



RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Narrating the displaced child: Postcolonial hybridity and resistance in *The Other Side of Truth*

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the effect of Beverley Naidoo's protagonist in *The Other Side of Truth* in light of displacement through a postcolonial perspective. It emphasizes how she navigates her identity amidst the traumatic exile and displacement, especially with the rise of forced migration. It further analyzes how political and psychological displacement shape the lived practices of refugees and encounters, leading to narratives whose protagonists have suffered a lot in their quest to speak up during their asylum and self-discovery journeys. Employing a close-reading analytical methodology, the analysis integrates works of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak with modern scholarship of refugee literature to properly understand issues of surveillance, hybridity, and narrative resistance. The findings indicate that the phenomenon of displacement is not confined to the geographical factors; it is viewed as a multifaceted state that intersects between the colonial power and violent practices against the colonized. The voice of the female narrator functions as a defensive mechanism against the colonizer while attempting to forge her identity by means of storytelling and narration. Naidoo's narrative challenges all aspects of Western narratives and positions refugee children as moral mediators within a postcolonial circle. Eventually, this study claims that *The Other Side of Truth* retrieves the refugees' lives from emotional or persecuted representations, proposing a resilient and resistant literary involvement with matters of exile.

KEYWORDS: Beverley Naidoo, displacement, hybridity, narrative resistance, refugee literature, trauma and exile

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1. Introduction

Beverley Naidoo's *The Other Side of Truth* (2000) narrates the story of the Solaja children, Sade and Femi, who were enforced to leave Nigeria after the murder of their mother because of their father's daring journalist activism. Naidoo's representation is intensely supported by both her experience in South Africa, in exile, and her investigation at the Asylum Screening Unit in the UK, offering her masterpiece work of *The Other Side of Truth* both a political urgency and bureaucratic detail (Naidoo, 2000; interview).

This study elaborates on the theme of displacement through three intertwined pillars: the histopolitical heritage of colonialism; the psychosocial trauma Sade eyewitnesses; and, most significantly, Sade's practices of narrative resistance and identity search. Postcolonial theory, including the concept of exile represented by Edward Said, Homi Bhabha's perception of linguistic hybridity (p.2), and Ashcroft et al's storytelling as counterargument context structures these explorations. Additionally, much more literature on refugees have been criticizing the process of continuously romanticizing and aestheticizing trauma in addition to emphasizing narrative form, morality and expectations beyond crisis (Jokić, 2018; Mugubi, 2017; Said, 2000).

2. The Novel: *The Other Side of Truth*

Beverley Naidoo's *The Other Side of Truth* (2000) is a compelling young adult narrative that unveils themes of political corruption, the intricacies of truth through the journey Sade and Femi, two Nigerian siblings, and relevant matters to dislocation and displacement. The siblings suffered due to their father's activism in writing articles against the political oppressive regime, especially against the General Sani Abacha, who represent the corrupt regime. The Solaja siblings are accordingly enforced to escape Nigeria, their home of origin, after the assassination of their mother. The narrative trails their traumatic passage to London, where they face many official encounters as they sought asylum, along with numerous racist attitudes and other situations relevant identity. In her Novel, Naidoo complicatedly intertwines aspects of individuality (identity) and politics, thus highlighting the impact of dictatorial regimes on people's personal lives and how corrupt regimes resilience children. Through its portrayal of exile and displacement, Naidoo's *The Other Side of Truth* offers a critique of both political corruption of the Nigerian regime and the shortfalls of Western democratic systems.

3. Colonial Structures and Forced Political Exile

Displacement in Naidoo's *The Other Side of Truth* is deeply rooted in the authoritative despotism shaped by western colonization. Given that Ken Saro-Wiwa was killed by the Abacha's regime becomes a contextual anchor, it dramatizes the conquest of opposition in Nigeria (Naidoo interview, 2000). Naidoo's work further proposes that the ongoing domination and suppression of political opposition in Nigeria mirrors practices of colonialization that are intended to silence local voices, like that of the protagonist (Mudimbe; Cambridge Companion). Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin maintain that writings like Naidoo's *The Other Side of Truth* not only "write back" but also fight back with imperialized narratives by reconstructing language, forging identity and creating flexibility (P. 2-3). In *The Other Side of Truth*, Sade narrates in English, a second language to be used for narration, but retains Yoruba, loaded with culture-oriented proverbs and places, thus creating "linguistic hybridity" that resists assimilation, forces the colonizer to come back to the original culture of the colonized so as to understand their culture, and maintains aspects of the Nigerian culture unexplained, resonating Bhabha's notion of the "third space," an theoretical space where people of different ethnicities might be able to socialize and forge a new identity.

Said's reproductions on exile underscore the cruelty and meanness of displacement, therefore rejecting any romanticizing theme that depict exile differently from its both denotative and connotative meanings: "Exile is [...] terrible to experience," tearing people from family, tradition, and geography (Said, 2000, p. 180) In Naidoo's *The Other Side of Truth*, displacement and/or dislocation is not defined as a renovating experience but a direct suffering that traumatizes its subjects in light of unhealed societal and psychological matters, including : alienation and separation, hard feelings and emotional loss, and, most significantly, cultural estrangement.

4. Psychosocial Trauma, Silence, and Subaltern Child

4.1 Trauma, Memory, and Silence

It is noteworthy to mention that Sade's internal story and Femi's storytelling talents depict how trauma cracks

one's self. Femi's drawings represent the inner fear he cannot address nor clearly express. Likewise, Sade's recalls of her past experiences and night hallucinations indicate a high level of intellectual and emotional estrangement. Such representation matches with Said's persistence on the material and ancient viciousness of exile, highlighting damage rather than symbol (Jokić, 2018; Said, 2000). Silence has been employed by Naidoo as self-defense mechanism through which she attempts to use it as a weapon for survival because any word that is uttered mistakenly by her or her brother might bear critical consequences. Especially at immigration meetings and personal interviews, the Solaja children did not reveal any of their familial information; divulging any unnecessary information will jeopardize their father. Silence, therefore, functions as a double-edged weapon; it functions as a safeguard and as an indicator of the regime's institutional violence.

4.2 Child Narration as Subaltern CounterVoice

Like silence, narration has been used as an empowering technique through which the narrator, Sade, speaks up to relieve herself and fight back her oppressors. Sade's story proclaims a voice for subjects who are marginalized twice, hinting at the child refugee in the current study. Spivak's idea of the subaltern aligns with Sade's case. Not given an access to dominant discourse, Naidoo purposefully gives Sade much empowerment and voice through narration. The Amazingly, by the virtue of the narrative empowerment, Sade, the subaltern child, was eventually capable to rebel against her oppressors and to speak back to the bureaucratic entities that seek to silence her throughout her journey in search of the truth, which was fully lost during her life experience starting from her experience with her father's job journalism, her mother's death, and her asylum journey.

4.3 Cultural Hybridity and Identity Negotiation

Like all expatriates living in a different home of origin, their new host home has been merciless under the umbrella of law and official practices. The protagonist and her brother, Femi, were lost in between their Nigerian cultural heritage and their assimilation in the English culture. A very challenging shift. How could they coexist in a culture that aims at erasing their original culture and always consider them second hand citizens? This will definitely place them in-between two different remote cultures and will dramatically reflect negatively on their attempts in forging an identity and, in turn, will increase their suffering of displacement and belonging. Living in London, the Solaja siblings exemplify hybridity; they recall some Nigerian cultural proverbial expressions and started longing for some of the societal practices they used to do back in their home of origin while circumnavigating British schooling and law. Clearly, no longer belonging to their home of origin and not being accepted in the host culture has created a sense of alienation and displacement for them, thus making them striving to live in a "third space" where identity is unstipulated yet resilient. Bhabha's hybrid "inbetween" subject is a useful example on Sade and Femi, who struggle to resist Nigerian displacement stories and British assimilation practices.

Apparently, Naidoo's work critiques all practices of refugee literature. It doesn't romanticize the host home in the eyes of the Siblings by making the new culture as God's heaven on earth, a land of promise that attracts all oppressed, silenced, persecuted and marginalized entities into its land. This aligns with Lucinda Newns' criticism of refugee literature that idealizes displacement and values people's disconnectedness from their cultural roots. Naidoo eloquently weaves an identity for Sade and her brother that is unbreakable. She empowered them with aspects that help them create their own intellectual home by making Sade write letters and equipping Femi with artistic talent of drawing, therefore providing a narrative structure for forging cultural identities for both of them (2015, p.506-7).

5. Literature Review

In fact, the scholarship specific to Naidoo remains inadequate and very limited. While King's findings highlight the role of silence as a defense mechanism against the bureaucratic resistance and their impact on children refugees, broader theoretical literature in which critics connect Naidoo's work to Decolonial childhood works or direct application of Bhabha and Hall is remained very humble. However, when it comes to refugee literature that tackles matters of alienation and displacement, whether for children or adults, it can be argued that almost all literary works written in the host home can hardly be devoid of a displacement experience.

In his work *Contemporary ArabAmerican and Middle Eastern Women's Voices: New Visions of "Home"*,

Abdullah Shehabat (2011) examines how autobiographers Leila Ahmad, Zainab Salbi, and Marjane Satrapi travel from their home of origin to live in the United States and Europe. Shehabat argues that memoirists view their homes as intrinsically powerless in terms of nourishing their academic, creative, and activist (feminist) aspirations—depicting them as positions of male-controlled subjugation and dogmatic restraint. While all three have nostalgic sensation for their homes of origin, they eventually look for their motivations and aspirations in the West, which, despite creating estrangement and displacement, offers a place for what Shehabat calls an “imagined spiritual home.” This theoretical space allows an epistemic fusion of inheritance and ambition a new intelligent home where the protagonists foster identity, voice, and agency free from the limitations of their original people.

Current studies also challenge earlier migration modes by assimilating experiences of displacement and estrangement. Newns (2015) argues that fictive tales like Gurnah’s *By the Sea* challenge the aesthetic values of rootlessness by refuge experience and narration rather than by impractical perfectionism and ideal representation. Newns analyses modes of migration that assist the necessities of Western themes by envisioning the matter of displacement as resource, when, in truth, enforced exile is perceived as loss, estrangement, and displacement. This insight has strong reverberation with Naidoo’s child heroines, whose shock is deeply entrenched in unexpected displacing and mental separation rather than exploration.

Drawing upon the same theme, Shome (2020) highlights the capability of refugee literature to “deconstruct the conventional narrative of borders,” therefore displaying how children immigrants exchange displaced lives and existential hazard beyond media archetypes. Drawing on Bhabha’s “Third Space”, Shome locates refugee storytelling as resisting binaries of East/West and existence/home. Naidoo’s novel correspondingly populates this “Third Space”: Sade and Femi Solaja inhabit identities that cross and challenge colonial structures (p.124-5).

5.1. The Child Refugee as Subaltern Voice

As far as the child refugee literature is concerned, the scholarship in this regard includes thorough employment of refugee children’s interior realms. Helen King examines how silence serves both as a survival plan and epitome of suffering in Naidoo’s tale. King maintains that official erasure of refugee immigrants in asylum preserves “silencing”, while storytelling develops and encourages political confrontation. In fact, the theme of silence highly prevails in Naidoo’s work especially when Sade was silent during all investigations in the immigration office fearing to be exposed to situations that reveal the hidden truth. However, it is noted that both the storytelling and the weapon of silence has been sources of empowerment rather than submissiveness and fear.

Much further scholarship has been written on the traumatic experiences of refugee children emigrating from their home of origin to their host homes. Here, it is pivotal to mention that the Gazan children have found no host home to immigrate to. They are lost in between either being enforced to be killed after starving to death or being deported to nowhere because none of the neighboring countries have accepted to host them fearing that they will lose their national identities. So, it is expected that much literature will be written on their traumatic experiences in the aftermath of the Israeli invasion on them. Boukhari (2025) elaborated on some of the practices that support identities of refugees and how to culturally respond to all attempts of usurping those refugee immigrants from their identities after being exposed to traumatic experiences in their homes of origin and also to defy all aspects of connecting them from their true identities in their host homes under inclusion and assimilation, a finding that highlights Naidoo’s depiction of memory as a healing procedure (p. 1038).

5.2. Postcolonial Theory: Hybridity, Silence, and Voice

Postcolonial theory is essential to understanding how the displaced people negotiate their own identities in the host homes. Bhabha’s notion of *hybridity* talks about the productive conflict between cultures, where displaced people try in vain to resist adaptation and assimilation while declaring new forms of subjectivity (p. 38). His concept of “mimicry” and “ambivalence” is specifically pertinent to Sade and Femi, who on purpose speak English mingled with Yoruba cultural proverbs. He further negotiates the acquired British customs while carrying Nigerian national memorials. The children thus dwelling Bhabha’s “Third Space” as postcolonial figures, neither viewed as fully English nor fully Nigerian, apparently lost their identities inbetween (p. 37-8). Here, Stuart

Hall's theory of "cultural identity" and "diaspora" similarly defines displacement as identity disintegration and defragmentation (1990, p. 122). Drawing upon the same theme, Hallian identity is energetic, disjointed, and is always negotiable. Naidoo's narrative symbolizes this: Sade and Femi renovate identity through the techniques of storytelling, memorization, and "passing" within antagonistic asylum structures.

Abebe, Dar & Lysa (2022), similarly, maintain that childhood studies must decolonize the power and the knowledge colonized, therefore recognizing organizational injustices entrenched in informative societies (P. 255). They explain how colonial structures can literally define children refugees as "weird child" subjects, therefore concealing their cultural heritage and identity. This resonates with Naidoo's portrayal of bureaucratic surveillance of asylum-seeking children and how they become assimilated in a culture that doesn't even recognize their original identity.

5.3 Narration as Resistance: ReMapping Story

Much scholarship locates "resistance" in narrative action. Jokic (2018) views "refugee literature" as a site of counter-discourse where storytelling, deeply-rooted in reminiscence and communal life, becomes a political act rather than a narrative technique that focuses on telling a story for entertainment in a sequential event. Jokic highlights that the act of resisting forcefulness, trauma and violence requires "narrative experimentation and situated ethical voice" (p.721-2).

Naidoo's novel *The Other Side of Truth* legislates this resistance by foregrounding child narrativity. This could be easily demonstrated by reviewing the power of the journalist voice against the corrupt regime, Sade's internal conflicting monologue and Femi's drawings. These serve as narrative mechanisms that challenge the official silencing intended by the regime against all colonized people who dwell in the home of origin; they need not to resist, speak up or write against the regime. So, they try their best to silence all rebels. King's archive comment displays how the weapon of silence is a spot of miniresistance, thus enabling planned suppression and usurpation of information and withholding of dignity under tyrannical regimes.

In analyzing the refugee fiction of the youth, Shome further underlines how the art of storytelling upsets binary depictions. Narratives, for him, can suggest alternative commonalities and moral considerations on refugees' lives. Naidoo's text, like that of Shome, discards sentiments and pity and places refugees, especially children, as agents of their own home of origin with voice, empowered endurance capabilities, and narration skills.

5.4 Institutional Structures, Racism, and the Limits of Solidarity

Additionally, much scholarship has recently focused on how asylum structures decree colonial-stained logistics in a very modernist means of representation. Boukhari's study (2025) underscores the interpersonal and official barricades and obstacles refugees, especially children, encounter, especially when it comes to matters of language, marginalization, and alienation at schools (p. 1039). Naidoo's depiction of the asylum process, including all practices of anonymous interviews, enforced silence and waiting, is stable in line with research on colonial investigation. King's study reviews silence as both an aspect of trauma and resistance amidst the oppressive formalities and institutions. Beyond these governmental institutions, racism has become a recurrent theme in most postcolonial scholarship, especially that of children's literature. Grzegorzcyk (2014) explains how international major literatures (English literature in his study) often depict immigrants as defenseless and marginalized; picturing institutions like schools as being allocated to become spaces of racist exclusive practices rather than inclusive ones (p. 31). This insight matches Naidoo's depiction of chauvinistic aggression and social segregation in London academic institutions.

In the end, this scholarship proposes a postcolonial method to displacement that fully differs from romantic narratives. Notably, most of the scholarship reviewed has a commonality thread, which is that most critics and scholars would resort to representations of children refugees whose experiences are ethically stigmatized. However, Naidoo's *The Other Side of Truth* interconnects these worries: children protagonists cross traumatic experiences and matters of displacement and eventually succeed in reconstructing their own identity through both hybridity and memory.

6. Discussion

Below are some excerpts from *The Other Side of Truth* that mainly center on aspects of displacement and how Naidoo's protagonists have undergone these traumatic experiences and what impacts have resulted. These excerpts will be followed by a critical postcolonial analysis, mainly referring to Bhabha, Ashcroft et al., and Said. The first quote "Sade is slipping her English book into her schoolbag, when Mama screams. Two sharp cracks splinter the air. She hears her father's fierce cry, rising, falling." (p.1) The above quote is an excellent example of a traumatic experience the protagonist felt at her home origin, thus representing an internal conflict. In it, this abrupt, pointed awakening stands for the violent displacement that drives Sade and Femi into being outcasts of their country. The interruption of normality, slipping a book in a school bag, by gunshots highlights the brittleness and breakability of the Solaja children's daily life under political subjugation and hegemony. From a postcolonial perspective, this scene reflects a moment of withdrawal and deprivation: Nigeria's colonial legacy of dictatorial government pugnaciously disturbs the children's native sphere, epitomized by their home of origin, which, supposedly, should be the place of safety, relaxation and comfort. This aligns with Said's idea of "exile" as "stripped identity and broken continuity" where people start to believe of themselves as having fragmented identities.

Another significant scenario of a traumatic scene which the protagonist eye witnessed. It was relevant to Sade's interior collapse equipped with her little brother's uncontrollable fear. This can be easily inferred through examining the quote which states, "A few seconds, that is all. Later, it will always seem much longer" (p. 3). Here, this scene describes how time is being distorted in traumatic manner, very few seconds of fear and horror have lasted forever. Sade's inner failure supported with her brother's unmoving fear, demonstrates the psychosomatic breakage displacement causes. Unsurprisingly, their sense of being frozen in time matches their hurt of home of origin and their societal life. From a postcolonial stand, this highlights the mental cost of state violence that trunks from colonial forms of authoritarianism and subjugation.

To further support more displacement examples that plagued the Solaja siblings, Naidoo resorted to figurative language to represent a state of statelessness where the protagonists have become "parcels with no address". He states that "[A]t the moment she and Femi were like two parcels with no address" (p. 130). This literary technique used by Naidoo is a useful example here that represents the protagonists' existential state of displacement. When she compares them as being stateless parcels, it means that these children have been uprooted from their original Nigerian identity, and have become fully detached from their original identity, a sensation that not only affect them psychologically but also strips them off their home and culture. They have become fully in-between two different conflicting cultures, both of which reject them and deal with them as an alien, outcast and marginalized. They no longer belong to any of their assigned homes, the home of origin and the host home. They dwell in a milieu that neither make them recognized nor safe. Such state of "statelessness" from a Postcolonial theory openly depicts them as only belonging to a modern state of Bhabha's notion of "third-space theory" which aligns with the case of both Sade and her brother; they become victimized between in-between spheres and in-between identities. They resist complete erasure while staying defenseless to institutionalized invisibility (p. 37-38).

The bus scene in London depicts London, which is supposed to be a host home as, is only depicted as a place of display and show rather than a home to reside and feel safe. This spectacle space remains insecure and always fertile area of being exposed to dangers and threats. Even in the bus they were viewed as aliens. Naidoo mentions that "They [Sade and Femi] had been propelled to this other side of the world...Now here they were on a bus just a bridge away from Big Ben itself...Thousands of miles away from home... Never again would Mama be able to tell them..." (p. 82). The image of distantly seeing the landmarks of London from a distance manifests the emotive gap between their current existence and their lack of fitting. Everything that looks familiar becomes inaccessible. Even the memory of the mother's voice at her home of origin when she used to ask her children to remain silent next to Papa is lost. Although the Solaja children are both physically in a democratic country which is supposed to ensure and safeguard security for citizens, the children are emotionally dislocated, a classic postcolonial condition where the capital appears large as an emblem but not refuge and asylum.

Another kind of displacement is the institutional one, a moment she felt fully silenced and unable to utter one more single word, which will definitely be going to endanger their lives. This kind of institutional silencing is one of the most traumatic experiences Sade and her brother experienced in which they have to

use coping as an erasure strategy. Naidoo states that “The more the social worker spoke, the more Sade’s mind spun ... Sade pressed her palm against her mouth to hold back her own weeping” (p. 121). Here, Sade’s emotional answer to the official services displays how official attention can copy erasure. “Coping” turns out to be a euphemistic procedure for expressive destruction. “Pressing her mouth shut” despite being understood as fragile state, it actually hints at confrontation and resilience. In a postcolonial interpretation, utilitarian speech becomes another means of colonial domination that disciplines the refugee child’s character (identity) and opinion, thus perceiving of agency as imperceptible.

A very significant yet unique form of silence is Femi’s special silence, which represents a special kind of non-verbal alienation and resistance. So, silence is equal to resistance. Apparently, Naidoo intends to use some intellectual weapons that match with the host home; she assigns Femi an intellectual weapon to resist all the challenging situations in which he was unable to speak up. Femi purposefully stops speaking completely, communicating only via drawing, and eventually refusing verbal engagement with social interviews. His withdrawal into silence and visual expression encapsulates alienation from asylum expectations. Resorting to drawing faceless numbers and figures along with confusing and perplexing forms speak of traumatic experiences he was unable to orally present and defend, like his sister, by using English words. This brings into line Jokić’s theory in which he employs both silence and visual storytelling as methods of resistance devices against colonial linguistic practices. Aligning Femi’s drawings to postcolonial theory make readers easily capture the idea that Femi’s silence is complete meaningful refusal; he neither integrates nor breakdowns, rather he creates alternate communicative methods that reserve his internal certainty.

7. Conclusion

In *The Other Side of Truth*, displacement (and/or dislocation) is portrayed as multifaceted and complex notion, ranging from geographic estrangement, intellectual and psychological suffering, (institutional) violence, and racial segregation. Yet Naidoo’s *The Other Side of Truth* also confirms resistance and confrontation through memory, language, drawings, ritual, and community. From a postcolonial perspective, displacement is not passive uprooting but a desire toward conversion and change, mainly through hybridity, solidarity and narration. Naidoo’s *The Other Side of Truth* further exposes the colonial inheritances represented in what- so-called political suppression and asylum structures, while emphasizing the children’s marginalized voices in all possible spaces. Eventually, Naidoo’s novel embodies the postcolonial project, refusing erasure, retrieving “hybridity”, and visualizing a future in which expatriate children speak truth.

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