

POST-COLONIAL AFRICAN LITERATURE: A COUNTER-DISOURSE

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ABSTRACT

Debates and discourses on post colonialism reveal that colonialism has been the major cultural experience of the century. Postcolonial studies are concerned with the material, cultural and intellectual impact of British/European rule. Postcolonial analysis also studies its effect on the colonized societies. The impact of the colonizing process on the colonizer has been studied by writers like Frantz Fanon and AshisNandy. The trinity of Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha studies the revolutionary impact of colonialism. Their studies aim at the exposition of the reciprocal relationship between colonial knowledge and colonial power. The postcolonial theorists like Ngugi challenged the dubious cultural and pedagogical pre-eminence of English within erstwhile colonies like Africa.

Keywords: *post colonialism, colonialism, British/European rule, colonizer, colonial knowledge and colonial power.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Africa has more often been described as the Dark Continent. This badge was attributed to the continent after the arrival of the British and the other Western adventurers in Africa. Prior to the dawn of the white man, the natives of Africa lived in an atmosphere of untouched beauty and remoteness. They had their own traditions and cultural values. The whites went to Africa with the objective of spreading Christianity, proliferating trade and empire building. These were the intentions with which Africa was colonized by the European Imperial powers, partly by the French and partly by the English. Chinua Achebe in his magnum opus work Things Fall Apart describes the white man's intentions in these lines: "The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart." Accordingly, the European languages, especially the English and the French, were imposed on the natives to promote/facilitate easy administration. In order to colonize or to make their presence perpetual, the white men opened new schools for the poor Africans. They brought classroom education and jobs to the continent. They build administrative units and missionary institutions. The white men thought that it was their primary duty to convert more and more people into Christianity. Those who resisted this mover were persecuted, jailed, killed and so on. This is evident when Achebe in Things Fall Apart states:

It was said that the white man had not only brought a religion but also a government. It was said that they had built a place of judgment in Umuofia to protect the followers of their religion, it was even said that they had hanged one man who killed a missionary.

The new education eliminated centuries old practices embedded in the African societies. What is doleful nonetheless, is the fact that in the elimination process, the Europeans have caused the displacement of the values and valuable tenets of African culture. This irretrievable loss was oft-times lamented upon by the African writers in their literary works, thus informing the world of their mournful predicament. In this context Achebe's words are noteworthy: "that our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us?"

African literature is a notable part of the twentieth century world literature. The literature of Africa is the writings produced by the African nationals living on African soil describing African native sensibility and atmosphere. The distinguishing characteristic of African literature is its retention of Africanness notwithstanding the continent's multiethnic/multiracial milieu. Writers of Africa have made a successful use of the European languages and their traditional literary forms in order represent their emotional turmoil and culture shock, the result of their traumatic colonial experience. While some of them eulogized Africa and its splendid past, few of them were vigorously vocal in giving voice to their exasperation, conflict, outcry and desolation in poetry, plays and powerful prose.

Before the African poet, playwright, novelist and short-story writer emanated in his entirety, the writers from Europe who wrote of Africa based their work on the tales/stories recounted by the Christian missionaries, adventurers and political representatives of the colonial powers. To them the Africa remained subhuman/aboriginal and barbarous/uncivilized and thus needed to be educated and civilized. Writers like Joseph Conrad, Joyce Carey and Graham Greene created an Africa who was eternally beyond absolution/redemption. They flourished largely in upholding the stereotype that clung to Africa as living memory goes back i.e. the Dark Continent. It is as an insider that African writers wanted to write the narrative of Africa prior and after independence. Chinua Achebe in this context writes: "the story we. [Africans] had to tell could not be told for us by anyone else no matter how gifted or well-intentioned." The main purpose of writers of the newly emergent/independent countries of Africa has been to efface the degraded views that the world has had of their land. These writers tried to produce a true and genuine picture of Africa to which they belong. All writers tried to revitalize the spirit of pride and self-regard in their fellow citizens.

The language that was imposed on colonized Africans became an advantageous and productive tool and potent weapon in the hands of the African writer writing in English. S/he used it as one would use a two-edged knife. On the one hand, s/he him/herself was able to apprise the world the authentic tale of Africa in a medium, which could reach a larger part of the world, and on the other, s/he could stimulate self-respect and honor in many of his own countrymen who indulged in self-degeneration credit to their close yet insidious encounter with the Europeans. The African writer out rightly told his brethren that there is nothing erroneous with the African climate and the palm tree is as apt a theme for poetry as Wordsworthian daffodils are. They told the fellow men that they should write in such a manner, that their work is at once profoundly African and should and retain ability to carry their experience through a foreign (English) medium. To be precise, the form and content of their works must emerge so as to make a cohesive and an impact-packed whole. Barring some of the earlier writers like Amos Tutuola, C. Ekwensi and Gabriel Okara, most of the African writers such as J. P. Clark, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Christopher Okigbo were educated and trained in universities. The latter group of

writers used their knowledge of the English language and its traditional forms to create dynamic works of art. C. Ekwensi and Chinua Achebe with their prose, Clark and Wole Soyinka with their plays and Okara and Okigbo with their poetry have blazed their way into their literary consciousness of the world. The response of the readers across the world to their works is binary one. Primarily, Africa's mystifying predicament is exhibited by Africans themselves for the first time in a widely accessible medium and on the other hand, readers across the globe are emotionally moved by the haunting experience of the African psyche. With the passage of time African literature evoked gaining ground as is noticeable by the huge amount of material both creative and critical coming out of the press each year. African literature, particularly the genre of novel, has become a major subject of study in colleges and universities all over the world. One major concern of African literature is that the Orient (non-whites) and the colonized have invariably been projected as the 'other' in European texts. Writers like Achebe and Ngugi Wa Thiongo show an awareness about the materialist basis of textuality. They object/resist to the stereotyped representations of Africa, its environs and people by imperialist writers like Rudyard Kipling, Macaulay, Haggard, Huxley and others. The African literature, by and large show a resistance to the colonial scheme of presenting the colonized from their point of view. They (African writers) favor the use of native languages and the elimination of the dominant (English) language and literature. One evident reason for African writers in one's native language is their belief that literature in one's native language is the authentic expression of one's culture. They asserted that native language for them is the best means of giving expression to the day-in-day-out life and problems of people in Africa.

II. CONCLUSION

In their writings, most of the African writers challenge colonialist critics for passing insignificant remarks without proper study of the tradition and culture. The African literature educates the Africans of their own cultural past. It brings out the complicated truth of African existence which is essentially dependent on religiosity and humanism. It demonstrates the fact that in traditional African society, social equilibrium is maintained. It depicts the kind of life lived by dignified clan of individuals. The African writers exhibit concern for individual's rights and social justice in the present political scenario of their respective nations.

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