

DECOLONIZATION AS A TOOL FOR AFRICAN RE-EDUCATION: THE EXAMPLE OF THE AFRICAN LITERARY RENAISSANCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines some of the contemporary discourses in the re-education processes championed by the African elitist caucus. It explores such phenomena as decolonization, culture reclamation and other liberating concepts as useful agents which will help to galvanize the inevitable independence of Africans from Eurocentric bondage. These agents enable the African elitist group to advance an intellectual disobedience to the false teachings and ideological biases left as legacies by the white supremacist colonizers. Such legacies become long term exploitative apparatuses with links to even more redesigned contemporary shapes of neo-colonialism such as globalization, monoculturization or cultural imperialism, capitalism, self-denigration, all for the perpetual subjugation and exploitation of Africa. The paper proposes that the commitment to reject another century of modern slavery however, must adhere to a cautionary process in order not to produce an artificial Africa. It clearly states the need for every society to form its own basis for an appropriate developmental theoretical framework. The work in itself advocates for the recognition, reclamation and sustenance of the original Nigerian/African socio-cultural system as one of the major reliable vehicles to transit and restore Nigeria to a unique and sustainable development. The paper concludes by advocating for the blue print of this new African roadmap which must be framed according to the peculiar African sensibilities in pursuance of Africa's development, as have been successfully attempted through the exemplary works of some Nigerian literary writers explored in the work.

Introduction

One of the most monumental challenges confronting the African literary elitist hegemony is the destruction of the emasculated "African mind" which is presently vulnerable to the implanted supremacist virus at the departure of the colonialists. A plethora of ideological divergences in this area of interest, one of which is the contestation of white supremacist epistemological hegemony that Africans lack the psychological capabilities of what Keith Gilyard (qtd. in James TarTsaaior, 67) regards as "high art", have in a way, helped to significantly spread the consciousness of decolonization. Decolonization, now a popular contemporary phenomenon and equally a hopeful tool for African liberation, simply means, the task of Africans to,

end all foreign domination of African culture, to systematically destroy all encrustations of colonial and slave mentality, to clear the bushes and stake out new foundations for a liberated African modernity. This is a process that must take place in all spheres of African life. (1)

The phenomenon has gained a wide range of acceptance in the African literary milieu as a suitable tool for rejecting those foreign agents that have forced the African literary experience into a perennial institutional hyphenation and negation by the white hegemonic literary forces. Its mission is only but to "change the order of the world", through the "replacing of a certain 'species' of men by another 'species' of men" as it is "the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature" (Fanon, 27-28). As if anticipating the measure of resistance from the existing colonialist ideological and hegemonic forces, Chinweizu et al chose to see themselves as *bolekajas* - "outraged touts for the passenger lorries of African literature"(xiv). Sparing and

leaving no "critical stone" unturned, they equally lashed out their anger at those Eurocentric African writers, whom they accused to have,

encouraged the manufacture of a stiff, pale, anemic, academic poetry, slavishly imitative of 20th-century European modernism, with its weak preciousness, ostentatious erudition, and dunghill piles of esoterica and obscure allusions, all totally cut off from the vital nourishment of our African traditions ... (3)

For the Africans, it is expected that the decolonization process among other advantages, should help valorise the African sensibilities and art-view, dynamically exploring and showcasing the African landscape, culture, economic/socio-political sensibilities and artistic aesthetics. The seed of liberation, obviously sown after the experience of the Second World War, exposed the Africans' worldview to transcend beyond the responsibility of not just wrenching back their sovereignty from greedy hands, but equally attempting to decolonize the African mind, and adopt all other forms of liberating practices while creating a framework that will sustain this new order. This reclamation, revivification and reincorporation of African values become a fundamental roadmap to the establishment of a 21st century African social order rooted in the traditional wisdom of African people. Among others, this cause has been fostered by such concepts as Nationalism, Negritude, Pan-Africanism, etc.

The battle of White supremacist ideology over other races has equally been similarly resisted by other group of writers confronted by such vexing challenges. The Afro-Americans are not left out of this contestation. They have made their own battle in a peculiar way, one of which is the projection of "black art in Harlem" otherwise known as the Harlem Renaissance:

the cultural and intellectual rehabilitation of the black race, the authentication and affirmation of the humanity of the black person, the search for a distinct identity

by a deracinated people under the cultural hegemony and tyranny of the white dominant culture and a more favourable disposition to African historical past. (Tsaaior, 75-76)

In all of these arguments, one point is abundantly driven home: every society has its own art-view and aesthetics. Put in another form, no race has lordship over another in art generally since it may be difficult to create ideal criteria to make such value judgement. Therefore, the attempt by one opinionated race to dominate another with its own art-form must be resisted in order to fully explore and sustain all the varieties of aesthetics in art generally, according to the peculiar artistic landscape of the environment in question. This resistance must come in the form of re-educating the Africans which, in part, will exhume some of the original mode of African cultural values and social life advanced and protected by the African educational process focused on creating an orderly society.

African Re-Education

As these contemporary decades come and go, more Africans are coming into the revolutionary consciousness of re-educating themselves and their brothers from those previously established colonial falsehoods that have trapped them in some sort of Sisyphean circle. This re-education process becomes a panacea for the vast range of developmental task confronting the African society. Re-education means the philosophical basis for re-ordering a person or persons' implanted false notion or understanding of a phenomenon into an appropriate truth based on undisputed or clear research. This means that the persons in question have already been given information or some sort of education which is incorrect and misleading. The short or long-term damage from such experience is sometimes better imagined. According to the *African Holocaust*,

The biggest challenges facing any study of any aspect of African history is the legacy of academic racism. African history is viewed from the outside as inferior. Thus students and teachers need to approach African history with this in mind ... Who is writing and why are they writing need to be examined as much as the content of what was written. (1)

Thus, from the above, it is in no doubt that some critics (prominent among them, Walter Rodney - author of *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*) have traced most of the factors for Africa's underdevelopment to the barbaric, exploitative and ill-conceived educational information passed down to the same Africans by their colonial "masters and teachers," subjecting them to the perpetual acceptance of the western world as eternal superior lords. This phenomenon has equally created deceptive theoretical framework for the development of Africa and, like a virus, trapped the growth of African socio-political, economic and cultural values. It is therefore inevitable that Africa would require not only an original educational prototype, but equally a process of re-orientation and decolonization of false colonial educational framework. A people who, for over three hundred years of slavery and other inhuman treatments, have lost their mind, pride, social and physical environment, culture, etc, would naturally require a whole wide range of psychological realignment from alien beliefs and methods in the new African dispensation. This heavy but noble task and responsibility of conscientization and decolonization mainly rests on the forerunners of the African society - the elitist group. Among other fields of the African social viewpoints, this consciousness has found a very strong tap-root in the contemporary literary world, given rise to what is now referred to as the "African literary Renaissance."

The Example of the African Literary Renaissance

According to Niyi Osundare, renaissance means,

"rebirth" in English, the renaissance (rinascenza or rinascimento in Italian, atunbi in Yoruba), was not just a revival of learning arts, culture, and science; it was a phenomenal re-awakening of consciousness and re-invention of the world on a scale hardly equalled in human history... Renaissance was not just an escape from the Dark Ages; it was a studied and comprehensive harbinger to the modern age and the root of its myriad achievements... central to the Renaissance spirit is the freedom of humankind from the tyranny of ignorance and darkness. (3)

In the bid to conquer this feat of colonial subjugation, most contemporary elitist African gatherings have been designed to explore all the possible related discourses, bearing in mind that the impact of colonialism in Africa has become an indelible scar on Africans till date. Perhaps there may never be an expiry date to this scar especially the unthinkable mental trauma of the over three hundred years of slavery. The wise suggestion therefore is, rather than allow this phenomenon haunt them, Africans should use it as an instrument for development. This means that the people must activate and use history as an instrument to prepare their future. In this new direction, there is need for the Africans to sieve the colonial mentality starting with its education. This is partly the argument Chinua Achebe makes as he states that "colonialism was essentially a denial of human worth and dignity, its education program would not be a model of perfection. And yet the great thing about being human is our ability to face adversity down by refusing to be defined by it, refusing to be more than its agent or its victim" (*The Education*, 22/23).

As if provoked by such statements, one would notice the ring in what can be termed as the restoration voices and writings of many contemporary African critics and writers who have

made quite impressive effort to search for a gradual return to African oriented art. This effort is currently sustained in most African literary works by the attempt to use African linguistic artefacts for artistic production within the already imbibed Eurocentric framework. Put in another form, it shows a clear indication that African fiction has been moulded to harbour certain seeds of literary revolution discernible in the stylistic choices made by some of its creative writers. Through experimented language manipulation, the contemporary African writer sets for himself the ultimate goal of decolonizing the art of African literary writing in the conscious attempt to call colonial legacy and cultural imperialism into question - writing in a domesticated version of the imperial (English) language. Such trend of revolutionary temper as typified in the fictional works of the likes of Chinua Achebe, Kole Omotoso, Chimamanda Adichie (to mention but a few), has become a common style of fictional writing in the post-colonial era.

As these Nigerian novelists indigenize the English language by employing appropriative strategies in ways that transgress the sacrosanct canons of the language, they domesticate the language by implanting Africanism or cultural and linguistic African sensibilities in their texts with the hope, apart from its artistic aesthetics, to convey certain specific cultural realities to their readership. Their predilection for indigenous language vocabularies is also to use the literary medium to shed light on cultural distinctiveness. More so, part of their target is to transpose the worldview and imagination of their indigenous people into the English language by having recourse to non-verbal communication and help conquer the disheartening complexes that have besieged Africans from the days of slavery. Their stylistic choices focus on the manner in which they employ language to wed form to content without undermining the aesthetics of literary creativity. In an attempt to transpose the speech mannerisms of their people into written English, they sometimes resort to code-mixing which is a technique that actually enables the

novelist to blend the English language with the particular native or pidgin language. This literary technique equally allows the readers of such novels to understand the original sensibilities of the natives or people of such African societies.

For example, Achebe's recurrent use of *chi* (one's deity or god in the Igbo language) or the example in the following excerpt: "He laughed loud and long and his voice rang out clear as the *ogene*, and tears stood in his eyes," as found in *Things Fall Apart* (6) and Omotoso's direct use of "moin moin" "akara" (Nigerian Pidgin English names for two of their beans processed delicacies) as found in *The Combat* (11), are evidences to the fact that there are intentional linguistic hybridization in the Nigerian literary world to carve out its own peculiar identity that is independent of the influences of external forces. At least, this effort is beginning to bring about an appreciable development in the literary world-view of Nigerians and, by extension, Africans. By utilizing the technique of linguistic indigenization to underscore the relevance of cultural identity, such Nigerian fictional writers have contributed immensely to the development of both the psyche and intellectual consciousness of Nigerians, and have equally announced to the world at large that Africans are not the second class humans they have been erroneously portrayed to be. What the reader peruses in the works of these writers is the crystallization of the manner in which ordinary Nigerians communicate with one another on a daily basis as they go about their business, since the generality of Nigerians are not only bilingual but also multilingual as well. As the characters in their works create their own speech patterns in addition to the narrative pattern of the narrator, these authors provide their readers the opportunity to appreciate the "Nigerianized" manner in which the English language is spoken in Nigeria and other parts of Africa. Such creative and revolutionary excavation of Nigeria's academic endowment should

help provoke a similar cause of realignment in other educational spheres even as Achebe vows to help champion such re-educating task. Thus, he says:

Here then is an adequate revolution for me to espouse – to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement. And it is essentially a question of education, in the best sense of that word... The writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. (*Morning yet*, 44/45)

The subversive implication of the "Western psychological education" occupies a huge range of discourse. What is ultimately important is that in the process of sustaining this re-educational process, the 21st century African youth must be taught to desist from those un-African or Eurocentric "modern traits". For instance, the African teachers must un-teach or re-educate the younger generations away from such un-African modern educational practices such as indecency in mannerism and behaviour which includes indecent dressing codes ("sagging"), sensual provocative attires, self-denigration such as the bleaching of the African black skin (not as a result of necessity but inferiority complex syndrome), gay relationships (including its marriage), human right syndromes that forbid the use of cane no matter how mild the users use it for the correction of their children, etc. Even if Africa stands to lose the "financial baits" (financial aids grants) from the colonizers or is deceived with the "Human Rights Syndrome" under the impartial joint colonialist body of the United Nations, the resistance must be firm against neo-imperialism. Lest one forgets, it was such desire to swallow a similar bait that crumbled and shattered the chief priest of Ulu in *Arrow of God*. Ezeulu who felt he was smarter and could beat the colonialist in his own game never knew the danger in his selfish intentions: "I have learnt to fly without perching. I want one of my sons to go into these people and be my eye

there. If there is nothing in it, you will come back home, but if there is something there, you will bring home my own share" (*Arrow of God*, 45). The consequences of such selfish interest and cultural blending becomes very glaring in *No Longer at Ease* as Obi Okonkwo, a symbolic representation of the new breed of Africans and a product of the colonialist experiment, starts a new tragic journey for his and the future African generation. This is the answer to the mystery that puzzled all the characters at the last paragraph of the novel:

Everybody wondered why. The learned judge, as we have seen, could not comprehend how an educated young man and so on and so forth. The British Council man, even the men of Umuofia, did not know. And we must presume that, in spite of his certitude, Mr Green did not know either. (*No Longer at Ease* 154)

The African future generation is inevitably integrated in this discourse as they sensitively occupy the ultimate future hope of their fathers in the bid to sustain this battle through decolonization. The speedy pace of losing them to alien cultures to the point where some find it extremely difficult to even grunt out greetings to their elders (not forgetting that some of them actually occupy political and administrative positions) requires urgent attention. The females, some among those who are obviously enmeshed in the obsession of white complexion due to self-denigration makes the process of decolonization even more herculean. Now to this issue of skin colouration, just as have been observed elsewhere, it is possible that if the reverse was to be the case where the colonialists were to have come to Africa in black skin, and Africans were created to be fair skinned, history would still have repeated itself exactly. Those Africans now in white skin (in this scenario) would still have made the attempt of darkening their white skin in order to wear the colour of their colonial masters in black skin. The lesson one would obviously

learn from this picture is that the shattered psyche of the Africans has made them lose respect for their own technology, culture, and also faith in themselves, finding refuge in the alien sensibilities. This refuge was what Ben keeps on seeking down the "River Road." At the end, he shockingly discovers the futility in such refuge as he saw all other African victims sitting "like dead fish; hardly drunk, cold and lonely, each lost in his own dark small world" (*Going Down River Road*, 214).

Mezda's mission to Kala, as a youth, opened him up to some of the truths behind the consequences of the colonial forces that he could not help but conclude: "Not least among these was the discovery - made by the contact with the country folk of Kala, those quintessential caricatures of the 'colonized African - that the tragedy which our nation is suffering today is that of a man left to his own devices in a world which does not belong to him..." (*Mission to Kala* 181).

The task of decolonization through the avenue of renaissance, seemingly quite a huge responsibility, has provoked a pessimistic reaction from the likes of Osundare believing that Africa is still not ready for a serious renaissance programme. In his words:

Contemporary African thinking and behaviour stand in need of rigour, a probing, interrogative energy, a stubbornly imaginative and original dynamism uncontented with facile imitativeness and slavish dependence on foreign "models". A people that would rather borrow technology than create it, a people who treat indigenous originality with neo-colonial disdain, a people who throw out the gods of their household to make room for idols from foreign temples can hardly be said to be in a true renaissance spirit. (10)

This gullibility on the part of Africans is the same worry Chinua Achebe in a recent biographical or personal account of Nigeria's past political experiences had when he wondered how his own parents (products of that colonial period) could have "embraced strangers from thousands of miles away, with their different customs and beliefs" (*There was a Country*, 8). Obviously such Africans (Achebe's father) are expected to end up as what Jean Paul Sartre sees as "the principles of western culture ... whitewashed" (7). Nevertheless, for those optimistic Africans, Osundare's position in this passage can be twisted to be a galvanizing mechanism for the elitist Africans who bear the responsibility as the forerunners of this cause to decolonize Africa from the White supremacist hegemony. This means that Africans are still on course with the phenomenon of decolonization through the African renaissance.

Conclusion

This work has briefly used the example of the on-going African literary renaissance, an aspect of a broader re-educational spectrum, to explore a feasible road map to the recreation of a new decolonized Africa. By implication, it has attempted to re-evince some of the African social values as part of a sustainable framework to the anticipated new Africa. The work advocates a realignment of the Nigerian/African cultural background in all the spheres of Africa's social milieu in order to, not only have a correct view of their past, but also recreate in their psyche, the lost confidence in their historical past which has been compromised or almost expunged by colonial Euro-centricity. In fact, such Afro-centric focused research exercises should be encouraged for the purpose of the re-education of Africans in respect to their history, culture, politics and economic life. It is with this spirit that Umelo Ojinmah believes that the African writer's first task is to rescue the African past from the colonial misrepresentation and biased stereotyping to which it had been subjected (4). For the Africans to earnestly begin the journey

of genuine development, they have to start by rejecting all forms of oppressions from their European counterparts by re-educating their people from ignorance, globalization, monoculturization, cultural imperialism, inferiority complex, and all other forms of self-denigration. There is need for a Pan-African projection and protection of the original African cultural values, ideology or sensibilities by a process of African dialectics. This should be done through the re-education of the African people from the colonial iniquitous mis-education that is inimical to the hope and progress of the African continent.

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