

REPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN VOICES THROUGH THE PORTRAYAL OF INDIGENOUS CULTURE IN P'BITEK'S *SONG OF LAWINO* AS A CHALLENGE TO THE COLONIALIST INNER CIRCLE

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Received: 14 February, 2023

Revised: 18 February, 2024

Accepted: 25 February, 2024

Published: 02 March, 2024

ABSTRACT

The study analyzes the representation of indigenous voices and culture in *Song of Lawino* (1966) by Okot p'Bitek. It is a critique of the impact of the imperialist discourse and agenda on the colonized socio-cultural values through the undertaken theoretical framework- Kachru's indigenization that is known as the Three Concentric Circles Model. P'Bitek represented the native culture in his work as a resistance against the imposition of the foreign culture. The selected epic that is the masterpiece of African oral literature is replete with the indigenous language that has been used by the poet as a dissent and demonstration against the invasion of Western culture. Therefore, the portrayal of the indigenous unheeded and marginalized African voices can be a potent counter-strategy to save the local representation against the onslaught of colonialist plan. Hence, Lawino as a spokesperson of the poet in this long epic comes up to voice against misrepresentation of her own loved ancestral identity through the usage of African linguistic terms and titles, idioms, etc. The poet in the selected work embedded local flora and fauna and indigenous figurative devices to highlight Imperial coercion and repression. The article is an attempt to offer an additional understanding of the selected work that the existing stock of knowledge has not explored it from the angle the study intends to delve into.

Keywords: Indigenization, Representation, Kachru's Model, Colonized Discourse, Imperialism.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Post colonialism is the scholarly, psychological, cultural, and ontological framework that supports the anticolonial understanding. This is the turning point in the political independence of African and Asian cultures. Anti-colonial progressivism and political ideologies in colonized areas gave rise to Post-colonialism as a concept and commentary. In these movements, academics and political figures among "natives" questioned European colonialism, and generated ideas that subsequently united into a thought process within intellectual strategies. Numerous anti-colonial advocacy groups whose political views evolved into ideological and literary criticism. Much of post colonialism's essential concern and societal issues stem from this political context. Indigenization is the pivotal lens through which all postcolonial analysis is filtered. Postcolonial theories begin to arise in the 1960s as

thinkers from the former colonies began to create their own forms of knowledge, their own discourses, to counter the discourses of colonialism: these postcolonial discourses articulated the experience of the colonized, rather than the colonize (Klages, 2006, p.153). It is one of the explicit agendas of postcolonial writers to question and encounter the imposed discourse of colonialists/imperialists on the native people under the rule of colonization that is propagated through the deceptive narratives of civilization, culture and education etc. Thus, the chief focus of postcolonial theory is to investigate the frameworks by which the colonizing forces urged the colonized people to recognize a foreign culture as "superior" over their own indigenous approaches of social and government institution.

Post-colonial theory is a critical and theoretical approach that views imperial texts, disciplines,

legislation, science, and other socio-cultural processes as racially based and uneven, with the colonial portraying the native.

Therefore, to project and represent the indigenous unheeded and suppressed voices in the works of postcolonial writers can be a potent counter strategy to save the local representation against the onslaught of colonialist plan. "The goal is not to replace Western knowledge with indigenous knowledge, and not merged (the) two into one. Rather, indigenization can be understood as weaving or braiding together two distinct knowledge system" (Antonie, Mason, Mason, Palahicky, & Rodriguez de France, 2018). P'Bitek's selected work; *Song of Lawino* (1966) is manifestation of how ongoing marginalization of indigenous voices can lead to devastation of local representation. The study in hand aims at analyzing the selected African work in the light of applied theoretical framework of Braj Kachru to pursue the targeted research objectives. The undertaken framework will help pursuing the objective of better understanding of indigenous voices in *Song of Lawino* (1966). As a result the local voices have been hushed and neglected by the imperialist to impose their culture and agenda upon colonized. Besides, it unfolds the causes of segregation and neglect of the native culture at the advent of the colonization. The study explores the effect of colonialism on the local African voices. The European imperialists ruled the world to control and influence the colonies with the falsifiable agenda to extend relationship on the bases of political, social and cultural exchange. This connection tended to include social, educational, economic, political, and broad cultural contacts, with a hierarchical European settler class and native educated elite class building layers between the European "mother" nation and the numerous indigenous peoples under the rule. Such a system promoted inherently ideas of racial inferiority and exotic otherness. However, natives find a representation of their segregated voice through the manifestation of their native culture and flora and fauna that is indigenization. As is elaborated in the given words: Indigenization allows a space for a native community to retell its own story or past---local and global, including its place, genealogy, local knowledge, culture, language, and social practices, all that are seen as marginalized—but then transforms these spaces into places of resistance and

hope. (Grande, 2000a; 2000b; 2004; Smith, 1999; Trask, 2000)

1.2 About the author and selected work

Okot p'Bitek (1931-1982) is one of the prolific Ugandan postcolonial writers that have earned the title of one of the best African poets. His notable works in poetry are *Song of Lawino* (1966), *Song of Ocol* (1970), and *Two Songs* (1971). Besides his poetry, p'Bitek has worked in other genres like he got his novel published in the Acholi language which was named "*White Teeth*" (1989) in English language later on. He has served as director of Uganda's National Theatre and National Cultural Center (1966-68). P'Bitek published various works on Acholi culture in addition to poetry. His essays are compiled in the book "Africa's Cultural Revolution" (1975). A collection of Acholi folktales assembled and translated by p'Bitek is called "*Hare and Hornbill*" (1978), while "The Horn of My Love" (1974) has poetry in both Acholi and English languages.

Up to this point, the only other high point in African poetry in English that surpasses it is p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* (1966), which is perhaps the most complete single project of African poetry in English. Songs like *Song of Lawino* (1966), and *Song of Ocol* (1970) by p'Bitek deal effectively with issues that are central to contemporary Africa. And they do so through the use of realistic African symbolism, proverbs, laments, devotions, and obscenities, successfully tying the modern to the traditional.

Asein (1978) "Okot p'Bitek: Literature and Cultural Revolution in East Africa" in which it is explored that in 1950s and 1960s the African literary figures started gathering and uniting the writers to revitalize and renew cultural uprightness of their societies. Many magazines, journals, workshops, foundations, reports and writing competitions were held in which young writers emerged with the focus on the traditional values. Besides, the research contends that through the writings and creation, there emerges that creative upsurge paved the way for the native cultural awareness among the masses (p, 360). The writers have manifested in their art that there should be no compromise on their own culture, however they can write and compose in English. There are no two opinions that African postcolonial writers have voiced for indigenous cultural representation.

Kahyana (2021) "Introduction: On the Enduring Allure of Okot p'Bitek's Song of Lawino" sheds light by describing that almost all of the issues raised by p'Bitek in the poem remain relevant today, such as the psychological hypnosis that happened to come with colonial education, political bad management of post-independence African societies, the marginalization of women in both personal and open space, and the deception of the general public by the literate class (es), to name a few. The academics in this special issue precede the virtuous task of extracting the poem for additional insights relevant to contemporary realities, five decades after the poem was first authored.

Ntangaare (2021) "Performance elements that keep Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* alive on paper, the stage, and in the mind" evaluates that post-independence Africa and the African people are unable to entirely reject Western values while still praising them and valuing their education and religion. Even Lawino, an ardent protector of Acoli principles, occasionally finds Ocol's use of English impressive and harbors resentment toward his mistress, Clementine. Africans in Africa are therefore fated to lead a precarious and contradictory existence: they must be both independent from and dependent upon their colonizers.

This qualitative work expresses the performativity and dramatic elements produced by the author of the poem "*Song of Lawino*". The researcher points out that the dramatic elements have made the poem to be acted, dramatized, staged and performed. The effect of indigenous dramatic elements in English language will be having a long lasting impression on the readers and general public viewers. P'Bitek brilliantly combines the two worlds in his experiments. He appropriates proverbs, sayings, and similes from Acoli folklore, as well as the imagery and metaphors used in oral song and dance, from traditional performances. He takes the English language, academic concepts, and elements of formal theatre and performance, particularly the techniques, from modern literature. *Song of Lawino* was transformed by P'Bitek into a public performance for everybody to enjoy, both inside and outside of academia. The work celebrates social class, ethnic diversity, and all ages thanks to the rich African language in English.

After going through and exploring the existing stock of knowledge on p'Bitek and his works, it is

revealed that different scholarly publications and articles left a space that is endeavored by the study in hand to be filled in with the focus on Representation of Indigenous Voices and Culture in *Song of Lawino* (1966). Thus, it will be an addition to the existing zone of knowledge on the selected poet.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The undertaken study carries a qualitative approach to pursue the set research objectives in the selected poetry of p'Bitek renowned African poet. This section of the study initiates an exhaustive discussion and explanation of the research framework and research methodology that dilates upon resources of data, its collection procedures and research tools. Research is a pursuit that is meant to use established methods for investigation and exploration of a problem or to answer a question in detail to add more to the existing stock of knowledge about it by applying the tested tools and methods involved in it. The basic aspect of qualitative research is to analyze non-numerical data that cannot be quantified because qualitative data can be found in the study of human behaviours, actions, events, ethics, and norms, etc. The qualitative approach represents data from the viewpoint of human beings who are taken as the major source of data collection as they witness different circumstances in daily life (Bryman, 2004). Therefore, qualitative research is also based on a naturalistic approach to data generation and data collection.

2.1 Research method

The procedure and process of collecting data in a research method includes a full-length and complete activity (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). Qualitative and quantitative research methods are the two main strands. Qualitative approaches are incredibly diverse, complex and nuanced (Holloway and Todres, 2003). Textual analysis generally begins with a close reading of the text, wherein you familiarize yourself with the text and pose questions about it.

Furthermore, these areas include its genre, themes, metaphor, use of language, narrative structures, etc. Once you have a deeper grasp on these elements, you can begin to ask questions about why or how the text uses them, to ascertain deeper meanings and cultural discourse (Skains, 2018). Textual analysis and thematic analysis are to be looked upon basic

methods for qualitative analysis. This research follows qualitative research method. Thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis.

The study in hand aims at exploring the selected poetry-a piece of the renowned African oral literature, through its textual and thematic qualitative analysis from the lens of the applied theoretical model. It will further lead to the exhaustive analysis of the poem from the angle of the relevant morphological (poetic word association) symbolic and thematic (semantic) explanation. Furthermore, the usage of the relevant key figures of speech, motifs and setting of the poem will be plumbed into. The dissertation contains two major sources of data collection by keeping research questions and objectives in focus. The primary source of data collection is based on the text of the *Song of Lawino* (1966). It will be comprehensively taken into consideration of text for an in-depth probe and study. Every relevant aspect of the poetry will be analyzed to highlight the concealed meaning with respect to indigenous culture and norms. Similarly, the study intends to utilize the relevant available secondary sources like books, published national and international publications, articles and theses for plugging the research gap as well as the methodology applied by

different scholars in the pursuit of their targeted objectives.

2.1.1. Theoretical Framework

The research applies a multilayer theoretical framework given by Braj Kachru that is commonly known as the Three Circles Model. This highlights indigenization, local/native language, socio-culture, and local voices. Moreover, the undertaken model pursues academic socio-cultural and political concerns associated with non-native language speakers (Raisa, 2022). It contains language-use, indigenization and imperial diaspora, Therefore; the prominent aspects of the framework are exhaustively elaborated as follows,

2.1.1.1. Indigenization

Likewise, the first to examine is “indigenization” by The Oxford English Dictionary defines indigenization as “the action or process of bringing something under the control, dominance, or influence of the people native to an area” and “the indigenization of education in Africa would include a focus on local languages and histories”. It is a method of appropriating and adapting exocentric values or notions to local situations. To do this, one has to accommodate foreign ideals to regional realities. The term "indigenization" is most frequently used to refer to the process of becoming African-adopting African values- in the context of Africa, where it is an approach to overcoming Western cultural imperialism.

The applied model by Kachru is as follows,

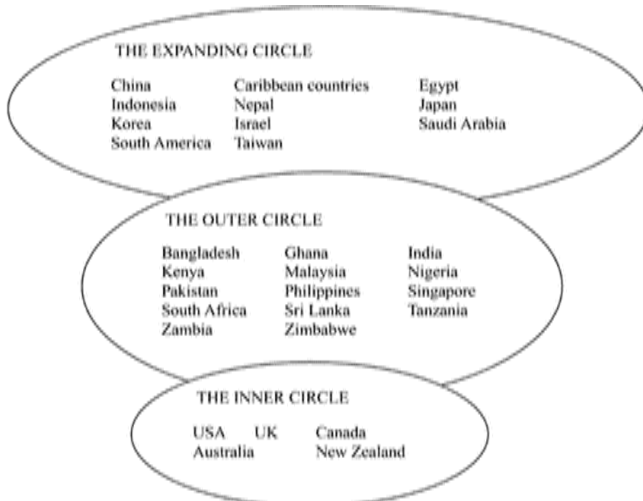


Figure 01: Kachru’s Three Circle Model (Bhatt 530 [Adopted from Kachru (1997)]).

In this context, the term "indigenization" refers to the process by which a language gets adapted to a certain region, such as English in Africa. The process of introducing a language while attempting to impart the cultural and philosophical ideas of a

particular location is referred to by this phrase. An instance of a language that required indigenization was in Africa, where the former colonizer's language needed to make references to African religion and culture, despite the fact that the original language lacked the vocabulary to do so. Typically, a meta-language that incorporates both the original language and the imported language is produced as this process is being carried out. It is common to do this in order to grasp the foreign language in the context of the local area because this language has cultural elements from both civilizations, making it unique. Because it contains no negative connotations or suggests any underlying meaning, the term "indigenization" is occasionally favored over others like “Africanization”.

3. Discussion and Analysis

3.1 Usage of Language of outer circle: a challenge to inner circle through indigenous Acoli language and vocabulary

P'Bitek's epic that is the masterpiece of African oral literature is replete with the indigenous language that has been used by the poet through the resistance and challenge by Lawino against the invasion of western culture. Most of the postcolonial literary authors and critics have contended the way language played the role in African decolonization. Along with p'Bitek, other writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Gabriel Okara and Frantz Fanon wrote as a resistance and challenge to English language for nationalistic narrative expressions and utterances (Ali & Masroor, 2017). Besides, Jasen & Nayar (2010) also sheds light by saying

The blacks had to create their own history and write their own stories to break free of the colonial shackles in what Fanon envisaged as a deeply humanist project. A national culture, believed Fanon, must take return to African myths and cultural practices so that black identity can be resurrected. (p. 10)

Lawino's husband had been to the western society and western universities to quench his academic and pedagogical thirst. This has led him to start detesting and looking down upon his own ancestral norms, values and identity. Fanon (1967a, p.60) writes, "In the man of color there is a constant effort to run away from his own individuality, to annihilate his own presence". The colonized ones seek to mimic and copy the colonizers in terms of religion, values, culture and language as escapism from ancestral background.

Westernization and colonialism robbed them (women) of the right, as western capitalism relegated women's traditional roles to social and domestic categories and increased their dependency on husbands, fathers, and sons (Echendu & Ogunyemi, 2014, p. 11)

Lawino as a spokesperson of the poet in this long epic comes up to voice for the misrepresentation of her own dear ancestral identity through the usage of African linguistic terms and titles, idioms, etc. The given language is explored from the lens of applied theoretical framework by Kachru. It is mentioned as follows:

The purely local flora and fauna that is reflected through the specified linguistic African terms and

vocabulary are fictionalized by the poet. The wailing of Lawino, a potent representative African voice is a representation of an African insect through a simile as a literary figure of speech. She is of the view that her husband calls her 'silly' like the insect, 'Ojju'. The miniature and tiny status of an insect is associated with African people who are ignorant and silly in the view of Ocol. It can be reflected in the words as follows

He says I am silly

Like the ojuu insects that sit on the beer pot.

My husband treats me roughly (p'Bitek, 1966-67, p. 35)

There is also a fictional illustration of a few unique species of insects that have got the poet's creative attention to refer in the song of Lawino. The particular type of insects like odir and oenne are cooked and eaten by African people, so they are the part of their food. It is imperative to highlight here that P'Bitek never forgets to represent indigenous flora and fauna. It is a potent answer/reaction to let indigenous voices come on the surface as a resistance to imperialist forces as is argued by Kachru in his famous model of indigenization.

And your thin children

Collect the odir and oenne insects

And they roast the odir and oenne

And eat them (p'Bitek, 1966-67, p. 108)

As we proceed further as an analyst, religion that is quite a personal and private affair in the view of the modern western world, however, Ocol as a spokesperson of Western civilization in African land literally does not follow his Western so-called ideals. He does not spare discussing their religious affiliation. Even the religiosity of African people is looked down upon by him in these lines, "He says we are all Kaffirs. We do not know the ways of God." And give preference to western religious heads as "The Padre who is very strong",

He says we are all Kaffirs.

We do not know the ways of God. (p'Bitek, 1966-67, p. 35)

The Padre who is very strong

Moulder of Skyland and

Earth ... (p'Bitek, 1966-67, p. 35)

Like the Padre;

Who listens,

And does not get annoyed (p'Bitek, 1966-67, p. 35)

P'Bitek through Lawino's voice has highlighted the indigenous ignored things like plants, animals and insects. As he the wife makes an alike comparison

of the bitter tongue of her abusive husband with the tangy roots of a particular African herb 'lyonno lily', Lawino speaks out her anger and protest in the lines:

My husband's tongue
Is bitter like the roots of the Lyonno lily,
It is hot like the penis of the bee,
Like the sting of the kalang! (p'Bitek, 1966-67, p. 35)

Festivals play a critical role in the growth of a culture. Similarly, P'Bitek also depicts the rank of celebration of different African festivals in this long narrative epic poem through the vigorous voice of Lawino. African particular dance on these jubilant occasions shows their adherence and regard for their local culture with regard to dancing and celebration. The specific names of 'Orak', 'Jok', 'ogodo', and 'moko' repeatedly is used for these types of dances by the poet to emphatically highlight their local culture.

You once saw me at the orak dance
The dance for youths
The dance of our People (p'Bitek, 1966-67, p. 42)
Like a girl
Ready for the jok dance,
Is the simsim grinding stone? (p'Bitek, 1966-67, p. 60)

At the lineage shrine
The prayers are for child birth!
At the ogodo dance (p'Bitek, 1966-67, p. 68)
It means the moko dance
When youths and girls
Get stuck to one another! (p'Bitek, 1966-67, p. 72)
Cuisines and Western food nowadays are given prominence and prestige over the non-western food; this biased discourse is further propagated through different advertisements. Lawino's husband who is the representative character of the western culture starts disgusting African food by calling it a tasteless and tangy as compared to the western cuisines. Lawino protests over this kind of attitude of her husband.

They are for warming up
Tinned beef, tinned fish,
Tinned frogs, tinned snakes,
Tinned peas, tinned beans,
Big broad beans
Tasteless like the cooro! (p'Bitek, 1966-67, p. 58)

Moreover, it's pertinent to mention that is one of stated objectives of Kachru's model used by the present study is to indigenize African language by

postcolonial writers so that their neglected language can compete with the international language or the language of imperialists. As we know a language carries a culture with it, therefore, it is a prudent strategy and approach of postcolonial writers like P'Bitek to help indigenous culture survive and flourish through representation of native Acoli language. For this, p'Bitek's pen figuratively weaves a long list of African idioms and phrases in the selected epic that have been translated for convenience in English in the tussle of a local traditional African wife with her Westernized husband who abhors his own culture due to his fascination of his masters-imperialists.

4. Conclusion

Thus, the study after exhaustive analysis concluded that p'Bitek being a prolific post-colonial African writer projects indigenous culture as a resistance to the onslaught of imperialist agenda for the identity and freedom of local Ugandan society. The present study was benefited with the application of Kachru's model that is used as a theoretical framework to achieve the set research objectives. The key research objectives that have successfully been attained through the analysis of Song of Lawino (1966) in the light of the afore-mentioned model are as follows. The study explored the negative and unproductive impact of imposition of imperial culture on the life and culture of local Africans. The poet gave a way forward by representing local voices and indigenous culture in his art that have been purposefully hushed by their imperial masters. The selected, Song of Lawino (1966) appeared to be the mouthpiece of the segregated colonized subjects who had no say in the affairs of their country. The projection of the Western culture that was in clash with the local was fictionally represented as a resistance and challenge to this imposition. The wailing and protest of Lawino who is p'Bitek's protagonist showed the inevitability of projection of their own identity and recognition.

The article contended that the effect and impact of colonialism and imperialism on the sociocultural, political and religious realities of African people are far-reaching. The poet adapted to voice for the marginalized and hushed realities through the selected piece of literature. The poet through Lawino - the spokesperson of African society, is vehemently adamant about projecting her ancestral

culture and she resists the foreign culture that is going to be imposed in the shape of her westernized husband.

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