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Rearticulating Women's Silence in Paulina Chiziane's *Niketche* and in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes*

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Abstract: This essay begins with a comparison of Gayatri Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) and Eni Puccinelli Orlandi's *As formas do silêncio* (2007). Through a contrastive analysis of these works, I aim to rephrase our critical understanding of the meaning and significance of "silence." From a cumbersomely imposed entity with fixed limits, and a means to dominate and oppress, I suggest that silence is a powerful and illusive passive instrument of microresistance. Subsequently, I locate the operation of these theoretical processes in two works of contemporary African female-authored fiction, *Niketche: Uma história de poligamia* (2002), by Paulina Chiziane, and *Changes: A Love Story* (1991), by Ama Ata Aidoo. Ultimately, I draw attention to how these works unpack and enhance our understanding of the representation of silence, which could be read as an effective tool toward contesting annihilation, assimilation, and appropriation. Remarkably, the foremost female characters in *Niketche* and *Changes*, Rami and Fusena respectively, succeed in distinct ways to combat societal impositions formulated by androcratic, phallocentric, and male chauvinist communities—all by "simply" cocooning themselves in a divine speechlessness.

Keywords: silence, female subalternity, resistance, literature of black African women

How to Rely on Silence

> Silence is all one has, or all one is allowed; silence is fear and talk is trouble; silence is shame and talk underserved; silence is resistance and talk is cheap; silence is golden and talk irrelevant; silence is privacy and talk is someone else's cover; silence is listening and it allows talk to be heard. (Patterson 681)

In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?," Gayatri Spivak considered the possibility for "subalterns" (men and, especially, women) to speak—that is, to concretely use their voices to defend themselves against annihilation and every possible epistemic violence. In simple terms, the act of speaking tends to coincide with a declaration, eventually even a *self*-declaration: the voice ascends to a level of being both an instrument and a weapon. As Spivak implies, subalterns should use it to emerge from their condition of oppression and victimization, as well as to re-present themselves in a wholesome, immediate, and unequivocal way. Frantz Fanon, for instance, wrote in *Peau noire, masques blancs*, "le moi se pose en s'opposant" (200), loosely translated as "the self arises in opposition." For Fanon, the idea of the subject or "my" presence—that is, my being "Me" (particularly the subaltern subject's "Me")—begins to exist as soon as "I" create resistance. In the very act of speaking, "I" appropriate a space and, by vocalizing "my" self, "my" needs, and "my" points of view, I materialize "myself" against all expectations and, for the most part, against all paradigms that the colonizing "Other" imposes over "me." This process, however, leads to another set of questions—could it be that only "my" voice has the potential to change this subalternity? Could change only be possible with the vocalization of "my" discomfort? Do I want to talk, beyond my capacity to do so? And, within the colonial/postcolonial context, could I be heard and understood? We must remember that colonial oppression mutes both the subaltern's voice and consciousnesses, where consequently silence becomes a form of alienation and powerlessness. It is true that the vocalization of a discourse is useful for "my" constitution as a subject. Notwithstanding, and despite this perspective argued for by Spivak, silence can, in fact, be reinterpreted as another meaningful expression of resistance, while equally constituting a site of contestation as strong and valid as speech. Let us proceed gradually.

In *As formas do silêncio*, Eni Puccinelli Orlandi argues that we live in the "império do verbal," a condition that has accustomed us into thinking that vocalization and writing have clear primacy over any other form of expression, be it objective or subjective, artistic, or scientific (30). Words complete silence, explain it, and give it a sense, a context, and a substance, whereas language becomes a concretization of discourse by allowing for the birth of meanings, concepts, and ideologies. "I speak, therefore I am": we must speak out so that others recognize our existence and do not dispute it in an effort to crush us. To be, then, implies that we demonstrate our presence in this world, and, in order to do so, we must express ourselves in a highly perceptible and clear manner. Within this ontological framework, silence suffers a process of inferiorization as it is condemned into revealing a deficient status in a communication system that eradicates dignity, importance, and understanding from what is not material, audible, or legible. Orlandi's analysis goes further by inverting the perspectives and rearticulating the weight of silence. She notes that silence is not simply nonsense or empty space; rather, silence is matter, and strongly signifies in itself. It is autonomous and even independent. It provides the backdrop for any process of significance, for meaning is and exists per se without any condition or mediation.

Silence acquires here an almost Platonic identity: it is all-full and complete, and is what is needed for there to be evolution and, consequently, the formulation of meaning. Language is nothing more than a bonus, a form of surplus that stems from the nonemptiness of silence to fragment it and restructure it into categories, groups, definitions, and models. Language pretends to be absolute and omnipotent, while it only works by crystallizing various shades of meaning. Words kill the polysemy of silence, its highly fertile and always reactive opacity. In speech, "há a negação da alteridade mas também a identidade é aniquilada"—that is, language homogenizes everything and masters the distances between different discourses, and additionally, stereotypes alterities while conforming them all to a single type (Orlandi 80). Words tend to complexify relations as they frequently leave a margin of indistinction or imperfection which, however, silence already includes. Silence allows the formation of words and their legitimization in a discourse, while equally empowering their materialization. It is both pure and hard materiality, for it is at the same time signifying, fundamental and founding matter and, depending on the occurrence, it takes the form of a written word, spoken word, or gesture (Orlandi

14). This is what Orlandi calls "a política do silêncio," which in turn encompasses both constitutive silence and local silence (29). To paraphrase the author, the former implies that to say something, it is necessary not to say something else, namely, all other words. The latter is identified with censorship, and corresponds to the falsification of the relationship between the said and the unsaid (Orlandi 24).

As Orlandi postulates, a policy of silence is not necessarily an imposition by hegemonic power. On the contrary, it can deliberately be chosen by the very same subaltern entities who adopt it for the sake of constituting a first opposition or even the core of their resistance (Orlandi 29). Subordinates and the oppressed programmatically use silence to limit the demeaning and epistemically violent definitions and connotations imposed on them by their persecutors. In this way, silence turns into a new and powerful rhetoric of struggle through which "A intervenção do silêncio faz aparecer a falta de simetria entre os interlocutores" (Orlandi 49).

If one applies this reasoning to colonial and postcolonial settings, it could be argued that the subalterns' silence alienates colonizers by disempowering their voices and utterances, while also highlighting how a discourse of domination is not a dialogue, but rather, a monologue that subaltern classes are expected neither to contrast nor to correct. The silence of dominated classes underlines another important feature of silencing domination: viz., that it was ideologically justified by the dominators not only as a vital tool in keeping control over the dominated, but also as the subalterns' fundamental inability to formulate any sort of meaningful message, thereby revealing a substantial lack of rational intelligence. For the oppressed, maintaining silence does not imply inaction or passivity, especially as abstaining from speaking is not even remotely comparable to being forced to silence. Rather, this is the most powerful and effective political action to assert their critical spirit while emphasizing the brutalities of silencing.

Silence is an alternative to the vocalization of revolt: it is as if the subjects decided to abandon words in pursuance of letting their nonspeaking speak. And, by collecting themselves in their silence, those subjects become inaccessible, as they escape any chance of approach and contact. At the same time, those same subjects regain their integrity since they do not waste precious time in dialogue or in mediation. Silently, subjects perform their protest against the sociopolitical system that they were coerced to recognize, in spite of themselves, as their own. They are not *a*vocal, but rather *anti*vocal considering that they are not *in*operative

or *in*active, but *anti*operative and *anti*active. This logic operates at two levels, those being "empathy" and "estrangement." Silence leans on the fact that while surrounded by silence, others get to notice the wrongs they have been doing and so are more intensely impacted with the brutality and injustice of their deeds. The persecuted refuse the role of victims and make a mirror of themselves, so that they can reflect the offenders and the oppressors' actions, thereby leading them to a course of critical reflection. The eyes of the subjugated refill with silent and vibrant accusations that the conscience of the tyrant cannot ignore. The second level of effectiveness of silence is "distancing": by mastering their reactions—that is, by containing any rageful or impulsive response—the oppressed rise up against the oppressors. In this way, subalterns substitute aggressive offense with a peaceful and hyperrational defense. To blind fury and brute violence, the subordinate offers divine detachment—an alternative that ends up coinciding with an act of tolerance. This dual attitude allows the oppressed to regain their agency, thereby promoting the emancipation from subordination and the overcoming of the oppressors' pettiness. All this favors, in turn, the repositioning of the "abyssal line" of which Boaventura de Sousa Santos speaks.[1]

This theoretical framework is useful for us to understand how Paulina Chiziane and Ama Ata Aidoo rephrase the meaning and importance of silence in their literary works—which are set in a postcolonial, male chauvinist, and androcentric setting. In particular, I analyze moments or scenes taken from Chiziane's *Niketche: Uma história de poligamia* (2002), and from Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story* (1991) with the aim of unpacking how the main female characters of these two works of fiction adopt silence as a means of revolt toward expressing their disdain and outrage in relation to a phallocentric society that surrounds them.

Silence and Defiance in **Niketche**

Niketche: Uma história de poligamia, by the Mozambican author Paulina Chiziane (b. 1955), follows the changes, struggles, and experiences in the life of a Mozambican woman, Rami. After a steady twenty years of marriage, Rami

[1] According to the Portuguese scholar, society is divided by a series of both visible and invisible distinctions into two groups—namely, the dominating group and the "Others." The latter are produced as nonexisting and irrelevant and therefore are excluded by the construction and direct participation of the civil society.

discovers that her husband, Tony, is a habitual adulterer who, after having betrayed her several times, has assembled families, each headed by a lover and crammed with children. Animated at first by pain and resentment, but later by a gradual thirst for revenge, Rami ensures that Tony makes all his relationships with his partners official, consequently determining the evolution of the family from a monogamous to a polygamic state. In the process, Rami not only builds solid bonds of camaraderie with her co-wives but gradually discovers her womanhood while embracing her sexuality. She recognizes her body's renovated sensitivity and sensibility. Her sexual and personal awareness accompanies her critical awakening. This is why she revolts against the feminine condition within so-called "traditional" culture and begins her insurrectionary path in favor of the status quo.

Niketche is all about speech: asking for and giving explanations, clarifying meanings, lying, confessing, praying, or reflecting out loud, speaking out, confabulating, contributing to the birth of a collective female discourse. Under Rami's direction, women who are part of Tony's gynaecium learn to instrumentalize speech, while through it and thanks to it, they also build agency against patriarchal discourses in society. It is not by chance that this novel is established in first-person speech by Rami: the internal focus underlines that the narration, the right to tell, must be guaranteed to female voices as well, so that they are able to share their version of life and of history. This, in turn, contributes toward contrasting the social and historical silence Mozambican phallocracy forced women into, and decisively allows them to be, as autonomous living and thinking creatures—a condition the following excerpt clearly highlights: "Meu Tony, a tua voz sempre ditou o que eu devia fazer. O que eu devia pensar. Tu desenhavas o meu presente e o meu futuro. Foste constituindo-me, grão a grão, meu divino criador" (Chiziane 240).

Introducing a female first-person narrator has some notable benefits. First, this is a reminder of how, traditionally, women were keepers of the spoken word. They absolved the function of *griots*, of storytellers, and as such, were the guardians of culture and tradition—that is, of collective memory. The passage from orality to the written word, however, made women lose their prestige as both sociopolitical and culturally relevant entities. This made them superficial in an epistemic system where men had abruptly become the paladins of writing and reading, thereby of the creation and maturing of new values, significations, and stories (Frediani and Barbosa; Goody; Sousa and Souza). Through *Niketche*, then, the power of telling

stories goes back to women—a female author, Paulina Chiziane, who gives life to a female narrator, Rami. Besides, as the narrator of the story, not only does Rami manage the advancement of the plot by driving a rhythm into what she wants in storytelling: she freely indulges in moments of quietness and silence—or, alternatively, explains the reasons and significance behind her own insubordinate silent outlook. A coherent example of Rami's "counterinsurgency through silence" can be read in the episode involving the celebration of a funeral for Tony, once his entire family believes that he died in a car accident. Tony's clan unexpectedly breaks into Rami's house and predisposes both the house and Rami to mourning without ever asking for her consent. The impetuosity of Tony's relatives does not stop in the face of anything—especially when confronted with doubts raised by the protagonist about her husband's alleged death. The more she asks questions and demands proof and confirmation, the more these voices of people intensify, stimulated by an utterly irrational and illogical spirit. Rami ends up silenced, and this event dramatically marks the loss of all her freedoms and rights: of opinion, of speech, of action, of (free) management of her body—as she indicates in the following excerpt:

> Enquanto me gritam, vão afastando as cadeiras e as mesas da sala e me mandam sentar num canto . . . como uma prisoneira . . . Eu grito, eu pergunto . . . aquelas mulheres respondiam-me: porta-te como uma viúva digna. Não compreendia o que estava a acontecer, mas sabia que uma viúva como deve ser não deve perceber nada, nem perguntar nem sugerir nada, para não ser chamada viúva fresca, viúva alegre. (Chiziane 211)

In the beginning, it is the family that is observant of the precepts of tradition, imposing silence over Rami, leaving her powerless. From the very first moment it is clear to Rami that she is a victim of a process of alienation that traditional structures advocate and defend. At the same time, conversely, despite her strong disapproval and dislike for those same sociocultural schemes, she is fully aware that she can neither contrast nor overturn these structures by herself. Concerned, she is at the absolute mercy of Tony's relatives' judgments and will. In order to safeguard her psychophysical integrity, then, Rami pointedly cocoons herself in

silence—and by assuming this posture she manages to turn her impotence into strength:

> Ó gente cega, gente surda, gente parva! Será que não tenho o direito de ser ouvida pelo menos uma vez na vida? Estou cansada de ser mulher. Suportar cada capricho. Ser estrangeira na minha própria casa. Estou cansada de ser sombra. Silhueta. Já que não querem me ouvir, a vingança será o meu silêncio. (Chiziane 217)

Talking involves the determination to open a debate, struggling to be heard and trying to be understood—but what for? What might be the conclusion one can derive from a dialogue with people Rami defines as "gente tarada [que] invoca a religião, a tradição e um monte de superstições de que nunca tinha ouvido falar" (Chiziane 214)? Silence forms Rami's exoskeleton and helps her cope with each moment of the funeral rites. As such, silence works here more as a barrier than as refuge: her recollection in silence demarcates her position and draws her distance from the world, and at the same time it is her gimmick to survive without having to deal with gratuitous criticisms, accusations, and further psychophysical and/or epistemic violence. While Rami is silent and (apparently) quiet, she is never mute. The rhythm and tone of the narration incessantly proves that her conscience and her critical spirit are always on their guard. She ends up acquiescing to mistreatments and pretends to surrender to traditional practices. Nonetheless, deep down, her silence and apparent inaction are toughened by her one and only purpose of hurting Tony. Rami, in fact, knows that when he gets back and finds out what happened to her and to their house, his narcissism and his masculinity will be dramatically hurt.

Rami's impenetrability and calculating attitude experienced a panicky break on the occasion of *kutchinga*, a ritual involving sexual purification that a newly widowed has to undergo through levirate. She is astonished with the way Tony's family treats her—comparable to a worthless doll who does not deserve to be cognizant of the steps and phases of traditional rites—as Rami insists: "por que não me disseram elas que [o kutchinga] era hoje? Para quê todo este segredo, esta surpresa?" (Chiziane 239–40). In the eyes of society (a phallocratic, androcentric, and male chauvinist culture), she, Rami, is deemed worthless because she is nothing but a woman—that is, she is the Other, one who is programmatically

visualized as inferior, dependent, lacking mental skills and critical sense, and as such, is reduced to a pure materiality that can be freely acted upon and directed. Being so, she is perfectly aware of her obligation to passively endure the whole process in silence so as not to lose the little that she has—as she declares afterward in another moment of narration: "Não tenho nada do meu ser … se eu recuso este ato me tiram tudo, até os filhos, e fico de mãos vazias" (Chiziane 240). Nevertheless, Rami reverses the polarity and the weight of the ritual—which she stops interpreting simply as an act of bodily, psychological, and epistemic violence leveled at humiliating and robbing her of her independence and self-control. She declares herself open to it by abandoning herself to the rite without any further hesitation, to the point where she affirms: "que me tchinguem. De resto, estou mesmo a precisar de um momento de amor" (Chiziane 231).

In the end, Rami gets exactly the result she had hoped for: when Tony returns and is informed of the events by his wives, he is both numbed by his powerlessness and hurt in his masculine pride. He cannot formulate a meaningful sentence; instead he simply starts sobbing. Thereafter, he simply asks why she did not react:

> — Não reagiste, não resististe?
> — Como? É a nossa tradição, não é? …
> Falo com muito prazer e ele sente a dor de marido traído. No meu peito explodem aplausos. Surpreendo-me. Sinto que endureci nas minhas atitudes. O meu desejo de vingança é superior a qualquer força deste mundo. (Chiziane 242)

Rami magisterially narrates this short response to Tony. He cannot understand why she did not try to resist the violence imposed by his family, especially to *kutchinga*. Rami masks her attitude, her silence, her apparent passivity with tradition. She was supposed, on that contingency, to behave as a good woman, and that implied keeping quiet at all costs and all moments, acquiescing, making no questions, patiently enduring every intromission, every touch, every moment. Her silence was the instrument she adopted not just to survive but promptly to offend Tony. And, along with him, his spoilt conception of tradition, which did not necessarily and at all moments and occasions protect male privileges and an imbalanced status quo.

Deafening Silences in Changes

Changes: A Love Story, by the Ghanaian author Ama Ata Aidoo (1942–2023), revolves around a strong friendship between two Ghanaian women, Esi and Opokuya. Both are wives and mothers with professional careers of their own. Their initial closeness is compromised as they express dissimilar opinions about conjugal life, marriage, family, and sexuality. Opokuya remains faithful to her husband despite the difficulties she endures; Esi, in contrast, after being raped by her husband Oko, divorces him to begin a new relationship with Ali, who is already married to Fusena. This fact does not prevent Ali from transforming his monogamous marriage into a polygamous union in order to formalize his relationship with Esi in front of their families and society, even at the cost of Fusena's happiness and equilibrium.

The episode I draw attention to concerns a scenario where Ali's family comes together to force Fusena to agree to Ali's second marriage with Esi. The following excerpt not only articulates the distinctive positions of silence from an intergenerational perspective but also shows the brutal silencing of any position that contradicts tradition and values held dear by the community.

> [Ali's] elders had to put their heads together and come up with some fresh ideas. And they did. They themselves would undertake the business of getting Fusena persuaded. Ali couldn't believe his ears or his luck. He literally jumped up to shake their hands in gratitude.
>
> Ali had not known, and was never to know, that in fact it was to these same elders that Fusena had gone to complain and to weep, the morning she drove so furiously from the house and later from the kiosk. . . .
>
> A day or two after the meeting with Ali, the patriarchs of Nima had asked those among their wives and sisters *whom they trusted* had *the patience and the wisdom* to do the job properly, to talk to Fusena. The ladies had in turn sent a message to Fusena to come and see them. When they met, Fusena was quick to realize that if the men had asked the women to talk to her, then of course, they were not going to get Ali to give up the idea of marrying his

> graduate woman. . . . As she sat in front of the group of older women trying so diligently to listen to them, she knew that all was lost. *Besides, what could she say to the good women, when some of them were themselves second, third and fourth wives? And those who had been first wives looked dignified, but clearly so battle-weary? She decided to make their job easier for them.*
> *"Yes, Mma. Yes, Aunty. Yes . . . yes . . . yes"*, was all she said to every suggestion that was made. *The older women felt bad. So an understanding that had never existed between them was now born. It was a man's world. You only survived if you knew how to live in it as a woman. What shocked the older women though, was obviously how little had changed for their daughters—school and all!* (Aidoo 106–7; my italics).

As readers, we move through a flagrantly patriarchal setting where tradition and customs are sacred, and where authority lies with a council of elders. This social structure observes men dealing with issues concerning other men, as women deal with women's issues among themselves—even if the root of the problem is men, as is the case here. Patriarchs are known to delegate the resolution of the problem to some trustworthy women—meaning, that those women are trained (or, better, tamed) by the male collective consciousness to diligently follow a predetermined path without rebelling or questioning societal customs and values (namely, phallocracy and androcentrism). This framework influences a combination of "patience and wisdom" as they are two faculties instrumentalized by patriarchal societies to preserve male interests and rights. Wisdom implies foreseeing the annoyances that dissimilarities and divergences have the potential to generate and knowing what the woman's rightful place in that universe is. Patience, instead, can be understood here in its etymological sense— that is, "endure, undergo, tolerate": patient women are expected to bear any and all epistemic violence silently, without daring to oppose. To sum up, women in this form of social and gendered organization are deemed trustworthy only if they comply with rules informed by a system that prioritizes the male urge. Two distinct and semiautonomous factions, the male and the female, thus arise, and their relationship is principally of a functional, almost material nature, as it corresponds to a *do ut des*: I promise to maintain you if, in return, you will satisfy all my needs and wishes.

Fusena's relationship with the patriarchs' wives is played according to two standards. The first implies that both interlocutors feign a form of communication that is encumbered with silence and tacit implications. As for the second, the elderly women speak a language of tradition, patriarchal domination, submission, and self-denial. Having suffered a radical, gender-based colonization that left them unable to be freely, their words were not only empty (i.e., showing little intellectual autonomy), but considerably modeled by the effects and consequences of an epistemically violent upbringing. Fusena, too, is silenced by at least two factors: a mentality shared and promoted among community members on the one hand, and her own conscience on the other. Her silence is cloaked by the intention of shielding her status as wife and mother, as an educated, well-behaved, and respectful young woman.

Much like Rami, Fusena also recognizes no other possibilities beyond the passive acceptance of the rules of the game. She is muted and paralyzed by social pressure and expectations, which makes her dramatically aware of her loneliness in what appears as an intensely personal fight. "All was lost. Besides, what could she say?," Aidoo marks in the above passage: Fusena knows that the game is over, for her plight will not be listened to—it will not even be heard—and that she is just a pawn in unalterable and rigid societal schemes. This is the foremost reason she opts for acquiescing, either physically, by nodding, or verbally. Fusena alone cannot determine a change in the dynamics of gender relations—especially because her audience is an assembly of elderly women, a cluster of entities who have been dealing with patriarchy over a lifetime, and who are not interested in fighting any further owing to their advanced age. Through this character, Aidoo sketches a present-day woman who fluctuates between modernity and tradition: Fusena is haunted by the persistence of an androcratic tradition even in the strict contemporaneity, despite her education and financial independence. Either she accepts a demeaning condition or she will find herself deprived of stability and of her social status.

It is interesting to study the female assembly, too. Aidoo describes the matriarchs as dignified and majestic women who, having spent most of their lives battling in the war of sexes, obtain nothing but the most absolute defeat, regardless of being the first, second, third, or fourth wives in their polygamic families. In meeting Fusena and getting to know her predicament, they are appalled to discover that the status of women has not changed from their youth to date. They are shaken

by Fusena's submissiveness—conceivably because they expected a violent reaction rather than complete surrender from someone like her, a young and highly educated woman who traveled overseas and lives in the capital city of Ghana. Fusena's silence works for them as an eye-opener, while theirs is the speechlessness of disappointment and bitterness: the elderly women are annihilated before this tragic realization. Not only does their silence reinforce their misery, but it also unites them: paradoxically, they feel closer to one another *now* rather than when they were competing against the others to reach a modest stability and prestige within their families and village. They form one silent organism, an enlarged female body that thinks in unison, as noted in the passage "it was a man's world. You only survive if you knew how to live in it as a woman"—that is, constantly displaying patience, and wisdom.

Nevertheless, the silence of the elderly women consubstantiates the readers' silence as well. Better said, Fusena's passivity triggers the old women's speechlessness, and together these two shades of silence instigate a reaction of intolerance and of uneasiness in the readers. As a matter of fact, Aidoo configurates her works as "dilemma tales"—that is, narratives "whose primary function is to stimulate serious, deep-probing discussion of social, political, and moral issues that confront human beings in their everyday lives" (Odamtten 18). This narratorial structure makes it possible for the author to both present in detail the tensions and problems that exemplify the experiences of her fictional characters and convincingly share them with her readership. The literary work, then, allows the structuring of a more informed opinion in its readers, and feasibly stimulates them to take on a more radical and active position in their real lives: "Aidoo's literary-ideological project . . . [is] to provide her audience-readers with new and radically challenging interpretations of 'old' tales, old ways of perceptions, in order that we might realize that the actual point of all these tales is to change our world rather than to interpret it" (Odamtten 189n5).

This, in turn, would strengthen the relationship between literature and society, and between ideology and experience, to the point of making it symbiotic, and thus, extending the agency and the impact of literature (Brown 583). So, the actual question, while reading *Changes*, becomes: was Fusena actually silent?

Screaming Silences

Let us briefly take into consideration the questions I introduced earlier, as we reflect on Spivak's theorization: could it be that only my voice has the potential to change my subalternity? Could change be possible only with the vocalization of my discomfort? Do I want to talk, beyond being able to? And, within the colonial/postcolonial context, would I be heard and understood? The scenes we have considered so far attempt at providing a consistent reply, figuring out new and unexpected nuances of silence. Thanks to Chiziane and Aidoo, we learn that female characters (and, perchance, real women too) sometimes, and for a number of different reasons, do not wish to speak out—because they know they would not be heard, because they expect they will not be understood, because speaking would prove useless, because their silence would serve as a means for revenge or as an insight into truth. Both Rami and Fusena sense that verbally expressing their discomfort or their pain, rage, and indignation would lead them nowhere. Hence, they stay silent. Yet, despite apparently appearing inactive and mute, both produce an astounding effect: Rami, the supreme master of silence, moves her co-wives by giving them an alternative example of counterinsurgency and of resistance against the gender gap; Fusena's silence, at first associated with speechlessness and powerlessness, awakens the old matriarchs' critical sense and, through them, directly involves the readers in a discussion of societal schemes and structures. Chiziane and Aidoo are able to make silence speak through their words and literary work, and they call attention to one very important point: the opposition of the self is not necessarily verbi-vocal; on the contrary, revolutionary meanings can be borne in the apparent calm of the unsaid, of the unspoken, of the silent.

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