

The Scholar as Cultural Custodian: Reclaiming Intellectual Authority in Africa in *Second Class Citizen* and *Isara: A Voyage around “Essay”*

AKINYEYE, Clara Olajumoke., OSUALA, Emmanuel M.I., ABIOLA, Olufemi (PhD)

Department of English, University of Ilesa, Ilesa, Osun State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the African writer as a cultural custodian through a comparative analysis of *Second Class Citizen* and *Isara : A Voyage Around “Essay”*. Drawing on post colonial theory; African feminist thought – particularly Molaria Ogundipe – Leslie’s STIWANISM; memory studies, and decolonial epistemology, the study interrogates how narrative functions as a site for reclaiming intellectual authority in African contexts. It argues that both texts, though differing in narrative structure and tone, engage in the reconstruction of identity and knowledge through lived experience and reflective memory. Through close textual analysis, the study demonstrates how Emecheta’s episodic, migration – centered narrative foregrounds the struggle for intellectual visibility within intersecting structures of patriarchy and racial marginalization, while Soyinka’s reflective memory-driven narrative reconstructs indigenous intellectual traditions rooted in cultural continuity and communal values. The analysis of imagery, memory, characterization, and narrative structure reveals that both writers transform personal and collective histories into epistemic tools for meaning-making. By engaging concepts such as hybridity, collective memory, epistemic injustice, and epistemic plurality, the study shows that African literature operates as a critical archive through which suppressed voices are recovered and re-centered. It concludes that the African writer is not merely a narrator of experience but an active agent in the preservation, interpretation, and transformation of knowledge. In this sense, literature becomes a vital space for asserting cultural identity and redefining intellectual authority within and beyond post-colonial contexts.

Keywords: African literature, cultural custodianship, intellectual authority, post-colonial identity, diasporic experience, STIWANISM.

INTRODUCTION

The question of intellectual authority in Africa cannot be separated from the long shadow of colonialism, which did more than re-organise political and economic life – it also reshaped what counts as knowledge. In privileging Western epistemologies as universal, colonial systems pushed African ways of knowing to the margins, often dismissing them as informal or lacking rigour. Yet in the aftermath of this disruption, African literature has steadily reclaimed space as a site where memory, experience, and cultural knowledge are not only prescribed but reasserted as legitimate forms of intellectual engagement. It is within this broader context that this study examines how Emecheta’s *Second Class Citizen* and Soyinka’s *Isara : A Voyage Around Essay* construct the African writer as a cultural custodian, a figure who not only preserves collective memory but also actively reclaims intellectual authority. At first glance, these texts seem to operate in very different worlds, one shaped by diasporic struggle and gendered marginalization, the other by memory, lineage, and communal life in colonial Nigeria. However, a closer reading suggest that both works are engaged in a similar project: they construct the writer as a cultural custodian, someone who does more than tell a story, but actively preserves and interprets knowledge.

In the case of Buchi Emecheta, her custodianship emerges through struggle. Adah’s story is not only about survival but about making meaning out of experience, turning marginalization into narrative authority. By contrast, Wole Soyinka approaches this role through memory and reconstruction. In *Isara*, knowledge is not fought for in the same way; rather it is inherited, negotiated, and passed down within a cultural framework that

predates colonial intervention. Still, both texts ultimately point to the same idea: the intellectual authority does not belong exclusively to formal institutions. Most existing studies, however, do not quite meet at this intersection. *Second Class Citizen* is often read through feminist or diasporic lenses, while *Isara* is treated as a work of cultural memory or autobiographical reflection. These approaches are valuable but they tend to remain within. What is less explored is how both texts, when placed side by side begin to speak to a shared concern with knowledge production and legitimacy.

This study, therefore, takes a slightly different routes. Rather than treating these works as separate thematic cases, it brings them into conversation as epistemic projects-texts that do not merely represent experience but actively produce knowledge from it. In doing so, the study argues that both Emecheta and Soyinka redefine what it means to be a “Scholar” in African contexts. Here the scholar is not confined to the university or formal intellectual spaces but emerges as a cultural custodian whose authority is grounded in lived experience, narrative agency, and memory. While this argument draws on existing work in African feminist theory, post-colonial studies, memory studies and intellectual authority, what emerges, as this research suggest, is a broader understanding of African literary production – not simply as representation, but as a form of thinking, recording, and knowing in its own right.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical work on *Second Class Citizen* has for the most parts been shaped by feminist and post colonial concerns. Much of the scholarship rightly focuses on gender inequality, migration, and the layered forms of marginalization Adah experiences. For example, Oladipo and Ogbeide – Ihama emphasize how the novel exposes the structural limitations placed on women, particularly within both African and diasporic settings. Their study highlights education as a means of escape and empowerment, which is certainly central to Adah’s journey. Still, this line of interpretation often stops at the level of social critique (Oladipo and Ogbeide – Ihama 215). Similarly, Ayyildiz frames the novel as a post colonial response – a form of “writing back” that challenges both racial and gender hierarchies. This is an important insight, especially in understanding Adah’s resistance. Yet even here, the focus tends to remain on oppression and survival, rather than on what Adah’s narrative produces in intellectual terms.

More recent studies begin to open up this question, even if indirectly. Adejumo, Sanni and Adebayo conceptualize *Second Class Citizen* as “auto-scriptotherapy”, suggesting that the act of narration itself becomes a form of healing and knowledge production for both writer and reader. In a related vein, Alharbi argues that education in the novel functions not merely as a narrative goal but as a symbol of access to knowledge, enabling Adah to transition from marginalization to intellectual agency: education becomes a means through which Adah claims the right to think, write, and define her own reality. Ozoh and Ihueze further underscore the resilience of African women, noting that Emecheta’s narrative challenges the silencing of female voices within both domestic and public spheres. Likewise, Francis’s character, demonstrating how structural inequalities collectively underscore the gendered dimensions of knowledge, demonstrating that intellectual authority in Emecheta’s work is negotiated within oppressive social frameworks, leaving the germane underdeveloped question : what does it mean to see the female protagonist Adah, not just as someone who resists, but as someone who knows – and whose story carries intellectual weight?

Among the most recent scholarship (2020 – 2025) that have extended these earlier perspectives are Elizabeth Nkechi Obiukwu and Deborah Ndidiamaka Umeh who argue that Emecheta articulates a form of African feminist consciousness grounded in resilience and transformation. Similarly Ade Adeniji, Oluwafemi Bolanle Jolaoso, and Adebayo – Bello Rofiat Olayinka highlight the psychological dimensions of gender oppression, while Aisha Al-Harbi underscores the role of education as a critical tool for self-definition. Together, these studies reposition Adah not merely as a victim of circumstance but as an active agent negotiating her place within restrictive social structures “writing back” that challenges both racial and gender hierarchies. This is an important insight, especially in understanding Adah’s resistance. Yet even here, the focus tends to remain on oppression and survival, rather than on what Adah’s narrative produces in intellectual terms.

In contrast, discussion of *Isara : A Voyage Around Essay* tend to move in a different direction. Critics have long recognized the text’s engagement with memory and cultural history. Scholars like Biodun Jeyifo point to

Soyinka's investment in reconstructing African historical consciousness, while Tejumola Olaniyan reads his work as documenting social experience and intellectual struggle. These are important contribution, especially in situating Soyinka within broader debates about culture and identity. Moreover, these readings often frame *Isara* as a record of the past rather than as an active site of knowledge production. Simon Gikandi's idea of African literature as an "archive of cultural imagination" helps shift this perspective slightly. If *Isara* is an archive, then it is also doing the work of selection, interpretation, and preservation activities that are inherently intellectual. This becomes even clearer when read alongside Achille Mbembe's argument that African knowledge systems are grounded in lived experience and historical context rather than abstract universality; a position that becomes particularly relevant in reading Adah's lived experience as a form of intellectual production rather than mere survival. From this angle, Soyinka's attention to memory, community and lineage can be seen not just as nostalgic reconstruction, but as a way of asserting alternative forms of knowing.

Recent African scholarship supports this dimension. Adedayo projects Soyinka's autobiographical work as cultural historiography, while Ogunleye points to its pedagogical implications. Yet even these studies tend to emphasize preservation over transformation. What remains less explored is how Soyinka's narrative reshapes the very idea of intellectual authority – moving it away from formal institutions and toward cultural and experiential grounding.

In addition, critical scholarship on *Isara : A Voyage Around "Essay"* has consistently foregrounded its hybrid generic form and its blending of memory with fictional reconstruction. Charles Bodunde in "Beyond Biography : Characters and Journeys in Soyinka's *Isara*" aligns with Jane Bryce's characterization of *Isara* "a semi-fictional memoir" (Bryce 26), noting that the text is deliberately fictionalized in order to accommodate the demands of memory and narrative coherence. This position is reinforced by Wole Soyinka himself, who acknowledges that the work seeks to "eliminate all pretence to factual accuracy" (*Isara* VIII), thereby foregrounding its status as a creative reconstruction rather than a strictly biographical account. Bodunde further argues that the fictionalization of characters and settings serves a preservative function, allowing Soyinka to transform fragile historical materials into a coherent literary form. Central to this process is "Essay's" metal box-containing letters, journals, and minutes of meetings – which functions as an archival relic. This repository of documents becomes the narrative catalyst for the text, enabling Soyinka to reconstruct the intellectual and social world of his father and his contemporaries.

In this sense, *Isara* operates as an act of cultural preservation, translating fragmented historical records into an artistic whole that safeguards them from loss. At the same time, Bodunde observes that Soyinka's attempt to narrate the lives of his father and his peers is marked by a degree of difficulty that borders on creative frustration. Soyinka himself admits that the project "came close to being abandoned more than once" (*Isara* VIII), a statement that underscores the complexity of representing intertwined personal and collective histories. The life journeys of these figures – marked by migration, exile, and return-inform their characterization, as they are presented as adventurers and seekers navigating multiple cultural and historical terrains. Bodunde further interprets these characters symbolically, suggesting that they can be metaphorically aligned with figures such as Shaka the Zulu and Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron, both of whom embody strength, transition, and transformative agency. The principal characters – Essay, Josiah and Mariam (Soyinka's grandparents), Wade Cudeback, Sipe Efuape, Wemuja, and Akinsanya – are thus presented as voyagers engaged in processes of self-discovery and social transformation.

In contrast, Peter Benson, in his review of *Isara* emphasizes the autobiographical impulse underlying the narrative. He identifies the text as a reconstruction of the lives of Soyinka's father and his circle of associates, who function as representation protagonists within a broader socio-historical context. According to Benson, these individuals, though initially trained as teachers, evolve into businessmen, trade unionists, and politically engaged actors. This transformation reflects the dynamic socio-political realities of colonial and early post colonial Nigeria, as captured in Soyinka's narrative. Taken together, these critical perspectives highlight *Isara* as a complex, hybrid text that negotiates the boundaries between biography, fiction and cultural historiography. They also underscore the texts role as an intellectual and artistic project through which Soyinka reconstructs and preserves a generation's lived experiences, thereby reinforcing his position as a cultural custodian.

When these two bodies of scholarship are placed side by side (Emecheta and Soyinka), a gap becomes more visible. Emecheta is often discussed in terms of gender and diaspora; Soyinka in terms of memory and tradition. Rarely are they brought into the same conversation around knowledge, authority, and the figure of the scholar. As a result, the broader question of how African writers function as intellectual agents, outside institutional frameworks, remains insufficiently addressed. This study responds to that gap by bringing these texts together and reading them through a shared lens. It suggests that both *Second Class Citizen* and *Isara* are not simply narratives about experience, but forms of intellectual work. In this sense, Emecheta and Soyinka emerge not only as writers but as cultural custodian figures who gather, shape, and transmit knowledge in ways that challenge conventional definitions of scholarship. This position aligns with Bernth Lindfor's argument that "... much of the African continent ... writers have served not only as chroniclers of contemporary political history but also as advocates of radical social change. Their works thus both reflect and project the course of Africa's cultural revolution" (Lindfor 22).

Theoretical Framework

This study integrates post colonial theory, African feminist thought, memory studies, and decolonial epistemology to articulate the concept of the African writer as a cultural custodian. These frameworks collectively provide a critical lens for understanding how African literary texts function as sites of identity negotiation, knowledge production, and cultural preservation. By bringing these perspectives into dialogue, the study foregrounds the ways in which narrative becomes a medium through which marginalized voices reclaim intellectual authority.

Post-colonial theory, particularly the work of Homi K. Bhabha, offers a foundational framework for understanding the complex position of African writers who navigate between colonial epistemic legacy and indigenous knowledge systems. For Bhabha, post colonialism is not merely a temporal marker denoting the period after colonial rule; rather, it refers to the ongoing cultural and psychological effects of colonial encounters (Bhabha 1 – 2). Identity in this context, is shaped through continuous negotiation between colonizer and colonized, producing what he describes as hybridity (Bhabha 27). Hybridity disrupts fixed identities by creating an "in-between" space in which cultural meanings are constantly rearticulated. This process takes place within what Bhabha calls the Third Space, a site where new identities and interpretations emerged (Bhabha 56).

Closely related to this is the concept of mimicry, which reveals the ambivalence inherent in colonial relationships. The colonized subject imitates the colonizer's language, dress, and behaviour, yet this imitation is never complete. As Bhabha notes, it is "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 86), a condition that destabilizes colonial authority by exposing its contradictions. These ideas are particularly useful in analyzing *Second Class Citizen* and *Isara*, where identity is negotiated through everyday practices of language, education, and cultural affiliation.

Complementing this is African feminist thought, which situates gender within the specific socio-cultural and historical realities of African societies. Unlike Western feminist paradigms that often universalize women's experiences, African feminist frameworks emphasize context, communal values, and the enduring impact of colonialism. Scholars such as Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, and Filomena Chioma Steady foreground negotiation, inclusivity, and collective responsibility as central to African women's experiences (Ogundipe-Leslie 548; Ogunyemi 65; Steady 12). Although female writers such as Buchi Emecheta, Mariama Ba, Ifeoma Okoye, and Chimamanda Adichie have extensively portrayed women navigating oppressive structures while reclaiming agency, the absence of a unified African feminist theory necessitates a content-specific model. This study, therefore, employs Ogundipe-Leslie's STIWANISM (Social Transformation Including Women in Africa) as its primary analytical tool. STIWANISM emphasizes women's participation in intellectual, cultural, and socio-political transformation, aligning closely with this study's focus on reclaiming intellectual authority and cultural custodianship. As Ogundipe-Leslie's affirms, "STIWA is about the inclusion of African women in the contemporary social and political transformation of Africa" (550).

Post-colonial and feminist concerns intersect within this framework as complementary approaches to reclaiming voice and intellectual authority. Both emphasize the recovery of suppressed histories and the active

participation of marginalized subjects in knowledge production. Through education, literature, and institutional engagement, they highlight how narrative and memory shape historical consciousness.

Memory studies further enriches these analyses by interrogating how individuals and societies remember, represent, and interpret the past. It makes beyond conventional historiography by examining the relationship between memory, identity, culture and power. Maurice Halbwachs's concept of collective memory challenges the notion of memory as purely individual, arguing that it is shaped by social frameworks such as family, community and institutions (Halbwachs 38). Building on this, Jan Assmann distinguishes between communicative memory-short term, everyday memory sustained through oral interaction – and cultural memory, which is long-term and preserved through texts, rituals, and symbols (Assmann 126). This distinction positions literary texts as repositories of cultural memory that preserve and transmit meaning across generations.

Similarly, Pierre Nora emphasizes the selective and political nature of remembrance, highlighting how societies determine which histories are preserved and which are marginalized (Nora 7). In post-colonial contexts, memory is deeply intertwined with trauma, recovery, and identity formation. It becomes a tool for reconstructing suppressed histories and asserting cultural identity. Writers engage memory as an act of resistance, reclaiming narratives that colonial systems sought to erase or distort. Within literary analysis, memory is often represented through narrative strategies such as autobiographical reflection, fragmentation, and oral story telling. In this regard, *Isara : A Voyage Around Essay* functions as a repository of cultural memory, while *Second Class Citizen* encodes diasporic memory, capturing lived experiences of migration and identity formation.

De-colonial epistemology brings these strands together by directly challenging the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge systems. The work of Anibal Quijano is particularly significant, as he argues that colonialism persists through the colonality of power, which extends into knowledge production (Quijano 533). Decolonial thought insists that knowledge is situated-produced within specific cultural, historical, and geographical contexts, - and advances the principle of knowledge plurality. This approach recognises the validity of multiple knowledge systems, including those rooted in African cosmologies, oral traditions, spirituality, and communal experience. The concept of epistemic injustice, developed by Miranda Fricker, further highlights how marginalized groups are excluded from being recognized as credible knowers (Fricker 1). In African contexts, this has meant the systematic silencing of indigenous knowledge systems.

Decolonial epistemology therefore advocates for the recovery of alternative archives, including oral histories, indigenous philosophies, and literary narratives. Language becomes a critical site of this struggle, as colonial languages function as gatekeepers of languages to express their worldviews. Through storytelling of Buchi Emecheta and Wole Soyinka – African writers assert their epistemic agency and reclaim intellectual authority. In essence, de-colonial epistemology calls for a shift from a single universal standard of truth toward a pluriversal understanding of knowledge. This restores voice and authority to marginalized epistemologies and reinforces the role of the Africans.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a balanced comparative and interpretive approach that prioritizes close textual reading alongside theoretical engagement. While the frameworks of Homi K. Bhabha, Molar Ogundipe – Leslie, memory studies, and Decolonial Epistemology provide conceptual grounding for the study, the analysis remains fundamentally text-centred, allowing meaning to emerge primarily from the narratives themselves. Rather than permitting theory to overshadow the literary works, the study employs theoretical concepts as interpretive tools for illuminating the representations of intellectual authority, cultural memory, gendered agency, and epistemic reclamation in *Second Class Citizen* and *Isara : A Voyage Around "Essay"*.

In essence, emphasis is placed on close textual analysis through attention to characterization, narrative structure, dialogue, memory reconstruction, and symbolic representations of education and cultural identity. Theoretical perspectives are, therefore, integrated organically into the discussion rather than mechanically imposed upon the texts. This balanced approach ensures that the primary texts remain central to the argument

while the selected theories deepen critical interpretation and enhance comparative insight. By foregrounding textual evidence alongside theoretical framing, the study maintains analytical coherence and avoids reducing the literary works to mere illustrations of abstract concepts.

Narrative Structure of the Texts

Second Class Citizen

Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* is structured as a semi-autobiographical, linear but episodic narrative that traces Adah's development from childhood in Nigeria to adulthood in Britain. While the narrative broadly follows chronological progression, it is broken into distinct experimental phases – education, marriage, migration, and self-assertion. This episodic structure reflects the discontinuities of diasporic life, where growth is shaped by rupture rather than smooth progression. The narrative is focalized through Adah, even though it is written in the third person. This creates an intimate alignment between narrator and protagonist, allowing readers access to her internal reflections while maintaining a degree of narrative distance. Structurally, the novel functions as a modified Bildungroman: instead of culminating in social integration, it ends with self-awareness and intellectual emergence.

Importantly, the structure mirrors Adah's intellectual journey. Early sections emphasize observation and aspiration, while later sections foreground interpretation and critical awareness. Thus, the narrative moves from experience to understanding, reinforcing the idea that knowledge is produced through lived engagement.

Isara: A Voyage Around Essay

In contrast, Wole Soyinka's *Isara* is a semi-fictional memoir, centres around Soyinka's father, it adopts a non-linear, memory-driven narrative structure that resists chronological ordering. The text unfolds through associative recollections where events are revisited and reinterpreted rather than simply narrated in sequence. This structure reflects the working of memory, emphasizing reflection over temporal progression. The narrative is retrospective, shaped by an adult consciousness that revisits childhood experiences with analytical distance. Temporal layering is central: past events are constantly reframed through present understanding, creating a dialogue between experience and interpretation.

Unlike Emecheta's forward-looking structure, *Isara* is organized around thematic and conceptual anchors, particularly the figure of the father, his friends' protagonists and the intellectual environment of the Yoruba community. Episodes are connected through ideas – discipline, education, cultural identity – rather than plot continuity. This reconstructive structure transforms the father's biography into cultural historiography, memory becomes an intellectual tool through which Soyinka reassembles a world of indigenous knowledge systems, thereby asserting their legitimacy.

Comparative Insight : Toward an Integrated Reading of the Texts

Although *Second Class Citizen* and *Isara : A Voyage Around Essay* emerge from different narrative traditions and socio-cultural contexts, the texts interact meaningfully in their shared concern with the reconstruction of African intellectual identity under colonial modernity. Rather than functioning as isolated representations of individual and communal experience respectively, both narratives engage in a sustained dialogue about the role of education, memory, and cultural negotiation in reclaiming intellectual authority. Adah's struggle for intellectual recognition in the diasporic space of Britain complements Soyinka's reconstruction of indigenous intellectual consciousness within the African homeland, suggesting that the reclamation of African authority occurs both externally and internally. While Adah confronts exclusion through self-writing and educational determination, Soyinka's narrative demonstrates how communal memory and indigenous epistemologies can coexist with modern intellectual formation. Read together, the texts reveal that African intellectual authority is neither singular nor geographically confined; instead, it is produced through interconnected processes of resistance, adaptation, and cultural mediation.

This integrative reading becomes particularly evident in the texts' treatment of hybridity and memory. Adah's experience of displacement and marginalization in Britain finds a conceptual counterpart in Soyinka's

portrayal of a society negotiating colonial influence without surrendering cultural rootedness. In both cases, education operates simultaneously as a colonial instrument and means of empowerment, creating a paradoxical space where African subjects reclaim authority through the very structures once used to marginalize them. Consequently, the comparative relationship between the texts extends beyond thematic similarity into a dynamic interrogation of how African intellectuals navigate competing epistemologies in different historical and geographical locations. This deeper integration foregrounds the shared project underlying both narratives : the transformation of lived experience and cultural memory into forms of intellectual and knowledge reclamation.

Synopsis of *Second Class Citizen*

Second Class Citizen is about the life of Adah, a determined young Nigerian girl who grows up in Nigerian patriarchal society that initially denies her access to education because she is a female. Despite these limitations, she persistently pursues schooling, driven by a strong belief that education is the key to a wealthy and visible life. Adah later marries Francis, a man who moves to England for further study. She joins him in London with their two children, with the hope of a better life, only to encounter harsh realities of racism, poverty, and domestic oppression. Francis refuses to provide for the family, undermines her ambition by burning the manuscript of her creativity and denounces her as his legal wife and father of her children. The resilient Adah does not give up her dream to be a writer but eventually has to accept the break down of her marriage with the full intent to provide for her children solely. The novel ultimately portrays Adah's transformation from a marginalized girl into a self-asserting woman who refuses to accept second class status within the country of her birth or Britain.

Synopsis of *Isara : A Voyage Around Essay*

Isara is a reflective autobiography prose in which Wole Soyinka reconstructs the life and intellectual environment of his late father, Samuel Ayodele Soyinka (Aka "Essay"), and the community of Isara in colonial Nigeria. Rather than a linear autobiography, the prosaic work blends memoir, essay, and cultural history. Though centres on Soyinka's father, the text explores Yoruba traditions, communal values, education and the tensions between indigenous culture and colonial influence. Mr. S.A. Soyinka, a respected school teacher and community leader, whose life embodies discipline, moral authority and cultural responsibility lays the foundation of the formation of Soyinka's own intellectual identity. The memoir reflects how his father's strict yet principled worldview shaped his understanding of authority, ethics, and resistance. The town, Isara ,is portrayed as a symbolic space of cultural continuity, where tradition and modernity mix, thus giving the text not only a stamp of a personal memoir but also a meditation on memory, heritage, and the intellectual foundations of African identity. *Isara* presents the African household and community as a site of knowledge production and moral formation of "Essay", a character testifies, "they are all afraid of Teacher. If they make a spelling mistake or commit what he calls grammatical error, they know they will be in for it ..." (*Isara* 86).

Textual Analysis of the Texts

The two primary texts : *Second Class Citizen* and *Isara : A Voyage Around Essay* construct the scholar as a cultural custodian through narratives of education, memory, and intellectual negotiation, though they do so from different experiential locations. In Emecheta's text, Adah's pursuit of education becomes an early act of resistance against both patriarchal and colonial restrictions. As the narrative goes "... even though Adah was about eight, there was still discussions about whether it would be wise to send her to school..." (4). Her determination is evident when she gate-crashes into a classroom, declaring, "I came to school ... my parents would not send me" (*Second Class Citizen* 7). This moment marks the emergence of intellectual self-consciousness, as Adah recognizes education as a pathway to self-definition and social mobility. Similarly, in *Isara*, Soyinka presents education as central to the formation of intellectual identity within the Egba community. However, unlike Adah's individualized struggle against exclusion, Soyinka's narrative frames scholarship as a communal responsibility shaped by cultural continuity. His recollection that "we were growing up at the interface of two cultures, neither fully rejecting nor wholly embracing either" (*Isara* 112) reveals an intellectual environment negotiating indigenous traditions and colonial modernity simultaneously.

Taken together, the texts demonstrate that intellectual authority in post-colonial Africa emerges both through personal resistance and communal cultural mediation.

Memory also functions centrally in both texts as a means of preserving and reclaiming African experience. In *Second Class Citizen*, memory is largely personal and diasporic, as Adah reconstructs her experiences of childhood, migration, and racial discrimination in Britain. Her memories become instruments of narrative authority, allowing her to transform marginalization into literary expression. In contrast, Isara operates through collective and cultural memory, reconstructing the intellectual life, traditions, and historical consciousness of the Egba people. Yet, despite this difference in scale, both texts use memory as a form of intellectual recovery. Emecheta preserves the experiences of the African migrant woman often excluded from dominant historical narratives, while Soyinka safeguards communal histories threatened by colonial erasure. In this regard, both writers position literature as an archive of African memory and the scholar as a mediator between past and present.

The texts further converge in their representation of hybridity and cultural negotiation. Adah's migration to Britain situates her within a transitional space where she is shaped by both Nigerian identity and British colonial influence. Her intellectual development, therefore, emerges through contradiction and exclusion. Soyinka's *Isara* on the other hand, presents hybridity within the African homeland itself, as Western education intersects with Yoruba intellectuality. While Adah experiences hybridity through diasporic alienation, the Egba elites in *Isara* experience it as cultural adaptation and reinterpretation. Nonetheless, both texts reject the notion of fixed or pure identity, suggesting instead that African intellectual authority is formed through negotiation between multiple knowledge systems.

Gender constitutes another significant point of divergence and convergence. Emecheta foregrounds the struggles of the African woman intellectual within patriarchal and colonial structures, emphasizing the double marginalization faced by women in the pursuit of knowledge. Adah's objection to being classified "Second Class Citizen" (40), "refusing to get a job in a shirt factory" and wanting to keep her children (48) rather than give them to foster mothers become both a personal declaration and a challenge to systems that deny African women intellectual legitimacy. Soyinka's text, though less centred on women's experiences, nonetheless portrays the broader intellectual responsibilities of educated Africans within society. Juxtaposed together, the texts suggest that reclaiming intellectual authority in Africa requires both communal cultural preservation and inclusive participation in knowledge production.

To sum up, the comparative engagement between *Second Class Citizen* and *Isara* reveals that the scholar as cultural custodian is not merely a recorder of history but an active agent of intellectual reclamation. Whether through Adah's diasporic self-writing or Soyinka's reconstruction of communal memory, both texts demonstrate that African literature functions as a site where intellectual authority is recovered, negotiated, and redefined against the lingering structures of colonial domination.

Comparative Discussion, Hybridity, Memory, and Epistemic Reclamation

A comparative reading of *Second Class Citizen* and *Isara : A voyage Around "Essay"* reveals two distinct yet interconnected modes through which African writers negotiate identity, memory, and intellectual authority. While both texts engage with the complexities of post-colonial existence, they do so through divergent narrative strategies that reflect differing conditions of intellectual formation, one shaped by diasporic dislocation and struggle, the other by retrospective reconstruction and cultural rootedness. From a post-colonial perspective, both texts exemplify what Homi K. Bhabha conceptualizes as hybridity, where identity emerges within an "in-between" space of cultural negotiations (Bhabha 37). However, the nature of this hybridity differs significantly. In *Second Class Citizen*, hybridity is experienced as tension and instability, Adah's identity is fragmented by the intersecting forces of race, gender, and migration, placing her in a transitional position where she is neither fully integrated into British society nor entirely anchored in her Nigerian origins. This condition reflects a form of what may be termed conflicted hybridity, in which identity formation is marked by struggle, resistance, and the continuous negotiation of belonging.

In contrast, *Isara* presents a more integrative model of hybridity. Through the figures of “Essay” and “Ligun”, Wole Soyinka constructs an epistemic environment in which colonial and indigenous influences co-exist and interact productively. Rather than fragmentation, this interaction produces a complementary hybridity, where different systems of knowledge – formal, institutional learning and experiential, culturally grounded understanding – converge to shape intellectual identity. This distinction underscores the role of context in determining whether hybridity manifests as conflict or synthesis. Memory further differentiates the epistemic orientations of the two texts. In *Isara*, memory functions as an organizing principle that reconstructs the past as a coherent cultural archive. Drawing on Maurice Halbwachs’s concept of collective memory, Soyinka’s recollections are embedded within communal frameworks that give them social meaning (Halbwach 38).

Similarly, Jan Assmann’s notion of cultural memory is evident in the way the text preserves and transmits shared values and historical experiences across generations (Assmann 126). Memory in this context is stabilizing, functioning as a means of continuity and cultural preservation. By contrast, memory in *Second Class Citizen* is marked by disjunction and re-evaluation. Adah’s recollections of her aspirations prior to migration are continually disrupted by the realities of diasporic life, creating a tension between imagined and lived experience. This aligns with Pierre Nora’s notion of memory as selective and constructed, shaped by present circumstances rather than fixed historical truth (Nora 7). In this sense, memory becomes a site of both disillusionment and redefinition, reflecting the instability of identity in migratory contexts. The divergence between the texts becomes even more pronounced when examined through the lens of African feminist thought.

In *Second Class Citizen*, Adah’s characterization embodies the principles of Molaria Ogundipe – Leslie’s STIWANISM which emphasizes women’s active participation in social and intellectual transformation. Adah’s persistent pursuit of education and self-definition represents a form of epistemic resistance, as she challenges both patriarchal constraints and racial marginalization. Her struggle highlights the gendered dimensions of knowledge production, where access to intellectual authority is mediated by systemic inequalities. In *Isara*, however, gender operates differently. While Wild Christian represents a strong and assertive female presence, her role is less overtly framed as resistance and more as a complementary force within the broader structure of cultural formation. The absence of sustained gender conflict in Soyinka’s narrative reflects a different mode of intellectual engagement, one that prioritizes communal continuity over individual struggle. This contrast underscores the importance of situating feminist analysis within specific narrative and socio-cultural contexts.

From a de-colonial perspective, both sexes engage in the reclamation of marginalized knowledge systems, albeit through different strategies. Anibal Quijano’s concept of the colonality of power is evident in *Second Class Citizen*, where Adah’s marginalization reflects the hierarchical structures that privilege Western knowledge and identity (Quijano 533). Her experiences also resonate with Miranda Fricker’s notion of silencing of voices, as she is repeatedly denied recognition as a credible knower within both domestic and societal spaces (Fricker 1). In *Isara*, de-colonial epistemology manifest as a process of recovery and affirmation through the reconstruction of indigenous intellectual tradition, Soyinka challenges the marginalization of African knowledge systems and asserts their legitimacy within literary discourse. The text thus operates as an archive of memory, preserving alternative ways of knowing that resist colonial erasure. Ultimately, the comparative analysis reveals that while *Second Class Citizen* foregrounds the struggle for intellectual recognition, *Isara* emphasizes the reconstruction of cultural and intellectual continuity. One articulates knowledge through resistance and negotiation within exclusionary systems; the other through memory and the reassembly of cultural inheritance. Yet both converge in their broader function as acts of reclaiming authority over knowledge and cultural meaning.

Taken together, these texts demonstrate that African literature operates as a critical site for the negotiation and redefinition of intellectual authority. Whether through the fragmented resistance-driven narrative of Emecheta or the memory-infused, reconstructive narrative of Soyinka, both writers engage in the production and validation of knowledge that challenges dominant unequal valuation of knowledge. In this sense, they exemplify the role of the African writer as a cultural custodian – one who not only preserves the past but actively shapes the intellectual contours of the present and future.

Operationalizing Epistemic Plurality and Epistemic Injustice

The study further operationalizes the concepts of epistemic plurality and epistemic injustice in order to demonstrate how both texts challenge colonial hierarchies of knowledge production. Epistemic plurality refers to the recognition of multiple valid systems of knowledge beyond Western epistemological frameworks, while epistemic injustice describes the marginalization or discrediting of certain groups as legitimate producers of knowledge (Fricker 1). In *Second Class Citizen*, epistemic injustice is evident in the racialized and gendered structures that repeatedly undermine Adah's intellectual legitimacy despite her educational competence. Although she is qualified and intellectually ambitious, she is frequently reduced to the status of a "Second Class" subject within British society. Her struggle to assert narrative authority through writing therefore becomes an act of epistemic resistance, challenging systems that deny African women credibility as knowers and intellectual agents. By transforming lived experience into literary expression, Adah reclaims interpretive authority over African diasporic identity.

Similarly, *Isara : A Voyage Around "Essay"* operationalizes epistemic plurality through its sustained engagement with Yoruba cultural knowledge alongside Western education. Rather than presenting indigenous epistemologies as inferior to colonial systems, Soyinka's narrative places them in productive dialogue, thereby resisting Eurocentric assumptions of intellectual universality. The recollection of communal traditions, oral memory, and indigenous intellectual practices affirms the coexistence of multiple ways of knowing within African modernity. At the same time, the text implicitly critiques epistemic injustice by recovering cultural histories and intellectual traditions often excluded from colonial historiography. Consequently, both texts position the scholar as a cultural custodian who do not only preserves memory but also contests unequal structures of knowledge validation.

CONCLUSION

This study has argued that *Second Class Citizen* and *Isara : A Voyage Around "Essay"*, though different in form and narrative orientation, converge in their engagement with the question of intellectual authority in African literature. Through distinct yet complementary strategies, both texts reveal that identity is neither fixed nor singular but produced through ongoing negotiation between cultural inheritance and lived experience. In Emecheta's narrative, identity emerges through struggle. Adah's journey foregrounds the difficulty of asserting intellectual presence within structures shaped by patriarchy, race, and migration. Her persistence reflects a form of resistance through memory and continuity. The interplay between "Essay" and "Ligun" reveals a more integrative process in which different systems of knowledge, formal and experiential, interact to shape intellectual formation.

Taken together, these texts demonstrate that African literature does not merely reflect social realities but actively participates in redefining them. Whether through resistance or reconstruction, both writers engage in the recovery and validation of ways of knowing that have been historically marginalized. In this sense, they function as cultural custodians, not by preserving the past in static form but by reworking it into meaningful frameworks for understanding the present. Ultimately, this study has shown that the reclamation of intellectual authority in African literature is not a singular act but a process – one that unfolds through narrative, memory, and the continued negotiation of identity. By bringing these texts into dialogue, the study contributes to a more integrated understanding of how African writers shape the conditions under which knowledge is produced, recognized, and sustained.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Building on the analysis of *Second Class Citizen*, and *Isara : A Voyage Around "Essay"*, this study suggests several directions for scholarship and practice.

First, there is need for greater integration of African literary texts into curricula as sources of intellectual inquiry rather than merely cultural representation. Texts such as these demonstrate that literature functions as a critical medium through which knowledge systems are preserved, contested, and redefined. Second, future research should adopt more comparative and interdisciplinary approaches that bring together gender studies,

memory studies, and post-colonial thought. Much of the existing scholarship treats these areas in isolation, limiting a fuller understanding of how African texts negotiate identity and authority across multiple dimensions.

Moreover, scholars should pay closer attention to autobiographical and semi-fictional narratives as sites of cultural memory and intellectual formation. As seen in *Isara : A Voyage Around "Essay"*, such texts offers valuable insights into the reconstruction of history and the transmission of cultural knowledge. Finally, there is need to continue foregrounding African-centred frameworks of analysis, particularly those that recognise indigenous knowledge systems and lived experience as valid forms of intellectual engagement. This will contribute to a more balanced and inclusive understanding of global literary discourse.

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