



**SUBVERSION OF MARGINALITY IN GENDERED ROLE  
REPRESENTATION IN GORETTI KYOMUHENDO'S *SECRET NO MORE*  
AND MOSES ISEGAWA'S *ABYSSINIAN CHRONICLES***

**By**

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**Abstract**

Contemporary Ugandan novelists are preoccupied with the consequence of female marginality. Women, for a long time, have been described as easily subverted by unpleasant situations they daily encounter. Hence, women characters are depicted as quickly succumbing to vices of subordination without outlining their effort to subvert marginal treatments meted out to them. This representation is an imbalanced imagination of women and their evolving resilience and self-assertiveness against continued depreciation. Feminist poststructuralism was deployed as the theoretical framework, while the interpretive design was used to analyse how instances of marginality are subverted after the victimised's encounter with violence. Gerotti Kymuhendo's *Secret No More* and Moses Isegawa's *Abyssinian Chronicles* were purposively selected for the study owing to their thematic relevance to the subject of the study. The selected texts were subjected to critical analyses. Also, the selection of a text each from a male and a female author was to help in the analysis of the nuances of subversion from a balanced gender perspective. I particularly paid attention to the ways the subjugation of women enhances the continuation of chasm in the representations of gendered roles. This, I have discovered, breeds not just their perpetual oppression, but conceals any possible attempt of transfiguring from the state of objectification. However, the varied replications of women's subservience as represented in the discussed fictional narratives expose deprivations in order to strategically plan women's emancipation from oppressive vices. In this way, the novels reflect stereotypes that influence the persistent dehumanisation of women but draw attention to the imperfections of polarities as possible propellant of transmutations which helps victims of oppressions to subvert their degradations. I submitted here that the need to exhibit parallel autonomy displayed in victimised characters is a main factor that disabuses fixations in expressions of antithetical gendered traits and roles.

**Keywords:** Ugandan literature, Marginality, Gendered roles, Women's emancipation, Transmutations

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### **Introduction**

The allotment of gendered roles based strictly on anatomic, physiological and cultural principles in almost all the world communities polarises both sexes. This makes it impossible for both sexes to relate as equals in many social matters. Observably, the childbearing and child rearing roles of women have continued since ancient times to define their personalities and values. Thus, gendered role is responsible for female subjectivity and marginality. Michel Foucault (1978) states that the reason for this differentiation is that all human societies are sexualised (p.147). The fact that strong consideration is given to biological make-up in almost all societies before gendered roles are assigned indicates the importance of the biological differences between male and female sexes. Consequently, this creation of differences between both sexes based on their biological make-ups empowers society to dictate the level of relevance of both girls and boys and ensures that both sexes function accordingly. Brownmiller (1975) asseverates that communal laws and ideologies are set up in diverse communities to reinforce the created differentiation between gender roles. These commonly held perceptions about the noticeable anatomical differences that exist between the male and female give expression to the notion of gender and gendered roles.

### **Adverse Implication of Gendered Role Classification on Literature**

The categorisation of roles based on a strong consideration of human biological nature has adverse implications for the conception of gendered duties in literary writings. This, according to Mackinnon (1982), has led to the conception of women as docile, soft, passive, nurturant, vulnerable, incompetent, masochistic and domestic in many literary texts (p. 580). They are represented in domestic terms as caregivers to their husbands and children. Such representations usually contrast the portrayal of men as strong, capable, natural leaders. This gender-based dichotomy makes it convenient to assign specific roles that index males' superiority over the females' inferiority, as they (the females) are assigned culturally-limiting roles as wives, mothers and housekeepers. Although, according to Sideris (2003, p. 13), gender role has experienced a lot of changes since the modern era and have continued to experience a paradigm shift within society, the influence this shift creates on the fluid adoptions of roles by both male and female is yet to reflect the dynamic representation of selves in most fictional narratives.

The allotment of gender roles, as it is constantly depicted in literature, still portrays the chasm that exists between both males and females especially in fictional presentations of characters. This portrayal of dualised gender roles in literature fails to represent the progress women have made over time in breaking free from societal and individualised dominance. Such literary texts replicate women history as a permanently subverted object and adopt the continual polarisation of gender roles. Hence, rather than create dynamic characters who express the essence of the dynamic trend in gender role assignment; many creative works still reflect the binary which permits the exaltation of one gender at the expense of the other. Invariably, this ascribes dominance to men while women are regarded as the *other* whose feeble nature predisposes her to male consistent dominance. Saadawi (2007) adds some insights to this observation when she alleges that:

Among the male authors I have read, both in the West and in the Arab world, irrespective of the language in which they have written, or of the region from which they have come, no one has been able to free him from this age-old image of women handed down to us from ancient past, no matter how famous many of them have been for their passionate defense of human rights, human values and justices, and their vigorous resistance to oppression and tyranny in any form (Saadawi, 2007, p. 77).

The distribution of gender roles using the ancient yardstick of biological and cultural measures, hinders the development of versatile male and female characters in literary representations. Rather they result in creating inferior female characters to gain much acceptance in a male-dominated community of writers. This attempt was first noted by Firestone (1970) as resulting in the “misrepresentation of odds” (p. 781). Invariably, in a bid to overhaul the perpetual description of female personalities as oppressed and subsumed under male authorities, female novelists often create female characters whose independence and sexual freedom often resembles that of:

. . .evil femme fatale who leads men down to their dooms, the proud educated woman who becomes someone's girlfriend, but never a wife, the virgin, the good girl who helps the old woman and gets rewarded, the one who suffers tribulations silently until a rich man comes along to 'free' her (Abiola et al., 2018, p. 1)

The inability of literary writers to construct dynamic characters that reflect the unbiased allotment of gender duties is, perhaps, because the problem of gender role division and

sexuality is oppression that goes back beyond recorded history to the animal kingdom (Firestone, 1970; Foucault, 1982). Hence, to construct fluid literary characters who exemplify the growing changes in the gendering of roles, particularly in this epoch, it becomes essential to look beyond biological and cultural limitations that segregate gender roles. However, Foucault (1978) suggests that to achieve a balanced depiction of characters, especially in literary representations of roles, there must be a continuous struggle against the “government” of individualisation. In other words, to break the continuous mystification of sexed characters and stereotypical differentiation of genders in creative writings, the formation of a new power struggle against polarisation becomes the viable solution.

### **Ugandan Literature and its Reformation on Human Roles**

Ugandan literary writers have engaged their creativity in discussing various issues of national and continental interests. Although cultural norms influence the literature of the early nineteenth century, the latter periods of this era and the early twentieth century in Uganda witnessed the emergence of literary writers who recreated the horrors experienced in their diverse communities. This is done through the characterisation of individuals and groups of people in the community; and the effects of socio-economic and political realities on them. At this point, Ugandan literature has gone beyond the didactic functional purpose it serves, it has become a refraction of the people's expectation of growth after the brutality of war. Therefore, the narratives of the contemporary writers' present confrontational reactions from different facets to the long suppression of violence.

### **Gender-based Revolutionary Struggles**

The issue of oppression which is as a result of anatomical differentiation in gender roles has been a topical discussion of feminist theorists for a very long time (Federici, 2012). Literary feminist studies have particularly taken cognisance of the disparities that occur in the general representations of women as a whole, not just in the way their duties are distributed based on stereotypic measures. Hence, as a result of this, their research has identified various gaps in the relational delineation of duties in literature. According to Hook (1982) one of the reasons for the earlier feminist revolution is the anger against male domination which led to the creation of liberation movements. Agreeably, Millet's (1970) version of the

rendition of sexual politics ascertains that the first generation of abolitionists who had worked to end slave trade after the eradication of slavery transferred their energy towards destroying the sexist domination of male superiority over female as a result of their biological differences.

### **Feminist Post-structuralism**

Feminist Post-structuralism emerged from the intersection of feminist and poststructuralist theories, both of which challenge established norms in literary criticism. Post-structuralism, influenced by the experiences of its proponents, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes and later Julia Kristeva, during the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962), resists conventional readings of texts and dismantles the ideological heritage of French colonialism (Young, 2007). This resistance extends beyond colonial ideologies to question the author's supremacy over the text, emphasising that meaning emerges from social interactions rather than the author's intent. Roland Barthes's *The Death of the Author* (1967) and Michel Foucault's *What is an Author?* (1969) reinforce this notion, advocating for the displacement of the author's centrality in literary interpretation. Influential thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Derrida, Hélène Cixous, Althusser, and Lyotard, shaped by their war experiences and literary insights, contributed to post-structuralism's critique of canonical readings, creating openings rather than reinforcing rigid representational systems.

Derrida, major proponent of Poststructuralism, introduced the concept of “differance”, a French word which explicates the instability of meaning in language. The term implies that meaning is constantly altering and metamorphosing instead of being static. The concept of differance became popular in the later part of 1960s and the 1970s, and mostly became a criticism of structuralism, propounded by Ferdinand de Saussure in the early 20th century; who articulated meaning as embedded in its structure than the object it describes or represents. The occurrence of the Algerian war and the instability it created soon made scholars question the fixation of meaning beyond language. As the application of poststructuralism to literature, philosophy, political science and feminism became profound, scholars began to use the sound interpretive assertions generated in poststructuralism to question rigid assumptions about life and living.

The post-structuralist challenge to binary representations in literature aligns with feminist theory, which has long critiqued gendered oppression and patriarchal structures. Feminism predates post-structuralism, starting in the 1600 and 1700 with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Vindication for the Rights of Women* (1792), that advocates women's education and fair treatment in politics, marriage and society. Among other earliest feminist writers and activists were Christine de Pizan, Catharine Macaulay; and Jeremy Bentham. Their works on the status and right of women were profound; however, they mainly reveal the generic challenges women were facing at the time. However, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), written after the Vietnam War, significantly shapes feminist discourse by centring women's experiences in sexuality, work, and family. Feminist critiques of authorship and gender representation gained momentum during the Second Wave, when scholars such as Kate Millett, Germaine Greer and Mary Ellmann interrogated 'phallic writings' and broke ties with patriarchal literary traditions (Humm, 1995). The feminist movement's defiance of traditional narratives, influenced by post-structuralist strategies, legitimised expressions of dissatisfaction with gender inequality and misrepresentation in literary works.

**Subverting Marginality in Gendered Role Representations in Kymuhendo's *Secret No More* and Isegawa's *Abyssinian Chronicles***

The existence of polarity in the replications of gendered roles has persistently influenced the visualisation of bodily signification for a long time and this has created chasms in the figurations of the allotment of roles in creative writings about male and female characters. This division allows the constructed difference to amplify bodily distinction which results in the formation of dualistic opinion about selves as superior or as inferior; this creates stereotypic alignment of selves to the duties allotted in order to consolidate the description of one's roles. This reason, according to Millet (1970), serves as the explication for the perpetual subjugation of women's personalities within societies and the repetition of its expression in literary works. Millet (1970) expounds the representation of selves and the roles adopted in fictional narratives as the extension of the portrayal of sexual politics that ensures the perpetual subversion of women. She introduces the concept of "sexual politics" to create the awareness of the political undertone the notion of binaries has on the representation of bodies in literature.



In order to achieve fluid representation of selves in literary works that disabuse the mind of dual visualisation of selves as a result of the division perceived in the allotment of duties, Millet (1970) recommends the deconstructive power of revolution. This suggestion, according to her, is premised on the fact that body significations are identified mostly during periods of revolutions which affirms that equal participation of both sexes can result in the re-figurations of selves in fictional narratives. Minh-ha (1989) states that “violations of the gender divide, which have occurred in all times and places, mostly result from...public calamity, private misfortune, or occasional emergencies” (p. 103). The main determinant factor for the transmutative re-creation of gendered roles is the deconstruction of expressed polarised behaviours among characters. Ugandan narratives continue to assert the traumatising effect the protracted occurrence of war has on the citizens and the country as a whole. Writers persistently represent the brutality experienced during the period of insurgency, continue to unravel different shifts the menace created. Existing criticism on Uganda, especially and her internationally acclaimed literary authors, provides abundant scholarly critiques on the thematic preoccupation of the writers and how this explicates evolving changes unfolding in the country.

#### **Existing Literature on *Secret No More* and *Abyssinian Chronicles***

Ogaga Okuyade (2015) examines the negotiation of growth in turbulent scapes in Kymuhendo's *Secret No More* and categorises the text as a Bildungroman since it narrates, in a chronological manner, the struggles of a female child for self-identity from childhood to adulthood in the most violent and miserable setting of war, agitations and struggles for survival. Set in two historically volatile sites of Rwanda and Uganda, *Secret No More*, according to Okuyade is seen as a Bildungroman and as Kymuhendo's imaginative attempt to correct the Western media mistake of streamlining the essence of the insurgency into a case of an “ethnic conflict” instead of construing it as an organised attempt to erase the existence of an entire race. Okuyade is able to identify the significance of rape in ascertaining the bodily superiority of men over women in war, and reiterates its impact during the mass performance of the act on the Tutsi women by the Hutu men right in the presence of their husbands. He construes this act as an expression of significant authority over the other clan. This corroborates the assertiveness of his observation with Brownmiller (1975) statement about the relationship rape has with the politics of power. This serves as a

supportive background for Okuyade's submission about the extensiveness of rape in violent situations in the work. However, Okuyade does not consider the fact that Brownmiller (1975) projects the possibility of eradicating rape permanently with the right type of defense education. Most importantly, he does not consider Mukundane's traumatic experience as enhancing her effrontery to dictate to her oppressors, but according to Armstrong (2009) is a bold choice of "speaking through the wound of traumatic memory/recall"; an instance which exemplifies the act of subverting masculinity.

On the contrary, this study diverges from the popular assertion but rather supports the fact that repeated use of rape during periods of war can change the notion of women's sexuality about themselves and give them a bold confrontational attitude towards men. Okuyade does not foresee the fact that repeated use of rape can lead to deviant attitudes in women which can be a step towards erasing duality in the adoptions and allotments of roles in imaginative writings. And this inability to connect the strength violence can sometimes cause, is an identifiable gap in his work which the current study bridges. Finally, Okuyade does not identify Mukundane's language as a resilient protest that articulates her sexual experiences. As a result, he does not explore the firm connection between his study, violence and sexual politics. Overtly, Okuyade significantly, identifies "*Secret No More* as a quintessential narrative of how injuries are (un)consciously inflicted on the self by others and how literary texts negotiate the issue of violence and remembering as a reconciliatory process." Aside from the stated omission, Okuyade's account gives an explicit analysis of the growth stages of the characters and the incidences which occur in their lives.

To further elaborate Kymuhendo's *Secret No More*, Barasa (2017), notices the pitched violence meted out to women's bodies in times of insurgency. His investigation, as Armstrong (2009), corroborates the fact that the female body is "abject and marked". Despite the violent desecration the heroine faces, Barasa describes her as an active victim who struggles to establish safe solutions. Barasa's explication of the author's use of rape establishes it more as a tool for enforcing obedience out of the victim. Mukundane's husband, Bizimana the Hutu government official, believed to be in possession of explosives, is psychologically tortured when the colonel rapes his wife right in his presence. This activity establishes the agony Bizimana suffers for witnessing his wife's violation. The



purpose of rape here is to enable the rulers assert their bodily superiority over those of the victims. Barasa recognises Kymuhendo's expertise in allocating the essential traits of each character to them and her explication of how the action of each character affects the eventual shaping of heroine's character.

Barasa further observes that the female characters in *Secret No More* are dynamic characters, who experience growth unlike other linear female characters often represented in other African fictional narratives. Nevertheless, Barasa omission is obvious in his inability to connect the effect the violation of rape has on Mukundane's evolved personality; after the incidence. This inability to connect the effect sexual freedom has on the reconstruction of gender roles, especially as a result of violence, makes it difficult for Barasa to wholly comprehend the change in the revolutionary stance of the victimised. The focus of this paper, however, is on the transformational influence of trauma on the reconfiguration of selves and the actual subversions of oppressing marginalities in the selected texts.

*Abyssinian Chronicles* (2001) captures the scenery of the Ugandan peace and war eras and explicates the implication of violence on gender role reversal. As a result of its versatile stance, some studies have been done to accentuate the impact of violence on the flexibility of the representations of characters in the novel. Edgar Nabutanyi (2012) investigates the impact of violence on children's perception in war situations, specifically, a war situated in family rivalry. He notes the violent attitude of the child narrator's mother and comments on the destructive effects of violence and the consequential abuse it results to. He significantly notes that parents' demonstration of domestic violence on children turns them to monsters that further perpetrate act of violence on others. In a bid to justify the harsh upbringing and loneliness; that Serenity encounter as a child, Nabutanyi fails to critique the unjust treatments that are meted out to women in the novel. This makes his analysis more like a staunch criticism of women and an obvious neglect of their challenges. However, Nabutanyi later explains that his focus mainly is on the domestic abuse of children, and not necessarily on sexual violation, since he considers it as not the only source of violation that impacts lives especially children's lives in Uganda. Nevertheless, the omission of this exclusion is very noticeable.

In furtherance of the explication of the versatility of Isegawa's *Abyssinian Chronicles*; Michelle Brown (2008) discovers the juxtaposition which exists between colonial and trauma studies mainly in respect of race, gender, identity, post-independence nation-state that the repeated perpetration of violence after its initial stage of violent actions and eruptions translate into an unhindered ability to express the violence experienced in speech. This expressive ability she notes only gets heightened after one's interaction with violence as a means of navigating the complex psychological and political processes of colonial trauma and recuperation. Brown's analysis, among other assertions, certainly demonstrates that traumatic suffering is fixed neither in time nor place, as she exposes through careful analysis, how the masculine narrator eventually realises the possibility of construing a non-patriarchal form of masculinity. However, based on her investigation of women's rights and the change trauma can impact on other literary novels she uses, she ignores the gender-related issues in *Abyssinian Chronicles* as viable contributions to her notion of trauma and testimonies. As a result of this omission, she does not assert the connection between bodily trauma and the testimonies of erasure of duality in gender roles. This significantly; leaves unexplained the impact of war on gendered duties and how this culminates in the possibility of subversion of marginality. The identified gap in the existing studies on trauma is the gap the present study intends to fill.

### **Subverting Marginality in Gendered Role Representations in Kymuhendo's *Secret No More* and Isegawa's *Abyssinian Chronicles***

Gorretti Kymuhendo in her debut novel, *Secret No More*, chronicles horrific experiences of war and trauma. A Ugandan and an internationally recognised prolific writer, Kymuhendo vividly captures traumatic impressions of war on the appropriations of gendered roles. The novel begins with a prologue that explicates the intertribal marital status of Bizimana and Mukundane. The omniscient narrator tells readers about previous clashes that have ensued between the Hutu and the Tutsi clans. But since those are scores long settled, the narrator concentrates on present issues. The inability of Bizimana and his wife Mukundane to conceive promptly after their marriage result in his wife's depression. To ensure her happiness and forestall her relapse into the terror of violence she has experienced before they are married, Bizimana employs Chantal as his wife's housemaid. The eventual birth of her first child, Marina, settles Mukundane into the normalcy of a happy living.

The novel at this stage, reveals the infiltration of rumours of unrest into the peaceful existence of the family. It subtly interlined with the expectation of having another child overshadows the violent agitations about to erupt. However, being a very sensitive person, Mukundane expresses her confusion to their maid: “But the things I hear on radio, Chantal, I am so frightened” (*Secret No More*, 9). Her sensitivity establishes her erstwhile encounters with violence and expresses her fear of losing the stability she now enjoys. However, the reassurances of her maid and her husband who is a topnotch official in the government parastatal continuously douse her fears. Although Bizimana occasionally gets afraid about the news of the building tension in the oppositional political circles between his wife's tribe and his, he never voices his fears in order not to upset the serenity she enjoys as a result of her progressive procreative abilities.

Meanwhile, yearn for retaliation slowly built over the years suddenly erupts into a massive uproar of war. The Tutsi and the Hutu exchange violent missiles; in spite of his pretending decoy Bizimana confidence wanes when his clansmen declare intertribal marriage with the Tutsi an unforgivable offence: “Any Muhutu who befriends or marries a Mututsi woman shall be considered a traitor” (*Secret No More*, 11). The writer's exposition of how seemingly unimportant decision can culminate in irreparable damage is an indictment that dismantles the relevance of anatomical polarisation during frightening situations. Bizimana finds “himself an enemy of the government” (*Secret No More*, 11). This early annulment of differences in the reaction of characters to terror is to foreground a connection of synergy among all bodies in trauma. This aligns with Braidotti's (2002) assertion that at this point, the notion of the “significant “I” detaches itself from authenticating the masculine essence and resolve into a singular affirmation that is impersonal. That is to say it expresses the immanence of a life, not Life as a metaphysical idea” (p. 94).

With the notion of hierarchy recently redefined by the vengeful marauders of violence, Bizimana and his wife are supposed to demonstrate their emotional specificity in responding to the trauma of oppression. But the enormity of the violence places both Bizimana and his wife on the same vulnerable platform, despite the fact that their roles within the community differ. Bizimana, apart from being the social archetype of superiority because of his anatomical framing, has also attained a level of profile which marks him

significantly as an elite in comparison to his stay-at-home wife. Mukundane's representation as reticent, unadventurous, static character at this point makes her totally dependent on her husband. While he operates in the public domain of life, work and influence, she remains attached to the private circle of loneliness, depression and panic. These obvious differences sometimes put a strain on the couple's relationship. Readers are informed about this thus: "Her husband had been desperate to make her happy. He always tried to draw her out in conversation. But she always kept mum, never explaining her source of unhappiness" (*Secret No More*, p.2).

The distinction the narrator shows here follows the dyad polarity in gendered roles. This exonerates the adoption of sexual politics to support the correctness of the ideology of inequality which enables one group to dominate the other. According to Millet (1970), the modern terminology echoes this fundamental division of temperament traits constructed to reinstate the pattern of "aggression is male and passivity female" (p. 32).

Meanwhile, the narrator discloses some discrepancies and affront in Chantal's behaviour towards community laws before she becomes the family's maid. She is an inferior defaulter of communal laws whom Bizimana converts to his wife's maid instead of serving prison terms. The fact that his position guarantees him safety makes him ignore some irreconcilable signs of danger about the defaulter at the point of interrogation: "And your children, how old are they." I have no children, Chantal answered flatly. I lied, I hate Umuganda. She continued indignantly" (*Secret No More*, p.3).

In spite of exhibiting dangerous criminal nuances, Chantal still gets employed as a maid. Probably because she ranks low to being his equivalent, her figuration as a wretch gives him a sense of accomplishment when he remembers how well he has changed his wife's life. Her reaction to the description of Chantal as a nonentity before he employs her gives a parallel connection to the lives of the two women:

She sounds helpless, desperate, like one would in a foreign country. Lost, homeless, unwanted. Tears were beginning to form in her eyes and she had a faraway look. He detected the sign. He knew his wife was about to lapse into one of her sad moods. He wished he had not talked about the strange woman. (*Secret No More*, p.5)

Having experienced the same fate as Chantal after her parents are killed in the violence of war, Mukundane's resonance with the strange woman's description makes her recognise their shared affinity. She is nothing before she meets her husband. It is in this enormity of being the saviour of inferior wretched women that he flippantly ignores the signs, so when Chantal takes the news of her employment calmly rather than become suspicious of her, he gets so annoyed that she does not pay obeisance to him: Bizimana felt a tinge of disappointment "...do you understand he asked irritably" (*Secret No More*, 5). He is the "self", and they are the others. The narrator's consistent identification of dichotomies in the gendered relationships here is to reinforce the extent of disparities and marginality in gendered roles. The fact that the writer draws hierarchical demarcations between figuration of both sexes in affiliations with their status and duties contributes to the polarised imagination of both sexes and their roles. Bizimana, the policemen, are all depicted as reveling in notable positions of authority, while Mukundane, Chantal, the foremost female castes exist in derogatory subservient situations. The problem about such imagination, apart from the fact that it persistently portrays women as weak, becomes targets of social vices. It empowers continuation of violent masculine show of prowess while it invalidates women's strength through faulty representations. According to Collins (2000), the continuous portrayal of women as perpetually objectified is a political decoy that ensures their extortion is unending.

However, to readily confront deprivations, it is important to reflect repeatedly the actuality of one's condition in order to act accordingly. Haraway (1991) suggests that the ideological resources of victimisation must be accepted for proper strategic planning of a real life. Thus, in order to transit the illusions of fixation with consistent dynamic flow in the imagination of gendered roles, the author reflects the imperfection of polarities.

In the same vein, Isegawa's *Abyssinian Chronicles* recounts the emergence of violence as being ingrained in family rivalry. The omniscient-protagonist through the deployment of flashback and foreshadowing reveals to the reader his father's background. The novel begins with Serenity's unwholesome attachment to tall women. Having lost his mother at a tender age of three, he craves motherly attention which makes him visualise most tall women as having the features of his mother. Disconcerted after receiving a sudden jolt from

one of the strange women, he withdraws to himself. To justify Serenity's predicament, a synopsis of his mother's experiences is presented. Married to clan chief in an atmosphere that is deeply entrenched in patriarchy, Serenity's mother soon finds herself isolated and abandoned by her husband whose position of authority grants him the autonomy to marry lot of women. An ardent patriarchal Serenity's father marries women from autocratic circle to display the splendor of his wealth and to also breed male children who will succeed him.

The competition to have a male child becomes so sever among the wives:

In an ideal situation, Serenity should have come first- everyone wanted a son for the up-and-coming sub county chief Grandpa was at the time- but girls kept arriving, two dying soon after birth in circumstances reeking of maternal desperation (*Abyssinian Chronicles*, p.4).

In order to secure his love and attention, his wives keep going into successive pregnant state. Apart from the loss of life that this might easily lead to, for any of them, it clearly indicates their low level of worth, which ranks them as severely below their husband. Similarly, as a group, their competition for the attention of one man establishes the ancientness of the practice of sexual duality in Africa. Besides, that each wife is a prototype of the other makes them easily replaceable. Reinstating this fact, the narrator says:

Serenity knew what Grandpa meant. He wanted his women tall and elegant, wasp-waisted but firm-buttred, and without the kind of boobs “which fell in the food while it was being served”. Without buckteeth, too. All Grandpa's women looked alike. He admired consistency of choice-it demonstrated character. He believed a man fell in love with one woman who appeared in different guises (*Abyssinian Chronicles*, p.26).

The cloning of sameness in the traits of grandpa's women is a politics that reinstates the autocratic belief of women as universal prototypes. This ideology apart from the fact that it denies any actual possible transition of growth for women portrays them as predictable, thus enhancing the manipulation of their oppression and marginality. According to Stratton (1988), this usual generic imagination of women despite the cultural specificity in its manifestation is a cultural constant. It is in the midst of this slavish portrayal of women that the character of Serenity's mother is appreciated. She represents an exception of change and struggle that threatens to rupture the conventionality of fixations. Serenity's mother is the youngest among the princesses Serenity's father married, this made her enjoy the best cordiality with him. He bestowed his love and devotion on her after she put an end to his



long wait for a male child, a role his other wives had failed to perform. Yet, she chose to have an affair with another man. “I gave her the best silks, fed her the best goat meat, treated her the best way I knew...” (*Abyssinian Chronicles*, p.52). Dissatisfied with owning material things at the expense of having an intimate rapport with her husband because of his polygamous status, Serenity's mother demonstrates equality with her husband when she starts a love affair with another man. In a strictly traditional patriarchal society, the decision to assume dominance over her own sexuality devastates the illusion of manly honour attached to the practice of polygamy. It rather foregrounds a parallelism of equality between the sexual performances of both genders and flaws the dichotomous ranking of sexuality as mainly a means that sustains the political discrimination of opposites in the imagination of gendered roles.

Furthermore, Serenity's mother not only cheats on her husband but also conceives a child with her lover while still married, symbolizing her defiance and quest for sexual autonomy, which subverts her marginalisation. The villagers' excitement over her pregnancy— “. . . was it Grandpa's or did it belong to the man she was deeply in love with?” (*Abyssinian Chronicles*, p.4)—suggests widespread awareness of the affair, likely reaching her husband. Despite expectations of punishment to deter other wives from similar defiance, her husband's reaction is unexpectedly lenient. His attachment to polygamy does not override his affection for her: “She was my favorite wife” (*Abyssinian Chronicles*, p.52). To keep her close to their children, he tolerates her indiscretions, challenging the notion that endurance is solely a woman's virtue.

The grandfather's constrained tolerance disrupts the stereotype of men as perpetual oppressors, illustrating how they, too, can be victims of circumstantial subjugation. The narrator critiques the rigid portrayal of men as enforcers of oppression, emphasising that marginalisation affects all individuals regardless of gender. Fictional narratives should, therefore, reflect this complexity rather than uphold a one-sided depiction of power dynamics. Ultimately, Serenity's mother, unable to find satisfaction in her royal yet lonely existence, seeks fulfillment in the arms of an unnamed lover, highlighting her pursuit of agency despite societal constraints.

The choice of an unidentified man over the royal autocracy of her husband is the last unpardonable desecration Serenity's mother could commit against unquestionable patriarchy. So she is exterminated through the *deus ex machina* of her lover's poverty. The narrator captures her travails thus:

...Before anybody could find out the truth, she left. But her luck did not hold-three months into her new life, her uterus burst, and she bled to death on the way to the hospital, her life emptying into the backseat of a rotten Morris Minor (*Abyssinian Chronicles*, p.4).

The struggle to acquire a personal definition for herself outside the matrix of masculine dominance reduces her to nothing. This depicts the risk involved in attempting to bridge the chasm of duality that exists between self and other. Hence, the miserable end of Serenity's mother further reinstates the staunchness of sexual politics. This implies that in spite of their best intention, fictional writers unconsciously reveal the binaries of biological differences while allotting roles to gendered characters. Dual presentation of roles is an enormous challenge that keeps the lead of constraints on self-developmental realities. With the mental stereotype of distinctions in place, the demonstration of power remains one sided still. Ngcobo (2007) describes the continuance of the partial description of power as enfeebling to women since in most of the literature written by Africans, especially male African writers, women are punished severely, even by death, for daring to exhibit independent values apart from the template men and society create for her. However, this narrative exposes the faulty myopic representation of weakness as mainly exhibited by women but it establishes the troupe of weakness as cutting across all genders. It exposes the implicit yet bold steps women now take to subvert oppression and establishes the possibility of male marginalisation especially within marriage. This reveals the fact that experiences of marginality are not gender sensitive, they can occur to either of the partner during encounters of violence.

### **Identifying the Universality of Vulnerability: An Explications of the Intertextual Relatedness of Marginalisation**

Scholars have foregrounded the transgressing experiences of gendered relationships in literature as capable of evoking intertextual slips in the evolving presentation of roles, the reflection of trauma in humans as dismantling stereotypic allotment of roles iterates scholarly theorised affirmations of rupture in the classifications of duties. "What we invoke

as the naturalized knowledge of gender is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality” (Butler, 1999, p. xxiii). Hence, the notion of gendered roles as unstable and subject to constant shift had long been theoretically discovered, still many literary works are yet to portray the dynamic shift this change propels in representation of gendered duties. “The end of history is the crossing over to the place of the Other, the return to the place of signifying productivity...Man will disappear into the space of the Other, explore it, and ultimately *become it*-that is her” (Goux, 1973).

Demonstrating the enormity of power regeneration, the writers of the selected texts acknowledge the needs of the victimised characters to control as existing beyond the constructed binaries of gender. They illustrate the breakdown of polarity in the conception of differences as evolving into a system of power replicates, where it becomes difficult to distinguish between the roles allotted to either male or female sexes. Hence, all roles resonate the unified instinct to dominate. Kymuhendo's *Secret No More* portrays the eventual arrival of the soldiers at Bizimana's home which is an eruption of violent chaotic situations that authenticate the contention for authority. The realisation of the soldiers' entry into his household gives a crippling fear to the couple which draws lines of similarities between their emotions:

He felt hot tears sting his eyes as he looked down at his children. God! he did not want to lose them, he prayed silently...Mukundane sat up abruptly, startled. The sound of a heavier gun, something like a sub-machine gun, rattled in the air, close to their gate. Mukundane swiftly got out of bed and began struggling into a night gown. Bizimana felt his legs go weak. He was frightened beyond words. (*Secret No More*, p. 13)

Bizimana's realisation of the inescapable looming terror creates for him a sudden shift from his autocratic position which subjects him to sharing same vulnerable traits of fear with his wife. At this point, all emotions possess similar traits which begin the erasure of polarity. War and all other violent encounters dissolve most division in the categorisation of emotions thus enhancing the gradual emergence of fluid presentation of roles. James (1983) maintains that “the projection of emotional segmentation male and female sexes is as a result of the fact that our knowledge about anger and other emotional related topic is largely, intuitive and unsystematic” (p. 1158). This essentially reveals that aggravations give a

corresponding similarity to responses of self and other during volatile situations, hence, bridging the gap of differences in bodily valuations. With his captivation so easy, the soldiers declare an incessant raid in his home and the futile effort it produces elongates his harassment: “Where are those guns?” he asked in a dangerously quiet voice” (14). His fear grows as he gets confronted by the notoriously Hutu Colonel, Renzaho, whose bestial acts give him a reputable awe for brutality.

The fruitless efforts of the soldiers make him resort to a more humiliating strategy to get the victim confess to an uncommitted crime, after he has been severely battered. Stunned to see her husband's disfiguration, Mukundane is soon subjected to her own misfortune which the narrator confirms through the lustful glitters on the Colonel's face: “The Colonel watching her in amusement the gown which she wore had a long slit in front” (*Secret No More*, 16). At this point it is easy to decipher the specificity of the Colonel's action. Rape is one of the main factors fueling dichotomy in gendered duties. Therefore, the writer through her portrayal of the excitement in the Colonel's demeanor reinforces this fact: “Sergeant, “the Colonel called one of the soldiers, “maybe we can use another method to make the Nyakubahwa tell us where he keeps the guns” (*Secret No More*, 16). That the Colonel intends to use sexual violation to demonstrate the condescending of the Hutu union with the Tutsi is an intensely political weapon that is associable with power possession and because of its versatile usability, the Colonel's encrypted gesture is easily decoded: “The soldier who had been called Sergeant immediately understood” (16). This reveals sexual oppression as an agreeable indictment on women between both the Colonel and his low-ranking officers which erases the differences in their ranking and confirms such alignment as having some broad consequences on women's personhood. To perpetuate his devious act, Mukundane becomes trapped:

With the help of another soldier, they got hold of Mukundane and proceeded to pin her to the floor. Mukundane kicked and squirmed, lashing out at the soldiers. The soldiers were momentarily shocked by her strength. One of them slapped her hard on the face...Marina, who had been hiding in a different place, had also come out when she heard her mother's screams...But then her eyes caught her mother's figure. She was spread-eagle on the floor with two soldiers holding her down (*Secret No More*, 16).

The foregoing vividly illustrates the traumatic implication of war on a woman's body. As

traumatised as Bizimana is he is not sexually violated. Hence, rape here reinstates the generic perceptual association of sexual stigma on mostly women's body. According to Armstrong (2009, p. 259), this rendition “foregrounds the female body as abject and marked- a thing to be violently 'written' on and as a site of amputation and disablement”. Inferably, women experience more violation in war because their body is a template on which social vices are comfortably written. However, that Mukundane puts up a resistance against this devilry act of cruelty reveals that women cannot just be intimidated into being sexually violated and it also suggestively indicates that perhaps had she been more vehemently dramatic, she could have escaped this violation altogether. This is a possibility which is corroborated by the “momentary shock of the soldiers about her strength (*Secret No More*, 16)”. Overpowered and violated by the men who reduce her husband to an unrecognisable mass, it is understandable she could not withstand their strength, giving especially, her earlier portrayed non-forcible nature. She is made to bear the humiliation of their marriage on her body. Although the role Mukundane plays here typifies the defeated posture women are mostly believed to assume in most crisis, her husband's effort to intercept her moments of horror results in diverse dissolutions of roles. Awaken to consciousness through his wife's screams, Bizimana's decision to intervene in his wife's dehumanisation culminates in the climax of the ferocious drama. In time he meanders his way to the Colonel aimed with the latter's baton which he has hastily left under one of the chair, to violate Mukundane. The distractions of the soldiers who watch in amusement how the Colonel rapes the victim and lustfully imagine when their turn will be, Bizimana crawls almost unnoticed to the Colonel with all the energy he could muster he hits the merciless evil mastermind on the head rapidly twice. All hellish frenzies are let loosed because of this action: “The Colonel was jerking away involuntarily when the pain seems to penetrate, and he withdrew abruptly” (*Secret No More*, p.18).

The death of Colonel Renzaho alongside the victims he terrorises after a brief encounter with violence certifies all bodies as susceptible to pain during violent circumstances. His immediate death after Bizimana's singular attack despite his high ranked position signifies limitation to all demonstrations of power which reverses the absoluteness of power. Foucault (1982) observes that “every intensification can only result in the limit of power” (p. 794). Through the occurrence of fragmentations here, the writer reveals eruption of

violence as capable of erasing the construct of duality that enhances the division of performance of gendered roles into static matrix of perpetrator/victim without depicting a possible interchange between both roles. The destructive implication of violence is beyond the wound it writes on the body of women; it draws a parallel of similarities across all bodies and authenticates the transversal nature of pain making it impossible to mainly associate wound, disablement and psychological trauma mostly to instances of women's violation. Judith Herman's (1992) interrogation on the rescind implication of the agony of rape concludes that:

...It is now apparent also that the traumas of one are the traumas of the other. The hysteria of women and the combat neurosis of men are one. Recognizing the commonality of affliction may even make it possible at times to transcend the immense gulf that separates the public spheres of war and politics-the world of men-and the private sphere of domestic life-the world of women (p. 23).

When, eventually the soldiers shot at Mukundane in her state of unconsciousness, it is to exonerate their completeness of the task which might help them escape any acute penalty because of Colonel's death: "My God! How are we going to explain the Colonel's death? he said. Let's get out of here!" he shouted (*Secret No More*, 21). The replications in the expression of both gender to brutality reveals the writers' synergic efforts towards eroding dual imagination of selves in fictional narratives. This concerted effort is to correct the anomalies that have long encouraged the oppression of women through faulty representations of selves.

### **Conclusion**

The paper, through its exposition of both genders' parallel response to fear and other humanly exhibited traits, debunks the one-sided representation of women as the only set prone to victimisation. Although it realistically recognises women's susceptibility to oppression especially in volatile circumstances, specifically that of war, it, however, foregrounds women's efforts towards asserting themselves through these unpleasant situations as threatening and actually deconstructing the formidability of patriarchy and all it represents. Also, the paper draws attention to instances of masculine marginalities and discredits the correctness of the dichotomy which usually asserts affection, endurance and fear as virtues mainly expressed by women. The deconstruction of the one-sided exhibition



of these traits reveals the writers' inclination to express vulnerability as a generic human trait and not gendered. Also, the paper, through the narrative substantiations of the writers, establishes that all bodies are susceptible to violence and all bodies can metamorphose as a result of their exposure to violence, depending on their performances and not necessarily on their gender. Most victimised female characters discussed here are able to subvert marginality through their relentless determination to affirm their humanity in the midst of their brutality.

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