

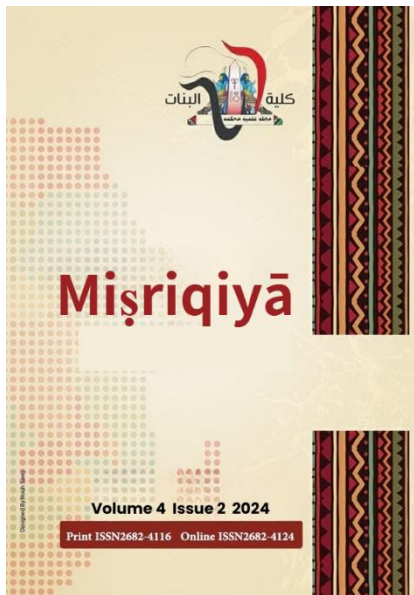


## Miṣriqiyyā

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## Ecophobic Rhetorics in Ma Jian's *The Dark Road* and Sefi Atta's "News From Home"

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### Abstract

The contestation of world economies and the trappings of geopolitics coupled with First Worldism in the current postmodern agenda offer a viable operation site for the various scientific and industrial inventions worldwide. Whether from Tokyo, Beijing, Washington D.C, Johannesburg, or Lagos man's so-called giant strides in architectural designs and technology keep reminding us of how much harm has been done to nature. Adopting a critical textual analysis within the context of Ecocritical theory, this paper seeks to explore *The Dark Road* (2012) by Ma Jian, and Sefi Atta's short story "News From Home" (2010), as a direct response to the challenges of the environmental degradation in the face of burgeoning economic order and globalization. The study contextualizes the challenging experiences of China and Nigeria on issues of environmental degradation as both countries struggled with man-made disasters. Beyond this, this paper highlights the devaluation of the environment in global cities and the apocalyptic warnings such human action portends. Findings reveal that humanity has eroded the quality of nature by engaging in activities that plunder natural landscapes. The study further revealed the contradictions and odds against the operation of industrialization; besides the fact that it makes the environment toxic for living, it also hampers our capitalist tradition which is retrogressive to conservation. In all, the novelists' ecocentric stance is not only discursive of vulnerability of 21<sup>st</sup> century social environment, but also indicative of the ecoglobal perspective of contemporary Nigerian and Chinese novelists.

**Keywords:** globalization, environmental degradation, Nigeria, China

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## Ecophobic Rhetorics in Ma Jian's *The Dark Road* and Sefi Atta's "News From Home"

### Introduction

Literature has continued to grapple with the problems of global cities and developing economies. Several issues ranging from the conundrum thrown up by industrialization, the alteration of the natural world and the erosion of stable counterbalance which should sustain the functional systems in the ecosystem, have all interested contemporary novelists. Thus, while the Nigerian novelists approach environmental pollution from mining, oil spills and gas flaring in the Niger-Delta with contempt their Chinese counterparts present an apocalyptic projection of a technologically advanced China burdened with the crises of industrialization and environmental degradation. Apparently, the reality of environmental despoliation has led to the emergence of writers who attempt at addressing this continental challenge.

Describing the twenty-first century as the 'Asian century' Guha (2014) observes that the economic growth which the continent has successfully achieved in the second half of the twentieth century has created a huge void between man and nature and the propensity for further devaluation of his natural environment. For ecocritics, the emergence of a predominantly industrial economy and the twin forces of capitalism and globalization only auspicate 'a spoliation of the natural world' (Abrams & Harpharm, 2012, p.98). Evidently, the depiction of ecological awareness in global fiction has birthed, to a large extent, a reengagement with the grimness of the general human situation with the increasing evidence of environmental deterioration and the effects of explosive capitalist growth.

Additionally, the sense that a degraded physical environment equates to a grave human existence has created an enigmatic evolution of ecocriticism in modern fiction. Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of d' Ubervilles* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* are perhaps a few of the major literary attempts to capture the adverse effect of modernization in London during the Industrial Revolution. The pioneer efforts of Dickens and Hardy also inspired an alternative focus on the adverse effects of globalization on the human race. It is this fact that gives credibility to the understanding that literature has been concomitant with ecocriticism; there is a constant flux between literary awareness and ecological transformation.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the work of Chinese and Nigerian writers in this era share similar similarities with the Victorian novelists. The similarity between the Victorian and Asian narrative is the post-modernist tendency and rebuttal engagement of economic liberalism in endangering human lives. Just like the master narratives of Europe, the trajectory of the Asian writers is that there is a global competition among the World powers and the economic and social aspiration to outwit one another in innovations and inventions. Hence, the thrust for modernization has constantly put the planet and the world population in a state of jeopardy. One feature of globalization, whether industrialization or mechanization, is despoliation of the natural environment. To this end, the various apocalyptic warnings amidst natural crises reveal that human beings have become more vulnerable in the environment which should shield them from the precarious forces of nature.

### **Theorizing Ecocriticism**

Our understanding of global problems such as environmental change and ecological transformation informs the conceptual background of ecocriticism which aims at providing a link between man and nature to bring about a balanced co-existence. Ecocriticism explores the connection between biological and physical environment bringing into awareness the devastation wrought on nature by human activities; industrial and chemical pollution of the biosphere, the depletion of forests and natural resources, the unrelenting efforts of the man at bringing into extinction rare plant and animal species and the alarming rate at which the human population is growing which seem to have exceeded the capacity of the earth at sustaining it. It is in the wake of these environmental crises that ecocriticism became an integral part of literary scholarship.

Ecocriticism seems propelled within a conceptual background of man's natural environments which has not only become increasingly degraded but has assumed a dangerous position in the face of man's unfriendly nature towards it. Unfortunately, the effects of human action are becoming more intense, producing in turn predictable eco-destructive rhetoric. Abrams and Harpharm (2012, p.98) posit that ecocriticism offers a critique of "binaries such as man/ nature as mutually exclusive opposition". The contestation and hostility between the two entities are further revealed in man's desire to dominate every force of nature albeit not in a way intended to conserve the environment. Ecocriticism invites us

to view all living things and their earthly environment no less than the human species, possess(ing) importance, value, and even moral and political rights (Abrams & Harpham, 2012, p.98). This constitutional movement questions the rationale for clearing the forests for landscaped gardens in global cities and the ambivalent position created by groundbreaking technological development in the ecological space.

Besides, the tradition of thematizing landscape, space, and the creation of awareness for conscious protection of the ecosystem is premised on the sensibilities of Chinese writers whose narratives have embraced global ecologist and environmental themes. Their writings reverberate issues that are pertinent to China's ecological civilization and environmental sustainability. Thus, the application of ecocritical theory is instructive for the understanding of the effect of globalization on man. The development of global cities implies that we must take foreign policy seriously for effective environmental management, making the ascendancy of protectionism necessary. This present mode of man's vulnerability is often explained in Levy's argument that as a result of man's inordinate ambition and quest to conquer nature, "(he) has control of the non-human world because he is unable to predict with any accuracy the effects of his actions upon it" (p.210). It is in the light of this that Estok explains that "the effects of our actions are becoming more intense and less predictable, producing in turn, though, a very predictable storm of ecophobic rhetorics" (2009, p.208). Invariably, adjudicating an ethical consideration for the natural environment in the face of the various apocalyptic warnings arising from environmental destruction only seem appropriate to ensure a balance between man and nature in global cities of the world.

### **Ecophobic Rhetorics: China's Example**

The change in global climate has necessitated a shift in paradigm especially the perception of the invincibility of nature to the role which humanity plays in creating the toxic social environment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Goron (2018, p.4) explains that "the global horizon of sustainability remains bleak: the depletion of resources and the loss of biodiversity has accelerated let alone the change required to prevent catastrophic climate change". Inadvertently, global warming and environmental crises have constantly presented nature as a hostile opponent who is responding angrily to incursions and actions, an opponent, to be

feared and controlled. So, by arousing nature's barren condition in the face of man's so-called unprecedented civilization, the globalized nature of environmental threats necessitates collaborative action.

Therefore, narratives of ecological concerns present the dilemma of capitalist China and the writer's deliberate attempt at interrogating domestic imperialism by exposing the living condition of the peasants. Thus, while China may not suffer overt colonialization like some of her other Asian counterparts, China's environmental history and literary engagement reveal ecophobia concerns in a conventional form such which has not been and may not be explored by Chinese writers as a result of the country's political dimension (Yang, 2012). However, the polemical concerns of contemporary Chinese novels in the twenty-first century have necessitated the transmutation from social realist concerns to address issues of globalization, hi-tech, urbanization, economy, and poverty and the impact of these issues on the low-income earners in China.

Citing a 2010 study conducted by the WHO and a group of universities, Huang (2014) observes that outdoor air pollution contributed to 1.3 million premature deaths accounting for almost 40 percent of the global death. Similarly, a 2011 research conducted by Nanjing Agricultural University explains that 10 percent of rice sold in China contained excessive amounts of cadmium. This research further estimated that as much as 70 percent of China's farmland is contaminated with toxic chemicals. The paradox in human development is that the spoliation of nature seems to be the defining trope of globalization going by the various architectural designs which stretch natural space and industrial pollutions which have caused various health challenges to humans. In a way, global ecological crises such as tsunamis, earthquakes, flooding, wildfires, and typhoons have raised environmental consciousness and at the same time raised concern on the role which man plays in wreaking havoc on the ecosphere. Subsequently, the task of ecocriticism is not only aimed at formulating a conceptual framework for the study of the interconnections between literature and the environment, the sheer precarity of human and animal life in an increasingly globalized world has necessitated the need to address depleting ecosystem in the face of cosmopolitanism and globalization.

In the delineation of Asian industrialization, therefore, the thrust for globalization is also very crucial. The Chinese writings in contemporary times, pointed out that present degradation of the natural environment resulted in the



thick toxic smog which engulfed Beijing in January 2013. Going by the statistics of the WHO that air pollution accounts for 40% of global deaths, one cannot help but question if humanity is a bespeaking factor in the operation of globalization. Can a country claim to be great when her citizens do not have clean air to breathe, safe water to drink, or uncontaminated soil on which to live and farm? These questions highlight the imperative to re-examine China's development model and its seeming technological advancement in the context of a depleting ecosystem and the hazardous living conditions of peasants, who constitute a larger percentage of the Chinese population.

Xiaoyun (2014) notes that the three decades after reform and the three following the opening up of Mainland China to economic activities transformed the country from being a traditional agricultural country to a modern industrialized state. He writes:

From 1953 to 1978, China prioritized heavy industry through a centrally planned economy intending to accomplish a great leap forward and catch up with the developed world. The second stage, the period of 1979 to 1999, witnessed a more balanced development to promote light industries. The third stage starts in 2000 when China saw the reappearance of heavy industrialization. (p.2)

The above appears to be the conception of globalization on the Chinese agenda. But in the actual sense, the enormity of contradiction and controversies with which man's advancement in technology is strewn informs a necessary intrusion in the contented space.

Hence, since the outrage on China's ecocritical activities, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) adopted Ecological Civilization (EC) as a constituent part of their green rhetoric and at the same time provides an alternative development theory capable of revolutionizing the ecocidal global economic order and brings about a global ecological transition (Goron, 2018, p.7). This measure becomes expedient as a means of sustaining nature and at the same time helps to avert further destruction of the ecosystem as a result of rapid industrialization. However, the subject of debate has been the effectiveness of the program in reforming China's industrial model to align with the international concept of a low-carbon economy and adjudicate an ethical consideration of China's ecological environment. The reality of globalization, despite the enthusiasm for establishing E.C., is that over time, the values and power practices

of successive leaderships in CCP have cast doubt on the real intention of establishing the E.C. This explains why Goron (2018, p.7) argues that ecological civilization should articulate professionalism instead of the CCP political propaganda. In a way, the deployment of civilization suggests a political and cultural paradigm. This in a way has reinforced China's doctrinal grip in the wave of economic globalization as well as designating a model for environmentalism.

It is on this note that Thorns (2002) posits "the invention of globalization in this postmodern age is defined essentially by the flexibility in the world economy which turns world economy into a dependent one and further results in further transformation of the cities" (p.71). The transmutation of the natural environment to global cities and this present mode of environmental policy are often explained by revealing the connection between capitalism and industrialization. Jian recognizes these developments and concludes in his novel that the harmony between man and nature becomes threatened as a result of the exploitation and spoliation of the land.

### **Ma Jian's *The Dark Road*: An Ecocritical Perspective**

The tide of Asian globalization and the tempo-spatial destruction of nature appear to be the greatest challenge of ecocritics whose primary concern has been the despoliation of global cities. *The Dark Road* is profoundly an environmental novel which explores the effects of industrialization on the local populace. The novelist's skepticism regarding representations of nature is tempered by an intense concern with environmental degradation in China during the late twentieth century in the last decades of the twentieth century. China's ecological concern becomes more worrisome when one considers the fact that the pollution from the environment deforms foetus before they were born while the women's gestation period becomes more prolonged going by the despoliation in the ecosystem. For example, Jian offers a vivid representation of the deplorable environment Chinese peasants fleeing from family planning officials are living in the face of the country's industrialization policy. Konzi observes:

Since the sluice gates were raised last week, foamy floodwaters have engulfed the creek, risen to the pond and lapping at the base of the willows a few meters to the hut..the flooded creek was teeming with dead fish, he brought the net so that he could scoop them out and sell them in the village.



He'd heard that once the poisoned fish are gutted, salted, and dried, the chemical taste is barely noticeable. (p.173)

Jian's engagement of this socio-economic and environmental crisis is, therefore, what one encounters in this narrative. The text also condemns the abuse of non-human nature by modernity, suggesting that the process that the hope for humanity in the globalization agenda lies not in outwitting other nations but in developing a stewardship relationship responsible for maintaining the natural world while providing an ecological vision of nature as possessing as counter-hegemonic power.

*The Dark Road* reminds us of how industrialization has been tied to the global agenda of China. Jian raises concern about environmental decline to oppose what appears to be an economic competition of world cities and the destructive operation of globalization which turned the lakeside town into mountains of European waste. In *The Dark Road*, degradation cannot be separated the economic boom which followed China's industrialization policy. The transmutation of the mode of economic sustenance from agricultural-based to industrialization and the ascendancy of the advancement of wealth and position of First World city is well stated:

Until recently, Heaven was a sleepy, impoverished lakeside.. But ten years ago, after the first British ship docked at the nearby Pearl River Port of Foshan and unloaded of electronic waste, Heaven's economy took off. An entrepreneurial family hauled some of the waste back to their homes and hiring migrant labourers to help out. Today, the front doors of every house are surrounded not by bales of wheat but bundles of cables, circuit boards, and transformers. In just one decade, Heaven has transformed from a quiet backwater into a prosperous, waste- choked town. (*The Dark Road*, p. 237)

Like most industrialized countries in the world, globalization has created an economic restructuring which is evident in the changes to labour market. This has in turn affected employment, migration, household formation, and housing. Besides, it needs to be clarified that this is just an aspect of the many challenges of industrialization. Similarly, the despoliation of rural spaces in building sophisticated architectural infrastructure is evidence of 21<sup>st</sup> century "technologicistic paradigms" Cripps (2010, p.226). This line of thought foregrounds the next question which is, how have technological innovations produced anthropocentric nations? In an attempt to answer, Jian challenges

technocrats who are engaged in transmuting the mode of production from agricultural-based to industrial based, and in which the ascendancy of the global city from its present state to the position of First world city.

The implication of a situation like this is the spoliation of both land and labour from the rural to the urban cities for the enhancement and advancement of the wealth and position of China to the burgeoning industrial city. Jian seems to suggest that the reality of environmental degradation and the implicit economic undertones emphasizes ecophobic rhetoric within the Asian psyche that the trending globalization is an albatross to the achievement of humanity in the face of modernity. According to Horkheimer and Adorno (2002), the relation to nature under capitalism is characterized by “domination of nature by human beings, the domination of nature within human beings, and, in both of these forms of domination, the domination of some human beings by others” (p.11). This domination over nature is conceived in the technologies which replete stunning master-pieces and architectural designs further point to human domination and transformations in nature which has alienated us from the natural ground of our being Gregory (2010, p.298). Ultimately, Jian’s ecocritical concern and demand for the conservation of the ecosystem is perceived as his skepticism towards all representations of capitalism in China and the country’s ecophobia vision in line with the global economic and political relationships which largely defines the country’s hegemonic stance.

The complex situation is often represented with the description of Heaven’s township, an e-waste dumpsite that produces 70% of the world’s toxic e-waste. The complicity of the West becomes more visible with the United Kingdom “taking delivery of 45,000 tonnes of Chinese manufactured Christmas toys, then the ship is returned to southern China a few weeks up later loaded with UK electronic waste” (*The Dark Road*, p.293). Meili, the protagonist of the novel, did not only give birth to an abnormal foetus as a result of her frequent contact with the toxic waste, but she also suffered the consequence of working on the waste as well. Yet, Meili, herself, tries to undermine the adverse effect of the contamination of their natural environment on the skin, respiratory, neurological digestive diseases, and the toxic waste laden in the soil, air, and water. Feeding on contaminated food has become a new normal. Kongzi, Meili’s husband cooked a fish he’d caught in the polluted river, and he can still taste its foul odour in his mouth (*The Dark Road*, p.149).

By emphasizing Meili's affinity with the slums, Jian in a way tries to impose the need to develop deliberate conservation of the land. Thus, in a sense, he emphasizes the need for nations to restrain themselves from eco destructive habits in the guise of global trends. More importantly, Meili's development in *The Dark Road* is marked by an awareness of her interdependence with the biosphere as she combines with the non-human nature to achieve progress past the destructive impact of the state on her. In other words, development in the novel is related to the acquisition of a more eco-conscious sensibility even as the protagonist reverts to her natural environment to create balanced and the desired healing. In all, the invention of globalization in this postmodern age is defined essentially by flexibility in the world economy which turns nations into independent entities and results in further transformation of the cities (Thorns, 2002, p.71).

Meili suffers spiritual and social degenerations whose scars the story serves to bear witness to. Consequently, the tragedy which results from the degradation of the protagonist's environment can be viewed as a collective tragedy as the narrator reveals the character's adaptation and survival while appropriating the blame and responsibilities of man's neglect of his social environment. Thus, in the face of the raging global pandemic, Jian's ethical perspective is aimed at mitigating China's industrialization policies which are capable of despoiling man's natural environment. As Meili, the protagonist, suffers from physical, spatial, and spiritual rupture and eventual death, the novelist attempts at conscientizing countries on the need to find the solution to the problem of air pollution. He advocates the need to adopt eco-friendly policies.

Essentially, Ma Jian points out the nature of the disaster in the slums, underlining the passive stance of the government on the predicament of Chinese citizens fleeing from the family planning policy. Finally, this present mode of Eco consciousness is often explained as a means of providing a sustainable global environment during and post-Covid to combat imminent threats to man's life and the natural environment.

Although Ma Jian's *The Dark Road* examines environmental degradation in the wake of China's economic boom, his attention is etched on addressing a broader continental audience on the need to preserve the ecosystem. In this instance while the setting in *The Dark Road* alludes to China's physical and political landscapes in the Communist and post-Communist era, what is

significant in the novel is the novelist's interrogation of the government activities in a bid to attain the country's millennial goals. To this end Jian eschews China's harmful ecological practices as the country rolls a triumphant entry to her economic miracle. On this note, Jian seems to suggest that the desired healing from the raging pandemic in the world can only be accomplished when individuals give nature the respect it deserves (*The Dark Road*, p.375). In other words, Jian seems to propose that industrialization without recourse for the natural environment only reveals man's inhumanity and injustice against nature.

### **Sefi Atta's "News From Home": A Narrative of Environmental Burden**

Since the discovery of oil in Oloibiri, a small community in the eastern Niger Delta region of Nigeria, the despoliation of the natural environment of the creeks and coastal areas where crude oil is drilled in Nigeria has been a great concern to ecocritics. Thus, starting from the agitations of Kenule Saro Wiwa, Niyi Osundare, and Tanure Ojaide, the tradition of Ecocritical writing has continued to resonate in Nigeria's literary circles. Despite the fact that the Niger Delta provides the vast majority of Nigeria's wealth, a generality of the populace remains in abject poverty. Comprising of states such as Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo Ondo and Rivers State, the indigenous population of the Niger Delta region have suffered tremendous neglect because of the degradation of the ecosystem by multinational companies.

Atta's "News from Home" is one out of the many stories in the novelist's collection which delves into environmental pollution arising from the effect of frequent oil spills and the practice of gas flaring by multinational companies. Atta explores the challenges of Nigerian coastal towns where oils are drilled affecting the natural environment around the family. Apart from the fact that what the people breathe in is polluted air, the water is polluted. As a narrative of ecological concern, Atta is quick to point our attention to the focal point of this study, according to her, "...the oil companies spill oil on the land, leak oil into the rivers and wouldn't clean up their mess". The economic exploitation and environmental degradation of the expatriate company do not seem to leave the prying eyes of the author. Eve, the protagonist, notes that the gas flaring which goes on daily in the community leaves the people susceptible to all forms of terminal diseases. She observes further that "there were patients with strange growths, chronic

respiratory illnesses, terminal diarrhea, weeping sores, inexplicable bleeding, miscarriages, stillbirths, babies dying in utero, women dying in labour” (“News From Home”, p. 177).

Similarly, there is evidence that the entire population suffered diverse health issues that would invariably lead to a high mortality rate. The community described in Atta’s writing is a place where human activities have despoiled the natural environment such that nature has become hostile to the inhabitants and what they feel is death. Madam Queen retorts “we are dying of our air, we are dying of our water, we are dying from oil” (p.191). Atta had written what seems to be a criticism of foreign earning for Nigeria. The narrative echoes the pains the oil boom has brought to Niger-Deltans. Consequently, environmental criticism in “News from Home” becomes a sharp, provocative, and penetrating engagement with the crises of oil exploration in the oil-rich region as oil has become a curse on the land.

As a result of the ecological condition of the land, feeding on food grown from other parts of the country has become the new normal. The flora and fauna have become anemic. The deplorable state of the natural environment in the creek area with the government issuing expatriates the license is brought to reality. Lamenting the state of events, Queen, one of the indigenes, cries “they drill our father’s farms and they don’t give we, their children jobs...There are no fishes in our rivers, no bush rats left in our forests. We don’t use natural gas in our homes and yet we have gas flares in our backyards” (“News From Home”, p.190). Again, it is an open secret the land is constantly raped given the sleazy roles of the government, expatriates, and traditional elders in the community. It is under such conditions that Atta, like the rest of other eco-conscious novelists jolts our senses to the ethical values of one of the reasons for the invincibility of the environment in the face of a global pandemic.

## Conclusion

This study has been concerned with the exploitation of the natural environment in China and Nigeria. The focus has been on the narratives of a Chinese author and a Nigerian author: Ma Jian’s *The Dark Road* and Sefi Atta’s “News from Home”. It is the trust of this investigation that, like other continental literature, Chinese and Nigerian novels in the 21<sup>st</sup> century explore ecological trauma. Environmental despoliation is reclaimed in narratological idioms that



merge globalization and economic strides. Whether the elected sites for these spoliations are in Asia or Africa, the numerous environmental concerns present a sordid revelation of government policy on the environment in China and Nigeria. The increasing need to awaken our ecological consciousness has created an ontological shift in the need to reverence nature but more importantly adopt measures to sustain it. The implication of this is the influx of constructive post-modernists who question the rationality behind man's anthropocentric nature in the quest for globalization.

The portrayal of biocentric issues revealed the literary motifs of the novelists. The novelists express concern for public health and the engendered landscape by transcending ethnic and national boundary to explore varying human experiences from ecoglobal perspective. Through the deployment of imagery, symbolism and metaphor, the novelists' anchorage of environmental issues reveals their chagrin to environmental degradation.

In Ma Jian's *The Dark Road*, there is a passive resignation as the citizens live with draconian government policies, while in "News from Home", the people revolt against the injustice of producing the majority of the nation's national resources without directly benefitting anything from the government. In both texts, there is a loss of meaningful living as the people grapple with the challenges of ruining the natural environment.

In addition, both texts affirm the dominant trope of ecocriticism that man should have a social responsibility of taking care of the natural environment. In *The Dark Road*, Meili and her husband suffer from physical, spatial, temporal, cultural and most importantly spiritual rupture. To attain healing and rejuvenation, Meili and Kongzi went back to the natural environment in the face of the overwhelming challenge of family planning officials. For instance, the visit to the nuwa cave helps Meili to reclaim her fertility while supplication to the fertility goddess of the cave facilitates the safe delivery of Newborn who had stayed in her womb for 3 years, while in Atta's "News From Home", educated citizens from the creeks migrated abroad or travelled to developed cities to find a means of livelihood.

Similarly, both texts uphold the notion that man is capable of inflicting injury to nature and vice-versa. However, the difference is that there is a passive resignation in *The Dark Road* as most of the vagrants resign to living with the



contamination of the natural environment while embracing adaptation and survival skills. The migrant peasants living around the slums work in the garbage dump while the burgeoning Chinese city profits from the filth. In “News From Home”, the nature of natural disaster is the pandemic and gas plant accident which resulted in the death of most of the villagers.

Findings in the study reveal that literature is against ecophobia policies in developed and developing nations. Consequently, apportioning blame and responsibilities where they belong can help illuminate the domain of social responsibility and political action. Ultimately, rather than forging an unholy alliance with imperial powers in the tyrannical management of nature and the natural resources, globalization should reflect an organic and relational perspective between man and the ecosystem. Finally, the novelists seem to suggest that it is only the advocacy for deep green and ecological rejuvenation through communal efforts during the Covid and post-Covid era that individuals can have ecological value to avert the multiple environmental crises in our contemporary world. Through this avenue also, we can have a more congenial 21<sup>st</sup> social environment for humanity as a whole.

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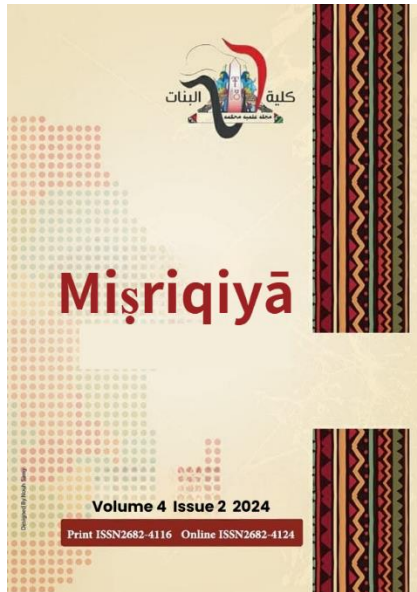
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## Interrogating Gender Injustices in Selected Nigerian Fictions

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### Abstract

This Paper explores gender dichotomies in fiction and real life through gender politics, patriarchy, and irony, focusing on Abi Dare's *The Girl with the Louding Voice* (2020) and Chimamanda Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele, Or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017). The study examines how male hegemony perpetuates cultural discrimination against women in the above named texts, using qualitative content analysis. Findings indicate that women are crucial to the family and society, and their empowerment through education is essential for personal autonomy, free from adult interference. The study highlights that patriarchy enforces social injustices against women through forced marriage and childbearing. Both authors call for institutional integrity to support women's rights and promote a healthy society. Additionally, the study reveals that some influential women contribute to the oppression of other women, causing unnecessary sufferings. It concludes with recommendations for addressing these issues: female children should not be coerced into marriage without economic empowerment; Nigerian culture should eliminate gender-based inequalities; and effective mentorship should be provided to guide and liberate young women from exploitation and servitude.

*Keywords:* Gender injustices, *Dear Ijeawele*, *The Girl with the Louding Voice*, female child, irony

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## Interrogating Gender Injustices in Selected Nigerian Fictions

### I. Introduction

The male and female beings found globally are biologically structured. They have the tendency to reason, perform and engage in all practices which are human by nature. The Nigerian cultures are distinguished into the locations of family, community, village, in particular, and the universe at large. They have the capacity to behave superficially, assuming that the “other” (de Beauvoir 1949, p. 40) group (female) does not exist; or even if she does, she is very insignificant. The Nigerian cultures which the male and female were born into, however, strategize on their own, a sort of imbalance bloc to reject the other, female gender. This, therefore, introduces gender treatise in view as Ciarunji Chesaina (2013, p. 213) states: “...African women have used the pen to have their voices heard...to examine the status of women in society and the challenges with which they are confronted in their relation with their male counterparts.”

The term “Gender” connotes the features of men, women, boys and girls which are socially built. Gender is culturally constructed, while sex is biologically created. Whatever is called gender is often always defined by patriarchy. It solicits that the female human is too inferior to live in the same culture with the male. Diala-Ogamba (2013, p. 241) expatiates this when she ascertains that: “most early African writers were males who presented the patriarchal world of male heroism in their works with (without due) consideration to the fact that several decades ago, women were respected in some parts of Africa; especially in matrilineal societies....” This implies that, several of the renowned African women were momentous in their fields, and were very active in political, economic, and social capacities in the pre-colonial and during the colonial eras in Africa. The activities of the leading African/Nigerian women are effectively captured by Mary Kolawole:

Incidentally, the females/women in the patriarchal cultures constitute the largest percentage of its population – most especially in the area of economic – agricultural, social and moral upheavals. The female group that patriarchal cultures reject, abuse, oppose, subjugate, and maliciously deny certain privileges/rights [accorded to men], are complete co-contributors/partners in homes, at schools, at the market areas, streams, etc.

(Kolawole, 1997, pp. 44-45)

The objective of this study is to project the disparity that exists in the structures of the society which makes it look like that the female is doomed to a dead end, of either accepting to live according to the dictates of culture and society, or she ceases to be what Chesaina claims: “women have been compelled to live a life of subordinations in most societies. For the women to cross such hurdles of servitude, they take to the song genre as an avenue for voicing their frustrations, and for protesting against the status quo” (2013, p. 215).

This study is categorized into two sections: the first part focuses on the patriarchal imposition of itself in the universal culture, while the second aspect concentrates on the feminist approach in the analysis of the obnoxious patriarchal ills put forth by Chimamanda Adichie’s *Dear Ijeawele, Or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017), and Abi Dare in *The Girl with The Louding Voice* (2020). The intention of this study is to equally give space to the up-coming Nigerian female writers to expose the inhuman treatments given to women, in spite of women’s resistance to patriarchal discrimination. Adichie and Dare use Nigeria as a microcosm, to examine what happens in most patriarchal societies. They continue from where their predecessors like: Flora Nwapa (1931- 1993), Mariama Ba (1929-1981), Efua T. Sutherland (1924- 1996), Nawal El Saadawi (1931- 2021), Ama Ata Aidoo (1942- 2023), Buchi Emecheta (1944- 2017), Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo (1947-- ) and others had stopped, to create public enlightenment about continuous suppression of women in the so-called patriarchal society where they are co-actors.

Chinyelu Ojukwu (2013, p. 9) ascertains that, the initial female writers – Flora Nwapa (1931- 1993) and Bessie Head (1937-1986) – were concerned with commitments of women in both traditional and contemporary African societies. These women’s previous works in African literature inspired not only the generality of the women, but also men, to the knowledge that, women are according to Ojukwu’s claims: “...equal partners not only in marriages, but also in the total work of reconstruction of the continent for the complete development” (Ojukwu, 2013, p. 9). The insensitive treatments which patriarchy apportions to the female folk are not limited to the image representation, physical brutality, and deprivation of some sort, but the people’s literatures also reinforce such.



## II. Defining the Concepts of “Gender Oppression”

### A. The Politics of Gender.

The concept of patriarchy is connected to what some feminists (Woolf 1929, de Beauvoir 1949, Mugo 1976, Spivak 1990, Millet 2000, Wollstonecraft 2006, etc.) refer to as “gender oppression.” The discernment of this oppression is an important factor of the activist’s or innovative theory in modern societies. The upper-class elites, according to Selden (1988, p. 319), are those who would relieve themselves from social and economic structures, and encourage the teaching of literature, as a knowledgeable field. Hoggart (1957, p.15) observes that, most of the subjugation of women can be explored only with an indebt knowledge of social marginalization. By “class oppression”, Hoggart illuminates that it denotes to: “the privileged (educated) literate or new elites who came out from the grammar-school education which was opened to brighter working class children/pupil.” But Selden (1988, p. 519) objects to Hoggart’s position by defining “class oppressions” to mean the discriminating disparity which exists between the upper-class elites (men), and the lower-class background (women) who “rose up in the Eighteenth Century.” This, he claims, occurs when the social, moral, economic, and political powers are expressed in the development of the novel. The class oppressions also recognize the enormous growth in the book production and distribution, reading public, which originate as a result of the enlightenment in education.

By “class-oppression,” other feminists (Showalters, 1979, Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2002, etc.), establish that the oppression of women should be investigated with a deeper understanding that patriarchal societies are quite older than the class societies, and that socialists, as Selden (1988, p. 320) states are: “no less patriarchal than capitalist societies”. In fact, Millet (2000, p. 39) rejects the repressive stereotyping of women, by questioning the differences between biological (sexes) and cultural (gender) identities. She uses the notion of patriarchy to buttress the root of women’s relegation in her classic – *Sexual Politics* (2000). Millet insists that power in both domestics and public life is dominated by males, and that literature is a record of the collective consciousness of patriarchy. This implies that much literature is the elevation of men talking to other men, not directly to women. In the post-modern literate era, Nigerian women, even the much younger generations among them – Adiechie 2017, Dare 2020, etc., – have asserted themselves to have their voices

heard. They have allowed their intellect and ink to run as the probing point, through which they continue to project the status of women in society – and the challenges with which they are confronted in their relations with their patriarchal counterparts.

It should be noted that, the assumed women's subordination dates back to the history of western patriarchal thought (Tyson, 2006, p. 101). Helene Cixious (1997, p. 91) further expounds that it is through the language that the male hegemony may project the world as tropical opposites, the type that can be considered as greater than others. She proceeds to differentiate the existing structures such as the family, culture, in particular, and the nation at large, as the practical systems of humanity. The hindrances as shown above suggest the way humans think, and also for each obstruction, Cixious proceeds to ask: "Where is [the woman]?" (1997, p. 91). The implication of Cixious questioning the side of the opposition organize to define the woman, is another way of still looking at the oppression of women – the class oppression.

A close look at patriarchal rational pattern in Nigeria and some other global societies portrays that the female human should permanently remain on the negative side of creation, as well as that of society, so that the male hegemony can forever subjugate her. The implication of what Cixious is advocating is that human culture, in fact, Nigeria in question, should abandon gender differences to give everyone a healthy opportunity to progress independently, physically and psychologically without demarcation (Cixious, 1997, p. 92). The summary of the above analysis projects that the Nigerian patriarchal culture from time immemorial has accentuated that the female beings are naturally resilience, when patriarchy operates as the master and lord who should remain permanently above. This implies that culture determines the gender (Macionis, 2005, p. 20), while nature forms the sexes in all human societies. Further scrutiny of this position is that it is only when a woman functions in the substandard position, that is when she can be totally accepted according to patriarchal approximation. It connotes that women by the above premise, are naturally born to be submissive to men, that the menfolk are natural leaders.

The questions that readily come to mind at this point are: Who made men "natural leaders?" Cannot women also be permitted by the same natural structure which has raised men to the position of leadership? The above questions get answered by portraying that, it is impossible for women to do away with patriarchal

discerning, by claiming to associate with what Cixious refers to as “patriarchal power structure” (1997, p. 96). This relates to a situation whereby Nigerian women struggle to attain equality in all ramifications in the contemporary male dominated society. The meaning of the foregoing is that women’s attainment of power within the existing socio-political institution might not completely change the position. Furthermore, the result could be that women may learn the male-controlled ways by so doing, thinking and behaving like patriarchy have been trained to conduct themselves since ancient times.

Having engaged so far on the politics involving women assessment of male domination, or looking at opinion about them, or examining patriarchy as weapon which Julia Kristeva (1980, p. 133) observes: “marginalized, besieged femininity, just as the working class is discriminated.” It is significant to single out the concept “Patriarchy” for examination.

## **B. What is Patriarchy?**

The term ‘Patriarchy’ as examined by Nash (2020) is a system of relationship, values, customs, beliefs, closely knitted into the political, economic and social practices that organize gender inequality between men and women. The meaning of the above premise is that issues clarified as feminine or concerning women (female) are often undervalued. In the same vein, all cases seen as masculine or pertaining to men/males are privileged. The patriarchal culture manipulates authority over both private and public fields and establishes that men exploit both. The concept of ‘patriarchal hegemony’ evolved in the Twentieth century as a theoretical approach to categorize the unsatisfactory authority existing between men and women as a set (Sanday, 2009, p. 9143). The classification approach to masculinity/femininity paradigm has a very long history of assumption concerning the political relations of gender which started in the ancient Greeks (Aristotle, 1920, pp. 23-27). A corresponding support of the notion resides elaborately on the deliberate segregation of western women from circular field on social, economic occupations, and political areas compared with the male hegemony associates as Gideon, et al (2022, p. 78) succinctly capture: “many man laws and similar masculinist manifestos...as a way for men to re-affirm their masculinity” over those described as feminine.

The notion of ‘Patriarchy’ according to Andrew Milner (1994, p. 15) is: “...the systematic oppression of women by men.” This implies that ‘patriarchy’ epitomizes the inadequate distribution of societal power between males and females as it affects the entire global cultures. Milner further depicts that the ideas of male dominance are agreed upon with the notion of belief, service, tenet and meaning which demand of each, essential reformation in conjunction with several types of gender modification and imbalance. In consonance with Milner’s position, Strid, et al (2022, p. 320) explain “Patriarchy” as composition of two elements: First structurally, patriarchy is an ordered formation of social relationships and social institutions which accord men to maintain position of leadership, authority, and privilege in society. Patriarchy as a belief justifies itself. The implication of this is that patriarchy supplies avenue for generating acceptance of judgement not only by the recipients from such practices, but also by some set of women who are situated in the relegated positions by society. Women are intentionally exempted from participating in the traditional elders’ hearings as can be watched by their patriarchal culture. In fact, radical feminism recognizes the oppression of women as ultimate political domination in which women are categorized as substandard class based upon their sex. Judith Hole et al (1973, p. 8) affirm that, ‘Radical Feminism’ is political, since it recognizes that men have composed for themselves power over women. And they have equally erected institutions to maintain this power throughout societies, with Nigeria inclusive.

In response to those who claim that the political subjugation of women is a thing of the past, Millet (1973), de Beaviour (1949), Tyson (2006), El Saadawi (2007) and so on, – both radical and moderate ones, point to an existing general cultural process of biased treatment based on sex. In conjunction with patriarchal continued sexual discrimination on women even in the twenty-first century, there are identifiable evidences presented at the Congregational Hearings on Equal rights in Education and Employment declared since in 1848 Seneca Falls Women’s Convention. Mappes et al (1977, pp. 115-116) ascertain that in vocational counseling girls are directed into marriage, child-nurturing and husband-nursing education, while boys are trained into engineering, space sciences and computer technology. Mezu (1994, p.24) sanctions Mappes et al (1977) earlier stated position when she advocates that the imperialist rule in Nigeria merely worsens the condition by introducing imbalance system in which, African/Nigerian Chauvinists were exposed to

multitalented education. And the African/Nigerian women, unlike their western counterparts before the mid-Nineteenth century, received what she describes as, “cosmetic helpmates of educated, utilitarian premier naturalists and professionals” (Mezu, 1994, p.24).

Further assessment of patriarchy and the Nigerian cultures indicate that, women as a group, are not given the opportunity to function in governance as they should, because patriarchy and its establishments discriminate against them. For instance, in Nigerian governance, important or sensitive positions/offices such as Presidents, Senators, Governors, some Ministers are always often assigned to men. The challenges of social and economic inequality between women and men, are imperative discourse as Gideon, et al (2022 p. 78) rightly put, “...remain the holistic mastery...to promote the masculine gender.”

### **III. Introducing the Authors and their Works**

Abi Dare and Chimamanda Adichie are new generation female writers, that take excursions into the male dominated Nigerian society to highlight in the realistic terms the extent to which the father, uncle, brother, husband, son cultures have failed the female child even in the twenty-first century. Dare was born in Lagos in Nigeria. She had obtained different degrees ranging from Law awarded by the University of Wolverhampton; MSc degree in International Project Management, obtained at Glasgow Caledonian University. Dare equally has a Master of Arts degree in Creative Writing at Birbeck University, London. Her pioneer work is *The Girl with the Louding Voice* published in 2020. And she has received outstanding awards since its publication – Bath Novel Award for emerging authors, Literary Consultancy Pen Factor in 2018, with an early version of the novel. And she was shortlisted in 2020 for Desmond Eliot Prize, with the publication of *The Girl with the Louding Voice*. She was instantly selected for New York Times best seller. Dare also won the Guardian’s Not the Book Prize. She is presently living in Essex with her family.

Chimamanda Adichie on the other hand, grew up in Nigeria. She has written and published various works to her credit. Her maiden novel, *Purple Hibiscus* was first published in 2003 and had won the Commonwealth Writers’ Award and the Hurston Wright Legacy Award. *Half of a Yellow Sun* was published 2006, and was selected for the Orange Prize, as well as a National Book Critics Circle Award

Finalist. *Americanah*, equally won the Award of National Book Critics Circle, which was identified as one of The New York Times Top Ten Best Books of 2013. Adichie is equally the writer of the short stories; *The Things Around Your Neck* was published in 2009. Adichie's works have been interpreted into more than thirty languages. Adichie latest work, *Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, published in 2017, is an epistolary novel. And it is one of the of texts selected for the present study

It is pertinent to spot out here that Dare employs ironic reflections on the obnoxious representation of female folks by the patriarchal culture and governance, which abhor the female as a second infidel. The male cultures right from time immemorial are of the belief that the female human should be sacrificed on the altar of patriarchy's needs. The subjugation of female gender is demonstrated in specific institutions created and preserved to retain women in humiliation and "in painful sisterhood" (Nnemeka, 2007, p. 573). Among the male created organizations in Nigeria that are undermining women's position and contributions are: the institution of sexual intercourse, marriage, motherhood and love. Such types of marginalization persist, despite the gain in the rights of women in areas that were totally men dominated before, because the status of women as perceived by radical feminists, is that of segregated group. To ascertain the truth of this, Kate Millet (1973, p. 385) succinctly expresses:

Oppressed groups are denied education, economic independence, the power of office representative, and image of dignity and self-respect, equality of status, and recognition as human beings. Throughout history, women have been consistently denied all these, and their denial today, while attenuated and partial is nevertheless consistent.

The implication of Millet's position is seen in the light that the oppression of women is purposively planned. A close examination of the sterling progress of women development over the years is enough for no institutions, whatsoever, to still relegate them to servitude.

Dare's fiction continues the castigation of the unwholesome practices of chauvinistic society in Nigeria. When one casts one's mind back to the age long psychological trauma, deprivation, and discrimination (Sigmund, 1970) that the female folks are still suffering in the twenty-first century, one comes to the



understanding that, all the robust intellectual productions, which have caused much ink to flow from the womanist/feminist practitioners, have not had effect on the male hegemony. Put simply, it is not healthy to acknowledge that women's victimization has been forgotten over time. It continues to be a thought provoking debate each time the concept of oppression, subjugation, marginalization and stereotypes come up in academic circle.

Adichie's advocacy on her own part is that a woman- female- should start on the feminist premise that she is more important than any other class of humans. (Adichie, 2017, p. 2). Why is this novelist so radical in her views against women bemoaning the patriarchal persecution of the female gender? Adichie believes that Nigerian women over the centuries have suffered long enough in the hands of men. She posits that the time is now for women to take up radical steps to say no to whatever setbacks have kept them in one position for too long. She claims that the new female should not wail herself into pity, seeking for the universal sympathy from patriarchy, since the Nigerian male kingdom may not have such to give her. Adichie in *Dear Ijeawele, Or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017) portrays that the female child should be raised to have her own solid unbending feminist contextual beliefs. This implies that when the male- husband- chooses to settle for infidelity as an occupation, if his wife chooses to give him amnesty, it can be regarded as a feminist decision. However, that forgiveness for infidelity which the erring man may get from his wife is not master minded by what the novelist symbolizes as "gender inequality" (Adichie, 2017, p 2). Adichie does not succumb to the popular opinion of what she refers to as an erroneous absurdist belief of the Nigerian male dominated cultural views of seeing themselves superior to the female counterpart.

Dare's *The Girl with the Louding Voice* (2020) presents new feelings and waves moving across the rural and urban communities in Nigeria. Though this novel is written in the heart of the twenty-first century, it captures in details the emotional effect of a woman's continuous sacrifices to her home, husband and children in order to make things work out. Adunni states:

...Thirty thousand naira is very plenty money, I know Papa cannot find that money even if he is searching the whole of Nigeria because even my school fees money of seven thousand, Papa didn't have. It was Mama who was paying

for school fees and rent money and feeding money and everything money before she was dead. (Dare, 2020, p. 5)

The act of women being the major contributors in real life and fiction is not an issue that can be dismissed with levity. By Dare portraying this aspect of the woman's life through the eyes of an innocent uneducated girl – Adunni, invariably ridicules the ills of Nigerian men's total dependence on the women to be the harbinger of their families' economic resources. Abi Dare does so by making the society to realize that the time has come for men to wake up from their slumber and put things together for economic empowerment of their homes and societies. Chesaina affirms this aspect of women always standing in as the economic work force for their families when she succinctly depicts: "Women form the majority of the work force on land and in rearing of animals, but they are marginalized when decisions on the utilization of the produce are made. During droughts and famines, they are the ones who travel to work for neighbouring ethnic groups to bring back food for family. Culture demands that women serve food to the men first, then the children and themselves last" (2013, p. 214).

However, in Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele, Or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017), she strengthens her protagonist, Ijeawele, to dwell with the profound knowledge that Nigerian women have always, from the beginning of time, contributed to the workforce of every home. And that possibly explains and solicits for the females that celebrate what Milner (1994) refers to as: "Women's consciousness/culture" (Milner, 1994, p.113). In conjunction with supporting Milner's "Women's consciousness/culture," Moers (1987, p.67) earlier, had signified that to mean "Female Realism". By "female realism," Moers clearly elucidates that, the money making processes originally have always been the endearing qualities associated with the female subjects. This, therefore, means that it is wrong for Nigerian patriarchal culture to erroneously claim that wealth originates from them, because women are resources avenue, as far as human cultures are concerned. Adichie encourages Ijeawele to rebuff her sister-in-law's unpopular counsel to be a traditional wife/mother who should always stay at home. A close look at Ijeawele's sister-in-law viewpoint that Chudi is contented with the little he brings home, since it is not right for him to have a family with multiple income (Adichie, 2017, p. 3), reveals how

Adichie dismisses such illogical reasoning as being invalid where a typical Nigerian woman is concerned. Why?

Adichie explains explicitly that the use of the word “tradition” is just a general opinion to justify anything bias. She admonishes Ijeawele to enlighten her arrogant husband’s sister that:

a double-income family is actually the true Igbo tradition because not only did mothers farm and trade before British colonialism, trading was exclusively done by women in some Igboland...Our mothers worked full-time while we were growing up, and we turned out well- at least you did; the jury is still out on me. (2017, p. 4)

Dare frowns so much at the crafty devices of the Nigerian cultural setting where patriarchy believes that it is a thing of pride for women to constantly bear men at all points in time. The climax of such shameful act of men’s laziness and heartless dependence on the women’s economic and resourcefulness is portrayed when Adunni is taken to Big Madam’s house because she elopes from her forced marriage to Morufu (Dare, 2020, p.105). There in the city, she discovers that even among the educated that Big Daddy is, as Kofi, the chef whispers to Adunni:

Unrepentant alcoholic. Chronic gambler. He keeps getting into debt and making his wife bail him out. Shame of a man, if you ask me. Real shame. He is away on business, should be back later today. And when I say business, I mean woman business...He is a womanizer. He has girlfriends. Plenty of them. (Dare, 2020, p. 130)

A critical examination of the patriarchal structure in the traditional Nigerian communities indicates that African Feminism would not be considered radical. Unlike the Western and American women, feminism to them is accepted as the total subjugation of the female folks in the areas of vocational/ and job opportunities, and so on. But when we look at the African-American and African women, feminism to them is a theory that highlights peculiarities of race, class, and culture. It is based on such requirements that the American and Western Feminism failed to provide a predictable appeal to the African women. The reason for this is on the basis that African women practice and believe in heterosexual relationships. They trust so much in marriage and motherhood for the continuity of their posterity. A little wonder why Big Mummy and Adunni’s late mother could manage with their

dependent spouses because they do not want to estrange their marriages. In fact, to confirm the fore-goings, Andrienne Rich (1976) buttresses that: "...the African womenfolk are not interested in estranging themselves from the bulk of the African formulated tradition-sisterhood; since many of the African traditional belief systems – customs and values are worth preservation" (Rich, 1976, p. 56). Further assessment of the issue confirms Alice Walker's (1983) position on "Womanism" as: "...a philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womanhood," its aim is "the dynamism of wholeness and self-healing..." (p. 231).

By still deconstructing the patriarchal dependence on the Nigerian women, the study equally employs "irony" as a literary tool. The word "irony" according to Frye, Baker and Perkins (1985, p. 250) originates from the Greek word *eironia*. It represents the arrangement of speech and behavior of a group of persons in the initial Greek comedy. The *eiron* was originally, an individual who by communicating, fabricated to be someone who was less intelligent, humble, simple, and of course, overcame the self-deceiving, bullying- *alazon*- stupid who made an attempt to accomplish his ends through exaggeration and deception. In literary field, the term 'irony' is merged in literature to postulate the difference existing between that which is avowed and what is finally accepted, or a kind of dissembling. The Greek stock character, the *eiron* was viewed as the natural and antagonist of the other stock figure – the *alazon*.

Having specified the origin of the word "irony", Douglas Muecke (1969, p. 53) depicts 'irony' as the type available in every field and claiming to be a way of: Speaking or writing, acting, behaving, painting, etc. in which the real or intended meaning presented or evoked is intentionally quite other than, and incompatible with the ostensible or pretended meaning. (The 'real meaning' may be the contrary of the pretended meaning or it may be no more than a hinting at a mental reservation...). From the reader's point of view, the irony depends upon felt incongruity of both meanings. It is too subtle, occulted, or impenetrable (for him) if the real meaning never appears, and it falls short of irony if the pretended meaning has no force.

But Holman and Harmon (1986, p. 264) succinctly describe irony as: "a broad term referring to the recognition of reality different from appearance." It is important to note that ironic situations can reveal the outlook of meanings in literary works, up

to the extent of portraying connotations which the novelists did not originally intend. However, by examining *The Girl with the Louding Voice* (2020) and *Dear Ijeawele, Or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017), there is a clear deployment of irony for its corrective, critical and perhaps, educative purposes, to align with what Charles Nnolim (2005, p. 131) calls “deflation”. Dare and Adichie reveal the two sides of the ironic nature by accepting such as the evaluative weapon to expose the double antithetical figures/ characters – *Eiron* and *Alazon* –in their fiction. Frye, Baker and Perkins earlier mentioned state a contrast in favour of *Eiron* due to his noble disposition. Furthermore, it is the other *Alazonian*, which is vice, that is the critical weapon, purposing attacking negative characters in novels, while the *Eiroman* applauds characters with virtue.

This said contrast is projected in the novels through the interface of what may be described as the weak and the ideal types of characters, families and marriages. For example, the under listed characters in Dare’s (2020) novel – Adunni’s father (Dare, 2020, pp. 3-9, 90); Morufu (Dare, 2020, pp. 31-45); Bamidele (Dare 2020, pp. 74-81); Khadija’s father (Dare 2020, pp. 39, 50, 56); Baba Ogun, Kike’s husband (Dare, 2020, p. 64); Big Daddy (Dare, 2020, pp. 130, 140, 150-152, 191-193); Labake (Dare, 2020, pp. 34, 38-39, 42, 49, 52-53, 59-62, 69); Big Madam, Chief Mrs. Florence Adeoti (Dare, 2020, pp. 137-141, 143, 160-169, 170-173; 253-254); Ms Tia’s mother-in-law (Dare, 2020, pp. 255-266); Mother Tinu (Dare, 2020, pp. 260-265); Mr. Kola (Dare, 2020, p.275); as well as some of the female characters delineated by Adichie’s (2017) novel – Chudi’s sister (Adichie, 2017, p.3); Nwabu’s wife (Adichie, 2017, p.7); all belong to the weak, negative, crafty, and dubious set of characters who work assiduously to flaw the characters with positive virtues. These characters in the first group are categorized as evil and deadly because each of them is an embodiment of marital vices. They are epitomes of backwardness in that they sell out their female children to early marriages at the expense of satisfying their indolent desires. Kike, Morufu’s daughter, confirms this assertion when she bitterly complains to Adunni, her father’s third wife, that their culture prefers to send all the male children to school, as well as train them on vocations, which might allow them to live independent lives. But that is not the case with female children, whom their fathers are marry them off at tender ages – from fourteen years old (Dare, 2020, p. 64).

A close look at Kike’s statement projects the reality of chauvinist practices of bias and discrimination against the female children in Nigerian society. Adunni argues on why it should be she (Adunni), that must be auction to old Morufu, the taxi driver, to enable her father to pay the “community rent of thirty thousand naira” (Dare, 2020, p.5). Of course, Adunni is wiser in her reasoning to realize that men are not that generous in their dealings with women, most especially, where it bothers on finances; except as Adunni rightly observes: “... unless he is wanting something...” (Dare, p. 5). To douse Adunni’s sharp thinking, her father immediately put it up to her that the money for rent which he, (Adunni’s father) had collected from Morufu, is Adunni’s dowry (Dare, p. 5). This implies that, her father chooses to collect “owo-ori” from Morufu rather than keeping the dying wife’s promise. Adunni reminiscences:

My throat tight itself as I hear her voice in my head now, the faint and weak of it, as she was begging Papa to don’t give me to any man for marriage if she die of this sickness. I hear Papa’s voice too, shaking with fear... ‘stop this nonsense dying talk. Nobody is dying anything, Adunni will not marry any man, you hear me? She will go to school and do what you want, I swear to you’.... (Dare, 2020, p. 9)

On the other hand, the characters with good virtues or positive attributes include: Mama-Adunni’s mother (Dare, 2020, pp. 5, 6, 9, 17, 64-65); Ms Tia (Dare, 2020, pp. 165-235; 255; 270-273) and Iya (Dare, 2020, pp. 77-87; 106-109; 113).

From the perspective of Adichie’s “Seventh Suggestion,” she cautions her friend, Ijeawele, to be weary of raising Chizalum Adaora with the popular Nigerian traditional belief of accepting marriage as an accomplishment. Adichie warns her friend to ensure that the girl- child does not grow up with the mentality that she cannot survive outside marriage (Adichie, 2017, pp. 20-21). The novelist vehemently disagrees with man-made-tradition which conditions girls to always aspire to marriage and fails at conditioning boys to also aspire to marriage. She solicits that such cultural practices create a terrible gender imbalance at the start. She argues further that, girls always grow up “to be women preoccupied with marriage. The boys will grow up to be men who are not preoccupied with marriage” (Adichie, 2017, p. 21). The overall implication of what the novelist is advocating is that women end up marrying men, who right from the beginning, do not have any sense of marital



responsibilities groomed in them. The uneven relationship bonding the women in the so-called marriages, placed them under untold agonies and responsibilities of carrying forward the burden of men, by sacrificing themselves out to make this imbalance institution-marriage- to work at all costs. Adichie strictly analyses: "...Is it any wonder that, in so many marriages, women sacrifice more, at a loss to themselves, because they have to constantly maintain an uneven exchange?" (Adichie, 2017, p. 21).

The ironic examinations of the unwholesome behavioral patterns of men are generally represented by Dare when she uses Adunni's father to expose the irresponsibility of most Nigerian men. He swore on the bed side of his dying wife- Adunni's mother- some years past that, he would not give out his daughter's hand to any man in marriage at the expense of her education (Dare, pp. 9, 23). But immediately his late wife was buried, he callously handed Adunni over in a forced marriage to the old polygamist, Morufu (Dare, pp. 12, 30-33). Another case in point which further explains the ironic nature of patriarchal falsehood and inconsistency is when Adunni runs to confide in her father, after Khadijah's death in Kere village, that Bamidele refused to bring a ritual soap as Adunni puts it:

...She have a man-friend, a lover. Bamidele is his name. He is a welder from Kere village. He give her pregnant and now he is leaving her to die because he didn't come back with soap to baff away evil curse (Dare, 2020, p. 89).

Here, Adunni expresses fear and doubt about her father's credibility to shield and perhaps, to defend her from being prosecuted, by what he (Adunni's father) describes as – "Khadija have her peoples, they must know that she is dead. The village chief must know that Khadija is dead. Morufu must know." (Dare, 2020, p. 90). A good sense of the power of reminiscence makes Adunni to recall a similar incident in the past in which her father failed. She states: "...Papa say nothing will happen to me, but Papa make a promise to Mama and he didn't keep the promise. How will he keep his promise now to save me from this troubles?" (Dare, 2020, p. 90). There is a kind of falsehood, in fact, a bridge of covenant in the negative set of characters.

Dare's character, Adunni's mother, and Adichie, the novelist, have the same mind towards the issue of marriage. These women, in life and in fiction, believe that the girl child should be allowed to mature first, be educated, learn the ways of life, before she is exposed to complex tasks, like marriage. In fact, Adichie frowns at the

society which always condition “girls to aspire to marriage and ...do not condition boys to aspire to marriage, and so there is already a terrible imbalance at the start” (Adichie, 2017, p. 21). These novelists are calling for a re-examination of the social strata of the Nigerian cultural values. This is the major reason Dare uses illiterate girl children- Adunni and Kike to castigate the patriarchal injustices done to the female folks. Adichie on her part, chooses the Epistolary genre to highly inform the upcoming mothers to ensure that they do not preach, and or force their girl children into accepting marriage by whatever standard, as a virtue.

Another character who acts negatively is Bamidele in Dare’s *The Girl with The Louding Voice* (2020). He craftily lures Khadija into an act of infidelity with him to accomplish his lust, infatuation and carnality. He confesses to Adunni in the dying state of Khadijah:

Khadija is my first love...Five years back, me and Khadija was doing love. Real love. We suppose marry yourselves...but her father fall sick, so he sell Khadija to Morufu to help them. Me, I didn’t have money that time. It pained me that they carry my love and give her to old Morufu, but I take it like a man...After four years of marrying Morufu, khadija come and find me. She say she love me. Me and her, we begin our love again...that baby in her stomach is for me. It is a boy inside. I know it (Dare, 2020, P.76).

The question Dare seems to be asking the present generation of Nigerian men is: Why are they (men) still engaging in pride and falsehood when they know it would be to the detriment of the progressing female folks? How could the man, Bamidele, destroy Khadija’s life by the stupid false claim: “My first love”? Dare, Khadija’s creator, gives space for her to die prematurely because of her moral depravity. The essence of her creator - Dare- eliminating her from the scene early by death, is to avoid contaminating those with noble virtues. Why should it be a woman signing the demise of the character of Khadija? It is to serve as a deterrent to the younger female folks that nature, culture, and humanity do not support adultery in Nigerian culture. Moreover, Dare posits that Morufu, Khadija’s real husband, is detrimental towards pushing her–Khadija- into striving out for what she could not get from him. He (Morufu) displays his ignorance:

...I marry the second wife, Khadija. Big mistake! Big mess! Why? Because Khadija is having three girls: Alafia, Kofo and I forget the name of the last

born now. No boy. Adunni your eyes are not blind, you can see very well that Khadija is carrying a new baby. I have warned her that if it is not a boy-child inside that stomach, her family will not collect food from me again. I swear I will kick her back to her hungry father's house. (Dare, 2020, P.37)

Reasoning should at this point inform Morufu that XY chromosome genes determinant for male and female children are only produced by the man (Llewellyn-Jones, 1998, p. 5). If Morufu, the man and husband, fails to produce the 'Y' chromosome responsible for a male child, should he then cause a poor and innocent woman to pay for his shortage? Again, a close look at Khadija's response to quickly succumb to the male – Morufu's, her husband and her lover, Bamidele's – intimidations, explains that female oppression and subjugation are issues which are prevalent with humanity. It means also that unless a human being is male, it connotes that such a being does not have the right to live. Morufu cautions Adunni on her wedding night when she newly arrives her husband – Morufu's home – stead:

Adunni, this is your new house...And in this house, I am having rule. There is respect of me. I am the king in this house. Nobody must talk back to me. Not you, not the children, not anybody, When I am speaking, you keep your mouth quiet. Adunni, that means you don't ask question in my front, you hear me? (Dare, 2020, p. 36)

It is rather disheartening that even in the twenty-first century, Nigerian men are still living in darkness of coercing the female beings. Why should the phase of humanity called men, be thinking towards intimidating women this much, without giving them the opportunity to be themselves and to live their lives freely? A close observation of this reveals that Morufu wants his new wife to live in total reference of him as a demi-god. He does not ever want Adunni to obtain her freedom, or to have a say in his home in particular, and in the culture at large.

Dare equally projects another pathetic state where a woman-Ms Tia's mother-in-law, (the likes of Big Madam), betrays her son's wife who by virtue of the female bonding, is good to be her own daughter. Dr. Ken's mother has been of the belief that Ms Tia, her daughter-in-law, is the cause of barrenness over the years. And that is why she is not raising children for her son, Ken (Dare, 2020, pp. 254-265). She takes it upon herself to scout for solution to the supposed problem which is not Ms Tia's own. She introduces Ms Tia to an archaic psychiatry- The Miracle

Centre at Ikeja in Lagos, Nigeria. It is at the so-called church, that Ms Tia receives the beatings of her life, in the pretense: “THE EVIL OF CHILDLESSNESS HAS BEEN CHASED OUT. PRAISE BE TO THE LIVING HIM” (Dare, 2020, p. 265). A close look at the irony employs here reveals what Ms Tia explains to Adunni directly after the ordeal of being beaten in that church: “...He cannot get me pregnant... His mother didn’t know. He didn’t tell anyone. Ken is infertile, unable to - He said because we’d briefly discussed not having kids, he didn’t think he needed to tell me ...” (Dare, 2020, p. 271).

If Ms Tia has already known that Ken, her husband, has low sperm count, and that he is not fertile enough to raise children, why did not she shout out? Why should she allow a problem that is not originally hers to make patriarchy and his cohort to bring so much traumatizing conditions- psychologically and physically and otherwise upon her? After all, if she were the one, Ken, the man cum husband, would not have taken it with levity. The agony, trauma and pains of such unjust beatings, which Ms Tia suffered through the wicked things those women are doing in the name of church (which Ken’s mother forcefully introduced Ms Tia to) provokes Adunni so much that she reasons beyond the ordinary illiterate girl, serving as a house-help to Big Mummy. She thinks aloud:

But there are words in my head, many things I want to say. I want to tell Ms Tia I am sorry I made her come here. I want to ask why the doctor didn’t come too? Why didn’t he come and get a beating like his wife? If it takes two people to make a baby, why only one person, the woman, is suffering when the baby is not coming? Is it because she is the one with breast and the stomach for being pregnant? Or because of what? I want to ask, to scream, why are the women in Nigeria seem to be suffering for everything more than the men? (Dare, 2020, p. 266)

Adunni avows to revenge the injustices committed against Ms Tia. And that is the main reason she reminds the reader that Mama had beautiful prospect of training her through Western education, to make Adunni, as she rightly puts: “I don’t just want to be having any kind voice ...I want a louding voice...” (Dare, 2020, p. 21). Adunni reflects upon her mother’s dying statement thus:

That day, Mama say, ‘Adunni, because I didn’t go to school, I didn’t marry my love. I was wanting to go outside this village, to count plenty money, to be reading many books, but all of that didn’t possible’...’Adunni, God knows I will use my last sweat to be sending you to school because I am wanting you to have chance at life. I am wanting you to speak good English, because in Nigeria, everybody is understanding English and the more better your speaking English, the more better for you to be getting good job...Your schooling is your voice, child. It will be speaking for you even if you didn’t open mouth to talk. It will be speaking till the day God is calling you home... (Dare, 2020, p. 21)

A close assessment of Adunni’s late mother’s position on female education, might be equated with Cixious belief, that women are the foundation of life, they are the spring of energy and power. Cixious (1997, p. 96) also claims that women are always in endless bonds with their mothers, who are innovative inventors of energy, strength and power. However, women have been given privileged connection to Feminine writing as a way of naturally relating to the unconstrained, blissful, liveliness of the female body that emphasizes the origin of life. Women writing might be regarded as representation of liberation. Women in their writings are clamoring for the rejection of patriarchal intelligent, which to others is typically perfect. According to Toril Mois’ (1985, p. 121) observation, it is pertinent to arbitrate that the ideal postulation is often always accepted as dependable motivation for feminist ideals.

By still considering the position of Cixious “écriture Feminine”, Luce Irigaray (1985) argues that in a patriarchal society, much of women’s coercion and subjugation occur in the nature of psychological cruelty endorsed through the medium of language. This means that women operate in a global universe in which virtually all meaning is completely defined by patriarchal language. This also culminates in situations whereby women do not communicate as active inventors of their own thoughts. Instead, they passively tend to duplicate already articulated ideas about them. Irigaray earlier mentioned, posits that for western philosophers, the woman is just a mirror of their own masculinity (1985, p. 54). This means that patriarchy has defined femaleness in terms of its multifarious needs, fears, and desires. It also explains that, when women are restricted to certain decisions- first, to remain silent on the grounds that, everything they say which do not have the approval

of or fit into the judgement of patriarchy might be regarded as meaningless and incomprehensible.

Secondly, women become compliant by imitating patriarchy's depiction of themselves, as it wants to see them – that is to act in the lesser roles which patriarchy clearly defines sexual difference to affirm male's dominance. Luce Irigaray (1985, p. 28), while buttressing on how women should sum up courage to overcome patriarchy, suggests that women should use the language which brings about common unity among gender. She advocates that the female being, should endeavor to ascertain the “woman speak” (p.2) medium to locate the female body, most importantly, when distinguishing between male and women sexual pleasures. Irigaray admits that the woman's sexual desire is enormously varied, complex, numerous, and elusive in variance, and is commonly functional (1985, p. 28). This means that when a woman sums up courage to speak in her own style, the male hegemony finds it difficult to discriminate the shrewdness of connotation. The “woman speak” has lexical complexity, opposing words and phrases which are made from the viewpoint of purpose, unfathomable for anyone who listens to them, with what Irigaray succinctly captures as “ready-made grids, with a fully elaborated code in hand” (1985, p. 29).

Lois Tyson (2006, p. 102) objects to Irigaray's (1985, p. 29) definition of “woman speak” as controversial in the sense that it appears to strengthen masculine stereotypes or even unscientific. The implication of Tyson's position is that one construction of women as illogical to view “woman speak” may be to consider the option that the former does not advocate that women do speak illogically; rather, that might be the way patriarchy views them. Patriarchal culture is spontaneously relating meanings solely to language that behaves in accordance to “patriarchal rules of logic than to linear thesis-oriented language” (Tyson 2006, p. 102). Further position of the language issue in women's writing (“*écriture féminine*”, Cixious, 1997, p. 96); (“woman speak” Irigaray, 1985, p.2), can be examined by what Julia Kristeva (1980, p. 133) rightly positions as stratified woman language because she believes that global culture misrepresents the female endless diversity and abandons them defenseless to the chauvinist's condemnation of women as naturally submissive, obviously expressive and psychologically unstable.



Josephine Donovan (1975, p. 77) by continuing the discourse on the essence of women's centered- language as a tool of talking back to patriarchy, ascertains that, the primary standards by which feminist scholars are adjudicating forms of literature is by what might be regarded as the total degree which validate possibilities of the women experiences. However, that is determined to process a condition which evaluates the genuineness of a literary declaration about women. In conjunction to the 'women's centered- language', Adichie (2017, pp. 22-25) solicits that every female should make it a choice to keep her maiden name even after marriage, because it will serve as her mark of identity throughout life. She claims:

I have kept my name because I like my name...There are people who say, 'Well, your name is also about patriarchy because it is your father's name.' Indeed. But the point is simply this: whether it came from my father or from the moon, it is the name I have had since I was born, the name with which I travelled my life's milestones, the name I have answered to since that first day I went to Kindergarten in Nsukka on a hazy morning and my teacher said, 'Answer "present" if you hear your name. Number one: Adichie"

In Adunni's case, what her late mother started and could not complete for her in terms of her education, is to make her have "a louding Voice" (Dare, 2020, pp. 21; 224); Ms Tia accomplishes it for Adunni. She takes it upon herself to train Adunni so that she could participate in the "SECONDARY SCHOOL SCHOLARSHIP SCHEME FOR FEMALE DOMESTIC WORKERS" (Dare, 2020, p. 155), which Kofi, the Chef- introduced her to Ms Tia works on Adunni's spoken and written English. And she, Adunni, learns so fast that when the case of injustice executed on Ms Tia came up, a day after the incident she states: "...I wish I could get those women arrested...That barbaric act must stop. It's bullshit" (Dare, p. 272). Ms Tia, at the end of it all, establishes a cordial relationship of myth of sisterhood with Adunni, and takes it upon herself to ensure that she, Adunni, gets the so much desired 'louding voice'. She promises Adunni that she would stand by her to ensure that she gets the much desired scholarship. Again, she determines to get Madam Florence arrested if she should resist Adunni's freedom from serving her as a house maid (Dare, 2020, p. 273).

Adunni's journey, from the remote village of Ikati to the city of Lagos in Nigeria, is symbolic of that transformation, which is part of her desire for the 'louding voice' which she and her late mother represent. Ms Tia is Dare's answer to the yearning

expectation of the female education and comfort of liberation in all sense of the word. Rather than joining forces with Big Madam to frustrate and truncate Adunni's dream of freedom and emancipation, Ms Tia works contrary to the expectations of her father, Morofu, her husband in Ikati, Mr. Kola who sold her to Big Madam, without returning to give her all the monies she has worked for in the latter's house. We witness an intellectual progression from the state of despair to that of glory. Adunni advancements from rejection, shame, suffering and agony of forced marriage to acceptance; from the state of hopelessness and unconsciousness resulting from fear and heartbreak caused by Khadija's sudden and mysterious demise in Kere village to a woman's care (Ms Tia); from illiteracy to sound formal education; and above all, from maid slavery to independence (Dare, 2020, p. 278).

Adichie, in the "Ninth Suggestion" of *Dear Ijeawele, Or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017), solicits for the proper training of the girl-child, Chizalum. She informs her friend, Ijeawele, to inculcate the virtue of self-confidence into the girl child so that she can grow up to think of herself importantly, above every other thing as: "a proud Igbo woman. And you must be selective – teach her to embrace the parts of Igbo culture that are beautiful and teach her to reject the parts that are not...say to her in different contexts and different ways, 'Igbo culture is lovely because it values community and consensus and hard work', and the language and proverbs are beautiful of great wisdom. But Igbo culture also teaches that a woman cannot do certain things just because she's a woman and that is wrong..." (Adichie, 2017, p. 28). The essence of admonishing Ijeawele to train up the girl child to be conversant with her cultural values is to empower Chizalum to take pride in the history of Nigeria. More so, the girl child should understand that Nigerian culture, represented in Igbo culture, victimizes the females. When she is imbued with such deep knowledge, she will live above patriarchal limitations by all standard.

While advocating for women to be given their full respect, Mugo Micere at the University of Nairobi in 2012, uses her poetry to enumerate the several roles which women play in the society. She divulges the extent to which patriarchal cultures flourish on subjugation and discrimination of women. She ascertains that women by all standards are the custodians of culture. This is clearly buttressed in Dare (2020, p. 109), where Iya, the old woman who is Adunni's late mother's friend, risks her life and comfort to ensure that Adunni is protected from destruction by her father and

other forces of tradition. This happens on the day Adunni ran to her after Bamidele wickedly allowed Khadija to die by the river in Kere village. She professes to her son Mr. Kola that Adunni "... must go today. This morning. Her papa will come back to find her here... I cannot let anything bad happen to Adunni. I make a promise to her mother years back, I will keep that promise till I die" (Dare, 2020, p. 109).

Speaking to confirm a deep sense of affiliation existing between women (mothers) and their children, an important question could be asked. Why? This question gets answered when one considers the fact that men (fathers) do not keep their own side of an agreement. Adunni's father, in *The Girl with The Louding Voice*, entered into a covenant with his dying wife not to force his daughter to get married early without giving her proper Western education (Dare, 2020, p. 9). But two days after the mother's demise, the irresponsible father married Adunni off to old Morufu. The inconsistencies of Nigerian men /husbands/fathers abridging the agreements are also displayed by Bamidele, who deliberately refused to carry out a certain ritual in Ikere river which could have preserved Khadija's life and her pregnancy (Dare, 2020, pp. 76-86). Further-more, Big Daddy, Adunni's master in Lagos, Nigeria, engages in pre-marital sexual intercourse with Rebecca (Dare, 2020, pp. 250; 277-279). The same Big Daddy makes sexual advances to little Adunni, the new housemaid (Dare, 2020, pp. 151; 191-192; 280-282). Moreso, he struggles to rape Adunni during the period Big Madam traveled to see her children at United Kingdom (Dare, 2020, p. 174). And above all, the big ingrate – Big Daddy – is equally known to have been keeping extra marital affairs with girls outside his marriage (Dare, 2020, pp. 203-204; 212-213).

The most pathetic of it all is documented when Kemi, Big Madam's sister, had an accident, and she (Big Madam) stays with Kemi at the hospital, the only thing that irresponsible fool of a husband could do, as Kofi the Chef states, has been to ignore his sister's-in-law critical condition in the hospital, and rather focuses on himself alone (Dare, 2020, p. 267). Little wonder Adunni becomes so infuriated with the attitude of these men that she desires to know how do Morufu, her forced-husband in Ikati, (Dare, 2020, p.6), and Big Daddy differ from one another? It is at that material time when Adunni discovers that Big Daddy is educated, while Morufu is not. However, Adunni comprehends that the two men are suffering from the appalling sickness of mind (Dare, 2020, p. 213). This singular realization of the state

of most Nigerian men and their dreadful practices is captured by Kofi, the chef. The novelist projects this to affirm that the time is now for the male kingdom to stop the game of irresponsible living since it profits a little.

In conclusion, the study posits that most men in Nigerian cultures are not generous in their dealings with women, most especially, where it bothers on marriages, child up-bringing, and so on. Adichie and Dare project men in their Nigerian cultures as being self-centered, uncertain, unreliable, callous, wicked-hearted, and lots more. It is also indicated that Nigerian men (fathers, husbands, uncles, brothers, and so on), find it difficult to keep their own side of agreement or testament. Cases in point have been projected in Dare (2020), where Adunni's father failed to keep the vow he made to Adunni's mother on her dying bed that he was not going to give out Adunni's hand in marriage at the expense of her education. More so, Bamidele lured Khadija to an untimely death because he could not stand by to help her after having impregnated her. Big Daddy in Lagos, Nigeria, laid such a thoughtless and useless lifestyle which made him squander his wife's resources on promiscuous living. Besides, Kola, Iya's son, is not left out in the category of falsehood. It is buttressed that after Kola collected what was supposed to be Adunni's wages from Big Madam, he never showed up again to check on the welfare of the servant girl he took to live with Madam Florence in Lagos.

The novelists use the negatives attributes of some characters (both male and female) to educate the Nigerian populace, on cases bothering on several injustices perpetrated by both males and females to their societies. Captivatingly, the novelists employ critical tools such as gender discourse and irony for the purpose of analyzing that both males and females have their own excesses of afflicting social injustices on people who are less than them in the social and economic status. The novelists have infused into their critical modes the sense of justices, whereby Ms Tia takes it upon herself to liberate Adunni from the shackles of patriarchy and matriarchy, by supporting her training towards having "a louding voice..." (Dare, 2020, p. 21).

Adichie on her part has put it up to the female-folks that they should learn to assert themselves to become significant in the Nigerian cultures where they matter. And secondly, their meticulous approaches have conscientiously awakened in the females, young and old, illiterate and educated, that sense of freedom from the restraints of injustices, which have since characterized their lives of servitude right

from time immemorial. The study concluded and recommended that female children should not be bullied into marriages when they are not economically empowered to compete with their contemporaries universally. The novelists posit that all sectors of the Nigerian society should recognize that the girl child is human, and as such should be given the opportunity to choose her life of independence.

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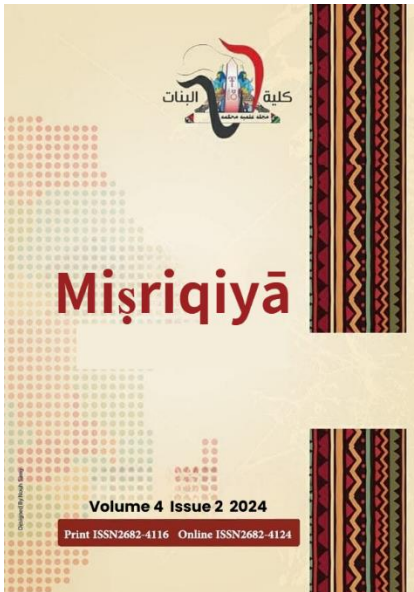
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## Exploring Third Space: Cultural Identity and African Traditions in August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1988)

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### Abstract

African American writers construct African traditions within American society to help African Americans form a new, empowered identity. Reclaiming such an identity requires reconstructing the erased cultural traditions. This paper focuses on how Homi Bhabha's concept of the third space enables August Wilson to empower African Americans by introducing their cultural elements within the mainstream American culture. For African American playwrights, the concept of the third space provides a framework for understanding the complexity and fluidity of African American cultural identity. Also, it highlights the transformative potential of the encounter between African and American cultures. By exploring the third space, African American playwrights can challenge dominant narratives and redefine identity in hybridization. The paper applies the idea of third space to August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1988). In his plays, August Wilson introduces the concept of the third space where African Americans can freely practice their African traditions and form their new hybrid identities. He empowers African Americans by bringing African traditions and heritage on the stage to help them recognize themselves as Africans and Americans. In his play, Wilson creates a liminal space for his characters to enable them to practice their cultural heritage and connect with their ancestors. Performing cultural heritage in the liminal space represents the power of human connections and highlights personal transformation.

*Keywords:* Homi Bhabha, hybridity, liminality, interculturality, empowering

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For African American writers, the idea of cultural identity requires a search for the forgotten past of African Americans. The reclamation of such identity has been achieved through reconstructing the erased cultural tradition. African American writers confirm that reconnection with one's ancestors is essential in understanding and strengthening the present. Thus, they emphasize retrieving African traditions from the American landscape to achieve the self-validity of black people in American society. They construct African tradition within American culture to help African Americans form a new hybrid identity in a liminal third space and enable them to be part of American society. The concept of the third space provides a framework for understanding the complexity of African American cultural identity and its representation in American society. It highlights the transformative potential of the encounter between African and American cultures and captures the fluidity of the African American experience and its hybridity. Thus, by exploring the third space, African American playwrights can challenge dominant narratives and redefine the notion of identity for African Americans.

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha (1994) introduces the concept of the third space to provide a framework for understanding the complex dynamics of cultural identities in postcolonial studies. He defines the third space as a space where different cultures, identities, and ideas interact, and people navigate between their original culture and the dominant culture of their society. In other words, it is a space of negotiation and contestation where marginal identities are reconstructed by exposing them to multiple cultural elements, which help them develop a hybrid identity (pp. 36-8). Therefore, the third space refers to the dynamic cultural transformation. In this sense, the concept of the third space is essential in African American drama, where the intersection of race, culture, and history plays a significant role in shaping narrative and performance.

The concept of the third space in African American drama highlights the complexities of African American identity, history, and tradition. Accordingly, it helps to create a new transformative identity by challenging the conventional notion of race, gender, class, and identity. According to Bhabha (2009), the third space disrupts the binary opposition of colonizer/colonized and center/margin. It



opens a space for negotiating cultural differences between the colonizer and the colonized, producing a new cultural identity. It is “a moment of enunciation, identification, negotiation – that was suddenly divested of its mastery or sovereignty in the midst of markedly asymmetrical and unequal engagement of forces” (p. x). This moment enables two cultures to interact and construct a different cultural identity.

Cultural identity is constructed through interaction with other human beings, which leads to some plurality in identities even in the same society (Dervin, 2012, pp. 183-4). Such plurality challenges the dominant narratives and power structures by providing a space of ambiguity and difference. This space challenges the essential notion of identity by highlighting the fluidity of identities in which cultural identities are not fixed (Bhabha, 1994, p. 37). For Bill Ashcroft (2009), “no culture is static, but is a constant process of hybrid interaction and change.” This is the third space where the process of appropriation and transformation occurs, and the third space becomes a space of resistance and sharing (p. 116). The interculturality in the third space leads to “the revival of traditional cultural and religious practices or even the creation of new identities to maintain continuity” (Dervin, 2012, p. 184). Therefore, the interaction between African culture and tradition and the dominant culture gives African Americans a space to represent themselves within American society.

Such space gives voices to marginalized groups and enables African Americans to challenge the traditional representation of identity and culture by creating a liminal space beyond the binaries of black and white. This traditional representation creates a fixed and repeated stereotypical image. Stereotype is an essential tool for making Others. According to Stuart Hall (1997), it is a “part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order” that is designated to exclude the Other and different (p. 258). In this sense, liminality enables social interactions and self-construction by providing a space to stand outside the center and challenge its authority. Bhabha (1994) remarks that the in-betweenness space enhances the question of culture’s representation of difference. In this sense, the boundary that marks the nation’s selfhood is interrupted (p. 184). Therefore, he remarks that this liminality allows marginal groups to speak and represent themselves.

Accordingly, creating a liminal space on the stage helps African American playwrights challenge the dominant narrative and stereotype by creating a new

hybrid identity. This new hybrid identity develops from the cultural negotiation of the center and margin. In this context, Neil Lazarus (2004) states that Bhabha's third space is "a fighting term, a theoretical weapon, which intervenes in existing debates and 'resist' certain political and philosophical construction" (p. 4). Such resistance occurs by interrogating the legitimacy and validity of the essentialist cultural identity. It can liberate marginal groups psychologically and spiritually. Therefore, the third space decolonizes the mind of the colonized by concentrating on the formation of subjectivities in the in-between space of cultural encounters between the colonized and the colonizer (Bhandari, 2022, p. 174). It enables the marginalized to create a hybrid identity.

Bhabha underlines that the third space is not merely a space of negotiation but a positive and empowering space (Ikas & Wagner, 2009, p. 2). It is a space where hybrid identity is constructed, and the dominant cultural authority is challenged. This empowering nature of the third space inspires marginal individuals to rethink cultural boundaries and embrace the potential of in-betweenness, where cultural traditions and heritage can negotiate and challenge the mainstream. Therefore, traditional culture and knowledge can be refashioned by the effect of cultural resources of another place. Bhabha (1994) calls this process "restaging the past" (p. 3). Such an act does not recall the past "as a social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The past-present becomes part of necessity, not the nostalgia of living" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 7). This in-betweenness not only disrupts the notion of past and present but also challenges the fixed notion of identity and offers new possibilities for self-definition. It challenges the limits of self and determines what is liminal in the cultural representation of other peoples, times, languages, and texts (Bhabha, 2009, p. xiii).

Therefore, hybridization is an empowering process that disrupts the purity and authenticity of the culture. This process creates what Bhabha (1994) calls "the third space of enunciation," in which the in-between space provides "the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity and innovate sites of collaboration, and contestation, in act of defining the idea of society itself" (pp. 1-2). In this sense, Bhabha asserts that culture automatically implies difference, and the third space is a response to the intervention of people's daily lives. Thus, the space of in-betweenness or liminality creates new cultural meanings where people can feel connected.

In African American drama, writers attempt to create alternative spaces in which black culture and identity can be explored. Such alternative spaces help African Americans create multiple discourses to overcome marginality (Dixon, 1986, p. 2). These spaces are marked as liminal, a threshold between two different states (such as the binaries of black and white and margin and center). In this sense, the margin acts as a threshold, in which liminality can be understood in Du Bois's concept of "double consciousness." Double consciousness, hence, refers to the internal conflict African Americans experience as they navigate their dual identities within their society. Thus, inhabiting a liminal space enables African Americans as a marginal group to become more adaptive and empowered. Victor Turner (1995) explains liminality as a state where the individual can claim his/herself by moving in an ambiguous state called the threshold stage. He states, "Liminality is thus the in-between and marginal state, in which an individual resides before becoming integrated into his or her new position in society" (p. 125). Thus, the liminality opens up the possibility of creating different social positions, encouraging the marginal to resist the dominant culture.

African American playwrights challenge the dominant culture in this liminal space by introducing African traditions, rituals, music, history, and stories. In this sense, the liminal space helps them redefine the dynamic relationship between the center and the margin and between African tradition and American mainstream culture. Thus, individuals in the liminal space are "betwixt and between" (Turner, 1995, p. 95), in which this space redefines the concept of unity, authenticity, and origin. In this sense, African American drama often uses rituals and ancestral connections to create a liminal space, disrupt binary thinking, and allow cultural mixing.

Like other African American playwrights, August Wilson engages with the concept of the third space to explore themes of identity, belonging, and power dynamics. He navigates the complexities of African American traditions, the historical legacy of slavery, and the contemporary realities of racial discrimination and social inequality in the United States. Wilson's characters inhabit a space that is neither purely African nor American but rather a complex state between cultural heritage and the American dominant culture. In his plays, Wilson emphasizes retrieving African traditions from the American landscape to achieve the self-validity of black humanity. He suggests that drama can help African Americans to understand the importance of celebrating their heritage. In his interview with David Savran (2006), Wilson asserts:

All art is political. It serves a purpose. All my plays are political but I try not to make them didactic or polemical. Theater does not have to be agitprop. I hope that my art serves the masses of blacks in America who are in desperate need of a solid and sure identity. I hope my plays make people understand that these are African people, that is why they do what they do. If blacks recognize the value in that, then we will be on our way to claiming our identity and participating in society as Africans (p. 37)

He considers African heritage a source of inspiration for African Americans. He confirms the possibilities they can realize when they reconnect with their ancestors and reach a deeper understanding of their present strength.

Accordingly, Wilson uses ritual and cultural elements to confront the negative stereotype. As his characters experienced much suffering in their lives because of slavery and racism, they face and overcome this suffering and stereotype by using African rituals and traditions in their daily life. Paul Carter Harrison (2002) states that black writers retrieve rituals from traditional folk life to illuminate the specific aspects of social experience that reaffirmed the presence of the human spirit struggling to overcome the conditions of oppression (p. 6). In this sense, Wilson attempts to unite the African American community despite poverty and oppression by recovering African cultural elements. He believes that without African traditions and rituals, the grandchildren of slaves will absorb the racist images formed by white culture. Thus, in Wilson's point of view, African ritualistic activities and indigenous heritage can give African Americans special power.

Kim Pereria (2007) asserts that Wilson's achievement lies in transforming black culture's stories, myths, language, and social rhythms into a vital drama registered in the national consciousness (p. 67). Therefore, the traditional aspects found in Wilson's plays articulate the demands of blackness through the performance of ritual elements that create a connection between actors and spectators, as well as African Americans and the dominant culture. Throughout this performance, Wilson explores his characters' unique entities to help them find new sides of themselves beyond the trauma of painful experiences. To achieve this goal, Wilson creates a space for his characters to practice their heritage and connect with their ancestor freely. This space helps them to heal, retrieve, and transform their identity. It also helps African Americans enter a new state of being, which heals and empowers them. Such space becomes liminal, according to Bhabha.

Using the concept of the third space in performance represents the power of human connection, allows internal cultural critique, and highlights personal transformation. bell hooks (1990) notes that we need to examine the factors that give life meaning despite deprivation, hardship, and despair. She adds, “The arts remain powerful means of cultural resistance, a space for awakening folks to critical consciousness and new vision” (p. 39). Thus, African cultural elements, such as music, storytelling, singing, and dancing, help African American writers resist the mainstream stereotype and liberate the path for African Americans to express their selfhood. In *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* (1988), using African traditions enables Wilson to unite African Americans and give them exceptional power.

In *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*, Wilson creates a third space that helps his characters tell their stories about the traumatic past of slavery and their present painful experience of racism. The boardinghouse in *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* represents a liminal space where the characters freely express their cultural heritage and tell stories about their past and present. By telling stories in familiar surroundings, they are spiritually empowered. Harry Elam (2009) explains that the tensions of African Americans can be solved by “confronting the past, finding room for forgiveness as well as resistance, remembering the ‘father’s story’ in ways to allow one to hold on but also let go” (p. 145). Creating a third space enables those characters to fulfill this goal.

*Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* reveals the African American experience of the Great Migration, a transitional phase in American history. It takes place in the 1910s, in which most of the blacks were deprived of their cultural practices because of the legacy of slavery. Slavery destroyed their identity and their sense of self-worth. The play presents the struggles former slaves faced in their migration to the North, searching for a new life and new identity. The protagonist, Herald Loomis, recently released from forced labor on Joe Turner’s plantation, arrived at Seth’s boardinghouse searching for his wife. Loomis was deeply traumatized and lost connection to his past and cultural tradition. In the boardinghouse, he meets several characters; one of them is the conjurer man, Bynum. Bynum helps Loomis to reconnect with his true self by connecting to his African culture and tradition. Although Loomis believes he is searching for his wife, Bynum lets him see that he is searching for his lost identity.

For Wilson's characters, the third space is a space to communicate, assert their identities, and resist the existing power structure. In *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, the boardinghouse becomes a third space for the African Americans who have migrated from the South to the North, searching for work and a better life. These characters are in a state of transition. At the beginning of the play, Wilson (1988) describes them in this crossroad:

They arrive carrying Bibles and guitars, their pockets lined with dust and fresh hope, marked men and women seeking to scrape from the narrow, crooked cobbles and the fiery blasts of the coke furnace a way of bludgeoning and shaping the malleable parts of themselves into a new identity as free men of definite and sincere worth (The play's setting).

The boardinghouse represents a liminal space where North and South, city and country, and past and present collide. It brings together a diverse group of characters who are all in a transitional state and seeking to integrate a new identity. Each character represents a unique aspect of the African American experience and reflects the complexities of their identity.

The boardinghouse is a liminal space where the characters can express their experiences. For example, Jerney, one of the boardinghouse residents, expresses his experience of being arrested for doing nothing except having black skin. In Wilson's dramatic world, nothing is about one person. Even when the focus seems to be on a single character, Wilson captures the African experience and releases it back into the world. Mary Bogumil (2007) asserts that Wilson does not write about victims or martyrs; he writes about ordinary black people in American society, "living lives whose value does not depend on their political or social roles nor in their historic function but on their human qualities, sustained, as they are, by an awareness of shared myths, a shared language, a shared fate, a shared humanity" (p. 60). Those ordinary people can share their experiences in a liminal space.

The play explores how the characters in the boardinghouse navigate this liminal space and struggle to define themselves. In Wilson's plays, African cultural ritual highlights the importance of African rootedness throughout the restoration of history and the reconstruction of blackness. In *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, Wilson illustrates that the boardinghouse residents, Seth, Bertha, Bynum, Molly, Mattie, Jeremy, and Herald and Zonia Loomis, meet at the crossroads and connect with their ancestors through African dance and other African rituals. Elam (2009) remarks that Seth's boardinghouse is a liminal space,



a blues matrix, “betwixt and between.” The boardinghouse, he adds, “serves as a way station for African Americans during the great migration from the South to find work” (p. 34). Most of the boardinghouse residents, especially the young ones – Molly, Mattie, Jeremy, Herald, and Zonia Loomis – are searching for their self-identity in American society, so they come to the boardinghouse to define and redefine their cultural identity and connect with their ancestors, which is essential for their survival. Seth, the boardinghouse owner, explains this idea at the beginning of Act I:

These niggers coming up here with that old backward country style of living. It’s hard enough no without all that ignorant kind of acting. Ever since slavery got over with there ain’t been nothing but foolish-acting niggers. Word get out they need men to work in the mill and put in these roads ... and niggers drop everything and head North looking for freedom .... But these niggers keep on coming. Walking ... riding ... carrying their Bibles. That boy done carried a guitar all the way from North Carolina. What he gonna find out? What he gonna do with that guitar? This the city (Wilson, 1988, pp. 5-6)

The boardinghouse allows its residents to reconnect with their heritage and transform their identity. It plays this role because of Bynum, the heritage keeper, whom Wilson describes as “*a conjure man, or rootworker, he gives the impression of always being in control of everything. Nothing ever bothers him*” (p. 4).

In the boardinghouse, Bynum tells other characters the story about his father and “the shiny man.” This story paves the way for other characters to confront their problem by connecting to their heritage. He asks Rutherford Selig, the people finder, to find the shiny man because he knows the secret of life. Selig tells him, “The only shiny man I saw was the Nigras working on the road gang with the sweat glistening on them (p. 8). For Bynum, the shiny man is someone else; he is not an ordinary man. He tells Selig, “Naw, you’d be able to tell this fellow. He shine like new money” (p. 8). For Wilson, the shiny man symbolizes African traditions and helps African Americans to be empowered by connecting to these traditions. Amanda Rudolph (2009) explains that Wilson is comparing the shiny man and the African god Ogun to introduce the shiny man as a god and as a higher power influencing Bynum and others (p. 107). The shiny man, as a representative of African traditions, can help African Americans overcome the oppression of the past.

After meeting the shiny man, Bynum finds his song. The song here symbolizes the true and authentic identity. He explains:

I turned around to look at this fellow and he had this light coming out of him. I had to cover my eyes from being blinded. He shining like new money with that light. He shined until all the light seemed like it seeped out of him and then he was gone (Wilson, 1988, p. 9)

After the shiny man disappeared, Bynum saw the spirit of his father, who taught him how to find his song. Bynum asked his father who the shiny man was. The father replied that he was the “One Who Goes Before and Shows the Way” (p. 10). Sandra Richards (1999) emphasizes that the story of the shiny man echoes the “Yoruba gods and Ogun and Esu ... who encourages fellow travelers to claim their predestined song in life” (p. 92). For Wilson, finding one’s song is essential to claim the black identity and survive in the dominant culture. As the shiny man helps Bynum connect with his ancestors and see things “bigger than life” (Wilson, 1988, p. 9), Bynum can help others connect with their traditions and find their empowered identities. Therefore, in the liminal space of the boardinghouse, Bynum encourages Loomis to find his song, which is his extraordinary power.

Loomis has lost his spiritual connection to his ancestors and the black community because of his experience as a slave. He is searching for his identity; the only way to find it is to reconnect with his ancestors and cultural heritage. For Wilson, African Americans need to claim their “African-ness” to be stronger people (Savran, 2006, p. 37). Loomis’s crisis lies in his sense of fragmentation and loss. After he becomes a free man, Loomis starts searching for his wife. Finally, he reaches the boarding house with his daughter, where he meets Bynum. Bynum symbolizes the collective African ancestors, as Samuel Hey (2007) remarks, “who made sure that people obeyed ancestral traditions of good and evil, and cleansed themselves of all abominations” (p. 95). Bynum’s power lies in his ability to connect and bend people. He is always highly concerned with looking deep inside other characters and discovering each one’s problem in an attempt to solve it. He explains:

I had the Binding Song. I choose that song because that’s what I have seen most when I was traveling ... people walking away and leaving one another. So I takes the power of my song and binds them together.... Been binding people ever since. That’s why the call me Bynum. Just like glue I sticks people together (Wilson, 1988, p. 10)

Bynum bends people together and helps them bend with their African traditions to heal and transform.

Songs and music are essential in connecting African Americans with their cultural heritage. By using music, Wilson reconnects African Americans to the past and present. Elam (2009) points out, “Music has its own time, matter, rhythms, but the narrating of music in time also connects to concept of memory and allows us to imagine and remember times” (p. 29). Wilson illustrates how singing and dancing help African Americans deal with historical trauma. Singing and dancing are the significant cultural aspects of *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*. In Act I Scene 4, After Sunday dinner, the boardinghouse residents, except Loomis, engage in Juba dance, which Wilson (1988) describes as:

*The Juba is reminiscent of the Ring Shout of the African Slaves. It is a call and response dance. Bynum sits at the table and drums. He calls the dance as others clap hands, shuffle and stomp around the table. It should be as African as possible, with the performers working themselves up into a near frenzy. The words can be improvised, but should include some mention of the Holy Ghost (original emphasis, p. 52)*

Wilson writes about African traditions, such as the Juba dance, to emphasize the connection with the past, heal the trauma of this past, and empower the new generation.

During the dance, Loomis enters, but he is not ready to engage with others because he does not yet know his identity. However, this ritual helps Loomis remember a vision of bones rising from the water and walking across it. He tells Bynum:

I come to this place ... to this water that was bigger than the whole world. And I look out ... and seen these bones rise up out the water. Rise up and begin to walk on top of it .... Walking without sinking down. Walking on top of the water (Wilson, 1988, p. 53)

The bones symbolize the African slaves who died in the Middle Passage. They represent the spirit of black people. Loomis tells Bynum that these bones “got flesh on them. Just like you and me! .... They black. Just like you and me. Ain’t no difference” (p. 54). For African Americans, the Middle Passage is a psychological threshold characterized by ambiguity and openness. Through it, the slaves lost their former African identities. Paul Gilroy (1992) states that the Middle Passage functioned as a liminal site of ambiguity and indeterminacy. However, slaves did not enter into complete possession of a new and higher status

of identity. Instead, they were forced by the structures of slavery and economics that confronted them on arrival in the New World to remain in an in-between state. He remarks, “The slaves’ situation became permanently liminal” (p. 58). In this sense, Loomis cannot stand up on his feet until he reconnects with the spirit of his ancestors.

Accordingly, this vision refers to the slaves who died in the Middle Passage and African Americans who were denied their African cultural traditions. In other words, it expresses the soul of black people. Elam (2009) states, “Wilson depicts black people in liminal space, displaced, disconnected from their history, separated from their individual identity and in search for spiritual resurrection and socio-political reconnection” (p. 29). In this sense, creating a liminal space on the stage allows Wilson to explore the interplay between history and contemporary reality and individual and collective identities. Wilson’s characters often find themselves caught between their cultural heritage and the pressure of assimilation in a society that renders them invisible. That is why Wilson brings African ritual dance to the American stage. He depicts how African Americans live in the new culture by clinging to their cultural heritage and reviving the past. In an interview with Kim Powers (1984), Wilson explains Loomis’s vision and how it connects to his identity. Wilson remarks that the vision is his connection with his ancestors, the Africans who were lost during the Middle Passage and were thrown overboard. Wilson adds:

He is privileged to witness this because he needs most to know who he is. It (the vision) is telling him, “This is who you are. You are these bones. You are the sons and daughters of these people. They are walking around here now and they look like you because you are these very same people. This is who you are” (Powers, 1984, p. 54)

The boarding house's liminality allows the characters to call on the spirits of those people to help Loomis in his journey to find his lost identity.

Loomis’s journey emphasizes that finding his lost identity is connected to his awareness of African traditions and spirituality. Thus, Loomis needs to deal with his traumatic past and forgotten African identity. Wilson asserts that music, especially the blues, can help African Americans deal with their traumatic past and connect with their cultural heritage. Blues Music functions as a vehicle for cultural transmission and remembrance. The blues songs serve as the African Americans’ response to slavery. These songs can connect the past and the present. In Wilson’s plays, music is woven into the cultural identity. It derives from the

African American traditions and slave tales. Thus, the recognition of music and the reaffirmation of the song are crucial to integrating African Americans with their African past and their spiritual and cultural roots.

After articulating Loomis's vision, Bynum starts singing a blues song that African American women first sang to reflect their pain and suffering when Joe Turner captured their husbands:

They tell me Joe Turner's come and gone  
 Ohhh Lordy  
 They tell me Joe Turner's come and gone  
 Ohhh Lordy  
 Got my man and gone  
 He come with forty links of chain  
 Ohhh Lordy (Wilson, 1988, p. 67)

The song makes Loomis unstable because it reminds him of his experience at Joe Turner's plantation. However, Bynum uses this song to start his process of healing Loomis's spiritual sickness. Bynum has excellent power to fix things by using the right song. In Bynum's opinion, if you have a song "kicking in your chest" (p. 22), you are reconciled with yourself. For Bynum, being unable to find your song means you are lost and cannot find your way in life. Bynum wisely diagnoses Loomis's problem, "Now I can look at you, Mr. Loomis, and see you a man who done forget his song. Forget how to sing it. A fellow forget that and he forget who he is. Forget how he's supposed to mark down life" (p. 71). The connection between Loomis and Bynum is inevitable for the action. Bynum paves the way for Loomis to find his song by forcing him to remember his past and forgive it. Wilson's characters are depicted as needing to discover their songs to get their freedom and overcome their sense of alienation and dislocation. This is only possible in the liminality of the third space of the boardinghouse.

Accordingly, traditional music and songs are artistically intended to help characters overcome their dilemma and griefs. They use blues to empower themselves in their new society. Wilson connects his characters' songs with their ability to go on in their lives. In this sense, when Loomis finds his song, he finds his wife, Martha. But Loomis realizes he cannot reunite with her and still feels lost. At this moment, Martha mentions the blood sacrifice, referring to Jesus, and Loomis realizes that he can bleed for himself and needs no one to do it for him. Patric Tyndall (2004) remarks, "he falls back on the African Traditional Religions that led him to this point and gives him the strength to stand up" (p. 169).

Shedding his blood represents a kind of resurrection, which leads Loomis to his transformation. By connecting himself to the African tradition, Loomis finally becomes a freeman. Tyndall adds, “Loomis’s bloodletting is not violent, but rather a crucial sacrifice of lost Loomis, in favor of a shiny man. When Loomis exclaims that he is standing, this is the same thing as Loomis saying he has found his strong, African identity” (p. 170). By the ritual of sacrifice, Loomis realizes that his identity is also connected to African ancestors and American social history.

Throughout the play, Wilson asserts the impact of the blues on African Americans' lives. He believes that the music contains their ideas and genuine soul. So, when Savran (2006) asks him, “When Loomis finds his song, he can stand up again,” Wilson replies, “Yes” (p. 37). At the end of the play, Loomis declares himself a free man. He tells Bynum, “Everybody wanna bind me up. Well Joe Turner’s come and gone and Herald Loomis ain’t for no binding. I ain’t gonna let nobody bind me up!” (Wilson, 1988, p. 91). Bynum tells him he is not trying to bind him; instead, he binds his daughter with her mother. Then, Bynum asserts that Loomis is a free man because he finds his song: “You binding yourself. You bound onto your song. All you got to do is stand up and sing it, Herald Loomis. It’s right there kicking at your throat. All you got to do is sing it. Then you be free” (p. 91). Loomis’s crisis is ended when he admits his anger and lets it go. Although he rejects Martha's Christian belief, he agrees that her daughter Zonia must live with her mother to receive proper guidance. Finally, Loomis realizes the meaning of his life. He tells Martha, “Life don’t mean nothing unless it got a meaning” (p. 93). The meaning of his life is to realize that he belongs to the African and American cultures. This is the uniqueness of his identity and the source of his power. This realization helps him to stand up: “I’m standing! I’m standing. My legs stood up! I’m standing now” (93). Wilson (1988) comments:

*(Having found his song, the song of self-sufficiency, fully resurrected, cleansed and given breath, free man any encumbrance other than the working of his own heart and the bonds of the flesh, having accepted the responsibility for his own presence in the world, he is free to soar above the environs that weighed and pushed his spirit into terrifying contractions.)* (original emphasis, pp. 93-4)

Connecting to his cultural heritage empowers Loomis spiritually. Loomis’s transformation depends on his ability to negotiate both cultures in the third space, in which cultural identities are contested and evolved.



The deconstruction of cultural fixity in the ambivalent third space produces meaning for marginal individuals like Loomis. Stuart Hall (1994) remarks that the original culture of the individual has an essential role in shaping the self-perception. In his conceptualization of cultural identity, he affirms the role of historical references and common cultural backgrounds in the notion of “being and becoming.” The concept of being refers to the origin and similarities among a group of people, while the concept of becoming refers to the negotiation with the dominant culture. Both being and becoming conjointly create cultural identity. Our cultural identities, according to Hall, “come from somewhere, have histories ... they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous play of history, culture, and power” (p. 225). Loomis finally integrates himself and becomes a shiny man. Bynum says, “Herald Loomis, you shining! You shining like new money!” (Wilson, 1988, p. 95). This means that Loomis finds his African American identity, which is a mixture of African cultural tradition and American culture. He transcends his liminal existence by recovering his cultural heritage, which enables him to achieve his new social status as a free African American.

Being aware of his new identity helps Loomis to be self-empowered. Bhabha (1994) remarks that the position of authority may be part of the process of ambivalence. He points out, “The exercise of power may be politically effective and physically affective because the discursive of liminality through which it is signified may provide greater space for strategic maneuver and negotiation” (p. 145). This new space of negotiation helps both dominant and marginal groups to demonstrate the forces of social authority by decentering the strategies of signification. It also breaks the binary relationship between minority communities and majority societies to form a hybrid identity. In this sense, hybridity does not mean the mixing of self-contained cultural traditions but rather, as Andrew Smith (2004) states, “the recognition of the fact that all culture is an arena of struggle, where self is played off against the purportedly ‘other,’ and in which the attempts of the dominant culture to close and patrol its hegemonic account are threatened by the return of minority stories and histories, and by strategies of appropriation and revaluation” (p. 252). Accordingly, in *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*, Wilson brings ancestors’ traditions and ghosts to the stage to help his characters, especially young ones, redefine their identities as hybrid entities. Throughout mixing African heritage and the mainstream culture of American society, Wilson recreates and reshapes the African American identity.

The new identity is hybrid and empowered by the negotiation of African and American cultures.

To conclude, Bhabha's concept of the third space challenges the fixed notion of identity and offers new possibilities for self-definition. It provides a framework for African American playwrights to represent the uniqueness and complexity of African American cultural identity, in which it becomes a positive and empowering space. Throughout such space, African American dramatists challenge the traditional representation of identity and create a new transformative identity beyond the binaries of black and white. Inhabiting this space requires retrieving African culture and traditions and redefining concepts such as identity, unity, authenticity, and origin.

As an African American playwright, August Wilson uses the concept of the third space to explore themes of identity, belonging, and power dynamics, especially in his play *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*. Wilson attempts to unite the African American community and gives them extraordinary power by letting them practice their cultural heritage in the liminal space. Performing cultural heritage in this space represents the power of human connection and highlights personal transformation. In *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, the boardinghouse becomes a third space for African Americans who have migrated from the South to the North. The liminality of the boardinghouse allows its residents to express their experiences, define themselves, and create their new hybrid identity, where Herald Loomis integrates his new identity and becomes a free African American.

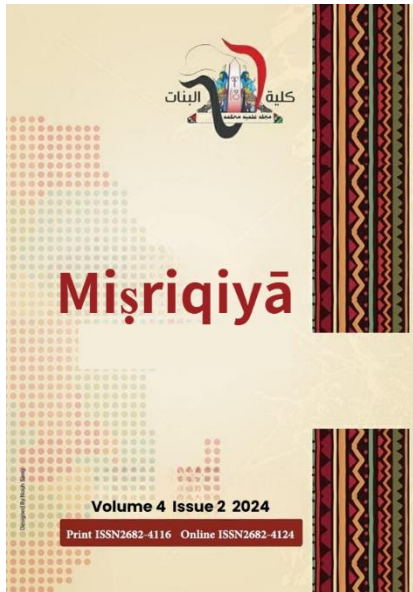
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## Iconography and Texts of the Headboard and Footboard of the Inner Coffin of Ta-Bes at the Egyptian Museum, Cairo

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### Abstract

This study discusses the iconography and texts that are depicted on the headboard and footboard of the anthropoid wooden coffin of Ta-Bes at the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, TR. 5/10/16/11, which has never been published before. Neither the provenance nor the date of this coffin was identified before this study. This coffin is distinguished by its yellow inscriptions on a black background. The present study will deal with the description of both goddesses Isis and Nephthys that are depicted on the headboard and footboard, translation of the texts, and then comment on the date, parallels, and provenance. This study concludes that the coffin can be dated to the late Twenty-fifth or early Twenty-sixth Dynasty and designated its provenance to Akhmim. Furthermore, the different representations of the two goddesses on the headboard and footboard of coffins from the same period have been discussed. In addition to, the religious purpose of the scenes. Finally, epigraphical notes will be made at the end of this paper to enhance the date of the coffin.

**Keywords:** Nephthys, Isis, Coffins, Thebes, Akhmim



## **Iconography and Texts of the Headboard and Footboard of the Inner Coffin of Ta-Bes at the Egyptian Museum, Cairo**

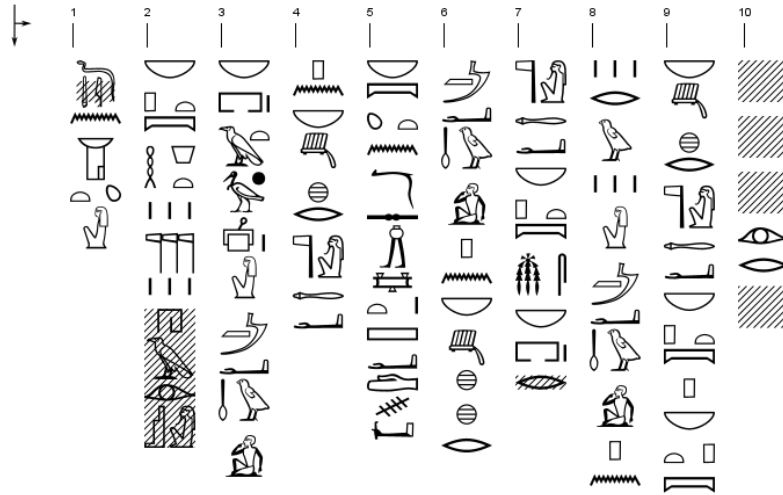
### **Introduction:**

The iconography and texts of the headboard and footboard are important dating criteria of the bivalve anthropoid wooden coffins from the Third Intermediate period and the Late period, so, this study aims to use these criteria for dating the inner coffin of Ta-Bes. This coffin belonged to “Type 3” in Taylor’s typological study of the Theban coffin during the Third Intermediate period (Taylor, 2003, p.114). It belonged to the group (B) in Brech’s Typological study of Akhmim coffins from the Third Intermediate period and Late period (Brech, 2008). It is distinguished with its yellow inscription on the black background which is first attested in the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty during the reign of Hatshepsut and Thutmosis III, and the last one dated to the reign of Ramses II (Niwinski, 1988, p.11), (Sartini, 2015, p.49). Then, it had another revival during the Saite period on the coffin of Irethoreru from Akhmim, which is preserved now at Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco (Brech, 2008, p.309) and continued in develop to the Ptolemaic period on many coffins such as the coffin Isetweret at The Metropolitan Museum (Brech, 2008, p.132).

### **1. Description:**



#### **1.1. Description of the headboard iconography and text (Fig. 1-2):**

The headboard scene is divided into two parts, the upper is belonging to the lid and the lower is belonging to the case of the coffin. The Upper part depicted the standing goddess Nephthys wearing a long-knit dress, while her winged arms are downcast, and holding ostrich feather in each hand, unfortunately, the facial features in boor state. The figure of Nephthys is flanked by cursive hieroglyphs text consisting of ten columns, five columns on each side read as follows:



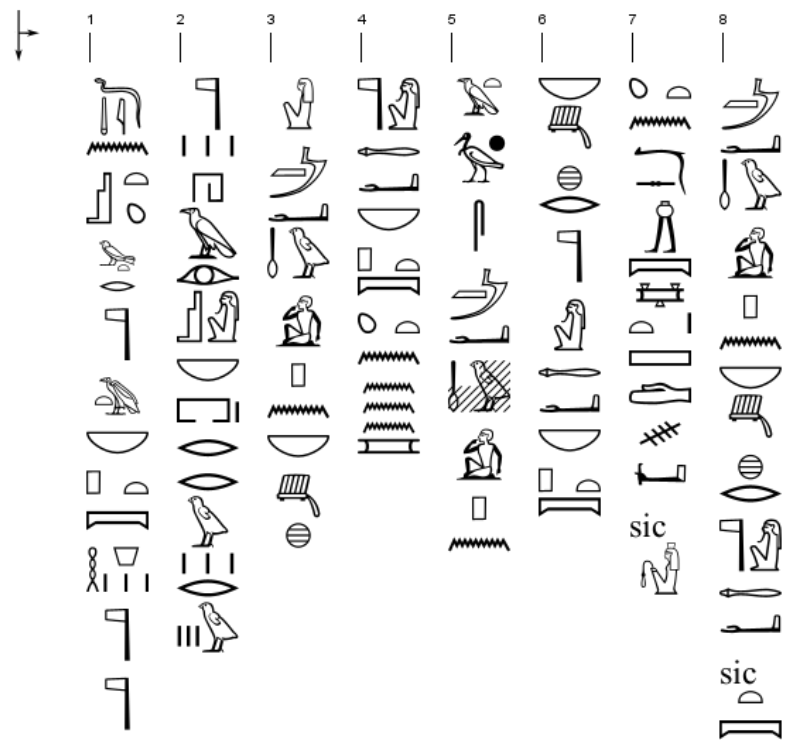
Transliteration	Translation
<sup>1</sup> <i>dd-mdw in Nbt-ht</i>	Words spoken by Nephthys
<sup>2</sup> <i>nbt pt hnwt ntrw [h3 Wsir]</i>	Mistress of the sky, mistress of the gods [O! Osiris]
<sup>3</sup> <i>nb(t) pr T3-bs m3<sup>c</sup>(t)-hrw</i>	Mistress of the house, Ta-Bes, true of voice
<sup>4</sup> <i>p3 n nb(t) im3h hr ntr 3</i>	possessor of reverence with the great god
<sup>5</sup> <i>nb(t) pt s3t n Ns-inhrt (nb) š<sup>c</sup>d-(ht)</i>	Mistress of the sky, daughter of Nes- inherit (lord) of Woodcutters
<sup>6</sup> <i>m3<sup>c</sup>(t)-hrw p3 n nb(t) im3h hr</i>	true of voice, possessor of reverence with
<sup>7</sup> <i>ntr 3 nbt pt ms(t) (n) nb(t) pr</i>	The great god, mistress of the sky, born of mistress of the house
<sup>8</sup> <i>Rwrw m3<sup>c</sup>(t)-hrw p3 n</i>	Ruru, true of voice

<sup>9</sup> <i>nb(t) im3h hr ntr ʕ3 nb(t) pt</i>	possessor of reverence with the great god, mistress of the sky
<sup>10</sup> [...] <i>irr?</i> [...]	[...] (name of someone?) [...]

A largely damaged text is written on the lower part of the headboard consists of four horizontal lines, only the beginning of the first line can be read as:  (*ntr ntrw wnn n.i*) which means (The most divine of gods, open to me), then, the name of the owner is appeared in the fourth line “Ta-Bes”. 

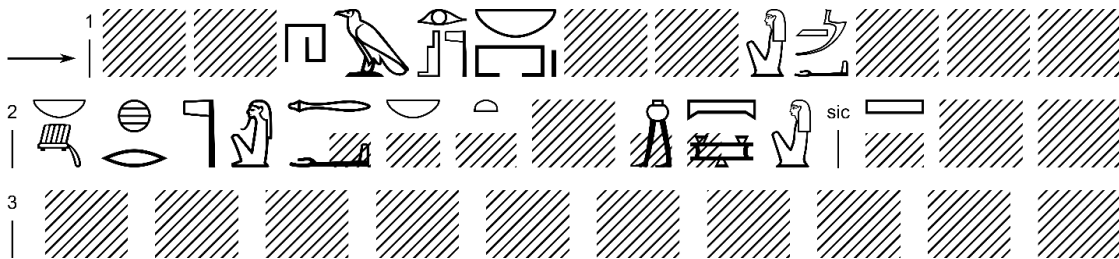
### 1.2. Description of the footboard iconography and text (Fig. 3-4):

The goddess Isis is depicted standing, wearing a long dress, with her winged arms lowered. She is holding an ostrich feather in each hand. Above the figure of Isis, the hieroglyphic sign of the sky (*pt*) appears, containing several stars. On either side of the figure of Isis, there are eight columns written in cursive hieroglyphs, which can be read as follows:



Transliteration	Translation
<sup>1</sup> <i>dd-mdw in 3st wrt mwt ntr nb(t) pt hnw(t) ntrw</i>	Word spoken by Isis, the great, Mother of the god, mistress of the sky, mistress of the gods
<sup>2</sup> <i>h3 Wsir nb(t) pr Rrw</i>	O! Osiris, mistress of the house, Ruru
<sup>3</sup> <i>m3c(t)-hrw p3 n nb(t) im3h (hr)</i>	True of voice, possessor of reverence (with)
<sup>4</sup> <i>ntr 3 nb(t) pt s3t n Mw</i>	the great god, mistress of the sky, daughter of Mu
<sup>5</sup> <i>T3-bs m3c(t)-[hrw] p3 n</i>	Ta-Bes, True of voice
<sup>6</sup> <i>nb(t) im3h hr ntr 3 nb(t) pt</i>	possessor of reverence with the great god, and mistress of the sky
<sup>7</sup> <i>s3t n Ns-inhrt (nb) šcd-(ht)</i>	daughter of Nes-inheret, (lord) of Woodcutters
<sup>8</sup> <i>m3c(t)-hrw p3 n nb(t) im3h hr ntr 3 (nb)t pt</i>	True of voice, possessor of reverence with the great god, and mistress of the sky

On the lower part, we find a partially damaged text in three lines. There are only a few remaining words that can be read as follows:



Transliteration	Translation
<sup>1</sup> [...] <i>h3 Wsir nb(t) pr [t3-bs] m3<sup>c</sup>(t)-[hrw] [...]</i>	[...] O! Osiris, mistress of the house [Ta-Bes] True [of voice] [...]
<sup>2</sup> <i>nb(t) im3h hr ntr 3 nb(t) [pt] [s3]t [n] [ns]-inhr(t) š[<sup>c</sup>d-ht]</i>	possessor of reverence with the great god, and mistress of [the sky], [daughter of Nes]-inheret, [(lord) of Woodcutters]
<sup>3</sup> Destroyed	[...]

## 2. Commentary: (Date, parallels, and provenance)

### 2.1. The Headboard scene of Ta-Bes coffin:

The depiction of Nephthys on the headboard belonged to Type 6 in Taylor's typology of the headboard iconography on the anthropoid wooden coffins from Thebes. This type is first attested at the end of the twenty-fifth dynasty (675-650 B.C.), and probably continued to the first half of the twenty-sixth dynasty (Taylor, 1985, p.312). Nephthys is represented in a standing position with her winged arms downward on paralleled coffins dated to the same period from Thebes such as TR.19/1/27/2, TR.21/11/16/10, CG41046 (Gauthier, 1913, pp.323-355, pl.XXIII), and CG41058 (Gauthier, 1913, pp.83-111, pl.VIII), as well as the coffin of Irethoreru from Akhmim at British museum EA20745 (Brecht, 2008, p.103). Therefore, we can date the coffin of Ta-Bes through the headboard scene to the end of the twenty-fifth dynasty and the first half of the twenty-sixth dynasty.

Various types depicting the goddess Nephthys on the headboard of several contemporary coffins:

1. Nephthys is standing on the upper part of the headboard, while the lower part is depicted with two baboons worshiped to the sun disk from which its rays extend (TR.27/9/16/7).

2. Nephthys is kneeling on *nwb* hieroglyph with outspread wings on the upper part, while on the lower part we find text in horizontal lines such as (CG41056), (Bibliotheca Alexandrina Antiquities Museum 0829), (Liverpool Museum M13992), this type fits with type 5 of Taylor's typology of Theban coffin (Taylor, 1985, p.311), In addition to its appearance in Akhmim.
3. Nephthys is kneeling on *nwb* hieroglyph on the upper part, while the sun disk which flanked with two uraeus cobras are represented on the lower part of the headboard such as JE25804, and CG41064 (Gauthier, 1913, pp.408-429, pl. XXXIII).
4. Nephthys is kneeling on *nwb* hieroglyph raising her arms up (Cairo, TR.12/11/16/2), or in a squatting position (Turin Inv.Nr. Cat. 2231/01).
5. Nephthys is seating on a base like the palace façade *srh* with her wings down (Cairo, TR.6/9/16/5).
6. As last one, but the Kheper beetle appears above the head of Nephthys as a sunshine symbol (Cairo, TR.28/9/16/14).
7. Nephthys is squatting and just one hand is raised to her face, while the wings are absent (Cairo, CG41057) (Gauthier, 1913, pp.297–323, pl. XXI).

## 2.2. The footboard scene of Ta-Bes coffin:

The depiction of Isis on the footboard belongs to "Type 6" of Taylor's typology of the footboard types. This type came into use around 675 B.C., at the end of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty. This date provides a *terminus post quem* for this type, which continued in use into the Twenty-sixth Dynasty (Taylor, 1985, p.330). This depiction of Isis in the standing position with her winged arms down has parallels from Thebes such as Cairo, TR.27/9/16/7, Toledo Inv. Nr.1906.1A (Peck, 2011, pp.82-83) and from Akhmim such as London BM EA20650 and EA20745, which are dating to the same period. So, we can date the coffin through the footboard scene from the end of the twenty-fifth to the first half of the twenty-sixth dynasty.

Various types depicting the goddess Isis on the footboard of several contemporary coffins:

1. Isis is kneeling on *nwb* hieroglyph with outspread wings on examples from Thebes such as Cairo, CG41056 (Gauthier, 1913, pp.267-297, pl. XIX),



- CG41064 (Gauthier, 1913, pp.408-429, pl. XXXIII) and one example from Edfu at Kelsey Museum Inv.Nr. 1989.3.1 (Wilfong, 2013, p.44).
2. Isis is kneeling on *nwb* hieroglyph without outspread wings but raise up just one hand to its face (Cairo, SR.7/23536).
  3. Isis raised up both of her arms whether standing such as CG41050 (Gauthier, 1913, 169–193, pl. XII) or kneeling on *nwb* hieroglyph (Cairo: TR.12/11/16/2).
  4. Isis is standing and raising up one hand to its face on the upper part of the footboard, while the *zht* hieroglyph is flanked with the East and West signs *iszbt* - *imntt* on the lower part such as (Turin Inv. Nr. S.5238).
  5. Isis is squatting and raising one hand forward such as Cairo, CG41048 (Gauthier, 1913, pp. 138–166, pl. XI).

### 2.3. Provenance:

The provenance of the Ta-Bes coffin had remained uncertain until this research proposed that its origin is likely from the Akhmim region. This identification was made through an analysis of the artistic features and epigraphy of two coffins from Akhmim dated to the 26<sup>th</sup> dynasty. The first coffin exhibits the same color scheme of yellow-on-black background (San Francisco-42895), a style that, until now, has only been observed on this coffin from Akhmim. The second one belongs to Djedhor which is preserved at British Museum (EA20650), this coffin closely resembles the Ta-Bes coffin, showing complete similarity in layout, iconography, and epigraphy. Unfortunately, neither the deceased nor her parents held any administrative or religious titles linked to a specific region that could assist in determining the coffin's provenance. Additionally, genealogical research did not provide further insights, as neither the names of the deceased nor her parents are associated with other individuals from the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasties.





The name “Ta-Bes” exhibits variations across different periods, including the New Kingdom, Late Period, and Ptolemaic Period (Ranke, 1935, p. 359). However, the name inscribed on the coffin does not correspond to the one listed in Ranke's Personennamen (PN), indicating that the name inscribed on the coffin is likely distinct from the Ta-Bes recorded by Ranke. Similarly, the name “Nes-inherit” appears on a stela from the reign of King Aspelta during the Twenty-fifth Dynasty

(Schäfer, 1905, p. 108), as well as on a Ptolemaic stela (Ranke, 1935, p. 174), but it is unrelated to the father of the coffin's owner. Additionally, while the name "Ruru" is documented in Ranke, PN, during both the Late and Ptolemaic Periods (Ranke, 1935, p. 221), it is not associated with the name found on the coffin of Tabes.

### 3. Function:

Nephtys and Isis were played important roles in the ancient Egyptian religion, the most important of which was protecting and supporting the deceased in the afterlife as Osiris (Wilkinson, 2003, pp.147-148). This is evident from the text of Spell 151a in the Book of the Dead (Quirke, 2013, p.369) (Allen, 1974, p.148) (Elias, 1993, p.591, p.598), which confirms the comprehensive protection provided by the two sisters to their brother Osiris. Their depiction on the head and foot of the coffin serves as a three-dimensional representation of the vignette of spell 151a from the Book of the Dead (Johnston, 2022, p.366). Although the text accompanying the two goddesses does not include Spell 151a from the Book of the Dead—possibly because the deceased lady was not an elite individual—the depiction of the goddesses alone still fulfilled the protective function. This is supported by the presence of Spell 151 on many coffins belonging to elite individuals from Thebes such as Cairo CG41056, CG41057 and from Akhmim such as London BM EA20745, BM EA20650.

### 4. Epigraphic notes:





The writing of the Osiris name is one of the most important independent dating criteria. Leahy mentions that the writing of  does not occur before the reign of Rodamun from the 23<sup>rd</sup> dynasty (Leahy, 1979, p.142). It then became more extensively used from the early years of the Kushite period onward. While the use of the older form  gradually declined during the 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (Leahy, 1979, p.146) (Taylor, 1985, p.24). This helps to date the coffin as  is not repeated very often in the coffin texts. While  is increased in use in Ta-Bes coffin texts, which suggests that it dates to the 25th Dynasty until the first half of the 26th Dynasty.

The word *šꜥd-ht* is frequently documented in texts from the 19th and 20th Dynasties, particularly in those of the workers from Deir El-Medina, and it translates to “woodcutters”. In certain texts, such as those inscribed on the Ta-Bes coffin, the

word *ht* is omitted without altering the meaning, which still refers to woodcutters responsible for chopping wood into small pieces to provide fuel for cooking and baking fires. (Janssen, et al. 2003, pp.1-2).

## Conclusion


This study concludes that:

1. The coffin of Ta-Bes can be dated to the late Twenty-fifth Dynasty and early Twenty-sixth Dynasty, based on a range of artistic and inscriptional evidence that supports this dating. Key elements of this evidence include:
  - **The depiction of Nephthys:** Nephthys is shown in a standing position with her wings pointing downward, a motif also found on coffins from the same period, such as TR.19/1/27/2, TR.21/11/16/10, CG41046, and CG41058 from Thebes, as well as the coffin of Irethoreru from Akhmim (British Museum EA20745). This dating is further supported by the coffin's classification as "Type 6" in Taylor's typology of the headboard iconography on anthropoid wooden coffins from Thebes.
  - **The depiction of Isis:** Isis is similarly depicted standing with her wings pointing downward on coffins from the same period, including TR.27/9/16/7 and Toledo Inv. Nr.1906.1A from Thebes, as well as the coffin of Irethoreru from Akhmim (British Museum EA20745). This dating is also reinforced by the coffin's classification as "Type 6" in Taylor's typology of the footboard iconography on anthropoid wooden coffins from Thebes.
  - **The writing of the Osiris name:** According to Leahy the writing of  became more extensively used from the early years of the Kushite period onward. While the use of the older form  gradually declined during the 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. This helps to date the coffin as  is not repeated very often in the texts of Ta-Bes coffin. While  is increased in use, which suggests that it dates to the 25th Dynasty until the first half of the 26th Dynasty.
2. **The provenance:** the study suggests that the coffin's probable provenance is Akhmim, based on a detailed analysis of artistic and epigraphic features, as well as comparisons with similar coffins from the same period.
3. **Nephthys was depicted in various positions on the headboard such as:**

- Nephthys is standing on the upper part of the headboard, while the lower part is depicted with two baboons worshiped to the sun disk from which its rays extend (TR.27/9/16/7).
  - Nephthys is kneeling on *nwb* hieroglyph with outspread wings on the upper part, while on the lower part we find text in horizontal lines such as (CG41056), (Bibliotheca Alexandrina Antiquities Museum 0829), (Liverpool Museum M13992), this type fits with type 5 of Taylor's typology of Theban coffin, In addition to its appearance in Akhmim.
  - Nephthys is kneeling on *nwb* hieroglyph on the upper part, while the sun disk which flanked with two uraeus cobras are represented on the lower part of the headboard such as JE25804, and CG41064.
  - Nephthys is kneeling on *nwb* hieroglyph raising her arms up (Cairo, TR.12/11/16/2), or in a squatting position (Turin Inv.Nr. Cat. 2231/01).
  - Nephthys is seating on a base like the palace façade *srh* with her wings down (Cairo, TR.6/9/16/5).
  - Nephthys is seating on a base like the palace façade *srh* with her wings down, furthermore, the Kheper beetle appears above the head of Nephthys as a sunshine symbol (Cairo, TR.28/9/16/14).
  - Nephthys is squatting and just one hand is raised to her face, while the wings are absent (Cairo, CG41057).
- 4. Isis was depicted in various positions on the footboard such as:**
- Isis is kneeling on *nwb* hieroglyph with outspread wings on examples from Thebes such as Cairo, CG41056, CG41064 and one example from Edfu (Kelsey Museum Inv.Nr. 1989.3.1.)
  - Isis is kneeling on *nwb* hieroglyph without outspread wings but raise up just one hand to its face (Cairo, SR.7/23536).
  - Isis raised up both of her arms whether standing such as CG41050, or kneeling on *nwb* hieroglyph (Cairo, TR.12/11/16/2).
  - Isis is standing and raising up one hand to its face on the upper part of the footboard, while the *ꜥht* hieroglyph is flanked with the East and West signs *ꜥꜣtt* - *ꜥꜣtt* on the lower part such as (Turin Inv. Nr. S.5238).
  - Isis is squatting and raising one hand forward such as (Cairo, CG41048).

- 5. The religious purpose:** The depiction of Nephthys and Isis on the head and foot was intended to provide protection for the deceased in the afterlife, as mentioned in Spell 151a of the Book of the Dead.

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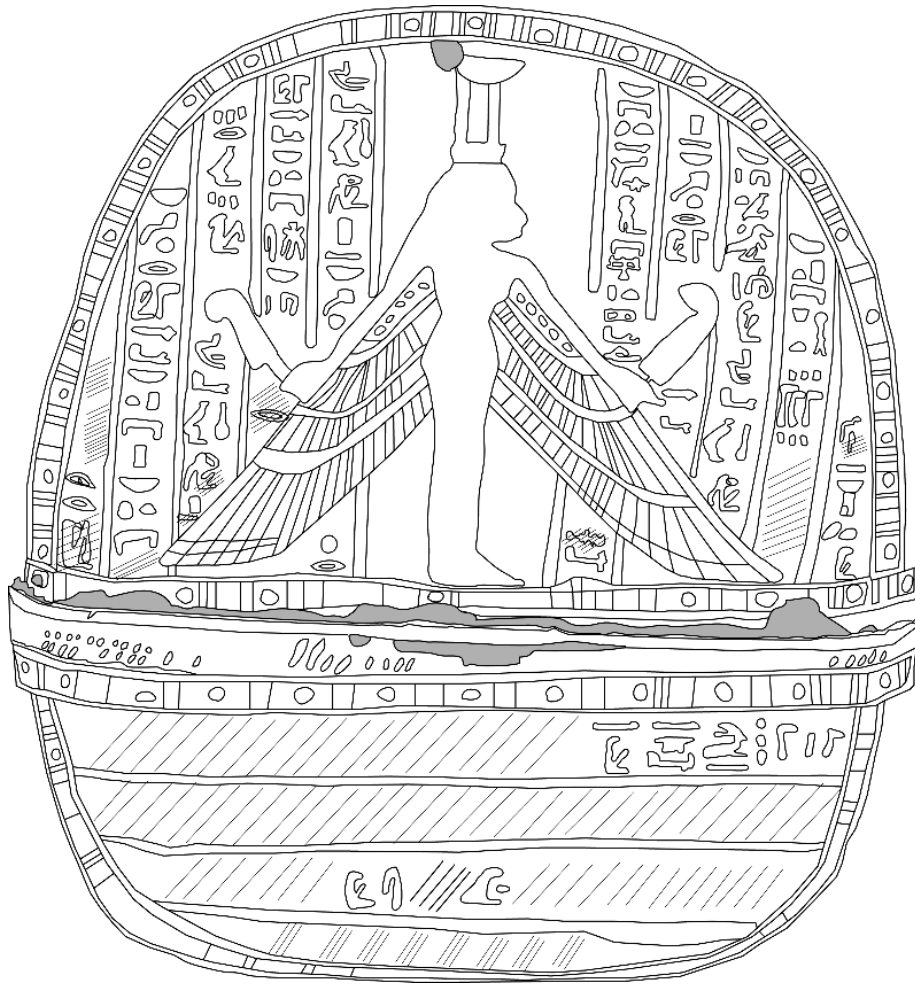
**Figure 1**

*Photo of the Headboard of the Coffin of Ta-Bes.  
Courtesy of the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Photograph by Sameh Abdelmohsen.*



**Figure 2**

*Facsimile of the Scene and Text of the Headboard of the Coffin of Ta-Bes. © Author.*



**Figure 3**

*Photo of the Footboard of the Coffin of Ta-Bes.*

*Courtesy of the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Photograph by Sameh Abdelmohsen.*



**Figure 4**

*Facsimile of the Scene and Text of the Footboard of the Coffin of Ta-Bes. © Author.*

