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Kachru's Indigenization: A Potent Voice and Pathway towards Decolonization in P'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*

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ABSTRACT

P'Bitek's acclaimed African work, Song of Lawino (1966) explores the complexities and conflicts of indigenous cultural identity and recognition grappled with the imposed colonization. Through the potent voice of an Acholi woman, Lawino challenges the western imperial effects on African culture, identity and values. She is extremely disappointed after her husband, Ocol's rejection of native culture and values in favor of the Western. This paper offers the reading of the African selected work through Braj Kachru's model of Indigenization to delve deep into the implicit agenda of colonization against the natives. Moreover, this study can provide an understanding to unfold the impact of colonization on Africans that has been fictionally represented in Song of Lawino (1966). Therefore, the present study examines to highlight how important and significant it is to project your own culture and identity that will go a long way towards decolonizing the indigenous lands under the occupation of colonial powers. The poet in his seminal and representative work in African oral literature suggests a way out to see the light at the end of the dark tunnel through projection of indigenization. Hence, indigenization is a potent voice towards decolonization and the research provides an alternative understanding to what colonists and imperialists manufacture and shape their discourse regarding colonized.

Keywords: Kachru, African Oral Literature, Indigenization, Potent Voice, Decolonization, P'Bitek, Song of Lawino.

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The study explores the effect of colonialism on the local voices and indigenous sociocultural realities. The European imperialists ruled the world to control and influence the colonies and margins with the falsifiable precept to extend relationships based on political, social and cultural exchange. This association tended to contain broader socio-cultural relations that were concerned with the political, economic and academic spheres of life of the colonial elite class and the educated elite class building layers between the European "mother" nation and the numerous

indigenous peoples under the rule. Such a system promoted innate notions of ethnic inferiority and exotic otherness (Ullah, I., Rehman, H. J. U., & Khan. (2021). However, natives find a representation of their segregated voice through the manifestation of their native culture and flora and fauna that is indigenization.

Indigenization allows a space for a native community to retell its own story or past—local and global, including its place, genealogy, local knowledge, culture, language, and social practices, all that are seen as marginalized—but then transforms these spaces into places of resistance and hope. (Grande, 2000a; 2000b; 2004; Smith, 1999; Trask, 2000)

As is elaborated in the ideas that indigenization provides enough room for the marginalized class to breath in an environment where they can narrate the stories of their own culture and then this opportunity given by indigenization will lead them to resistance and optimism. (Grande, 2000a; 2000b; 2004; Smith, 1999; Trask, 2000).

Furthermore, Smith has shed light on the term indigenization, that it is a way to know theory and practice from the perspective of natives (1990).

In Africa, colonialism disconnected people from their histories, landscapes, language, social relations and their own ways of thinking, feeling and interacting with the world (Thiong'o, 1994; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). It further destroyed existing structures and social support systems based on mutual respect and reciprocity through the introduction of capitalist economic structures (Smith, 2015).

Decolonization is a struggle by the natives to reclaim their marginalized culture, customs and linguistic identity by adopting and projecting local representation. It is an intellectual reaction against the imperial agenda of expansion with its own economic, political, sociocultural and linguistic objectives (Von Bismarck, H. 2012). "Colonization and decolonization are social processes even more than they are political processes. Governance over a people changes only after the people themselves have sufficiently changed" (Laenui, P. 2000).

1.2 About the Author and his Selected Work

Okot p'Bitek (1931-1982) is celebrated for his works that examine issues of cultural identity colonialism and post-colonial Africa. He was a well-known poet, novelist and social anthropologist from Uganda. His most well-known work is *Song of Lawino* (1966) a lengthy poem presented and given voice through an Acholi woman from the countryside that examines how Westernization has affected African culture. Other noteworthy works by him include *African Religions in Western Scholarship* (1970) *Song of Ocol* (1970) and *Two Songs* (1971).

By questioning Western views of African religions and cultures, P'Bitek made important contributions to the field of social anthropology. His writings are still relevant today because they offer perceptive commentary on colonialism, cultural identity and the challenges of modernity in Africa. His poetry frequently criticizes how colonialism and Westernization have affected African societies especially how they have lost their traditional values and embraced foreign cultural norms. He included aspects of traditional songs and storytelling into his writing drawing extensively from the Acholi people's oral traditions. His writings examine the conflict between traditional African cultures and Western influences as they deal with the complexity of post-colonial identity in Africa. P'Bitek is renowned writer for his poems' directness and accessibility which allow them to be relatable to a broad readership while retaining their nuance and complexity.

Song of Lawino (1966) is a potent work that expresses Lawino's sorrow over her husband Ocol's rejection of his own culture and acceptance of Western culture.

2. Literature Review

Rinsum & Boessenkool (2013) "Decolonizing African management: Okot p'Bitek and the paradoxes of African management" investigates the spread of cultural and intellectual traditions were as important to the creation of the modern world system as economic exploration of regions outside of Europe. These intellectual traditions have undergone many modifications as a result of this process, including transformation, contestation, masking, and so on.

P'Bitek was both a modernization and an indigenous tradition's child. Instead of an 'authenticity of identity,' P'Bitek embodies several identities, including those of a poet, an atheist, a Western-trained scholar, and a cultural nationalist. They constitute a life-long process of the creolization of various cultural assumptions, leading to a plethora of different cultural orientations. P'Bitek is explicitly opposed to the Western intrusive construction of identity of both the 'unbeliever' and the 'ignoramus' in Africa. He denounced Western hegemony in religion and academia in expressive and at times heated language. P'Bitek sharply scrutinized a colonial and neocolonial discourse while also criticizing his fellow Africans who uncritically embraced the postcolonial ideology in the 1970s. P'Bitek also fought hard to decolonize an African ideology. In this sense, his work, both literary and scholarly, is significant and timely in attempting to uncover the various mental concepts in management in Africa, including African management.

Nyongesa (2017) "Resistance in African Poetry: Postcolonial Perspective of Okot P'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* and Okigbo's *Labyrinth and Path of Thunder*" points out that after independence, Frantz Fanon (1961) emphasizes the need for the marginalized group to resist Western, dominant cultures. Fanon proposed direct confrontation as a means of resisting colonial influence in his postcolonial writing.

Before and after colonialism, African literary writers used literature to challenge the dominant, colonialist discourses of the period. Influenced by authors such as Frantz Fanon, they saw literature as a means of removing depreciating notions instilled in the colonized by colonizers. African literary writers adopted two resistance strategies: cultural fixity and cultural hybridity. Those who chose cultural fixity emphasized the importance of glorifying Africa's past traditions in order to oppose colonialism, which distanced and denigrated Africans.

At the time of independence, most African literary author wrote to depict the charm and excellence of African culture in response to demeaning and unjust colonial writing. Some writers opposed colonialism's orientalist philosophy and advocated for the use of African languages in African literature; they proposed that African writers write in African languages to ensure that literature is linked to a people's innovative resistance to colonialism. For them, using African languages would render African writers harder to colonial powers because they would be speaking directly to the people.

Writing in European languages, in their opinion, would be severely affecting. According to Thiong'o (1986), language was central to imperialism. He observes that "the bullet was the means of physical subjugation; language was the means of spiritual subjugation" (Nyongesa, 2017, p. 9). On the other hand, some African literary writers chose the middle way, shading African and European styles in their writing. Homi Bhabha corresponds to this middle ground as hybridity. Using postcolonial theory, the author examines hybridity and fixity as mechanisms of resistance in the poetry of P'Bitek.

Mukundi (2021) "Reading Okot p'Bitek's Song of Lawino in the Era of Postcolonial Technoscience" contends that it has often signified in its characterization the tendency to move post colonialism from resistance. "Resistance has become a much-used word in post-colonial discourses, and indeed in all discussions of 'Third World' politics," writes Bill Ashcroft (2001, p. 19). Ashcroft contends that resistance was crucial to the erstwhile colonies' independence struggle and later for self-definition in the post-independence period, examining the development of this opponent approach to issues.

Nonetheless, he questions whether "armed or ideological uprisings is the only probable meaning of resistance, and, more relevantly, whether such a history exists in its wake a rhetoric of opposition devoid of any ability for social change" (p. 19). Ashcroft is not dismissing the hardships of the many vast numbers of formerly colonized who had to resist racial oppression and affirm their humanity. He also does not mean that the war against dominance ended with colonial independence, because that would ignore the negative effects with both colonialism and neocolonialism. Instead, Ashcroft opposes an obstinate opposition that refuses to acknowledge that social change, sometimes influenced by ex-colonial powers, is always possible, as is cultural shift (p. 20). This qualitative study aims at some scientific and political ways that will help in changing and transmitting old postcolonial narratives that are based on resistance.

After going through and exploring the existing stock of knowledge on p'Bitek and his works, it is revealed that different scholarly publications and articles left a space that is endeavored by the study in hand to be filled in with the focus on Kachru's Indigenization: A Potent Voice and Way towards Decolonization in P'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* (1966). Thus, it will be an addition to the existing zone of knowledge on the selected poet.

3. Research Methodology

This research follows the qualitative approach based and grounded in the textual analysis of *Song of Lawino* (1966) through the perspective of Braj Kachru theoretical framework of indigenization. Kachru's model focuses on the indigenous linguistic, social and cultural identities that challenges imperial linguistic and cultural onslaught and the said model reclaims African identities through representation of native flora and fauna. "As is discussed by Kachru, a language may be considered transplanted if it is used by a significant number of speakers in social, cultural, and geographical contexts different from the contexts in which it was originally used" (ur Rehman, M. S., Khan, I. U., & Khan, A. K. 2021. p. 339). The data is taken from the primary source, the textual and analytical commentary on the relevant extracts and stanzas from the selected p'Bitek's poetry. Kachru's model serve as a second source as a critique of the primary source, *Song of Lawino* (1966). The undertaken framework demonstrates that the indigenization not only works for linguistic identity but it also safeguards socio, cultural and political identity of the native Africans. Therefore Kachru's given model of indigenization argues that through the representation of native culture and linguistic identity, Africans can redefine their relationship with the imperialists. The said model helps reclaim suppressed culture of outer circle challenging the inner circle-African elite that is the representative of western tradition.

The poet through the process of localization and indigenization in his works attempts to get English language adapted to the requirements of the natives. It was beautifully being carried out by imparting African cultural and linguistic appropriation. It was not possible without first abrogating the imperial English language in accordance with local African linguistic needs. Typically, a meta-language that incorporates both the original language and the imported language is produced as

this process is being carried out. It is common to do this in order to grasp the foreign language in the context of the local area because this language has cultural elements from both civilizations, making it unique. Because it contains no negative connotations or suggests any underlying meaning, the term "indigenization" is occasionally favored over others like "Africanization". The undertaken model is as follows,

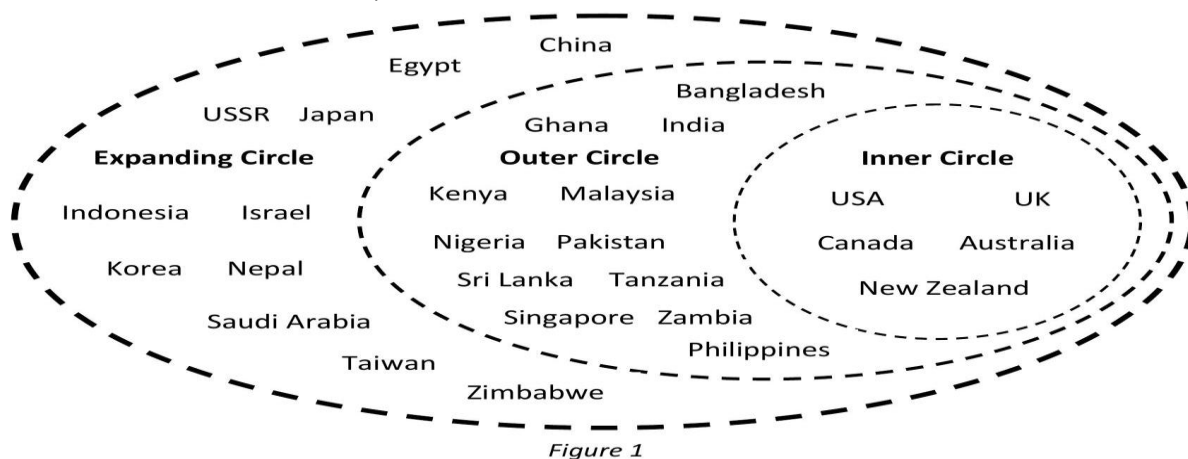


Figure 1

This diagram (figure 1) shows kachru's three circles of indigenization.

4. Discussion and Analysis

4.1 Indigenization as a tool towards decolonization

Through Lawino's countering voice and response to the incursion of European culture, p'Bitek has represented in this epic work that is the magnum opus, an oral African work, abounding indigenous language and voices against colonialism (Salim et al., 2024. p. 1592). Along with p'Bitek, other writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Gabriel Okara and Frantz Fanon wrote as a resistance and challenge to English language for nationalistic narrative expressions and utterances (Ali & Masroor, 2017). Besides, Jasen & Nayar (2010) also sheds light by saying that the blacks had to create their own history and write their own stories to break free of the colonial shackles in what Fanon envisaged as a deeply humanist project. A national culture, believed Fanon, must take return to African myths and cultural practices so that black identity can be resurrected. (p. 10)

The poet in this selected piece of oral African literature, willfully, follows the strategies that have been theorized by Braj Kachru. The poet knows the power and significance of a language, that's why he prefers to employ fictional representation of indigenous cultures, language and ideology. Mbembe (2015) contends that decolonization is basically a rejection of the belief that the west is the real cause of African cultural identity and heritage. This is to negate the assumption that Africa is the creation of these imperial powers.

It is one of the common characteristics of postcolonial writers to indigenize and appropriate the language of imperialists to decolonize the system and mind.

Thiong'o, 1994; & Smith (2012) say "In Africa, colonialism disconnected people from their histories, landscapes, language, social relations and their own ways of thinking, feeling and interacting with the world.

Although oral literature is transmitted mouth to mouth from one generation to another, yet, critics may point their accusing fingers towards p'Bitek by writing *Song of Lawino* (1966) in English.

The imperialist came with the Bible in their hands to preach their Christianity among African people whom they consider pagans. They looked down upon their faith by calling them "kaffir",

superstitious and heathens. Desmond Tutu (2007) speaks “when the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said, “Let us pray.” We closed our eyes. When we opened them, we had the Bible and they had the land!”

The matter of fact is, his *Song of Lawino* (1966) is replete with more African vocabulary, discourse, terminologies, titles, proverbs, idioms and local names. So it is flavored richly with more in African language than English.

“Pagan names, he says,
Belong to sinners
Who will burn
In everlasting fires:
Ocol insists
He must be called
By his Christian name!” (p’Bitek, 1966-67, p. 82)
“My husband rejects me
Because he says
That I am a mere pagan
And I believe in the devil.
He says
I do not know
The rules of health,
And I mix up

Matters of health and superstitions” (p’Bitek, 1966-67, p. 91)

Similarly the ethnocentric tendencies and thoughts of occidental regarding Orientals like Asian, African or South Americans have been probed in *Orientalism* (1978) by Edward Said in his magnum opus work.

P’Bitek very beautifully depicted the very symbolic image of the church and priest having rosary in hand to send blessings upon his/her followers. Lawino through her protestation is adamant not to be impressed and moved by the criticism of her husband who starts abhorring any faith, culture and society other than westerns.

“I accept the Hunchback
The Padre who is very strong
Moulder of Skyland and
Earth ...” (p’Bitek, 1966-67, p. 86)

It is, therefore, brought about through unshakable love and attachment of Lawino with her indigenous and native African culture by the poet in the selected piece of oral African literature. P’Bitek through the vigorous and clamorous voice of his protagonist who appears to be the spokesperson of African people and society, challenges the distorted notions of the supremacy of western culture. Although, Lawino’s husband prefers and values Clementine as a sophisticated and modern lady instead of her own wife who is from his fraternity, yet she does not lose her heart. This kind of personae that unfolds the inferiority complex has been instilled and inculcated in the minds of colonized by their so called masters. Hence, this study after an exhaustive analysis of the representation of indigenized flora and fauna and African voices is a strategy that has been suggested by the implied Braj Kachru model that will go a long way towards decolonization of

African people. This is the only way left with the colonized to go to the road of freedom, liberty and identity.

5. Conclusion

Thus, the study after exhaustive analysis concluded that p'Bitek being a prolific post-colonial African writer projects indigenous culture as a resistance to the onslaught of imperialist agenda for the identity and freedom of local Ugandan society. The present study was benefited with the application of Kachru's model that is used as a theoretical framework to achieve the set research objectives. The key research objectives that have successfully been achieved through the analysis of *Song of Lawino* (1966) in the light of the theoretical framework. The poet exemplifies the African culture and indigenous voices as a tool that not only resists against the imperial epistemological dominance through the character of African woman Lawino, but the poet also paints the richness, diversity and worth of indigenous culture and language. The selected work therefore, serves as an indigenous voice and pathway towards abrogating the shackles of colonization. Hence, indigenization is taken nationally as a way to decolonization.

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