

HEGEMONY: A STUDY OF THE NOVEL “THE DEATH OF COMRADE PRESIDENT” BY ALAIN MABANCKOU IN POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

African literature becomes one of the key aspects in decolonizing the colonization because the write-ups illustrate the individuality and strength. African authors become the voice of their whole society. This research breaks the above said concept and it studies the condition of Africa after the immediate period of independence. Alain Mabanckou is a familiar diaspora author in postcolonial literature and his literary contribution in taking African literature to the next phase academically is notable. All his works are the replication of the voice of African diasporas to recognize the significance of the native country. Mabanckou's recent novel *The Death of Comrade President* is accounted to establish the concept that Africa was under the colonization even after the independence. The postcolonial key concepts namely hegemony is employed to study the influence of France in Congo. Hegemony is the indication of political, economical and military domination over other. It is utilized to find out the invisible domination of France on Congo. The study comprises the detailed information of the chosen novel with the reference to associated key concept. It aims to enlighten that Africans do not have the independent feel. It is not the fault of French rather it studies the mindset of Africans who are entirely influenced by the activity of colonizers. The objective of the research is that Africans are the main cause for their unfortunate and they attract the unfortunate by their act.

Keywords: African Literature, Colonial Education, Hegemony

African literature is one of the valuable realms in literary world because its contribution to the global literature is immeasurable. Plenty of African authors make their noise from different countries in different perspectives through their literary contribution. They end up in the concept of their social importance or praising their customs amongst others. Though they commenced with orator, they have become one of the best part amongst other literatures. Writers from West Africa utilized the media of news paper to spread their ideas against of the Europeans. In France, the French speaking Africans were guided by Leopold Senghor and they were very strong in keeping the concept, 'negritude' in literature and they spread to the society in order to elucidate the significance of blacks.

Leon Damas and Aime Cesaire were the idols in spreading this movement vigorously. The poems of French Guiana and Martinique did not only disgrace the colonialism rather it showed case the value of colonized culture and the way it had been demolished by the colonizers. African writers started insisting the independence after WWII and many authors published their literary works with the concept of independence. They are Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Ousmane Sembene and so on. Even after the independence, so many African countries are under the colonization of Europeans without their knowledge. This research denotes the period immediately after the independence with reference to Alain Mabanckou's novel *The Death of Comrade President*.

Teju Cole, Chinelo Okparanta, Chika Unigwe, Imbolo Mbue, Alain Mabanckou, Chigozie Obioma, Chibundu Onuzo are the contemporary African diaspora writer. They hold up the African culture and tradition through their literary contribution in world literature. Alain Mabanckou is chosen for this research. He is from Francophone literature because he writes all his works in French and being a French literature professor at Los Angeles University of California, he adds the credit to Francophone literature. He has authored twelve novels, seven poems, nine essays and three illustrated books. Nine novels amongst twelve have been translated to English. The French version *Les Cigognes sont Immortelles* was written in 2018 and it was translated in the name of *The Death of Comrade President* in 2020.

The theoretical approach hegemony is accounted to analyze the concept dominant role of France on Congo. It derived from Greek word 'hegemonia' and it refers the leadership and the dominant rule. Brian Schmidt has quoted the definition of hegemony in *Oxford English Dictionary* as "leadership, predominance, preponderance; especially the leadership or predominant authority of one state of a confederacy or union over others." In 19th century, hegemony was established to notify the social or cultural predominance of one group within the society or one country over other country. It studies the predominance role of France even after the independence.

The railway department was established by Europeans in Africa at the initial stage for

their benefit but Africans were also allotted some compartment due to earn money from them through the ticket collecting way. Mabanckou has focused the dominant role of Europeans in derailment incident. Maman Pauline is a banana vendor and she buys the banana from the West Africans directly because she meets the farmers directly in the field and collects the banana by offering a lot of gifts to them.

She earns a lot of money by selling them in the East African people. Whenever she travels, she has to be very scruples of derailment. The event of derailment is noted to denote the dominant role of Europeans on Africans. The derailment happens very often during the crossing time of Dolisie, Dechavanne, Mont Belo, Hamon and Baratier stations. The railway department does not have the role to play in solving this problem rather they have to call Europeans to rectify this problem. Michel narrates the European dominance as:

Now everyone knows that derailments happen all the time at Dolisie, Dechavanne, Mont Belo, Hamon and Baratier stations. Train can stuck there for ten to fifteen days before the European technicians arrive from Brazzaville in a handcar and fix the tracks, They're wily ones, these white technicians, they hide their technique from our railway workers, so they'll get a lot of money, when all they're doing is giving orders to the Congolese who lug huge stones around in the hot suns, lay tracks and tighten bolts with no gloves on their hands. (14)

The above passage reports the hegemony aspects of Europeans because they economically dominate the Africans by hiding their technical skill from African railway team. The Africans are in the place to wait till the arrival of European technicians from Brazzaville. They utilize African labours only for dragging the big stones and tightening the bolts under the hot sun. They are not ready to teach the technical skill of solving the derailment issues. The main purpose of hiding this skill is to earn big amount of money from them. This episode highly portrays the hegemonic elements in the life of Africans.

Maman Pauline is accounted to depict the financial loss of Africans. She is stuck in the train with her bananas by the derailment. She is pushed to the situation to give away her bananas for free of cost and otherwise all the bananas would get rotten. She receives only the first class compartment from them for the reply of bananas. The business loss of Maman Pauline happens very often and it is considered as the planned act of White technicians with the help of African railway workers to earn money. Europeans dominate the Africans by their pre-plan economically. The impact of hegemony illustrates the economical dominance role through the loss of Maman Pauline.

The concept colonial Africa is expounded through the event of electing presidents of African countries which French have colonized. Papa Roger illustrates that wherever the

civil war happens, France is anticipated to play the major role not to sort out the problem but they attempt to rule indirectly. The civil war of Nigeria has been noted for the hidden influence of France. Paper Roger secretly enlightens the role of France in the political issues of the African countries. The France president General de Gaulle employs the man to monitor the activity of Africans with the regards to president election. Whomever support the entry of France in their country have been elected with the influence of France president. The monitoring person is called „white sorcerers“ and he gains more information about the country than the natives. His report decides the president candidate of the African countries. Their indirect dominant role does not stop with that rather the elected president's duty is to make France always happy. They must support France in UN meeting directly. If any elected president raises the voice against them, the white sorcerer's gets completely disturbed and some uncommitted crimes would be imposed on him. He would be in prison for the uncommitted crime. The narration of Papa Roger to his son Michel is noted as:

Most black presidents have to talk with the 'white sorcerers' to keep France happy. This is the man who decides who will be president of Republic of such and such a country that the French have colonized... the white sorcerer gets annoyed the next day the jumped-up Africans is no longer president of the Republic, he'll be put in jail, if they haven't already killed him in a coup d' e'stat secretly cooked up in France with other Africans who don't understand they're providing a rod for their own backs and continue to have riches stolen at the midnight when people are in bed dreaming about more important things than oil, which is the cause of so many of our problems. (22)

The above quoted passage records that Most of the African countries are still under the colonization of France after the independence. Africans do not have the authority to rule the country without the support of France and they are in the position to praise them in order to survive in the power. If any native activist comes forth to raise the voice against their invisible dominance, they are immediately imprisoned and murdered by imposing the big crime on him.

The cooked-up story to find fault with the activist is secretly done by the 'white sorcerers' along with the African supporters. The supports fail to understand that their sources are stolen by France by the name of the under prop. The native people have the mindset that they are blessed with the oil and they are very concern in keeping them safe from the colonizers. France does not focus much on the oil issues rather they direct the natives towards this business and the other significant rich resources are taken out from them. The predomination of France is still analyzed to illustrate the political dominance and it further exhibits that the native Africans lose their riches by supporting them. The betrayal event of their native people does not allow the emerging activist to protest against the

invisible power of France.

European dominance is illustrated through the schooling system. Whenever there is a visit of European countries presidents, all the school children are dressed up like them. They all are asked to memorise the biographical elements of the visiting presidents and their history of the country. When the presidents enter into the school, it is their duty to recite the history and their biographical sketch to make them delighted. All of them are asked to be smart. The African authorities never mind about the condition of the school children rather they are very concern in making the visiting presidents happy. They never mind about the climate of Africa. Europeans do the same whenever they receive the presidents because they are under the cool climate. Africans atmosphere is entirely different, they are burnt under the sun by wearing the gloves, shoes, suits and coats.

The African authorities have the fear on European officials because they are the deciding authority of African countries. They influence the political and economical condition of Africa. If any African president goes against of his words and displeasing them by his act, he has to face the hard situations. Sometimes, they would completely loss their power. In order to make them happy, they push their children under the grievance by calling them smart and intelligent. The reality is entirely different. The connotation of the welcoming president with the welcoming remarks denotes that European still have the authoritative power in Africa.

The influence of Europeans life style is existed through the members of the Congolese Party of the Labour in Africa. They always wear coat suit and use good smelling perfume while they go out for the meeting. Uncle Rene is one of the members of Congolese Party of Labour and he visits the house of Maman Pauline to inform the sad news which is the death of her family brother. He comes along with two more members to inform her. While he arrives at the house, he starts the conversation slowly with Maman Pauline. Michel is asked to sit beside them to learn about the sad news. Michel is the representation of young society of native Africans. Michel does not bother about the sad news rather he admires the life style of his uncle and his dress code. He narrates his admiration as:

I sit beside my uncle and I can already smell his nice perfume. He's the only person who has perfume like this, the ones I smell in the street are rubbish; they smell like *Mananas*, which they use on dead bodies so they won't smell bad when they arrive in the land of dead. I'm admiring Uncle Rene's badge, which lets him go out even after curfew. One day I'll have on too, I'll be a member of the Congolese Party of Labour, I'll wear a white suit and hold meetings with weird men like the two here this evening. (52)

The passage affirms the existence of European dress culture in African society. Uncle Rene has been influenced entirely by European society. Wherever he goes, he never forgets to wear coat and suit because it is considered as the descent dress code. He always uses the perfumes to attract the people in the meeting. When he visits the house of Maman Pauline, Michel is completely attracted by the dress code of Uncle Rene and he wishes to become like his uncle. It is the replication of hegemony because European society dominates the Africans in the view of dress culture and it is existed through some Africans in Africa. It does not only affect the elders rather it has got the influence in the life of young society.

The supremacy role of Westerners was not developed whereas it was enforced. Africans are unable to emerge from the colonized thought because they devalue the native society and their strength. Papa Roger is accounted under this perspective because he plays a vital role in devaluing his society through his act. The notable point is that he is psychologically corrupted to believe that Europeans are greater than Africans in the aspect of intelligence and so on. Though there are so many radio stations existed in his native country, he never bothers and values them.

His misunderstanding attitude is transformed to his son Michel. He always glorifies the intelligence of Europeans because he is employed in the hotel, run by White. All the European channels attempt to expound the happenings of Africa. Their target is to degrade Africans in the world and they take a lot of effects to prove that Africans are not capable to be united. Most of the Africans fail to comprehend the original ideology of Europeans in focusing elements of Africa. The misunderstanding capacity of Paper Roger is explained as "Papa Roger doesn't want to listen to the Voice of the Congolese Revolution this morning; he's turned into Voice of America. He thinks the Americans are the only people who know what's happening in the world" (81).

The quoted lines explicitly demonstrate the psyche of native Africans. Papa Roger is the representative of the whole African society, he fails to value his native media because he emphasis that Europeans are always updated and they obtain the news of the whole world and broad cast them as they are. The wrong conception is not stopped with him rather he transforms his son Michel very often that Europeans are always intellectuals and they collect the news very informatively to the world.

The brave native Africans are enforced to face the harmful situation even though they render their maximum help to the whites. The betrayal act happens immediately after the whites realization of the black development. Mabanckou decodes the character Christopher Smith as an experienced personality of African society. While the emergency situation is enquired to Smith, he responds with lots of hegemonic events of Europeans. He unfolds his huge book in order to refer the supremacy over Africans. It throws light on hidden role of

Europeans in the African continent. They enkindle the Africans to fight against their own race. To the core, they provide arms to one side to destroy the peace of the country. This incident still finds the root of Europeans in African countries and their dominant role is proved through the book of Smith.

Smith as an interviewer, Sophie asks about the historical event of Africans and how they were betrayed during the colonization period. André Grenard Matsoua is reported as politician. He is accounted to gloss the betrayal event against Africans. It is expounded by Smith as:

Sophie, no one denies that Matsoua added his own stone to the edifice of the French empire. He was captain of the one of the black regiments in the colonial army, the 22nd, known as the Senegalese Tirailleur, though only Senegalese served in it, but Congolese too, like Matsou! Sadly he died in prison, where he had been sent to forced labour by the same colonial administration under which he'd served, he was becoming a significant voice, representing hope – and danger. (89)

The above passage delineates the betrayal of Europeans, done against to the mostly helped Africans. Matsoua strived hard to spread the French empire across the world since he had participated so many wars in the side of France. He was awarded for his hard work with the position of captain in the colonial army. His death was very cruel because he opened his mouth for the liberalization. He was sent to prison and enforced to do the labour work. Though he did lots of supportive acts to the French army, he was not considered. He was made to undergo the same trial as the prisoners. Smith strongly emphasis that Europeans were merciless and they did not consider the people who supported or never supported. They executed them with no proper evidence of guilty.

The postcolonial theory hegemony is adopted to highlight the aim of this research and it conveys that the dominant role of the nation over another nation. The economical dominant role through derailment solution, political dominance through selecting and deselecting the African presidents, sociological dominance through making the school children to recite their country history, dress code dominance through attracting the young society and the betrayal event of Europeans illustrate the colonial Africa. The study of this research is that African is still under the colonization invisibly even after the independence. Europeans are the deciding authorities in Africa because they have the control over the political and economical part of Africa.

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