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Systemic Functional Linguistics:

“Applied” and Multiculturalism

Interpreting Multiculturalism and Language Teaching and Learning
through Systemic Functional Linguistics

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CHAPTER 36

POSTCOLONIAL COMPLEXITY IN ACHEBE'S *DEATH MEN'S PATH* AND KURESHI'S *MY SON THE FANATIC*

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ABSTRACT

*People in the third world are shaped by the experience of colonialism. Although physically colonialism has ended, the effect is still felt amongst the ex-colony people. Through the two postcolonial literary texts, Chinua Achebe's *Dead Men's Path* and Hanif Kureshi's *My Son, the Fanatic*, this article is going to discuss the postcolonial complexity experienced by the people of the ex-colony of England and migrant in England. The postcolonial complexity here means the social and cultural problems following the decline of colonialism and process of decolonization. This complexity includes cultural clash between ex-colony culture and Western culture which has been internalized by some ex-colony people and internalized racism, that is the conscious and subconscious incorporation and acceptance of all the negative stereotypes and images from media, folklore, accounts of history, and so forth, that define persons of color as inferior. It is a kind of new form of colonialism. Using postcolonial perspective which is proposed by Franz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Mask*, and *The Wretched of the Earth*, Aime Caesar's *Discourse on Colonialism*, the writer is going to analyze how the above texts portray cultural clash and self-hatred racism through the conflict and characters.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Postcolonial Literature

Most nations in Africa are formed by the experience of colonialism. Colonialism enters into social, cultural, economic, and political aspects of the people in the ex-colony. Many writers of the third world often share their life of colonial experience and decolonisation process. Some writers give critical resistance against the colonial discourse. Elleke Boehmer calls it "postcolonial literature", that is literature which scrutinizes the colonial relationship and sets out in one way or another

to resist colonialist perspectives (1995:1). Boehmer states further that as well as a change in power, decolonization demands overhaul and reshaping of dominant meanings. Postcolonial literature forms this kind of overhaul. It doesn't support the discourse of colonialism but deconstruct its myth, the race superiority, the imagery of subordination, and power domination.

In postcolonial literature the writers question the salutary effects of empire, e.g. gift of civilization, and raise such issue as racism and exploitation. They offer a counter narrative to the long tradition of European imperial narrative. They investigate what happens when two cultures clash and when one of them with its accompanying ideology empowers and deems itself superior to the other. From postcolonial perspective, Western values and traditions of thought and literature are guilty of a repressive ethnocentrism (Bressler, 1999:265)

In postcolonial literature the writers also deal with conflicts of identity and culture. The colonial power enters the colonies and destroyed the native culture. This often leads to conflicts when countries became independent and suddenly faced the challenge of developing a new nationwide identity. As the generations live under the power of colonial power, they adopt Western culture. Finding their own identity is the challenge. They can neither get rid of the Western life style, nor manage to create a completely new one. Language is also the powerful means by which postcolonial communication and reflection takes place. This is particularly important as most colonial powers tried to integrate their language, the major aspect of their civilised culture, in ex-colonies and for the ex-colonized. In short, "all postcolonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neocolonial domination, and independence has not solved this problem" (Makaryk, 1993:24). The postcolonial literature concern itself in race, class, gender, ethnicity, and cultural clash themes (Ashcroft, 1995:2). *Weep not Child* (1964), *The River Between* (1965), dan *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) by Ngugi Wa Thiongo, for example, describe the real problem of decolonization, which includes the marginalization and oppression of the local African people by neo-colonialism. (Innes, 1990:456).

1.2. Postcolonial Complexity in Postcolonial Literature

Postcolonial literature show that decolonisation has not solved the problem yet. There will be some social and cultural problems following the process of decolonisation. John Walsh call it "postcolonial complexity" (<http://socyberty.com/government/what-is-post-colonialism>, accessed in 28/11/2011). John Walsh states further that the immediate postcolonial complexity may be more or less traumatic for the people involved. In African countries, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia decolonization was marked by fierce by turmoil, repression and violence. The postcolonial period does not only involve the creation of national governments, the creation of institutions, and the settlement of borders but also involves the creation or recreation or even invention of national culture.

Under colonization, John Walsh declares, it is generally the colonizing power's culture, language and customs that are privileged. In British Burma, for example, Burmese had to speak English to obtain good state sector jobs and generally had to compete with Indian people imported to run the civil service. English in particular has become a global language and so postcolonial societies that prefer to speak an indigenous language and reduce the use of English also reduce the competitiveness of their economy and their workers in a globalised world. There are many very complex issues in this regard which operate at the individual and the societal level.

This article is going to show how the short story of *Death Men's Path* (1972) by Chinua Achebe (Nigeria) and *My Son, the Fanatic* (1997) by Hanif Kureshi (Pakistan) reflect the postcolonial complexity, that is the social and cultural problems following the decline of colonialism and process of decolonization. This complexity includes cultural clash and internalized racism. Cultural clash here means colliding social forces between ex-colony culture and Western culture which has been internalized by some ex-colony people. Internalized racism means, as Gerald Cunningham defines, the conscious and subconscious incorporation and acceptance of all the negative stereotypes and images from media, folklore, accounts of history, etc., that define persons of color as inferior ([http://www.djan.net/assets/cunningham-](http://www.djan.net/assets/cunningham)

0305.pdf accessed in 29/11/2011). Some say as self-hatred racism, that is discrimination of one's own race because he is ashamed of the stereotypes placed on the majority of people of his race because he feels that he is better than the people of his culture.

This kind of complexity actually has already been proposed by Franz Fanon and Aime Cesaire. Fanon proposes that much as the white man thinks himself superior to the black, the black man desires to be white. Indeed, black "men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect. For the black man, there is only one destiny. And it is white (Fanon, 1967:10). There is a vast difference between Frantz Fanon's approach to the black struggle and that of Rev. Martin Luther King's nonviolent consciousness raising. Fanon asserts that decolonization is always a violent struggle and those who would undertake it must be prepared to get and keep the upper hand (Fanon, 1967:9).

In *Discourse on Colonialism*,. Cesaire discusses the colonial ideology and how the system of thought was racially and cultural-hierarchically constructed, circulated and motivated. He defines colonialism, its power, its psychology, and its subsequent effects on the colonized. At the heart of colonization was a system of subjugation and alienation. The mechanism of colonialism promoted violence, fear, inferiority, race hatred, immorality and intimidation. In essence colonialism dehumanizes the most civilized man and decivilized the colonized. In fine dialectic discourse, Cesaire demonstrates that colonization is a discharge of two opposed societies, two incompatible cultures—the one of the colonized and the one of the colonizer. Colonialism, according to Cesaire, robbed the subjected societies of their glories—their material and spiritual, their local systems and their local economies, their identity and self-worth, their cultural values and societal essence. Cesaire clearly shows that colonization is a complete system—it is a racialized system, a system of psychological dimensions, power domination and economic oppression (1972:36-40). On the other hand, it is a system that failed, generating a civilization in decay. For "a civilization that proves incapable of solving the problems it creates is a decadent civilization. A civilization that uses its principles for trickery and deceit is a dying civilization (1972:31).

2. POSTCOLONIAL COMPLEXITY IN ACHEBE'S *DEATH MEN'S PATH* AND KURESHI'S *MY SON THE FANATIC*

Dead Men's Path is a story about a traditional pathway to a burial site that passes through school compound. This pathway has been there for centuries. This pathway connects a native village to their sacred burial grounds. The pathway has a lot of traditions and superstitions. Nothing matters with the existence of the pathway in school compound until the new school headmaster is appointed. Michael Obi was appointed the new headmaster of the school. He took a tour of it and saw how the school compound were. He decided to plant flowers and bushes around the school. One night he saw an old woman walk across the flower patch in the school yard. The next day he goes to one of the teachers and asks why they allowed that. He gave him a history of the people and the burial grounds. He also explained how they tried to close it before but there was a big argument so they left it open. Mr. Obi decided to close it. He built a fence around it. The head priest of the natives goes to talk to him to try to reopen the pathway but Mr. Obi says no. Two days later after a death in the village Obi finds his school in ruin. The supervisor came to inspect the school and when he saw the condition of the school he fired the headmaster.

My Son, the Fanatic is a short story which portrays the conflict between a father, named Parvez, who desires a western lifestyle, and his son, Ali, who wants to return to his roots, Islamic tradition. Parvez, a Pakistani immigrant who became a taxi driver in London, decides to internalize western values in his life as he moved to England. In raising his son, Ali, Parvez always teaches him Western values in every aspect of his teenager, such as his school, career, girlfriend, hobbies, and way of thinking. However, influenced by his Islamic fundamentalist environment, Ali develops a fanatic interest in the Islamic religion. He grows beard, prays five times a day, throws away all things representing Western civilization, such as his computer, guitar, video tapes, books, and fashionable clothes. He stops studying accounting, and he parts from his English girl friend who used to come around to his house. Ali even accuses his father, with hate and disgust in his remarks and outward appearance, of having broken count-

less rules of Koran and of being too implicated in Western civilization. Ali hates his father because his father drinks alcohol, eats pork, and has intimate relations with Bettina, a London prostitute. Although Parvez tries to pen Ali's mind by explaining why Parvez decides to live the Western life, Ali refuses to listen to his father's explanation. The story reaches its climax when Ali, Bettina, and Parvez are sitting in the taxi. This is the turning point where Parvez has to choose between his two colliding worlds, following his son's belief which implies he still has Ali as his son or keeping on assimilating to Western values which means he loses his son. At the end of the story, at home Parvez kicks Ali over, drags the boy up by the front his shirt, and hits him. But Ali neither covered himself nor retaliated and there was no fear in his eyes.

The above two texts clearly show that nation independence and decolonization are not the key to the social and cultural problem of postcolonial society. The shadow of colonialism in the form of values and superiority hover over the life of the people of ex-colony. The impact of colonialism with its ideology, perspective, and attitude still exist within the life of the ex-colony people. Even, the problems connecting to colonialism, as John Walsh called it as "postcolonial complexity", are still felt through the characters and conflict in these two short stories. The complexity includes cultural clash and internalized racism.

2.1. Cultural Clash

Observed from the point of view of the conflict, the two stories clearly reflect two forces which collide to gain the domination. The forces are between ex-colony culture and Western culture which has been internalized by some ex-colony people. In Achebe's *Dead Men's Path*, the ex-colony culture, that is the African culture represented by the village priest of Ani and its people's superstition and pagan ritual is in opposition with the colonial culture represented by Obi, the new headmaster of the school.

Although both of them are African, the priest and Obi have their own interest and values. The priest told the headmaster that the path was there when the headmaster had not been born, even when the headmaster's father had not been born. It is the village culture that the path connects the village shrine with their place of burial. It is their ancestral footpath. The priest states, "The whole life of this vil-

lage depends on it. Our dead relatives depart by it, It is the path of children coming in to be born" (Achebe, 1972:73). The village people still keep this belief and maintain it for the sake of their existence, safe, and survival.

Obi, as the new headmaster is responsible for the progress and beauty of the school. For Obi and his wife who have adopted Western values, the concept beauty must be applied in the school Obi is going to rule. "We shall have such beautiful gardens and everything will be just modern and delightful.." said his wife. In their two years of married life she had become completely infected by his passion for "modern methods" and his denigration of these old and superannuated people.... (Achebe, 1972:71). Education, according to Obi, is a means of abolishing the old culture which is useless for people. Through education, which is Western culture, Obi is outspoken in his condemnation of the narrow views of these older and often less-educated ones. From the conflict, it can be analyzed that the cultural clash here is between African superstition and Western education. This cultural clash results in physical clash through the destroying of the school building.

In *My Son, the Fanatic*, it can also be probed that the clash is between Western culture represented by Parvez who has adopted British values and Islam tradition represented by his son, Ali. Before connected to Islam fundamentalist in London, Ali is an ordinary migrant boy who adapts himself to Western life style. He studies accounting, wears fashionable clothes, plays video games, enjoying playing cricket, plays the guitar, and likes to go with his English girl friend. "The West was a sink of hypocrites, adulterers, homosexuals, drug users, and prostitutes", "The Western materialists hate us", stated Ali (Kureshi, 1997:106). He adds, "Western education cultivates an anti religious attitude. And in the world of accountants it was usual to meet women, drink alcohol, and practice usury" (Kureshi, 1997: 107). Ali behavior changes after he experiences Muslim struggle against oppression in England and other countries. For Ali, Islam is his religion with its identity, values, and way of life. All aspects of life must be in accordance with Koran. The Koran must color his attitudes, remarks, behavior, and thought. He grows beard, prays five times a day, eats no defiled food, and joins the fundamentalists as his new community.

Meanwhile, Parvez is a person who is open to Western culture. Individual freedom, rationalism, protection of human right, democracy, individualism, and the separation between religion and social life as proposed by Samuel P. Huntington are the values that Parvez adopts. Parvez loves England as he said, "But I love England..They let you do anything here (Kureshi, 1997:107). Rationalism becomes Parvez's way of thinking. Living as migrant needs adaptation in order to survive. He will not stick on strict rules of religion. Besides, he has to get good associated with people of different races and religion. For Parvez, rules and laws must be seen as products of commitment to democracy, not from a certain religion. Parvez also separates religion from social life. Religion is individual's relation to God and he has his own freedom to make friends and connection with any affiliation which are not from Islam.

The cultural clash in *My Son, the Fanatic* is caused by Ali's strict view of Islam and Parvez's liberal attitude. Ali will not tolerate whatever is not in accordance with Koran as he internalizes Islam as his way of life. The spirit of Islam makes him convert his father in many ways, including with his sarcastic remark on his father's behavior. This strict concept collides with the concept of individual freedom, human right, and democracy that Parvez has adopted.

This is as what Cesaire demonstrates that colonization is a discharge of two opposed societies, two incompatible cultures – the one of the colonized and the one of the colonizer. Colonialism, according to Cesaire, robbed the subjected societies of their glories – their material and spiritual, their local systems and their local economies, their identity and self-worth, their cultural values and societal essence (1972:36-40).

2.2. Internalized Racism

The other postcolonial complexity reflected in these two short stories is internalized racism. It is the conscious and subconscious incorporation and acceptance of all the negative stereotypes and images from media, folklore, accounts of history, etc., that define persons of color as inferior. It can be also self-hatred racism, that is discrimination of one's own race because he is ashamed of the stereotypes placed on the majority of people of his race because he feels that he is better than the people of his culture. This kind of racism is done

by Obi, the African new headmaster, toward the village people and Parvez toward his own son.

Adopting Western culture, Obi thinks of himself superior to his own people living in the village. His contempt to his own culture, that is the superstitious pathway passing by his school, is given bluntly and openly. "He was outspoken in his condemnation of the narrow views of these older and often less-educated ones" (Achebe, 1972:70). He looks down he African traditional culture and its superstitious belief. Obi boldly declares to the village priest that the education he is bringing to this area will erase the pagan rituals. "The purpose of our school is to eradicate just beliefs as that. Dead men do not require footpaths. The whole idea is just fantastic. Our idea is to teach your children to laugh at such ideas. (Achebe, 1973:73). Obi finally fences the school compound so that the villagers cannot pass through the school.

Parvez's hate for Ali's way of life is showed by getting angry with and blaming him for the way of life Ali chooses. His contempt for Ali's belief reaches the top when Parvez kicked him over him and hit him till Ali's face was bloody.

This hatred reveals Obi and Parvez's superiority attitude toward the tradional culture, that is African and Islam belief. It is in accordance to what Fanon proposes that much as the white man thinks himself superior to the black, the black man desires to be white. Indeed, black "men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect. For the black man, there is only one destiny. And it is white (Fanon, 1967:10).

3. CONCLUSION

The short story of *Death Men's Path* (1972) by Chinua Achebe (Nigeria) and *My Son, the Fanatic* (1997) by Hanif Kureshi (Pakistan) reflect the postcolonial complexity, that is the social and cultural problems following the decline of colonialism and process of decolonization. This complexity includes cultural clash and internalized racism. From the analysis it can be concluded that independence and decolonization have not solved the problem of oppression and domination. After the colonial power withdraws, there is a neo-colonialism taking other form. Clash between the Western and native culture does not end as the

colonialism ends. Even, colonialism seems not to end. As reflected in the above short stories, the decolonization brings about new problem, that is the postcolonial complexity, cultural clash and internalized racism.

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