

# **The Dialectics and Critical Bearings of Niyi Osundare's *The Man Who Walked Away*.**

Clement Olujide AJIDAHUN, PhD

Department of English Studies, Faculty of Arts, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria. Email: [jideajidahun@gmail.com](mailto:jideajidahun@gmail.com), [jideajidahun@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jideajidahun@yahoo.co.uk). Mobile: +2348033927663.

## **Abstract**

This paper is a critique of Niyi Osundare's *The Man Who Walked Away* as a satiric and protest play focusing on its themes of poverty and unemployment as reflecting the deplorable socio-economic state of Nigeria. The paper notes the preponderance of these themes in the drama of Femi Osofisan to reflect his ideological commitment. The paper observes the poetic ingenuity of the playwright and his attempt to experiment with the theatre medium to further extend the frontiers of his vision to the Nigerian society. The paper also reveals and discusses the dramatic and theatrical inadequacies that mar the revolutionary aesthetics of the play and reduce the text to a mere literature for the teenagers and thus make it incomparable with the satiric and protest plays of the foremost Nigerian and African dramatists.

**Keywords:** Social Satire, Poverty, Unemployment, Niyi Osundare, Drama.

## **Introduction**

Niyi Osundare is a renowned literary intellectual and scholar who has carved a niche for himself as a ferocious poet using the platform of poetry, with an undying passion, to express genuine concern on issues of social justice, corruption, human rights abuse, leadership failure and despotism in government. His poems have been thought-provoking, intellectually stimulating, perspicaciously enthralling. Consequently, Niyi Osundare has clinched a number of local and international laurels and attracted numerous accolades in recognition of his literary fecundity, profundity of his discourse, and creative adroitness. However, Osundare has decided to extend the frontiers of his artistic ingenuity to drama to ventilate and project his vision to the society. The critical works on Osundare focus on his poetic art. There is therefore paucity of critical materials

on the dramatic works of Niyi Osundare. Understandably, this is because Osundare is more of a poet than a dramatist. This is not an attempt to denigrate the artist and describe him as a greenhorn dramatist but to dissect his dramatic works with the literary scalpel and attempt to compare him with other outstanding dramatists in Nigeria.

The postcolonial African drama has been predominantly protest and remonstrative in nature and ideology. Fifty six years after Nigerian independence, the country is still enmeshed in graft and corruption that has discoloured and cast an aspersion on the image and integrity of the country in the global community. The country, in spite of its seeming growing economy, appears to be more notorious for its numerous post-independence, socio-economic and socio-political problems among which are leadership failure, despotism, nepotism, kidnapping, insecurity, armed-robbery poverty, high unemployment rate and corruption.

The postcolonial literature has consistently been capturing all these issues with a view to drawing the consciousness of the rulers to these societal malaises and provoking the masses into a social protest in order to create a new social order that is devoid of social injustice, inequality, corruption and economic exploitation. Niyi Osundare, therefore, like other playwrights such as Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark-Bekederemo, Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan and others is deeply concerned with the socio-economic and socio-political problems plaguing, irremediably, the Nigerian state. In tandem with the Marxist ideology, Niyi Osundare reacts with passion to the oppressive tendencies in the society. According to Balogun (2007), "the aim of Marxist critics and Marxist writers is to expose the oppressive class and its medium of oppression".

### **Thematic Analysis of the Plays**

One of the overriding themes of *The Man Who Walked Away* (2005) is poverty and its devastating consequences on the masses. It is a common theme in the plays of Femi Osofisan such as *The Chattering and the Song* (1976), *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1980), *Morountodun* (1983), *The Inspector and the Hero* (1990), *Fires Burn and Die Hard* (1990), *The Album of the Midnight Blackout* (1994), *Many Colours Make the Thunder-King* (1997) and others. The themes of poverty and unemployment are overwhelming in *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* (1988). Osofisan in *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* (1988) addresses the socio-economic forces like the issues of unemployment and poverty as contemporary experiences in Nigeria. In the play, the five vagabonds are driven to the crossroad as a result of lack of employment. This is because government has proscribed the profession of the musicians. It is dehumanizing for a man to be driven to the crossroads in search of food brought there as a sacrifice for *Esu*. To worsen their condition, their search is in vain as the whole place as described by Epo Oyinbo is "a barren as a graveyard" (5). Osofisan laments the state of the oppressed and the poor in one of his articles entitled "Like A Fire in A Freezing Night" published in the *Sunday Times* of June 25, 1989. According to him:

Poverty is in the household, oppression in the air we breathe... If a free society cannot save the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich... a society that cannot save the many who are poor, it cannot itself be a free society... Poverty degrades the people; it decays governments. (5)

Niyi Osundare in *The Man Who Walked Away (2005)* depicts poverty as a ravaging canker and its debilitating effects on the common man in Nigeria. Deyi, the protagonist and the tragic character in the play is married with two children and his wife is an expectant mother. Poverty is portrayed in images of squalor, dearth and wretchedness. Abeke, the wife of Deyi has an ancient, outdated, manual sewing machine. Deyi has a rickety couch, old bicycle with the wheel and tyre in an advanced stage of puncture. He lives in a rat house with leaking roof. He has a pair of big rusty boots and a bowler hat. He is unable to pay his rent and the family relish in fairly used cloths (bosikona) purchased for twenty naira; he eats *eba* without meat.

Deyi, the breadwinner has been retrenched from work as a machine operator due to the economic recession. The boss is not concerned because he is the supreme head, and his decision is final. The effects of poverty are obvious in every aspect of the couple's life. Even Toyin, their daughter has become traumatized and depressed that she fails Social Studies in school because the answer to her question on social studies shows that she is from a poverty-ridden home that an abnormality has become normal. For Toyin, a room should accommodate nine persons as it is the practice in her family, and she thinks it is normal. Her classmates laugh at her. This is shown in the text below:

**Abeke:** Today is Friday. Didn't you bring your report cards?

**Toyin:** I scored an "A", Mama, and our teacher said it was the best in the class.

**Abeke:** Un un un Toyin, your score in Social Studies is not so good this time. Why?

**Toyin:** The teacher asked how many people should sleep in one room and I answered nine: three on the bed, three under the bed, and three on the remaining part of the floor.

**Abeke:** Then what did your teacher say?

**Toyin:** He said I was wrong, and my classmates laughed at me.  
(*The Man Who Walked Away*, 3)

The entire family becomes a laughing stock in the society. Besides, poverty has deprived and robbed Deyi of his status as a man and breadwinner. The society has made him the

object of ridicule and derision. Iya Agba, his mother-in-law even calls Deyi, “street wanderer with shoes worn at the heels.” She refers to Deyi as “a lazy man with hair on his palms!” This is a metaphoric language for describing a useless and irresponsible man that the society has turned Deyi to due to no fault of his. When his wife, Abeke challenged him to prove his manhood after the loss of his job, Deyi replied despondently:

“That manhood is gone; it evaporated the day I lost my job. My manhood was crushed under the might of the personnel manager’s pen... Do you call him a man who packs his family in this hovel competing hard with rats and cockroaches? (*The Man Who Walked Away*, 8)

Poverty has turned Deyi to “become the grass of the wind-valley, bent head-to-ground in whatever direction the wind blows.”- (7) and a “fingerless leper that cannot carry his own baby” (5). For Deyi, a man who cannot provide food for his family and basic education for his brilliant children is not a man. Deyi scouts round for jobs; the only job available for him is the menial job of a houseboy to an expatriate. Pathetically and ironically, what qualifies Deyi for the job is that he speaks good English. The second qualification “is that you crawl on your stomach like a snake.” Crawling like a snake to survive is a metaphor for dehumanization, despondency, abject surrender to shame and ridicule and the readiness to surrender and succumb to scorn and eventualities in life.

The society that empowers Deyi with such a level of linguistic competency and communication ability and proficiency cannot provide him a corresponding job where he can exhibit his potentials. Recently in Nigeria, both the print and electronic media were awash with the news that a PhD holder was employed by Dangote Company as a driver. Everybody knows that an average good driver in Nigeria is an illiterate and unschooled person. The skills acquired by this PhD holder in the university are a mismatch with his current job as a driver. This is a skills mismatch. Its implications for the individuals and the society include inefficiency, low productivity, underdevelopment, under-utilization, underpayment, employee turnover, waste of resources, and reduction in the growth of the gross domestic product (GDP) at the macroeconomic level.

Abeke, Deyi’s wife refuses the counsel of her mother, Iya Agba to leave Deyi and marry another man as a panacea to end poverty. Abeke displays unusual courage, patience, bravery, loyalty, valour and fidelity as she decides to stand by her husband in this trying moment as she bluntly declares:

Mama I know we live in a society which measures people’s worth by the length of their cars and the cost of their apparels. Deyi may not have big cars and costly clothes, he has us. And my two children and the one I carry in my womb? What shall I tell them? That I change husbands because Deyi is too poor to be their father? No, Mama. I don’t know what these children could become tomorrow. I have seen bright stars emerge from a dark

sky; small forests have bred elephants. (*The Man Who Walked Away*, 18-19)

Women like Abeke are rare in the society today. Abeke, is therefore, depicted as a heroic, patriotic, responsible and trustworthy wife and mother who sees bright light beyond the dark tunnels of life. Abeke, an optimistic and enthusiastic wife is confident that her cloud of destiny will bring down rain. In her delicate state as an expectant mother whose needs are not being met, she unmasks her masculinity and courageously encourages her husband to cheer up and swim against the tide and storm of life that is besieging their ship of destiny. In her words to Deyi, she says:

When life's drum sounds *Pami! Pami! Pami!* (Kill me, Kill me, Kill me) should we devise a softer way of dancing to it? Why do you talk as if the end of the world has come? Come on, Deyi, *Olowoori mi*, (My boss, my master) heavier rains have fallen and the ground has sucked up their water. Where is the manhood you often boast of? (*The Man Who Walked Away*, 7)

Abeke tacitly and subtly provokes Deyi her husband to be resolute, hopeful and positive about life. Abeke's text is a combination of tact, wit, tradition and philosophy. This depiction is surely a consolation to African feminists who have consistently been accusing African creative writers of depicting women as slaves, house helps and appendages to men. Abeke shuns despair, anguish and hopelessness and embraces confidence and hope for a bright future in the face of today's poverty and deprivation. Abeke's perspicacity, humility, intuition and systematic discernment like the Biblical Abigail, the wise wife of Nabal subdues the oppressive Landlord's anger. Her tenacity and resolve to stay committed to her husband tamed her mother's obstructiveness, disobligingness, convulsive rage, spasmodic interference and incommode.

Besides, the playwright shows us through Deyi that the educational qualification has no meaning in the Nigerian society. What matters is your connection. Abeke laments and says, "It does not depend upon who are but who you know," (26). That is why in the Nigerian society today, a graduate of Banking and Finance with First Class Honours will be teaching in a private nursery and primary school with a monthly wage of N7, 000 (\$23) because he does not have the connection to work in the banking industry, whereas a graduate of Religious Studies or History with a Second Class Lower Division will be working in the banking industry or in oil companies with fabulous and juicy pay of N1,000,000 (\$3,333) monthly because he is well connected in the society. Where then is the equality? This situation ultimately will lead to frustration for lack of fulfillment, low wages and self-actualization. Deyi is a symbol of joblessness, unemployment, deprivation, poverty and dehumanization occasioned by the nonchalant attitude of our rulers to the people, the oppressive and tyrannical predisposition of the rulers and the systemic failure of the government at all levels.

While Deyi and his family languish in poverty, Chief Kagbade-Jones organizes a night party where he sprays crisp notes on individual foreheads, pastes some notes on the forehead of the band leader using the sweat as adhesive and then throws the rest into the air in celebration of another contract award. The man is gaudily dressed and sandwiched between two plumb women. He relishes in a song that says,

We are fully contented (2ce)  
What business is ours if  
Others are starving?  
We are fully contented.

Bamu bamu layo (2ce)  
A wa o mo pe'bi n pomo  
Enikan an kan  
Bamu bamu layo.  
(Yoruba version). (*The Man Who Walked Away*, 22)

Osundare satirizes social injustice, corruption, selfishness, ostentatious and flamboyant life style of the elite, shameless exhibition of ill-gotten wealth, voluptuousness, sybaritic lavishness while the masses groan in dismal poverty, unemployment and those manage to find jobs are paid low wages and denied of their entitlements with impunity. While the likes of Akin and Goke partake of the public *saara* (public largesse) of Chief Kagbade-Jones, Deyi refuses to crawl before Chief Kagbade-Jones, the government contractor who suddenly turns a millionaire overnight and sprays money to curry the hailing and encomiums of the people. According to Deyi who sounds poetic and whimsical:

I do not want the tree to fall so that I may pluck its fruit without climbing. I do not want my neighbour's wall to fall on his goat so that I may have meat for the evening meal. (*The Man Who Walked Away*, 23)

Deyi shuns opportunism, buccaneering and unscrupulousness to enrich himself and survive in life. Unfortunately, Deyi commits suicide leaving behind a pregnant wife, unpaid rent and poor children without anybody in sight to take care of them. The family is thrown into perpetual mourning and irretrievable sorrow.

Osundare also exposes the deception, pretence and hypocrisy of government. In the play, the news on the radio informs the public that:

'The Governor of Apeloko State performed the laying of the foundation of a seventy-five million naira project at Ereki today. It is a joint venture between an overseas company called Richester and a handful of local, enterprising entrepreneurs. The Governor praised the project and called it another brave step towards wiping out unemployment and raising the living

standard of every ApeloKoan. He described this day as one everyone should be proud of. The election...' (*The Man Who Walked Away*, 26-27)

It is this news items that sends Deyi to an early grave. It exposes the insincerity of government to the masses. The project, according to the Governor is to wipe out unemployment of every citizen of ApeloKo. ApeloKo in this play is a microcosm of the Nigerian macro society. In Nigeria, government projects are conduit pipes for siphoning public funds and enriching private individuals. Successive governments hide under the guise of tackling unemployment and poverty by establishing white elephant projects with huge amount of money.

In most cases, such projects are never completed due to graft and corruption. Examples of some of these projects include the National Accelerated Food Production Programme and the Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank in 1972, Operation Feed the Nation of 1976, the Green Revolution Programme of 1979, the Directorate of Food Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) in 1986, Family Support Programme and the Family Economic Advancement Programme in 1993, the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). Abdullahi (2007) added Transcorp Plc, NEPA, NITEL, Federal Housing Corporation, Nigeria Airways, Ajaokuta Steel Rolling Mill among failed projects, corporations and public utilities in Nigeria. According to him, "Transcorp is being floated to siphon our hard-earned foreign exchange (the oil windfall?) which the same cabal that corners the Nigerian economy will invest in for their benefits."

The People's Bank initiative of the Babangida administration in Nigeria which was put in place to alleviate poverty and encourage entrepreneurship among the poor and low income earners was smeared with corruption as private individuals and agents of government suddenly became millionaires out of the project that was floated with a lot of money. The project, expectedly, was a failure and the poor were left uncared for. They continue to live in abject poverty while the rich continue to swim in opulence and luxury. Osundare makes the same point in *The State Visit* (2002) where he satirizes corruption, and leadership failure. The play is a damning commentary on the socio-political situation in Nigeria. Reacting to the play, Tobalase ( n.d. ) says that

In present-day Nigeria, it is not just the Maize Funds that is diverted but all sorts of funds: Agricultural fund, Kerosene and Petroleum subsidy fund, Pensions fund, Education fund, Water project fund etc. The present suspension of the CBN Governor, Mallam Lamido Sanusi Lamido is still raising dusts while several others before it have been laid to rest without any proper resolution proffered.

### **The Dialectics and the Limitations of the Play**

The play, in spite of its ideological delineations, has a number of dramatic flaws that we intend to raise. First, the death of Deyi can only be excused as the tragedy of the poor and the peasants in the society who languish in poverty hopelessly and forlornly. Besides, in terms of dramatic theatricalities and character delineation, the playwright is unfair in the treatment given to Deyi at the end of the play although Deyi earlier signifies to his friends Akin and Goke when he says, "Frankly, most times I believe I do not belong here" as an expression of his depression and frustration, Deyi, who refuses to bow in his integrity to the sprawling wealth and extravagant display of opulence of Chief Kagbade-Jones even when he should have done so because of the dire need to meet his basic needs finally decides to commit suicide. The strength of character that Deyi possesses that enables him to resist that temptation and qualifies him as a man of integrity, a man of honour and truth should have enabled and emboldened him to resist the temptation to commit suicide. Deyi is thus portrayed as a coward and weakling protagonist who is stripped of all the qualities of a hero.

Unfortunately, the playwright does not allow us to have access to the content Deyi's suicide note that he leaves behind for his wife. Maybe that would have explained the reasons behind his action. The deliberate omission further worsens the condition of his family. That explains why Abeke, his wife collapses after reading the paper. Who knows a miscarriage or pregnancy complications might be imminent for her and thus complicating the tragedy of the family.

Also, Osundare announces at the beginning of the play while describing the sitting room of Deyi and Abeke that "in the centre of the black wall is hung a cardboard chart on which the following is boldly printed: MOTTO: WHEN THEIR'S LIFE, THEIR'S HOPE. First, the grammatical error in the motto attracts our attention. The correct way to write the motto should have been: MOTTO: WHEN THERE'S LIFE, THERE'S HOPE or MOTTO: WHEN THERE IS LIFE, THERE IS HOPE. Granted that Abeke is not lettered and that Toyin and Sola, the children of Deyi and Abeke are too young to discover the error in the motto, how about Deyi who is offered a job as a houseboy to an expatriate because he speaks good English? Deyi is not portrayed as an illiterate person otherwise he will not be rejecting menial jobs. Even his wife confirms to Iya Agba that Deyi used to work with the white people. According to her, "the Oyinbo and his representative here have told him to stay at home." (15). Besides, his language in the play is elegant, poetic and standard. All this should have made him correct the error in the motto if it was not composed by him. If it was written by Deyi, then that will be a worrisome contradiction. So, the issue of loss of job or unemployment should not arise then. Afterwards, who will like to keep an illiterate machine operator working in an international company like Pantibury Overseas Limited who does not know the difference between THEIR (3<sup>rd</sup> person plural possessive personal pronoun) and THERE (existential *there*)? Communication will thus be a hindrance but Deyi speaks good English. This is a major slip in the play or what is the essence of the ungrammatical motto that is conspicuously hung in the sitting room of Deyi and Abeke? Is it a typo?



In addition, one does not really understand the dramatic essence of the motto. A statement of this nature is like one's motto and creed capturing one's belief and the philosophy that one holds on to tenaciously in life. The depiction of Deyi as a weakling and a coward who finally terminates his life does not justify the import of the motto. We do not know why Osundare presents to us a man who has life and does not wait for the hope to come. The display of the motto without a corresponding dramatic action to justify the spirit and the content of it is unrealistic and is viewed as a dramaturgical slip.

Toyin is reported to have failed Social Studies because she says nine people should sleep in one room in response to the teacher's question. This is not convincing. Toyin is twelve years' old who ideally ought to be in the secondary school as it is the practice in Nigeria today. Granted that she is in the final class in the primary school; she is old and cognitively and intellectually mature enough to understand the question that says, **how many people should sleep in one room?** (3). The question asks Toyin for the ideal situation. That is why the question says how many people **should** (ideally, preferably) and not **how many people are living in a room in your family?** We are persuaded that Toyin knows the import of the question but the playwright decides to depict Toyin, albeit, unrealistically and overzealously, like an irrational, disillusioned poverty-ridden girl that is totally consumed and overwhelmed with the effects of poverty. Most school children today are precocious, audacious, articulate and smart in spite of the challenges of poverty. This is because of the impact of information communication technologies, improved feeding and health conditions, enlightenment campaigns on good living, improved educational curricular activities etc. on the society. Besides, examination questions are based on the recommended textbooks on Social Studies for at least primary five pupils which will take care of the issue of family set up and the related matters that would have informed Toyin of the correct answer to the teacher's question. We are persuaded from the text that Toyin is not a dullard but a brilliant and intelligent girl. The conversation between her and her mother, Abeke reveals this:

**Toyin:** Mama, the teacher says I'll go on school bursary to college: the school will pay half of my fees and my parents the other half. He said that is what the school does for the brightest pupil each year.

**Abeke:** And what did you tell your teacher?

**Toyin:** I said that the bursary, and that my dad will be able to pay the other half since he works for a big company... So next year, mama, Toyin will be in a college, (Demonstrates as she speaks) going about with those big books in my arms, with an Oxford Maths set, big exercise books with the name of my college written boldly on them, speaking English and French at social gatherings, wearing school uniforms. When I leave college, I will go to university and become a doctor or a lawyer, or an engineer. (*The Man Who Walked Away*, 3-4)

The playwright describes Toyin's response as a "prophetic rhapsody, which is an admission of Toyin's intellectual sagacity. Indeed, the discourse portrays Toyin as a smart, enthusiastic and budding scholar. It is a paradox therefore that the same Toyin fails Social Studies because she does not know how many people **should** live in a room. Again, this is naïve and unrealistic.

Again, we are worried about the answer given by Toyin: "**three on the bed, three under the bed, and three on the remaining part of the floor**" (3). This is a hyperbolic, delusive and frivolous expression. We are not aware of a bed under which three people can sleep. If it is a bunk bed, then Deyi is not poor. Even the rich use bunk beds in their homes.

In addition, while we admit that poverty and unemployment can lead to suicide, the prevalence of suicide cases in the society is however caused by other reasons other than poverty. Majority of the unemployed youths and those who are victims of retrenchment are involved, albeit desperately in menial jobs, petty businesses, prostitution, travelling abroad in search of greener pastures with or without proper documentation and crimes instead of resorting to suicide. Nigerian masses are now more resilient, irrepressible, and rugged to survive without willing to die for their country that does not care about their welfare. One is convinced that the play does not reflect the Nigerian stark realities but rather dramatizes a stereotyped and preconceived idea about the Nigerian society.

## **Conclusion**

*The Man Who Walked Away* is an attempt to capture the socio-economic realities in the Nigerian state focusing on the issues of poverty, squalor and unemployment confronting the teeming Nigerian population. About 63% Nigerians are living on less than \$1 per day. The report from the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) shows that 80% of Nigerian youths are unemployed, while 120 million persons still lack access to electricity. According to the UNICEF, the poor are vulnerable to infectious diseases, malnutrition, stress, overwork. It is also revealed that 54% of childhood deaths are from disease of poverty.

Besides, the playwright has domesticated the use of English language through code mixing, transliteration among other linguistic devices in the play to make it popular, accessible and indigenously. The dramatic elements deployed by the playwright include Yoruba proverbs, songs, and dance as some of the critical features of oral tradition and the total theatre. However, in terms of dramatic and theatrical performance, there are number of illogicalities and flaws that mar the plot and the theme of the play. Besides, there is lack of depth of characterization. Consequently, the play suffers irremediably for lack of conventional dramatic form reflecting the quintessential Osundare, the poet and not Osundare, the dramatist. The play appears to have been hurriedly put together as children literature but with some spasmodic poetic allusions as authorial intrusions. Certainly, the play does not belong to the category of classical and satiric plays written by Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan.

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<sup>ii</sup> A summary of previous positions within film studies is articulated in Malitsky (2012). The American theorist expresses frustration at long-held associations between indexicality and “medium specificity” within film studies (also see Gaines 1999 and Doane 2007). An attempt is made to distinguish yet reconnect the index as both photographic trace and spatial deixis. According to Malitsky the latter “highlights the ‘*hereness*’ and ‘*thereness*’ of space, testifying to cinematic spatiality” (2012: 246). Nevertheless, a much more comprehensive account of object, deictic perspective-taking and temporality is provided in West (2014).

<sup>iii</sup> All transcriptions of Kampuchean names are taken from Panh (2007).

<sup>iv</sup> A fuller account of this essay, which compares deliberation to experimentation with mathematical diagrams, is to be found in Campos (2015).

<sup>v</sup> It should be noted that both West (2014) and Stjernfelt (2007/2014) acknowledge the key role of phenomenology throughout semiosis and refer in detail to Peirce’s Decalogue. Unfortunately, there is not sufficient space here to elaborate on the processual and embodied nature of semiosis. The latter is fore-fronted in the anthropological work of Daniel (1984) and in the more generalist work of Merrell (1995/2003).

<sup>vi</sup> I have parenthesized these terms in order to emphasize the inter-relationship between these signs and the phenomenological categories of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness, which correspond respectively to qualitative immediacy, rupture and resistance, and a sense of mediation. An extensive but accessible exegesis of the Peirce’s Decalogue and phenomenology can be found in Merrell (1995/2003).

<sup>vii</sup> Images of singing occur several times in the film. The presence of tone and melody is part of our embodied projection into the lives of people from a culture distinct from own. Also see West (2015) for more on corporeal projection and Tsang (2011) for work on embodied affect within a documentary context.

<sup>viii</sup> Roughly the same is said the anthropologist, Marcus Banks by in reference to ethnographical film in general (1991: 20). Bank’s emphasis on the role of phenomenology in Peirce’s semiosis, inspired partially by of the field work of ethnographer E. Valentine Daniel (1984), has been largely neglected within film studies.

<sup>ix</sup> With great relevance to film as a visual medium and Panh’s combination of speech and diagrammatic experimentation, Stjernfelt also highlights the “co-occurrence of pictures and words in propositions and quasi-propositions . . . we should rather see the occurrence of pure text without any picture – or the appearance of isolated images unaccompanied by text – as rare, marginal special cases selected for special effects” (2014: 189).

<sup>x</sup> See Merrell (1995: 100-113) for work that refers to Peirce’s decalogue in much more detail. Semiotic flow is described through a contrast between de-generacy and generacy. The former is associated with “entropy”, “embedding” and “automisation”, the latter with “novelty”, “de-embedding” and “de-automisation”.

<sup>xi</sup> Much has been written about Peirce’s notion of habit-change. Most notably, Tom Short (2007) uses such a notion to distinguish different stages in Peirce’s development. A nuanced account is also to be found in Bergman (2016).

<sup>xii</sup> All translations from the film’s Italian subtitles are my own.

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<sup>xiii</sup> An account of dissent and agonism that is indebted to the work of Talisse (2009) and Misak (2000) can be found in Tsang (2014).

<sup>xiv</sup> Significantly, the full formulation of the words in complete sentences are never fully revealed in the film, so that we are participants in a process of learning and inquiry rather than passive recipients of pre-formed knowledge. Grimshaw and Ravetz also refer to an “expansive space between subjects, filmmaker and viewer. The kind of anthropology forged in this encounter is no longer about the transmission of bodies of knowledge but involves the generation of a more temporal, mobile knowing pursued through engagement and relationship” (2015: 266).

<sup>xv</sup> My observations take much from Sonesson (2003). The Swedish semiotician argues, contra Umberto Eco, that the mirror has all the properties of a genuine sign, and functions iconically, indexically or may even serve to interpret.

<sup>xvi</sup> Barnes’ remark that ‘the viewer is encouraged to identify with the subject position of the prostitute’ (2015: 61) is also complemented by West’s more general observations about human agency. West reminds us that to “perceive oneself as an object, such that one’s own perspective is but one point of view among others represents a major advance in recommending a course of action for any subject, self, or other” (West 2014: 133).

<sup>xvii</sup> The relationship between dynamic object and collateral experience is also commented in detail in Tsang (2013: 31-38). Also see Short (2007: 196-200) and Stjernfelt (2014: 80-101).

<sup>xviii</sup> The role of doubt and error is a major part of Peirce’s early arguments against Descartes’ atomistic account of intuition (EP 1: 20/114-115). This work has also been highly influential on recent work on epistemic and deliberative democracy (Misak 2000; Talisse 2009). Also see Colapietro (1989: 73 - 80) for an account of error that is linked to a notion of human agency.

<sup>xix</sup> Also see Stjernfelt (2014: 174 - 177) for more on hypostatic abstraction as a dialogical form.

<sup>xx</sup> In effect, Da has blocked inquiry by claiming cognitive asymmetry between the two speakers. Similar ideas about the viciousness of such rhetoric is also broached in Aitkins and Talisse (2016).

<sup>xxi</sup> My interpretation is informed by the presence of other shots in the film that feature Da and Aun Taunch looking out onto a university building and also by my engagement with Panh’s work in *The Land of the Wandering Souls* (1999). His earlier documentary film describes the lives of workers laying a cable for the digital internet highway. It is also features strong women characters, in the context of historical and geographical change (Tsang 2013: 146-158).

<sup>xxii</sup> Also see Stjernfelt (2014: 189-195) for more on the combinatorial nature of dicisigns.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Colapietro’s work on inwardness and autonomy draws our attention to both the instinctual and dramatic nature of the inner theatre that contributes to human self-control (1989: 114). By doing so, Colapietro emphasises the interconnection between inner and outer worlds. Also see Campos (2015: 345-346).

<sup>xxiv</sup> Grimshaw’s and Ravetz’s interventions are also complemented by Sonassen’s (1989) pioneering work on pictoriality in the photograph and Lefebvre’s more recent work on indexicality (2007), both of which engage with Peircean sign theory albeit in quite distinct ways.