *very* narrow way. Masculinity is a hard, small cage, and we put boys inside this cage. We teach boys to be afraid of fear, of weakness, of vulnerability. We teach them to mask their true selves, because they have to be, in Nigerian-speak, a *hard man*... But by far the worst thing we do to males – by making them feel they have to be hard – is that we leave them with *very* fragile egos. The *harder* a man feels compelled to be, the weaker his ego is. (11)

Nevertheless, Awa prefers to remain in an unhappy marriage thus “contributing generously to the population of the village” (*The Stillborn* 86). She believes that “every woman needs a man, at least to mend the fence” (88). To avoid the humiliation of other people’s children, she leaves her work at school to devote herself fully to her family. Despite her initial submissiveness, later, she is transformed into a strong subaltern. Unlike her husband, she does not abandon her traditional roles of motherhood and a housekeeper. Unlike her husband, Awa complies with the changes brought about by modernisation carrying on with her life in the village. Thus, her prophecy that “we need not go to the city” since “the city will come to us” ultimately becomes true (56).

Li is shocked to discover that in her absence, the whole family lived on the proceeds of her mother’s farm. Awa admits that “[she] wouldn’t have known how to cope without Mama”, who “would go to the farm at cockcrow and won’t come back until the chickens have gone to roost” (87). Li is ashamed to realize that up to the present “she [has] done nothing herself but add to the growing number of mouth” (87). Li’s mother, whose existence in the house did not matter to anybody before Baba’s

death, is the only female character in the novel through whom the author develops the conceptions of womanism and motherism within the framework of African women's literature. Alkali's attempt to define these terms as specific spheres of study is clarified by Stephanie Newell, who puts the concept of motherism "beyond feminism" (152). Investigating West African women's literature, Newell explains that "the popular link between 'feminism' and excessive female sexuality has caused many West African women to take charge of their own naming practices in the effort to generate discourses and identities that are specifically 'African'" (152). This breakthrough paved the way for the formation of locally situated gender definitions and theories representing black women's identity (152). One of them is a womanist perspective including an affirmation of motherhood as the "source of supreme power" (153). In this respect, Li's mother, who may initially seem a traditional subaltern silently suffering Baba's derision, proves to be a strong and self-determined woman. Her agency comes into prominence after Baba's illness and Dan Fiama's addiction to alcoholism. As a result, she virtually becomes the 'man of the house'. Alkali implies that silence does not always mean a lack of agency since women are as capable as men in undertaking particular social and economic responsibilities. Moreover, the fact that Li's mother is never named in the novel suggests that she is the archetypal character having the characteristics of African womanism.

Li's mother becomes an inspirational character in her future accomplishments, which echoes Baba's adage that "the lion cub takes after its mother" (*The Stillborn* 13). Li begins to appreciate her mother and Awa's difficulties when she goes through unpleasant trials of city life. Hajiya's polygamous and childless life instils patience in Li. Hajiya's agency consists in her ability to wait as a result of which she learns a valuable lesson that patience "does not sour no matter how long you keep it" and "a patient person could cook a rock and drink the soup" (73). Her wise words and motherly manners reminds Li of something familiar, which she is not able to explain. She observes that: "this gentle woman shared something with her grandfather. Li could not put her finger on it, but whatever it was, it was beautiful. It sustained them and gave them their hold on life" (73). Hajiya and Kaka are the last representatives of tradition and as such, they seek to keep it alive by imparting its values to the young

generation. Not surprisingly, Li has been exposed to her grandfather's mentorship suffused with cultural beliefs of her community since her childhood. Its effect is particularly felt in the city when Li is guided by various superstitious signs prefiguring the forthcoming events. In this respect, Li remains a true daughter of her tradition:

Li's eyelid began to twitch. She placed a finger on the spot... It was the usual omen that an important visitor was on the way... Li let out a yell, as she knocked her big toe against a jutting stone, stumbled and nearly fell over a chameleon. 'Gods of my ancestors,' she exclaimed excitedly. 'First the twitch, then my big toe and a chameleon crossing my path. Maybe I will get a visit from one of my ancestors.' (95)

It is undeniable that Li's self-improvement takes shape in the city. She completes her education and becomes a highly qualified teacher. However, another major factor contributing to the formation of her character is her relationship with Habu. In this respect, it is noteworthy that Li understands the value of Hajiya and Kaka's wise words with the hindsight developed through a series of trials that she undergoes in the city. Li discovers Habu's betrayal and his double life when she is already pregnant. Hajiya, "who had known a lot of things about Habu that Li would never know", tries to open Li's eyes to the cause of her problems without doing her too much harm (90). Habu's city wife gets pregnant; however, to avoid her uncle's anger, she has to commit abortion, which leaves her infertile. Telling Awa the story of Habu's betrayal, Li states that just like Habu, his city wife is also 'crippled' (93). In this respect, the signifier 'crippled' that depicts the plight of the city woman suggests *différance* of signification. As stated above, in the Nigerian society, infertility is a stigma attached to women as traditionally, their womanhood is expressed in motherhood. It follows that since the city woman is unable to conceive, she is deprived of both womanhood and motherhood. On the other hand, the author implies that these disastrous consequences are due to the patriarchal system that keeps women dominated and subordinate. Out of fear of her uncle, the city woman had no choice but to commit either abortion or suicide, otherwise, her uncle "would have killed her" (91). Thus, as a female subaltern, she is crippled by the harsh enforcement of traditional norms.

The author proposes her own perspective on the troubling issue of infertility through another female character – Manu’s bride. It is observed in the novel how Manu, “a miserly bachelor” and a “notorious woman-hater” turns a “woman-lover” (53). At this point, Alkali touches upon the importance of fertility by making Manu impotent. He knows that he is unable to copulate but does not dare to reveal his vulnerable state, which explains his misogynistic attitude. Manu’s impotence challenges the phallogocentric attitude of infertility traditionally ascribing childlessness to women. In this case, impotence stands for male powerlessness and incompetence. Manu’s situation is epitomised by a wise old saying that “the chicken is better left in its feathers” since “that way you never know how thin it is” (54). This attitude serves as another illustration of phallogocentrism fostered by traditional society (54). Further, Manu falls seriously ill and desperately needs care. He knows that he is unable to consummate his marriage and has “absolutely nothing to offer to a woman but hard work”, yet, he goes ahead to marry (54). Eventually, tired of the villagers’ gossip and threats, Manu’s wife decides to leave the village. However, before her departure, she addresses the whole village by making a striking speech encapsulated in her vignette:

My blood is hot, but my flesh is famished,

I fear I will burn to ashes,

The rains have come, the field is prepared,

But my field remains untilled.

Do not ask me to stay, my clanspeople.

Who can stand the sneaking whispers of the wicked market
women?

Who can avoid the mocking looks of the age-group?

Who would rebuke the innocent children when they call me
barren?

Who, indeed, can stop the wagging tongues of my enemies in the dancing arena?

Age-mates of my father,

Have you an answer to my plight? (54)

This dramatic monologue depicts a woman's desperation and protest posing a challenge to the traditional views of the male-dominated society in which women are not allowed to speak out for fear of being condemned or excluded from their communities. Manu's wife rhetorically criticises stereotypes and preconceptions of her culture branding her as infertile. Through extensive use of metaphors, a man's impotence is juxtaposed with a woman's wholeness. Womanhood is expressed through various indigenous mediums of expression such as 'blood', 'flesh', 'flame' and 'rain', whereas cultural prejudices are described as 'wagging tongues', 'sneaking whispers' and 'mocking looks' (54). Manu's wife acts as a daring subaltern who refuses to accept her fate as the status quo. Initially, for Li, this outcry seems to be an arcanum that she is unable to comprehend. However, as she grows older and "a lot of secrets [unfold] themselves before her", she asks herself: "How can it be that the hunchback [Manu] is also a man like Habu and my grandfather?" (55).

Habu's life begins to go wrong when he decides to settle in the city. He cannot extricate himself from his relationship with his city wife. Initially, Li is unable to understand the changes that have come over her husband. Further, she relates to his situation by showing deep understanding of challenges of city life. She explains Habu's predicament as follows: "It was when Habu was new in the city and was a bit awkward, but she showed him round, cooked for him and was generally helpful. The friendship went too far and she found herself with child" (91). Later, he gets involved in a car accident, which leaves him crippled and destitute thus unable to provide for his city wife. Li admits that initially, having lost her husband to the city woman, she felt bitter, however, gradually she "learnt to accept her fate" (93). Ultimately, Li's trials enable her to better understand the people who are trying to cope with the challenges of city life. Similarly, she relates to Faku's predicament and never doubts

“her friend’s sense of direction” (102). Therefore, she reproaches Awa for believing in the rumours about Faku’s prostitution circulating in the village. Li states that “like all of us, Faku has her problems and is struggling the best way she can survive” and “the method she chose should not concern anybody else” (94). Moreover, since Sule relies on Garba’s groundless accounts, Li feels obliged to explain to her brother what Faku has really gone through in the city. In this respect, African female discourse once again comes to the fore emphasising the vernacular concept of womanism:

It’s not true, Sule. Faku also had a dream, a deep need for security. She had grown up without a father – she yearned for a man’s presence in her home... I remember her saying, and I can still see the glow on her face as she said it, ‘A man’s muddy shoes outside my door! A man’s commanding voice in the early hours of the day and the late hours of night. Where indeed is the Lord of the house who brings in food for his obedient wife to cook?’ No, Sule, if any of us didn’t mean to drift, it was Faku. (100)

Li’s brother Sule leaves the village long before Li’s marriage and reappears years later having learned of his father’s death. Unlike Dan Fiana and Habu, Sule endures the trials of life and learns to stand on his own feet. It is worthwhile to note that Sule ascribes his achievements to mores and values of his community. He has learned a lot of things about life, which has softened his heart towards his father (100). Moreover, he admits that “[he] could have ended up in prison but for the conscience [his] father instilled in [him]” (100). He faces numerous challenges of city life until he meets a man who helps him out. Due to his hard work, Sule gains the confidence of his master, as a result of which his business prospers. He also notes that his master was “like a father to [him], the kind [he] never had before” and that after his death he suddenly felt rootless (99). Li urges Sule to stay in the home of his ancestors since “there is no responsible man in the house”, to which Sule responds: “I am no longer sure. [I] was born here, but the stranger country nurtured me to manhood, instilled in me a true sense of human values. It was there I understood the full meaning of independence” (100). The author deliberately attributes the concept of manhood to Sule since he is the only male character who emerges triumphant in the long and thorny path to success. He

accommodates himself to changed circumstances ultimately adopting the idea that 'home is where you make it'. It follows that Sule's success consists in his ability to incorporate the wisdom of his own tradition into the modern values of city life, which evokes Derrida's concept of supplement. The logic of supplement enables Alkali to distort the binary between tradition and modernisation. Hence, they become neither opposite nor identical to each other; in other words, modernisation is both added to tradition and replaces it. By doing so, the author implies that one cannot exist without the other; as a result, it becomes impossible to put a clear-cut line between tradition and modernisation thereby producing an effect of the Derridean penumbra that exists in texts to undermine the distinction between the two warring binary oppositions (*Of Grammatology* 149).

On the other hand, there is a minor character, simply described as Audu's son, who has been derided by his father for his supposedly feminine occupation in the city. Audu ignorantly assumes that cooking is unmanly and that this job makes his son look effeminate in front of "the big men in the city" (*The Stillborn* 49). However, later, he realises that he has been mistaken about his assumptions, which is aptly epitomised in his short monologue:

What is important is what man makes of himself in this life. His ability to succeed in the game of life... We always ask, 'Whose son is he?' or 'Whose daughter is she?' We never ask, 'Who is he?' Can a man choose his parents? No. Can he help coming from a particular family or clan? No. But my clanspeople, a man can help being who he is. (52)

Audu's confession demonstrates that the advent of modern values to the village has made the rural people redefine their traditional views customising them to the needs of contemporary society. This is also valid for their patriarchal mindset that places the masculine point of view at the centre of all discourses. Audu understands that sticking to rigid traditional stereotypes creates tensions ultimately leading to massive social vices, one of the striking illustrations of which serves Dan Fiama's tragic end. Dan Fiama, who was held up as an example to others by the village elders,

falls behind the social changes taking place in his village. By doing so, the author also deconstructs the phallogocentric discourse on masculinity since Dan Fiama fails to perform his duties as a family man thereby becoming a victim of his own tradition. Dan Fiama's life serves as a parable for such people as Audu who initially disapproves of his son's choice, however, later realises that his assumptions are invalid for a society in transition. Hence, Audu's conciliatory approach prevents another tragedy from happening.

Awa is another character through whom the author problematizes the beliefs of a traditional subaltern who holds prejudged views on the usefulness of modern values. Initially, Awa, who has never been beyond the vicinity of the village, firmly believes that "we need not go to the city...the city will come to us" (56). As a diehard traditionalist, she has always conformed to the tenets of her community without question. However, attributing Li's significant change to urban exposure, Awa reexamines her own assumptions regarding the city, which is illustrated in her free indirect speech serving as another bricolage employed by the author:

Li had changed incredibly. This wasn't the sister she was used to, impetuous and critical of people. This was a different Li, tolerant and understanding. What had brought about this change? The emotional hardships she went through – the city? If the city could change Li, then the city could not be all bad, thought Awa who had never been there. Li had, no doubt, matured and in the process of maturing, had become a better person with a finer soul. (94)

Unlike Awa, Li practically accepts the fact that "the city destroys dreams" (94). Indeed, Li's initial dreams, being far from reality, fail to materialise. In the dialogue with her sister, Li describes all her painful experiences in the city as "a game of life" in which "we are all struggling to survive" (93). On the other hand, Li also observes that the village has changed to such an extent that there is no longer any distinction between the Hill Station and the African quarters (94). This reaffirms Awa's claim that "we needn't go to the city, the city will come to us" (94). With the emergence of new houses, these two places have "merged into one solid piece of metal" (94). She feels

upset that “the front yards of elders that used to serve as recreation centres for yelling children were now commercial centres for petty traders” (94). Also, “the days of dancing, singing and holding hands under the watchful eyes of the full moon were over” (94). Li is even saddened not to be woken up early in the morning by the sound of the cockcrow or with the latest gossip” (94). Li had experienced similar feelings evoking Derridean ‘nostalgia for origins’ when she visited the city for the first time. Therefore, having returned to the village, she expected to see the same “self-sufficient and irreplaceable” image of her native village (*Of Grammatology* 145). In terms of the Derridean approach, this project of reappropriation is deceptive since its very starting point is not presence itself but the desire for presence, which points to the lack of presence (142).

The final scene of the novel inhabits Li, Awa and Faku, who come together for Kaka’s funeral. They pay tribute to the last representative of tradition hailed as “a lion among men”, “a man without an equal” and “the last of his kind” (*The Stillborn* 101). Kaka’s death signifies the end of old values and respectively, Li’s initiation as “the man of the house” (101). This newly acquired role associated with “phallic symbol of power” shows that “woman can be relied upon where the men have failed” (Okereke 114). Indeed, Li is described as an established person who has accomplished her ambitions by becoming a successful teacher and an owner of a huge modern building (*The Stillborn* 101). Considering both Faku and Awa’s circumstances, Li infers that they have become independent in their own way. Faku, supported by an elderly woman, works as a social welfare officer. Li feels happy for her friend who has finally found fulfilment (102). On the other hand, Li observes that Awa, by being “everywhere at the same time”, has become ‘the mother of the house’ “who [has] given her life for the happiness of others” (102). The closure of the novel suggests that though Li, Awa and Faku have been subject to various pressures by virtue of their subaltern position, ultimately they emerge as honourable and strong women. On the other hand, in view of the fact that these female subalterns have gone through various trials, it can be argued that Li occupies the middle ground between Awa and Faku in that she does not completely attach herself to tradition nor does she disregard it.

In terms of Derrida's hinge mechanism, both tradition and modernisation function as pharmakon acting alternately or simultaneously as remedy and poison (*Dissemination* 70). It is obvious that two opposite signifieds are incompatible. However, the concept of pharmakon accommodates both signifieds at the same time performing a dual mission that produces an effect of *différance*. This approach points to the fact that both values of society are subject to change, which reaffirms the essence of pharmakon introducing itself as an open-ended discourse (70). Li's urban exposure enables her to understand that in contemporary society, it is necessary to be flexible and not to be a complete subaltern of her tradition, which also makes her reexamine particular values of her community. In this respect, her urban experience serves as a foil to her initial misconceptions. This awareness also helps her to distinguish between beneficent and maleficent features of tradition and modernisation. Thus, based on Derrida's hinge mechanism, it can be argued that eventually, Li strikes a happy medium between tradition and modernisation by making herself relevant to their beneficial values.

Li can fully express her self-determination by the decision that she makes after her last dream. As compared to her initial dreams, by which she prefigures the future of other people, her last dream takes her fifty years into her own future. In the dialogue with her great-granddaughter, Li expresses her frustration at not being able to fulfil her dreams of a happy family life:

This time it is your dream. Go and make the best of it. Don't be like me. I spent my entire life dreaming, I forgot to live... It is well to dream... Everybody does, and as long as we live, we shall continue to dream. But it is also important to remember that like babies, dreams are conceived but not all dreams are born alive. Some are aborted. Others are stillborn. (*The Stillborn* 104)

The above excerpt reveals the significance of dreams in Li's life, hence the title of the novel. Being naïve, Li initially romanticised the city building her dreams on false assumptions. She regarded marriage as a way to materialise her dreams of success in the city, which ultimately leads her to disillusionment. Her initial dreams of

glamorous and luxurious city life called ‘paradise’ remained ‘stillborn’ due to her exposure to urban realities and Habu’s infidelity. Li’s understanding of dreams and expectations changes when she undergoes a considerable transformation in the city empowering herself with education and learning to sustain herself without a man’s assistance. Thus, Li’s story of determination and self-realisation serves as a parable to her granddaughter, whom she advises not to waste her life on empty daydreaming.

Nearer the end of the novel, having accomplished all her ambitions, Li wonders if “she could make some sort of an impact in her society” (102). This preoccupation is reflected in her dream prophesying that she will “give her life for the welfare of the people” (104). Indeed, Li’s last dream conveys important messages by giving her strength and confidence to do what others will not dare. She realises that “the bond that had tied her to the father of her child was not ruptured” (105). Thus, she decides to save her marriage. The novel ends with a passage epitomising the author’s vision of women’s role in the Nigerian society:

‘I am going back to the city,’ she said simply. ‘To the city, Li?’ Awa asked in surprise... ‘Why, Li? The man is lame,’ said the sister. ‘We are all lame... But this is no time to crawl. It is time to learn to walk again.’ ‘So you want to hold the crutches and lead the way?’ Awa asked. ‘No,’ answered Li. ‘What then, you want to walk behind and arrest his fall?’ ‘No. I will just hand him the crutches and side by side we will learn to walk.’ (105)

Ironically, Awa, who believes that “to break up a home is like breaking a child”, tries to dissuade her sister from reuniting with her husband (88). She explains that Li may occupy a superior position in the family if she ‘holds the crutches’, thereby leading the way. On the other hand, Li may as well remain a traditional subaltern by ‘walking behind’ her husband. Of the two options, choosing neither she prefers to establish the middle ground as she does in her attitude towards traditional and modern values. Moreover, Li’s exposure to urban reality contributes to her social awakening which promises further improvement of the female subaltern in the existing patriarchal system demoting women to the subordinate position. In her interview with Adeola

James, Alkali admits that: “When I was creating Li, I thought she would come out a typical ordinary northern Nigerian woman who has to grapple with the strange ailment called culture conflict. I never imagined Li would emerge with special strengths, as I am constantly told even by my strongest critics” (qtd. in James 30).

It is obvious that Li’s speeches and thoughts predominantly represent Alkali’s viewpoint. Pointing to the link between the last syllable of the author’s surname – Al-ka-li and the main character’s name – Li, Ogunyemi argues that the name Li is author-identified (310). On the other hand, at the beginning of the novel, Li informs that her name is short for Libira, which means ‘needle’ in the Hausa language (*The Stillborn* 5). She also adds that this name identifies her as somebody who “can never stay in one place for long” (6). This trait is aptly described in the epilogue when having accomplished her goals, Li is eager to continue her struggle, “for that was the only way life could be meaningful” (102). However, it is worthwhile to note that the book was originally published in English, thereby intended for English-speaking readers. In this sense, Libira, as a signifier evokes two signifieds: libra and liberty. Within this context, libra stands for equality and harmony thus balancing the relationship between men and women, whereas liberty represents Li’s independent spirit and free will of self-realisation. In the deconstructive play of signification, these signifieds complement each other producing an effect of *différance*. By incorporating both ideas in the novel, Alkali conveys a womanistic message encapsulated in Li’s self-determined and cooperative attitude to walk side by side with her husband. By this optimistic closure, the author creates a vision of a better life based on solidarity between men and women thereby assuming the role of reconciliation. In this respect, Okereke describes Alkali’s womanist stance as “neither anti-male, nor inherently combative. Her feminism only adopts a combative posture when man objectifies and victimizes her by betraying her loyalty and love. Even when this happens, however, calm returns after the raging of the storm and life has to continue meaningfully” (119).

Derrida’s concept of palimpsest serves to construe Li’s position in relation to tradition and modernisation. Trained in traditional values as well as equipped with proper education, she becomes ‘the man of the house’, which enables her to insert modern values into the palimpsest of her culture. Her understanding of modernisation

enables her to make use of its advantages in order to transcend her traditional role and achieve self-realisation. In doing so, Li also initiates the awakening of the female subaltern who aspires to free herself from the power structure of patriarchal society regarding her as a male appendage.

As a conclusion, in *The Stillborn*, Alkali examines the condition of the female subaltern caught between conflicting values of tradition and modernisation in contemporary Nigeria. The novel charts physical, psychological and spiritual growth of the main character, Li, from childhood to adulthood. From the very beginning of the novel, she challenges the norms of her tradition determined by regressive patriarchal values that relegate women to inferior position. She cannot reconcile herself to the role of a submissive female subaltern and aspires to achieve self-fulfilment. In this respect, her journey to the city in search of education becomes a synonym for the female subaltern's self-realisation. Education offers her the opportunity to extricate herself from the oppressive bonds of tradition. Empowered with education and her new status as 'the man of the house', Li returns to the city promising further empowerment of the female subaltern in the male-dominated society.

3.2. Exposure to Another Culture as a Major Factor in Shaping the Self of the Subaltern in Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde*

The second section of this chapter is based on a deconstructive reading of the Nigerian female subaltern in Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde*. Since the main character is exposed to another culture, the study incorporates Homi K. Bhabha's cultural concepts into Derrida's deconstruction. The binary between the female subaltern's self and other is examined with respect to native and host cultures. The study also explores the effect of both cultures upon gender relations in contemporary society. Before dwelling upon the novel, it is worthwhile to provide information on Buchi Emecheta's life, literary career and the milieu within which the author has created her works.

Buchi Emecheta, Africa's most prolific female writer, was born in Lagos, Nigeria in 1944. Her parents sent her younger brother to school and kept her at home

simply because she was a girl (Umeh, “Emecheta’s Life Story” xxv). Thus, her struggle for achievement of parity with men started by refusing to accept the secondary status prescribed for women by the patriarchal society. Emecheta’s desire for education made her parents enrol her in her brother’s school (xxv). Unfortunately, she was separated from her biological parents at a young age when her father died of a brief illness and her mother in accordance with African custom married her dead husband’s brother (xxv). Consequently, she was sent to Lagos to live with her mother’s cousin where she was treated “more like a servant than a relative” (xxv). Estranged from all the relatives, Emecheta realised that there is nobody who can provide for her “basic needs for love, protection, direction and understanding” (xxv). She turned inward for sustenance and direction (xxv).

Due to her self-determination, Emecheta completed her primary education and won a scholarship to Methodist Girls’ High School in Lagos. She passed her West African School Certificate Examinations with honours and subsequently married Nduka Sylvester Onwordi. Emecheta worked for the American embassy in Lagos for two years before she went abroad in 1962 to join her husband, who was studying for a degree in accountancy at London University (Umeh, “Buchi Emecheta” 148). In London, her married life was strained by such factors as wrong family planning and estrangement from relatives (Umeh, “Emecheta’s Life Story” xxvi). In addition, she had a tense relationship with her husband, which became even worse when he burned the manuscript of her first book, *The Bride Price*, “because he thought it would shame his family” (xxvi). Ultimately, having saved enough money, Emecheta left her husband, taking her five children with her (xxvi). The author recounts this difficult period of her life as follows:

I found myself at twenty-two, husbandless with five young children. I thought I would wait to be as old as Big Mother with a string of degrees before writing. But I had to earn my living and the only thing I could do was write... I have been writing ever since, and I am now living entirely on my writing... I am not doing anything particularly clever. I am simply doing what my

Big Mother was doing for free about thirty years ago. (Emecheta, “Feminism with a small ‘f!’” 174)

Emecheta’s works have redefined the lop-sided image of African woman delineated by male writers. Her contribution includes *In the Ditch* (1972), *Second-Class Citizen* (1975), *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977), *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *Double Yoke* (1982), *Naira Power* (1982), *Destination Biafra* (1982), *The Rape of Shavi* (1985), *A Kind of Marriage* (1987), *Gwendolen* (1989), also known as *The Family* (1990), and *Kehinde* (1994) (Umeh, “Buchi Emecheta” 149). She has also written autobiography *Head above Water* (1986) and four children’s books: *Titch the Cat* (1978), *The Moonlight Bride* (1983), *The Wrestling Match* (1983), and *Nowhere to Play* (1980) (149). Two of her dramatic works, *A Kind of Marriage* (1975) and *Juju Landlord* (1976) were performed at the London Theatre (149). Emecheta’s writings generally benefit from her sociological training focusing on such issues as black oppression in a white society and man-woman relationships in traditional society.

Buchi Emecheta died at her home in London in January, 2017. Paying tribute to a Nigerian-born literary icon, president of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) Denja Abdullahi said, “We have lost a rare gem in this field. Her works would forever live to speak for her... She was known for championing the female gender and we would forever miss her” (qtd. in George, “Obituary”). Emecheta once described her stories as “stories of the world where women face the universal problems of poverty and oppression, and the longer they stay, no matter where they have come from originally, the more the problems become identical” (“Obituary”). She was the writer who worked toward the liberation of women, aptly describing herself as not a feminist but a woman (“Obituary”). Even though Emecheta created her works away from Nigeria, she always reiterated:

I shall for ever be a Nigerian writer working in Britain, for after all who can sniff eighteen years of one's life as nothing. And of course where one's family is and where they are happy, there will be, for ever, one's Shangri-La. But as a child I have washed in the

Atakpo stream. I have eaten the bitter crabs from Iyabi, I have eaten the Ukpa during the Ine festival, and have danced my fathers' burial dance in the Eke market. These are my roots. And I feel I must go back there, live there, and tell the world through my books about the way we do our things. (“A Nigerian Writer Living in London” 123)

Emecheta's books, cited as the path toward women's empowerment, are comprised of three stages: discovering voice, establishing forms of collective solidarity and engaging in political activism (Dawson 118). Characterised as “the first successful black woman novelist living in Britain after 1948”, Emecheta also evokes the central issues concerning black women, particularly their attempt to establish identity in Britain (118). Describing these novels as ‘the been-to (dis)advantage’, Ogunyemi states that “her [Emecheta's] been-to fiction straddles sharply contrasting worlds, which she departs from, arrives at, revisits, and longs for, yet criticizes...” (220). In this respect, *Kehinde* is classified as one of Emecheta's ‘been-to’ novels, at the heart of which is the main character's quest for self. In fact, there is a number of African writers who have written about migration but Emecheta's firsthand experience combined with her writing creates a powerful tool by means of which the author reconstructs the lives of immigrants going through difficult times of change and adaptation to a foreign culture. In this respect, Romanus Muoneke believes that none experienced migration to the extent Emecheta did (54). She left her home country, Nigeria at a young age to settle in London and most of her novels are fictionalised accounts of her life experiences (55). It is clearly expressed in her nonfictional autobiography *Head Above Water*, where she admits that her first encounter with England was rather disappointing since she could see nothing but “masses of grey, filth, and more grey” (26). However, she was determined “to make it here or perish” (27).

Kehinde (1994) is a story of a Nigerian family, namely Okolo, who came to England with the wave of Nigerian student immigration of the early 1960s. Albert and Kehinde Okolo have been living in London for 18 years when Albert's sisters put pressure on him to return to Nigeria. Albert is also determined to return to Nigeria in

order “to be someone . . . to show off his own life style, his material success” (*Kehinde* 6). Since their two children have never been to Nigeria, Kehinde is totally against this idea. Besides, she has recently learned that she is pregnant. Forced by her husband, she has an abortion. Albert leaves Britain earlier than the rest of the family to make preparations in Nigeria before the arrival of his wife and children. After a while, Albert sends for the children, Kehinde is lonely at first but manages on her own. Eventually, she begins to feel like a “half-person” without Albert, gives up her job and departs for Nigeria (59). On her arrival, she is horrified to learn that during their two-year separation, Albert has had an opportunity to “reclaim his birthright”, that is polygamy, by taking a second wife (35). Kehinde decides to return to England and establish a life for herself there. Kehinde's troubled relationship with Albert and her children are paralleled in her recollections of a difficult childhood. Kehinde means the ‘last-born of the twins’, signifying that Kehinde was the second-born of the twins when their mother gave birth. However, Kehinde's twin was stillborn and her mother died at birth, prompting the family to believe that she had eaten her sister. Therefore, Kehinde is followed by the voice of her dead sister in London. However, as soon as she goes to the country where she was born and raised, the voice stops pursuing her. Kehinde has to face the realities of her community that still practices polygamy thereby suggesting that women are inferior to men in their society. Having returned to England, and considering what she has gone through, she murmurs to Taiwo, whose voice visits Kehinde for the last time: “Claiming my right does not make me less of a mother, not less of a woman. If anything it makes me more human” (141).

Kehinde is a novel that deals with circular migration of the eponymous character – Kehinde from Nigeria to England, back to Nigeria and then back to England. The point of view shifts between the third and first person narratives thereby giving a deeper psychological insight into the female subaltern's inner world. The story opens with news about a letter foreshadowing significant changes in the life of the Okolo family. Albert looks pleased since the letter is from his sisters who are asking him to return to Nigeria, to which Kehinde quickly objects pointing out that the invitation to come home excludes her and their children:

‘They want you to return home? What of us?’ Kehinde asked, bringing in a pot of tea. ‘They have been hinting at it for a very long time, now they’ve got the courage to spell it out. Return home, return home indeed! They keep forgetting that you left Nigeria a young bachelor and that now you have a wife and kids. Return home, just like that, enh?’ (1)

Bypassing exposition, the author starts the story in medias res. With this narrative bricolage, Emecheta builds a non-linear plot structure suggesting the insertion of important background information through further dialogues, interior monologues, flashbacks, letters and description of past events. This gradual unfolding also reveals the impact of another culture on Kehinde’s inner development. In this respect, her reaction to the idea of going back to Nigeria illustrated in the above excerpt stems from her settled way of life in England. This attitude prefigures the further development of the story built on the female subaltern’s ambiguous position between two cultures expressed through the binary between self and other.

Furthermore, the description of the Okolos’ house is conveyed through Derridean descriptive technique known as rebus. By this literary device, the author creates an image of a Nigerian immigrant family supposedly acculturated into English society:

Theirs was a typical East London mid-terrace house with a small living room. Attached to the poky kitchen was a pantry, now converted into a dining room which was so small that when the family sat at their meal there was little room to move. There was another large room at the back, with a glass door opening into a small, untended garden. It was a room in which they could have eaten in comfort, a room the estate agent described as the morning room, but which the Okolos called the big bedroom. (2)

The above passage exemplifies the fact that the Okolos have successfully settled in London and their income made it possible for them to own a typical London house.

However, the changes made in the house, such as converting the pantry into the dining room and respectively, the dining room into the bedroom show how a Nigerian family has customised the English way of life to their needs. They also try to retain their culture eating Nigerian food, “ground rice and egusi⁶ soup” (2). Albert constantly brings up the topic of returning to Nigeria and believes that even the Europeans are rushing to Nigeria”, to which Kehinde replies tightly in Igbo: “Leave the white people out of it. Everybody knows they always rush to any place that has cooked yams ready for them to eat” (3). The factor of language that permeates the novel contributes to Kehinde’s cultural limbo. This ambivalence, which Bhabha characterises as “neither one nor other”, epitomises the condition of the main character (*The Location of Culture* 181). In this respect, the “in-between space” within which Kehinde tries to determine her position between self and other, is based not on the diversity of cultures but on the articulation of cultures’ hybridity (56). This attitude is also reflected in the upbringing of her children, especially her son Joshua, who thinks that whenever his parents speak their language “it means they don’t want us [the children] around” (*Kehinde* 3). The dialogue between mother and son aptly illustrates the above stated situation:

Kehinde, who was always indulgent towards her son, ignored his rudeness, which she rationalised as the normal behaviour of a fourteen-year boy establishing his identity. she simply laughed and ventured, ‘Whose fault is it that you don’t speak your mother tongue when you refuse to learn?’ ‘You mean *your* mother tongue. Mine is English. Remember you said that when I was born, the first thing you said to me was, “Hello Joshua!” So I speak the first language I heard. (3)

Kehinde’s lopsided views regarding her children’s indifferent attitude to their mother tongue and culture overshadow the fact that she has always had a blind spot concerning her own standpoint. On the one hand, by speaking Igbo and cooking egusi, Kehinde tries to instil an awareness of belonging in her children, on the other; she

⁶ Egusi comes from the seeds of a creeping melon plant that is grown in West Africa (Massaquoi 34).

refuses to return to her country saying, “What is in Nigeria anyway? Are we not happy here?” (3).

From the very beginning of the novel, Kehinde’s cultural dilemma affects her status as a Nigeria-born and England-living female subaltern. The author explains this situation through the relationship between Kehinde and Albert. As a typical Nigerian man, Albert is well aware of his own traditions, among which there are particular norms and practices observed within the marriage institution. It is worthwhile to note that the Nigerian society is patriarchal in nature, which is a major feature of a traditional society (Makama 115). In this respect, “tradition or culture and religion have dictated men and women relationship for centuries and entrenched male domination into the structure of social organization and institution at all levels of leadership” (116). This remarkable part of Nigerian culture is also infused into the novel when the author clearly states that the home belongs to the man, even if the woman spends her entire life keeping it in order (*Kehinde* 4). However, Albert, who has spent a substantial part of his life in London, “[is] not unaware of the legal status of a wife here in Britain” (4). Therefore, not wanting trouble, he constantly reiterates the idea that “we own a house” and it is “our house” (4).

Kehinde and Albert seem to have a perfect relationship in their marriage. She has a well-paid job and can “talk to her husband less formally” than women in Nigeria, who are in traditional polygamous marriages (6). In addition, contrary to her native culture, she regards her husband “as a friend, a compatriot, a confidant” (6). Being the primary income-earner in the household and having joint ownership, enables Kehinde to claim an independent social status in England. The fact that the greater part of the income comes from Kehinde makes her children and Albert dependent on her. However, she prefers to act as if the breadwinner were her husband thereby denying the rights and privileges granted to her by the host culture. By doing so, she creates an imaginary Nigeria where she is expected to behave as a traditional female subaltern:

In fact, Albert was only being realistic, since Kehinde earned more than he did. It was because of her position in the bank that they had been able to get a mortgage. But a good wife was not

supposed to remind her husband of such things. When Kehinde said ‘your house’, she was playing the role of the ‘good’ Nigerian woman. Conversely, when he said ‘our house’, he was being careful not to upset her. After almost sixteen years of marriage, they played this game without thinking. (4)

By acting as a submissive wife, Kehinde seeks to please her husband, one of the remarkable illustrations of which is her consent to the abortion. At this point, Emecheta focuses on the patriarch of the family – Albert, whose position in England is rather ambivalent. Having learned of Kehinde’s pregnancy, he starts to regard her “as if she were an alien being, rather than the woman he’d lived with for fifteen years” (5). On the one hand, as a traditional Nigerian man coming from a polygamous family, Albert is supposed to have an extended family. Deep down he admits that even their conversion and Catholic upbringing “had not been able to eradicate their parents’ long-held traditional beliefs” (5).

Subscribing to Emecheta’s view, Chibueze Udeani maintains that even Christianity introduced by the West has been unable to change the attitude regarding polygamous marriages in most African countries. He argues that the strict and uncompromising stand of the Church on the issue of polygamy in Africa today is to some extent based on some unconsidered attitudes towards African culture (90). In Western Europe, polygamy was and is often associated only with sexual debauchery without consideration of it as a product of economic, social and political circumstances in African society (90). This is not to take a stand in favour of polygamy, but to illustrate the fact that little or no effort was made by most of the missionaries to understand the African culture per se (90). In this respect, Emecheta’s firsthand knowledge of native culture enables the author to create a world in which Kehinde’s “doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once” makes it impossible for her to be either completely Nigerian or fully initiated into the host culture (*The Location of Culture* 64). However, instead of exposing this quality as the flaw of the character, the author applies it as bricolage, which Homi K. Bhabha defines as the interstice. In this sense, Kehinde places herself at the intersection where two cultures negotiate. In other words, this in-between position is presented as the “third

dimension that gives profundity to the representation of self and other” (*The Location of Culture* 68). It follows that Emecheta, raised in accordance with rigorous Igbo culture where “a child belongs to many mothers”, is well aware that the practices and traditions of her people are completely strange to English society (“Feminism with a small ‘f!’” 173). In this regard, the author’s tongue-in-cheek handling of polygamy is noteworthy: “They both came from polygamous families – his father had two wives, Kehinde’s three. The Irish priests, not knowing which way to turn, had baptized them all, seeing it as a chance to save these lost souls for Christ” (*Kehinde* 5).

The author ironically underscores the fact that with a typical English name as Albert, Kehinde’s husband is yearning to return to Nigeria. Through this ambivalence, the author deconstructs the relationship between Kehinde and Albert. Albert feels rather restricted and incomplete in England, which explains his decision to go back to Nigeria. He believes that living in another country prevents him from playing to perfection the role of a traditional African patriarch who needs “room to breathe” (35). Being “far from satisfied with its restrictions”, he is “alive and strong, awaiting an opportunity to reclaim his birthright” (35). Reluctant to integrate into English society, Albert reassures himself that back in Nigeria, he will be able “to be someone” (6). In the Derridean sense, Albert experiences a “nostalgia for origins” that stems from the clash of two cultures (*Writing and Difference* 369). He still remembers Nigeria as the country full of “sunshine, freedom, easy friendship and warmth” and flatters himself with the idea that by returning there, he will finally take his place as head of the family and “show off his new style” and “material success” (*Kehinde* 6). However, Albert is afraid that Kehinde’s pregnancy will spoil all these plans and deprive Kehinde of a well-paid job, which means the end of a substantial financial contribution to the household. In this respect, Marie Umeh describes Albert as “a wayward husband” (“Buchi Emecheta” 153). Albert’s aporia, which Derrida characterises as a “nonpassage” or “not knowing where to go”, can be explained with the fact that he is torn between the advantages of two cultures (*Aporias* 12-13). This situation is exemplified in his dialogue with Prahbu, his colleague, to whom he confides his concerns. Albert states that Kehinde will undermine her own promotion at the bank if they realise that she is going on maternity leave (*Kehinde* 15). He also knows that

abortion is foreign to Nigerian culture, therefore, it is more convenient for him to justify his decision as “we are in a strange land where you do things contrary to your culture” (15). Compromising the morals of his native culture, Albert rationalizes his decision as “our people never lived in London, where parents have to pay a great part of their wages to nannies to look after their babies” (7). Thus, he exploits the cultural system of the host society only when it suits his needs.

In fact, Albert’s phallogocentric and manipulative attitude pervades the novel. It is also present in his views on women’s rights in England. He states that he lives in a “stupid country where you need your wife’s money to make ends meet” (15). Indeed, throughout the years spent in London, Albert is discouraged by the fact that his wife earns more than him. Kehinde has a well-paying bank job, whereas Albert works in a warehouse. Considering that money equates with power, such income inequality in marriage damages Albert’s reputation, which prevents him from exerting authority in England; while in Nigeria, he would be “having his drink on the verandah and people paying attention to him, including his wife” (35). Emecheta’s ironic overtone is aptly epitomised in Albert’s dream to be made a “chief in his homeland” (16). Thus, he admits to his colleague Prahbu that in England, he is fed up with just listening to his wife and indulging her (35). Albeit unwillingly, Albert has no choice but to keep up appearances. However, the author discloses his annoyance using free indirect discourse, whereby the author’s thoughts are indistinguishable from the thoughts of the character. This bricolage, which is “critical language itself”, enables the author to reveal the extent of phallogocentrism in Nigerian culture so proudly propagated by Albert (*Writing and Difference* 360). His attitude illuminates deep-seated gender stereotypes of his native culture:

Kehinde would learn when they got home how she was supposed to behave. Here, she was full of herself, playing the role of a white, middle-class woman, forgetting she was not only black, but an Igbo woman, just because she worked in a bank and earned more than he did. Many women worked in banks at home, but did not allow it to go to their heads. (*Kehinde* 35)

Based on the above description, Albert can be regarded as one of Emecheta's stock characters representing a typical Nigerian man who is not satisfied with his position in a foreign land dictating him its cultural norms. Thus, considering himself as a temporary resident in England, Albert explains to Prahbu that "our cultures in Nigeria put a lot of emphasis on home. The Yorubas say, 'Ori oye ki sun ta' – the heir's head does not sleep outside, meaning the heir must always be buried in his father's compound" (34). Referring to Homi K. Bhabha's concepts based on 'the location of culture', Albert's nostalgia can be identified as an "ambivalent part" that is "untranslatable, inexplicable, unknowable yet endlessly repeated in the name of the native" (*The Location of Culture* 197). Hence, whenever Albert feels that his authority is undermined, he resorts to the convenience of his native culture, which is characterised by male dominance:

Into Albert's memory came the image of his large, slow moving father, as he was when Albert was growing up in Lagos. On Sundays, his father and his mates would put on crisp *agbadas* which their wives had spent the greater part of the week bleaching and starching. They would go from house to house visiting friends, drinking palm wine, eating kola nuts and dried fish. In this way they kept in touch with friends and relatives, caught up with home news and indulged in a little relaxation. (*Kehinde* 35)

Considering Albert's self-centred and manipulative character, Stratton argues that "while Emecheta portrays her female characters realistically, her male characters tend toward stereotypes" and by describing them as egotistical and callous, she "initiates a reverse discourse as a means of subverting the sexual allegory" (117). However, as Stratton points out, some male critics object to Emecheta's derogatory portrayal of their gender. They believe that the author exaggerates her male characters' irresponsible and unreasonable behaviours to the point of unrealism (117). In one of her interviews, Emecheta responds to these critics as follows:

I describe Nigerian males as we see them but once they are read outside the culture, people realize how weak they are. But our

men don't realize that they are weak because they hide behind the women and at the same time, they put the women down by not acknowledging the type addition the women make to our daily living. By so doing, their weaknesses don't show in real life until you put them down on paper then they become visible. When you see these characters in black and white, you will realize that our men need to re-educate themselves or reexamine their actions... (qtd. in Ogundele 453).

Emecheta also examines the issue of abortion, which brings about major changes in Kehinde's life. The author undermines the literal meaning of this leitmotif suggesting various signifieds that can be analysed in the system of Derridean metaphors. In this sense, abortion is a signifier producing an effect of *différance* that suggests more than one signified. Its denotative meaning, which means the intentional termination of pregnancy, has a noteworthy cultural explanation. In Nigerian culture, motherhood is a mission assigned to women from the very childhood as a "prerequisite for social acceptance which bestows a joyful and privileged status on them" (Mohan 7). Therefore, mothering and nurturing are regarded as important biological acts that women are expected to perform (7). Accordingly, children in Nigeria are a sign of wealth and necessity (Berrian 172). They function as the retirement fund for aging parents, particularly male children, who assure the family's lineage (172). Similarly, Kehinde, who was brought up to respect her traditional values, tries to dissuade Albert from the abortion stating that in their culture, "people are more valuable than money" (*Kehinde* 7). However, for Albert, who prepares to return to Nigeria, Kehinde's pregnancy comes as an undesirable surprise. He decides that he cannot afford another child because "there was no way he could save for their home-going on his income alone, to say nothing of feeding another mouth" (22).

Consequently, Kehinde develops into a depressive and melancholic person. Hurt and humiliated by the selfish husband, she believes that Albert has brought her to the level of the prostitute that they have come across in front of the clinic. Kehinde likens herself to that woman and infers that for Albert all women are the same, "just bodies, convenient vehicles which, when they took on an inconvenient burden, could

be emptied of it by the same means” (17). She believes that women who have abortions are no better than street prostitutes. Thus, triggered by the sense of motherhood, Kehinde boldly states that “I am a mother. A mother of two... I am not a whore, beating the street. I am a respectable woman” (23). Emecheta defamiliarizes the traditional approach to abortion by stating that:

I am not for abortion on demand. I think that it should be left to the woman. She should have a chance to make that decision. I personally won't abort or encourage any of my children to abort a child unless there is physical illness or danger to the life of the mother. Abortion should not be used as a form of contraception. (qtd. in Ogundele 455)

Deeply affected by the abortion, Kehinde tells Albert that “the child I just flushed away was my father's chi, visiting me again. But I refused to allow him to stay in my body. It was a man-child... and a man one day... If you have known it was a boy, Albert, would you have made me abort it?” (*Kehinde* 32). By reiterating the signifier ‘man’, Kehinde is trying to hurt Albert's ego since in Nigerian culture, “children are regarded as a luxury” and a necessity meaning “a good old age” and respect (16). However, Albert, who is determined to go back to his country, “[has] nothing to offer [Kehinde]” (33).

Abortion also signifies a fracture in the relationship between Kehinde and Albert foreshadowing the end of their marital life. Kehinde strongly believes that abortion is a violation of her traditional beliefs and values, which forever changes the dynamics of her relationship with Albert. Thus, putting a brave face on it, she whispers to herself “I am not going to cry, stupid woman. Two children are enough. I don't care if my mother already had eight children...” (24). Meanwhile, she firmly decides that she will never have other children ultimately having her tubes tied (22). This moral decision can be regarded as the first step towards the female subaltern's self-awareness, which supports Emecheta's view that a woman should have full and total control over her body. By this decision, Kehinde challenges the traditional role of a female subaltern because in her culture, tubal ligation is unconventional. Similarly, Marie Umeh thinks

that by taking control over her body, Kehinde “redirects her life outside of the limiting definitions of patriarchally controlled womanhood” (Introduction xxviii). On the other hand, even though the signifier sterilization stands for an operation making the female reproductive system dysfunctional, in the Derridean sense, it connotes more than this. The act of sterilizing also denotes cleansing and purifying of a living thing, thus, for a female subaltern, this act functions as a *différance* metaphorically implying a new life.

By incorporating her heritage into the novels, Emecheta creates a powerful narrative of the Nigerian world. The author contributes to the literary tradition by merging the oral medium with the techniques of written literature. Within this framework, Kehinde’s background is introduced through dreams and flashbacks, where the omniscient viewpoint switches to the first person voice enabling the author to reveal the inner world of the protagonist. Moreover, by providing a direct account of the events from the primary source, Emecheta authorizes her female subaltern to narrate ‘herstory’. The narrative comprises Nigerian cultural beliefs and Kehinde’s childhood memories. Based on these stories, it becomes obvious that naming is an established tradition in Nigeria. Since the main idea of deconstruction is that all the significations have their source in the logos, it is worthwhile to examine the signifier ‘Kehinde’ within its cultural framework (*Of Grammatology* 10).

Emecheta admits that naming is an important preoccupation in her novels, which she explains as follows:

In Nigeria and African situations, especially in our own culture, we just don’t give people names. Our names have to identify with something. For example, Nnu Ego, a beautiful woman... Adaku means the child of wealth... I always choose my characters’ names carefully. The latest one ‘Kehinde’ is one of the twins in the novel of the same name. And of course, you find out how the other twin Taiwo, the first born, is affecting her life. I needed to establish a reason why some women hear voices from unknown sources. These voices can affect our lives but we learn to live with them. (qtd. in Ogundele 449)

Emecheta focuses upon the cultural signification of the names Kehinde and Taiwo. It becomes clear that they are considered traditional Nigerian destiny names given primarily to twins. A Nigerian linguist Kola Tubosun, who has performed a comprehensive study of Yoruba names translating them into English, explains that Kehinde is derived from two words ‘kehin’ and ‘de’ signifying one who arrives second; whereas Taiwo means the first to taste the world (Yoruba Names). However, even though Kehinde means the one who comes after Taiwo, the first-born sister, that is, Taiwo, constantly exerts her spiritual influence over Kehinde (Muoneke 66). Since Nigeria is a multicultural country, depending upon the culture of indigenous people, the birth of twins can be interpreted differently. As the novel proceeds, it becomes obvious that Kehinde and Taiwo are prevalent names among both the Yoruba and Igbo people. However, Kehinde is not a welcome child in Igbo culture because she is thought to bring bad luck (*Kehinde* 18). Contrary to this myth, the Yoruba people believe that twins bring luck therefore, they give them special names: Taiwo and Kehinde (18). Examining the issue from historical perspective, Berrian states that:

Formerly, Igbo abhorred the birth of twins and eliminated them and sometimes the mother, whereas the Yoruba have always revered twins. With the intervention of Christian missionaries and changing value systems, twins are presently cherished by the Yoruba and tolerated by the Igbo. (170)

Weaving this belief into the novel, Emecheta reveals that even in the same country, different cultures discriminate against each other (“Feminism with a small ‘f!’” 173). On the other hand, the binary opposition between the Yoruba and Igbo concepts of twinhood illustrates the dichotomized idea of pharmakon developed by Derrida. In terms of cultural studies, the signifiers Kehinde and Taiwo embrace both qualities of this concept – beneficent and maleficent, on which Derrida bases his main ideas of deconstruction (*Dissemination* 70). Hence, the concept of pharmakon deconstructs the traditional concept of twinhood where it simultaneously or alternately functions as both remedy and poison (70). This concept can be furthered with the idea that Kehinde “came as two seeds in one”, which means that she is endowed with twin authority making her more powerful (*Kehinde* 82). In this respect, the fact that Kehinde

“has the chi⁷ of three great women in her” – hers, her twin’s and her mother’s, both of whom died to give Kehinde life, reaffirms this argument (82).

Donatus Nwoga argues that Emecheta defamiliarizes the traditional belief by using the chi to refer to not only an individual’s personal god but also to the person who reincarnated the individual (65). Accordingly, in *Kehinde*, Taiwo functions as her sister’s chi, which Nwoga explains as follows: “The deceased who is believed to be reborn in the new child is generally called the child’s *chi*. The woman’s *chi* is the alter ego of the person concerned, whose present life must be supervised and guided by circumstances” (65). Taiwo’s periodic intervention takes place after Kehinde’s two difficult decisions: an abortion and a tubal ligation. Taiwo serves as a kind of guardian angel who comes back to protect, warn and direct Kehinde. Likewise, Berrian describes Kehinde’s sister as her chi or spiritual double who is “connected to Kehinde’s pride, fortune and fate and sets limits on her sister’s conduct so that she can avoid humiliating situations” (173). Guiding Kehinde, Taiwo also makes her aware of her origin. This is particularly obvious in their dialogues, where Emecheta easily glides from the omniscient to the first person narrative thus accentuating the individuality of the female subaltern. “Into Kehinde’s mind, interrupting her thoughts came a voice, the same voice she often heard when she was lonely and confused. ‘Our mother died having you. I too died so you could live. Are you now going to kill your child before he has a chance of life?’” (17).

Through Kehinde’s dream, it becomes obvious that after her birth nobody wants her in her native village because there is a belief that twins bring bad luck. Therefore, her aunt Nnebogo takes her to Lagos where the Yoruba people believe that twins bring good luck. Throughout her childhood, Kehinde feels that something is missing from her life. Thus, she creates an imaginary part of herself called Taiwo with whom she shares her food and space. Wanting to do everything twice, Kehinde develops a fabricated kinship with Taiwo when finally at the age of ten, her intuitions are verified by her elder sister Ifeyinwa (81).

⁷ According to Igbo belief, chi is an individual’s personal god. The chi of an ancestor may inhabit the body of a descendant (*Kehinde* 143).

Emecheta's employment of satire functioning as Derridean bricolage demonstrates her ability to handle particular beliefs and superstitions of her culture in a light-hearted way. In this respect, the writer states that she writes social documentary novels based upon what she has seen and experienced in her part of Africa (Emecheta, "A Nigerian Writer Living in London" 117). Discussing traditional cultures of her society, the author also reveals their impact on both the individual and the collective group. Therefore, to ignore these traditional beliefs, attitudes and practices can only lead to a lack of understanding of African behaviour and problems. In this regard, Ogunyemi regards Emecheta's use of cultural motifs as one of her greatest achievements whereby the author also "internationalises the Nigerian novel by women" (220). Emecheta admits that great artists do not belong to a particular nation, they belong to everybody, and therefore, a good artist is international (qtd. in Jones 65).

Emecheta's universal approach to works of art can be compared with the lappa, which is the most important item in the African woman's wardrobe (Ogunyemi 4). It is versatile fabric that can be used as "a dress, a blanket, a pillow, a curtain or screen, a mattress or mat, a sheet, a bed cover, a tablecloth, an umbrella, headgear, a baby carrier, a sling, a wall decoration" (4). The convertibility of this household item explains the concept of African womanhood. Likewise, Emecheta's novels functioning as the lappa "are intended primarily for women who mostly bear burdens, yet they are indispensable for communal use" (4). In this regard, Emecheta's choice of the name for the main character is not coincidental. Kehinde is a unisex name suggesting a more global approach to the position of the female subaltern.

Further, the author expands this idea by endowing her female character with another name – Jacobina, "after Jacob who fought and won the battle against his brother Esau in the Bible" (*Kehinde* 19). Her adoptive mother, Aunt Nnebogo, has no child of her own and raises Kehinde in accordance with Christian values. She believes that strong faith will save Kehinde from superstitious beliefs of the Igbo tradition labelling her as "an ill-luck child" (19-21). However, religious upbringing "[does] not let her identity die" and strengthens Kehinde's bond with Taiwo (21). As a result, Aunt Nnebogo comes to terms with her sense of belonging and asks a special ibeji carver to

make Kehinde her Taiwo (21). According to Opoku, “the souls of the twins are believed to be inseparable and when one of the twins dies, a little ibeji statuette is carved to serve as the abode of the dead twin” (106-7). Aunt Nnebogo’s attempt to combine the Yoruba belief in Taiwo with the Igbo belief in chi can be regarded as a pragmatic attitude towards both the Yoruba and Igbo concepts of twinhood by which “twins are cherished by the Yoruba and tolerated by the Igbo” (Berrian 170). This position corresponds to Derrida’s concept of supplementarity, where one side of the binary serves as an addition to the other, thereby undermining the distinction between the two oppositions (*Of Grammatology* 148). Aunt Nnebogo’s pragmatism is also reflected in her maternal attitude towards Kehinde that the author provides through the first-person perspective based on the main character’s personal observation:

I called Aunt Nnebogo ‘Mama’, because she was the only mother I knew... I always sensed that she did not allow the milk of her love to flow unchecked as many mothers around me did. Most mothers gave too much love and tried to own the beloved... Aunt Nnebogo put me on the hem of the skirt of her love. (*Kehinde* 21)

The above excerpt reveals the ambivalence between a traditional understanding of motherhood and Aunt Nnebogo’s perception. Because of the circumstances of her birth, Kehinde is unfamiliar with true motherly love, which makes her perspective on motherhood rather ambiguous. Trying to pinpoint this feeling, Kehinde seems to both endorse and disapprove Aunt Nnebogo’s attitude towards her, which leads to undecidability.

Language is another illustrative aspect in the novel pointing to the main character’s dual position between self and other. It is observed that Kehinde makes an extensive use of Nigerian Pidgin, which is one of the English-based creole languages spoken as a lingua franca in Nigeria. Kehinde’s Nigerian Pidgin is remarkable for its overly anglicized content. The dialogues between Kehinde and her friend Moriammo are a case in point:

‘So, wetin you wan do? Tanda here when Alby stay at home? You go let him stay home alone among those Nigerian acadas? You no know say those young overeducated women dey thirst for been-to men as small baby dey thirst for suck? I no dey-o! Make you think twice, my friend.’ ‘My Alby no be like that. Him different. I fit swear with my life for him’... (*Kehinde* 10).

‘But Nigeria na country where dem dey paper-qualification mad. All this in-service training and experience wey I dey get here no go mean nothing’... ‘Where you de all the time, Moriammo? We no get Barclays any more. Na Union bank now. Nigeria don boycott Barclays because of that trouble for South Africa.’ (51)

Talking to her compatriot Moriammo, Kehinde gratifies herself with her supposedly native pidgin. However, a close study of the above passages reveals extensive use of English which produces a mixture of two different languages. Kehinde’s hybrid language is closely associated with Bhabha’s views regarding “the difference between being English and being Anglicized” (*The Location of Culture* 128). Describing this strategy as “metonymies of presence”, Bhabha argues that since this mimesis is produced through repetition, each time it becomes different (128). In this respect, Kehinde’s attempt to use both languages in the same content is the act of enunciation, which functions as a mediator between Nigerian Pidgin and English. Kehinde’s ambivalence exemplifies the inbetweenness signifying the cultural space between self and other, which as Bhabha argues, “carries the burden of the meaning of culture” (56).

Criticising particular norms imposed by African patriarchy, Emecheta also points out that women as well as men contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes attached to them by native culture. Indeed, in some cases, Kehinde’s allegiance to tradition blinds her to such an extent that she becomes unable to judge as an individual thus behaving as a traditional female subaltern who conforms to the established cultural norms without questioning. Emecheta illustrates this attitude in chapter “The Party”, where Kehinde’s heavy reliance on tradition comes into prominence. Despite

having been through a painful experience, Kehinde once again makes a concession to her husband by giving him a great farewell party, where she appears in a traditional Nigerian attire. At this point, the author's descriptive style harmonizes with Derridean narrative technique called rebus aptly epitomising Nigerian cultural patterns conveyed through Kehinde's appearance and views (*Writing and Difference* 304):

Kehinde did not let Albert down. She treated her guests to the whole array of Nigeria traditional styles and fabrics, from guinea *boubou* to *aso-oke iro* and *buba*, to the Igbo lace blouse and George *lappa*, ending with the Igbo ceremonial costume of white *otu-ogwu*. This consisted of a cloth wound around her body beneath the armpits, leaving her shoulders bare. Precious coral beads adorned her neck, hair and ears. The outfit was to emphasise her position as first wife of the first son, and the mother of a son herself. Kehinde revelled in the impression she created. (*Kehinde* 38)

An extensive use of indigenous words describing the main character's extravagant appearance aims to mock Kehinde's clumsy efforts to pose as a traditional female subaltern. In this respect, Emecheta employs irony when she depicts Kehinde performing her cultural practices by changing clothes ten times, "as rich men's wives did in Nigeria, to advertise their wealth and boost the ego of the man of the house" (37). In addition, the fact that Kehinde is the mother of a son makes her particularly proud since in Nigerian culture, it is considered a prerogative for a woman to have a son, which strengthens woman's position in the family. Kehinde dotes on her son, Joshua, who is given a lot of privileges and importance in the family. She dismisses his rudeness as "the normal behaviour of a fourteen-year-old boy establishing his identity" (3). In this regard, Flora Nwapa expresses her strong belief that "[i]f you can educate a boy at an early age, he will grow up to appreciate women and to appreciate his wife" (qtd. in James 114). She goes on to add that "[a] woman who says she is oppressed and then has a son and treats him like a king, such a woman is perpetuating the problems we are complaining about" (114).

Another aspect explored in the novel is the issue of solidarity among women. Emecheta expresses her disappointment in some Nigerian women who fail to support each other arguing that:

...half of the problem rests with the women. They are so busy bitching about one another that the men say the women are acting just as expected. But when you deal with foreign women, say, you go to a place like Norway, or here in England, all you have to do is give a talk and they appreciate you and express solidarity with you. But it isn't so in our own country... if we as women don't put one another down, things should work out better. (qtd. in James 36)

Emecheta's aforementioned allusion to Nigerian women is expressed in Kehinde's initial views largely informed by patriarchal discourse. To this end, the author introduces another woman from the same culture, Mary Elikwu, who serves as a perfect foil to Kehinde. Kehinde's treatment of Mary Elikwu, who left her husband because he beat her, is rather contemptuous. She does not believe that domestic violence should serve as a reason for divorce thus regarding her compatriot as "a woman who refused to work at her marriage" (*Kehinde* 39). Further, alluding to this case, the author harshly criticises those women who "in their ignorance pass judgment on their sisters" (132). This attitude is obviously circumscribed by phallogocentric reasoning making the main character navigate her life within the frames of patriarchy, who, feeling incomplete without a man, conforms to the stereotype of a traditional female subaltern. Discussing Mary Elikwu's case with Moriammo, Kehinde states that "some women choose a life like that to prove how tough they can be" (11). She disdains women who attain self-actualisation at the cost of sacrificing their private lives:

I have seen one such woman. She's a townswoman of ours. She has six children. She said her husband beat her, so she left him. Of course, the man disappeared. The woman now lives in a council flat – one of those dangerous and filthy ones. What

annoys Alby is that she noises any little success she has, as if we all cared. The other day, she gave a party because she had bought a sewing machine. Imagine! (11)

Kehinde's unsympathetic approach to her female compatriot is due to the influence of her native culture that preaches its patriarchal ethics and values. Indeed, in some cases, Kehinde's self tilts too much toward her Nigerian roots, verifying the fact that the source of her moral inclinations is cultural. For this reason, she regards Mary Elikwu as "a fallen woman who [has] no sense of decorum" (38). Free indirect speech and interior monologue employed throughout the chapter aims to reveal how the two Nigerian female subalterns behave under different circumstances. In this respect, serving as a foil to Kehinde, Mary Elikwu is described as a liberated woman. Being educated and self-confident, she releases herself from the shackles of stereotypical gender roles relegating her to a position of a submissive female subaltern. She is well aware that within her culture, "a woman who left her marriage would always be marginalised" (39). Moreover, disregarding the traditional norms of her society, she refuses to use her husband's name, which surprises Kehinde since in their culture, Nigerian women are "dying for the title, even professors or doctors or heads of companies still call themselves 'Professor (Mrs)' or 'Dr (Mrs)'" (39). Therefore, Kehinde regards herself in a more favourable position yet not giving up wondering, "how Mary Elikwu coped on her own" (39).

As compared to Kehinde, Moriammo shows more understanding to Mary Elikwu's predicament. She believes that "no sane woman go choose such a life" and "not everybody gets good luck for this world" (11). Moriammo likens Mary Elikwu's achievements to the story of a musical called *Fiddler on the Roof*, where the young couple "invited the whole village because they had bought a new sewing machine" calling it "a new arrival" (11). Unwittingly, Moriammo implies that for some people 'a sewing machine' is associated with 'a new arrival' (11). In this respect, the reiteration of the signifier 'new' suggests substantial changes in the life of the main character. However, for the time being, Mary Elikwu's decision of 'a new arrival' does not make sense neither to Kehinde nor to her friend Moriammo, thus both infer that

“too much book [is] bad for women”, otherwise Mary Elikwu would stay for her children (12).

In the course of time, it becomes clear that Mary Elikwu has really coped on her own and achieved self-actualisation by becoming a writer and a social activist volunteering for the campaign ‘Milk for Our Babies’ (101). Returning to the issue of Mary Elikwu, the author takes a retrospective glance at her own life full of painful experiences. Emecheta believes that:

If marriage fails, the woman should not be labelled a social failure and be rejected by her people and his people; that in marriage, no one has the right to own the other to such an extent that one becomes the nodding shadow of the head of the family; that I would like to see social services developed, and that mothers should be given what is called ‘Family Allowance’ in Britain. I don't know if I could have raised my children without the little social benefit I received. I also felt that women should be economically independent so that they do not have to choke their growing children with responsibility, so much so that the children are not able to develop to their full potentiality. (“A Nigerian Writer Living in London” 117)

Even though Kehinde practices Nigerian culture in England, she never entertains the idea of going back to Nigeria. She believes that they are doing fine in London and have no reason to return to their own country. Unable to understand Albert's decision of leaving England, she inwardly blames his sisters who have been trying to exert an influence over their marriage through letters and newspapers full of Nigeria's oil boom. Retrospectively, it had seemed to her that Albert had adapted to the cultural dictates of England:

They loved parties and went out frequently in the old Jaguar, which Albert washed and polished every Friday evening. Sitting in the passenger seat beside Albert, with the car stereo playing

Sunny Ade or Bob Marley, Kehinde did not worry much about what else was happening in the world. (*Kehinde* 41)

Kehinde is preoccupied with the idea of 'home' particularly after Albert's firm determination to return to the homeland. Moreover, the abortion only adds to her state of confusion about home. Nevertheless, she continues to seek Albert's approval since he is the man of the house. On the other hand, in return for her docility and devotion, Kehinde wants to be appreciated, but instead, as the time of departure approaches, she feels "Albert slipping through her fingers, like melting ice" (*Kehinde* 41). Hence, her effort to please Albert by creating a microcosm of Nigerian culture in England proves to be in vain.

On the other hand, Kehinde's children, like their father, have also adopted a desire to go to Nigeria. They believed they "were promised a real adventure" there (45). This Kehinde fails to understand regarding her children's reaction as betrayal. Ultimately she convinces herself that it will be good for them to experience Nigerian life. Kehinde postpones her departure for Nigeria until she sells their house in London. In the absence of Albert and her children, Kehinde feels lonely and incomplete. She cannot stop worrying about Albert and the periodic intrusion of Taiwo's voice telling her that in their culture, "it is considered manly for men to be unfaithful" augments Kehinde's apprehensions (46). However, deep inside, she continues to believe that: "Albert was not like that... She knew him through and thorough. He was different, he had principles, and the major one of these was to keep his family happy. No, Albert was not the type to break apart his family, or to make her unhappy. The voice of Taiwo was simply being mischievous" (47).

Moriammo is also truthful to Kehinde constantly warning her about those young overeducated Nigerian women who "thirst for been-to men as [a] small baby [thirsts] for suck" (10). She advises her friend to go to Nigeria, "be a white woman" and enjoy her status as a "rich, been-to woman" (47, 52). On the other hand, Kehinde is well aware that back in Nigeria, she will not be able to get a job since she has no degree. She cannot imagine herself completely dependent on her husband just because she is

married to him. She believes that for a Nigerian woman, “her capacity for work is her greatest asset” (52).

Kehinde’s feelings of loneliness and anxiety are aggravated by the fact that in London, she becomes marginalized by her own community. Moreover, her best friend, Moriammo, avoids her company since her husband Tunde thinks that a good Muslim wife has nothing to do with “a woman who had sent all her family so she could have a good time” (56). Deprived of her family and community, Kehinde feels as a “half-person” slowly sinking into depression (59). In this respect, Derridean brisure that embraces both joint and break at the same time describes her dual position between self and other (*Of Grammatology* 65). Her situation worsens with Tunde’s outspoken views about Albert reported by Moriammo:

He spoke with contempt of inadequacies of men like Albert, who leave their wives at the mercy of all-comers in London, who take their wives to clinics to abort their babies because of money. Why did he go back to Nigeria when they both had good jobs? It was because of greed and the love of women. It was obvious Alby must have another woman by now, and no further use for Kehinde. (*Kehinde* 57)

Kehinde’s first epiphany takes place when she quits her job to reunite with her family in Nigeria. Her state of insecurity and helplessness makes her ponder upon why she has found herself in the position of a “fallen woman” or “the street walker she had condemned when she was covered in furs and purring like a spoilt cat in Albert’s Jaguar” (61). At this point, Derrida’s ellipsis aptly explains Kehinde’s tough situation, by which she has once described her compatriot Mary Elikwu: “a fallen woman who had no sense of decorum” (38). Kehinde begins to see her own position as a reflection of Mary Elikwu’s. According to Muoneke, Kehinde “experiences life in the ditch, similar to Adah’s ordeal in the earlier novel, except that she has no children for whom to provide” (66). She comes to better understand the plight of divorced women and widows like Mary Elikwu who are ostracized by their own communities:

She stretched her hand out many times before she eventually had the courage to phone Mary Elikwu. She had no idea what she was going to talk to her about. Was she going to ask her what it meant to be rejected? She began to understand how widows feel, not only at the loss of their husbands but also their friends. (*Kehinde* 61)

This attitude recovers her misjudgement of Mary Elikwu, whom she has previously labelled “a fallen woman who had no sense of decorum” (38). Having undergone unpleasant experiences in her country, Kehinde acknowledges that Mary Elikwu “has foresight, going to college and having herself educated, after so many children” and the fact that “when women are married, they feel they have an advantage over a woman who is living by herself, even if the latter is a million times happier” (95, 101). This recognition evokes Emecheta’s belief that “marriage should not be the only career left to women; it should be one of the careers” (“A Nigerian Writer Living in London” 117). Hence, for Kehinde, Mary’s thorny path to liberation through education must serve as the model for all women. In this respect, the author places Kehinde and Mary Elikwu as a counter-response to their patriarchal society. However, this does not come to mean that the author renounces marriage in general; on the contrary, in her works and interviews, Emecheta constantly reiterates that “[she] [writes] about women who try very hard to hold their family together until it becomes absolutely impossible. [She] [has] no sympathy for a woman who deserts her children, neither [does] [she] have sympathy for a woman who insists on staying in a marriage with a brute of a man, simply to be respectable” (“Feminism with a small f” 175).

Kehinde realizes that her efforts to preserve Nigerian traditional patterns as a model of existence in England are fruitless since it does not work in the host country. Considering this fact, it can be argued that Kehinde’s awakening, taking place prior to her trip to Nigeria, initiates her acculturation to the host society. Acculturation is the term used to describe both “the process of contacts between different cultures and also the outcome of such contacts” (Hill 14). In fact, it has become an important concept in the explanation of varied experiences of ethnic and cultural minorities living in the host country. Handling the issue from psychological aspect, Joseph Trimble asserts

that if the elements of a dominant or contributing culture have not been fully or thoroughly internalized, then full acculturation cannot occur (6). According to Bhabha, Kehinde's initial step towards acculturation is characterized as "unhomed" or "displacement", which does not mean to be homeless but "the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations" (13).

Since Kehinde is unable to sell her house before leaving for Nigeria, she decides to rent it to a Caribbean tenant, Michael Gibson, who works at the local community centre (*Kehinde* 47). Though Gibson is a fairly well educated black person in a lower middle class job, Kehinde initially feels uneasy since the man is not from Nigeria (48). However, she discovers that Michael Gibson, having the same story of immigration as the Okolos, is distinguished from other immigrants living in England: "Many black men could not stand routine for long, and they reacted more violently to the inevitable racism than women. This man, on the contrary, was calm and considerate, as he would need to be to keep his job as a community worker" (48). Judging by Gibson's casual short conversations about London weather, "well laundered clothes, close cropped hair, and "very clean and smooth hands" as compared to "rough hard-working African men's hands", Kehinde infers that "he is turning white" (50-51). This viewpoint is characterized by Bhabha's concept of mimicry describing "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (*The Location of Culture* 122). Therefore, Kehinde assumes that by adopting English manners, Gibson is no different from a white Englishman. She is yet to understand that Gibson's behavioural patterns and appearance are due to the fact that he has come to terms with the culture of the host society.

The major binary between Kehinde's self and other comes to the fore when she recklessly breaks up her ties with England by quitting her well-paid job, which she explains with the reason traditionally uttered by immigrants, "I never intended to settle here permanently" (*Kehinde* 62). In addition, Albert's rare letters from Nigeria and his anger over Kehinde's unplanned resignation from the bank make her fragile situation more intense. All this adds to her estrangement from the host culture, as a result of which she feels like an outsider enduring racial slurs. For the same reason, never offended by her boss's banter before, she starts to take them as provocative

insinuations to her cultural values: “[you] must have been longing for your old man... You’re probably going home to have a baby, like your friend” (62).

Before leaving her favourable position in England, Kehinde refuses to consider her decision of departure properly as well as the female colleagues’ warning that “jobs like theirs [are] hard to come by” and that “there are men who can’t wait to step into their shoes, with all the unemployment” (62). She believes that the only way to put an end to her ‘half-person’ situation is to rejoin her family in Nigeria. Although Kehinde is unable to sell their house in England, she decides to follow her dead sister’s advice to give her husband “the attention he needs to survive” in Nigeria (46). Thus, ignoring Albert’s final requests to wait until she “[prepares] properly for her departure”, Kehinde sets out for Nigeria (63).

Kehinde’s subsequent experiences in Nigeria are prefigured by Albert’s completely transformed appearance. Pointing to a considerable change in Albert, the author underlines the role of culture in shaping and promoting gender stereotypes. In this sense, the author’s employment of Derridean rebus serves to describe the character’s proud posture as a metaphor to describe the extent of phallogocentrism that he has developed in Kehinde’s absence.

He looked more imposing than the London Albert, in flowing white lace agbada and matching skullcap. His skin was darker and glossier, and he exuded a new confidence. Women knew the country did this to their men. There was no doubt about it, Albert was thoroughly at home... Besides there was something about Albert’s new confidence which excited admiration, made him more attractive... He had never been an openly demonstrative person, but in the last two years he had acquired a new layer of self-control and detachment. (66, 67)

Kehinde’s hopes about returning home as the respected been-to madam collapse when she finds out that during her absence, Albert has had an opportunity to “reclaim his birthright” by taking another wife, a sophisticated university professor, Rike (35).

Moreover, within two years Albert “[has] fathered a son and have another on the way” (86). Thus, Kehinde has to face the realities of her culture that still practices polygamy relegating women to the subaltern position. The author deliberately embarks upon this aspect of Nigerian culture through the perspective of a been-to female character. According to Berrian, when traditional Igbo values meet with Western ones, “the result is often confusion and conflict within a person who must try to reconcile the different ways of life mandated by the two belief systems” (177). This is particularly applied to Kehinde’s dual situation. Having spent most of her life in England, she has become a total stranger to most of her traditional norms and practices, including polygamy.

After many years of exposure to the host culture, Kehinde is aware of the values of Western society where polygamy is regarded as a patriarchal instrument of oppression bringing women under subjugation. Even her best friend Moriammo pokes fun at her by stating that, “It’s lucky that Alby decided to go polygamous in Nigeria and not here in London. It would have been much worse for you here” (*Kehinde* 101). On the other hand, Albert, as a typical Nigerian man, justifies his act referring to the cultural practices of his community allowing him to marry more than one woman. He believes that just like his father, he is also entitled to claim his birthright. At this point, it is relevant to bring up Albert’s early views on this practice. Through Kehinde’s accounts, it becomes obvious that even before going to England, “Albert’s attitude was that polygamy was degrading for women, which he based on his own experience with his father’s two wives” (84). In this respect, Albert’s fickle nature adopting two opposing ideas at the same time is closely associated with Derrida’s concept of penumbra used to describe the alternate or simultaneous existence of two warring forces that undermines the binary opposition and gives way to deconstruction (*Of Grammatology* 149). Albert’s hypocritical stance towards polygamy is due to his manipulative abilities that make it possible for him to accommodate himself to a new situation. Given his character and self-interests, Muoneke describes Albert as “Emecheta’s neocolonial type whose activities will place the newly independent nation in jeopardy” (66). In fact, Albert’s insincere and conflicting views regarding polygamy serve as a typical example of the male-dominated literary tradition promoting particular patriarchal practices as part of African culture. On the other hand,

Emecheta turns the practice of polygamy to advantage by handling it in a whimsical way:

People think that polygamy is oppression, and it is in certain cases. But I realize, now that I have visited Nigeria often that some women now make polygamy work for them... In many cases, polygamy can be liberating to the woman, rather than inhibiting her, especially if she is educated. The husband has no reason for stopping her from attending international conferences like this one, from going back to University and updating her career or even getting another degree. Polygamy encourages her to value herself as a person and look outside her family for friends. It gives her freedom from having to worry about her husband most of the time and each time he comes to her. He has to be sure that he is in a good mood and that he is washed, and clean and ready for the wife, because the wife has now become so sophisticated herself that she has no time for a dirty, moody husband. And this in a strange way, makes them enjoy each other. (“Feminism with a small f!” 176, 178, 179)

In the novel, the above-illustrated approach is echoed through Rike, who, in Kehinde’s absence, “has been a real little mother” to her children and “has been helping [Kehinde] to look after [her] family, since [she] could not have been in two places at once” (*Kehinde* 73). Indeed, Rike is described as a typical female representative of Igbo tradition who reconciles with the patriarchal norms relegating her to a subaltern position. In this respect, the author explores the impact of tradition on women and their acquiescent attitude towards it. Rike is depicted as a woman, who Moriammo labels as a “Nigerian acada who thirsts for a been-to man” (10). In the glossary appended to the novel, the word ‘acada’ denotes a “slang for university educated person, derogatorily applied to women” (143). A close reading of the novel reveals that the signifier ‘acada’ suggests two signifieds thereby producing an effect of Derridean *différance*. On the one hand, such pejorative characterization as ‘acada’ serves to describe Rike as a stock character harbouring Machiavellian goals. This is

explained in her attitude towards marriage in the sense that despite her education, she easily accommodates herself to the position of a second wife within a polygamous household, which is particularly due to the fact that her views are shaped in the community whose patriarchal role definitions of gender and marriage she unquestionably accepts. Rike's subservient attitude is consistent with Chukwuma's views that "passivity is acquiescence to the *status quo* and so a perpetuation of it" (5). Rike does not mind that she disrupts Albert's first marriage as she aims to marry "a been-to with a shiny Jaguar" (*Kehinde* 117). Albert definitely matches the description of "a polished one who spoke with a sophistication that at first used to take her breath away" (117). Thus, perfectly performing the role of a typical home girl, who "[does] not ask any questions", Rike deliberately enters into a love affair with Albert ultimately luring him into a marriage. Hence, she acts as a typical 'acada' who "just jumps on any been-to man so that [she] can claim [her] husband studied overseas" (71).

Another *différance* implied by the signifier 'acada' is that it poses a threat to Kehinde's position in the family. In this respect, Emecheta's choice of Rike as an educated Nigerian woman is noteworthy in that her social status serves as a foil to Kehinde's undetermined position within the native culture. She feels intimidated by Rike's social background that provides the latter with more privileges in the household. Despite her status of "the senior wife of a successful Nigerian man", Kehinde is reduced to a small bedroom and deprived of the king size bed on which she spent a fortune in Harrods (69, 73). She does not make sense of superfluous customs that exalt men and relegate women to subaltern status. She is constantly reminded about household norms by which a woman is not allowed to call her husband by his name. Instead, Kehinde has to learn to refer to Albert as "our husband", "Joshua's father" or "our father" (93). Besides Kehinde's peripheral position at home, she is also unable to find a proper job in the country where "you must produce certificates or perish" (94). Thus, it is hard for her to reconcile with the role of a traditional female subaltern who has to kneel to take money from her husband (94).

Kehinde has taken particular lessons from what she has undergone during her one-year stay in Nigeria. She recognises that her unemployed senior wife position "[does] not stand a chance against Rike, with her Lagos sophistication" since "they

[are] not playing by the same rules” (89). The meaning behind ‘play by the same rules’ suggests that Kehinde does not intend to internalise the role of a traditional subaltern who submissively complies with the norms of patriarchal society. Having experienced contrasting situations within two different cultures, Kehinde becomes more determined to be self-accomplished. In her views, the fact that Rike is a “young woman with a doctorate degree in literature”, who has a maid, a Peugeot and a son, does not earn her a respectable position in society because she remains marginalized within her culture (94). Thus, Kehinde’s initial perception of her tradition is deconstructed by her own words:

Raising children is no longer enough. The saving grace of for us women is the big ‘E’ of education. This girl, Rike, doesn’t even have to live with us because her education has made her independent, yet she is content to be an African wife in an Igbo culture. How come we in England did not see all this? I think perhaps Mary Elikwu did. (95)

Kehinde recognises that the views she has previously advocated regarding her culture have been rather superficial. This realisation is in line with Derridean ellipsis, reminding Kehinde of all those “traditional styles and fabrics, from guinea *boubou* to *aso-oke iro* and *buba*, to the Igbo lace blouse and George *lappa*, ending with the Igbo ceremonial costume of white *otu-ogwu*” do not represent Kehinde’s true self (*Kehinde* 38). All through her one-year stay in Nigeria, Kehinde’s experiences can be described, as Bhabha aptly puts it, “not self and other but the otherness of the self” (*The Location of Culture* 63). Her exposure to cultural practices firsthand helps Kehinde to accept the fact that her self does not identify with them and that in England, she only “revelled in the impression she created” (*Kehinde* 38). In the Derridean sense, Kehinde’s ‘truth’ about native culture is nothing more than “a simulacrum of ‘an original’ that touches us more than the truth, strikes us more effectively” (*Of Grammatology* 240). Thus, “the Africa of her dreams had been one of parties and endless celebrations, in which she, too, would enjoy the status and respect of a been-to. Instead, she found herself once more relegated to the margins” (*Kehinde* 97). In this respect, Kolawole asserts that:

African women cannot remain the same within traditions that undermine them. But they need to maintain alterity to resist myths, theories and any reality that erodes their humanity, encourages self-deprecation, and undermines their ability to be their own voices and act for themselves as agents of culture and of change. (204-5)

Another family aspect explored in the novel is the concept of motherhood. Upon her arrival in Nigeria, Kehinde is disappointed to find out that in her absence, her maternal position has been usurped by “little mother” Rike (*Kehinde* 73). At this point, Derridean ellipsis aptly fills the gap that Kehinde finds hard to comprehend: “In our culture, few people are raised by their real parents. Your real mother carries you for nine months, but think of those who carry all our troubles, who feed us, who comfort us as we grow up. Those women are our mothers too” (*Kehinde* 79). By this explanation, Emecheta sheds light on the norms of indigenous Igbo tradition, in which a child belongs to many mothers, not just one’s biological one (“Feminism with a small f!” 175).

Kehinde is also surprised at how quickly her children have accommodated themselves to the idea of a new mother. Though her heart goes out to her children for the adjustments they have had to make, they seem to have perfectly internalised the norms of traditional society, which is clearly expressed in her daughter’s letter to her mother:

I know it was painful for you, what Dad did. Joshua and I were shocked at first, but we soon learnt that it is very common here. And Rike is not bad at all. She prays for all of us all the time. And we are family... I have many mothers, but you will always come first, not just because you carried me for nine months before I was born, but because you are a special person...Goodbye Special Mum. (*Kehinde* 121-2).

According to Kolawole, African women's self-definition "endorses the overt manifestation of womanhood and motherhood with no apologia" (127). Therefore, Joshua and Bimpe's personal choice to stand by their father's side does not estrange Kehinde from her children. On the contrary, she continues to remain in contact with them by supporting them financially and exchanging letters. Thus, her traditional role as a mother is seriously maintained.

Even though for Kehinde Nigeria is associated with unchanged oppressive traditions, it is also a place of sacred memory. The novel explores Kehinde's attachment to her roots through dreams and flashbacks in the aptly called chapter "Origins". They gradually reveal the main character's unconscious state of mind rooted in her self. This scrutiny is in line with Derrida's description of a dream as "a conglomerate which, for purposes of investigation, must be broken up once more into fragments" (*Of Grammatology* xlvi). Through Kehinde's retrospective journey, it becomes obvious that she had a typical Nigerian family performing all the practices of Igbo tradition. Her first exposure to tradition takes place at the age of eleven when her aunt sends her to the village of Ibusa to meet her relatives. Due to the first encounter with her family, Kehinde becomes acquainted with an authentic polygamous household, where the head of an extended family is surrounded by his wives and children. In this regard, the author's portrayal of a typical Igbo family is aptly performed through Derrida's descriptive technique called rebus:

There was a big house, painted yellow, with people rushing out from all directions. They snatched my basket and raffia bag from the men who had brought me, thanking the one who said he was my uncle... Ifeyinwa, my sister, led me into the house to a room where a huge dark man was sitting on a leather chair, drinking beer with another man... I found myself sitting on my father's lap, while he introduced many other children, both older and younger, as my brothers and sisters. (*Kehinde* 77,78).

Throughout Kehinde's dreams and flashbacks, her father appears as the dominant figure occupying a significant part of her childhood memories. As opposed

to superficial and manipulative Albert, Kehinde's father is characterized as a true representative of indigenous Igbo community epitomising Albert's "nostalgia for lost origins" which turns full circle in Nigeria (*Writing and Difference* 369):

Kehinde knew that in his heart of hearts he was not enjoying all this. Albert had wanted to come back to Nigeria of his youth, but that Nigeria no longer existed, where people like his father had been happy to work as washermen, boat cleaners or wood carriers, and the women of the family did not go to school. That Nigeria was a nostalgic dream. (*Kehinde* 88-89)

In fact, in the absence of the Okolo family, Nigeria has undergone considerable changes, which is observed by Kehinde on the first day of her arrival. She is impressed "by what oil has done for Lagos. Beautiful wide roads, elegant individually designed houses, soaring flyovers. It was almost like a developed country" (67). This development ironically explains the meaning of "oiling the palms" standing for bribery. The expression is repeatedly used throughout the novel to point to the corruption of the country in transition due to the 'oil boom' of the 1970s. In this respect, Toyin Falola explains that "since the 1970s the vast majority of Nigerian export revenues have come from a single source: petroleum. Petroleum production began in the late 1950s, but it was not until the 'oil boom' of the 1970s that oil revenues skyrocketed" (*A History of Nigeria* 11). Inevitably, this development has gradually led to the replacement of long-held traditional beliefs by new modern values of contemporary Nigeria.

Considering that Kehinde's father is never named in the novel suggests an idea of the last representative of tradition, both archetypal and immemorial, deeply rooted in Kehinde's unconscious self as an arcanum, which Derrida characterises as inexplicable and unknowable (*Of Grammatology* 76). In fact, Kehinde's "self-sufficient and irreplaceable" image of native culture remains intact due to the presence of Taiwo in England and her father in Nigeria (*Of Grammatology* 145). However, it is worthwhile to note that Taiwo's voice, guiding Kehinde in most crucial moments, does not accompany her in Nigeria. As Kehinde's self, Taiwo's presence in England and

absence in Nigeria point to the main character's ambiguous position complicating to identify her with either culture. According to Bhabha, this ambivalence opens up "the chasm of cultural difference", which he refers to as "a mediator or metaphor of otherness" (*The Location of Culture* 45). The simultaneous presence and absence of Kehinde's self within both cultures "marks the site of an ambivalence" (73).

The sisterhood motif skilfully crafted by Emecheta is presented through Kehinde's elder sister, Ifeyinwa. As compared to Taiwo and Kehinde's father, Ifeyinwa is the only living member of Kehinde's immediate family who serves as a guardian angel and "little mother" to her younger sister (*Kehinde* 79). Apart from their blood relationship, Ifewinya and Kehinde are also spiritually akin to each other. Ifeyinwa has fabricated a story around her missing sister just as Kehinde has for her Taiwo. In line with traditional norms, Ifewinya is expected to perform the role of a submissive female subaltern. She has grown up in an extended family at the mercy of her stepmother thus "accustomed to accepting what life threw at her" (109). In addition, she has to live in a polygamous marriage with her husband's two other wives. Looking at her, "you'd think marriage was a prison", therefore, "she looks about as healthy as a two-day old chick caught in the rain" (94). Notwithstanding her compliance, Ifewinya's spirit is "trapped behind the veneer of tradition" (106). She wishes "she could go with Kehinde" to England in order to experience "that particular freedom" (106). Thus, "she [is] playing a simple-minded, older woman" who "[has] worn a mask for eighteen years and nobody but Kehinde [has] seen behind it" (112). As opposed to her current life within tradition, Ifewinya's dreams about emancipated life evoke the concept of Derrida's trace. According to Jacques Derrida, "every present bears the trace of an absent", which explains Ifewinya's trapped spirit as a possibility of trace (*Of Grammatology* 57). For Kehinde, Ifewinya's hidden trace appears to be an arcanum demystified at the end of the novel. In this regard, Ezeigbo's views on Emecheta's novels indicate Ifewinya's position as a female subaltern compelled to live in line with traditional norms of society:

By examining the social, economic and historical realities of African women's lives, [Emecheta] not only destroys myths about women's contentment with the status quo but also gives

fresh insights into women's struggle under male domination and women's ability to map out strategies that enabled them to survive the patriarchal society that was structured to dominate and oppress them. (6)

Through Ifewinya, the author also deals with the issue of sisterhood, one of the remarkable illustrations of which serves Ifewinya's act of revenge on Rike when she informs the latter about the existence of Albert's third wife. In this respect, the author's employment of paralanguage⁸ and literary tropes as Derridean bricolage intensifies the rhetorical effect of the novel:

'It took my sister and Albert over sixteen years to build that home!' Ifewinya was talking with her whole body, holding her waist as if to squeeze more horrible words from inside her... She gave Rike one long animal stare, like a predator assessing its victim... God forgive me, but people – man or woman – should not reap where they did not sow... She had gained something sweeter than money – the satisfaction of exerting her power in her sister's interests. (*Kehinde* 113, 114)

According to Derrida, all our languages are the result of art generated from a natural language (*Of Grammatology* 247). Though this language is inarticulate, it comprises tone, stress and meaning (247). Given that these components work closely together as part of the same semiotic system, the author infers that "it is not the sense of the word, but its accompanying intonation [accent] that is understood" (247). Benefiting from this aspect of language, Ifewinya, through the tone of her voice and various gestures, achieves the desired effect reflected in Rike's transfixed appearance (*Kehinde* 114).

Due to her unpleasant experiences in Nigeria, Kehinde examines her position as a woman, a wife and a mother. She realises that "there is no place for her in the family"

⁸ Paralanguage involves non-verbal elements of communication such as pitch, volume, and intonation used to modify meaning and convey emotion (Poyatos 2).

since “the circle [has] closed in her absence and she [does] not have the strength to fight her way back in” (91). She also recognises the fact that in England, Albert has never felt at home; whereas in Nigeria, he has more “room to be a man” and “the kind of freedom he [has] longed for in England” (89, 117). Kehinde’s insight regarding Albert’s position in Nigeria is completely out of line with hers. Having experienced both cultures firsthand, she holds conflicting opinions that exacerbate her dichotomous position between self and other. According to Bhabha, “the concept of cultural difference focuses on the problem of the ambivalence of cultural authority. (*The Location of Culture* 50). In this regard, Kehinde’s dual position stems from the struggle over domination that Bhabha describes as “a cultural supremacy” produced “only in the moment of differentiation” (51). Thus, the main character’s liminal position once again comes to the fore, this time in Nigeria, complicating her already difficult situation. On the one hand, she thinks that “it [is] foolish to pine for a country where she would always be made to feel unwelcome”, on the other, in Nigeria, she finds herself “relegated to the margins”, thus estranged from her own culture (*Kehinde* 96, 97).

In a broad sense, Kehinde’s struggle between self and other echoes the condition of all been-to Nigerian women throughout the world. In line with this approach, Hawley suggests that these women “have taken root in the West but have maintained their ‘twin’ identity in their homeland” (336). The author goes further by adding that been-to women are subject to “univocal declarations in the country of origin based on their sex and to univocal declarations in their new countries based on their nationality” (336). Likewise, Emecheta’s *Kehinde* “fall somewhere ‘between’ Great Britain and Nigeria in [its] psychological and spiritual milieu” (336).

In the Derridean sense, Kehinde’s straddling both cultures and not fully belonging to either of them is explained as the hinge that “articulates and at the same time disarticulates the immediate unity of meaning, within which the being of the subject distinguishes itself neither from its act nor from its attributes” (*Of Grammatology* 279). This leads to the deconstructive reversal of the binary between self and other, which becomes more prominent with Kehinde’s yearning for her comfortable London life, to borrow from Derrida, “the other side of nostalgia” (*Of*

Grammatology xvi). In the same vein, the author's choice of autumn as a proper season for Kehinde's romantic feelings is in tune with Derridean rebus portraying an ordinary day in London:

Suddenly the heat made her remember that this was October, autumn in England. The wind would be blowing, leaves browning and falling. In a few weeks, the cherry tree in her back garden would be naked of leaves, its dark branches twisted like old bones. On a day like this, after the Friday shopping, her feet would be stretched in front of her gas fire, while she watched her favourite serials on television until she was tired and until her eyes ached. Autumn in England. (*Kehinde* 96)

Kehinde's nostalgia anticipates her return to London. It is also foreshadowed in her letter to Moriammo, where she states, "our husbands feel threatened when a woman shows signs of independence" (92). Moriammo extends her helping hand by sending Kehinde some money to buy a plane ticket back to Britain. She also supports Kehinde's decision advising her not to "let fear of what people will say stop [her] from doing what [her] chi wants" (100). In line with Derridean ellipsis, Kehinde's confidence in Moriammo's loyalty goes full circle. It shows the strong bond of sisterhood between the two friends: "Our friendship is deeper than you can ever imagine, Tunde" (66).

After one-year long oppressive atmosphere of Nigerian life, Kehinde takes refuge in England. Her "surge of elation" in tune with the stimulating season of spring anticipates a fresh start (107). The author undertakes Derrida's reversal to portray Kehinde's return to London, which becomes a real homecoming as opposed to Lagos, full of the noise, dirt and the chaotic hustle and bustle (67). She feels reunited with a familiar ambience where everything appeals to her:

At Heathrow, to Kehinde's surprise, even the immigration officers were welcoming... Only a few hours before, still in Nigeria, she had thought the whole world was collapsing. Now

she noticed that the trees the council had planted along the street were just beginning to bud. In a few days, they would burst into bloom, and it would be spring. (107)

Entering her London terrace house, Kehinde is greeted by Taiwo's welcoming voice: "Home, sweet home!" (108). Encouraged by this reunion, Kehinde removes the 'For Sale' sign with her resounding declaration that: "This house is not for sale... This house is mine" (108). Kehinde's laying claim on her London house is the first step towards her conscious acculturation into the host country. This act is also the precursor to her self-actualisation as a woman and as an individual. To this end, she makes the most of her potential and receives a degree in sociology. Emecheta, who has also made remarkable achievements by her personal efforts, strongly advocates the role of education in women's self-fulfilment. She asserts that education helps women to rear a generation ("Feminism with a small 'f'!" 175). The author also believes that "if one educates a woman, one educates a community, whereas if one educates a man, one educates a man" (175). It is worthwhile to note that Kehinde's choice of sociology is not coincidental. In a broad sense, sociology is "the systematic study of society and social interaction" (Keirns 10). It deals with all aspects and levels of society as well as "the experiences of individuals and how those experiences are shaped by interactions with social groups and society as a whole" (11). Emecheta believes that "fiction has a vital social responsibility now that oral tradition is less strong" (qtd. in Kenyon 113). Therefore, benefiting from her sociological training, she deals with particular issues of society by way of literature:

Literature has a lot to say about the social life of a people at a particular place and time. Because my first degree is in sociology, I always deal with my subject from a social angle. I form the social theory, then I expand the theory in the novel. I look for a problem strictly from a woman's point of view. (qtd. in Thomas 144)

Kehinde can be considered a true sociological report of the feminine perspective on the position of a been-to Nigerian woman. Emecheta explores the social impact of

“being a woman and African born through an African woman’s eyes” (“Feminism with a small ‘f!’” 175). Within this framework, the author’s major concern is to shed light on the position of a female subaltern who, revisiting her culture with a been-to perception, can no longer identify her new self with it. According to Ogunyemi, “been-toism registers as sophistication engendered by contact with another world, with the traveller acquiring an improved lifestyle, to confirm the vast difference between the person who has been to the other place and the stay-at-home” (221). In this respect, Kehinde’s visit to Nigeria and then return to Britain may be regarded as the journey of self-discovery or quest for her self by which the Nigerian female subaltern forms a new social space within the host culture.

On the other hand, Kehinde’s pragmatism appears to be a benefit that she derives from both the study of social sciences and Aunt Nnebogo, who has instilled in her only useful values of culture. Owing to her practical way of thinking, Kehinde quickly perceives and evaluates the conditions within which she lives. This down-to-earth approach is illustrated in the following dialogue between Kehinde and her like-minded colleague Duro taking place in the hotel where they work as cleaners:

‘I don’t waste time deceiving myself, I’m beginning to give up hope for our country. If the country is well run, will we be working as hotel room cleaners? You with all your sociology degree and me with my so many diplomas?’ ‘Yes,’ Kehinde agreed, ‘you see all those women cleaning the underground, they are qualified as we are, but they do it because the pay is enough to live on. In Nigeria, with the exception of the corrupt politicians, very few honest people can make a living from their profession... The children want to earn good money. Life here will be easier for them than it has been for us. After all, they were born here...’ ‘You want your children to be really free? Well, they are free to make this choice. Many of their mates at home would love to have such opportunity.’ (*Kehinde* 124)

The conversation between Kehinde and Duro reveals their flexible nature developed throughout their stay in London due to which they have successfully accommodated themselves to the norms of the host culture. Regardless of the challenges brought about by cultural difference, Kehinde readily accepts them in the name of freedom. In this respect, Derrida's reversal of self and other is maintained in favour of the host culture. This "indispensable phase of reversal" facilitates Kehinde's cross-cultural adaptation by which she transcends all the negative aspects of her tradition (*Dissemination* 6).

The author also performs a deconstructive reversal of gender roles through Kehinde's new love affair with Michael Gibson. By hinting at their owner-tenant relationship, the author subverts traditional definitions of gender roles. Due to her self-reliant stance, Kehinde builds her relationship with Michael Gibson exceptionally on her terms. According to Berrian, "female sexuality is not reduced to an expression of male dominance for as an educated woman, [Kehinde] is no longer willing to share a man in a relationship" (177). In this respect, Kehinde and Albert share a common side. Considering Albert's case, Berrian explains that he is unfaithful according to the western concept of monogamy, but he stays loyal to Igbo notions of polygamy (177). Kehinde enacts Albert's attitude in England by doing likewise and taking Michael Gibson as a lover. Furthermore, this stance is reiterated by her witty response to Joshua: "... but it's not a crime to love. Your dad has taken two other wives in Nigeria, and I am not complaining. That's one of the beauties of polygamy, it gives you freedom. I'm still his wife, if I want to be, and I'm still your mother. It doesn't change anything" (*Kehinde* 138).

According to Ngcobo, "it is not surprising that the relationship between mothers and sons, far from being harmonious and loving is often ambivalent and erratic" (145). The author explains that in polygamous or extended families, "where the wider family relationships are competitive, mothers and sons can get very close, for mutual protection. This is particularly so where matters of inheritance are concerned" (145). In this respect, Joshua's reappearance in London is not coincidental. Kehinde's London home appears as the final stage where she settles accounts with her oppressive and patriarchal family, which Berrian aptly describes as "the battleground between

Kehinde and Albert” (178). “Having been to Africa, where young men were made to feel they owned heaven and earth”, Joshua is back to “reclaim his birthright”, in that to take the house that supposedly belongs to him (*Kehinde* 35). However, Joshua is shocked to see a woman who is hardly associated with his mother. Instead of “the ideal Ibusa village mother”, he meets an assertive woman who is not daunted by the oppressive effects of tradition any longer (138). He even thinks that Kehinde is not only depriving him of his rights but is also abandoning her responsibilities as a wife and a mother, to which she responds that “[my] whole life was wound around your needs, but now you’re a grown man! Mothers are people too” (139). Kehinde has no intention to be exploited by a manipulative husband and a son, both treating her like a property. Laying claim on her London home empowers Kehinde to act for herself and remove traditional customs and practices encroaching upon her independent self and welfare. In this sense, Derridean ellipsis reaffirms Kehinde’s act by Albert’s recognition that “women rule in this country” (16). Furthermore, in terms of *différance*, the signifier ‘home’ stands for Kehinde’s own space from which she can speak up for herself and declare her independence from patriarchy.

Back in England, Kehinde encounters the issues characterizing public life of Britain. One of them serves the case of a rich but perverted Arab sheikh, who demands to see Kehinde naked to satisfy his desire to view a nude black woman (131). Moreover, applying for a job as a social worker, Kehinde’s female employer jokingly assures her that “[she] won’t be asked to take [her] clothes off” (*Kehinde* 134). Feeling humiliated once more, Kehinde thinks that her case with an Arab sheikh “[has] been trivialised” (134). This serves as an example of racial abuse hurting Kehinde’s moral sentiments. Kehinde is also aware that “an educated black person in a responsible job is too much of a threat” since “white people don’t feel comfortable in their presence” (125). However, “the oil money makes people colour-blind” (126). The employment of satire as Derridean bricolage is obviously at work when the author criticises shortcomings of the host society. This also points to Emecheta’s skilful handling of the English language, which, as she argues, is her powerful vehicle for bringing up the nuances of the society (qtd. in James 39).

According to Kenyon, in her been-to novels, Emecheta deliberately “[demythologizes] the glorifying illusion of the mother country England without denying that English culture offers other women in particular opportunities to gain independence” (132). On the other hand, Christine Sizemore argues that “[Emecheta] is in a liminal situation, because from the perspective of England she sees problems for women within patriarchal Nigerian culture but from the perspective of her homeland she sees the problems for blacks within racist British culture” (368). As a result, multiple forms of marginalization existing within both societies undermines a deconstructive reversal of self and other producing the effect of Derrida’s erasure. It becomes more prominent when back in England, Kehinde is no longer guided by Taiwo’s voice since she “[has] stopped protesting that all her thoughts were hers alone, and started accepting Taiwo’s voice as a permanent part of her consciousness” (*Kehinde* 135).

Kehinde’s self-made position is consistent with the dynamic concept of African womanism characterized by such qualities as “appreciation, emancipation, elevation and total self-fulfilment of the woman in positive ways” (Kolawole 204). Kehinde confirms these attributes by asserting that: “Claiming my right does not make me less of a mother, not less of a woman. If anything it makes me, more human” (*Kehinde* 141). The novel ends by Kehinde’s laconic utterance to her spirit: “Now we are one” (141). This closure reaffirms the final stage of deconstructive reading by which the female subaltern’s self and other merge to create a palimpsest articulating the cultural *différance* of her new individual self. In the process of Derrida’s erasure, the subaltern’s dual position alternately or simultaneously produces the traces of both native and host cultures. These cultural traces neither fully erase nor fully represent the subaltern’s self. In the Derridean sense, her cultural palimpsest becomes a continual reinscription of her initial position pointing to its perpetual improvement. Thus, by accommodating both cultures within her new self, the been-to subaltern carves out her own space from which she articulates her empowerment.

As a conclusion, *Kehinde* is a contemporary representation of a Nigerian been-to subaltern by which Emecheta recounts firsthand experiences of the eponymous character who undergoes considerable changes as a result of exposure to two different

cultures. Relegated to the margins in her own country, she takes the opportunity to live an independent and respectable life in England. In this respect, her been-to perception is essential for her self-discovery due to which she moves from a state of powerlessness to a state of self-fulfilment. The theme of the journey from England to Nigeria and back stands for the female subaltern's emancipation. Ultimately, empowered with education that helps her achieve self-realisation, she evolves into a self-reliant woman. Due to this new stance, the been-to subaltern woman forms a synthesis of native and host cultures appropriating only those values that contribute to the improvement of her condition in society.

3.3. The Role of Social and Cultural Awareness in Self-attainment of the Subaltern in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*

The last section of this chapter is based on a deconstructive reading of the Nigerian female subaltern in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*. In this respect, the female subaltern's individual self is examined in relation to her native culture. Given the main character's exposure to Western culture, the research also incorporates Bhabha's concepts on cultural difference. *Everything Good Will Come* is Sefi Atta's debut novel charting the growing up of the protagonist, Enitan, from adolescence to adulthood. Following the physical, psychological and moral formation of the main character, the research explores how the female subaltern establishes her individual self despite her cultural expectations. The novel is set against the backdrop of political unrest taking place in Nigeria between 1971 and 1995 thus examining the position of the female subaltern in relation to the socio-political milieu within which she lives.

Sefi Atta is a prize-winning Nigerian author and playwright. She is regarded as one of the most popular writers in the third generation Nigerian literature. Atta was born in 1964 in Lagos, Nigeria. She received her education in Nigeria, England and the United States (Collins ix). Having graduated from the creative writing program at Antioch University, Los Angeles, she started to write exceptional and revealing novels, plays, and short stories earning her several literary awards (x). Her honours include the Red Hen Press Short Story Award in 2003, first place for the PEN International David TK Wong Prize in 2005, the Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa in

2006, the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa in 2009 (x). Sefi Atta's novels have been lauded by the well-known Nigerian female writers, such as Buchi Emecheta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (x). In her novels, Atta explores contemporary Nigerian culture and tradition illuminating her perspective on such issues as Nigerian patriarchy, the role of women and mothers in society as well as neocolonialism and the city (ix). Her works are also popular beyond the places she has lived, which she acknowledges as follows: "My work as a writer is a long-term engagement with places I have called home—Lagos, Nigeria, in particular. England has given me work to do, and America is giving me work to do right now. But Lagos just keeps on giving" (qtd. in Collins xiv).

Everything Good Will Come (2005) is a coming-of-age novel awarded the inaugural Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa. It deals with the life of a girl growing into a woman in post-independent Nigeria. By employing a first-person narrative, the author gives a direct account of the events and experiences where the narrator and the main character Enitan appears as both an insider and an outsider. Sefi Atta states that "[her] novel is narrated by a modern Nigerian woman who is in conflict with her patriarchal culture. She is an intimate narrator though, almost as if she is taking your hand and saying, come and see" (qtd. in Sy 101).

Everything Good Will Come is set in one of the biggest cities of Nigeria, Lagos. The novel spans three decades of the political history of Nigeria beginning in 1971 and ending in 1995. The protagonist, Enitan, grows up in a privileged middle class family. Her father is a lawyer with enlightened modern views, whereas her mother is a devout Anglican. Thus, Enitan's upbringing is determined between her mother's extreme religious adherence and her father's contemporary beliefs. With the death of her brother, Enitan's parents start to exert more control over her life thus preventing her from having a normal childhood. Meanwhile, she makes friends with the next-door neighbours' daughter, Sheri. Years pass and Enitan is sent to London to study law. When she returns to Lagos, she starts to work with her father as a lawyer. She resumes her friendship with her childhood friend Sheri and notices the changes that she has undergone in her absence. Eventually, Enitan marries a divorced lawyer Niyi Franco. However, the differences over each other's views lead to their separation. She becomes

involved in political activism that results in her short-term imprisonment. Enitan believes that women must have the right to decide for themselves. The role of Western education is presented as one of the major factors due to which Enitan becomes aware of the rights denied to women in her culture. At the end of the novel, the author's positive overtone is observed through the main character's eponymous utterance 'everything good will come to me' accompanied by the dance of palongo (257).

The novel opens with eleven-year-old Enitan reflecting on how different her life is from her peers since at an age when other Nigerian girls are masters at the game called ten-ten, she has to listen to her parents constantly preaching to her about how to behave best (6). Thus, she implies that despite having her own inclinations, she is not allowed to perform them (6). Describing the house where she lives, Enitan points to the high wooden fence that surrounds their yard. Further, she adds that her mother has replaced the wooden fence with a barbed wire fence (6). The reiteration of the signifier 'fence' points to *différance*, by which the author implies barriers that Enitan subsequently has to overcome in her life. Enitan is the first and only child of her parents as her brother died of sickle cell disease at a very young age. Since the premature death of her son, Enitan's mother, Arin, has devoted herself to the church. Enitan's father, Bandele Sunday Taiwo, nicknamed Sunny, is a Cambridge-educated middle-class lawyer. As an advocate of democracy, he promotes the liberation of women by which he instils a sense of self-determination in his daughter (15). He believes that women are empowered enough to make their choice between subordination and emancipation. Opposing traditional upbringing whereby girls are nurtured to be 'kitchen martyrs', Enitan's father subverts the stereotype that women should be defined by their role in their household. Instead, he urges Enitan to become a lawyer and defend her rights (30).

On the other hand, Sunny's self-styled modern stance helps him to justify his wife's submissive position within the domestic sphere: "I've never asked you to be in here cooking for me.' 'Ah, well,' she said, wiping her hands with a dishcloth. 'But you never ask me not to either.' He nodded in agreement. 'It is hard to compete with your quest for martyrdom'" (15-16). This corroborates the observations of Adeola James, who ironically notes that although African men allow their children a lot of freedom

and adopt modern technological devices, they never change their attitude towards women since even the most educated men look for simple and ignorant women as wives (3). This attitude is true for Sunny since he exploits Arin's uneducated state by implying that she assumes the role of a traditional subaltern by her free will. Arin, on the other hand, exposes Sunny's hypocritical stance pointing to the discrepancy between his beliefs and actions. Nevertheless, Arin's acquiescence to submissiveness as the status quo suits Sunny's purpose in that by keeping his wife at bay, he can nurture his daughter in accordance with his own principles. Moreover, by constantly criticising Arin for her rigid religiosity, Sunny alienates Enitan from her mother thereby making her closer to himself.

Molara Ogundipe-Leslie asserts that by denying that there is any oppression of women in Africa, the male-dominated society behaves in the typical sexist fashion (qtd. in James 68). They skilfully disguise their stance in their patriarchal culture claiming that the family is more important than the fate of the individual woman thus discarding women's concerns with the hypocrisy that the development of the country is a greater priority than the liberation of women (68). They deliberately mislead the society by asserting that women do not need to be liberated since they have never been in bondage (68). In doing so, patriarchal institutions aim to frighten women into quietude (68). Sunny's attitude towards his wife and daughter is in line with the above assertion. However, his phallogocentric tactics are more oblique in that he acts like a hypocritical politician who tries to convince his people (in this case, his family) of his sincerity.

Sunny's manipulative attitude towards female liberation is related to Derrida's concept of penumbra, which is the adoption of two opposing ideas at the same time. Sunny's hypocrisy leads to the early phallogocentric indoctrination of Enitan's individual self. Furthermore, by promoting the myth that men like him have made the liberation and empowerment of women possible, Sunny seeks to perpetuate Enitan's ignorance about the true condition of Nigerian women (De La Cruz-Guzmán 8). Naturally, being a naïve and inexperienced child, Enitan initially accepts these views without question. Sunny's penumbral position also enables him to hold the power

characterized by both promoting and suppressing Enitan's success at will. This act is foreshadowed in his game with Enitan where he conveys his message:

He always won, but today he explained the secret of the game. 'You'd better listen, because I'm tired of defeating you...' I was winning the game and thought that if I moved, I would lose my good fortune. 'Heh, heh, I'm beating you,' I said, wriggling in my chair. 'Only because I let you,' my father said. (*Everything Good Will Come* 27)

On the other hand, Enitan's relationship with her mother is rather ambiguous. At some points, she relies on the image delineated by her father who refers to his wife as a selfish and uncaring woman, which makes her appear evil to Enitan (6). However, most of the time, she is caught in the middle of their arguments over her upbringing in which both sides favour their own methods. On the other hand, Enitan is unable to discover the reason behind her mother's dependence on her father. In the Derridean sense, her mother's covert behaviour seems inexplicable to Enitan as an undiscovered arcanum:

My mother never had a conversation with me; she talked and knew that I was listening. I always was. The mere sound of her footsteps made me breathe faster. She hardly raised a hand to me, unlike most mothers I knew, who beat their children with tree branches, but she didn't have to. I'd been caned before, for daydreaming in class, with the side of a ruler, on my knuckles, and wondered if it wasn't an easier punishment than having my mother look at me as if she'd caught me playing with my own poop. Her looks were hard to forget. At least caning welts eventually disappeared. (14)

Despite Enitan's distant relationship with her mother, there are particular moments in her growth determined by her mother's traditional views. In the opening paragraph of the novel, Enitan says that her mother constantly forces her to help in the kitchen (6). It is obvious that Enitan's mother attempts to prepare her daughter for the

domestic sphere assigned to women by her society thereby socialising Enitan into the role of a traditional female subaltern. According to Smit, Arin's characterization fits in with the Victorian colonial model of a wife in African society (73). Indeed, Arin holds a typical cultural approach prevailing in the Nigerian society since Nigerian women are expected devote all their time to the family by cooking for them and labouring in the kitchen, irrespective of their education levels (De La Cruz-Guzmán 10). Enitan's father, in contrast, believes that young girls, such as Enitan, should have the freedom to make their own choices. Similarly, encouraged by her father's liberal ideas, Enitan thinks that kitchen work is ugly and her main plan for the future is to starve herself so that she will not have to cook (*Everything Good Will Come* 15).

Given Arin's subordinate position, the term 'kitchen martyr' may be analysed within the framework of Derrida's deconstruction. On the one hand, the signifier 'kitchen martyr' symbolises a traditional subaltern woman who has confined herself to the domestic sphere. This definition aptly describes the plight of Enitan's mother, Arin, who is relegated to the kitchen to perform the expectations of her culture. On the other hand, the signifier 'kitchen martyr' functions as a powerful weapon of patriarchy serving to disguise its oppressive norms. By promoting his supposedly liberal ideas on the equality of women, Enitan's father, Sunny explains Arin's choice of being a 'kitchen martyr' as her voluntary preference. This approach is in line with De La Cruz-Guzmán's argument that Nigerian women are considered kitchen martyrs since they serve by choice thus erasing the very real patriarchal forces that make them comply with such duties (10). The label of martyrdom is humiliating to women as it blames them for their own choice of suffering, alienation, and subservience (10). This pretext enables Enitan's father to perpetuate patriarchal enforcement of his society. Thus, as opposed to Arin's traditional subaltern position, Sunny assumes the role of a typical Nigerian man propagating phallogocentric values of his native culture. As a result, the signifier 'kitchen martyr' produces the effect of *différance* simultaneously pointing to the plight of Nigerian women in a male-dominated society and the ability of patriarchy to appear invisible.

Language is another significant aspect revealing the extent of phallogocentrism in Enitan's family. Enitan recalls that whenever her father spoke English at home, she

knew that he was angry (*Everything Good Will Come* 16). She even did not understand what he meant most of the time (16). By using the language of the former colonizer, Sunny asserts his authority over the household members. Sunny's position corroborates Muoneke's description of the educated national middle class who, fully grounded in Western education, is qualified to join the elite that has inherited the management of the country from the colonizer (65). In this respect, Sunny's labelling of western Nigeria as 'the Wild West' points to the appropriation of the colonizer's heritage consistent with Bhabha's concept of mimicry (*Everything Good Will Come* 7). This also explains his hypocritical attitude towards the liberation of women since he not only imitates the culture of the colonizer but also customises its values to his own needs, which enables him to camouflage his patriarchal views.

While performing transitions in Enitan's development, Sefi Atta employs indigenous proverbs, sayings and adages that serve as Derridean bricolage. They help to advance the meanings and formal qualities of the narratives in which they occur functioning as images, metaphors and symbols (Obiechina 125). In this sense, when Enitan informs that in Yoruba tradition, Nature heralds the beginning of a person's transition to life, adulthood, and death, she indicates the transition from childhood to adolescence (*Everything Good Will Come* 9). This implication also foreshadows her encounter with the next-door neighbour, Sherifat Bakare, who calls into question Enitan's early conceptions imposed by her parents.

Sheri is the daughter of Engineer Bakare, the head of a polygamous household, and a British mother, who has allegedly passed away. Alarmed by Sheri's behaviour and social class, Enitan's parents forbid their friendship. However, Enitan defies her parents and continues to meet Sheri secretly, which is considered her first act of self-determination. Enitan's friendship with Sheri contributes to the development of her individual self. Further, Enitan remembers that Sheri has led her to the gap between parental consent and disapproval and has taught her how to bridge it with deception, "wearing a face as pious as a church sister before [her] mother and altering steadily behind her" (33). In fact, throughout the novel, Sheri serves as a foil to Enitan, which is revealed through their opposing views on the gender role in society illustrated in the following dialogue:

‘I want to be something like... like president.’ ‘Eh? Women are not presidents.’ ‘Why not?’ ‘Our men won’t stand for it. Who will cook for your husband?’ ‘He will cook for himself.’ ‘What if he refuses?’ ‘I’ll drive him away.’ ‘You can’t,’ she said. ‘Yes I can. Who wants to marry him anyway?’ (*Everything Good Will Come* 22)

By challenging the way with which Nigerian women are identified, Enitan also foreshadows her subsequent social and political activism. The difference between Enitan and Sheri is developed further through the reiterated signifier ‘gap’ (9, 28). On the one hand, it points to Enitan and Sheri’s different backgrounds and family structures. Sheri grows in a polygamous family and because of her mother’s early death, she is raised by her grandmother Alhaja. She is funny, but also rude, which Enitan ascribes to her lack of home training (12). On the other hand, the signifier ‘gap’ stands for ethnic and religious differences between Enitan and Sheri. Sheri is a Moslem and she does not know much about Christianity, except that there is a book called the Bible and if you read it, you would go mad (25). Through this difference, Atta also criticises discriminatory treatment of the authorities breeding hatred and intolerance among children. Enitan remembers that at school, girls were teased for being yellow or fat as well as for being Moslem or Igbo (13). Moreover, stuttering and wearing a bra would also make them objects of ridicule (13). Enitan implies that these differences do not affect her friendship with Sheri. In this respect, the signifier ‘gap’ functions as a conciliatory space bringing Enitan and Sheri together regardless of their ethnic, racial or religious differences. As a result, in the play of interchangeable signification, the signifier ‘gap’ produces the effect of Derridean *différance*. According to Kadidia Sy, through ethnic and religious differences between Sheri and Enitan, Atta makes an allusion to the perpetrators of the Biafra War. In the novel, the author demonstrates that “some differences can be very constructive and contribute to the foundation of a true female friendship”, whereas Nigerian officials “fail to take advantage of such an opportunity” (18). Indeed, African women writers have a “socially educative role to question why national ruling classes are so irresponsible, criminal, and wasteful”, thereby raising social and political awareness intrinsic to

African feminism (Sackeyfio 130). On the other hand, through Enitan and Sheri, the author also brings up the aspect of sisterhood, by which “[women] appropriate and refashion oppressive spaces through friendship, sisterhood, and solidarity and in the process reinvent themselves” (Nnaemeka 19). Further, maturing into a young woman, Enitan would acknowledge that “[Sheri] was my oldest friend, my closest friend. We had been absent friends, sometimes uncertain friends, but so were most sisters and she was the nearest I’d come to having one in this place where families were over-extended” (*Everything Good Will Come* 161).

Along with the differences between the two girls, Sheri also displays the ambiguities of Nigerian culture. This ambivalence is initially implied through her background exposing cultural stereotypes of the patriarchal society:

So did the stereotypes. Yoruba girls were considered quarrelsome; Hausa girls, pretty but dumb; Igbo girls, intelligent, but well, they were muscular. Most girls had parents of the same origin, but there was some intermingling and we had a few girls, like Sheri, who had one parent from a foreign country. Half-castes we called them, without malice or implications. Half because they claimed both sides of their heritage. There was no caste system in our country. (*Everything Good Will Come* 34)

Sheri’s cultural hybridity is furthered by her involvement with the pop culture and fashion of the 1970s. She is also well aware of the realities of modern urban culture, which she admits as “I was raised in downtown Lagos... Bring the Queen of England there. She will learn how to fight” (133). Sheri’s cosmopolitan perspective is in line with Ayo Kehinde’s assertion that “Sefi Atta occupies a position as a ‘cultural traveller’, projecting the tensions which ensue from the clash between traditionalism and the different faces and phases of modernisation in Nigeria” (66).

On the other hand, growing up in a polygamous family, Sheri has to obey the patriarchal authority of the household. However, this obedience should not be confused with subordination. Even though she is exposed to the traditional side of her

culture, she skilfully turns this to her advantage. In this regard, Sheri's obedience to her stepmothers described as "I kneel for them, help them in the kitchen" serves as a strategy through which she secures her space (*Everything Good Will Come* 26). In doing so, she manipulates both the people around her and the cultural system within which she lives. Sheri's attempt to create space for personal freedom is characterized as Derridean supplement. By means of this supplement, Sheri customises the conventions of the society to her needs in order to achieve her ends. Her ability to contrive supplements to the existing system is sustained throughout the novel.

Another aspect of phallogocentrism is illustrated in Sheri's rape incident. At a teenage gathering in Ikoyi Park, the three boys pinning Sheri down, rape her and bruising her body disgrace her. Providing a storyboard description of the incident, Enitan implies that its consequences will chase both of them up to their adulthood. However, being naïve and immature, Enitan reacts to Sheri's rape as "a silent moment... a peaceful moment... a funny moment... then tears filled [her] eyes" (42). Although Sheri is initially regarded as a strong and confident person, being subjected to rape, "she looked tiny... tiny" (42). Following the rape, Sheri's request to wash her, reminds Enitan of her mother's words echoing through Derrida's ellipsis "[s]ex was a filthy act, she said, and I must always wash myself afterward" (17). Guided by her mother's advice, Enitan believes that "[o]nce [the water] was clear, we would have survived" but "[i]nstead it remained pink and grainy, with hair strands and soap suds. The sand grains settled and the scum stayed" (47).

Enitan's blind reliance on her mother's instructions is due to the enforcement of patriarchal dictates that suppress female sexuality, thereby "[estranging] women from their bodily experiences and their sexuality. Such estrangements have serious implications for female becoming" (Smit 74). In this respect, Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie notes that:

[N]igerians have been raised to think of women as inherently guilty. And they have been raised to expect so little of men that the idea of men as savage beings with no self-control is somehow acceptable. We teach girls shame. *Close your legs. Cover*

yourself. We make them feel as though by being born female, they are already guilty of something. (13)

Therefore, the thought of rape embarrasses Enitan and she reacts to it in complete unison with her mother's traditional views guided by gender stereotypes: "Bad girls got raped. We all knew. Loose girls, forward girls, raw, advanced girls. Laughing with boys, following them around, thinking she was one of them. Now, I could smell their semen on her, and it was making me sick. It was her fault" (*Everything Good Will Come* 48). Enitan is yet to learn that "nothing a woman does justifies rape" (55). In terms of deconstruction, the signifier 'rape' evokes Derrida's concept of *différance* standing for both difference and deferral of the meaning. Primarily, 'rape' points to sexual violence that arises from gender inequality prevailing in patriarchal cultures to oppress women and empower men. In this respect, Enitan's opinionated attitude is the result of the early phallogocentric indoctrination promoting gender stereotypes. On the other hand, the signifier 'rape' suggests Derrida's 'deferral' deriving from *différance* that subsequently empowers Enitan with the agency to surmount the circumstances relegating Nigerian women to the subaltern position.

Performing elaborate research into the history of sexuality in Nigeria, Eno Ikpe asserts that sexuality "[is] not a natural given but culturally negotiated in the society" (29). In the cultures of most Nigerian peoples, "sexuality was consigned to the realms of marriage. It was only under marital condition that sexuality was to be experienced. Outside this, it was culturally taboo to discuss sex and sexual matters. Sexuality was full of silence and discretions..." (6). Pointing to the aforementioned issue in the novel, Sefi Atta implies that the taboo nature of female sexuality has been sustained as another manipulative instrument of the phallogocentric system. Well aware of this taboo, Enitan and Sheri are unable to speak about the horrible incident that has befallen them. Instead, to avoid public shaming, they seek refuge in silence. Thus, the power of phallogocentrism is confirmed through an effective silencing of the female subaltern's voice subjecting her to both psychological and physical violation. On the other hand, Sheri's rape also leads to Enitan's disillusionment with her first romantic partner being involved in the incident. This attitude extends to her further relationships with the opposite sex and obsession to wash herself after sexual intercourse:

It was his semen. I couldn't bear the thought of it leaking out of me and rolling down my thighs. But each time I opened my mouth to tell him, about Sheri and me that awful summer, I thought my voice would blast my ribs apart, flatten him, flatten the bed, toss my sheets around like the wind, so I said nothing... as he slept, I crept to the bathroom and filled the aluminium bucket with cold water, and washed myself clean. (*Everything Good Will Come* 54, 89)

Further, Sheri's rape results in her self-performed abortion causing the ensuing infertility. Enitan points out that in her culture, "[b]etter to be ugly, to be crippled, to be a thief even, than to be barren.... Marriage could immediately wipe out a sluttish past, but angel or not, a woman had to have a child" (76). The signifier 'barren' implies that fertility is pivotal to Nigerian culture since it puts emphasis on progeny. Moreover, childbearing is regarded as the most important expression of womanhood as well as a source of security for women in the male-dominated society. It follows that, being deprived of this faculty, such women as Sheri are rejected by the society. On the other hand, taking into account Sheri's manipulative skills, the signifier 'barren' suggests an avenue for developing new supplements to the existing system in order to avoid marginalisation.

Enitan's secondary education in the boarding school for girls marks another step towards the development of her self. She is exposed to diverse cultures of Nigeria, which adds to moral, intellectual and social growth of her individual self. Enitan becomes aware of cultural practices characterizing different ethnic groups, such as:

[women] from Zaria, Katsina, Kaduna who decorated their skin with henna dye and lived in purdah; women from Calabar who were fed and anointed in fattening houses before their weddings; women who were circumcised... The girls I met at Royal College were so different. I could tell a girl's ethnicity even before she opened her mouth. Hausa girls had softer hair because of their Arab heritage. Yoruba girls like me usually had heart-shaped

faces and many Igbo girls were fair-skinned; we called them Igbo Yellow. We spoke English, but our native tongues were as different as French and Chinese. (33-4)

The above excerpt also points to Enitan's gradual introduction to women's voices, each representing their own selves. In this respect, Atta expresses the opinion that "women-directed theories thus lose their analytical and explanatory power if they seek only to engage with collective, rather than with individual or specific situations" (Smit 61). This approach is in tune with Enitan's individual self being exposed to the diversity of her culture with which she gradually comes to terms. In addition, the accumulation of knowledge based on different cultures and experiences contributes to her subsequent understanding of the true condition of the female subaltern.

Following her secondary education, Enitan is sent to England to study law. She spends nine years in London maturing into a young woman. There, she is exposed to Western ways of romantic commitment characterized as "[a] boy loved a girl and he called her his wife. A girl loved a boy and she stayed at home on weekends to cook for him, while he went out with some other girl" (*Everything Good Will Come* 56). England provides Enitan with an opportunity to fully express her thoughts and behaviours thereby opening up space for her self-realization, which she has not been able to achieve in Nigeria due to the enforcement of strict gender norms. Therefore, it is not coincidental that the chapter titled "1985" opens with the loss of her virginity: "The first person to tell me my virginity belonged to me was the boy who took it. Before this, I'd thought my virginity belonged to Jesus Christ, my mother, society at large. Anyone but me. My boyfriend, a first-year pharmacy student at London University, assured me that it was mine..." (54). The author implies that virginity is a social construct firmly situated within the phallogocentric system that symbolises the mark of woman as man's property thus serving as a way to control and subjugate women. On the other hand, the signifier 'virginity' stands for Enitan's self-determination, which "society at large" denies her (54).

While studying law, Enitan becomes more aware of her individual rights as well as such concepts as justice, inequality and crime. Meanwhile, being away from her

country, she joins “the Nigerian student community, who, like the English community in Lagos, clung to each other, grappling with weather conditions and sharing news from home” (55). After graduating from university, Enitan joins a firm of solicitors in London during which another military coup takes place in her country. With the growing sense of political awareness, she recognises that:

[Our] parents had graduated in the dawn of sixties England, and we were to graduate in the material eighties. Like any generation defined by the economics of their childhood, we were children of the oil boom, and furthermore, we were the children who had benefited from the oil boom. Politics in England played out on a continuum from left to right wing. Politics in our country was a scuffle between the military and politicians. Both were conservative and so were we. Now our greatest contribution to our society was that we were more traditional than the people who had given birth to us. (56)

Enitan’s exposure to both Western and native cultures enables her to acknowledge the fact that Nigerian authorities inheriting colonial belief in the superiority, still hold on to tradition thereby reinforcing phallogocentric power deeply rooted in culture. Through her Western exposure, Enitan explores deeply ingrained aspect of the British society, which is racism. On the other hand, she also acknowledges the fact that Nigerians have not lost interest in the Western culture and “still [make] pilgrimages to London like no man’s business, whereas [o]ver there, only our money was welcome” (*Everything Good Will Come* 225). Ultimately, Enitan’s growing concern about the future of her nation coupled with her disappointment at pretentious Western values urge her to return to her country:

I was thinking of men who were given to acts of cowardice, lying when they should be braver. I was thinking of a certain partner in my firm who stared at my braided hair as if it were a head full of serpents. I thought of partners who walked like they’d never

passed wind. I remembered my phone bills. I was thinking that if I returned home, at least, at least I would be warm. (57)

In Enitan's absence, her parents decide to divorce, which is followed by the squabble over the ownership of property as well as over Enitan. Straddling between "[her] mother's worship of religion and [her] father's disinterest", she tries to figure out the reason behind their separation (85). Enitan's mother breaks the silence by voicing what she has experienced throughout her marriage. She states that "[t]he man gave me nothing. Nothing, for all his education, he's as typical as they come" (69). Arin's utterance is a clear confession of a traditional female subaltern pointing to the oppressive aspect of culture implied by the invisible nature of phallogocentric system. In this respect, the signifier 'the man' given in the above excerpt produces the effect of *différance* denoting not only Enitan's father but also standing for an archetypal father figure of the patriarchal society. Despite all Arin's attempts to open her daughter's eyes to reality, Enitan, who has always seen her father as a mentor, refuses to believe her mother due to her religious blindness that "misconstrued her entire childhood" (69).

Having returned from England, Enitan begins to work as a lawyer in her father's firm. He buys her a car but pays her very low wages thus making her economically dependent on him. Enitan comes to understand that in doing so, she is serving life for acting as an accomplice to patriarchy. Thus, she uncovers her father's phallogocentric attitude skilfully disguised throughout her childhood. Having unmasked her father's double standards, she is also able to recognize her mother's plight regarding it as a mirror of her own:

I had always believed my mother chose to depend on my father. The evidence was there in her dusty certificates. Other mothers walked out every day, to work, but she didn't. Now I felt no different from her, driving the car he had bought. My father would give a car, but he would not pay me enough to buy myself one. If I were taking the car with me, I deserved it. If my mother took a

house, two houses even, she deserved them. The power had always been in my father's hands. (119)

Enitan confronts her father demanding that he should take her seriously as a professional since “[f]or three years I was respected, paid well. I come back home, you treat me like an idiot, pay me nothing...” (109). On the other hand, she puts pressure on her father to sign the documents releasing property to her mother. However, he avoids her demands by giving evasive responses thus postponing the issue. In fact, Sunny's attitude towards both his wife and daughter is regarded as a typical patriarchal stance since traditionally, “patriarchy creates dependence on males to the extent that in the absence of males, many women cannot manage to support themselves financially as they were socialized to believe that, that role should be played by males” (Kambarami 4). In this respect, as Kambarami argues, “the family, as a social institution, is a brewery for patriarchal practices by socializing the young to accept sexually differentiated roles” (3). However, Enitan does not want to accept this condition as the status quo and protests against the oppressive nature of native law challenging her father to change the culture, to which he reacts as “[y]ou are not oppressed; you are spoiled” (*Everything Good Will Come* 109).

Further, Enitan is shocked to learn that her father has another family that she has never known about, describing it as feeling “like shrapnel, being pulled out” (117). Moreover, it turns out that she has a brother who is four years younger. Her father could not reconcile himself to the thought of having only a female child since his culture puts emphasis on the male child in the family. Thus, as is customary in the Nigerian society, he has resorted to polygamy, another manipulative mechanism of the phallogocentric system. However, Arin's awareness of the situation and passive resignation make Enitan more disappointed:

He was no good. After you were born, I told him I didn't want another child. God had blessed us with a healthy child. Why risk having another? But his family wouldn't hear of it. He had to have a son, so they started threatening that he would take another wife, and his mother, that woman who suffered so much herself,

threatened me too. Your father never said a word to support me.
(135)

Polygamy is another instrument of phallogocentric system exacerbating the state of the female subaltern. As a common cultural practice in Nigeria, polygamy does not only “show a man’s affluence and power over the woman, but also [assures] the continuation of the man’s lineage” (Udenweze 19). Moreover, “[the] number of male children a man has during his lifetime not only ensures the continuity of the family lineage but also is a form of social security for parents when they grow old” (2). While Enitan’s uncle excuses her father’s act as “[b]ut you know, an African man cannot die without leaving a son”, Enitan, on the other hand, cannot come to terms with her father’s hypocrisy (*Everything Good Will Come* 226). Having discovered his double life, she protests against him, calling him a liar and announcing that she will move out.

This is considered Enitan’s major act of rebellion against her father’s hypocrisy by which her individual self comes to the fore to challenge the norms of native culture, which marks a turning point in the novel. Driving away, Enitan reflects that: “[p]erhaps it was a sign. Daughters didn’t walk away like that. It was sacrilege. Costly, too. Under my breath, I cursed our economy that didn’t give me freedom to sustain myself” (119). She becomes aware that her father actually seizes the reins of power dictated by patriarchal society. Thus, being in the same position as her uneducated mother, Enitan is also subjected to the cultural norms of her society regardless of her academic accomplishments. Eventually, Enitan’s mother develops hypertension as a result of which her health deteriorates. Enitan sadly describes her mother’s lonely death as “I smelled her death before I saw her” (242). Derrida’s ellipsis aptly illustrates Arin’s passive silence through Enitan’s observation: “Our mothers were wonderful, mostly. They shielded us from the truths about our fathers, remained in bad marriages to give us a chance” (65). This recognition concurs with Enitan’s separation from Mike, with whom she has a short-lived relationship. Mike’s cheating on her comes as another blow after she discovers her father’s stealthy affairs. Hence, disillusioned with men, she comes to believe that they conspire against women (109).

Meanwhile, Enitan resumes her friendship with Sheri as they have been estranged from each other due to her education in England. Sheri has become “the Nigerian man’s ideal: pretty, shapely, yellow to boot, with some regard for a woman’s station” and “moved with the rhythm of big women” (71, 78). She lives with a Nigerian general, Brigadier Hassan, who is twice her age. He has become her “sugar daddy” providing her with lodgings, clothes and jewellery in exchange for an extramarital relationship (88). Preoccupied with Sheri’s condition, Enitan recognises that “[she] remembered only that [Sheri] was the most powerful girl [she] knew, and then she wasn’t anymore, and [Enitan] became disappointed with her” (75). Instead, Sheri has become “a kitchen martyr” who “[has] forgotten how to flaunt her mind” (78).

It is obvious that Sheri’s ability to develop supplements to the existing system is at work. Since her infertility rules out any prospect of marriage, she has to contrive new ways to attain security in her society. Therefore, by acting as an acquiescent mistress for men in return for their financial support, she manipulates the phallogocentric system to achieve her ends. On the other hand, as Nnodim argues, Sheri “carves out a space for herself at the margins of society, but still remains within the framework and constraints of possible models of urban female subjectivity (110). Sheri’s attitude towards marriage is similarly informed by her manipulative approach. Therefore, when Enitan asks her if she wants to marry some day, Sheri responds:

Maybe you don’t know this because you were raised by your father, but let me tell you now, to save you from unnecessary headache in the future. Forget that nonsense. Education cannot change what’s inside a person’s veins. Scream and shout, if you like, bang your head against this wall, you will end up in the kitchen. Period. Now, where I differ from most women is, if you lift your hand to beat me, I will kill you. God no go vex. Secondly, while I am there cooking for you, I won’t be thinking of dropping some poison in because you’ve gone to eat another woman’s stew. (*Everything Good Will Come* 77)

For the same reason, Sheri rejects to enter a polygamous relationship with the brigadier, who practices polygamy in his household. She is well aware that polygamy is yet another tool of patriarchal exploitation by which “[a] man could marry only one wife under civil law, but he could bring another woman into his home under native law. It was polygamy, not bigamy. If he pleased, he could beat up his wife, throw her out, with or without her children and leave her with nothing” (106).

Through Brigadier Hassan, Sefi Atta explores dictatorship as the repressive mechanism of phallogocentrism that exercises authority both in the private and public domains. It is noteworthy that “the dominance of the military in the third generation Nigerian literature, especially in its fiction, is a reflection of the experiences of the writers of this period with the turmoil of military governance” (Tenshak 38). Though Enitan has never met the brigadier personally, she imagines him according to the stereotype “dressed in a long white tunic with a Maostyle collar, gold cufflinks, fat diamond watch on his wrist. His hands would slip in a handshake. His trousers would flap around his ankles. His feet would be small in his leather slippers. Absolutely no conversation. He would not be used to talking to women. Not that way” (*Everything Good Will Come* 124). Claiming to be a good Moslem, the brigadier confines Sheri to the house and makes her cover her head thereby keeping her under surveillance. Pointing to the domestic authority exerted by the brigadier over Sheri, the author draws a parallel between the private and domestic spheres. This state is confirmed by Enitan’s observation that “Sheri’s brigadier [is] the one of the military men who deprived me of my right to vote” (80).

Further, having ended her relationship with the brigadier, Sheri starts her own catering business thereby establishing herself as a self-made woman. In this respect, the following observation of the African woman aptly describes Sheri’s condition: “The new characteristically urban figure of the male-unprotected, husbandless single woman has significantly taken shape... the consciously deliberate rejection of marriage on the part of an increasing number of urban women appears to be a courageous, indeed daring deed (qtd. in Oluwayomi 380). It is worthwhile to note that Sheri’s self-realisation is mainly due to her grandmother Alhaja. She has inherited Alhaja’s business skills since after school she would help her in her fabric store.

Indeed, Alhaja is described as the most powerful woman in her extended family and community. Having become a widow in her thirties, she [heads] a market women's union and [earns] enough to educate her children overseas (*Everything Good Will Come* 123). "She would go to the houses of her daughters if their husbands beat them" (123). Alhaja serves as a role model for Sheri, who, taking over her duty in the household is "expected her brother's wives to run around for their family functions" (191). Thus, the spirit of Alhaja is alive in Sheri, "keeping the next generation of wives in check" (191).

Eventually, Enitan marries a divorced lawyer named Niyi Franco. This act is an attempt to negotiate her individual self with native culture since she performs one of the most important cultural expectations assigned to the female subaltern who is "raised to believe that [her] greatest days would be the birth of [her] first child [and] [her] wedding" (76). Nevertheless, Enitan does not resign herself to the traditional role of the subaltern wife, which is foreshadowed by her unconventional behaviour in the wedding ceremony:

I did not shed a tear over leaving home. I, who cried easily. After the final rites, when a bride knelt before her parents and they blessed her, she was supposed to cry. An entire wedding party waited for this moment, so that they could say 'Ah, she wept. She wept, that girl. She loves her parents no end.' (139-140)

The above excerpt also points to Enitan's resentment over her father's mistreatment towards her and her mother. In some respects, Enitan's marriage may be regarded as an escape from the pressure of an autocratic father. As the novel progresses, it becomes obvious that her husband's family puts emphasis on male privilege propagated by phallogocentrism:

Niyi Franco. He was a lawyer, though he was now a manager in an insurance company. His grandfather was a lawyer. His father and four brothers were lawyers... The Francos were one of those Lagos families, descendants of freed slaves from Brazil, who

once formed the cream of Lagos society. They considered themselves well-bred because their great-grandfather, Papa Franco, was educated in England... Papa Franco's only son, Niyi's grandfather, had twenty-six children by three different women who died before him and there had been several documented court cases over his estate. (126, 142)

The reiteration of the signifier 'lawyer', in addition to its primary meaning, suggests *différance* in that it points to the family legacy established by Niyi's family handing down the tradition of becoming a lawyer from father to son. Thus, all the male heirs of the Franco family are supposed to follow their predecessors' example, which is a typical illustration of gender roles serving to maintain the status quo in phallogocentric society. Accordingly, within this context, upon the birth of the first child, women are expected to stay at home to perform the household duties.

On the other hand, Niyi, like Enitan's father, holds ambivalent beliefs regarding the role of women in the family. Initially, he does not mind Enitan's household rules including "women should not serve their husbands food", which always brings a reaction from his brothers, such as "Niyi, your wife is a bad influence!" (152). Niyi, on his part, evades these warnings and complaints by publicly declaring that "I can't stop her. She's the boss in this house" (152). Meanwhile, Enitan relishes the opportunity of "[contributing] to that illusion, claiming to be free from domesticity, and encouraged [her] friends to argue about division of home duties" (152). However, after a while, domestic responsibilities become a source of disagreement between the two. Enitan does not want to be confined to the kitchen thereby assuming the submissive role of a subaltern woman that her mother has performed throughout her marriage. At this point, Derridean ellipsis evokes Enitan's childhood dreams of becoming president and marrying a man who "will cook for himself" (22). Enitan's apprehensions regarding the female subaltern's position in the private sphere is relevant to Odaga's observations on the African culture that assigns many responsibilities to women in marriage:

The wife has to rear the children, which is a hindrance to any woman's progress. Secondly, as an African woman there are traditional beliefs and practices which put you down and make it difficult for you to be as free as if you were not married... You are all the time made to feel that your place is in the family and all the other things you are doing only come second. (qtd. in James 123-4)

In fact, Enitan's refusal to cook for Niyi's family is a rebellious act by which she attempts to transcend her subaltern status. In this respect, Ayo Kehinde argues that Sefi Atta "seems to suggest that marriage and freedom are mutually exclusive in a typical African perspective" (73). Enitan is also aware that "what [her husband] [wants] [is] a surrender" since he is a man "who believe[s] in absolutes" (*Everything Good Will Come* 195). Nevertheless, she tries to avoid confrontation with Niyi, which is clarified through a close reading of their conjugal relationship: "I also clipped his toe nails before we slept. I always did because he wouldn't and he would end up scratching my legs. As I wrestled with three months' nail growth... He wasn't kicking me and I was cutting him up" (239). This illustration serves as another strategy developed by Enitan to negotiate her individual self with native culture reflected in Niyi's traditional beliefs, which is in line with Derrida's hinge mechanism. In Enitan's case, hinge serves as a bridge between Niyi and Enitan's viewpoints on the position of women in society. Enitan's strategy corroborates Nnaemeka's assertion that in order to win challenges and gain freedoms, African feminism knows "when, where, and how to detonate and go around patriarchal land mines" ("Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way" 378).

Regarding Enitan's attitude as a challenge to phallogocentric authority, Niyi tries to protect his male ego. He refuses to help her in the kitchen claiming that "he was totally inept inside kitchens" and that "[h]is favourite trick was to feign panic attacks by the door, clutching his throat and keeling over" (*Everything Good Will Come* 143). Niyi warns Enitan to watch her words in front of his brothers since "[n]ext thing they'll be calling [him] woman wrapper." Wrapper was the cloth women tied around their waists. Woman wrapper was a weak man, controlled by his woman" (142). As the

novel is intended for a foreign audience, the author clarifies particular customs of Nigerian culture. However, this does not appear as the only reason of Sefi Atta's interference. The author utilizes both meanings of the signifier 'woman wrapper' as *différance* to reverse the position of the man making him appear weak and powerless in his cultural context. In doing so, Sefi Atta deconstructs gender roles assigned to both men and women in her society, which is worthy of consideration.

In fact, there is a growing interest among Nigerian female writers in treating the issue of gender stereotypes through literature. In this respect, questioning the norms of her culture, Nigerian author Chimamanda Adichie states that:

[T]he worst thing we do to males – by making them feel they have to be hard – is that we leave them with *very* fragile egos. The *harder* a man feels compelled to be, the weaker his ego is. And then we do a much greater disservice to girls, because we raise them to cater to the fragile egos of males. We teach girls to shrink themselves, to make themselves smaller... If you are the breadwinner in your relationship with a man, pretend that you are not, especially in public, otherwise you will emasculate him. (11-12)

Adichie reiterates the pronoun 'we' to show that women as well as men participate in the upbringing of children in the above illustrated manner. Sefi Atta voices this issue once again through Enitan's mother-in-law, Toro Franco, "who swallowed her voice from the day she married" (*Everything Good Will Come* 141). If her husband or her children "mentioned the word hungry, she ran into her kitchen and began to boss her house boys⁹ around" (141). This illustration shows that Toro has been socialised to the traditional role by which the woman is a wife, a mother and a housekeeper. It is obvious that Enitan and her mother-in-law have different conceptions to the fact that "kitchen is the loneliest room in the house", which the latter dismisses (141). Moreover, Toro advises Enitan that as a woman, she should make

⁹ Previously in the novel, Sefi Atta explains that house boys or house girls are young children helping with household chores, otherwise called the general help (*Everything Good Will Come* 161).

sacrifices in life and indulge her husband for the sake of peace in her house (232). Nigerian author Obioma Nnaemeka characterizes the plight of such female characters as Toro Franco in the following illustration:

Feminist notions of agency draw the line between feminist interpretations of the situation of women in African novels and African women's perceptions of their own situations. For example, while some feminist analyses of the African novel conflate silence (the noun) and silence (the verb), the novels themselves make a distinction between "to be silenced" and "to be silent" (the former as imposition and the latter as choice). One exercises agency when one *chooses* not to speak; the refusal to speak is also an act of resistance that signals the unwillingness to participate. (4)

Nnaemeka's views are in line with Orabueze, who describes Atta's presentation of "gender silences in the face of oppression and brutalization" as "contributory factors to the erection and sustenance of the walls of imprisonment of the individual in the Nigerian society" (280). Further, Orabueze goes on to add that this silence may serve as "a weapon and a shield depending on how the individual wants to wield it" (281). Both of the above stated observations are relevant to Toro Franco's plight. Toro does not deny that Niyi's father was a difficult man, yet, she comes to terms with the fact that "when two rams meet head on, nothing can happen until one backs down" (*Everything Good Will Come* 231). She is well aware that in her culture, "men do not like women concerned with social transformations that shake the roots of their male dominance" and "[no] man wants a revolution in his kitchen" (Lewis 5). Hence, by resigning herself to the role of a submissive subaltern and accepting her position as the status quo, Toro Franco, like Enitan's mother, defers to her cultural norms thereby using her state of subalternity as a 'shield', which is interpreted as passive silence against the oppressive social factors of phallogocentric system. The author also underscores the negative effects of this subservience on both men and women since "[f]orty-five years later, [Toro's husband] had bad arteries and her hands were as dry and shrivelled as the meat she fried" (*Everything Good Will Come* 141).

Meanwhile, Enitan's confidence in her beliefs is undermined when she starts to struggle with fertility problems. While previously she was proudly declaring that "[women] [are] greater than [their] wombs, greater than the sum of [their] body parts", her current situation is encapsulated in the statement "I shrunk to the size of my womb", which describes Enitan's aporia (144). This is a cultural implication socialising women to the role of motherhood primarily defined by childbearing. In despair, Enitan comes to believe that:

[it] was a punishment; something I'd done, said. I remembered the story of Obatala who once caused women on earth to be barren. I made apologies to her. I remembered also, how I'd opened my mouth once too often and thought that if I said another bad word, had another bad thought, I would remain childless, so I swallowed my voice for penitence. (145)

The above excerpt shows the effects of phallogocentric indoctrination upon the condition of women in Nigerian culture. Stifled by the 'fertility regime' of her culture, Enitan withdraws into herself thus losing her voice both in the private and public spheres (144). She reflects on her situation echoed through Derrida's ellipsis: "Better to be ugly, to be crippled, to be a thief even, than to be barren" (76). Her desperate situation is consistent with Trinh Minh-ha's assertion that "[t]he need to contain and restrict women's wisdom within the mothering role is [a] constant in social institutions across cultures; and women's status as childbearer continues in many African contexts to be the test of their womanhood" (31).

Enitan's predicament is exacerbated by Niyi's silence over her refusal to perform the household duties as well as her subsequent political activism that arises from her father's imprisonment for his outspoken political views. Niyi wields his silence as a powerful tool against Enitan's rebellious attitude, which he implies by the statement "[in] our family, [we] don't raise our voices" (*Everything Good Will Come* 142). Through Derrida's ellipsis, it is possible to read between the lines that Niyi has applied the same tactic to muffle the voice of his former wife. Obviously, he assumes the role of his autocratic father, who has been able to suppress his wife's voice by means of his

own silence. Nevertheless, Enitan regards Niyi's silence as a weakness and challenges him as: "What kind of woman are you?" (255). Niyi's attitude confirms Ogundipe-Leslie's assertion that the men who try to mute women's voices completely disregarding them "cannot speak for us" (qtd. in James 72). She goes on to add that "[o]nly rounded human beings who consciously seek wholeness in human society and life; who know that society can progress only with the full recognition of men and women both, and not women ministering to men and living thorough men; only such whole men can speak for women" (72). Moreover, "such men should not only theorize about woman's place and role, they should also live out their theories in their personal lives" (72).

Meanwhile, Enitan's struggle for the release of her father recovers her lost voice. As a result, she takes over her father's law firm and recruits her uncle to deal with her father's release. Further, her encounter with Grace Ameh, a journalist who provides her with information about her father's activities, expands Enitan's social and political horizons, which ultimately serves as a catalyst for Enitan's political awakening:

How did we live comfortably under a dictatorship? The truth was that, we in places like Sunrise, if we never spoke out, were free as we could possibly be, complaining about our rubbish rotten country, and crazy armed robbers, and inflation. The authorities said hush and we hushed; they came with their sirens and we cleared off the streets; they beat someone and we looked the other way; they detained a relation and we hoped for the best. If our prayers were answered, the only place we suffered a dictatorship was in our pockets. (*Everything Good Will Come* 177)

In an interview with Grace Ameh, Enitan takes the opportunity to publicly announce that "[her] father is not a criminal" (184). Encouraged by Grace's outspoken political views on the authoritarian regime of the country, Enitan attends a reading session where Grace gives a speech on the repressive policy of the government on journalists and writers. Subsequently, Enitan is arrested for the involvement in the

meeting and spends a night in jail. There, she is faced with dreadful conditions of the prisoners left abandoned to their fates:

There were twelve other women in the cell they threw us in; fourteen of us in a space intended for seven, with ventilation holes on an area the size of an air-conditioning unit. There was no air, no light. My pupils widened in the dark. Outside crickets chattered. Mosquitoes buzzed around my ears. The women lay on raffia mats, overlapping each other on the cold cement floor. (201)

Through her firsthand experience, Enitan discovers the hidden face of the phallogocentric system consolidated by political power. It is clearly observed in the deplorable condition of the women prisoners, some of whom are not even aware of their crimes desperately awaiting trial for years. This case is aptly illustrated through the character nicknamed Mother of Prisons. She rules over the whole cell initially threatening Enitan with her offensive and commanding attitude. Further, it is revealed that Mother of Prisons has been victimized by primitive cultural practices of her community subjecting her to public humiliation:

‘Monday morning,’ she said, ‘my husband dies. Tuesday morning, they shave my head and say I must stay in a room. Alone. Naked. I can’t touch my children. Twins. Twins, I had for that wretched family... ‘They say I can’t see my twins. Instead, they give me the water they used to bath my husband’s corpse, to drink, to prove I didn’t put a hex on him. I say I’m a secretary typist. Qualified 1988. I’m not going to drink it. They say I killed him. I didn’t kill my husband...’ (206)

The employment of a fragmented narrative makes it possible to put emphasis on particular signifiers point to the subaltern woman’s humiliation. The days of the week as well as the jumbled phrases and sentences stated in the above excerpt expose the debasing aspects of local cultures. The signifiers ‘alone’, ‘naked’, ‘wretched’ and

'corpse' stand for a brutal manifestation of patriarchy. The author implies that the execution of such savage customs attests to the perpetuation of phallogocentric practices aiming to keep the female subaltern under control. Enitan comes to understand that the rotten and corrupt policy of the government affects both men and women as she admits on being released from prison: "But it was one thing to face an African community and tell them how to treat a woman like a person. It was entirely another to face an African dictatorship and tell them how to treat people like citizens" (217). Enitan harshly criticises the regulations of native law subjecting people to brutality and oppression. In this respect, silence serves as the most powerful repressive tool of phallogocentrism through which the government issues decrees "under which persons suspected of acts prejudicial to state security could be detained without charge" and "under which journalists could be arrested and imprisoned for publishing any information about public officials" (57).

On the other hand, Enitan's prison experience helps her to delve into the complex nature of her plight as a female subaltern. In the Derridean system of metaphors, prison symbolises the state of female subalternity encapsulated in Enitan's recognition: "We were all women in this place. There was no reason to be proud" (213). Deprived of their personal freedom, women representing all layers of society regardless of their education level are subject to the same treatment of the male-dominated system that incarcerate their individual selves and silence their voices. Indeed, through the portrayal of the prison scene, the author exposes the plight of Nigerian women who are subjected to both physical and psychological forms of oppression ranging from rape to various mental disorders that arise from phallogocentric constructions of gender roles. Enitan's exposure to political oppression firsthand inspires her to continue political activities with Grace Ameh and other female activists.

Eventually, Enitan gives birth to a baby girl, which is marked as the most significant event in her life. However, the fact that Enitan's daughter is born into a male-dominated society should not be disregarded. On the one hand, the birth of a female child offers a reversal of phallogocentric values favouring male child preference; on the other, her daughter's birth attests to the traditional concept of womanhood defined by childbearing. In the view of the above stated perspectives,

Enitan's childbirth may be regarded as an attempt to negotiate a middle ground between her individual self and native culture. However, Enitan does not make concessions in her marriage to Niyi. Niyi's silent protest followed by his indifferent attitude towards Enitan's difficult pregnancy and her father's imprisonment exacerbate their relationship. Enitan realises that Niyi has failed to be her "greatest ally" (239). Her recognition is echoed by Derrida's ellipsis delivering her mother's last advice: "Never make sacrifices for a man. By the time you say, 'Look what I've done for you,' it's too late. They never remember" (136). With the benefit of hindsight, Enitan's mother reaffirms that "victims are also agents who can change their lives and affect other lives in radical ways" (Nnaemeka 3). Indeed, having suffered from the experiences of womanhood, Arin tries to protect her daughter from the negative effects of native culture.

Enitan's separation from Niyi may be regarded as the female subaltern's empowerment that provides her with the agency to break with the domestic oppression of the phallogocentric system embodied in the character Niyi. By this emancipatory act, the female subaltern also "reclaims the experience of mothering from the patriarchal institutions of motherhood" (qtd. in Smit). This assertive role enables her to raise her child exempt from the patriarchal indoctrination propagating gender stereotypes. By defying motherhood as a phallogocentric construct, Enitan undertakes this role in terms of female authenticity thus performing it exclusively on her terms. This act empowers Enitan as a subaltern woman to resist the traditional definition of motherhood determined by the male-dominated society. Further, Enitan's assertive self provides her with the agency to decide against her naming tradition according to which she is expected to call her daughter Yetunde, which means, 'mother has returned' to salute Enitan's mother's passing (*Everything Good Will Come* 245). Instead, she calls her Yimika, meaning, 'joy surrounds me' (Tubosun, *Yoruba Names*). Enitan clarifies her decision in the following passage:

Everyone must walk their own path unencumbered. Hers wouldn't be easy, born in a motherland that treated her children like bastards, but it was hers. And I didn't worry that she wasn't born in a more fortunate place, like America, where people are so

free they buy stars from the sky and name them after their children. If you own a star from the day you are born, what else is there to wish for? (*Everything Good Will Come* 245).

Name giving is another cultural aspect determining Enitan's fate in the novel. Enitan is in fact a misspelled version of Ẹniitàn, which the Nigerian linguist Kola Tubosun explains as the name "given to a child believed to embody a specific history that is worthy of remembering. Perhaps a notable event occasioned his/her birth" (Tubosun, *Yoruba Names*). Since the novel is intended for English-speaking readers, the author adapts the main character's name to the rules of English orthography. The significance of being 'a child of history' lies in the fact that all the events taking place in the novel reflect the political atmosphere of the time within which the novel is set (*Yoruba Names*). On the other hand, the notable event mentioned by Tubosun is expressed in the author's deliberate choice by which Enitan's date of birth concurs with the start of Nigeria's independence:

I was born in the year of my country's independence, and saw how it raged against itself. Freedom was never intended to be sweet. It was a responsibility from the onset, for a people, a person, to fight for, and to hold on to. In my new life, this meant that there were bills to pay alone; memories to rock and lay to rest; regrets to snatch and return; tears, which always did clear my eyes. (*Everything Good Will Come* 254)

According to Ayo Kehinde, "Atta would have us believe as the novel unfolds and grinds to its conclusion that it is when her characters start fighting that they start living" (74). Attributing her own birth to the start of Nigerian independence, Enitan, like the female protagonists in *The Stillborn* and *Kehinde*, opens a new beginning in the history of the female subaltern thereby rewriting the cultural palimpsest of the Nigerian society. She comes to terms with the fact that there is no single category with which Nigerian women can be identified since the palimpsest of her culture embraces all kinds of subaltern women: "strong and silent, chatterbox but cheerful, weak and kindhearted" (*Everything Good Will Come* 152). Although none of the

characterizations fits in with Enitan's individual self as well as her perception of the position of women in society, they represent Nigerian culture. Enitan acknowledges and celebrates the diversity and heterogeneity of subaltern women's nature. In doing so, Sefi Atta underscores the fact that African feminist voice is "characterised by a hybridisation of various subversive feminist strategies" (Smit 61).

On the other hand, the author also sheds light on the male perspective by stating that "[i]f a woman sneezed in my country, someone would call her a feminist. I'd never looked up the word before, but was there one word to describe how I felt from one day to the next? And should there be?" (*Everything Good Will Come* 152). She implies that Nigerian patriarchal society has always shunned feminism regarding it as a threatening entity to their authority. Instead, by subsuming all women under the inferior position of subalternity, they make them appear weak, dependent and submissive thereby depriving them of their female agency. The stereotypical attitude of Nigerian culture is also reflected in Adichie's works. Based on her personal observations, she argues that feminism is un-African since it suggests negative connotations associated with Western radical feminism, such as hating men and African culture (Adichie 7). Instead, she comes up with her own definition that aptly captures the message conveyed in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*. Adichie asserts that a feminist is a person, who, regardless of his/her sex, admits that there is a problem with gender and makes every effort to solve it (17).

It is obvious that through Enitan, Sefi Atta seeks to establish the authentic voice of the female subaltern who gives utterance to the true condition of Nigerian women silenced by masculine discourses of their culture. In fact, this issue concerns most Nigerian women who suffer from the oppressive nature of their patriarchal society. In Nigeria, there exist various women-based organisations addressing inequalities between men and women. Some of these gender movements disengage themselves from feminism for the sake of the protection of their culture and tradition as well as male dominance (Madunagu 155). On the other hand, there are also gender activists condemning the women who publicly declare that they are feminists (156). However, as Madunagu argues, more consistent and organized form of feminism in Nigeria was established in 1983 (156). It was conceived as a feminist movement hence its name

Women in Nigeria, shortly referred to as WIN (156). WIN is regarded as one of the dimensions of African feminism since they share common ground on a variety of issues concerning African women.

From the onset, the movement came up with clear objectives and ideology aiming to transform the conditions of women living in Nigeria (157). They recognize the double oppression of Nigerian women both as members of the subaltern class and as women (157). Thus, in order to fix this gender imbalance, they fight against both gender and class oppression of their culture (157). In this respect, women from various backgrounds, cultures and experiences work together to help in the process of building a constructive approach to gender issues in patriarchal Nigerian society (158). In order to create social awareness among Nigerian women, WIN holds annual conferences that helps to promote basic principles and values of the Nigerian feminist movement (157). They are particularly concerned with cultural issues of the Nigerian society voiced in *Everything Good Will Come*. Their beliefs are in tune with Sefi Atta's understanding of feminism. In this sense, being a dimension of African feminism, the Nigerian feminist movement, places patriarchal institutions at the centre of their concern thereby reaffirming their "commitment to dismantling patriarchy in all its manifestations in Africa" (161). By defining themselves as feminists, they politicize their struggle for women's rights (161). They acknowledge that even though they have multiple identities, their focus is on the condition of African women on the continent (161). For this reason, they "question the legitimacy of the structures that keep women subjugated" and "develop tools for transformatory analysis and action" (161).

By ascribing the aforementioned attributes of African feminism to Enitan, Sefi Atta inspires Nigerian women to liberate themselves from the traditional gender roles assigned to them by the male-dominated society. In this regard, Enitan serves as a mouthpiece voicing Sefi Atta's views on the future of the Nigerian female subaltern implied through the birth of Enitan's daughter, Yimika. Indeed, Enitan's aspiration to transcend the peripheral position of subalternity is handed down to her daughter, which is foreshadowed in the following passage: "My mother once said she whispered words of guidance into my ear, when I was born. She never told me what she said. She said that I had remembered. I whispered into my daughter's ear like that, in my mother's

house. I told her, “I love you. You have nothing to do but remember” (*Everything Good Will Come* 254). Enitan is well aware that she cannot remain as she was before “otherwise [her mother’s] memory would have been in vain, and [her] survival would certainly be pointless” (255). She decides that the aftermath of all her experiences must be reincarnation, “like a god with the power to revive [her]self” (255).

At the end of the novel, Enitan’s final utterance “[n]othing could take my joy away from me” is a clear attestation of the female subaltern’s empowerment (*Everything Good Will Come* 326). This closure holds several connotations ranging from her father’s release to the legacy passed on Yimika. Moreover, the release of Enitan’s father along with other inmates conveys the author’s conciliatory message based on solidarity between men and women for the welfare of society. This belief is also reflected in the spirit of African feminism or womanism promoting “the complementarity between men and women of Africa” as well as “African women’s search for self-fulfilment within the diverse cultural context” (Coulibaly 3). Sefi Atta’s optimistic approach is present in Enitan’s eponymous message “everything good will come to me” accompanied by the cultural dance of Nigeria in the middle of the street, “fearing nothing for [her] sanity, or common sense” (257-8). By this flamboyant ending, the author offers a promising future for the condition of Nigerian women.

To conclude, Sefi Atta, in *Everything Good Will Come*, aims to encourage women to change their subaltern role as the status quo. To this end, she creates a dynamic and assertive character, Enitan, who brings all subaltern women’s voices to the fore as a subversive and determining force in order to fix the imbalance of gender roles impeding their progress. Much of Enitan’s childhood is spent witnessing her parents’ arguments over differing views on her upbringing. Growing into maturity, she is subjected to various forms of discrimination exerted through the imposition of cultural norms predetermining the place and role of women in a male-dominated society. Therefore, she seeks to rise above the oppressive cultural practices responsible for her deplorable condition. In this respect, her education in England as well as exposure to Western ways contribute to her awareness of social and individual rights in Nigeria. Partly benefiting from her father’s early instructions informed by modern views as well as equipped with Western education promoting gender equality, Enitan

starts a journey towards her independence from a submissive role of the subaltern. Ultimately, Enitan, as an independent-minded subaltern woman, extricates herself from the domestic shackles of patriarchy. She gradually comes to terms with the fact that even though her culture considers women inferior to men, she will continue her social and political struggle to improve the condition of the female subaltern.

4. CONCLUSION

The research has performed a deconstructive reading of the female subaltern in the frame of Nigerian culture aiming to defamiliarize Spivak's pessimistic approach to the condition of the subaltern as a female subject. It has been held in different cultural contexts ranging from rural and urban Nigeria to the host culture of a foreign country. A deconstructive analysis has been performed on the basis of the following novels: Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn* (1984), Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* (1994) and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005). A deconstructive reading has enabled to carry out an elaborate investigation into the culture of the Nigerian society. In this respect, Derrida's concepts have extensively been employed throughout the research to untangle the strict boundaries arranged by phallogocentric institutions that put obstacles to the female subaltern's empowerment. Along with the theoretical framework of the study, the position of the Nigerian subaltern woman has been explored through various dimensions of African feminism particularly focusing upon such concepts as womanhood and motherhood. Since the Nigerian society is patriarchal in nature, this feature is presented as a major factor predetermining the status of the female characters in the novels under discussion. A close analysis has also revealed how the female authors of the aforementioned novels have construed the authentic image of the Nigerian woman misrepresented by the male-dominated literary tradition.

Zaynab Alkali, in *The Stillborn*, explores the life of a young girl raised in rural Nigeria. In this respect, a deconstructive reading of the Nigerian female subaltern is carried out in the framework of tradition and modernisation as well as the position of women in relation to men in the patriarchal society. From the very beginning of the novel, Alkali points to the importance of education through her main character Li, who aspires to receive higher education in the city and become an accomplished teacher. However, the patriarchal society within which she lives entrenches male authority by relegating women to the subaltern position. Li's initial assumption regarding marriage as a way to materialise her dreams of success in the city fails her. As a subaltern woman, Li realises that in order to accomplish her dreams, she must struggle against the oppressive structures of patriarchy. This self-recognition is an important step

towards the awakening of the female subaltern, who breaks the silence to voice the circumstances making her appear submissive and weak.

Li's articulation of female agency is epitomised in her further accomplishments as a successful teacher and an owner of a huge modern building. In this respect, modernisation serves as a beneficial aspect offering the female subaltern an opportunity to exercise her faculties in the phallogocentric society. Ultimately, empowered with her self-made position and hailed as "the man of the house", she restores her marriage, which serves as a conciliatory message promoting solidarity between men and women (*The Stillborn* 101). In doing so, the female subaltern also evolves the agency to decide for herself and to "make some sort of an impact in her society" (102). Li's self-determination and persistence serve as an inspiration for subaltern women to struggle for their ideals, which is aptly captured in her final message to her granddaughter: "This time it is your dream. Go and make the best of it" (104). Her ultimate return to the city reaffirms the female subaltern's determination to continue her struggle against the regressive values of patriarchy and further empowerment in the male-dominated society.

A deconstructive reading of the Nigerian female subaltern in Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* is performed in the context of native and host cultures embodied in the eponymous character's dual position between self and other. The novel deals with the been-to woman's circular migration from Nigeria to England, back to Nigeria and then back to England. Since the novel encompasses the been-to subaltern's experiences in two different cultures, the study merges Derrida and Bhabha's concepts based on *différance* and cultural difference. Initially, Kehinde's attitude towards her native culture is as superficial as her husband's in terms of the host culture, which is observed in his compelled manners to kiss his wife in public and his constant emphasis on "our house" (*Kehinde* 4). Her first step towards self-awareness takes place by her decision of tubal ligation in protest against her husband's forced abortion. Thus, by claiming control over her body, she challenges the traditional role of a female subaltern.

Kehinde's journey to Nigeria provides a revealing insight into the true status of subaltern women in Nigerian culture. Her hopes to return to her country as the

respected been-to madam collapse since in her absence, her husband has had an opportunity to “reclaim his birthright” by taking another wife (35). Having spent most of her life in England, Kehinde cannot reconcile herself to the idea of polygamy regarding it as demeaning to women. She struggles to identify herself between the values of native and host cultures. However, examining her position as a woman, a wife and a mother within her native culture, Kehinde comes to realise that “there is no place for her in the family” since “the circle [has] closed in her absence and she [does] not have the strength to fight her way back in” (91).

Kehinde’s ultimate return to England articulates the female subaltern’s agency to exercise her freewill encapsulated in her recognition “[our] husbands feel threatened when a woman shows signs of independence” (92). Equipped with education and firsthand experiences of living within both cultures, she develops a new pragmatic outlook on life. As a self-made been-to subaltern, Kehinde identifies herself as neither fully Nigerian nor fully westernised; rather, her been-to perception enables her to carve out a middle ground between native and host cultures by appropriating only their beneficial values. Her ultimate assertion “[t]his house is mine” attests to the female subaltern’s empowerment and self-determination (108). By this act, she rises above the oppressive aspects of her culture evolving into a strong and self-reliant woman.

The last section is based on a deconstructive reading of the Nigerian female subaltern in Sefi Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come*. Considering the main character’s exposure to Western education, the study also incorporates Bhabha’s concepts on cultural difference. Based on the physical, psychological and moral formation of the protagonist, Enitan, the research explores how the female subaltern establishes her individual self despite the cultural norms of patriarchal society. Since the novel covers the period of political turmoil taking place in Nigeria between the 1970s and the 1990s, the position of the subaltern woman is examined with respect to the socio-political milieu within which she lives. The study scrutinizes all the cultural aspects affecting the development of the subaltern’s individual self. In this sense, it is noteworthy that initially Enitan’s growth is largely informed by her mother’s religious beliefs and her father’s phallogocentric views skilfully disguised as “the liberation of women” (*Everything Good Will Come* 15). This split in opinion predetermines the subaltern’s

subsequent protest against her cultural expectations. Furthermore, Enitan's legal education in England contributes to her social awareness. As a result, she breaks with domestic confinement and becomes involved in political activism.

It is worthwhile to note that the protagonists of the aforementioned novels Li, Kehinde and Enitan undergo similar stages by which they explore their culture through firsthand experiences. They are faced with oppressive aspects of Nigerian culture that relegate women to inferior position such as polygamy, barrenness and male child preference. In this respect, the vernacular African theory known as womanism is an accommodating discourse voicing the realities and experiences of Nigerian women. Li, Kehinde and Enitan overcome many obstacles in order to extricate themselves from the traditional role assigned to them by native culture. Their trajectory towards self-realisation and self-attainment symbolises the female subaltern's circular journey from rural to urban culture then to the host culture and back to the native culture. Through this migratory process, she is gradually transformed into an empowered self-reliant woman who ultimately establishes a middle ground between her native culture and personal independence.

Despite the differences of cultural contexts and conditions, these subaltern women raise their social awareness through education, which is accentuated as an essential means of empowerment in the patriarchal system. Indeed, education has a conscious-raising effect on them bringing about liberation and the ability to shape their vision of the future. With the benefit of hindsight, Li recognises that she spent her youth on empty daydreaming blindly relying on the fact that marriage would be a way to materialise her dreams of success. Her further education in the city offers an opportunity to exercise her agency and become a self-made person who sustains herself without a man's support. Kehinde, on her part, deriving from her social education coupled with a been-to perception, develops a pragmatic approach to life ultimately becoming a self-reliant woman. This is reaffirmed at the end of the novel when she lays claim on her London home. Similarly, Enitan, equipped with legal education received in England comes back to her country as a socially aware person believing that her voice can make a difference for the condition of Nigerian women who are obliged to abide by the male-centred cultural norms pushing them to the

background and making them appear as traditional subalterns and 'kitchen martyrs'. Securing her liberated position in the private sphere, Enitan sets out to fix gender imbalances in the public realm through political activism. It is also noteworthy that Enitan's ultimate self-attainment is due to her exposure to both Western and native cultures that shape her individual self.

Li, Kehinde and Enitan call into question the traditional definition of womanhood, which is limited to childbearing and domestic sphere. They defy the repressive aspects of their culture by which women have to internalise their subalternity as the status quo. Due to their self-determination, they can effectively voice the issues that the Nigerian woman faces while experiencing her womanhood. They refuse to live on the margins of society that deprive them of the agency to decide for themselves and achieve personal accomplishment. However, their self-reliant stance is not anti-male or separatist since they fight against patriarchal ideology rather than individual men. In this respect, they take a conciliatory approach promoting solidarity and complementarity between men and women, which is considered one of the basic principles of African feminism. They come to terms with the fact that as subaltern women, they have multiple and heterogeneous identities. Nevertheless, they celebrate this diversity by setting out a shared commitment to fight against the imposition of patriarchal authority exerted through social, economic and political institutions that keep women inferior to men. In order to exercise their autonomy, they aspire to improve their condition and want to be regarded as women and humans rather than subaltern subjects. In this respect, the closure of each novel suggests that the female subaltern will take her struggle to a higher level until she achieves her goal of becoming an equal member of society. Hence, as opposed to Spivak's pessimistic approach regarding the condition of the subaltern as a female subject, the Nigerian female subaltern carves out her own space from which she can speak for herself.

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