Ideology and Identity in Salleh's "Do Not Say"

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Abstract

Postcolonial literature not only extended the cannon but also made questions of ideology and identity and important point of literary studies. Particularly, the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised has been a central issue. Colonial literature has been perceived as a means to support the ideological control of the colonised. Postcolonial literature, on the other hand, has been seen as a way out of colonial ideology. For instance, Salleh's poem "Do Not Say" uses and abuses colonial imagery, depicts the anger towards colonial oppression and asserts the value of a national literature. Nevertheless, any writing back strategy in terms of anti-colonial resistance is a falling back to colonial ideology thereby continuing characteristics of colonialism based on hatred and othering.

Key Words: Salleh, "Do Not Say", colonial ideology, identity, anti-colonial resistance, othering

1. Introduction

Questions of ideology and identity have been the focal point in the last decades in cultural studies backed up by postcolonial issues. As for the former, Žižek has asserted that ideology is a phenomenon that has regulated "the relationship between visible and non-visible, between imaginable and non-imaginable, as well as the changes in this relationship" (1994, 1). The visible outer reality and the mechanism of how that reality is "(mis)perceived" (Žižek, 1994, 1) can be focused on in order to understand identity as well. The postcolonial era, in particular, has shown us how the changes in the relationship between the visible, that is, the constructed identities of the coloniser and the colonised, and the invisible, that is, the real but unidentifiable identities of these, have fostered to change also our perception of the Self as a monolithic and unified phenomenon and led us to ask what Laclau defined as "questions of subjectivity" (1992, 83).

Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that the "old way" of perceiving the Self in terms of essentialism has functioned as a starting point to pose such questions (Hall, 2007, 2). Hence, any reaction towards the confinements of ideology is actually a falling back to it. Thus, we "slide into ideology under the guise of stepping out of it" (Žižek, 1994, 17). This can be seen especially in anti-colonial and nationalist poetry in the postcolonial era, which tries to write back against the colonial ideology based on derogation in order to have the upper hand in signifying the self of the colonised, which, however, affirms Žižek's claim that there is not such a thing like "non-ideology", or in our case, non-colonialism, but merely a "fight for discursive hegemony" (1994, 10, 12). Here, the colonised does not "fully and finally" (Hall, 2007, 16) create his/her identity in a coherent national identity as s/he assumes but merely "reconstitutes" (Hall, 2007, 16) the former colonial legacy. For instance, Mohamad Bin Haji Salleh's poem "Do Not Say" writes back against the clichés that were posed on people of the East by the people of the West, especially by the orientalists and voices the "political struggle of colonized peoples against the specific ideology and practice of colonialism" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2000, 11) through literature. Especially, Salleh's use of non-standard English, or his "english" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989, 40), by rejecting capitalisation, is a "mimicry and mockery" of the language of the coloniser in Bhabhaian sense (Bhabha, 1994, 86). Hence, the old way, the coloniser, functions as a starting point for the colonised to react against him by using him.

Likewise, the use of literature, written tradition, is essential to counteract colonialism with its own means as Boehmer stated that colonial literature was used to proclaim "cultural superiority and rightness" of the coloniser as, what Althusser would have called, an ISA to sustain his system (Boehmer, 2005, 94; Althusser, 1971, 143). Here, Salleh asserts his own "particularism" against the coloniser's "European particularism" that had been made and posed as "universalism" (Laclau, 1992, 86). As Belsey has argued in the case of women (1994, 360), Salleh shows the importance of literature as a means to re-interpellate the colonised subjects to recognise their selves outside the colonial ideology and its premises about them. Consequently, Salleh uses literature, which had been used by the colonial ideology as an Althusserian ISA, to counteract against colonialism. Furthermore, quite in a Saidian way, Salleh challenges "the ontological and epistemological distinction between the 'Orient' and the 'Occident'" (Said, 2003, 1), which has been used to define the identity of the coloniser and the colonised so far.

Here, difference is crucial in such definition. As Hall argued, "identities are constructed through, not outside, difference" (2007, 4). Therefore, the colonial ideology of derogation uses difference in order to set up "[b]inary oppositions", such as the coloniser/colonised, civilised/primitive, or good/evil (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2000, 19).

In order to subvert colonial binary oppositions, the persona of the poem uses the imperative mode to shock the addressee, that is, the coloniser, and remind him constantly *the do nots* of the colonised, which he has not been able to see so far. Particularly, the first line of each stanza urges the coloniser to change his mind, to "decolonise" his mind in Wa Thinog'Oian sense (Wa Thiong'O, 1986, 16). For instance, the coloniser should not "say" (Salleh, 1996, 1, 34),[1] "think" (Salleh, 1996, 7, 13), "write" (Salleh, 1996, 15), "condemn" (Salleh, 1996, 24) or "tell" (Salleh, 1996, 30) anything concerned with of for the colonised. Hence, the coloniser should stop defining the colonised as what Hall would have defined as the "narrativization of the self" (2007, 4), that is, the construction of the self, which is here done by the coloniser.

2. Argument

This paper will analyse to what extent Salleh was successful in liberating the colonised subject from the coloniser's ideology.

3. Analysis

Although defining has been stated as the major reason for the abasement of the colonised, it becomes the major starting point for the deconstruction of the colonial logos in the poem. Particularly, one of the most obvious means of occidental defining is "**naming**" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2000, 165, their emphasis), which can be seen in the stereotypical and derogatory adjectives and phrases of the coloniser the persona makes use of, such as "lazy" (Salleh, 1996, 1), "weak" (Salleh, 1996, 7), "have no literature, culture" (Salleh, 1996, 15) and "poor" (Salleh, 1996, 24), which form the denominators in the colonial binary opposition. Nevertheless, before focusing on stereotyping, the historical background of Orientalism should be taken into account, which functions as the base for such derogation. Particularly, the creation of oriental stereotypes is based on the fact that the Orient is perceived as a "European fantasy" (Said, 2003, 6), a way in which the Occident wants to see the Orient. Thus, the Occidental view of the Orient is, what Baudrillard would have stated, a simulation of reality, that is "[m]ore real than the real" (1994, 81), which "presents itself only via its incomplete-failed symbolization" (Žižek, 1994, 21), that is, in colonial language/discourse, which is "a (symbolic) fiction" (Žižek, 1994, 21).

As a reaction to this fabricated reality, "hyperreality" (Baudrillard, 1994, 81), the persona, explicitly or implicitly, constantly repeats the fact that the coloniser, as "an onlooker" (Salleh, 1996, 3), an outsider, cannot "know" (Salleh, 1996, 2, 4, 35) the actual situation of the colonised. As Certeau has asserted for the passivity of the consumer in our present time, the colonisers are "spectators who refuse to be participants" (1997, 18), especially to be participant in the lives of the colonised, which Salleh confirms in asking "have you ever lived in a kampong [Malay village]?" (1996, 23). Thus, what Belsey asserted for male ideology and male authorship that exclude women is true in the colonial context as well: similarly, the coloniser cannot "explain or understand" (Belsey, 1994, 369) the colonised. Hence, the persona challenges the position of the coloniser as the source for "knowledge" and "supremacy" as Said has termed in another context (2003, 32) and reduces him to the position of a mere spectator.

4. Findings

Salleh deconstructs each fictive reality the coloniser has taken for granted, which the coloniser used, in Said's terms, "for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (2003, 3). Peculiarly, the persona asserts that the coloniser as the "critic" who takes pseudo-scientific "data" about the colonised while sitting in his comfortable "car" can in no way "judge" the real ontological reality of the Malay people (Salleh, 1996, 3-6). Hence, the "Orient" that has been seen "suitable for study" (Said, 2003, 7) has been ignored or studied in wrong way by the unknowing coloniser who has presented himself what Laclau called "in terms of a universal civilizing function" (1992, 86). Here, what the coloniser does actually is to project *his* knowledge in a top-down fashion onto the colonial area rather than making an empirical analysis that he claims to make. Thus, the colonial "Truth" that "is centered" like any Foucaultian notion of truth "on the form of scientific discourse" is not stable (Foucault, 1991, 73). For instance, the coloniser is blinded with his own notion of truth so that he considers the colonised as "weak" persons only because "they do not build skyscrapers" (Salleh, 1996, 7, 9) or as "poor / because" they "have very few banks" (Salleh, 1996, 24-5).

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[1] All references to the poem will be given in mere line numbers based on Mohamad Bin Haji Salleh, "Do Not Say," *The Arnold Anthology of Post-colonial Literatures in English*, ed. John Thieme (London, New York, Sydney and Auckland: Arnold, 1996): 814-5.

Consequently, under such circumstances the colonised persona has felt him/her obliged to voice his/her stance. Therefore, the persona, with his/her frequent use of questions, not only deconstructs his/her own constructed identity as the "silent" and obedient slave of the coloniser (Boehmer, 2005, 20, 164), but also informs the coloniser about native culture, hence tries to deconstruct the coloniser as well. Here, the nationalist colonised in his "self-recognition" (Hall, 2007, 8) "repeatedly invoke[s] a glorious pre-colonial past or traditions" (Loomba, 1998, 196). Hence, the colonised people do not need to be told "how to live" (Salleh, 1996, 30) because they have actually a way of living, an "entity" (Salleh, 1996, 32), with its complex and coherent structure. This structure creates a sense of "identification" which "is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group" (Hall, 2007, 2). Here, the persona's use of "untranslated words" on lines 5, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, 21 and 22 are also functional in "conveying" that "sense of cultural distinctiveness" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989, 64), with which the colonised can identify himself.

Hence, the persona asserts that the Malay people have had their own distinctive culture "before the advent of" imperialism (Salleh, 1996, 33). Particularly, non-irrigated framing, that is, "ladang" (Salleh, 1996, 11), local music, such as "ronggeng" (Salleh, 1996, 11) and "dondang" (Salleh, 1996, 12), local literature, such as verse, that is, "sajak" (Salleh, 1996, 16), opera, that is, "bangsawan" (Salleh, 1996, 17), "epic shairs" (Salleh, 1996, 18) and "theological theses" (Salleh, 1996, 19) and local "history" (Salleh, 1996, 20) that can be analysed in martial equipment, such as a dagger, "the keris" (Salleh, 1996, 21) are named by the colonised as examples of the native heritage.[2] Consequently, the persona fills in the gap of the coloniser's mind whose knowledge about the colonised seems like a *terra incognita*, according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, "an unknown or unexplored region" and, thus, deconstructs the position of the coloniser's quasi omniscience.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the persona's attitude is belittling the coloniser's knowledge, hence the coloniser, which may be considered as a lacking part in the poem as it does not give an end to derogation but continues it in a topsy-turvy fashion. Thus, Salleh's assertion of nationalism is actually a "misrecognition" (Laclau, 1997, 300) of the coloniser's ideology in the "guise" (Žižek, 1994, 17) of nationalism, which is like a "myth" where "the meaning of behaviour is distorted" (Barthes, 1972, 122). Thence, the colonised creates a bottom-up distortion where s/he cannot perceive that s/he promotes the top-down colonial ideology rather than to resist it. Hence, the persona's anti-colonialism is a mere "appropriation and subversion of forms borrowed from the institutions of the colonizer and turned back on them" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2000, 12). Therefore, Salleh's notion of nationalism as a Laclauian "pure particularism is" likewise "self-defeating" (1992, 88). Thus, all the assertions of the colonised persona seem a "'blurred copy'" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2000, 125) of the minimising coloniser rather than an authentic voice. Particularly, quite in an idealistic way, the persona creates another binary opposition and contends that

> [...] the richness of our people [the colonised],
> the brimful hearts that do not grab or grapple.
> we collect humanity from sun and rain and man,
> transcending the business and the money. (Salleh, 1996, 26-9)

Here, according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, "grab" is "grasp or seize suddenly [...] in a rapacious or unscrupulous manner" and "grapple" is "to take hold of" something "with a grapple or anchor". Grab and grapple are used as actions the colonised does not. Hence, these are non-colonised actions or the actions of the coloniser. Thus, now the coloniser is *othered* in the binary opposition that is created by the colonised persona, which Boons-Grafé would have called as the creation of the "Other" that is taken as the "absolute pole of address" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2000, 155; Boons-Grafé, 1992, 298). Thus, although "identification" is also "a recognition of some common [...] ideal" (Hall, 2007, 2), that ideal seems to be removed from the external reality, and has become "more real than reality itself" (Žižek, 1994, 30), that is, "his [Salleh's] ideology" (Žižek, 1994, 3). Besides, it can be said that Salleh, like many colonial nationalists, suffers from what Boehmer has called in another context, as a "romantization of the past" which, however, is based on the colonial legacy (Boehmer, 2005, 110). Hence, Salleh in deconstructing his own identity fails to see that "deconstruction has been [...] critical of the notion of an integral, originary and unified identity" (Hall, 2007, 1), or has led to the "death of the Subject" (Laclau, 1992, 83), which coherent Subject he seeks in the illusion of cultural nostalgia. Consequently, although the colonised attempts to liberate his/her identity from the domination of the coloniser's ideology, s/he cannot stop referring to the coloniser as the focal point of his/her resistance and "(mis)perceive[s]" (Žižek, 1994, 1) this because s/he cannot see his/her "multiple identities" (Laclau, 1992, 83).

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[2] Explanatory information is taken from the footnotes in on Mohamad Bin Haji Salleh, "Do Not Say," *The Arnold Anthology of Post-colonial Literatures in English*, ed. John Thieme (London, New York, Sydney and Auckland: Arnold, 1996): 814-5.

This can be deciphered in the poem at the easiest level in Salleh's use of the English language in combination with Malay terms, which reflects also the "hybridity" (Bhabha, 1994, 38) of his identity that bears the colonial legacy and combines local elements.

5. Conclusion

Salleh's poem is an important example of how ideologies shape identities. The colonial ideology had reduced the colonised to the position of a denominator with derogatory adjectives. Thus, Salleh felt himself/herself obliged to counteract derogation with the same means in deconstructing the colonial binary oppositions. Nevertheless, although Salleh subverts the colonial discourse in "the fight for discursive hegemony" (Žižek, 1994, 12), his nationalist anti-colonial resistance cannot go beyond the prescribed western framework of creating binary oppositions and belittling the other. Thus, epistemological deficiencies degrade the effect of the poem, similar to what Irwin[3] and MacKenzie[4] have asserted for Said's deficiencies in his *Orientalism*. Besides, the poem shows how the colonised "(mis)perceive[s]" (Žižek, 1994, 1) his resistance as a way to surpass the colonial ideology and assumes that his resistance would create a space of "non-ideology" (Žižek, 1994, 10) or the subversion of colonialism, that is, non-colonialism. Hence, it can be argued that Salleh only contributes to the continuation of discrimination on which colonialism has been based on, and, thus, contributes to the continuation of the colonial ideology. Thence, the colonial ideology is, like all ideologies, "*eternal*" because "identity acquires its fictitious coherence" in it as an independent Self, as Laclau asserted in another context (1997, 302). Therefore, Salleh in his poem, in a Gramscian way, "consent[s]" to guarantee colonial "hegemony" (Gramsci, 1995, 399-400), rather than to react against it, which may clarify the questions related to ideology and identity and affirm Žižek's position that the subject cannot think of "non-ideology" within the confinements of the means of ideology, that is, "language" (1994, 10, 11).

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[3] Irwin has shown technical deficiencies of Said and asserted that, like Foucault, Said is reducing the egression of colonialism merely to the emergence of the Enlightenment. See Robert Irwin, *Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and its Discontents* (Woodstock and New York: Overlook P, 2006): 283-4.

[4] MacKenzie said that Said's ideas are taken for granted without proper criticism so that admirers of Said posit him to the position of an "apostle" of an "intellectual Utopia." See M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 1995): 20.