
**MODERN COLONIZATION, RACIAL-CULTURAL IDENTITY STEREOTYPE,
AND ANTI-COLONIAL RESISTANCE IN SEMBENE OUSMANE'S "THE
PROMISED LAND"
:(A Post-Colonial Approach in Literature)**

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ABSTRACT

This research paper discusses the phenomena and the arousing impacts of the modern colonization of the French white family toward the African black maiden as reflected in Sembene Ousmane's "The Promised Land". The literary work reveals the story of a Senegalese black girl, Diouana, who greatly idealizes to be a very successful housemaid in "the promised land" of a French white family in European country. Nonetheless, the girl's dreams ruins in bad luck, misery, and suffering for the white master and family's domestic colonial treatments, exploitations, and oppressions. This domestic brutality emerges since the white family considers that the Senegalese black girl belongs to the different racial and cultural identity. The black girl's attempts to get rid of the white family and to reject working in the white household are really not impactful to change the black girl's fate, therefore, she shows her last struggle of anti-colonial resistance by committing suicide.

Keywords: White Modern Colonization, Racial and Cultural Identity Stereotype, Anti-colonial Resistance

1. INTRODUCTION

European colonization has, long time, inevitably, resulted in a complexity of impacts that linger in the aftermath of the colonial era. Post-colonial or postcolonial itself means the period after colonialism, and, at the same time, the word "post" is always in relation to colonialism (Budianta, 2004:61). As a part of the colonial discourse, a nation, ethnicity, race or social class in a colonized community has a tendency to always be marginalized, alienated, read, and controlled by the colonial imperialists and their descendants. In their minds, it is imprinted a colonial ideology that anyone who is formerly colonized will receive the "Stigma of the Defeated" as people who must be under the control of the colonizer in all aspects of life. The defeated stigma creates an ideological discourse that they must be exploited as effectively as possible in the perspective of the colonizer. At the same time, the colonized community perceives that the colonizer is strong, great, prosperous, rich, smart, and so on. The colonized believes that the colonizer can promise and offer the ability to change the poverty of one's life, provided that the colonized is willing to be "read and controlled" and stand side by side with the colonizer (Loomba, 2003:50).

Senegal is one of the former French colonies in Africa with its black community that leaves many problems of social, cultural, educational, and economic marginalization in particular. Under such conditions, every black person who suffers materially and economically will fantasize and dream imaginatively about the beauty of life if they have the opportunity to work and live together in the intellectual, modern, and rich French white community. Therefore,

when they return to their African homeland, they will come with victory, prosperity and pride in life. Such fantasies of life's happiness are also reflected in one of the African short stories entitled "*The Promised Land*" written by Sembene Ousmane. The short story, which is very much close to postcolonial ideology, tells the story of an African black girl, Diouana, who is willing to leave her hometown of Casamance, Africa to be taken away to France by her elite white employer. There, the girl intends to realize her beautiful dream of becoming rich by working as a housemaid. However, in the end, it not a triumph, but a misfortune, her life ends tragically as she becomes nothing more than "a bought slave" for her employer, family, and relatives. Together with her employer, the black girl is crammed with workloads that extraordinarily exceed the limits of humanity continuously without stopping and without being compensated for enough rests for sleep and proportional wages for life.

The dichotomy between the white and the black, the colonizer and the colonized, the modern and the backward, as a result of the long colonial period on the African continent, causes the African black community to be "forced into a position of marginalization and oppression" severely. The European white community has long time regarded black Africans as stupid, dirty, and animal people who do not deserve to be on an equal position with them.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1 Research Approach

Referring to theme of the literary work and the background of the research that describes post-colonial phenomena in Sembene Ousmane's "*The Promised Land*", the writers adopt post-colonial approach in literature to analyze the phenomena in the literary work. Post-colonial approach in literature is an approach in analyzing all emerging phenomena as the impact of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized (Endraswara, 2003:178). All literary works after colonial period, which reflect colonization either the newly published literatures or the long-time ones, can be analyzed through post-colonial perspective. The writers make good use of post-colonial approach in analyzing Sembene Ousmane's "*The Promised Land*" endorsed with the application of Homi K. Babha's theory of post-colonialism.

2.2 Method of Data Collection

The researchers collect the information data for the analysis of the literary work through library research. Library research is an observation to get the data and related information of the object of the research, which covers facts, unknowns, hypotheses, validation, assessment, and analysis of discoveries in broadening comprehension, which is performed in a working room or a library (Semi, 2013:9). There are some data sources related to library research, namely primary and secondary data. Primary data is first-hand information gathered during the research process of the original source, while secondary data is any source of information supporting the primary data. The primary data of this research paper is Sembene Ousmane's "*The Promised Land*" short story. Meanwhile, the secondary data are supported sources, such as electronic books, textbooks, journals, and some other sources of data from internet.

3. COLONIZATION OF THE WHITE EUROPEAN RACE AGAINST THE BLACK AFRICAN RACE

3.1 Exploitation of African Wealth by The White Race Colonizer

The colonization has already been sensed from the very beginning of the short story "*The Promised Land*" when three reporters enter the house of the white Mademoiselle, the employer, the white master of the black African girl Diouana, to investigate with some police inspectors about the cause of the African girl's tragic death at the scene of the crime in the house. The

reporters look around the house in a daze, where they see African figurines, masks, animal skins and ostrich eggs scattered around. It occurs to someone that these are symbols of African wealth that should have remained and become “the precious treasures of the indigenous African race”, but they have, in fact, been exploited, plundered to the hilt by white Europeans due to their imperialist power. Cogitatio of Sembene Ousmane as the author of this short story intends to say that white Europeans have succeeded in “stealing the loot of the natives” and have enjoyed wealth and prosperity in the former French colony of Africa particularly. These things, actually, should be in the homes of black Africans and not in the homes of white Europeans. Because black Africans are identified with the ignorant, primitive, dirty, weak, and oppressed, the strong white colonizer is able to control them. At the same time, the author of the short story intends to say that Africa is a continent which is full of richness in art, culture, and wildlife. This characterizes Africa identity which differs from any other continents.

3.2 Stereotype of Racial and Cultural Identity Between The White and The Black

3.2.1 Racial Identity Stereotype

The construction of racial identity stereotype is evident in the short story” *The Promised Land*” with the different treatment and level of respect between white Europeans and black Africans. The main character, Diauana, who represents the black race, is identified with ugliness and other negative stereotype in Mademoiselle’s family that she has, formerly, never encountered in Dakar Africa anything related to harassment and mockery of skin color. This racial insult is revealed in the following quotation:

“Taking phrases from Mama’s, Papa’s, or African neighbors’ conversation there- phrases that contained racial prejudice-she made up out-of-bounds sayings to her friends. Unbeknownst to his parents, they would chant, “Black girl, black girl. She’s as black as midnight.”

(Ousmane, 2005:217)

It can be analyzed based on the above quotation that the white French family, starting from the children, Mademoiselle’s husband, Mademoiselle herself and the French neighbors, who own elegant villas in Africa, give stereotype or “label” to the black girl, Diouana, with a mocking racial prejudice stigma. The white European children rudely and sarcastically identified blacks with the phrase “black as midnight”. The word “midnight” means darkness, and darkness is always connoted with negative things, which, of course, contrasts with the word “light” which has a positive connotation. Darkness means ugliness, misguidance, misery, filth, unpleasantness, distress, gloominess of the future, even more radically equal to hell. Meanwhile, the opposite word “light” is constructed as something good, beautiful, pleasant, joyful, clean, pure, bright life, and even synonymous with heaven. It can be concluded that the power, prowess, and success of colonization in a colonized area will eventually be able to create a dichotomy of “different racial places and positions” in the postcolonial period, and the colonial ideology created both intentionally and unintentionally is the affirmation of the higher and honorable white race by the colonizer and his descendants. Thereby, the “stigma of inferiority” will be accepted by the colonized black Africans.

African black people, especially women, actually dislike their own naturally curly hair, which is not the same as white European hair that extends straight or wavy. They, Africans women, want their hair to be shaped straight and long, this can be seen from their great desire to order “a hair straightening iron” to the black girl, Diouana, before the girl is taken away to France. It can be concluded from the statement that long straight hair is constructed as a white racial identity that is more ideal and more beautiful in the eyes of the African black race women.

3.2.2 Cultural Identity Stereotype

The construction of cultural identity stereotype of African women is backward in physical look for they have no physical appearance with male haircut style. It is different from the appearance style of white French people represented by Mademoiselle's sister, Miss Dubois. With the physical anatomy of a straight forehead and a charming curved nose, she makes use of a male haircut style. Male hairdo adopted by such a woman shows a construction of a more modern cultural identity in human civilization. Another cultural identity stereotype that can be seen in this short story is that the black African race are mostly just domestic servants or housemaids like the black girl, Diouana, or the white family's cook, Samba, or as poor sailors like Tive Correa. Meanwhile, the image of the wealthy elite social status that the white Europeans have, in the eyes of indigenous Africans, with the symbol of the "prestigious job" of Mademoiselle's husband who works at an air navigation company in Dakar. This implies that the white European race image is in a higher binary opposition than the black African race. The image of white Europeans as highly respectable persons in the eyes of Africans can also be seen in Mademoiselle's husband and his family who own a grand, luxurious, and elegant villa both in France and Africa completed with a Peugeot 403 car. However, villa and Peugeot are symbols of luxury that only rich people like Mademoiselle's family can afford, whereas poor black people cannot have as stated in the following quotation:

"There was nothing green about the Villa of Green Bliss except its name. The gardens were laid out in the French manner, the paths covered in gravel, terminated by two palm trees with drooping fronds..."

(Ousmane, 2005:199)

The image of beauty, elegance, and prestige of wealth that can be seen from the quotation above shows the identity of white people who are stereotypically constructed to be much more modern, honorable, and rich. France is identified with a distinctive beauty that is certainly different from Africa which is black, poor, and primitive. It is also described in the short story that France is studded with beautiful gardens, villa fence green plants, and palm trees that clearly distinguish it from the land in Africa.

Another binary opposition constructed as cultural identity stereotyped by white Europeans against black Africans is that the indigenous Africans are portrayed as people who like to lie, unlike white Europeans who are constructed as honest people who are far from lying as seen in the following quotation:

"Kids! The children are clean. Maybe you're tired of them. But knowing you lie, like a native, that I don't like. I don't like liars and you are one!"

(Ousmane, 2005:224)

Another construction of cultural identity stereotype can also be seen from the typical character of modern French people who live an individualistic, self-contained, and closed life. They busily do anything in their own houses, neglecting a social interaction. Such a lifestyle is certainly different from the lifestyle of a traditional African community in the countryside where togetherness, openness, and helping each other are the colors of their daily lives.

3.3 Anti-Colonial Resistance of The Black

One of the native people responses against colonization is resistance against the colonial power in various forms. This reaction is also revealed in the short story "*The Promised Land*" when Diouana, who has many beautiful dreams and lovely hopes for success and prosperity in the French country, has to reap the pains of life while living with her white master family. The hard work she has done by spending her savings to make an identity card and buy a boat ticket to France "results in a bitter fate". It seems that the colonized is trying to idealize a good life

as part of anti-colonial resistance by trying to change their colonized status, so that they are not too different and, if possible, occupying the same “respectable elite” position as the colonizer, although this will never be allowed by the white colonizer. The fantasy of France, that can give the black girl the beauty of life and the optimism of future happiness she thinks before, turns out to be just a wishful thinking. Previously, while the black girl, Diouana, is still in Dakar, Africa, she has struggled hard for her life as Mademoiselle’s housemaid by walking three times a week for six kilometers to Mademoiselle’s elegant villa in Hann Street, Africa. It can be analyzed that perception and image of living a beautiful promised land, automatically, arise in the minds of colonized black people. This is because the colonizer is always identified with the greatness of the more sophisticated and prosperous status of modern civilization. Although the twenty-one-year-old black girl has been repeatedly advised by Tive Correa, a poor old sailor who has ever lived in France, to abandon her intention to leave the African village of Casamence for France, she still feels determined to be willing to change her fate and feels confident about her happiness and triumph in France. Diouana has such an exaggerated impression of the prospects of living happily in her employer master, Mademoiselle’s colonial country. Thereby, if her employer master changes her mind and cancelled her departure, Diouana will be restless.

The beginning of anti-colonial resistance occurs after the housemaid, Diouana, passes the two-month work service. In her third month at her employer’s house in France, Diouana’s cheerfulness begins to disappear; there is no more laughter, no more passion for life, her eyesight becomes less alert. Diouana seems to be overburdened with more work than when she is, beforehand, living in the African villa. Diouana, as the housemaid, has to take care of the seven people in Mademoiselle’s family and does daily chores, such as cooking, washing, ironing, babysitting and so on, in fact, she is only getting paid three thousand francs a month. The power relations shown by the employer master to the housemaid indicate the dominant power of the white European race over the black African race, oppression after oppression done by the white family, begins to be felt by Diouana in the house. The relationship of power is also shown by the employer master by asking Diouana to pay homage to the white employer and serve her white friends with her African cuisine. The white employer, Mademoiselle, is often away and leaves his four children with Diouana, and ironically, the children emulate and implement the totality of their parents’ power relations by setting up a mafia organization, recruiting friends to home who are just doing mischievous and oppressive actions to Diouana. The attitude of mocking, teasing and harassing her blackness continuously makes Diouana feel excluded and marginalized in the social interactions in her white master’s house. Colonization is also evident when Diouana’s master and her family often take her from villa to villa approximately one hundred times, ordering her to make delicious dishes as a tribute, and so on. Diouana’s resistance begins rebelling against her white employer for the first time by showing hatred for treating her as a housemaid like a slave just for three thousand francs. The realization that her employer’s kindness to her in Africa is nothing more than for her own benefit, erodes her pride in the “important white man” she has once revered so much in Africa.

The emerging resistance of resentment results in the breakdown of the relationship between the white employer and the black housemaid, Diouana. The maid’s ineptitude at work is shown as a result of her anti-colonial resistance to her employer, Mademoiselle. The oppression as a result of excessive power relations is carried out by the employer by considering the maid as a useful object that can be best-utilized, placed in exhibitions like trophies, used as illustrations of indigenous psychology of African people, and positioning the housemaid as the absolute property of the employer. As things become clearer, the housemaid, Diouana, becomes more aware and more enlightened about all the reasons why her white employer is really eager to

bring her away to France. Feelings deeply alienated and marginalized with all the harsh realities she faces in the diaspora of a foreign country make the housemaid remember her hometown and the life of the people in Africa. Feeling regretful and blaming herself is too late, so the anti-colonial resistance as the oppressed and the colonized strengthens Diouana to continue the same movement and to remain closed off from others. Her resistance is, further, heightened by her neglect of work ordered by her employer, such as cleaning the garden. This rejecting action, of course, angers the white employer so much that the employer's family seems reluctant to allow the housemaid to go out of the house to another place. The black housemaid's expression of anti-colonial resistance to the white employer finally reaches her turning point by committing suicide as a form of self-freedom for the African black existence since she could not bear the burden of suffering and oppression by being severely scolded by the white mistress any longer.

4. CONCLUSION

Modern colonization in the sphere of white domestic life is clearly viewed in the binary opposition and power relation between the French white family and the African black girl in Sembene Ousmane's "*The Promised Land*" where white Europeans superiorly colonize and oppress black African people through the character of Diouana, a black girl whose beautiful dreams must run aground and whose fate must end tragically due to oppression by her unbearable white employer and her family. White people also exploit Africa's rich treasures and bring them to France, where white people come from.

The difference of racial and cultural identity construction is also clearly seen in the short story where the black race is stereotypically denigrated and identified with the phrase "black as midnight" or something ugly, dirty, and primitive. The naturally straight hair of the white European race is identified as a beautiful and ideal hair type, unlike the short curly hair type of the African race which is regarded far from beauty. The construction of cultural identity stereotype is viewed in the symbols of civilization and modern people's culture owned by white Europeans in contrast to black Africans, such as women's haircuts that adopt male styles, prestigious jobs, Peugeot 403 cars, elegant luxury villas, France as an enchanting country, the white race portrayed as good and honest people, and the individualistic lifestyle of the people. As a result of the dominant power relation of the white employer and her family, there are many practices of domestic oppression towards the black Africans. Thereby, the anti-colonial resistance against the white colonizer will always appear in various forms. Anti-colonial resistance is performed by the housemaid, Diouana, through her reluctance to do her daily job in Mademoiselle's white family properly. Eventually, since she could no longer bear the circumstances that she has faced, rather than serving working for the white family, the housemaid, Diouana, shows the climax of her resistance by committing suicide.

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