

RESEARCH ARTICLE

NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF COLONIALISM: A STUDY OF GRACE ODOT'S THE GREEN LEAVES

Naimuddin Ansary

S.A.C.T.-I, Department of English, Raghunathpur College, Raghunathpur, Purulia,
W.B., India

Abstract:

This paper attempts to elaborate effectively the negative effects of Colonialism on the lives of the indigenous people of the downtrodden section of the society of Kenya in Africa as reflected in the short story, The Green Leaves, by Grace Ogot. Grace Ogot, an eminent writer of Kenya, penned many important short stories which were published in her 1968 collection called Land Without Thunder. Most of these stories have been loosely based on the stories she heard from her grandmother in her childhood. Some of her stories are steeped with the information of Kenya's recent developments, social customs of its indigenous people, its colonial past and subsequent national independence movements. According to Lois Tyson, "colonialist ideology was based on the colonizers' assumption of their own superiority, which they contrasted with the alleged inferiority of native (indigenous) peoples, the original inhabitants of the lands they invaded" (419). Ogot's The Green Leaves is a story which deals with the colonial past of Kenya attracting the attention of the readers and critics to study it from the lens of Postcolonialism. Ogot used the conflicts between the Luo people of

Kenya and the colonialists as a source of her story, The Green Leaves which presents an open verbal conflict between the clan leader, Olielo, on behalf of the native villagers and the White European Police Officer. This concept of conflict takes a new dimension when Nyamundhe, the wife of the hero, Nyagar, openly attempts to detain the police officer from taking away the dead body of her husband, Nyagar, for postmortem towards the end of the story. Issues like colonial greed, power, violence and resistance constitute a major part of the story through the deft presentation of the same by Ogot. She embodies the concept of colonial greed in the story by depicting skillfully the character of Nyagar who surrenders himself as a victim of his own intense greed even though he possesses a considerable amount of wealth and has a happy family with three wives and twelve children. She also manages to incorporate the aspect of colonial power in the story through the portrayal of the dominance, control and exploitative attitude of the White European Police officer over the native people of the village.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Keywords: Colonialism, conflict, indigenous people, resistance, White European Police officer,

Aims and Objectives: The chief aim of this study is to explore the psychological as well as physical disruptions occurred on the lives of the indigenous people of Kenya in Africa in the pre independence era due to the establishment of colony by the White Europeans and objective of this article includes the proper investigation of the negative effects or impacts of each and every issue related to the system of colonialism as depicted by Ogot in her famous short story, The Green Leaves.

Research Questions: Many important questions arise in the process of the investigation of this story, The Green Leaves by Ogot. These include

i) How were the indigenous people of Kenya in Africa dominated and treated inhumanly by the White Europeans?

ii) How was the resistance on the part of the native people to the White Europeans?

Research Methodology: Methodology adopted in this study is qualitative and historical study. The current study includes the history of colonized Kenya and its people. The recent development of theories related to colonialism has also been incorporated into this study for the purpose of analysis.

Review of the Existing Literature: In the process of current analysis of The Green Leaves by Ogot, many reviews over the oeuvre of the author by many critics and scholars can be traced back. Many critics have been allured to lay down their own opinions and analyses in the field of short story of Ogot's literary world. A famous African Literary critic, Twaiwo Oladele says about the short stories of Ogot, "Her practice is to hit direct on the subject matter without allowing the beginning of the story to drag, and leave something for the imagination of the reader at the end." The story, The Green Leaves by Ogot rationally testifies to it. The women of Africa were not only the victims of the colonial system but also an object of oppression and subjugation to the patriarchal system existed in the society of the contemporary time. In short, they were doubly oppressed and ill treated in the society in the colonial period. In Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender, feminist critic Florence Stratton claims that "the colonized women were doubly oppressed, enmeshed in the structures of an indigenous patriarchy and of a foreign masculinity colonialism." Although in the story, The Green Leaves, Ogot has tried to show the resistance to the prevailing system of colonialism through the courage of defense of Nyamundhe against the White European Police Officer who tries to take away the body of her husband, Nyagar, the hero of the story, The Green Leaves invites

RESEARCH ARTICLE

his downfall due to his materialistic mentality. Peter Nazareth truly points out in his article True Fantasies of Grace Ogot, Storyteller, "Modern Society in Kenya she sees as sick, a world in which people chase after false materialist values instead of pursuing the truth."

Introduction: Literature of Africa in the postcolonial era emerges as a mirror of the colonial power, subjugation, violence and the resistance. Most of the literary pieces of that period deal with the theme of cruel experiences, inhuman treatment and endless exploitation of the native population by the mechanism of power and politics of the white Europeans in the name of colonialism. The white colonizers extended their inhuman, oppressive and cruel treatment to delve the colonized people into the deep ocean of trauma and terror through the application of multiple means of violence, strength and threat. According to M.H. Abrams, postcolonial studies include, "The critical analysis of the history, culture, literature, and modes of discourse that are specific to the former colonies of England, Spain, France, and other European imperial powers. These studies have focused especially on the Third World countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean islands, and South America." What he means is that Postcolonial writings of the postcolonial writers focused on the specific culture, history and literature of the colonized countries. Postcolonial writers of Africa like

Chinua Achebe, Ama Ata Aidoo and Grace Ogot steeped their texts with elements of history, culture and tradition of their own country, Africa, of the colonial era.

Ogot in her short story, The Green Leaves presents a pen picture of the negative effects of colonialism on the lives of the native people of Kenya. By describing a story of a group of villagers in the text, She actually attempts to bring out the real realities of the indigenous Luo people of Kenya who were the victims of colonial masters for a long time in the pre independence era of Africa despite having their impressive integrity among themselves and robust resisting power.

Argumentation: The story of The Green Leaves begins with the hero, Nyagar who awakes from his dream by the sounds of movements of feet of a group of villagers. A small group of people is found chased by a larger group of people. It comes to the fore of Nyagar gradually that the small group consists of three thieves who are pursued by the native villagers as they have stolen the cattle of the villagers. Two thieves have managed somehow to escape from the clutches of the villagers while one has failed in his endeavour to do so. Villagers have overrun and caught him. He is beaten mercilessly and cruelly. The condition of his life becomes so severe that he is about to die. At this juncture, one of the villagers warns his accomplices that they should

RESEARCH ARTICLE

leave the thief to "give up his ghost" by himself. Thus, they return to their respective cottages after covering the body of the thief with green leaves. They also decide that they will meet there again in the morning before the women of the village awake and go there. Nyagar is one of the wealthy and happy villagers. He has a happy family with children and wives.

He lacks no material support .But it is the internalization of greed of the Colonial masters that dooms his own life and ruins his happy and contented family which is revealed in the bitter wailing of his wife after the discovery of his dead body under the green leaves in place of the attacked and supposed dead thief .Nyagar cannot resist his temptation of procuring money from the bag of the thief whom they attacked earlier in the evening. As a result of that although physically he returns to his hut with the other villagers from the place where the thief is left to "give up the ghost" by himself, mentally he is lured away by the thought of going back there alone in order to grab the money. He reaches there stealthily and contemplates a lot of things. His pecuniary greed leads him to his own downfall.

Here, before placing his hands in the pocket of the thief, mentally he is found perturbed for sometimes as he is engrossed in the thought of the fact that he should remain satisfied with what he possesses. He

has a happy family and possesses adequate means for sustaining the same. At this particular time, his soul is divided into two parts. He has an affinity with that of Dr. Faustus who is the protagonist of the magnum Opus, Dr. Faustus by Christopher Marlow. Dr. Faustus, a German scholar, was in dilemma whether he would take up the black arts by abandoning scriptures or not. Good Angel and Bad Angel who represent the divided soul of Faustus appear in the scene to help him get out of the difficult situation. Good Angel suggests Faustus that he should abandon black arts and adept himself in the habit of reading scriptures. On the other hand, Bad Angel is of the opinion that he should practice black arts as it will enable him to have power to have a strong hold and command over the universe. Finally, Faustus's soul is won by the Bad Angel which suggests that he yields to his temptation or greed for acquiring power"

Good Angel. O Faustus, lay that damnèd book aside And gaze not on it lest it tempt thy soul And heap God's heavy wrath upon thy head! Read, read the Scriptures—that is blasphemy! Bad Angel. Go forward Faustus, in that famous art Wherein all nature's treasure is contained. Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky, Lord and commander of these elements!." In the same way, Nyagar in Ogot's story fails in his endeavour to resist himself from yielding to greed. He falls a sheer victim of greed. What Ogot attempts to portray here is the that the

RESEARCH ARTICLE

native people internalize in their pure heart the sense of greed from their Colonial Masters who used to transport various resources from their colonies to their own country due to their greed which is better known as Colonial Greed. Nyagar is found to waver and the good angel of his soul tells him "What do you want to do with money? You have three wives and twelve children. You have many cattle and enough food. What more do you want?" On the other hand, bad angel of his soul suggests him "Don't deceive yourself that you have enough wealth. Nobody in the world has enough wealth."

The colonial Masters followed the "divide and rule" tactic in order to exert their dominance over the native people. Ogot is found to reflect on this concept by shaping her story in this vein. In *The Green Leaves*, the White officer tries to create a breach in the integrity of the native people by asking only one individual among them to take the onus of the murder of the thief. He says, "Don't be silly. Who hit him first?"

The idea of colonial power or dominance over the native population is prevalent throughout the story, *The Green Leaves*, of Ogot. Ogot embodies this aspect by introducing the conflict between the White police officer and the villagers. The White officer is found exerting his power through his verbal command to the villagers

over the incident of murder of a thief in the village. He says, "How many times have I told you that you must abandon this savage custom of butchering one another this time I shall show you how to obey the law. Who killed him?"

Kenya attained its independence in 1963. It was a colony of the White Europeans. White supremacy reigned there for a long time. Luo community of Kenya became the target of the White Settlers. Luo people were dominated, oppressed, suppressed and made subservient to the White Europeans. They were treated as uncivilized, uneducated, inferior and subservient while White Settlers tried to hold themselves as civilized, educated and superior. The sense of racialism emerged gradually between them. Racial discrimination played a vital role in the lives of the indigenous people of Kenya in the pre-independence era. They were racially subjugated for being members of black community. The discrimination between black and white colour of skin created a sense of inferiority, horror and alienation in the minds of the natives of Kenya. In *The Green Leaves*, Ogot incorporated this issue cleverly. In the story, the discrimination on the ground of racialism can be traced when the entire village waits for the arrival of the White police officer for taking further action of the murdered person as they regard themselves as inferior. The laws of the Whites are different to that of the villagers

RESEARCH ARTICLE

to some considerable degree. Olielo, the clan leader, says that "Now, listen to me ,although our laws prohibit any wanton killing, thieves and adulterers we regard as animals. If anyone kills one of them he is not guilty of murder. He is looked upon as a person who has rid society of an evil spirit, and in return society has a duty to protect him and his children. You all know that such a person must be cleansed before he again associates with other members of society. But the White man's laws are different. According to his laws, if you kill a man because you find him stealing your cattle or sleeping in your wife's hut, you are guilty of murder--- and therefore you must also be killed. Because he thinks his laws are superior to ours"

The villagers in the story , The Green Leaves, register their resistance to the growing injustices mated out to them by the White officer. got here records the bravery, courage and determination of Kenya's Luo people who were under the yoke of Colonialism in pre independence era. Olielo, the clan leader, asks people of the village to remain united. They decide that no individual of the village will take the sole responsibility of the murder of the person rather they will have to defend themselves by saying that all the villagers are involved in the murder of the thief. They do the same when the White European officer inquires about the murderer of the thief and asks one individual of the village to surrender as the

murderer. They answer to one of the questions of the White officer by saying, "We all hit the thief. If you want to arrest us, you are free to do so." Apart from this incident, the resistance of Nyamundhe, the wife of the hero, Nyagar, of the story as noted earlier, to the urge of the White officers of taking the body of Nyagar away to Kisumu for postmortem. She doesn't allow the police to take away the dead body of her husband "She struggled wildly with the police who carried the corpse of her husband and placed it at the back of the lorry to be taken to Kisumu for a postmortem." She pays no heed to the police who tries to comfort her. She says "If you say you will give him back to me alive then, I will listen."

Results and Research Findings:

Through this study, it has been made possible to have a glimpse on the myriad forms or issues of colonialism pervaded in the text, The Green Leaves. This current study helps to bring out the relationship between the colonized and the colonizers and the unrest prevailed in the minds of the native people of Kenya in Africa in the colonial period. It is the microcosm of Colonialism. It also reveals the sense of resistance of the native people to the cruel acts of the White Europeans.

Conclusion:

To conclude this study, it can be said that the story, The Green Leaves by Ogot

RESEARCH ARTICLE

leaves immense space for the readers and the critics to cast their critical glance to open up new windows of knowledge. As a postcolonial writer, Grace Ogot does not only saturate her this story with multiple issues related to colonialism but also provides a deeper insight into the reality of Kenya during its pre independence period. Apart from this, many other significant aspects such as the socio economical scenario of the contemporary African society have also been brought out indirectly through the current discussion of the story, The Green Leaves. The confrontation of the native Indigenous people with the White Police Officer in the story, The Green Leaves is the miniature version presented by Ogot of the larger conflict that existed between the colonizer and the colonized in the Colonial period. The resistance of these native people is impressive and praiseworthy indeed as they do not surrender themselves fully before the White Police Officer. They have shown their courage and cleverness in order to survive the onslaught of the White Police Officer. In short, Ogot has endeavoured to show the the rude, cruel and inhuman treatment of the Colonial Masters of the "Centre" to the people of the "Periphery" and their resistance to it through her Short Story, The Green Leaves.

Abrams, MH. A glossary of literary terms. Patparganj Delhi 110092. Cengage Learning India Private Limited 418, F.I.E.. 10th edition, 2012. Print
Marlowe, Christopher. The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus In The Complete Plays. New York: Penguin, 1969. Print
Ogot, Grace. Land Without Thunder and Other Stories. Nairobi. East African Educational Publishers Ltd, 2001. Print
Tyson, Lois. Critical Theory Today. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print
<https://www.scribd.com/document/434237010/Grace-Ogot-Green-Leaves>
https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-1-4614-5583-7_37

References