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Familial Space and Children's Social Identity in Elieshi Lema's Parched Earth: A Love Story

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Abstract
This article examines the representation of children's social identity in Elieshi Lema's *Parched Earth: A Love Story*. In the context of family abandonment, this article explores the use of familial space in the narrative and its role in the construction of children's social identity. In this undertaking, we are primarily guided by Obioma Nnaemeka's 'nego-feminism' and Spain Daphne's spatial theories, which facilitate an understanding of the role of space in the construction of one's social identity while challenging the patriarchal assumptions through 'negotiation'. We argue that familial space plays a crucial role in the construction of children's social identity. Through the flashback structure, the protagonist narrates her childhood experiences after family abandonment and the experiences of other children to expose the debilitating nature of patriarchy, whose effects cut across age, gender, ethnicity, and social class.

Key words:
Familial space, identity, parental/family abandonment
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Introduction

Family abandonment as depicted in Elieshi Lema's *Parched Earth: A Love Story* results from societal demands imposed on men. The societal expectation is for men to fulfil them including procreating sons to continue the bloodline of patrilineal families. In this set-up, where the male heir takes precedence, family abandonment may also result from unfair treatment of women in the family. Such unfair treatment prompts women to abandon their husbands. In Lema's *Parched Earth,* Justine who abandons her husband, Joseph. At the heart of this abandonment is familial space and its implications for members, including children. This

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article, therefore, explores the use of familial space to examine children's social identities in the context of family abandonment as represented in Lema's novel. Parental/family abandonment in this article refers to the failure of a parent to provide reasonable support and maintain regular contact with the child, including providing normal supervision. In other words, abandonment implies minimal efforts in supporting and communicating with the child. Using the flashback structure, the narrative uses an adult female protagonist, Doreen, who recounts her childhood experiences in her abandoned family to reveal the formation of her and her brother's children's social identities as well as her daughter's social identity.

In his theorisation of a parent-child relationship, Yunusy Castory Ng'umbi treats children as the first victims of parental separation (2018, p.155). The impact manifest in the "child's heart, mind and soul ranging from soft to cruel, from apparently small to visibly large, and from short term to long term" (Malinda 2017, p.14). Using familial space, we would argue that the female protagonist in the selected text exposes children's social identities in the context of family abandonment. In many cases, children are supposedly 'blind' and 'dumb' during the abandonment of the family. Blind because the supposition is that they do not understand what has transpired between the parents (after all they are amoral); and they are dumb since societal norms do not require them to have a say in the matter and irreconcilable differences of their parents.

Speaking of childhood memories as a new style in African women's writings, Okuyade Ogaga (2011, p.138) argues that African women writers of the twenty-first century claim a subtle shift in the artistic curve of African literature in style and thematic concerns. The style and thematic concern, according to Okuyade, give them a discrete position in the development of the African novel.

Lema's use of familial space to represent the female protagonist using the first-person narrative voice (the "I" perspective) embodies the essential characteristics of children's social identity resulting from family abandonment. Asante Lucy Mtenje's (2016) probing question: "To what extent does patriarchy influence the socialisation of daughters by their mothers?" (p. 64) is crucial in understanding the role of the patriarchal system within familial space (Foibe's house) from which the whole story

originates. Doreen and Godbless are socialised differently under their mother's roof. Doreen admits that, unlike Godbless, she does not look for alternative realities that she can recreate and, instead, makes hers (p.10). Linda Kerber (1988, p. 11) highlights the association of women with domesticity, with home depicted as the women's 'proper sphere'. Unlike her mother and Aunt (Foibe and Great Aunt Mai) whose socialisation disempowers them, to Doreen, this socialisation constitutes a reason for her social development. The narrative reveals how Doreen works extra hard as a girl: "Hard work was a practical lesson I internalised just by watching my mother" (p. 9), to attest to how women can be self-less in their families.

Ng'umbi (2018, p. 157) appreciates the use of a female child narrator because "it is through the eyes of child narrators that a different perspective becomes accessible, regarding the struggles of the adult world". Using a female protagonist (as a child through the flashback structure) in this narrative, we can easily access children's social identity in different spaces – familial space, rural and urban, psychological, school, and the workplace. Extrapolating from what Ogaga calls *Bildungsroman* novels, through this narrative, readers enrich themselves as the protagonist voyages from childhood to adulthood. This is because, according to Ng'umbi (2018), "the *Bildungsroman* tradition has become an endeavour, one that makes children occupy a hybrid space that enables them to navigate between private and public spaces" (p. 157).

Mandy Treagus (2014, p. 1) defines *Bildungsroman* as a narrative "that outlines the growth of an individual from youth to maturity, a growth entailing character development culminating accommodation between the individual and society. Treagus (2014) asks a provocative question if the *Bildungsroman* is an expression of a patriarchal, can it be used by a woman writer to give voice to a narrative of a woman's development? (p. 13). This question opens the door to seeing the reason behind the use of female protagonists in African women's writings. In the same vein, Ralph Austen (2015, p. 214) has noted that "[It] has, since the 1980s, come into wide use among critics of African (and more general postcolonial) literature, although usually in very critical terms". Extrapolating from Austen's (2015) contention that "there is a body of African literature that can be usefully identified as the *bildungsroman* even (and sometimes especially)

when it deviates from its "classical" European model" (p. 215), *Parched Earth* can also be identified as the *bildungsroman* because it deals with Doreen's life (female protagonist), focusing on her development from childhood (the one who does not have a dream) to adulthood (a successful teacher) in the context of an increasingly modernising world.

Although the narrative seems to align with Treagus', Ogaga's, Austen and Ng'umbi's analysis of *Bildungsroman* novels, it rejects the notion of physicality and masculinity as important survival and socialisation attributes. We do not wish to linger on the issue of *Bildungsroman,* which has been treated in serious discussion elsewhere (Treagus, Austen, Okuyade, Nadaswarin and Ng'umbi, to mention a few) but only to note that this novel can also be situated in these kinds of narratives.

After all, the protagonist in the novel narrates her childhood-to-adulthood story and challenges the notion that physicality and masculinity are the only attributes for survival and socialisation. We centre our discussion on how the selected novel uses familial space to represent children's social identities. On the other hand, the narrative uses familial space to portray Doreen, a female protagonist who understands that the important attributes for survival and socialisation in the twenty-first century are creativity and knowledge. This realisation helps the protagonist negotiate and challenge the patriarchal assumption that man is the measure of all things. The narrative demonstrates how a *bildungsroman* female character controls her own world. On the one hand, the narrator learns how to do what Carol Lazzaro-Weis (1990) calls a "protective colouration"[1] to achieve a "measure of private success" (p.19). On the other hand, the protagonist negotiates with her male counterparts. The representation of a female protagonist as a successful teacher signifies the narrative's agenda of negotiating the attributes for human survival and socialisation, creativity, intelligence, and knowledge. These attributes do not regard one's gender/sex.

Denis Washburn (1995, p.1) argues that "the subject matter of a *bildungsroman* is the realisation of the protagonist's self-identity through his integration into society and its value". In the narrative style,

[1] Carol uses Northrop Frye's term to explain how the female characters in *bildungsroman* novels collaborate with patriarchy publicly in order to achieve some measure of private success.

bildungsroman is a vehicle for Doreen to explore her social identity in the context of family abandonment. In her eBook "We Should All Be Feminists", Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2014, p. 14) vehemently invites parents to raise children focusing on interest and ability instead of gender because everyday life reinforces one's social identity. As knight (1994, p. 218) indicates that everyday life, as a symbolic practice, is consistently evoking and reinforcing social identity. Here we borrow Michael Watts' understanding of identity as "[a] meeting point that constitutes and continually reforms the subject so that he or she can act – point of suture, of temporary identification" (Watts 1992, p.124). Looking at identity as a bus ticket, Watts adds:

> Identity is rather like a bus ticket, you just have to get from here to there, the whole of you can never be represented by the ticket you carry but you have to buy a ticket in order to get from here to there (Watts 1992, p.124).

As identity is like a bus ticket, the narrative shows that space controls and constructs one's social identity. Therefore, Doreen, Godbless, Martin and Milika ought to make sure that they get their own social identities to achieve self-realisation. Doreen says: "We live in a world which is strange *where everyone is trying to draw a circle of comfort around*, everyone for themselves, rarely, very rarely for the other" (p.3; *emphasis added*). Daphne Spain notes that developing positive social identities requires one to reject the dominant, oppressive orientations and create his or her own values and structures (2016, pp. 25-26). Broadly speaking, Spain is quite correct in his statement that 'identity is not given' meaning that one must struggle for it. That is why Doreen does not believe what Aunt Mai told her because "the concept of ownership had changed" (p. 81). Stuart Marriott (1998, p. 10) notes that, in any society anywhere, children develop [a social] identity within the social context:

> The stories we tell our children, the narratives we give them to make sense of cultural experience, constitute a kind of mapping, maps of meaning that enable our children to make sense of the world … this is because the interaction between children and stories has powerful implications for personal and social development… they contribute to children's sense of identity, an identity that is simultaneously personal and social. (p. 9)

The challenges one faces and how one deal with them determines one's identification as either weak or strong. This depends on the space where one is socialised. Since identity is constructed alongside other identities, Watts (1991, p. 11) argues that it must be subjected to negotiations because identity is malleable and flexible. In this regard, the narrative reveals how Doreen, the female protagonist, struggles to identify herself in the patriarchal single-mother's family and negotiates with men in different spaces. For example, in the first place, Doreen negotiates with Zima at the workplace, in the second place, she negotiates with her brother (Godbless) about who will help their ageing mother, in the third place, she negotiates with Martin about infertility and child's sex preference and lastly, she negotiates with Joseph about the working of patriarchy. On the other hand, Godbless who gets no chance at all to go to secondary school refuses to accept that he must resign to being a villager because he wants to identify himself as strong enough to realise his dream (pp. 6-7). This results in feeling ashamed before his sister (Doreen) and even jealousy of her.

Parched Earth: A Love Story

Elieshi Lema is a Tanzanian female writer. She was born in 1949 and grew up in a village (Nronga) on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro, Tanzania. She appeared on the writing scene in 1995 with the publication of *Safari ya Prospa* (*Prospa's Journey*), a novel for children written in Kiswahili[2]. Another novel after this one is called *Mwendo* (1998). In 2001, she shifted her writing from Kiswahili to English by publishing *Parched Earth: A Love Story,* which has captured a wide audience beyond the East African countries. Later, she published novels such as *Upendo's Dream* (2004), *The Man from Tanga* (2007), *In the Belly of Dar es Salaam* (2011), and *Cousin Lusu* (2011).

Parched Earth charts the story of Doreen, the protagonist, and her encounters from childhood in single-mother's family to adulthood (in marriage). As a girl child, Doreen is raised differently from her brother, Godbless, who is admired by their patriarchal society. Socialisation in single-mother's house initially frustrates Doreen's dreams. Eventually, she becomes a successful geography teacher by chance. So, she uses the chance effectively to demonstrate a woman's ability in the patriarchal society and

[2] See Ng'umbi's *Politics of the Family in Contemporary East and West African Women Writing*

uses the chance for her social development. Trying to change what seems to be unfair from her mother's legendary story; Doreen finds herself entrapped and ends up abandoned just like her mother. The same is evident in Martin who promises not to follow in his father's footsteps (by not prioritising male children) but still ends up abandoning his family in search of a son. Through Doreen, the novel reveals how both men and women are victims of patriarchal operations and orientations. Towards this end, the narrative juxtaposes the stories of Foibe and Doreen (female children) with those of Godbless and Martin (male children).

Role of Space in Constructing Children's Social Identity

Amanda Flather (2013) advises readers to read spatial narratives and treat space as a "ground for social construction" (p. 146). To her, space plays a vital role in the construction of one's social identity. Within the realm of this novel, we can contemplate the relationship between space and children's social identity. In spatial turn[3], Emmanuelle Peraldo (2016) harks back to the idea of *time* being the main category of analysis and interpretation by aligning with Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift (2000) who suggest that "space is everywhere in modern thoughts" (p. 1).

We use familial space to shape our discussion of children's social identity in *Parched Earth* because space can serve as a new inquiry in literary analysis and interpretation. This idea of space is buttressed by Michael Foucault's (1986, p. 22) declaration, "We are in the epoch of simultaneity; we are in the epoch of juxtapositions, the epoch of the near and far, of the side by side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment". Fredric Jameson calls space an ideologeme, which he defines as,

> [A]n amphibious formation, whose essential structural characteristics may be described as its possibility to manifest itself either as a pseudo idea- a conceptual or belief system, an abstract value, an opinion or prejudices-or as a proto-narrative, a kind of ultimate class fantasy about the "collective characters" which are the classes in the opposition. (p.87)

[3] Emmanuelle Peraldo defines the *Spatial Turn* as a transdisciplinary phenomenon in the humanities. It was coined for the first time in 1989 by Edward Soja in *Postmodern Geographies* to explain the increasing concern of academics in social sciences for space in the 1960s and 1970s especially with the contribution of Henri Lefebvre (1974), Deleuze and Guattari (1980) and Michel Foucault (1984).

In what follows we use Jameson's term 'ideologeme' to conceptualise the role of space in the construction of children's social identity in Lema's *Parched Earth*. Extrapolating from Gareth Jones's idea of space as embedded with power and ideology, both real and imagined, we argue that space is produced by human agencies. This is because space in "itself has no power" (Jones 1994, p. 1). Jones (1994) underscores importance of stressing the production and reproduction of space by human agencies, which enhances diversity between boys and girls in their socialisation (p. 2).

Although the narrative looks up to a male child as a representative of power and other social expectations, it alerts us that the rule operates under some conditions. Lema uses familial space to reveal Godbless' disappointments. Godbless does not live up to societal expectations because the system has rejected and labelled him as illegitimate. In this stance, the novel refutes the patriarchal assumption that once one is born a boy [man], he is automatically legitimate. Godbless' rejection to the system signifies Lema's rhetorical agenda towards challenging what Gerda Lerner (1986) calls an "unproven and unprovable assumption" (p. 5) that celebrates patriarchal power over women. Godbless' illegitimacy is figured out by Doreen's childhood memories as she remembers Great Aunt Mai's strange philosophy that a "child who comes carried on the head *is never liked, especially when it is a boy*" (p.120, *emphasis added*). Through this philosophy, the novel reveals the disappointments male children whose social expectations for good future rest upon them face.

The novel underscores familial space plays a vital role in the construction of children's social identity in the context of family abandonment. Mtenje (2016, p. 63) notes that mothers are the primary agents in children socialisation. Through mothers, children learn and acquire values, and morals of society. The novel seems to use familial space to reveal the ground upon which children's social identity is constructed. We would argue that women oversee the running of the house while men are exposed to the public sphere and superintend over the family's economic stability. As Nicole Bourque (1997, p. 163) points out, cooking is one of the activities which define the female gender. The narrative reveals how Foibe embraces patriarchal orientations and socialisation. Being aware of the operation of the patriarchal system, she raises her children in accordance

with their gender. Foibe associates Doreen with domestic chores. Doreen admits this aspect by saying: "[a]s a girl child, my mother would leave me in charge of the house […] later in the day; I would look something to cook so that my brothers would not starve" (pp. 10-11). Doreen's observation legitimates familial space in the narrative as it primarily legalises women's stay indoors.

Doreen, a female child protagonist, narrates her brother's experience especially at the age of twenty-six when he considers himself a grown man. This explains why Godbless starts longing for his biological father. For Lema, this signals how male children are victims in the context of family abandonment. Carol Christine Smart (2004) points out that the ethos of norm of family abandonment made children live out of the new social norms (p. 404). In consequence, Godbless long for his biological father to acquire social identity as a man. There is evidence that Godbless' fragmented social identity is the outcome of his family abandonment. Enduring a sense of children's social identity, Doreen, a protagonist narrates her brother's marginalisation by society. Foibe's abandonment (family abandonment) turns Godbless into an illegitimate identity. This fact supports the assumption that Godbless loses his social identity as a privileged male child.

Godbless becomes a victim of his family abandonment—he remains illegitimate in his society because "he was locked in the cold, without identity, denied acceptability by those who defined his place" (*emphasis added*). At this juncture, Godbless spearheads the struggle to find his biological father. Marvis Eileen Hetherington and John Kelly (2002) assert that individuals whose parents' divorce have serious long-term social, emotional, or psychological problems in adulthood. This conclusion can be treated similarly in the context of parental abandonment in the narrative because, unlike divorce, which is legal separation, abandonment which means informal separation has also serious long-term effects on a child. Thus, the idea resonates with Doreen's memories about her brother's (Godbless) situation at the age of twenty-six (adulthood). Echoing similar views to those of Smart (2004), and Hetherington and Kelly (2002), Anthonia Essein and Agapetus Bassey have noted that cues from mothers alone leave a void about who the children are from a male perspective. To them, a child with a father's absence, "become[s]

depressed, disappointed, sad and angry" (2012, p. 248). Godbless, being a male child, is much more affected than his siblings.

Godbless' life at the age of twenty-six is characterised by depression and disappointment, though it nostalgically gives him hope because "men think of greater things" (p. 128). Godbless has been nurtured believing that success in life is for men because a "man is a measure of all things" and, therefore, "everything is to be measured in reference to him" (Aguirre 1990, p. 63; Cain 2012, p. 124). Extrapolating from Mtenje (2016) on her critique of *Purple Hibiscus*, Godbless, being a man wields him more power because of the prevailing social belief that his wife must respect him. Thus, he needs a good house. Godbless feels responsible for the family matters only because he is a male child. He is responsible for taking care of his mother who is now ageing. Single-mother's house gives Doreen a space to reveal the way male children are critically affected in the context of parental/family abandonment. Doreen wonders:

> He [Godbless] was already a man. It occurred to me then that his desire to be a separate entity, to identify with the father, to belong to the world of men, distinctly apart from the mother, was a thing beyond the decision of the conscious mind. It was the logical route of the thread in the matrix of maleness (p. 136).

Evidently, Doreen considers his brother's manhood as *maleness* unless he has all the things he desires as a man. Juxtaposing Godbless' and Martin's manhood, Doreen seems to appreciate Martin's manhood because, at the same age as her brother (Godbless), Martin owns everything a man is traditionally supposed to own— a good house, a good job, and now a wife (Doreen). Doreen admits that her brother's talk was, perhaps, spurred by Martin's visit (p. 136). In other words, Godbless fulfils his dream within Martin's talk.

Lansford (2009, p. 141) findings suggest that the effects of divorce and abandonment are not apparent until children try to marry or have children of their own. Since parental/family abandonment relates to a boy's externalizing trajectories (Lansford 2009, p.142), Godbless becomes jealous of his sister. In this regard, Doreen says: "My letters to Godbless, talking about the good life of teacher education, must have crusted his hurt to a stone. That life was *supposed* to be his! But he did not write any of those things in his replies" (9). The narrative represents the role of familial

space in constructing children's social identities in the context of parental/family abandonment.

In the context where the mother is the head of the household, Dominique Meeker (1992) notes that mother exerts less control over their children (p. 66). These societies according to Mona Etienne (1977) "characterised by considerable freedom of choice" (p.42). Whereas Etienne underscores the role of women, who, as mothers, tend to determine 'the autonomy and mobility' of children in matrilineal societies, the narrative suggests that even in patriarchal societies, if there is no man as a head, traditions do not stay. By drawing from Foibe's family, Foibe perhaps, apart from being unusual in the patriarchal world, rejects what Clifford Odimegwu, Nyasha Mutanda and Chidimma Mbanefo (2017) would suggest to the effect that single motherhood is strongly associated with a negative economy that affects the well-being of their children (p. 313). Thus, Foibe debunks this patriarchal assumption that a woman's house is dependent without a man as the head of the household. Doreen reminds us about her mother's refusal of this patriarchal assumption when she remembers her mother's oath: "My children will find laughter in my house" (p.134). This means that Foibe can provide for her family without depending on her men (co-parents).

Doreen suggests changing the concept of *home* and considering a woman's home in her own biology. Doreen says, "If that is all there is for her, then own it, make a power base that can never be claimed or given to others". To ensure that a woman owns that power, the novel suggests keeping the strictest distance between men and women, that is, sexual life must be hers, owned and controlled by a woman. Lema argues similarly to what Robert Jensen observes that identity is formed within the patriarchal construction; so it is not static or dictated by biology (Lema 1995, p. 112). That is why Doreen passes her Standard Seven Examination while her brother fails. The narrative teems with different scenarios that account for Godbless' hate of his fate. One passage that shows that Godbless hates his fate reads:

> […] My brother Godbless got no chance at all, having failed his exams. He is still in the village, working on the land. He has never liked it, never forgiven fate for that raw deal […] Godbless had hated that fatalism, had hated the uncle who pronounced it as if the man had chosen the road for Godbless. (p. 6)

Even though the narrative subverts Godbless' power as a head of the family as expected by society, Doreen's social identity, like her brother, also suffers as a result of parental/family abandonment. Doreen wishes to fight against the oppressive social system believing that the "social laws that forced a man to keep what was his were no longer operative to us" (p. 81). She believes that the woman-man norm can make a family and raise children. Knowing that her family (familial space) plays a crucial role in her identification as an 'immigrant', Doreen, however, encounters the challenges in her struggle to identify herself in her family; in a presence of her brother, Godbless. To vindicate the way familial space plays a pivotal role in Doreen's social identification, the narrative on some occasions juxtaposes Foibe's and Doreen's stories. For example, Doreen narrates Foibe's love story which ends in abandonment:

> I am amazed at how our storylines join, all the time, my mother's and mine, Godbless' and Martin's. The places, the meetings, the soul's mirror flashing back to us reflections of bodies without skin, without shadows. Hearts pumping blood, pulsating veins, vital forces … Life so tender. (p. 116)

In "Parental Divorce and Children's Adjustment", Jennifer Lansford (2009) wants us to link parental abandonment and children's effects with demographic characteristics such as gender, race and/or ethnicity (p. 142). Godbless' life in his mother's abandoned family becomes even tougher at the age of twenty-six, even though the patriarchal system still gives him glimmer of hope. Doreen's childhood memories, through the image of the spider web, shows that "[It] is not just the fly can die inside that web, but also one of its own kind or even itself" (p.4). Arguably, this memory reminds society that even though they admire male child(ren) more than female ones the truth is that their admiration indirectly creates a chain that blocks male child(ren) from achievements – in marriage like Martin, in education like Godbless and workplace like Zima.

Spider Web and Daydream Structure

Lema begins her narrative by teasing out the story of her protagonist when she is already a successful teacher at Sokoni Juu Primary in Moshi Rural District. Lema introduces her narrative with daydream and the image of a spider web:

> I sit in front of the class watching the children hew knowledge from the quarry of my words. Occasionally, one of them looks into my eyes, unseeingly, seeking some magical intervention to give answers to the teacher's questions. And all the time my mind is telling itself stories. My stories, your stories. Our stories... There is no timeframe to the stories, to their evolution…
> We live in a world, my mind says, which is very strange. Always new, always surprising. In this world, we are all trying to draw a circle of comfort around ourselves, everyone for themselves, rarely, very rarely for the other. The struggle to remain within this circle creates a matrix in which we travel, sometimes blindly… Always searching. It is like a curse!
> The image of the spider comes to a kid, the way it spins its web from the very inside of its stomach, for itself, and for trapping others into its power and into death, which is life for itself. Death for one, life for another. The spider spins its power web from the secretions of its stomach to survive … Life informs life (pp. 3-4).

In "Reflection vs. Daydream: Two types of the Implied Reader in Hemingway's Fiction", Hebert Zapf (1987) notes that in the daydream pattern, the reader instead of being confronted with his own interpretive subjectivity is drawn into the imaginative world of the text. Reader's psyche is brought to experience the fictitious world under the simulated conditions of 'real life' (p.106). By beginning her narrative with a daydream structure when Doreen is in class, the narrator informs the readers about the use of flashback structure, which underscores Doreen's childhood experiences and adulthood achievements. Such stories which use flashback structure, according to Ng'umbi, underscore the achievement of the protagonist (p. 164). It is childhood memory' and a way toward challenging the oppressive social laws: "My mind is used to travelling, everywhere, places I have been and have not been, crossing past times and future times, spinning webs like a spider" (p. 5). This daydream is built up in the reader's expectations and is destroyed unexpectedly at the end of the story when Doreen and Joseph create space for an intimate relationship after experiencing abandonment. The flashback narrative structure does not only communicate the aesthetic quality of the story but it also accentuates the fruits of struggle among women (Ng'umbi 2018, p. 164). The narrative uses a daydream style to

make readers feel what Doreen feels, as a teacher, mother, girl, woman and/or wife.

The image of a spider and its web, according to Vincent Dussol (2011) gives a model of natural order amid the flux of human meaning in a physical world (p. 11). The spider web is the first point, which is critical for patriarchal consciousness. It is argued that when it comes to Spiders in spatial narratives, the authors through their characters become naturalists. Our interpretation of the spider web and comparison of fiction with American literature intends to clearly understand the meaning of the spider web attached to real life. After all, the spider web symbolises "the feeling that life is a trap of evil and cruelty disguised in beauty and delicacy" (Hamutal, Bar-Yosef 1993, p. 361). The narrative shows the evil and cruelty disguised in the beauty of men's love and delicacy through Doreen's first date with Martin (chapter three) and Foibe's legend (chapter eleven).

Diane Cousineau (1990, p. 21) argues that the spider web is an emphatically no hierarchal form. What is crucial to a structure are points of insertion where line differences converge, those moments of transition where everything hangs in the balance. For instance, in the narrative, Doreen's story is interrupted by Foibe's legend which aims at comparing the experiences of these two characters, as female children and as adults. Lema's use of familial space in the rural context aims to show how Foibe's legend serves as Doreen's point of reference to women's subordination, oppression, victimisation, and struggles. Existing in different spaces, Foibe's and Doreen's experiences point at a self-sufficiency struggle against patriarchal social laws. We would say that Lema has succeeded to provide the narrative a spatial form.

Another memory brought into the narrative is Doreen and Martin's family where Milika, as a child is suffering/ victimised under the context of abandonment. It is within Doreen and Martin's house that we interrogate how familial space plays a role in Milika's suffering to reveal children's social identity in the context of parental abandonment. Milika does not bear to carry the burden of abandonment. Doreen explains Milika's frustration at seven years old when she starts to question and analyse things. As Doreen admits: "The older she grew the more she quarrelled, the attention went to her father" (p. 161). Milika's rejection of the toys and

clothes convey the message that both father and mother in the family are important. With father's absence, to Milika feels like incomplete meaning that the woman-man norm is diverged. Doreen, however, sympathises with Milika because she does everything to make Martin settle in the house for her own sympathy and Milika. Milika's story captures reader's attention to see Milika's suffering resulted from her mother's abandonment. Doreen holds the view that a family "should constitute a father and mother who live together and who cherish their children" (Ng'umbi 2018, p. 165). Therefore, Martin's abandonment of his family not only victimises Doreen, but also Milika, as a child is even more victimised because even though Doreen finds a relief from Joseph, Milika has no one to sympathise for her suffering. As a result, "Milika's unfed gullibility for attention turned to open rebellion" (p.161). As a figure of rebellion, Milika is aware that her father has abandoned the family. That is why she seeks for father's presence in the family by rejecting toys and good clothes. Milika's response implies that father's presence, care, and love in the family is very important and in fact it completes the cycle of family hood.

Milika, as Smart (2006 qtd in Ng'umbi 2018, p. 166) would argue, has a keen sense of what a proper childhood should be and what constitutes the responsibilities of her parents. Consequently, Milika becomes so stubborn when her father abandons them. Milika observes that her father is never at home with them when she is little (p. 161). In Ng'umbi's (2018) voice, Milika "holds a strong and vivid ideal of what a father should be. That is a father is someone you love, someone who kisses a way your tears, tells you everything would be alright with your world, someone who is there for you" (p. 166).

Negotiating Social Identity and African Feminism

Lema, as the first Tanzania woman writer in English, produces a narrative that challenges the narratives of male predecessors. She depicts a central character who challenges the patriarchal assumption that they are superior to women and should rule over them. *Parched Earth: A Love Story* negotiates man's and woman's worlds in different spaces. Space in Lema's story reveals the problems raised by patriarchal orientations and socialisation. As Shalini Nadaswarin (2011, p. 23) would argue that "the patriarch of the family decides the family's daily actions and holds the power to influence their thoughts." Doreen is a product of a single-mother who socialises her children basing on gender and not ability and interests.

Yet Doreen discovers her social identity "separate to her former self, completing the process of transmission, placing power and decision-making into her hands" (Ibid: 25) regardless of her subordination in her single-mother's house. It is important then, to note that men are not the other in feminist agenda. Obioma Nnaemeka (1997, p. 1) emphasises the importance of cultural literacy to any valid feminist theorizing of African literature. It is important because culture shapes everything. Doreen, a protagonist (a child through flashback structure and adult) in the narrative engages and travels in different spaces to explore women's children's social identities while negotiating with her male counterparts.

Conclusion

The realisation of the role of space in the construction of one's social identity makes the readers aware of the need to negotiate to subvert some of the patriarchal social laws and order. This awareness is what Epifania Amoo-Adare (2011) calls 'critical spatial literacy' (p. 102). Amoo-Adare defines critical spatial literacy as "the ability to read codes embedded in the urban built environment in order to understand how they affect social life and to determine if there is a need for transformative spatio-political action" (Amoo-Adare 2011, p. 102). In this article, we have used the same concept to mean the ability of men and women to grasp the way space plays a significant role in the construction of one's identity and to determine a need for transformative spatio-social, cultural, political, and economic actions. *Parched Earth* uses single-mother's familial space to demonstrate the construction of children's social identity. Meanwhile, the writer has a spatial literary, which helps her to develop a protagonist—Doreen— as the one who sees the need for change in perception of patriarchy. Moreover, we have argued that Lema's use of Doreen, a female protagonist in *Parched Earth* is what prompts one to read this novel as a *Bildungsroman*. Lema, whose novel belongs to the fourth generation of African female writers, employs a daydream as a narrative technique that, in fact, validates this categorisation as a *Bildungsroman* narrative. At the same time, the novel depicts Doreen as an adult using spider web image. Using spider web image, Doreen exposes the need to negotiate to remove the tyranny of patriarch which affect everybody regardless of gender, age and/or socio-political and economic status.

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