



Afropolitanism, Marginal Identity and Culture Shock in Tendai Huchu's the Maestro, the Magistrate and the Mathematician

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Abstract: Noting the dynamics of cultural interference on migrants, there is a conscious concern towards the sustainability of true African cultural values and identity by African migrants living in the diaspora, as their hybridized African cultural disposition, appears quite superficial. Evidently, with the presence of a stronger force, influence or interference, there is bound to be domination and monopolization of the smaller units or margins. Thereby, eradicating or totally altering a people's cultural history, as their afropolitan manifestations, of maintaining their individual Africaness in these western societies or spaces slowly succumbs and fades off. Given the overwhelming nature of the higher force and having been treated or regarded as the marginal or invisible identity, by denying them their rights and privileges. Hence, it becomes natural, for their prodigies to align and identify with the stronger force, in furtherance, losing them to the western foreign cultures and tradition. Thus, Huchu's novel, The Maestro, The Magistrate and The Mathematician, seeks to address the danger involved in migrating and getting hybridized. So, within the purview of cultural coexistence, superiority and dominance, Homi Bhabha's Hybridity theory, therefore helps to interrogate and highlight the unspoken pains and hurt of being in the third space of the hybridized.

Keywords: *Hybridized, Westernized, African, Migrant, Cultural Heritage.*



1. INTRODUCTION

Narratives on African migrants' experiences in recent times traverse every aspect of migrants' lives in the diaspora, ranging from racism, identity, alignment, dislocation, border-line and cultural shock, which interface with their native norms, beliefs and traditions. Being the 'invisible citizens', their subtle self-protests usually stay within the confines of their minds and homes, as they learn to cope with the 'irregularities' of the new environment. So, there exist different stages of learning and unconscious unlearning of indigenous values as they grasp for survival.

Navigating through the hubris of the seemingly cascading cultural values and ethics in the present western 'circular' society, Tendai Huchu sought to address these issues affecting Africans, especially Zimbabwean migrants in Germany. Through the Magistrate character, the author traverses the basic African cultural expectations and norms, that have been altered or influenced by the western culture as seen in the African offspring or prodigies. The family of the Magistrate serves as an insight into the present cultural state of Africans living in the diaspora. It is an unarguable fact that Africans generally believe in gender roles, hierarchy and respect for elders, which often time do not suffice in the western society, as it is perceived as an individual view or opinion to practice or observe. So, for many of the African immigrants in the west, they struggle to uphold these cultural traits, though not within the ambience of the general society, but in their individual homes. However, due to the high level presence of the western culture, in their immediate society and the unavoidable interference, they are often overwhelmed, as they are unable to inculcate in their offspring these African norms, ethics, cultural values.

Hybridity Theory

As migrants, especially African migrants juggle between these different spaces and dispositions of the society, while struggling to fit into their 'new' environment that has greatly influenced the setting of their individual homes, the identity of self becomes hybridized, as it begins to transverse a dual social space. Hence, hybridity happens when an individual is fixed between two different things at the same time, often two different cultures, which leads him to a double vision or double perception and finally a merged or even a lost identity. According to Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*, he introduces "Hybridity" as, "The sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority). Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination (160). Thus, the concept of hybridity preoccupies a major aspect of postcolonial discourse. As it is "celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-betweenness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference." (Hoogvelt, 158) This is the exact portrayal of it in Bhabha's discussion. Therefore,



when individuals leave their own country and go to another one, they experience new opinions, new culture, new language and so on which bring them a dual life, as it creates ‘diverse realities’ (Durie 13). Indeed, living in the in-between spaces and flanked by two different worlds bring them a merged identity. And this is what Bhabha refers to as the ‘third space’, and he describes its uncertainty and conflicting characteristics. But as for Fuss it is “the belief in invariable and fixed properties which define the ‘whatness’ of a given entity.” (xi). Bhabha opines that border lives plunges individuals into “moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion, [for] there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction in the ‘beyond’” (Bhabha 1). As for Rutherford, “the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘Third Space’, which enables other positions to emerge” (211) So, hybrid identity is situated within this third space, as ‘lubricant’ (Papastergiadis 20) in relation with cultures. Hence, living in the ‘third space’ with reminiscence of the past brings a sense of hybridity and uncertainty for the individuals because they are caught between two different cultures. As Bhabha further argues that, “[The] importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge” (211).

Discourse

Usually, the effect or impact of this society drives their homes, as depicts in the novel, the character, the magistrate, becomes the family cook along other different house chores. It alien to African culture for the ‘man of the house’ to be involved with house chores like cooking and cleaning. According to the narrator, during Alfonso’s visit, as the watch a football match, the Magistrate observes he needs to prepare launch and he puts “I’ll be in the kitchen, cooking.” The Magistrate excused himself. “But the game is on” Alfonso said. “tell the girl to do it”. “I go to school. Mum goes to work. Dad disnea do anything. That’s why he has to do the housework.” Chenai gave Alfonso a wicked stare. (7) He can only reminiscence of the how respected and honoured he used to be in his home country, Zimbabwe, as a Magistrate, compared to his present jobless state in Germany. He remember how indifferent he was towards his wife injustice upon their maid, back home in Zimbabwe. How he tolerated his wife’s injustice against the maid despite being a minister of justice. His present state helps him to assess and appreciate the maid, as his wife was never appreciative of her efforts in their home. According to him: Mai Chenai had never been satisfied with her. The food was never cooked well enough. The house was never clean enough. The maid had a thankless job but she never grumbled. Looking back, he’d never given it a moment’s thought. The house was a woman’s domain. Now he found himself questioning the conditions under which the maid had work for him. The first time this had occurred was when he was bent over, brush in hand, cleaning the toilet bowl. In his entire life, he’d never imagined himself carrying out such a humiliating task. (8) The Magistrate sees it as a humiliating task judging from the African standard of patriarchy, undermining the level of cultural diversity or influence in his immediate society. There exist a drift and a vivid shift from his local tradition to the present, due to his transition. This, however reflects in every aspect of



him and family as well. He struggles each day to understand and act accordingly. Another issue in the text is the issue of addressing elders or superiors by their first name. Chenai, the Magistrate daughter, being highly influenced by the new culture, as she sees it as the tradition, ethics and norm, easily displays such trait, which often irritates her father. Hence, there exist a gap between her and her father, who struggle always to understand her point of view and her understanding opinion about things. Chenai is more concern about her rights as a teenager rather than cultural expectations or norms. To her, “I’m not a kid anymore. I’m fifteen” (4). Again, in her encounter with Alfonso, the Magistrate notice the cultural influence in her, as she scolds Alfonso saying, “I’m watching my music pal” (4). She addresses elder Alfonso as her “pal” - mate, showing lack of respect. However, the Magistrate, reprimands her as he puts “show some courtesy, he is our guest. And don’t call him ‘pal’, call him Babamudiki Alfonso. Okay” (4). The prefix ‘Babamudiki’ is a sign of respect, so culturally, Africans do not call their elders by their first name. The Magistrate reiterate:

Back home he would have been Babamudiki or VaPfukuto at the very least. This western business of calling people by their first names riled him. He reasoned it was the consequence of an individualistic culture, as though everyone had simply sprung up from nowhere. Some utopian ideal of equality – calling Her Majesty, Liz! The Shona way, the right way, stressed the nature of the relationship. The individual was the product of a community and had to be placed in relation to the next man. It was the glue that held them together, giving each value (11). Hence, addressing elders by their first name in alien and uncomfortable for Africans, who believe in hierarchy and due respect for the elders in any society. Again, the Mathematician, Farai, a Zimbabwe PhD student, also finds it difficult to address his girlfriend’s mother by her first name, as it appears disrespectful and cannot participant in such act. The narrator again adds that “it’s like, he’s never gotten the hang of calling grown-ups by their first name, let alone his girlfriend’s mum. He still doesn’t feel like and adult himself. Jane doesn’t like being called Mrs Gordon – or should that be Ms? He hasn’t a clue” (95) So, culture being a vocal point of human development, as it involves social dynamics in line with societal interpretations, serves as a tool for promoting and discarding ‘unwanted’ norms and popular views. Nevertheless, in the west, media plays a huge role in achieving this, as in the text, the media portray the West to be perfect, with their cultural practices, while Africa is seen to be doomed, hopeless, unserious and comic. These portrayals, invariably, unconsciously, inform the thought and cultural interpretations of these African prodigies towards the continent, as they find it awkward to associate with their true culture and origin. Magistrate again laments that, from these foreign media report like BBC, SKY, CNN and others about the war in the Middle East, which reflects how Africa is usually projected in the west, do not give a serious or professional report/attention about the continent. By capturing the real happenings and the true essence about Africa but they deliberately project it as a comic relief. The narrator puts:

The Western troop looked heroic, larger than life, liberators, not conquerors. The footage was a hypnotic stream of live action, dazzling explosions, dramatic commentary. But it wasn’t what the



Magistrate wanted to see. He waited for the story to change, hoping there might be a piece about Zimbabwe, but the country never featured when there was real news. It seem to him that Zimbabwe was a filler used when something about dystopian Africa was needed for comic relief. (38) Consequently, this view about Africa reflects on how Africans are usually treated and perceived in the diaspora, as they lack the due attention and respect amongst others as migrants. Again, the Magistrate, in his jobless state seeks for jobs within his profession, in order to be responsible father and husband in his home, but he could not get any befitting job, as his certificate or qualification is invalid in the west. So, despite been a respectable Magistrate in his home country, he is seen and treated in Germany like commoner, a homeless black migrant or refugee. Back in his country, he “remembered a time when he walked into places and people rushed to serve him (42).” But on the contrary, now in the diaspora, he is the one wanting to serve, to be recognized, admitted and accommodated in this new ‘modern’ society. The issue of segregation against the blacks is vividly explored through his encounters in the text, Alfonso puts:

They think we come from the jungle. They think we have kangaroo courts. They will say ‘How can you practice law here when you couldn’t even preserve the rule of law in your own country? I knew your applications would come to nothing. They didn’t even reply you, did they? Only nursing is the same, because no matter where you go in the world, wiping bums is still wiping bums. (45) This conscious perception about Africans is seen as a product of the slave trade of the 17th to 20th century in the novel. But unfortunately, in this present time, Africans seem to be practicing “voluntary slavery” (44), as they now scramble for Europe, unlike the earlier contrary narrative of the Europeans scrambling for Africa. However, despite their qualifications and professions, they are constantly faced with rude rejections in the same professions in Europe, as they are regarded as less standard and under qualified due to colour, social status and societal order. Abigail Oaikhena asserts that:

It is often believed that the grass is greener on the other side, but in reality nothing good comes easy, especially in an environment full of racial and class boundaries. It becomes more traumatizing when smart and intelligent young African university graduates, with hopes and dreams, are lured into Europe with promises of juicy jobs and flamboyant lifestyles, only to be subjected and coerced into odd jobs like taxi driving, gardeners and prostitutions, in order to make ends meet (2) Like the character, an African migrant, Mdala Phiri a trained electrician, who was living comfortably in his home country is now seeking to get an electrician’s job in Europe, as he believes he will get a better pay and live a luxury life oversea. To his shocking reality, his interviewer warns him, “look here, why are you bothering us? Can’t you see the electricity we use is different from the electricity in your country? (45)”. He is not given any chance to learn or try his capability before been rejected. In the novel, the west portray themselves as perfect and fit for the better positions, the reason Alfonso is surprised to see whites who cannot communicate in English, despite being the native speakers of the language. According to him, “before I came here I didn’t know they were white people who couldn’t speak



English. It's disgraceful (333)". Yet despite having these class of people in their society, African migrants are ones usually considered for menial jobs and manual labours to balance the society's socioeconomic rate or status quo. Alfonso again, warns the Magistrate's through the wife, saying:

Look, tell him to stop applying for those posh jobs in the newspapers. They are not for the likes of us. This country now uses a system I call voluntary slavery. The used to bring you people in big boats, shackled together – you didn't even need a passport, and then you started refusing, saying you wanted equality. Now, you flood their borders looking for work. (44) To Huchu, in his novel, African migrants are usually not given their deserved 'offers', in terms of employment and other form of engagements, as Oaikhena observed again that "there is a constant interplay of racial, class and social discriminations among the natives and migrants (197). They are often subjugated and relegated by the system, which appears unfavorable to the majority, as it constantly subjected them to odd jobs and engagements that are quite unbecoming to their status. This act has gradually taken a strong hold on many African migrants, who could not seeking for 'good' jobs but to take solace in the menial ones, just to stay alive and keep their families going. In another scenario, as depicts by the narrator:

Farai's been to many clubs up and down the country, and the toilet attendant is always an African immigrant. It seems to Farai, as he dries his hands, that African immigrants have cornered this aspect of the British night-time economy. He wonders when the backlash will come, just the backlash against Jews in global finance, or did it already start with Cheryl Cole" (320). Subsequently, the Magistrate, as it becomes difficult and impossible to get himself a career or professional job, decides to contact Alfonso and who eventually secured him a job, as a care-giver in one of the old people's homes. He could not come to terms or been able to reconcile the nature of the job description and its final reality. He is traumatized and exasperated seeing how he has been humiliated by his new society. But he could not leave the job, as he cannot afford keep staying at home and doing the job of a house maid, yet unable to provide for him home financially. He recalls his first day at work as a care-giver, his encounter with Fred, a stubborn patient/resident, who can easily attack staff as he does not care the Biological Warfare in Geneva Conventions. Luckily for him a young lad, Brian, rescued him by warning him about Fred and also helped him to do his job that night, noticing he is new, as he asks "you haven't been here that long, have you" (73). According the narrator:

After they finished with Fred, they went round the wing, settling the other residents. There was another section upstairs where they had to drain catheters, give them water, put people to bed and collect human waste at an industrial pace.... The magistrate had heard about these places before and the reality was worse than the stories.... They had a full yellow bag when they walked back to the sluice. Brian showed him how to use the sluice master into which they pour the waste (72-73) This encounter becomes a psychological torture for the Magistrate, who begins to take a retrospect of his comfortable life in his home country. He is surprised and embarrassed about the



harsh reality of things he used to imagine. In his thoughts, “He’d never once changed Chenai’s nappies, there was always the maid for that sort of thing – how he missed her. His feet ached. The safety shoes pinched his small toes (73)”. The idea of ‘voluntary slavery’, gradually sinks into the narrative, as the Magistrate like many African migrants are subjected to all forms of dehumanizing job in the diaspora. Again, he is disturbed in seeing how elderly people are being treated by their family members in this foreign country, as the idea and practice of aged home is alien in Africa, since there is none known to him in his home country. He fears for his future in the hands of his westernized daughter, Chenai. His concern is if Chenai will someday take and dump him in such places, when he becomes too weak and unable to take decisions for himself, due to age. He worries that, “was this the fate that awaited him should he stay in this country for too long? Would Chenai allow that? She was already too modern, too westernised” (73). So, Chenai’s westernized ideas and approach to life and things generally, usually unsettles the magistrate, as he keeps comparing his Africa brought up to that of his daughter, who appears uninterested and equally makes no efforts in learning it. She does things as an adult, by constantly reminding her father that she is grown teenager and as such, her rights should be respected. This informs her decision to bring to her father a gift of outdated Sony Walkman and earphones from her boyfriend, Liam. When she is asked who he is, she retorts that he is “just a mate from school” (78). But “The Magistrate reminded himself that things were different here. Girl could be friends with boys, something unheard of in his time (78)”. However, African parents, despite their effort to fit into these western environments, they are still uncomfortable about the unmonitored freedom of teenage youths in the western world. Because in Africa, teenagers are not given such rights and privileges, as they are being treated more like children and fully answerable to their parents. This is African ideology about teenagers is what triggers the shock the Magistrate receives when he sees Chenai and Liam in a very uncompromising state, in his living room, when he decides to come back home unexpected at night, due to fever. He freeze on seeing naked Liam with his pale skin in contrast with the black material of the sofa and Chenai, his beloved daughter, kneeling while popping her head up and down as she sucks and slurps in-between Liam’s legs. He imagines:

His Daughter Had a Penis in Her Mouth: Chenai stopped, looked up, saw her father and cried OMG! The kid’s penis was glowing scarlet, veins bulging, vibrating with unfathomable power of teenage virility. He grabbed a cushion and tried to cover it. What the hell is going on in my house? The Magistrate shouted, his power of speech is restored. He took giant strides and tried to grab at the boy who cried, “Jesus Christ”, and jumped away, just in time. (169) Hence, as expected of an African child, Chenai supposed to be remorseful and apologetic over her disrespectful act, by either going on her knee or look for ways to beg for her father’s forgiveness. But on the contrary, since the western influence has taken such values away from her, as the Magistrate is holding her by the hand, to tell him who the boy is, her response is “He is my boyfriend, Liam. Dad, you’re hurting me (170)”. He is devastated and frustrated at the turn out of her westernized daughter. The narrator puts, “He sat on the stool that entire night, unable to sleep, the image etched in his mind was of his little girl with a penis in her mouth (171)”. He



tries to grasp and settles with the unfortunate reality, as his better past keeps popping and scuttling his efforts. The narrator asserts that:

He remembered a time when the young were respectful. He remembered a time when people were decent and upright, or was it all just a trick of the memory, selective reminiscences filtered through the periscope of time. He'd been at Rufaro in 1980, amidst the crowd that danced to Marley, and watched the Union Jack come down. (165) He can only reminisce as he cannot go back to Zimbabwe due to the political upheaval ravaging the country neither is he comfortable with the present system of things, especially his daughter, Chenai, who seems to be 'lost' in western ideology and opinions about life generally. That is why, Avtar Brah in her *Cartographies of Diaspora* states that, "Home' is a mystic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no-return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'" (192). The Magistrate is constantly in dilemma, navigating through western modernity at his old age, when he ought to respectfully be enjoying his pensions, as one of the elder state men in his home country.

2. CONCLUSION

The novel reflects the grey aspects of migrants living in Germany, from racial subjugation, relegation and culture shock. The main character, the Magistrate juggled between these experiences in Germany, as the author, Huchu, through the protagonist depicts these pertinent issues. From the forgoing, starting with addressing elders by their first name, engaging African migrants professionals with unbecoming menial jobs to sadly losing their prodigies to the western culture, despite their effort to inculcate in them the true African cultural heritage, the author try intimate everyone with the sad reality about many African migrants, which hurts the Magistrate all through the novel. In furtherance, the study helps to caution prospective migrants in understanding the necessary expectations and sacrifices of living in the diaspora, in order for them to make informed choices and decisions about their future.

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