

Research Article

Deconstructing Colonial Tropes in Postcolonial Works of Achebe, Ngugi and Mohanty

Dr. B. S. Selina

Academic Officer, Academic Cell, A P State Council of Higher Education, Mangalagiri working on deputation with the APPSC, Vijayawada

Corresponding Author: Dr. B. S. Selina.

Abstract

Postcolonial writings played an important role in the deconstruction of colonial tropes which supported colonisation by stirring up the imagination to conquer and control. It fell upon writers to show how representations and constructions of tropes and images in the colonialist writings were disguised as truths, and projected colonisers with a moral responsibility to consider themselves as apostles of truth on a civilising mission who have placed their lives at great risk to redeem the indigenous tribes. Therefore even the economic exploitation of looting and plundering of the natural resources was swept under the carpet of these writings, which provided a falsified façade to the colonial motives. The desire to know and to interpolate culminated in the desire to control and to rule. The colonial discourses that supported colonisation and the veracity of these representations were never questioned as they were readily accepted by the west and returned with the sanction of power. The text became a site of power constructed by the coloniser's selfish motives, a site whose empowerment came from outside the realms of literary creativity.

Keywords: Postcolonial, imperialism, tropes, discrimination, indoctrination, hierarchy.

The early colonialist writings provided the base for English literary writers to romanticise the theme of colonisation in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, texts that have been widely discussed as synoptic of colonisation through the textual space. Though these texts are imaginary voyages written for reasons other than political, the images, metaphors and tropes created by them have contributed to textual violence. In this context, Paul Longley Arthur opines:

This new form of fiction simulated contemporary accounts of discovery voyages by incorporating the latest knowledge of the world in painstaking detail, and adopting the same matter-of-fact rhetoric used in genuine voyage accounts. Despite their high levels of realism writers of imaginary voyages in the setting of the antipodes helped to create a social acceptance of colonial expansion by imagining environments in which a European presence was constructed as natural, beneficial and welcomed (p.208).

Postcolonial writings, therefore, played an important role in the deconstruction of colonial tropes which supported colonisation by stirring up the imagination to conquer and control.

As Edward Said observes in his *Culture and Imperialism*, "imperialism and the novel fortified each other to such a degree with the other." (p.84). It fell upon writers like Achebe,

Mohanty and Ngugi to show how representations and constructions of tropes and images in the colonialist writings were disguised as truths, and projected colonisers with a moral responsibility to consider themselves as apostles of truth on a civilising mission who have

placed their lives at great risk to redeem the indigenous tribes. Therefore even the economic exploitation of looting and plundering of the natural resources was swept under the carpet of these writings, which provided a falsified facade to the colonial motives. The desire to know and to interpolate culminated in the desire to control and to rule. The colonial discourses that supported colonisation and the veracity of these representations were never questioned as they were readily accepted by the west and returned with the sanction of power. The text became a site of power constructed by the coloniser's selfish motives, a site whose empowerment came from outside the realms of literary creativity. As Edward Said observes in his *Orientalism*:

What they shared, however, was not only land or profit or rule; it was the kind of intellectual power I have been calling Orientalism. In a sense Orientalism was a library or archive of information commonly and, in some of its aspects, unanimously held. What bound the archive together was a family of ideas and a unifying set of values proven in various ways to be effective (pp.41-42).

The brutal violation of human rights was committed in an age when there was learning and enlightenment in Europe. It is sardonic to find that their pursuit of knowledge ultimately led them to experience greed, materialism, violence and cruelty. The advances in the field of science and technology widened the gulf and enabled the Europeans to assume a superior position and understand themselves in relation to the inferior other. Social theories such as Darwin's theory of evolution fuelled the fire of imperialism and led the West to believe that they were indeed a superior race. According to Michael Adas:

Those who held to the social evolutionist dogmas interpolated from rather dubious readings of Darwin's writings were convinced that the most benighted of the savage races were doomed to extinction. Some observers, such as the Reverend Frederick Farrar, thought the demise of these lowly peoples who had "not added one iota to the knowledge, the arts, the sciences, the manufacturers, the morals of the world," quite consistent with the workings of nature and God (p.33).

Postcolonial writings are now regarded dreadful where inhuman treatment was thrust on the indigenous tribes. The western intelligentsia which is informed by Postcolonial transaction is fully alive to the ills of discrimination on the basis of race and colour. It also explains the reason behind the boom in the emergence of Postcolonial studies which was/is nursed within the ivory towers of western academia. Postcolonial studies are increasingly becoming an academic activity with far-reaching theories, that are written and published by the hitherto suppressed voices.

Since writers are influenced by their social milieu, Postcolonial writers operate as a mouthpiece for their people to express the counter-discursive perspectives of colonisation, their pre-colonial traditional and cultural life and the present Postcolonial scenario of their societies. It fell upon their shoulders to investigate the dominant discourses throwing new light on relationship between narrative and experience. Since the colonised were interpolated through powerful colonial representations, Postcolonial writers reverse the view upon the colonisers even as their writings pass off as a universal symbol for valorising the local culture. This practice of re-inscribing the coloniser in a perspective that subverts the colonial stance is one of the powerful strategies used by Postcolonial writers.

It would not be hyperbolic to state that the Postcolonial writing endeavoured to decolonise, the colonial ramifications that have made an indelible mark on the life of the ex-colonised. Though the colonisation has ended, its ramifications are felt in every aspect of life which the Postcolonial writer has to come to terms with. Though these writers prefer English to their mother tongue they engage in creative handling of the language. In Postcolonial transaction, there is nothing offensive about their usage of English as they experiment with the

language sometimes consciously warping it. English is fused with native cultural terms which bring it closer to the lives of the colonised. Therefore in Postcolonial writings, even though English is used as the medium of communication, the language is decolonised in its form and content. The myth of the superiority of English is dealt with as the native cultural terms pervade the language to mark the cultural hybridity of the colonised societies. The writers do not hesitate to give vent to their anger as they use the language and distort it to look and sound ridiculous. As they write decolonising fictions, they also see to it that English is decolonised in the first place. The images and metaphors are creatively used alongside the insertion of local varieties and cultural terms as the language is distanced from its colonial associations and is brought closer to the Postcolonial life of the colonised. Since language is localised, Postcolonial writers appropriate the language to hold mirror to their cultural experience as they interrogate the colonial discourses and also offer to negate the colonial constructions. Postcolonial transactions see increased use of English as they make use of various strategies to appropriate the language and use it for their ideological purposes.

English becomes more than a medium as the writers incorporate it into the thematic pattern of their fiction. Though their novels have been written from different social milieu, these writers reveal their marked interest in the deployment of the Tribal ethos. As Postcolonial writers they are aware of the problems that come along with the choice and use of English. The writers address their Postcolonial concerns which ultimately serve the purpose of decolonization and as the language is appropriated to assert their native life and culture and also offer counter-discourse to herald the political implications of their writing. The process of decolonisation is furthered as Postcolonial writers address it not only at the content level of their writing but also at the formal level where English is decolonised and appropriated.

Although these writers use different strategies to nativise the language to make it relevant to the context of their writing, their similarity lies in their will to violate the established norms of writing. While writers like Ngugi and Achebe indulge in explicit experimentations by breaking the grammatical rules of English, other writers do it in a subtle manner.

While the language is decolonised at the formal level, these writers address the Postcolonial concerns for their cultural assertion and to counter the colonial discourses. The colonial representations produced a negative image of the colonised culture which helped further the cause of cultural imperialism of the west. The coloniser dismissed everything pertaining to the colonised as primitive, wild and barbaric. The natives were taught to give up their cultural practices and were forced to learn the ways of the imperial masters which was a necessary first step in the civilising project of the colonisers.

Therefore, Postcolonial writers take it upon themselves to assert their native culture and deconstruct the hierarchies. The native life of the colonised is given its due importance and the negative images that were constructed upon the lives of the natives are effaced.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe creatively uses figures of speech to evoke the rural life of Nigeria. He also borrows elements from his oral tradition to project his Igbo culture. Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* is a situational novel where he affirms the life of a remote village in Kenya. He captures the songs, dances and other cultural artefacts and validates their significance to the Africans. Mohanty in *Paraja*, creatively uses the landscape to enable a reconciliation with the splintered past of the Parajas. The characters of the novel, through their language of consciousness communicate with their physical environment and strike an affinity with it.

As language and culture are interwoven, these writers fuse their native cultural components as part of decolonisation. The language is used creatively so as to accommodate the oral literary forms which assert the native life and culture. While cultural imperialism created negative images and distanced the natives from their traditional culture, Postcolonial writers aim to valorise and celebrate their native culture in order to help the colonised to get reconciled

with their past, reaffirm their identity and to revive their relationship with the traditional culture.

Since English provides the scope to write back to the centre, these Postcolonial novelists confront the various colonial discourses that were constructed and circulated during the process of colonisation. Now that the colonised have taken to writing and speak for themselves, they offer counter-discourses as part of their Postcolonial response. Colonial myths are punctured as truths from the colonised point of view are affirmed. Histories are reconstructed from an alter perspective and texts that promoted colonial ideologies are rewritten. The construction of counter-discourses by Postcolonial novelists is one of the recuperative strategies used in the restitution of facts and retrieval of suppressed truths that enhance their project of decolonisation.

Achebe deflates the myth of the superiority of colonial education and instead valorises the traditional wisdom; Ngugi in *A Grain of Wheat*, rewrites the Kenyan political history as he validates the Mau Mau party and points out its indispensable part in the Kenyan freedom struggle. He also highlights the negative impact of colonial education on the African individuals who become estranged from their community and African values; Mohanty counters various discourses that were constructed around the life of the Parajas; and reveals the violence that was suppressed in the western narratives. He also offers a counter-perspective to the colonial educational methods and highlights its irrelevancy to the cultural context of a Paraja society.

These novelists express their unflinching involvement with the politics of using tribal ethos as their vehicle of communication. They also decolonise the English language from its colonial associations by using different strategies and manoeuvre the language to serve their desired ideological ends. As the content of their writing is essentially political, it is paramount to the understanding of the role of English to notice how English is reworked and refashioned to serve as an effective tool to counter the ideologies of colonisation. Therefore, as English is decolonised it becomes a potent force in Postcolonial transaction that is dexterously commandeered to address the various Postcolonial concerns of the colonised societies and further the cause of decolonisation.

British colonisation of the past is now regarded as one of the grave injustices meted out to the indigenous tribes across Africa and India. The western intelligentsia which is informed by the Postcolonialism is fully alive to the ills of discrimination on the basis of race and colour. It also explains the reason behind the boom in the emergence of Postcolonial studies which was/is nursed within the citadels of western academia. As Postcolonial studies are increasingly becoming an academic activity with its far-reaching theories, Postcolonial writing nevertheless achieves its significance in the Postcolonial experiences that are written and published by the hitherto suppressed voices.

Although these writers use different strategies to nativise the language to make it relevant to the context of their writing, the point of convergence that marks their Postcolonial resistance lies in their will to violate the conventional form of English. While writers like Achebe and Ngugi indulge in explicit experimentations by breaking the grammatical rules of English, other writers do it in a subtle manner. By incorporating the language varieties of the marginalised people, these writers attempt to erase the boundaries of standard and variant and thereby subvert the hierarchies that pertain to the language of the colonised. Therefore though the medium of writing is English, it is not the standard variety of English that these writers strive to retain. As native varieties are fused with the standard variety, new words are coined and new meanings are assigned to the new usages of English. The language is decolonized even as it is appropriated by these writers who use it creatively for their ideological interests.

Since English was employed by the colonizer for the cultural indoctrination, critical writers like Ngugi, Achebe and Mohanty call for the linguistic indigenization. While the language

issue is articulated at an emotional level, these writers are alive to the necessity of English that has been left as a colonial legacy in the colonies, though they don't forsake the basic premise that 'colony' and its creator are evil.

It can be safely assumed that the art of writing in English is itself a colonial product as the traditional African and Oriyan tribal literature existed in oratories. It is not possible for Postcolonial African and Oriyan literature to go back to oral form nor is it possible to go backwards in an attempt to revive the pre-colonial Igbo or Gikuyu or Paraja consciousness. Colonialisation in the soil of the tribal societies of Achebe, Mohanty and Ngugi threatened the community feeling-the very fabric of what bound the indigenous ethos. But independence provided a chance to assert their cultural identity and highlighted the linguistic freedom of one's language to suit one's cultural needs. However, several writers present through their fiction the indelible effect of English and the impact of written mode upon the indigenous oral traditions of literature.

All the three novelists express their unflinching involvement with the politics of using English as their vehicle of communication. They decolonise the local psyche from its colonial associations by resorting to different strategies and maneuver the engagement to serve their desired ideological ends. As the content of their writing is essentially political, it is paramount to the understanding of the role of English to notice how English nuances are reworked and refashioned to serve as an effective tool to counter the ideologies of colonisation. Therefore, it becomes a potent force in Postcolonial writing and is skillfully commandeered to address the various Postcolonial concerns of the colonised societies to further the cause of decolonisation.

Indeed as a concluding observation it would not be out of place to assert that the three writers display excellent craftsmanship by correlating their modernist urban reality closely with their own self experience well grounded in their origins. The biggest contribution of these Postcolonial writers is that they emerged in a new Postcolonial environment making their presence in avant-garde circles in the west and posing the challenge of their self expression to European cultural authority by their self confidence and outspokenness.

Works cited:

Primary sources

1. Achebe, Chinua. *Arrow of God*. New York: Anchor Books, 1969. Print.
2. Achebe, Chinua. *Anthills of the Savannah*. New York: Anchor Books. 1987. Print.
3. Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2006. Print.
4. Mohanty, Gopinath. Danapani, 1955. Trans. Bikram K. Das. *The Survivor*. Madras: Macmillan India, 1996. Print.
5. Mohanty, Gopinath. *The Ancestor*. Trans. Arun Kumar Mohanty. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1997. Print.
6. Mohanty, Gopinath. *Paraja*. Trans. Bikram K Das. Delhi: O.U.P.1997.
7. Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *The River Between*. London: Heinemann, 1965.
8. Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *A Grain of Wheat*. London: Heinemann, 1967.
9. Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Petals of Blood*. London: Heinemann, 1977.

Secondary sources

1. Abdelrahman, Fadwa. "Said and Achebe: Writers at the Crossroads of Culture." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* (2005): 177+. *Questia*. 28 July 2007. <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5011730569>>.
2. Achebe, Chinua. "Commitment and African Writers." *Africa Report*, March, 1990
3. Achebe, Chinua. *Writers in Politics*. London: Heinemann, 1981.
4. Adas, Michael. "Contested Hegemony: The Great War and the Afro Asian Assault on the Civilising Mission Ideology." *Journal of World History*, 15.1, 2004, pp.31-38.
5. Amuta, Chidi. "Fanon, Cabral and Ngugi on National Liberation in Post-Colonial Studies". Ed. Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin. London & New York, 1995.

6. Fanon, Frantz. "The Wretched of the Earth. Trans. Constance Farrington". New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1963. Questia. 28 July 2007 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=9701586>>.
7. Fergusson, Niall. "The Empire Slinks Back" New York Times, 27 April, 2003.
8. Gikandi, Simon, ed. "Encyclopedia of African Literature". Questia. New York: Routledge, 2002. 28 July 2007. <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=107705238>>. Ikiddeh, Ime. "James Ngugi as a Novelist." African Literature Today, No. 2 (1972):3-10.
9. Innes, C.L. Chinua Achebe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
10. Innes, C.L. and Bernth Lindfors, eds. Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe. London: Heinemann, 1978.
11. James, Trevor. "English Literature from the Third World." Ed Jeffares, A.N. Hong Kong: Longman York, 1986. pp.1-16, Print
12. Johnston, Anna. "The Well-intentioned imperialists: Missionary Textuality and (post) Colonial Politics." Resistance and Reconciliation: Writing in the Commonwealth. Ed. Bruce Bennett, Susan Cowan, Jacqueline Lo, Satendra Nandan and Jennifer Webb. Canberra: ACLALS, 2003. 102-113.
13. Lindfors, Bernth "The Palmoil with which Achebe's Words are Eaten." African Literature of Today (roll-4) London: Heinemann, 1968. Rept. 1972: 2-18.
14. Lindfors, Bernth and Bala Kothandaraman, eds. "South Asian Response to Chinua Achebe", New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1993.
15. Macdonald, Bruce, F. "Chinua Achebe and the Structure of Colonial Tragedy." The Literary Half yearly, Vol. xxi, No.1 (Jan. 1980): 50- 63.
16. Mishra, Yashodara. "Gopinath Mohanty". The Book Review, Vol.16 no.1, Jan-Feb.1992
17. Moore-Gilbert, Bart. "Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices", Politics. London: Verso, 1997. Questia. 28 July 2007. <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=59774722>>.
18. Nayar, Pramod. K. Post-colonial Literature: An Introduction. New Delhi: Dorling Kindersky (India) Pvt Ltd., 2008.3 (Print)
19. Nkosi, Lewis. At the Crossroads Hour. London: Review of Books. May 20 2006. <www.lrb.co.uk/v20/n22/nko501_html>.
20. Palmer, Eustace. The Growth of the African Novel. London: Heinemann, 1979.
21. Parkinson, Tracy Scott. "Reading the colonial Christian mission: Postcolonialism and liberation theology in novels by Mongo Beti and Rene Philombe." Diss. The University of Tennessee, 2003. ProQuest Digital Dissertations. ProQuest. Library of King Saud University. 4 Jan. 2008 <<http://www.proquest.com/>>
22. Porter, Andrew. "The Missionary Enterprise in the Nineteenth Century: An Overview." Columbia International Affairs. 15 Jan 2005 <<http://www.ciaonet.org/conf/mei01/poa01.html>>
23. Rushdie, Salman "Imaginary Homelands." Imaginary Homeland: Essays and Criticism. Caranta and Penguin, 1992. 9-21. Print.
24. Rushdie, Salman. "Common Wealth Literature Does Not exist in Imaginary Home lands: Essays and Criticism", 1981-1991, London, Garanta p.61.
25. Said, Edward. "Culture and Imperialism." London: Chatto and Windus.1993 ... Orientalism. New Delhi: Penguin, 2001, pp.41-48.
26. Said, Edward. Orientalism. London: Penguin, 1995.
27. Sehgal, Nayanatara. Rich Like Us, New York: New Duotones, 1988, p.68.
28. Sharma, Amiya Bhushan. "Paraja: A Post-Modern Reading." The Quest. Vol. 12, No.1, June 1998, p.15.
29. Spivak, Gayathri Chakravathy. "Race and the Web of Empire: Aryanism from India to Pacific." Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History 2:3, Winter 2001. Aug 27 2007. <<http://muse.jhu.edu/>>.
30. Taylor, W.H. "Missionary Education in Africa Reconsidered: The Presbyterian Educational Impact in Eastern Nigeria 1846-1974." African Affairs, Vol. 83, No. 331 (Apr. 1984),

Citation: Dr.B.S.Selina 2026. "Deconstructing Colonial Tropes in Postcolonial Works of Achebe, Ngugi and Mohanty". International Journal of Academic Research, 13(1): 153-158.

Copyright: ©2026 Dr.B.S.Selina. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.