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Language and Identity Relationship in *Little Bee* by Chris Cleave

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
Master's Degree in Literature and Civilization**

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Dedication

To all those who inspired us and contributed to the completion of this research, your support made it possible.

Maroua BEGGAT: I dedicate this work with heartfelt gratitude: to my mother and father; whose affection and prayers helped me reach such success, to my sisters and brothers; my lifelong companions in joy and struggle, to my fiancé; for his deep belief in me, to my beautiful friend, Nadjah, whose support never wavers, and to my pupils; whose curiosity continues to inspire me.

Meriem MEFTAH: I dedicate this work to my great family, to my beloved parents whose endless patience, love, prayers and silent sacrifices have been the foundation of all my strength. To my dear husband and my dear brothers especially Dehmane. I would not have been able to complete this work without your faith, support and constant encouragement. To my sweet Little Bees, Mohammed-Al Fatih and Azzahraa.

We dedicate this work to those who struggle to seek knowledge.

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Abstract

Little Bee is a significant novel that delves into how characters confront personal and cultural struggles, using language as a powerful tool to reveal themes of identity, displacement, and survival. The aim of this research is to explore the relationship between language and identity in *Little Bee*, examining how linguistic expression shapes and reflects the characters' evolving identities throughout the novel. The dissertation adopts a postcolonial approach to explore themes and characters' experiences in *Little Bee* through deep textual analysis, investigating how issues of migration, trauma, and identity are shaped by the legacy of colonialism. As a result, post-colonial African writers often blend native and colonial languages to express identity, reclaim cultural heritage, and resist the enduring impacts of colonialism. Similarly, in *Little Bee*, Chris Cleave illustrates how language functions as a reflection of both personal and social identity, serving as a tool for survival, resistance, and empowerment within the postcolonial world.

Key word : Identity, Language, *Little Bee*, Migration, Postcolonial world.

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General Introduction

1. Background of the Study

The history of African nations passed through a long journey, from colonialism, to the influence of neo-colonialism, then through the struggle for decolonization, finally to the efforts in post colonialism to reclaim their identity and independence. As a reaction to these challenges, post colonialism emerged as a critical framework to analyze the lasting impacts of colonization. This intellectual movement seeks to restore African histories and identities that are marginalized under colonial rule. Through post-colonial literature, African writers resist colonial legacies and regain cultural autonomy using language and storytelling.

Postcolonial literature describes the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. More accurately, it depicts the experience of the oppressed through stories of suffering and trauma. Chris Cleave's *Little Bee* is a powerful example, representing a Nigerian refugee whose life is shaped by conflicts and violence. The novel explores central themes like identity and language, as well as migration and displacement as common themes in postcolonial writings. These have become important topics for postcolonial researchers.

This study highlights the deep connection between language and identity in postcolonial literature. In *Little Bee*, this theme is reflected in the story of the young Nigerian girl who uses language to survive and express herself. Her journey shows how identity is shaped by both cultural origins and the challenges of the new society.

2. Problem Statement

Chris Cleave's *Little Bee* novel highlights the different challenges which face a young Nigerian girl in the British society. Through *Little Bee* narrative, he critiques the immigration system of the country and shows its hypocrisy and injustice against those who seek asylum. Cleave introduces to the reader the protagonist who symbolizes the emotions and struggles of

most immigrants in postcolonial world. *Little Bee* is a young Nigerian girl who attempts to reconstruct her identity and find a place in the British society. She is portrayed as someone who is different as well as foreign there. Additionally, she is depicted as someone who is hopeful despite the misery she lived in her country and in the UK.

Little Bee presents the experiences of a Nigerian refugee whose life is characterized by the differences between the language of the immigrants and the society she lives in. This linguistic contrast helps reveal key themes such as trauma and identity. Overall, *Little Bee* clearly conveys the voice of black immigrants; their suffering, resilience, and the silent battles they confront in a world that marginalizes them.

3. Research Questions

This research explores how identity and language are depicted in *Little Bee* by Chris Cleave. It seeks to address a series of questions related to the ways in which identity is constructed and how language is used throughout the novel. The study aims to provide answers to the following questions:

- a- How does Chris Cleave portray identity in *Little Bee*?
- b- What are the major features of the characters' language in *Little Bee*?
- c- How does the use of language in *Little Bee* influence the characters' sense of identity?

4. Research Hypotheses

To guide the investigation of the questions posed, a number of hypotheses is suggested:

- a- Chris Cleave portrays identity in *Little Bee* as a dynamic struggle shaped by trauma, displacement, and the search for belonging.

b- The characters' language reflects their experiences, emotions, and cultural background.

c- The language shows the change of identity through the novel.

5. Literature Review

The connection between language and identity has been a significant area of study in postcolonial literature since language is a central tool through which identity is shaped and expressed. The novel *Little Bee* by Chris Cleave serves as a rich site for exploring these themes. This literature review provides an overview of the existing studies on the relationship between language and identity, particularly in postcolonial contexts, and identifies areas where further investigation is needed.

Language in postcolonial discourse is deeply tied to issues of power, displacement, and cultural interactions. Scholars such as Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o in *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) have argued that language is not only a medium of communication but also a carrier of culture and identity. Ngũgĩ emphasizes how colonial languages have been imposed on colonized people, leading to fragmentation of identity. This idea aligns with *Little Bee*, where characters navigate multiple languages reflecting their distinct and evolving identities.

According to *Language and Identity in Postcolonial African Literature* by Ernest N. Emenyonu, the way language is used reflects how individuals shape their identity. The characters change their languages as a survival mechanism or as a means to fit in. In *Little Bee*, the protagonist adopts her speech depending on her surroundings, using language to express herself and as a protective strategy.

Furthermore, in Postcolonial Linguistics, the concept of linguistic Othering is deeply explored, particularly in *Language, Identity, and the Politics of Place*, edited by Alison Phipps. It investigates how language proficiency is used to include or exclude individuals

from social groups. This study is conducted to understand how refugees' identities are shaped according to the way they use language in the host society.

This review shows that while many works have investigated language and identity separately, there is still a gap in literary studies that focuses specifically on how *Little Bee* demonstrates the relationship between both of them. Future studies might further examine how language serves as a barrier as well as a bridge in identity formation within postcolonial and diasporic narratives.

6. Aims of the Study

This research aims to explore the relationship between language and identity in Chris Cleave's *Little Bee*. The analysis focuses on how language serves as a key element in the construction and transformation of identity, particularly in the context of displacement and migration. It investigates how the protagonist, Little Bee, and the other characters use language as a means of coping with trauma, establishing one's own identity in British society.

7. Significance of the Study

The connection between language and identity is clearly emphasized in the *Little Bee*, which makes it a rich context to examine how linguistic choices reflect personal and social transformation. The significance of this research study lies within its contribution to the understanding of how language serves as a powerful tool in constructing people's identity. In addition, it helps readers recognize how speech as well as silence becomes means of identity formation and expression. The investigation of language use and identity in *Little Bee* might help future researchers in the same field of study. Furthermore, it may provide a deep understanding of the cultural, and social implications of language in postcolonial literature.

8. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology. It provides a textual analysis of the novel *Little Bee* in addition to academic sources such as reports, journal articles, books, and book chapters. The analysis aims at answering the central questions in order to fulfil the overall objective of the research.

9. Structure of the Study

The dissertation is divided into two chapters. The first chapter, titled "Language and Identity in Postcolonial Literature," explores key aspects of postcolonial literature and its historical context, with a focus on how language and identity are represented. The second chapter, titled "Analysis of Language and Identity in *Little Bee*," presents a detailed analysis of the novel, examining how the characters' experiences reflect the interplay between language and identity throughout the narrative.

CHAPTER ONE

Identity and Language in Postcolonial African Literature

Chapter One: Identity and Language in Postcolonial African Literature

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Introduction

Post colonialism refers to the period of time that examines the effects of colonialism and imperialism on previously colonized societies. It shows how colonial power shapes culture, identities, and social systems. Theoretically, postcolonial literature is defined as the literature that belongs to countries that have gone through the bitter phase of European colonialism. It explores various themes including identity, hybridity, immigration, and language. The aim of this chapter is to offer a general overview of postcolonial theory, focusing on the fundamental challenges faced by the colonized, such as oppression, resistance, and identity. The main concern of postcolonial literature is the connection between identity and language, as both are shaped by the colonial experience. Postcolonial criticism examines how colonial rulers marginalize the colonized and silence their voices, leading to the disruption of their sense of identity (Ashcroft, 1989, p.1)

1.1. Post-Colonial Literary Theory

1.1.1. Colonialism and Neo-Colonialism

Colonialism is the modern European imperial subjection of non-European peoples, especially in Asia and Africa. Often used as a broad term to describe historical and political systems of domination. The impact of colonialism extends beyond the colonial period, influencing modern nations and the lives of billions of people today. As stated in Oxford English Dictionary (OED), the term colonialism originated from the Latin word *colonia*, meaning a settlement or a farm, combined with the suffix *-ism*, denoting a practice or a system. Colonialism has involved many cases across different regions and historical periods. British rule in India is a key case of colonialism, marked by events such as the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the enforcement of repressive laws. More broadly, European control over Asian and African countries is a primary form of colonial rule. For instance, French rule in Algeria and British dominance in Nigeria involved direct governance, economic exploitation, and cultural supremacy. Settler colonies such as Australia and Canada are examples of

colonial rule, though they are considered somewhat different because of how they are established, as they involve huge European settlement and the displacement of native populations rather than just economic exploitation. In addition, the 2003 invasion of Iraq is seen as imperialism, not colonialism, because it did not involve long-term control of land (Sultan, 2024).

Colonialism is a system of European rule over various regions of the world; historically it is associated with the establishment of settlements and control over native populations (Finley, 1976, p.1)

It is the process by which a foreign power takes control over a territory, affecting its people through displacement, exploitation, and the imposition of a new social structure designed to serve the interests of the colonizers.

The relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is defined by domination, inequality, and, therefore, resistance (Finley, 1976, p.1). The terms colonialism and imperialism is often used interchangeably, but their meanings are developed over time. While colonialism refers to direct territorial control, imperialism involves broader forms of domination, including economic and military influence. The word imperialism derives from the Latin term *imperium*, meaning authority or control. This control extends without full ownership of the territory.

Colonialism progresses through many stages, beginning with imperialism to the last stage known as neo-colonialism. As defined by Nkrumah, neo-colonialism is the most oppressive form of imperialism. For those who impose it, it grants power without responsibility, and for those who endure it, it results in exploitation with no means of justice.

In traditional colonialism, the imperial power had to defend and justify its actions to its own citizens. Moreover, those who collaborate with the colonizer are granted security from oppression. However, neo-colonialism offers neither responsibility nor protection for its allies

(Nkrumah, 1965) Neo-colonialism is a strategy within the capitalist economic system that maintains international inequality. For the purpose of ensuring continued access to cheap labour and resources in less developed countries. This allows wealthier nations and multinational corporations to maximize profits while keeping poorer countries dependent and underdeveloped.

1.1.2. Decolonialization

Decolonialization refers to the process by which colonies gained independence from colonial rule, leading to the political, economic, and cultural restructuring of formerly colonized nations (Fanon, 1961). It is affected by various factors, including nationalist movements, economic exploitation, and international pressure especially after World War II when global attitudes shifted toward self-determination (Duara, 2004). In Africa and Asia, decolonization often involves armed struggle, as seen in Algeria's war for independence against France (Evans & Phillips, *Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed*, 2007), while in other cases, such as India, it occurs through negotiations and nonviolent resistance led by figures like Mahatma Gandhi (Brown, 2009). Additionally, decolonization extends beyond politics to intellectual and cultural domains, where scholars such as Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o argue for linguistic and educational decolonization by advocating for the use of indigenous languages in literature and academia (Ngũgĩ, 1986).

1.1.3. Post Colonialism

The term post-colonial and post-colonialism is first introduced in the mid-1980s and had since gained particular scholarly attention, namely in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin's book *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (2002). By the mid-1990s, both terms became increasingly familiar on a wider range in academic and non-academic discourses. The prefix, 'post' means 'after'; carrying a chronological meaning indicating a temporal succession period that comes after colonization,

post-independence, On the other hand, post-colonial may refer to the state of a land that is no longer colonized and is regained its political independence, such as post-colonial Algeria.

Post colonialism according to Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin is a critical framework that examines the lasting impact of colonial rule on formerly colonized nations, including issues of identity, culture, power, and resistance. It explores how colonial ideologies continue to shape political and economic structures even after independence. It is mainly concerned with examining the processes and effects of, and reactions to, European colonialism from the sixteenth century up to the present day.

Anissa Mursalina and Siswo Harsono in their research of defines post colonialism as “a period when the values of colonialism still exist, although it is combined with the indigenous” (Mursalina & Harsono, 2021). Languages, style of clothes, and beliefs are the values of colonialism that are left behind. One of the colonized countries that experience post colonialism is Nigeria.

All in all, postcolonialism is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction dealing with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies during the post-independence period. It focuses on the challenges and implications that former colonies struggle with and face.

In literature, post colonialism is an academic discipline or a study that aims at analyzing and explaining the impacts of colonialism and imperialism. Post-colonialism in literature comprises the study of theory and literature as it relates to the colonizer-colonized experiences in different fields.

Postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said highlight how Western narratives are historically misrepresented the colonized world, reinforcing stereotypes and justifying imperial domination (Orientalism, 1978). Frantz Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), argues that decolonization is not just political but also psychological, requiring the dismantling of colonial mentalities. Additionally, Homi Bhabha introduces concepts like

hybridity and mimicry, showing how colonial subjects navigate their identities between indigenous and imposed cultures (Bhabha, 1994). One of the leading theorists in this field is Edward Said, with Chinua Achebe being one of its leading authors (Bhabha, 2001).

1.2. African Literature

African literature is the literary works of the African continent. It consists of a body of work in different languages and various genres, ranging from oral literature to literature written in colonial languages (French, Portuguese, and English). Oral literature, including stories, dramas, riddles, histories, myths, songs, proverbs, and other expressions, is frequently employed to educate and entertain children. Oral histories, myths, and proverbs additionally serve to remind whole communities of their ancestors' heroic deeds, their past, and the precedents for their customs and traditions.

After World War II, as Africans start demanding their independence, more African writers are published, giving voice to the continent's diverse experiences and aspirations. These writers explore various literary forms, including poetry, short stories, novels, essays, and plays. Wole Soyinka's *Idanre* represents a significant contribution to African poetry. In short fiction, Chinua Achebe's *Girls at War* and Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o's *Secret Lives* gained prominence. Notable novels include Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, which portrays the impact of colonialism on traditional Igbo society, and Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o's essays such as *Decolonising the Mind*, which advocates for cultural and linguistic reclamation. In the realm of drama, Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* and Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* stand out for their exploration of tradition, identity, and resistance. Despite writing in European languages, these authors often share common themes: the clash between indigenous and colonial cultures, condemnation of European subjugation, pride in Africa's pre-colonial heritage, and hope for the continent's independent and self-determined future.

1.2.1. Postcolonial African Literature

African literature in the postcolonial era has gone through a significant transformation. Before European colonization, African literature is oral. It includes storytelling, proverbs, and epics. However, European colonization changed it into written literature. The struggle and the cruelty of that time led Eastern writers to challenge European ideas. They question the belief that Western culture is the centre of civilization. This criticism plays a key role in the rise of postcolonial African literature, which aims to reshape African identity and break away from a Eurocentric perspective. African authors like Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o seek to restore a sense of pride and identity by highlighting the richness of their history, social systems, and philosophies. They reveal the misleading narratives introduced by European writers. The study of African cultural heritage lead to a sudden awakening and maturity after the independence of many African nations. Literature reflecting this struggle and transformation became known as postcolonial African literature.

Prominent African writers such as Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe, Buchi Emecheta, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie; have made significant contributions to postcolonial literature in Africa. Alongside them, non-African authors like Joseph Conrad and Chris Cleave; have also explored complex themes of identity and culture. Among these voices, Chinua Achebe stands out as a foundational figure whose work reshapes how African societies are represented in literature. His ground breaking novel ,*Things Fall Apart*, directly counters the colonial portrayals by Western writers, which often depict Africans as primitive, disordered, and dependent on European control.

The novel presents the real African perspective, showing the richness of pre-colonial Nigerian culture while also exploring the devastating impacts of colonialism.

1.2.1.1. Themes of Postcolonial African Literature

Over decades, African literature develops to reflect the changing political state of the continent. While early writings focuses on the struggle for independence and the

consequences of colonization, later works cover a range of themes. These include African diaspora, wars, immigration, hybridity, double consciousness, identity and language.

1.2.1.1.1. Oil Wars in Nigeria

Nigeria, the largest oil producer in sub-Saharan Africa, holds about 32% of Africa's oil reserves and 34% of its gas reserves. However, like many other oil-rich nations, Nigeria experiences persistent conflicts linked to resource control and revenue distribution. The Niger Delta covers 70,000 km² along the Gulf of Guinea. It is the third-largest wetland (Tell, Lagos, 2004). The Biafran War (1967–1970) is partly fuelled by oil-related disputes, and since the mid-1990s, violence in the Niger Delta is intensified. Oil wars and conflicts over resource control plays a crucial role in the emergence of petrification as a literary genre. Amitav Ghosh (1992) is the pioneering writer of this literary genre through the famous essay *Petrifaction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel*.

Michael K. Walonen (2012) acknowledges that Petrofiction effectively shows how oil changes places and societies but agrees with Amitav Ghosh (1992) that no single book fully captures the movement of people, money, and political control driven by the oil industry (Walonen, 1958). However, Chris Cleave's *Little Bee* (2008) challenges this claim by showing how petro-capitalism works like an empire. The novel criticizes how British multinational companies dominate Nigerian oil, take wealth while leaving local communities in poverty, and force them to leave their homeland through immigration.

1.2.1.1.2. Immigration

Africa, including Nigeria, faces numerous human security challenges, such as poverty, unemployment, hunger, and internal conflict. These issues drive many Nigerians to immigrate in search of better living conditions (Flahaux & the Haas, 2016). Nigeria, in particular, produces more irregular immigrants than other sub-Saharan African countries due to its economic and social struggles (Beber & Scacco, 2020).

The legacy of colonialism is widely regarded as a major factor contributing to underdevelopment in Africa. As economic conditions worsen, Nigerians increasingly immigrate to Europe and the United States (Black et al., 2004, p. 9). Strict immigration policies in Europe did not reduce Nigerian immigration. Rather, they led to an increase in irregular immigration. Many Nigerian immigrants used longer and more dangerous immigration routes, often relying on smugglers.

Another significant movement in Nigerian immigration has been the feminization of labour immigration. However, not all female immigration has been voluntary. While many women are not aware that they would be engaged in sex work, they are often unaware of the harsh working conditions there. The human experiences of immigration—its challenges, sacrifices, and consequences—are deeply explored in literature. As a result, immigration affects post-colonial African literature in different ways. According to Andrew Smith, immigration challenges the notion of static national culture, leading to cultural hybridity (Lazarus, 2004, p. 245).

Immigration also leads to identity crises, as post-colonial scholars argue that mass immigration, whether voluntary or forced, such as through slavery, disrupts traditional ties between place and self. Immigrants often experience a sense of otherness in both their homeland and the new countries, feeling culturally displaced (*The Empire Writes Back*, p. 8-9). This dynamic of immigration is evident in Chris Cleave's *Little Bee*, where the protagonist's journey reflects the challenges of displacement, the feeling of otherness, and the complex cultural interactions in the post-colonial world.

1.2.1.1.3. Hybridity

Writers use hybridity to examine how colonial rule transforms cultures and creates hybrid identities. Hybridity is the mix of native and colonial structures, creating new identities. It highlights the struggle of characters as they balance tradition and modern life. Homi

Bhabha(1994) describes hybridity as a "third space" where cultural meanings are redefined, challenging colonial authority.

Similarly, in *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Chinua Achebe portrays hybridity through Nwoye, a colonial son who adopts Christianity, leading to conflicts between traditional Igbo identity and Western influence. Likewise, in *Season of Migration to the North* (1966), Tayeb Salih explores Mustafa Saeed's struggle between his Sudanese roots and British education, showing hybridity as both liberating and isolating.

1.2.1.1.4. Double Consciousness

Although hybridity focuses on the merging of cultures, double consciousness emphasizes the internal struggle of individuals torn between their native identity and the colonial perspective. Double consciousness results from the displacement of colonized people, particularly African Americans who struggle with their identity in a society that marginalizes them.

W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) first introduces the concept in *The Souls of Black Folk*, describing it as a feeling of "twoness," where African Americans see themselves both through their own perspective and through the lens of a dominant racist society.

1.2.1.1.3. Identity

The term "identity" is derived from the Latin *identitas*, meaning "the fact of being whom or what a person or thing is". Identity refers to the qualities, values, beliefs, personality traits, appearance, and expressions that define an individual or a group and distinguish them from others. It involves how people perceive themselves and how they are viewed by others, playing a critical role in shaping behaviour, social interactions and relationships. Identity consists of different interrelated components; personal identity, social identity, cultural identity, Collective or group identity. Personal identity involves every individual's self-perception, including their name, character traits, preferences, values, memories and life experiences. Social identity is shaped by the groups people belong to, like ethnicity, race,

gender, nationality, language, class, religion, occupation, and political orientation. Cultural identity emerges from being part of a cultural group and it is reflected in shared language, dress, food, rituals, values, and customs. Collective or group identity refers to a shared sense of belonging within a community, nation, or movement, achieving solidarity. A key feature is that identity is not fixed, it changes over time according to social, personal, and historical factors (Ghosh, Abdi, & Naseem, 2008).

Identity is a central theme in postcolonial African literature because it reflects the struggle of African societies to redefine themselves after the changes brought by colonial rule. Colonialism imposed foreign languages, religions, and governance systems, erasing or marginalizing native cultures. As a result, postcolonial African writers focus on identity as a way to restore African heritage while resisting Western dominance.

Frantz Fanon explores the psychological effects of colonialism on identity formation. He shows how colonialism creates an internalized feeling of inferiority among colonized individuals, forcing them to struggle between their African roots and the European values imposed on them. Fanon's analysis highlights the deep impacts of colonialism on self-perception, revealing the struggle between embracing one's heritage and adapting to foreign cultural standards.

Colonial education plays a key role in shaping the identities of colonized people by promoting European knowledge and culture while suppressing native ones. This system is not merely about teaching literacy or new skills; it is a deliberate strategy to manipulate identity and create a sense of separation from one's own culture (Fanon, 1994).

One of the clearest examples of this approach is Thomas Macaulay's *Minutes on Indian Education* (1835), in which he argues that the British should educate a group of Indians who would act as intermediaries between the British rulers and the local population. His infamous goal is to produce individuals who are "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in

opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (Macaulay, 1995). This reflects the broader colonial strategy of creating a class of educated elites who would support colonial rule even after independence (Chatterjee, 1993).

1.2.1.1.6. Language

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, the term "language" is defined as a system of communication used by a particular country or community. Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o argues for the use of African languages in literature, emphasizing that language is deeply connected to culture and identity. He believes that writing in native languages is essential for authentic expression.

In his speech *The African Writer and the English Language*, Chinua Achebe discusses the dilemma of writing in colonial languages versus native tongues. He acknowledges the challenges but also recognizes the effectiveness of English in conveying African experiences. He states, "I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience, but it will have to be new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit a new African surrounding." (Achebe, 1965).

1.2.1.1.5.1. Relationship between Language and Identity in Post-colonial African Literature

Identity and language in post-colonial African literature are deeply interconnected. Language serves as a primary means through which identity is formed, expressed, and challenged. Post-colonial African writers confront identity issues by either rejecting colonial languages, modifying them, or integrating indigenous languages into their literary works. Cultural identity's fundamental component is language. Post-colonial African literature often reflects a hybrid identity, where writers merge indigenous languages with colonial ones to create a unique literary voice. This fusion allows them to preserve their cultural heritage while adapting to the influence of colonial rule (Ashcroft et al., 1995, p. 23).

Even when native stories and traditions are preserved, their retelling is influenced by colonial languages. African writers work to reclaim and reshape their histories through

literature. They use creative writing to ensure that their voices are heard in a way that stays true to their cultural heritage while also recognizing the realities of post-colonial life (Ashcroft et al., 1995, p. 44).

This linguistic hybridity allows post-colonial writers to reclaim their cultural identity. Instead of simply adopting a foreign language, they adapt it to make their own, using it as a tool to express their history, traditions, and experiences. Language shapes self-perception and contributes to identity struggles in post-colonial African societies. The dominance of colonial languages changes how people viewed their own cultures, often making indigenous languages seem inferior. This shift creates a psychological dependency on colonial languages, affecting how Africans express their identity and cultures (Ashcroft et al., 1995, p. 283).

Speaking a colonial language is not just about communication; it has deeper implications. When individuals adopt a language, they also adopt the cultural and ideological framework embedded in it. This means that speaking a colonial language involves more than just learning its grammar and vocabulary. It requires embracing the worldview, values, and social norms associated with the colonizer's civilization (Fanon, 1952, p. 17).

For colonized Africans, this creates a psychological struggle. On one hand, mastering the colonial language provides access to education, political power, and economic opportunities. On the other hand, it often leads to alienation from their own cultures. As the colonial system treats native languages as inferior, this tension contributes to an identity crisis, where individuals find themselves caught between their traditional heritage and the cultural expectations imposed by the colonial language. After gaining independence, many African nations have to decide whether to restore their native languages as a symbol of cultural identity or continue using colonial languages for political and administrative purposes. Literature helps shape nationalism by standardizing languages, making them central to a country's identity (Ashcroft et al., 1995, p. 173).

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o represents the complete rejection of colonial language, believing that identity can only be restored through indigenous languages (Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, 1987) while other writers, like Chinua Achebe, instead of rejecting these languages entirely, they adopt them by infusing them with African languages and cultures. In other words, post-colonial writers do not merely adopt European languages. They transform them into Englishes that reflect African perspectives (Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, 1987, p. 8).

Conclusion

In this chapter, the study has explored the main aspects of post-colonial literary theory and its central themes, such as language, hybridity, and identity highlighting the relationship between language and identity. The chapter also discusses colonial legacies of conflicts, wars, and immigration issues in Africa. These concepts are the basis of the next chapter, where they will be further examined through a practical analysis of the novel *Little Bee* by Chris Cleave.

CHAPTER TWO

Analysis of Identity and language in *Little Bee*

Chapter Two: Analysis of Identity and language in *Little Bee*

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Introduction

Literature often reflects real human experiences which include historical issues like colonialism and explores themes like identity, displacement, and racism especially in postcolonial literature. This practical chapter will deal with the traumatic events which the colonized societies suffer from by examining the effects of colonialism on Africa, especially on Nigeria and on Nigerian women as one of these experiences. The chapter attempts to give a glimpse into Chris Cleave's life, and then it provides a thorough summary of the novel events, locating them in the setting and introducing the characters. It examines *Little Bee* by analyzing the situation of Little Bee, the protagonist, and all characters through their struggle to find their real identities. The chapter gives clear analysis of language and the relationship between identity and language in Cleave's masterpiece.

2.1. Chris Cleave

Chris Cleave was born in London in 1973. He spent some childhood in Cameroon, and when he was eight years old, he returned to England. He graduated from Balliol College in Oxford in the field of psychology. He is one of the contemporary English postcolonial authors. Chris Cleave is known for his bestselling novels which explore themes of identity and social issues. His writing is famous for its emotional depth, sharp social commentary, and compelling characters. Cleave is a London novelist and columnist for *The Guardian*. His very successful book *Incendiary* was published in 20 countries. He was awarded the Somerset Award in 2006, was a finalist for the 2006 Commonwealth Writers' Prize, won the First Fiction Award from the United States Book of the Month Club in 2007, and won the Spécial Jury Award at the French Lecteurs Award in 2007 (Cleave, 2008, p.3).

Chris Cleave's novel is influenced by his personal experience working temporarily in an asylum detention centre, as mentioned on his official website. This real-life experience helps shape the novel and highlights Cleave's compassion and understanding of the challenges

faced by refugees. His insights are reflected throughout the story, suggesting that the events and themes in the novel are drawn from situations he witnessed firsthand. The book gained significant recognition, reaching the top of the New York Times bestseller list and receiving nominations for both the 2008 Costa Book Awards and the 2009 Commonwealth Writers' Prize. These honours demonstrate the novel's popularity and wide readership (Annisa, Kuncara, & Nasrullah, 2021)

2.2. Summary of *Little Bee*

Little Bee is the second novel by Chris Cleave which sheds light on the forced "illegal" migration caused by oil war, hence illuminating the unequal power dynamics between the globe's Northern core and its Southern periphery. The novel evolves from the juxtaposed descriptions of the lives of the paperless asylum seeker (*World Petro-Illiterature: An Ecofeminist Reading of Ecological Refugees*, 2021). In this novel, a young Nigerian girl is released from an immigration detention centre where she has been held for two years after sneaking aboard a British tea ship. This girl, called Little Bee, makes her way to the home of Andrew and Sarah O'Rourke, the only people she knows in England. However, Andrew has recently committed suicide and Sarah is still reeling from the shock which is compounded by the sight of Little Bee, someone she had thought is dead.

Little Bee is released from an immigration detention centre after being held there for two year. Her release with other three girls occurs under irregular circumstances; one of them secures their freedom after performing immoral favour for a detention officer. After their release, the girls cannot get a taxi and find themselves staying on a small farm across from the detention centre. In the middle of the night, one of the girls kills herself. Afraid that she will be sent back to Nigeria, Little Bee runs off into the night in search of Andrew O'Rourke. Little Bee calls Andrew, a man she once met on a beach in Nigeria, and tells him she is coming to see him.

Five days after Little Bee's phone call, Sarah Summers O'Rourke receives a visit by the police at work and learns that her husband hanged himself. Sarah coasts through the next five days, struggling to deal with her own grief as well as her guilt. Sarah has been having an affair for more than two years and feels that her affection for her husband died long ago. However, Sarah misses Andrew deeply and feels that she should have been able to save his life if she had been aware of and been able to fight his growing depression. Sarah blames herself for Andrew's depression, not only because of the effect her affair had on him, but also because it is this affair that inspires her to take Andrew on a Nigerian holiday two years ago and it is what happened on that distant Nigerian beach that Sarah knows led to her husband's depression and death.

On the morning of the funeral, Little Bee knocks on Sarah's door. Sarah lets her stay, taking her to the funeral along with her four year old son. That night, Sarah asks Little Bee to tell her the story of what happened on the beach that fateful day. Little Bee describes how she and her sister flees the men hired by the oil companies to kill everyone in their village. However, the men came after them because they could not leave witnesses. Early one morning the girls had reached the edge of the jungle. As they waited for dawn, they saw a white couple walking along the beach, visitors from a nearby hotel compound. The sounds of dogs in the distance frightened the girls and they came out of the jungle and begged for help. The white couple, not understanding their situation, began to leave. However, a group of men with machetes marched out of the jungle and surrounded them. They wanted to take the girls and kill them, but the white woman refused to let them go. The leader asked the white man to cut off his finger in exchange for the girls' lives, but he could not do it. The woman did, however, and the leader promised to spare one of the girls before he dragged them both away.

Sarah learns that after the men dragged her and her sister away, Little Bee is forced to listen to the men rape and murder her sister. Afterward, Little Bee walked until she came

across the British tea ship that would take her to England. Now Little Bee wants to help Sarah through the death of her husband, to return the favour in which Sarah saved her life. Sarah pledges to help Little Bee become a legal immigrant in Britain, but before she can, a visit to the river ends in the disappearance of Sarah's son, Charlie. Little Bee calls the police to find Charlie and the police arrest her. Little Bee is soon deported. Sarah travels with her and stays in a hotel with her to protect her from the military police. However, when Little Bee requests that they go to the beach so that she might say goodbye to her sister, they are overrun by soldiers and Little Bee is arrested.

2.2.1. Characters of *Little Bee*

2.2.1.1. Nigerian characters

The Protagonist Little Bee

Little Bee is one of the two narrators of the novel and the main protagonist whose real name is Udo, and the main protagonist. Little Bee is a teenage Nigerian refugee who flees Nigeria in the midst of an oil war. Little Bee's journey is one of survival and self-discovery, as she navigates the complexities of identity and belonging. Her relationship with Sarah and Charlie becomes a source of strength, as she learns to confront her fears and embrace her role in their lives. Little Bee's character embodies resilience and the transformative power of human connection (Cleave, 2008, p.19)

Nkiruka

Nkiruka is Little Bee's older sister. Her name means "Future is Bright" but she changes her name to Kindness Nkiruka beauty and spirit are destroyed by the violence they encounter in Nigeria. Her fate is a constant reminder of the brutality and loss. Nkiruka's character embodies the innocence and hope that is shattered by the harsh realities of their world(Cleave, 2008, p.215)

2.2.1.2. Non Nigerian Characters

Sarah

The second narrator of the story and the secondary protagonist, as well as Andrew's wife and Charlie's mother. At the beginning of the novel, she is the editor of a successful fashion magazine in London and puts great effort into maintaining her identity as a successful career woman and working mother (Cleave, 2008, p.22)

Sarah is grappling with the loss of her husband, Andrew, and her responsibility to Little Bee. Her journey is one of redemption, as she seeks to make amends for the past by helping Little Bee find safety. Sarah's character is defined by her compassion and determination to create change, even in the face of personal and societal challenges. Her relationship with Little Bee becomes a catalyst for her own healing and growth (Cleave, 2008, p.37)

Andrew

Andrew is Sarah's husband and Charlie's father. Andrew is a columnist for The Times, writing articles about public morality and the War in Afghanistan (Cleave, 2008, p.168).

Andrew's encounter with Little Bee in Nigeria has left him deeply traumatized. His inability to reconcile his actions with his conscience leads to a downward spiral of depression and ultimately, his suicide. Andrew's character is a reflection of the moral complexities and consequences of privilege and inaction (Cleave, 2008, p.38)

Charlie

Charlie is Sarah's young son, who struggles to understand his father's death and his place in the world. His Batman costume symbolizes his desire for protection and control. Through his interactions with Little Bee, Charlie learns to embrace his identity and finds comfort in the love of his family. Charlie said: "I is going to take mine batman costume now" (Cleave, 2008, p.264). His character represents the innocence and resilience of childhood, offering hope and healing to those around him.

Lawrence

Lawrence is Sarah's lover, whose relationship with her is complicated by his own insecurities and the presence of Little Bee. He is torn between his desire to protect Sarah and his fear of losing her. Lawrence's character reflects the moral complexities of privilege and responsibility, as he grapples with the consequences of his actions and the impact of his choices on those he loves (Cleave, 2008, p.127)

2.2.1.3. Minor characters

Clarissa

Clarissa is Sarah's friend and one of her editors at the magazine. Whenever Sarah wants to run articles about refugees or the war, Clarissa tries to convince her not to because sexy articles sell better. " I just think it is an issue that isn't going to go away. May, June, or anytime soon". Clarissa thus embodies the ethos of the magazine, which is shallow and glossy, without substance (Cleave, 2008, p.206)

Mr. Ayres

Mr. Ayres is a British farmer who offers shelter to undocumented refugees in the seasonal workers dormitory including Little Bee and her friends, his farm is near the immigration detention centre. "We have a dormitory where our seasonal Labourers sleep. It is empty at the moment ... You can stay there a week, no longer." (p.75)

Albert

He is Mr Ayres' friend and works at his farm. He shows the girls where they can sleep in the dormitory. "The four of us girls, we followed Albert across the fields" (p.75)

Yevette

Yevette is a Jamaican refugee with whom Little Bee leaves the detention centre. Yevette does not believe that she will ever be granted asylum, so she makes love with an immigration officer in exchange for her illegal release.

Sari Girl

Sari girl is an Indian refugee who leaves the detention centre with Little Bee and Yvette. She cannot speak English and seems unintelligent.

Taxi Driver

He picks up Little Bee, Yvette, Sari Girl, and The Girl With No Name from the detention centre. He eventually drops them off somewhere because he thought Little Bee insults him " I smiled and walked up to the open window and said to the taxi driver, *Hello, I see that you are a cock*"(p.69)

The Girl With No Name

One of the three refugees, she is also released from the detention centre with the rest of the girls. She commits suicide in Mr. Ayers's shelter (Cleave, 2008, p.89)

The Killer

He murders Little Bee's older sister Nkiruka after terrorizing the two girls on a Nigerian beach in front of the British couple, Sarah and Andrew (Cleave, 2008, p.119)

2.2.2. Setting of Little Bee

Little bee is set in both Nigeria and England, shifting between past and present events. These settings play an important role in developing the novel's themes.

2.2.2.1. Time Setting

Little Bee takes place between 2005 and 2007. Firstly, the depressing events in Nigeria, in addition to Little Bee's entry into the detention centre, occurred in summer 2005:

It was two years before, in the summer of 2005, that Andrew had begun his long, slow slide into the depression that finally claims him. It started on the day we first met Little Bee, on a lonely beach in Nigeria. (Cleave, 2008, p.38).

Secondly, in spring 2007, Little Bee managed to get out of the detention centre, and she moved to live with Sarah: "From the spring of 2007 until the end of that long summer when Little Bee came to live with us." (p.35).

2.2.2.2. Place Setting

The story of Little Bee takes place in two main locations: Nigeria and England. Nigeria is Little Bee's home. It is shown as a place of natural beauty but also great danger and violence. The story begins and ends there" It started on the day we first met Little Bee on a lonely beach in Nigeria" (p, 38). England, on the other hand, is seen as a place of hope, but it brings sadness and confusion instead. Little Bee spends two years in an immigration detention centre in England, where she feels scared and alone. "For the whole two years, I did not smile or even look in any man's face. I was terrified" (p, 148) after that, she stays at Sarah's house, which is safe but strange to her. This shows the big difference between her life and Sarah's. "Maybe I will only be able to stay for one month, maybe only one week. Someday, the men will come" (p.148)

2.3. Analysis of Identity

Postcolonial literature examines how literature portrays the effects of colonialism including issues like Identity, displacement, racism and the struggle between the colonizer and the colonized. Due to the increase of immigrants' numbers in the modern world, Identity has become a highly controversial topic of postcolonial theory and a phenomenon of immigrants (Ulucan, O. In *Little Bee*, Identity is a central struggle which is shaped by the legacies of colonialism. It shows that postcolonial identity is not stable but it is a mixture between past trauma, cultural displacement and the struggle for recognition.

2.3.1. Analysis of the Nigerian Characters Identity

The Protagonist Little Bee

Chris Cleave suggests that Identity is something we construct and lose. According to Riska Hendika Rani in *The social identity change: identity reconstruction of Little Bee in the novel* is caused by four factors. They are her envy towards British people's easy life, her need to tell her sad story, her will to survive and her desire to overcome her past.

The first factor is the envy Little Bee feels when she finds out her life is more difficult than British people because she feels unwanted and devalued in British society. "Most days I wish I was a British pound coin instead of an African girl. Everyone would be pleased to see me coming..." (p. 1) she also sees the British as people who have a bright future, unlike hers.

Little Bee is an African little girl, and most British people do not look at her or consider her just nothing. Little Bee expects to be treated like British pound coin which is universally accepted and valued. The phrase 'see me coming' above can have meanings other than 'to look at her' or 'to see her come'. The word 'bee' in which she refers herself points to the treatment she gets when she is in the United Kingdom. Just like a bee, not everyone likes her as an African girl. The moment when detainees are given a book like *Life in the United Kingdom* reflects how education can be used as a tool of control as Little Bee says, "the detention officers gave all of us a copy of a book called *Life in the United Kingdom*" (p. 49). Barry (2022) discusses how this experience reflects Spivak's theory of "epistemic violence" masked as education. Barry notes, "Little Bee explains that, after reading about England and how to fit in, she begins to understand her dire need to assimilate if she has any hope of documented citizenship in Great Britain," highlighting how she internalizes colonial values as a means of survival, reinforcing dependence on the colonizer and alienation from her native identity.

So, I am a refugee, and I get very lonely. Is it my fault if I do not look like an English girl and I do not talk like Nigerian? Well, who says an English girl must have skin as pale as the clouds that float across her summers? Who says a Nigerian girl must speak in fallen English, as if English has collided with Ibo, high in the upper atmosphere, and rained down into her mouth in shower that half drowns her and leaves her choking up sweet tales about bright African colours and the taste of fried plantain? Not like a story teller, but like a victim rescued from flood, coughing up the colonial water from her lungs? (p. 12)

This passage is full of emotion and powerful imagery. Little Bee is asking a painful question: is it her fault she feels alone just because she doesn't fit into what people expect an "English girl" or a "Nigerian girl" to be? She is caught between two identities, and neither one accepts her. She points out how unfair these expectations are. Why should an English girl have to look a certain way like having pale skin? Why should a Nigerian girl speak in a certain accent or use "broken" English. She compares English and Ibo (her Nigerian language) clashing like a storm in the sky and raining down on her in a way that almost drowns her. That shows how confusing and painful to carry the weight of two languages, two cultures, and a colonial past. Her final words are heart breaking. She says she is not telling a story like a happy narrator. Little Bee is more like someone who barely survived a flood and is still gasping for air. Her voice is full of the pain of being displaced and silenced.

The situations experienced by Little Bee and her social awareness through comparing her self-identity and the people around her show how three stages of social identity formation as described by Tajfel and Turner happen to Little Bee. The first stage is her awareness that she is a refugee from Nigeria. The second stage can be seen from the way she begins to recognize how most Nigerians speak English with certain accent while comparing them the way British people speak in their own native language. The third stage is her social awareness that she is socially inferior compared to British because she does not speak like Native British people. It shows how the three stages are related to each other (Tajfel and Turner, 1986)

By the process, she begins to question the reason why she cannot have a peaceful life in Britain. She keeps aside the fact that she does not have any papers as a requirement to be accepted legally in the United Kingdom. With her most effort to speak English like Native, she thinks she deserves to be treated like an English girl although she does not look like one.

We can see how Little Bee uses different objects to illustrate the relationship and comparison between African and British. Not only does Little Bee categorize herself as an

African, but she also labels herself as a refugee. Little Bee tries to form her British social identity, although she does not look like British in her look.

The second factor which makes her want to change her social identity is her desire to share her horror story with others. She feels sad whenever she speaks about her horror, that is why she mentions earlier that the story she wants to tell is a sad story. Little Bee wants to tell her story in a proper language, so the people who hear her story could easily understand. She wants people to know what she has been through. "I am sorry to learn your language properly. I am here to tell you a story" (p. 12). The line "I am here to tell you a story" is one of the most powerful sentences in the novel because it carries a deep emotional weight in terms of identity and trauma. By saying that Little Bee claims control over her narrative. As a refugee her life has been determined by others: government, systems, violence. But the line is a moment where she speaks about her own story which becomes a way to assert her humanity in a world that neglects refugees. Her Identity is not what others see but it is what she remembers, chooses and shares. In a world that consider her as illegal or foreign.

Being a survivor is another reason of identity reconstruction of Little Bee. She changes her identity, her name, with the hope to protect herself from the hunters. As a refugee, Little Bee searches for the ways of constructing a new identity in order to adopt her new life in Britain recovering from the first shock of being treated badly in the detention centre. She learns from girls in the detention centre that she "must look good or talk good" (p.6) to survive in Britain and she prefers talking which she thinks to be safer for her. "Why did I go to all the trouble? It is because of what some of the older girls explained to me: to survive, you must look good or talk even better..." (p. 4)

The fourth reason of identity reconstruction of Little Bee is to overcoming her trauma; Little Bee has a fear about her past. Her older sister is raped, killed, and eaten by the hunters. She is afraid they would find her even when she is in the United Kingdom. "...Freedom for

me is a day when I am not afraid of the men coming to kill me. Freedom for Sarah is a long future where she can live the life of her choice.” (p. 254).

Little Bee runs away from her country because there is an oil war in her homeland, Nigeria. The war becomes a traumatic event which still haunts her up to the present. Therefore, she wants to be free from her past. One of her efforts is learning to speak proper English, so people could not know that she is actually a refugee and to look more British.

Nkiruka

Nkiruka Little Bee's elder sister is absent for most of the novel but she plays a central symbolic and emotional role. Nkiruka's identity is not developed through her own voice but rather through her impact on others especially Little Bee. She stands as a powerful literary figure: a representation of the innocent who suffer, the voices erased by violence, and the hope that persists in memory. Through Nkiruka, Cleave critiques the cost of global injustice while also affirming the enduring power of love, remembrance, and the human spirit.

The Soldiers in Nigeria

The soldiers in Nigeria are anonymous agents of brutality and agents of merciless that kill and destroy. “That was when I stood up and I started to run toward Charlie. I ran so hard my breath was burning and I screamed at the soldiers, ‘don’t shoot, don’t shoot, I am the one that you want’ (p263). Chris Cleave describes the scene to illustrate how the soldiers are agents of terror, prompting characters like Little Bee to make desperate choices.

2.3.2. Analysis of the Non Nigerian Characters Identity

Sarah

Parallel to Little Bee's journey is Sarah's transformation. At the beginning, Sarah is a successful editor, of a fashion magazine, wife, and mother confident in her life choices. However, her encounter with Little Bee and the traumatic events on the Nigerian beach where she is forced to make a morally compromising choice, unravel the stability of her identity.

Following the re-entry of Little Bee into her life, Sarah undergoes a moral reckoning. Her identity as a mother, professional, and moral agent is challenged. She is confronted with the reality that her position in the world is built, in part, on the silencing of others like Little Bee. This realization forces her to change not only in how she sees herself but in the choices she makes.

So, I realized—life had finally broken through. How silly it looked now, my careful set of defences against nature: my brazen magazine, my handsome husband, my Maginot line of motherhood and affairs. The world, the real world, had found a way through. It had sat down on my sofa and it would not be denied any longer. (p.95)

Her reconstructed identity is not based on grand transformation, but on clever shifts in moral clarity and responsibility.

In addition to Little Bee and Sarah there are several minor characters who give insights into identity in the novel.

Andrew

Andrew Sarah's husband, whose identity is rooted in logic, journalism, and a desire for detachment, is destabilized by witnessing the brutal events in Nigeria, creating an internal conflict between his values and his failure to act. "I just think this is not our affair and so..." (p.112) This quote reveals his deep guilt and the fracture in his moral identity. This dissonance ultimately leads to his suicide. His death serves as a turning point in the novel, pushing Sarah to confront her own identity.

Charlie

Moving to Sarah and Andrew's son, Charlie uses his Batman costume as a coping mechanism to deal with his father's death and the surrounding chaos. "Do you need to be Batman all the time?" Charlie nodded. "Yes, because if I is not Batman all the time then mine Daddy dies" (p.223). Charlie's insistence on being Batman illustrates his struggle to make

sense of loss and maintain a sense of control in an unpredictable world. His fantasy identity protects him from emotional trauma and helps him create a world he can control. “He doesn’t like to be called Charlie anymore. He likes to be called Batman.” (p.22). Charlie’s choice of identity reflects a larger theme in the novel; how people invent personas to survive. Just as Little Bee changes her name to protect herself, Charlie becomes “Batman” to shield himself from his father’s death and the chaos around him.

Lawrence

Lawrence represents the conflict between institutional roles and personal ethics. He initially tries to help Little Bee but retreats when his job is threatened. “You don’t understand what you’re asking me to do. I can’t just make her disappear from the system.” (p.180). This quotation demonstrates how constrained he is by his professional identity. He is an example of how easily and quickly moral identity can be corrupted by fear and self-service.

Yvette

Yvette, the Jamaican girl who befriends Little Bee in the detention centre maintains her pride and defiance despite the dehumanizing conditions of detention. She shows resilience and humour despite hardship. “You English girls, you get to choose. We African girls, we get to survive.”(p 190). This powerful quote speaks to the imbalance of agency and how identity is shaped by geography and privilege. Yvette’s blunt words reveal the core of refugee identity: not who you are, but what you endure.

The Immigration Officers

Anonymous, Dehumanizing Forces Characters like the immigration officers are largely unnamed, representing an institutional identity that suppresses individuality and enforces rigid categories. “They gave us numbers instead of names.” (p.5) This detail illustrates how systems strip refugees of identity, reducing them to data. These faceless characters highlight

the cold impersonality of systems that refuse to see the humanity of those they control. In *Little Bee*, identity is not a right it is a battle.

For Little Bee and Sarah, as well, identity must be rebuilt on the foundation of pain, moral tension, and belonging. In the end, Cleave's novel leaves us with the sense that identity is profoundly personal and deeply political. With lyrical prose and deeply human characters, he demands that readers find some value in the richness of what it means to be anybody in a world that all too often refuses to let people have the right to be themselves.

2.4. Analysis of Language

2.4.1. Analysis of the Nigerian Characters Language

Postcolonial writers Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o, and Homi Bhabha emphasize the significance of language in postcolonial narratives. In the novel, language functions as more than a medium of communication. It becomes a strategy for survival and adaptation. Scholars like Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o have criticize the continued dominance of colonial languages in African literature, considering it as a form of cultural alienation. Although Little Bee's fluency in English empowers her, it also reflects the lasting psychological and cultural legacies of colonialism.

The Protagonist Little Bee

Little Bee's mastery of formal British English is not only a reflection of her intelligence, but also a form of adaptation allowing her to navigate and challenge Western society that marginalizes her (Barry Kama, 2012). English is one of Nigeria's official languages, a legacy of British colonial rule. It is regularly taught in schools, especially formal English. As she mentioned, "I learned the Queen's English in my village school and from the BBC World Service on the radio" (p. 31). Little Bee is taught English first in her Nigerian village, where she attends school and listens to the BBC World Service on the radio. After leaving Nigeria and arriving to the UK as an asylum seeker, Little Bee spends two years in an immigration detention centre. During this time, she focuses on mastering English specifically "The

Queen's English" which refers to the standard, formal version of British English. "I tried to speak the Queen's English because I thought it would make them take me seriously" (p. 37), Little Bee says. She hopes that speaking proper British English would help her gain asylum.

Little Bee also learns English through social interaction, by listening to others inside and outside the detention centre. She tries to mimic different accents from the North of England, from London, and even from Ghana. "I can do accents... Sometimes I speak like the girls from the north of England, and sometimes like the girls from Ghana" (p. 38), she expresses. This mimicry shows she's not just learning the language; she's studying how they socially act and behave. She knows that how she speaks will affect how people treat her.

In *Little Bee*, language is not just a means of communication—it is a survival mechanism. As a Nigerian refugee in England, Little Bee knows that mastering English offers her an opportunity to survive in a new and unwelcoming society. Through learning the grammar, vocabulary, and the accent of the language, she tries to protect herself from racial prejudice. As she explains, "I would say my voice was like a soldier's uniform. It was not mine, but I was using it to survive" (p. 215). This quote highlights how language becomes a "protective armour." It is a strategy to gain legitimacy and avoid the dangers that may face her as any other immigrant. "They taught us the Queen's English in the detention centre, so we would sound like the people they would not send home" (p. 38). Here, asylum is clearly dependent on language; people who sound British are less likely to be sent back home. So, language can both protect individuals and determine who is accepted in postcolonial Britain and who is not.

For Little Bee, adopting English has a significant cultural and psychological cost. "I do not remember the words of my village. I remember the smell of the flowers and the shape of the trees. But the words are gone" (p. 216). This quote illustrates that Little Bee's native language has been lost due to trauma and time, replaced by formal English. She remembers only some details such as the smell of flowers and the shape of trees.

Although the language is erased from Little Bee's memory, its traces remain present. One of the most apparent features of her narration is her frequent use of metaphor and symbolism, which give the novel an emotional depth. These literary tools not only reflect the harsh psychological effects of conflict and displacement on the immigrant girl, but also reveal her Nigerian cultural storytelling heritage. "Sadness is a little bird, perched in the cage of my ribs" (p. 10). Here, Little Bee turns an abstract feeling, sadness, into something concrete and vivid. The metaphor of a bird trapped inside her chest illustrates emotional suffering. The bird, often a symbol of freedom and weakness, represents pain that is difficult to escape. This also reflects a Nigerian cultural tradition in which emotions and elements of nature are often used in storytelling.

Chris Cleave gives a unique voice for Little Bee. Despite that she is a young Nigerian refugee; she speaks in a beautiful, poetic way in the novel. Instead of copying how a real refugee would speak, Cleave constructs a voice that has emotional and symbolic depth. It helps readers understand not just what happened to her, but how she experiences the world. It shows her intelligence, her high sensitivity, and her ability to see the world in a deep, reflective way.

The author uses figurative language like metaphors and symbolism to help readers understand Little Bee's emotions and thoughts in a profound way. Instead of expressing exactly how she feels, Little Bee often describes her emotions through poetic images, making her pain and experiences more vivid and powerful. Through this style of language, Cleave gives her strength, depth, and a means to express trauma without fully losing her identity. Even though Little Bee learns to speak English fluently, Chris Cleave shows that this fluency is not a reflection of her own voice, but a need for survival as an immigrant seeking asylum. English becomes a tool for her to stay safe in a society where refugees are judged on how well they adapt to British culture.

Chris Cleave gives Little Bee a gentle, polite voice to describe even the most violent moments. When she says, “the air filled with the smell of fire and meat” (p. 194), she refers to burning bodies, but Cleave avoids describing the harsh details of the scene. The calmness of her words contrasts with the violence she’s describing, and this tension deepens the emotional impact. This contrast between Little Bee’s calm way of speaking and the terrible things she is describing highlights the deep impact of the traumatic experiences on her. Through his writing style, Cleave helps us see the world through Little Bee’s eyes. Her way of speaking reflects her cultural background and her ability to manage her emotions even when she faces loss, oppression, and racism.

Nkiruka

While the protagonist Little Bee narrates the novel in a controlled, poetic English, her sister Nkiruka speaks in a strong, emotional, and honest way. Little Bee’s careful English reflects her efforts to survive in a foreign country by mastering its language. Her careful choice of words and the frequent use of metaphors show her emotional control and her attempts to gain legitimacy in the host society. Chris Cleave uses this contrast to highlight different responses to trauma and displacement. Although Nkiruka appears briefly in the story, her language plays an important role in revealing the brutal violence and the emotional reality of life in conflict areas. For instance, when she cries, “Just give them what they want, Little Bee!” (p. 56), her words are simple and desperate because she is in serious danger. She doesn’t use any figurative or poetic language but speaks full of fear and sadness, showing that she is focused only on survival. Additionally, when she says, “They will kill us anyway!” (p. 57), Nkiruka recognizes the painful destiny that awaits them. Her words show that she feels powerless and aware of the danger they are in, especially as girls in a life-threatening moment. In contrast, Nkiruka’s honest way of speaking shows a language that hasn’t been changed by colonization. It comes from her real experiences and is not influenced by the

pressure to fit in socially. Therefore, the difference in their language style shows how Nkiruka stays connected to her native identity while Little Bee becomes a hybrid character shaped by both cultures and languages.

The Men in the Oil Conflict (Unnamed Soldiers)

In *Little Bee*, the language of the unnamed Nigerian men involved in the oil war, especially the soldiers who attack Little Bee's village, achieves a clear purpose; Chris Cleave uses their speech to reflect power, violence, and the lasting effects of colonialism. Even though these men are unnamed and appear briefly, their language is harsh, threatening, and dehumanizing. They speak in short, sharp commands used to terrify and control. For example, one of them quietly gives Sarah and Andrew a terrible choice: "We cannot protect both of you and the girls. You must choose." (p. 142) The guard speaks as if he is just stating a rule, not facing a serious life-or-death situation. The use of impersonal phrases, like "we cannot protect", helps the guard avoid taking responsibility. It makes him seem like he's just a tool for authority, not someone making his own decisions. The guards' way of speaking shows how ruling systems make violence seem normal, as if cruel procedures are just part of a system. Also, their speech reveals how people like Sarah and Andrew are protected by authorities that treat others' pain as merely a problem to solve. Cleave uses this contrast; a polite way of speaking versus a violent meaning, to show how people in power justify their actions by using calm, logical language.

2.4.2. Analysis of the Non Nigerian Characters Language

Sarah

Sarah, a British magazine editor, has educated, formal English that reflects her professional life and middle-class background. Her language is confident and logical; however, as the story progresses, it becomes loaded with guilt, uncertainty, and emotional struggle. At the beginning, Sarah's speech reflects her sense of power and privilege. Her voice is calm and reflective, marked by self-awareness but also a sense of superiority. For example, when the

soldiers in the beach scene force her to choose one option, she says: “I knew what the right thing to do was, but the right thing is not always the easiest.” (p. 120) This sentence indicates her ethical dilemma, but also makes the moment feel less emotional. The expression “the right thing” versus “the easiest” illustrates a philosophical problem, not an emotional one to Sarah. However, as her relationship with Little Bee becomes stronger, Sarah’s language becomes more emotional and confused. For instance, she expresses this when she says: “I did it because I was afraid. I couldn’t save her.” (p. 185) unlike the previous one, this quote is more personal and reflective. The shift in style conveys a loss of emotional control and an emerging sense of responsibility. Throughout the novel course, Sarah’s voice changes between rational analysis and emotional expression depending on the situation she is involved in. In conclusion, Chris Cleave uses Sarah's language to reveal the moral struggle of people who witness suffering from a position of power. This demonstrates how language reflects a deeper conflict in the Western conscience, between responsibility and helplessness.

Andrew

In *Little Bee*, Andrew, Sarah’s husband, plays a key role in exploring the moral conflicts inside Western society. His language reflects his internal conflict and the tension between personal desires and ethical principles. To begin with, Andrew's speech reflects the confidence and authority that characterize any British man. His professional language is quite different from Sarah’s emotional and personal voice. This contrast becomes especially significant at a critical point in the novel—the beach scene—where Andrew and Sarah are forced by soldiers to choose between two Nigerian women, Little Bee and her sister. Under pressure, Andrew decides to save his family, which leads to the death of Little Bee’s sister. Although his choice is made in a moment of extreme stress, Andrew feels guilty. He realizes that his action is influenced by his position of privilege as a Westerner, which contributes to the death of an innocent girl. Consequently, as the novel progresses and Andrew’s guilt

deepens, his language begins to reveal emotional tension and defensiveness. For example, when he discusses the consequences of the event, Andrew says: “It wasn’t just us. It was the situation. There was nothing anyone could do.” (p. 220) Here, Andrew avoids taking responsibility, as if the outcome is something outside his influence. In other words, he distances himself from accountability by framing the situation as an external force beyond his control. His language, marked by passive constructions like “there was nothing anyone could do”, shields him from confronting the personal guilt that Sarah eventually accepts. Furthermore, Andrew’s language also reflects a difficult moral dilemma when he speaks to Sarah about his choice: “I didn’t know what to do. I thought I was doing the right thing, but... maybe I wasn’t.” (p. 225) This reveals his inner conflict between a belief in Western superiority and the painful realization that his actions are not as noble as he believes. Through this, Chris Cleave uses Andrew’s voice to show how his sense of identity, built on moral superiority, gradually breaks down when privilege can no longer hide the painful truth.

Lawrence

In *Little Bee*, Lawrence is Sarah’s lover and a government official who works for the British Home Office. As someone embedded in the immigration system, his language reflects his role as an enforcer of bureaucratic authority. He often speaks in formal, impersonal terms, relying on legal jargon and official procedures to distance himself from the human consequences of his actions. For instance, when confronting Little Bee, he says, “You’re an illegal immigrant. I’m obliged to inform the authorities.” (p. 135) This use of passive, official language shows how he deflects personal responsibility by appealing to institutional rules.

Even in personal settings, Lawrence’s tone remains guarded and authoritative. He often attempts to control situations through calm, clipped speech, which masks a deeper anxiety about losing power. When challenged, however, his language slips into defensiveness. He says, “I didn’t ask for this. None of this is my fault,” (p. 156) revealing cracks in his

composed exterior. His words expose an inner struggle between his professional identity and the emotional weight of the moral dilemmas he faces. Chris Cleave uses Lawrence's voice to critique the language of systems that prioritize order over justice. His speech reflects an identity shaped by duty and control, which gradually unravels when confronted with the messy, painful realities of refugee experience and personal responsibility.

Charlie

Often dressed like "Batman," Charlie, Sarah and Andrew's son, uses simple language and often repeats imaginary ideas, such as when he says, "I'm Batman. Batman doesn't die." (p. 210). He also avoids speaking about emotion. This reflects his developmental stage but also highlights how the adults around him fail to provide the clarity and emotional safety he needs. His language is marked by grammatical mistakes, as illustrated in the quote, "If I is not in mine costume then I is not Batman." (p. 223). This is also evident in a discussion with his mother, when she asks, "Do you need to be Batman all the time?" and Charlie nods replying, "Yes, because if I is not Batman all the time then mine Daddy dies." (p. 223). His mother, Sarah, gently and continuously corrects his speech, trying to guide him while respecting his emotional world. These language patterns serve as a protective shield, helping him avoid painful feelings like the sadness over his father's death and the violence he cannot yet understand. Chris Cleave uses Charlie's voice to show how children cope with trauma through imagination rather than reason or logic.

Girls in the Detention Centre

The girls in the immigration detention centre are asylum seekers from various countries; each one has her own story of displacement. Their language carries both resistance and sadness caused by displacement and conflicts.

Yvette is one of the women kept in the British immigration detention centre with Little Bee. She is a Jamaican girl known for her strong personality and resistance to the system. She

is the closest to Little Bee and is unable to speak the Queen's English as fluently as Little Bee but still can make herself understood. Yevette plays a key role in their release from the centre, and she takes pride in her linguistic heritage, choosing not to invest much time in learning British English. This decision highlights her Caribbean accent and authenticity, underscoring her cultural identity and resistance to the dominance of English, reflecting a sense of pride in her native way of speaking. For example, when challenging the injustice of their detention, she says, "We was in there for how long? And for what? 'Cause we brown and got accents?" (p. 185) Her casual grammar highlights both her frustration and her refusal to be silenced. It reflects a language shaped by resistance and survival in the face of discrimination.

The sari girl is an Indian girl who appears in the immigration detention centre with Little Bee, Yevette, and other women seeking asylum in the UK. Her language is broken English and it is marked by literal translations from her native language, which reflect both her cultural background and her marginalization within society. Chris Cleave uses the sari girl's language to highlight the impact of colonialism and to reveal both her struggle and her strength in a system where language is power. Little Bee says, "Sari, the Indian girl, she said something in Hindi and then translated it herself. 'You can't kill a flower with a gun', she said." (p. 150) This line clearly shows how non-native speakers bring their own structures into English. The phrase "you can't kill a flower with a gun" suggests beauty, innocence, and peace that resist brutal force. Cleave does not correct or mock her language, but he uses it to illustrate the beauty and the struggle of being heard in a foreign society. Through the sari's girl voice, Cleave reminds readers that every voice, broken, accented, or poetic, deserves to be listened to.

The silent girl is one of the prisoners in the immigration centre with Little Bee. She never speaks throughout the novel. Her silence is a powerful tool to express herself. Although she has no voice in the novel, her presence is strongly felt. Her silence represents the language of

suffering. While others talk, express, and interact, the silent girl transmits her messages using her stillness. As Little Bee describes her: “She never spoke a word. I think she had used all her words up before she came to England.” (p. 182) This quote illustrates how silence can be a form of resistance to suffering and a means to survive in a cruel world.

UK Immigration Officer (Detention Centre Staff)

In *Little Bee*, the UK immigration officers at the detention centre represent the British governmental system. They are the guardians who control the asylum seekers like Little Bee and the other imprisoned women. Their language is formal and bureaucratic, and it serves the system’s purposes. Moreover, their speech is rigid and does not show any empathy. For example, when Little Bee is released from the detention centre, one officer says, “You are being released. You must sign here and here.” (p. 220) This sentence is short and passive. It doesn't give any explanation or clarification, just instructions. Moreover, the use of the passive voice “you are being released” removes any trace of human responsibility. As a result, this kind of official language turns suffering into procedures. Even though the guards do not insult or threaten, the violence is still present in imposing actions without feeling or understanding. Through this, Cleave uses the officers’ speech to critique the language of authority, showing how official speech can systematize injustice and strip away individual humanity.

British Policemen

The British policemen’s language is marked by formality, politeness, and a strong focus on procedure, neglecting human emotion. When a policeman tells Sarah, “We just need to ask you a few questions, madam,” (p. 208) he uses formal language softened by words like “just” and “madam.” These words create distance instead of offering comfort. Cleave shows that even in times of personal suffering; the system uses cold and harsh words that lack empathy. Cleave uses the language of the British policemen to expose a bureaucratic system that

follows rules while ignoring people's humanity. Through short, formal sentences and superficial politeness, he reveals how emotional detachment becomes a tool of control. Cleave shows that the British authorities, like the immigration officers and the police, preserve control not through violence like the Nigerian soldiers, but through bureaucratic means.

In *Little Bee*, each character's language reveals their identity and its relationship to their experiences. Little Bee's formal English shows assimilation and loss; Nkiruka's Igbo illustrates cultural resistance; Sarah's formal style internalizes moral conflicts; Andrew's silence hides guilt; and Charlie's language protects him from pain. All together, their voices highlight how language shapes postcolonial identity.

2.5. Language and Identity Relationship in *Little Bee*

This study reveals the relationship between language and identity for each character, highlighting how their linguistic choices shape their experiences and identities.

2.5.1. The Protagonist Little Bee

As a Nigerian refugee in England, Little Bee is aware that people treat her according to the way she speaks. Speaking English fluently gives her more acceptance into the British society. This shows that language is a tool she uses to form her identity and to ensure her safety. But at the same time, her mastery of the new language is not without a cost. Little Bee's native language is forgotten, saying, "the words are gone." (p. 216) This clarifies that when she acquires the new identity through language mastery, she loses an important part of her original identity. In other words, she gives up a piece of herself to be able to fit in. Despite her fluency, the way she uses metaphors and figurative language is still influenced by the Nigerian background. For instance, when she expresses, "Sadness is a little bird, perched in the cage of my ribs," (p. 10) the usage of a metaphor that is common in African storytelling indicates that her original identity is not fully erased.

In *Little Bee*, the protagonist's ability to shift between linguistic registers, especially her use of formal British English, is a powerful way to construct identity and ensure survival. This linguistic mimicry allows her to perform a version of herself that suits the expectations of her British surroundings, yet it also highlights how refugees must often reconstruct their identities through the lens of colonial languages (Goldberg, 2016, pp. 60–61).

Moreover, Little Bee's experience of migration plays a central role in shaping her identity, particularly through language. As she navigates life between Nigeria and England, it is her use of language that becomes the primary means of self-definition. Rather than simply adapting to her new environment, Little Bee actively uses English to bridge cultural gaps, preserve fragments of memory, and assert her individuality. Her story demonstrates that, for child migrants, language is not just a tool for communication but a powerful medium through which complex transcultural identities are formed (McLaughlin, 2013, pp. 47–48).

2.5.1.1. Little Bee as Different

The most apparent representation of identity that is embodied in Little Bee's character is difference. Little Bee's character displays the qualities of someone seen as unusual and different. According to the Oxford Dictionary (2008), the term 'different' is defined as something that is not the same as another in nature, form, or quality, but is instead distinct and separate. Little Bee describes herself through the following quotation: "I have been in your country two years. I learned your language and learned your rules. I am more like you than me now." (p. 269) Little Bee emphasizes how her identity is reshaped by adaptation. Lawrence answers laughingly. 'I really don't think you're anything like me,' he said." (p. 269) This quote illustrates how Little Bee's difference is preserved even with her efforts to assimilate. Lawrence's sarcastic reaction demonstrates that regardless of the determined efforts to learn the language and fit in, in the eyes of the British, her identity is still seen as different. Thus, the novel portrays language as a necessary but insufficient tool to obtain

acceptance. In *Little Bee*, identity is deeply constructed by social judgments that language alone cannot cancel.

2.5.1.2. Little Bee as Inferior

Another way Little Bee's identity is portrayed is through a sense of inferiority. "Most days, I wish I was a British pound coin instead of an African girl." (p. 1) This passage clearly shows how language enables Little Bee to express an internal feeling of inferiority shaped by her original identity. By wishing herself to be a currency, as it is a universally valued object, she conveys a strong desire to get acceptance, value, and worth that she lacks due to her origins. In the scene where Little Bee says, "I said, thank you, sir, may God move with grace in your life and bring joy into your heart and prosperity upon your loved ones." (p. 5) Then she narrates the way the officer react to her words: "The officer pointed his eyes at the ceiling, like there was something very interesting up there, and he said, Jesus" (p. 5), despite her attempts to adapt through mastering the Queen's English, her words are received with mockery and disregard. Instead of being valued for her linguistic fluency, she is mocked and undermined. In summary, language does not just express inferiority; it reveals how that inferiority is formed through social and cultural norms that link value with whiteness and Westernness, and depict African identities as worthless or invisible.

2.5.1.3. Little Bee as a Nigerian

A central aspect of identity explored in *Little Bee* is national identity, particularly what it means to be Nigerian in a postcolonial and diasporic context. According to the Oxford Dictionary (2008), national identity is the shared sense of a nation's unity, marked by distinctive traditions, culture, language, and politics. In *Little Bee*, Chris Cleave portrays Nigerian identity through the way Little Bee uses language. Her speech reveals the presence of her Nigerian heritage. Little Bee shows a conflicted relationship with the English language. Despite her fluency, she never truly feels a sense of belonging within it. Her Nigerian identity

becomes clear when she expresses a deep longing for her origins: “I would like to be a village girl again... And most of all, you know, I would like to use my actual name” (p. 219). Her desire to reclaim her real name illustrates a wish to return to her Nigerian identity, which she is forced to mask in England for safety reasons. Furthermore, *Little Bee*’s narrative includes Nigerian idioms, oral storytelling patterns, and metaphors within the framework of the English language, thus achieving a hybrid linguistic identity. She frequently uses vivid imagery drawn from Nigerian settings even while speaking fluent English. Therefore, Cleave uses *Little Bee*’s voice to demonstrate that migration does not erase Nigerian identity, but instead reshapes it through language. Her linguistic duality embodies the postcolonial experience: the Nigerian girl who speaks English fluently while still carrying the memory and longing of her homeland in every word.

2.5.1.4. *Little Bee* as a Refugee

One of the most important representations of identity in *Little Bee* is that of the refugee. As defined by the 1951 UN Convention, a refugee is a person who escapes their home country due to persecution, violence, conflict, and who cannot return safely due to a fear of harm. Refugees often face legal marginalization, social exclusion, and are treated as “outsiders” regardless of their attempts to assimilate. In Chris Cleave’s novel, the theme of identity is intricately shaped by the protagonist’s status as a refugee, forcing her to adapt to a new environment that neither welcomes her nor offers a stable sense of belonging. This experience reflects what Bhabha terms the “in-between” space of hybridity, where refugees must negotiate cultural differences and reconstruct a new sense of self in unfamiliar surroundings (Mittich, 2017, p. 46). Despite *Little Bee*’s fluency in the colonizer’s language, her identity is still classified as “unauthorized.” Thus, language becomes both a tool for resistance and a barrier that reinforces her marginalization. Mr. Ayres once questions her: “Is there any way you can prove that you’re legal? I could be in trouble if I let you onto my land and then it

turns out I'm harbouring illegal immigrants." (p. 89) Little Bee's identity is reduced to her immigration status, positioning her as a danger or burden, even when she is peaceful and articulate. While Little Bee uses English to assert her voice and humanity, the institutional and everyday language used around her continually defines her as "other," "unauthorized," and "illegal." In this way, Cleave shows that refugee identity is shaped not only by where one is from, but by how others choose to speak about -and to- them.

Little Bee's character embodies a complex identity shaped by difference, marginalization, and displacement. She is portrayed as different, inferior, Nigerian, and a refugee. These labels reflect how language and social perception define her in a post-colonial context.

2.5.2. Nkiruka

While Little Bee speaks in careful and poetic English that reflects her desire to survive, Nkiruka speaks in direct, emotional language. This shows that she is still deeply connected to her Nigerian identity. Unlike her sister, she hasn't changed her language to fit in the Western world. Consequently, Nkiruka's identity is more static and authentic, but also more vulnerable in the dangerous world she lives in. Although Nkiruka's brief presence, she serves as a reminder of the cultural identity that Little Bee is in danger of losing. By contrasting Nkiruka's direct and honest language and Little Bee's carefully mastered English, the novel investigates how language reflects different reactions to trauma, and how it both constructs and preserves identity in the struggle against displacement.

2.5.3. Soldiers

In *Little Bee*, the language of the unnamed Nigerian soldiers' language illustrates an identity formed by the influence of the violent system of control. Their speech is mechanical, emotionless, and bureaucratic; it reflects their function as instruments of authority, rather than autonomous individuals. Their identity is not developed through personal experiences but through their roles within the structure of governance.

2.5.4. Sarah

Sarah's language throughout the novel reflects the transition of her identity, showing her change from a privileged professional figure to a character with deep internal conflicts. Sarah's speech shifts from an authoritative and philosophical tone to one marked by moral responsibility and empathy. For example, she says, "I am a magazine editor. I have deadlines and staff and meetings to attend. But right now I have to help this girl" (p. 117), revealing both her professional authority and her increasing ethical awareness. Through Sarah's language, Chris Cleave shows how identity is dynamic, shaped by ethical dilemmas, emotional experience, and personal growth.

2.5.5. Andrew

The language of Andrew in *Little Bee* reveals how his identity falls apart as he struggles with guilt and the consequences of his actions. His speech at the start of the novel reflects his privileged status as a Westerner, as seen when he says, "We were on a beach. It should have been beautiful." (p. 19) this line confirms his perspective and ignores the violence surrounding him. However, as Andrew is confronted with the effects of his behaviours, his language becomes more defensive, illustrated by his response to Sarah: "You think this is all my fault, don't you?" (p. 223). This progression from a confident character to one filled with self-doubt portrays the collapse of his identity, ultimately leading to his suicide.

2.5.6. Lawrence

Lawrence's speech illustrates his identity as a government employee, marked by formality and rigidity that prioritize bureaucracy over humanity. This is evident when he states, "I am just a civil servant, I am doing my job." (p. 104), emphasizing his detached, bureaucratic mindset. As his ethical dilemma deepens, his language shifts to reveal the tension between his professional responsibilities and personal conscience, as seen when he hesitates and says, "I had to choose between what was right and what was safe." (p. 178). This progression highlights the internal conflict between his duty and moral responsibility, ultimately showing

how institutional positions corrupt ethical judgments, silencing any voice of compassion and accountability.

2.5.7. Charlie

The language of Charlie reflects his natural need for emotional safety particularly after the shock of his father's death. His disguise as Batman serves as an emotional self-protection by adopting a character that symbolizes strength. This choice of identity corresponds to Little Bee's change of her name, highlighting how both characters create new identities to cope with trauma and protect themselves. Charlie's speech illustrates the novel's exploration of how individuals reshape identities to endure intense emotional pain.

2.5.8. Yevette

Yevette's speech in this literary work reveals her deep sense of her cultural identity and her resistance to assimilation within the British immigration system. Her pride in her Jamaican accent and refusing to speak the Queen's English, challenge the authority of English and confirm her cultural roots. For Yevette, language does not serve only as means of communication, but a way of asserting identity in a society that marginalizes her.

2.5.9. UK Immigration Officer (Detention Centre Staff)

The language used by UK immigration officers in the novel emphasizes their role as tools of the state's authority, adopting a bureaucratic tone where individual identity is obscured in favour of professional purposes. An example of this bureaucratic tone is when an immigration officer says: "You are now in the United Kingdom. Your application for asylum has been noted. Your case will be processed. Your file will be opened." (p. 3). Cleave critiques this institutional language because it reduces refugees like Little Bee to mere numbers, stripping them of their humanity. This highlights how language can suppress the individual identities of both the officials and the refugees.

Through the different voices in *Little Bee*, Chris Cleave reveals how language functions not just as a tool of communication, but it serves also as mirror of identity, trauma, authority, and resistance. Whether poetic, emotional or rigid, bureaucratic or silent voice; it reflects the speaker's historical background, social status, and the strategy for survival in postcolonial world. Cleave shows how fluency can be an armour and a burden, how silence can convey resistance, and how language determines who is heard and who is ignored. Ultimately, the novel invites readers to reflect on the way language shapes human struggle to be recognized and heard within oppressive systems.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Chapter Two serves as the practical application of the theoretical study conducted in the first chapter. It offers a detailed analysis of *Little Bee*, in which Chris Cleave explores the complex relationship between language and identity.

The novel vividly portrays the harsh realities of war and displacement, revealing the profound impact these experiences have on the characters. Each character's linguistic choices provide insight into their evolving identities, highlighting how language functions both as a survival strategy and a marker of difference. This strong link between language and identity shapes refugees' lives in the post-colonial world, where language often determines their access to belonging and survival.

General Conclusion

Colonialism refers to the notion of colonial rule which means settlement and exercising power over the indigenous population, exploiting their wealth and cultural products. It passes through many stages starting by imperialism ending with neo-colonialism. However, decolonization is a transitional stage between colonialism and independence. It is the step when the colonizers start to withdraw the colonized nation leading to independence and self-governance.

Additionally, post colonialism is the process of resistance and reconstruction which examines the impact of colonization on societies and cultures during the post-independence period. It focuses on the challenges that former colonies suffer from and face. In Literature post colonialism is the study of explaining and analyzing the impact of colonialism and imperialism. African post-colonial literature is one of the examples in post-colonial period which is famous by themes of immigration, hybridity, double consciousness and identity which is portrayed in *Little Bee* by Chris Cleave and is thoroughly analyzed in this research paper.

Little Bee is one of Chris Cleave's most important works. The study of this dissertation aims to analyze the relationship between identity and language and how language serves as a key element in the construction of identity of each character in the novel. The British writer Chris Cleave uses dual narrative in *Little Bee*. One of them is Nigerian and the other is a British. This dual narrative enabled a comparative exploration of identity and otherness.

The dissertation seeks to answer the research questions by using both theoretical frameworks and practical analysis. The findings illustrate the complexity of the relationship between language and identity in the novel and the importance of language in shaping people's identities in addition to the understanding of the cultural and the social implications

of language in postcolonial literature. Therefore, various academic studies relevant to this topic are analyzed.

The dissertation is divided into two main chapters. The first chapter, titled “Language and Identity in Postcolonial African Literature” which provides a historical overview of postcolonial issues in Africa, including topics such as oil war, immigration, and displacement. It discusses how the maltreatment of the colonized by colonial powers contribute to a postcolonial identity crisis as an essential issue in postcolonial studies. The second chapter, “The Analysis of Identity and Language in *Little Bee*” is a practical application of the theoretical discussions. It tries to confirm the theoretical arguments and responds directly to the research questions. This chapter analyses identity and language and highlights the relationship between them for each character in order to explain how their linguistic choices shape and express their identities. Chris Cleave illustrates the struggles of postcolonial African individuals through the character of Little Bee.

Throughout the process of completing this dissertation, the researchers find many challenges. Among the difficulties that are encountered in this dissertation are time management and balancing academic and personal responsibilities. In addition to the limited access to reliable academic sources—many of them are not freely available— which hinder the depth of the research.

Finally, it must be noted that numerous themes in *Little Bee* remain unexplored in both this and previous studies. Future research into these themes would further enrich the academic understanding of the novel. *Little Bee* is a powerful literary work that offers rich opportunities for continued study in the field of postcolonial literature.

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ملخص

تعد رواية *النحلة الصغيرة* عملاً أدبياً بارزاً يستكشف كيفية مواجهة الشخصيات للصراعات الشخصية والثقافية، حيث تُستخدم اللغة كوسيلة قوية للكشف عن موضوعات الهوية والبقاء. يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة العلاقة المعقدة بين اللغة والهوية في رواية *النحلة الصغيرة* من خلال تحليل كيفية تشكيل التعبيرات اللغوية وتجسيد الهويات للشخصيات. تتبنى هذه الأطروحة مقاربة ما بعد استعمارية لتحليل الموضوعات وتجارب الشخصيات في الرواية من خلال تحليل نصي معمق، وذلك لفهم كيف تتشكل قضايا الهجرة و الصدمة والهوية تحت تأثير إرث الاستعمار. وتشير النتائج إلى أن الكتاب الأفارقة في مرحلة ما بعد الاستعمار غالباً ما يمزجون بين اللغات الأصلية واللغات الاستعمارية للتعبير عن الهوية واستعادة التراث الثقافي ومقاومة آثار الاستعمار المستمرة. وبالمثل، يُظهر كريس كليف كيف تؤدي اللغة في رواية *النحلة الصغيرة* دوراً في البقاء والمقاومة. وتعكس في الوقت ذاته الهويات الشخصية والاجتماعية ضمن سياق مرحلة ما بعد الاستعمار.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهوية، اللغة، النحلة الصغيرة، الهجرة، أدب ما بعد الاستعمار

Résumé

Little Bee est un roman important qui explore la manière dont les personnages affrontent des luttes personnelles et culturelles, en utilisant le langage comme un outil puissant pour révéler les thèmes de l'identité, du déracinement et de la survie. Ce mémoire vise à examiner la relation complexe entre la langue et l'identité dans *Little Bee*, en analysant comment l'expression linguistique façonne et reflète les identités changeantes des personnages. Cette dissertation adopte une approche postcoloniale pour explorer les thèmes et les expériences des personnages dans *Little Bee* à travers une analyse textuelle approfondie, en examinant comment les questions de migration, de traumatisme et d'identité sont façonnées par l'héritage du colonialisme. Les résultats suggèrent que les écrivains africains postcoloniaux combinent souvent les langues indigènes et coloniales pour exprimer leur identité, revendiquer leur héritage culturel et résister aux effets persistants du colonialisme. De la même manière, Chris Cleave montre comment la langue dans *Little Bee* agit comme un moyen de survie, de résistance et d'émancipation, tout en reflétant les identités personnelles et collectives dans un monde postcolonial.

Mots-clés: Identité, Langue, *Little Bee*, Migration, Postcolonialisme