Performing Identities
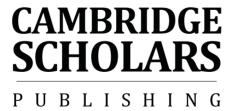# and Utopias of Belonging

Performing Identities and Utopias of Belonging

Edited by

Teresa Botelho and Iolanda Ramos

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PREFACE

This book is about utopia today. It is not about blueprints, grandiose schemes for the redemption of humanity or for the expansion of a nation. It is not about a future meant to replace the present, a history that calls to be fulfilled, steered by the ideal of a flawless society. It is about our times, which is to say that it gives shape to our understanding of utopia and to our use of utopian hope as a tool for the transformation of the present. It is not, to resort to Gilles Deleuze's terminology, about *transcendental utopias*, but about *utopias of immanence*, i.e. utopias as acts of resistance, contributing to change and progress insofar as they show new ways of being, living and sensing the world under the form of virtual becomings. It is not about *political utopias* nourished by inspired projects that are inscribed in history in order to affect the entire world—as in the grand metanarratives of the nineteenth century—but about *philosophical utopias*, as Dias de Carvalho defined them, utopias that are to be seen as a counter-time of history, centred on the discussion of ideals rather than on the analysis of the outcomes of particular idealizations.[1] It is about utopias based on the rejection of the idea of blueprint, but which, as Tom Moylan has argued, have still preserved the dimension of the dream.[2] And it is about *utopias* in the plural, as Lucy Sargisson has maintained, since nowadays "no one utopia can become 'the' utopia."[3]

This move from the exercise of imagining a "radical transformation of the world,"[4] an entirely different and distant future, to a reflection on the process of transforming the present, from thinking at a macro-level to operating at a micro-level, from conceiving utopia as a target to devising it as a process, reflects the important epistemological change that has taken

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[1] Adalberto Dias de Carvalho here relies on the discussion of the concepts of 'ideal' and 'idealization' offered by Henri Maler in *Convoiter l'Impossible.*

[2] Thomas Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (New York: Methuen, 1986), 10

[3] Lyman T. Sargent, "US Eutopias in the 1980s and 1990s: Self-Fashioning in a World of Multiple Identities," in *Utopianism / Literary Utopias and National Cultural Identities: A Comparative Perspective*, edited by Paola Spinozzi (Bologna: COTEPRA/University of Bologna, 2001), 37.

[4] Frederic Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), 135.

place in the late twentieth century. As Fernando Arenas has contended, "from a philosophical standpoint, significant attention has been given to questions of ethics […] whereby notions of 'alterity', 'difference', the ethical relationship of the subject with the other, or the renewed possibilities of co-belonging to a human community, have become paramount"; and the focus has gradually become the "facets of human subjectivity that have been historically neglected or marginalized, such as gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity."[5] Contemporary utopianism naturally reflects this epistemological shift; as a result, since what is in question is no longer the collective fate of a nation, when encountering the Other the utopian traveller is not meant to stand for a nation's viewpoint anymore but for that of the group to which he belongs, determined by his sex or gender, race or ethnicity, beliefs or culture. These are in fact the disruptive factors that the contemporary utopian traveller mostly takes into account when, faced with the Other, he is led to reflect on himself. The identity issues that inevitably arise are those of the individual, not of the nation; it is his subjectivity—his perceptions, sensations, emotions, thoughts and beliefs—that are shaped by the interaction with different imagined modes of being in the world.

This book is about 'utopias of alterity' or 'utopias of otherness', as Arenas has defined them and explained their emergence:

> With the exhaustion, weakening, or relativization of the utopias of Marxism, Christianity, nationhood, and globalization, among others, we are left with humanity as the most basic ontological foundation as well as the source of faith and hope. The utopia of otherness thus situates itself between the condition of being an absolute principle and the condition of being radically fragmented into a multitude of small narratives and relational instances that describe and govern the contemporary human condition.[6]

It should be noted that this shift does not by any means imply that contemporary utopian thinking has lost its ties with the utopian narrative invented and established as a literary genre by Thomas More. More is in fact what Michel Foucault would call a 'founder of a discursivity' (or a 'transdiscursive author'), comparable in that regard to Marx and Freud insofar as, like them, More produced something which went far beyond his work: "the possibilities and the rules for the formation of other texts", "a

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[5] Fernando Arenas, *Utopias of Otherness: Nationhood and Subjectivity in Portugal and Brazil* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 102.
[6] Ibid., 105.

possibility for something other than [… his] discourse, yet something belonging to what [… he] founded." Like Marx and Freud, More provided space for a 'certain number of divergences' that arises from utopian discourse itself.[7] In reality, contemporary utopianism not only recognizes More as its founding figure but also builds its discourse on direct references to his work and to utopian works produced by subsequent writers. The reflexive nature of contemporary utopian discourse is thus not only translated into a critical analysis of the identity and subjectivity of the utopian traveller (when faced with the Other) but is extended to the utopian tradition itself, offering a meta-utopian perspective of the way identities and subjectivities have been shaped throughout five centuries of utopian thinking.[8]

But the reader also is affected by this reflexive trend as he too gets engaged in the process of thinking, comparing and judging. No longer provided with infallible recipes to change the world, but instead with 'critical utopias' or 'critical dystopias',[9] the reader is invited to go beyond the texts he reads and imaginatively think of other alternatives. By doing so, he too becomes an agent of the utopian process as he repeats the utopian gesture of confronting his identity with that of the utopian traveller, with that of the imagined Other and with the identities of all the Others imagined by previous utopian authors; and through this game of mirroring/confronting identities, his own subjectivity is shaped.

This book is about utopia today because it deals with 'utopias of alterity', because it is centred on the utopian process of constructing and deconstructing identities, because it describes the transient nature of the self and how it is shaped by utopian encounters, because it conceives of the politics of (un)belonging—with its movements of continuity, disruption and reinvention—a crucial part of the utopian discourse. These

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[7] Cf. Michel Foucault "What's an Author," in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, edited by Josué V. Harari (New York: Cornell University Press, 1979), 151-5.

[8] In *Archaeologies of the Future*, Fredric Jameson describes how utopia has become auto-referential and meta-utopian.

[9] Tom Moylan first defined "critical utopias" in *Demand the Impossible* as texts informed by a "postmodern attitude of self-reflexivity", which is epitomized in an open 'awareness of the limitations of the utopian tradition', ibid.:10. Along with Raffaela Baccolini, he described, in *Dark Horizons: Dark Fictions and the Dystopian Imagination,* "critical dystopias" as texts which "negotiate the necessary pessimism of the generic dystopia with a militant or utopian stance that not only breaks through the hegemonic enclosure of the text's alternative world but also self-reflexively refuses the anti-utopian temptation that lingers in every dystopian account", thus maintaining a "utopian impulse", ibid.: 7.

aspects are analysed and problematized from a variety of perspectives since the articles of the three sections that compose the volume have not been built on a common theoretical framework with regard to the issue of utopia and identity. This did not happen because this is still quite a recent topic of research within Utopian Studies. In fact, the absence of such a theoretical framework is one of the reasons why this volume is important to this field of study: at the same time as the different authors are struggling to sketch the theoretical background for their essays, they are contributing to the construction of that framework, thus making a meaningful contribution to the advancement of Utopian Studies.

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INTRODUCTION

TERESA BOTELHO AND IOLANDA RAMOS

This volume emerged from a multidisciplinary international symposium, hosted in 2010 by NOVA University of Lisbon, where scholars from diverse academic backgrounds reflected on the interface between identity, rootedness and group membership and ways of rethinking utopia. *Performing Identities and Utopias of Belonging* consists of sixteen essays, expanded and reworked versions of selected papers, arranged in three parts, reflecting the current conflicted debate on the ontology, constructiveness and affect of categories of ascribed social identity such as gender, ethnicity, race and nation, in the context of British, Irish and North American cultural landscapes. They address the many ways in which these communities of belonging are imagined, iterated, performed, questioned, and deconstructed in literature, cinema and visual culture; they also support or counter claims about the enhanced value of social identity in the expression of the self in the light of the present debates that surround the contested post-identity turn in cultural studies. Significantly, they also address the role of social identity in the field of utopian and dystopian thought, focusing on the projection of imagined futures where alternative means of conceiving ascribed identity are conceptualized.

The contributions are shaped by a plurality of approaches and theoretical discourses, and come from both established and emerging scholars and researchers from Europe and beyond. The collection is structured in three sections—the politics of (un)belonging, deconstructing utopian and cultural paradigms, and performing identities in the visual arts—which organize the multidisciplinary discussions around specific nuclei of interrogations.

In the first section, Politics of (Un)belonging, which discusses the contradictory navigations of racial and national identity, Naveira considers the case of Adah in Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* as an example of the changes in African identity from a surrender to the communal identity to an individual auto-affirmation; Wood rethinks both the category of Englishness and fictional characterisation as a sense of (un)belonging by showing how characters as 'types' are in fact problem cases of identity

in John Fowles's novel *Daniel Martin*; Silva analyses the nature of the dislocation and estrangement from America's political community in Henry Adams's autobiography in order to map some of the (dis)continuities which characterize his thought; Botelho discusses how the work of deconstruction of race as an ascribed constructed social category is being pursued in post-Black literature, namely in Danzy Senna's *Symptomatic* and argues that the text foreshadows a strategy of disruption of utopias of belonging, deauthenticating concepts of sameness; Millette investigates the life and career of the Irish theatrical impresario and eventual American immigrant, Dion Boucicault, as a case study of identity plasticity and self invention used to suit the cultures of whichever national environment he wanted to claim as his own.

The second section, Deconstructing Utopian and Cultural Paradigms, examines and questions established notions of space, gender and identity in articulation with utopian and dystopian approaches to reality and illusion. Kushal problematises the notions of multiculturalism and diaspora communities by discussing the in-between space of the migrant minority and the resident majority in Meera Syal's *Anita and Me*; Žugić argues that Huxley's *Ape and Essence* is an intimidating image of man's nemesis as well as of the destruction of identity, both individual and collective, and a Procrustean drama about Man's surrender to the Devil; Ramos uses a neo-Victorian framework for associating stage illusions and spiritualism with utopianism, drawing on the apparent possibility of both going beyond the limitations of space and time and crossing the boundary between life and death, addressing the issue of identity construction and deconstruction by providing a background for the survey of the spectral presence of the Victorian past in contemporary culture; Muthu considers the concept of heterotopia as a particular place that juxtaposes several spaces and articulates it with the illusion of a perfect (re)created place that turns into a dystopia in Julian Barnes' *England, England*; Lopes analyses Anne Sexton's *Transformations* as a rewriting of the traditional fairy tales from a woman's positioning, deconstructing the idealized feminine identity shaped by the 'cultural corset' of a normative patriarchal discourses; Negra explores the representational culture of recessionary Ireland and discusses how the transformation from a seemingly capitalist utopia is linked to the ways societies in crisis seek to stabilize themselves by reaching for bedrock ideas about gender, family and community.

The third section, Performing Identities in the Visual Arts, focuses on the visual regimes that shape the performance of gender and social belonging. Hayes examines the alternative forms of community and belonging proposed by the HBO television series *The Wire* and speculates

not only on the existing (dystopian) portrayal of Baltimore but on potential future 'Baltimores' that may be imagined; Almeida applies Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*, illuminating how they deconstruct utopian concepts that have molded feminine identity in literature and the media during the twentieth century; Singh addresses mainstream British Asian films in comparison with more recent productions of discordant voices as cultural referents for problematising the complexities of negotiating national identities; Morais considers the representation and critique of personal identity in a number of Clint Eastwood's films as it negotiates the challenges caused by the tension between the self and the collective renewable and unstable American social identities; Costa revisits the myths of 'Indian' identity through the discussion of contemporary native American films that present characters living in in-between worlds, exposing complex and multilayered representations of a sense belonging which is fluid and unstable.

This collection of essays is the result of a dialogue across continents and academic fields and, most and foremost, results from the engagement of all contributors to whom we express our heartfelt appreciation. Without their vision and originality this volume would not have been possible. We also want to convey our gratitude to Professor Fátima Vieira, the Chairperson of the Utopian Studies Society (Europe) for graciously accepting to write this collection's preface and for all the support given to this undertaking. This appreciation is extended to NOVA University and our research center CETAPS, for providing a dynamic environment that encourages original and independent research. We are also indebted to Cambridge Scholars Publishing, who believed in this project from the beginning.

Finally the people who helped shape this volume: Ricardo Figueira, who designed its cover, Joana Mendes, who competently helped with technical issues in the final stage, Vanessa Boutefeu, for her attentive linguistic revision and finally Susana Costa, our assistant editor, whose tireless effort and unfailing good humour turned editing this volume into such a pleasure. Taking time from her own Ph.D. project, she gave this undertaking all she could and more. No editors ever had a more helpful and cheerful assistance and for this we are infinitely thankful.

PART I:

POLITICS OF UN(BELONGING)

CHAPTER ONE

FROM SOCIAL TO INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT: THE CASE OF ADAH IN BUCHI EMECHETA'S *SECOND-CLASS CITIZEN*

ISABEL GIL-NAVEIRA

During the last century many critics explained the situation to which Western women have been exposed. Authors like Louise O'Brien give us the key point to women's situation in a patriarchal society: "In traditional culture, women are defined firstly by the men in their lives: initially by their fathers, then their husbands, then their sons. They are defined secondly, by their sexuality and their maternity."[1]

Simone de Beauvoir[2] in her work *Le Deuxième Sexe* explains that the aim of women in the 20th century was maternity, showing us at the same time that there is a way to rebel against that establishment. For these critics the concept of feminism follows a Western pattern and could be defined as

> a political perception based on two fundamental premises: (1) that gender difference is the foundation of a structural inequality between women and men, by which women suffer systematic social injustice, and (2) that the inequality between the sexes is not the result of biological necessity but is produced by the cultural construction of gender differences. This perception provides feminism with its double agenda: to understand the

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[1] Louise O'Brien, "Buchi Emecheta and the 'African Dilemma'", *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 36, no. 2 (June 2001), accessed July 24, 2008, doi: 10.1177/002198940103600208, 96.

[2] Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe. Vol. II: L'Expérience vécue* (La Flèche, Sarthe: Gallimard, 1992), 391.

social and psychic mechanisms that construct and perpetuate gender inequality and then to change them.[3]

As Harry Olufunwa[4] comments, this fighting is common to all women, though in the case of African women writers they fight from their own perspective to rebuild the model of woman that patriarchal colonial society implanted in their countries, forcing women to be considered as just another object, the property of their fathers in the first place and of their husbands later on. This different perspective of African women writers prevents us from defining feminism following Western ideas. Furthermore, it is very common to find most of these writers directly expressing their condition of non feminists, as they usually consider that Western feminists' fighting has nothing to do with them because it does not consider the social situation in Africa, which affects both men and women equally.

In Buchi Emecheta's case the word feminism seems a term she is not very comfortable with. According to Molara Ogundipe-Leslie: "Some quite outstanding women like Buchi Emecheta, say they are not feminists without saying why."[5] Nevertheless, the Nigerian writer seems to have very clear ideas about what feminism should not be like in Africa that, without a doubt, keep her apart from Western feminists:

> I am a feminist with a small 'f', I love men and good men are the salt of the earth. But to tell me that we should abolish marriage like the capital 'F' (Feminist) women who say women should live together and all that, I say NO! Personally I'd like to see the ideal, happy marriage. But if it doesn't work, for goodness sake, call it off.[6]

Buchi Emecheta is not the only African woman writer who establishes differences and who avoids being related to Western feminism. As Modupe Kolawole[7] reminds us, this is also the case of the Ghanaian Ama Ata

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[3] Pam Morris, *Literature and Feminism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 1.

[4] Harry Olufunwa, "Earning a Life. Women and Work in the Fiction of Buchi Emecheta." *Thamyiris/Intersecting* 11 (2003): 35-44, accessed July 24, 2008, http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/rodopi/tham/2003/00000011/00000001/art00003?crawler=true, 43.

[5] Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, "Stiwanism: Feminism in an African Context" in *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, ed. Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007)," 549.

[6] Mary E. Modupe Kolawole, *Womanism and African Consciousness* (Trenton, N.J.: African World Press, 1997), 11.

[7] Ibid., 199.

Aidoo and the South African Bessie Head. However, the three of them are very concerned with the situation of African women and "their works reveal strong womanist qualities and their voices are loud and uncompromising in decrying women's oppression and liminality."[8] Despite the fact that she does not like the concept of feminism itself, Emecheta's main interest is avoiding the 'Western' label that many African writers who have lived in the West have to face, as we can interpret from her statement: "if I am now a feminist then I am an African feminist."[9] Having these ideas in mind and the fact that the intention of this study on identity does not aim at following a Western feminist perspective, we will try not to fall into what John Gruesser considers a common mistake in Western scholars, who reflect "more about themselves and their culture than about Africans and theirs."[10]

   As identity is closely related to the role African women play in society, to analyse both identity and social roles in the African context and above all in Buchi Emecheta's novel *Second-Class Citizen* (1974) we should take into account two factors. The first one is the balance between social and individual identity that seems to exist and the second one is the relation between literature and sociology. Considering the first factor, we should pay attention to Senghor, for whom both the individual and the social identity have always co-existed in African societies:

> Ethnologists have often praised the unity, the balance, and the harmony of African civilization, of black society, which was based both on the *community* and on the *person*, and in which, because it was founded on dialogue and reciprocity, the group had priority over the individual without crushing him, but allowing him to blossom as a person.[11]

In the case of women we cannot forget that within African history there are many references to societies where women were not subjugated by a patriarchal system. Lynn M. Thomas reminds us of the studies of Amadiume and Oyewumi on the active role of women in precolonial Igbo

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[8] Ibid., 199.
[9] Florence Stratton, "'Their New Sister'" Buchi Emecheta and the contemporary African literary tradition" in *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*, ed. Florence Stratton (London: Routledge, 1994), 111.
[10] John Gruesser, *White on Black: Contemporary Literature About Africa* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 1.
[11] Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century" in *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, ed. Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 199.

and Yoruba societies. These studies emphasize the fact that this active role of women has been frequently ignored, above all by Western feminists:

> According to Amadiume, precolonial Igboland was characterized not by men's domination of women but by a "flexible gender system" in which women "could play roles usually monopolized by men, or be classified as 'males' in terms of power and authority over others." Oyewumi went further to argue that gender did not exist in precolonial Yorùbá society, only the reproductive distinction between anafemales (anatomical females, *obìnrin*) and anamales (anatomical males, *okùnrin*). Gender difference and its accompanying notion that women are of "no account," Oyewumi explained, came with European colonialism. Amadiume and Oyewumi also argued that the most important divisions within precolonial Igbo and Yorùbá societies were constituted through age and seniority, constructs that Western feminists had generally ignored. Together, their arguments about the importance of reproduction and age hierarchies suggested that what women/anafemales have shared is not a common subordination to men but the potential to claim power through procreation.[12]

However, this does not mean that the African woman's situation has to be left aside in favour of the African situation in a general sense. Ogundipe-Leslie makes it very clear that "an ideology of women and about women is necessary and has always existed in Africa".[13] Other critics and authors, like Modupe Kolawole, agree with this definition of the African woman as strong and powerful and give us an image of union that existed long before colonization:

> For too long, the African woman's reality has been inscribed from the West or by men. Yet, African women did not learn about self-assertion from the West. [….] [I]nstances of collective actions by African women in pre-colonial and colonial times confirm the strong concerted actions by women towards liberation and self-actualization.[14]

Nowadays these unions of women give form to different sorts of feminisms that do not take into account just gender difference and inequality, but "the junctures of race, class, caste and gender; nation, culture and ethnicity;

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[12] Lynn M. Thomas, "Gendered Reproduction: Placing Schoolgirl Pregnancies in African History" in *Africa After Gender?*, ed. Catherine M. Cole, Takyiwaa Manuh and Stephan F. Miescher (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007) 48-49 / Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London: Zed Books, 1987), 156.

[13] Ogundipe-Leslie, "Stiwanism," 548.

[14] Modupe Kolawole, *Womanism and African Consciousness*, 10.

age, status, role and sexual orientation."[15] After all, we cannot forget that "African women are products of multiple subjugation. Patriarchy, tradition, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, and gender imperialism all combine to act against the African woman's self-assertion"[16] and that "[t]heir quest for a positive but distinct identity is often mistaken for silence and invisibility."[17] Nevertheless, the fact that they try to fight these oppressions from their own perspective and not following Western conceptions about women's liberation "becomes a stepping stone for self-identity and a strong drive for cultural self-retrieval."[18]

In order to fight for their own identity women have to change the image that both Africa and the rest of the world have of them. For this reason most authors and critics try to give a correct image of the strong and capable African woman, showing African women are not subjects. For Modupe Kolawole it is necessary to correct "the representation of African women as if they exist in some subterranean world, tongue-tied and demobilized"[19] because it not only helps women to establish their individual identity, as we have seen above, but it also helps them in the process of "[s]elf-healing".[20]

To take into consideration the second factor, the relation between literature and sociology, we have to bear in mind the idea that Buchi Emecheta's novel *Second-Class Citizen* is autobiographical. This autobiographical component enables us not only to develop a literary study, but it also helps us to analyse the novel from a sociological perspective, which is very useful in identity studies. We cannot forget that literature has always been considered a tool to represent the society around us, and in this case Buchi Emecheta's novel definitely helps us to develop a highly valuable ethnographic study. As Lucia Benitez reminds us:

> the study of literary sources, usually within ethnographic and socio-anthropological research studies […] also has to be incorporated to the transdisciplinary spirit of sociology: life stories turn into an object of analysis that provides us, on the one hand, with the subjective interpretations of the social imaginary […], and on the other hand, with the

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[15] Ogundipe-Leslie, "Stiwanism," 548.
[16] Modupe Kolawole, *Womanism and African Consciousness*, 25.
[17] Ibid., 25.
[18] Ibid., 25.
[19] Ibid., 25.
[20] Ibid., 25.

biographical account as a personal point of view to get closer to social problems.[21]

To explain the complex relationship between literature and sociology we will also take into account Ogundipe-Leslie's ideas. She considers literature as a tool to study society as "[t]he relation of literature to society is more complex and dialectical than common usage usually presupposes."[22] In her analysis, Ogundipe-Leslie divides this relation into two different levels:

> On a very primary level, literature can be said to mirror or reflect society, providing a reliable image of a number of hard, social facts. In this light, literature can be viewed as a social document, a record of existing facts of life in the society. Literature has been used throughout human history by disciplines of the social sciences such as history, anthropology and sociology. […] [L]iterature can be used to document social facts and realities in our study of women and society.
> On a secondary and more profound level, literature can reflect society in the sense of embodying and revealing that which pleases that society. What pleases can then be subjected to analysis to reveal other factors; namely, aesthetic tastes, ethical values, norms and so on.[23]

Although the secondary level is described as more profound, the one that interests us the most for this study on African identity is the first one, as it sets the idea that literature is an essential instrument to help us in our study of the development of women's identity from a social to an individual identity. To this we will also add a new level to complement Ogundipe-Leslie's. In this tertiary level, literature not only reflects but helps to stimulate social justice. Through their literature African women writers express and spread their ideas; we are referring specifically to what these

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[21] Lucía Benítez Eyzaguirre, "Mujeres Migrantes Africanas en Busca de Identidad: El Camino de la Literatura." *Afroeuropa: Journal of Afroeuropean Studies* 1, no. 1 (2007). Accessed July 24, 2008. http://journal.afroeuropa.eu/index.php/ afroeuropa/article/view/6/9: "El estudio de fuentes literarias, habitualmente dentro de la línea de investigación de la etnografía y la antropología social […], también se debe incorporar al del espíritu transdisciplinar de la sociología: las historias de vida se convierten en un objeto de análisis que aportan de un lado las interpretaciones subjetivas del imaginario social […], y de otro, el relato biográfico como un punto de vista propio para el acercamiento a los problemas sociales" (my translation)

[22] Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women & Critical Transformation* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1994), 44.

[23] Ibid., 44.

women are fighting for and what they want to change in their societies and in Africa. Then we could say that the role that literature has for these women loses somehow its cultural component in favour of a social component that enables them to fight for their ideals but also, as Modupe Kolawole[24] defends, literature helps to change the ideas and prejudices created in the past. In this sense,

> Because literature is an imitation of reality, it is one of the major avenues of decoding African women's yearnings and encoding her alterity. Women writers are reacting against Eurocentric portraits of Africa by Western writers. But they are also correcting the African world of male heroism presented by male writers. Literature as an imitation of African women's reality and inscription of their values, inevitably underscores gender uniqueness which is encapsulated in cultural difference. Difference or otherness has been manipulated by feminists and patriarchal structures to situate African women in marginal or liminal social positions. […] African women cannot remain the same within traditions that undermine them. But they need to maintain alterity to resist myths, theories and any reality that erodes their humanity, encourages self-deprecation, and undermines their ability to be their own voices and act for themselves as agents of culture and of change.[25]

These ideas we have analysed on women's identity and on women's relation to society are reflected very faithfully by Buchi Emecheta's attitude in her novel *Second-Class Citizen* when she describes the main character for the first time. Despite this main character, Adah, being somehow weak, we see the strong identity that lies beneath the surface. In this novel Emecheta explores the changes in Adah's African identity from her childhood to her early adulthood. The author presents us with a character who desires to be recognised and to belong to her community, but who cannot avoid the whirlpool of subordination she is involved in.

To understand how the identity of this African woman evolves, it is important to know what sort of childhood and early adulthood she lived. As a girl child, Adah is inherited by her uncle after her father's death, and he considers her a 'slave' and an 'object' to 'sell' in exchange for the bride price. At this time, despite being very young, Adah shows a strong identity when she fights to go on with her studies and when she despises the idea of getting married to a rich old man. However, she is unable to escape the society she lives in; and though Adah tries to escape her difficult situation by marrying Francis, a young student who would allow her to go on

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[24] Modupe Kolawole, *Womanism and African Consciousness*, 204.
[25] Ibid., 204-205.

studying, her community is not prepared to give her the freedom she needs. In consequence, she stops being the property of her family to become the property of her husband and his family.

Likewise, in her early adulthood, Adah keeps doing what she is expected to do by her community in three different areas. First of all, she earns money and maintains her husband, as he expects her to do. Secondly, she has children, as her parents-in-law expect her to do. And finally, she goes to Britain, as her dead father had always expected her to do. In this sense, Adah's feeling of communal belonging is destroyed step by step by her family and community, as they do not respect her own individuality. However, through her exile in Britain, Emecheta shows how Adah realises that a new possibility has opened up for her. Emecheta establishes a change in Adah's life through her experience in exile as it implied living between two worlds, Nigeria and London. She is in a hybrid situation, what Homi Bhabha[26] called the 'liminal' space; and it is this liminal space that offers her "the possibility of a cultural hybridity".[27]

Adah's identity grows stronger day by day, but as she does not see herself able to get ahead on her own, she suffers by not having the support of a family and a community in London. According to Elaine Savory Fido, "When a daughter loses a mother, she loses lines of communication with other women as well. One solution to distrusting other women is to turn to men, but in the attempt to please them, a false self may be created".[28] The solution Demaris S. Wehr offers women like Adah, who fight for an identity of their own, is to destroy this false self:

> Women, too, need to 'die' to something before a new self can be born […] Perhaps women […] need to die to the false self system that patriarchy has imposed on them, whatever form it has taken. This is not the same thing as the annihilation of the ego but dying to the false self would necessarily precede the birth of the true self.[29]

In Adah's case, Wehr's theory is true twice, as she tries to please two men in her life. The first one is her father, from whom she gets her obsession to go to London, probably to please him. However, though she was subdued

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[26] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 4

[27] Ibid.

[28] Elaine Savory Fido, "Mother/lands: Self and Separation in the Work of Buchi Emecheta, Bessie Head and Jean Rhys" in *Motherlands*, ed. Susheila Nasta (London: The Women's Press, 1991), 336.

[29] Demaris S. Wehr, *Jung and Feminism: Liberating Archetypes* (London: Routledge, 1988), 103.

to his dream, we can see that she has no doubts about fighting against London, that is, against her father, for the well-being of her children. The second man is Francis, who is still alive, and therefore it is more difficult to fight against him. Francis, who had seemed to be her salvation raft in Nigeria, ended up being her identity's worst enemy. Through her relationship with Francis, Adah suffers double slavery; on the one hand, she is enslaved as a woman because Francis uses her as a sexual slave and her continuous pregnancies prevent her from taking any decision; on the other hand, she is enslaved as a worker, as she maintains her husband and her family-in-law.

Once in London, Adah's relationship with her husband Francis gets harder and harder every day and Adah just deceives herself by thinking that she will be able to save her marriage. Adah does not want to abandon her role as a mother nor as a woman, but neither does she want to abandon her role as a wife. The Nigerian tradition that still lives in her makes her believe that if only Francis could get a job their marital problems would end, and that his attitude towards her and the children would be more positive. What is important about this is that according to Igbo tradition women have to work, but Adah feels that working is just her duty and not the duty of her husband too, who "was to have an easy life, the life of a mature student, studying at his own pace".[30] The main problem is not that Adah believes this by herself but that it is an idea Francis has filled her head with. As Emecheta expresses in the novel, Adah "simply accepted her role as defined for her by her husband".[31]

At this point of the novel we need to pay attention to the aesthetic component and its connection to the sociological role of literature; as we have seen above, Ogundipe-Leslie[32] includes aesthetic tastes within the secondary level in the relation between literature and sociology. Thelma M. Ravell-Pinto defines the aesthetic as:

> a social phenomenon, culturally determined which influences how we perceive ourselves and others. Aesthetic values are dynamic and intertwined with the power structures, thus what is beautiful or good in a particular culture is related to economic, social and political ideologies. The aesthetic is subject to change and influenced by time/history and socio-cultural trends.[33]

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[30] Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen* (Reading: Heinemann, 1994), 98.

[31] Ibid.

[32] See note 23 above.

[33] Thelma M. Ravell-Pinto, "Comparative Aesthetic: Buchi Emecheta and Toni Morrison" in *The Growth of African Literature: Twenty-Five Years after Dakar*

As we have previously mentioned, women have to fight against the traditions and myths Modupe Kolawole[34] talked about, but we also have to bear in mind that these ideas are closely connected to the aesthetic of their societies. In the case of Emecheta's novel, Ravell-Pinto highlights:

> the centrality of the aesthetic to the concept of self, identity and self-worth. […] Women have for too long been held up as objects to be admired and have internalized their objectification. They have been more directly influenced by the aesthetic values because that determined their status and position in society.[35]

In the case of Adah, the time she spends in London alters her perception of her marriage and of work. Adah begins to see that her job belongs to her and although Francis threatens not to let her work if she does not go on maintaining him, she knows that his threatening is no longer valid: "This is England, not Nigeria. I don't need your signature to secure a job for me".[36]

According to Simone de Beauvoir,[37] it is through her job that a woman finds her independence. In the case of Adah, it is her job and her education that help her obtain independence from her husband. They give her the strength she needs to appropriate her own life. Her job gives her security in herself and the strength to fight all those problems she is no longer willing to tolerate, "[a]fter all, she earned the money in the family".[38] In spite of this new strength, Adah still feels insecure sometimes, for example when she is in hospital having given birth to one of her children and she imagines the rest of the mothers are criticizing her and laughing at her. The solution she finds at that time is to take shelter under the bed sheets, "[s]he did not want to hear any more. She did not want to think any more. She did not want to see any more".[39] However, she starts thinking that hiding under the bed sheets is the same as defining herself as somebody who does not exist: "Had she not covered herself up, just like a dead person?"[40] Adah realises that not fighting against being treated as a second-class citizen just leads her to invisibility, so from this moment

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and Fourah Bay, ed. Edris Makward, Thelma M. Ravell-Pinto and Aliko Songolo (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1998), 225.

[34] See note 25 above.

[35] Ravell-Pinto, "Comparative Aesthetic," 234.

[36] Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, 171.

[37] Beauvoir, *Deuxième Sexe*, 597.

[38] Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, 64.

[39] Ibid., 124.

[40] Ibid., 124.

onwards she takes the decision to live her life. Adah becomes aware that she is self-sufficient and that she does not need Francis; all she needs is the support of her children. At this point in the novel she takes one of her greatest decisions: "Leave this person. No, live with him as long as it is convenient. No longer."[41]

From this moment onwards, Adah's attitude to people changes, and at the same time she becomes determined to avoid letting her children suffer from invisibility as she did: "To her children, the indifferent attitude would never apply. You see, they were her children, and that made all the difference."[42] Adah does not pretend to be like the rest of the people who surround her; she just wants to be proud of who she is:

> She was different. Her children were going to be different. They were all going to be black, they were going to enjoy being black, be proud of being black, a black of a different breed. That's what they were going to be.[43]

Adah has always thought that black was not inferior and she saw herself "as the equal of any white,"[44] but not until her transformation did she know of the existence of other African writers apart from Chinua Achebe and Flora Nwapa. Emecheta plays with the role of literature within this novel, making Adah realize, through these new writers and their books, that 'black is beautiful'.

To return to the concepts of "self, identity and self-worth"[45] we will pay attention once again to how women writers, like Buchi Emecheta, use literature as a tool that enables them to fight against the establishment. Through her novels, Emecheta shows the different possibilities a woman can have in her life, none of them subjugated to a preconceived social role, and struggles against the idea of "one aesthetic for all women."[46] In this novel, through the new ideas Adah is acquiring, Emecheta shows us how the main character is getting more and more confidence in herself and starts taking more decisions about her life and her body. In this sense, Adah decides that she does not want to have more children for two main reasons; the first one is that she is afraid of dying while giving birth to a fourth child, and the second is that she wants to keep her job and have more time for herself to take up her studies. This second reason is the

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[41] Ibid., 127.
[42] Ibid., 132.
[43] Ibid., 148.
[44] Ibid., 71.
[45] Ravell-Pinto, "Comparative Aesthetic," 234.
[46] Ibid., 234.