

Modern Ideologies of Race, Culture and Identity in Africa

¹Gita Devi and ²Dr. Ashok Kumar

¹Research Scholar, Singhania University, Rajasthan

²Supervisor, Department of English, Govt. College, Satnali, M.Garh

ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 10 October 2018

Keywords

Race, Culture, Identity, Ideologies.

ABSTRACT

To know African literature, it is required to know Africa at its back. It is to examine how 'Africa' operates as a referent and as a politics in modern ideologies of race, culture and identity. Hence these perceptions of race, culture and identity are interconnected through their social milieu which refers black identities and cultures. These are the theorization of formations and necessity to recognize not only by the interrelatedness of the streams of social and cultural identity but also the ways in which the present has been constructed by its historical traces. The tension between African and European contexts reveals that how Africa and its identities have been crucially framed by the impact of forces and interests from outside the continent. These are the attempts for identity, assertion and fight for human rights at equal platform. Succinctly the African history is divided into four parts.

1. Introduction

The first part consists of West African literature which includes the writers like Chinua Achebe, Buchi Emecheta, and Ayi Kwei Armah. In the second part which is the East African literature, the writers like Ngugi Wa Thiong'O took hold of their distinctive assertion. In the third part which is South Central part consists of Atwell Sidwell who made literature to be significant. Finally in South African literature Nadine Gordimer, Alex la Guma, Alan Paton and Bessie Head took their respective directions for their voices. Hence starting from the nineties and early twentieth century it leads to further study of colonialism that concludes it for race and identity. These are the forces which compelled to write about the individual, then from individual to social and finally from social to the national at large. In this arena if we talk about Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) then it becomes obvious that these are the complexities of historical interconnectedness and social identity for which the continent struggled:

Going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginning of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were king, an empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. (HOD 536)

The familiar colonial atrocity of the continent, the emptiness of liveliness and the primitive savagery energizing the episodic destruction of order have led the people to protest against that force which denied them to come forward and be equaled with the common man. History has been a witness as to how the yearning for liberty became a pivotal point for the readers to look into the personality of people. To dig up the history of a nation is to interpret one. Talking about the colonial literature it is to be added that it is all about the theories and ideologies which inform the superiority of European culture and the rightness of empire. It is the spurting out of the close relation of literature and the philosophy by implication. It is the ideology to change social, political and theoretical dogmatic believes. In addition to reflecting pre-national political and social formations, literature is considered by the writers to be uniquely able to form and foster the values, identities, and culture of the new nation.

These theoretical disciplines are concerned with the raising social consciousness, philosophy and literature engaged in similar speculation about the good society and which is considered a prototype for humanity. The writers with their imaginative contributions influence thoughts about social and political conditions. They lead the readers to critical reflections on the social milieu of the writers suitable for a given society and on the degree of civic consciousness exercised by the people in protecting their rights. (Ocolo 2007) Philosophy and literature equally offer critical evaluation of existing and possible forms of political arrangements, beliefs and practices. In addition, they provide insights into political concepts and justification for normative judgements about politics and society. They also create awareness of possibilities for change. However, there can be no doubt that the appeal of their novels has to do with the integrative function that narratives have always played in African societies, a role that is well illustrated not only by the didactic and reflexive purpose of the folk tales and fables but also inform the sensibility and define a primary level of the imaginative faculty in traditional African societies. (Watt 1957) Achebe expresses this idea thus:

An African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant. (Achebe 1975: 78)

This broadening of the critic's scope to allow for a consideration of the dynamics of empire was consolidated over the decade with a number of collaborative efforts of which *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989) by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin stands out as a noteworthy example. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2007) The rhetorical features of postcolonial discourse such as mimicry and hybridity proposed in *The Empire Writes Back* (1994) were subsequently expanded and refined by critics such as Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994). (Bhabha 1994)

W.E.B. DuBois in *The Black Atlantic* (1993) writes in 1903 that, 'the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line that race and its variously linear parameters (borders,

passages, journeys, traditions and origins; demarcations and discriminations) are still politically central, at the end of the century serves as a reminder that the urgency of this message has in no sense diminished. (DuBois 1975: 116) Situating the politics of race and racism as problem that haunts and constructs the discourses of modernity, the subjectivities we inhabit and the times in which we live, makes dramatically apparent the ways in which the 'race' becomes the founding illusion of our identities. Moving within the historical era that stretches from the mid-eighteenth century to the present, the argument seeks to make it clear about the analyses of Ethnographic, literary or theoretical texts—for a reading of how Africa and Blackness becomes meaningful—demands attention to the historical traces that form the assertion of African aspirants.

Hence this area of study includes post-colonialism, a term which refers to a condition in which colonized people seek to their place, either forcefully or otherwise, as historical agents in an increasingly global world. It includes the literature which 'came after' empire, it scrutinises the colonial relationship. Even the African writing that emerged in the postcolonial era, a literature which is shaped by the pressures of arrested decolonization and the pitfalls of national consciousness, it can be said to have been driven by the same imperative as writing under colonialism – a desire to understand the consequences of the colonial moment. (Jeyifo 2004: 33– 46) In other words we can say that it reflects the ideologies of Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who take a clear intellectual debt to an earlier generation of French theorists like Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Claude Levi-Strauss, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to refer those post-colonial theorists. Achebe expresses this idea thus an African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant. (Achebe 1975: 78)

The African literature achieved its sudden maturity with the publication of Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) and Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City* (1956). Shorn of ideological veils, South African literature emerges in two main phases: (a) a white dominance before 1960, accompanied by emerging black self-discovery and literary achievement. The literary movement culminated in the publication of the magazine *Drum* (1951) as a vehicle for literary writing and (b) the period after 1960 that highlights the emergence of blacks as literary leaders after 1950s, with white writers joining in a general protest against apartheid. (Wautheir 1966) Both periods were dominated by concerns and passions that appear incomprehensible in the present. The twenty-first century may view the wars of the colonial past and the struggles of the later twentieth century as incomprehensible, yet modern nightmares such as race, discrimination, and unemployment rooted in the past.

The writers such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, George Lamming and many other postcolonial writers have envisioned a more active role for literature in the production of the nations that would come into existence at the end of colonialism. These multiple, heterogeneous in many cases, contradictory discourses and practices together form the 'zone of instability' (Kanneth 2002) within which writers in these regions had to operate. For these writers, a genuine literature

is less a sign of the nation than an important perhaps even the most important force for bringing about a substantive political transformation of the colonial situation; it is their own literature that allows the nation to become a reality.

In addition to reflecting pre-national political and social formations, literature is thought by these writers to be uniquely able to form and foster the values, identities and culture of the new nation. In this way Negritude also finds its origin in 1930, one of the premier cultural phenomena of the twentieth century. It flourished in Paris in the mid – 1930s led by the writings of two black scholars from the French colonies, Aime Cesaire (b. 1913) of Martinique and Leopold Sedar Senghor (1906-2001) of Senegal. Senghor differed from Cesaire in both his vision and practice of negritude. The negritude opposing the values of Europe to this African world led him to valorize life forces as the essential framework grounding his poetic portraits of African civilization. It is where Fanon asserts:

I am wholly what I am; I do not have to look for the universal.... My Negro consciousness does not hold itself out as a lack. It is its own follower. (Black Skin White Mask 19)

It is the humanism that propels any reader to ponder about the aspirations and betrayals. It is necessary to know the idea of 'African' and the 'humanism'. It is the European humanism that denigrated African aspirants and their yearning for assertion. This led African ideology a figure of their humanistic approach to assert itself if not to overtake but to be equaled at the same platform. It has been a battle with a long, even ancient history of its own; this took a particular form because the contribution of European thinkers to European humanism involved a nearly uniform denigration of Africans which is a questioning of their intellectual capacities and their status as human beings. One Afro-centric theorist who comments on enlightened thinking is Simon Gikandi. He highlights the British Philosopher Hume's claim that the African is 'incapable of artistic production and by implication of intellectual aesthetic judgment.' (Gikandi 2004: 379)

It is not only the oral literature in which the people projected the truth but the writers with their ecritures projected the same with their distinctive ideology and narrative style. It is to enhance or condition a practice of reading African texts, or texts about Africa. If we take James Cary's *Mister Johnson* (1939) and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) then it is obvious to analyze them as explorations of the rifts and continuities between oral and written worlds, and simultaneously the interpretations of African societies which perform contesting and protest. These texts represent the societal and colonial implications on common man. To dig up the functional role of African art two ardent nationalists have gone against the generally accepted views and labeled a charge against the negritude movement which denied African people from their rights and these are Frantz Fanon and Ezekiel Mphahlele. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Fanon was hailed as a revolutionary writer, a hero of the Third World and anti-colonial movement. He wrote his most influential book, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), just before his death, published in 1961, with a preface by Sartre; it became a key text for radical students and served as an inspiration for the Black Power movement in the United States. While its endorsement of violence is problematic, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) offers one of the most penetrating analyses of the

social psychology of colonialism. This concurs with the implication in Jean Paul Sartre's statement on the revolutionary action in the preface to *Wretched of the Earth* (1961):

We only become what we are by the radical and deep-seated refusal of which others have made of us. (WOTE 15)

References

1. Achebe, Chinua. *Morning yet on creation Days: Essays*. Heinemann: London, 1975.
2. Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. 2nd edn., London: Taylor and Francis, 2007.
3. Attwell, David and Barbara Harlow. "Research in African Literature Vol.34", No. 2 Summer (2003): 155- 162.
4. Attwell, David. J. M. Coetzee. *South Africa and the Politics of Writing*. Berkley: University of California Press. 1993.
5. Barnett. A. Ursula. *A Vision of Order, A study of Black South African Literature in English: 1914-1980*. London: Sinclair Browne Ltd., 1983.
6. Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
7. Biko, Steve. *I Write What I Like*. Ravan Press, 1996. 153. (Reprinted in 2000)