



African Journal of Biological Sciences



Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger*: A Quest for 'self-knowledge' of the Colonised People

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Abstract

The House of Hunger by Dambudzo Marechera has been helping literary scholars investigate how colonized people may respond to colonial rule and how they embrace 'exclusion' in their own lands. This study examines how the characters reacted to incidents in their lives while struggling to determine their positions in the society in which they live. A close examination shows that colonized people are not treated as citizens but only as objects to be exploited to the maximum extent. While being treated like objects, the characters, being human beings, like to believe they have identities, and they must trace out their positions, though all in vain. This essay argues that *The House of Hunger* tries to prove, both in its content and form, the impossibility of acquiring 'self-knowledge' for the colonized people, and this is the prime concern of Marechera in *The House of Hunger*. This essay will also explore to what extent *The House of Hunger* by Dambudzo Marechera is a quest for acquiring 'self-knowledge', what initiates the writer to conduct a desperate search for it, and how the colonized people fail to attain 'self-knowledge'.

Keywords: self-knowledge, identity, identity crisis, cultural identity, Marechera, House of Hunger, postcolonialism

Article History

Volume 6, Issue 13, 2024

Received: 18 June 2024

Accepted: 02 July 2024

doi:10.48047/AFJBS.6.13.2024.2819-2830

Introduction

In the process of plundering resources, European colonizers in Africa robbed people of their identities, putting them culturally at a loss. wa Muiu writes, 'Africa's enormous wealth in natural and human resources - such as gold, prime agricultural land, and especially people who could be used as slave labour on European plantations - demanded that Europeans create an ideology that dehumanized Africans' (wa Muiu 75). When resisted, colonial forces used to silence millions of voices through brutal and amoral colonial policies.

Colonial and postcolonial literature sometimes bears witnesses of silenced voices better than history does and can show why colonized people repeatedly fail to stand upright with a strong sense of 'self-knowledge'. *The House of Hunger*, published in 1978 by Zimbabwean writer Dambudzo Marechera (1952–1987), is a record of the time when the struggle for liberation was going on against century-long British colonial rule (1890 —1979). The characters represent oppressed and suppressed people who suffer and die unheard of. Along with many other sufferings, the agony and disappointments of being 'the Other' in their own land is a significant theme (Said 1). Colonial power develops a narrative about the colonial subject in their own way, as Edward Said describes in his seminal book *Orientalism*.

Identity crises haunt them irrespective of their age, sex, and social strata. Without being politically and financially empowered, a colonized nation may duly be regarded as *The Wretched of the Earth* — objects to be exploited only (Fanon). A colonized nation undergoing all sorts of exploitations loses its power to develop 'self-knowledge,' which is the prime concern of Marechera in his novella, *The House of Hunger*. This novel is worthy of being investigated through the lens of postcolonial theory as 'Decker writes, 'The vulgar, irreverent aesthetic of Marechera's debut novella, *The House of Hunger* (1978), expanded the definition of postcolonial African writing and at times prompted his categorization as a cosmopolitan or global modernist author (Decker 131).

'Self-knowledge' – Why Impossible to Attain for a Colonized People

In colonial Zimbabwe, people were stripped of their identity – political, cultural, economic, and legal- and that is why the narrator finds himself nowhere. Hence, he launches a desperate search for 'self-knowledge', piling up unconnected events from his personal, family, and social life. First of all, the colonized people do not have the rights of the citizens in their own country. Secondly, they gradually lose their cultural identity. The colonizers determine the identity of the colonized people, which works to the advantage of the rulers. Edward Said's *Orientalism* analyses the way Western discourse seeks to 'control, manipulate, even to incorporate' the Oriental 'Other' (Said 12). This applies to almost any other colony, irrespective of its geographical position. The colonizers have invented their own narrative, and the 'dogma' is that the colonized country is at the bottom, something either to be feared... or to be controlled' (Said 302). The colonizers refused to admit that 'As much as the West itself,' the colonized country 'is an idea that has a history and tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary...' (Said 6). The tragedy is that the characters in *The House of Hunger* do not live in an identity created by themselves but by the colonizers. They do not have any agency in self-determination and are deprived of a voice to protest. People, in general, find themselves nowhere because of the identity crisis in *The House of Hunger* by

Dambudzo Marechera. The eagerness to identify himself goes on throughout the novel as the narrator says, 'At this time I was extremely thirsty for self-knowledge and curiously enough believed I could find that in political consciousness' (Marechera 12). The problem lies in the fact that people without agency cannot determine their identities. This identity crisis is not an isolated problem for an individual but for all. So, 'All the black youth was thirsty. There was not an oasis of thought which we did not lick dry; ...' (Marechera 12). In the words of Said, '...ideas, cultures, and histories cannot be seriously understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configuration of power...' (Said 6). The educated young people become desperate to trace themselves out in relation to the rulers and their fellow people, but to their surprise, they do not find themselves belonging anywhere.

Intimidation is a way to silence voices that otherwise might have established their own identity and rights. To corner citizens and prevent them from revolting, the colonizers in Zimbabwe indiscriminately used force. Here one historical fact is to be mentioned and kept in mind that the British colonial force was facing the Rhodesian Bush War, also known as the Second Chimurenga or the Zimbabwe Liberation Struggle which started in 1964 aiming at ending colonial rule and liberating Zimbabwe. This was the time when the USSR trained and funded communist groups as part of their anti-West strategy. The USSR supported Joshua Nkomo and his Zimbabwe African People's Union. The Soviet Union supplied arms to them. Afraid of the involvement of the USSR in the liberation war of African people, the colonizers became more desperate lest they should lose the colony. Desfosses says,

Africa is important, as is the Third World in general, because the Superpowers wish to test each other's mettle and determination to meet commitments. Because they are afraid to run these tests at the point of direct contact in Western Europe or in areas which might really threaten the East-West balance, they choose areas like the sub-Saharan region which remain unimportant in a vital strategic sense. (Desfosses 3)

Moreover, young people were motivated because many countries around the world gained independence after World War II. The British tried to thwart the Second Chimurenga through the indiscriminate use of force. Police brutality became so common that everyone faced imprisonment or physical violence. The narrator describes how all ranging from a beggar old man to able-bodied young men underwent colonial repression, 'The old man who died in that nasty train accident, he once got into trouble for begging and loitering. Peter got then jailed to accept a bribe from a police spy. When he came out of jail Peter could not settle down' (Marechera 12). Brutality on Peter is so acute that he loses his mental sanity, depriving him of his sane and sound mind, 'And Peter walked about raging and spoiling for a fight which just was not there' (Marechera 12). During the Bush War, the colonial state machinery becomes so desperate that they tried to silence the children as well, considering them the next set of people to revolt, 'There were arrests *en masse* at the university and when workers came out on strike there were more arrests. Arrests became so much a part of one's food that no one even turned a hair when two guerrillas were executed one morning, and their bodies later displayed to a group of schoolchildren (Marechera 13). Thus silencing the voices of

colonized subjects remains part of the process of colonial rule. In the words of Jefferson-James 'A colonized man has no tangible power and authority in any other public sphere' (Jefferson-James 167). And this lack of authority is a potential barrier to achieving 'self-knowledge'. Very understandably, this social instability created through perpetual intimidation makes it difficult for people to concentrate on 'self-knowledge'.

In colonial and postcolonial literature, women have been shown to be more vulnerable in terms of their identities, finding themselves nowhere. Even in *Shame* by Salman Rushdie, which is considered a good example of postcolonial literature, the writer's primary concern is how women's voices are silenced even at home. Women, not economically and politically empowered in Colonial India, suffered more than their male counterparts. Even their father fails to recognize the suppression the daughters have undergone. When their old father dies, 'Chhunni, the eldest daughter, quickly asked him the only question of any interest to the three young women: 'Father, we are going to be very rich now, is that not so?' (Rushdie 6) This is an apathetic expression toward her dying father, who represents the postcolonial social structure that goes on to silence women. Even the callousness of the father is noteworthy as he fails to understand and recognize the anguish of his daughters. That is why, 'Whores,' the dying man cursed them, 'don't count on it' (Rushdie 6). Silencing does not involve recognizing that a particular section is deprived of its rights. The word 'Whores' show the rootlessness of women in a colonial or postcolonial setting. Rushdie gives the form of identity crisis in the character of Sufiya Zinobia Hyder. The case is identical to the female characters in *Beloved* or *The Bluest Eye* by Tonny Morrison, where female characters, unempowered in all respects in slavery and the post-slavery era, fumble for an identity but in vain.

However, in *The House of Hunger* by Marechera, women's struggle with their status in this society compared to their male counterparts proves it is next to impossible for a woman to reach 'self-knowledge'. (Of course, the comparison between the female characters in *Shame* by Rushdie and those in *The House of Hunger* by Marechera is not logical in all respects as *Shame* has the element of magic realism, which has brought some unrealistic elements in the novel.) Women are the worst victims of suppression in the colonial power structure, and in the social setting of Zimbabwe described in *The House of Hunger*, their voices remain unheard. Women in *The House of Hunger* encounter severe physical and sexual abuse with no power to protest. The narrator describes the beating of the girl, and it

feels like a common treatment meant for women. The description of torture is heart-rending, but it is so normalized that no one cares for it, 'And though he finally beat her until she was just a red stain, I could still glimpse the pulses of her raw courage in her wide animal-like eyes. They were eyes that stung you to tears. But Peter with his great hand swinging yet again to smash – those eyes stung him to greater fury' (Marechera 14). Their legal rights are not preserved by state machinery, or they do not care for the well-being of citizens. What the colonizers work for is only to tighten their grip on the colonized people so that they can siphon more resources for a longer period. The narrator's mother, Nestar, tells the narrator her story of how she became a prostitute after becoming pregnant at the age of twelve.

Examples of violence against women of two generations show that the same

process of silencing voices continues throughout the colonial period in a given country. Women are the most vulnerable section of society, having no power to protect themselves from the everyday violence inflicted upon them. In his famous book *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon shows how colonizers control colonized people. A colonial power takes control with the help of tanks and rifles and keeps a firm grip on them with violence. The natives are pushed to the margin in terms of resources and all other rights. They live in 'shanty towns', which are disreputable places inhabited by disreputable people (Fanon 11). Death and suffering are so common for the natives that 'You die anywhere, from anything. It's a world with no space, people are piled on top of each other, the shacks squeezed tightly together' (Fanon 39). The colonized sector is a famished one, 'a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light. The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire, hungry for bread, meat, shoes, coal, and light' (Fanon 39). The colonized people are silenced on every front, with no power to raise their voices against the oppression they undergo. The picture of a colonial society drawn by Fanon is duly applicable to the status of women in *The House of Hunger*. The stability and the environment needed to develop and strengthen 'self-knowledge' is completely absent even for men, let alone women, who are more marginalized in a colonial setting.

Acute racism confuses the native people of Zimbabwe, especially the women, of their 'self-knowledge'. In this colonial context, 'the young women's life is not at all easy one; the black young women's.' (Marechera 65) They 'do not exist unless they take in laundry, scube lavatories, polish staircases, and drudge around in a nanny's uniform' (Marechera 65). It is usual for both the European and the native people to judge black young women's beauty standards. They are 'mugged every day by magazines that pressure her into buying European beauty...' (Marechera 65). The reason why 'they do not exist' is they are not even least empowered in the society and family they live. Barnes writes, 'Within the colonial order, men of working age were transformed into laborers who were not paid enough to support families; women of working age were transformed into laborers who supported families without pay' (Barnes 586).

Silencing the native voice is a colonial policy, and it is done through marginalization that deprives them of their 'self-knowledge', forces them to forget their cultural identity, and thus makes them more prone to exploitation. Poverty silences the masses in colonial Zimbabwe. As Fanon says, they are kept in 'shanty towns' stripped of fundamental facilities like food, coal, and housing. Ultimately, they create violence and divisions among themselves, which are characteristics of 'subaltern' or 'the Other' (Spivak 282). The title of the novel, *The House of Hunger itself*, refers to the abject poverty that the people in the country were going through. Of course, the word 'Hunger' involves hunger for an identity as well, but the word, at the same time, refers to marginalization in terms of resources. Wayne writes,

In *The House of Hunger*, not only is literal food desperately required, owing to the narrator's poverty, but also the social, political, and cultural nourishment lacking in the lives of the voiceless and powerless in Rhodesian society. Here both the literal body and the social body are starving (Wayne 112).

In *The House of Hunger*, rape, bloodshed, domestic violence, and alcoholism among the colonized people refer to the fact of how much they are pushed to the margin of fundamental rights they need. Dehumanization results from abject poverty, acts of violence, and deprivation of legal rights, and thus the voices of the colonized people are put down. The following description is symbolic, ‘He was hit by the train at the rail-crossing,’ she said. ‘There was nothing left but stains’ (Marechera 6). The people have ‘nothing’ but ‘stains’ or ‘gut rots’, and this is how Marechera shows how the colonizers make the natives the ‘Other’.

The lewd, obscene, and vulgar language refers to the stark identity crisis of the narrator. The language of a community or an individual determines their identity and their position with regard to others and society itself. An individual’s identity shapes his language, which is missing in *The House of Hunger*, indicating the fact that the narrator fails to trace himself out in society with regard to his relationship with society itself and the power structure he is chained with. Along with obscene words, the writer has mentioned the works of Shakespeare, Homer, Shakespeare, Franz Kafka, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, T.S. Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, James Joyce, Arthur Rimbaud, and Richard Wright. Yet, he cannot connect himself with any of the writers – neither with the ‘existentialism’ of Sartre nor the modern worldview of Eliot. Theirs is not the case similar to ‘ancient Greece’ — a nation with ‘self-knowledge’, and so the comparison of Harry with ‘Achilles sizing up Troy’ does not make any point (Marechera 27). The mention of the hero, Achilles, and the story of Ancient Greece give the readers points to ponder since, unlike the colonized people, the Greeks and Achilles had crystal ‘self-knowledge’. The colonized people are not given any identity by the colonial rulers – neither do they have any legal rights, nor do they have any physical and social protection in family or society. The narrator’s mother may lose her temper on the slightest excuse as he speaks in English despite knowing the fact that his mother does not know English. Quite rapidly, family violence occurs, leading to bloodshed. Most importantly, the indifference of the parents to the pain of the children strikes the readers who discover the utter dearth of love, sympathy, and compassion even in the people supposed to be related by dint of selfless love. There begins the frustration of a structureless identity, leading to a structureless pattern of thought.

Marechera’s ‘self-knowledge’ is so unstable and obscure that he moves among different philosophical, ideological, and aesthetic levels. When the description of bloodshed, beating, fist-fighting, and corpses dominates the whole narrative, accompanied by vulgar language, the narrator and the other characters try to look deeper into the daily incidents and weigh them on a philosophical level. Wayne and Grogan write, ‘More specifically, corporeal imagery emphasizes the unnamed narrator's troubled existence, suffusing *The House of Hunger* in a manner that elicits disgust and horror, thus encouraging the reader's affective response to the representation of the colonial condition’ (Wayne and Grogan 104). The characters often try to see their daily lives through the lens of Homer or T S Eliot and try to find out the struggle of the Greeks in the Troy war or what ‘Things fall apart’ means in their context. His disorganized thought is reflected in the sentence describing the importance of money, ‘There was no possibility of loving, eating, writing, sleeping, hating, dreaming...’ (Marechera 23). Here, the word ‘hating’ is inconsistent with other ones on the list, but this

type of use of words and thought is very consistent with the other descriptions of the story. The narrator is very enthusiastic about describing things and incidents in a way that evokes uneasiness in the reader. The description of how girls are cornered in society begins, saying, ‘Once every month a girl would be expelled from the school because she had become pregnant’ (Marechera 64).

Gradually, the examples of suppression and repression that the women face become more and more vulgar and lewd. The description goes, ‘The most lively of them ended up with the husband actually fucking – raping – right there in the thick of the crowd.’ The description keeps no limit as the narrator says, ‘And he seemed to screw her forever- he went on and on and on until she looked like death’ (Marechera 65). Still, the description is at a tolerate stage until the narrator goes on describing, ‘When at last- the crowd licked its lips and swallowed- when at last he pulled his penis out of her raw thing and stuffed back into his trousers’ (Marechera 65). This is not the only description that reaches the zenith of vulgarity; rather, the narrator is consistently vulgar, practising no limit as to what to describe and what not. In most cases, this type of vulgarity seems unnecessary, and the images he creates with vulgar thoughts are mostly far-fetched. Even the description that states how white people look at black women is, in the same way, vulgar and uneasiness inspiring, ‘And masturbate like hell...I would suck his balls, and he would come off into my hair. He would really grease my hair with the stuff’ (Marechera 66). The inconsistency lies in the fact that the narrator frequently refers to poets and artists of Europe and tries to link his thoughts with theirs. The cause behind Marechera’s vulgarity can be found in the narrator’s description of the poems, ‘They expressed some form of discontent, disillusionment, and outrage. Clarity, it seemed, had been sacrificed for ugly mood.’ Then, the narrator especially speaks of a poem where ‘Even the praises of ‘Blackness’ had a sour note in them’ (Marechera 74). Nevertheless, at the same time, Marechera offers some rich metaphors like ‘Life is a series of explosions whose eco dying out settle comfortably at the back of our minds’ (Marechera 39). In the 1999 preface of *Emerging Perspectives on Dambudzo Marechera*, Dennis Brutus mentions that Marechera was ‘exposed to a wide range of literatures and ideas from many cultures and this gave his writing a freedom and a wide range of imagery...’ (Brutus ix). However, as a writer, he might have consolidated all ideas into a unifying whole instead of being so inconsistent. This consistent inconsistency tells the readers the trouble colonized people face regarding their ‘self-knowledge’.

Descriptions of everyday violence which seem to be too normal to be stunned or surprised in this socio-political setup imply that those people are politically, economically, and legally rootless – subject to no right. ‘Stains’ spread throughout the novella, hinting at the dehumanization of a colonized community, deprived of every human right, pulled down the level of ‘The Wretched of the Earth’ (Fanon). The colonized people are like Sethe in *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, who knows that she is killing her daughter, but she does not have a better choice. Again, it is worth remembering that Sethe is a mother and a human being with a conscience. However, the lack of legal and social rights that human beings need to form their identities occasionally dehumanizes them. The crux of the problem is that the very dehumanization haunts their ‘human’ part of consciousness. In *The House of Hunger*, people,

irrespective of age, sex, and socio-economic class, undergo violence, and the violence comes from different directions — not only from the colonial ruler who is despotic about killing the ‘guerrillas’ but also from family, friends, and random individuals. Children are not safe even in their families, and women are the easy victims among ‘the Other’ (Said). People may die in accidents because the lives of the colonized people hardly matter. Here, the search for ‘self-knowledge’ of the young people falls flat, ending up in utter disappointment that runs through generations of people in a colony. Mother comes out and, in her ‘usual bass voice’ declares that the old man is ‘dead’. The reaction of the narrator is significant as he says, ‘I laughed long and loud’ (Marechera 19). When violence in a family is normalized, the death of an ‘old man’ hit by a train accident does not demand any attention. There are roots in the idea of ‘embracing exclusion’. (Ward 1)

The rootless generation- particularly the younger one, in *The House of Hunger* is struggling to reach ‘self-knowledge’ but in vain. When one day, the narrator is invited to deliver an ‘illegal’ speech to ‘a group of vagrants’, he begins to ‘harangue’ them to the extent that there prevails a ‘venomous silence’. A boy from the group comes to the narrator ‘menacingly’ and strikes him with his ‘fists’ twice. (Marechera 38) Then the boy is ‘lost to sight in a mass of fist-flying, boot-kicking, and head-butting...’ (Marechera 39). Actually, the boy is made ‘permanently invalid, and the nature of violence refers to the fact that everyone is living in a huge chaos of thoughts along with the chaos of incidents. The significant point is that the whole generation does not know which direction to take, and from that day on, the angry boy’s mind refuses to ‘budge in any direction’ (Marechera 39). The quest for ‘self-knowledge’ in a colonial setting is, thus, often seen at a loss. In the colonies, irrespective of continents and colonizers, many revolutions fail, leading to the death of millions of rebels. The colonized countries finally started getting independence in the twentieth century because of the changed world’s politics, economic dynamics, and polarizations of power. The colonized people are too powerless to develop a strong protest against the oppressive colonial regime. The subjugated people are robbed of their ‘self-knowledge’, left at the lurch of sectarian conflicts.

In his family as well, the narrator fails to determine his position in relation to his parents and siblings, lacking in ‘self-knowledge’. None of the family members knows their limit about how to behave with other members related to him, or her differently. The narrator describes his father saying, ‘I knew my father only as the character who occasionally screwed my mother and who paid the rent, beat me up, and was cuckolded on the sly by various persons’ (Marechera 95). In the chaos of ‘self-knowledge’ from the perspective of a family, a mother does not have any set of principles for her children and the children do not know in which tone or language they are supposed to talk with their parents. The narrator’s mother provokes her husband to beat the narrator because her son spoke in English despite knowing that she does not ‘understand it’ (Marechera 24). His father begins to punish him to the best of his capacity. As the narrator says, ‘The blow knocked my front teeth out.’ Here the noteworthy fact is the response of the son is also desperate, ‘I flung myself at him but his long arm reached out and grabbed my forehead so that my failing hands and my kicking rage did not again brush against him’ (Marechera 26). Muponde says,

The unhappy family in this sense is a space bereft of the sacred, and childhood itself brutally neutered as a political and moral force as to lose its symbolic function as a source of deathless optimism in the genesis and continuation of the nation–family. (Muponde 523)

Love, sympathy, and affection are crudely absent in the family that fails to attach a member closely to each other. Even the members do not seem to practise any family values that will help them grow individually and collectively. This dearth of family values is a part of the lack of overall ‘self-knowledge’ that leads the narrator to come out of everything. The first sentence of the novella is ‘I got my things and left’(Marechera 11). In the words of Muponde, why a man born in a family like that of the narrator fails to discover his identity in the cultural arena is evident :

It is a great risk to be defined by adults as a child in ‘House of Hunger’, and it is equally dangerous for childhood to reach into adulthood, which represents symbolic degeneration of the body and spirit (Muponde 526).

The images, metaphors, and similes used in *The House of Hunger* reflect the inconsistencies of the ‘self-knowledge’ of the narrator. Even the use of images in *The House of Hunger* reflects the inconsistency of ‘self-knowledge’ and insecurity of identities through far-fetched comparisons. The comparison, as found in metaphors and similes, reflects anger and frustration, resulting in conceptual violence along with physical violence. The comparisons are often lewd, vulgar, inconsistent, and irrational and stand for the same theme of a desperate quest for ‘self-knowledge’, which makes the existence of colonized people irrelevant in the context they live in. Violence dominates the thoughts of the narrator, referring to the disappointment of the generation. Comparisons charged with aggressiveness and vulgarity, which often do not make much sense, imply that thoughts are not consistent, keeping track with precise ‘self-knowledge’. The narrator describes Julia saying, ‘I used the pause to savour old Julia’s make-up; her massive breasts that were stamped by the gigantic legend of Zimbabwe. With weapons like that Africa could...’ Thus, either lewdness or violence spreads throughout the images used. In explaining Harry’s anger, the narrator says, ‘Harry cracked, and took a coal-like step towards her;..’ and then again, Harry’s angry eyes are compared with ‘live coals’ — ‘His eyes were glowing like live coals’ (Marechera 33). The use of animal imagery evokes violence and awe, but the comparisons sometimes do not sound quite rational. The narrator spends a lot of time on Julia, and a description goes, ‘Her painted claws reached out and closed over my fist. The hyena, the wild dog, and the vulture had finally seen that I could not defend myself because the lions before her had already picked my bones clean’ (Marechera 59). Only a reading between the lines can reveal what was working in the mind of the writer, while the surface will only confuse readers with inconsistencies.

The same inconsistency pervades across the narrative style of the novella, a disjointed, chaotic narrative. The whole book is a collection of memories, not a coherent narrative. The narrator often goes back and forth between his young age and youth, with any character hardly developed to the full or developed enough to suit a novel. The narrator

abruptly goes back to his childhood to point out his origin, where violence and dehumanization are a daily occurrence. The disappointment of finding themselves nowhere erupts violence, pulling down human qualities like love and sympathy to the lowest point. All of a sudden, the narrator brings a new character who prevails in the story for a few lines and disappears. In a novel, many characters may come and go, but they are supposed to contribute to the development of the story. However, the characters, in most cases, are not related to a coherent plot. Very few colonial and postcolonial African writers, unlike Marechera, could realize the problem of 'self-knowledge' of the colonized Africa. Consequently, they were different and quite traditional, as Habila says,

Up until the time he appeared, the leading writers like Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Ayi Kwei Armah had written in an accessible, social realist mode, and most of the writers that came immediately after them adopted the same style, not only because of the earlier writers' influence, but also because of the effectiveness of this very accessible style in presenting the anti-colonial, nationalist themes that had become the predominant concern of early post-colonial African fiction. (Habila 256–7)

Buuck says that Marechera does not give 'any fixed notions of a unified and stable' identity or 'self' (Buuck 118). The concept of 'self' is obscure in the colonial setup where the elements of identities like language or means of livelihood are under attack. It is true that 'The history of the autobiographical form in African writing in many ways parallels the concurrent development of nationalism and narrative,' but regarding Marechera's *The House of Hunger*, there are a number of questions to be considered (Buuck 118). Many critics question the 'authenticity' of the autobiographical elements of Marechera as Buuck writes, 'The complexities in Marechera's constructions of what is autobiography and what is fiction make it seem as if any critical investigation of the broader implications of his work must eventually address the thin separation between the author's life and his writing' (Buuck 118). However, the truth, as reflected in *The House of Hunger*, is that 'His voice is one of a generation of Africans who have found themselves within that postcolonial space of unstable identities and schizophrenic allegiances' (Buuck 123).

Conclusion

Marechera's *The House of Hunger* digs deeper into the psyche of every character being put in defining incidents and tries to find out the mental struggle they are undergoing because of their extreme dearth of knowledge of what they are aiming at and how they can execute. Those characters, including the narrator, know that their thoughts are disorganized, even about the war they want to wage against the colonial force, but they do not know themselves individually and collectively. Here begins the struggle of the individuals and the struggle of individuals and the nation as a whole. On personal, family, and collective levels, they remain disorganized about their 'self-knowledge' up to the last- when the novella comes to an end with the constant obsession and realization that 'Trouble is knocking impatiently on our door' (Marechera 101). This realization of the nagging truth alone cannot

help them come out of the ‘Trouble’ while they are in utter lack of ‘self-knowledge,’ the prime force to encounter the challenges.

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