

Identity Politics

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Abstract

Having been a very painful, narrow-minded and long period, colonisation, started with the Age of Discovery in the fifteenth century, led writers in the colonised countries to answer back to their colonisers so as to prove not only their own customs and traditions, but also their languages in danger of being moribund.

In this paper, the burden of the colonized writers and the difficulties they encountered to establish their reconstruction ideas while preserving their own societies will be enlightened. When the colonisation period started, first the writers made situation assessment, then their ideas to answer back divided into two; using the power of literature, some of them decided to fight in English, some of them in their own languages.

This paper also aims to mention the importance of literature through decolonization period and gives significant examples of the writers, embracing the discrimination and suppression of the time.

Keywords: *Colonized Countries, Writers in The Supressed Societies, Reconstruction Ideas, Decolonisation, Post Colonial Studies*

Özet

Uzun, sancılı ve bağınaz bir dönem olarak anılan sömürgeleşme, on beşinci yüzyılda Keşif Çağı ile başlamış olup, sömürgeleştirilmiş ülkelerdeki yazarların hem gelenek ve göreneklerini korumak amaçlı hem de kendi dillerinin yok olma tehlikesi altında olmalarından kaynaklı, kendilerini edebi bir şekilde savunmalarına yol açmıştır.

Bu çalışmada sömürgeleştirilmiş devletlerin yazarlarının kendi toplumlarını korurken yükledikleri ağır sorumluluk ve yeniden

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yapılanma fikirlerini inşa etmede karşılaştıkları zorluklar anlatılacaktır. Sömürge dönemi başladığında sömürgeleştirilen ülkelerin düşünürleri ilk olarak durum değerlendirmesi yapmışlar ve onlara kendilerini doğru bir şekilde anlatmalarının tek yolunun edebiyatla sağlanabileceğine karar vermişlerdir; fakat bu konudaki fikirlerde iki şekilde ayrılık yaşanmıştır: Edebiyatın gücünü kullanarak bazıları İngilizce, bazılarıysa kendi dillerinde sömürgecilerin kendileri hakkında edindikleri yanlış bilgilere karşılık vermişlerdir.

Ayrıca bu çalışmada dekolonizasyon dönemi boyunca edebiyatın öneminden bahsetmek ve zamanın ayrımcılık ve sömürge baskıcılığıyla yüzleşmek zorunda kalan yazarlardan önemli örnekler vermek amaçlanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sömürgeleşmiş Ülkeler, Sömürgeleştirilmiş Toplumlardaki Yazarlar, Yeniden Yapılanma Fikirleri, Post Kolonyal Çalışmalar

DECOLONIZATION MOVEMENTS IN HISTORY

After the French Revolution(1789- 1799), the secular system of all European countries was shaped. What a successful and courageous effort is, despite the suppression of the misused religion by the unjust monarchist regime, people won their own independence. Hence, this liberty victory became a moral degeneration of the people as it led to a hatred for religion. What the revolutionaries failed to notice was that by abandoning the idea of God, they would be effective only within small group of people to end up as a system in which people rule over people. As time went by, the feudal oppression that people had suffered at that time, only changed a phase and colonisation period continued its way, just like Orwell's words in *Animal Farm*, "all animals equal, but pigs are more equal". (Orwell,1987, 12).

The colonisation of the countries started as a need of finding new places and sources with limited conditions of the powerful countries. The civilizations and nations can differ from place to place and people to people, but ignorance and arrogance of the colonisers oppressed the colonised people by forcing them to change their habits, traditions, customs, languages, even religions. Achebe in his book, *Things Fall Apart*, said that white men came and put a knife on everything they have and all the things fall apart, meaning that the coming of the colonisers changed all their traditions,

even people's attitudes by either assimilation or education (Achebe, 1996, 30). There are advantages and disadvantages of the colonisation period: European colonisation brought a vast amount of technology to a land but prejudice towards the Africans resulted in atrocities from which the colonists went unpunished for; furthermore, the Africans were sold as slaves around the world to spend their lives. Having been in place prior to colonisation, the society was destroyed. Life would never be the same, and not particularly for the better, so the disadvantages outweigh the advantages but the colonised people with education started to reconstruct the values of themselves and answer back the colonizers literally.

For many years, French was thought to be the only language in the world. Americans and French closed their eyes to the new movements of colonies and they used to be in denial of having the objective angle that there are lots of languages, literature and identities that can define the world differently. Said claimed that there cannot be only one identity and it pushes all the nations of objectivity and subjectivity. Despite the denial, the beginnings of a new paradigm, reconstructed by the ideas of thinkers started in 1950s and 1960s, even before Said. Gugi Fanome asked the question if language can be neutral and post-structuralists are really important for this new paradigm, including Said. Roland Barthes with representation explained what reality, consciousness and signification is related with the similarities of semiotics. Foucault wrote a book called *This is not a Pipe*, but there is a pipe on the cover of the book showing that it is not a pipe but a representation of a pipe. With the impact of the French Revolution, some Christian people wrote even pornographic writings and cartoons about the church without thinking twice of how they would harm their own values. For instance, Steven Hawkins is the cutting edge of astronomy, not knowing about theology and philosophy, wrote *Brief History of Time*.

Many people do not know anything about the history of Christianity but they take it for granted. Hans Küng, professor of Christian theology in Germany, wrote *Islam Past, Present and Future* as if he were a Muslim man and when it is read, it is easily understood that he cannot understand Muslims. Truth is relative. He estimated that protectiveness undermined their faith; further more, he wrote back to the medieval Christian writers, attacking Islam. (Tibawi, 1961, 32).

Abdullah Yusuf Ali, an African Scholar, translated Quran into English after his retirement. He studied English literature at Cambridge and kept on referring to mythology. Jamaica Kincaid wrote *On Seeing England for the First Time* to talk about the prejudices of stronger ones not being the same as the weaker ones and added that there used to be an unbalanced power to be reconstructed. (Kincaid, 1991). Just as Kincaid rejected to be misunderstood or misled, there are lots of writers, philosophers, linguists and sociologists to decolonise people's ideas literally.

In 1960s, people moved from modern to post- modern and then decolonization period started. The roles between the West and the East cannot be minimized. Interpreting the societies is very crucial for not underestimating the values of other cultures, societies, languages, ethnic groups and even small tribes. The problem of the non-Western societies was that uneducated people misled the East and Islam. Muslims are like Marxist socialists, not reading other than theirs.

Reality is also relative. Meaning and reality is arbitrary. There is not one reality. The meaning of a word cannot be understood in isolation. This is the concept of signified and signifier. Like a verb and the object being arbitrary. Saussure, as an important Swiss linguistic, said that there is binary opposition 'between two opposite ideas (Holdcroft, 1991, 76). In essence he claimed that language is a symbolic system and there are different symbolic systems to isolate. (80). Saussure said that people have to isolate the signifier and the signified, identifying iconic and indexical meaning. (90) . Charles Peirce, a Canadian philosopher, extended the meanings. "Icon", for instance, comes from Greek meaning symbol, image, those that appear. When you see an envelope on the computer screen, you know that you have an e-mail. The envelope is the signifier of the e- mail that you have, but it is not the real e- mail, but an image of it, so people are socialized into these roles that determine the boundaries of a person and they take it for granted, without questioning the roles they are forced to have.

¹ *The principle of contrast between two mutually exclusive words: on/off, boy/ girl, etc...An important concept of structuralism which sees such distinctions as fundamental to all language and thought.*

Saussure also came up with the notion of *langue*² and *parole*³. People do not learn through invitation and repetition but they internalise a system of grammatical finite rules, so when we speak a language, we bring the appropriate rules. (102). Saussure said: “A sign is the basic unit of language (a given language at a given time). Every language is a complete system of signs. *Parole* (the speech of an individual) is an external manifestation of language.” (113). This is very much part of Chomsky’s linguistics. There are no languages that are harder than other. It is a myth so Chomsky translated *langue* and competence widely understood. Not all the rules are systematic.

People just internalise and bring them to appropriate rule through habituation. *Parole* is actual articulation of amusing sentences to create. *Parole* has the icon performance. Saussure extended this meaning by social conversations⁴. Language is an abstract system of structures but it is made up of phonetic, phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic structure. Saussure argued that there is no difference between language, family and economic structure, depended on one another. If one is removed, the system will collapse. (Harris, 1987, 210).

By the enlightening ideas of Saussure, the structuralists have the idea that all languages are interconnected. If a person is born in a particular culture, that person socializes all the internals of that society and this is *langue* in a system of meaningfulness. As we grow up, we create reality, which is an important concept for post- structuralists because meaning is a multiplicity of other things.

As structuralists changed the language system taught, people realised that language is not the only thing that has been internalized, ethical and moral values are also arbitrary. Reality is socially constructed, because it is the representation of reality. The post-colonial and post- structuralist writers believe that slice of reality create a way of talking to particular group, othering and alienating the other group that is not amongs them. All these constructive images, internalised through media and education system make us create a discourse for *others*. Roland Barthes wrote *Mythology*

² *Language in French*

³ *Conversation, what is spoken*

⁴ *For instance boys are on this side and girls are on the other side. If it is not that way, there will be cultural shock.*

talking about myths and stereotypes⁵. For instance, he explained that wine is supposed to be the signifier and drinking wine is thought to be romantic and healthy, but this is just a discourse that people create for themselves. Wine can be taken as a sin or unhealthy drink in another discourse. (Bannet, 1989, 122). Barthes deconstructed these myths saying that people are essentialising *the other*. (125). Essentialisation is the centre to discourse.

Discourses within discourses, dominant groups have hegemonic power to other, just like people are still facing the Western hegemony, transmitted through education and media⁶. Antonio Gramsci kept his prison diaries to define different categories of people, constructing contemporary discourse. (Hoare, 1977, 54). He talked about power and knowledge saying that knowledge is not created, it is assumed, which is a lazy thing to do.

Deconstructuralists have a discourse of enlightenment, tearing things into ideas; moreover, they question the discourse of modernity and became post- modern. Most of these were French; Foucault, Derrida, Barthes, Saussure, etc... They criticized the discourse of orientalism. Anderson in his book *Imagined Societies* examined the creation and global spread of the 'imagined communities' of nationality. Anderson explored the processes, created these communities: the territorialisation of religious faiths, the decline of antique kingship, the interaction between capitalism and print, the development of vernacular languages-of-state, and changing conceptions of time. (Anderson, 1991, 67). He also showed how an originary nationalism born in America and was modularly adopted by popular movements in Europe, by the imperialist powers, and by the anti-imperialist resistances in Asia and Africa. (78). Further more, he discussed the complex role of the colonialist state's mindset in the development of Third World nationalism, while the others analysed the processes by which all over the world, nations imagining themselves as old. (99).

People look down on their own cultures to glorify the colonisers, so Fanon rehabilitated cultures to build confidence of the new states to become an independent nation and to break the boundaries of the discourse, shaped by the Western societies, because those cultures has been despised both by the coloniser and the colonised. Albert Memmi also wrote *The Psychology of*

⁵ a fixed idea that people have about what someone or something is like, especially an idea that is wrong

⁶ Especially today's media; facebook, twitter; youtube, etc..

Colonialism showing that he belongs to the worlds in between to create a counter discourse.

The post- colonial countries revised their cultures with self- renewal ideas of their own writers and linguists. Because of the cultural alienation, people receded from their own cultures and languages, so Homi Bhabha talked about this ambivalence⁷ of the colonized, claiming that people can have multiple identities and belong to multiple cultures, One of his central ideas is that of *hybridisation* taken from Said's work, he described the emergence of new cultural forms through multiculturalism. Instead of seeing colonialism as something locked in the past, Bhabha showed how its histories and cultures are constantly accepted on the present, demanding that people transform their understanding of cross-cultural relations (Bhabha, 1994, 88). By applying post-structuralist methodologies to colonial texts. his work transformed the study of colonialism

Fanon, a French psychiatrist, philosopher, revolutionary and author, believed that people have to work on their own cultures for rehabilitating them only by being themselves, whereas Thiong'o, a Kenyan author, disagreed with him saying that people must not accept English language as lingua franca and forget their own languages. Thiong'o used the ideas of Fanon but he argued that local language is also important for preserving their own languages and cultures. Thiong'o in his book *Moving the Centre* talked about English as a lingua franca language; furthermore, he believed that it was instrumental for global thinking of literature. (Thiong'o, 1992, 23). He mobilised every item to be checked. He also changed the department of English to literature saying that Japan or Arabic literature can also be learnt, so English can be one of the options in literature. These issues were also held by Spivak in even more ironical position that the Westerners, learning their languages and reading in their own languages, also create a form of arrogance. Spivak in her *The Death of a Discipline*, talked about there should be a comparative literature. (Spivak, 2003, 136).

Kenyetta also wrote a desertation to test his own hypothesis in his book *Facing Mount Kenya*, saying that the colonizers are insulting them. (Kenyetta, 1965, 54). He justified the ceremonies, symbolic of transition

⁷having two opposing feelings at the same time,for instance you can hate the coloniser,but you can love the language, laws or literature that they bring with them.

from one style to another, childhood to youth, youth to adulthood, etc...⁸(78).

Thiong'o by writing the novel *The River Between* showed the realistic novels that describe the situation between the coloniser and the colonised. (Thiong'o, 1965, 6). The story explains the audiences the reality of lovers kept apart by the conflicts between Christianity and traditional ways and beliefs.

By these extraordinary writers, a new historicism period started. Either they use their own language or English, history has changed within the renewal movements; moreover answering back created a new literature of the colonised people who already had their own literature, combining it within their new values. Literature has always impact on writing and changed history by the enlightenment thoughts of writers who always reconstruct ideas that lead the audiences to new philosophies and thoughts.

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