Resilience and the Wandering Subject

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Introduction

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> Finally, all these present struggles revolve around the question, Who are we? (Foucault 781)

Any investigation into "Who are we?" struggles to formulate an answer. This book "participates" (Derrida 65) in the quest to comprehend the essence of human beings from the two strands—"struggle" and "who"—which has been transliterated into resilience and subject/self/identity in the chapters that follow.[1] Resilience or "positive adaptation despite adversity" (Fleming and Ledogar 2) is captured as one of the forces that nudge the im/mobility of the subject and plays a pivotal part in the formation of identity.[2]

The formulation of the concept of the wandering subject that is reflected in this book emerges from my doctoral thesis, where the intention was to particularly analyse the ever-evolving and forming subject in contemporary novels from Africa. The context of extrapolating this concept of the subject was that the overriding Western thought, as criticized by Achille Mbebme, seems to depend on binaries that consequently give prominence to one as opposed to the other (2). So, either the self is markedly different and superior to the other, or the human is essentially rational and, therefore, not an animal. What happens when one does not inhabit the space of the subject as conceived by Western Enlightenment? How does one conceive what the human is when "the definition of what and who human was based on exclusion, so that the slave, the barbarian and the foreigner were … figures of an animal in human form" (qtd. in Roos 67).[3]

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[1] Jacques Derrida uses "participates" in the context of genres," Every text participates in one or several genres" (65), in the sense that the text does not commit to one particular genre. Similarly, the concepts discussed in the book, while examines concepts of subject/self/identity, does not claim to belong to one absolute strand of thought not claim to carve a unique pathway, but explore a different paradigm to understand these fluid concepts.

[2] S.S Luthar's definition of resilience from other definitions of resilience has been used here since this resonates with the idea of resilience in the book. Nevertheless, the introduction will glance upon the variations formations of resilience in the latter part.

[3] Daniel, Supriya. "Conjuring the ghostly storytelling space and subject in select novels from Africa."

Nevertheless, "'The Subject' is an elusive subject" (Strozier 10) even within the Western thought. While tracing the historical construction of "subject", Robert Strozier delineates the Subject from the already formed, a priori Subject of Aristotle and Kant to Foucault's discursive subject where power and knowledge network of discourses produces the subject (11).[4] Arguably, Foucauldian thought catapulted an upheaval in the discussion of "who are we?" that spilt into the discourses of identities and the usual markers of it as gender, race or nation.[5] One could perhaps even navigate to posthumanism which has compelled new conceptions of the human. However, critics like Sylvia Wynter and Charles W Mills call for a new humanism influenced by Franz Fanon's humanism.[6] They critique posthumanism as an alibi for further denial of humanity to the people who were never considered humans (Shu-mei 30).

In this context, it would be beneficial for the very formation of the subject discourse to garner voices from around the world to comprehend the nuances of the concept of the subject.

The aim of this compilation is to interject at this point of the discussion and offer the concept of wandering subject as one of the perspectives that allow an inclusion of a spectrum of voices and experiences and a modality to express the concept of subject in not fixed modes of thought processes.

The term "wandering subject", itself in the thesis and eventually in this book, is borrowed from Achille Mbembe's "Life, Sovereignty, and Terror in the Fiction of Amos Tutuola". His analysis of the beings in the Nigerian author Amos Tutuola's works reveals that:

> there is no body except in and through movement. That is why there is no subject but a wandering one. The wandering subject moves from one place to another. Journey as such does not need a precise destination: the wanderer can go about as he pleases. (17)

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[4] Another compilation on the matter of subject that can aid this discussion is "Who Comes After Subject?" where Gerard Granel examines the different coordinates from which the (Western) subject has been understood. As an expansion of the notion of subject, he suggests that one who comes after the subject would be the one who has not been allowed to emerge as subjects "otherwise than as a people of production" (156), which is the existing mode of formation of the subject.

[5] The primary thoughts being of Judith Butler or the postcolonial discourses (refer Daniel, Supriya."Foucault and Postcolonialism: An African Perspective" in the journal *Critical Space*)

[6] In *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon advocates his brand of humanism, which is multi-layered drawing from Western and African traditions. He argues, "if we want humanity to take one step forward, if we want to take it to another level than the one where Europe has placed it, then we must innovate, we must be pioneers" (238).

The subject that is in constant movement is also a "subject *au travail*, in the making" (16). The movement is not just the journey without a destination but also the constant change in form and content of the wandering subject.[7] Deployment of existence for this ever-changing subject can occur only when the subject leans "upon a reservoir of memories and images that are never fixed definitively" (23). The unstable and ever-changing "entity" or the wandering subject must "allow himself [sic] to be carried away by the flux of time and accidents" (23). The subjects produce themselves in the "chain of effects" that do not occur as was foreseen. It is in this flux that the subject invents "himself," thus negating any sovereignty to the subject.[8]

This book expands this concept of wandering subjects to understand myriad ways of the ever-evolving subject. The spirit of the concept, as elucidated in each chapter, ruminates about the other tangents through which we can comprehend the ever "elusive subject" (Strozier 10) that is in continual formation through struggle that exhibits resilience. Each chapter serves to exhume the concept of the wandering subject in its various nuances, situating the subject in several spaces and times, with emphasis on how acts of resilience are integral to the subject formation. The struggle emanates from the quest of "who we are?" as Foucault seems to suggest, and one could argue that "who we are" emerges from the struggle that one overcomes and in the process of resilience.

In the first chapter, "Women Walking the City: Analysing the Wandering Subject in Amrita Mahale's *Milk Teeth*", Namrata Nirmal and Merin Simi Raj elucidate the role of a woman as the flaneur in the city and devices the city through the wanderings of the woman. The wandering in this chapter is the physical mobility and the lack of it through the city, which is dominated by the male gaze. The wandering subject, then, becomes a mode of negotiation through the patriarchal, postcolonial urban space to find a footing, through resilient overtures, for the ones who have been excluded from these spaces.

The wandering subject's intertwining between the space of wandering is continued in the second chapter, "Home(in)g the Hostland: Provincializing Metropolitan Cities of Refuge in Sethu's *The Saga of Muziris*". The urban space is again invoked but as a refuge for a community. While both the chapters articulate from a postcolonial urban space, this chapter examines this space as a shelter for the migrating Jewish community. The wanderings of the displaced

[7] Mbembe quotes passages from Tutuola's novels to show the dismembered bodies and how they get mixed up and entangled.

[8] Refer Supriya Daniel's "Conjuring the ghostly storytelling space and subject in select novels from Africa."

community, as they continue in the city, configure their self and identity in the act of resilience and hope generated in the city that serves as their home.

The quest for home emerges in the wanderings of the protagonist in Le Guin's novel to overcome trauma and find home. In the third chapter, "In Search of a Home: A Queer Hero's Quest to Belong", Aleena Achamma Paul argues that the protagonist's mobility, spurred by trauma and the need for belongingness, serves to inspect the act of resilience or heroism leads to the discovery of self of the wandering subject. The chapter draws parallels to historical events and other science fiction to re-affirm that the wandering subject does not just emerge in certain fictional works but is a concept that can be used as a framework to elucidate subject formation.

Continuing with the motif of a journey in a hostile environment from the previous chapter, the fourth chapter, "Carrying the Fire: *The Road* and Rituals of Resilience in a Dead World", extrapolates the idea of the constant movement of the wandering subject without a destination. The road they travel evokes a sense of the journey itself being the destination. The mobility of the subject is encumbered with the task of upholding optimism in the face of chaos and destruction. The resilience and insistence on being the "good guys" even when the odds are compiled against the subject become the only constant in the wanderings.

Moving on from speculative and dystopian worlds to a postcolonial one, the fifth chapter, "'Masi': The Wandering Subject in "Wake Up Call" in *Barbed Wire Fence* (2015)", positions the unreliable narrator, Masi, to explore the concept of identity from a marginalized space. The setting and the character of the story selected to illustrate the concept of wandering subject provide ample scope to comprehend the complexity of the wandering subject that arises from "ghostly" figures like Masi who are in spaces where they are considered as non-entities struggling to find citizenship in a nation where they are in the periphery and lost in the process of documentation.

Ijeoma Odoh, in the next chapter, "Construction of Maternal/Womb Space and Her-story in Andrea Levy's *Small Island*", through a reappropriation of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome, excavates the concept of the wandering subject through the women who are forced to migrate—through the routes and connections they undertake to re-form their identities. The identity formation seeps beyond the usual compartmentalization of race, gender, class and nation to foster new connections and render voice to the voiceless in their resilient search for change through migration.

The penultimate chapter, "Resilience as a Form of Contestation in the Poetry of John Clare", breaks away from the journeys of the subject within the text to the subject producing the text. Anindita Chatterjee chronicles the life and work

of the poet John Clare as a resilient voice who defied any sense of fixed identities. His poems reflective of his marginalised status, pours the angst of the lack of comprehension of his 'true' self. Perhaps the subject within the text and without, are mirror images of the same self.

The last chapter, "*Mise en Abîme*: A Strategy that Highlights a Wandering, Fluid Subjectivity in Abdallah Laroui's novel *ʾAwrāq: Sīrat Idrīs al-dhihniyyah*", delves into the novel to discover means of deciphering and portraying the wandering subject. The narrative device of *mise en abîme* allows us to further dissect the concept of the wandering subject's lack of a fixed definition, as embedded in this concept is the idea of mobility. This traversing is not just through physical spaces but through self and time. The subject, never being constant and always evolving, renders marking its boundaries an impossible and unnecessary task. Subsequently, providing further insights to elucidate the wandering subject.

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