

Dominant Thematic Pre-occupation in the Post-Colonial African Literature: A Reading

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Abstract

The events of colonialism have taken the attention of arrays of African literary writers, discussing the nature of the period of colonialism, the implications to the social, religious, human rights, and other aspects of human functionality during the colonial period. This article provides a survey of dominant themes in post-colonial African literature. The direction is to discuss some post-colonial African writers, the dominant themes they projected about 20-30 years ago, and the implications of this narrative in modern literature. The study was conducted using a qualitative approach, the analysis was conducted using the descriptive analysis method, and data was sourced directly from selected post-colonial African writers. The survey unveiled dominant themes in post-colonial African literature. However, eight basic themes were discovered to be dominant across arrays of literary studies. The themes of colonialism itself, colonial liberation, nationalism, tradition, political liberation, displacement, gender equality, and greater rootlessness are dominant in the literature. These themes are built across slave narratives, cultural and traditional conflicts, protest against colonialism, open calls for the end of colonialism, protection of the African pride promoted through traditional dominance of women liberation, expression of hope for Africa, and discussion of womanhood. The works of Chinua Achebe, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiongo, among others are quite dominant. The study thus concluded that post-colonial African literature is still a reflection of the events of the colonial period and a narrative for a future Africa without the effects of the presence of the colonial representatives. It is also recommended that analysis may need pay on how the themes of post-colonial African literature shape the contemporary realities of the African political, social, economic, religious, and collective existence.

Key Words

Colonization, African Literature, Themes of Literatures, Struggle, Nationalism, Liberation, Post Colonial African Literature

1. Introduction

Post-colonial African literature analytical studies are abundant in the academic literature. Significantly, postcolonial African literature is prominent in the intellectual

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debates on a variety of issues, the direct re-evaluation of the African society, the re-evaluation of theories in postcolonial African literature, and the redefinition of the concepts of postcolonial African literature, postcolonial Africa literary themes, etc. It is necessary to offer a precise definition of the notion of post-colonial African literature, which will serve as a guide for further debate on studies that should be classified in this field.

The concept of post-colonial African literature is based on certain historical events and periods. Typically, the term African postcolonial literature refers to the writings and publication of literary works produced following the political independence of various African nations that were once dominated by various European administrators. An emphasis is placed on the fact that works classified as postcolonial African literature must originate from an African, and may or may not be written in any African state, but the writer's country must have been liberated from European colonial administration.

Numerous post-colonial African authors exist. It is important to note that African countries achieved independence at different eras. Some African countries achieved independence from colonial administrators as early as the 1950s, while others did so between the early and mid-1990s. The fact that some authors wrote literary works before their countries achieved independence is significant. These literary works are not classified as post-colonial African literature, mostly because the author's country is still under the administrative jurisdiction of colonial administration.

Numerous investigations have uncovered various characteristics of post-colonial African literature. According to Poppen (2012), the majority of post-colonial writings, both those created in Africa and those produced in the Diaspora tend to emphasize their colonial experiences or the decolonization process. The narratives of slavery, the destruction of already established African cultural heritage, the cruelty of administrative processes perpetuated by colonial administration officers, the relegation of women and children, and the process of decolonization tinged with narratives of liberation and resentment are prominent in the literary works of this period. These are major subjects in the post-colonial study of African literature. This study provides a survey of the prevalent topics in post-colonial African literature. The focus is on revealing the prevalent themes in postcolonial African literature's various postcolonial African literature. Post-colonial African literature analysis studies are abundant in the academic literature. Significantly, postcolonial African literature is prominent in the intellectual debates on a variety of issues, the direct reevaluation of the African society, the reevaluation of theories in postcolonial African literature, and the redefinition of the concepts of postcolonial African literature, postcolonial Africa literary themes, etc. It is necessary to offer a precise definition of the notion of post-

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2. Colonialism and the Revolution of African Literature: A Brief Review

For African communities, the period of colonialism was a crucial time. The time was marked by numerous transformations and dramatic relocations. Colonialism imposed on the African people's tradition, belief systems, cultural standards and behaviors, and the projected standards of the colonial administration. The colonial authorities compelled them to accept the lifestyles of the colonial masters, leaving them with little other option. At this point, African tradition and religion began to be displaced, and their belief system was tossed into the baskets of outmoded components. As a

means of engaging the colonized by the colonial administrator, the colonized Africans were forced to learn that administrator's language. As a result of this unintentional dominance, the settlers begin to absorb the language of the colonial officials and to mix it with their own tongues. The languages of the colonial administrators were acquired through inadequate education or by "subverting the colonized and compelling him to learn his language so that he could interact with him" (Asma 2015, p. 18).

Not only did the colonized mingle their language with that of the colonial administration, but they also blended their culture, lifestyle, custom, and standard of living. During the colonial administration, the indigenous culture and tradition began to clash with the imported heritage, resulting in a number of revolutions and freedom-seeking demonstrations. The battle for freedom and emancipation at the hands of colonial administrators was supported by a variety of strategies. In an effort to recover their independence, some projected aggressive acts against the colonial authority. There are also some who opted for an academic approach, producing an array of literary studies to expose the colonial authorities' nefarious acts.

During and during Africa's colonial regimes, several literary works were produced. This study focuses on post-colonial African literature, its major themes, and a synopsis of how these themes reflect current events in the African community. The post-independence reality of African life is especially shown in the works of African authors from many backgrounds. In the precise words of a notable postcolonial African author, Ngugi Wa Thiong, the author wrote, "For the vast majority of Africans in the new state, independence did not bring significant improvements, as independence with a question mark" (Ngugi 1993, p.65). This expression implies that African communities encompass more than independence.

3. Methodology

The data collection process utilizes a straightforward survey method and a descriptive-analytic strategy. As a survey study, the research was inductive in that it addressed who, what, where, how much, and what in relation to the development of various themes in post-colonial African literature. Adopting the survey method permits the discussion of opinions, attitudes, expectations, and intentions in order to construct the themes. The approach permits the compilation of diverse submissions and conversations on post-colonial African literature's intended themes. Data was collected from properly cited secondary sources, and descriptive analysis was conducted, focusing on the tenets of the selected novels, the authors, and the manner in which the authors implemented the various approaches to understanding the dominant themes of post-colonial African literature.

4. Discussion

From the survey, a variety of themes were identified in post-colonial African literature. However, from the perspective of domination, around four themes have dominated post-colonial African literature. This section provides a study of these four themes. As such, each theme represents a separate segment, and the analysis is based on several literary works.

4.1. The Theme of Colonialism

The topic of colonialism has dominated post-colonial African literature discussions and literary works. Various African literary studies have reflected the events that transpired throughout the time of colonial rule. The focus of the research is on how the African community functioned during the colonial period. Different literary works depicted various facets of the colonial government in various African regions. Significantly, colonialism is the dominant theme in post-colonial African literature.

Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe is one of the post-colonial African literary masterpieces. It was initially published in 1958, two years after the British colonial administration granted Nigeria her independence in 1960. The issue of colonialism is central to the plot of Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe. Achebe used his literary skills to demonstrate, through a variety of narrative standards, to western communities who viewed Africa as uncivilized and that they played a significant role in transforming Africa's projected civilization into an alien one. In Things Fall Apart, Chinua Achebe described the pre-colonial African community, focusing on the system of government, social structures, tradition, and belief system, as well as the condition of the African country after the arrival of Europeans.

In the work, the author attempts to show the genuine image of African culture from a different perspective by employing literature, which the colonial masters disparaged as uncivilized and backward in the literature of other languages. After the entrance of Englishmen in the region, the author incorporated the story and the transition of a Nigerian tribe from a traditional society to a colonialist one. Colonialism is one of the key themes in Chinua Achebe's work, as he strives to demonstrate that Nigerian society possessed a distinct culture that the English deemed barbaric. Things Fall Apart's depiction of the colonial era may have been an attempt to represent changes in Nigerian society; yet, it emphasizes the reality that white men stripped the natives of their traditional traditions, religion, and political and economic dominance. In his novel, Chinua Achebe portrayed a Nigerian community whose traditional practices had been eradicated by colonialism. In Things Fall Apart, Chinua Achebe tells the narrative of an elderly man who labored his entire life to prove to his community that he was able to make critical judgments in defense of their traditions and culture. To

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demonstrate his masculinity and strength of character to his clan, he murdered his adoptive son; nevertheless, this led to his banishment from his homeland. People in that region believed in a number of gods and goddesses, but when he returned to his homeland, they had forgotten their traditions and were being influenced by the customs of the white men. Achebe portrayed the arrival and impact of the white males on the indigenous people as follows:

The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together, and we have fallen apart (Chinua, 73).

He stated how the white men began meddling with the native people's daily lives and preventing them from practicing their traditional beliefs because it was incompatible with their views. It is also one of the primary reasons why they deemed the inhabitants of the African region to be barbaric: they were unable to understand them owing to a language barrier and lack of communication. Due to their unique ideals and beliefs, they attracted the local populace and compelled them to act against their own people by obeying the white people's demands. Colonialism influenced African society's religious practices and caused the people to convert to Christianity. Achebe's story demonstrates that the white civilization looked down on the African people due to their religious differences. As part of their belief, African tribes worshipped multiple gods and made sacrifices to the gods.

Achebe supplied the detail that "new churches and a few schools were erected in the surrounding villages." Since the beginning, religion and education have been intertwined (Chinua, 75). Due to a lack of understanding of the local language, the white men were unable to comprehend the value and significance of the native people, so instead of attempting to understand their religion, they declared it false and began preaching their religion and educating the people from their perspective. Religion, which was a unifying force for the indigenous people, became a divisive force, wreaking devastation on society.

Colonialism also affected the African tribes' political and economic conditions. Instead of supporting the indigenous people's traditions, culture, and customs, the white men attacked them and labeled them as backward. Achebe mentions the following in his writing:

"The white man, had indeed brought a lunatic religion, but he had also built a trading store, and for the first-time palm-oil and kernel became things of great price, and much money flowed into Umuofia (Chinua, 73).

They transformed the political and economic customs of the indigenous people and gradually seized control of the society by dividing the indigenous people over religious differences. Achebe stated in one of his essays that the white society sought to prove African nations to be barbaric and uncultured in order to seize their land and resources. He stated, "Quite simply, it is the desire, one would perhaps say the need in Western psychology to set up Africa as a counterpoint to Europe, as a region of negations at once distant and faintly familiar, in contrast to which Europe's unique position of spiritual grace shall be shown" (Achebe, 14). The west desired to explore other regions of the planet and assert its dominance over the entire globe. If they had attempted to seize power by force, it would have been a waste of their own resources, therefore they divided the populace through economic and religious conflict to seize power. Although the white men caused conflict, as stated by the author, some natives also backed them. The deterioration and disintegration of Igbo society is not just the result of conquerors' religious and governmental interventions. Many Igbo people join the religion introduced by the conquerors because they believe that many prevalent cultural practises are irrational evils (Purwarno, and Suhendi, 674).

The aboriginal people, who murdered the twins to eliminate evil, began to adopt the Christian doctrine that God controls life and death. The religion that had unified the people had a significant part in dividing them, and colonialism sowed the seeds of strife in African civilizations. Colonialism is an essential issue in the novel *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, in which he demonstrates that western nations, which viewed African communities as barbaric, had a significant role in making them so. African groups were well-organized and had their own religion, beliefs, customs, as well as political and economic structures. The western societies desired to establish their dominance, which they could do through their authority over the indigenous people. As a result, they used religion and traditional rituals as a source of strife among the local populace and seized control of their political and economic system. They depicted African society unfavourably to boost their profit and demonstrate to the world that they were attempting to civilise a barbaric nation. Colonialism caused more harm to African societies because it broke up the indigenous people.

In addition to Achebe's writing, numerous scholars have explored the issue of colonialism. Other authors, like Efua Theodora Sutherland, Buchi Emecheta, Peter Nazareth, Femi Osofisan, and Ama Ata Aidoo, published diverse works on the topic of colonialism. Following various techniques, these literary works have depicted the

condition of the African country prior to colonial rule and described its transformation.

4.2. The Theme of Displacement and Disillusion

The African community became chaotic with the departure of the colonial authority, at least from the mainstream leadership and political organizations. The issue of relocation illustrates how the hopes of the African community's founding fathers were not realized. After the departure of colonial authorities, the essence of the African state was reflected in many literary works. "The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born" by Ayi Kwei Armah is one of the works that elucidate the characteristics of the post-African state. The novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* by Armah illustrates the confounding harshness of the post-independence Ghanaian society during Nkrumah's administration. The author's dissatisfaction with the unanticipated failure of socialist democratic aspirations inaugurated at independence in 1957 inspired the work in division. (Adeodi, 2006)

The betrayal of Africa by its leaders is likely the most important lesson Armah wishes to convey. Armah was appalled at the new nation's realities. He questions in an unexpected manner how far Africa would be condemned by its despicable leaders. In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Born*, the leadership difficulties are highlighted by the man's lack of faith in the new military leaders of 1966. (Hay, 2000)

Surprisingly, the people who battled for independence were betrayed throughout the time that followed independence. The primary cause of Africa's decline is its leaders' inability to deliver effective government. The current government leaders were once on the opposing side. These ruling elites have been focused with retaining power for their own benefit, rather than for the betterment of their own people. After supplanting the colonial rulers, they became identical to them. One can now declare that nothing has changed; only the white faces have been replaced by black faces (Ayintey, 1992).

"*A Man of the People*" by Chinua Achebe is another literary masterpiece that describes the essence of the post-independence African state. This novel described the political structure and dominant condition of post-independence African states, particularly Nigeria. Both '*A Man of the People*' by Chinua Achebe and '*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*' by Ayi Kwei Arma are vehicles for the authors to voice their displeasure with what Africans typically made of political independence. The political and moral deterioration in independent Ghana and Nigeria is the subject of these novels, which have been deemed to be potent. In *A Man of the People*, Achebe attempts to determine where they went wrong, where the rain started to pummeled us. (Ngugi, 1972) The displacement in this work is masterfully depicted by the image of the rain and the house, through which the author shows the reality of the country immediately following the independence years.

Achebe attempted to convey disillusionment on the last promises of African freedom. Regarding the sociopolitical contradictions that are being explored, particularly at the level of the expressed concepts, the metaphor of the rain and home in *A Man of the People* can be considered the central idea or topic of the work. Consider a selection from the novel:

“A common saying in the country after independence was that it didn’t matter what you knew but who you knew. And, believe me, it was no idle talk. For a person like me who simply couldn’t stoop to lick any Big Man’s boots it created a big problem. In fact one reason why I took this teaching job in a bush, private school instead of a smart civil service job in the city with car, free housing, etc., was to give myself a certain amount of autonomy. So when I told the Minister that I had applied for a scholarship to do a post-graduate certificate of his help. (Achebe, 1966, p. 17)”

This statement was stated by a character in the novel *A Man of the People*. The statement illustrated what the African community has evolved into since the departure of colonial administrators.

The publication of *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, a highly evocative book, propelled Armah to the forefront of the new generation of African writers. In his depiction of a society on the verge of suicide, Armah has painted a deeply disturbing picture of the failings of all decadent political systems of all late bourgeois' worlds, in which morals and values have been lost and even the man of good intentions begins to doubt his sanity and feels guilty for not being corrupt. It is a work that burns with passion and tension, with a fire so intense that one can practically hear or smell the author's body on fire in every word and sentence (Larson, 1971).

In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah paints a vivid image of the disillusionment and suffering following freedom. His anger stems from the leaders' failure to keep their commitments. He asks:

How long will Africa be cursed with its leaders? There were men dying from the loss of hope, and others were

finding gaudy ways to enjoy power they did not have. We were ready here for big and beautiful things, but what we had was our own black men hugging new paunches scrambling to ask the white man to welcome them onto our backs. These men who were to lead us out of our despair, they came like men already grown fat and cynical with the eating of centuries of power they had never struggled for, old before they had ever been born into power, and ready only for the grave. They were lawyers before, something growing greasy on the troubles of people who worked out the land, but now they were out to be saviours. Their brothers and friends were merchants eating what was left in the teeth of the white men with their companies. (Armah, 1968, pp. 80-81)

This passage is from the book *The Beautiful Ones Have Not Yet Been Born*. As a result of postcolonial Ghana's political activity, it is evident how the issue of displacement was depicted. The post-colonial African state was portrayed as a failure, unable to live up to the expectations of the founding fathers of African nations. The novel was intended to examine the political climate of Ghana following independence.

4.3. The Theme of Gender Equality

Gender equality in Africa has been a topic of discussion since the departure of the colonial overlords. Some scholars contend that the colonial overlords introduced gender equality to Africa. African males have struggled to prevent their wives from exploring the topic of gender equality, according to various accounts. There were other anecdotes depicting how many post-colonial African men treated their wives. "Purple Hibiscus" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is one of the most well-known post-colonial African literary works discussing gender equality. There is a need for additional discussion on the nature of gender equality in African society.

Purple Hibiscus is a novel that depicts the ideal post-colonial African woman as one who remains silent in the face of abuse. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie effectively reflects the role of male literary characters through domination, control, and power, and the role of female literary characters through silence and oppression. Eugene Achike's control over his family, businesses, and newspaper manifests in his family connections as a desire for abusive control. Obiora and Jaja assume the position of authority, as would an elder son who lacked a father figure and was concerned for the family's well-being. Beatrice Achike nourishes and plans

for her children despite the torture and tyranny she endures at the hands of her husband.

Beatrice Achike, commonly known as Mama, is a female figure who correctly exemplifies the role of women in society. The majority of mothers are compassionate and desire what is best for their children, however not all married women are shielded, silent, and victims of domestic abuse. This is evident from Kambili's perspective on numerous occasions. Mama's portrayal begins while Kambili is studying in her room and Mama pulls her uniforms inside to protect them from the rain. Mama and Kambili experience a moment, similar to any other mother-daughter relationship, when Mama tells Kambili she is pregnant. Mama is there to comfort Kambili after his father splashes boiling water on his and his brother's feet for stepping into sin after returning from Nsukka. "Tears were streaming down her cheeks. She combined salt with cold water and applied the gritty mixture to my feet with care. She pulled me out of the tub and offered to carry me back to my room, but I declined." (pg. 195) This demonstrates that Mama has assumed the role of a woman and mother, caring for and protecting her children. Mama decides to defend her children by murdering the man who has tormented and abused them since they were young. "I began poisoning his tea before I arrived in Nsukka" (pg. 290) Mama informs her inquisitive children. We can assume that she did this because he was causing her and her children pain.

Throughout the entirety of *Purple Hibiscus*, the gender roles of the characters remain consistent. One is able to observe the inherent conflicts between each character and the problems that each conflict causes. The oppression of Mama and the care she provides for her children correctly portray the social positions of women in today's society. Papa's power struggle is also visible in the manner in which he handles his family members. Obiora's responsibility to care for his family when his father is absent exemplifies a young man's duty in society. Adichie does an excellent job portraying each aspect of each character.

4.4. The Theme of Liberation and Nationalism

The primary theme of *A Grain of Wheat* is the importance of national independence. A corollary is a difficulty of achieving independence because the colonial system prevented colonized subjects from gaining the necessary skills of self-governance. Closely related to these themes is the personal abuse of power among both colonizers and the colonized. Along with this theme goes the harm caused specifically by hypocrisy and, more generally, the selfish misuse of political stance for personal purposes. Although Ngugi wa Thiong'o provides substantial material on the reasons that Mau Mau arose and the workings of the larger Kenyan independence movement, his novel is not primarily a social and political analysis. Rather, he focuses on the human elements in the late colonial era and the related efforts to free Kenya's diverse

peoples from British rule. He shows how the variety of social conditioning in which diverse characters were raised later influenced their attitudes toward independence. Personal decisions based on emotion play central roles, especially among people who sought to distance themselves from political commitments. The author shows that no one is truly immune from the legacy of colonialism. At the same time, he seems not to place full confidence in those who espouse political and altruistic motives for their actions.

The characters of Mugo, who accidentally becomes a hero, and Gikonyo show how ordinary people can get caught up in something larger than themselves; one becomes a traitor, and the other is broken by his experiences. The falsity Karanja displays by betraying his people is paralleled by his personal behavior in his sexual relationship with Mumbi, in which Mumbi betrays her husband. The deep longings of Wambui and Warui to see freedom in their lifetimes are apparently achieved, and their subsequent disappointment at the limits of social change in the new nation encapsulates common frustrations.

5. Summary

This study analysed the prevalent themes in post-colonial African literature. The purpose of the study was to identify major themes in the literature and evaluate their significance for post-colonial African society. The study examined four major themes and used several African novels to illustrate the themes' consequences for African society. From the data, it is obvious that after the colonial period, the African population has produced an abundance of studies. The majority of literary works written after the colonial era focused on the arrival of colonial administrators in Africa, the manner in which they operated, and primarily the imposition of foreign culture, tradition, religion, and education on the African people at the expense of their existing structures. There are additional literary works written after the colonial era that examine the nature of the African state. Ayi Kwei Armah's 'The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born' and Chinua Achebe's 'The Man of the People' are examples of post-colonial African works that describe the post-independence status of African nations. Ngugi Wa Thiong depicted the theme of nationalism and liberation actions, whereas Adichie concentrated on the position of African women after the colonial period. These investigations gave evidence of the continuous growth of African literature beyond the colonial period.

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