

---

## Language And Culture In African Postcolonial Literature

Language often heavily burdened by political populism and leftism in African Postcolonial Literature, which appeared to promote rejection. One of the literary ramifications of nationalist / anti-colonial agitation was an aesthetic based on race that saw even the new product of literary hybridity born of cultural exchange as a sign of Western conquest and servility.

One of the literary ramifications of nationalist / anti-colonial agitation was a racially based aesthetics that saw in their literary projects even the new product of literary heredity born of cultural exchange as a symbol of West domination and servile imitation by Africa. He explains that all these aspects contain a duality born on the one hand from the reconciliability of African literary aspirations, and on the other hand from Western standards. Lastly, Asante-Darko demonstrates that the African literary and cultural history can not be reconstituted but only restored, and that the textual, thematic and artistic hybridity that this presupposes must be accepted in order to give African literature the autonomy it needs to contribute to the universality of literature in its entire quota.

A mixture of agitation and imitation is postcolonial literature. It is a combination of rebellion and conciliation. In a way that is not always readily perceptible to critics, this duality permeates its stratagem, its style, and its themes. This has practical didactic implications for the contemporary literary endeavor in Africa. The central concern of this article is to assess the extent to which African protest literature seems to have imitated European and colonial literary discourse in matters such as thematic concerns, aesthetics, and methodology. The imitation, exchange, and hybridity relationship is presented with the aim of highlighting the thematic, methodological, and esthetic differences between some aspects of African literature on the one hand and Western literary tradition on the other.

The African colonial experience dominated the origin and nature of contemporary African literature of protest and rendered it contrary to Western aesthetic standards. This Manichean interpretation must have been a response to the stance of Horace, 'O imitatores, servum pecus!' Imitators are a servile race. The rejection was reinforced by the general impression that Africa needed a literature to evolve that would not imitate Europe's literary norms. Therefore, it is not surprising that authors of protest literature promoted a literary endeavor whose form, vocabulary, esthetic expectations and concerns needed to be different from those of the colonizing forces that were viewed as subjugating them and underestimating every aspect of their live.

Thus, the desire for originality was to become the prerequisite for authentic African literature, exploring the past of Africa, supporting its present, and promoting a hopeful future.. Nonetheless, a closer look at the threads involved in weaving the cloth of this Negritude protest literature shows that Negritude imitated some of the goals and methods of the very discrimination it kicked against in carrying out its protest work.

' When all is said and done, it will be understood that bringing new ways of doing things into Africa is simply an offer of an opportunity to choose between different options, at least the old and the modern, the Western and the local. This position is confirmed by the composite essence

---

of African literary discourse of opposition to the colonial experience and its implications as expressed in the groundbreaking literary works. Thus, Negritude's aggressiveness can be explained in the vengeance logic, which is essentially an imitation in so far as it is one's reaction to the action of another. We only mimic when we avenge or retaliate.

It was not meant to challenge any race's dignity and intellect. The same language and method used to denigrate him becomes his tool of revalorization, pride, and restitution. Therefore, imitation denies the inferiority assigned to him by compulsion. This imitation then tends to be enforced in a way because circumstances require him to address the colonizer in a language and logic that the colonizer may understand, hence the use of European languages and literary forms as instruments of postcolonial literary speech. The former tends to presume that pre-colonial African culture and society are virtuous innocent. This, by definition, makes the African in a world of so-called international evils the lethargic entity. Such notions were propagated by the mistaken idea that imitating practices and values that were originally European even when such imitation is realistic and pragmatic is unacceptable for an African. This is because the contemporary African was born into a social environment that combines the conventional precolonial history with the emergence of 'new' notions. The failure to distinguish between what can be recovered in its purity and what is irremediably lost to hybridization can lead to a literal misinterpretation of the ideas expressed in works such as this poem by Guy Tirolien entitled: 'Je ne veux plus aller à leur école' in which the person advocates the rejection of European values and education in favor of the traditional African way of life. Only when they invoke history as a roadmap for the future can such precolonial nostalgia among African writers be appreciated. This idea falls into the controversial opinion that the possession of a particular language indicates that the possessor shares or even endorses the ideological and cultural world view of the society in which the language is born and practiced. On little deliberation and questioning, the very basis of such claims starts to falter.

.The legitimacy or appropriateness of this question lies in the fact that these same foreign languages have been the cementing factor for communication and the dissemination of ideas among countless African societies that have hitherto been separated and linguistically inconsistent entities that lack any form of intercomprehensibility. Again, various sections of African communities differ in the final analysis as to what constitutes spiritual 'subjugation. From these opposing perspectives, it follows that while some may see a reconstitution of precolonial culture as redemptive, others may see it as not only impossible, but also unwanted.

The postcolonial truth is not a physical mixture to the latter, but a chemical substance that can not be isolated into its original constituents. Imitation of language, like that of cultural value, becomes an unavoidable form of hybridization, not only optimistic. The position of Fanon and Ngugi can be summed up in the contention that foreign languages in Africa are imposition which must be rejected on the grounds that they are vehicles of a foreign culture whose continuing imitation or acceptance in the literature of postcolonial society is indicative of persisting subjugation.

In 'Towards a National Culture,' Ngugi states that: 'by learning his adopted language's thinking process and values. It must be pointed out; however, that any language can carry any culture just as any culture can carry any language: witness the transformation of various ancient cultures and societies when they fell under Greek and Roman rule. Languages and cultures have demonstrated the ability to adapt in science, philosophy and art to 'foreign' cultures and novelties by introducing new words and borrowing from other languages to express new

---

notions.

Such borrowing highlights the linguistic exchange phenomenon, which is essentially a process of imitation and hybridization.

The real problem arises when we classify literature into realms of linguistic expression rather than representations of cultural experience; when we consider Joseph Conrad's works as English literature, those of Ionesco and Beckett as French literature instead of a classification that emphasizes content rather than medium. The reference here is made to a shared colonial / imperial (cultural) experience that unites Great Britain and its former colonies; and these experiences can also be articulated in African languages. Such a Commonwealth meaning goes beyond mere language speech.

In fact, it is not only objectionable, but also patently idealistic and superstitious to pretend that a given language possesses any measure of intrinsic oppressive, imperial tendencies of dominance and must therefore be rejected as a medium of the emancipatory account of postcoloniality, especially when the cultures of such languages are the cradles of The Magna Charta and The Rights of Man. Contrary to the advocates' claims that foreign languages were rejected as a medium of African literature, the stylistic legacy left to postcolonial writers found meaningful expression in Negritude writers' works.

Negritude's rejection of a supposedly alien contaminated present inevitably culminated in the urge to redeem and emulate the past. This has been appealing for several reasons, including the innate psychological desire not only to be part of a distinct and exclusive and glorious history, but also to develop a sense of self-confidence that ties one to an indissoluble community that stretches across eternity. It is therefore clear that the rejection of European values as promoted by post-colonial African commentators and authors, far from being an expression of freedom, has meant enforcing prohibitions and inhibitions that continue to compel individuals to adhere to limited choices in cultural values and language matters. Therefore, it has consequences for marriage, occupation, migration,

In concluding this brief discussion, I would like to reiterate that the ubiquity (or even dominance) of 'imperial' culture and language may provoke nationalism's reactions, but it is not subjugation per se. African literature's modern definition and function must be founded on the solid rock of universal heritage so that we can start to see its linguistic medium and themes as part of a global heritage. Whatever language or culture is introduced in Africa in favor of pre-colonial ones. Within African literature, the option to emulate foreign languages and cultures will continue to provide a unifying nucleus for the multitude of African languages and cultures for which the political and legal ramifications of a return to pre-colonial multilingualism and plurality of culture are neither desirable nor feasible.