



Countering Colonial Narratives: A Comparative Study of Resistance And Identity In The Postcolonial Novels of Ngūgĩ Wa Thiong’o, Chinua Achebe, And Wole Soyinka

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Abstract

The present paper involves the comparison of works by Ngugi wa Thiong to compare and contrast the works of Ngugi wa Thiong, Chinua Achebe, and Wole Soyinka to analyze the way African literature confronts the colonial discourse and the way it creates identity. Through the postcolonial theory, the paper highlights how Ngugi resisted using indigenous language and Achebe retrieved history using cultural signifiers and linguistic hybridity, and Soyinka used Yoruba myth and ritual to bargain with both the colonial and postcolonial aspects. A comparative literature approach shows both similar strategies of counter-discourse and difference, i.e. linguistic nationalism on the one hand, pragmatic use of the English language on the other hand and hybrid dramaturgy of Soyinka. The results support the fact that these authors are relevant to postcolonial studies and will continue to be so in terms of how Africa should shape its culture.

Keywords: Postcolonialism; Resistance; Identity; Counter-discourse; Decolonisation; African Literature.

• Introduction

The new scholarship redefines the African postcolonial literature as a form of reaction but

instead as a form of counter-discourse that is proactive and reinstates language, memory and cultural forms that had been displaced by colonial epistemologies. The shift to vernaculars and embodied, indigenous practice by Ngugi wa Thiong has been interpreted as a lifelong program of language decolonisation that places linguistic agency at the centre of political action (Canagarajah, 2022). The so-called narrative strategies of Chinua Achebe, his use of proverbs, scenes of ritual, and historiograph re-casting have been considered as the means of challenging the colonial representation and re-establishing the sense of communal identity (Mengara, 2019; Orock, 2022). The dramaturgy of Wole Soyinka, combining Yoruba myth and ritual with modern stagecraft, is also presented as a form of protest expressed through ritual-performative, a way of negotiating the hybrid postcolonial realities (Bigot, 2024; Mekunda, 2019).

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Although the author-centred literature abounds, there is a relative gap in the international literature: a relative paucity of recent studies that systematically examine the ways in which Ngũgĩ, Achebe and Soyinka, who write in different genres, different languages, and in different historical periods, overlap and diverge in their approaches to the countering of colonial discourses. A comparative emphasis will uncover the ways in which language policy, historiographic re-narration and myth-ritual performance interact as discursive and aesthetic technologies of resistance.

The role of this paper is thus to follow and draw comparisons on how Ngugii wa Thiong, Chinua Achebe, and Wole Soyinka reversed colonial discourses to (re)-create postcolonial identity. It aims at: (1) to discuss the decolonizing practices of Ngugi through the use of vernacular and multimodal forms; (2) to discuss the Achebean strategies of historiography and linguistics in reclaiming indigenous views of the world; and (3) to interrogate the Soyinka mytho-ritual dramaturgy as political action. The paper goes on to present a theoretical framing, close analysis of selected texts, a cross-author comparative analysis, as well as discussion of implications in modern postcolonial studies.

• Theoretical Framework

This paper is grounded in the postcolonial theory, especially those underlying interventions of Said, Bhabha, and Spivak, whose ideas still dominate the current literature. The concept of Orientalism developed by Said would continue to be important in exploring the ways the colonial discourses create the image of Africa as the

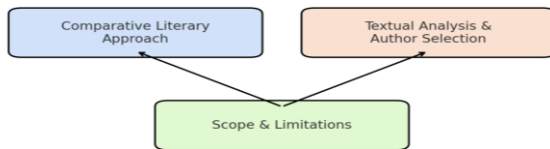
Other (Young, 2020). The concepts of the hybridity and the third space introduced by Bhabha were reconsidered in modern readings of the African literature to demonstrate how authors find a compromise between the local culture and the colonial past (Chowdhury, 2021). The subaltern, as defined by Spivak, on the other hand, shapes the discourse on silenced voices, politics of representation of African novels (Chilisa, 2019).

One of the key issues of this framework is the counter-discourse and decolonisation. The call to write in native languages can be seen as an example of such decolonisation of the epistemology of culture more generally, as Ngugi advocated, and it is the case with the recent discussions of linguistic decolonisation in African literary and cultural studies (Canagarajah, 2022). Comparative methods emphasize the use of narrative and performative technique to deconstruct colonial epistemic systems by postcolonial writers and form alternative knowledge systems (Thiong'o, 2021).

Lastly, this analysis is based on questions of identity, resistance and cultural negotiation. Postcolonial African literature is also being understood as a place of identity reconstruction based on cultural memory, myth, and ritual, and resistance is practiced based on the language and aesthetic decisions (Afolayan, 2023). The above theoretical orientations enable the current research to trace the convergences and divergences between Achebe, Ngugi and Soyinka in the way they negotiated colonial and postcolonial realities.

• Research Methodology

Research Methodology



Flow of Methodology: Comparative Approach & Textual Analysis feed into defining scope & Limitations.

This research paper uses comparative literary analysis in exploring bargaining of colonial and postcolonial realities by Ngugi wa Thiong, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka. In African literary studies, comparative approaches have been reevaluated and allow scholars to find commonalities and differences between authors, genres, and history (Damrosch, 2020). The research aligns the three authors in common but divergent paths to point out the more comprehensive postcolonial techniques of resistance and identity creation.

The critical review is based on the textual analysis, which dwells on the chosen works which can demonstrate the intervention of each author. Postcolonial criticism is still textual because it is possible to interpret the close reading of words, images, and narrative structures and identify how texts are involved in counter-discursive practice (Shih, 2019). Critical consensus was used to select the authors because they were the most prominent figures in African literature, and their approach is linguistic decolonisation (Ngugi), historiographic reclaiming (Achebe), and mytho-ritual dramaturgy (Soyinka) (Canagarajah, 2022; Afolayan, 2023).

The study has a narrow focus of three Anglophone male writers, and this is the reason why it does not represent the views of Francophone, Lusophone, and female writers. Although it makes comparative analysis more profound, it is also an indicator of the necessity of future research incorporating African literary traditions and voices in general (Ngũgi, 2021; Quayson, 2020).

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o: Language, Culture, and Decolonization

The work by Ngugi wa Thiong enlightens us to the significance of the use of language as an oppressive and as a resistance tool. The controversy regarding the writing in Gikuyu has been the point of debate on the issue of linguistic decolonisation. The recent scholarship confirms that the vernacular turn by Ngugi reorganizes literature as the political arena to fight the hegemony of the English language in African literary writing (Canagarajah, 2022). Through foregrounding of the native languages, Ngugi places the very linguistic practice as a counter-discourse to disrupt epistemologies of colonization and restore the cultural independence (Thiong, 2021).

In addition to language, cultural memory and national identity can also be found in the fiction and essays of Ngugi. Memory is prefigured in his novels as a source of community struggle connecting oral culture and national history with the national-building project (Gikandi, 2020). According to scholars, novels like *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross* dramatise the ways in which memory defies erasure by entrenching national narratives into the daily struggles of ordinary people (Mwangi, 2023).

This combination of memory and identity makes Ngũgĩ a writer who is not only a critic of the neocolonial order but also sees a different national consciousness based on native cultural heritage. Therefore, his works demonstrate the interplay of language and memory as resistance mechanisms and sources of recreating postcolonial identity.

• **Chinua Achebe: Reclaiming History and Indigenous Perspectives**

The fiction of Chinua Achebe is canonical in terms of a representation of African identity manifesting through the narrative genres that predict the cultural practices and the social values of indigenous people. The recent literature highlights the importance of novels like *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* in the reconstruction of African identity with a focus on oral traditions, proverbs, and the life of rituals as authentic representations of Igbo worldviews (Mengara, 2019). The careful use of English with Igbo expressions is a tactic by Achebe to believe that the colonial language can be transformed to African functions hence asserting cultural identity in response to a global audience (Davies, 2023). His writings, therefore, are the sites where African voices can express themselves and not be voiced by the colonial masters.

It is also important that Achebe is able to oppose Western epistemologies. Scholars emphasize that Achebe subverts the Eurocentric historiography by revealing the way the colonial histories twisted African societies (Orock, 2022). His fiction questions the stereotypes of the primitivism and restores the complexity of the African political, social, and religious structures and situates the African

knowledge systems as valid and strong (Gagiano, 2020). In such a manner, the work of Achebe is in opposition to colonial epistemic authority and African agency in telling the past. His work is still relevant to the study of postcolonialism in that it provides a literary anthropology of African cultural survival and intellectual sovereignty.

• **Wole Soyinka: Hybrid Identities and Political Resistance**

The literary work and dramaturgy of Wole Soyinka represent the intricacies of the postcolonial identity in the interplay of native myth, ritual, and contemporary dramaturgy. According to scholars, Soyinka reinvents the Yoruba mythology, especially through characters like Ogun, to comment on the violence in politics and the disintegration of culture (Afolayan, 2021). The ritual in plays such as *Death and the King's Horseman* serves not only as performance, but as a recreation of collective memory, in which sacrifice and transition are used to represent larger conflicts with colonial encroachment (Bigot, 2024). These mytho-ritual systems place the Soyinka drama in the position of a cultural repository, where Yoruba cosmologies are held in reserve to be reenacted in the political processes of criticism.

No less significant is the negotiation of colonial and postcolonial realities as Soyinka does it. The conflict between local ritual orders and colonial modernity are frequently performed in his dramaturgy, providing a hybrid identity that is not limited by dichotomies (Mekinda, 2019). Scholars underline the fact that Soyinka relocates the colonial experience not merely as a place of domination but as a field of

negotiation where the traditional and modern coexist to envision other postcolonial futures (Afolayan, 2023). Accordingly, the Soyinka oeuvre is a model of identity and aesthetic hybridisation, which anticipates the strength of native culture and challenges the inconsistencies of postcolonial political existence.

• Comparative Analysis: Convergences and Divergences

Comparative analysis of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe, and Wole Soyinka shows that their counter-discourse strategies have some significant convergences. Both authors reclaim the forgotten histories and cultures, and place literature as the weapon of decolonisation. Ngugi focuses on reviving the native languages, and the linguistic practice is placed as resistance (Canagarajah, 2022). By reinventing the English language, Achebe restores the cultural identity of the Igbo and reclaims the past of the colonial misrepresentation (Mengara, 2019; Orock, 2022). In his turn, Soyinka appeals to the Yoruba myth and ritual as the performative counter-discourses that safeguard the indigenous cosmologies (Afolayan, 2021; Bigot, 2024). These strategies, together, represent the contributions of postcolonial literature to the deconstruction of colonial epistemologies and the restoration of African agency.

However, their identity and resistance vary in their approach. The radical insistence of Ngugi on Gikuyu predicts the language as the key to the cultural survival, by contrast, Achebe is more pragmatic and promotes the re-invention of English to suit African needs (Davies, 2023).

Soyinka goes a step further to form hybrid identities by blending the ritual and the modern dramaturgy where negotiation is prioritised over linguistic or historiographic purism (Mekinda, 2019). These opposing trends illustrate the diversity of postcolonial practices: linguistic nationalism, cultural recovery, and mytho-ritual hybridity. The two of them contribute to the enrichment of the knowledge on resistance and identity formation in African literature, both demonstrating how writers challenge and remake colonial histories in different ways.

Comparative Analysis: Convergences and Divergences



Green = Shared Strategies (Convergences) | Red = Contrasting Approaches (Divergences)

• Discussion

Comparative analysis of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka highlights the importance of strategy to the present postcolonial studies. They are written in an era of globalization and digital modernity, revealing how the postcolonial theory should keep on adapting to changing types of cultural domination such as neoliberal capitalism and cultural homogenisation (Young, 2020). The idea of insisting on the use of indigenous languages is very familiar to modern discussions of linguistic justice and decolonisation of knowledge (Canagarajah, 2022). The historiographic reclamation by Achebe and hybrid dramaturgy by Soyinka focus on the current necessity to challenge



Eurocentric histories that continue to be present in the world academia (Orock, 2022) and the intercultural negotiation of the current societies as a more plural reality (Afolayan, 2021).

Regarding the implication on African literary and cultural identity, these writers, collectively, show that postcolonial identity is not a unitary one but plural, dynamic and negotiated. Their writings help us remember that African identity will not be regained by simply denying the colonial forms, but rather by restoring cultural memory, reinstating indigenous epistemologies, and developing new hybrid means of expression (Gikandi, 2020). This provides an important lesson to present-day African authors who struggle to balance the need to maintain local cultures and appeal to international markets. In the end, the heritage of Ngugi, Achebe, and Soyinka confirms that the African literature is still an effective place of resistance, revitalization, and cultural self-determination.

• Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka use different and complementary mechanisms of resistance and self-defense. Ngugi nationalism linguistically anticipates the decolonial practice of language, Achebe re-invents African history by using cultural signifiers and narrative hybridity, and Soyinka balances the tensions between colonialism and postcolonialism by negotiating both myth and ritual with modern dramaturgy. Their works together show how African literature can be a counter-discourse, deconstructing colonial epistemologies and reasserting cultural memory and identity. The paper makes a contribution to the postcolonial

literature by developing a comparative framework which points out the convergences and divergences between foundational African writers in the name of strengthening the relevance of their interventions to current debates over decolonisation and cultural sovereignty. This investigation needs to be expanded in future research by bringing in the voices of Francophones, Lusophones, and females in Africa, and by placing African counter-discourses in the context of global struggles in the twenty-first century against epistemic domination.

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