



A Postcolonial Reading of Novuya Tshuma's *House of Stone*



Muhammad Hassan Shaikh	Assistant Professor, Institute of English Language & Literature, Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur, Sindh, Pakistan.
Ajab Ali Lashari	Lecturer, Department of Education, Sindh Madressatul Islam University, Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan.
Shah Muhammad Farooq Rashdi	Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur, Sindh, Pakistan.

Abstract: *The current paper attempts to investigate postcolonial concepts in Zimbabwean writer, Novuya Tshuma's debut novel, House of Stone (2018). The present study is built on the theoretical framework of Homi K. Bhabha who, in his, collected writings titled The Location of Culture (1994) mentioned key elements of postcolonial criticism like an identity crisis, othering, mimicry and hybridity. The textual analysis method has been applied to analyse the relevant text objectively. Findings suggest that the above postcolonial concepts like an identity crisis, othering/otherness, mimicry and hybridity are vividly available and have been objectively analyzed. Moreover, the novelist uses an ample amount of figure of speech (simile, metaphor, personification and oxymoron) to carry forward the story in a literary manner. In addition to the above aspects, the concept of feminism is found in an African setting, the character of Thandi promotes feminism through her words and action.*

Key Words: Colonial Discourse, Postcolonialism, Othering, Hyberdity, Cultural Hegemony

Corresponding Author: Ajab Ali Lashari (Lecturer, Department of Education, Sindh Madressatul Islam University, Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan. Email: ajablashari@smiu.edu.pk)

Introduction

Like different literary theories, postcolonialism is also considered as a major field of study in the discipline of literature. It is believed that postcolonial literature not only discusses the effects of colonial powers but also underlines social, political, psychological and literary parts of the imperial hegemony. This literary theory finds its origin in leading postcolonial intellectual and cultural critic Edward Said's work

Orientalism (1978). Apart from Said, Homi K. Bhabha's *Location of Culture* (1994) and Gayatri Chakravotry Spivak's work also presents the postcolonial concepts vividly. Spivak's translation and scholarly preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology* and her intellectual essay "Can Subaltern Speak"? (1983), and her book *Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999) have intellectually contributed to the development of postcolonial concepts.

In this regard, Young (2001) mentions "postcolonial theory is always concerned

with the positive and negative effects of the mixing of people and culture” (p.69). Novuyo Rosa Tshuma’s debut novel *House of Stone* (2018) also portrays the same landscape through her memorable story told in the first person point of view. Readers are encountered with experiences of love, fashion, violence, war, refugee camp and independence.

Commenting upon postcolonial discourse, Selden, Widdosson & Brooker (2005) argue “Postcolonial criticism in general draws attention to questions of identity in relation to broader national histories and destinies” (p.224). As put forward by the above scholars, postcolonialism discusses dominant ideologies and identity crises and Sawant, in his major work, *Perspectives on Post-colonial Theory: Said, Spivak and Bhabha* (2011) asserts that it not only portrays colonial experiences from colonized perspective but also presents indigenous culture after the colonizers have gone. The aforementioned ingredients could better be understood with reference to colonial powers, myth, history, language and landscape as discussed in postcolonial studies. In addition to it, Rahman (1993) in his study, *A Comparative Analysis of the Poetry of Taufiq and Daud Kamal*, states:

The major themes of post-colonial literature in Africa, the Caribbean and India have been the conflict between tradition and modernity, the search for roots and identity among members of the Westernized middle classes or expatriates, the alienation of the same kind of people with both Westerners and their own people, the struggle for power and money in the ex-colonies of Europe, poverty and exploitation (p.61).

To the observation and understanding of Rahman, themes of postcolonial literature are more political and social, being ultimately connected with the colonial experience, universal themes are found in the literature of all countries. Moreover, in this context,

Asmat, Hayat & Qasim (2012) are of the view that “Postcolonialism being a multilateral interdisciplinary movement attempts to interrogate the constructed identities of colonized territories and probes into many critical issues such as nationalism, language, race, marginalization and identity” (p.41). These scholars point out that postcolonialism is not only a many-sided discipline but it also investigates various serious issues of political domination, subjugation, identity crisis and culture. Chandio (2020) states “The colonizers leave physically but they leave the system behind which is purely a colonial product. Overall, it affects mindset, behaviour, education, law and culture in general” (p.36). Chandio believes that though colonizers have left the countries they ruled confidently their educational legacy, code of law and behavioural patterns are still surviving

Literature Review

Novuyo Tshuma’s *House of Stone* (2018) is the latest novel and therefore only a single study is available on it. Hence scanty work is found in terms of reviews digitally published. For example, Tshuma (2021) reveals that “In looking at the novel as historical fiction, importance is placed on the connections and continuities between various demarcated histories and relationships – such as what we think of as pre- and post-independence, colonialism and post-colonialism, and liberation war and post-independence genocide” (p.745). Tshuma, the novelist, shedding her intellectual light on various aspects of her debut novel, writes that it depicts various elements of war, colonial hegemony, postcolonial features, and genocide of indigenous people and blessing of independence while Habila (2018) states “Tshuma is incapable of writing a boring sentence...She has managed to not only sum up Zimbabwean history but also all of African colonial history: from devastating colonialism to the bitter wars of

independence to the euphoria of self-rule and the disillusionment of the present. It is an extraordinary achievement for a first novel" (The Guardian). Helon Habila, an author and professor of creative literature argues that the novelist is endowed with the mesmerizing power of writing that holds the readers spellbound. She portrays African colonial history, destruction and postcolonial conditions of Zimbabwean people in her debut work of fiction.

Furthermore, Tommi (2018) discusses that the novel is replete with suspense. It is a reflection of colonization, internal conflicts in the country and the aftermath of postcolonialism. Tshuma presents a charming blend of "history, storytelling, violence, love, patriarchy, and unreliable narration". Tommi is of the view that the present novel is a work of suspense and illustrates various aspects of history, romance, violence, patriarchy and miserable conditions of the indigenous people of Zimbabwe who faced trauma and tragedies. Discussing this exceptional novel with intellectual insights, Dansby (2020) writes "House of Stone is a devastating and inviting piece of fiction that is earning its raves as a beyond notable first novel.... Her book slips like sand through fingers through time and voice.... Tshuma deftly tells a story of colonization and decolonization both with a wide focus on the nation and a tight focus on a few people. The latter serves as a tragic microcosm of the former.... Her balance between the tightest and broadest focus is admirable and efficient" (Houston Chronicle). He is of the opinion that the novel paints various shades of events along with colonial powers, decolonization aspects and conditions of indigenous people what they felt after their colonial masters are gone. Tshuma has fascinatingly composed a marvellous fiction story. But Hill (2019) reveals it as "deeply smart, highly inventive and often darkly humorous, *House of Stone* is a mad and glorious epic about the makings of

a young post-colonial nation. This wildly ambitious, rambunctious debut bursts with wit, guile, rage and seduction, the sheer joy of invention and the power of imagination—at once charmingly playful and deeply serious, dazzling fireworks of universal comedy and tragedy. *House of Stone* is an astonishing feat by a brave writer of prodigious talents" (AnzLitBlog). In this regard, Mzini (2020) argues that the novel, through its character, reveals how the people of Africa in general and Zimbabweans in particular encountered torture, rapes, and deaths by invaders and foreigners.

It is observed that colonialist literary works demonstrate a deep sense of superiority and celebrate their cultural pride and race jubilantly while showing an extreme level of inferiority or cultural hegemony towards the colonized individuals labelling them as others. They also depict the same scenario through their writings. It is stated that the novel contains some of the elements of postcolonialism through the language of characters, setting, environment and oppression done to the people of the African country, Zimbabwe. In order to investigate concepts of postcolonial theory, the following research questions have been set to objectively analyze the relevant text.

Research Questions

- Q1:** Does the African novel *House of Stone* portray the concept of othering/otherness?
- Q2:** How far the novelist has succeeded in presenting postcolonial elements of mimicry and hybridity?

Research Methodology

Research methodology is the set of tools and techniques to clearly guide researchers to discover new information or "create a better understanding of the topic". The current study is based on the textual analysis method to analyze relevant texts objectively. In this

connection, Arya (2020) states "In Humanities, there are various research methods, out of which, textual analysis is one of the most common research methods, especially in literary and cultural studies. It helps to study the text in its cultural, social and historical context by interpreting it" (p.173). Furthermore, Caulfield (2019) believes textual analysis is an extensive term used to "describe, interpret and understand texts". It involves a deeper analysis of prose, poems, plays, short stories and novels. As far as the theoretical framework is concerned, it is taken from Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994). In this connection, Mostafae (2016), in his study on Investigating Identity, Ambivalence, Hybridity: A Bhabhaian Reading of J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* and *Grace*, discusses that Bhabha is one of the most influential theorists of postcolonial studies as well as a contemporary writer of outstanding vision. Moreover, Milostivaya, Nazarenko & Makhova (2017) are of the opinion that the postcolonial theory presented by Bhabha, a modern thinker of the 20th Century, largely consists of liberty where cultural borders of different countries are open up to each other.

In this respect, academic endeavours are made to explore postcolonial concepts and analyze them with textual citations. It is said that the fiction story narrated in *House of Stone* (2018) provides various textual evidence to justify the selection of the above theorists' aspects comprehensively.

Textual Analysis

First of all postcolonial aspects as theorized by Homi K. Bhabha are traced out and underlined and, later on, they have been objectively analyzed to answer relevant research questions.

Identity Crisis

After the devastation of World War II and the decolonization of several countries, a crisis of

identities cropped up as newly freed nations faced serious issues to form their self-identity. Issues of race, gender, ethnicity, identity and culture became the subject of their literary works. In this context, *House of Stone* (2018) portrays the aspect of identity crisis meaningfully.

Othering/Otherness

It is believed that postcolonial theory is built on the concept of otherness. It suggests how the colonizers treated the colonized. It sees the world "as divided into mutually excluding opposites" This concept is also available in various chapters of the novel.

Mimicry

Mimicry comes into view when the colonized began to imitate the "language, dress, politics or cultural attitude of the colonizers". According to Homi Bhabha, "mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal" (p. 122).

Hybridity

Hybridity is a cultural term that refers to the concept of mixing different cultures, values and traditions. Homi K. Bhabha defines it as the "perplexity of the living as it interrupts the representation of the fullness of life" (p.314).

Identity Crisis

The story of the novel moves around Zamani, the narrator of the story, who stays with Abednego (also called Abed) and Mama Agnes as a paying guest. Their young and energetic son Bukhosi went missing during a protest rally. Zamani is a victim of an identity crisis. He plans through hook or crook to get adjusted in the home of protagonist, Abed.

At the very beginning of the novel, he asserts, 'I am a man on a mission. A vocation, call it, to remake the past, and a wish to

fashion all that has been into being and becoming' (Tshuma, 2018, p.9). It is discovered that he is facing a crisis of identity acutely. Zamani, a foxy kind of young man wants to get sympathy and earn the trust of Abed and Agnes by being closer to them as they are already troubled and face extreme torments of the absence of their blooming son. He uses a sweet tongue and serves them to be called their surrogate son to replace their real son who was lost and kidnapped by state police. His evil actions indicate that if Bukhosi is found or recovered he will lose his deeper association with Abed and Agnes.

Othering/Otherness

The concept of Othering comes up at several places in the novel. The colonizers deal with local people as savage or inhuman. Their behaviour with the indigenous population is entirely deplorable and highly condemned. In this respect, Tyson (2006) writes "The colonizers believed that only their own Anglo-European culture was civilized, sophisticated, or, as postcolonial critics put it *metropolitan*. Therefore, native peoples were defined as savage, backward, and underdeveloped" (p.419). Different chapters of the novel reveal such negative treatment done to natives. For example, in book I, chapter 2nd, Abednego and Thandi with whom he develops a romantic relationship and later on Weds with her. When Abed, Thandi, Frankie and Mvelaphi attempt to step up a restaurant for joyous company, food and wine they are strictly prohibited to enter the restaurant by the hostess. In response to their question, she responds:

'I'm sorry, sir, but I....we don't allow natives in this establishment...'
'Why?' said Thandi. 'Why are you sorry? What, exactly, are you sorry for?'
'The hostess stumbled back as though she'd been slapped'. 'If you don't leave, I'm afraid I'll have to call security...'. (Tshuma,2018, p.31,32).

The above textual reference clearly reveals the sense of otherness. The othering is a postcolonial terminology, to look down upon the indigenous peoples. Colonizers behave with them as savage and downtrodden. They are privately and publicly humiliated as shown in the above-mentioned example. It is usually noticed that the colonizers saw themselves as superiors and the colonized as extremely inferior in terms of political, social, cultural and psychological domains. The element of othering/otherness frequently comes up in the novel.

Another instance of othering can be noticed when the father of Abed (a soldier) is engaged in conversation with his boss. He gets extremely confused in front of his boss as mentioned below:

'Right, soldier, get on the floor and give me fifty!'
'Sir, yessir!' he said, and lowered himself to the dung-and-mud floor, where he began to huff and puff out fifty press-ups'. (Tshuma, 2018, p.23).

This reference deeply underlines the cruel behaviour of the boss with subordinates and how he commands them and they hurriedly obey his orders, getting perplexed. They are unable to communicate with superiors comfortably and sit down on a rough floor in fear of hesitation. Resultantly, under the pressure of high command, their confidence is punctured.

Mimicry

Mimicry is one of the key concepts of postcolonial theory. In this respect, Chandio (2020) asserts "It is a desperate action someone makes s/he tries to copy someone else and the failure to this action is ridiculously disappointing" (p.43).

Abed when in chase of Thandi, his future inamorata gets prepared to impress the woman of his dreams. He intends to impress

her with a decent appearance and smart looks as young boys catch the eyes of beautiful damsels with their dresses and hairstyles. Abed's cousin applies gel to his skin and he doesn't look the way he desired. Instead, his style of hair looks like a pompadour. He is not happy with his unattractive style and complains to his cousin. Abed's cousin tells:

'Never mind, cousin, you look like an American rocking and rolling star, that's all. We've washed the rural of you, cousin. You've become the kind of man city girls love. Your girl's eyes are gonna drop when she sees you!' (Tshuma, 2018, p.32).

The above-cited textual reference suitably stresses the notion of mimicry. The novel is full of mimicry aspects of postcolonial techniques. The concepts of mimicry are shown in various chapters. In this context, a striking conversation over the matter of Thandi takes place between Uncle Zacchaeus and Abed. Abed is a simple character and he is not well-educated in comparison with Zacchaeus. Uncle Zacchaeus seems to form a close bond of understanding with Thandi. For example:

Uncle Zacchaeus: 'Stay away from her, brother. She is mine'.

'Whatever did she see in you, brother? I could never see you landing such a girl...so I'm warning you'.

Abednego: 'Yes, but I've been to school, I know things you will never know. I shall forge towns and cities, and even whole countries, for worldly wisdom, I shall fashion myself into a Great Colonizer' (Tshuma, 2018, p.76).

The above-placed heated discussion and argumentative communication between the two characters of the novel vividly reveal that Abed is doing mimicry to win Thandi from Uncle Zacchaeus. And presents himself in the garb of a great colonizer. The concept of mimicry is also an aspect of postcolonialism depicted in the novel.

Hybridity

The postcolonial aspect of hybridity is traced out from various scenes of the novel. One of these scenes is depicted in the dressing and behaviour of Abed and Thandi. In the words of Zamani:

'She placed carefully first one sandalled foot and then the other onto the platform, her floral dress whipped about her thin legs by a gust of wind blowing from the tracks. She had a doek wrapped around her head, covering that mfushwa hair he loved so much' (Tshuma, 2018, p.110).

Her fashionable style of dressing suggests an excellent choice of garments, hair cutting and the manners she gracefully walked and impressed the beholders. When colonizers occupied the resources and land of the indigenous people, the locals piece by piece adopted their cultural style, manner of dressing, and style of fashion.

Findings

The novel under discussion is a fictional story of resistance and presents the revolutionary spirits of the characters. Protest rallies are taken out against the menace of racism, Mthwakzi Secessionist Movement and Gukurahandi Genocide are portrayed with scenes and sights of bloodshed, tears and dead bodies. The meaningful story of the novel is based on historical fiction that explores "Zimbabwe's history, beginning in 1974, during what is known as Zimbabwe's War of Liberation or the Second Chimurenga, up to post-colonial Zimbabwe in 2007" (Tshuma, 2021, p.745).

After a careful reading of the novel, it is stated that the novel is beautifully written. An ample use of figurative devices (simile, metaphor, personification and oxymoron) is made to carry forward the story interestingly. Apart from figures of speech, names of Western poets, writers and thinkers are also mentioned. In addition to it, the concept of

feminism is found in African settings. The character of Thandi promotes feminism through her words and actions.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the current research has traced out and objectively analyzed concepts of an identity crisis, othering/otherness, mimicry and hybridity as postcolonial elements propounded by a cultural critic of the 20th Century, Homi K. Bhabha respectively. The research questions have been validated with textual references as cited above. The postcolonial concepts

have been classified after careful study of an African novel, *House of Stone* (2018).

The story is told through the character of Zamani. His character is revealed to readers as the kind of person with a colonial approach, who with cajoling and sycophancy attempts to "doing his best to fill the void left by their missing son". He shows a false kind of sympathy in sugar-coated terms to win their trust and wider acceptance in their hearts.

It is believed that this study will open a window of academic research to explore more aspects of the novel under the umbrella of different cultural theories.

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