

**Corruption as a Theme in African Post-colonial Literature A(Case Study of Alan Paton's novel Cry the beloved country)**

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**Abstract**

This study aimed at investigating corruption as a prevailing theme in African post-colonial literature with a reference to Alan Paton's Cry the Beloved Country. The post-colonial theory has been used to highlight the theme under study. The novel is written in the post-colonial period, which witnessed waves of corruption at all levels. The results after investigating the below points through discussions and analogies, show that the theme of corruption exists in the novel through the interactions between characters and symbols. It is proved that moral, political and economic corruption is prevailing all over the novel. On the basis of the obtained results of the discussions, the researcher gave forward the following recommendations and suggestions for further studies: African people can get a great deal of the African novel about the political and diplomatic history of their countries; corruption as a main theme in the African post-colonial writings can be an exhortation to the African people in search of building their continent.

**Keywords: corruption, post-colonial, cry the beloved country.**

**المستخلص**

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تقصي الفساد كمغزى متقش في الأدب الإفريقي إبان فترة ما بعد الاستعمار بمرجعية لرواية ألن باتون أبكي أيها الوطن المحبوب. استخدم الباحث نظرية أدب ما بعد الاستعمار لتسليط الضوء على الموضوع الذي تم التقصي فيه. كُتبت الرواية في فترة ما بعد الاستعمار والتي شهدت موجات من الفساد بكافة أشكاله. أسفرت النتائج بعد دراسة النقاط التالية عبر النقاش والقياس عن أن الفساد هو واحد من المواضيع التي تناولتها الرواية ويتجلى ذلك من خلال الرموز وتفاعل الشخصيات كما كشفت الدراسة عن الفساد السياسي، الاقتصادي والأخلاقي المتقش في جميع فصول الرواية وجراء ذلك قام الباحث بتقديم بعض التوصيات شملت: يمكن لسكان القارة الإفريقية الحصول على الكثير من تاريخهم السياسي والدبلوماسي في متون الروايات الإفريقية كما أوصى الباحث بأنه يمكن للفساد المذكور في الكتابات الإفريقية في فترة ما بعد الاستعمار أن يكون موعظة لأهل القارة عبر مسيرة بنائهم لأوطانهم.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الفساد، ما بعد الاستعمار، أبكي أيها الوطن المحبوب.

**Introduction**

The countries of a particular continent would have something in common in terms of economic, social and cultural aspects. The points of intersection among these countries come as a result of their geographical adjacency and the shared demographic characteristics among them. In this context authors

can address this phenomenon through their writings. They depicts the areas of differences and similarities and the liaison between their culture, social life or other aspects of life in comparison with their neighbors.

This study is intended to reveal the aspects of corruption as a theme in African post-colonial literature.



Literary work evolves as authors undergo an assortment of social, economic or political disorders so that their writings will probably be based on a realistic background which might form and shape their themes and messages in a sort of intertextuality that would make their texts similar in some areas and different in others. So, dealing with this theme some things will be interpreted and explicated in the upcoming sections of the study.

Society and literature are inseparable. Society inspires novelists and literary writers portray society. All what characterizes a given society; values, norms, beliefs and culture can be reflected in the novelists' pieces of writing. Those modes of portraying can be seen in literary genres and writers' style and themes. In all its changing forms and contents, literature traces the development of the society through history in very creative way. This creativeness is clear when literature combines the society's culture to "represent impalpable subjects such as assimilation, rejections, transformation as well as political and social issues and historical facts" (Dobie 84-85)

Corruption was noticeably tackled as a theme by many African writers in the post-colonial era. The reason behind that was the departure of colonizers from the most of the countries of the continent. The space left by the Whiteman was so complicated to fill and the natives of the countries in question were not qualified enough to take office. Therefore, the inhabitants of those nations led a life of corruption somehow.

#### **Objectives of the Study**

Taking into consideration that African writers realistically depicted their society in the post-colonial era, the study under investigation aims at investigating the intertextuality of corruption as a theme in African literature during post-colonialism.

#### **Post-colonial Theory**

post-colonialism is problematic in nature. It is facing difficulty to have one clear and concise definition. It has been known that this term come into fame as result of what happened in the colonial era. Concerning colonialism, it did not only affect societies on the social perspective, but it exceeds to touch the politics and economy. The consequences of these dimensions gave a broad area to what comes after colonialism.

#### **Defining Post-colonialism**

The term post-colonialism is complex. Its complexity led to a definitional problem. To understand what this term implies, we need to look backwards to colonialism and neo-colonialism. In 1950, Alfred Sauvy coined the term Third World to refer to the developing nations such as the ones in Africa. He was interested in the colonized societies who were ruled by the power. He gave an analysis to the circumstances of the colonized societies. He considered their political, social and psychological changes that were due to the colonizers impressive power. In brief, we can say that post colonialism was interested in all what concerns the societies under power. Consequently, it discusses what happened to colonial people at all levels. As long as those people are in focus to postcolonial era, the colonizers, as the doers of abuse, are intervened with the discussion.



Colonialism can be defined as the subjection of one population to another. This has obviously been seen in physical conquest. Not only does this conquest imply physical domination, but also it does political, economic and cultural control. As the time goes on, the traditions of the colonizer started to gain supremacy over the colonized so that many aspects of the colonized culture began to disappear.

The period preceding 1970s, witnessed the rise of anti-colonialist movements against colonialism. These have been known as anti-colonial movements. Many journals discussed this issue such as: *African Literature Today* (1988). Thus, Post colonialism was used to refer to the period following colonialism. Luzarus indicates that from early 1970s, the term post colonialism has no ideological spirit. It was not interested in social or political order of the colonized societies. So that, it was just a historical perspective.

In her article "Introduction to Postcolonial Studies" (1996), Depika Bahri argues that post colonialism is a reaction against the colonialism which exercises power on natives to abuse their wealth. The term post colonialism was not used until 1980s. The interests of post colonialists attracted first literary scholars and critics. Dobie explained that Post colonialism is concerned with what happened to a culture from the beginning of colonization to the present, it is also making inroads in field as diverse as political science, sociology and psychologically. Another term played a great role towards defining this term. Orientalism had an important role towards shaping the notion of post colonialism. In an analysis, Edward

Said claimed that all the colonizers create kind of societies, which are entirely different from them. Purposely for invading them easily. The way they see the other makes them think that all the humans who are not the same as the colonizers are inferior and objectionable. Said raised the questions about colonization, imperialism and constructions of the other. Again, the intent of post colonialism, as Dobie claimed, is to study what occurs when culture is dominated by another. After Edward Said's term of Orientalism, we can speak of postmodernism which refers to social and cultural changes, that had taken place after the colonialism.

Imperialism for Young works as an approach of state driven by conspicuous ventures of control inside and past social boundaries. From another side, Nkrumah believes that imperialism is a policy of a nation to dominate other nations in order to control their economy through exploiting their resources, assimilating their peoples and making them submitted forever. Colonialism as analysed above is a practice by which one nation possesses another for herself purposefully for developing the colonizers economic advantages. For that, colonization does not only dominate physically, but also it practices any kind of economic and political influence to fully dominate the colonies. Slemon(1990) said that the evidence here is that, along with the past of colonialism in taking only the physical flag of the country, not for the freedom of politics and economy. Imperialism as a concept and colonialism as a practice are still active in a new form called neo-colonialism.



Neo-colonialism is the situation where the colonizers interfere politically and economically in post-independent nations. According to Cabral Neo-colonialism is a classical colonialism's development. For Young, it is the last stage of imperialism.

The above-mentioned notions paved the way to the term post-colonialism. The way in which the colonizers influenced the colonized made the term hard to be specifically defined. The human nature is changeable and the term discussed as Carter defines as the ideas of Europeans and Americans that influenced nearly all the planet through their work of literature and critical theory. They dominate specifically the countries, which were under colonization. As Post-colonialism concerns with politics, economy and culture, it is hard to be agreed upon one definition to the term as Selemon gave a further explanation. He said that as post colonialism yields itself to numerous kinds of fields, it is described as a heterogeneous term in nature. Theorists and critics gave their criticism to the term in an attempt to give it a theoretical framework.

#### **African Novels**

As novels mirror the social reality, as the realists proclaim, European novels tell the victory of their invasion as people spread peace and civilization, not as wealth stealers. On the contrary, those who tasted injustice, poverty and the lack of education highlighted their own thoughts and their social reality of being oppressed. This new independent African thinking gave birth to a new kind of literature, which is the Anti-colonial one. Speaking of colonialism, western civilization touches all aspects of life. It even impacted the produced literature at that time. The call for

decolonization was a result of criticizing colonist literature and the one, which glorifies imperialism. Still, the post-colonial literature defines the term that refers to "all cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization till the present day" (Ashcroft et al, 02)

African literature started to take its own shape when it became a media for calling for a revolution against and refusal to all kinds of exploitation. It discussed the issue of African culture that has been taken by force. Not by going back to their deep past to defend their right of being culturally independent, but shaping the thoughts of the masses. African novels argue several issues that are in direct relationship with what happens in society during a giving period. Firstly, they spot the light on the issue of individualism as a reaction to the impact of Western literature on the African ones. Secondly, their recent literary works tackle the issue of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and post-colonialism as James proclaims "all third-world text are necessarily allegorical" (69). The use of symbols, description and allegorical side were widely spread in the African postcolonial novels.

Moretti and Milner emphasize that the idea of African novels focuses on the use of characters who symbolizes the power in society. Thus, much of African literature characterized its political tone. What characterizes much the African writers is their emphasis on the social roles and denying all aspects of colonial impact. In this respect, Achebe stated his satisfaction when he said that his novels taught his reader their past with all its ups and downs.



Not only Achebe who patriating in giving Africa its own independent literature but Ngugi also played a great role through his "passion for change and social regeneration which has not yet found its agents" (Jameson,81) For characterizing African novels, two aspects are fundamental to distinguish it from any other kind of literature, western or European for instance. First, African novels focused always on social reform by affecting the masses thoughts to rebel and take their own rights. Second, the causes behind the call for social change are totally different than any other kind of society. As they were oppressed, the effects of colonialism and neo-colonialism were enough to give the right for African writers to switch the alarm for the change.

#### **The main themes of postcolonial literature**

The post colonialism should only refer to "the period after independence" (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 26). Many writers describe this period of time as a recovering one. Countries tried to solve their problems, and deal with the consequences from the past period. The elite people of that era; writers, artists, and journalists tried to tackle many themes in their works. Among these themes were rediscovering their own history, and refusing the western ideology of enlightenment, bring civilization to them, and discovering the black continent. The issue of history was widely spread among the postcolonial writers. Moreover, it was a very important issue to them as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o said that "History is the result of struggle and tells of change that is why it is perceived as a threat by

all the ruling straits in all the exploitative systems (96-97).

The writers of this period, also present the imperialistic view of the western world to the colonies which shaped by the colonist literature. The purpose of colonialist literature is "to justify the conquest, occupation, and destruction of non-Western societies" (Ching-Liang, 1). The western writers used their creative imagination and philosophy to portray Africans as sub-humans, evil and culturally inferior. For example, according to Hill, et al the Calvinists (The Puritans) insist that Africans represent evil and are "cast among the non-elect" and for this, they are "ideal subjects for enslavement"

Besides the African history and the blurred vision of the western to the Africans Postcolonial works spoke about the literature of post-colonialism spoke also about the identity, language, religion, the consequences of the pre-independence period as corruption, and the injustice, racism, and poverty.

The themes of postcolonial literature are many in number. All of them are a result of the colonial abuse of societies. The writers, as they are history recorders, were affected by these savage practices and wrote about it. They tackled the themes of cultural nationalism, disillusionment, the hunger of education, identity, violence, failure, betrayal, revolution and renewal and calling for change.

#### **Corruption as the Main theme in Post-colonial African Literature**

Noticing that all of those themes can be a result of the practices of corrupted people, the next section will give a detailed account of corruption as it is considered as a main theme in the African art.





### Definition of corruption

To agree upon one definition for the term is impossible for its relation to different categories. Still, we agree without a doubt that it is the bitterest poisons that people may taste. It is seen as a social, legal, economic and political concept. Corruption is defined in Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary(1995) as “illegal, bad or dishonest behaviour, especially by people in positions of power”. In this respect and for the sake of this paper corruption is seen as any kind of abuse that calls for the exploitation of the colonized people.

### Categories of Corruption

In relation to Africa, (Nduku and Tenamwenye 2014). divided corruption into four categories: Corruption-with, corruption-to, corruption against and corruption for. They defined the first category as “general manifestation of the epistemological corruption in which the corrupt agent is in collaboration with others to carry out fraudulent or deceptive activities” (p.66) Corruption-to is “the ability to initiate a chain of recurrent schemes of corruption independent of a group” (p.66). This category is valuing the power of money over the power of education.

Corruption- for is related to “material, political, economic, religious, social, military, intellectual and bodily benefits of the corrupt agent and other corrupt agents” (p.69). The last category is corruption-against which is defined as the other dichotomy of corruption-for.

### Kinds of Corruption

Many kinds of corruption echoed in the postcolonial African novels. The African writers consecrated their pens

to show the messes the real scene of their independence countries. Since one kind of corruption leads to another, the following kinds are the representatives.

### Political corruption

This kind found and portrayed in the policy of the one political party, the extrajudicial killing, the autocratic leadership, lurching, tyranny and the political anarchy, also genocides. In place of making reciprocal relations with western countries, politicians become wealth seekers and paved the way for them to benefit from the raw materials of their homeland.

This kind of corruption can be couched in the below quoted lines taken from Paton’s Cry the Beloved Country:

*“There was a change in his voice, it became louder like the voice of a bull or a lion. “Go to our hospital,” he said” and see our people lying on the floors. They lie so close you cannot step over them. But it is they who dig the gold. For three shillings a day. We come from our tribes, from all over South Africa. We live in the compounds, we must leave our wives and families behind. And when the new gold is found, it is not we who will get more for our labor.” (Paton. 1990. 27)*

### Moral corruption

Due to the maladministration and incompetence in the political system many other problems come to the surface on the workers class category. Nepotism, Hypocrisy, smuggle, embezzlement, banditry, land grabbing, briber and tribalism.

Cry the beloved country as a reference of the study gives a proof of moral corruption in Johannesburg in post-colonial time among the countries of the black continent:



*“So they talk about the sickness of the land, of the broken tribe and the broken house, of young men and young girls who went away and forgot their customs, and lived loose and idle lives. They talked of criminals, of how white Johannesburg was afraid of black crime. One of them went and got him a newspaper, the Johannesburg Mail, and showed him in bold black letters: OLD COUPLE ROBBED AND BEATEN IN LONELY HOUSE. FOUR NATIVES ARRESTED. “That happens nearly every day,” he said” and it not only the Europeans who are afraid right here in Sophiatown. It was not long ago that a gang of these youths attacked one of our own African girls: they took her bag, and her money, and would have done worse to her too, but people came running of the houses.” (Ibid. P 15)*

#### **Social corruption**

Social corruption shows up in the ethnic tension between the tribes, the use of the black magic to harm members from the other tribes, the different vices, the regional disparities, the epidemic. All the mentioned problems were a result of a corrupted political system, that works on impoverished people and weakens them to not call for their rights.

As a good evident of social corruption, Alan Paton in his novel Cry the Beloved Country, displayed in several positions the social corruption of the inhabitants of South Africa in post-colonial time; some of which is the following excerpt:

*We had a son” he said harshly. “Zulus have many children, but we have only one son. He went to Johannesburg, and as you said- when people go to*

*Johannesburg, they do not come back. They do not go to St. Chad’s, to learn the knowledge without which no black man can live. They go to Johannesburg and there they are lost, and no one hears of them at all...” (Ibid. P.8)*

Paton in this context tried to portray different types of corruption throughout his novel conveying the idea that the Whiteman could destroy the African nationalism in Africa leaving the African countries entirely devastated without crafty and well educated natives, so that the departure of the Whiteman left behind destroyed countries in the continent. Here is some of the words he used to portray that:

*It is not far to Claremont. They lie together: Sophiatown, where anyone may own property, the Western Native Township, and Claremont, the rubbish-heap of the proud city. These three lie between two European districts. So they walked till they came to Claremont and Kumalo was shocked by its shabbiness and dirtiness, and the closeness of the houses, and the dirt in the streets.(Ibid. p 20)*

#### **Corruption in Post-colonial Africa**

Subsequent to the Berlin Conference of 1884, European powers waved massively on the African continent in what has described ‘the Scramble for Africa. This violent conquest lasted until the decolonization processes were completed with the liberation of South Africa in 1990 (Mwakikagile).

Thereby, the colonial period let their traces all over the black continent. A new kind of colonialism was imposed by the political systems, which lead to the appearance of so many other problems.



Western literature played a great role in presenting African people as primitive and uncivilized masses that must be ruled by an iron hand. In order to make their exploitation easier, the western government appointed corrupted political systems all over the African countries. The politicians acted as agents who favour foreigners' benefits upon theirs. By acting so, African leaders have a double benefit: first, being bribed for their services, and second, having protection to steal the small benefits that belong to the Africans masses. Mwakikagile said that This act of using power to make personal gains is known as corruption. Mwakikagile sees that Western colonialism did not only blur the African history, but it also caused several problems that postcolonial Africans are still facing today. They exploited and are still exploiting African countries across the continent which provokes political, economic, and social troubles for its inhabitants. Yet, the former colonizer has no intention to help; all that matters is the security and promotion of their political and economic interests.

#### **Conclusion**

The study endeavored to investigate corruption as a theme in African post-colonial literature with especial reference to Alan Paton's novel *Cry the Beloved Country*. The researcher went over the points related to corruption with its various categories throughout the novel and tried to confound each category to attain the main objectives of the study. It was obvious that corruption was a prevailing theme in the African post-colonial writings as the African writers attempted to hold comparisons and contrasts between the time of

colonialism and their national polices after their countries had self-determination. The study showed that corruption was out there in post-colonial literature as a main them. On the basis of what is mentioned the researcher put forward some recommendations, some of which could be as follows: African people can get a great deal of the African novel about the political and diplomatic history of their countries; corruption as a main theme in the African post-colonial writings can be an exhortation to the African people in search of building their continent.

#### **Recommendations**

After the above written discussions and analogies, the researcher gave the following recommendations for the readers or researchers of the field under investigation:

- African people can get a great deal of the African novel about the political and diplomatic history of their countries.
- Corruption as a main theme in the African post-colonial writings can be an exhortation to the African people in search of building their continent.
- The researchers of the field can conduct various studies on the assortment of the themes mentioned and used in the African post-colonial writings.

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