



INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF COLONIALISM ON RESISTANCE AND SUBVERSION IN THE “OLD CHIEF MSHLANGA” BY DORRIS LESSING.

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Abstract

This study presents a theoretical and practical framework of resistance and subversion as a concept of postcolonial criticism. It describes various kinds of resistance as presented in Doris Lessing's short story Old Chief Mshlanga. A historical approach is adapted to trace 'resistance Literature' throughout the postcolonial criticism. The main aim of this research is to highlight the themes of resistance and subversion portrayed in the story. A textual analysis approach is used to examine narrative techniques, character development and symbolism that highlight the acts of subversion and resistance. The theme of resistance and subversion is tackled from a cultural point of view where culture becomes a form of resistance. This analysis contributes to discussion of justice, equity and resistance by unveiling how literature serves as a medium to critique systematic oppression in the form of colonial appropriation of land. The ideology of both the colonized and colonizer is revealed throughout this analysis.

Keywords: *Ambivalence, Colonialism, Cultural Depth, Decolonization, Injustice, Land, Oppression, Racism, Resistance, Silence, Subversion, Transformation*

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1. Introduction

Colonialism a historical phenomenon reshaping societies, identities and cognitive processes of the marginalized since ages. This poignant narrative set in colonial Africa and this story serves as a microcosm of the colonial encounter highlighting the dynamics of power, suppression and unyielding resistance. This story set in Southern Rhodesia(present Zimbabwe) during the early 20th century(1952). The story set in small, localized setting-a colonial farm-as a microcosm to represent the broader cultural encounters between the colonizers and colonized. The story revolves around the Old Chief Mshlanga a black Chief who is struggling to guard his lands and farms from the colonizers. Initially the girl ignorant of the colonizers brutality but latter in the story she begin to question the racial prejudices and injustice's by observing the Chief's dignity wisdom and deep connection to the land and culture. In this text Chief Mshlanga's silent dignity and unwavering adherence to his cultural values subtly subvert colonial authority as he remains a symbol of endurance and resilience. The young white settler, through her evolving perception of the chief and the indigenous people contributes to her realization challenging her preconceived notions of racial superiority marking a shift in her understanding of the colonized as equal individuals with their own rich culture and identity. The research illustrates that how themes of resistance and subversion in the story can be used to critique colonialism. These themes are deeply interrelated and are manifested not only through characters of Chief and White settler girl but also through narrative shifts serving as tools to expose the subtle exploitation of the colonized. Resistance in the "Old Chief Mshlanga" take several forms, both overt and subtle. This non violent and silent resistance is embodied in the character of chief Mshlanga as his resistance is not expressed through violence or overt rebellion but through his composed demeanour and resilient dignity. Although displaced and marginalized, the Chief does not accept the settler authority as he was not ready to compromise on the exploitation of his cultural heritage by the colonizers. The theme of resistance revolves around the young White girl as she represents internal and ideological and begins to question the legitimacy of the colonial system and this resistance subverts colonial authority by exposing its moral contradiction. The research objectives are the analysis of colonial power dynamics portrayed in the story between the white settler and the indigenous African population, to explore the role of cultural identity embedded in the indigenous people struggle to preserve their dignity in the face of colonial oppression, to investigate subversion of colonial narrative in which narrative critiques or undermines the justifications for colonialism, to analyze the White girl's evolving perspective promoting a more equitable view of cultural relationships and justice.

2.Theoretical framework

This study explores themes of resistance and subversion in Old Chief Mshlanga. The study incorporates Harlow's Resistance Literature, Franz Fanon idea of resistance,

Homi K Bhaba's concept of subversion, which are central to understanding the interaction between colonizers and colonized in the story. Harlow(1987) illustrated new potential of literary criticism to discuss various types of resistance in her book *Resistance Literature*. In the preface of her book, she explains

“ like the resistance and national liberation movements which it reflects and in which it can be said to participate, not only demands recognition of its independent status and existence as literary production, but also explains a challenge to the codes and canons of both the theory and practice of literature and its criticism as these have developed in the west”(Harlow, 1991, p.2).

Homi K Bhaba's concept of resistance as an **effect of ambivalence** within colonial discourse provides a powerful and critical lens to analyze the quiet yet profound forms of resistance in the *Old Chief Mshlanga*. Bhabha demonstrates that resistance can not be manifested necessarily as overt rebellion rather it often arises from within the power structures of colonialism, subtly subverting its authority. According to Bhabha “ the production of colonial power is the production of resistance, resistance lies in hybridity of its ambivalent articulation”. Bhabha's assertion reveals that how colonial power, in its attempt to dominate, inadvertently creates resistance within its structures. This resistance does not always emerge as direct and violent opposition but instead arises from ambivalence and hybridity where the colonized subtly subvert colonial authority through non violent assertion of their cultural identity.

Franz Fanon's work , particularly **The Wretched of The Earth** (1961) and **Black skin white masks** (1952), explores themes of resistance, decolonization and the psychological impact of colonialism. His theories incorporated with these themes provides a powerful lens to analyze Dorris Lessings *Old Chief Mshlanga*. Fanon argues that colonialism dehumanizes the colonized by considering themselves superior and stereotyping the colonized as savages. As in the story the protagonist initially ingrained seeing Africans as identity less labourer and the land as a possession of her settler family. This reflects the colonial “ Manichaeism” a worldview demonstrated by Fanon, where the colonizers view the world in binary terms; colonizer is equal to superior, colonized is equal to inferior. Fanon describes that resistance begins when the colonized reject the imposed cultural norm and rediscover their own traditions, language and art as sources of dignity and identity. This adherence and reclamation of indigenous culture serve as a personal and collective form of resistance along with it subverting the colonial narrative that portrays indigenous culture as uncivilized. As Fanon says in his book “ colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts it, disfigures it and destroys it” (*The Wretched of The Earth*), this destruction and disfigurement is portrayed by Dorris in the story where the white settler seeks for the erasure of African culture and identity by snatching their lands and identity.

Frantz Fanon theory of decolonization and internalization of colonialism can be applied to the transformation of the White Girl. This transformation can be viewed as a process of psychological decolonization, where she begins to reject the colonial mindset of superiority and authority. The change of her perspective from seeing the African people as inferior to recognizing their dignity and cultural significance. This can be referred as an internal struggle against the colonial ideas and we can perceive it as an internal resistance.

Edward Said a seminal figure in his most influential work *Orientalism* analyzes how the West (the “Occident”) constructs the East (the “Orient”) as the “Other” in a manner that justifies colonialism and domination. In *Old Chief Mshlanga*, the protagonist, a young white girl raised in a colonial settler family, initially sees the African people through the lens of colonial stereotypes. She views them as primitive, inferior and alien to her way of life. This reflects the Orientalist tendency of the colonizer to construct the colonized as the “Other”. The subversion comes when the protagonist begins to challenge these constructed stereotypes. Through her encounter with Old Chief Mshlanga, she starts to observe the African people as dignified, complex individuals with their own history, culture and authority. She rejects the colonial worldview and the concept of othering of the African people.

3.Literature Review

Through a comprehensive analysis of cultural, psychological and political dimensions of resistance and subversion, this literature review investigates how Lessing portrays the effect of colonialism on both the colonizer and colonized focousing specifically on non violent resistance and subversion on colonial encounter.

In post-colonial theory, **resistance** is often seen as a reaction to the systemic violence of colonialism and can involve both individual and collective effort.

Subversion the act of overthrowing; the state of being overthrown. Especially; an attempt to overthrow or undermine a government or political system by persons working secretly in the country involved.

Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin,H.(2002) wrote a book “The Empire writes back”. This foundational text in postcolonial literature not only provide a comprehensive overview of postcolonial theory but also demonstrates its application to literature. The authors explore how literature serves as a powerful vehicle for expressing resistance. This book highlights both overt and covert mechanism of resistance and their ways for challenging the colonial power structures in subtle form.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s seminal essay *Can the subaltern speak?*(1988) provides extensive exploration of the limitation and complexities of resistance within colonial and postcolonial context. Spivak critically examines that whether the voices of oppressed, colonized, marginalized groups are often silenced, distorted within dominant resources. However, the voice of resistance in the story is not only the matter of individual

act of defiance. This story describes the limitation of subaltern resistance, a theme that resonates with Spivak's respective essay. In the story we can observe the realization of colonial injustice by the colonized or indigenous people where they are performing the act of resistance but they often remain voiceless and have to practice non violent resistance. This highlights that how the colonizers snatches the voice from the indegenious people and the colonized becomes enable to speak for their own rights.

The Kambanathe protest by the Maori in the New Zealand parliament can be viewed as a cultural resistance for asserting identity and challenging colonial hegemony just like in Old Chief Mshlanga

In a Passage to India by E.M Forster the concept of resistance is portrayed by discussing the tension between the colonizer and colonized in the similar way as depicted by Lessing in the Old Chief Mshlanga. Resistance in both the texts is a response to colonial domination and oppression, express through cultural preservation and dignity maintainance. The oppressed are humanized by the challenging colonial narratives represented by Forster and Lessing. They use the theme of resistance such as Dr.Aziz's refusal to submission to colonial injustice and the Chief's dignified resistance to white settler's encroachment. Both the characters are constantly questioning the moral justification of imperialism.

Bhabha discusses the concept of 'third space' in the essay 'The commitment to Theory', which is included in his book , "The location of culture(1994)". The resistance in the The Old Chief Mshlanga aligns with Bhabha's concept of subversion in the third space by signifying concept of ambivalence, hybridity and negotiation of cultural identities. A gap is created between the colonizers's perception and the actual behavior of colonized by subversion, as elaborated by Bhabha.This gap can be seen in the story between the white settler and chief Mshlanga.

The theme of cultural resistance and subversion in "Train to Pakistan" by Khushwant Singh can be related to the Old Chief Mshlanga as both shared the theme of cultural identity and dignity and represented these themes as a form of resistance within sociopolitical context. In Train to Pakistan the villagers attempt to preserve their traditions and in Old Chief Mshlanga the Chief act as a symbol of indigenous pride, both can be viewed as a form of subtle resistance. In both the texts cultural resistance operating as a form of passive subversion. The characters steadfast adherence to their cultural identities and their persistent effort of not to surrender against the hegemonic forces is an example of subtle defiance undermining oppressive systems.

4.Research gap

The research gap that is filled by our research is that the theme of resistance and subversion is not discussed in the simultaneous and coherent manner. The Old Chief Mslanga has been studied widely and in an extensive manner, but there remain certain

potential research areas unexplored, such as violent resistance against oppression is discussed in excess but non-violent subtle form of resistance and silence as a form of resistance in the story are not discussed.

4.1. Research questions

- Why do the indigenous characters in the story “The Old Chief Mshlanga” resist colonial authority and what motivates their subversion of the colonial system?
- What forms of resistance and subversion are portrayed by Chief Mshlanga and indigenous community in response to colonialism?
- How do the indigenous characters acts of resistance affect the colonial relationship between the young narrator and Chief Mshlanga?

4.2. Significance of research

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to both postcolonial theory, its relevance to the global world and cultural preservation. This study explores how the identity is preserved through passive resistance and how resistance plays its role as a silent yet powerful weapon for the marginalized. This research describes the ways in which this weapon is used by Marginalized to resist, subvert and reassert their identities in the face of colonial injustice. The study does not only analyze the point of view of colonized but the colonizers perspective is also analyzed. This is carried out by an extensive analysis of transformative journey of the white settler. This study highlights that how this realization of colonial brutality and injustice give rise to another kind of resistance and this resistance is not inherent rather acquired through realizing the pride of indigenous culture.

5. Analysis

The role of land as a site resistance and cultural identity

Geographically land is the solid part of the earth surface which included terrestrial features such as mountains, plains and plateaus, which form the physical landscape. Culturally land is a symbolic and material resource connected with identity, heritage and meaning representing a community’s tradition, culture, history and social connections to place. The land represented in Old Chief Mshlanga can be viewed with both the perspective as it holds geographical as well as cultural significance. As far as geographical representation of land is concerned the land of Africa of that area presented as having the potential to sustain life and nurture communities. The land of Mshlanga holds the value of gold for them as it is portrayed as lush, wide and fertile. This land has fertility in abundance as it is capable of sustaining agriculture and life. The Africans had two miraculous resources; one was gold and another was land but certainly the land was more precious entity for them. Because the land was capable of supporting vegetation and crops essential for the local community. The land encompasses diverse landscape, rolling hills, dense forest, symbolizing the natural diversity of Africa which was contributing to natural wealth

of Africa that has historically attracted both indigenous utilization and colonial exploitation.

This land is not only a resource for materialistic purposes but also serves as the cultural connection for the native community specially for the Chief Mshlanga. The indigenous people view land as sacred and deeply tied to their traditions belonging an identity as all of these were threatened by the colonialism. The land is not considered a dead entity for the people rather it's a living entity with spiritual and ancestral significance. Lessing use the character of Chief Mshlanga which embodies the traditional connection to the land, as he doesn't consider that land merely accomodity but a heritage passed down through generations. When the colonizers in the story were trying to snatch their lands, indigenous community considered as if they were losing their identity, autonomy and culture. The character of Chief Mshlanga is connected to the land which shows that his connection serves as assertion of indigenous heritage and a passive form of resistance to dispossession. The Chief's connection to the land is deeply rooted in the community's way of life because that was the part of their land culture that they shared the land and used it communally. This contrast with the Europeans settlers commodification of the land. Despite the settlers attempt to alienate the local people from their land but they were unable to do so as due to the cultural resistive forces represented by the characters in Old Chief Mshlanga. Though Chief Mshlanga doesn't engage in overt rebellious acts against colonizers, his presence and pride that he always shows in his heritage serve as a quiet yet powerful resistance to colonial dispossession. As when the narrator visits Chief Mshlanga village, she becomes aware of the stark difference between the settlers expansive and confiscated land and on the other side the lands of the indigenous people were small and overcrowded. Throughout the story the constant presence of Chief on the land represents that how valuable indigenous traditions, values and respect for the land persist despite colonial domination. Dorris Lessing illustrates how the African land which was initially viewed as a mere commodity by settlers, transforms into a sacred place as the white girl undergoes the process of self-realization and personal awakening. As narrator recalls her daily walks across the land, viewing its vast, empty, with no acknowledgement and praise for the indigenous community those actually owned that land. In contrast of her this perception when the white settler visits Chief Mshlanga's village she experiences the land as a space of community and cultural significance. She realizes the sacred and ancestral bond which was shared by Chief Mshlanga with their land.

5.1.Forms of Resistance

5.1.1. Cultural resistance

Cultural resistance is the process of using traditions, practices, beliefs, values to challenge and oppose domination, oppression or attempts to erase their identity. The indigenous people or marginalized people assert their heritage, values and autonomy in

the face of cultural and economic subjugation. The character of Chief Mshlanga portrays cultural resistance, the Chief's commitment to his cultural heritage enable him to stand steadfast as resistive pillar against the exploitations of colonizers. His authority and pride, symbolizes his role as a custodian of the culture and heritage of his people, the way Chief views the land as a sacred place reflects that he considers the land deeply bonded with his culture. He was not ready to give his land because he was not ready for his cultural erasure his this deep bond with the land and culture give him the subtle power to resist and assert sovereignty. "I realized that a Chief was not just a little native but a man with a proud history", this proud history reflects his proud culture for which he is showing resistance. As the white settlers says " They had lived for centuries on this land, and the soil was in their blood and bones" here the blood and bones refer to the indigenous people's connection to land and culture. This means that their culture runs in their blood and is embedded in their bones and they are fighting for their blood and bones.

The Kambanthe protest is one of the example cultural resistance. As the Maori used their presence and traditions in parliament to assert their rights, language and culture against hegemonic power structures. In both Chief Mshlanga and Maori protest land is central to cultural identity. Both acts rely on non-violent resistance using their cultural symbols and languages as a tool to resist with a dignified silence.

5.1.2. Psychological resistance

Psychological resistance is defined as the process of subconscious defense mechanism used by individuals to avoid confronting uncomfortable thoughts emotions and realities. The narrator's psychological resistance mirrors the broader societal resistance which acknowledges the inequalities and injustices of colonialism. In the Old Chief Mshlanga, psychological resistance operates on multiple levels as an internal struggle within the narrator as a braoder metaphor for colonial power dynamic. The white girl settler after realizing the significance of Chief Mshlanga heritage and culture came in the phase of psychological resistance, where she recognize the brutality of her family and is in constant phase of psychologically negating the rules of her colonizer family. Her denial is an example of the psychological resistance.

5.1.3. Passive resistance

Passive resistance refers to non violent forms of opposition to an authority or oppressive system. The aim of passive resistance is to challenge power structures without using physical force. The character of Chief represents a significant passive resistance although he doesn't have political power and control over land due to colonial rule. He resist the oppression imposed on him through his silent and dignified presence. He doesn't physically fight against the colonial settler, but he maintains his self respect and refuses to be dehumanized. His ability to say no doesn't sound violent but his this

ability of silent assertion is the perfect example of passive resistance portrayed through his composure.

5.1.4. Subversion of Colonial ideologies through characterization

Characterization is an essential process for making characters relatable, multidimensional and believable in the way that engages the reader in a realistic manner. Lessing has used elaborative characterization to explore the clash of culture and dehumanizing effects of colonialism which is ultimately giving rise to the storm of resistance and subversion. The character of Chief in the story presents subversion of colonial ideologies through his subtle assertion of ownership. This subversion is portrayed when the white settler girl meets chief on a walk. The demeanor, composure, integrity and dignity of the chief subverts the stereotypical image of submissive and inferior natives. The chief subverts the oppressive ideology of colonial oppression and dominance by refusing to conform to the colonial view of land appropriation. The Chief subverts all the brutal colonial ideologies with a dignified resistance which shows how deeply he is connected with the roots of his culture.

The white settler girl undergoes a transformation in the story which is accompanied with realization of the African significant indigenous culture. She recognized the cultural depth that the chief embodies. The gradual acknowledgement of Chief Mshlanga's qualities leads her to question the colonial ideologies she was raised with. The girl subverts the strict and brutal colonial ideologies due to her transformation from a colonially conditioned perspective to a reorganization of dignity of chief Mshlanga and his rich culture. The character of the girl embodies subversion by rejecting colonial prejudices and acknowledgment of Land injustice. The girl says, "I felt small, and ashamed. And from that moment, my feet seemed to have different relationship with the earth". This moment highlights her rejection of colonial superiority as she is ashamed of his family's injustice. The girl's awareness extends to the land appropriation perpetuated by the colonizers. She was against this brutal occupation and begins questioning her family's occupation of the fertile lands of natives. Fanon argues that colonization dehumanizes both the colonized and the colonizer. The girl's realization and awakening represents a moment of decolonization of consciousness, as she moves beyond the brutal ideologies of dominance and begins to consider natives as equals rather than others. Though the story does not end on a happy note but the realization shown in the story plays an integral role in order to begin a resistance and to sustain it as well in order to subvert the brutal ideologies. As Fanon emphasizes in *The Wretched Earth*, resistance begins with the recognition of injustice and dehumanization. Similarly, this recognition and realization is depicted in the story.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

The investigation of this research paper highlights and demonstrates the impact of colonialism on resistance and subversion in Dorris Lessing's "The Old Chief Mshlanga". This story reveals that resistance is not always overt and open but can be manifested through cultural dignity and assertion of identity. The persistence of the Chief elaborated as a quiet resistance in this paper. The symbolic silence of the Chief and the evolving perspective of the White girl are interpreted as form of subtle resistance in this paper. This study illustrates that how subversion is deeply rooted in dignity, cultural identity and symbolic resistance which in result highlights the disruption of colonial binaries. This study highlights that how Lessing criticizes the hierarchical colonial perspective by using subversion in the story. This paper relates subversion and resistance shown in the story with Homi K Bhaba's hybridity and Third space where cultural identities are negotiated and transformed. This resistive silent negotiation is shown in the character of Chief and transformation is depicted in the self-realization of the White girl. The destabilizing potential of the "Third space" is mirrored by depicting the shifts those are subverting colonial binaries of dominance and inferiority. Fanon emphasizes the dehumanizing effect of colonialism and which sparks resistance and subversion through reclamation of identity. This research paper elaborates and illuminates the concept of resistance and subversion in the story by using Fanon theory of Psychological defiance and Bhabha's concept of hybridity and Third space.