

Dramatizing Silence and Women's Agency in *Angel's Diary*

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Abstract

This article examines the different mechanisms used by women in *Angel's Diary*, a popular television theatre text aired on Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) to demonstrate their agency. Using *Angel's Diary* as its point of reference, the article interrogates the dynamics of women's position that characterize their existence and their inexorable struggle to affirm their potential in a limiting and unequal society. The positioning of women in the society is informed by historical, economic, political, social and cultural experiences in Africa that place a woman in a marginal locus. The article therefore deals with strategies that women use to overcome the inequalities, dominations and 'normalized' practices that are manifestations of domination and silencing apparatus of various aspects of women's potential. Methodologically, the paper employed qualitative approach in reading *Angel's Diary*. Content analysis of video tapes was the primary method used. In content analysis, I interrogated ways employed by women to subvert social norms, forms of domination and the eventual resistance to emancipate the self. The article found out that women characters in *Angel's Diary* employ strategies such as the journey, music, monologues, and silence to transcend the limitation created around them and perpetuated through the father figure.

Key Words: *domination, subordination, silence, agency, subversion, resistance, family*

Introduction

Discourses of domination and subordination have preoccupied most artistic production in post-colonial societies. Of significance in such discourses is the struggle to consolidate power and sustain it by all means on one hand and on the other, the struggle to gain access to power. Domination and subordination dichotomy in artistic imaginations has been realized through a number of strategies. Some of the strategies employed include silencing and marginalizing a section of a population that mark people's existence in contemporary societies. Though such strategies have worked for the benefit of the dominant groups, what is interesting is the subordinate's ability to rebel against such structures and institutions that limit their potential.

The concern of this article is to analyze *Angel's Diary* to find out how silence, exclusion and marginalization impact characters' behaviour and how the characters respond to different situations that define their existence. My choice of *Angel's Diary* is informed by the subversive way in which it deals with the socio-political and cultural experiences in contemporary Kenya. To realize this endeavor, I problematize individuals' daily experiences in Kitali's family against the socio-political landscape in Kenya. This article holds that children (Kitali's twin daughters) and women are resourceful tools used in the text to image and address silence, domination and subversion of the same in contemporary Kenya. Of interest in the essay is the happenings and interactions in Julius Kitali's family. I examine the strategies employed by characters to transcend the different forms of limitations in their quest for agency. The essay grapples with manifestations

of unequal power relations, which in most cases favor the dominant centre. The essay employs postcolonial theory to interrogate sites of domination and its impact on the oppressed. Robert Young argues that postcolonial theory “seeks to change the way people think, the way they behave, to produce a more just and equitable relation between the different peoples” (7). In this regard, postcolonial theory is germane in reading the different manifestations of power disparity. In the main, Frantz Fanon’s concept of psychopathology is applied in the essay to read the relationship between the oppressor and the subjugated of the society. According to Fanon, domination not only deals with physical control but also mental control which he refers to as psychopathology. Fanon proposes an understanding of the psychological effects of domination and disempowerment on the subjugated as important in the process of individual liberation. Fanon further notes that any attempt to understand domination should “include not only the interrelations of objective historical conditions but also the human attitudes towards these conditions” (84).

The understanding of such conditions implies that resistance against domination and any other forms of oppression must not only be material but also deal with the oppressed’s mind. Fanon refers to this process as the decolonization of the mind. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin explain that decolonization is the “process of revealing and dismantling oppressor’s power in all its forms. This includes dismantling the hidden aspects of institutional and cultural forces that maintain power” (63). In using Fanon’s concept of psychopathology, I interrogate the inner effects of domination on the subordinated and examine how such an approach provides the necessary tools of resistance. This is because the process of decolonization originates from the positive change of the mind.

Emancipation of women characters in *Angel’s Diary*

Debates on whether the human being is an agent or not have been in existence in scholarly researches over time. For instance, the twentieth century saw an emergence of a school of thought that criticised the rationality that the human being was a free acting agent. This proposition was advanced by Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory in Linguistics. According to de Saussure, the meaning of a sign resides in the (structural) relation between the sound image (signifier) and the concept (signified) (68-78). Similarly, Althusser dethroned the individual subject as the centre of the social universe and the maker of history. In doing this, Louis Althusser removed the subject from its status of a free agent in favour of the social structures by arguing that the concrete individual subject has been constituted by ideology (128). What this implies is that instead of the subject creating ideology it is ideology that creates the subject, according to Althusser. This may be understood in relation to the socialization of individuals in the society. In most cases especially in Africa, it is the “what” of society that constructs the individual but not the individual being a construct of the self. This then implies that an individual is not an agent but a recipient of what society has created. However, I point out that human beings have potential of attaining agency and be free. The human agency is not automatic but requires that one devices ways that can be employed in the realization of the same.

In addition, Miriam Glucksmann observes that any meaningful interpretation of subjects resides in the interrelated concepts of structure and history (106). This requires an understanding of the place and role of the subject therein. However, I make haste to point out that of significance here is an interrogation of how the subject negotiates its way out of the social structures put in place to dictate individual’s actions. For instance, the analysis of female characters’ traditional positions

such as being a good wife, submissive, silent when talked to among others and how the same is subverted to realize the self. It is only when this is done that one can talk of subjects as agents. Based on the arguments above, one is inclined to ask: What is the place of a human being, whether man or woman, as a free agent? I noted that the arguments above seem to deny an individual the ability to act as a free agent. Does it mean that there is no possibility for one to act freely without dictates from social structures?

Informed by the above arguments postcolonial theory and Fanon's ideas in particular, I examine how characters claim their agency in *Angel's Diary* through their actions and inactions as demonstrated in Kitali's family. Family relationships and interaction in the African society is hierarchical. The Kitali family in *Angel's Diary* is read beyond its ordinary conceptualization as a place for love and warmth. As an institution, the family is replete with veiled discourses of domination and subjugation that dictate individual interaction of its members. The family members are supposed to obey decisions made by the head of the family. With the headship of the father well designed, the rest of the family members are his subordinate. This reduces family members to silent listeners and passive partakers of the decisions made by the father.

My reading of silence in this article is, therefore, connected with the initial lack of agency—both socially and politically. I read silence not as the absence of speech but as a language of its own embedded in hegemonic social structures such as cultural beliefs, economic and political discourses. Trinha Minh-ha argues that within the “contexts of women's speech, silence has many faces, silence as a will not to say or a will not to unsay and as a language of its own” (73). Accordingly, Benita Parry points out that “silence has been read as a many-accented signifier of disempowerment and resistance, of the denial of a subject position and its appropriation” (152).

Silence in *Angel's Diary* is entrenched in several hegemonic social, economic and cultural structures that inform characters' way of life especially in the denial of the active position for women and children. Silence in this article is read as the muteness of the ‘subordinate’ members and not the absence of speech. Marginalisation is a relative term and depends on the subject under discussion. In this article, marginalization refers to a situation where some members of the society are not placed at the center of the decision-making process. Such individuals are not treated as equals depending on the position they hold.

Most of those who occupy the top most position are those who have power and authority; hence their opinion matters in comparison to those who do not. In this light, those who have power occupy the center of the society while those who do not, occupy the margins sometimes referred to as the periphery. Women and children are some of the groups not allowed to occupy the center thus pushed to the periphery of important matters and even matters that concern them. In this way, they do not make it into the ‘mainstream’, ‘authoritative’ discourses that define their very presence.

It is imperative to note that women and children in *Angel's Diary* remain on the periphery, are marginalised, “silenced”, and “unseen” by those who matter in the society. This is because women and children are excluded in the decision-making process hence their presence reduced to that of the voiceless “other”. Despite this exclusion, the marginal position provides an appropriate vantage point from which its occupants subvert to interrogate structures that relegate them to the position they occupy. The subversion of key structures by the ‘voiceless’ underscores the fact that voices

from the marginal position echo their presence hence cannot go unnoticed as wished for by dominant discourses.

I also point out that subversion as used in this article is not a deviation from what is expected of an individual but that it is a transformational kind of subversion- one that is geared toward liberation. In doing this, subversion disorients the center thereby allowing the “silenced” members agency. *Angel’s Diary* employs different strategies to image marginalisation and characters’ quest to emancipate themselves from situations that limit their agency. The text interrogates the operations of power, veiled forms of muteness and the obstacles that stand in the way of the characters in their attempt to realize their agency. Despite the Kitali’s affluence and social standing, there exists forms of domination and subordination as seen in his relationship with his wife and children.

The first strategy employed is the long gazes and stares used by both Pitch and Paula. It seems Kitali’s twin daughters are not allowed to speak in the presence of their parents especially their father. Though the children are always together, they do not speak to each other especially in the presence of an adult. The children resort to speaking using long and extended gazes when confronted with situations that demand verbalization of thoughts. The stares image the girls’ lack of voice to speak their thoughts and on the other, the stares are demeaning and annoying. The stares are a strategy not to unsay the unwritten rules about children’s relationship with parents. However, their silence is used to read the girls’ awareness of what they are supposed to say in the circumstances but choose not to speak. In this regard, the girls’ stares become a form of resistance of structures that impede their freedom of speech.

‘Voice’ is important as it demonstrates an individual’s assertiveness. One of the reasons as to why the children communicate through gazes is because of the violence embodied in their father. This is illustrated when Pitch hints at both physical and psychological violence in Julius Kitali’s house when they are caught entertaining a boy from the neighbourhood in the absence of an adult in the house. She tells Aunt Pam that “please do not go, dad is going to kill us after you leave”. This is sufficient confirmation of the violence that the members of Kitali family live with. What is interesting in Paula’s observation is that Kitali’s house has an element of domesticated violence juxtaposed against a resolute silence imposed on Paula and Pitch. This is made possible through dread and veneration of their own father who the girls cannot talk to. In this way, the punishment that Kitali administers to his daughters fail to correct the wrongs that children have committed to forcing them into silence. In this particular incident, he does not give the children a chance to explain why they are at home and not in school. The allusion of violence in this household paints an atmosphere that is stifling, suffocating and an atmosphere that forces the children into docility.

The text also employs the journey motif as a strategy for emancipating Paula and Pitch. On one of the occasions when Julius and the wife had travelled out of the country, Aunt Pam realizes that the girls cannot make a simple mug of tea. She blames her brother for the behaviour of his children by pointing out to her brother that “I don’t blame them, I blame you. You don’t even know your children. It is like you are living with strangers in this house” (Episode 11). It is Pam’s revelation that makes Julius to allow Paula to Pam’s house in Jericho, in Eastlands. Majority of people in Eastlands are low income earners who rely on casual jobs for a living. This journey is pivotal in Paula’s life as it helps her move away from her limiting home. It is a journey that opens Paula’s

world to the life outside the affluence and a journey that allows her to evaluate and reevaluate her own life in relation to others she encounters on this journey. Jericho exposes her to the social realities that low-income earners grapple with daily.

Life in Jericho is contrasted with life in Kitali's house. For instance, in their home, the children's life oscillates between books, eating, sleeping, watching movies, and sometimes family leisure outings. In this way, the children do not know anything beyond their ordered and punctuated lifestyle. However, when Paula goes to Jericho, she comes face to face with a care free lifestyle in Aunt Pam's house. Pam has many friends and neighbours who are always welcome to her house. The viewer is able to see that Aunt Pam's house is small and the friends and neighbours make use of the little space available. The social company and laughter in Pam's house lack in Kitali's house where people talk and interact with one another mechanically. Paula notes down in a diary her first encounter in Eastlands as follows:

My first night, my first ever night in Eastlands was scary. It begun well. But this friend of my aunt really scared me, I thought he would go away, but instead he was going to spend with us the night under the same roof. I wasn't sure of my safety because I have heard of unbelievable stories about Eastlands. Welcome day one in Eastlands. (Episode 11)

The excerpt above captures Paula's initial fear of Eastlands which is worsened by the presence of Aunt Pam's boyfriend. It is the first time Paula encounters a man sleeping in a house not his. In addition, Paula's fear is made worse when Aunt Pam's boyfriend does not leave the sitting room immediately. Contrary to their house that has many rooms and plenty of space, Pam's house is one bedroomed and small in size. Paula is forced to sleep on the sofa set while Aunt Pam uses the bedroom. The sleeping arrangement in Aunt Pam's house is a typical scenario of life in Kenyan urban centers where lack of enough bedrooms, make people to use any available space such as the couch, sitting room floor or even the kitchen for a night. Pam's boyfriend is unable to join her in the bedroom immediately since Paula is still awake. He therefore sits on the chair next to Paula's waiting for her to fall asleep before he could join Pam. On her part, Paula is not sure of what he is up to given the stories she has heard about Eastlands, thus she is also waiting for him to leave before she could sleep. She feigns sleep which makes him to join Pam and this allows her to write down her first experience in Eastlands in her diary as observed in the quotation above.

This journey to Eastlands helps Paula to grow and learn about the social realities in informal settlements within Nairobi. It is therefore ironical that it is within Pam's lack that Paula is able to learn about life, something that lacks in her father's luxury. Contrary to her communication with her twin sister Pitch using eyes as discussed earlier, Paula starts laughing and even engages in household chores. The journey therefore becomes a learning experience that is missing back in her father's house. Paula is able to fit into the Jericho mold with a lot of ease through the guidance of her aunt. She also starts laughing and participating in the merry-making that characterizes Aunt Pam's lifestyle.

Laughter is important for Paula as it propels her into the growth lane and freedom that she so much desires. Mikhail Bakhtin points out that "laughter purifies from dogmatism, from fanaticism and pedantry, from fear and intimidation, from didacticism, naiveté and illusion..." (123). As such, laughter for Paula is symbolic of freedom and an expression of feelings that had been silenced within her body. In this way, the laughter in Pam's house images individual freedom involving both the body and mind despite the squalid environment within which Pam lives. In this way, the

positioning of Paula into Jericho leads to her self-realization as she is pushed away from the silence and marginal position that had informed her upbringing in their home. Jericho therefore opens Paula's horizon beyond the Kitali home. Paula's encounter with life in Eastlands has helped her grow as a human being, able to reach out to the less privileged. On social inequality in the post-colony, Robert Young observes that postcolonial theory "seeks to change the way people think, the way they behave, to produce a more just and equitable relation between the different people" (7).

The second journey in this text is the one that Julius and the family make upcountry. Initially, Pitch is not enthusiastic about going upcountry as shown below:

Pitch: Mum what about Paula? I don't like shags. It is a long journey and it is tiring.

Rebecca: No, we just have to travel so we will just go.

Julius: You are not going to carry your computer there.

Rebecca: Today, I asked you to come help me serve the food you didn't.

Julius: I want you to learn to plant, harvest, how to take care of cows.

Rebecca: How to milk them. I know grandmother will teach you how to do that.

(Episode 12)

The dialogue above captures the fears and misconceptions that Pitch has about the village. One of her fears is the dialect spoken at home. Since Kitali's children were born and raised in town, they do not speak their mother tongue. The situation is even worse as the children speak English, a language that is in tandem with their stature and educational background. One would expect that they could be conversant with Kiswahili which is a language spoken by a majority of urban dwellers in Kenya. I read this as another form of silence. A mother tongue is significant as it gives a person identity, a belonging, a genealogy and even a culture. Since they cannot communicate in their own tongue, the children are alienated from their own roots. In this regard, when Pitch fails to speak her own language, she is in principle rejecting her own culture.

Pitch's reluctance to go to the village because of accent is informed by a clash of cultures. Kitali's children have been brought up in the metropolitan thereby embracing some "Englishness" such that their own village is "othered". In this way, the children find themselves at crossroads illustrative of what Homi Bhabha (qtd in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin) refers to as the Third Space (156). Bhabha observes that the Third Space is a psychological location that comes into existence as a result of a superior culture and inferior culture interconnecting. This forms what is commonly referred to as the hybrid individual characterized by a number of features such as the language used and traditions or cultures that inform one's behaviour. Kitali's children can be said to be hybrid individuals occupying the third space based on their urban upbringing. This is the reason why Pitch foresees difficulties in using her own tongue in the village.

Apart from the above, Pitch also says that she does not like the village. This is because the village does not have what the city has for her. One of the conditions given by her father is that she will not carry her laptop upcountry. This is a lifestyle that the Kitali children are used to back in the city. On the contrary, this journey allays Pitch's fears about the village. Pitch comes in direct contact with reality in the village as she is exposed to the beauty of village life as seen in the communal lifestyle that characterize people's interaction. In an internal monologue, Pitch says:

Wow! I like this. This is good, this is real life. I like the presence, no money, a lot of beans, maize, bananas, name it and they are so jolly, look at their fashion, oh my! I must write a composition about this. (Episode 12)

Pitch's internal monologue above can be interpreted in a number of ways. Pitch has realized that despite lack in material wealth, the villagers are rich in their own right as they have plenty of food stuffs and freedom expressed in the laughter that permeates their interaction. In addition, she observes that the people are jolly and satisfied in lack.

Pitch's journey to the village marks her sense of agency as it is symbolic of her growth. After observing the beauty of life in the village, she confirms that she wants to write a composition about her experience in the village. Writing, at this point, provides a sense of freedom by getting down thoughts and feelings without fear, thoughts which would otherwise be silenced. The village therefore jump starts her to the need to engage with her inner ability, that of doing and being that her own father had hindered. In this case, Pitch's potential to tell her experiences comes to fruition only when she comes into contact with the village. One would imagine that the city has opportunities that would enable her write but, in this case, it is the village that initiates that.

Pitch's home back in the city had plenty with all the luxury but lacked experiences that would make one think independently. The village becomes a resourceful tool for her to claim her agency and ability to tell her experiences from the perspective of a girl child. Unlike her internal monologues that are personal and within her, writing makes her thoughts public and accessible by many. In this way, her experience as a child is no longer private but public. In the city, Pitch's life is artificial as she spends most of her time on non-human gadgets such as laptops. The city lifestyle therefore cannot allow her experience direct human interaction and creativity. Pitch observes that in the village people laugh, shake hands, socialize, and eat together. Their grandmother's house in the village is full of neighbours and relatives all laughing wholeheartedly at the top of their voices. Laughter, in Christopher Ernest Ouma's analysis of *Purple Hibiscus*, [is] a speech-act that allows [one] freedom to act and exist (77). In this way, laughter entails some form of freedom of those who laugh. By observing how people laugh in the village, Pitch says this is "real life." This is because, their life in the city is mechanical and dull, lacking all the human social aspect evident in the village.

Through the use of laughter, the producer contrasts the village and the city in that the former is depicted as a space of freedom and action while the later as a choking environment. It is important to note that after the journeys to different places, both Paula and Pitch decide to write down their experiences of the places they journey to. Paula keeps a diary where she notes everything that happens while Pitch says she will write a composition about life in the village. Writing becomes a powerful tool for both girls as it allows them to assert their individuality as each is able to write her experiences from a personal point of view. In addition, writing signifies that both Paula and Pitch have prevailed over their silenced limitations and excessive control by their father. On silence as a strategy, Michael Marais (1996) observes that:

Silence is neither a sign of submission nor merely a strategy of passive resistance, but a counter-strategy, through which the other preserves, even asserts, its ulterior status and in so doing interrogates the fixity of dominant power structures and positions. (74-75)

Marais' observation above underscores the ability of the silenced in interrogating the structures that inhibit their individuality and potential. In this way, writing is used metaphorically to image the yearning of the girls to speak, to do and to be. To this end, writing becomes a space within which the girls are no longer victims but actors of their own thoughts and feelings.

Based on the discussion above, an analysis of the behaviour of Paula and Pitch demonstrates that silence is not the absence of speech as it manifests itself as having a multiplicity of meanings both as a site of subjugation and at the same time, a self-empowerment weapon. Paula and Pitch therefore subverts the supposed silence to show that they have prevailed over limitation to be free agents of their own destiny. For instance, the writing thrusts Paula's and Pitch's invisibility and obscurity into action. In this way, the journeys are used metaphorically to image how the girls walk away from their physical and psychological entrapment by their father to a locale of action.

In addition, the journeys open up dialogic spaces for the girls to re-evaluate their lives independent of their father's looming control and presence. As the girls move out of their home to different directions, they literally embark on a learning experience, dropping their long held negative beliefs and attitudes of the two places they journey to as they move further away from their home. At the same time, the journeys allow them to pick new ideas and experiences that ultimately change their mindset. Paula in a monologue says that "I resolved to go and stay with my aunt in Jericho estate indefinitely. Whoever thought it was punishment. Oh no, I will feel most needed." Paula's sentiments capture her desire for human presence which helps her to learn and grow. The text seems to point out that Kitali's home is devoid of the necessary conditions for the children's personal growth. This implies that in order to realize individual growth, Paula and Pitch must transcend and navigate their social, and geographical limitations through the journeys they embark on.

Another strategy that the producer uses to depict silence in the text is Pitch and Paula's internal monologues. The girls usually have the urge to speak but their thoughts are not verbalized. In one incident discussed previously in this section, Paula's internal monologue points to the reason as to why the girls did not report to school and the fact that they love their father despite his violent nature. In this monologue, Paula says "I am sorry Dad, sorry Dad it is just that the school is too much on us, that is why we decided to be sick at least for a day. Don't kill us Dad" (Episode 11). However, of note here is that Paula's thoughts and desire to speak is not verbalized. It is only the viewer who is privy to the children's thoughts and feelings.

This monologue captures Paula's internal conflict of wanting to say, to do and of making known thoughts which fail to be realized in speech. The monologue images a repressive environment which has robbed children of their own voice and agency. Additionally, the monologue shows that in a repressive environment, it is only the mind that is free to wander since the oppressor cannot mute it in the same manner as with speech. In this regard, monologue becomes a space within which Paula and Pitch attain some freedom of thought to "articulate" their unvoiced feelings.

One may want to know why the girls resort to internal monologues rather than just speak out loud. I point out that the monologues are significant especially so in a situation where one's voice is muted. The monologues therefore provide a space within which the girls can "speak" freely

without fear. In addition, within the sphere of the monologues, Paula and Pitch question, criticize, disapprove, reject and sometimes agree to what is happening around them. Paula and Pitch's desire to "speak" is in agreement with Duncan Brown's observation that:

Popular performance genres from colonial and postcolonial societies suggest that the attempts to silence the other were far from successful: the colonized have continued to speak, often in unofficial ways and from unofficial spaces, but also from the centres of their societies. (47)

As such, the monologues become dialogic spaces for debate within the self which in turn empowers one to discern right and wrong. At the same time, the monologues are Paula's and Pitch's cry and thirst for knowledge especially a cry to know more about what is happening around them. Kitali's behaviour is unpredictable and it is the reason the girls are always afraid of him and what he is capable of. For instance, when Kitali finds his twin daughters entertaining a boy neighbour, Paula in a monologue says "dear God, I wish I never hatched this plan. What is in Dad's mind, only God knows (Episode 11). Inherent in this monologue is Paula's cry to know. Paula's innocent concern in the quotation confirms the children's yearning for knowledge.

In addition, through the monologues, the viewer is able to get pictures and snippets of the girls' experiences. The fact that the girls' experiences are relayed to the viewer through the girl's position is significant in as far as reading the marginal space is concerned. As twelve-year old girls, they are children and marginalised in terms of important happenings in Kitali's family. The producer uses the monologues to define Paula's and Pitch's position of "otherness" in their own family and at the same time an image of resistance by the girls. The girls are speaking from the marginal position, on the fringes of the Kitali family. What is interesting and ironical is that, it is within this marginal space that Paula and Pitch get the agency in telling their experiences. Towards the end of the text, both Paula and Pitch have attained significant agency as they speak their thoughts with ease. A case in point is when their father beats their mother.

On the morning when their mother is beaten, they were supposed to be dropped to school by their father. However, he had changed his plans that their mother does that. The girls are aware that the parents had fought the previous night and it is the reason their mother has a swollen face and a black eye. Of the two girls, Paula is the most affected by what her father has done. Paula tells her mother that it is not right since this is not the first time she is beaten as shown in the quotation below:

Pitch: Mum we are no longer babies. We know what is going on.

Rebecca: (*wiping tears*) I am fine, ok! I had a small fight with your father but I am ok, alright. You need to go and change into school uniform I take you to school.

Paula: This is not the first time it is happening.

Pitch: Mum you need to do something before he kills you.

Paula and Pitch are concerned about their mother's life especially with constant beatings as seen in the quotation above. The children feel that if the beating is not controlled, Kitali will one day kill their mother. The excerpt captures Paula's disparagement of her own father as she refers to him as "a man used to beat my mother." This declaration is significant as it points at Paula's need

for action, to do and to change the peripheral position they have occupied all along. During the fighting, Paula goes to her parents' bedroom door holding a wooden rod as she shouts "that is enough, am tired of this! Stop beating my mother!" and on the morning after the night ordeal, Paula tells her mother that she must do something before her father kills her.

Through this outburst and advice to her mother, Paula's action is a revolt and a voice for the subaltern women who have chosen to keep quiet such as her mother. On the need for agitation for equality, Paulo Freire succinctly points out that:

In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform. (49)

Freire's argument in the quotation above underscores the need for action by the oppressed in terms of making use of the opportunities available. Paula's awakened consciousness provides a window within which she transformatively subverts structures that dictate her being. On the use of violence in its varied forms, Etienne Balibar points out that violence is "the repetition of certain habitual dominations at the invisible or indiscernible limit of violence because, it seems, they are part of the very foundations of society or culture" (10). On her part, Obioma Nnaemeka describes actions such as Paula's as "women's desire for freedom, a desire that often assumes the form of counter violence, but also other channels such as writing and solidarity/sisterhood through which women survive and gain freedom" (18-19). In Paula's case, the channel available to freedom is being in solidarity with her mother, talking and writing as seen in the diary she keeps. In this way, Paula wrestles the various obstacles 'institutionalized' and 'normalized' by the oppressor such as violence that inform Kitali's behaviour.

To this end, Paula deconstructs the long-held view that equates obedience and submissiveness as values of a good daughter or wife. Docility or obedience is a word that is used to indicate submissiveness, compliance or passivity" (Koumagnon Alfred Djossou Agboadannon, 152). This is because such long-held practices fail to acknowledge the fact that as postcolonial subjects, women are likely to offer resistance from within the dominating forces that work to contain them. Commenting on Asian American women, Insook Lee observes that:

Women like postcolonial subjects, have an ability to enter into the "interstitial space" created by power imbalance to subversively negotiate their identities and thus resist and potentially transform the unequal relationships from the inside out. This resistance is different from an oppositional, confrontational Western model based on binary thinking. Rather, as a "hybrid" subject that practices both the "discipline of civility" and "disobedience" and has both the capacity to be contained and to resist containment ... women become agents who can threaten the dominating power from within. (11)

The quotation above is significant as it relates to Paula's ability to question structures that undermine women's emancipation within the unequal power equilibrium in contemporary society. By moving out of the space designed for her by her father and society at large, Paula has actually occupied the third space and it is within this space that she is able to offer her resounding resistance to her father's authority. The producer therefore uses the marginal position that Paula has occupied as a source of knowledge in her agitation for agency. In doing this, the producer succeeds in giving

the women (masses) in Kitali's household "a space from which they generate alternative interpretative modes and, in turn, speak out and become agents of their own history" (Kehinde 49).

However, Rebecca struggles to convince Paula and Pitch that all is fine. In saying this, Rebecca unconsciously imparts the same complacency of wife battery in her girls. Unlike her daughters who see that things are not ok, Rebecca says the contrary. In fact, Rebecca is not different from Beatrice in Chimamanda *Purple Hibiscus* who is always battered by her abusive husband but often takes it as her fate as she tells Aunt Ifeoma that she has nowhere to go to. This is similar to Rebecca who claims everything is fine when we know that she is an abused woman. In fact, the camera focuses on her face where the viewer is able to see that despite her claim that she was fine, her face shows the contrary. Rebecca is therefore symbolic of women who are indoctrinated to believe that violence and wife battery is a normal occurrence.

On the contrary, Paula and Pitch are not ready to accept the cover-up advanced by their mother. When their father shows up, Paula is visibly annoyed with him. He tries to play the whole issue down by giving the girls their weekly allowance, however, Paula defiantly rejects the money. Kitali is speechless as his hand remains extended to Paula while still holding the money. Paula's rejection of the money is instructive since it interrogates and destabilizes the manipulative tools used by their father to coerce them into docility. Paula's action confirms John Hyland's argument that the "Other must construct herself as an autonomous subject by destabilizing those discourses that produced her" (5). In rejecting the money, Paula has consciously rejected the silencing instruments used by her father.

Rebecca insists that Paula has to take the money since what she was doing was disrespecting her father. She eventually takes the money but throws it on the floor in the presence of her father. This takes Julius by surprise as he has never encountered such behaviour in his house. At this point, it is not Paula's speech that matters but her action which emasculates Kitali in the presence of other "marginal persons" in his family. Paula does not talk but just stares straight into her father's eyes. Paula's action is a defiance of her father's authority and power masked in the money he gives them. This is significant as it is the first time the girls revoltingly reject their father's hypocrisy-a gentleman physically but a brute inside. Julius confirms his violent character by saying that "I am very impatient with people who go against my principles.... I don't advocate for wife battery but I couldn't help it" (Episode 15).

Through domestic violence, the text raises critical questions and identifies serious concerns regarding the impact of violence as a weapon used to silence women and children in families. *Angel's Diary* seems to suggest that violence cannot be sustained by the doer as victims such as Paula, and Pitch adopt strategies that allow them to resist and emancipate themselves. The eventual resistance and challenge of Kitali's power by Paula leaves him speechless staring at Paula who also stares at him. Paula's action takes away a percentage of the power that Kitali had wielded before. In this way, Paula has deconstructed structures that had curtailed her potential. Like Babamukuru who is slapped by his daughter in Tsitsi Dangrembuga's *Nervous Conditions* or Eugene Achike whose daughter wrestles him as she shields her grandfather's portrait in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Julius appears confused and speechless when those he considers marginal revolt.

Paula and Pitch's agency strips bear the false power that Kitali had been privileged with through patriarchy that place a man in the highest position in the family. Kitali confirms such false power when he says:

Sometimes being tough all the time doesn't help. This time round, I met a tougher lady than me.... I know Becky was really happy because I had met a tough lady in her presence and my money couldn't help me out. (Episode 14)

What stands out in the quotation above is the fact that the margin has the potential to destabilize male "power" and is the reason why Kitali's money cannot help in the face of the subordinate's revolt and quest for agency. When Paula refuses to take the money, Rebecca is seen encouraging her to take the money and that she has to respect her father. Two things come to the fore, one, as a wife and mother in the family, Rebecca is the custodian of norms and customs that define the family as an institution. As such, she is supposed to inculcate the "right" values in the children and at this point, she is performing her role as a mother and wife in the African society. In doing this, Rebecca is able to advance order and the power discourses that mark individual positions in the family. This therefore demonstrates that wives and mothers unconsciously aid the father's exercise of domination in the family. Secondly, the text interrogates Rebecca's behaviour since she is the one battered by Kitali, yet it is the daughters who speak on her behalf. She is therefore an abettor in the vice of wife battery as seen in her assurance that all is well.

Rebecca's disposition contradicts what most available research on artistic scholarship has pointed out that education emancipates women. Rebecca Kitali is an educated and working woman. We would therefore expect that her finances and education should form a foundation for her empowerment. However, she still remains folded under the traditional roles of a battered woman and therefore a good wife. It is argued that financial stability has potential of liberating women, something that lacks in Rebecca. For instance, in my analysis of Macgoye's *Coming to Birth*, I argued that:

Paulina's economic success offers her an inner stability that results from her ability to be self-sufficient and be able to support her extended family as well as herself. By negotiating economic parity with the male, women in the embodiment of Paulina demonstrate their capacity for independent action. Paulina's economic stability leads to a personal reconstruction of the dispersed female self-leading to her physical beauty. (78)

Unlike Paulina in *Coming to Birth* who has acquired beauty and agency from her financial stability as observed in the quotation above, Rebecca's financial stability has not accorded her physical beauty since she is battered. The fact that she cannot reconstruct herself in the face of Kitali, is a clear demonstration that she has accepted the margin and has chosen to remain there. The text uses Pam as a mouthpiece in voicing domestic violence in contemporary society. Pam's observation images the deep-rooted silences and gender inequalities that manifest themselves through violence especially within the family setup. Hyland observes that "the systemic violence of the post-colony, which is a miniaturized but direct descendent of those beginnings, continues on under cover of seemingly mutable social structures" (5) such as patriarchal structures that define the African family. Commenting on silence, Pauline Adah Uwakweh observes:

Silencing comprises all imposed restrictions on women's social being, thinking and expression that are religiously or culturally sanctioned. As a patriarchal weapon of control, it is used by the dominant male structure on the subordinate or mutual female structure. (75)

The citation demonstrates how silence is sustained in contemporary society. In this context, silencing in Kitali's family is not only a manifest of patriarchal order but a case of subjection of those oppressed by the system. Rebecca has not only failed to claim her voice but has also failed in terms of being a mother.

Another character worth analyzing in this text is Aunt Pam. Unlike the other female characters in Julius Kitali's household, Aunt Pam is assertive. When Julius blames Pam for allowing a man into his house, Pam tells him that "Mr. Julius Kitali, look at me keenly (*hands akimbo*). I am neither your wife nor your daughters. I was only taking care of your children because you and your wife were away" (Episode 11). This outburst depicts Pam as knowledgeable hence evinces power as an emancipated individual. According to Michael Foucault, knowledge is vital in reading oppression since knowledge and power are intertwined. Pam's demeanor demonstrates that she is knowledgeable and powerful. By reminding Julius that she is neither his wife nor his daughters, Pam communicates to Julius that he has no powers to control and manipulate her the way he does with his family. Pam's declaration confirms Anna Katharina Hildegard Weinrich's observation that:

A husband and father as head of the household derived from this economic control of his dominant position in the family and full authority over his wives and children. He was respected and feared because everybody realized his power over them. His words had always to be obeyed and those who aroused his displeasure were physically punished. (47)

Pam's refusal to obey what society has privileged Julius demarcates his power and authoritative behaviour to being only viable in his family. At this point, Pam subverts patriarchal structures that bestows the father absolute power over his household and at the same time requiring those under him to comply without questioning. Pam's voice in the above quotation is crucial as it disorients the hegemony that has existed in Julius' house. Kitali is the only person who has been speaking and making decisions on behalf of others, in this way, Pam is supposed to have surrendered her voice to Julius. However, Pam is not ready to let go her voice and be silenced by the patriarchal controlling instruments. It is within her rebellious personality that she refuses to be acted upon by men in the embodiment of her own brother.

Pam is fast in reminding Kitali that he has no respect for her. As a woman, ordinarily the mishandling of Pam would have passed as a normal thing given Julius' reaction. Pam debunks the myth and fear created around Julius as a person and by so doing rejects the label of a subject supposed to be acted upon. Pam subverts what Achille Mbembe refers to as "official fictions that underwrite the apparatus of domination" (111) personified through Julius Kitali. Commenting on the construction of individuals as subjects in the society, Althusser points out that the:

Invention of ourselves as concrete, individual, distinguishable and naturally irreplaceable beings and the belief of ourselves as people who form our own ideas and who act on the bias of these ideas is to think of human beings in ideological categories of subjects. (162)

This seems to be what *Angel's Diary* interrogates in presenting a strong-willed personality in the character of Aunt Pam. Althusser's argument points to the fact that people's perception of themselves as subjects is inculcated in them by the ideological apparatus such as Julius Kitali. In this way, the subject comes out as a construction of society in the manner in which one is socialized.

Angel's Diary raises critical questions of how the subject is socialized to be complacent in the marginal position that society has pushed them into. Women's assumption of the subject/dominated position needs to be debunked to free them from the mental disease of complacency. This is because socialization in most postcolonial societies emphasizes the binary oppositional relationship of subordination and superiority of different people. Dominica Dipio points out that "these patterns are continuously reproduced and insisted upon as natural, eternal and unchangeable. Social institutions, both formal and informal, socialize their members to reinforce distinct gender roles and differentiate between women and men" (78).

To gain individual agency, there is need for the oppressed to wrestle societal structures placed in their way in order to free themselves from any form of limitation. Julius Kitali's demand that Pam owes him an explanation is informed by the fact that he has the power and deserves to know by force. In knowing one acquires knowledge and it is in this sphere of Knowledge that one can make decisions. Pam refuses to give Kitali the information he so much demands from her. This is the reason why Julius is zombified standing there in the presence of his daughters not knowing what to do when Pam leaves.

Aunt Pam like other women in Kitali's house was expected to stoop low to comply with her brother's demand for an explanation. However, I read Julius' outbursts and demands as false acts of power. In as much as Julius expects Pam to behave in similar manner as his wife and daughters, Pam is "rebellious". Pam's level of consciousness has helped her to transcend social limitations to reach a new self that is liberated and free, a self that talks than being silent. Unlike the other women characters in Kitali's family, Pam is strong willed. Her stubbornness and courage become weapons against male dominance.

The text contrasts Pam with Rebecca Kitali who is silent under Kitali. Pam's behaviour resonates with Frantz Fanon's concepts on the process of decolonization where he argues that formerly colonized people suffer from psychopathology and that for decolonization to happen, the mind has to be liberated. This is because it is the mind that is indoctrinated to accept the wrongs that society has 'normalized'. In most cases, such complacency as illustrated through Rebecca leads to women's acceptance of the marginal position. On the contrary, Fanon proposes a violent rejection of such mentalities to acquire free thinking approach to overcome injustices and attain freedom. In the quotation above, Pam does not adopt the physical violence but uses her tongue to free herself from her brother's domination.

Conclusion

This article examined the domination of female characters in Julius Kitali's family and how the same is made possible through the father figure. The article further read women's marginal positions as having been made possible through the socio-political, economic and cultural inequalities that exist in the society. The essay established that the power vested in the father figure subjugates other family members. For instance, the father is the only one who is supposed to make decisions for his family and the other members are to obey. In order to sustain his dominant and powerful position, the father employs unorthodox ways such as violence and money to intimidate his family. The powerful position of the father eventually silences the other family members. However, despite this, the characters devise ways such as the physical and metaphorical journeys, monologue, music and silence as strategies that allows them to transcend the limitations to assume a level of agency. This is a demonstration that women characters are endowed with ability to subvert societal structures that hinder them from being agents of their own destiny.

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