

# A Psychic Journey to “Somewhere House” in Helen Oyeyemi’s the Icarus Girl, the Opposite House and White is for Witching

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**Abstract---** My current paper examines the Psychic journey to ‘Somewhere house’ in the select fictions of Nigerian born British writer Helen Oyeyemi. She is one of the prominent female contemporary authors. Oyeyemi migrated to Britain when she was young; pursue her education and inhabit the new home. This study focuses on the Psychic journey to ‘Somewhere house’ undergone by the protagonists in Oyeyemi’s novels *The Icarus Girl*, *The Opposite House*, and *White is for Witching*. Characters in these novels experience “differences” in connecting attachment to the new home and the spirit world. The occupants in the ‘Somewhere house’ subjected to different identities in terms of fragmentation, disruption, and cultural displacement. My research discusses how the fantastic irruptions of the ‘Somewhere house’ taken into the real world as a discourse on assimilation and cultural deterioration. This research paper foregrounds and driven towards another imaginary world of ‘Somewhere house’ in different criteria in the construction of characters identity in Oyeyemi’s novels *The Icarus Girl*, *The Opposite House* and *White is for Witching*. Her characters are often symbolic representatives of the negotiation of intersecting traumas.

**Keywords---** Somewhere House, Imagination, Reality, Spirits, Hysteria, Displacement, Haunt, Fragments and Trauma.

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## I. A PSYCHIC JOURNEY TO ‘SOMEWHERE HOUSE’

Helen Oyeyemi’s novels draw a variety of critical perspectives and a wide-ranging approach. She recognizes the importance of blending identity, myth, displacement, psyche, fragments, imagination, spirits and voices from multiple sources. Through her multiple codes of ideas, she brings and threads coherent connectivity in narratives. She marginalizes Nigerian socio-political realities of her day along with the immigrant status of being a contemporary Britain. Oyeyemi’s work functions to “express another, potential community, to force the means for another consciousness, and another sensibility” (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 17). ‘Somewhere house’ explores the female tradition of complex mysticism combined with maternal natural tendency, stifling and hurtful. It is inhabited by deceitful noxious characters which makes the protagonists Jess, Maja, and Miranda ‘Personal hysteric’- unruly response towards oneself or isolation. The house is haunted by spirits affected undeniably personal which moves the characters to the stage of hysteria. It is the representation of blurring of lines between fictive and real bodies and the difficulties faced by them in terms of struggle, bewilderment, trauma, and ruin. “The house is connected to the feminine enclosure, and feminine fiction.” (Becker 1990: 7-9).

The first of Oyeyemi’s ‘Somewhere house’ accompanies doubly displaced girls in which the physical space of

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the house is used to reflect particular 'abiku' myth of Nigeria. Jess in *The Icarus Girl* caught in a tension between real and imaginary and is possessed by twin sister Tilly. The similar house brings Psychic and twinship visions in *The Icarus Girl* where the protagonist lives in an imaginary house and troubled by the double identity of spirit. She is connected to her dead twin sister visible only to her eyes who takes and keeps under her control in 'Somewhere house.' The second 'history house' in *The Opposite House* is to unfold the displacement and cultural identity of Maja. 'Somewhere house' in *The Opposite House* stands for the feeling of dislocation, the sense of imagination and unable to find the past history of roots. This house instigates the sense of disconnection and erases their boundaries of old homes. The third of Oyeyemi's *Silver House in White* is for Witching embodies a xenophobic nationalist of ancestors. Rudd observes: "The haunted site will not necessarily be located in the castle or the old house"; she adds that "any location that is freighted with unjust violent acts of the past will continue on" as a site of supernatural and Gothic events (Rudd 2010: 10). The Silver house in *White is for Witching* is haunted by the spirits of ancestors where the protagonist feels inevitable attraction towards horror and supernatural elements. She develops a series of surreal visions about her great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother, who were all trapped by the 'Somewhere house' in different ways. The characters in these novels explore various categories of identity and they are connected to social constructs, not essential truths.

In *The Icarus Girl*, Jess encounters Titola also known as Tilly Tilly, who is a spirit, imaginary friend and twin sister of Nigerian myth. When the novel travels from Nigeria to England, these two children have two nations and are attributed to English or Nigerian binarisms. "May be Jessamy has all of these "attacks" because she can't make up her mind whether she's black or white!" (Oyeyemi 2005: 86). Jess encounters 'Personal hysteria' when she is ruled over by the possession of Tilly that echoes, mirrors and fragments. Jess and Tilly resembling is always "something about her that was out of proportion." (Oyeyemi 2005: 43). A sight of shadow tends to shift to 'Somewhere house' where Jess becomes unstable or uncomfortable that 'she would run to the other side of the house' (Oyeyemi 2005: 69). The shifting boundaries between Jess and Tilly forced to the center point of narrative disruption. Jess's twin demonstrates tension, darkness, illness, evil and frenzy feature in 'Somewhere house'. Oyeyemi appropriates the figure of the hysteric, often 'taken to epitomize a universal female oppression' and repurposes the figure in this feminine text' (Showalter 1993: 286).

The continuing effects of colonization and colonial ideology are seen most obviously in the possession of spirits encountered by Jess; displacement and different forms of negotiating her home experienced by Maja in London. They cannot connect with reality, which becomes inaccessible but nor can they find affirmative connection with 'Somewhere house'. Jess's house becomes haunted by the gothic spectre, Tilly Tilly whereas Maja's condition is wavering between Cuba and London. Maja is a black Cuban living in London; she has Cuban and West-African roots. This is portrayed by the way she describes her Cuba: "My Cuba is a hut with a tabletop for a roof, wall-less and unmoored by strange music and feet and fruit juice." (Oyeyemi 2007: 45). She encounters 'Psychic hysteria' due to the Xenophobic nationalism. She says: "The hysteric isn't appealing to me." (Oyeyemi 2007: 120). British colonial power is occupied by ghosts that control the Other(Cuba) and restricts her self-identity. Her ideology demonstrates her cultural attachment excluded in Britain, therefore creates a sense of Britishness that triggers the sense of disorder and trauma. The space between Cuba and Britain is dark which represents Maja's conflicting

identity within the flat where she lacks a sense of entitlement. Thus Maja engages with the construction of borders in ‘Somewhere house’ through her exploration of identity. Oyeyemi states Maja’s condition: “She fled to be born. She fled to be native, to start somewhere, to grow in that same somewhere, to die there.” (Oyeyemi 2007: 114).

Miranda in *White is for Witching* lives in The Silver House which is her ancestral house particularly affected by grief, following the death of her mother which leads to a worsening eating disorder called Pica. This is a kind of disorder that induces her to eat non-nourishing substances like chalk. When her condition worsens, she is unable to identify her identity and she is subjected to the possession of spirits in ‘Somewhere house’. It is inside the Maja’s self, inescapable at home and is haunted by problematic absences. The wicked old women in the house accustomed to disagreeable conditions, they instruct Miranda to undergo self-splitting or halving. “She split, and cleanly, from head to toe[...] She gathered the halves of her shed skin and tried to fit them back together across herself.” (Oyeyemi 2010: 230). ‘Somewhere house’ in *White is for Witching* acts as a neo-imperial space by illustrating how people's racist tendencies affected by the Second World War in Britain have been passed on through subsequent generations. Furthermore, the voice of the house asserts chaos and destruction to Miranda who represents a component of English identity, unresolved. “She is haunted by the racism and the strife for “racial purity” by her ancestors and must resist their attempts to get her to consume the “other”. (Yuksel 2015: 9).

## II. CONCLUSION

‘Somewhere house’ in three novels displays how borders built upon imperialist ideologies can limit and control identity. “Through the ‘somewhere house,’ Oyeyemi shows that cultural atrophy is inevitable within that uneven practice.” (Cousins 2012: 9). In the form of the house, the voices carry imperial legacy which strives to reject the ideologies of the self. The voices in the house exemplify racism, displacement, ingrained with spirit possession which highlights the imperialist and Xenophobic constructions of Britishness. “The houses in these novels represent temporal locations in-between realities.” (Harris Satkunanathan 2018: 206).

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