

**Post-Apartheid Fiction: A Reading of Yewande Omotoso's  
*The Woman Next Door***

by

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**Abstract**

Omotoso's novel, *The Woman Next Door* (2014), can be best approached within the post-apartheid discourse of colorblindness, non-racialism, reconciliation, and cultural diversity. The paper aims to show how Omotoso's novel depicts an important epoch in the history of contemporary South Africa, i.e., the post transitional phase, by adopting the basic principles of the "Rainbow Nation" government. An analysis of Omotoso's novel reveals that though it does not openly deal with racism in the way apartheid fiction does, it does not ignore it either. That Omotoso's novel presents a reconsideration of racism by depicting its effects on determining black / white relations is also among the aims of this paper. Besides, best approached within the discourse of post-apartheid era, Omotoso's *The Woman Next Door* re-examines African cultural identity in the 21st century. The paper elucidates how the writer deploys memory as a significant means of identity construction. In addition, Omotoso deconstructs the stereotypical image of the black woman long depicted in South African fiction. Certain concepts such as Hall's "cultural identity", Nuttall's "entanglement", Kalua's "intermediality" and Chapman's "the humanism of reconstruction" will be used to analyze the transformation in Omotoso's main characters in *The Woman Next Door*.

**Keywords:** Omotoso, Post-apartheid Fiction, The Rainbow Nation, Hall's "cultural identity", Nuttall's "entanglement", Kalua's "intermediality".

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ادب ما بعد الفصل العنصرى : قراءة في رواية يواندي أوموتوسو

" المرأة التي تقطن في المنزل المجاور "

ملخص

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية بالتحليل رواية أوموتوسو "المرأة التي تقطن في المنزل المجاور" (2016) كأحد روايات ادب ما بعد الفصل العنصرى بما يتضمنه من مفاهيم عمى الألوان، وعدم العنصرية، والمصالحة، والتنوع الثقافي. ويهدف البحث إلى إظهار كيف تصور رواية أوموتوسو حقبة مهمة من تاريخ جنوب أفريقيا المعاصرة، أي مرحلة ما بعد الفترة الانتقالية، من خلال تبني المبادئ الأساسية لحكومة "أمة القوس قزح" حيث يكشف تحليل رواية أوموتوسو أنه على الرغم من أنها لا تجسد بشكل صريح العنصرية بالطريقة التي تصور روايات الفصل العنصرى هذا الموضوع، إلا أنها لا تتجاهلها أيضًا. ويوضح البحث كيف تحاول رواية أوموتوسو لفت النظر إلى ضرورة إعادة النظر في العنصرية من خلال تصوير آثارها على تحديد العلاقات بين الأسود والأبيض. علاوة على ذلك فهي تركز على دراسة الهوية الثقافية الأفريقية في القرن الحادي والعشرين. وتوضح هذه الورقة كيف تستخدم الكاتبة "الذاكرة" كوسيلة مهمة لبناء الهوية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك تقوم أوموتوسو أيضًا بتفكيك الصورة النمطية للمرأة السوداء التي تم تصويرها منذ فترة طويلة في الأدب الجنوب أفريقي. وسيتم استخدام مفاهيم معينة مثل "الهوية الثقافية" لهول، و"التشابك" لنوتال، و"الوسائطية" كالأدوات لتحليل التحول في شخصيات أوموتوسو الرئيسية في *المرأة التي تقطن في المنزل المجاور*. **الكلمات المفتاحية:** أوموتوسو. رواية مرحلة ما بعد الفصل العنصرى. "الهوية الثقافية" لهول "أمة القوس قزح". "التشابك" لنوتال. كالأدوات "الوسائطية".

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Omotoso's novel, *The Woman Next Door* (2016), can be best approached within the post-apartheid discourse of colorblindness, non-racialism, reconciliation, and cultural diversity. The novel depicts an important epoch in the history of contemporary South Africa, i.e., the post transitional phase, by advocating the basic principles of the "Rainbow Nation" government. Although it does not openly deal with racism in the way apartheid fiction does, it does not ignore it. Omotoso's novel presents a reconsideration of racism by depicting its effects on determining black / white relations. Besides, Omotoso is keen to re-examine the concept of the African social and cultural identity, particularly in the post 1990s era.

In fact, the first democratic election of 1994 marked the end of the apartheid regime and ushered in a new phase in the history of contemporary South Africa. First coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the term "Rainbow Nation" is used to refer to the post -apartheid South Africa era after the 1994 elections. The term has also been used by Nelson Mandela in his 1994 state of the Nation Addresses. Furthermore, the term has its biblical allusions, symbolizing the promise of creating a new peaceful world after the great flood during Noah's time. Adapting this metaphor, Nelson promises his people peace and prosperity. Arousing a new kind of Nationalism, Nelson Mandela calls for the creation of a new South African Nation that is based on unity while embracing diverse races, promoting equality, non-racialism, and justice. In other words, Mandela's "Rainbow Nation" could be considered a counter discourse to the apartheid system—apartheid itself is an African word denoting apartness or separating – that has dominated south Africa for long decades.

According to Goodman (2017), the 1994 elections of the African National Congress (ANC) and the advocacy of the "Rainbow Nations" has been "supposed to be a beginning," a beginning of a new epoch. Unlike the old apartheid system which has been based on white supremacy, racism and segregation, Mandela's new concept adopts non-

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racialism reconciliation, forgiveness and equality among other principles that ushered in the beginning of post-apartheid south Africa. Furthermore, “Rainbowism”, which calls for “unity, equality and non-racialism” (Gqola, 2001, p. 99), becomes, as Baines (1998) believes, the dominant metaphor that characterizes South Africa ruling parties from 1994 till the present

In addition, “Rainbowism” signifies a new inspection into the nature of South African identity during the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early decades of the 20<sup>st</sup> centuries. Indeed, adopting the “Rainbow Nation” vision enhances the inclusion of several races – not only whites – but also Indians, coloured and blacks as well. According to Evans (2010), creating a nation that embraces unity within diversity has been a dream that South Africa aspires to fulfill in the post-apartheid era. Turner (2019) adds that the “Rainbow Nation” metaphor has become a worldly recognized “socio-political map” that endorsed the South African vision (p. 87). Besides, it, as Turner (2019) affirms, enables Mandela to present an image of nation “in a way that makes her appear to itself united yet diverse” (p. 87).

The “Unity in diversity” vision has been also adopted by the South African constitution and the South African leaders following Mandela. Describing the new constitution vice-president Thabo Mbeki (2001) acknowledges that:

The constitution whose adoption we celebrate constitutes an unequivocal statement that we refuse to accept that our Africanness shall be defined by our race, color, gender or historical origins. (p. 11)

In fact, Mbeki’s speech has been considered “the greatest statement in celebration and affirmation of non-racialism” (Ndlozi, 2018, n.p.). Moreover, it allows earlier white settlers to be included within the new African identity, being a part of the new South Africa “Rainbow nation.”

Furthermore, the “Rainbow Nation” discourse has not been only intended to provide hope and prosperity to black South Africans in the post-apartheid epoch, but it also aims to show that the “founders of the New South Africa cared for the insecurity of white people, they were genuinely sympathetic to their fears” (Ndlozi, 2018, n.p.). In addition, it shows the South Africans “opening up their humanity, opening themselves to the European settlers, despite centuries of base dehumanizations and violence” (Ndlozi, 2018, n.p.). It becomes clear

that only by adopting forgiveness, reconciliation and non-racialism could the new African nation be established.

This ideal has been emphasized by Mbeki himself in his famous speech “I am an African,” which he delivered in 1996, celebrating the passing of the new constitution. Calling for a new “African Renaissance,” which aims to redefine “Africanness,” the “parameters of which would not be set in terms of race or historical origin” (Paphitis and Kelland, 2016, p. 240), Mbeki even enlarges the concept of “Africanness” and extends it to include animals and plants in addition to all races including whites as well as their black victims who have lost their life defending their freedom. Mbeki (2001) adds that:

Today, as a country, we keep an audible silence about these ancestors of the generations that live, fearful to admit the horror of a former dead, seeking to obliterate from our memories a cruel occurrence which, in its remembering, should teach us not and never to be inhuman again. (p. 9)

In fact, both Mandela’s “Rainbow Nation” ideal and Mbeki’s “African Renaissance” aim, according to Paphitis and Kelland (2016), to find out a “renewed and unified African identity” (p. 240). Besides, the “African Renaissance” project, Paphitis and Kelland (2016) add, is considered a “broadening of the South Africa rainbow nation project” (p. 241), both of which, as Paphitis and Kelland (2016) point out, look forward to establishing “a new identity based on unification through diversity” (p. 241).

Aiming to establish a new democratic rule, the new South Africa under Mandela and the (ANC), as Marszalek-Kawa et.al (2017) remark, “required the complete reconstruction of the society’s political identity and constructing new rules for organizing the political life in the country” (p. 227). To do so, the ANC employs the “Remembrance narratives” to provide “support for the vision of the inclusive and non-racial Rainbow Nation, the reconstruction of the society, the rule of law and human rights protection as well as the programme of reconciliation and national unity” (Marszalek-Kawa et.al., 2017, p. 227). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, has been entrusted to carry out this goal, clarifying how to deal with the past in an age of transformation in order to maintain peace and reconciliation. Representing the “utopian vision” of the government, Mavengano and Hove (2020) state, “the multi-ethnic and transcultural communities were

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expected to come together and forge a new interracial community that accommodated unity in diversity” (p. 169).

Furthermore, the “remembrance policy” of Mandela and his cabinet has been characterized by “moderation and was totally subordinated to the overriding objectives of the transformation – the reconciliation of the divided nation and the reinforcement of the democratic order based on non-racialism, pluralism, the rule of law, and human rights protection” (Marszalek-Kawa et.al., 2017, p. 228). In other words, the atrocities of the past are remembered as a psychological means to unite a divided nation and reconstruct or redefine national identity. McEwan (2003) adds that:

coming to terms with the past has emerged as the grand narrative of the late twentieth and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Individuals and nations are seeking to overcome their traumatic legacies through the establishment of historical truth and the creation of collective memory” (p. 740).

The attempt to create a new collective memory for post-apartheid South Africans, “as a means of overcoming trauma and creating a new, collective identity,” as Winstanley (2022) remarks, is “a national preoccupation in South Africa” (p. 39). Seeking to create a South African collective memory during the early to mid 1990s, the TRC, Adams and Kurts (2012) argue, foregrounds “past injustices” to create “a common ground understanding of history, which in turn would provide a foundation for an emerging national identity” (p. 9). Besides, the TRC’s work, Winstanley (2022) argues, has led to a “concept of collective memory that implied that all South Africans had suffered a collective trauma-Apartheid – from which they collectively needed to recover” (p. 41).

Evaluating the TRC’s role during the 1990s, Winstanley (2022) adds:

Looking back on the TRC more than twenty years on, it is clear that the commission, along with other measures, helped to avoid complete societal breakdown in the transition period. Still, the benefit to the new South Africa was limited as many groups felt that their victimhood was channeled into politically convenient terms, or simply elided by the whole TRC process. (p. 41)

The fact that several narratives of the South Africans’ suffering have not been heard by the TRC created dismay and frustration among black South Africans. Moreover, their dissatisfaction has been increased particularly



with the rising of crime, violence, unemployment, and political corruption which have been depicted by several South African writers. Hence, Winstanley( 2022) argues, some South African writers:

do not reject the idea of shared collective trauma forming a part of South African memory. However, by representing diverse and changing collective memories, they show the limits of this ideology as the singular South African narrative memory. (p. 54).

In addition, the rising crime, violence, corruption, poverty, etc. in the late 1990s reflect the limitation of the TRC and the betrayal of the “Rainbow Nation” ideals. Both white and black South Africans , as Dalley (1999) points out, are dissatisfied with the government which fails to come up to their expectations. According to Zuma (2009), the early decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century show that there is no significant difference between apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa particularly with unemployment and poverty exceedingly rising. Furthermore, Turner (2019) comments that the “Rainbow Nation” has been “a suitable concept to both display as well as fade out and blur social, cultural and political differences of South Africans” (p. 97). By the end of the mid 1990s, several black South Africans have found out that they are denied basic rights such as good education, proper jobs, civil services, etc. Moreover, Lester et.al ( 2009) add that poverty has become a dominant reality for black South Africans just like the segregated “apartheid cities” have been the “reality for other cities” (p. 53). In other words, by the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Gqola (2004) remarks, the “Rainbow Nation” ideal has disappeared from “public parlance” (p. 6).

Post-apartheid South African literature has responded to the changes of the late 90’s era in various ways. For example, some writers have been preoccupied with presenting the new forms of racism, corruption, violence—particularly xenophobia, and crime—and poverty and the resulting frustration, disorientation, and disillusionment in the post-apartheid era. In their works, they have depicted the frustration deeply felt by black South Africans for the failure to adhere to the ideals of the “Rainbow Nation.” Examples include Galgut, Moele, Mhlongo, Mpe, etc. who explore the difficulty of creating a nation that is unified yet diverse as well as the failure to reconcile the past with the present. On the contrary, other writers, such as Omotoso, adopt the ideals of the “Rainbow Nation” in their works. In *The Woman Next Door*, for example, she shows the ability to reconcile the past with the present, the success of overcoming past atrocities by advocating non-racialism, reconciliation,

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and forgiveness. In their fiction, racism has been replaced by “a consciousness toward ‘non-racialism’ so that the discourse on race has somewhat muted into class differentials” (Rotich ,2002, p. 143).

Therefore, post-apartheid literature – also termed by Frenkel and Mackenzie (2010) as “post-transitional” literature– generally refers to the “new wave of writing that is usually unfettered to the past in the way much apartheid writing was but may still reconsider it in new ways. Equally, it may ignore it altogether” (Frenkel & Mackenzie, 2010, p. 2). In other words, post-apartheid, or post-transitional fiction, can be best understood within the discourse of globalization, late capitalism, the end of the cold war, etc., which have brought about, as Frenkel and Mackenzie (2010) put it, “drastic changes not only in South Africa but the whole world” (p. 3).

Criticizing some South Africans for focusing on the representation of the “spectacular” more than the ordinary, Ndebele (2006) argues that:  
[t]he history of black South African literature has largely been the history of the representation of spectacle. The visible symbols of the overwhelmingly oppressive South African social formation appear to have prompted over the years the development of a highly dramatic, highly demonstrative form of literary representation. (p. 37)

The new post-apartheid fiction, Ndebele (2006) argues, should deal with the ordinary life, “the deepest dreams for love, hope, compassion, newness and justice” (p. 47). In addition, instead of focusing on narratives based on the “black race,” the new fiction is more interested in depicting “African identity which, as Kalua (2020 ) argues, “cuts across the various racial and ethnic boundaries throughout the African continent” (p.XIII). Furthermore, according to Frenkel and Mackenzie (2010) , the new fiction focuses on narratives of “buried histories, the legacies of resistance, suppressed conceptions of identity and the deployment of nuance to describe the ordinary” (p. 4). Similarly, Davis (2013) remarks that the TRC has changed “the ostensible focus from the national to the individual” as it “seemed to understand its mandate within the individualistic frame of personal forgiveness” (p. 799).

Best approached within the discourse of post-apartheid era, Omotoso's *The Woman Next Door* re-examines African identity. It focuses on the “ordinary” contemporary South Africans– both black and



white – and their longing for love, compassion and most importantly forgiveness and reconciliation. The novel, in addition, depicts the cultural identity of the new generation of South Africans who did not go through the turmoil of apartheid and who opt for a new community that is based on cultural diversity and colorblindness.

The novel depicts the attempts of two old black and white South African women to come to terms with their old age, identities and overcome cultural and racial differences. It is clear from the early beginning of the novel that Omotoso, who belongs to the new-born generation of black writers, is trying to assert the identity of unity within diversity. There is a clear parallelism in depicting her main characters. Both Hortensia (black) and Marion (white) are two elderly women going over 80. Both are widowed. Both are lonely human beings who need care and affection. Both are betrayed by their husbands, though in different ways. Though Marion has four children, she is completely neglected by them. Hortensia's husband fell in love with a white woman and has a daughter, whereas Marion's husband left her deeply in debt and almost penniless. Both Hortensia and Marion went through a journey of self-realization, several crises that force them to reconsider their past life, change their attitudes and acquire self-knowledge. Their journey enabled them to recognize their past errors and ends in reconciliation not only with themselves but also with each other.

A major focus of the novel is the exploration of the cultural identities of the major characters, a process that testifies Hall's concept of cultural identity as a process of "becoming" as well as "being" (Hall, 1994, p. 224). It is never fixed, as it belongs to the past, the present as well as the future. Therefore, it is subject to "constant transformation" (Hall, 1994, p. 224). Furthermore, cultural identity, according to Hall (1994), is determined by "the continuous 'play' of history, culture, and power" (p. 224). Besides, Hall (1997) adds that precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies (p. 4).

As subjects to the history of long enmity black / white, East / West dichotomy and cultural and racial differences, Hortensia and Marion's transformation can be better understood as natural outcome of the post-apartheid "Rainbow Nation" discourse. Indeed, the characters of

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Hortensia and Marion are greatly affected by the apartheid experience and the patriarchal society which has assigned them specific rules and power relations. It is remarkable that Omotoso has deconstructed the stereotypical image of South African woman. Hortensia, for example, is not the submissive housewife or kind, self-sacrificing mother. She is not illiterate either. Rather, she is strong-willed, self-made, well-educated, highly successful businesswoman who has sacrificed her motherhood to establish her career as renowned textile designer. Furthermore, she is fearless, ruthless, unkind to her neighbors and therefore friendless and lonely. In addition, she has defied the norms of her community and married a white man much to the disapproval of both his family and hers.

The writer deploys memory as a significant means of identity construction and as a means of justifying the present life of her characters by laying bare to her readers their motivations and hidden secrets. Indeed, in Omotoso's novel, memory and remembrance play a pivotal role in exploring the past life of both Hortensia and Marion. The fact that their past life and experience have been affected by apartheid discourse is stressed in the novel. For example, Hortensia has been scorned by her classmate for her black skin and lower social status; her father was a postman and her mother used to wash and drive for London transport. Whenever Hortensia walks, people make "chimpanzee sounds" (Omotoso, 2016, p. 69). However, she defies her social milieu and fulfils her father's dream, finishing her higher education and becoming a wealthy and successful textile designer. Moreover, she marries Peter, a white man, against the will of his parents who are apprehensive of the fact that their marriage would result in a "mixed race" children.

Hortensia has learned at an early stage of her life to be strong and ruthless. She has been quite aware of racial prejudice and the affluent white society which justifies her disdain and continuous quarrels with Marion. In addition, Hortensia's high education, her marriage to a white man and her wealth enable her to rise above her black social status and later move to live next door to a white woman and deal with other white neighbors as an equal and sometimes superior person. The fact that Hortensia discovers the betrayal of her husband with a white woman also deeply affects her and increases her hatred for her neighbors, life and , most of all, herself.

Hortensia recalls several memories which justify her hatred and unravel her motivations. For example, Hortensia remembers following her husband disguised in “Burkha” (Omotoso, 2016, p. 182), watching him betraying her with another women. Her feelings when she was following him were described as “righteous, she felt she was conducting an important task that demanded rigor and integrity” (Omotoso, 2016, p. 184). She insists on watching them. She wants to “remember everything. She wanted to be able to recollect it, to be able to draw it, if such a time was ever called for” (Omotoso, 2016, p. 184). It is this experience that has created the hateful, cruel Hortensia: “at the age of thirty-one, Hortensia James starts to hate” (Omotoso, 2016, p. 148). The metaphor the narrator uses to describe the effect of hatred on Hortensia is also significant: “She tied a block of concrete to her ankle and let it drag her down. Hating, after all, was a drier form of drawing” (Omotoso, 2016, p. 185). She has been completely absorbed by her hatred. Symbolically, their marriage has been stained and the memory/ stain must be covered by a portrait hung on the wall. Furthermore, she keeps cleaning her bathroom and polishing her mirror until she is completely tired so that she can sleep later; her hatred has been turned against everyone and everything, not only people but even trees and insects which she enjoys crushing under her feet during her walks.

Similarly, it is through memory that a great part of Marion’s character is revealed. Memories form a great deal of Marion’s identity, justifying her attitudes and even explaining the causes of her children’s repulsion of her. Omotoso depicts how Marion’s character is also shaped by the apartheid experience. As a child, she has grown up in a world that is based on racial prejudice. For her, the black man is a “Kaffir” (Omotoso, 2016, p. 98). Her parents have taught her no religion. Though they are of those Jews who have escaped from the horrors of the Nazi regime, Marion’s parents deny the South African blacks their rights as equal human beings. Furthermore, they are involved in the apartheid system and enjoy feeling superior to the other race.

Despite avoiding writing straightforwardly on racism, Omotoso’s novel does not ignore it. Several accounts of racial oppression are narrated and recalled through memories. For example, Marron remembers being a witness to the common practices of apartheid. She narrates how she once saw the humiliation of a slave girl of the Smiths, their neighbour, who was accused of stealing Mrs. Smith’ earrings and shoes because she was once dressed well. She is stripped of her clothes to make

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sure she is not hiding any valuable things. Even when Mrs Smith tries to wear the mistaken objects and fails because they were not hers, the slave girl is denied an apology. In his *Black Reason*, Mbembe (2017) describes race as a mask, hiding a human face, and replacing it with a fetch of the imagination that “replaces the body and face of a human being” (p. 32). It results in a distortion of reality. Mbembe (2017) argues that “when the racist sees a Black person, he does not see that the Black person is not there, does not exist, and is just a sign of a pathological fixation on the absence of a relationship” (p. 32). Adopting apartheid creed, the Smiths fail to see Alberta, their slave, as a human being. Instead, they see her as representing a fictional image they have created in their mind. In other words, they see what they want to see, a shadow of an animal, a symbol of “emptiness” (Mbembe , 2017, p. 11), hatred and vengeance.

It is thus natural that Marion deals with Agnes, her servant, in the same way. Adopting her white community values, Marion makes Agnes's life a nightmare. Similarly, working for Marion – according to Agnes-is a “tribulation that builds faith” (Omotoso, 2016, p. 101). For Marion, Agnes is just a face with “two eyes, a nose” (Omotoso, 2016, p. 126). She is allowed to use separate utensils, camps, plates, and lower toilet brands.

Throughout the novel, the reader can notice the great contrast between Marion and Agnes. Though white, Marion – now old – lacks the peace of mind Agnes enjoys in her old age. In addition, Marion is depicted as a lonely and friendless old woman, whereas Agnes has a boyfriend and enjoys a holiday with him. Marion suffers from being avoided by her children, whereas Agnes's daughter calls her to live with her and take care of her daughter. Furthermore, Marion's racism towards Agnes is completely rejected by her children and grandchildren. She is described by her daughter as “old and stuck to old bad days” (Omotoso , 2016, p. 138).

Omotoso also deconstructs the stereotypical image of the black servant as a symbol of “emptiness”, an invisible creature, by probing further aspects of Agnes' character. Marion recalls Agnes' wish to be a teacher. However, she is scorned by Marion who cannot imagine that a black servant can have her own aspirations for a better future. The greatest surprise for Marion comes at the end of the novel when Agnes gives her back her own painting, which was brought to Agnes's home by mistake after the destruction of Marion's house. Despite the long life of

humiliation at Marion's house, Agnes feels that "a person has to be true" (Omotoso, 2016, p. 257). It is Agnes who teaches Marion, the white, a good lesson which fills Marion with shame and guilt and forces her to apologize for Agnes – though it is too late. Such a lesson marks a great transformation in Marion's character.

The second event that has a great impact on Marion's character is when she visits the library to inquire about the story of the Beulahs and the claims of the Samsodiens to have a piece of land in Kattij , which shows the ugly face of apartheid. Going through the various documents and drawings that describe the wheels of torture and the death of Annamarie's children, Marion feels ashamed. Agatha, the libertarian, reminds her that "there's blood here Marion" (Omotoso , 2016, p. 168). Such feelings of shame and guilt, the fact that Marion has been all her life blinded by false tales of the superiority of the white race, that she never questions the righteousness of apartheid practices make her realize, for the first time, that she has been wrong.

In fact, the novelist's reliance on memory to justify the cruelty and hatred of the major characters reflects two important things. First, Omotoso makes clear that though apartheid has ended, its consequences can never be erased, a fact stressed by several post-apartheid writers. Unable to cope with the past or forget it, the characters are haunted by such memories which have shaped their identities. The novel, in another way, confirms that despite the efforts of the "Rainbow Nation" government and its TRC to help South Africans overcome their past grievances, it is hard to forget them. Second, the novel suggests that the only possible remedy for such hatred and enmity can be reached through forgetfulness and forgiveness. It is important to forget about the past which also involves forgiveness and reconciliation. "To forget," to use Marcuse's words , "is also to forgive what should not be forgiven if freedom and justice are to prevail" (qtd by Chapman, 2002, p. 232).

It is remarkable that laying bare the memories of both Marion and Hortensia has been a preliminary step towards their reconciliation. The destruction of Marion's house, during the repairs made at Hortensia's own house, and the fact that Hortensia feels sorry for being responsible for Marion's distress, which is made worse by the loss of the painting that Marion feels would make her life better, coincide with the breaking of Hortensia's leg and her decision to make it up for Marion by inviting her to stay at Hortensia's place. Omotoso brilliantly depicts the complex



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relationship between Marion and Hortensia, their long enmity and how it later turns into a unique form of friendship, a process that can be best described as a form of “entanglement,” which Nuttall (2009) defines as a “condition of being twisted together or entwined, involved with, it speaks of an intimacy gained, even if it was resisted, or ignored or invited” (p. 1). Metaphorically speaking, the novel suggests that since both black and white South Africans are living in the same house / country, they must overcome the barriers that separate them. Though this process may be difficult, it can be approached through a form of reconciliation that will enable both to cope with their traumatic past and live the present.

The relationship of both Marion and Hortensia has been marked with hatred and distrust before they manage to form a kind of intimacy, or “entanglement,” which as Nuttall (2009) explains, “works with difference and sameness” (p. 2). Black / white relation, as depicted in this novel, shows that the past, present and future are interlocked, hence the difficulty of separating them. Despite their many differences, not only in skin color but also in perspective, Marion and Hortensia need each other. The fact that Marion finds herself nursing Hortensia, convincing her to allow the Beulahs to bury their grandmother’s ashes in her garden, helping Hortensia to be better than her, is significant. In addition, the fact that both these two old ladies need company and care helps them bridge several old enmities. Both discover new things about each other and mostly about themselves. Marion, “the vulture” can cry and help others, whereas the ruthless Hortensia is “soft-hearted” (Omotoso, 2016, p. 219). Both unburden their hidden secrets to each other. Marion, for instance, confesses to Hortensia that she has been a “terrible mother.” Disliking her own mother and denying the freedom of choice, Marion insists on raising her children differently only to find at the end of her life that she is just like mother. Her failure as a mother, which caused her to be rejected by her children, fills Marion with bitterness. Later, her discovery of the shameful history of apartheid and the new knowledge she gains by her contact with Hortensia, Beulah, Dr Mama, Bassey and Agnes force her to change her life perspective and reconsider her past life. She keeps telling Hortensia that she is not racist. The word “sorry” is often repeated in Marion’s dialogue with other “black” characters. She also realizes that she is an old woman “trying to fix everything” (Omotoso, 2016, p. 244).

Similarly, Hortensia’s character is greatly developed through her contact with Marion; she apologizes to Marion for destroying her house



and is deeply affected to see her crying. She also acts nicely when Innes, Marion's granddaughter, visits them. Marion even feels "jealous that Innes and Hortensia got acquainted so quickly" (Omotoso, 2016, p. 156). Furthermore, she unburdens her own grieves to Marion, telling her about Peter's betrayal, his own child and most importantly that Hortensia herself was pregnant several times and failed to keep her children. Her desperate need to have a family and a child of her own, in addition to Peter's betrayal, are presented as the main causes of her rudness and hatred. Marion, too, realizes that Hortensia's rejection of the Gierdiens' request to bury their grandmother in her garden symbolizes "the power of family, love, children" (Omotoso, 2016, p. 234), all of which Hortensia lacks. Likewise, Hortensia convinces Marion to visit Agnes in her last days, a visit which has taught Marion a great lesson and tolerance and fills her with shame and guilt.

A greater transformation in Hortensia's perspective takes place when Marion convinces her to receive Esme, Peter's daughter. To her great surprise, Hortensia finds out that Esme is blind. Moreover, Hortensia is deeply affected by Esme's "tolerance and peace of mind" (Omotoso, 2016, p. 261). She even feels sorrow as she realizes the mystery of the inscription on Peter's tombstone. The slab commissioned by Peter is a message written in Braille which is meant to be read by Esme. Hortensia also realizes that Peter has chosen to live with her and has been separated from his daughter for 40 years because he loves Hortensia. Like Marion, Hortensia thinks she is a "bad person" (Omotoso, 2016, p. 268). Both will go to hell for their "bad choices". Both will be haunted by the ghosts of their past. Marion is afraid of Agnes' ghost whereas Hortensia is afraid of being sent to hell.

In fact, both Marion and Hortensia manage to create a successful contact with each other despite their differences. They become friends. Several seasons after Esme's visit, Hortensien starts to take care of her garden. The narrator's description of the blossoming of various species of flowers, "dragonflies, butterflies, sunbirds, frogs and lizards" (Omotoso, 2016, p. 275) all came as a great surprise to Marion who tells Hortensia "I don't know you cared" (Omotoso, 2016, p. 275). She even goes into Hortensia's kitchen to make dinner for both, which grants the novel an optimistic end.

The life journey of both Hortensia and Marion has taught them that it is important to forget about the past and to forgive. Haunted by the memories of their past, their life is turned into a hell. They are completely

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absorbed in their negative feelings: hatred, bitterness, shame, guilt, and anger. It is, therefore, most salient that they should reconcile not only with their past but also with their present to live a better life. The novel stresses the idea that though it is hard to forget the past, the only possible remedy for both black and white South Africans to overcome apartheid trauma is reconciliation. The novel, therefore, calls for questioning the validity of old dichotomies that form the apartheid system while adopting the TRC discourse particularly "memory as the repository of the past of reconciliation over retribution of confronting past evil in order to find the condition of a shared humanity, of healing through confession" (Nuttall, 2009, p. 74).

The novel has, thus, explored the various means towards reconciliation, the common area they can share, learn to live together, and accept each other despite racial and cultural differences, an experience of humanism, according to Nuttall (2009), "vested in a recognition of shared human frailty and vulnerability, grounded in feelings of shame, self-stigma, empathy and compassion" (p. 979). Seen within the TRC discourse, Omotoso's *The Woman Next Door* calls for a reconsideration of the inherent causes that have torn South Africans apart because of apartheid practices. It also argues for the necessity of establishing, to use Chapman's words, "the humanism of reconstruction" (2002, p. 232). According to Chapman (2002):

There is a need in societies of sharp inequalities for a humanism of reconstruction, in which damaged identities are reassembled, silenced voices given speech, and causes rooted close to home in the priorities of the local scene examining itself as it examines its relations to any international counterpart. (p. 232)

Omotoso's novel argues for the necessity of re-examining black / white relations in contemporary post-apartheid South Africa before establishing the "humanism of reconstruction." The novel succeeds in fulfilling this goal by giving voice to several silenced voices to narrate their stories such as Agnes, Hortensia, Marion—mostly female voices. Remembering the past has liberated their souls. For example, despite long years of humiliation and marginalization, Agnes chooses to forgive and forget. The black Agnes has thus taught the white Marion a great lesson in forgiveness. Similarly, the white can teach the black a lesson. Esme, Peter's daughter, has taught Hortensia to forgive and forget about her past

hatred and rage. The Gierdiens request to bury their grandmother's ashes in Hortensia's garden and the Samsodiens 'claim of a part of the land in Kittijin symbolize the fact that though apartheid can never be erased or forgotten, it can be reconciled.

Furthermore, the great transformation in the attitudes of both Hortensia and Marion testifies to Hall's concept of identity as affected by history, power, and culture. Their past has been determined by apartheid context and cultural ethos. The fact is that though they are over 80, they manage to reconsider their life and acquire new knowledge about the world and mostly themselves. They have not only reconciled with the world but have gained the peace of mind they have longed for. This change proves that identity is never a fixed entity. Rather, it goes through a continuous process of becoming.

The loneliness and bitterness accompanied by old age proves Mandela's own discovery during his long life of imprisonment that "nothing is more dehumanizing than the absence of human companionship" (Mandela, 1994, p. 334). Marion and Hortensia's long hatred has changed their life. By the end of the novel, they become more mature. Imprisoned in their race / hate culture for decades, they now realize the need to deal with each other as equal human beings not as enemies. Furthermore, they have created a contact zone, a space of "intermediality," a state of "in-betweeness," which Kalua (2020) explains as a "state of affairs which emphasizes the need to embrace difference, otherness, of categories such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion and other categorisations"(p. xiii). Hortensia and Marion manage to overcome their racial and cultural differences, their Otherness. Omotoso's novel suggests a reconstruction of black / white relation, one that is devoid of hatred, vengeance, or racism. The new community depicted at the end of Omotoso's novel is actually an embodiment of the "Rainbow Nation" ideal of creating a new South African multiracial society that is based on shared human values such as love, commitment, natural respect, solidarity, and compassion, revealing a new African identity that embraces all races and all cultures, one that is characterized by unity in diversity.

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