



A POSTCOLONIAL READING OF AMA ATA AIDOO'S ANOWA AND MAISHE MAPONYA'S *THE HUNGRY EARTH*

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Abstract:

Literature has always been read in a variety of ways, some of which struggle to uncover the latent ideologies behind its aesthetics. Postcolonial theory is, by definition, the best in this regard. This study aimed to approach Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* and Maishe Maponya's *The Hungry Earth*, and establish a comparison between them in the light of postcolonial perspectives. The method used in this study is qualitative, and the texts are taken from Gilbert's *Postcolonial Plays*, which include a collection of contemporary plays considered by critics as masterpieces of postcolonial literature. This analysis showed that *Anowa* and *The Hungry Earth* are anti-colonial plays par excellence. They both mirror the cruelty and oppression of Western colonialism in Africa and reveal some of its colonial discourse and ideologies. They condemn and document the horrible aspects of discrimination and exploitation. Moreover, they both imply different strategies to resist colonialism, among which mimicry, hybridity, and armed fighting are the most highlighted. This study could be beneficial to students of postcolonial literature to build on it in their future studies. This study recommends the application of other literary theories in the analysis of these two plays, amongst them Feminism and Marxism. In addition to the postcolonial-oriented themes covered in this article, a sense of patriarchy, social inequality, and class distinction is also developed.

Keywords: postcolonial theory; Ama Ata Aidoo; *Anowa*; Maishe Maponya; *The Hungry Earth*; colonial discourse

1. Introduction

Postcolonial studies are, from colonized and decolonized standpoints, natural reactions to colonial discourse. They reflect the resistance of different mechanisms against imperial powers and Eurocentrism. This will be the core of our current study through the analysis of two selected postcolonial works: *Anowa* and *The Hungry Earth*.

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Since the first sessions, the Postcolonial Theory course has tremendously caught my interest for many considerations. Of major importance was that sense of belonging to the realm of postcolonialism, being an Algerian citizen. My country has been colonized by France for more than a century, and independence and sovereignty have not unfortunately meant the end of the nightmare. Although tanks and soldiers have left for decades, the colonizer is still everywhere: in language, administration, the education system, in the dreams and aspirations of the younger generation to migrate to France, and even in the air we breathe every day. Algeria is only a prototype of many decolonized countries all over the world.

For my study, two plays are analyzed from postcolonial perspectives. The first play is Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa*, which sheds light on the theme of slavery in Ghana on one hand, and the protagonist's failure to be *HERS* on the other. I have not found a topic other than slavery to depict colonialism in its ugliest and cruelest representations. Slavery, for me, is double colonization: one of the land and its resources and the other of personal life and privacy. The second play, entitled *The Hungry Earth*, by Maishe Maponya tells the painful story of black natives under racism and oppression in South Africa.

This study is set in three main sections: methodology, discussion, and conclusion. In the methodology section, the approach and theory of study are presented. In the discussion section, selected extracts from both plays, Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* and Maishe Maponya's *The Hungry Earth*, are analyzed and compared with each other. In the final section, a summary of the study along with its findings, limitations, and recommendations are provided.

2. Methodology

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach through which a comparative analysis of Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* and Maishe Maponya's *The Hungry Earth* has been conducted. In addition, the postcolonial theory was adopted in this article, and much of it from Homi Bhabha's perspective.

Sasani (2015) explains how postcolonial theory fits into tackling various topics. It points out that postcolonial theory, in general, and Homi K. Bhabha's perspective, in particular, provide more effective tools and techniques to analyze colonial discourse (p. 238).

After a critical reading of the two plays, the extracts that were relevant to the aims of this study were selected, interpreted, and analyzed according to postcolonial theory. Next, they were compared to their counterparts to underline similarities and differences.

3. Results and Discussion

The literary writings of both authors who belong to decolonized territories and those who write for the colonizer represent the core of postcolonial studies. Postcolonialism

uncovers and questions the latent ideologies in colonial discourse. The field of postcolonialism is multidisciplinary, where literature, sociology, psychology, forensic studies, and many other disciplines overlap.

The plays under study reflect a sense of struggle and resistance against colonialism, as stated by Gilbert (2001), "*postcolonial has become a convenient (and sometimes useful) portmanteau term to describe any kind of resistance, particularly against class, race and gender oppressions*" (p. 1). They depict common feelings of an identity crisis, loss, and alienation. However, a strong will for resistance and a sound determination for self-fulfilment are omnipresent as well.

The issues of slavery and oppression have always been attributed to imperial powers for centuries. Parallely, colonization and colonial discourse go hand in hand: the first abuses and violates, and the second legitimizes. Colonization is manifold and one of its most terrible forms is military invasion and large-scale settlement; this is what happened in Africa of which the two present plays present good accounts.

A. Slavery and Oppression

Both Aidoo's *Anowa* and Maponya's *The Hungry Earth* are anti-colonial plays as they imply a strong rejection of slavery, racism, and oppression. The playwrights are present everywhere in their works through characters, their thoughts, speeches, and movements; through light and darkness on stage. The playwrights are driven by nationalism and a sense of patriotism. At the very beginning of the play, Aidoo is determined to draw the spectators' attention straight to the issue of enslavement in the way she introduces some characters through the repetition of the word slave:

BOY a young *slave*, about twenty years old

GIRL a young *slave* girl

OTHER MEN and WOMEN *slaves*, carriers, hailing women, drummers, messengers, townspeople (Gilbert, 2001, p. 101).

Comparatively, Maponya also opens his play with a strong warning and call for action against colonialism in Africa, which evokes his strong impetus for resisting colonialism:

Before the white man rapes you.

Wake up Mother Afrika (Gilbert, 2001, p.16).

The white man, as Usiviko declares, stands for "*an evil nightmare*" (Gilbert, 2001, p.16). The indigenous peoples of Africa have suffered a lot with the invasion of the European stranger "*umlungu*" who stole their wealth and enslaved them. They were discriminated against and mal-treated on their lands; they were starved, and deprived of education and civil rights. Moreover, they were depicted by the Occident as inferior and less than full humans.

Both plays are full of colonial connotations. *Anowa* refers, for example, to the Bond of 1844 that officially bound Ghana, the playwright's country, "to the white men who came from beyond the horizon" (Gilbert, 2001, p. 103). It also uses the "picture of Queen Victoria" and "the totem bird of the Nsona clan" (Gilbert, 2001) to establish an official representation of the dichotomy of the colonizer- colonized. It is the British Crown that colonized both Ghana and South Africa, the playwrights' countries respectively.

Slavery makes free humans properties, bought and sold by force and threat. In some dialogues between *Anowa* and her husband, Kofi Ako, who plans to get "one or two men" as slaves, it seems that buying humans is a sign of wealth and high social status regardless of their right to enjoy the freedom and natural basic rights all people should have been born with. Slaves "are worse treated than dogs" (Gilbert, 2001, p.115). Kofi Ako who speaks on behalf of the colonizer, tries to legitimize the slave trade and rhetorically asks his partner, "who told you that buying men is wrong?" and "What evil lies in having bonded men?" (Gilbert, 2001, p.112) As his slave "trade with the white men is growing" (Gilbert, 2001, p. 123), Kofi's speech reflects more and more some version of colonial discourse.

Similarly, *The Hungry Earth* maintains colonial discourse, which is "the variety of textual forms in which the West produced and codified knowledge about non-metropolitan areas and cultures, especially those under colonial control" (Williams, P., & Chrisman, L., 2015, p. 5). The following two extracts from the play are good instances in which the white man and someone else who mimics him both defend colonial existence in Africa in general, and in South Africa in particular:

Extract 1:

Before he came you were savages swinging onto trees and eating bananas. You deserted your culture and allowed the hides and wood to rot in the fields. Umlungu taught you how to make leather and how to make furniture. Today you can even make money. You lived like wild animals; now you live like human beings. But no, you ungrateful creatures, you are not satisfied with the things you got from umlungu. (Gilbert, 2001, p.17)

Extract 2:

"UMLUNGU What have I done to deserve your enmity? During the two hundred years I dwelt with you I taught you to live a better life. I brought you the wisdom and fertility of Europe. Why is it then that you are after my blood, that you want to kill me and my family?" (Gilbert, 2001, p.17)

Both extracts stand for colonial discourse as they present the colonizer as being superior, an educator, prompter, and a man of civilization, and the natives as inferior, barbarous, and primitive. It is a stereotypical image about the East that the imperial West used to foreground and propagate.

However, Maponya reacts to such a colonial discourse with an anti-colonial discourse in which he defends his people's culture and identity and boasts of their past. Anti-colonial discourse is an effective strategy for resisting colonialism by attacking the

fake rationale set by colonial discourse. The following extract is a good example of an anti-colonial discourse delivered in Maponya's *The Hungry Earth*:

"BESHWANA How dare you curse my people like that! We blew horns, we beat the drums and we sang the song 'Ngelethu Mawethu' [it is ours, my people], when this land was unknown to the white skins! Shit! We gave culture to the world, we built the pyramids. No!" (Gilbert, 2001, p.17)

In contrast to Kofi, Anowa defends the other as she believes that *"no man-made a slave of his friend and came to much himself. It is wrong. It is evil"*, and that *"we did not have to put the strength of our bodies into others. We should not have bought the slaves"* (Gilbert, 2001, p.16). According to Cherry (2020), othering is the case when some people or groups are excluded from society because they do not enjoy the socially shared norms and standards.

In addition to slavery highlighted in *Anowa*, a similar version was referred to in the second play: exploitation of labour. The play shed light on the sufferance of black coal miners in South Africa, who were extremely abused and exploited by the white man, the colonizer. They were threatened to be shot to death if they complained about their work rights or went on strike, and many of them were killed.

As the title of the play *"The Hungry Earth"* indicates, the mines underground were feeding on them and devouring their tired and miserable bodies. Maponya expresses this tragedy as follows:

*"Where have all our men gone?
They have all gone down into the
mines
They will never return again
They have been swallowed up by this
hungry earth!"* (Gilbert, 2001, p.24)

Not only were men and women forced to work in bad conditions for long hours and at low prices, but also their children were abused. Child-labour is another example of colonial exploitation and cruelty given in *Anowa* and *The Hungry Earth*. Children between twelve and thirteen years old are abused on plantations from dawn to dusk for only 50c. They spend the nights at stables like animals and the days at hard work: no school, no appropriate and enough food.

Child labour is the type of illegal practice that forcibly engages children in any kind of work that hinders them from being physically and mentally developed, and deprives them of their basic rights, for example, going to school and enjoying their time naturally through playing and practicing their hobbies. It can also take the form of enslaving children in a way that isolates them from their relatives and compels them to make a living on their own. Imperial powers ensure their children's natural rights and

providing them high lifestyle while enslaving others on their lands, and killing their innocence.

B. A Sense of Alienation, Non-belonging, and Double Consciousness

It is common in colonized societies to find natives suffering from being alienated and marginalized. In *Anowa*, a strong sense of non-belonging and being unhomed is felt. A slave "does not belong [...] has no home, no family, no village, no stool of his own; has no feast days, no holidays, no state, no territory" (Gilbert, 2001, p.115). Anowa, along with the slaves around her, confesses that "None of us belongs" and that she has nowhere to go (Gilbert, 2001, p.123). She endures alienation, estrangement, and a sense of double consciousness: she is torn between her native culture and identity, and the exotic culture of the white man.

Badua feels sorry for her daughter Anowa, who left her land and lives with her children as strangers elsewhere. Osam, her father, explains well what that would really mean:

"But don't other women leave their homes to go and marry? And do they stay away forever? Do they not return with their children to the old homestead to attend funerals, pay death debts, return for the feeding of their family stools? [...] The children of women like Anowa and their children after- them never find their ways back. They get lost. For they often do not know the names of the founders of their houses . . . No, they do not know what to tell you if you asked them for just the names of their clans." (Gilbert, 2001, p113)

C. Strategies of Resistance

In fact, different strategies for resisting slavery, racism, and oppression are referred to in the plays under analysis. In *Anowa*, hybridity and mimicry are implicitly possible options for some natives, and no action is called for. For Homi Bhabha (1994), "Mimicry is, thus, the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power" (p. 126). The colonized may find it useful to adapt to the colonizer's culture as a strategy to cope with and lessen the effects of discrimination in their dominated societies. Learning and imitating the colonizer's lifestyle, i.e., mimicking him, is then a sign of being civilized and accepted within the dominating social norms:

"ANOWA Besides, such women are more civilised than I, who only come from Yebi. They, like you, have learned the ways of the white people. And a woman like that may be attractive enough to be allowed into your bed." (Gilbert, 2001, p123)

On the other hand, *The Hungry Earth* recommends demonstrating and fighting to "stop all the suffering, [...] stop the wars, stop slavery, destroy the prisons, stop detentions, stop the killings, stop selfishness" (). It is a call to action to end apartheid. For Bin-Kapela (2022),

fighting is an option for getting freedom, as Fanon has strongly defended and believed in the idea of violent counter-violence (p. 225-226).

In colonized societies, discrimination on various grounds has been a striking phenomenon. Big red lines were not allowed to be crossed by black people. The latter were discriminated against at different levels; unfair laws were enforced by the white man, limiting their freedom and dehumanising them. According to Maponya (1984) in *The Hungry Earth*, it was strictly forbidden for blacks to be anywhere in the city without permits. He wonders: "*Is freedom not the law of nature?*" (Gilbert, 2001, p.19)

People, black and white, are born free and equal in every aspect of life. They are expected to live together peacefully regardless of their race, beliefs, social status, or any other considerations. Nature is against discrimination and oppression, but human nature is not. Blind greed and sharp selfishness control parts of the *White World*, the imperial powers.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* and Maishe Maponya's *The Hungry Earth* are anti-colonial plays par excellence. They both mirror the cruelty and oppression of Western colonialism and expose its colonial discourse and ideologies. They condemn and document the terrible aspects of discrimination and exploitation carried out in the name of noble missionaries.

Moreover, they both imply different strategies to resist colonialism amongst which mimicry, hybridity, and armed fighting are the most highlighted. Furthermore, the plays provided good instances of anti-colonial discourse. The latter is an effective strategy to confront colonial propaganda. However, Maponya's *The Hungry Earth* reflects a more revolutionary attitude than that felt in Aidoo's *Anowa*, maybe because of gender considerations of the playwrights; men are generally more rebellious than women.

This comparative study of *Anowa* and *The Hungry Earth* would be beneficial to students of postcolonial literature, and forensic and human rights studies to explore in their future studies. It recommends the application of other literary theories in the analysis of these two plays, amongst them Feminism and Marxism. In addition to the postcolonial-oriented themes dealt with in the analyzed plays, a sense of patriarchy, social inequality, and class distinction is also developed.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

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