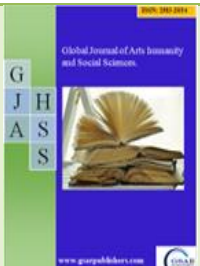
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Transnational Subaltern Dynamics in The Black Man and His Visa by Jean Tardif Lonkog

By

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Abstract

This work seeks to examine the manner in which the Cameroonian novelist Jean Tardiff Lonkog projects migrant realities in his autobiographical novel *The Black Man and His Visa*. The question that guides the research is: How does Lonkog represent the conditions of the migrant in *The Black Man and His Visa*? It is hypothesized that the author highlights the endless struggles of the immigrant despite the changes in location. From a theoretical percept, Subalterneity as postulated by Gayatri Spivak is used to analyze the treatment of the underprivileged migrant not only in his Chinese destination, especially when he does not have a visa, but also in Cameroon his homeland. The paper is divided into two parts with the first entitled “Subordinate Realities in the Cameroonian Society” and examines the situation of the migrant in Cameroon before emigration; while the second phase labeled “Lower Class Negotiations in China” focuses on the diaspora conditions in China. It is revealed that migrating from Cameroon to China does not necessarily change the migrant’s suffering despite the hopes associated to it because each of the two environments offers different challenges to the struggling inhabitants. Therefore, Cameroonians planning to emigrate to China for better opportunities should know that immigrants in China have difficulties to surmount; and should make sure they do not stay there illegally to avoid further challenges. Lonkog’s work contributes to the understanding of how globalization and migration affect individual and collective identities, highlighting issues of race, class, and cultural adaptation. This narrative provides valuable insights into the lived experiences of the subaltern in a transnational context, enriching the discourse on migration studies and postcolonial theory.

Key Words: Migration, Subalterneity, Suffering, Hope, Disillusionment

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1. Introduction

Currently, migration is a major issue in world affairs in general and in literature in particular since literary expression is an artistic representation of societal realities. However, a huge proportion of diaspora discourses related to Africa have often focused on the movement of Africans to European and North American countries; as well as the numerous multi-dimensional effects of such movements to the migrants, their countries of departure and the host communities. This is alluded to by Betts (2013: 112) when he states: “The journey of an African migrant is often marked by perilous sea crossings, exploitation, and a constant struggle for survival.” Recently, a new trend of movement has emerged between Africa and South Asian countries such as China; which has also come with its own dilemmas. This research is aimed at examining the manner in which the Cameroonian novelist Jean

Tardiff Lonkog projects migrant realities in his autobiographical novel *The Black Man and His Visa*. The question on which the research anchors is: How does Jean Tardiff Lonkog represent the conditions of the migrant in *The Black Man and His Visa*? The hypothesis is that the author reveals the continuous struggles of the immigrant despite his movement from Cameroon to China. From a theoretical standpoint, Subalterneity as postulated by Gayatri Spivak is used to analyze the treatment of the underprivileged migrant in his homeland Cameroon as well as his emigration Chinese destination, especially when he lacks the much needed visa. Spivak confirms that space engenders difference in subalternic terms thus: “Subaltern is not just a classy word for ‘oppressed’, for the other, for somebody who’s not getting a piece of the pie. [...] In post-colonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern—a space of



difference.” (Spivak 1999: 284.) Therefore, power dynamics and social structures have implications of marginalization against the downtrodden irrespective of the spatial considerations. This paper dwells on the fate of the protagonist in *The Black Man and His Visa* who is at the bottom of the pyramid and how he struggles against marginalization through several ways including resistance; in line with Bhabha’s declaration that: “The subaltern is not only the oppressed subject but also the subject that resists oppression. The subaltern is a site of resistance and agency.” (Bhabha 1994: 171) The paper is divided into two parts with the first entitled “Subordinate Realities in the Cameroonian Society” and studies the situation of the migrant in Cameroon before migration; while the second phase labeled “Lower Class Negotiations in China” focuses on the diaspora conditions in China.

2. Subordinate Realities in the Cameroonian Society

In his Cameroonian country of birth, the protagonist of the autobiographical novel *The Black Man and His Visa*, Lonkog, is exposed to a good number of difficulties owing to his subaltern condition. Most of these hardships are linked to his status as a bottom of the pyramid personality for financial, cultural, linguistic and geographical reasons; and are perceived in his life in the domains of education, health, employment and travel. These will be analyzed below.

2.1. Education

Education is one of the key areas in which Lonkog’s struggles are highlighted very clearly. When Lonkog completes high school at the age of twenty, he quickly realized that difficult days lie ahead of him due to the lack of money to sponsor himself in the university as he says: “I did not have the finances to enter university”. (Lonkog 2013: iii) Furthermore, it is even more difficult to get trained in a professional school in Cameroon; partly explaining why the rate of unemployment is so high in the country. The protagonist ends of spending a few years at home before securing admission into the university; after which he drops out due to the lack of finances. This does not, however, kill his dream of getting the required education in the university and becoming a lecturer. He says: “At that time, one course of action occupied my mind: enter university, climb the academic ladder as far as possible, become a full time university lecturer.” (Lonkog 2013: 1) The metaphorical use of ladder highlights the patience and gradual process required in realizing his goal.

One of the reasons for which Lonkog is unable to educate himself in the university is because his father, who is supposed to take full care of him in a typical Cameroonian setup, is incapable of doing so for several reasons. Lonkog, referring to his father, says: “He had many wives and children. In that case as in most African polygamous homes, it was difficult for him to sponsor us in school”. (Lonkog 2013: 1) Consequently, his mother, a peasant farmer, had to educate him and his four sisters to the high school level; after which she was unable to continue. Lonkog therefore has to stay at home and do agriculture; hoping to raise enough money from the sale of his produce that year to finance his

university education. Unfortunately, he says: “I never had good harvests nor good sales, at least not good enough to help me enter university.” (Lonkog 2013: 3) He continued farming until he and also his mother sold all their harvests for him to go to the university.

Unfortunately, by the time he gets the money, he is told that admissions are over. However, his relatives tell him to bribe the officer in charge of admission. Pursuant to this suggestion, he states: “The next day I put 2000 FCFA, which was about \$4, in an envelope and went to the office. I handed the envelope together with my documents to the registrar. He took the envelope and my documents and smiled broadly. [...] He admitted me, matriculated 97L443, in the department of Sociology, Psychology and Philosophy, and my major was Sociology” (Lonkog 2013: 5) The protagonist involves himself in bribery and corruption which highlights the moral decadence in the society that further cripples the poor financially though they willingly participate in it. After securing admission, Lonkog goes home, and gets money for his rent and other things before returning for classes.

When he begins school, he is faced with an element of linguistic subalternism because the university he gets registered to is in the majority francophone part of Cameroon; meaning that lectures were in French instead of English that is practiced in the minority Anglophone regions he comes from. He presents this difficulty thus: “The University of Dschang is a French speaking university, so the notes were in French, and at that time I was blank as far as French was concerned. The exams were already too close. I had to look for a student who was good in both French and English and pay him or her to translate the notes for me”. (Lonkog 2013: 5) This is due to the colonial history of Cameroon which exposed them to different cultural and linguistic realities as pointed out by Danlami thus “When the Germans were ousted from Cameroon during the First World War, Britain and France partitioned the territory and ruled their respective portions using different policies and practices.” (Danlami 2023: 133). This aligns with Spivak’s declaration that: “The subaltern cannot speak.” (Spivak 1988: 308) Even examination questions are set in French as the protagonist says: “The professor gave me the question, and it was in French. By some magic, I understood it”. (Lonkog 2013: 6) This use of magical realism highlights the difficulty Lonkog had, as a minority Anglophone in a typically francophone university; but ring a tone of optimism because he manages to pass the course in question.

Despite this temporary success, hardship, poverty and language challenges continue to plague the protagonist’s university education. Paid translated notes and financial help from family members like the uncle living in the USA permit him to forge on; till October 1998 he had to finally drop from the university because he had no money with which to continue financing his education. He subsequently returns to the village and gets fully involved in farming. It is noteworthy that the idea of emigrating comes to the protagonist after all his endeavours fail and he is faced with endless hardship. This confirms Shire’s statement that: “No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark.” (Shire 2011: 25) Lonkog’s ordeal in his home country as he attempts to acquire

university education and achieve his dream of becoming a lecturer can actually align his home to Shire's description.

2.2. Health

In addition to education as seen above, health is another sector in which Lonkog's tribulations are presented. The protagonist announces this by saying: "First I experienced a financial catastrophe to enter university, then a health calamity. I stopped thinking of university. I thought only of recovering my health and becoming normal as I used to be." (Lonkog 2013: 9) This can be seen as malaria and typhoid fever attacked him regularly, making his bad financial situation even worse as he states: "Then even the small money I earned from the farms I had to use to pay the hospital for treatment and good health. I needed strength and physical energy in the farms, but because I was always sick, the farms too failed." (Lonkog 2013: 3) His poor health therefore had a negative multiplier effect on the rest of his activities and further chained him down among the dregs of humanity as highlighted by the /f/ alliteration above which shows his continuous suffering.

Some of these expenses are futile in the realistic sense of the word as they are used in carrying out tests whose results are negative; meaning that he remained sick despite of the expenditure. Stating this, the protagonist says: "I went back to the hospital, and this time the lab results showed no malaria and no typhoid. I was constantly anemic. This began as a joke, but I stayed under this condition from May 1999 to around the year 2004." (Lonkog 2013: 7) Therefore, the negative results from the Akum Mission Hospital and St. Louis Hospital in Bamenda after spending much on tests mean that he would continue to be sick.

This poor health impacted not just Lonkog's financial situation but also his education. This is because he cannot study effectively when he is sick as he says: "I could not read for more than five minutes at a time, for if I tried, tears would start running down my cheeks. When the rays of the sun touched me, it was as if I would collapse." (Lonkog 2013: 8) The effect of ill health on Lonkog's education is clear not only because he cannot read his notes and finds it difficult to go to school under the sun, but equally because he sleeps for eighteen or nineteen hours a day.

Such realities help to maintain Lonkog in his subaltern state by making it difficult for him take full advantage of the limited opportunities open for him to improve his lot and potentially that of his family. He presents such a challenge by saying "By September 2001, my uncle encouraged me to write the entrance examination so I could train as a teacher. But serious headaches kept me from reading". (Lonkog 2013: 9) This health condition makes him reluctant to register for the examination but when he finally does, he has to work extremely hard amidst the poor health before succeeding in the exam and finally graduating as a teacher in July 2002.

In order to treat himself and others, Lonkog decides to learn some of the unconventional traditional medicine from his father. Consequently, as he worked in his farm, Lonkog often created time to harvest herbs from the farm and nearby forests which he dried, packaged and stored. He then used them to produce different types

of traditional medicine which he used in treating himself and others of some illnesses his medicine could handle. This is how he managed to stabilize his ill health and continue tackling the numerous challenges on his way to success.

2.3. Employment

(Un)employment equally helps not only in highlighting Lonkog's suffering and subaltern status; but also plays a key role in maintaining him in that situation. The protagonist announces this by saying: "Even when there were opportunities for work, thousands of people would flock there to compete for the rare places. The result was that the rich and those who had people in high positions in government would grab them" (Lonkog 2013: iii) Here, there are very few employment opportunities which the financial and political elite would illegitimately acquire for their family members, friends and other relations; while the poor had nothing thereby further consolidating their hardship and subaltern states. In a related context, Guha says the following about the subaltern versus elite regarding domination, which can be relevant in Lonkog's situation with the elite in Cameroon: "The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism—colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism. Both these varieties of elitism share the prejudice that the making of the Indian nation and the development of the consciousness—nationalism—which informed this process were exclusively or predominantly elite achievements." (Guha 1999: 1) Thus Lonkog finds it difficult to shake off his poverty chains through employment because the financial and political elite take every job for their people; leaving the poor in more destitute.

This reality has a damaging effect on the poor and is arguably one of the reasons why Lonkog's father, previously a striving traditional healer, loses his mental health. Referring to his father, Lonkog says: "He slowly and steadily sank into a kind of depression. He started drinking and could not sit steadily in his clinic." (Lonkog 2013: 1-2) Since he has fallen into depression and cannot properly manage his traditional clinic, Lonkog's father gradually loses all his clients. This further creates a financial vacuum in the family and intensifies hardship not only for Lonkog's father, but also for all members of the family including the protagonist.

However, Lonkog has an opportunity to fairly compete for an examination that will get him trained a potentially recruited. In September 2001, his uncle encouraged him to write the teacher training entrance examination which he wrote, passed, got trained as a teacher and graduated in July 2002. Unfortunately for Lonkog, there was no integration into the civil service after training as he says: "However, the government was not recruiting teachers. The private schools and mission schools would pay around 40 000 FCFA (\$80) a month. With this amount of money, how could I rent a house in the city and live there? It meant I had to live in the slums, and I never chose to live in the slums." (Lonkog 2013: 10) The rhetorical question above means that salaries given by private and mission schools were not enough to give a teacher decent living conditions and the government on the other hand was not recruiting; probably explaining why the financial and political elite



did not seize the opportunities for their relations. Thus the downtrodden are at the extremes of financial and political narratives as Spivak affirms: “The subaltern is necessarily the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic.” (Spivak, 1988b: 12) Lonkog and his kind are thus left out of any fruitful narratives.

The government gives the unemployed teachers hope by announcing that there is an impending recruitment of contract teachers and indicated that those teaching as volunteers will be prioritized. As a result, Lonkog says: “I strongly believed in this government promise and decided to stay in my village and did voluntary work there. I was teaching children in the government school in my village. The parents of the children were giving me a monthly income of 12 000 FCFA (\$24) a month. I was in the school until the end of 2004.” (Lonkog 2013: 10) Lonkog then did volunteering teaching in a government schools for a ridiculous pay that was given, not by the government but by the parents of the pupil; and when there is time for recruitment, the government does not keep its side of the bargain when recruitment came in 2003. The protagonist says: “There were probably more than thirty thousand unemployed teachers. We went for the interview, and the whole place was like ants. We were so many. Just by seeing the number of us for the job interview, there was no hope I would have a chance. Finally it was over, and there was no recruitment for me. At that time, I knew that the government had tricked us. The government just fooled us into teaching in its schools”. (Lonkog 2013: 10) The simile where the job seekers are likened to ants indicate the great number of teachers seeking recruitment, but does not justify, as Lonkog affirms, government’s decision to trick teachers to teach in its schools for little or no pay; and this indicates the state’s role in inflicting more suffering on the poor.

This hardship was part of Lonkog’s reality as he states: “My misery was great. I had only one pair of shoes and barely any clothes, which are basic things for a human being. I was wearing certain short trousers every day. (Lonkog 2013: 13) He continues that he bought some cheap used clothes but adds that: “When I arrived home, I saw the clothes were actually rotten. I feared diseases if I put them on, and I never wore those clothes. (Lonkog 2013: 13) This is indicative of the hardship the poor go through due to the lack of employment, the usurpation of available jobs by the elite and the manipulation or exploitation of the subaltern by the government with available but unobtainable recruitment opportunities.

2.4. Travel

With this poverty and hopelessness, Lonkog made up his mind to travel abroad, specifically to China, and this presented numerous obstacles of its own. He remembered Mr. Thomson who had left for China in 2003. He consequently decided to contact him through an email and neither had the food and network to do so, nor the required technological knowhow. He finally pays money in an internet spot and had a message sent to Mr. Thomson, whose reply a few weeks later had the pivotal question: “Would you like to come to China and study Chinese medicine?” (Lonkog 2013: 16) Lonkog’s answer was affirmative because the prospect of

travelling abroad is a lofty one for almost all Cameroonian youths given the way those who are abroad and their relatives exhibit wealth and prestige. However, Lonkog would have preferred Europe or America due to the high esteem given to those who travel to these areas as he says: “My friend and I loved this kind of good life too. We wanted to go to America and Europe too, but because we didn’t know how to go about that, we humbly accepted the offer of Mr. Thomson to help us travel to China. (Lonkog 2013: 20) That notwithstanding, views the China project as a blessing and is fully committed to making it work.

However, in making arrangements to have a visa for China, Lonkog faced several difficulties due to his subaltern status. The first challenge he faces is linguistic as he finds it difficult communicating with the assistant consular officer in the Chinese consulate in Douala. Referring to the consular officer, the protagonist says: “He could only speak Chinese and French. My friend and I were Anglophone. (Lonkog 2013: 21) This is because Lonkog is from the minority Anglophone regions of Cameroon while Douala is in one of the dominant francophone regions. Thus he needs the services of an interpreter. The second difficulty involved providing bank accounts to show that he could sponsor his stay in China, given that he and his family are very poor. He equally needed money to carry out the very expensive medical examination in a Chinese hospital. Since he could afford none of these, the visa application documents were rejected as he says: “Therefore, without bank statements showing our financial capabilities and a medical certificate, the officer rejected our documents. (Lonkog 2013: 22) He had to assemble money for these before reapplying.

Lonkog managed to get money from his farm produce, family members and friends to undergo the medical examination. But the bank statement appeared more difficult as he could hardly find someone with the required money in his or her account. He ends up getting duped by someone who collects money from him as pre-requisite for giving him the bank statement, only for the man to disappear because he had little or nothing in his account. This indicates the lack of unity that the subaltern need to elevate themselves together as Gramsci states: “The subaltern classes, by definition, are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a ‘State’: their history, therefore, is fragmented and episodic.” (Gramsci 1971: 52) Consequently, like Lonkog and the dupe, they fight each other instead of the oppressors. After contacting several individuals and institutions, he finally gets the bank statement from a small scale business friend in December and was finally given the visa despite initial refusal because classes already started in September; and he subsequently has to travel to China before March 22nd, 2005 as indicated in his visa.

This success presented yet other challenges. The first one involved having money with which to buy a flight ticket. Mr. Thomson who had promised to help him get a visa and pay for his ticket had kept none of his promises; and many people, including family members he met, had nothing to give him. However, he was fortunate that his uncle who lives in America sent him 450 000 FCFA (\$900) which he combined with money borrowed from relatives on



interest to buy the ticket. He metaphorically expresses his happiness after receiving money from his uncle thus: "I felt so light, almost like a feather. It was as if the force of gravity had no effect on me. (Lonkog 2013: 31) The second difficulty was where to stay once in gets to China before raising the money to start school. At this point, Mr. Thomson, once again, promises that Lonkog will stay with him till he does jobs and has money to start school. But this arrangement rested on a lot of suspense as the school authorities who are supposed to receive him at the airport can decide to take him directly to the school and immediately ask for school fees and lodging fees among others; since the bank statement he provided can cover all of his requirements. The very last difficulty regarded the yellow fever test, which Lonkog had not been told about at any stage in the process, but which he is now informed by his cousin that he needs it when they are almost at the airport. Luckily, his cousin knows her way about it as he says: "When we arrived at the airport, my cousin left us for a few minutes. She returned with a vaccination card for me, and it indicated I had had the yellow fever vaccination. (Lonkog 2013: 35) Arguably, this is another corrupt way of extorting money from the poor without really carrying out the test because Lonkog has acquired the yellow fever card without doing the test.

From all these, it can be seen that Lonkog faces a lot of challenges in his country Cameroon due to his status as a linguistic, financial, cultural and geographical subaltern; and this is reflected in several aspects of his life including education, health, employment and travel. In these domains, factors like poverty, inability to speak French, corruption, elite appropriation of employment for their relatives, government manipulation, unfulfilled promises and duping contribute in consolidating the subaltern's suffering, though out of desperation he also corrupts.

3. Lower Class Negotiations in China

The challenges faced by Lonkog in Cameroon due to his subaltern position and the numerous failed attempts to elevate himself from hardship as presented above convince Lonkog that the best solution is for him to travel to China, since there is no hope in his homeland. However, when the protagonist arrives China, he soon realizes that all is not a bed of roses as he had imagined; and that he has other subaltern obstacles to tackle. This confirms Nyabola's statement that: "For many African migrants, the dream of a better life abroad turns into a nightmare of exploitation and abuse." (Nyabola 2018: 134) Lonkog corroborates this when he says: "As I migrated to China, I hoped to have a different life, a life better than the one I had in Cameroon. However, my expected good life cut short because my residential visa expired sooner than expected, and I had to go through difficulty after difficulty. (Lonkog 2013: iii) From this utterance, it can be seen that Lonkog's challenges in China come from his visa expiration, though there are other issues that compound his subaltern struggles. This will be explained in this section with reference to education, employment, romantic life and visa issues.

3.1. Education

Lonkog's reason for travelling to China is to study medicine in the Taiyuan University of Traditional Chinese Medicine; and consequently education is of prime importance in his realities in China. Consequently, an analysis of Lonkog's activities in the educational domain is pivotal to understanding his overall situation in China. Although the protagonist arrives in China when the first semester is almost over, the school receives him well, provides him decent lodging on campus and make arrangements for him to attend extra classes for first semester courses in order to go to the next level together with other students of his level. Lonkog is very excited about studying Chinese medicine and coming back to Africa to help the sick; and courses like Herbalogy, Diagnostics, and Basic Theory of Traditional Chinese Medicine are particularly appealing to him.

However, not too long, Lonkog starts to face enormous difficulties due to his subaltern status. Firstly, he faces the challenge of fitting into the Chinese educational system as a foreigner who certainly constitutes a minority. He says: "As a first time learner of Chinese medicine, the concepts were entirely new to me. (Lonkog 2013: 38) Thus he has to learn not just the course content but also the Chinese educational system which is very different from what he was exposed to in Cameroon; meaning that he has to work far more than someone who already mastered the system in order to be at the same level with them.

Another challenge Lonkog faces, which is more serious and related to his destitute state as was the case in Cameroon, is to raise money to finance his studies and stay in China; given that he enters China with just 90 000 FCFA (\$180). When it is time to pay fees, Lonkog is frustrated when Mr. Thomson who had promised several times to help him pay fees disappoints him. This is a case where a subaltern's ordeals are intensified by someone who had to intervene with a positive impact; and aligns with Spivak's affirmation that: "To confront the subaltern is to confront the impossibility of an unmediated voice." (Spivak, 1988, p. 309.) Here, the mediated voice, Mr. Thomson, has clearly become part of Lonkog's problem; despite initially giving him 50 Chinese Yuan (\$7) per month for food.

The protagonist pleads with his university to give him more time to pay his fees; and together with the money he had started earning from teaching, he managed to complete his studies and earn a diploma in Chinese Medicine. From this perspective, it can be said that the Chinese society and educational system is flexible enough to accommodate the needy and accompany to achieve their objectives, unlike his Cameroonian homeland where he did not have such success despite the attempts.

3.2. Employment

In order to finance his education and stay in China, Lonkog has to get a job since, as already stated, he had submitted a bank statement with money he had no access to, in order to have a visa. But finding a job in China is very difficult from a subaltern perspective due to the racism against blacks and particularly Africans. The protagonist affirms this by saying: "As a new person in China, if you are not a white, you will go through many

obstacles before you have a job". (Lonkog 2013: 41) He stretches the point thus: "To the Chinese, Africa was a place to build infrastructure, to create business, exploit oil and make money. It was not a place popular for English teachers. Therefore, it was not surprising that my nationality was not an African one". (Lonkog 2013: 46) This consolidates Mbembe's declaration that: "The trauma of displacement is compounded by the racism and xenophobia that African migrants face in their host countries." (Mbembe, 2019, p. 45) As a surviving strategy, Lonkog opts to be dishonest by declaring that he is American. He says: "They knew my nationality as American because for those of us from Africa, we had to lie to get work. If known to be an African, especially as a newcomer, it would be hard to find work". (Lonkog 2013: 41) He adds that: "I learnt how to pronounce words not as we do in Africa. I bought books in phonetics, followed BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), VOA (Voice of America) and other news channels. After that, I had enough work. I had more work until I lacked time to take on new jobs. (Lonkog 2013: 42) From this, the dishonest action helps him to achieve his goals in a less than ideal context.

This is similar to the bribery he gives in Cameroon to have admission into the university after the registration is declared closed; attesting to the fact that there are problems for the subaltern in all societies and their coping strategies in both may involve unethical behaviour. In the same dimension, officers in both setups project immoral behavior which frustrates the subaltern. Like the admission officer in the University of Dschang-Cameroon who exploits Lonkog by collecting money from him to give him admission, an officer in the Taiyuan University of Chinese Traditional Medicine-Chinese exploits the protagonist by not giving him money meant for his services as Lonkog states: "The boss took me to a nearby restaurant, gave me a plate of food, and vanished. It was later that I understood that normally he should have paid me for the three hours of work that morning". (Lonkog 2013: 42) From this, no environment is perfect for the subaltern as in both, he is faced with difficult situations causing him to adapt unethical behavior and also suffers exploitation in both settings.

The search for jobs is a constant struggle because the protagonist needs different and better jobs to be able to take care of himself. But this is further complicated because his visa does not allow him to work; and he consequently finds it extremely difficult to get a job especially in the state where he schools despite the help from his Chinese girlfriend Na. To mediate this, he decides to look for jobs out of his state which was still risky not only for him but his university; and this works for him as he states: "Through a man called Michael, Mr. Thomson found me this job to teach English at number 1 middle school in Xiang Yuan". (Lonkog 2013: 45) This was quite helpful to him.

When Lonkog finds a job, his problems as a subaltern do not disappear. First of all, he faces a problem of rejection by Chinese students who despise foreigners especially blacks, and do not want to be taught by them. The protagonist states: "The Chinese students protest against you, everything about you. They do not want you to teach them, they do not like you. I faced this resistance in my workplaces just as many other teachers of English in China did and

still do". (Lonkog 2013: 67) To overcome this, the teachers, including Lonkog, need to adapt strategies to be more creative, interactive and likeable by the learners. The protagonist does so successfully to an extent as he says: "The students finally accepted me as their teacher. However, in one of the schools, the students protested to an extent that I could not stand it. Therefore, I told the woman who was in charge of the English department that I wanted to drop the job. I did not want to go back there again. (Lonkog 2013: 67) In situations where Lonkog is accepted, he faces difficulties fitting into his unreal identity created to medicate negative subaltern realities. Regarding this, he states: "It was somehow troublesome to teach English in China. We Africans pose as Americans and British to find work, but no matter how much you pretend, you shall never have the American or British accent of British and American natives. (Lonkog 2013: 66) This means that the solution adopted by the subaltern does not handle the problem entirely.

From this, it can be seen that those considered the subaltern in China, like the black and specifically Africans, have enormous difficulties finding jobs. Lonkog witnesses this and has to lie about his nationality to have jobs; which does not entirely solve the problem because not only do learners energetically reject him due to his skin colour, but he also finds it difficult to speak in the accent of the country he lied to have come from.

3.3. Romantic Life

In terms of his romantic life, Lonkog's subaltern as a black foreigner in China put him in a difficult situation. He falls in love with a Chinese girl, Na, who is willing to reciprocate but does not want to even consider marrying him because he is a foreigner. The protagonist says: "As far as my love life, my girlfriend was a very traditional Chinese girl. Although I visited her family several times, she never hoped to marry a foreigner. She liked to assist me in whatever I wanted to do, but the idea of marrying a foreigner was not very strong in her mind". (Lonkog 2013: 65) This leads to the collapse of the relationship because Lonkog wanted a lady he could later marry.

He later starts a relationship with another Chinese lady called Zhao who was a complete foil to Na in terms of character and conduct. Referring to Zhao, Lonkog says: "She was so crazy. She could not do nor think of anything serious. Her mind was so unstable and inconsistent. She was not a serious student at school". (Lonkog 2013: 65) Since she does not share the protagonist's values, they separated in March 2007 after being together for just five months.

Lonkog witnesses the greatest shock in this context with regard to a Chinese English language teacher who had sought private classes from him in order to improve his English. This is because the man was gay, and actually used the idea of private classes just as a pretext to have access to Lonkog. As a minority migrant himself, Lonkog was tolerant towards the gay individual, whose sexual orientation is considered minority, without compromising his own values. Lonkog brings this out by saying: "I had heard of gay people, but I never knew one personally. However, I was determined to stay cool. I told him I understood him now but that

we should have the English lesson. He replied, “No, English is not important. I love you.” (Lonkog 2013: 60) The gay man made several attempts to touch Lonkog in a way that could be termed harassment, but the latter manages to resist while staying calm and polite. The protagonist adds that: “Well, in any case, I had nothing against this man or his sexual orientation. It is not for me to decide whether a person is homosexual or heterosexual. (Lonkog 2013: 61) This implies that he shows tolerance and empathy towards someone whose realities could be termed minority; and that is the way he ought to be treated in China as a poor migrant.

Lonkog finally meets a Chinese lady, Rong, whom he starts a romantic relationship with. The protagonist perceives Rong’s character as outstanding and believes she sincerely loves him. This is not just because she does her best to provide any help he needs like running his errands when his visa expires and he goes into hiding, but also because she manages to forgive him when she learns that he is a Cameroonian after lying to her that he was American. Lonkog resumes this by presenting events preceding his departure from China thus: “My girlfriend and I returned home. We had mixed feelings. We were happy and sad at the same time. I had betrayed her. I was not American, but I was Cameroonian. We spent the next three days together. We vowed to reunite again and get married as we had planned”. (Lonkog 2013: 93) He therefore has the conviction that he has found true love despite the previous difficulties.

Lonkog’s status as a foreigner and especially as an African makes his love life in China very complex. Na his first Chinese lover does not want to marry him because he is a foreigner; another one, Zhao, does not share the same values with him; and he succeeds to push aside the advances of a very invading Chinese gay man. Finally, however, he meets Rong who shows him love in all respects and accepts to marry him despite everything; constituting a rather rare exception.

3.4. Visa Issues

As a legal migrant in China, Lonkog faces several challenges due to his black race, African origin, poor status and culture. When his visa expires and he goes into hiding because he fears deportation, his situation becomes worse. Adichie makes reference to the ordeal migrants go through when they are in an illegal situation by declaring that: “Migrants live in constant fear of deportation.” (Adichie 2009: 89) This is the fear Lonkog experiences when the expiry period for his visa gets closer as he says: “Because my visa had just a few hours of life left, I feared disaster. As I passed through various checkpoints, I imagined terrible things happening to me with an expired visa in hand”. (Lonkog 2013: 37) It is obvious that Lonkog’s fears and problems will increase when his visa finally expires.

When Lonkog is still a legal migrant, his visa presents a precarious and potentially disastrous prospect for two reasons. First of all, his visa stipulates that he is a full time student normally just not acquire a job. Secondly, in some places he presents himself as an American, as already explained; and in others he claims to be Dutch. This makes it difficult for him because he can neither

present his true documents, though valid, to the police or the school authorities where he teaches. Such an instance, and its adverse effect on Lonkog, is perceived when he says: “The school authorities asked this time for my passport and knew I came from Cameroon and not Holland. The principal of the school was so angry. He sent a teacher to come and tell us we should leave the school. (Lonkog 2013: 51) As seen here, he loses his job because of the complex visa situation and the police got involved; and this is not the only situation in which it happens.

When Lonkog’s visa expires, he needs to renew it and if possible change it to one that can permit him to work freely. But he has no money to do so. Finally, he borrows money from a lady and send her passport to Beijing for renewal; and paid the money gradually by teaching a handful of children, including the lady’s child, English. The visa situation is so serious in China that corruption networks have emerged around it. For example, the protagonist says: “A certain Chinese once approached me to propose I buy a passport of a certain Ghanaian with a valid visa in it”. (Lonkog 2013: 68) Thus the hardship faced by illegal migrants has created a desperate situation which has favoured the growth of corruption, identity theft and impersonation.

When the protagonist’s visa finally expires, he comes up with different kinds of tactics to evade the police and continue working while hoping to extend his visa as soon as possible. Unfortunately for him, he is finally arrested in the district of Gao Ping and charged teaching illegally in their district, and living there without a visa. Consequently, the school in which he was teaching terminated his contract; and the police took pictures of him and put in their system before question him. He was freed because his short visa extension was in process and had a temporary authorization..

Before his arrest, Lonkog had anticipated a potential arrest and had made arrangements in that regards. For example, he had indicated to Mr. Thomson where he could collect money he had kept in his apartment and buy him a flight ticket for Cameroon with; had sent 600 000 FCFA (\$1200) to Cameroon to start a living with; and had bought a Toshiba laptop and paid some online courses online which he could easily complete in Cameroon. However, as the 2008 Beijing Olympics, arrests for expired visas intensified and with advice from people, Lonkog turned himself in to the police after buying his return ticket, carrying along his big box of belongings in case he not allowed to return to his apartment.

Lonkog and Rong, his girlfriend who had helped him buy the flight ticket at Kenya Airlines arrived the police station with all his belongings. Though the protagonist is present, it is Rong who explains to the police that Lonkog’s visa had expired and his temporary residence permit would expire in about a day; and he wanted to go back to Cameroon. This confirms Spivak’s strong affirmation that: “The subaltern cannot speak” (Spivak, 1988, p. 307) Lonkog is present but Rong has to speak for him since he is subaltern.

Lonkog’s status as a black migrant in China poses visa problems to him when his visa is still valid; and especially when it expires. When he is still a legal migrant, he involves himself in identity



theft and false identity to be able to secure a job; and this puts him at logger heads with the school authorities and the police when they finally perceive his true documents. When such papers expire, the situation becomes really chaotic as he has to go and to hiding; and realizing that it cannot last for too long, hands himself to the police in a bid to return to Cameroon.

4. Conclusion

Lonkog faces subaltern realities in Cameroon, his homeland, and also in his migration destination, China. In both settings, he struggles to emancipate himself but is exposed to subaltern realities which make it very difficult for him to succeed. The protagonist affirms that: "I finally learned that life is a struggle, and as long as you are alive you cannot hide, and you cannot run away from problems. In moving to another environment, you can have a change of life, but in the new environment there are new problems" (Lonkog 2013: iii) This work examined the manner in which the author presents such "problems" that stem from his subaltern status in Cameroon as far as education, health, employment and travel are concerned. When he fails to achieve his objectives, he decides to migrate to China where, unfortunately, he is equally a subaltern and faces challenges in terms of education, employment, romantic life and visa issues. By analyzing the manner in which Lonkog presents such realities in the two environments, this work exposes not just the content but also the style used in his autobiographical novel to highlight his suffering in Cameroon and in China. By revealing how different societies present different challenges to a migrant, it explores the complexities of transnational identity and subaltern dynamics; provides valuable insights into the lived experiences of the subaltern in a transnational context; navigates the impact of globalization on individual and collective identities; indicates that migration in itself does not end the migrant's problems because they exist everywhere and are expressed differently; and, enriches the discourse on migration studies.

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