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Epistemological Purity and the Experience of Vision in Henry James's *What Maisie Knew*

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Abstract

It is stating the obvious that What Maisie Knew *is considered one of Henry James's least successful undertakings as a novel, but it is undeniable that his novel is a fascinating experiment with form, symmetry, narrative voices, and focalization. This paper claims that despite Maisie's role of being a victim because of her parents' divorce, she eventually manages to surmount the complexities of the epistemological and moral confusion with which she is grappling as a young child. In support of this argument, the paper concludes that Maisie's moral vision expands as she experiences the world around her and builds her own individualistic way of seeing the confluence of egoistic and uncaring human attitudes. One thing that she learns as the novel comes to its end is that the child's loss of "epistemological purity" (Bell, 1991, p. 248) will not prevent her from becoming an independent agent capable of making her own moral choice. The novel's open-endedness is not uncharacteristic of James, who always found a suitable (non)resolution for his characters to embark upon a journey of a new understanding in quest of self-expression, and moral and epistemological growth. In his novel, James experiments with form, symmetry, modes of expression, narrative voices, perspectives, and focalization, all of which can only be fully comprehended if Maisie's vision represents much more than her longing to fly out of her suffocating parental nest.*

Keywords: vision, epistemology, innocence, narrative voices, focalization.

Henry James gained creative inspiration to commit himself to the writing of *What Maisie Knew* (1897) after his ponderous religious play *Guy Domville* (1895) had evolved into a gargantuan fiasco at its premiere. In spite of the failure that James suffered as a playwright that night (so much so that he even fled his own play to watch Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband* only to return to his curtain call to be painfully jeered), the author's interest in performance and theatricality rose to prominence in many of his novels to follow (Haralson & Johnson 2009: 461). Understandably, he managed to turn his flopperoo around into the well-deserved success which he continued discovering as a novelist, or as Conrad (1916) referred to him, a supreme "historian of fine consciences" (589). Theatricality, though often left unnoticed by critics in the Jamesian scholarship, serves as an important structuring principle in *What Maisie Knew*, a novel which helps trace the eponymous hero's evolution from a powerless and impressionable child, subservient to the whims and fancies of her oppressive environment, to an all-knowing free moral agent. Once the reader is informed that the "child has been provided for," Maisie is perched in her stall as if "the whole performance had been given for her — a mite of a half-sacred infant in a great dim theatre" (21)[1], and she is instantaneously defined as the novel's central eye.

This paper will argue that despite Maisie's role of being "the little feathered shuttlecock […] flying between" (24) her divorced parents from one situation into another, she eventually succeeds in orienting herself amidst the epistemological and moral confusions with which she is grappling as a young child. In support of my argument, I shall claim that Maisie's moral vision expands as she experiences the world around her and builds her own idiosyncratic way of seeing the confluence of egoistic and uncaring human attitudes. One thing that she learns as the novel comes to its end is that the child's loss of "epistemological purity" (Bell 1991: 248) will not prevent her from becoming an independent agent capable of making her own moral choice. Vision, through Maisie as the novel's central consciousness, is a thematic principle that provides a coherent framework for the novel, the meanings of which none other than the child is able to assemble into an organic whole from a multitude of impressions her mind receives through the jumbled interpersonal relations surrounding her.

1

Maisie's evolution is what the title intimates with its spurious use of the past tense, leading the reader down the garden path by raising a spark of hope that one is presented with an answerable epistemological problem found elsewhere of the great tradition of coming-of-age novel, practitioners of which were Charles Dickens, Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, and many others. Yet, the title promises more than it can undertake, and the puzzling thinness of its action, narrated in thirty-one lengthy chapters, provides neither fulfilment nor solace for those searching for an answer to what Maisie actually knew at the novel's nonresolution that is so typical of the realist James.[2] The novel, disguised as an emblematic example of a Bildungsroman at the outset, deviates from the conventions of the subgenre in that its goal is to give Maisie the maturity she yearns to accomplish; however, just before she makes her decisive choice to stay with Mrs. Wix, one might only speculate whether the girl's future remains precarious or she succeeds in exercising her willpower as an autonomous human being, early traits of which emerge in the crucial closing chapter. In his introduction to the novel, Adrian Poole (1996) calls attention to the scope and extent of how Maisie's story varies from the generic attributes of the Bildungsroman:

> The child travels towards the adult but does not cross the frontier. In this respect the novel bears comparison with the masterpiece of James's slightly older contemporary, Mark Twain, *The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), and even with that other class of boy's story a younger contemporary, Kipling's *Kim* (1901).
>
> (viii)

Contrary to the hallmarks of the coming-of-age novel, Maisie, who is at the cusp of her parents' divorce, is neither ready to espouse the values of her decayed society, represented by a cohort of bickering and insensible characters, such as her biological parents, a hysterical Ida and a conniving Beale, nor is she ultimately accepted into her society as an individual with a life of her own. As the novel closes and Mrs. Wix expresses her continued "wonder at what Maisie knew" (248), the child, who has become somewhat older and wiser since the beginning, is no longer regarded as someone only experiencing the vices of the ruthless world of adults and all its paraphernalia that she had been unable to comprehend as a child. Maisie's only responsibility

throughout the novel is degraded to that of a mere catalyst and a repository of animosity and invectives between her divorced parents. In James's long preface to the novel, he acknowledges that Maisie is but a "ready vessel for bitterness, a deep little porcelain cup in which biting acids could be mixed" (6). Adrian Poole (1996) locates metaphorical value in Maisie as he garners further designations which are used in reference to the child. In Chapter 2, the narrator comments how Ida unleashes her vituperations on her former husband through Maisie:

> The objurgation for instance launched in the carriage by her mother after she had at her father's bidding punctually performed was a missive that *dropped into her memory with the dry rattle of a letter falling into a pillar-box*.
>
> (24, emphasis added)

This association of Maisie with empty vessels at a metaphorical level (as interpreted by cognitive linguists in particular) also shows that the child is capable of receiving all the impressions through careful observation and meticulous attention to her nearest surroundings. Akin to the preponderating part of his oeuvre, James attempts to make Maisie function as a representation of life through her own experiences, which implies that the child must progress her *internal vision* before reaching a new phase of understanding, leading to the impairment of what Millicent Bell (1991) calls "epistemological purity" (248). However, this understanding comes at a price: as Maisie develops her awareness by "see[ing] much more than she at first understood" (21), she feels increasingly inclined to build "a protective armor against the thoughtless cruelty of the adult world" (Shine 1969: 110). James's interest to make Maisie a sophisticated observer, whose ability to create her own reality from the material of lived experience, does more justice to the novel than any verbal representation could ever achieve. Galbraith (1989) makes a compelling point when she contends that instead of "reproducing a character's language," James resorts to the "metaphorical representation of speech" to capture the "force of a character's argument" (200). Such a "force" can be sensed when something nearly revelatory or hard-to-grasp from a child's perspective occurs in the novel. In this context, it seems pertinent at this juncture to quote what Walter Pater denotes as "beatific vision" in his philosophical novel, *Marius the Epicurean*:

> From that maxim of *Life as the end of life*, followed, as a practical consequence, the desirableness of refining all the instruments of inward and outward intuition, of developing all their capacities, of testing and exercising one's self in them, till one's whole nature became *one complex medium of reception*, towards the vision-the "beatific vision," if we really cared to make it such-of our actual experience in the world.
>
> (1973: 142, italics in the original)

To my mind, Maisie is not only a recipient of novel impressions due to her dysfunctional familial relations, which she only strives to comprehend with the faculty of a child, but she also functions (both literally and figuratively) as "one complex medium of reception" (Pater 1973: 140). Muriel Shine (1969) assumes that the child's consciousness to become the novel's "unmediated center" (110) is of vital importance as regards the aesthetic form, that is to say, how the story is narrated and what the reader can make of it. In his seminal essay, "The Art of Fiction" (1884), James writes that "a novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct

impression of life: that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression" (James 1956: 50). What this means is that the quality of a novel depends on the acuteness of the observer; as a result, the novelist's task is to search the length and breadth of his work of art for lived experience. To James, what best defines fiction is its ability to have "a conscious moral purpose" (1956: 52), and only experience and observation as creative tools can surpass imagination. Aladár Sarbu (2006) innovatively reads James as Pater's steadfast disciple by asserting that "Pater's sensualism and solipsism are clearly at work in Henry James's concept of the novel" (165). Sarbu's claim that "there is no way of reliably comparing our sense-impressions with those of other people" can be read as an implication that Pater's "epistemological premises" anticipate ideas of phenomenological theory (2006: 165). Maisie serves as an illustrative example of being "confined to the prison of self" (165), an idea that has been extensively elaborated by Paul B. Armstrong in his analyses of James's moral vision.

2

James is often identified as a purveyor of a unique trend of psychological realism which Maisie and most other main characters possess. James's pursuit is always to look behind the material surface of reality by evincing a keen interest in psychological and aesthetic depths (Bollobás 2006: 236, my translation). This fittingly applies to *What Maisie Knew*, where the child's vision is utilized as an ideal medium to collect all the self-impressions in her morally, epistemologically, and existentially expanding world, which is capable of accommodating "two fathers, two mothers and two homes, six protections in all" (78); similarly, she is saddled with a faculty to find her way out of an endless maze with no apparent exits. It seems obvious to the reader after the first ten or so chapters that Maisie's name evokes a labyrinthine, or rather, *mazy* structure, which is congruous with James's convoluted yet suggestive syntax. The novel itself offers the author the opportunity to experiment with representations of consciousness, something that anticipates his much bolder later style. Indeed, Maisie's psychological depth — inconsistent and spontaneous as it is in a child's ever-changing modes of perception — allows the author to make his heroine stand at the "ironic centre" (7) of the Jamesian novel. His descriptions of manors, gardens, social gatherings, and natural sceneries generally function as ideal backdrops to help him represent his characters' minds. Instead of opting for one single scene that projects Maisie's trains of thoughts, it is the novel as a whole that produces a similar effect. Poole (1996) writes that "*Maisie* is a novel that keeps changing its rules as it goes along. One kind of scene meets into something quite different; characters imagined in one idiom give way to characters created in another" (xi). As scenes morph into one another with the same juggernaut force as Maisie is thrown as a "tennis ball" (8) among parents, governesses, and stepparents, the assumption gains immediate "currency" that the "suppleness in the play of voices, the sequence of tones, the shuffling of space and time" (Poole 1996: vii) are intrinsically modernist techniques used extravagantly later in twentieth-century Anglo-American literature.[3] While Poole is a vigilant observer in arguing that Maisie's mind is analogous to how the text is constructed, James's innovations in the novel, most evidently in his stylistic prose experiments, clearly register an effect on later modernist art, especially on how the story is recounted from a narratological point of view. And it is James's ingenious mode of narrating the story of a divorce

through a "young intelligence" (21) that also allows the reader to extract more (in terms of knowledge) from the novel than the child through her limited prism of understanding.

In earlier works of criticism, focalization stood out as one of the most fundamental elements of the Jamesian oeuvre. In *What Maisie Knew*, James uses a limited omniscient narrator, whose position is fixed in the novel; in other words, "one and the same character provides the focus throughout" (Sarbu 2006: 249). The focalizer here is Maisie, who is lost, victimized, and objectified by her cruel environment which renders her a speechless observer: her sustained "exchange of silences" (6) just before leaving for England in Chapter 33 signifies that her attainment of knowledge leaves her moral purity unscathed amidst the immoral machinations of the adult world, where corruption is best defined as a synonym for verbal language. It might be stating the obvious that the novel's narration is left completely at the mercy of "a narrator, who is superior to the action, who is typically witty, quick with a paradox, and frequently arch" (Klein 2006: 139). Having a narrator in control of the story straightaway answers the question of "who speaks?" but leaves the reader in the novel's ill-lit foyer, where Maisie's blurred vision conceals more than it reveals. Let us not forget that Maisie's role, as it is set out in the opening chapter, is primarily to act as the spectator of a confusing domestic theater, which she *sees* and *registers* but fails to *understand*. Armstrong (1978) remarks in his phenomenological reading of the novel that Maisie's "unsettling unpredictability" is what makes her "construction of meaning seem futile without assurances about continuity with the future" (519). In grappling with her own limitations as a seer, Maisie finds herself entrapped in "the prison of ambiguity" (Armstrong 1978: 520), which she occupies as an epistemologically pure child. In registering sense-impressions, Maisie is shown to share some affinities with James's real-life amanuenses—his preferred word for a secretary or a literary assistant—who would typewrite the author's dictation of the story with the help of a melodiously clicking Remington (Schilleman 2013: 14).

It is through Maisie's limited narrative focus that readers learn about the gradually unfolding events. Central as her seeing eye might be in digesting (or rather, ingesting) the course of actions, one must not be misled by the impression that the novel's third-person narration establishes her role differently from the speaking voice, which, as Marcia Jacobson (1983) claims, clearly belongs to James. In her reading of innocence as an object of historical interest, the commentator points out that "James blurs [Maisie's] vision with his own" (114). Evidently, any adult reader has the edge on Maisie's limited perception in terms of knowing what is happening around her. Where Maisie only notices a strange gesture between the characters, the reader's sharpened awareness that the gesture is an erotic innuendo would be a sobering experience for a child. On a side note, it stands to reason to identify James's novel as a typical example of what Roland Barthes (1970) famously calls a "writerly" text, which makes demands on the reader, who must work hard to extract meaning from the text as a producer. In his excellent analysis of narrative voices in the Jamesian novel, Richard Aczel (1998) highlights that James's text "draw[s] attention to [its] self-consciously writerly character […] foregrounding the narrator not as an abstracting, interpreting, or communicatively subversive function, but as manifest stylist, orator, or *ethos* in the Aristotelian sense of the term" (472). On a different register, however, it would be a misconception to classify Maisie as an emblematic "consumer" of the events, as she painstakingly aims at congealing the fragments of her vision into an organic

whole. One of the alluring effects that the novel creates is owing to the distinction between the child's vision and the interpretation provided by adults. The narrator's erudition, choice of words, linguistic bravura, and convoluted syntax are a clear indication that the narrator is not a child.[4] In making all these observations, one might not be amiss to consider James at his most radical in his attempts to prove that mistaking the narrator and the focalizer is indeed a mistake— and an unpardonable one at that. Aladár Sarbu (1981) correctly points out that "[t]he narrator and the focalizer, Maisie, represent varying degrees of experience as well as mental and psychological development" (118). He adds that Maisie does not occupy an active role in the novel. This also implies that the romance between Sir Claude and Mrs. Beale, the initiation of which ("You brought us together!" exclaims Sir Claude in joy) is attributed to Maisie as an executor. In reality, however, Sir Claude's interjection only suggests that Maisie served as a pretext for the two adults to meet. As far as the novel's narration is concerned, it would have been unlikely for James to create a character who is noticeably different from him (Bollobás 2006: 246).[5]

Granting pardon to her uncaring environment proves to be challenging for Maisie, as it is the "death of her childhood" (7) that indirectly led to her maturation, which is coreferential to the developed moral vision she eventually attains. Throughout the novel, Maisie is subjected to malicious name-calling by nearly everyone who thinks of her as a powerless child without the fundamental ability to speak for herself. This is one of the faculties she should learn to possess in order to process the overwhelming number of impressions in a world of nonchalant adults. Robert B. Pippin (2008) is correct in pointing out that "the five adults in charge of her care are each speaking rather grotesquely only for themselves" (121). Every time she utters her ubiquitous "I don't know," Maisie leaves room for her environment to use and abuse her by assuming vehicular role in a series of malicious adult games: "She would forget everything, she would repeat nothing, and when, as a tribute to the successful application of her system, *she began to be called a little idiot*, she tasted a pleasure new and keen" (25).

Even Mrs. Wix, with whom Maisie chooses to stay at the novel's closure, talks to her with condescension by calling her a "[p]oor little monkey" (18). Name-calling must have been one of the novel's most noticeable aspects for contemporary readers, who were used to the widespread idolization of children in literary works during the Victorian era. Marcus Klein (2006) asserts that "[w]ith its little heroine, forefronted by the giving of her nice name to the title, the novel promises to be an episode in what was at the time the immensely popular mode of children's literature" (135). Yet, Klein is wide of the mark by demoting Maisie to what he calls a "type" with her contemporaries emerging in the novel as "implied shades" (137). To my mind, Maisie is the novel's only genuine character whose constant exposure to the moral squalor of adulthood sends her off on a quest of self-knowledge and an existence of its own right. Her silence and feigned acquiescence to her incessant ill-treatment make her occupy a vantage point whence she can launch her fearful campaign of "wordless knowing" (Bell 1991: 245) on a nefarious world dominated by the verbal language of adults. On a side note, it might be interesting to note that James, who either satirized the topic of marriage or offered contemptuous critique of it in light of the blatant social problems of his time, used the notion of marriage in *What Maisie Knew* as a denunciation of the Victorian family's obsession with social hierarchy rather than genuine emotions.

3

Maisie's oppressive environment is composed of mere rhetoricians who are as static and insensible as theatrical props on a stage. It is the exceptional value of silence in her tawdry milieu of a loud mother, a calculating father, and a holier-than-thou governess that allows her to intratextually join forces with other Jamesian female heroes, the most silent of whom is *Washington Square*'s Catherine Sloper, who challenges male authority by serving vengeance on a world of rhetoric *not* with the weapon of audible utterances but with her weapon of frustrating silence. In one way or another, it is the female protagonist of this early short novel that may have anticipated a series of other characters in James's forthcoming works of his late period. While Maisie's tongue is literally tied in the hurly-burly of *fin-de-siècle* London, she comes across as a dreamer with a vivid imagination, which she uses to channel her vision of self-knowledge and morality in a world marred by hostility and anger (no wonder her family name, Far*ange* carries a bit of this anger). W. A. Merle (1993) correctly posits that "the novel gives prominence to the individual […], while society functions largely as a contextualizing backdrop" (33): it features the child's dysfunctional family consisting of hackneyed "flat" characters according to E. M. Forster's designation. Maisie's wonderment of her surroundings is portrayed in a similar vein to that of a story-book world. It seems worthwhile at this point to quote a lengthy passage of the innocence and awe with which Maisie captures images and echoes of her (nightmarish) fairy-tale:

> Preoccupied, however, as Maisie was with the idea of the sentiment Sir Claude had inspired, and familiar, in addition, by Mrs. Wix's anecdotes, with the ravages that in general such a sentiment could produce, she was able to make allowances for her ladyship's remarkable appearance, her violent splendour, the wonderful colour of her lips and even the hard stare, *the stare of some gorgeous idol described in a story-book*, that had come into her eyes in consequence of a curious thickening of their already rich circumference.
>
> (62, emphasis added)

Maisie relies on her "imaginative agility" to make sense of the world around her, and by doing so, she is able to engage in the constructive act of a young genius, whose silent rhetoric is inextricably linked to her faculty to "reflect on the unreflected" (Armstrong 1978: 520). James notes in the preface that Maisie's mind works in mysterious ways because whenever she starts wondering, "they [the objects] begin to have meanings, aspects, solidities, connexions — connexions with the "universal!" (8). The child's unbridled imagination functions at its best when she talks to Lisette, her doll, so as to search for a moment of lucidity if her circumstances outgrow her general understanding:

> Little by little, however, she understood more, for it befell that she was enlightened by. Lisette's questions, which reproduced the effect of her own upon those for whom she sat in

the very darkness of Lisette. Was she not herself convulsed by such innocence? In the presence of it she often imitated the shrieking ladies.

(37)

It seems sound to posit that James's narrator routes his vision through Maisie in a similar way to how she attempts to project her ambiguity, fears, and anxiety onto the doll. James's inclusion of the story-book element is the result of careful methodical planning. On the one hand, readers devoured the fairy tales of Ruskin, Thackeray, Wilde, and Charles Kingsley during the Victorian era which also positioned the author on the threshold of literary modernism with a slight inclination toward the more conventional Victorian systems of motifs and topoi. On the other hand, James enables Maisie to espouse the art of world construction which can only be achieved through her creative gift of "exploiting her apparent safety by constructing a bridge between her world with Sir Claude and her world with the Captain" (Armstrong 1978: 522). It gradually transpires that both Maisie and Mrs. Wix are storytellers in their own humble ways. In Chapter 19, just as Maisie is leaving the house after her encounter with the Countess, the narrator says that

> the sound was commanding: the cab rattled off. Maisie sat there with her hand full of coin. All that for a cab? As they passed a street-lamp she bent to see how much. What she saw was a cluster of sovereigns. There *must* then have been great interests in America. *It was still at any rate the Arabian Nights.*

(141, emphasis added)

In this passage, the Arabesque reference to the fairy-tale, Maisie figures that the lady who lives in such a luxury must be radiantly beautiful. Upon meeting the repulsive Countess, she is abysmally confused and frightened by such a repugnant companion to the man who had earlier married two beautiful women. Here, the narrator's allusion to the *Arabian Nights* allows the reader to sense that this version of the *Arabian Nights* abounds in heated eroticism, lust, deceptiveness and greed. It seems improbable that Maisie's otherwise fine mind was able to capture the full essence of the text's Arabesque innuendo. For her, the fairy-tale aspects of the tale must have lain in her preconceived idea of beauty and its complete absence in the case of the unappealing Countess.

Albeit a daydreaming romantic at heart, Maisie is amorously attached to Sir Claude and possesses the perspicacity of a poor fairy-tale heroine, whose traditional role is to use her charms to conquer the heart of her coveted prince. And Maisie realizes in the cold light of day that she is *also* capable of responding to her devious parents with a considerable degree of sharpness. Chapter 19 sheds light on Maisie's exceptional wit: Beale informs her that he plans to move to America with the Countess and inquires with Maisie if she is willing to join them. Halfway through their conversation, Maisie realizes that her father is in fact trying to dissuade her from going with them while still having the deceptive countenance of a caring father. When Maisie confirms her readiness to travel with them (in fact, a clever gimmick on her part), Beale makes a grimace and leaves the discussion uninterpreted. Maisie clearly understands that her father would not like her to go with them, and upon the Countess's arrival she has a growing desire to leave.

Her impetuous reaction is seen as a sign of coming to terms with the novel's harrowing reality by presenting "a sharpened sense of latent meanings" (170).

Klein (2006) claims that Maisie's victimizers are "stock figures" (141), whose self-indulging and hedonistic behaviors introduce them as bearers of an assortment of deplorable modern values. As such, it is not incorrect to see them through a postmodernist lens as largely interchangeable characters with cotton-padded bodies who refuse to evince even a modicum of interest in Maisie's pathos. Aladár Sarbu (1981) convincingly argues that Maisie's gradual intellectual development sets the novel's direction as Maisie (mingling with adults who play their own roles) learns how to wear a mask and be a hypocrite (117). He refers to one important scene where Maisie, who has by now acquired the art of playing make-believe, is confronted with her mother's alleged sickness and responds to it in a manner that clearly resembles an artistic performance. I agree with Sarbu (1981) that "the girl is mature enough not to take the lies of the adult world for granted, but she is still a child in her ability to voice her independence" (116). The passage in which Maisie's hypocrisy takes central stage is worth quoting:

> This for a minute struck Maisie as but a part of the conversation; at the end of which time she became aware that it ought to strike her — though it apparently didn't strike Sir Claude — as a part of something graver. It helped her to twist nearer. "*Ill, mamma—really ill*?"
>
> <div align="right">(152, emphasis added)</div>

It would be hard to dismiss the fact that Maisie's role-play runs counter to her romanticized and fictitious way of imagining events and interpersonal relationships. James's reference to a "story-book world" (59) in Chapter 9 discloses more than Maisie's fascination with tales of the imagination and their projections with real-life scenarios. The fact that she learns how to resort to her world-constructing ability whenever she is confronted with a confounding situation makes her occupy a place similar to the intradiegetic locus of a focalizer who is engaged in the telling of an embedded narrative. These inner workings of Maisie's imagination within her narratives reveal much about Maisie's continuously broadening mind, but they also have a symbolic and psychological significance for the characters in the outer story, or rather, the light in which the reader sees them. Certainly, less valiant, moral, caring or charismatic than Maisie portrays them in the distorted mirror she holds up to their objective reality. Armstrong (1978) notes that "Maisie makes a guess about hidden sides in her extravagant, imaginative interpretation of the Captain as her mother's knight in shining armor" (521). Furthermore, Maisie derives creative inspiration of weaving her own story when she draws a parallel between how the Captain is saving Ida and Sir Claude is rescuing her in a scene that resembles the fearless act of Prince Charming. In a similar vein, Maisie is literally charmed by catching sight of Sir Claude's photo before physically encountering him. The scene that unfolds is nearly phantasmagoric, but fable-like at best, in providing *vision* of Sir Claude-as-Prince that further awakens the child's interest in the young man:

> Mrs. Farange, in the candour of new-found happiness, had enclosed a "cabinet" photograph of Sir Claude, and Maisie lost herself in admiration of the fair smooth face, the regular features, the kind eyes, the amiable air, the general glossiness and smartness of her

prospective stepfather—only vaguely puzzled to suppose herself now with two fathers at
once.

(46)

Here, James gives Maisie a fragmentary vision of what is yet to come, but he also uses irony to
affix in Maisie's mind the image of this charming man as her prospective stepfather. Her ability
to travel mentally through imagined landscapes and scenarios ensures that the "hidden sides of
her interpersonal world stay hidden, if only it is more pleasant to dwell in fantasies than to face a
disillusioning reality" (Armstrong 1978: 523). Additionally, I believe that Maisie's dreamlike
reflection on events and her attempt at building worlds and fathoming out their related meaning
provide her with the opportunity to exercise her artistic freedom as though she were re-creating
the fantastic world of *The Arabian Nights*. Yet, as opposed to the endless possibilities of love,
care, and solace that any fantasy world could proffer, Maisie's fictional castles and hiding places
only make her realize that the world of negligence she inhabits is in fact the reversal of a fairy
tale.

4

The real world, where her role as a "socially constructed entity" (Galbraith 1989: 201) limits her
freedom, throws her into an epistemologically and existentially precarious position. Mary
Galbraith (1989) appositely explicates the epistemology of the novel's prologue by stating that
Maisie appears in the text as "the child" (a legal entity) and "the bone of contention" (in her
parents' battle), which render her an entity who "does not yet exist as a live, experiencing
subject" (201). While Galbraith's analysis stands to reason in her close phenomenological
reading of the text, it seems to me that divesting Maisie of her status as an individual and
identifying this status with her being a non-entity categorically assigs the female protagonist a
fixed position. Instead of reading Maisie's usual appellation as "the child" as opposed to calling
her on a first name basis, a phenomenon that Galbraith considers to be a phenomenon of "social
defamiliarization" (202), I believe that the notion of liminality, used widely in cultural
anthropology and literary theory, can be adequately applied to the consciousness Maisie
represents. In the novel, the qualities of indeterminacy, ambiguity, and becomingness, which are
key features of liminality as formulated by Arnold Van Gennep (2013) and later by Victor
Turner (1995), are easily detectable at a textual level and unmistakably refer to Maisie's
boundless and in-between existential position. The following two quotes exemplify how "dawn"
and "dusk" hold liminal positions between night and day (a usual set of examples to define
liminality). However, more importantly, Maisie's *exilic position* as a cultural phenomenon of
modernity correlates to liminality in more than just a subtle fashion:

> Every single thing he had prophesied came so true that it was after all no more than fair to
> expect quite as much for what he had as good as promised. His pledges they could verify to
> the letter, down to his very guarantee that a way would be found with Miss Ash. *Roused in
> the summer dawn and vehemently squeezed by that interesting exile*, Maisie fell back upon
> her couch with a renewed appreciation of his policy.

(184)

The scene in which Maisie sits down on a bench bears more than a passing resemblance to a decisive scene in *The Portrait of a Lady*, where Isabel Archer occupies a rustic bench as darkness gathers under the oaks at Gardencourt.

> After she had disappeared, *Maisie dropped upon the bench again* and for some time, in the empty garden and the deeper dusk, sat and stared at the image her flight had still left standing.
>
> (160, italics added)

The fact that her "fortune will be never to grow up and never to be young again" (Poole 1996: v) positions Maisie in a liminal space, which Turner (1995) uses to denote "an interior state — a projection of creative power, a metaphor of the imagination" (qtd. in Joseph 2011: 139). It is this transitional, in-between state of the child's rite of initiation into a later stage of adolescence that helps her come to the realization that she alone is capable of exonerating herself from the shackles her family forces her to wear and define her own being.[6] This is not to mean that she ever succeeds in freeing herself from the liminal position that keeps her trapped. In his analysis on liminality in children's literature, Michael Joseph (2011) proffers an idiosyncratic way of describing liminal characters (such as Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, whose coming-of-age story — despite its inconclusiveness — is often compared to James's novel). The following line of argumentation is germane to our analysis of Maisie as a liminal character:

> Someone whose personhood is liminal lives beyond the pale of society, or structure. For such persons, liminality is neither ritual nor transitional, but *an open-ended way of life* qualified by sets of cultural demands, ethical systems, and processes that are irreconcilable.
>
> (140, emphasis added)

Regardless of how Maisie's liminal position is read, the self-knowledge she gradually comes to possess makes her realize that her quest for care will never come to fruition unless her own caring nature toward others is not taken into account as a genuine and most likely unpronounced fulfilment of her desires. However harsh her realization might seem, Maisie knows—though she is no doubt epistemologically naïve—that she can put faith in no one to rush to her rescue. Such a desperate call for help recurs in several of James's works, most notably "The Turn of the Screw" (1898), highlighting the helpless plasticity of childhood through sensitive and vulnerable children. Armstrong's (1978) interpretation of the novel's ending is at variance with Joseph's (2011) take on how the story comes to an end. While the latter destabilizes Maisie's position by casting her among a cohort of liminal characters, Armstrong (1978) claims that "[f]or Maisie, knowing the worst with certainty is the epistemological triumph that found her existence more securely than ever before" (533). I believe that Maisie's triumph lies in the fact that she opts for an "open-ended way of life" (Joseph 2011: 140), which allows her to further develop her moral vision after arriving at a conclusion in the city of Boulogne—now as an individualized moral agent.

When Maisie naively suggests in Chapter 25 "Why shouldn't we be four?" (188), referring the possibility of cohabitation in adultery, she is still facing the epistemological

confusion which prevents her from being able to come to terms with the baffling circumstances. One of the novel's most memorable scenes further complicates, or rather, violates, Maisie's epistemological horizon in a way that James's syntactical density, typical of his mature style, becomes a parody of itself. Klein's (2006) observation is especially pertinent in his otherwise scantily developed analysis of the following sentence, which does not only burlesque authorial style (and, by extension, authorial control) but also momentarily decentralizes Maisie's position as the novel's fixed focalizer.

> The immensity didn't include *them*; but if he had an idea at the back of his head she had also one in a recess as deep, and for a time, while they sat together, there was *an extraordinary mute passage between her vision of this vision of his, his vision of her vision, and her vision of his vision of her vision*. What there was no effective record of indeed was the small strange pathos on the child's part of an innocence so saturated with knowledge and so directed to diplomacy.
>
> (132, emphasis added)

In more simplified terms, Beale is looking at Maisie, Maisie is seeing Beale looking at her, Beale is seeing Maisie seeing Beale looking at her, and finally Maisie is seeing Beale seeing Maisie seeing Beale looking at her. Here, all the different visions coalesce at one unitary moment of time, generating a sense of fullness akin to Pater's beatific vision, Eliot's epiphanies, or Nabokov's cosmic synchronization. The only difference is that in *What Maisie Knew* this sense of fullness offers a moment of fear and confusion in the company of a cunning father. At the level of content, Mrs. Wix's ubiquitous "straighteners" and "the full force of [Ida's] huge painted eyes" (31, 106) indicate the importance of personal vision throughout the novel. When Maisie is described in the same passage, sitting on Beale's lap, who is lighting a cigarette and puffing the smoke into her face, she experiences an extraordinary cognition which can be associated with the girl's own vision of arriving at a crucial phase of maturation in a manner that, for Maisie, is more nauseating than enlightening. Some commentators suspect the infiltration of forbidden and heated eroticism in this scene (Hugh Stevens, Arthur Marotti, Alfred Habegger, and John Carlos Rowe). It goes without saying that the scene presents a fundamental ambiguity of this odd familial intermezzo; it is then not accidental that Klein (2006) considers the novel as "James's most devious" one with its "sheer persistence of its probing behind and below" (135). Vision, therefore, one might suggest, has a malleable and ever-changing quality, and Maisie is not the only one permitted to usurp the acuity to portray her environment from one single point-of-view. The vision long-windedly described in the earlier passage deliberately confounds the child in this rare moment of the multiplication of perspectives only to inform her that the experience of vision is a precursor to understanding, but vision *never* lends itself well to finding one ultimate route to an absolute truth. In one way or another, James's intricate play with the pronouns found in this passage makes him stand out as something of a forerunner of postmodernism, where the ambiguous nature of identity is problematized through unusual syntax.[7] The passage also draws attention to the fact that everyone else around Maisie has the ability to empirically see what is happening, yet no one but Maisie has the faculty to emotionally process the seen (and, to a certain degree, the unseen).

5

When the novel is ferried to Boulogne, Maisie starts to realize that *knowing*, more than anything else, let alone the demoralizing maneuvers within the confines of her family, is a self-liberating process, and the sedulously gained maturity is an eventual tool to understand and manage her interpersonal relationships in life. Taking the boat across the channel to France marks the novel's psychological zenith: when Sir Claude, preoccupied with the posting of some letters, sends Maisie and Miss Ash out for a walk, the girl experiences a sudden revelation, which functions as her final awakening to the fact that her "emotion, at Boulogne, was speedily quenched into others, above all in the great ecstasy of a larger impression of life" (163). The geographical dislocation, emphasizing Maisie's exilic state of peregrinating between childhood innocence and an affirmed perception of the corrupt adult world, literally broadens the girl's vision, and the unfamiliar milieu suddenly metamorphoses into an enchanting and colorful place which she may have only dreamed of during her earlier reveries. Maisie's hitherto obscure world with its ubiquitously dark tonalities, on account of her lack of vision, is counterbalanced by her awakening consciousness as she feels, for the first time in her life, that she is "the guide and not the guided" (Haralson & Johnson 2009: 174).

Maisie takes delight in breathing in "the bright air, before the pink houses, among the bare-legged fishwives and the red-legged soldiers" (163), which introduces France as a symbol of romance and other forms and depths of love absent from England's rigid social climate, which James had described with ruthless realism owing to the wantonness of England *haut monde* (Sarbu 1981: 117). Maisie's outburst of emotions at the early discovery of being abroad for the first time is followed by a moment of subtle intimacy in Sir Claude's company. Armstrong (1978) writes convincingly that "Boulogne is only the threshold and Paris is the goal" (154) in order for Maisie to attain full maturity. To my mind, if England represents childhood and the innocence it entails, and Boulogne — no doubt, a liminal space, which Armstrong leaves unnoticed in his analysis — is the place where Maisie "[l]iterally in the course of an hour […] found her initiation" (163), then Paris stands for fulfilment, which never transpires on the novel's pages but is (perhaps) transported to the author's later novels. James implicitly refers to the fond emotions Maisie is more than likely to nourish for Sir Claude when she inquires with him "if he were prepared as yet to name the moment at which they should start for Paris" (164). This is a crucial scene, for the girl is shown to be in possession of her own will and the exact course her life should take. Her unveiled infatuation is only reinforced by what the narrator later describes as Maisie's "more than filial gaze" (184) toward a confused Sir Claude.

Maisie's going abroad and eventual return to England constitute a launch toward freedom, a mythical trip of awakening. The novel ends on a dramatic yet ambiguous note. Its open-endedness is not atypical of James, who always found a suitable (non)resolution for his characters to embark upon a journey of a new understanding in quest of self-expression, and moral and epistemological growth. In his novel, James experiments with form, symmetry, modes of expression, narrative voices, perspectives, and focalization, all of which can only be fully comprehended if Maisie's vision represents much more than her longing to fly out of her suffocating parental nest. Her vision becomes a foray into the understanding of the dark side of human nature and eventually allows her to cultivate her own ethics. I could not agree more with

Klein (2006), who attaches crucial importance to the role Mrs. Wix occupies in the closing chapter as an escape route for Maisie out of the novel. With the governess's frightened rejection to understand what the little girl knew in the beginning forms a circular narrative structure for the novel. Maisie's awakening state of consciousness and extreme willpower to grow — to learn to fight for an *existence* of her own instead of being buffeted from pillar to post, that is — and to transcend her boundaries, anticipates a series of later figures in the Jamesian universe. Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady*, Hyacinth Robinson in *The Princess of Casamassima*, and Maggie Verver in *The Golden Bowl* may not have come into existence had it not been for Maisie's expanding moral vision beyond the pages of the novel. J. Hillis Miller (2005) aptly claims that Nanda, the heroine of James's next novel, *The Awkward Age* (1899) has already experienced her rite of initiation, and she does not have much more to learn. "James attributes to Nanda a power of intelligence and of penetrating sensitivity not unlike his own" (100). It would not be rash to assert that Maisie, as a precursor, has given Nanda the present tense of the titular *knew* only to bestow upon her successor the knowledge that is more of a curse than a blessing. Further epistemological quests as to what Maisie knew, never knew, or may have known remain the subject of moot discussions. In lieu of an attempted conclusion, I can do no better than to offer Armstrong's (1978) final words: "For James, the pursuit of the moral life is an often ambiguous, always perilous, never ultimately completed activity because it is a constant epistemological and existential challenge" (535).

[1] All references are to this edition: James, H. 1978. *What Maisie Knew*. New York: Penguin

[2] Robert B. Pippin (2008) hypothesizes that the novel's title "could refer to a kind of knowledge and (innocent?) self-knowledge that Maisie had, but lost when she takes up her new 'experienced' position" after leaving England for France (123).

[3] Consider the cacophony of voices and the blending of temporal sequences in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* or James Joyce's equally bold enterprise of capturing sense-impressions in Molly Bloom's monologue in *Ulysses*. It is also interesting to note how James turns toward Modernism in featuring a handful of characters, all of whom represent modern values through their exercise of authority and denial of any fixed position, such as the sacrosanct nature of family. Marcus Klein (2006) mentions that in the novel James "constructed a pattern of couplings and uncouplings and recouplings—the four characters consisting of the parents and the step-parents who crisscross and redouble" (137). In fact, James's complicated interpersonal relations do not only shed light on the tragicomic nature of Maisie's fate, but also serve as an antecedent of the emergence of the double as a rejuvenated literary theme found in post-modern literature. Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, in which Humbert Humbert and Clare Quilty act as one another's double characters, insomuch that they become interchangeable through the ingenious jumbling of personal pronouns before the novels ends.

[4] It is worthwhile to note Gorley Putt's remark that presents the following argument: even though Maisie's vocabulary is far from being that of a child, James captures one of the attributes of how a child thinks by continuously allowing her to make judgments over material and emotional phenomena (qtd. in Sarbu 1981: 114).

[5] Bollobás (2006) also notes that the narrator's sexual identity cannot be determined with utmost certainty. It can be only surmised that the narrator is a man, or rather, one might assume that he is a man based on the ideological projection he represents (246). This view is also supported by the queer readings of Alfred Habegger and John Carlos Rowe, who speculate—in relation to James's young and sensitive male characters—that Maisie is the author's reproduction of his own childhood as a fictionalized boyhood (qtd. in Haralson & Johnson 2009: 179).

[6] Examining the concept of liminality in *What Maisie Knew* presents itself—though outside the scope of this paper—as an intriguing and novel subject. The novel abounds in further instances of liminal spaces, among which, the most striking one is how she is constantly portrayed as a child on the outside of doors and windows (Poole 2006: p. ix).

[7] Consider, for example, the final brawl between Humbert and Quilty in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, where the two characters, or rather, identities, are indistinguishable from one another: "He was naked and goatish under his robe, and I felt suffocated as he rolled over me. I rolled over him. We rolled over me. They rolled over him" (Nabokov 1995: 287)

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The Stylistics of Functional Metaphor in Adichie's *Americanah*

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Abstract

The paperevaluates the importance and function(s) of metaphor in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah. *This evaluation isdone using Systemic Functional Grammar as a theoretical foundation. SFG is a model of grammar that sees language as a socio-semiotic tool employed by language users to perform specific metafunctions (ideational, interpersonal and textual). These metafunctions, according to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014: 30) relay the purpose of language, as helping us to "make sense of our experience and act out our social relationships". In a text, the reader actually encounters these linguo-authorial traits as he/she tries to comprehend what the writer means. Using a random process, twenty metaphorical expressions are selected from the text and judged on the basis of their functional categories and how they contribute to thematic preoccupations and authorial style. The findings reveal a stylistic arrangement of metaphors to consolidate meaning and reinforce lines of thought that run through the narrative. The paper concludes that in* Americanah, *Adichie succeeds in using different metaphors to convey units of meaning in ways that add to the profundity of her celebrated style.*

Keywords: metaphor, metafunction, Adichie, Americanah*, stylistics*

Introduction

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* is a contemporary novel about Africans in the Diasporaand the challenges they encounter in the pursuit of the Golden Fleece, especially in the United States of America. It is the third novel in her literary career, although she has collections of short stories and poems that complement them. Adichie's works have received generally favourable critiques and mentions in both local and international literary circles. Her first novel titled *Purple Hibiscus* (PH) introduced her to the world as an emerging talent who should be taken seriously. PH launched her into the literary limelight and commanded critical attention to an emerging artistic force in Africa. *Half of a Yellow Sun* (HYS), her second novel about the Nigeria/Biafra war, however, removed every doubt concerning her artistic competence.

Americanah explores the themes of love, exile, the search for identity, alienation and betrayal in the contemporary world. Ifemelu, a driven and assertive Nigerian lady goes on a long journey of self-discovery layered with labyrinths of love, betrayal, loneliness, poverty, estrangement and reunion. The plot revolves around her and Obinze, a charming young man and son of a university Professor. Their affair quickly blossoms into a deep relationship that transverses the cultural as well as the intellectual. They become so inseparable that both families become aware of their bond. They do things together, often with brilliant results.

The parting of ways, nevertheless, occurs when Ifemelu travels to America for further education. There, she garners many socio-political experiences that are to strengthen her already remarkable character. She becomes distant, troubled, lonely and more psychologically aware of the powers of inner strength. Also, Obinze has a spell in the United Kingdom, where he too is introduced to the real world which is starkly different from their

near idyllic and innocent upbringing back in Nigeria. All the characters Ifemelu and Obinze come in contact with in both the US and the UK facilitate the process of the major characters' development and awareness of the aforementioned themes. The plot twists and turns grapple with the existential realities of immigrant life in the West. Characters like Aunty Uju, Dike, Emenike, Bartholomew, Kimberly, Laura, Kosi and Blaine are all stylistically woven into the compelling narrative that showcases the author's real motifs and objectives.

Typical of Adichie's literary engagements, the novel *Americanah* speaks to the political, cultural, economic and sociological peculiarities of Nigeria. While she celebrates what she deems original and enthralling, she does not fail to criticise the parts of us that appear as openly hypocritical and somewhat backward. Adichie's skilful presentation skills which are at once sophisticated and at the same time fairly easy to penetrate have already made her a celebrated wordsmith both locally and internationally. Indeed, one cannot but agree with the opinion of Owoeye and Owolabi (2013: 28) who submit that "Adichie is seen as a leading light in modern Nigerian literature as she has, no doubt, proved herself as a 21st century star of the Nigerian novel".

Metaphor and African Writers

According to Toolan (1996: 18) "[...] metaphorical language is language used creatively, in ways beyond the reach of normal usages". Metaphor is a literary tool used for the comparison of one thing with another. According to Bellard-Thomson (2011), metaphor is simply "indirect meaning". It is a direct comparison of two dissimilar entities with a view to instigating an indirect understanding of the effort. The use of metaphors in writing predates documented endeavours, according to Melvyn Bragg in his November 25, 2010 edition of the BBC Radio 4 podcast, *In Our Time*. One of the powers of language lies in the art of stringing together small metaphors to produce a very strange unbroken picture/wonderful image. Metaphors are not just a poetic tool. They are everywhere. From business to agriculture, commerce and construction, people use metaphors to help shape our understanding, especially of complex phenomena. These are broken down into units of meaning which are then mentally assembled to form the semantic whole. The rich understanding of linguistic and aesthetic resources is a direct concomitant of readers' ability to process information through "ordinary" words, figurative expressions and imagery. Describing one thing in terms of another is a way of making the reader appreciate, further, the conceptual value of the initial referent. Artistic deployments such as these constitute the hallmark of literary language. When we seek to describe and project a particular meaning, the use of linguo-graphic comparisons, imagery, parables and local idioms usually suffice. All these aid the speaker/writer in couching their thoughts in both compact and concise manners, thereby illuminating otherwise dark conclaves and alcoves of meaning in communication.

The nature of metaphors allows for them to be absorbed into both the linguistic and contextual environment in which they are used. Scholars have argued that both the structure of the figure of speech and the context of its use have made metaphors a huge object of intellectual engagement in recent years (Opeibi 2009). In other words, to fully understand and appreciate the underlying meaning of a speaker/writer's motivated metaphor, one must share a certain degree of mutual socio-cultural proclivities and nuanced inclinations. Since metaphors could be culture specific, one then has to be properly immersed in the worldview, mores and sociolinguistic fads of the people with whom one intends to communicate. For example, the fox does not have the universally acceptable metaphorical interpretation of a

cunning entity. Indeed, in some parts of West-Africa, both the tortoise and the spider take turns in projecting the same figurative meaning. Also, metaphors have been studied inrelation to such parameters as cognition, politics, rhetoric, and other human conducts and agents.

Examples abound of scholarly engagements that studied the subject of metaphor in relation to some allied disciplines. From Charteris-Black's (2005: xi) investigation into the "convincing explanations" of metaphor as "a highly effective rhetorical strategy for combining our understanding of familiar experiences in everyday life"; Steen's (2007: 3) detailed "analysis of the most important methodological issues involved in finding metaphor in language"; Cienki and Muller's (2008) seminal treatise that has expanded the frontiers of scholarship in the study of the relationship between metaphor and gestures, to Tendahl's (2009) hybrid theory of metaphor that uses Cognitive Linguistics to address and gauge the degree of metaphorical perceptions in language users: metaphor has been construed as a linguistic and literary phenomenon that language users use to empower themselves in the delivery of their intended motifs to particular audiences. It enables them to project meanings and describe persons, ideas and positions from different perspectives which eventually shed more interpretative lights on otherwise too familiar, vague, or difficult thoughts. Writers from all parts of the globe find metaphor a desirable element in the realisation of their artistic endeavours.

Africans, generally, use tropes in their daily use of language. These tropes, embedded in non-literal units of expression like metaphors, metonymies, proverbs, anecdotes and the like, could be found in linguistic realities of admonition, caution, praise, rebuke and sundry others. Indeed, Medubi (2018: 9) opines that

> one of the strong appeals of many African writings, e.g. Chinua Achebe's novels, Ola Rotimi's plays and Wole Soyinka's works, etc., resides in their judicious use of proverbs, metaphors and other tropes to project specific character types, illustrate important points or paint particular pictures germane to the African cultural context and content.

The opinion above informs of the indispensability and acceptability of figurative language to and by both writers and readers of African literature, respectively. The conspicuous nature of these elements (proverb, metaphor etc.) in the communicative engagements of language users must have prompted Achebe's famous posit that proverbs are the palm-oil with which Africans eat their yam. They are very potent discursive weapons often wielded to project powerful meanings. The realities of African life are so graphically displayed on the pages of texts in such a way that those who are familiar with such existential variables and sociolinguistic environment relate so well with the linguistic realities of same.

Again, Soyinka (2015: 50) writes on the "metaphor-cluttered mind" of the average African intellectual, giving the example that "the breeding habit of rabbits is universal metaphor for high productivity". This, certainly, heralds a convergence of positive opinions concerning metaphor in African literature. A constant assertion in African literature is that since it is rather herculean for writers to use the indigenous language to project their thoughts, they most certainly have to settle for domesticating the language of the colonisers in such a way that the African essence is still reflected in these linguistic choices. Indeed, in the view of some scholars, the aesthetic deployment of tropes like metaphors, proverbs and other literary accoutrements constitute the bulk of artistic identities in African literature that may push critics to run commentaries on authors' styles (Osunkentan 2009). These local variables

may then be measured and used to gauge an author's immersion into the rubric of the society he/she purports to represent and propagate through his/her writing.

However authors use metaphor in writing, the goal remains the celebration of the beauty of language in the aesthetic communication of thoughts. In Adegoke and Adebayo (2018: 96), Leech's (1991) theory of metaphor is used to appraise selected poems from Niyi Osundare's *Village Voices*, published in 1984.The scholars find, among other discoveries, that Osundare employs "locally motivated metaphors...in the creation of effective imagery and projection of a distinctive point of view". They also examine Osundare's predilection for using his Yoruba roots as a base for the linguistic manipulations of the English language to suit his authorial style, a trait replete in all his works. Adegoke and Adebayo (2018: 87) submit that Osundare's use of metaphors "that are firmly rooted in the culture and environment of the Yoruba people" increases his poems' readability and generally enhances the interests of his international audience to get more intellectually acquainted with his African homeland. All these are made possible by the author's use of diction that positively project his ideas as having originated from his deft use of the linguistic resources at his disposal.

At this juncture, it becomes expedient to introduce the theory within which we are to analyse Adichie's use of metaphor in the propagation of authorial style in *Americanah*.

The Metafunctions of Language/Functionalist Stylistics

In Systemic Functional Grammar, language is viewed as a pragmatic tool human beings employ to realise their existential goals. This grammatical model posits that language is structured like a system that is further divided into "a set of possible elements" from which choices can be made to suit particular linguistic purposes (Halliday 2013: 17). SFG studies language from a discourse perspective by validating both the linguistic elements employed and other sub-linguistic parameters (such as context, familiarity with subject and relationship between interlocutors) as harbingers of meaning in any communicative event. It essentially explores the clause as the base of speech and relates the sociological aspect of life to the understanding of same. The theory claims that the purpose of language is, primarily, to initiate meaning in context, and consequently delineated same into the so-called metafunctions of language. These metafunctions serve as the tripod upon which the foundation of the "functional" essence of this particular theory of language is built.

There are three metafunctions of language, according to Systemic grammarians. These metafunctions, note Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), ensure conceptual cohesion and meaning in texts by linking the reader's experience with the world that has been created and sustained by text. Canning (2014: 46) avers that the ideational metafunction of language is "used to express ideas and experience"; that is, it is employed to relay information in a way that encapsulates the user's motivation, experience and immediate desire, (clause as representation). The interpersonal metafunction is applied to "mediate in the establishment of social relationships"; that is, it is used to strengthen and foreground lines of thought in mutual linguistic transaction (clause as exchange). Finally, the textual metafunction is responsible for the provision of the formal properties of language, that is, the attainment of a central unity of purpose in the textual through cohesive devices-(clause as message). All these are central to the stylistic evaluation of texts using the functional paradigm.

In the view of Canning (2014: 46):

> Functionalist stylistics is concerned with the relationship between the forms of language as a system and the context or situation of its production, as well as the social, cultural and political (what we may collectively call ideological) factors that impact upon its construction and reception. In other words, functional stylistics deals with the connections between what Leech (2008: 104) calls "language and what is not language".

The forms of language referred to in the excerpt stem from Halliday's description of language as a linguistic system from which choices are made, both vertically (paradigmatic) and horizontally (syntagmatic). When we speak/write, we instinctively make choices from available linguistic alternatives at all the lexico-semantic levels. This is done within a framework of familiar social-cum-cultural settings. Also, when we listen/read, we unconsciously make sense, deductions and interpretations through a symbiotic interaction of the textual and sometimes, extra-textual environment in which linguistic elements are deployed. Again, this is summed up in Canning's (2014: 46) opinion that "for functionalists, the context of a language event is as important as the formal features of which it is comprised." It is against the backdrop that the stylistic investigation into Adichie's use of metaphor in *Americanah* will be weighed, with reference to the metafunctions outlined in SFG.

Methodology

Twenty metaphors were randomly selected and shall be analysed, presently. As stated earlier, the ideation, interpersonal and textual metafunctions provided in SFG will be used to determine authorial intent and show how their effective usage contributes to the style of the novel *Americanah*. For want of space, only the ideational part of the triangle of metafunctions will be graphically represented. In doing this, the configuration of process types such as material, relational, verbal, mental etc. and transitivity function including actor, goal, benefactor and so on, shall be employed. These SFG variables are used to describe the functions of the clause and its importance as the base of meaning in discourse. Their deployments project both the regular and "instantial" layers of meaning that then go on to assume major blocs of thoughts, ideas and their comprehension by interlocutors. The contributions of the other two metafunctions in realisation of meaning will, however, be explained concurrently.

Data Presentation and Analysis

1. I'm longing for ceiling (32).

	I	am longing	for	ceiling
Function	Participant Actor	Process (mental affection)		Participant Goal
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Prepositional group	Nominal group

Ceiling, the metaphor for sex as used by the character in the structure above, performs the ideational metafunction of representing the human experience of passion. The participants in

this exchange (Ifemelu and Obinze) share this particular knowledge that the conscientious reader should also be aware of. Again, there is a textual metafunction of cohesion. The idea of metaphorical reference to sex as ceiling had earlier been projected on page 29. Therefore, the embedded meaning of same is reinforced in the narrative. It ensures the stylistic progression of the theme of love in the novel. The average reader is unconsciously made to participate in this trope as a result of the author's deft presentation of same, using the characters' own words and situational dispositions.

2. She is still single (48).

	She	is still	single
Function	Participant Sayer	Process (Relational)	Participant Goal
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Nominal group

In context, being married is given the metaphorical interpretation of responsibility. This meaning is ensconced in Obinze's dialogue with his wife, Kosi, concerning her friend's rather unusual apathy in coming to visit them. Kosi's negative connotations with the idea of being single as unlucky, unwanted and even irresponsible is transferred to Obinze, as well as the reader. This performs the ideational metafunction at the clause configuration. The inherent portrayal of love and its beneficial advantages to those who find it, against its stinging arrow to those who are yet to, runs through the novel. Also, the word "single" coheres with the author's intent in many other instances. An example of such is found on page 476. The positive and negative celebrations of love are both functionally beamed to the reader through the above utterance.

3. The agreements that were trampled in the dust by government men whose children were schooling abroad (119).

	The agreements	that were trampled	in the dust	by	government men
Function	Participant Sayer	Process (material)	Circumstance Place		Participant actor
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Adverbial group		

	whose children	were	schooling	abroad
Function	Participant Benefactor	Process (Relational)	Process (material)	Circumstance Place
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group		Adverbial group

The metaphor above is used by Adichie to demonstrate the manner in which successive governments in Nigeria have always treated the agreements legally signed with the union of university teachers. When we read "trampled in the dust", whatever comes to mind has to be about total neglect, nonchalance and the lip service with which those in authority have always treated mass education. The powerful images that come to mind during the cognitive process of reading and comprehension say much about the reputation of Adichie as a remarkable

stylist. The metaphor performs both ideational and interpersonal metafunctions by highlighting the disturbing scenario of official indifference to teachers' plight and showcasing the social relationship with regards to the balance of power between governments and their citizens.

4. She perched on a chair at the back and ate fried chicken wings (123).

	She	perched	on a chair at the back	and
Function	Participant Sayer	Process (material)	Circumstance Place	
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Adverbial group	

	ate	chicken
Function	Process material	Participant (Goal)
Class	verbal group	Nominal group

Adichie has often been accused of empowering her female characters, often with exaggerated courage. In the midst of the turmoil in Ifemelu's personal life (her mental vacillations about moving back to Nigeria, her obvious discontent in the troubled romantic triangle involving her, Obinze and Blaine, the disturbing headache she suffers at her temple, and the discomfiting temperature in the Philadelphian summer) she still manages to carry herself with endearing grace and poise that speaks to her inner strength and fortitude. The metaphor of "perching" confidently in a corner of a salon, despite the noisy environment and her own personal issues relays the idea of a strong female, whose bravery against both human and environmental adversaries is firmly established in various episodes throughout *Americanah*. Both ideational and textual functions of language are reinforced in this usage.

5. He went to America and got lost (138).

	He	went	to America	and	got lost
Function	Participant Actor	Process (material)	Circumstance (Place)		Process (material)
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Adverbial group		Verbal group

The author uses Bartholomew as an archetype of the African immigrant who has become "marooned" in America. The search for identity ultimately culminates in the loss of identity. In other words, the race to be accepted into mainstream American society eventually overshadows and removes the originality of many African immigrants. Therefore, the sense of loss of the African identity and the elusive American acceptability presents such characters as being "lost". The themes of loneliness, alienation, and misplaced cultural appropriation are all contextually put forward and related with in this clause.

6. The cultural cues had seeped into her skin (147).

	The cultural cues	had seeped	into	her skin
Function	Participant Sayer	Process (material)	Circumstance Place	Participant Goal
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Adverbial group	

In describing Ginika, the biracial friend of Ifemelu, the author compares her seamless immersion into the American culture and society with that of Aunty Uju, who still finds it difficult to adjust. By comparing Ginika's quick acculturation to liquid seeping through an orifice, Adichie succeeds in imposing the functional attributes of creating a human experience and relating same with the different characters she has created on the metaphor used.

7. She was standing at the periphery of her own life (150).

	She	was	standing	at the periphery	of	her own life
Function	Participant Actor	Process (relational)	Process (material)	Circumstance (Place)		Participant (benefactor)
Class	Nominal group	Verbal	Group	Adverbial group		Nominal group

The themes of exile, alienation and detachment run through the mind as a result of the use of the metaphorical expression above. Here, Adichie recounts the experiences of diasporan Nigerians, nay Africans, who feel helpless as the Western systems determine their fates and emasculate their dreams. The mental images of helplessness and disillusionment are evoked by the way the clause is configured. This brings to light the textual representation of the aforementioned subjects and how they are perceived and reacted to, by the characters of both racial and systemic orientations in the novel.

8. The world was wrapped in gauze (154).

	The world	was	wrapped	in	gauze
Function	Participant Sayer	Process (relational)	Process (material)		Participant Goal
Class	Nominal group	Verbal	Group		Nominal group

Again, the suffocating feeling of powerlessness in the face of myriad problems is vividly depicted in the metaphor above. The idea is projected in the clause, its engagement with characters is described, and the message being passed across coheres with one of the central themes of the novel. It thus embeds the three metafunctions of language described in SFG.

The author's disposition to the subject of racism and its allied human problems are laid bare in this aesthetic composition.

9. Her meagre bank account was leaking money (154).

	Her meagre account	was	leaking	money
Function	Participant Sayer	Process (relational)	Process (material)	Participant Goal
Class	Nominal group	Verbal	Group	Nominal group

The clausal configuration above is used by Adichie to emblematise Ifemelu's dwindling finances in the face of the reality of American life. Equating money with a liquid material that is capable of leaking informs the reader of the prohibitive cost of living that literally drains the pocket of an unemployed immigrant. The dire circumstances of the lead character are projected by the deft use of the metaphor that informs of, as well as situates the economic haemorrhage that is being experienced by the lead character and how it affects her relationship with both humans and the environment.

10. It stung her, to have to beg (159).

	It	stung	her	that	she	had
Function	Participant Sayer	Process (material)	Participant (sayer)		Participant actor	Process (relational)
Class	Nominal group	Verbal	Group		Nominal group	Verbal group

	to	beg
Function		Process (material)
Class		Verbal group

The economic injury to Ifemelu's sense of pride and self-esteem is couched as a stinging bite that painfully runs across a human body. Adichie compares the humbling of a proud African woman to a throb that is inflicted by a poisonous insect. This description triggers the idea of capitulation amidst insolvency. The clause also relates with the reader who shares the same society and who may have the same economic challenges like the character being portrayed. Finally, the metaphor links up with the already established subject matter of economic inequality that is commonplace in all the seven parts of the novel.

11. I know I am mauling your name (173).

	I	know	I	am	mauling	your name
Function	Participant Actor	Process (Mental)	Participant (actor)	process (relational)	Process (material)	Participant (benefactor)
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Nominal group	Verbal group		Nominal group

Adichie's choice of the word "mauling", out of all the possible alternatives, may be interpreted against the backdrop of the perceived heightened sensitivity of the average white person not to stir a racial controversy as a result of any linguistic slip. Kimberly's utterance, being from a privileged upper class Caucasian, connotes an exaggerated, perhaps condescending, sense of altruism and the willingness not to offend. The functional significance of this clause, therefore, lies in its capacity to relay the aforementioned experience, weigh its implication for both Ifemelu and Kimberly, and associate with the theme of racism in the novel

12. Ifemelu sensed, between them, the presence of spiky thorns floating in the air (174).

	Ifemelu	sensed	between them	the presence	of	spiky thorns
Function	Participant Actor	Process (mental)	Circumstance (place)	participant (benefactor)		Participant (sayer)
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Adverbial group	Nominal group		Nominal group

	floating	in the air
Function	Process (material)	Process (relational)
Class	verbal group	Adverbial group

The theme of love, albeit in its contaminated variety, runs through the clause above. The sisters Kimberly and Laura have always had a cat and mouse relationship. However, the growing resentment of Laura in her sister hiring a coloured babysitter is metaphorically depicted as the presence of "spiky thorns". The comparison is noteworthy, as its function is to tell the reader of the gap between the personalities of both sisters and how they perceive the people and the world around them. This is a crafty way of using language to create lasting effects in the minds of the readers.

13. ... to be a resident doctor is slave labour (178).

	To be	a resident doctor	is	slave labour
Function	Process (relational)		Process (relational)	Circumstance (Place)
Class	Verbal group	Nominal	Verbal group	Adverbial

			group		group	

Racism re-echoes in the way Adichie presented the clause above. In its sharp and direct comparison, unpacking the implanted racial innuendos is relatively easy. Aunty Uju's submission overtly exposes her own predicament in finding a permanent job offer as a medical practitioner in America. The pittance she is being paid, the contempt from both staff and patients, and the under-appreciation of her daily hustles are all summarised in the metaphor "slave labour". The conscientious reader is, thus, presented another avenue of the author's functional depiction and characterisation of the immigrant experience in America.

14. Ifemelu felt acid in her veins (179).

	Ifemelu	felt	acid	in her blood
Function	Participant Actor	Process (mental)	Participant (Goal)	Circumstance (Place)
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Nominal group	Adverbial group

Acid, as used in the expression above, denotatively means blood, but it connotatively means anger. Adichie employs this particular metaphor to account for how Ifemelu's blood boils over as a result of frustration. The experience of anger is represented by the clause; there is an object for this rage (Elena, Ifemelu's housemate) and the linguistic structure also semantically supports the thoughts that have been documented in earlier pages of the book. Thus, all the three metafunctions are assembled in the clause.

15. I'm not comfortable going too far (180).

	I	am not	comfortable	going too far
Function	Participant Actor	Process (relational negative)	Attribute	Process (material)
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Adjectival group	Verbal group

"Going too far" is a metaphor for sex in the clause above. The author blends Ifemelu's innocence with her resolute mien. The character cautions her male friend against consummating their budding relationship, yet. The stylistic use of the metaphor above evokes a guarded attitude from a vigilant youth who is in control of her emotions. The themes of love and feminism are, therefore, foregrounded in the reader's mind.

16. Her mind choked with mud (181).

	Her mind	choked	with mud
Function	Participant Sayer	Process (material)	Circumstance (manner)
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Adverbial group

The feeling of dirtiness, resentment and self-loathing are all subsumed in the information above. Anybody familiar with the experience of choking is advertently made to comprehend the depth of Ifemelu's situation. Taken advantage of by a coach due to her financial difficulty, the central character in *Americanah* is described as broken and scarred. This deep seated emotion is stylistically worded and leads the reader along familiar lines of thought

17. When she said she was the doctor the patient's face changed to fired clay (213).

	When	she	said	she	was	the doctor
Function	Circumstance (time)	Participant (actor)	Process (verbal)	Participant (actor)	Process (relational)	Participant (benefactor)
Class	Adverbial group	Nominal group	Verbal group	Nominal group		Nominal group

	the patient's face	changed	to	fire clay
Function	Participant Sayer	Process (material)		Participant (Goal)
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group		Nominal group

The conspicuous nature of racism in American society is laid bare in the metaphor above. Here, Aunty Uju relieves one of her experiences with her patients at the hospital. The forceful imagery of "fired clay" adequately captures the stony expression the said patient must have had on his or her face at the point of that disclosure. All the three metafunctions of language are represented in this clause.

18. His cousin Nicholas had the jowly face of a bulldog (275).

	His cousin Nicholas	had	the jowly face	of	a bulldog
Function	Participant Sayer	Process (relational)	Participant (Goal)		Participant (benefactor)
Class	Nominal group	Verbal Group	Nominal group		Nominal group

The purpose of the metaphor above will be best understood when the clause "yet still somehow managed to be very attractive" is taken into consideration. Teenage love and attraction occupy a considerable space in the novel, and the author manages to view the topic from different perspectives. Beyond the surface level, what Adichie attempts to communicate here speaks to the subject of love as incomprehensible, both to the people involved and the outsiders who judge them.

19. ... his words aflame with dishonesty (304).

	His words	aflame	with dishonesty.
Function	Participant (Sayer)	Process (material)	Circumstance (manner)
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Adverbial group

The clause above calls attention to the treachery of Emenike, Obinze's bohemian friend. This particular character is often described in the novel as being unable to hide his true intentions, even when he tries very hard. As a flaming entity calls attention to itself, therefore, Emenike's own dissembling words show themselves to the contextual hearer (Obinze) in a more virulent tone that display their mendacious essence.

20. The Island flooded and cars became gasping boats (437).

	The Island	flooded	cars	became	gasping boats
Function	Participant (Sayer)	Process (material)	Participant (Sayer)	Process (relational) Attributive	Participant Goal
Class	Nominal group	Verbal group	Nominal group	Verbal group	Nominal group

Again, Adichie compares cars that are stranded in flood waters on Lagos Island to "gasping boats" that have, probably, run out of steam. The imagery that this artistic comparison conjures up aptly captures the level of aquatic devastation. In deconstructing the metaphor, therefore, one has to be able to relate with the experience of flooding, acknowledge the inconveniences it causes the people and the environment, and purposefully link it up with the existential miseries of the characters in the novel.

Overview of Findings

All the twenty selected clauses analysed through the functional variables of participant, actor, sayer, goal and what they have been assigned to do (known as processes material, mental, verbal, relational) have stylistic meanings that carry pragmatic weight. The analysis has showcased the linguistic elements that constitute the base of the text and which are layered with units of meaning that go on to solidify the basic ideas of the novel. Participants are mainly Actors and Sayers reaching for particular goals in the practice of doing or acting (processes). The combinations of these are supported by the circumstances (Adverbials) that suffice.

Through the representation of the thoughts and the actions of the characters in the text, we can discern the central ideas of racism, alienation, loneliness and search for identity in the novel. These tropes are especially and forcefully represented in the words and actions of Ifemelu, a strong willed female who, despite all challenges, remains undaunted in the pursuit of her (American?) dreams. The excellent use of metaphors by the author also brings out the hidden meanings that are superimposed on the clausal elements. These are revealed

by the transitivity features that betray the real authorial intents behind the stylistic deployments of particular metaphorical expressions.

Since, according to Canning (2014: 61) referencing Fowler (1996), "modality is inherently bound up with point of view", we then must acknowledge the authorial inputs in the propositional and pragmatic possibilities and functional realisations of the selected clauses. With regards to interpersonal metafunction, the clauses help us to understand and appreciate the truth values placed on characters' opinions as measures of checking how the social relationships involving them are managed and emphasised. The umbrella of modality gauges the dispositions of the persons in the text and how they relate with one another as the narrative evolves. Indeed, the interpersonal metafunction at the level of clause configuration gives credence to its role as the custodian and moderator of the exchanges between discourse participants in a particular linguistic or situational context.

Also, cohesion ensures that the referents of particular metaphorical clauses are not lost on the attentive reader. The organisation of cohesive devices such as his, she, her, it, whose, and I are assigned to particular constituents within the linguistic context. However, their meaning making potentials have far reaching implications that extend to situational contexts within the text as a whole. All these have been ably demonstrated and explained in the analysis.

Conclusion

We have tried to analyse the twenty selected clauses and their metaphorical aesthetics with regards to their functional significance in Adichie's *Americanah*. Although, a little familiarity with the primary text may aid further understanding of the discussions in this paper, we have, however, run elaborate commentaries on each of the selected clauses in ways that illuminate their connections to the storylines and different thematic concerns of the novel. It is the researchers' opinion that the much celebrated Adichie's compelling literary style has been further elevated by the adroit manner in which she has used metaphors to weave a forceful story that speaks to her ingenuity as an original storyteller in the modern African mould.

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Woman, but Not Human: Appraisal of Patriarchy, Women Commodification, and Failed Feminism in the African Contemporary Novel *La Tâche de Sang*

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Abstract

This study is based on the premise that patriarchal moulded structures ensure that women remain in perpetual slavery. Using a combination of theories including gender, patriarchy, and feminism, the study examines the types of oppression women face from infancy through adulthood and mostly marriage, as portrayed in Philomène Bassek's La Tâche de Sang (1990), *which I translate as* Stain of Blood – *for thus far the novel has not been translated into English. It is discovered that, due to the patriarchal system that has granted man the power over woman, the latter does not have a voice when it comes to the choice of a marriage partner. Furthermore, once married, her husband's power extended to her body and mind and thus commodified her in the process. The study further exposes the failure of feminism – western feminism to be precise – in an African environment. It concludes that patriarchy is a social evil that has spread across the African continent and that a concerted effort is required from women to join hands and together fight for their liberation.*

Key words: failed feminism, patriarchy, self-effacing identity, women commodification.

Introduction

The interest of this paper is to explore the contemporary nature of male dominance in an African marriage context, leading to female commodification. In addition, the paper attempts to explore the failure of feminism to empower the female subject. In this article, I rely on gender, patriarchy and African feminism as the theoretic devices to analyse the female subalternized body and mind in the contemporary African novel *La Tâche de Sang* [The Stain of Blood] published in 1990 by the Cameroonian female writer Philomène Bassek. I have decided to focus on this novel because it foregrounds a male character while adopting a feminist perspective, which sets it apart from many female-themed novels that abound in African literature.

Synopsis of the Novel

Set in a fictional Cameroonian village in the early 1960s, *La Tâche de Sang* (1990), which I translate as "Stain of Blood" – for thus far the novel has not been translated into English – is the story of Mama Ida, a middle-aged mother of ten children who engages in self-effacing politics of identity through the narrative. In the text, the chief male protagonist, Same Hamack is the beneficiary of the unfairness of patriarchy. This social organization provides males with privileges and power while creating an inferior status for females. Same Hamack has the power to control the mind and body of his wife Mama Ida, leading to her self-effacement and loss of identity.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in a combination of theoretical approaches including gender, patriarchy, and feminism – Western radical feminism to be precise – and African feminism.

Through the lens of these theories, I will try to investigate the way in which women are commodified within the household, and the failure of feminism – western feminism to be precise – in an African environment.

Gender is a socio-cultural construct of men and women that permeates all levels of society. It is an integral and important determining factor in the organisation of any given society. It is a structure based on socio-cultural production and is sustained by an ideology. According to Dube, "the fact that gender is culturally constructed means that it is neither natural nor is it divine; it has to do with social relationships of women and men, and can be reconstructed and transformed by the society, and since it is culturally constructed it can be socially deconstructed" (2003: 83). Furthermore, how we relate as men and women is always gendered and it is dictated by society. Society places certain expectations on men and women. For example, men in most African cultures are expected to be brave, strong, fearless and authoritarian. They should never express their feelings of pain and fear in public. In other words, traits associated with men are bravery, fearlessness, toughness, physical strength and authoritativeness. Women, on the other hand, are supposed to be gentle, timid, weak, and fearful. They are allowed to express pain and fear openly and whenever they feel like.

Closely related to the above characteristics are the sanctioned roles of men and women. For women, these include being a wife, mother and daughter in a subordinate position within the household. The most important role associated with women is motherhood. It is the responsibility of the female to produce offspring especially sons so that the social order is maintained and the family lineage is continued (Furniss & Gunner 1995: 155). On the other hand, the sanctioned roles of men include being a husband, father, son, seniority and exerting authority over women. The social organization relies on the power and authority of males.

Also included in the theoretical framework is the patriarchal concept, which is concerned with how patriarchy spreads its ideology of male domination. Patriarchy is identified by feminist scholars as one of the social practices that oppress women. This is because it mostly gives more privileges to menfolk than womenfolk, especially in traditional African societies.

How then is patriarchy defined? The word "patriarchy" literally means the rule of the father or the *patriarch*. As Asiyambola (2005) observes, the word "patriarchy" was around before the current resurgent of the women's movement. Originally used to describe the type of "male-dominated family" – the large household of the *patriarch* which included women, junior men, children, slaves and domestic servants all under the rule of this dominant male. Now the term is used more generally "to refer to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women, and to characterize a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways" (Bhasin 2006: 3). Feminists use the term "patriarchy" mainly to describe the power relationship between men and women. They claim that it is a system of male authority which oppresses women through its social, political, and economic institutions.

As a social institution, the family is generally a *brewery* for patriarchal practices by socializing the young to accept socially differentiated roles. In agreement with this assertion, Kate Millett (1970) asserts that socialization practices of the young take place only within its confines, which is the family. These socialization practices aim to instil specific personalities into male and female children. As exemplified by Maureen Kambarami (2006), in Shona culture of Zimbabwe, from a tender age, the socialization process differentiates the girl child from the boy child. Males are socialized to view themselves as breadwinners and heads of

households while females are taught to be obedient and submissive housekeepers. Kambarami (ibid.) furthermore observes that, in the family, the male child is preferred to the female child. By virtue of being male, even if he is not the first born, he is automatically granted, by birth, the right to rule females, and considered the head of household who should protect and look after his sisters. The female child is further discriminated against due to the fact that eventually she marries and joins another family while the male child ensures the survival of the family name through bringing additional members into the family. As a result of such attitude, some parents prefer educating boys to girls. The reason for such differentiation and discrimination is due to the fact that society views women as sexual beings and not as human beings (Charvet 1982).

Reiterating the unfairness of patriarchy, Irène D'Almeida (1994) states that this social organization provides males with privileges and power while creating an inferior status for female (1). Similarly, commenting on the ideology of patriarchy in Nigeria, Izugbara (2004) apprises that male socialization practices in many Nigerian cultures aim largely to train them to be domineering, ruthless, and in control, and to see themselves as naturally superior to women. On the other hand, female socialization often aims at making girls and women submissive, easy ruled or controlled, and to see themselves as naturally inferior to men. These socialization practices inscribe superiority into maleness and masculinity, and inferiority into femaleness and femininity. I can therefore argue that, this cultural socialization locates men and women in specific places in sexuality and endorses the belief that the natural order of things is for men to control women in a number of ways.

This study also draws its theoretical underpinnings from feminism and African feminism. The subject of feminism has received extensive treatment. It is beyond the scope of this paper to offer a comprehensive survey of these debates, but I will focus on those that are pertinent to my discussion. What is feminism? *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* views feminism as "the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men and the struggle to achieve this aim" (2010: 575). In the same breath, Mhindu (2014) states that "feminism is a political position committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism" (46). Karik-Namiji (2016) quotes Adebayo as saying that "feminism brings to mind the idea of challenging male hegemony" (13). It is therefore right to say that feminism entails the advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of sexual equality. In other words, the main thrust of feminism lies in its striving to fight for women's rights and against oppression.

As mentioned earlier, this paper also adopts African feminism as its theoretical framework. In the paper, African feminism is distinguished from its precursors that dominated the scene before 1960, after which varieties of modern feminism continue to flourish. This discourse does not countenance the complexities and the intricacies of conceptualizing or taxonomizing Africa. Africa, in this context, will refer to the geographical space rather than the metaphorical or historiographical polemics. In the African context, feminism "is not calling for a reversal of gender roles, and it is not a call for a particular sexual orientation; neither is it in opposition to men and African culture" (Ogundipe-Leslie 2007: 545-547).

African feminism recognizes the existence of other forms of feminism such as liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist feminism, cultural feminism and Islamic feminism. African feminism, according to Ogundipe-Leslie (2007), is "a kind of red flag to the bull of African men" (548). African feminism, therefore, calls for the overhauling and amelioration of the conditions of women in which women will be economically, politically and socially

empowered to enable them to be involved in the societal transformation without compromising their motherhood and recognizing their biological and reproductive rights. (ibid.: 549). Although this view is also shared by other forms of feminism, African feminism lays more emphasis on the complementary roles of both genders in enhancing societal growth and development in addition to the welfare of women.

Mekgwe (2008: 167) defines African feminism, while acknowledging the complexities that surround the linguistic and socio-cultural realities of African women, as:

> A discourse that takes care to delineate those concerns peculiar to the African situation. It also questions features of traditional African values without denigrating them, understanding that these might be viewed differently to the different classes of women.

That is the concern of Olomojobi (2013) when he says that African feminism is concerned with African nuances without disparaging them in view of the various socio-economic classes and socio-cultural backgrounds that define the identities of the African women. He says that:

> African feminism rests on the notion that women in Africa are socially constructed by different cultural components. [. . .] The theory attempts to shift away from misleading notions of equating western values with non-western societies. The point to bear in mind is that African women have different identities and primordial attachment to region and cultural determinants than women from western societies.
>
> (Cited in Ajidahun 2020: 44)

One of the main objectives of African feminism, according to Arndt (2002: 32), is to dismantle the current atmosphere of domination and then transform the concept of gender roles in African societies in order to improve the conditions of African women.

In his conceptualization of African feminism, Badeji shows that womanness is the centre of African feminism. In addition, he describes the relationship between power and femininity as mutual. He also captures other features of African feminism thus:

> African feminism embraces femininity, beauty, power, serenity, inner harmony, and a complex matrix of power. It is always poised and cantered in womanness. It demonstrates that power and femininity are intertwined rather than antithetical. African femininity complements African masculinity, and defends both with the ferocity of the lioness while simultaneously seeking male defence of both as critical, demonstrable, and mutually obligatory.
>
> (Cited in Ajidahun 2020: 45)

African feminism critically interrogates gender discrimination from the African perspective with a view to elevating the roles of African women who are seen traditionally as the carriers of societal encumbrances and whose roles must be made complementary to the roles of the men. It is only in this context that African women can be liberated from the socio-cultural, patriarchal and phallocentric shackles that have tied them down for so long. Without this liberation the entire African continent will remain in bondage. This theory is apposite for this paper because it condemns and opposes all forms of gender discrimination and prejudices experienced by African women. It also recognizes the biological and motherly roles of women which do not inhibit them from participating in societal transformation as men do.

It should be mentioned that, although there are various feminist approaches like African feminism, liberal feminism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism that provide different explanations for the roots of gender inequality, they all present patriarchy as the source of women's oppression. Thus, the aim of feminism is to challenge the privileged position of men and demand for the equal distribution of power between men and women in all spheres including political, economic and social.

Textual Analysis

As a stated earlier in the study, Kate Millett (1970) observed that patriarchal socialization practices of the young girl take place only within its confines, which is the family. In *La Tâche de Sang* (1990), we encounter Mama Ida meticulously carrying out the exigencies of her patriarchal traditional education as mother and wife, a battered and subalternized wife to be precise; all under the tutelage of her mother. Mama Ida is gradually being socialized into a submissive adult woman. This is not surprising, for her mother Veronica had been subordinated to her father and she wants to pass on the same education to her daughter. As the narrator reveals, Mama Ida even had to abandon school in order to release her old mother from certain domestic chores:

> L'irrégularité de Mama Ida commença à se faire sentir à l'école et le temps nécessaire pour étudier ses leçons vint à lui manquer. Veronica avait de plus en plus besoin de de l'aide de sa fille à la maison et aux champs, d'autant plus que de nouvelles maternités l'accablait [. . .] Mama Ida finit par sacrifier l'école. Elle déchargea sa mère de certains travaux en savourant le plaisir d'acquérir le bagage technique et artistique nécessaire à un exercice appréciable de son futur rôle d'épouse.
>
> (Bassek 1990: 11-12)

> [Mama Ida's irregularity began to make itself felt at school, and the time needed to study her lessons was missed. Veronica increasingly needed help from her daughter at home and in the fields, especially as new maternity overwhelmed her [. . .] Mama Ida ends up sacrificing the school. She relieved her mother of certain works, enjoying the pleasure of acquiring the technical and artistic baggage necessary for an appreciable exercise of her future role as a wife.]

As evidenced above, Mama Ida is being socialized into a submissive adult woman. She happily or perhaps ignorantly acquires this education for her future role as a wife and mother. Though this is the only glimpse the narrator gives us of Mama Ida being socialized into the submissive adult woman, it is sufficient to prepare us for this description of the married Mama Ida that we encounter later in the novel:

> Levée très tôt le matin, elle n'aspirait qu'à faire ses devoirs harassants de femme. On lui avait appris dès l'enfance qu'une situation de ménage qui ne marche pas comme il faut a essentiellement pour responsable la maîtresse de la maison. Aussi passait-elle le plus clair de son temps à trimer pour sauver l'honneur.
>
> (Bassek 1990: 71)

> [Up early in the morning, she aspired only to do her harrowing duties as a woman. She had been taught from childhood that a household situation that does not work properly is essentially responsible for the mistress of the House. So she spent most of her time trimming to save honour.]

This description of Mama Ida's personality through the prism of domestic responsibilities and her submissive relationship to her husband is sustained throughout the novel:

> Mama Ida incarnait la bonne épouse. Tous les hommes la citaient en exemple lorsqu' ils n'avaient pas eu la chance de se marier à une femme de son genre : forte, travailleuse, docile et soumise. Elle bavardait peu et haussait rarement le ton devant son mari.
>
> (Bassek 1990: 71)

> [Mama Ida played the Good Wife. All the men mentioned her as an example when they had not chance to marry a woman of her kind: strong, hardworking, docile and submissive. She chatted little and rarely raised her voice in front of her husband.]

Before proceeding, let us briefly look at the institution of marriage. In her article *Femininity, Sexuality and Culture: Patriarchy and Female Subordination in Zimbabwe*, Kambarami (2006) observes that marriage in Africa is sacred and a married woman is treated with respect; in fact the desired destination of most women is marriage. This brings us to the difference of marriage concept and practices between the African and Western society. European marriage is very different from the African concept of marriage. For the Europeans, marriage is an exclusive relationship between husband and wife. But in Africa, marriage is not simply the affair of the individual couple but of the community. As Chondoka (1988) contends, marriage in Africa is a wider relationship that embraces the families of both the husband and the wife. In America and Europe, marriage is defined as a union of man and woman by a ceremony in law. Parents and indeed families have very little role to play. Before marriage can take place, a man does not need to consult elders for their opinion. Upon their mutual consent, a man and a woman will first cohabit, and later on get married. Conversely, in the African traditional society, prospective husbands are made to learn and know about the prerequisites for marriage before being allowed to marry. For example, as practiced by the Lunda people of Zambia, a prospective husband, paid back–cloth as one of the marriage payments to the girl's family. Chondoka (1988) further observes that these marriage payments reflect a number of things about the prospective husband. First, it meant that the man had reached an acceptable level of maturity in the community for him to take part in the activity of making various items. Second, it meant that he had satisfactorily acquired certain skills to enable him make these items for his future family. Thus, he was only allowed to marry after the community convincingly proved that he had mastered certain skills that would help him and his family successfully. In this way, marriage payments reflected the man's ability to take care of his future family.

Traditionally, as John Mbaku (2005) points out in *Culture and Customs of Cameroon*, many Cameroonian communities have practiced arranged marriage, in which the daughter is married to a man chosen by her parents. But in recent years such marriages have become less common, particularly in urban areas among families where parents are educated. In arranged marriage, the choice is primarily based on the quality of the potential husband's family as well as personal traits exhibited by the man. Moreover, most parents wish their children to marry someone from their own ethnic group (Mbaku 2005: 143-44). In Mama Ida's case, after she drops out of school in order to release her old mother from certain domestic chores, her father and uncle choose Same Hanack, an older and polygamous man, because they know

his family and he inspires trust and a sense of responsibility. In their opinion, Same is "un homme d'âge mûr, simple, généreux et étroitement lié aux affaires de l'église; originaire de Mbakassi, à une trentaine de kilomètres de Song-Mbônji" (*TS* 12) [a simple, mature, and generous man who is deeply involved in church matters; he hails from Mbakassi, thirty kilometres away from Song-Mbônji]. Mama Ida's input is not sought nor is her opinion considered. She cannot even refuse to marry Same who is polygamous and old enough to be her father, as doing so would be contemptuous of tradition. The lack of choice is one illustration of how hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy affect women. This kind of marriage that deprives a woman of her right to choose a partner of her choice is a way of commodifying her.

At this juncture, let us look at what commodification is and how the concept can apply to women and Mama Ida in particular. According to wikipedia, commodification means the transformation of goods or services (or things that may not normally be regarded as goods or services) into a commodity, or assigning economic value to something that traditionally would not be viewed in economic terms. Lindorfer (2007: 126) notes that, in African societies, children were the glory of man and his property, and moreover woman was seen as a valuable commodity owned by her male family members and later by her husband and his family. In general, daughters were required to make their parents' lives easier. Moreover, as Lindorfer (2007) further observes, in some communities, women are viewed as income-generating mechanisms, even at a young age. Thus, whilst a girl is still in her father's home, she is viewed as an investment and when she marries she becomes an asset to her husband and his family.

As a result of the emphasis placed on material considerations, women are limited in the choices that they are able to make because they do not have the opportunity to marry the men they love; this applies to Mama Ida in *La Tâche de Sang*. In this novel, Mama Ida's parents decide to marry off their daughter without consulting her or listening to her opinion. They believe that Same Hanack is the right man for their daughter, despite being old and having other women. Because of his wealth, and having come from a known ethnic group, they think he can take care of her, and they will benefit in return. Quoting Mankaasi (2008), it can be observed that, like Binetou's mother in Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1981), Mama Ida's parents are eager to have her married to Same not for her happiness but for the opposite reason, despite the age difference between him and their daughter. Motivated by self-interest, Mama Ida's parents want to elevate themselves from their poverty-stricken life because this elevation will make them respected in society.

The South African writer Ngcobo (1991: 194) reinforces this point when she states that an African girl child is born to fulfil a specific role, for she is trained to be a suitable wife from a very early age. This was done in order to make sure that the girl child would become a "valuable" commodity, as is evident in *La Tâche de Sang*, the bride's family would be able to gain materially from marriage to a prosperous man.

The above argument shows that a young woman whose destiny is determined by a man and older people stands no chance of refusing what has been planned. It further illustrates the extent to which Mama Ida is denied the chance to enjoy her youth. If she had stayed in school amongst her peers, she might have developed a more critical, questioning mind, and perhaps acquired the ability to speak for herself, but she is denied this. Mama Ida's fate is illustrative of the way in which the girl child is at a disadvantage because she is brought up to be married, hence it becomes difficult for her to pursue her goals in life and develop her own capacity for independent self-expression. Furthermore, by marrying off

young Mama Ida to the old and rich man, Same Hanack, her parents contribute to the oppression of the girl child. By forcefully marrying her off to old Same, Mama Ida ceases to live her own life, and she dies inside as she watches her other friends enjoy their youth, as we shall see later.

As we have seen, Mama Ida has her future decided for her and she has no say in the matter. Marina Deegan (1994) comments further on the boundaries that surround women such as Mama Ida: "[C]onfined by their low position in society, their social and economic powerlessness, and most importantly by the restricting definitions of womanliness, women are forced to repress all their natural ambitions and inclinations" (43). This description of a woman satisfies the proponents of polygamy and patriarchy. According to the dictates of African tradition, a woman is a good wife if she observes the status quo by, for example, not challenging her husband and looking after the children. This leaves women in a situation in which they are not able to support themselves because their primary role in life is that of a wife and mother, to the exclusion of all else. They become the property of men, thus making them commodities that men can treat in any way they choose. As we have seen, this state of affairs can encourage selfish, irresponsible behaviour on the part of men.

Commenting on arranged marriage in Zimbabwe, Kambarami (2006) apprises that arranged marriages are familiar within Shona traditions and elsewhere in Zimbabwe. These can be based on religion such as the Apostolic Sect where young girls are married off to older members of the Sect based on prophetic revelations. In some cases, parents marry off their daughters to affluent members of the community in exchange for money or grain to plant. In extreme case, Kambarami (2006) notes, some parents marry off their daughters to their debtors when they fail to repay their debts. In all these cases, consent is not sought from the young women concerned, but they are forced to comply with cultural tradition. This is exactly what happens to the young Mama Ida. After dropping out of school, her father and uncle marry her to an old and polygamous man simply because they know him and that he is affluent enough. This is reminiscent of the young Binetou, in Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter*, who was reluctant to marry Modou, a man so much older than herself, but her mother who wanted to escape from poverty encouraged her to abandon her education in order to give the mother access to a higher socio-economic status quickly via marriage to Modou.

Undoubtedly, this patriarchal practice of arranged marriage reinforces male supremacy while depriving Mama Ida of the power to choose and to control her body. The involvement of family in the marriage process is consistent with the African belief that marriage is an alliance between families rather than between individuals, as is the case in the Western world. It is also true that arranged marriages often happen for valid reasons and can be construed as a way of protecting young people from making bad choices. For example, in Ghana, as reported by Baffour Takyi (2003), it is the duty of the parents of each party to ensure that their potential in-laws do not come from a family with any known serious disease (including lunacy and leprosy), are not known criminals or witches, do not engage in quarrelling, and are hardworking and respectful. The involvement of family also serves to insure that the future couples are compatible in values, expectations, and lifestyle. In the same breath, Chondoka (1988) apprises that the practice of parents choosing marriage partner for their sons was very common in the traditional pre-literate society in Zambia. Parents or close relatives of the man were the ones who went in the neighbouring villages (or their own village) looking for a girl from a good family for him to marry. The man or the girl was, by tradition, not allowed to reject the partner his or her parents had chosen for him or her. One reason for such a choice was to ascertain that their daughter and son marry someone who

belongs to their ethnic group in order to avoid intermarriage with people with whom they have had tribal feuds in the past.

Having examined the ways in which Mama Ida is perceived as a mere commodity by her parents when they married her off, the next form of oppression within the marriage, leading to failure of feminism, will be discussed. From the outset, the marriage of Same Hanack and Mama Ida is based on a non-egalitarian relationship. Same believes in the power patriarchy has granted him as a man, and he uses it to subdue his wife, either by persuasion or by physical force. In one instance, he invites his brothers to his house to share a snake he killed earlier in the day, without informing Mama Ida of the visit. It should be mentioned here that in Bassa society of Cameroon, and indeed in most African communities, one of the major ways to cement social relationships and express the high value placed on human company is through the sharing of food. Moreover, the gourmet dish of viper steaks is served to honour guests, especially male relatives.

While waiting for the snake to cook, Mama Ida serves fish, which angers her husband. As Mama Ida tries to justify her action, Same Hanack, who feels that his masculine authority is being challenged, reminds his wife: "Ici, c'est moi qui commande et j'ai le droit de corriger qui je veux, quand je veux" (*TS* 39) [Here, I am the one who gives orders, and I have the right to beat whomever and whenever I like]. A brutal beating ensues. This violence, as Green (1999) observes, is "one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position" (2). Violence instils fear, which in turn makes women subservient to men.

Mama Ida is not totally oblivious of her disadvantaged location in the scheme of things. She knows that it is wrong for Same Hanack to beat her the way he does, but she rationalizes and justifies his action: "mais qu'y puis-je? N'est-il pas plus fort que moi? N'en-est-il pas le droit?" (*TS* 90) [But what can I do about it? Is he not stronger than I am? Doesn't he has the right?]. As far as she is concerned, Same has the right to beat her. She believes that by virtue of being male, Same is entitled to power and privilege, including the privilege of abusing her.

If Mama Ida is the character through whom the theme of patriarchal education is developed, her husband Same presents the sub-theme identified by the narrator as "conjugal hierarchy" in which Mama Ida would be perfectly controlled. Same's only concern throughout the narrative is the maintenance of this hierarchy which makes man the unchallenged supreme head in an unequal conjugal relationship:

> La responsabilité de chef de famille qui incombait à Same et qu'il assumait non sans privilège et abus lui pesait parfois [. . .] Que pouvait lui apporter son épouse? N'était-il pas à lui de lui apprendre? Comme beaucoup d'hommes de sa génération, Same pensait que les femmes étaient toutes comme ça, qu'elles ne savaient pas grand-chose, et que lorsque même elles faisaient exceptionnellement montre d'une certaine intelligence, il fallait leur faire croire le contraire en exploitant leur savoir. Le maintien de la hiérarchie conjugale était à ce point.
>
> (Bassek 1990: 47)

> [The responsibility of the head of the family that fell to Same and that he assumed not without privilege and abuse weighed on him at times [. . .] What could his wife bring him? Wasn't it up to him to teach her? Like many men of his generation, Same thought that women were all like that, that they did not know much, and that when even they

were exceptionally intelligent, they had to be made to believe otherwise by exploiting their knowledge. The maintenance of the conjugal hierarchy was at this point.]

Same's reasoning, reminiscent of Okonkwo's attitude to women in *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe 1959), often makes him resort to violence to maintain his cherished conjugal hierarchy. Justifying the brutal beating of his wife after Mama Ida dared to contradict him; Same argues that: "même hors d'elle, une femme doit pouvoir taire ses instincts et éviter de s'emporter en présence de son mari" (*TS* 40) [a woman should learn to keep her emotions to herself and avoid losing her temper in the presence of her husband]. Same assumes that a woman cannot do, think, or say anything important, and that man's power, bestowed by patriarchy and expressed in his role as head of the family, has to be used to keep women in check because otherwise they will abuse their freedom. Consequently, he expects his wife to be submissive and remain silent whenever he talks to her. After all, he sees himself as the supreme head of the household, and if his wife fails to comply, she must pay for her insubordination.

Perhaps an appropriate question to ask at this juncture is why men have recourse to physical force, especially in their relationships with women. In his anthropological study on male dominance entitled *Why Men Rule*, Steven Goldberg (1993) articulates the reasons for such violence on the part of men: he observes that men tend to use physical aggression as the means to an end; they resort to physical violence in the pursuit of dominance. Same epitomizes this behaviour. In his relationship with Mama Ida, he often resorts to physical and verbal abuse in order not only to subdue his wife, but also to maintain his masculine identity in front of his friends and for himself.

To have total control over his young bride and to satisfy his sexual desires, Same decides to isolate her from any external contact, thereby bringing her totally under his control. He forbids Mama Ida to go to her own village or to visit her family, claiming that because he paid a bride-wealth, he now owns her: "Mets-toi dans la tête que j'ai payé la dot et que tu n'as plus rien à voir là-bas" (*TS* 44) [Get it into your head that I paid bride-wealth for you and that you don't have anything to do there any more]. Implicit in this comment is the notion of entitlement that only men enjoy. Here the writer underscores the tradition of bride-wealth, which, according to Eustace Palmer (1982), degrades women to the status of goods and chattel, while allowing husbands to dominate their wives and thus ensuring a system of perpetual subjugation of women. I however take issue with Palmer's assessment of the bride-wealth, which I believe plays an important role in African customary and civil law marriages. Unfortunately, this practice has often been misconstrued by some Westerners and by some westernized Africans as the mere purchase of a wife.

In the past, as mentioned earlier, bride-wealth was offered to the bride's parents by the groom's family as a kind of contract that sanctioned a union – not only between two individuals as is the case in the West – but also, and particularly, as an alliance between two extended families. Furthermore, bride-wealth served as compensation to the woman's family for her labour. The bride-wealth was also intended to acknowledge the wife's family for giving away their daughter; in addition, it "placed the marriage on firm ground if questions later arose about the position of children within their father's lineage, their rights to inheritance, and the rights to property on the part of the husband or wife if the marriage ended in divorce" (Denbow and Thebe 2006: 136). In other words, bride-wealth was a means of recognizing and legitimizing marriage in the eyes of the public. However, in recent years, due to the emergence of a monetary economy, the bride-wealth has become more and more

commercialized; for instance, the more educated the woman, the higher the cost of bride-wealth. As a result, a man who pays an inflated bride-wealth may have the impression that he has "purchased" his wife (Green 1999: 37). These are the kinds of beliefs that make Same think Mama Ida is his property and should, therefore, submit to his will.

At this point, one may wonder why Mama Ida cannot leave her abusive and disrespectful husband. There are a number of theories that attempt to explain why women live with abuse. In a study on Ghanaian women, Ofei-Aboagye (1994) reveals that many women remain in abusive relationships due to economic dependency. In another study on Zimbabwean women, Taylor and Stewart (1991) reports that women stay with abusive men because they enjoy being dominated by men and believe that a happy family depends on women respecting men's authority. While I agree with Ofei-Aboagye (1994) that some women stay in abusive relationships because of economic dependency, I dispute Taylor and Steward's theory; I do not think that women stay with abusive partners because they enjoy being dominated by men. Very often women put up with abusive men because of cultural beliefs. Women have been brought up to believe that being a wife and a mother is the only good thing and that divorce is wrong. As a result, they often feel that their family needs to stay together.

In Mama Ida's case, it is the combination of social and economic factors that deter her from leaving her abusive husband. Mama Ida has been socialized to believe that marriage and family are the ultimate things a woman should vie for; she has learned to "veiller sur son mari et ses enfants au point de s'oublier" (*TS* 12) [look after her husband and children to the point of forgetting herself]. She cannot leave for the sake of keeping her family together: "ses fils et se filles étaient sa raison d'être. Aussi consentait-elle à tous les sacrifices pour pouvoir demeurer auprès d'eux et les élever droitement" (*TS* 45) [Her sons and daughters were her reason for being. She therefore agreed to make every sacrifice so that she could stay close to them and raise them rightly]. Another reason is that Mama Ida is unable to sustain herself; she entirely depends on Same for economic support. We need to keep in mind that Mama Ida's willingness to conform to patriarchy does not necessarily mean she ignores her alternatives. I would argue that it is a result of fear of being rejected by Same, by society, and of being thrown into a world where she has no means to survive.

In most African societies, the main purpose of marriage is to have children and continue the bloodline. In addition, having many children addresses the fear that not all children may turn out to be successful and the hope that at least one out of many will. Furthermore, it is believed that the more children one has, the greater one's chances of living comfortably later in life because then, the roles will be reversed and the children will be able to take care of their parents. In Zambia, among the Lunda, for example, there is a common proverb that illustrates this traditional belief which is upheld by men and women alike: "*elekaku mwana, kumbidi niyena akakweleki*" [carry a child on your back today so s/he can carry you in your old age as well].

One model of masculinity stresses the ability to procreate, "something that every man must do in order to be respected as man" (Fuller 2001: 96). In other words, having many children not only enhances a man's self-confidence and social prestige, but it is also an indication of manliness. In this connection, Same desires to have as many children as he can in spite of his wife's advanced age and poor health. Furthermore, despite his unsound financial position, Same believes that being able to father many children is vital to his male identity. This corroborates the claim by Connell (2005) that masculinity is socially constructed because society expects one to behave like a man and not otherwise.

This raises the question of how men view other men in this novel. They constantly scrutinize one another, watching and ranking other men before granting them acceptance within the realm of manhood. If his friend Oman's remark is anything to go by, Same has proved his manhood: "Mes félicitations [. . .] Dieu est avec toi. [Ma femme] Johanna a eu beaucoup de problèmes [. . .] Je n'en ai que sept, moi" (*TS* 70) [Congratulations, God is with you. (My wife) Johanna had many problems [. . .] I only have seven (children)]. Oman's statement underscores the importance he and Same attach to having many children, even when a man is not financially capable of sustaining a large family.

Same attempts to control not only his wife's mind but her womb as well, the womb which Gayatri Spivak (1987) maintains is "a workshop," a place that can be managed and controlled in terms of use value and surplus value. Hence, when he realizes that Mama Ida's concern over giving birth at the age of 55 may cause her to re-evaluate her pregnancy, Same is quick to allude to biblical characters in the same situation, hoping that the analogy will convince his wife to carry her pregnancy to term. He exploits Mama Ida's profound Christian faith when he says:

> Je connais des femmes qui ont fait quatorze, quinze enfants sans peine. As-tu véritablement eu des problèmes depuis que tu en fais toi? [. . .] Ida, l'enfant est et reste le signe de la bénédiction divine, il est la seule vraie richesse du monde.
>
> (Bassek 1990: 65)

> [I know women who have given birth to fourteen, fifteen children without difficulty. Have you really had any problem with childbearing? [. . .] Ida, a child is and will always be a divine blessing; it is the only real fortune in the world].

The above passage reveals that Same is a selfish carnivore who considers Mama Ida as a mere object of possession, a body for sexual gratification, and a children-baking machine. His attitude is typical of bourgeois life style or capitalist modes of production that view women as property, tools for production or labour.

To continue with religious analogies, Same reminds his wife of the biblical story of Abraham and Sarah:

> Rappelle–toi qu'Abraham était âgé de cent ans et Sara de quatre-vingt-dix lorsqu'elle devint enceinte. Grâce à Dieu l'Eternel. Et leur fils, Isaac, grandit et devint riche.
>
> (Bassek 1990: 65)

> [Remember that Abraham was a hundred years old and his wife Sara was ninety when she became pregnant. Praise to the everlasting God. And their son Isaac grew up and became rich].

Upon hearing such "paroles angéliques" (*TS* 65) [angelic words], Mama Ida becomes so persuaded that she cannot do anything but agree with her husband. Here is an example of the exploitation of religion by men for their personal interests. According to biblical teaching, God gave Abraham a child in his old age because he had none; but in Same's case, he already has ten children and the multiple childbirths have compromised his wife's health. Like her husband Same, Mama Ida is also happy that she is pregnant with her eleventh child. Not once does she consider the implication of her pregnancy for her fragile health; after all, Same "owns" the pregnancy. By rejoicing over her eleventh pregnancy without considering its

effects on her health, Mama fails to "question obligatory motherhood" (Davies and Graves 1986: 8), which is one tenet of African feminism.

As expected, Same is excited about the prospects of being a father again. He therefore decides to send Mama Ida to the city for pre-natal care. In the city, she is to put up with their eldest child Patricia, an educated, thoroughly westernized woman married to a successful lawyer Mandinka. Patricia's "revolutionary" ideas, her belief in her independence and individuality even within the marital context, set a stage for an inevitable confrontation between mother and daughter. For, as might be expected, Mama Ida attempts to foist the code of patriarchal education – which she inherited from her own mother Veronica – on her daughter's domestic space.

Events soon begin to justify Mama Ida's anxiety over Patricia's behaviour. The "unimaginable" liberty Patricia takes frequently with her husband induces a feeling of guilt in her mother who begins to wonder if somehow she failed in her duty to effectively transfer – as her own mother Veronica did – the code of patriarchal education to her daughter during her formative years:

> Pourtant, il y avait longtemps de cela, sitôt que le corps de sa fille eut commencé à prendre des formes provocantes, à se faire femme, Mama Ida prit soin de la mettre en garde contre certaines idées. Elle lui enseigna la tradition dans le domaine qui la concernait le plus, à savoir son avenir d'épouse–mère. Elle lui répéta qu'une fille ne pouvait trouver le bonheur que dans le mariage. Que pour être une femme respectable et respectée, il fallait aimer son homme, lui faire de bons plats, deviner ses intentions et surtout, avec l'aide du bon Dieu, lui faire des enfants, beaucoup d'enfants.
>
> (Bassek 1990: 83)

> [However, a long time ago, as soon as her daughter's body began to take provocative forms, to become a woman, Mama Ida took care to warn her against certain ideas. She taught her the tradition in the field that most concerned her, namely her future as a mother–wife. She repeated to her that a girl can find happiness only in marriage. That in order to be a respectable and respected woman, one had to love her man, make him good dishes, guess his intentions, and most importantly, with the help of God, make him children, many children.]

As a graduate and agent of patriarchal school, Mama Ida wonders where she could have gone wrong in educating her daughter Patricia. She remembers having imparted in her daughter the necessary knowledge and skills a woman needs as wife and mother such as respect and care for the husband, and ultimately giving him more children.

The feminist critic Odile Cazenave (2000) observes that, like in other African women's novels that examine the mother-daughter relationship, there is in *La Tâche de Sang* a fundamental questioning of the mirror–image trope of the mother, as well as textual move to deconstruct the age-long axiom: like mother, like daughter. This explains the irreconcilable differences between Mama Ida and Patricia, who would have none of her mother's blind adherence to the tenets of patriarchal education. Patricia, joining a radical women's movement, rebels against the codes of patriarchal teaching to which her mother adheres. Patricia and her friends, mostly married and all very westernized, come together in a movement described in terms reminiscent of radical feminist formations in Europe and North America. Mama Ida is, of course, horrified by the idea that her daughter belongs to such a group, but Patricia insists that their intentions are noble: "nous réfléchissons sur les

conditions d'existence des femmes dans la famille comme dans la société et nous étudions la manière de les transformer" (*TS* 89) [we reflect on women's conditions in the family as well as society at large, and try to find a way to transform them].

The news that her mother is carrying her eleventh pregnancy and has actually come to the city for pre-natal care infuriates Patricia, who insists that a woman's life cannot be reduced to marriage and procreation. But Mama Ida's commitment to Same is very strong. As a woman used to putting herself last, Mama Ida can only reiterate her husband's wishes: "mon mari adore les enfants" (*TS* 130) [my husband adores children]. Mama Ida's statement baffles Patricia's friend Modi, who quickly responds: "Tu parles comme si tu n'existais pas" (*TS* 130) [You are talking as if you did not exist]. Mama Ida's response should not come as a surprise; after all, she has indisputably internalized her social role so much that she is willing to please her husband while suffering silently. Everything Mama Ida does is to please and appease Same, she is not at all concerned about herself. She has internalized the traditional values of her upbringing. As an adolescent, she learned that women's value was in marriage and that as a woman, she should be a passive breeder under the jurisdiction of her husband.

Patricia does not agree with Mama Ida's world view. Having realized that her mother is incapable of making an independent decision concerning the pregnancy, she conspires with Modi, one of her feminist friends and a medical doctor, to perform a drug-induced abortion without Mama Ida's knowledge and consent, without consulting Same, without even discussing the matter with their own husbands, with whom they both have successful marriages. To show her friendship and solidarity, Modi reassures Patricia: "Ne t'alarme pas, Patricia, ton drame et ton combat sont les miens" (*TS* 131) [Don't worry, Patricia, your tragedy and your struggle are mine]. This is an indication of women's solidarity. Mama Ida consequently loses the pregnancy that gave her a sense of her own value. The narrator informs us that administering such drugs secretly to pregnant women who, in her view, are only carrying their pregnancies at great risk to their own health just to make their husbands happy, is Modi's stock in trade. She rationalizes her action as a contribution to the necessary feminist struggle. It follows therefore that Patricia and Modi assume that they know, while Mama Ida and others non-westernized women do not know – that is do not know what is good for themselves. By acting for her mother and terminating her pregnancy surreptitiously, Patricia denies her the right to make her own decision, the right to choice, the very right she and her "feminist" friends set out to defend.

One might think that Patricia's decision to terminate her mother's pregnancy is a victory because she is able to take responsibility and help her mother, whose health has considerably deteriorated as a result of a series of unplanned pregnancies. But, in fact, the abortion does not liberate Mama Ida, since by failing to consult her, by exercising control over her body without her consent, Patricia and Modi – like Same – rob her of the right to exercise agency on her own behalf. They act upon her, treating her as an object whose voice and choices are less important than theirs. The abortion is then a typical colonial move. The educated, Westernized younger women feel justified in what they do because they have agreed that it is in the best interest of the ignorant native woman, who clearly cannot be trusted to do what is good for her. And because Mama Ida has been so thoroughly conditioned by the patriarchal system she lives in to bow to male authority, Patricia and Modi are right in thinking this. But it is a hollow victory, achieved at great cost in terms of trust and family relationships.

At this point, one may wonder why Patricia and her friends were not successful in their attempt to foist a workable feminist ideology on a subalternized female subject like

Mama Ida. For an understanding of why radical feminism fails in Bassek's novel, let us turn to Uha Menon's (2000: 77-78) analysis of the failure of feminism (Euro-American feminism to be precise) in India:

> I suggest that feminists working in India find themselves out of touch with ordinary Hindu women because they offer very little in terms of message and meaning that resonates with the lived experience of these women. I submit that feminism is so particular a product of Western social and intellectual history, its moral order constructed so explicitly in terms of equality, individual rights, and personal choice, that it appears quite alien to Hindu women who live within another, equally elaborated moral order that cherishes self-control, self-refinement, and duty to the family.

This quote apprises that Euro-American feminists working in India among Hindu women fail in their mission simply because the message they offer could not resonate with the lived experiences, history, and culture of the local people. Their message was incompatible with Hindu women and therefore alien.

One only has to substitute Africa for India and African women for Hindu women in this passage to arrive at the situation in *La Tâche de Sang*. A group of Westernized African women come together to impose their Western influences in an African context, without serious consideration of how their newly acquired Western feminist consciousness could be adapted to appeal to African women. I agree with Adesani (2002: 107) that, in *La Tâche de Sang*, as elsewhere in contemporary Africa, the daughters of imperialism ascribe to the role of liberating "daughters of goddess" only to end up alienating them. The failure of Patricia and her friends also raises the crucial issue of who has the right to speak for or on behalf of the other.

Conclusion

The novel analysed in this study cast much light on situations familiar to various women in diverse parts of Africa, depicting the ways in which they are oppressed in their households as a result of gender and patriarchy, and describing the extent to which feminism has failed to empower them.

From her young age, Mama Ida was groomed for marriage. As a result, her parents decide to marry her off without consulting her or listening to her opinion. They believe that Same Hanack is the right man for their daughter, despite being old and having other women. They also believe that, because of his wealth, he can take care of her, and they will eventually benefit in return, thus making her a simple commodity. Unfortunately, this marriage turns into hell for Mama Ida as she is abused physically and emotionally. Voiceless and powerless, Mama Ida has to comply with her husband's demands, including that of procreation despite her frail health.

As a way of expanding power and control over Mama Ida, her husband (Same Hanack) isolates her from all external contacts, claiming that, since he paid bride price he now owns her. To him, Mama Ida is simply a commodity he purchased with his own money. However, having been socialised to believe that marriage and family are the ultimate things a woman should vie for, Mama Ida cannot leave her abusive husband. It should be added that her enlightened feminist daughter, Patricia, also cannot help to liberate Mama Ida who is willing to conform to patriarchy without questioning it.

Considering all the oppressions that Mama Ida has put up with, there is a need for women to join hands together and struggle against patriarchal power and authority, not only within the family structures and society, but in all sphere of their life, in order to liberate themselves. Since suffering is a common denominator that they share together, women need to unite so that they can stop it. As D'Almeida (1986) rightly points out, "a greater solidarity among women is needed to alleviate the agony women go through in marital and social situation" (162). However, as Mutunda (2007) observes, this solidarity cannot flourish without a good understanding on the part of women themselves that, in a patriarchal society, all women are second class citizens.

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BOOK REVIEW

Uncovering Caledonia: An Introduction to Scottish Studies
Milena Kaličanin, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018, pp. 223[1]

Anglophone studies in Slovakia and other post-communist countries have come a long way since the time when they were limited to linguistics, the canonical works of Anglophone (typically exclusively English and American) literatures and overviews of British and American social and cultural institutions. Postmillennial globalising processes have brought about a radical transformation of these traditional approaches, and the need to "consider the relationship of the literatures and culture of the United Kingdom and the United States to globalization" (O'Brien and Szeman 2001: 610) has become widely accepted. As Stefano Tartaglia and Monica Rossi (2015: 106) note, global culture modifies local cultures, thereby producing a destabilizing effect that "is often counteracted by the reaffirmation of a strong group identity defined, for example, by nationalism or religion." This reaffirmation of a strong group identity is clearly visible in the case of subjugated nations that are currently facing more intensive forms of cultural modification as the older, centuries-long pressure of a hegemonic national culture is exacerbated by the more recent impact of global culture. An illustration of this situation can certainly be found in the case of the Scottish nation, whose struggle for the revival and preservation of their cultural identity has not gone unnoticed by scholars in Central and Eastern European academic departments specialising in Anglophone studies.

Although the times in which English language students in the former Czechoslovakia had only a restricted access to foreign literature (Janigová 2015: 124) are almost forgotten, there is still a need for Scottish studies textbooks and study resources that can introduce Scottish issues to Slovak students in an accessible way. From this perspective Milena Kaličanin's book *Uncovering Caledonia: An Introduction to Scottish Studies* is a welcome help for teachers who would like to offer their students something that goes beyond the more typical textbook format filled with facts about Scottish literature and culture. Kaličanin has many years of experience in teaching Scottish studies to Serbian students and she conceived her book as a "cultural journey—an attempt on the part of a non-Scot to portray and illustrate the burning cultural issues of modern Scotland" (1) and offer "an insight into these issues through the interpretation, analysis and comprehension of Scottish folk tales, legends, literature and film" (2).

The book focuses on these burning issues of Scotland's past and present through Kaličanin's examinations of selected works that illustrate some of the major trends in the poetry, drama, novels and short stories of Scottish literature. The book consists of five extensive chapters, each divided into several segments, in which the author offers discussions of topics that cast light on the overarching issue of Scottish cultural identity. Each discussion is presented in a carefully chosen and well-constructed theoretical framework that provides a sound basis for Kaličanin's analyses and interpretations. The author's discussions range from famous Scottish legends and myths to poetry, short stories, novels and finally to an example from Scottish film, but the real advantage of the book's arrangement is that each chapter, even each individual segment, can be read and studied separately, allowing teachers to find useful examples of Scottish cultural issues and major literary works, regardless of whether or not their specific courses focus on Scottish poetry, short stories, novels or Scottish cinema. At

the same time, Kaličanin's work can also be used as a primary study resource for an introductory Scottish studies course. Among its other uses, the book offers readers the possibility to gain insights into the relevance of legends of monsters in the Scottish national mythos and the importance of the poetry of the Scots Makars in the construction of Scottish national and cultural identity, but the book also enables students to learn about numerous cultural trends that challenge both the outsider's stereotypical images of Scotland and Scottish attempts to construct a fixed and unique Scottish identity.

Chapters two, three and four form the strongest parts of the book, offering the reader an opportunity to become acquainted with a number of interesting and topical issues that include, among others, Scottish urban myths in short stories by A. L. Kennedy and Laura Hird, the quest for Scottish independence as seen by James Robertson, the dystopic vision of future Scotland found in Andrew Crumey's work, and the exploration of famous "Caledonian Antisyzygy" in Margaret Laurence's expatriate short fiction. The chapter on drama offers insights into key issues of Scottish history ranging from the English (and later also American) exploitations of the Scottish Highlands (John McGrath's *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*) through the famous conflict between Elizabeth I and Mary, Queen of Scots (Liz Lochhead's *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off*) to the exploration of much more recent history – the Scottish Black Watch regiment's engagement in the Iraq war (Gregory Burke's *Black Watch*). At the same time the chapter helps readers and students to understand the approaches and dramatic techniques of in-yer-face theatre, verbatim theatre and post-verbatim theatre.

The last chapter also offers an unusual but refreshingly new approach, essentially contrasting the poisonous pedagogy of Muriel Spark's well-known character of Miss Jean Brodie, as discussed in the first segment, with the author's own pedagogical practices. The second segment of the chapter illustrates the usefulness of the famous *Trainspotting* films (1996 and 2017) in the class aimed at introducing innovative and thought-provoking ways of teaching Scottish culture to Serbian students. On the whole Milena Kaličanin's book *Uncovering Caledonia: An Introduction to Scottish Studies* not only offers useful tips for teachers and a solid study resource for students of Scottish studies courses but also an interesting and inspiring read for anyone who wishes to learn more about the rich and often unjustly overlooked culture of the Scottish nation.

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