

The colonizer and the colonized: A postcolonial approach to *Brave New World*

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Abstract

Postcolonial studies analyze the power relationship between the colonizer and the colonized people and tries to show the dominance of the colonizer over the colonized people not only in political, but also in social, cultural, and psychological aspects of life. The aim of this paper is to show how *Brave New World* (1975), a dystopia by Aldous Huxley, is strongly in line with postcolonial approach, and how it reveals some traces of Britain postcolonial attitude toward the colonized people. One of the key concepts which Edward Said (1979) introduces to literary criticism is 'othering'. This concept can be traced well in the novel about the character called John and also his mother Linda. The governors of England consider John and Linda as inferior, savage, and dangerous persons who is an alien and an "other" for their society. Exile is another postcolonial term which is well applicable to this novel. According to this postcolonial definition both John and his mother are in exile because both of them are separated from their true culture. Other postcolonial conceptions such as subaltern, and cultural diversity shed light upon the unexplained, but seemingly simple plot and structure of *Brave New World*. Finally, the conclusion focuses on the fact that in *Brave New World* both John and Linda are others who are sacrificed because of the imperial oppression of the World State.

Keywords: colonization, colonizer, colonized, creole, other, subaltern

1. Postcolonialism: Said and Spivak

Postcolonial studies analyses the relationship between colonizer and colonized. Being strongly influenced by literary theories like deconstruction, feminism, Foucault's notion of power, and ideology in Marxism, it focuses on power relations in the colonial world. It examines cultural details of both the superior, which is colonizer, and the inferior, which is the colonized, to show how culture and social life go through changes and displacements under colonization. This theory can be seen as the culmination of twentieth century's preoccupation with the theme of identity in novel studies. The focus of postcolonial criticism is considering issues of imperialism, identity and values of colonized people, culture and economical forces in these societies. In other words, it is the recent influence of postmodern criticism and "reexamine the taken-for-granted notions of identity" in world literature, in works of African, Asian, Caribbean or Britain literature (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004)

The study of controlling power in colonized societies had begun in late 1970 with Said's *Orientalism* (1979) and developed in the works of theorists such as Spivak (1985) and Bhabha (1990) though the actual term 'postcolonial' was not employed in these early studies. The focus of the works of literary critics like Spivak rendered to Third World countries' literature; others like Said concentrated English and American literature, because they owned a wide range of colonies in the Nineteenth century. Edward Said as the pioneer of postcolonial theory and criticism examines Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* to show how English colonization penetrated literary works that are by no means concerned with politics.

Edward Said in his *Orientalism* (1979) clarifies that the western thought constructs the Orient through its own taste and imagination. He developed the notion of orientalism to how and in

what ways Western people and writers constructed a version of eastern people as different, other, exotic and strange and believes the western culture looks down on the Orient as the 'other' and "has produced some myths about laziness, deceit and irrationality of orientals" (Widdowson, 1993, p. 190). He argues that this has been the basis of much misunderstanding, hierarchy and racism. Likewise, Said is concerned with the ways in which knowledge is governed and owned by the Europeans to reinforce power and exclude the knowledge which the natives might claim to have (Innes, 2007, p. 9). He refers to "anthropology, linguistics, history and literary criticism as well as European literary works as a network of discourse" which makes a particular view of "the orientals as people to be governed rather than as equals who are capable of self-government" (p. 9). According to Said the culture of the orientals is seen as degenerate. In any case contemporary oriental societies were perceived to be in the need of civilizing, and that meant European civilization.

The inferiority that is attributed to the east simultaneously serves to construct the west's superiority. The sensuality, irrationality, primitiveness, and despotism of the east construct the west as rational, democratic, progressive and so on. The west always functions as the 'center' and the east is the marginal 'other' that simply through its existence confirms the west's centrality and superiority. *Orientalism* offers a challenging theoretical framework and a new perspective on the interpretation of western writing.

In his *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said not only analyzes the presence of empire in English literature and in *Mansfield Park* in particular, he also refers to writers such as Achebe, Fanon and Yeats from colonized countries. In this work Said, through a minute examination of Austen's work, proves that even in a work that by no means is political or by no means is concerned with colonial issues, the trace of English colonization can be found through a minute analytical reading.

Spivak adds new dimensions to postcolonial studies. She is the first postcolonial theorist who owns a fully feminist view. In her "Three Women's Texts and Critique of Imperialism" (1985), she

goes on to analyze Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and shows her disapproval about the way Bertha Mason, the white Jamaican 'Creole', is represented in this novel. According to her, Bertha is the 'foreign other' who is sacrificed so that another woman, Jane, would reach home (Hale, p. 661). Spivak believes that Bertha is not represented through a "native point of view, rather she is created 'within' an imperial perspective"; thus Spivak praises works in which the 'other' or the native owns a point of view (p. 661). She admires *The Wide-Saragossa Sea* by Jean Rhys which is a rewriting of *Jane Eyre* and portrays Bertha as a colonized other, "knowable only through the native role projected upon her by her colonizers"; so according to Spivak, Rhys successfully renders Bertha as "an allegory of the general epistemic violence of imperialism" which is in service of "imperialist demystification" and is better than the opposite situation in which "natives seem to be personalized only to perform as mouthpieces of their colonizers" (p. 661). As Widdowson (1993) explains, in *Jane Eyre*, Bertha must play out her role, act out the transformation of her self into the fictive other, set fire to the house and kill herself so that Jane become the heroine of British fiction (p. 194) and become "the paragon of feminine virtue against whom Bertha is defined as monstrous, or bestial" whose race is related to natives (Morton, p. 88). No matter a literary work is the product of the western world or the Third World countries, For Spivak, a work attains revealing truth when it is written from the point of view of the natives, or else, the natives have a voice and ability to express the effects of imperialism on them.

Social class is an issue which is crucial in Spivak's writings and she consistently concentrates on the important concept of the subaltern: those who are lower in rank or according to Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin (1999), they are "of inferior rank"...they are "those groups in the society who are subjects to the hegemony of the ruling classes" (p. 215). Spivak critiques the assumptions of the subaltern studies in "Can Subaltern Speak?" and by combining Marxism and deconstruction and feminism describes the lower people in postcolonial or neocolonial society who are peasants, farmers, homeless and workers. She goes on to elaborate the

problems of women and Indian women in particular, because the female subalterns are more deeply marginalized and more in shadow. Therefore, female subalterns are removed from their rights in a double way: both as colonized and as women. In this article Spivak explains that “how the benevolent radical western intellectual can paradoxically silence the subaltern” instead of helping him by claiming to represent and speak for their experience (Morton, p. 56). In other words, the western people never understand the culture and problems of working class people in India or anywhere else.

2. *Brave New World* and Postcolonialism

Brave New World is a satire on the World State. By World State Huxley means that the majority of the population is unified under a powerful government which controls the society by means of highly technological and scientific advances. The sole and main aim of the rulers and controllers of that society is to keep stability and to avoid any kind of change and instability. “The individuals are like ants, should work and their claims are never permitted to overrule the need of the State” (Mackerie, p. 15). People are addicted to the drug soma. Soma is hallucinogen that makes users relaxed, relieved and ignorant. Soma eliminates the need for religion by making a deep comfort. Living alone and wanting to be an individual is shocking, horrifying and embarrassing in this State. Conditioning trains people to consume and never to enjoy being alone.

This powerful hegemony soon is compared with a savage reservation which is located in New Mexico and consists of a community named Malpais. Therefore, in the novel the world is divided into two distinct parts: the progressed World State and some minor and marginalized islands and places on the map whose people are called savages and are used as places for banishing the intellectuals and genius people who are considered as rebels in the World State. While there is no clue of colonization between these two parts, there are some strong traces of neocolonialism in this dystopia. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1999) define

neocolonialism as follows: “Although the time of direct imperialism is finished, the ex-colonial powers and the nearly emerging superpowers continue to play a decisive role in the fate of less powerful countries and continue to control them by any means, in other words, the Third World countries are unable to become totally independent under the pressure of globalization” (pp. 162-3).

The World State is very powerful and despotically controls people’s minds. The hegemony of this State divides the World into two parts. Those who make no problem for the State are permitted to live in it and those who demand for a little change should be banished and should be deprived of all facilities and live like ‘savages’. So it is the World State that by its hegemony and despotism dispossesses the distant islands and places on the map to add to its own stability and power. This kind of imperialism is called neocolonialism: the ex-colonizer by help of new political and economical ways keeps the ex-colonized ‘Third World’, ‘other’ and dispossessed.

Among the savages two are introduced in this novel: Linda and John, who are mother and son. Linda, in accordance with postcolonial criticism, is a Creole. Creole originally means native and “refers to those with a white European descent, raised in a tropical colony” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 1999, p. 57). She is a member of the World State who had been lost on a trip and lived in Malpais the rest of her life. Linda for Lenina Crown and Bernard is the foreign other, the Creole, very similar to the case of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*. As both Said and Spivak state about different characters in literary works, Linda is a dislocated person and is moved from her ‘home’ to the colonial margin. Linda is displaced and sacrificed so that the people of the World State would not experience her strange and out of place appearance. The interesting and similar point between Bertha and Linda is that both are imprisoned and not permitted going into public. Bertha is imprisoned in the attic and Linda is banished and lives in solitude. Bertha is mad and is supposed to be dangerous for others; Linda is sick, old and ugly, excommunicated and ostracized both by her friends and by the natives. According to Spivak Linda is the female

subaltern not only with no voice in her society, but also secluded and desolate and excommunicated. Her only fault or guilt is being born and raised in another place and in a different way.

Spivak wrote an article about subaltern people and introduced women as more marginalized group of subalterns. C.L. Innes (2007) quotes an Indian nationalist who says "I know my country as Mother. I offer my devotions, my worship. If a monster sits upon her breast and prepares to suck her blood, what does her child do?"(p. 138). This way many postcolonial critics consider and identify the colonized countries as female delicate creatures. As Innes states in *Heart of Darkness* Conrad contrasts Kurtz's two mistresses, one white and one black as symbolizing European and African worlds respectively, and in contrast with Kurtz's frail and idealistic 'Intended', the African mistress epitomizes what Europeans conceived as dark, mysterious barbaric continent. (p. 137)

Linda in *Brave New World* is the female subaltern whose old, freakish body is very different from healthy, nice bodies of English people who never get old and so she is strange, mysterious and unknown to them and is a symbol of subaltern country that is under the pressure of abuse and insult of the imperial country. This quotation from the novel shows Linda's appearance through Lenina's eyes well.

Lenina noticed with disgust that two of the front teeth were missing. And the colour of the one that remained...She shuddered...So fat. And all the lines in her face, the flabbiness, the wrinkles. And the sagging cheeks, with those purplish blotches. And the red veins on her nose, the bloodshot eyes. And that neck-that neck... (Huxley, p. 98)

Linda is no more healthy and young and so she is the alien and foreign other among those people. That she is aged, toothless and decrepit makes her similar to the black intended in *Heart of Darkness* who is dark, mystifying, and savage. Her body and Malpais are identified with each other and both are disgusting for Lenina.

One of the polemical questions the postcolonial feminists are concerned with is that whether gender or colonial oppression is the more important political factor in women's lives. In *Brave New World* Linda is the victim of both: victim of patriarchal natives and victim of colonial oppression of the World State. Daniels and Bowen (2003) illustrates that women in dystopian novels, for example in *Brave New World*, do not experience a happy life and their personal leisure spaces are not defined well. She explains how all women in this novel are objects of love. For all of them, including Linda, bodily perfection is very important (pp. 1-3). Since she is old and ugly, the World State has abandoned her as an expired and out of use object and never went in search of her: this way she is both herself and the symbol of Malpais as the foreign other. On the other hand, the natives hate her because of being immoral and different and degrade her. Therefore she is the victim of both World State and the native land.

John who is first happy to visit his mother land, soon is disappointed and disillusioned. He is now alienated, alone, unhomed, and is not able to adapt himself to the new culture. He grows frustrated by a society he finds wicked and debased. He isolates himself in a lighthouse outside London where he tries to return to his precolonial and savage past and redefine and self-define his identity. He mourns his mother's death and is disturbed by the memories of civilization and commits suicide.

Though he conducts a tragic ending with suicide, John is a character who is central in the novel and his actions are heroic, because he aims to save the world. While he is not successful, John has a dominant voice in the novel and the readers sympathize with him. As mentioned, Spivak believes that Bertha has no 'native' point of view and is within the context of imperialism, but in *The Wide Saragossa sea* she has a native point of view and is able to show the imperialist behavior of the oppressors. While Linda is not given a native point of view and one is not able to observe the imperial oppression over her, this latent native view is later transferred to her son, John. John, who is dislocated like his mother, but this time from a Third World country to London, the 'center' of

civilization in the novel, represents the native view of his own culture, suffers from confronting the new but immoral civilization and just like Bertha he commits suicide to show the imperial oppression on him. Although John's views are not presented from first person point of view, we are able to sympathize with him, because he is given a voice and he is the mouthpiece of his own culture and people. As Schmerl states "John is needed" for this novel, "he is the alien" and his role is to "show the emptiness of the world State" by a native view through which the native characters and their motifs are divulged (p. 392).

John and Linda both are displaced from their homelands. Linda as a female subaltern has no voice and is not the mouthpiece of the natives, she is only the victim of being a woman and being an other. Since female subaltern in the native country cannot speak, this view and voice transfers to John to express his true self and identity and his culture and show his disapproval of the western culture. He succeeds in expressing himself, but fails to impress others. By committing suicide he can only object, but is not able to change anything.

3. Conclusion

In this novel England has the colonial power of the past and even more than that. It has been made the 'center' of the world which signifies universalism and globalization which offers hegemonic view of existence by which the values "of a dominant culture are held to be true for all humanity"(Ashcroft et al., 1999, p. 235). England is successful in globalizing the world and making a unified state which is gained at the cost of dispossessing and marginalizing other countries on the map. Aldous Huxley, unlike many other British novelists, did not write his work from the point of view of imperial power. While the ending is bitter and pessimistic, the work criticizes the relationship between powerful and powerless, the colonizer and colonized from a native view and is critiquing the First World countries because of their attitude toward the foreign 'other'. Huxley believes even in a future that the imperialist attitude

of England continues to shadow over the style of life of the subalterns and affect their lives. The closure puts an end to any hope for future of the subalterns and this is natural for a dystopia which depicts a dissatisfying picture of future.

The role of women in this dystopian fiction is noticeable. Women of the world State are treated as objects and not respected as human beings. Linda, on the other hand, represents a woman who is sacrificed by patriarchy of the World State and Patriarchy of the natives. She is humiliated for her physical appearance and has no voice in the society. She is the symbol of her country, because there is a great emphasis on her body as old, decrepit, ugly and different and also disgusting for those who live in the World State.

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Pakzad

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