

A TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF KAY ADSHEAD'S *THE BOGUS WOMAN* (2001)

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Abstract

*Kay Adshead's **The Bogus Woman** (2001), which dramatises through the experiences of its asylum-seeking African protagonist the inhumane treatment of asylum-seekers and the violation of human rights at the detention centres in Britain, has so far been analysed within the frame of asylum theatre and feminism (by Elaine Aston in 2003), trauma drama and trauma theory (by Hildegard Klein in 2012) and from the perspective of cultural theory (by Sarah Gibson in 2013). In all these works, the analysis of the play has been conducted together with its so-called 'companion piece', **Credible Witness** (2001) by Timberlake Wertebaker, which, too, dramatises the atrocities of political asylum in a transnational world and has been staged in the same year as Adshead's play, in 2001. The aim of this paper, which will focus its attention solely on **The Bogus Woman**, will be to analyse the play from a transnational feminist perspective and to present how the issue of human rights is discussed within this feminist position.*

Key Words: Kay Adshead, Human rights, First World women, Third World women, Transnational feminism.

KAY ADSHEAD'İN *THE BOGUS WOMAN* (2001) ESERİNİN TRANSNASYONEL FEMİNİZM BAĞLAMINDA ÇÖZÜMLEMESİ

Özet

*Kay Adshead'in, mülteci Afrika'lı ana karakterinin yaşadığı olaylar vasıtasıyla sığınmacılara uygulanan insanlık dışı muameleyi ve Britanya gözaltı merkezlerinde yaşanan insan hakları ihlalinin canlandırılan **The Bogus Woman** (2001) oyunu bugüne kadar mülteci tiyatrosu ve feminizm (2003'te Elaine Aston tarafından), travma tiyatrosu ve travma teorisi (2012'de Hildegard Klein tarafından) ve kültürel teori bağlamında (2013'te Sarah Gibson tarafından) incelenmiştir. Tüm bu çalışmalarda oyunun incelemesi, Adshead'in oyunu ile aynı yılda, 2001'de sahnelenen ve 'kardeş oyun' olarak tanımlanan, ve yine transnasyonal (uluslararası) bir dünyada siyasi ilticanın tahammül edilmez zorluklarını anlatan, Timberlake Wertebaker'in eseri **Credible Witness** (2001) ile birlikte yapılmıştır. İnceleme boyunca sadece **The Bogus Woman** üzerine yoğunlaşacak olan bu çalışmanın amacı, oyunu transnasyonal feminizm bağlamında irdelemek ve insan hakları meselesinin bu feminist yaklaşımda nasıl tartışıldığını ele almak olacaktır.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kay Adshead, İnsan hakları, Birinci Dünya kadınları, Üçüncü Dünya kadınları, Transnasyonal feminizm.

Introduction

A feminist position that emerged in the 1990s, at a time when the dominant middle-class white Western feminism had started to be widely criticised for its emphasis on 'global sisterhood', transnational feminism has developed as an approach that resists the idea of global sisterhood, arguing that it overlooks the "deep divisions created by differences of race, class, sexual orientation and nationality among women" (Mendoza, 2002: 314). Criticising the so-called 'First World' white Western feminism for assuming the experiences and oppression of women as 'common' by a 'universal' patriarchy, transnational feminism argues that such universalising approach to women's oppression leads to the disregarding of the role of colonialism, imperialism, race, class and sexuality in the experiences of women of different backgrounds. In their analysis, transnational feminists also consider the role of white women in the history of colonialism and imperialism, and reveal their "complicity" in this history (Mendoza, 2002: 320), where they uncover the dominance of non-white and non-Western women by the white Western women. Thus, focusing its attention on the intersection of race, gender, imperialism, colonialism, human rights and nationalism, transnational feminism recognises the 'differences' between women of different backgrounds by analysing gender, race, sexuality, patriarchy and the nature of women's oppression beyond the confines of national borders. Furthermore, it looks for the possibility of a cross-border collaboration between women by creating for them the spaces to establish connections between women of different national, cultural and racial backgrounds (Okin, 1998: 37-39; Mendoza, 2002: 320).

Working towards establishing such connections between the women of the First World and the Third World, transnational feminists promote the idea of 'transnational solidarity' among women across race, class, sexuality, ethnicity and nations, and put emphasis on the possibility of "coalition-building across differences" (Conway, 2013: 57). In this regard, they see a critical understanding of race and capitalism as essential, and stress the importance of "shifting the unit of analysis from local, regional, and national culture to relations and processes across cultures" (Alexander and Mohanty, 1997: xix). Consequently, in their feminist approach, thinking beyond the boundaries of a nation and not 'essentialising' differences, but 'theorising' from the differences between women is upheld as a major principle (Mendoza, 2002: 320).

Moreover, focusing "less on economic issues, and more on issues related to travel, political immigration, forced removals, diasporas and asylum" (Mendoza, 2002: 319-20), transnational feminism also addresses the issue of human rights. In their critical view, they see human rights (specified in the UDHR) as both "masculinist", reflecting the priorities of men, and "Eurocentric", favouring the rights of those in power or those already privileged (Grewal, 1998: 505). As a result,

they regard human rights as imperialistic in nature, privileging the white Western women over the non-Western women of colour. Hence, interpreting human rights in the form of women's rights, transnational feminists voice the idea that women's rights must be recognised as human rights (Okin, 1998: 37). Within this context, they argue that this recognition will make a new definition of human rights possible, which they suggest should be "expanded to include violations that concern particularly women" and with consideration of women's different backgrounds and different experiences (Mendoza, 2002: 323).

In close association indeed, Kay Adshead's *The Bogus Woman* (2001), a play about the inhumane treatment of asylum seekers in the detention centres in Britain, especially in England at the turn of the 21st century, draws attention to the necessity of revising the definition of human rights in a transnational feminist approach so as to make the human right to freedom through asylum and the human right to a life away from the fear of persecution accessible also for the Third World women. A human rights activist, Young Woman applies for asylum in Britain with the fear of being murdered in her own African country. However, what she encounters in the country where she seeks asylum only contributes to her further violation because of her racial identity.

The Bogus Woman was originally written for Mama Quilla, a "political theatre company" (Sierz, 2006), which takes its name from 'Mamma Quilla/ Mama Killa', the goddess of the moon and defender of women in Inca mythology (Bingham, 2010: 80), and was founded to criticise human rights and abuses from the female perspective (Mama Quilla, 2009). Having first introduced the play to theatre audiences at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh in 2000, which has brought the playwright the Fringe First Award, Mama Quilla has produced *The Bogus Woman* also at the Bush Theatre in London in 2001, and toured New York and Australia in 2006, where the latter of which has brought Adshead the Best Play of the Adelaide Fringe Award. More recently, the play has been staged at the Lincoln Performing Arts Centre on 26 May 2014, and jointly produced with Theatre by the Lake by Mama Quilla with twenty-four performances on a tour in the autumn of 2015 (*The Bogus Woman*, Curtis Productions, 2015). Thus, as the playwright has rightfully observed, continuing to be produced over the years not only in Britain but also on international theatres in translation, like in France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal and Equatorial New Guinea, the play displays the fact that "the asylum debate [still] remains at the centre of not just British politics, but international policy making" (Adshead, 2001: 10).

Having taken its source material from the real stories of asylum seekers as recorded by the Refugee Council, and based on the playwright's own research about the condition of the detention centres, particularly the Campsfield House (Adshead, 2001: 9), *The Bogus Woman* is a harsh attack on the British political regime that dehumanizes and humiliates refugees seeking asylum in England to the extent of violating human rights.

Written at the time when Britain was under the rule of New Labour, whose immigration policies had further intensified the hostile climate against asylum seekers despite promoting on its programme the idea of tolerance and hospitality in a multicultural Britain (Gibson, 2013: 3), Adshead in her work aims at revealing the hypocrisies of New Labour and displaying her disappointment with its practices, as a politically-oriented leftist writer. In her notes to the play, she writes:

Throughout the process of research, I simply could not believe what I was hearing. I could not believe that the violation of human rights of vulnerable people was happening in England in 1997 [...] and more shocking still in the first year under a Labour government for which I had waited eighteen years! I wrote my play before xenophobia hit the headlines. I have written it because I hope it will give people an insight into what it can really be like to seek asylum in this country. I also hope it may change minds. (Adshead, 2001: 9)

Thus, focusing on the issue of asylum in modern Britain, Kay Adshead's play, which Michael Billington (2001), the theatre critic for the *Guardian*, truthfully describes as "a play written in anger but rooted in reality", stands out as her fierce criticism of the injustices of the British asylum system and the abuse of human rights under New Labour, as well as her angry voice against the violation of human rights from a transnationalist feminist perspective.

In *The Bogus Woman*, the experiences of the African young woman, the protagonist whose name and country of origin are never specified, are dramatised through the process of detention, dispersal and deportation within the British asylum system. The so-called Young Woman (performed by Noma Dumezweni and Krissi Bohn at different productions), plays the roles of more than fifty characters in this poem-play in a monologue, such as the immigration official, the doctor, the solicitor, a child man, a young man, the interrogator, and the judge, each with "accents suggestive of class and nationality" (Walker, 2008), in a lengthy performance for more than an hour. Stage directions are kept to the minimum, the stage is almost bare. As the play opens, the "YOUNG BLACK WOMAN" (Adshead, 2001: 13) has just landed at the Heathrow airport and is interrogated by the immigrant officials upon the discovery of her entry into Britain with a false passport. With this moment, Young Woman's trying ordeal in the process of proving her innocence and credibility as an asylum seeker takes start, and she is soon sent to the Campsfield detention centre –the "first purpose-built camp for migration detainees in the UK" (Welch and Schuster, 2005: 402), which opened in November 1993.

Staging Methods

At this point, it should be noted that Adshead's choice for the setting in the exposition as the detention centre is politically significant, since it was the "key space in the policy of deterrence articulated by New Labour, as the detention of asylum seekers both 'encloses' them within the detention centre, and 'excludes'

them from the receiving host society” (Bloch and Schuster, 2005: 493). Moreover, the detention centre functions as the place where the asylum seeker, the potential threat to the welfare of the State, can be both “silence[d]” and “screen[ed]” (Gibson, 2013: 9) from public view. Thus choosing the detention centre as the main location of action with the multi-role playing Young Woman on stage, Adshead establishes a structure where the audience, like a third character, is put into the position of the ‘public’/ the ‘host society’ observing the experiences of the feared ‘Other’ at a critical distance and is immediately confronted with the reality of asylum-seeking as it occurs within the detention centre. Hence they become ‘witnesses’ to the young woman’s painful humiliation within the British asylum system. This structure in return both increases the play’s persuasive power in making the audience understand what it really means to seek asylum in the British society at various levels and adds to the play’s capacity to force the audience to question the receiving society’s responsibility in contributing to the inhumane treatment of those who are forced to seek asylum with the hope of finding a safe home for themselves through empowering the ‘culture of disbelief’. The following reviews by theatre critics prove the cogency of the play: “*The Bogus Woman* might upset those of a delicate disposition, but it is essential watching for its cutting indictment of the way in which we, as a society, fail those who rely on us for fairness, freedom and compassion” (Walker, 2008). Theatre critic Anne Hopper’s (2008) review reinforces the same idea: “If [this play] is a fact, it is an appalling critique of our attitude to human rights.” Likewise, Carole Woddis (2001) in the *Herald Scotland* observes the following: “You can’t possibly come away from it without feeling a deepening sense of shame about Britain’s treatment of its asylum-seekers [...] Kay Adshead [...] wake[s] us up to the infamies perpetrated in our name.”

Further analysis of Adshead’s staging methods reveals that it is also highly significant that the African Young Woman playing multiple roles acts out the roles of both the characters representing the nation state (e.g. the immigration officer, the solicitor, the interrogator, the female guard) and the detainees (e.g. the child man, the female detainee, the Gambian, the protestor) in the detention centre. As a result of this, she speaks, as Elaine Aston (2003a: 12) has remarked, both as “the centre and the margin” in her identity as a black woman, alternating between the victimiser and the victim, the oppressor and the oppressed, the authority and the subject, the male and the female, and the white and the black. By this method, Adshead manages to expose the political injustices in the British system under New Labour as well as the abuse of human rights with regard to race, gender and ethnic identity, thus making the audience ‘see’ the victimisation of the asylum seeker directly through the experiences of her female African protagonist, who through her changing roles as the white British female and the black African female also invites a discussion on the oppression of the Third World women by the First World women. Later in the play, she turns to the audience and says: “Forget I’m black/ by the way/ I could be pink/ or puce/ or grey” (Adshead, 2001: 40), blurring racial

differences and reminding the audience of the humanitarian aspect of her detention.

Thus, following the “model of political theatre devised by Brecht” (Watkins, 2001: 484) through the multi-role playing of asylum episodes by a single actress, the cross-gender acting, making the character on stage address the audience directly, and the switch between the white and the black in the identity of a black actress, Adshead manages to disturb the audience and confronts them with the “terror of the ‘other’” (Aston, 2003a: 11) through the monologue of the black woman, who speaks to the audience not only as the victim but also as the rebel, reminding them both of “an imperialist past” and a “contemporary history of British race relations, and immigration policies” (Aston, 2003a: 13). Hence, the audience is “forced to ‘learn to see differently’: they must shift their view of an imperialist past and learn to see themselves inside (not outside) asylum histories” (Aston, 2003a: 6).

The Bogus Woman and Human Rights

Establishing these technical devices immediately in the exposition of the play, Adshead soon reveals through the interrogation of Young Woman some details about her background. We learn that she was a journalist and a poet in her African country, yet had to flee from her homeland in order to free herself from a traumatic existence. Having published articles critical of the regime and written “on issues / concerning / human rights” (Adshead, 2001: 42), Young Woman has severely been punished for her ‘crime of thought’, and so has witnessed the murder of her whole family, has been raped by the soldiers killing her family and has lost her baby as a result of her rape. Thus, hoping that Britain could be home to her and provide for her the safety and freedom she needs for a peaceful survival as a human, she seeks shelter in Britain as the victim of physical, sexual and psychological violence.

At the Campsfield detention centre, where the devastating tribulations of her life in her home country are unfolded as such, Young Woman does not encounter any different situation from what she encountered at the Heathrow airport upon her arrival. Again, her papers are not believed to be true, her accounts regarding her profession, her rape and the murder of her family members back in her country are not found credible; moreover, her whole testimony is simply regarded as a “story” (Adshead, 2001: 51) and “good stuff” (Adshead, 2001: 36). Thus, Young Woman undergoes a trying process of further humiliation and excruciation through her continual interrogation by the immigrant officers and the guards, which in the end only makes her relive her trauma. In a “*very anxious*” state she asks, “Where am I? / How long will I be here? / What happens next? / What happens now?” (Adshead, 2001: 23). As she goes through her interrogation where she is forced to remember her traumatic past with all its most destructive details, like the murder of her family members in front of her eyes, her rape by the soldiers who killed her family, and her miscarriage, some ancient African music in the

background, which at times “*climaxes and then dips*” (Adshead, 2001: 22), accompanies the scene, which functions as the presence of her “past, home, family, belonging” (Aston, 2003a: 10), thus reminding us also of her African roots.

This interrogation scene which takes place in the detention centre that becomes home to Young Woman’s ceaseless torment is highly significant in that it parallels Young Woman’s victimisation and torture in her home country. Just like she was the victim of a cruel attack directed at her own self and her whole family in her unnamed African country because of her human rights journalism, in the detention centre she becomes a victim of the British asylum system first through her cruel and inhumane interrogation and later through the fierce conditions of her detention. By bringing the two together –her victimisation in her home country and at the detention centre in England– where the latter experience is presented as at least as destructive as the former, if not more with the added dimension of her humiliation through racism, the playwright gives the message that the brutality of the British immigration system is no less than the cruel practices of the African government, which in return invites a discussion on the violation of human rights in England.

At the detention centre, Young Woman not only herself suffers from an abominable state with her stinking body, infected lips and lousy hair but also becomes witness to the miserable condition of all the other detainees, deprived of their most basic and fundamental human needs. They are not allowed to change their clothes, to shower, to make any phone calls nor are they permitted to interact with each other in the little “warm damp hole” (Adshead, 2001: 30), in which they are forced to live closely together. In her astonishment, Young Woman comments: “I am now left to persuade them that there are humanitarian / or compassionate reasons why / I should be allowed to remain in England” (Adshead, 2001: 39). What she lives through with her fellow detainees soon after they voice a complaint about the rotten food they are served, convinces her about the violation of human rights in this country, which according to her was previously “holding out / its one good hand / to [her]” (Adshead, 2001: 22) as the land of her hopes for a safe and decent future.

The detainees protesting their inhumane treatment are punished by the guards for their “ill-discipline” and “lack of co-operation” (Adshead, 2001: 55) by being beaten up and locked into their cells, which in the end leads to a big affray in the detention centre. In an attempt to frighten and silence the protesters, the guards start the sirens, smash all the telephones, plunder all the papers necessary for the asylum appeal of the detainees, and threaten the protesters with rifles in their Landrovers in front of the cameras (Adshead, 2001: 57-59). In the end, despite all the evidences justifying the inculpableness of the detainees in the outbreak of this affray, the British authorities decide that it was not the guards but the detainees who were in “serious breach of the law” (Adshead, 2001: 60), and so they take further measures to keep them under control: they enforce the daily

body search, forbid any incoming and outgoing calls, control the time they would spend in the washroom, and ban visits from lawyers. Finding it all hard to believe, Young Woman in her great disappointment reacts: "This can't be happening/ in England, August nineteen ninety-seven [...] That is a fundamental breach/ of human rights" (Adshead, 2001: 63).

Indeed, what the playwright displays us in the play through the Campsfield experiences of the African woman, which are all based on the real stories of asylum seekers in England (Adshead, 2001: 9), stands as a concrete display of a "fundamental breach of human rights" specified in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)*, as well as in the *European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)*. In the first place, both Article 5 of the *UDHR* and Article 3 of the *ECHR* state that "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment." In like manner, Article 9 of the *UDHR*, provides that "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile." However, by subjecting the asylum seekers to inhumane practices, and by holding them in an arbitrary detention with no "individualised analysis of the reasons for their detention" (Welch and Schuster, 2005: 412), the British authorities in *The Bogus Woman* expose how their actions constitute the violation of human rights in their approach to the detainees seeking asylum in England.

Considering that such treatment of asylum seekers as against the EU law and the international law is part of a deliberate 'deterrence policy' to end up in deportation (Gibson, 2013: 4), it may be plausible to argue also in support of Welch and Schuster's (2005: 407-408) observation that this policy has in its roots the "colonial politics" of the UK. As Welch and Schuster (2005: 408) refer to, in his work *Frontiers of Identity: The British and the Others* (1994) the social scientist Robin Cohen finds the origin of the contemporary asylum regime in the practices adopted during the reign of William the Conqueror, who had developed the 'exercise of control' over the newly colonised lands as a formal strategy. This, in extension, he argues, came to recreate and represent the power of the monarch in their practices about immigration, asylum and deportation as well, eventually making 'the right to exclude' legal for the British in Parliament. The outcome of such approach to the asylum seeker, or to borrow Cohen's designation, to the 'Other', however, appears as a political practice that legally sanctions the abuse of human rights.

In the case of Young Woman, however, the violation and victimisation of the asylum seeker goes one step further, with the added dimension of her being victimised also because of her sexual and racial identity. Observing soon after her arrival in the detention centre the condition of the detainees who feel the threat of violence in their daily existence, who have lost their speech because of their fear of the 'oppressor', and who have even been denied the right to express any complaint about their conditions, Young Woman's indignation towards the British system victimising these people grows even more. When she asks one of the detainees

how she could make a complaint to the officers, she receives a warning from the so-called Fellow Detainee, who speaks for all the asylum-seekers fearing deportation: "Complain / and they transfer you to another jail / without appeal. / Ban visitors. / Intercept your calls. / Lose your files. / Send you back. / I'm telling you girl / keep your head down" (Adshead, 2001: 24). However, Young Woman, as a defender of human rights, does not refrain from raising her voice against the authorities in the detention centre, and she even volunteers to be a "defence witness" (Adshead, 2001: 76) for her fellow detainees who have been involved in the Campsfield riots. Yet, Young Woman's insubordinate standing leads not only to her psychological and physical violation but also to her sexual and racial exploitation.

In her various encounters with the guards in the detention centre either directly or indirectly, she is constantly humiliated because of her identity as a black and is treated as the 'Other'. Each time she attempts to criticise them about their harsh treatment of the detainees or asks questions about how her file for the asylum will be processed, she receives from the officers and guards, who want to 'silence' her, a derogatory approach in a debasing language like, "Shut up / little nigger woman" (Adshead, 2001: 23), "fat nose" (Adshead, 2001: 24), "fat lip" (Adshead, 2001: 55), "we'll make burgers / out of you, / black meat" (Adshead, 2001: 57). Or her sexual abuse is combined with her racial humiliation, as in the scene where she is taken for a prostitute while she is imagining herself as breastfeeding her dead baby: "[B]lack meat's tough / but tasty..." (Adshead, 2001: 123). Through such 'forms of address' employed by the British authorities mainly in their contact to the female detainees, Adshead shows how the dominant First World discriminates and abuses those who are Third World and women of colour. Moreover, in a colonial context, she demonstrates how the (white, Western) colonising power, represented by the British authorities, 'silences' the 'Other', or the 'subaltern', in Spivak's (1988) terms. By not being allowed to 'speak', the subaltern who wants to "act and *speak*" rather than only to "act and *struggle*" is enforced by the colonising power to lead a silent existence (Spivak, 1988: 275). Young Woman, however, who stands for the 'acting, struggling and *speaking*' subaltern in the detention centre, refuses to keep "mute" (Spivak, 1988: 275) about their condition, and soon writes a letter of complaint to the hospital administrator regarding the racist remarks of the nurses and the ill treatment of the detainees during their arbitrary detention: "And I write, / slow and shaking / to the hospital Administrator, / complaining of the remarks / made by two nurses" (Adshead, 2001: 53).

In the end, not having followed the advice of the Fellow Detainee and having reacted against the cruelties of the guards, in other words, having acted as the 'speaking subaltern', Young Woman is not only removed to another detention centre, the Tinsley House, whose "ethos" is known to be "famously non-confrontational" (Adshead, 2001: 67), as she relates, but she is also given by her

solicitor, Mr. Pennington, the news that her claims regarding their ill treatment at Campsfield will be rejected: "I have received / a reply / to your / complaints / regarding / ill treatment / after the protest. / [...] in the face / of blunt denial / supported from the very top, / that is the Home Office, / it'll be hard / to make your charges / stick, / if not impossible" (Adshead, 2001: 74). Not surprised at this news, Young Woman sarcastically withdraws her claims: "We were never denied access to lawyers- / a misunderstanding / it seems, / not locked in- / but confined, / the meagre / portions / of food / were not / deliberate policy / but / staff vindictiveness [...] / There has never been / any verbal racist abuse / or / sexual harassment / of female detainees!" (Adshead, 2001: 74-75).

Additionally, she is delivered the news that her papers for asylum got lost or destroyed during the group protest at Campsfield, thus being reduced to the "subaltern" who "has no history" (Spivak, 1988: 287). So, Young Woman finds herself in a position to restart the whole bureaucracy and undergo yet another mind-numbing interrogation for her asylum appeal –a situation which all the other detainees who refuse to 'keep silent' against their ill treatment have encountered. Thus Young Woman is once more forced to remember and relive her traumatic past, as seen in the following scene:

Lights change.

YOUNG WOMAN AS INTERROGATOR:

And then they shot / your father is it?

YOUNG WOMAN:

No! / no! / my husband.

YOUNG WOMAN AS INTERROGATOR:

With a single shot?

YOUNG WOMAN:

No / they were spraying / bullets everywhere / by then

YOUNG WOMAN AS INTERROGATOR:

Really? / And yet you yourself / escaped / all those bullets?

YOUNG WOMAN:

(Halting.) I was lower down / on a day bed, / I don't think / they'd seen me then / and . . . / my husband . . .

YOUNG WOMAN AS INTERROGATOR:

Acted as a shield, / yes thank you. / Now they killed / your father / with a bayonet / am I right?

YOUNG WOMAN:

Yes.

YOUNG WOMAN AS INTERROGATOR:

How extraordinary. / Why take the trouble / of suddenly bayoneting / someone / when you`re in the middle / of spraying bullets / from your rifle.

YOUNG WOMAN:

They`d stopped shooting

YOUNG WOMAN AS INTERROGATOR:

Really?

YOUNG WOMAN:

Yes

YOUNG WOMAN AS INTERROGATOR:

And had the men / seen you yet?

YOUNG WOMAN:

I . . .

YOUNG WOMAN AS INTERROGATOR:

Yes?

YOUNG WOMAN:

I . . . / don`t know

[. . .]

YOUNG WOMAN AS INTERROGATOR:

So they had suddenly / decided to stop shooting, / and bayonet / your father.

YOUNG WOMAN:

He`d screamed / don`t you see / and sprang / at them / he surprised them.

[. . .]

YOUNG WOMAN AS INTERROGATOR:

Where did they / bayonet your father, / on what part of the body?

YOUNG WOMAN:

Every part

YOUNG WOMAN AS INTERROGATOR:

And then / they calmly decided / to put the bayonets away / and shoot your mother?

YOUNG WOMAN:

(Faltering, in difficulty.) I . . . / Yes . . .

YOUNG WOMAN AS INTERROGATOR:

Then stop shooting again / and bayonet / your baby daughter.

YOUNG WOMAN:

(Appears to have difficulty breathing.) I . . . / I . . . [. . .] *(Very softly.)* my baby / wasn't killed / with bayonets, / [. . .] / *(very tense, tearful, distraught.)* I was raped / by the soldiers / I . . . / miscarried a foetus / in a bucket / while hiding

YOUNG WOMAN AS INTERROGATOR:

Ah yes. / Are you quite sure of this?

YOUNG WOMAN:

(Hesitant.) Yes

[. . .]

YOUNG WOMAN AS INTERROGATOR:

You still insist you saw this / grinning foetus / in a bucket?

YOUNG WOMAN:

I . . . / yes . . . no . . .

YOUNG WOMAN AS INTERROGATOR:

Well did you or didn't you?

YOUNG WOMAN:

I . . . perhaps . . . I

[. . .]

YOUNG WOMAN AS INTERROGATOR:

Did all four men / rape you?

YOUNG WOMAN:

Three / there were / three men

YOUNG WOMAN AS INTERROGATOR:

Did they all rape you?

YOUNG WOMAN:

Yes

YOUNG WOMAN AS INTERROGATOR:

And you received injuries / in this attack?

YOUNG WOMAN:

Yes?

YOUNG WOMAN AS INTERROGATOR:

They were . . .

YOUNG WOMAN:

A cut lip / two black eyes / a broken arm / and . . .

YOUNG WOMAN AS INTERROGATOR:

Yes?

Pause.

You mentioned other injuries/ you mentioned / bruising and lacerations/

[. . .]

Why did they rape you? / And not kill you

Silence.

Tape: African music, a pounding drum.

[. . .]

Generally it is reported / that / a woman / in the situation / you describe/
from the area / you claim / to come from, / would more likely / be raped/
then killed.

Tape: a sudden urgent drumming.

YOUNG WOMAN:

(Softly, troubled.) I don't know / why they didn't

[. . .]

YOUNG WOMAN AS INTERROGATOR:

And yet / at Heathrow / you did not - / I repeat / not / claim asylum.

In fact / you did not / seek asylum / for a week

YOUNG WOMAN:

I was ill / I was confused / I was . . . / I was . . . / I was . . .

Her words are drowned by final climactic drumming.

Sudden silence. (Adshead, 2001: 77-88)

At the end of this painful process, however, the Interrogator decides that she is "lying": "I would suggest / your whole story, / the killing of your family / the rape / is nothing / but a pack / of well-schemed lies" (Adshead, 2001: 84). Consequently, her application for asylum is rejected also by the Special Appeal Tribunal. Nevertheless, Young Woman does not give up and she asks her case to be forwarded to Judicial Review, while she herself is granted temporary admission after managing to give the officers an address to reside in with the help of a fellow detainee, Agnes. Her temporary admission, however, is allowed under certain conditions: she "cannot / change address / without permission /", "must report weekly / to the police station / and the / Department Social Services / to receive / [her] thirty pound voucher" and she "cannot work" (Adshead, 2001: 98). Once she breaks these conditions, she "can be deported any time" (Adshead, 2001: 97). Not very surprisingly, being left with no work, unable to live on the money granted to her and having also been sexually abused by a male neighbour who has attempted to take advantage of her helpless state, she is eventually forced to break the

conditions for her survival, and so abandons that place. At the end of a desperate struggle to find a new shelter, she makes the streets her home and prostitution her means of survival.

In the meantime, her absence from her temporary address granted by the refugee council is discovered, and the final decision about her case is declared by the Judge:

. . . there's absolutely / no evidence / put before me / to suggest / her life is at risk / in fact / in the ever changing / political climate / she might even / be greeted – / a heroine! [...] / now it's a straightforward / case of Absconding / whilst on Temporary Admission / we shall [...] recommend immediate return / to country of origin. (Adshead, 2001: 125)

So, Young Woman is deported despite the known fact that her life will be in danger if she is sent back to her country. At the end of the play, Young Woman as Solicitor reports:

She was not arrested at the airport / and her re-entry into the country / provoked no comment in the papers / she was hidden successfully / moving from safe house / to safe house. / On August 14th 2000* / a group of three young men / in part military uniform / burst into the apartment / where she / and her three friends / were drinking morning coffee / *Tape: blast of gunfire then silence.* / They were all killed outright. / *Lights change, African music.* / *The End.* (Adshead, 2001: 127)

In her footnote to the last scene of the play, where the date of Young Woman's murder is specified, Adshead (2001: 127) writes: "This date should change to be the day after the day of the performance, i.e. constantly changing", revealing thus her loss of belief in the British asylum system and indicating that human rights will continue to be abused and violated in this system.

As can be concluded from the experiences of Young Woman, in its dehumanising effects, Young Woman's torture and exploitation in the asylum system in England is no less than her violation in her own African country, from which she had escaped with hopes for a safe and secure future. Moreover, having established herself as a 'defender of human rights', she ironically becomes the victim of those very human rights and in the very country which she had regarded as the 'safeguard of human rights'. Hence, contrary to her expectations before seeking asylum, in the land which she was ready to embrace as her new home she encounters violence at different levels: physical, sexual, psychological. Thus, in Michael Billington's (2000) words, the African journalist tragically suffers "the ritual humiliations of the asylum seeker" in this trying process, which ends up in her persecution following deportation.

The Bogus Woman and Transnational Feminism

As the close analysis of the play reveals, in *The Bogus Woman* Kay Adshead presents the experiences of the asylum-seeking African Young Woman "through

the racialized, female body”, while “situat[ing] the narrative of asylum within a matrix of gender, race and nation” (Aston, 2003a: 6). Correspondingly, while demonstrating through Young Woman’s experiences the condition of the asylum-seekers in the British system, Adshead not only raises her critical voice against the violation of human rights in England, but also “offers her own critique of feminism” (Aston, 2003a: 17).

In the play, Young Woman is not only deprived of her ‘human’ right to “life, liberty and security of person” (Article 3), but is also subjected to “torture”, “cruel, inhuman” and “degrading treatment” (Article 5), as contradictory to what is specified in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)*. Furthermore, she is subject to explicit discrimination because of her racial identity, just like the other women of colour in the detention centre, which is again a violation of human rights according to the *UDHR*, where it is stated that “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion” (Article 2). What is more, her persecution back in her own country is initiated by the violation of her human right to “seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution” (Article 14, item 1). Interestingly enough, Young Woman is exposed to such torture and discriminatory approach leading to the violation of her human rights not just by the male but also by the female around her, which invites a discussion on the ‘lack of solidarity’ among women across the globe.

In this connection, it can be stated that by demonstrating the victimisation of an African woman in a country that historically represents the colonial power as well as white Western feminism and by explicitly taking sides with her protagonist, Adshead in *The Bogus Woman* “interrogates white western feminism as a site of privilege” (Aston, 2003a: 6), and stresses the importance of “making cross-border connections, resistant to the colonial ‘othering’ of gender, race and nation” (Aston, 2003b: 8). Hence, the play offers a ‘transnational feminist’ approach as a solution not only to the erasure of differences that invite inequalities between the (non-Western, non-white, colonised) Third World and (Western, white, colonising) First World women but also to the protection of women’s human rights in the non-Western countries, as well.

As shown in the close analysis of the play, with her African background and as a victim of rape who has the risk of being persecuted in her own country for her human rights activism, Young Woman applies for asylum in Britain; however, what she has to undergo for her freedom and safety in this country only adds to her further violation because of her racial identity.

In the first place, by approaching her simply as a story-teller and declaring her as the bogus asylum seeker, the British (asylum) system, representative of the imperial and colonial power, denies and violates Young Woman’s fundamental human rights to freedom, equality and security. Second, both the female guards at the Campsfield detention centre and the female nurses at the hospital humiliate

her with no sense of solidarity or empathy. For instance, at the Campsfield detention centre, one of the female guards, Chatty Caryn, proud of her "observational expertise" (Adshead, 2001: 32), tells Young Woman boastfully that "[she] can tell/ a Ghanaian / right- / from a Gambian, / a Kenyan / from a Nigerian, / a Somalian / from an Angolan / At twenty, / thirty, / forty feet / at least [...] / Not by the boat race / [...] / but by the bum" and further adds, "[n]ow/ Iraqis/ are quite different/ to Pakis" (Adshead, 2001: 32-33), thereby not only revealing her racist and discriminatory approach, 'othering' her own gender for their non-white and non-European identities, but also displaying an attitude 'homogenising' the diversity among non-Western women by ignoring their 'differences'. Indirectly, her pride in such expertise also discloses Chatty Caryn's consciousness of her own privileged status as a white Western woman, attached to the imperial and colonial power. This in return demonstrates how gender relations between women across the globe, as the First and Third World women, are shaped by an understanding of 'power', and how these relations have "acquired a racial and colonial dimension" (de Groot, 2005: 34-35). Thus, supporting de Groot's rightful argument, through the racist approach towards her own gender of the female guard representing the First World white Western women, we are invited to see both "the impact on Black or Third World Women of imperialism, ethnocentrism or racism" and "the significant role of racial, colonial and ethnocentric elements in the making and maintenance of gender in Western societies themselves" (2005: 34). Again, in a transnational feminist stance, Adshead stresses the importance of 'building bridges' between women across the globe and of establishing 'transnational solidarity' in order to eliminate inequalities among women of different backgrounds and cultures.

Similarly, following her hunger strike at the detention centre, Young Woman's encounter with the female nurses at "John Radcliffe Hospital" (48) shows how a woman's human right to freedom, safety and security is ignored by women. Not considering the fact that Young Woman has been on a hunger strike protesting the ill treatment she has received in the detention centre and turning a blind eye to her deteriorating health condition, the female nurses inconsiderately claim that "[the British government] run these detention centres / like 18-30 clubs", suggesting wrongfully that they almost create an environment of luxury for the detainees with a "pool / a library / cafeteria / and a snooker room" (Adshead, 2001: 48), hence completely disregarding the truth about the detention centres. However, the female nurses, calling sarcastically Young Woman in her ill-bed as a "[s]ister" (Adshead, 2001: 49) are highly aware of the realities surrounding the asylum seekers in these detention centres: they ask with no self-critical approach and without showing any female solidarity, "why don't they go back if it's so bad they want to die?" (Adshead, 2001: 49). Thus, to borrow Susan Okin's (1998: 33) words, Adshead also exposes in the play indeed the "vast gap between declarations of rights and actual practice" of it as a "common pattern".

Like Young Woman's experiences at the Campsfield detention centre and later at the hospital as demonstrated above, what she goes through at the "non-confrontational" (Adshead, 2001: 67) Tinsley House is also an explicit display of the twofold humiliation of Third World women by both their First World 'sisters' and the male power. At Tinsley House, first, she is forced by the male interrogators to tell her traumatic experience of rape in every detail. Despite knowing well that the act of rape was used by the soldiers as a weapon of war against Young Woman while her family was being executed in front of her eyes, the interrogators approach her rape as if it were a straightforward case that requires close investigation by simply calling it as an "attack" (Adshead, 2001: 86), rather than physical and sexual violence. Moreover, they force her to detail out her traumatic experience through their insensitive questions like, "Did all four men / rape you?" (Adshead, 2001: 85), "And you received injuries in this attack?" (Adshead, 2001: 85), "Why did they rape you? / And not kill you" (Adshead, 2001: 86), which function only to intensify her psychological torture. This in return is not only the violation of the aforementioned human rights specified in Article 3 and Article 5 of the UDHR, as given above, but also a renunciation of the 1993 *United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women*, which states in Article 1 that "any act of violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women" means "violence against women". Showing through the interrogation scene how rape is ignored as a form of sexual, physical and psychological violence by the British authorities standing for the male power as well as the imperial power, Adshead raises the transnational feminist argument that violence against women is a violation of human rights and that women's rights must be regarded as human rights (Hall, 2015: 404). Hence, the playwright once again draws attention to the necessity of redefining human rights by suggesting that rape should be recognised as a form of violence against women, which means the violation of women's human rights, especially "to physical and mental integrity" (Lemaitre, 2013: 189).

In the play, besides providing a transnational feminist analysis of human rights via the experiences of Young Woman, Adshead also displays the shortcomings of the 'global sisterhood' idea of white Western feminism. Suggesting that global sisterhood leads to an approach that not only universalises women's experiences but also denies their differences like race, ethnicity, religion, nation and class, the playwright reiterates the cruciality of 'seeing' and 'recognising' women's differences, instead of denying them. For instance, when the "sisterly" Janice in Tinsley House, who represents "white western feminism" (Aston, 2003a: 17) comments with her "London accent" on Young Woman's singing of a "simple, beautiful" "African tribal song" (Adshead, 2001: 67) saying, "That was beautiful / I'm sure, like myself, / everyone here / feels / that you were singing / not just for yourself, / but / for dispossessed people / everywhere" (Adshead, 2001: 67-68), the playwright raises a criticism against the First World/ white Western feminism which universalises women's experiences disregarding their individual patterns that make

them distinct from each other. By assuredly announcing that Young Woman's song was for "dispossessed people / everywhere" (Adshead, 2001: 67-68), Janice mechanically interprets the African woman's singing as encompassing all victimised women (and men) all over the world, regardless of their different stories of dispossession and their different backgrounds. Hence, she reveals a 'universalising' approach to the oppression of the victimised women. However, as Aston (2003a: 18) states, "[t]he specificities of oppression ought not [...] to be erased through a universalising approach" or "through a feminism that denies 'multiplicities'." In this regard, with reference to Kristeva's (1981: 33) interpretation of feminism which suggests that feminism should "bring out the singularity of each woman, and beyond this, her multiplicities, her plural languages, beyond the horizon, beyond sight, beyond faith itself", it can be argued that Adshead in *The Bogus Woman* promotes such approach to women by putting stress on the importance of having an awareness of women's diversities, as it is promoted in transnational feminism. This in return, will pave the way for transnational solidarity among women and no women will be designated as the 'Other', or the 'marginal' (Aston, 2003a: 18).

In connection to the transnational feminist analysis of the play, it should perhaps be noted that it is also highly significant that the colour grey is a recurrent motif in the play. As colour psychology relates, grey is known to be the colour of dullness and authority, and too much grey suggests depression, fear, tension, anxiety, dreariness, dampness and lack of life and energy (Gray Colour, 2016). Indeed, when the play is closely analysed, it can be observed that this repeated use of grey suggests all these elements. For instance, when Young Woman arrives at Heathrow, the immigrant officials make her interrogation such an excruciating process that the country which formerly meant freedom for her shrinks in her eyes into a "small grey rectangle of sky" (Adshead, 2001: 14), suggesting for her the damp and dull state of England in her new perception affected by all what she has negatively experienced there. Similarly, in her distress at the Campsfield detention centre, while grieving over the loss of her baby as a result of her miscarriage caused by the soldiers who sexually violated her in her African country, she dreams that she is "suckling an old grey grinning bull" (Adshead, 2001: 31), which is later revealed as her imaginary description of the soldiers who raped her. Thus, the 'grey' bull in her dream reflects her fear and tension. Moreover, her solicitor, Mr Pennington, who stands for authority, is appropriately dressed in a "good grey suit" (Adshead, 2001: 35) and Young Woman's "skin is grey" (Adshead, 2001: 34), reflecting her anxiety, when he announces to her that her papers for asylum are not found convincing enough by the British authorities. Likewise, when Mr Pennington informs Young Woman about the refusal of her application for asylum, the imagery in his remarks is that of the grey colour, which suggests an uncertainty about her papers: "The area with you is genuinely grey" (Adshead, 2001: 94), he comments. Hence, at one level, the weight of the grey colour in the play reflects the draining physical body and the depressed psychology of Young Woman, highlighting her tension, distress, fearful and dreary state, as well as the authority.

With respect to the symbolic significance of the grey colour, it should be underlined that Adshead's choice for this recurring image in the play is also important in terms of reinforcing the major transnational feminist principle that underlies the importance of cross-border connections and collaboration between women without 'othering' each other for their racial, national, cultural and religious differences as a fundamental principle for equality between the First and Third World women. When Young Woman, while narrating the personal and family tragedy she has suffered in her African country, turns to the audience and says: "Forget I'm black / by the way / I could be pink / or puce / or grey" (Adshead, 2001: 40), she symbolically draws attention not only to the 'diversity' among women with regard to their racial identity but also to their ethnic and cultural mix. Each of the colours in her address is the outcome of a mix of two different colours, like pink is the combination of red and white, puce of dark brown and purple, and grey of black and white, which thus brings to the foreground the idea of plurality of identity and ethnic, racial and cultural diversity, which is specified in Article 4 of the *UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity* (2001) as "inseparable from respect for human dignity": "It [the defence of cultural diversity] implies a commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular the rights of persons belonging to minorities and those of indigenous peoples." Correspondingly, it can be argued that through her African protagonist's words revealing her rebellious cry against racial discrimination in her quietude, Adshead in a transnational feminist approach calls for respect for cultural as well as racial and ethnic diversity, and presents the recognition of such diversity as the recognition of human rights in the context of Third World, that is, non-white and non-Western women, too.

On the whole, considering that grey is also known as "the colour of mediation and compensating justice" (Matthews, 1986: 128), as described in *The Herder Dictionary of Symbols*, it may be true to state that in *The Bogus Woman* (which also has a book cover suggestively in grey, with a figure in the foreground, in the shape of a wing in black and white stripes), through the recurring image of the grey colour, Kay Adshead highlights the idea of indeed 'compensating justice' for the Third World women, who are also subject to racial discrimination in a globalised world that privileges the First World women with respect to 'human rights' and 'women's rights'.

Conclusion

As a concluding remark, it can be stated that with its focus on the racial discrimination the Third World women experience outside their national borders, and by explicitly showing how their women rights and human rights are abused and violated by both the male power and its extensions like the imperial and colonial power as well as by their privileged First World 'sisters', *The Bogus Woman* can be seen as Kay Adshead's bold attempt to "create a more informed public consciousness" (Welch and Schuster, 2005: 403) among her white Western audiences about the 'othering' of the non-white women, who have historically and

culturally remained outside the Western world, as a result of not having been “given the chance” (Spivak, 1988: 283) to speak for themselves. As Anne Hopper (2008) in her review of the play has stated, *The Bogus Woman* might be “a politically one-sided work, just holding the New Labour responsible for all”, but Adshead’s work is not only a dramatic and convincing demonstration of the violation of human rights in a country that has put its signature under the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, but also a substantial contribution to transnational feminist literature with its call for ‘compensating justice’ and genuine cross-border collaboration through transnational solidarity between women across the globe.

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