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"The Missus has paid for your life.": Preconstituted Third-World Women in Chris Cleave's Little Bee

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“The Missus has paid for your life.”:
Preconstituted Third-World Women in Chris Cleave’s *Little Bee*

Jeanette Parry Barry

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

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Thesis Final Approval Form



The signatories of the committee members below indicate that they have read and approved the thesis of Jeanette Parry Barry in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in English.

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Abstract

In “Under Western Eyes,” Chandra Mohanty explains how some Western feminist scholars unconsciously other third-world women by imposing on them their Eurocentric universality. Using Mohanty as a primary lens, this thesis argues that in Chris Cleave’s *Little Bee* (2008), the protagonists, Sarah and Little Bee, are respectively represented as a Western referent and a third-world preconstituted woman, rendering any true collaboration between them impossible. *Little Bee* is meant to enlighten its readers of the plight of refugees in the United Kingdom, and in some ways it does just that. *Little Bee* also, however, situates the English protagonist Sarah as a frame of measurement for all of the third-world women in the novel, particularly the Nigerian asylum-seeker, Little Bee, and in doing so, positions Little Bee and all the novel’s women of color as already-constructed characters of the Global South. In opposition to the representation of the liberated and independent Sarah, Little Bee and her asylum-seeking companions are presented as little more than victims of male violence who are dependent on various institutions for their welfare. I use several other postcolonial theorists to critique the binary positioning of the two protagonists, and these different approaches allow for a comprehensive study of what are presented as seemingly equal female characters in Sarah and Little Bee.

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Introduction

Chris Cleave's *Little Bee* (2008) tells the story of a Nigerian girl who experiences a horrific loss of home and family before stowing away on a ship to England, where she lives first in a refugee detention center and then with an upper-middle-class white widow, Sarah O'Rourke, and her young son, Charlie. As the novel's protagonists, Little Bee and Sarah alternate as narrators throughout the novel. Little Bee's portion of the narrative begins with her as a teenager who relates stories of her Nigerian home before "the men came" (Cleave 124). "The men" in question are Nigerians who work for Western oil companies that want to drill for oil beneath the village but do not want to pay the villagers for the privilege of doing so; the men in Little Bee's story avoid the issue of payment by killing most of the village population. While Little Bee and her sister escape from the men, eventually, the girls are caught just beyond a hotel compound where Sarah and Andrew O'Rourke are vacationing from London, England. Sarah and Andrew try to take the girls with them back to the hotel, but the gang leader and his band of young men insist on killing them because of the village slaughter the girls have witnessed. In a momentary act of bravery, Sarah chops off her finger, which, according to a judgment by the gang leader, will save Little Bee, but not her sister. The O'Rourkes return traumatized to their hotel and their lives in England, while Little Bee's sister, Nkiruka, is killed. Little Bee eventually escapes as a stowaway on a ship to England, where she is held in a refugee detention center for two years. Upon her accidental release (she has no legal documentation), she shows up on Sarah's doorstep. Little Bee lives for a time with Sarah and her little boy, Charlie. Not long after, they all visit London on a daytrip, and Little Bee is arrested on suspicion of being in the U.K. without

authorization. She is deported back to Nigeria, where she will surely be killed by the oil men, and Sarah and Charlie surprise her by accompanying her on her flight back. Little Bee and Sarah attempt to gather stories like Little Bee's in hopes that those stories, when published, might help secure Little Bee's safety. The novel ends on the same beach where it began, with Little Bee willingly handing herself over to the authorities to save the life of little Charlie.

Chris Cleave is an English writer who attended Balliol College, Oxford, and has written several *New York Times* best-selling books, including *Incendiary* (2005), *Little Bee* (published as *The Other Hand* in the United Kingdom in 2008), *Gold* (2012), and *Everyone Brave is Forgiven* (2016). According to his personal website and social media accounts, Cleave is especially interested in the United Kingdom's treatment of refugees. Cleave stated recently, "So, what's going on in the phenomenon of refugee-hating? Well, whenever we see this kind of radical othering, it's worth thinking about what we are finding intolerable and perhaps trying to disown within ourselves" (Twitter April 14, 2022). In this social media statement, Cleave denounces the othering of refugees in his home country and urges his readers to examine their own intolerant inclinations first so they might disavow any hatred they feel toward asylum seekers. Cleave is a self-proclaimed "empathist," who has a healthy "willingness to surrender heat to light" in his capacity as an author (Kunzru); in other words, Cleave prioritizes enlightenment in his writing over popular opinion. He asserts his authorial objectivity by "[showing] scenes from both sides, using one character to view another askance" (Kunzru). Cleave's desire is to craft a novel whose "reflection is fair," regardless of the origin of its materials (Kunzru). In *Little Bee*, the co-narrators are, indeed, showing scenes from both sides,

but the perspectives are problematic, and not, perhaps, as “fair” as Cleave might have intended. Despite Cleave’s often successful intention to shed light on othered people through the presentation of the refugees in his novel, when viewed via the perspectives advanced in Mohanty’s “Under Western Eyes” as well as those of other postcolonial scholars, the character of Little Bee is a “preconstituted third-world woman,”¹ and Sarah O’Rourke is the obvious Western referent by which Little Bee and the other refugee characters in the book are measured. The two narrators share the account of the Nigerian refugee’s story and that of her British savior, and both make sacrifices that might constitute their depiction as heroes, but read through the insights of several postcolonial theorists, the two women, as they are portrayed, cannot be seen as exemplifying the solidarity that Cleave hopes readers will perceive in their relationship in the book. The main difference between them is straightforward: Sarah is represented as a fully realized person, while Little Bee is presented as a non-autonomous human subject.

While the co-narrators, Sarah O’Rourke and Little Bee, are offered as liberated characters who sacrifice themselves for others, they are both fixed in their construction as the novel’s objectified and subjectified females. There are two registers under which I will analyze *Little Bee*, one with Sarah as an uncritical Western referent and one with Little Bee as a perpetual third-world² victim. In the following pages, I will elaborate on

¹ My understanding of a “preconstituted woman,” as defined by Mohanty, is a third-world woman whose generalized and categorized identity, by virtue of a discursive Western perspective, has already been constructed by a Western feminist.

² “Third World” is a highly debated academic term currently. The term was acceptable in 1988, but today many scholars resist its derogatory connotations, while still others insist we should not abandon the term. I will use ‘third world’ with these ideas in mind to most clearly align my argument with Mohanty’s claims.

this assertion and in doing so, I will rely on the insights provided by Indian theorist and postcolonial feminist, Chandra Mohanty, especially with a focus on how the two narrators are represented: Little Bee as a “preconstituted” other – a mythological figure otherwise referenced by Mohanty as “the third-world woman” – and Sarah as the persona of a committed but detached Western female, who serves as a frame of reference for Little Bee’s otherness. I will use the work of Mohanty to sharpen my critique of the characterization of Little Bee and her othered companions through a particular employment of other notable postcolonial theorists, whom I will detail in the following Literature Review.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

In my argument I will attempt to show that, according to Mohanty's analysis and the works of other postcolonial scholars, Sarah's representation is that of a liberated Western referent, while Little Bee comes across as a preconstituted third-world woman. Before I discuss my analysis of the novel any further, however, I would like to provide a brief discussion of other scholarly engagements with the novel.

While there is not a lot of academic writing regarding *Little Bee*, there is some, including a chapter in Agnes Woolley's *Contemporary Asylum Narratives: Representing Refugees in the Twenty-First Century*, published in 2014. By comparing Cleave's work with Kate Clanchy's *Antigona and Me*, Woolley asserts that the relationship between the middle-class British woman and female refugee in each novel bridges the "disjunctive imaginative gap" in power that "prevents action on behalf of those others to whom we are brought close by an increasingly interdependent world" (Woolley 164). Woolley concludes in her writing that Little Bee successfully "forges a relationship 'between worlds'. . . through the politically transformative potential of journalistic and literary texts" (171). I agree with the assessment that there is a "transformative potential" but assert that neither Sarah nor Little Bee achieves such a transformation within the pages of their novel.

Laura E. Savu argues further in "Bearing Wit(h)ness: 'Just Emotions' and Ethical Choices in Chris Cleave's *Little Bee*" that Little Bee renders the possibility of healing and recovery from injustice to the other. Savu uses Sara Ahmed's model of the "sociality of emotion" together "with Emmanuel Levinas's analysis of the face-to-face relationship with the Other," concluding that the novel has the potential to transform

consciousness “by mobilizing the so-called just emotions” (Savu 91, 101). While Savu argues that *Little Bee* “challenges the politics of subject formation that necessitates the making of ‘the other’” (91), I disagree in light of Mohanty’s theory of the third-world woman and her implicit referent. Savu sees “the narrators’ voices and perspectives combine, echo, and interrupt each other, articulating the self as relational, rather than autonomous” (92), but I argue that Sarah’s voice overpowers that of Little Bee, as Cleave depicts Little Bee as subconsciously allowing this capture of her voice by passively permitting Sarah to speak for her.

With yet a different lens, Jyhene Keksi’s work “World Petro-illiterature: An Ecofeminist Reading of Ecological Refugees in Chris Cleave’s *Little Bee*” argues that Cleave’s novel “highlights the imperial power of petro-capitalism, which turns the periphery into a supplier of resource revenue” that benefits and grows the metropole, and that “the oil business’s decimation of the Niger Delta ecosystem cannot be separated from its destruction of female asylum seekers’ lives (Keksi 1-2). Keksi argues that *Little Bee*’s Nigerian setting serves to “highlight the imperial power of petro-capitalism,” which results in a third-world country supplying resources to the metropole (1). In my thesis I concur with Keksi’s premise that Nigeria’s citizens, including Little Bee and her fellow refugees, have been denied their full realization as human beings in exchange for the material wealth that their oppression and dispossession provide to many in the West, and I further agree with Keksi that the Western oil extraction and its ravaging of the Niger Delta cannot be disentangled from “its destruction of female asylum seekers’ lives” (2). Unlike my argument, however, Keksi’s primary assertion is that *Little Bee* is a sub-genre of petrolic literature called “petro-illiterature,” which is

distinct in its focus on the re-presentation of asylum seekers due to petro-capitalism (2-3). Kebsi's paper explores a combination of "patriarchal, capitalist, imperial and ecological forces" working against the refugee women in the novel (16), whereas I focus more explicitly on the conflated re-presentation of characters themselves.

I wish to enter the discourse on *Little Bee* by asserting that Little Bee arrives on page one of her eponymous novel already constructed as an other in the minds of Sarah O'Rourke and some minor white characters in the novel. Furthermore, Little Bee's imposed identity exists in relation to an implicit reference point in the form of the middle-class, educated, and British Sarah. Mohanty's conceptualization of "the preconstituted woman" in her seminal essay "Under Western Eyes" is vital to my study because the representations of the two female protagonists come across as equal with regard to their co-narration and their sacrifices for others. However, the Western feminist perspective, according to Mohanty, is burdened by its own Eurocentric and patriarchal leanings, rendering the two female characters unequal in status by virtue of their respective nationalities from the moment their characters appear in the novel.

Leaning additionally on several postcolonial scholars such as Frantz Fanon, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and Gayatri Spivak, I will deploy Mohanty's concepts to show how the novel renders its narrator Little Bee as a clear representation of Mohanty's "third-world woman" and Sarah, Little Bee's co-narrator, as the implicit "primary referent" (Mohanty 62), noting with regard to the latter that a contrast between the Western feminist self-presentation and the Western feminist re-presentation of the third-world

woman has many important consequences for women everywhere³. In Chapter 2, I argue that the assumption of a preconstituted group of women “sets up its own yardstick by which to represent and encode others” (64), and that yardstick, I assert, is Sarah: she is what Mohanty calls the “primary referent in theory and in praxis” (62). It is Sarah who gives the reader the parameters by which to determine Little Bee’s status in the novel, for this is what happens when “‘women as an oppressed group’ [are] situated in the context of western feminist writing about third-world women” (79). Little Bee’s construction, as I delineate in Chapter 3, is in opposition to Sarah’s place as referent and lies primarily in her (and her sister and refugee friends’) victimization by male violence. Finally, in Chapter 4 I argue that all the novel’s refugee women, including Little Bee, are constructed as universally dependent beings in the novel, rendering all of these othered women as “a unified ‘powerless’ group” of preconstituted females (68).

As mentioned, there are several other postcolonial scholar-theorists whose works I will call upon in my thesis, including Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (born 1938), and Gayatri Spivak (born 1942). Foremost as a cornerstone in my argument, however, is Chandra Mohanty (born 1955). Fanon was a psychiatrist and author from Martinique (one of two formerly colonized Caribbean islands called the French Antilles). Fanon’s work, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) picks up the thread of language as a way to constitute the self as object rather than subject, especially in the chapter, “The Negro and Language” (17). Fanon studied Black people in the French

³ Mohanty argues that the ‘self-presentation’ and ‘re-presentation’ principles of analysis “serve to distort western feminist political practices, and limit the possibility of coalitions among (usually white) western feminists and working-class and feminist women of colour around the world” (62).

colonial overseas territories of Guadeloupe and Martinique from a psychiatric perspective and deduced that colonial subjects live with a “self-division,” in that they inhabit a Black physical body, but their minds are the product of the white imposed thinking of their colonizers.⁴ While Fanon speaks directly of his experiences with people in the French Antilles, he notes repeatedly in his book that his studies “include every colonized man” (Fanon 18).

Fanon emphasizes how the appropriation of a Western language results in the loss of one’s native culture, creating a fractured self that is then dependent on Western people and Western thinking for one’s identity. Encumbered with that dependency, Fanon argues, colonized subjects are never fully realized as human beings because in their Western-imposed subjugation, they have also internalized Western, racist ideas regarding colonized Black people, and that incorporation produces an inferiority complex. In response to this complex, colonized people of color attempt to appropriate and imitate the language of the colonizing country to succeed in that world. Regarding his use of the term “inferiority complex,” Fanon asserts:

Every colonized people – in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality – finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that

⁴ It is important to note here that W.E.B. DuBois originated the term “double-consciousness” in his book entitled *The Souls of Black Folk*, (1903). DuBois defined double-consciousness, referring to Black Americans, as “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One feels his two-ness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (DuBois 8). Fanon’s similar idea refers to colonized people who experience a double consciousness.

is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle. (18)

According to this passage, a colonized person can only overcome his innate inferiority by repudiating his own native culture, in effect – himself. In doing this, the colonized person is made to internalize whiteness as the superior condition and abhor the Blackness of his native culture and identity. I argue in Chapter 4 of my thesis that while Little Bee is not a colonized subject, for her presence in the book occurs after the decolonization of Nigeria, she is subject to neocolonial socioeconomic pressures, and her desire to survive after seeking asylum in England forces her to incorporate the language and culture of England.

Fanon asserts that as the colonized subject takes on his whiteness, his Blackness of self must necessarily be minimized, producing a fracture – much like Ngũgĩ's "colonial alienation" that I will discuss next. Fanon explains his definition of "the divided self" further:

The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man. A Negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro. That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question. . . . No one would dream of doubting that its major artery is fed from the heart of those various theories that have tried to prove that the Negro is a stage in the slow evolution of monkey into man. (Fanon 17)

Fanon argues that an Antillean Black man has a double-consciousness directly caused by the Western colonization of the Antilles. His self is divided because he has been forced to assimilate with his colonizers to both survive and be as successful as possible. Fanon also argues that a colonized subject has a dependency on his colonizer. As part of the French subjugation, Fanon says that for colonized Black people “to speak is to exist absolutely for the other,” meaning that “the other” – white, Western man, or in the case of Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Mask*, white French people – is wholly dominant, for one’s language is intrinsically tied to one’s culture, and the Black man from Antilles has been forced to speak a language and, therefore, embody a culture that is not his own (Fanon 17). This dependence, Fanon argues, further removes a colonized person from his natural self.

Fanon is important to my overall argument that Little Bee’s represented colonial mindset as a poor, Black Nigerian woman and as a refugee produces in her an inferiority complex that presents itself as weakness and dependence. Little Bee, in her assimilation of the English culture and consequently her self-division, begins to “exist absolutely” for not only the English way of life, but also for the very English Sarah.

In addition to Fanon, my argument regarding pre-formulated female characters in *Little Bee* is informed by the intellectual approach of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, another well-known postcolonial academic. Ngũgĩ is a Kenyan author and scholar who asserts in his *Decolonising the Mind* that language and culture are inextricably joined. Ngũgĩ says:

Language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture. Take English. It is spoken in Britain and in Sweden and Denmark. But for Swedish and Danish people English is only a

means of communication with non-Scandinavians. It is not a carrier of their culture. For the British, and particularly the English, it is additionally, and inseparably from its use as a tool of communication, a carrier of their culture and history. (Ngũgĩ 13)

According to this passage, language is both a marker of communication and a marker of culture, depending on where and who uses it. While English might be spoken in other countries, it is most often perceived as a means of communication outside of the United Kingdom, the broader Commonwealth, and the United States. In England and all of Britain, however – particularly during colonialism but currently, as well – the English language carries both the history of Great Britain and its culture, and these are indivisible from one another. Ngũgĩ uses this explanation of the duality of language to show how any Western language, to African children who are not descended from colonizing populations, is foreign, reflecting another culture, even though in many parts of Africa, Western languages have been imposed on its people for generations during and after colonialism. This passage is important to my thesis in Chapter 3, when I discuss Little Bee's informal Western education, for much of her education is comprised of learning to speak English specifically as it is spoken in England. Little Bee already spoke English as one of the national languages of Nigeria, but it is her understanding that the most effective means of survival in the West is to go unnoticed, and her mastery of language is one of the most important means of remaining inconspicuous.

Ngũgĩ further makes a connection between one's native language and the language of his or her education. He first explains that there are three elements of language: 1) the labor process -- the means of communicating with others and

producing wealth or means of food; 2) words as signposts, or “the language of real life”; and 3) the written word that imitates the spoken word (13-14). These aspects of communication are important in his analysis of a colonized African child’s education.

Ngũgĩ says the following regarding the written aspect of communication:

The language of the books he read was foreign. The language of his conceptualization was foreign. Thought, in him, took the visible form of a foreign language. So the written language of a child’s upbringing in the school (even his spoken language within the school compound) became divorced from his spoken language at home. There was often not the slightest relationship between the child’s written world, which was also the language of his schooling, and the world of his immediate environment in the family and the community. For a colonial child, the harmony existing between the three aspects of language as communication was irrevocably broken. This resulted in the disassociation of the sensibility of that child from his natural and social environment, what we might call colonial alienation. The alienation became reinforced in the teaching of history, geography, music, where bourgeois Europe was always the centre of the universe. (17)

Ngũgĩ believes that the written element of communication was the colonizers’ most compelling part of the domination process because the African child was “exposed exclusively to a culture that was a product of a world external to himself,” and that produced a perspective of himself that could only be seen through the lens of the colonizing culture of their language (17). This “colonial alienation,” which causes the child to “[see] oneself from outside oneself as if one was another self” (18), is analogous

to DuBois's "double-consciousness," Fanon's "divided self," and Spivak's "selfed Other," which I will discuss in the Spivak section. Ngũgĩ's idea of language as culture and his concept of colonial alienation both support my Chapter 4 assertion that Little Bee's self-education contributes to her disunified idea of herself.

I will also use excerpts from Spivak's essays, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" in my discussion about Little Bee, who is presented as a clear example of Spivak's definition of a subaltern, which Spivak details in an interview with Leon De Kock (1992): "everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern – a space of difference" (De Kock 45). Not only does Spivak's conceptualization of the subaltern align with my assertion of the third-world women in *Little Bee* as preconstituted in their alterity when measured against the white Western feminist, but Spivak, like Mohanty, also primarily considers women in much of her writing, whereas Ngũgĩ and Fanon focus more on men from colonized spaces.

Further parallels between Spivak and Mohanty are drawn when Spivak says in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" that "The question of 'woman' seems most problematic in this context. Clearly, if you are poor, black and female you get it in three ways" ("Subaltern" 90). This observation is highly relevant to Mohanty's preconstituted third-world woman, who is destitute, dependent, and of color. Furthermore, Mohanty asserts that women cannot be categorized as one subset, and Spivak argues similarly that "one must nevertheless insist that the colonized subaltern subject is irretrievably heterogeneous" (79), once again reinforcing a connection among their respective ideas.

In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak questions a subaltern’s specific education as a colonial subject. Spivak discusses “the work of imperialist subject-constitution, mingling epistemic violence with the advancement of learning and civilization,” which only reinforces a subaltern’s silence (“Subaltern” 94). This idea aligns closely with both Fanon’s and Ngũgĩ’s ideas of internalized Western education. I will refer specifically to Spivak’s assertion as it is reflected in the combination of oppressive violence of the detention center as the primary setting of Little Bee’s self-education in Cleave’s novel. Finally, Spivak addresses as impossible any potential for a subaltern woman to find solidarity with other women when she says, “to the question of woman as subaltern, I will suggest that the possibility of collectivity itself is persistently foreclosed through the manipulation of female agency” (78). I believe this concept is at the heart of my assertion that Little Bee is preconstituted and objectified, precluding and abrogating any relationship other than one of dependence on Sarah.

In Spivak’s essay entitled “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism,” Spivak once again deliberates from a postcolonial feminist perspective. Spivak introduces an idea similar to Fanon’s “divided self” when she refers to the “selfed Other” and the “Othered self” while analyzing Jean Rhys’s postcolonial prequel to *Jane Eyre*, entitled *Wide Sargasso Sea*: “In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Narcissus’ madness is disclosed when he recognizes his Other as his self . . . Rhys makes Antoinette see her self as her Other, Brontë’s Bertha The gilt frame encloses a mirror: as Narcissus’ pool reflects the selfed Other, so this ‘pool’ reflects the othered self” (“Three Women’s Texts” 250). Like Fanon’s understanding of two selves, Spivak also accepts that the colonized subject embodies two selves: one inflected by whiteness and one othered.

Spivak contends that the twentieth-century Dominican-British author Rhys reveals Antoinette's double-consciousness to inscribe humanity into the foreign and othered Bertha, which is opposite of Brontë's representation of Bertha as a West Indian monster at the end of *Jane Eyre*. Spivak's examination strengthens my analysis of Little Bee's character and her perpetual contention between her Western educated English self and her self-perceived ignorant and helpless Nigerian self by reinforcing the divided self.

Spivak's "Three Women's Texts" is also central to my discussion in that she argues imperialism, and the literature that was produced during it, was an important element in England's cultural education of its citizens. Spivak says, "imperialism, understood as England's social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English. The role of literature in the production of cultural representation should not be ignored" ("Three Women's Texts" 243). This idea is similar to Ngũgĩ's assertions in his *Decolonising the Mind* that language carries history and culture, for Spivak sees the language of literature as producing culture. I will argue in Chapter 3 of my thesis that all of Little Bee's available reading materials shamelessly promote Western religion and Western ideas, and Little Bee internalizes that English culture, producing her double-consciousness.

Finally, Spivak's "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" is important to my thesis discussion of how the third-world female characters are, by virtue of their opposition to Sarah as a referent, necessarily situated as others in *Little Bee*. Spivak analyzes the primary othered female character in *Wide Sargasso Sea* as one who, limited by her place in an imperial world,

must play out her role, act out the transformation of her 'self' into that fictive Other, set fire to the house and kill herself, so that Jane Eyre can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction. I must read this as an allegory of the general epistemic violence of imperialism, the construction of a self-immolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the colonizer. At least Rhys sees to it that the woman from the colonies is not sacrificed as an insane animal. ("Three Women's Texts" 251)

Spivak insists that even while *Wide Sargasso Sea* makes progress toward a full realization with regard to the humanity inscribed in its depiction of Antoinette/Bertha, her character is, nevertheless, confined in an imperial world and, therefore, does not have the capacity to develop wholly. Spivak goes on to argue that the British empire's "worlding" of the West Indies – their perception that the West Indies was a blank slate to be culturally and historically inscribed in any fashion the British desired – is internalized by Bertha, further confining her to an imperial world⁵. Similarly, I will argue that, while Little Bee is presented as an anticolonial character whose actions and presence are equal to that of Sarah, Little Bee's representation, like Bertha's, serves as a "subject for the glorification of the social mission of the colonizer" ("Three Women's Texts" 251), the Western Sarah.

The most important stage of postcolonial theory in the scaffolding of my argument is Mohanty's theory of the preconstituted third-world woman. In every aspect

⁵ In Spivak's Endnotes, she explains, "My notion of the "worlding of a world" upon what must be assumed to be uninscribed earth is a vulgarization of Martin Heidegger's idea; see 'The Origin of the Work of Art,' *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York, 1977), pp. 17-87."

of my thesis, I will deliberately use Mohanty's conceptualization of a pre-established third-world female subject who is objectified at the expense of her Western referent. In the 1988 publication of "Under Western Eyes,"⁶ Mohanty asserts that specific feminist writings "discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world," and by imposing their ethnocentric universality on the women in developing countries, these Western scholars "[oppress] most if not all the women in these countries" (63). As such, this chapter provides a relevant framework for my discussion of *Little Bee*. Using parts of Mohanty's theoretical intervention, I contend that Sarah is committed to Little Bee but too constrained by her own colonial mindset to physically save her, and that Little Bee enters the novel as a preconstituted other and largely remains so until the final page of the novel. In *Little Bee*, the co-narrators, Little Bee and Sarah, each inhabit either the "third-world woman" or the implicit measuring device for the construction of the other, and those attributes, as well as the cultural consequences of their presence in Western writings including *Little Bee*, will be my primary focus.

In "Under Western Eyes," Mohanty's argument is "not against generalizations as much as for careful, historically specific generalizations responsive to complex reality" (Mohanty 77). The idea that Mohanty's argument criticizes all generalizations regarding

⁶ The article, "Under Western Eyes," that I use in my argument was published by Sage Publications, Ltd., in the *Feminist Review* in 1988. In 2003, Chandra Mohanty published her book, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, and in it she includes a chapter of the original 1986 version of "Under Western Eyes," as well as a revised version, in which she clarifies her argument that some feminist writings homogenize third-world women.

third-world women is a notable criticism of her essay, but that is not at all what Mohanty argues, for she says,

I do not question the descriptive and informative value of most western feminist writings on women in the third world. I also do not question the existence of excellent work which does not fall in the analytic traps I am concerned with However, it is both to the explanatory potential of particular analytic strategies employed by such writing, and to their political effect in the context of the hegemony of western scholarship, that I want to draw attention here. (64)

Mohanty doesn't question the generalities per se, but, rather, she is questioning the potential political effects of Western feminists who uncritically consolidate all third-world women. Without a self-conscious acknowledgement of the arbitrary re-presentation of third-world women within some Western feminist scholarship, then third-world women will continue to be categorized and objectified.

Right away, Mohanty analyzes the construction of the "Third World Woman," as a singular monolithic subject" (Mohanty 1). She promptly notes that her use of the term 'colonial' implies a hierarchical structure and a discursive oppression of the analyzed subject, in this case the third-world woman, and also observes that in particular feminist writings, there is an "appropriation and codification of 'scholarship' and 'knowledge'" that is applied by Western feminist authors in their discourse (61). Mohanty asserts that Western feminists codify their relationship to the other in structurally dominant terms, but she claims further that this critique "also pertains to identical analytical principles employed by third-world scholars writing about their own cultures" (62). When middle-class Asian or African scholars write on or about "their rural or working-class sisters,"

there is often an assumption of their own middle-class culture as the norm, therefore marking lower-class female workers and cultures as the other (62). Hence, no one culture is immune to the use of this idea of preconstituted other, for it appears to be a class and/or cultural construct.

Mohanty observes that the trope of the third-world woman misrepresents Western feminist political practices and undermines the possibility of alliance among women of different cultures and classes. She notes that Western feminist scholarship is globally published, distributed, and consumed, and is both political and discursive, and it is not only a “mode of intervention into particular hegemonic discourses . . . and as a political praxis which counters and resists” what are considered legitimate and scientific discourses about all women (Mohanty 62). Because of the West’s overwhelming influence via globalized publishing potential, Mohanty says, the relationship between this constructed idea of the composite Woman as the other and women – “real, material subjects of their collective histories” – is a relationship that Western feminist writings must acknowledge because it “carries with it the authorizing signature of western humanist discourse” (63). Mohanty argues that a privileged and ethnocentric universality combined with an underdeveloped self-consciousness regarding the influence of Western scholarship on the third world gives a homogeneous shape to what she calls the third-world woman.

Per Mohanty, Western feminists rely on a monolithic idea of patriarchy to construct what she calls the “third-world difference – that stable, ahistorical something that apparently oppresses most if not all the women in these countries” (Mohanty 63). She claims that Western feminist scholars often fall prey to their own lack of self-

consciousness and to their unconscious acceptance of a monolithic idea of male dominance, and with this 'third-world difference' such scholars "appropriate and colonize" the characteristics of third-world women (63). Only once this power is clarified, Mohanty believes, can it be adequately addressed and rectified. Mohanty asserts that we must examine the roles of Western feminist scholarship because of its effect on all women everywhere. She is careful not to question all Western feminist scholarship, and she, in fact, addresses works later in her article that do not fall into the trap of crafting a homogeneous "third-world woman." Mohanty questions "any discourse that sets up its own authorial subjects as the implicit referent, i.e., the yardstick by which to encode and represent cultural Others" (64). She states that she is not arguing against ethnocentrism, but, rather, she is analyzing how it is produced within much of Western feminist scholarship.

According to Mohanty, in the process of third-world women being preconstituted by Western feminists, all 'women' are first bound together by a sociological idea of their sameness as victims of male oppression. Mohanty argues:

By women as a category of analysis, I am referring to the crucial presupposition that all of us of the same gender, across classes and cultures, are somehow socially constituted as a homogeneous group identifiable prior to the process of analysis. The homogeneity of women as a group is produced not on the basis of biological essentials, but rather on the basis of secondary sociological and anthropological universals. (65)

To be clear, Mohanty asserts that prior to any feminist analysis, 'women' are often uncritically situated as a standardized group of people who are designated as

oppressed. According to this standard, all women practice an uncomplicated solidarity among themselves; hence, 'women' are a category. Mohanty argues that this constructed category of 'women' is then used by Western feminists in their analysis of third-world women, labeling them as a singular category of "implicit victims of particular cultural and socio-economic systems" (66).

Mohanty describes third-world women as being represented as sexually constrained, "ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, domesticated, family-oriented, victimized, etc." (Mohanty 65). This, she says, stands in stark comparison to "the (implicit) self-representation of western women as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the 'freedom' to make their own decisions" (65). Mohanty likens this contrast to a Marxist comparison of a housewife's labor versus a "more" productive wage-laborer, a comparison that is made by privileging a particular norm or group (65).

According to Mohanty, Western feminists perceive women as existing within a male/female binary of power, whereby men have power, and women do not. When this binary is situated within a Western feminist analysis of third-world women, Western women self-present as different than third-world women by virtue of the established male/female-binary social structures – "Legal, economic, religious and familial" (Mohanty 80) –as judged by Western standards. Mohanty calls this the "third-world difference" (80). According to Mohanty,

It is here that ethnocentric universality comes into play. When these structures are defined as 'underdeveloped' or 'developing' and women are placed within these structures, an implicit image of the 'average third-world woman' is

produced. This is the transformation of the (implicitly western) 'oppressed woman' into the 'oppressed third-world woman'. While the category of 'oppressed woman' is generated through an exclusive focus on gender difference' the 'oppressed third-world woman' category has an additional attribute – the 'third-world difference'! The 'third-world difference' includes a paternalistic attitude towards women in the third world. (80)

To summarize this passage, Mohanty argues that feminist discourse assumes a homogeneous group called 'women,' and that group encompasses all women in a binary system, with 'men' possessing the power. Mohanty's 'third-world difference' is an additional and unintentional feminist layer of oppression that supplements the ever-present patriarchal hierarchy. The third-world woman is now patronized not only by men, but also by uncritical Western feminists. The "third-world difference" is important because it privileges Western women to then self-present as subjects who have more agency than their third-world sisters. According to Mohanty, the 'third-world difference' is a "colonialist move" because Western women become the true subject in the newly constructed binary system of Western women and third-world women, and third-world women become the object, never rising above their oppression. In this way, Western feminists oppress third-world women in the same way that they perceive men oppress women, and this "third-world difference" renders the idea of solidarity among all women impossible.

Mohanty goes on to describe how the employment of 'third-world difference' limits the Western understanding of a third-world woman:

This average third-world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being ‘third world (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, domesticated, family-oriented, victimized, etc.). This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of western women as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the ‘freedom to make their own decisions’.

(Mohanty 65)

In this passage Mohanty describes how feminists, using the lens of “the third-world difference,” conflate the identities of the third-world women, rendering them without agency in all aspects of their lives. She asserts further that a Western feminist’s self-presentation of full agency becomes the subject in a power hierarchy, in stark contrast to the binary object, the third-world woman, who has no power at all.

In light of their powerlessness, one of the primary aspects of this lack of agency, according to Mohanty, is the third-world women’s representation as being perpetually and violently dominated by men⁷. In “Under Western Eyes,” Mohanty asserts that often, when Western feminists describe third-world women, they “are defined systematically as the victims of male control – the ‘sexually oppressed,’” regardless of specific and individual circumstances (Mohanty 67). Mohanty’s context here is an article about female genital mutilation in Africa, but the author of that article, like many others

⁷ In this section, Mohanty echoes Spivak’s assertion that “White men are saving brown women from brown men” (“Subaltern” 92), rendering all brown women, regardless of their circumstance, in need of saving. Spivak is discussing how the British argued that they “saved” Indian women from a horrific practice (sati) of a rigid patriarchal Hindu society.

according to Mohanty, conflates their situation with all women in the third world.

Mohanty goes on to explain that,

Although it is true that the potential of male violence against women circumscribes and elucidates their social position to a certain extent, defining women as archetypal victims freezes them into 'objects-who-defend-themselves', men into 'subjects-who-perpetrate-violence', and (every) society into a simple opposition between the powerless (read: women) and the powerful (read: men) groups of people. (67)

In other words, if male violence is categorized as affecting all third-world women, a banal binary of powerless females versus powerful males is perpetrated. If male violence is not analyzed within specific contexts and societies, Mohanty believes, it will never be better understood or eradicated.

As part of Mohanty's definition of the already constituted third-world woman, she asserts not only the shared construct of women as victims of male violence, as I will later discuss regarding the subaltern women of *Little Bee*, but also the patriarchal assumption of "women as universal dependants" (Mohanty 67). In this part of her essay, Mohanty offers several examples of Western feminist writings in which "third-world women constitute an identifiable group purely on the basis of shared dependencies," including those based on race, sex, and class (Mohanty 67). Certain Western feminists, Mohanty claims, classify women in terms of their inadequacy in the world. Because third-world women are already categorized as deprived, they can never be in a position of power in any binary, whether it be a hierarchy with men or with Western women. In any discourse of third-world women, regardless of class, religion, or finances, Mohanty

says that as third-world preconstituted women, they will always be a monolithic category which is situated as the object, not the subject, of power.

In her attempts to expose a homogeneous and flattened idea of the third-world woman, Mohanty discusses three methodological moves that Western feminist academic writings employ: 1) The patriarchal and universal “assumption of women as an already constituted and coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location” (Mohanty 65-74); 2) the uncritical manner in which ““proof” of universality and cross-cultural validity are provided” (74-78); and 3) as a result of 1 and 2, a flattened idea of women as an oppressed group is assumed, leading to the image of the third-world woman that has clear political effects (78-81). I will focus on Mohanty’s conceptualization of the first and third moves as a lens through which I will analyze the representations of Sarah, Little Bee, and Little Bee’s othered companions as either a referent or a preconstituted third-world woman.

Within the first move, Mohanty’s assessment of women as one universal category of analysis is important to my argument because, before the colonialist move can be made, there must be an assumption of women as one category. Mohanty focuses on specific ways in which Western feminists construct third-world women as a monolithic and powerless group, including their characterization as “victims of male violence” and “universal dependents.” These concepts are essential to my argument because the othered females in *Little Bee* are all represented within these frameworks. Finally, I will use Mohanty’s discussion of Western women as the subjects of power, which is how Sarah O’Rourke is represented, and the “colonialist move” of situating women as an oppressed category in Western feminist writing about third-world women,

as illustrated by the characterization of Little Bee and the other refugee women in comparison to their referent, Sarah. As the platform of my analysis of the female characters in *Little Bee*, I will use Mohanty's idea of the preconstituted third-world woman.

Chapter 2: Sarah as the Implicit Referent

As I've discussed in the Introduction, Mohanty asserts that Western feminists present women as part of a binary in which men possess the power, but who also fail to understand themselves as part of a first-world/third-world hierarchy. In many Western feminist discussions of third-world women, then, Western feminists situate themselves as separate from third-world women by virtue of their own Western standards. *Little Bee's* Sarah O'Rourke clearly illustrates Mohanty's "third-world difference," for she self-represents as career-oriented, sexually free, adventurous, and undeniably first-world English, as opposed to her othered representation of Little Bee and other women of color in the novel. Based on Mohanty's analysis of specific Western feminist writings, the character of Sarah O'Rourke is the clear Western model by which Little Bee and the female refugees in the novel are measured. Sarah is situated not as a woman of essentially equal standing among all the novel's female characters cross-culturally, but, rather, as a yardstick that signifies Little Bee's third-world inability to "measure up" – in her domestic tendencies, sexual limitations, and inability to travel freely, for instance – on any scale associated with Sarah.

Antithetical to the stereotype of the third-world woman being domesticated and familial, Sarah is neither; rather, she is job-focused to the point of neglecting her family. Sarah's work-life exists to control and maintain her privileged surroundings and status, and her family life appears to be an accoutrement to all of that. She is the managing editor of a fashionable London magazine called *Nixie*, which features beautiful models, contemporary clothing, and provocative yet vacuous articles detailing such ideas as "a new kind of orgasm you could apparently only get with the boss" (Cleave 33). Sarah is

loath to relinquish her power or status as a high-level editor at this sophisticated magazine, even at the expense of her much more practical responsibilities as a mother, as she likens the duration of Britain's then-current war in Afghanistan, a potential yet unlikely subject for her magazine, to the age of her son, noting that "Sometimes a particular event would cause me momentarily to look at one or the other of them – my son, or the war – with my full attention, and at times like these I would always think, Gosh, haven't you grown?" (33). She does not pay close attention to news that impacts othered human beings in the world, and she does not pay close attention to her own child, either.

Sarah is a caricature of a modern woman, who lives to make her own choices, including whether to be emotionally and physically present for her son and her husband. On the day her husband commits suicide, Sarah is aware enough to see signs of his anguish but too determined to get to her office to console him in any meaningful way. And on the day of her husband's funeral, when her son is so distraught that he jumps into the grave of his dead father, it is not Sarah who consoles him, but rather Little Bee, who is herself traumatized by her past and her more recent detention center experiences. Sarah, instead, looks down at her hysterical son in the grave and thinks to herself, "Why doesn't someone do something?" (Cleave 43). Sarah's preoccupation with her frivolous magazine and the life it affords leads to a disconnect with her son and husband, revealing a lack of familial compassion, which, in turn presents her as distinct, through Mohanty's lens, from the third-world women in the novel, who do not have the freedom to choose a trendy-magazine career over the well-being of their family members, and who are, by virtue of the "third-world difference" that Mohanty identifies,

familial and domestic. Sarah's presentation as a woman whose family is not of primary importance, then, is now portrayed as a self-perceived positive factor in that she has the freedom to be an uninvolved parent or partner, while the familial stamp of the third-world women that Sarah implicitly measures with a first-world rubric is seen as part of the unfortunate make-up of a persecuted woman based on her geographic locale.

Sarah also differs from her third-world female counterparts in *Little Bee* in terms of her uninhibited sexuality. She not only begins an illicit affair in a government office with a man whom she has just met, but she also continues her sexual liaisons after she promises her husband to end them. On the day of her husband's funeral, Sarah wantonly entertains her lover in her dead husband's bed. Actively choosing to assert her own sexuality with a man who is not her husband "was a relatively minor transgression" (Cleave 161-162), according to Sarah, and she blames it on that "cussed streak in me – the one that made me launch *Nixie* instead of joining some tamer glossy; the one that made me start an affair with Lawrence instead of mending my fences with Andrew" (99). Sarah diminishes the moral weight of the sexual choices she makes based on her "cussed streak," which is motivated only by her capacity to choose for herself how to conduct her life, sexually and otherwise. Sarah's sexual agency, within or outside of traditional morality, is decidedly Western, and this separates her, in Mohanty's perspective, from the clear fact that the third-world female characters in the novel have all suffered or witnessed sexual violence and oppression on a scale unimagined by someone like Sarah, who understands her sexual freedom to be part of her identity as a Western woman.

Little Bee has witnessed horrific sexual violence and has been traumatized by it, so much so that she now hides any physical sign of her own femininity. Sarah, on the other hand, revels in the freedom of her own sexuality, wearing on her vacation in Nigeria's warzone a "very small green bikini" (Cleave 109). In retrospect, Sarah sees but does not entirely understand her self-presentation as a liberated Western woman when she repeats herself:

I will say that again, and maybe I will begin to understand it myself. In the contested delta area of an African country in the middle of a three-way oil war, because there was a beach next to the war, because the state tourist board had mail-merged tickets for that beach to every magazine listed in the Writers' and Artists' Yearbook, because it was that year's cut, and because as editor I was first in the queue when distributors sent their own freebies to my magazine's office, I was wearing a very small green bandeau bikini from Hermès. (109)

All the privileges of sexual freedom that Sarah enjoys as a middle-class Western woman culminate in her questionable decision to wear such a scant piece of clothing in a very specific and dangerous location in Nigeria. She does not quite understand what is evident as an intrinsic part of her identity: her sexual freedom to be exhibited when and wherever she chooses. Sarah's sexual freedom and her position as a referent in the novel serve to reinforce and define the repressed freedoms of the collective othered women, depicting all of them as already different from herself and beneath her station in life, regardless of any specific third-world woman's situation or identity.

Contrary to all the "unworldly" and "oppressed" subaltern counterparts in the novel, Sarah also self-presents as adventurous and brave, for she feels an innate,

Western sense of freedom regarding her movements throughout the world. On taking an impromptu holiday to Nigeria, Sarah feels “an adolescent thrill” at the idea of traveling to a distant and dangerous place (Cleave 99). After all, she reminds her husband, they had “taken [their] honeymoon in Cuba, and parts of that place were horrific” (99). The idea of “horrific” areas in a country are little more than an inconvenience to someone like Sarah, who can announce her British citizenship and flash her affluence in order to avoid many dangers. Even her idea of “danger” in a third-world country has been flattened, making it seem to her that all dangers extant in the Global South are the same and are all avoidable via her perceived elevated status as a citizen of the metropole.

This perceived sense of adventurous invincibility makes its way into her decisions while in Nigeria, as well. When her husband refuses to cut off his finger to save Little Bee and her sister, Sarah is inspired to do it herself. Sarah is presented in the moment as a white savior to the subaltern girls: if her Western husband is unwilling to act in the moment, then this Western woman will: “[She] chop[ped] off her middle finger with one simple chop, like a girl topping a carrot, neatly, on a quiet Surrey Saturday, between gymkhana and lunch” (Cleave 115). Sarah refuses to be anything other than brave and adventurous, and that includes being recklessly courageous. Even Sarah’s act of accompanying Little Bee during her deportation to Nigeria is motivated by a sense of willful adventure and by the confidence that either her citizenship or money will save her and her son should they get into trouble. Her certainty that her identity can save Little Bee is always questionable, but that certainty is secondary to her belief that she and her son will be safe. Yes, Sarah wants to save her asylum-seeking friend,

insisting she “won’t ever give up on Little Bee” (261), and, yes, there is personal danger involved, such as when the soldiers are shooting toward Charlie, and there was “a jet of sand flying up from the hard beach beside him” (263), but ultimately Sarah’s understanding of her own bravery in following Little Bee is undone by her arrogant Western-ness and her identity that is always in stark contrast to that of Little Bee. Distinct once again from Mohanty’s idea of the third-world women in the story, Sarah’s “adventurous and brave” behavior aligns with her self-perceived place of power next to her ever-threatened third-world sisters. In this case, Mohanty’s “third-world difference” allows Sarah a paternalistic narrative of being different than – and, in fact, a savior to – Little Bee, whom she regards as always-disadvantaged.

In the next chapter on Little Bee’s character, I will discuss her incessant fear of “the men,” a homogeneous group of Nigerian males who incite a victimizing fear within Little Bee. Little Bee’s and Sarah’s responses to ‘the men’⁸ whom Little Bee dreads from one locale to the next are strikingly different. One of the groups of nebulous Nigerian men are those who hunt the two sisters on the Nigerian beach when they all encounter Sarah and her husband. Despite Sarah’s shared encounter with Little Bee and ‘the men,’ Sarah is never presented as a fearful victim to Black Nigerian men, even when she returns to Nigeria at the end of the novel. When the military police attempt to detain Little Bee at the airport in Abuja in the final pages, Sarah looks straight at the men and

⁸ Mohanty argues that when third-world women are defined repeatedly as victims of male violence, not only are they objectified, but, consequently, so are the third-world men constructed as “‘subjects-who-perpetrate-violence’, and (every) society into a simple opposition between the powerless (read: women) and the powerful (read: men)” (Mohanty 67). In this novel, “the men” are simultaneously several groups of violent Nigerian males – all of whom are objectified by *their* fixed construction.

tells them, "I am a British journalist. Anything you do to this woman, I will report it" (Cleave 251). Sarah is neither fearful of these armed males nor traumatized by her previous encounter with other Nigerian soldiers, including one who used a machete to murder her hotel guard right in front of her. Immediately after he is killed, Sarah says, "We all stood in silence as we watched the guard bleed to death. It took the longest time" (111). Despite this horrific encounter during her first visit to Nigeria, Sarah self-presents only as confident in the face of "the men" during her next visit at the end of the novel. This is in stark contrast to Little Bee's representation as a perpetual victim of this vague male group, for she is "very frightened" upon arrival in Abuja and stands silent while Sarah does all of the talking for her (252).

While Sarah highlights by contrast Mohanty's "third-world difference" in almost every area of her life, her character attempts to align itself with Little Bee in terms of being a victim. This self-proclaimed victimhood would seem to undermine my contention that, through Mohanty's argument, Sarah self-identifies as a referent – if that victimhood actually existed. In fact, though, Sarah's "victimhood" is always self-imposed to justify her own complicity in morally questionable situations. For instance, Sarah feels victimized by losing her finger in Nigeria. In any of Sarah's memories of that fateful day, she focuses on her own injury and no one else's. On the couple's journey back to London, Sarah thinks, "Through the fog of painkillers, its approach unseen and unexpected, the thought presented itself to me that it would be sensible not to let Andrew touch my injury, then or ever again" because she is so angry with her husband (Cleave 125). Sarah will forever place blame for her injury on Andrew's lack of heroism.

Over and over again, Sarah aims attention at her missing finger: how her missing finger itches, how others “glanced at the stump on my finger” (Cleave 92), and how “the middle finger of the left hand glove was truncated and stitched” (94). As an alternative, Sarah could have left the finger on the glove alone so that it did not call attention to her missing finger, but her self-perceived victimhood will not allow her to miss this opportunity for attention. In Sarah’s memory of the day she met Little Bee, Sarah says, “what does one call the type of meeting where one gains an African girl and loses E, D, and C on the computer keyboard?” (25). Sarah’s obsession with her own finger might be symbolic of her nagging conscience regarding her responsibilities to Little Bee and her sister, but because Sarah does not ever meaningfully act on those promptings, her missing finger becomes symbolic instead for all the pain that day on the beach has caused her in her otherwise privileged life. Likewise, Sarah flips the narrative of other aspects of her life, making herself the suffering object. Instead of owning her part in her marital affair, Sarah also sees herself as a victim of her husband’s offenses when she tells Andrew, “You bullied me. I just never felt loved or supported” (163). In this moment when Sarah should feel remorseful, she plays the victim in her relationship with Andrew. It is she who repeatedly commits adultery and sacrifices any vestige of marriage sanctity, but she disparages her husband to avoid responsibility. Sarah is a victim in her own irresponsible and Western mind, but she is not Mohanty’s female victim with the “third world difference.” Sarah once again self-presents as the subject of power in this constructed narrative of the Western woman.

In *Little Bee*, there are two minor female characters – Clarissa, Sarah’s long-time friend and features editor, and an unnamed immigration officer, whose progressive and

superior self-presentations serve to reinforce Sarah's place as a referent. These two Western female characters perceive *Little Bee's* refugee women as inferior and objectified characters, separate from themselves by virtue of their own Western perspectives. Clarissa is presented as a career woman whose high salary supports her expensive and fashionable taste in clothing; her meticulous ensemble of an "aubergine shirt dress with a smooth black fish-skin belt and glossy black knee-high boots" is a testament to her unfettered options (Cleave 200). Clarissa's decisions in all aspects of her Western life are unhampered by any class, ethnic, or racial challenges, and these circumstances inform her perceived position as a superior example of a powerful female. It is evident that her intemperate sexual life contributes to that felt sense of dominance when she proudly "[wears] yesterday's clothes" because last night, she "met yesterday's man," presumably had sex, and is now openly pleased with her freedom to do so (32). Clarissa is further depicted as maritally open-minded in that she wonders aloud why Sarah might go "Out in public? With your husband? Isn't that terribly last season?" (35). Her contemporary representation sees an affair as fashionable and a committed relationship as sexually constrained and backward-thinking, much like her perception of the third-world "woman who was trying to get out of Baghdad" (33) that Sarah wants to include in their magazine. Clarissa, though, is concerned that their readership will decline, and instead of writing about female "refugees to the UK" (203), she is eager to publish an article about "a woman with two ugly daughters and only enough money to pay for cosmetic surgery for one of them" (201). While a trivial discussion of Western sex issues takes precedence in Clarissa's mind, her depiction in the novel situates her as a referent, lacking any empathy for the re-presented weak and

hopeless British asylum-seekers. Clarissa regards these third-world women as disassociated from herself in terms of their freedom of choice and movement, and she, therefore, views them as insignificant objects in her world. The female asylum-seekers are presented in their helplessness and desperation as preconstituted third-world victims when measured next to Clarissa, and the added presence of Clarissa's self-presentation bolsters Sarah's position as a referent in *Little Bee*.

Like Clarissa's presentation as superior to the female refugees in *Little Bee*, the female immigration officer who transports Little Bee to the airport also self-presents as separate from the third-world women she detains in her line of work. The officer assumes the girl's ignorance and "was surprised" at Little Bee's exemplary English, but is quick to assure her that "It doesn't matter how you talk . . . The point is you don't belong here" (Cleave 246). The officer imperiously informs her prisoner that to belong in Britain is to "share our values," and seeing only what the guard presumes to be Little Bee's ethnicity and refugee-status – that is, her weakness and fear – she assumes that Little Bee's values do not align with her own more authoritative and Western traits (246). Like Fanon's eventual awareness of the futile fact that "it is not enough to try to be white, but that a white totality must be achieved" (Fanon 193), Little Bee realizes that her hopes of earning acceptance with her mind and actions will never come to pass, for "The color of [her] skin . . . is black. All the inabilities to understand are born of this blunder" (Fanon 193), so Little Bee resignedly "turned away from the woman and looked out at the rain" (Cleave 246). The female immigration officer is depicted as a Western woman with a degree of power beyond that of her third-world detainee, and the officer uses this self-perception to measure and assign hegemonic

stereotypes to Little Bee and all the third-world women with whom she interacts, further reinforcing the referent status of the Western co-narrator of the novel, Sarah O'Rourke.

Within the context of Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes," Sarah O'Rourke is a "dominant 'representation' of western feminism" in *Little Bee* (Mohanty 64). Sarah is cast in the role "as the norm or referent" by virtue of her Western ethnocentrism (65), and her Western presence and attributes conflate the identity of Little Bee and all Nigerian women into one flattened and subordinate group. Because Sarah, as one of two narrators, is presented as a Western feminist subject, who is implicitly viewed as "educated, modern, as having control over [her] own [body] and [sexuality], and the 'freedom' to make [her] own decisions" (65), an opposing narrative of an object, her co-narrator, Little Bee, emerges – a narrative in which Little Bee does not share in Sarah's Western-ness, and, therefore, must belong to Mohanty's idea of homogeneous "third-world women," whose identities are abridged and dependent on their Western counterparts in the novel.

Chapter 3: Little Bee and the Othered Women as “Victims of Male Violence”

In *Little Bee*, the third-world female characters, including Little Bee, her sister, and the refugee women from the detention center are all portrayed as powerless due to what Mohanty describes as their “object status (the way in which they are affected or not affected by certain institutions and systems)” (Mohanty 66). They are already categorized, according to Mohanty’s logic, as a standardized group of victims of male violence and Western dependence and, according to Ngũgĩ, victims of their own colonized and decolonized culture because of their ‘colonial alienation’ as a result of that dependence (Ngũgĩ 17). The effect of their perpetual objectification as helpless victims throughout the book is that they are never fully realized as human beings.

Despite Little Bee’s position as co-narrator and co-protagonist in the novel, she is rarely developed as a human being beyond her attempts to survive the various groups of “the men”⁹ who haunt her.¹⁰ Little Bee exerts a great deal of energy avoiding, dreaming, planning, and assimilating, but she is always represented as a fixed victim.

⁹ Little Bee refers repeatedly in the novel to “the men,” initially when she tells the story of men destroying her village, and later, referring to any group of authority figures whom she perceives as threatening: police, soldiers, immigration officials, etc. The haunting memories of the men who kill her sister are reinforced by the actual men she encounters in England.

¹⁰ One example of her character development is her connection to Charlie as his caretaker, but even then, her position as caregiver situates Little Bee, according to a definition provided in feminist author Maria Isabel Romero Ruiz’s *Identities and Bodies in Colonial and Postcolonial History and Literature*, as more of a “mammy” figure than anything else. Ruiz says, “From the ‘mammy’ to the ‘jezebel,’ stereotypes defining and reinforcing the representation of the black woman as irreducible Other” have persisted to justify many types of oppression (28). She goes on to explain, “In the rigid Cartesian separation between body and mind, women have traditionally been denied intelligence, confined to a passive, ‘naturally’ inferior role” (28). Even in Little Bee’s more nuanced relationship with Charlie, it seems, she is categorized by virtue of Ruiz’s definition of a “mammy” figure.

Early on, Little Bee intimates her fear of male violence when she notices that the men who are locked up in the detention center “looked hungry. I thought they watched me with ravenous eyes” (Cleave 6). Some of the older refugee women detained in the Black Hill Immigration Removal Center advise Little Bee to either “look good or talk good, [so] I decided that talking would be safer for me” (6). Little Bee dresses in oversized clothing and even binds her breasts with fabric to mask her identity as a woman. Her response to “the men” here is to hide herself from them, which might remove her from the gaze of men, but it does not increase her social status.

Nightmares and suicide plotting are further examples of Little Bee’s responses to her fear of “the men.” Little Bee says, “For the first six months in the detention center, I screamed every night and in the day I imagined a thousand ways to kill myself” in case they showed up (Cleave 47). Little Bee never effectuates her detailed plans, but “[after] a hundred sleepless nights” she is placed in the medical wing of Black Hill because of her screaming and suicide ideations (48). Eventually, Little Bee smiles to herself at a death joke she makes at her own expense, and this begins her healing. Little Bee realizes that her suicide planning is the only reason she is still alive, for she has “killed [herself] back to life” by persistently remaining alive to imagine another suicide (49). As she gains strength from eating and sleeping, she is not inspired to end her suicide mission, but, rather, she believes she will make herself healthy so that she can “be stronger for the act of suicide” later (49).

According to Little Bee, it is at this point that “the detention officers gave all of us a copy of a book called LIFE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM” (Cleave 49). This merging of the violence of the detention center and the textbook “education” Little Bee experiences

is reminiscent of Spivak's idea that part of the subaltern's construction consists of "mingling epistemic violence with the advancement of learning and civilization" ("Subaltern" 94). In this way, the subaltern women Spivak addresses in "Can the Subaltern Speak," are reflected in the character of Little Bee. Little Bee explains that, after reading about England and how to fit in, she begins to understand her dire need to assimilate if she is to have any hope of documented citizenship in Great Britain. Little Bee is actively and accurately assessing the political climate of the United Kingdom, as well as determining how to align herself with the politics that are best suited to her survival and ability to thrive in the country. She is acquiring information that she believes will certainly increase her assimilation with her host country's citizens, which she understands to be a path to power, but the consumption of that textbook information also reinforces in Little Bee what both Ngũgĩ and Fanon discuss as the internalization of the colonizing culture, along with an alienation of the native culture (Ngũgĩ 17) and then, finally, a dependence on her colonizer (Fanon 17). Little Bee's representation as a victim of her circumstances continues unabated at this point in the novel.

Even as Little Bee avoids the consummation of her own suicide, she is, nevertheless, situated as a potential victim of the consequences of two other suicides as soon as she leaves the detainment center. Once they are released from Black Hill, unofficially and without their papers, Little Bee and her three refugee-companions (whom I will discuss at length at the end of this chapter) find temporary residence at a farmhouse nearby. That first night, one of the three women hangs herself from the rafters of the barn. Instead of awakening Yvette, the one traveler for whom Little Bee has great affection, Little Bee sneaks away from the scene because "if you are a

refugee . . . [m]any things arrive after death – sadness, questions, and policemen – and none of these can be answered when your papers are not in order” (Cleave 80). Little Bee might have been able to find strength in numbers to grow outside of a Western dependence had she awakened Yvette to accompany her, but Little Bee’s fear of what the ‘policemen’ (presented as yet another male group) might do to her in such a situation motivates her to escape alone, once again a victim of circumstances perpetuated by “the men” (4). Little Bee’s presentation remains, within Mohanty’s framework, a preconstituted third-world woman, all of whom many Western feminists categorize as being victimized by men and the institutions they represent.

Further perpetuating the binary of powerless females versus powerful males, Little Bee is depicted as avoiding the consequences of Andrew’s suicide because of a specific group – the police – that Little Bee identifies as male, as well. When she first arrives at the O’Rourkes’ home in Kingston-upon-Thames, Little Bee hides in their garden for two days and nights, uncertain of how she might best approach the couple. While she might be seen as cautiously mindful in order to preserve her freedom, she is presented as once again helpless, like a small bird, even as she waits unseen: “I did not have anything to eat, so I came out when it was dark and I ate the seeds from the bird feeder and I drank the water from the tap on the outside of the house” (Cleave 191). Little Bee hides, watching Andrew in his “clinically depressed” state (191), and once while he is weeping, he sees her. In his altered mindset, however, he believes Little Bee is a ghost, vengefully haunting him for allowing her sister to die. Andrew hangs himself from a wooden beam in the ceiling, and although Little Bee attempts and fails to aid him, she does not call anyone to resuscitate him because she thinks, “If I call for help,

the authorities will know that I am here. And if the authorities know that I am here, they will deport me, or maybe even worse” (193). Little Bee deliberates at great length, and before she knows it, five minutes have passed, and “I realized it was too late and I had saved myself. And then I went to the refrigerator and ate, because I was very hungry” (194).

At first glance, this moment of survival might be construed as a sign of strength except that her actions are couched in third-world stereotypes. Little Bee’s decision to save herself here, as when she saved herself at the detention center from suicide by contemplating, emerges out of frantic indecision, not necessarily intention, and she is depicted in animalistic terms regarding her intent to rummage through the refrigerator, despite what she has just witnessed. Here, as in the earlier barn scene, Little Bee is situated as a primitive third-world woman, desperate, indecisive, and always fearful of police “[taking] me away” (Cleave 194). The animalistic depiction of Little Bee and her fear of the men in her life renders her a continued victim and a persistent representation of a third-world woman whose powerless identity was constructed long before her textual development in the novel.

This reminder of the constraints on Little Bee’s agency is further perpetuated when she is arrested by the police in London. Just a few moments earlier, she had begun to walk away from Sarah and all of her family-related drama, but when Little Bee notices Charlie, ignored by Sarah and her lover, Little Bee feels obligated to be there for him; Little Bee is situated here as a consequential victim of Sarah neglecting her son, for whom Little Bee feels responsible. Sarah rejoins the group just before Charlie disappears, and in desperation to find him, she forgets about the risk posed to Little Bee

and insists, along with Lawrence, on assigning Little Bee the task of telephoning the authorities, who subsequently arrest Little Bee for having no proper documentation. Little Bee is again renounced, this time by Sarah and Lawrence, for the sake of Charlie's well-being. As an object of sacrifice, Little Bee is assigned the role of a powerless being in the presence of "the men" (in this case, the police and government authorities) from whom she has been "running, running, running, without one single moment of peace" (Cleave 259) since the beginning of the novel, aligning the presentation of her character with Mohanty's objectified and preconstituted third-world woman.

In the final chapter, Little Bee makes the ultimate surrender of herself to a group of men – again – to save Charlie's life, suggesting, once and for all, that her character has, at best, an illusion of agency. Little Bee's depiction as persistently fearful of men who have perpetrated violence on or near her – on the beach, inside the detention center, and outside the detention center – suspends her character's development and situates her as an object of the amorphous "men" she must always evade. The final scene opens on the same beach where Little Bee first met Sarah and Andrew. Little Bee, Sarah, and Charlie have returned to the sea so that Little Bee could say good-bye to her sister, whose remains had been discarded there by the vigilante soldiers years before. While relaxing, they see armed men walking toward them down the beach, and Sara realizes that "those policemen in Abuja" notified the soldiers who are headed toward them (Cleave 260). Men, again, are after Little Bee, rendering her character fearful and powerless. She runs to merge with the other Nigerian women on the beach, hoping the armed men will not recognize her, but Charlie eventually runs toward Little

Bee and the “rocky point where [Little Bee and the other women] were sitting” (263). One of the riflemen points his gun and shoots at Charlie, and at that moment, Little Bee runs out from the camouflage of Nigerian women, screaming, “Don’t shoot, don’t shoot, I AM THE ONE THAT YOU WANT” (263). Little Bee is taken prisoner by “the men,” and Sarah and Charlie are free to go wherever they choose. Little Bee’s character relinquishes her life for that of Sarah’s son, and the novel, once again, positions this third-world woman as a preconstituted, impotent being whose existence, when viewed through Mohanty’s “Under Western Eyes”-lens, is always oppressed by men and always subordinate to Western women and their needs. Little Bee’s objectification by her fear of the men is reinforced through her sister’s and her refugee-friends’ experiences.

Little Bee’s sister, Nkiruka, further informs the novel’s perspective of third-world women as sexually oppressed and victims of male violence. Nkiruka is barbarically raped and murdered by an unidentified group of mercenaries who chase the sisters down on the beach,¹¹ and this horror occurs very shortly after she has been traumatized by “the men” who destroyed her village. Nkiruka’s character is never developed beyond her sexual identity. From the first page of the book, her character “used to smile at the men in our village in the short summer after she was a girl but before she was really a woman, and certainly before the evening my mother took her to a quiet place for a serious talk” (Cleave 1). Nkiruka’s character is situated at the cusp of her sexual

¹¹ The leader of this group of men is also incompletely developed by his description as a Nigerian who had been educated in London at some point in his life. He orders the death of Nkiruka, and then he commits suicide; no further context is ever provided as to how his British education impacted him, whether that education played a part in his part in his decision to hunt and kill women and children as a vocation, or whether it played a part in his decision to commit suicide. His undeveloped presence as a third-world man reinforces Little Bee’s undeveloped character as a preconstituted third-world woman.

coming-of-age, and she smiles at men – not boys – in such a suggestive manner that her mother feels obligated to address her behavior. Just a few pages later in the novel, Nkiruka is described as becoming “a woman in the growing season, in the African sun¹², and who can blame her if the great red heat of it made her giddy and flirtatious?” (7). Later, Little Bee remarks that her big sister “was the kind of girl the men said could make them forget their troubles. She was the kind of girl the women said was trouble” (101). Here, even her burgeoning identity is determined by the responses of the men in her life, and her moral integrity is cast into doubt by the suggestion that her flirtatious personality “was trouble” according to other women in their village. Nkiruka is represented as little other than Little Bee’s “beautiful sister” (131), who is sexually curious and who is barbarically raped and dismembered. The juxtaposition of her scantily developed, promiscuous personality and her sexually violent death are consequential in their positioning in the novel, for she is objectified as one whose sole purpose in the book is to represent, like Little Bee, what Mohanty views in her analysis as a “victim of male control – the ‘sexually oppressed’” (Mohanty 67). Nkiruka is used as a means to an end in that her barely developed character and interactions with men reinforce Little Bee’s permanent victim-status as well as the pattern of categorized male violence that permeates Little Bee’s world.

¹² As I have noted earlier regarding the “mammy” and “jezebel” figures discussed in Maria Isabel Romero Ruiz’s *Identities and Bodies in Colonial and Postcolonial History and Literature*, Little Bee’s perception that “the African sun” is the cause of her sister’s blossoming sexuality speaks to the colonial and stereotypical view of African women that Little Bee’s character seems to have internalized regarding a “jezebel” interpretation of African women (Ruiz 28).

Like Nkiruka, Little Bee's refugee-companions from the detention center as well as her "girls back home" – an imaginary group of Nigerian friends whom I will detail later in this section – are further represented as props rather than fully realized human beings, for they appear not as individuals, but as parallel examples of Little Bee's representation as a woman exploited by men. The refugee group is comprised of four women of color: Little Bee, Yvette, "the girl with no name," and "the girl in the yellow sari" (Cleave 14). Yvette's character is represented most thoroughly, for she at least has a name in the novel, but her representation is clearly aligned with Mohanty's definition of the preconstituted third-world woman. Like Nkiruka, her sexual desirability is highlighted in her brief rendering as a third-world woman. "Her thing was beauty, not talking" (9), for Yvette's broken English and strong foreign accent, neither of which the character of Little Bee presents in the novel at any time, hinder any serious message on Yvette's part, depicting her as one of many stereotyped subaltern women who cannot speak for one reason or another. Yvette's use of a mixture of Creole and English is reminiscent of Fanon's reference to a mixture of Creole and French called "pidgin," a racist term used to stereotype an amalgamated language of some colonized subjects that did not conform to Western standards of grammar. Fanon asserts in his study that white people address Black people in pidgin "to express this thought: You'd better keep your place" (Fanon 34). In other words, per Fanon, to speak pidgin is to "be a good n***** [in the eyes of white interlocuters]; . . . To make him talk pidgin is to fasten him to the effigy of him, to snare him, to imprison him, the eternal victim of an essence, of an appearance for which he is not responsible" (35). Fanon argues that because pidgin does not, from a Western perspective, reflect a Western ideal of being educated or

intelligent, when the colonizers expected their subjects to continue to use the language, it amounted to permanently situating the colonized people in a hopelessly inferior intellectual and cultural space.

Yevette's representation as speaking in a variation of English, even though her national language, like Little Bee's, is English, might be perceived as an identifying marker, and even a method of colonial resistance. Ngũgĩ discusses in his writing the fact that "when the peasantry and the working class were compelled by necessity or history to adopt the language of the master, they Africanised it . . . [and] created new African languages, like Krio in Sierra Leone or Pidgin in Nigeria," keeping their native languages "alive in the daily speech" (Ngũgĩ 23). Perhaps if Yevette were situated in Jamaica and was depicted as resisting Western culture in any other ways, this might be believable, but a critical analysis of the lack of depth in her character's portrayal follows Fanon's assertion "that the European has a fixed concept of the Negro" (Fanon 35), and Yevette's representation perpetuates this static perception.

In addition to her language, Yevette's appearance also lends to her inadequate development as a character. Little Bee observes Yevette's focus on her outward aspect because she has evidently gone to a great deal of trouble in the detention center charity boxes "to put together an outfit that is truly an ensemble" (Cleave 9). Her attractive appearance and open discussions with Little Bee regarding her sexual experiences situates Yevette, like Nkiruka, as someone who is at once overtly attractive and the victim of male violence. Once outside the detention center, Yevette wonders whether the taxi driver who will fetch them is attractive, for she tells Little Bee, "Eighteen months gone without a man, Bug" (53), suggesting that she desires sex after such a long time.

Her desire for sex after so many months of celibacy is not intrinsically problematic. What is problematic, however, is that there is an implication that third-world spaces are such that sexual violence is a norm, and that is what Yevette eventually confides to Little Bee when she says that if she were sent back to Jamaica, she would face sexual punishment worse than prostitution, and “dey gonna make yore family suffah . . . like you wake up in you chillen’s blood, and suddenly yo house is very very quiet, fo ivver an ivver, amen” (71). Even though Yevette appears to have a sexual freedom not unlike that of the Western Sarah, Yevette’s sexuality is constrained by the fear of men who will sexually exploit her and kill her. The cumulative and disturbing effect of this juxtaposition of sexuality and fear within two othered women (Nkiruka and Yevette) in *Little Bee* illustrates Mohanty’s argument that these preconstituted third-world women’s sexual identities are always controlled – to the extent that these refugee women are presented as both welcoming men in their lives and being horrifically violated by them. Neither Yevette nor Nkiruka is presented as having an identity she can call her own, for her representation is ultimately defined by being attractive to and violated by male characters.

Yevette’s character is further represented as a perpetual victim when she begs Little Bee to change their taxi destination from Kingston-upon-Thames, which she misunderstands to be Kingston, Jamaica: “Anywhere but Jamaica. Dey mens be killin me de minnit I ketch dere, kill me dead” (Cleave 15). Yevette, like Little Bee, is consistently portrayed as running from and a victim of violent men. She communicates her terror at being sent back to the men in Jamaica who will exploit her, recognizing later that being sexually exploited by white government men in the detention center

“was nuthin . . . Compare to what dey do to me, if I be sent back to Jamaica? Nuthin” (72). Regardless of where she is geographically, Yevette is presented as an already-conceived third-world female, who is always subjected to violence at the hands of men. More realized and nuanced than Little Bee’s other companions, however, the characterization of Yevette has the most potential to break the mold of being seen as the preconstituted third-world woman, but once Little Bee walks away from the girl-with-no-name’s suicide, she also walks away from Yevette, who ceases then to exist within the text, rendering her yet another under-developed and preconstituted third-world female character who, like Nkiruka and Little Bee, is victimized by males.

Little Bee’s other two refugee friends also follow a pattern of male-dominated and objectified third-world women, and they similarly function in *Little Bee* to amplify the preconstituted third-world woman representation of Little Bee’s character. “The girl in the yellow sari” is the first unnamed refugee girl; Little Bee explains, “she was thin and her skin was dark brown and her eyes were green like a jelly sweet . . . She was so pretty, I cannot even explain” (Cleave 10). Like Yevette, the girl in the yellow sari’s “thing was beauty,” not talking, for she speaks quietly “in some language that sounded like butterflies drowning in honey” (13). Even when she is quiet, she appears to a Western taxi driver as though she is “not right in the head” because she is so amazed by her apparent first vision of an automobile that she examines it like a small child might, looking straight into its headlights and giggling (56). Her ignorance, in the context of Mohanty’s argument, characterizes the yellow-sari-girl as an “average third-world-woman,” with “the third-world difference.” This girl’s hampered communication impedes her ability to communicate with anyone else in the novel, rendering her as another

message-less and powerless refugee woman. Further reinforcing her helplessness, she has no belongings, carrying an empty see-through bag everywhere she goes, and the only detail of her story as a human being is “the scar across her throat, right across it, thick like your little finger. It was white as a bone against her dark skin. It was knotted and curled around her windpipe . . . Like it thought it still had a chance of finishing her off” (58).

The specificity of this scar that is presumably given to her by violent men from whom she is running, is the only meaningful aspect of this woman’s portrayed identity, for she does not speak in a language Little Bee can understand, and she carries no documents that tell her story for her; the girl-with-the-yellow-sari is represented as an unnamed and stereotyped victim of male violence in *Little Bee*, and that scar is the entirety of her evolution throughout the course of the novel. Her only purpose is to reinforce the idea of the preconstituted third-world woman and co-narrator, Little Bee, who is also perpetually running from unnamed men.

The final member of the band of refugee-women in the novel serves the same objectified purpose as Yevette and the girl in yellow. This fourth girl is also unnamed, but she is neither beautiful nor good at speaking; “This girl’s thing was, she had her story all written down and made official. There were rubber stamps at the end of her story that said in red ink this is TRUE” (Cleave 10-11). This girl’s story began in the same way that “All the [refugee] girls’ stories started out, *the-men-came-and-they*. And all of the stories finished, *and-then-they-put-me-in-here*” (10). She, like all the refugee women in *Little Bee*, is a victim of male violence, as were her daughters, who were tied-up, raped, and kidnapped. The girl with the documents speaks very little, but “her story

had made her so sad that she did not know the name of the place where she was at and she did not want to know” (11). She is uncommunicative and willfully ignorant within her status as a victim, and so she never develops beyond that point. Her intentionally inconspicuous attire of blue t-shirt and jeans speaks to her desire to assimilate and survive. This clothing is unremarkable except for her very Western “white Dunlop Green Flash trainers,” which dangle from the ceiling of the farmer’s barn the night she commits suicide, perhaps signifying that no matter how much she fits into Western society on the surface, her potential for survival in that society is hopeless (10).

The girl with the documents is a victim of male violence, loses her family, runs, is placed in detainment, suffers mentally, and then commits suicide: her story is so similar to all the refugee women in the novel that she is, through the lens of Mohanty’s analysis, indistinct and one-of-a-number of “average third-world” women. She is, according to Mohanty, the kind of woman who is preconstituted and objectified by virtue of her underdeveloped representation as a female victim of male violence who has the additional attribute of not being Western.

There is one last group of third-world women represented in terms of being victims of male violence in *Little Bee*, and their growth, too, is limited by their very characterization as already being dead throughout the novel. “The girls back home” are introduced by Little Bee as a nebulous collection of “Nkiruka and the other girls from my village” (Cleave 4). As the novel explains that everyone else in her village has presumably been murdered, Little Bee’s “girls back home” no longer even exist as living

human beings but as ghosts, rendering them voiceless¹³ by virtue of their lifelessness. These othered representations from Little Bee's small hamlet speak Nigerian English as their national language, but they do not understand Western English or Western customs, and Little Bee must patiently explain to them that a "topless [woman] does not mean, the lady in the newspaper did not have an upper body. It means, she was not wearing any garments on her upper body. You see the difference?" (4). This one-way discussion requires Little Bee's patient explanation because her mates from home are, like the refugee women in the novel, presented in the context of Mohanty's argument as ignorant in that they are unaware of slippery Anglo-English in its non-literal presentation as well as technological advancements. Little Bee, on the other hand, has begun to master the ambiguous English language, but that is only because of her internalization of Western information via the English books she has read. Using her newfound Western knowledge, Little Bee distances herself from the girls back home, and in doing so, she herself others the women further.

Aside from Nkiruka, none of the group members has a name or even a scar as part of any individual identity, so their presence is ambiguous: Nigerian, Black, simple, and probably dead at the hands of "the men," who had "hunt[ed] down the fleeing women and children and [buried] their bodies under branches and rocks" after the village massacre (Cleave 101). These girls, like all the third-world women in *Little Bee*, comprise what Mohanty would describe as a "western feminist re-presentation of women in the third-world" (Mohanty 65), and it is a representation that lacks any

¹³ Spivak talks about "the unquestioned muting of the subaltern woman" ("Subaltern" 91), and "the girls back home" definitively represent this characteristic, which I will also discuss later with regard to Little Bee.

development that might identify the women as individual human beings, before or after their murders. Cleave labels these girls “the novel’s Greek chorus – they are a foil in whose imagined reaction the cultural dissonance experienced by Little Bee can be made explicit” (“Author Q & A” *Little Bee*). Their presence does, in fact, reinforce Little Bee’s “cultural dissonance” in England, but it also fortifies the imprecise presence of third-world women whose stereotyped beings exist to support the kind of woman Little Bee is – a victim of male violence who is ignorant of the ways of the West. The girls from back home are yet another example of already categorized third-world women.

Chapter 4: Little Bee and the Othered Women as “Universal Dependents”

Little Bee and her refugee comrades are all situated as not only victims of male violence, but also as characters who are fixed, universal dependents of various, more powerful subjects. As I discussed in Chapter 1, Mohanty defines universal dependents as third-world women who are already categorized as deprived, circumventing a position of power in any binary, whether it be a hierarchy with men or with Western women. Mohanty stresses that according to this standard, all women “practice an uncomplicated solidarity among themselves” (Mohanty 66). In *Little Bee*, however, all four of the asylum-seekers are depicted as relying on British taxpayers and the generosity of various British citizens. In each situation of dependency, the subalterns are always seen as objects of Western sympathy and generosity.

Because of this female group’s “third-world difference,” only sympathy exists within the context of Western “generosity,” for empathy would require an equal standing among all the nationalities and genders in question. The four women spend years in the Black Hill Immigration Removal Centre, which is government-funded for the purpose of determining which, if any, of the asylum-seekers should be allowed to stay in the United Kingdom. All four of the women, as discussed, have fled from male violence and danger in their respective African, South Asian, or Caribbean countries, and upon their arrival in the West, all of the women carry as their sole possessions the garments they’re wearing and a small, government-issued-see-through plastic bag of items. For their daily necessities they rely on “charity boxes . . . full of secondhand clothes and shoes” (Cleave 6-7) and a British nurse who distributes aspirin and sanitary towels to the women, upon approval of a written application “twenty-four hours in advance” (227).

The asylum-seekers are even dependent on the provided sleeping area with “white fluorescent strip lights, in an underground room . . . [that] was cold, cold, cold” (7), perceived by the Western government to be good enough for detainees with a third-world difference (7). The four refugee women, as they are portrayed, can only be seen as objects, beholden to the West¹⁴ for their existence.

The dependent status of these refugee women is reinforced by their reliance on Western male detention center workers who already objectify women in general, even before any third-world difference is considered. Only Yevette knows why the four women have been released without their government paperwork. Yevette eventually confides to Little Bee:

Me did a favor for one of dem immigration men, all right? He make a few changes on de computer, jus put a tick in de right box, yu know, and – POW! – up come de names for release. Yu, me and dem two other girls. Dem detention officers don’t be askin no questions. Dey jus see de names come up on dere computer screen dis morning and – BAM! – dey take yu from your room and dey show you de door. Dey don’t care if yore caseworker be dere to pick yu up or not. Dey too busy peekin at de titty-swingers in de newspaper, truth. So here we is. Free and ee-zee. (Cleave 68)

There is an easy understanding among the male government workers at the detention center, who recognize their patriarchal and political power over the asylum-seekers. One male worker prostitutes Yevette in exchange for adjusting paperwork that will allow

¹⁴ This, of course, is the same “West” that, in large measure, created the conditions in their home countries from which they need refuge in the first place.

for her freedom, and in a different scene another male worker looks the other way from the refugee-women as they are being released – “staring at that [topless] girl in the newspaper . . . and not us girls in the queue for the telephone” (6) – objectifying all women, but particularly these third-world women, whom the men view as boxes to be ticked on the computer. In Mohanty’s conceptualization of the preconstituted third-world woman, *Little Bee*’s four asylum-seekers are universally dependent on the Western government for their well-being (however that is measured) in, and their freedom from, the detention center.

While *Little Bee* is presented as a preconstituted third-world woman when viewed through Mohanty’s theory, she is, nevertheless, more Westernized than the other three women by virtue of her intentional self-education during her two years in the detention center; she has consumed so much Western reading material that she can more readily pass as a British citizen by discarding her Nigerian pronunciation and speak, instead, with a British-English accent when she chooses. Just as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o discusses the immense power of the colonizers’ language over the mind of the colonized student in *Decolonising the Mind*, *Little Bee* is presented as understanding that “English was the official vehicle and the magical formula to colonial elitedom” (Ngũgĩ 12). *Little Bee* emerges from a neocolonial, rather than colonial, context, but she has internalized the Western culture and history she has studied, and, unlike Yvette, *Little Bee* is presented as having eradicated any speck of her Nigerian accent in her English. All four of the women, then, rely on *Little Bee*’s Westernization for survival. Once the other three have failed in their attempts to call a cab to take them to London, *Little Bee* takes her turn and tells the cab driver on the phone that they are cleaners, not detention center refugees;

he believes her because of her accent, saying, "It's true you don't talk like one of them" (Cleave 15), presuming that if she did talk like one of the detention center refugees, she would not be able to pay, and he would not pick them up. Little Bee's attempt to "[put] on the white world" (Fanon 36) secures the cab for the women; however, her Western skills are cursory, and when she tries to make the cab driver happy by showing "that we were British and we spoke your language and understood all the subtle things about your culture," she misinterprets a British-English nuance and calls the cab driver "a cock," thinking she is complimenting his contemporary hairstyle; this misunderstanding causes him to spew at them a racial slur and immediately drive away (Cleave 56-57). Little Bee's situation in this scene brings to mind the words of Fanon regarding colonized subjects who mimic their colonizers' language, for Little Bee "talks like a book" and "talks like a white man" (Fanon 21). The colonized person, Fanon continues, will "be more or less judged by it. With great contempt, [the white person] will" evaluate him if his diction and understanding of the language of the master is not perfect (20). While Fanon is discussing the perspective of the colonized in the Antilles, his observations bolster the perception of the subaltern Little Bee when confronted with white citizens in a country where she longs to assimilate. For the cab driver, among others, the four women are only worthy of equal treatment if they can inhabit a version of Western-ness that is seemingly beyond their grasp, rendering them perpetually dependent in Mohanty's conceptualization of the preconstituted third-world woman.

Little Bee's informal yet impactful Western education evokes the concepts of Ngũgĩ, who stresses that the colonial subject internalizes the Western education system, leading to an inferiority complex that precipitates the subject's self-

understanding as a victim of their own culture. Little Bee does not have a formal Western education, and she is not a colonial subject because the setting of *Little Bee* occurs after Nigeria is liberated from colonization, but the incomplete Bible from her village, the unfinished novel from the ship, and the historical textbook from the detention center that she is presented as reading within the context of *Little Bee* are entirely Western and written in English, which for the colonized, according to Ngũgĩ, is “the measure of intelligence and ability” (Ngũgĩ 12). Little Bee is a neocolonial asylum seeker whose very survival, she believes, depends primarily on her assimilation within British culture, which, according to Ngũgĩ, is inextricable from the English language. Little Bee’s education in the English language begins in what is presented as her small and destitute village, after even the Western missionaries, who are there to teach the village children, had given up hope on the subalterns’ lack of resources. Little Bee says the missionaries

had boarded up their mission . . . [and] left us with the holy books that were not worth the expense of shipping back to your country. In our village our only Bible had all of its pages missing after the forty-sixth verse of the twenty-seventh chapter of Matthew, so that the end of our religion, as far as any of us knew, was My God, my god, why hast thou forsaken me? We understood that this was the end of the story. (Cleave 182)

As gleaned from this English culture lesson from an incomplete book, Little Bee and her fellow villagers are left to believe that what was presented by the missionaries as their one true God has now forsaken them, and they are left with the notion that there is nothing beyond that page or their situation as poor and needy people in Nigeria. Little

Bee has begun to be “exposed exclusively to a culture that was a product external to [herself]. [She] was being made to stand outside [herself] to look at [herself]” (Ngũgĩ 17), and from that “worlded” (Spivak 243) perspective, Little Bee’s Nigerian space has been erased and re-inscribed with Western thought.

Continuing through the lens of Ngũgĩ, Little Bee’s second English lesson occurs on the ship to England. Once she is discovered by the ship’s captain, she says, “he locked me in a cabin . . . So for three weeks and five thousand miles . . . I read a book that the captain gave me. The book was called *Great Expectations* and it was about a boy called Pip but I do not know how it ended” because the ship landed, and she was sent to the immigration authorities before she could finish the book (Cleave 129). Optimistically, Pip’s perseverance and tenacity in the face of hard luck in *Great Expectations* might be interpreted as potentially inspiring to the young refugee, but that would require Little Bee to leave the ship and perhaps remind herself during her future desperate moments of the fictional boy. Instead, there is no further mention of Pip or the book, and the book becomes one in a line of English books – religious, fictional, and historical – that serve as Little Bee’s constructed Western view. Little Bee’s limited perspective reflects Ngũgĩ’s thinking regarding African students when he says, “it does not matter that the imported literature carried the great humanist tradition of the best in Shakespeare, Goethe, Balzac, Tolstoy, Gorky, Brecht, Sholokhov, Dickens. The location of this great mirror of imagination was necessarily Europe and its history and culture and the rest of the universe was seen from that centre” (Ngũgĩ 18). Instead of developing as the story moves along, Little Bee’s representation as anything other than a proper-speaking English asylum-seeker is shrinking. All of the literature that Little Bee

consumes is Western, and that fact limits her understanding of her true self beyond her English accent and understanding of British history, for she is continually represented as assimilating rather than growing as a character.

Finally, Little Bee's Western education is shown as being consummated in the Black Hill Immigration Removal Centre, where authorities distribute the "book called LIFE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM. It explains the history of your country and how to fit in" (Cleave 49). By reading a British version of its history as a colonizing country with a Western perspective of how formerly colonized people from third-world countries do not "fit in," Little Bee is presented as believing that she "began to understand how [England] worked" (49). This neocolonial interpretation of her own country's history, according to Ngũgĩ, renders the African Little Bee as decentered and "alienated," which Ngũgĩ defines as having two selves and viewing one from the other, and which Fanon defines as a "divided self." From studying her British handbook, Little Bee recognizes that to succeed in their country, she must assimilate because the Nigerian culture and identity with which she has been born is inadequate to successful integration in the United Kingdom and requires a more advanced knowledge to be complete. Not only is Little Bee, according to Mohanty, perceived by her referents as desperate, but she has also, according to Ngũgĩ, internalized that sense of inadequacy, so she self-presents as a victim of her own "deficient" culture.

Until their final moments in the novel, following Mohanty's idea of the preconstituted third-world woman, the immigrant companions, including Little Bee, continue to be represented as needy. Once outside the detention center, in what is a rare moment in *Little Bee*, an English man who is disdainful of his "Bloody government,"

which “[doesn’t] care about you refugees, doesn’t care about the countryside, doesn’t care about farmers,” kindly offers the women food and shelter in “the pickers’ barn” (Cleave 63). This scene might be interpreted as a less patronizing and more empathetic moment on the part of the English citizen, except for an implicit ranking order among the refugee women and the land-owning farmer, whose sense of common oppression is itself hierarchical in that he likens himself to be exploited by his government in the same way as these immigrants, but at the same time he sees them as worthy of staying only in his barn and not his home. The farmer has far more rights and privileges because of his gender, nationality, and race, yet he hollowly imagines a fellowship with the othered women. Even in his kindness, the white farmer is condescending. Regardless of the accommodations, the girl with the documents begins sobbing because as Yevette says, “Mebbe de girl jus ain’t used to kindness” (63). These desperate women, who are seen as preconstituted third-world females, are necessarily dependent, but the charity on which they depend is typically not as kindly given as with the farmer. They accept the farmer’s sympathetic charity with deep gratitude, and that is the last day that Little Bee’s companions – always situated as defenseless – appear in *Little Bee*. Discerned through Mohanty’s lens in “Under Western Eyes,” the three mostly unidentified beings serve little purpose aside from reinforcing Little Bee’s representation as a preconstituted third-world woman.

Little Bee continues to tell her story, but once she leaves the group at the farm, her perceived dependency, in the context of Mohanty’s analysis, shifts from Western organizations and white men to the Western Sarah, on whom Little Bee relies for much of her existence in the rest of the book. As the presentation of Mohanty’s Western

referent, Sarah relies on Little Bee maintaining her position as other, for the referent cannot exist without the object against whom she is measured. This codependent scenario, according to Fanon's discussion of philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's idea of the necessity for "the White Master" to be open to "the Negro slave" to "*make himself recognized*" (Fanon 217) as an equal human being, renders Little Bee in a hopeless position as Sarah's third-world other. Fanon says the following:

The only means of breaking this vicious circle that throws me back on myself is to restore to the other, through mediation and recognition, his human reality, which is different from natural reality. The other has to perform the same operation. 'Action from one side only would be useless, because what is to happen can only be brought about by means of both . . .'; 'they recognize themselves as mutually recognizing each other.'¹⁵ (Fanon 217)

Fanon asserts here that the white master, as well as the Black slave, must intentionally think beyond their own 'natural' (colonial) thoughts to recognize and accept the Black slave's full and equal humanity. In *Little Bee*, Sarah must give up her perceived power as Little Bee's intellectual and materialistic "superior" (and vice-versa), and that unlikelihood means she will never truly be receptive to Little Bee's third-world female existence as an equal to her first-world existence.

Little Bee is first represented as dependent on Sarah when they meet on the beach. Sarah's initial vision of Little Bee is with her sister, walking out of the jungle, "looking up at the white man and the white woman – Andrew and me – in hope and

¹⁵ Fanon provides the following citation: G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. By J.B. Baillie, 2nd rev. ed. (London, Allen & Unwin, 1949), pp. 230. 231.

expectation. I suppose there was nothing else in the developing world they could do” (Cleave 105). Little Bee’s citizenship in a “developing” country – regardless of which country or class she belongs to – is a direct cause of her incapacity to do anything except look to the Western couple for help. Because the third-world categoric representation of Little Bee positions the Western Sarah as protective caregiver, Little Bee, according to Sarah, “spoke to me as a woman, knowing I would understand” (106). Before Little Bee even utters a word, she is what Mohanty would define as a preconstituted third-world female character in the mind of the Western referent, Sarah. Sarah’s insertion of “I suppose” adds a patronizing effect to the downward perspective she offers Little Bee and also highlights Sarah’s inability to use her imagination to create empathy – “supposing” there is nothing else Little Bee can do reveals Sarah’s narrow, self-centered vision of the Nigerian girl. Spivak’s idea of the impossibility for solidarity (“Subaltern” 78) in a situation such as this is very important, because Little Bee is situated without agency in this moment on the beach. Despite Sarah’s interpretation of her and Little Bee’s community as women, their difference in agency prohibits such collectivity.

The gang leader solidifies that Sarah is the reason Little Bee lives when he points Sarah’s severed finger at Little Bee, saying, “You will live. The Missus has paid for your life” (Cleave 116). The stereotyped, third-world, savage gang leader calmly acknowledges the benevolence of the superior “Missus” from the West, who must step in to stop him from murdering his third-world victim. Never once does the gang leader seriously intimate that he will harm Sarah or her husband, for the British couple is situated as the Western subjects to the male othered person in this North/South

hierarchy; in any binary, however, Little Bee and her sister are always the third-world female objects. This scene is also reminiscent of Spivak's definition of the subaltern, for Little Bee is positioned in this scene as someone who "has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism . . . a space of difference" (De Kock 45). Little Bee is a helpless female, separated from Sarah and her first-world agency, and her only hope for survival is the potential generosity of the Western couple. Little Bee's third-world existence on earth, as it is presented, is predicated on the benevolence of people in the West.

Two years later, when Little Bee shows up at Sarah's home, Little Bee is further represented as universally dependent on Western generosity. Sarah asks Little Bee why she comes to her house, and Little Bee says, "I did not have any other place to go" (Cleave 91). Little Bee has no money, no resources, and no place to live; she is destitute and dependent on the only people she knows, affirming Sarah's earlier "I suppose" in that Little Bee's presentation is devoid of the agency to do anything other than turn to Sarah. According to Sarah, Little Bee came to her wearing "a mortifyingly unfunereal Hawaiian shirt and blue jeans," so Sarah loaned her a "smart black raincoat" to wear to Andrew's funeral that morning (23). Later, when Sarah and Little Bee visit little Charlie's nursery school, Sarah insists that Little Bee cannot go out "dressed like that," and she loans her "a pink summer dress" which Little Bee describes as "the prettiest thing I had ever worn" (141). In both instances, Sarah appears generous, but only from the perspective and to the extent of how other Westerners will perceive Little Bee. As Little Bee is a guest of Sarah, it is also, therefore, from Sarah's perspective of how other "equal" citizens will perceive Sarah.

Fanon recognized this superior perspective in *Black Skin, White Masks* as the colonized man saying to his native clothing, “Good-by bandanna, good-by straw hat” (Fanon 23), for “The wearing of European clothes, whether rags or the most up-to-date style . . . [contributes] to a feeling of equality with the European and his achievements” (25). Western clothing, from both aspects of the North/South hierarchy, represents civility and superiority. Not only is Little Bee recognized by Sarah as lacking in her appearance, but Sarah’s “generosity” enables Little Bee to enjoy something she would never have except for the “goodness” of the West. Again, from Sarah’s perspective, Little Bee’s appearance has fallen short and needs enhancement, which Sarah will proffer, and Little Bee will willingly accept. Little Bee is continually represented in a universally dependent and grateful state of womanhood, always object to Sarah’s charity.

Once Sarah decides to accompany the deported and alone Little Bee back to Nigeria, Little Bee continues in her place of dependency on the person she perceives as her Western friend. Sarah’s decision to accompany Little Bee to Nigeria is benevolent to a degree. It is apparently dangerous for Sarah and Charlie to accompany Little Bee to Abuja, where the military police commander “with tribal scars on his cheeks” wants to immediately arrest Little Bee (Cleave 251).¹⁶ But Sarah also has another motive for accompanying Little Bee, and it is not entirely selfless. Before Little Bee is arrested, Sarah tells her that Andrew had gathered research relating to Little Bee and her sister: “Stuff about Nigeria. About the oil wars, and the atrocities . . . about asylum and

¹⁶ This is yet another example, like the gang leader, of the book perpetuating African males as always-dangerous.

detention” (226). Once at the Abuja hotel, Sarah informs Little Bee that she will write the story of people like Little Bee, and that to do so she “[needs] to collect more stories like yours” (252) so she might continue Andrew’s work of “saving girls like you” (253). Sarah asserts herself as Little Bee’s savior, arguing further that gathering stories is “the only way we’ll make you safe” (253). Little Bee eventually agrees to participate in Sarah’s plan, but only after she looks out at her capital city and sees “for the first time . . . how much space there was in it. There were wide gaps between the city blocks . . . waiting for something to be built. Abuja was a city that was not finished . . . [it] carried its dreams in a see-through bag” (254), just as Little Bee had carried hers outside the detention center. Little Bee believes that she has evolved as a person since leaving the detention center, and she wants to participate in the development of her capitol city. Little Bee’s protest that “it is not a good idea to collect stories” (253) is silenced when she realizes that she, like Abuja, has the potential to build her dreams. This realization might be interpreted as a liberation of Little Bee’s colonized mind, except that Little Bee can only achieve her dreams with the help of her Western friend, who will tell the stories of her country for her. Spivak talks about “the unquestioned muting of the subaltern woman” (“Subaltern” 91), and Sarah definitively ‘mutes’ Little Bee by presuming to author the asylum seeker’s story. Neither is Little Bee presented in this scenario as wanting to use her own voice, for her only “job was to find people who would normally be scared to talk to a foreign journalist” (254), rendering her subaltern character effectively ‘muted’ at both ends of the North/South hierarchy within Sarah’s project.

As the novel progresses, so does Little Bee’s reliance on Sarah. When their plane lands in Abuja, Sarah pays off the police who immediately try to arrest Little Bee.

Sarah, Little Bee, and Charlie stay in hotel rooms paid for by Sarah and construct a plan to gather stories of other female Nigerian women who are victims of the Western oil industry. After driving in a car (also paid for by Sarah) to nearby villages and gathering the stories for several weeks, Sarah plans to write and publish their stories, which seems benevolent but again reinforces the Spivak idea just noted that none of the women are presented as having a voice to speak their own truths – another instance of the "muting of subaltern women" ("Subaltern" 91). Those helpless women highlight Little Bee's impotence as she confirms to Sarah, "I do not need to tell this story to anyone else. Thank you for saving me" (Cleave 257). Even if this quote is interpreted as Little Bee believing she has the right not to tell her story anymore, not only does telling her story publicly put Little Bee in great danger from "the men," but she also does not have the resources to publish her story herself, which is the only way for her humanity to be recognized. Little Bee believes that Sarah, inhabiting Mohanty's "third-world difference," will more suitably tell and publish her third-world woman's story than she herself.

Little Bee's identity is repeatedly represented as a preconstituted third-world woman for ten chapters, but in the last scene of Little Bee's narration in the eleventh chapter, there is the promise that Little Bee might actually create for herself some freedom, power, and agency. Lying contentedly on the Nigerian beach, Little Bee watches the sea and eventually sleeps:

I dreamed I was a journalist, telling the stories of my country, and we all lived in the same house – me and Charlie and Sarah – in a tall cool three-story house in Abuja. It was a very beautiful home. It was the sort of place I never even dreamed of, back in the days when our Bible ended at the twenty-seventh

chapter of Matthew. I was happy in this house that I dreamed of, and the cook and the housekeeper smiled at me and called me princess. Early each morning the garden boy brought me a scented yellow rose for my hair, trembling on its fine green stem with the dew of the night still on it . . . In my dream Lawrence telephoned Sarah to ask when she was coming home. Sarah . . . smiled and she said, What do you mean? We are home. (Cleave 258)

Little Bee seems to move toward liberation from her colonial mindset, for she has a meaningful purpose and her own beautiful home in Nigeria, complete with a new family. It is a step forward for the depiction of Little Bee as a permanent victim to see for herself a future in which she is neither desperately running from “the men” nor silenced by anyone, for she is writing her own stories of Nigeria. Not only do her house workers respectfully serve and obey her, but Charlie and Sarah are dependent on Little Bee in this fantasy, as well. Arguably, Little Bee’s dream is problematic as a liberating moment in that she has few aspirations that do not involve Sarah: Her choice of career is identical to that of Sarah, and like Sarah’s house in Kingston-upon-Thames, Little Bee’s home is replete with roses, one of “the English flowers” Sarah described in her own garden in England (145). However, while Little Bee’s dream has clearly been shaped by her internalization of Western culture, that same dream reveals that she is, in fact, capable of imagining herself as a privileged person who is free to flourish in a life she has chosen for herself. The sheer imagining of herself beyond victimhood is a necessary step out of what Fanon calls “bare existence” and into a freedom of being that he calls “*desire*” (Fanon 218).

Fanon argues that the colonized person must experience the “savage struggle” to “be recognized as a *person*” (218). According to Fanon, this struggle or “risk means that I go beyond life toward a supreme good that is the transformation of subjective certainty of my own worth into a universally valid objective truth,” and that truth is his self-recognized and worthy being (218). Through her dream of a different life, Little Bee has shown the “*desire*” that might move her to both see herself and then be seen by her “colonizers” as a person. Unfortunately, that desire only emerges in her dream, not her reality, and then the armed men on the beach apprehend Little Bee, presumably to stifle her story forever, and Little Bee is quickly situated once again as a helpless victim of male violence. Just as she begins to evolve into something other than her preconstituted and objectified self, Little Bee is effectively eliminated from her own story, and her only remaining hope is that somehow Sarah might save her one more time.

Little Bee’s fixed dependency is reminiscent of Fanon’s understanding of the colonized subjects’ dependence on the Western man: “For twenty years [the colonizers] poured every effort into programs that would make the Negro a white man. In the end, they dropped him and told him, ‘You have an indisputable complex of dependence on the white man’” (Fanon 216). Just as the colonized people about whom Fanon speaks have no choice but to be dependent, neither does Little Bee, for her character is contrived as a preconstituted third-world woman and is, when viewed through Mohanty’s lens, universally dependent on Sarah for every aspect of her identity – save for a few moments in a dream. Little Bee’s representation as one who is perpetually reliant on others has left her bereft of an identity aside from that of a powerless victim.

Conclusion

In *Little Bee*'s singular and composite representation of third-world women, the female characters are fixed in their construction as either the objectified and preconstituted third-world woman or the uncritical Western referent, by whom Little Bee and anyone from the Global South is measured. *Little Bee* provides a veneer of human equality among the two protagonists, Little Bee and Sarah, by virtue of their separately narrated chapters, their respective sacrifices, and their friendly relationship; however, applying Mohanty's theories to *Little Bee* allows us to see how the characters are not proportionate, but rather, their representations are subjective and objective, relative to their origins in the Global South or the West, with Little Bee presented as the perpetual victim and Sarah as the frame of reference for Little Bee's otherness.

Mohanty's conceptualization of the preconstituted third-world women in her "Under Western Eyes" begins with the assertion that many Western feminist writings impose their Eurocentric gaze on their analysis of third-world women, unintentionally conflating subalterns within one category. By tracing the development of the two protagonists in *Little Bee* via Mohanty's argument, Sarah perceives herself to be liberated in all of the ways that Little Bee is not, emboldening Sarah to self-identify as Little Bee's referent in their relationship. Sarah's empowered self-perception, reinforced by Clarissa's privileged character, situates Little Bee and the third-world women in the novel as the inferior part of a constructed binary of powerful and powerless in all but a few instances, and Little Bee is presented as accepting her position, ultimately sacrificing her own promise of a life for that of her Western referent and child. Little Bee's sister and her refugee companions from the detention center reinforce Little Bee's

location as an objectified victim through their own lack of development and status as fixed victims.

Fanon, Ngũgĩ, and Spivak's arguments regarding the effects of colonization on its subjects complement Mohanty's theory in that Little Bee inhabits many of the characteristics inherent in a colonized mindset. Additionally, all four scholars' suppositions of hegemonic power are reflected in the representations of both Sarah and Little Bee, and it is not a stretch to apply postcolonial attributes to either of these women, despite the fact that the novel's setting is in the twenty-first century, some fifty years after Nigeria has been politically decolonized.

While Chris Cleave might "tap into the novel's potential for transforming consciousness by mobilizing the so-called just emotions" (Savu 101), a Mohantian reading of the same novel reveals its potential to "oppress most if not all of the women" in the third-world countries by othering subalterns and also contributing to their discursive colonization (Mohanty 63). Cleave's stated intent in writing the novel is to advocate for refugee women in the United Kingdom, and though some might read Little Bee as a friend to Sarah, equal in her position as hero and human being, Little Bee's inferior position in contrast to Sarah's subjectivity, from a postcolonial perspective, renders impossible a coalition between them. With Sarah's position as Western referent, the alterity of Little Bee and all the women of color in the book is fixed.

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