

ISSN 0976-8165

The Criterion



The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Quarterly Refereed & Indexed Open Access Journal

April 2013 Vol. 4 Issue- II

Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Vishwanath Bite

Managing Editor

Madhuri Bite

www.the-criterion.com
criterionejournal@gmail.com

Decolonization in Some Cult Texts of African Literature

Musarrat Nazmi

Assistant Teacher,
Barasat Priyanath Balika Vidyalaya, Kolkata.

Postcolonial literature is an attempt to undo the discourse imposed by Europe on native countries. This approach involves the production of a counter-discourse designed to resist the continued encroachment of European culture on former colonies. An important aspect of postcolonialism is decolonization. Decolonization is marked by a re-affirmation of one's cultural values and systems. While the colonial masters had rejected and destroyed native culture and superimposed the European one, decolonization seeks a retrieval of the forgotten rhythm of life. Decolonization which can be seen as another term for 'postcolonial' is marked by a concern with native cultural identity.

One way of reclaiming of one's cultural past is to re-envision European discourse about one's (formerly colonized) culture. The first body of postcolonial writing in the 1950's and 1960's was explicitly decolonizing, working with new concepts of national identity and critiquing the former colonial ruler. It projected folklore, myth, intellectual debates and epistemologies in combating the colonizer's culture.

Decolonization seeks freedom from colonial forms of thinking, a freedom to revive and rejuvenate native forms of knowledge. The term is used to describe a methodology where European categories and epistemologies are called into question. It involves a process of close examination of historical processes — and this is where it departs from postcolonial theory which is, for the most part, ahistorical — European forms of thought, nationalist thinking and forms of resistance. It engages European forms in a dialogue, and hence decolonization is always a dialogue process. It is a critical methodology that draws on postcolonial theory's interrogative stance but seeks a more nuanced historicized theorization. It is both a state of mind and a critical approach, a political process and a social attitude.

We may see this in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963) which represents characters from two different worlds — one representing traditional ways and the other modern Christian ways of life. Sidi, the beautiful girl of the village stands between the world of Lakunle, the modern, educated school teacher and Baroka who is the image of the tribal past of the chieftainship. Lakunle's passionate love for Sidi and his promise to turn the village inside out are the same dreams he cherishes. The school teacher holds before Sidi advantages of using machines in daily life which would take away the inconvenience that she suffered in her everyday working condition:

*"In a year or two
You will have machines which will do
Your pounding, which will grind your paper
Without it getting into your eyes."*

Sometimes Lakunle woos Sidi by drawing a picture of their wedded life:

*"Together we shall sit at table
Not on the floor- and not eat,*

*Not with fingers but with knives
And forks, and breakable plates
Like civilized beings."*

On the other hand, chief Baroka wants to make Sidi his new wife. He sends proposals by Sadika, his headwife, but Sidi regards herself to be more esteemed than Bale Baroka as her photograph appears on the cover page of a Laos magazine. But at last tradition wins over modern and mechanical life. Sidi submits to tradition in the form of Baroka preferring to marry him instead of Christian and civilized Lakunle.

In his *Death and the Kings Horseman* (1975) Olunde embraces his own Yoruba tradition and erases his English education and acculturation. According to Yoruba tradition, the death of a chief must be followed by the ritual suicide of the chief's horseman, because the horseman's spirit is essential to helping the chief's spirit ascend to the afterlife. But at the last moment the local British colonial ruler, Simon Pilkings, intervenes, the suicide being viewed as barbaric and illegal by the British authorities. The horseman, Elesin, who is Olunde's father does not keep up the tradition by not committing the suicide. For the community, the breaking of the ritual means the disruption of the cosmic order of the universe and thus the well being and the future of the collectivity is in doubt. Olunde, who has returned to Nigeria from studying medicine in Europe, takes on the responsibility of his father and commits ritual suicide in his place to restore the honour of his family and the order of the universe. The expensive and exhaustive educational and cultural machinery has not erased the sense of community in Olunde. It has not destroyed his Yoruba sensibility.

Achebe's fiction constantly questions the Europe generated image of benevolent colonialism. What Achebe does is to reveal how violent, self-destructive colonialism has been. It erased local cultures and systems so completely that the native lost his support system. It presents itself as an attractive alternative to the native's own religion and culture but actually it destroys the clan, traditional values and social bonding in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) Achebe's cult text, Okonkwo is troubled by the impending destruction of his tribe's way of life. Okonkwo is the patriarch who has taken the Ozo title for his honor, courage and strength. He values tradition so highly that he has paid the high price of killing Ikemefuna and moving to Mbanta to uphold it. He is not at all impressed by the missionaries. He thinks them mad people. He is furious with Nwoye for going to the Christian church and brutally beats him. Okonkwo is afraid that the old ways will soon be lost. He is deeply hurt to see the clan breaking up and falling apart. At last Okonkwo prefers to die than to accept the attack on his own Igbo tradition. Okonkwo's suicide represents his rejection of the changes in his people's culture, as he realizes that the Igbo society that he valued so much has been forever altered by the christian missionaries.

Novelist, critic and dramatist, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is now an icon of anti colonial and postcolonial resistance. Writing originally in English and then switching to his native tongue, Gikuyu, Ngũgĩ has been in exile from his country, Kenya for being an outspoken critic of its government. His novels are powerful indictments of the postcolonial condition where dictatorship, corruption and westernization have ruined traditional tribal cultures in Africa. Ngũgĩ argues that the study of Africa is inevitably treated as study of its tribes and tribal conflicts. This deflects attention from the real problem: European colonialism that ruined the African culture. More than economic or military annihilation, it is Europe's

cultural war that has devastated African identity according to N’gugi. And central to this cultural war is the arrival of English in Africa. In his 1986’s book *Decolonizing the mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Thiong’o argues that a national culture must include that nation’s literature expressed in that nation’s native language. In other words, Thiong’o argues that the English language ought not to be the language of education and culture in areas where it was used as an implement of colonial domination. He gives his reasons for rejecting English. As a child Gikuyu was the language spoken in N’gugi’s home and by the workers in the fields. His early schooling was also conducted in Gikuyu, but when the state of emergency was declared in 1952, Gikuyu was replaced at school by English. Children found speaking Gikuyu in school were punished and the language was suppressed. For N’gugi the silencing of Gikuyu was a violent and destructive act of colonialism. N’gugi reasons that if he continues to write in English, he remains split off from the “memory back” of his community, a split caused by colonialism which he wishes to heal. To write in English is to deal in the values of the oppressor, to see the world through colonial lenses and not through inherited ‘spiritual eyeglasses’. Therefore N’gugi declares his determination to ‘restore the Kenyan child to his environment’ by writing in his mother language. In N’gugi’s view what is needed is a ‘decolonizing’ of the mind, of the biased European intellectual traditions that Africans have assimilated. N’gugi’s return to Gikuyu is an attempt to achieve this decolonization, but as is with much postcolonial theorizing, he is able to do so only within the western (in this case American) academic system: for ironically N’gugi is the professor at the University of California, Irvine.

Works Cited :

- 1) Wole Soyinka: *Lion and the Jewel* (1974, *Collected Plays 2* - Oxford University Press)
- 2) Wole Soyinka: *Death and the King’s Horseman* (1984, *Six Plays* London: Methuen)
- 3) Pramod K. Nayar: *Postcolonial Literature* (2008, Pearson Education)
- 4) John McLeod: *Beginning Postcolonialism* (2010, Viva Books)
- 5) Chinua Achebe: *Things Fall Apart* (1969, New York: Fawcett)
- 6) N’gugi wa Thiong’o: *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of language in African Literature* (1986, London: J. Currey, Heinemann)