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The Repression of Patriarchy and Imperialism in Barbara Kingslover's *The Poisonwood Bible*

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Abstract

The present paper shows the special interesting case of Barbara Kingslover's interweaving of the voicelessness of contemporary American women with the colonial subjugation and helplessness of an African nation in *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998). Through the critical lenses of Chinwa Achebe and Frantz Fanon this study focuses on showing Kingslover's representation of and response to this double-layered marginalization and voicelessness of women and colonized nations. Drawing on Gayatri Spivak's metaphor of speaking as a form of revolt against the overwhelming subjugation, this paper also shows how Kingslover creates voice to speak for the voiceless women and the colonized African nation, an attempt perhaps to undo the silencing carried out to sustain a patriarchal and imperialistic culture.

Key words: Male dominance; Contemporary American women discourse; American imperialism; Postcolonial feminist literature; Barbara Kingslover

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The contemporary American novel of Barbara Kingslover *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998) shows that marginalization of women is still a major argument in contemporary American women writing. The novel presents a case of a contemporary American woman repressed in spite of the progress that women's movements have made over centuries. Kingslover fuses the story of Orleana's marginalization and voicelessness into the story of the Belgian colonization of the Congo and the American imperialist involvement in it. The interrelated stories exhibit various similarities in the perceptions, patterns and impacts of the different forms of domination on different social groups or peoples, who are similar to Gayatri Spivak's muted "peoples or subalterns" as they are seen "as a difference from the elite" or "*deviation* from an *ideal*" (Spivak, 2003, p.323), Overall, Orleana's story remains central. She is portrayed as invalid and muted as middle-class women of the nineteenth-century America.

Kingslover's *The Poisonwood Bible* seems to be drawing on Gayatri Spivak's outstanding essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" of (1988) which combines the dilemma of "subaltern as female" with the dilemma of "the subaltern of imperialism" (Spivak, 2003, p.325). In the novel, the twentieth-century American female protagonist recounts the suffering of a colonized nation from the perspective of a subjugated woman. Orleana is portrayed as a woman having "no life of [her] own" (Kingslover, 1998, p.8). She is one of five female narrators of insurmountable troubles and suffering under the rule of her domineering husband, Nathan Price, who takes his family to the Congo and neglects them after becoming absorbed in an American missionary task in the Kilanga village of the Congo that was under Belgian colonization. Losing her youngest daughter there by a snake bite, Orleana gains some strength to speak and reconstructs herself and story to convince her remaining daughters of her innocence and how she went to the Congo reluctantly walking "across Africa" shackled (p.9). During colonial rule, Orleana describes her situation as a woman who "stayed alive by instinct rather than will" (p.182). The novel reveals after the 'subaltern' is able to 'speak' that Orleana is in fact representative of other marginalized captives downtrodden at the hands of colonialists at multiple intertwined levels.

Orleana's explicit narrative of a repressed wife is interwoven allegorically with the colonial subjugation of the Congo. The novel associates Orleana's husband with the Belgian colonizers and American imperialists in the Congo. The patriarch, Nathan Price, rules despotically not only his household and women, but is also perceived as a strong embodiment of the imperialists and colonizers of the Congo. Nathan, Orleana says, controlled her in the same way western "profiteers" and imperialists, Belgian or American, colonized the Congo, stole "the goods: cotton or diamonds," and then "walked out on Africa as a husband quits a wife leaving her with her naked body curled around the emptied out mine of her womb" (p.9). Kingslover's novel shows a very exceptional case of interweaving the suffering of a marginalized silenced mother and wife with the suffering of a colonized nation. "Poor Africa. No other continent has endured such unspeakably bizarre combination of foreign thievery and foreign goodwill" (p.528). The well-meaning Nathan Price and the colonizers and imperialists were "in the service of saving Africa's babies and extracting its mineral soul" (p.530). Throughout the novel, Orleana completely identifies herself with the colonized Congo. Similar to Africa, she was exploited; "poor Congo, barefoot bride of men who took her jewels and promised the Kingdom" (p.201). Despite the racial boundaries drawn by the wrong colonial perceptions, the repressed white western woman, Orleana, shows solidarity with the subjugated Africa. Kingslover perhaps wishes to say that the taste of subjugation is always bitter whether of a country or of a woman. Orleana was "occupied as if by a foreign power" (p.198). This is why and how Orleana draws no line between the subjugation and exploitation of Africa and the subjugation and exploitation of women at the hands of domineering husbands and fathers as she explains "Nathan was in full possession of the country once known as Orleana Wharton" (p.200).

In attempting to reconstruct herself in the aftermath of her nonbeing under the colonial rule of Nathan, Orleana overcomes silence. She narrates her story saying Nathan took advantage of her at a very early age, but because of the longstanding stereotypes of women as inferior, she remained silent against emotional and physical abuse. "I always watch his hands to see which way they are going to strike out" (p.134). Like Africa, Orleana was burdened by a fierce colonial domination on accounts of inferiority because "I was an inferior force" Nathan believes, "his instrument, his animal, nothing more" (p.192). Orleana's only fault is that she dedicated her whole lifetime to her family, yet she perished under this domination like all "wives and mothers" who "perish at the hands of [their] own righteousness" (p.89). Taken obsessively by the moral burden of (en) lightening the dark Congolese souls, Nathan Price banished five women, wife and four daughters, to the margins of silence to fulfill his passion similar to the colonizers who banish whole nations to the fringes of living and cause them ultimately to fall into inferiority and invisibility after pushing their cultures underground. As described by the narrators, Orleana "kept moving, her grief streamed out behind her" (Kingslover, 1998, p.381) and she bore "scars" (p.89) of motherhood viewing her four daughters imprisoned between their father's unbearable fierce obsession and their mother's silent fright. Nathan, Orleana says, kept moving "with a stone in place of his heart" (p.97). She carried the burden of her four children alone. "Their individual laughter he couldn't recognize, nor their anguish" (p.98). Orleana states that "a wife is the earth itself" "bearing scars" (p.89) of motherhood; wearing marks of her children "gracefully" on her back "as the Congo wears hers" (p.385):

> What happened to us could have happened anywhere, to any mother. I am not the first woman on earth to have her daughters possessed. For time and eternity there have been fathers like Nathan who simply can see no way to have a daughter but to own her like a plot of land. To work her, plow her under, rain down a dreadful poison upon her. (p.191)

The twentieth-century American patriarch, Nathan Price, is the domineering nineteenth-century American husband who forces his troubled wife to a confinement in the bordered room of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) and eventually leads her to crawl and fall down and deep into invisibility and eventually madness at the end of her struggle. In Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the female protagonist follows her husband timidly and frustratingly as she fearfully puts it to "a colonial mansion," to "the haunted house" in which there are many confines, "hedges and walls and gates that lock." Gilman's setting shows that the whole place around women looks like a prison, full of confinements and lines these female protagonists cannot cross; even the garden is "full of box-bordered paths, and lined with long grape-covered arbors" (Gilman, 2003, p.833). In *The Poisonwood Bible*, Orleana as well "wouldn't go against him, of course" when Nathan Price decides to take up the mission of moving towards Africa believing himself to be the savior, the liberator, and the redeemer of the black men from their blackness. Timidly and silently Orleana packs American food of cake mixes and cans and medicine "safely transported and stowed against necessity" in the heart of the jungle as she was informed by Nathan. She too has to follow her husband reluctantly to a confinement, as he adamantly wished to save the children of the Congo. She carries to the Congo "'the bare minimum for my children,' she'd declare under her breath, all the livelong day" (Kingslover, 1998, p.13). Gilman's nineteenth-century American woman becomes extremely-exhausted and emotionally-worn out because she is confined and restrained from her passion of writing, the only good outlet for her soul. The female protagonist lives in a confinement within a confinement imposed by

her husband. Yet Gilman reveals that the trapped woman makes attempts to rebel. She confesses, "I did write for a while in spite of them; but it does exhaust me a good deal- having to be so sly about it, or else meet with heavy opposition" (Gilman, 2003, p.833). Similarly, Orleana, the wretched protagonist female of Kingslover's novel is prevented from writing and books as well. She says she "despised" her husband the most "when he used to make fun of my books. My writing and reading" (Kingslover, 1998, p.496). For that reason, Orleana calls her husband to write the story of the noble "twelve-month mission" to civilize the people of the Congo: "Let men write their stories, I can't" (p.8). Orleana insists throughout the novel that she had been only "a captive witness" (p.9) who is capable only of showing the bitterness of voicelessness and subjugation. Gayatri Spivak states "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (2003, p.325). The muted Orleana whispers under her breath: "What did I have? […] no way to overrule the powers that governed our lives. This is not a new story: I was an inferior force" (Kingslover, 1998, p.192). Gilman's nineteenth- century woman eventually descends into madness because she could not rise facing the patriarchal confinement. "What is one to do? What can one do"? (Gilman, 2003, p.833) says the frustrated woman who declares sarcastically at the end of the story that in the late nineteenth-century American culture "it would be a shame to break down that beautiful door" (p.843), the door that isolates, confines and locks women in. Gilman's patriarch and Kingslover's are difficult to tell apart. Kingslover shows that over a hundred years passed by and they remain the same. Like a nineteenth-century feminist discourse, Kingsolver's contemporary novel is occupied by invisible powerless women; women with no backbones in the eyes of their men; only characterless creatures. They are only visible in their own eyes.

In *The Poisonwood Bible,* Nathan Price embodies not only American masculinity in the twentieth century which as noted earlier resembles that of nineteenth-century America but also imperialism and colonization. In fact his patriarchy in the household is strikingly knit by Kingslover into American imperialism and Belgian colonization of the Congo. Through the story narrated by his subjugated women, Nathan is perceived not only as the stanch powerful patriarch of the household but also as an immovable missionary who represents respective aspects of colonial oppression. Orleana was silenced all through, and could never say no to Nathan when he drags five women to the Congo led in the first place by his blind enthusiasm to preach the Scriptures to the Congolese. In the Congo he becomes increasingly obsessed with saving all the Congolese children through baptism while noticing his own "children less and less" (Kingslover, 1998, p.98). His missionary task converts into a zealous enthusiasm that completely identifies with the colonialist ideology. The novel reveals that he gradually becomes not the peaceful preacher or father but the zealous overpowering missionary driven by the wrong colonialist assumptions about colonized peoples. He tells his Congolese translator: "I fail to see how the church can mean anything but joy, for the few here who choose Christi-an-ity over *ignorance and darkness*" (p.128). There is dramatic irony in his failure to see or foresee the consequences of domination which were so clear to his subjugated women. Despite his blindness, he continues his task which becomes to preach not the Bible itself, but its significance and authority over the dark ignorant Congolese; "to lighten their darkness" as Frantz Fanon (1963) ironically describes the colonialist's mission (p.211).

Throughout *The Poisonwood Bible*, Nathan keeps "shouting" forcefully to the Congolese: "*Tata Jesus is bängala*!" (Kingslover, 1998, p.533) meaning to teach them to love Jesus without heeding the warning signs written over the faces of his subjugated congregation or women. One day Orleana dares to warn him against the difficulty of his missionary task saying "well, for one thing, sir, you and the good Lord better hope no lighting strikes here in the coming six months." "Orleana shut up! he yelled, grabbing her arm hard and jerking the plate out of her hand. He raised it up over her head and slammed it down hard on the table, cracking it right in two" (p.133). Nathan "could not abide losing or backing down" after he "wrapped himself up in the salvation of Kilanga" (p.96). He never takes Orleana seriously, so he tells her with utmost superiority and even contempt as she tries to warn him: "Who were you showing off for here, -with your tablecloth and your fancy plate […] and your pitiful cooking?" (p.133) Nathan's calm preaching converts into persistent shouting in front of the Congolese to impose "*Tata Jesus is bängala*" (p.533) on them with no compromises because Nathan has already declared similar to the colonizers and imperialists that those dark natives represent as Fanon (1963) ironically explains "not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values […] the enemy of values, and in this sense […] the absolute evil" (p.41). The Congolese natives listen to Nathan but silently reject his accusation of *ignorance* and *darkness*. "In his innermost spirit, the native admits no accusation. He is overpowered but not tamed; he is treated as an inferior but he is not convinced of his inferiority; he is patiently waiting until the settler is off his guard to fly at him" (Fanon, 1963, p.53).

Nathan's blind persistence and failure to see the determination of the Congolese to adhere to their beliefs become the passage to his own downfall and ruin in the Congo. Before he falls down Nathan spends months explaining the significance of his "fixed passion," "*batiza,*" or baptism (Kingslover, 1998, p.214) in front of the Congolese mothers. He makes sure he has spoken with every mother who lost a child to enlighten her that "if baptized, the children would be saved and in heaven

now" (p.196). Nathan, Orleana reveals, "was well inclined toward stubbornness," so he "couldn't [even] begin to comprehend, now, how far off the track he was with his baptismal fixation" (p.96). The Congolese mothers did not want to listen to him because in the Congo it is believed that it is no good "to speak of the dead" (p.196). Yet still, Nathan persists in preaching the significance of baptism to the African children failing to see again that the Congolese mothers shut their ears to his cries. He accepts neither compromises nor transition periods presupposing that "the cultural estrangement" as Fanon calls it (1963, p.210) can be carried out quickly and with no effort. "Nathan felt it had been a mistake to bend his will, in any way, to Africa" (Kingslover, 1998, p.97). Nathan's well-intentioned persistence resembles the well-intentioned colonial resolution to replace the savagery of the colonized with the civilization of the colonizer, which Fanon ironically calls a noble process of "devaluing pre-colonial history" (p.210). Kingslover creates a remarkable symmetry between Nathan and the colonizer. Nathan wishes to abolish the old ways and the old religions. He preoccupied himself entirely with "bring[ing] salvation into the darkness" (p.120). The colonialist, Fanon (1963) observes, would not be "satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content, by a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it" (p.210). The Congolese mothers told Nathan they will use every fetish in the African tradition "to ward off evil" (Kingslover, 1998, p.296) and protect their children. Yet still, Nathan persists exerting more efforts; domesticating baptism into "*batiza*" (p.214) to reach deep and down into the Congolese dark souls. "*Batiza* is no fetish" (p.296), he shouts reporting that "the Congolese do not become attached to their children as we Americans do" (p.297). He again "fail[s] to see" (p.128) that Congolese motherhood is the same as American motherhood. In fact Orleana believes he underestimates motherhood altogether, American or African. "To live is to be marked, [Orleana] said without speaking […] to die one hundred deaths. I am a mother […] he wasn't" (p.495).

While Nathan identifies himself with the colonizers and imperialists, his subjugated wife and daughters completely identify themselves with Africa because they were also occupied. After the end of Nathan's rule, his daughter Leah marries Anatole, the African translator and resides in Africa. With no complaints, she adapts really well into life's circumstances of the Congo: "I live in a tiny house piled high with boys, potatoes, fetishes and books of science" (p.506). Contrary to her father, Leah learns to accept and appreciate the value of African traditions. Like Congolese mothers she seems proud using African fetishes to protect her own children. She learns through the Congolese parents that the fetishes used and "treasured by mothers" in the Congo are made of "life's best things." Leah came to see while her father could not that these fetishes are not mere amulets worn around the neck claiming secret magical powers for protection; she learns from the mothers that they are extracted from the finest foods in the Congo, "the first potatoes of the season" and "grubs." The mothers told her "you must dig and dry the grub and potatoes, bind them with a thread from your wedding cloth and have them blessed in a fire by the *nganga* doctor" (p.505). Nathan told these mothers many a times that *only* baptism can protect the children from evil and illnesses. He repeatedly envisioned how the proper baptismal ceremony would go: "a joyful procession down to the river with children dressed up all in white getting saved" (p.46). The Congolese mothers could not believe how can immersion in water, mere water, protect the children better than the fetishes prepared from the finest foods in the whole African continent. They "surely" believe that "only by life's best things are your children protected" (p.505). Yet Nathan persists in preaching the significance and authority of baptism over traditions accusing the Congolese mothers of being very superstitious while determining to baptize all Congolese children in spite of their mothers.

Nathan spread his influence over his wife through religion in the same way colonizers and imperialists claim to have the noble intention of enlightening the Africans and ridding them of all unprogressive ways. Under the colonial rule of Nathan, Orleana 'cannot speak', so in the "sleepless nights" of her untold silent suffering, she "would turn to the Bible for comfort," only to find out that "God was on his side": "*Unto the woman God said: I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception, in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee"* (Kingslover, 1998, p.192). For that reason, Orleana was silenced or silent. It never occurred to her "to resist occupation" (p.383). She was "just one of those women who clamp their mouths shut" because she feared God, loved Him, served Him" (p.192). In the colonial days she and Africa were under the impression that "conquest and liberation and democracy and divorce are words that mean squat" (p.383). Being a mother she could not rise against her conqueror. She resigned believing "there are no weapons for this fight." A mother "can't throw stones. A stone would fly straight through him and strike the child made in his image, clipping out an eye or a tongue or an outstretched hand. It's no use" (p.191). So for so long she remains subdued, she says, because her gifts were so simple, primitive and quite "different from those of the women who cleave and part from their husbands nowadays" self-assuredly on account of no happiness. "I knew Rome was burning, but I had just enough water to scrub the floor" (p.383). It never occurred to Orleana "to leave Nathan on account of unhappiness." Her story reveals that she married him at a young age with primitive passions, "with simple hopes: Enough to eat and children who might outlive us"; her whole life, she says, "was a

business of growing where planted" (p.384). This is how she was pacified and gradually reduced to submission. Yet, in the aftermath of her colonial rule when she "gained her wings back" (p.201), and overcame silence, Orleana seems to resent that feeling of being primitive which meant only inferior in the eyes of Nathan who was wearing the same lenses imperialists used to view and talk about Africa, also the primitive.

The Congolese in the Kilanga village had asked Nathan "to leave a hundred times," but Nathan persists and stays until he is sixty-four. He said scaring the Congolese parents to death: "he wasn't going to go away till he'd taken every child in the village down to the river and dunked them under" (p.486). Nathan could not see that "the Church in the colonies is the White people's Church, the foreigner's Church. She does not call the Natives to God's ways but to the ways of the white man, of the master, of the oppressor" (Fanon, 1963, p.42). Long after Nathan's family depart from the Congo he is reported to be "still carrying on with his tormented Jesus is Bängala Church" (Kingslover, 1998, p.434). Nathan never understood that the African native needs not what the white man offers him; for the native has his god, which is his own strong-minded and resolute self as Chinwa Achebe observes noting the qualities of an African leader, Okonkwo, in *Things Fall Apart* (1958):

At an early age he [Okonkwo] had achieved fame as the greatest wrestler in all the land. That was not luck. At the most one could say that his *chi* or personal god was good. But the Ibo people have a proverb that when a man says yes his *chi* says yes also. Okonkwo said yes very strongly; so his *chi* agreed. And not only his *chi* but his clan too, because it judged a man by the work of his hands. (Achebe, 1994, p.27)

In postcolonial literature, there are striking similarities among the perceptions, patterns and impacts of the different forms of colonial rule on different colonized groups or nations. Chinwa Achebe's *Dead Men's Path* (1953) shows an exemplary scenario of colonial persistence. The story demonstrates that the colonial ideology often reinforces the dominant hegemonic positions of the colonizer's culture, language and religion which consequently leads to a clash of civilizations, devastation and ruins. In this story, an old Nigerian priest came to convince the headmaster of a missionary school who was appointed by the British Mission authorities to reopen a traditional footpath he closed earlier as it goes across his school compound. The priest of traditions did his best to explain that the path is of seminal traditional value to the Nigerian villagers. He says, "this path was here before you were born and before your father was born. The whole life of this village depends on it. Our dead relatives depart by it and our ancestors visit us by it. But most important, it is the path of children coming in to be born" (Achebe, 2002, p.496). The headmaster rejects this explanation about the value of the "ancestral" path to the villagers. He tells the Nigerian priest that "the whole purpose of our school is to eradicate just such beliefs as that […] Our duty is to teach your children to laugh at such ideas." The priest who appears more compromising and tolerant than the headmaster tries to make his view much clearer by using a proverb of his Ibo Nigerian culture: "Let the hawk perch and let the eagle perch." He meant to convey that their civilization is not of lesser value; if the colonizers are hawks, Africans are eagles, and there is room for these two strong birds to perch on the same branch peacefully. The headmaster completely rejects the priest's compromising ideology presupposing villagers' beliefs to be below his civilization. His extremism led finally to devastation; the headmaster "woke up next morning among the ruins of his [school]" (Achebe, 2002, p 497).

The Poisonwood Bible (1998) presents a corresponding situation of ruin and devastation caused by colonial domination at multiple levels. At one level, the novel presents a realistic historical account of the ruin and anarchy resulting from the Belgian colonial rule and the American involvement in the Congo: "How many Congolese were killed by the Belgian and labor and starvation, by the special police, and now by the UN soldiers, we will never know. They'll get uncounted" (Kingslover, 1998, p.422). Nathan's subjugated women note in particular the violent consequences of the American involvement in the devastation of the Congo as follows: "Murdering Lumumba, keeping Mobutu in power, starting it over again in Angola-these sound like plots" (p.502). Moreover, the novel reveals that the imperialist Americans tried to make another Congo of the neighboring African country of Angola and the consequences were also grave: "Americans are losing in Angola"; and even after they leave "their land mines are still all over the country, they take off a leg or the arm of a child everyday" (p.506). There was one producer for the overwhelming ruin and anarchy that killed "an awful lot of Congolese" (p.482). Leah says "it's the doing of the damned Belgians and Americans" (p.420). The colonized Congolese never came to accept the hegemonic ideology of its colonizers. In fact Kingslover demonstrates that the colonial rule of the Congo came to a complete breakdown. In the Congo's colonial crisis, the Belgians and Americans used to call themselves "the Combined Forces," while the pro-independence Congolese call Belgians and Americans and even the UN soldiers of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations: the "invading army," "the U.S, Belgium, and hired soldiers left over from the Bay of Pigs" (p.422). Nathan's daughter Leah notes that after all, the Congolese became only "outraged by the sight of white skin" (p.418).

Throughout *The Poisonwood Bible* the subjugated women of Nathan Price identify themselves with the

colonized Congolese entering into their bitter feelings of being subjugated and equating Belgian colonizers and American imperialists, including missionaries, with the domineering patriarch of their family. Viewing the overwhelming ruin and deaths of Congolese natives under the colonial rule as parallel to the ruin and death of her youngest sister as a result of her father's blind persistence, Leah says resentfully "I have damned many men to hell. President Eisenhower, King Leopold [of Belgium], and my own Father included" (p.420). On these accounts, Nathan's wife and daughters desert him facing the political anarchy and the ruin of the Congo crisis. Leah reports: "Our house had burned […] probably Father was trying to toast meat over a kerosene flame" (p.417) while by himself. Susan Strehle (2008) observes "Nathan's faith in God is complemented by his belief in the superiority of American civilization" (p.417). His house burned while he was demonstrating his American aristocracy. Moreover, the novel suggests that the fire which took Nathan's own home at a result of insistence on American aristocracy is symmetrical with the overwhelming fire and fighting raging across the Congo. After his home burns, Nathan resorts to the woods with no family or congregation. Earlier, he had conveyed the following message through his African interpreter to the Congolese: "I am a messenger of God's great good news for all mankind, and He has bestowed upon me a greater strength than the brute ox or the most stalwart among the heathen" (Kingslover, 1998, p.130). The Congolese villagers were surprised and took this as a challenge. When Nathan resorts to the woods, the villagers keep watching him wishing to see how he would manage to survive amid the overwhelming anarchy and ruin, "the same as everyone" in the Congo, through the help of Jesus alone as he preached, "without outside help from the airplane or even women." Some time after leaving, Leah kept wondering "who would cook for him"? She "never envisioned Father without women's keeping" (p.417). Nathan, the late twentieth-century male could stay functional only with the Puritan and "the nineteenth-century ideology of femininity, which emphasized women's roles as nurturing mothers and gentle companions and housekeepers for their husbands" (Davis, 1983, p.5). When Nathan's wife and daughters leave, he is incapable of managing his own affairs without the help of women. Living alone in the woods, "he was reported to be bearded, wild haired, and struggling badly with malnutrition and parasites" (Kingslover, 1998, p.417). Moreover, "He hid from strangers" and by time, the Congolese started to tell "stories about the white witch doctor named Tata Prize" (p.485).

Nathan never thought of the consequences of his violent imperialistic persistence. Fanon (1963) observes "colonialism is not a thinking machine nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence" (p.61). Nathan's family leaves the Kilanga village showing remorse and solidarity with the subjugated Africa. After a two-day walk under the barrage of bullets and cover of darkness followed by a ride on board a truck loaded with bananas and another loaded with rifles, Orleana and her daughters leave regretful and anguished not only at the death of Ruth May, the youngest daughter by a poisonous snake, but also after realizing the anarchy and deaths of many Congolese: "How is it right to slip free of an old skin and walk away from the scene of the crime? We came, we saw, we took away and we left behind" (Kingslover, 1998, p.493). Before Orleana leaves, the pressure of being subjugated kept building up inside her. When the news of the murder of Congo's independence leader, Patrice Lumumba, reaches her, she hates her compliance with the colonizer: "when it came I felt as if I'd been waiting for it my whole married life. Waiting for that ax to fall, so I could walk away with no forgiveness in my heart" (p.323). The subjugated women leave remorseful and even ashamed realizing they have nothing to offer to the Congolese. But "Father," says Leah, "wouldn't leave his post to come after us, that much was certain" (p.393). Nathan, however, could not resist the thought that he still has something to give to the Congolese children. He stays wishing to baptize all of them, yet his family depart not only for their own lives but after realizing the grave consequences of subjugation. "Father seemed to be reaping no special advantages. Additionally, his church was too close to the cemetery" (p.417). His daughter, Adah reports: "In our seventeenth months in Kilanga, thirty-one children died, including Ruth May" (p.413). Nathan did not think of the fiery consequences, "he waited till he was on fire" (p.487).

In an earlier episode to Nathan's downfall, the Congolese lost dozens of children in a river after their boat was tipped over by a crocodile. Because of his violent constant insistence on the significance of baptism to the Congolese children, Nathan "got the blame for it" (p.486). Before that incident and after his family desert him, Nathan "had reached a certain point" of ruin that the Congolese started to call him "the white witch doctor named Tata Prize," and even worse "he'd gotten a very widespread reputation for turning himself into a crocodile and attacking children" (p.485). Believing that the colonizers brought them only ruin and death, the Congolese parents chase Nathan away from the village with sticks. He reaches a coffee field and climbs up on a Belgian watchtower "left from the colonial days," an indication perhaps that Nathan, the zealous missionary associates himself in interests and actions with the colonizers against the colonized. Aroused by the sight of the watchtower and the bitter memories of their subjugation "where in old days the Belgian foreman would stand watching all the [Congolese] coffee pickers so he could single out which ones to whip at the end of the day," the Congolese villagers "set the tower on fire" (p.486). Nathan "waited till he was on fire before he jumped off" into

the burning coffee field (p.487) similar to the colonizers and the imperialists who left the Congo only after it was set on fire.

Only when Orleana sees the devastating consequences of colonial domination raging across the Congo taking her own home and one of her children she decides to revolt. As the conflict was rising between the Congolese on one side and the Belgians and Americans on the other, Orleana's pressure towards the bitterness of subjugation was rising as well. From the day she lost one of her children in the Congo at the hands of Nathan's blind obstinacy to baptize the children of the Congo, she "could hardly sit still" (p.396) preparing to speak and revolt against her conqueror. Kingslover seems to be using Gayatri Spivak's metaphor of speaking in her article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" as a form of revolt against domination. Kingslover shows that towards the end, Orleana decides to reveal her suffering and speak after realizing that she has "nothing to lose but [her] chains." She tells her daughters with difficulty: "I'll discuss it […] I despised him. He was a despicable man" (Kingslover, 1998, p.495). She said that for the first time to let out most of the pressure. Earlier she never articulated her suffering under the rule of Nathan. Towards the end of the colonial rule of the Congo, Orleana blames herself and Africa for their long inappropriate silence and for not resisting and being defiant saying "whether you're a nation or merely a woman, you must understand the language of your enemy," (p.383) that is the colonialist ideology. Even fifteen years later, Orleana still blames her silence and passivity saying: "Where had I been" somewhere else entirely? […] I am sure we understood nothing. From the next five months of Lumumba's imprisonment, escape, and recapture, I recall-what? The hardships of washing and cooking in a draught." She confirms "History didn't cross my mind. Now it does" (p.323). Orleana reveals that under the persistence and expansion of colonial rule and through the long emotional suffering she had "lost her wings" (p.201) and withered. Adah narrates "when father was around, she never gardened at all. That was his domain" planting only "useful foods, all to the Glory of God" (p.409). In the aftermath of her colonial rule, she blossoms and is "surrounded by a blaze of pinks, blues, and oranges." Adah notes her mother "was an entire botanical garden waiting to happen" (p.410).

Kingsolver gives Orleana voice towards the end of colonial rule. She made her speak: "I'll discuss it" (p.495) she says trying "to invent her version of the story" (p.492). "He was a despicable man" (p.495) she declares after a long silence perhaps to undo the silencing realizing that the only celebration in life should be to "acquire the words of a story" because "in perfect stillness" Orleana "only found sorrow" (p.385). When she is informed of Nathan's death "she was strangely uncurious about the details" (p.494). Under the colonial rule of Nathan, Orleana was occupied by him; "swallowed by Nathan's mission, body and soul" (p.198); inhabited by him. In the aftermath of colonial rule, she occupies her world and some space outside. The domineering Nathan made her despise confinements even being indoors similar to Gilman's nineteenth-century confined woman who "takes hold of the bars and shake them hard" to free herself at night and make outdoor journeys (Gilman, 2003, p.841). Orleana takes to the open "to escape it" (Kingslover, 1998, p.492). After Nathan, Orleana is always outdoors "march[ing] for civil rights" (p.442) gardening, standing barefoot "glaring at ocean" towards Africa; wearing "only the necessary parts of the outfit" (p.492) lest clothing interferes with her newly-constructed liberty. She is constantly outdoors rejecting all confinements; working on "civil rights and African relief" (p.495) still showing solidarity with the subjugated Africa and women. Orleana never remarried saying "Nathan Price was all the marriage I needed" (p.531). The Congo forgot its wounds after the Belgians and the Americans left, but Orleana couldn't. Her daughters beg her to ignore "the old injuries," "burry them, forget" (p.495), "Slide the weight from your shoulder and move forward," leave the shadows "into the light" (p.543).

In *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998), Barbara Kingslover clearly weaves a complex relationship of marginality. She moves between the marginalization and voicelessness of a white western woman to the colonial subjugation of Africa. She creates a marvelous overlapping between the stories of Orleana and the Congo. Within the context of colonial rule, the subjugated Orleana and Africa have learnt to identify themselves with one another despite the racial boundaries drawn by the vile colonial ideologies. Towards the end of *The Poisonwood Bible,* the overall impression that readers have is that the overwhelming silence imposed by various hegemonic forms of domination is giving way to speech and revolt. Kingslover shows readers that the late twentieth-century promises a chance of speech joined in revolt against the surrounding enclosing environment of repression and silencing.

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