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Anti-Othering in the Lion and the Jewel: A Postcolonial and Oriental Analysis of Wole Soyinka's Play the Lion and the Jewel

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Abstract

This paper tends to propose a new term for the literary world called "anti-Othering" analyzing an African as well as a post colonial play The Lion and the Jewel by Wole Soyinka. This paper guides the literary world to rethink how Wole Soyinka has subtly introduced the idea of anti-othering in the play The Lion and the Jewel. In this paper, how the world is affected by the idea of othering of the west, is displayed first and then with textual referring to the play The Lion and the Jewel the idea of anti-othering is proposed. This work reflects on how the power of mimicry can be used for both othering and for anti-othering. It illustrates how Wole Soyinka treats a performance and uses the tool mimicry to found the ground idea of 'anti-othering'. Finally, the paper argues why the world needs to identify anti-othering now.

Keywords: Othering, Anti Othering, Performance, Mimicry, East, West

Introduction

Whether or not in the first act of the play The Lion and the Jewel by Wole Soyinka, anti-othering is applied or not, is the intent of this paper. The Lion and the Jewel is by and large analyzed, researched and celebrated for its depiction of cultural, traditional and/or gender conflicts. However, in the first act (morning) of the play, an interesting element is applied by Soyinka; play within a play. Soyinka entitles the moment as "the dance of the lost Traveller" (Soyinka) where Lakunle, Sidi and other characters act as modern western people. The satire of the western norms and perceptions is vividly presented by Soyinka. When the west looks down upon or satirizes the third world's and/or the colonized ones' norms and/or cultures, it is termed as othering. So, why can't Soyinka's making fun of the western norms in a post colonial play be considered as anti-othering?

Wole Soyinka is considered as one the most versatile authors as well as a prominent political activist of Africa who won Nobel Prize for literature in 1986. He has written literary pieces of different genres. All of them are in English. In 1959, Soyinka published his famous play The Lion and the Jewel. It was the time period when Nigeria still did not get their independence from British colony. It was that period; people of Nigeria were still confused choosing between their own tradition and the upcoming modernization which is also the main theme of this play. To illustrate this, he introduces two male characters and by them, he introduces two world views; the Afrocentric view and the Eurocentric view (Moawad). The play is divided into three parts. They are: 'Morning', 'Noon' and 'Night'.

The main plot of this play is that the female protagonist of this play, Sidi the village belle, has to choose her suitor of marriage from two of her village people. One of them is the head of the village, Baroka who is a believer of African traditions and the other one is the village school teacher Lakunle, who wants to change the village like a western world. Sidi does not want to marry Baroka as he is old and she believes that she deserves better. On the other hand, she does not want to marry Lakunle as he does not want to pay her the bride price. This confrontation and struggle between Baroka and Lakunle can be interpreted as the struggle of Nigeria to choose between tradition and modernity; where Sidi is representing Nigeria, Baroka tradition and Lakunle modernity (Litcharts). The play ends with Sidi choosing Baroka to marry which means choosing tradition over the modernity.

Also, this play explores the theme performance impressively. The main topic of this paper is basically based on one of the performances in the act 'Morning' called 'the dance of the lost Traveller'. Dance always plays an important part of any African literature as if it is a part and parcel of their culture and this play is not any different. Dance and performance are a medium of communication for humans from the ancient period. The musical performances in the play seem to be a part of the everyday life, and they all seem to carry a sense of authenticity. There is an emphasis on the rhythm and on the colorful aura surrounding all the performances. "The notion of rhythm (i.e., the constant beating of the drums) sets the resistive, strong undertone upon which the performance unfolds itself" (Sutluoglu). However, 'the dance of the lost Traveller' is represented in the play as not only an ordinary dance performance, but a mimicry, a mockery of the west, modern persona through the eyes of African people. "Soyinka often turns the dancing body into a paradoxical discursive image which mediates a controlled, subversive message targeting the ideological constructs of power and authority" (Bigot). In the play too characters act as their true self while performing. For example, throughout this play, Sadiku is seen as the submissive, loyal and obedient wife of Baroka, but suddenly all of these changes when she starts to perform. Her dedication and wild approach to the performance builds her a wild card herself who hides

behind the face of a docile wife. Is it not possible that Soyinka through the performance called 'the dance of the lost Traveller' has not only mocks the modernity of the west but also has protested modernity of the west into the African culture!

Othering

Othering refers to a "process by which imperial discourse creates its others" (Mushtaq). It is quite necessary for a colonial empire to create the other, "Whereas the Other corresponds to the focus of desire or power [...] construction of the other is fundamental to the construction of the Self" (Ascroft et al.). It is also used as an umbrella term, under which there are so many different ideas like racism, xenophobia, ethnocentrism etc. Othering can start from a small situation like isolating any member from the family to any kind of global situation like othering any county because of its people's belief. However, in postcolonial context "othering is the practice of representing and defining the colonized natives as inferior to their European counterparts. The term is used to discuss the discursive and other processes used by the colonizers to create and sustain the negative and inferior views and assumptions about the colonized natives" (Raja). Othering is rooted in Freudian analysis of formation of subjectivity (Das). Jacques Lacan initiated a distinction between 'other' and 'Other.' "The Other-with the capital 'O' has been called the 'grande-autre' by Lacan, the great Other, in whose gaze the subject gains identity" (Das). So, creation of the others and initiating the process of Othering, hence, is necessary for the imperial and colonizing powers to assert their own power, will, and value. In the field of orientalism, the idea of othering defines the domination of the west upon the east. How the West look down upon the East, how they depict us. How they represent us in their media. All these things can be seen subtly through their action. In easier words, Othering is labeling people as 'other' from a group of people. This labeling comes from different perspective. Such as: skin color, religious group, gender identity, sex, race, language, age, disability, political affiliation, sexual orientation, occupation, ethnic group, nationality etc. (Cherry). So, being colonized both Orientals and Africans have suffered Othering by all or some of these perspectives.

Orientalism

Orientalism is mainly a post-colonial term. In the book, *Orientalism* (Edward) Said described about the orientalism as well as discussed, many characteristics of orientalism. According to Said, orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the orient and the occident. Here by the orient, he meant the people of east and the people of west are the occident. And by this distinction between orient and the occident emphasized the hegemony of the west over the east. Also, Said explains that orientalism is a field of academic research that includes everyone who teaches, investigates and writes about the orients. Orientalism discusses about the superiority of west over the east, what they think of the east, how they treat, or how they represent them. It describes how the people of west continue their dominance over the east even after the end of the colonial period. (Said)

Mimicry

In general sense mimicry refers to mimic parodies as it has a history as a pervasive method to play with language, combined with gesture due to the historical figure of the jester (Jungen). In easier words it is understood as copying or resembling anyone's actions like their speaking style or walking style etc. In postcolonialism and othering mimicry always plays a significant role. "Within the performance of mimicry lies, on one the hand, the desire to become or produce an equality that clearly will never be reached; on the other hand, the obscurity of this performance gains the potential to process, to incorporate and even to absorb the alleged primal image, to indicate it is reflecting the alleged profound reality" (Jungen). So, in postcolonial literature who mimics whom, is an important issue; it might be both the colonizer and the colonized. For Homi K. Bhabha mimicry "emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge", but there is ambiguity as to whom it gives power (Bhabha). He has suggested that the colonized can use it to subvert the colonizer. Bhabha argues that colonial mimicry is 'the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite' (Bhabha).

Literature Review

Anti-othering is a term which has never been used in any literary piece or theory so far. However, the conscious representation of mimicry and the pseudo-modern character of *Lakunle* by Soyinka in his play *The Lion and the Jewel* is sufficient enough to rethink whether or not this representation should be regarded as only mimicry or binary of Othering, Anti-othering.

For the Oriental and African people, Othering is so subtle that they cannot even understand when they are sidelined, marginalized and othered. In Hollywood movies, TV shows, magazines Othering had and has been a regular element to entertainment. For example, in the skit, called "Guys After the Game", Rowan Atkinson (popularly known as Mr. Bean) performs live on stage acting out the role of a waiter in an Indian restaurant in England (Atkinson et al.). The performance by Atkinson is extraordinary and even though the English accent of people of the Indian subcontinent is mimicked and mocked, it is still a loved one to even them.

In Hollywood films, people of the countries which are not part of Hollywood industry are always represented as Other stereotypically. Such as, Russians are the villain who are always hungry for power and money, Mexicans are all about drugs, all Japanese and Chinese people are martial art expert, Indians are either driver, doctors or just for some comic relief character (Osifo). Not only just the characters or people, representation of countries is also not near about being okay. Such as, in 2020 Netflix streaming service released a film titled "Extraction". (Hargrave) In this film, we see the portrayal of Bangladesh which leads to many controversies.

To some researchers too *The Lion and the Jewel* is a symbol of protest and resistance against the Eurocentric hegemony because of the tactful representation by Wole Soyinka. Liton Ahmed Hussein finds "Soyinka depicts the decolonizing mission of the Africans in the play through the symbolic representation of the characters like Sidi, Baroka and Sadiku" (Liton). Liton places Wole Soyinka at a different level than other colonial and postcolonial authors like Kipling, Conrad, E.M. Forster, Rider Haggard, Mary Kingsley etc. as in

Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* he "questions the inadequacy of white man's supremacy, and attempts to dismantle the colonial subjugation and cultural hegemony, and to re-read the own cultural heritage, religion, history, synchronism, custom and glory" (Liton). In the characters in *The Lion and the Jewel* too there is resistance: "The indigenous people like Sidi, Baroka and Sadiku, to maintain their own freedom and cultural identity, relentlessly combat against Eurocentric cultural hegemonizing and hybridizing effort" (Liton). In this play, Soyinka deconstructs the notion of Eurocentric white racist supremacy and hegemonic persistence of their civilizing mission with post-colonial re-visioning inquiry (Liton). As Lakunle, the western representative, fails to manipulate Sidi, the civilizing mission of the west fails too in the play. Liton regards *The Lion and the Jewel* as an anti-colonial nationalist writing as Soyinka establishes 'Africanness' that is articulated in direct opposition to dominant Eurocentric discourses.

Çağla Büyükoç Sütüoğlu gives emphasis on the performances represented in *The Lion and the Jewel* by different characters. "The performers resist postcolonial powers, forced modernism, gender oppressions through music, mime, and dance. The actions, at times, surpass the dialogue" (Sutluoglu). For example, the sounds of "metal percussion" while Lakunle describes how Baroka has hindered progress create an orchestra of sounds of the working class, or the oppressed (Sutluoglu).

'The dance of the lost Traveller' in the Morning act is a great caricature by Soyinka regarding the play as postcolonial text of counter-discourse to some established western stereotypes. The simulation of the recent past event of the photographer, 'a stranger' who had come from Lagos to Illujinle sometime before by Lakunle, Sidi and other characters is regarded as "counter 'otherness' by Md. Habibullah. Even being the colonizer, the stranger becomes the 'other' for the colonized people of Illujinle. The "simulacrum" helps Soyinka to innovate a counter-discourse by which the colonialist instead of the colonized is being categorized as the "other" (Habibullah).

So, there is no research so far on *The Lion and the Jewel* focusing mainly on 'anti-othering'. This gap can be filled in through this research.

Anti-Othering in the Lion and the Jewel

Now, the question is whether or not the process of this counter 'otherness' in *The Lion and the Jewel* can be termed as Anti-othering or not. Through the use of mimicry, Wole Soyinka has displayed Anti-othering discreetly. He has used the performance 'the dance of the lost Traveller' as a mimicry and challenged Othering to initiate Anti-othering.

Anti-othering Through Mimicry

Mimicry always plays an important role in othering especially when it comes to the topic of colonial, post-colonial literature. Because mimicry is a common tendency for the people of colonial area. There is always a tendency of copying each other in the process of colonialism. Sometimes the colonized people try to be more like their colonizer master by imitating them unconsciously. Such as, dressing like them, talking like them or acting like them. However, in this play, the villagers perform a dance named 'the dance of the lost Traveller' about the photographer, but interestingly the performance becomes a mimicry as they start to fully mimic the western photographer and his actions. Such as, how he acted, his behavioral pattern, his movements etc. Even in the play, there is a line which indicates that this performance is as a mimic, when Wole Soyinka said: "He alone does not dance. He does realistic miming" (Soyinka).

Most of the time, mimicry does not come from the positive intentions or positive mind set up. People use mimicry in a purpose of mocking others. Mimicry is used to irritate or ridicule others. This play is not any exception. When villagers start to dance the lost dance Traveller dance, there intention was not to encourage or praise the foreigner. Rather it was to mock him. To show the audience how stupid he was in their eye. Such as, Sidi chooses Lakunle to act the foreigner because she thinks them both as the same. Sidi uses the word 'clumsy' to describe the foreigner, as she also says Lakunle that he is just as clumsy like the foreigner.

While performing they go to the root of their dance. This performance would not have been a mimicry if they did not have gone this far. Such as, they give the accurate description of the action of the western photographer, but the funny thing here

is that none of them proposes any positive feeling to the audiences about the photographer. They depict his all the negative qualities through the mimic to represent him like a fool and thus they show how trivial he is to them. Like how he starts swearing and cursing because of the problematic situations or his movements. Through the performance of Lakunle, audiences can realize the uncomfortable feelings of the photographer because of the situation. Even the Bale of the village, Baroka starts to perform his part as the Head of the village to make the photographer more ridiculous.

Another important thing is that the way the title of that dance performance is uttered in the mouth of Sidi:

CROWD: Hurray for the Lagos man!

SIDI: [wildly excited.] I know. Let us dance the dance of the lost Traveller.

SHOUTS: Yes, let's. (Soyinka)

As if they have been performing this particular incident or incidents like this regularly. It is interesting to notify that Soyinka only by this dialogue by Sidi has established the fact that the actions of the colonizer/s are source of entertainment for the colonized ones. Even, the colonized perception motorbike as to understand as 'devil-horse', can be taken as a symbol of their negation towards the so called western materialistic progress. Moreover, the continuous failure to start the bike during the simulation done by the four girls adds more to this negation. Again, while selecting Lakunle to perform the role of the stranger Sidi says, "We've got to have the being from the mad outer world" (Soyinka). So, to Sidi as well as to all other characters of the play who stand with African tradition, regards the outer world from where the stranger has come, the modern world as a mad one. Thus, Soyinka discreetly implies the native perception of Yoruba society towards the modern western society as the 'Other'. The colonized here mimics the colonizer to make fun of the colonizer's norms. Mimicry, a strong tool to other the colonized by the imperialist here used by Soyinka in the opposite manner to initiate the path for Anti-othering.

The (Anti-) othering process of the Ilujinle people continues towards the stranger. He never actually appears in the play, rather his appearance is

recognized from the villager's conversations and the performance and none of them connotes positivity towards the stranger as well as the western modernity. Such as, whenever there is any type of conversation about him, the use of negative words as well as negative attitude is found. The (Anti) othering of the stranger by Ilujinle people is expressed through their attitude and language. They think him as a fool who is just a laughing stock for them. Even one of them states him as a clown, "FIRST GIRL: The stranger. The man from the outside world. The clown who fell in the river for you. [They all burst out laughing.]" (Soyinka). Their dance performance becomes a process of mimicking the 'Traveller' and it is seen that this mimicry was started in the first place to mock him. So, why a dance, as a mimicry actually! Why has not Soyinka just given a description about the stranger! Like the stranger came to the village, he fell down in the river, then the villagers found etc. Or Soyinka could have used any other way to describe, but rather than this Soyinka used the technique of mimicry by performing the dance. It is because performance always shows the real version of oneself, how they feel about anything, how they watch anything through their eyes. And mimicking reflects about the hatred or the triviality towards anyone. Here this mimicry by the villagers somehow sidelines the photographer from the villagers of Ilujinle. Or it might be said that through this simulation the colonized have sidelined the colonizer. The power alters here; Othering meets its counterpart here- the Anti-othering. More importantly, the performers do go through every detail of the action of the stranger but they have never mentioned his name. Thus, the submissiveness of the photographer is depicted in *The Lion and the Jewel* by Soyinka.

Anti Othering Through the Representation of Lakunle

In *The Lion and the Jewel*, Lakunle is the representative of the West. He dresses like them, thinks like them, even wants to reform the African community with new ideas like the west people. That is the reason, the people of Ilujinle hate him so much and he faces the (Anti-) othering in his own village. This statement proves the point, when Sidi says to Lakunle:

Sidi: Well go there. Go to these places where
 Women would understand you
 If you told them of your plans with which
 You oppress me daily. Do you not know?
 What name they give you here?
 Have you lost shame completely jeers
 Pass you over. (Soyinka)

This statement is alone enough to prove the attitude of the village people towards Lakunle. His attitude and action despise the villagers to take him as one of them. Villagers think him as more of a madman here. They do not think his western method to be successful here. They do not like him as they think him as the outsider in their village. Villagers also think him as fool who tries to change the things, as Sidi points out that the villagers think him as a ‘mad man’. Sidi does not believe that Lakunle will find anyone like him especially in Ilujinle, as she believes that he is not one of them. Thus, Lakunle is an ‘other’ to Sidi as well as his co-villagers.

Soyinka represented Lakunle in a tactical manner. Lakunle is mocked even for his western attire. “He is dressed in an old-style English suit, threadbare but not ragged, clean but not ironed, obviously a size or two too small. His tie is done in a very small knot, disappearing beneath a shiny black waistcoat” (Soyinka). Clearly, he wants to look like a modern west man, but fails to do so fully as his attempt is represented more vividly than representing him a fully modern one. This ambivalent in his appearance helps him too to be a ‘mad man’ to his villagers. Sidi rejects his western ambition of civilizing the indigenous people as absurd and farcical to the traditional society: “O oh. You really mean to turn/ The whole world upside down” (Soyinka). His ambition is vivid during a conversation between him and Sadiku, the former, an anglophile, says:

In a year or two I swear,
 This town shall see a transformation
 ...
 A motor road will pass this spot
 And bring the city ways to us.
 We’ll buy saucepans for all the women
 Clay pots are crude and unhygienic
 ... We’ll burn the forest, cut the trees
 Then plant a modern park for lovers
 We must reject the palm wine habit

And take tea, with milk and sugar. (Soyinka)

Through this conversation Soyinka represents the Eurocentric idea of ‘progress’ where Lakunle is the agent. By rejecting him even after his dreamlike sweet talks and promises, Sidi actually is rejecting the western progress in their land. Thus again, the powerful becomes powerless by the tool (Anti-)othering.

Proposing Anti Othering

So, what is Anti-othering actually? How has it been termed? In post colonial perspective othering refers to labeling or sidelining the powerless (i.e., the colonized) by the powerful (i.e., the colonizer). However, when those sidelined people will be able to sideline those powerful ones intentionally using the tools of Othering in the opposite manner, it can be termed as ‘Anti-othering’. The idea of Anti-othering should not be regarded as any kind of hatred or vicious characteristics. Rather it is a protest. A protest against the negligence and resent of the oppressor. Such as, the quite in the class who is being bullied for day after day, if one day he is able to stand against the othering by sidelining bully group, then it is Anti-othering. In *The Lion and the Jewel*, Wole Soyinka has intentionally sidelined the western norms by the powerless, colonized African people. So, Anti-othering prevails in *The Lion and the Jewel*.

The idea of Anti-othering is needed to set free the colonized world from their own psychological slavery under the west. The people of East and Africa have a tendency to think themselves as the subordinate of the west. It is the effect of the long-lasting imperial slavery under the rules of the west. Anti-othering as a protest in postcolonial world, can make the West aware of different perspectives and at the same time injects confidence among the colonized world.

Conclusion

On the whole, it is emerged in the present study that Anti-othering prevails in Wole Soyinka’s play *The Lion and the Jewel* through the mimicry and performance in ‘the dance of the lost Traveller’ and through the representation of pseudo modern character Lakunle. The powerless, colonized

people of Illujinle, sidelines the powerful western photographer by mimicry presented by people of Illujinle. Thus, the opposite of Othering occurs and Soyinka initiates the idea of Anti-othering to challenge the powerful as well as the colonizer. Again, the making fun of Lakunle for his attempt to be like a modern western man, also makes him an 'Other' among his villagers. Moreover, Sidi's rejection of Lakunle as a suitor also resembles the rejection of Eurocentric progress in Illujinle as well as in Africa.

This study initiates a new term 'Anti-othering' in an African as well as postcolonial play *The Lion and the Jewel*. Any other related term for this sort of representation has not yet been established as a strong opposition of the established 'Othering'. More and more findings of Anti-othering in other postcolonial literatures are needed now to stabilize this idea. As a protest to all sorts of Othering, Anti-othering should now get more attention.

Recommendations

This study opens up some more opportunities for further studies.

1. Further study on Anti-othering in more postcolonial literatures can be done.
2. More study can be done to understand the need of direct anti terminologies of established theories in the postcolonial world.

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