

Neo-Colonialism in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* and Ferdinand Oyono's *The Old Man and the Medal*

EMEKA IKECHI, TARIKIYE E. ANGAYE

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Abstract. This study will critically examine the issues of alienation and disillusionment, which results in the economic down-turn of most African nations after independent and to date because of mismanagement and lack of proper control of endowed resources. Neo-colonialism is one of the foremost contemporary focuses of the twenty-first century literary discourse. It is an alternative and new artistic explorative mechanism, for the fact that it centres on the socio-economic realities and leadership styles of African rulers, which portrays the disregard of fellow Africans. Earlier studies concentrate on the concerns of the use of language, identity crisis and forceful acquisition of natural resources, which provided the platform of the In Africa, the period of colonial administration experience disillusionment, where writers across the African continent lend their voices to protest the marginalization, discrimination and other inhumane treated meted to the aborigines (Africans) by the alien (Europeans) rulers. The Europeans prejudice reflects in their literary works, which indicate wrong impression of Africa to the rest of the world. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1995) and Joyce Cary *Mister Johnson* (1952) are explicit examples of European literary works, which portray African in a biased form. Chinweizu states that "Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, though written by a Pole, in English, and set in Africa, with an 'all-European' protagonist ... rightly considered a British novel..." (9). In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Africa was projected as a dark and barbaric continent, where nothing good exists. For the fact that, literary works are considered in high esteem and regard, the bigoted information spread to the global view.

In response, writers from all parts of the continent, irrespective of the region agitate for the exit of the

different forms of revolutionary experiences against the colonial administration. The theoretical approach to the study hinges on the post colonialism as a theory and a period that echoes the African culture and sensibilities. The objective of the study is to show the disappointment and agony of the teeming mass of the continent in the post-colonial and modern periods. The study will assist in expanding scholarship of representation in postcolonial and contemporary African literary discourse.

Keywords: disillusionment, exploration, leadership, alienation, sensibilities.

1. Introduction

colonialists and declare the need for sovereign African states. The study will draw attention to African writers; in no particular order, the different regions of the continent with some of their outstanding works in order to provide the platform for the understanding of the unity in the struggle for self-governance and the nascent development. For instance, from South Africa, some of the vocal writers and their narratives include: Peter Abraham's *Mine Boy* (1946) and Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* (1962) and *Time of the Butcherbird* (1989). The Eastern Africa region also feature prominent writers such as: Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* (1982) and *Weep Not Child* (1964) from Central Africa consist of, Ferdinand Oyono's *The Old Man and the Medal* (1965), Mongo Beti's *Mission to Kala* (1957), in West Africa Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966), North Africa Nawal El Sadaawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1983) and Alifa Rifaat's *Distant View of a Minaret* (1983). These are African novels of the colonial and postcolonial dispensation, where voices echo the feelings,

aspirations and experiences of the people. This study will focus on, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross*, a foremost novelist reacting from East Africa and Ferdinand Oyono's *The Old Man and the Medal*, another rejoinder from Central Africa.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical approach to the study hinges on the post colonialism theory, which features as a concept as well as period in echoing the African culture and sensibilities. M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham argue that postcolonial studies dwells on the "critical analysis of the history, culture, literature, and modes of discourse that are specific to the former colonies of England, Spain, France, and other imperial powers" (306). He asserts that postcolonial studies are concern with the "Third World countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean islands, South America. Some scholars, however, extend the scope ...countries such as Australia, Canada, and New Zealand ... encompass aspects of British literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (306).

In a similar manner, M. A. R. Habib states that "the complex phenomenon of postcolonialism is rotted in the history of imperialism" (737). He provides further background explanation that "postcolonial literature and criticism arose both during and after the struggle of many nations in Africa, Asia, Latin America (now referred to as "tricontinent" rather than the "third world"), and elsewhere for independence from colonial rule" (738). Abrams and Harpham states the significance of the theory and practice as the "Orientalism" (1978), they further identify some of the regular themes of the postcolonial discourse as hybridization, subaltern, Eurocentric and "forms of imperialism other than European, including the domination of some southern-hemisphere groups or nations by other southern-hemisphere groups or nations" (306-8). Neocolonialism is viewed as a vexed terminology because of the negative connotation, which is often applied to the financial circumstances of many former colonies after the attainment of political independence. This results in scores of nation's dissatisfaction with the indigenous rulers of their countries. The African identity and personality are the dominate discourse that defines the ideologies African novels of the colonial dispensation.

3. Literature Review

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* and Ferdinand Oyono's *The Old Man and the Medal* both remarkably accomplish current discussion on African

fiction as the stories share themes of estrangement, alienation and deception because of the disappointment of the masses in the poor leadership style of few African rulers. The novels of the African writers reflect matters of neocolonialism. Ngugi asserts that "African writers have always complained about the neo-colonial economy and political relationship to Euro America" (26). The issue is that as long as Africans feel in-debted to western form of civilization and viewing it as the yardstick for measuring development, the continent would experience "continuing that neo-colonial slavish and cringing spirit" (26). These issues are mostly depicted in the prose narrative to show the gist of the African experience.

This is not to say that other genres such as drama and poetry were not used in the struggle, but the point remains that the prose fiction, which remains the oldest oral form of narration or storytelling is the best technique the modern African writers adopt to continue not just the unique tradition of educating, enlightening and disseminating of information but to project the evidence of African cultural heritage. In the words of Ngugi "the novel, at least the writing of it, needs only pen and paper" (71). In fact, Chinyere Nwahunanya asserts that an "historical novelist who does not acquaint himself with the historical materials he incorporates into fiction is likely to encounter problems" (263). For instance, Ngugi's novel was written from prison, when he was arrested and detained, which rather than daunting, the situation spore the foremost writer to put pen on paper, to tell the historical account of his experiences. In fact, some school of thought are of the view that Ngugi uses pieces of papers found on the floor to write the story because of the incarceration by the government. The period experiences the arrest and imprisonment of writers who oppose the government policies. At the period, some writers insist on writing in African language to show the Africaness and originality of the text. Other African writers embark on translating oral literature into the English language to proper documentation and indication of African literary existence.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* and Ferdinand Oyono's *The Old Man and the Medal* are indications that African literature exist, though mostly in its oral form and without formal classification, as opposed to European notion that the continent is devoid of literary works. F.B.O. Akparobaro argued that "one of the frequently adduced basis of the idea of Africaness (African identity) of the novels is the nature of its uniquely African ontological world, and the complex milieu of

metaphysical beliefs in terms of which human lives and social order are conceived" (27). Tanure Ojaide stated that "it is an interesting period to note that while there were no formal schools as in modern times, the evening fireside informal gathering of children after the day's hard work is a traditional school of deep learning" (xv). The novel maintains the culture of folklore in a formal and structured presentation to show the aesthetic values of the African tradition.

During the colonial regime, Europeans rule Africa with an economic intent of looting and the Blacks react and protest against, which finally results to the gaining of independence of most Africa countries. It means that African literature gain prominence after independence in what V.Y. Mudimbe describes "as a commodity in recent inventions" (61). This underscores the study's focus on Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* and Ferdinand Oyono's *The Old Man and the Medal* to reflect the problems of estrangement and cynicism of African leaders due to poor political administration.

Before the advent of neo-colonialism, the colonial writers such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* depict the continent in what Laurie L. Harris describes as "hot, barbaric interior of Africa inspires revulsion at the dehumanizing effects of the colonialism, a disgust that culminates" (79). There world view the African continent from the stories of people who provide first-hand information, like Conrad, who sometime resides in the Congo during the late nineteenth-century. In the words of Caroline Rooney, "Joseph Conrad's description show the image of an Africa that is, for once intensely alive", which African writers view as biased global view (196).

Rooney explains that "Conrad confronted as precisely that which he cannot see, the projecting his shadow and his inner darkness onto Africa and women" (196). These distant and contradictory assertions provide the platform for African writers to correct the prejudice and portray the rich and unique cultural heritage of the people to the world. African writers apart from facing the issues of internal colonialism are also counter the confrontations of correcting the wrong impression of the whites about Africa. In other words, the post independence period experiences the divergent opinions that call for urgent attention in other tackle the wrongs and the projection of the culture, norms and values of Africa.

4. Neo-colonialism in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross*

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on The Cross* is one of the narratives of Neo-colonialism, in which the stories explore the attitude of the new African political elites, who amass the nation's commonwealth for their personal aggrandizement. Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross* commences with diverse opinions, feelings and consequences of divulging of certain information about the elitist class. The narrative points to the fact that: "Certain people in Ilmorog, our Ilmorog, told me that this story was too disgraceful, too shameful, that it should be concealed in the depths of everlasting darkness. There were others who claimed that it was a matter for tears and sorrows, that it should be suppressed so that we should not shed tears a second time" (7). People are anxious of divulging the truth, but the fear of the actions of the ruling class continues to hunt and intimidate the citizen to suffer untold hardship.

The elitist would prefer to remain mute on issues affecting the populace, which writers reiterates by investigating "How can we cover up pits in our courtyard with leaves or grasses, saying to ourselves that because our eyes cannot now see the holes, our children can prance about the yard as they like? Happy is the man who is able to discern the pitfalls in his path, for he can avoid them" (7). It implies that, that the writers are the hope of the masses in the struggle for freedom of oppression from internal colonialism otherwise, the African politicians otherwise called "The Devil, who would lead us into the blindness of the heart and into the deafness of the mind, should be crucified (7).

Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross* is the story of a young woman, Jacinta Wariinga from Ilmorog in Iiciri District whose "misfortune is swifter than the swiftest spirit, and one trouble spawns another" (10). Wariinga is a victim of circumstances and effects of Neo-colonialism, in which the events of depression occurs in quick successions "on Friday morning Wariinga was dismissed from her job for rejecting the advances of her boss Kihara, her employer, who was the manger director of the firm" (10). Wariinga tries to come to terms with the reality of losing a job, before she could absorb the shock of unemployment "on Saturday morning Wariinga was visited by her landlord, the owner of the house in Ofafa Jericho, Nairobi, in which she rented a room ... The landlord told Wariinga that he was increasing her rent. She refused to pay more. He ordered her to quit that instant" (10). The saddest aspect is that she suffers molestation as her belongings are thrown to the streets by tugs, who obey orders of their boss.

Akparobaro argued that the story “draws a panoramic view of African life and nations which after their emergence from colonial power – and domination generated by the new political elites who see political, power as a means of personal enrichment at the expense of the masses” (299). Wariinga echoes the voice of the people, for that reason the tribulations of the people should be exposed to forestall further occurrences. The writer’s messages symbolize and convey prophetic connotations because of the derivation of inspiration, which provides the impetus for presage and prevailing utterances: “I, even I, Prophet of Justice, felt this burden weigh heavily upon me at first, and I said: The forest of the heart is never cleared of all its trees. At first I hesitated, asking myself this question: Who am I – the one who sees it than the one who shouts it to alert others to its presence” (7). It shows that Ngugi’s *Devil on the Cross* is “an account of what I, the Prophet of Justice, saw with these eyes and heard with these ears when I was borne to the rooftop of the house... The voice of the people is the voice of God” (8).

Ngugi employs the stream of consciousness technique to recall Wariinga’s childhood experiences and dreams “I remember the dreams of my youth, when I was at school at Baharini Primary and Nakuru Day Secondary, and I recalled how my dreams were trampled into the dust of the Rich Old Man from Ngorika” (14). Ngugi argues that the purpose of colonialism is to acquire the resources through force and moderate the people’s culture and language (16). It implies that the colonizer will exchange these values for the newly introduced system of administration, which is the western form of civilization.

The colonizers introduce their form of civilization and language to their conquered territories. It situates the western culture and language as dominate because subordinate and minority cultures are subsumed by the majority tribes. The Neo-colonialist rulers also imitate their predecessors, which are the colonialists, to undermine the powers of the smaller ethnic nationality, because the large population works in their favour during elections. The narrative reveals the ills of the society, which is an indication of ensuring corruption for instance, features prominently in the work to show the magnitude of decadence of the society.

5. Neo-colonialism in Ferdinand Oyono’s *The Old Man and the Medal*

On the contrary, Oyono’s *The Old Man and the Medal* is a response to assimilation policies of the colonizer, which is a complete clash of foreign and African cultures. The story portrays and projects the African identity and exposes the deceit in the French assimilation policy of integration propagated by the colonialists. It depicts the socio-economic realities of the masses, which necessitates the re-awakening of the African sensibilities to the reality, as indicated by the protagonist “Meka was already awake when the first ray of sunlight (God’s good morning to him) found its way through one of the holes in the rotten raffia thatch that was full of chinks you could see the sky through and fell, as it did regularly every morning into his left nostrils” (3).

Meka is an old man, who dreams of a cordial relation with the colonial masters and was lured into believing his actions would be awarded by giving him a medal, which creates tension “Kelara’ he shouted, dumping her back. How can you sleep when your husband has trouble? ... Wake up! How can you sleep when I have trouble? Woman, you are as weak as the disciples were on the Mount of Olives” (3). The anxiety is building up gradually and it will eventually get to the climax because Meka is shouting on his wife to be wake to face the challenges and restlessness. Also the deliberated reference to Biblical locations is intended to draw and arouse the readers’ attention and interest.

6. Themes, Structure and Style

Although the novels are of different setting, Ngugi’s *Devil on the Cross* shows Ilmorog, in Kenya, while Oyono’s *The Old Man and the Medal* is in Doum, Cameroon. The stories explore the apprehensions of the human mind, in what Akparobaro describes as the “aesthetic, defamiliarised or alienation exploration of man’s interior or psychological landscape” (34). This is achievable because of the adaptation of the cinematographic technique of projecting the activities of the heart. Jaanna Udunna Nwafor-Orizu argued that Ngugi’s “*Devil on the Cross* is about neo-colonialism ... takes events of post-independence Kenya, and examines the neo-colonial tendencies of African governments (66). Oyono’s *The Old Man and the Medal* experience excessive anxiety, which is uncalled for an old man because of a vague promise of a medal and friendship that translates to the absurd and nothingness of existentialist ideology.

The weird characteristics of Meka continue to bring more tension not just to him alone but the entire household, friends and the community, who anxiously want to witness the proposed open

relationship and award from the whites, which eventually happens “Then it was Meka’s turn. The white Chief stood in front of him and began to shout... He took another medal from the case and came towards Meka, still talking, Meka had time to notice that it was not the same as the Greek’s medal” (93). The white Chief exploits Meka’s excessive anxiety over a mere medal, in which “after he had pinned on the medal, took a few steps backward and shook his hand... the whole world had seen how the very hand of the High Commissioner had pinned the medal onto his chest (93). This reflects the undermining of Africans during the colonial era because of the former’s receptive approach towards strangers, in which the later capitalizes and misinterprets.

Afterwards Meka’s mind starts to drift into another world, where thought about animals, guns and soldiers, who later maltreated him. Yet, Meka’s wife was not moved as “Kelara had watched her husband presented with his medal through eyes damp with joy. When the whiteman shook Meka’s hands she thought her heart will stop beating (94). In the venue of the ceremony Meka noticed that “the High Commissioner and all the Frenchmen in Doum had seats up on the dais along with the Greeks...there was no African on the platform with them” (111).

At that point Meka’s joy was short lived as his emotions reflect the dawn of reality, as he asked: “how could they talk of friendship if you could only talk to High Commissioner as if you were addressing a tribunal” (111). I believe Ngugi’s statement that “the Europeans that came to Africa at the end of the nineteenth century had at its head the bourgeois man, now transformed from a captain of industry in a free market system into a commander-in-chief of vast financial resources regulating huge industries and commercial monopolies and in search of new markets to conquer”(65).

The intentions of the European on arrival to Africa are different from the actions that were eventually implemented. In Ngugi’s *Devil on the Cross* portray the Europeans having meetings with the political class to perfect their strategies in misappropriating public funds. In the invitation card that Wariinga, Muturi and Mikirai receive for a meeting at the “Feast ... arranged by the Organization of Modern Theft and Robbers in Ilmorog to commemorate a visit by foreign guests from an organization for the thieves and robbers of the Western world, particularly from America, England, Germany, France, Italy, Sweden and Japan” (78). The period of colonialism end when the whites relinquish power to

African, but neocolonialism start at the next level where power changes, and the African leaders exhibit poor leadership to the detriment of the continent.

7. Conclusion

The study examines the rise of the Africa novel, in which the issues of neocolonialism features prominently. Earlier European literary works portrayed African continent in a negative perspective. Though the study discovered the western influence on African literature, in particular, Ngugi and Joseph Conrad, but the point is that the setting of Conrad’s novels may be African but the protagonists is white It implies that Conrad’s novels are English. The study examines the fact that three literary genres: drama poetry and prose featured in the write backs, which are responses to correct European prejudice and misconceptions about Africa. The study highlights the relevance of the novels as the preferred genre for story telling as a way of preserving the age long culture of Africa. It means that the narrative form is oldest oral story telling technique, which modern African writers adopt to continue the tradition to inform and propagate the African folklore. The study highlights some of the foremost novelist of the period, from the cardinal point of East, West, Central, North and Southern Africa who respond to the literary callings of the continent.

This study focused on Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross* (1982) and Ferdinand Oyono’s *The Old Man and the Medal* (1965) to reflect the problems of deception, disillusionment and disparagement, which the colonialist introduced and now perfected by African leaders. Both stories show the ordeal of anxiety, unnecessary and unfounded relationship with the whites as exhibited by the old man, Meka and Wariinga. Wariinga faced the problems and consequences of urban migration of the youths, irrespective of the sex, when she left Ilmorog for Nairobi for greener pasture. Her boss, who claims to be ‘god-fearing’ at the initial stage later, unmasked his real identity to sexually arouse her. The same way the whites later showed their real attitude to Meka, at the medal awarding ceremony.

The theme of disenchantment and deception featured prominent in the stories to show the neocolonial state of the African nations. The study examined issues of the heart in African discourse as a way of letting the reader into the world of the story. For the reason that the novel is a solitary readership text, unlike drama that requires an audience, the narration utilizes the technique to justify the companionship between the imagined character in the text and the reader.

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