

MOVING COLONIES: THE MIGRANT SUBJECT IN A POST-COLONIAL SETTING

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The paper deals with an inverted model of post-colonial representation. More often than not, the entire discourse concerned with this has been focused on the colonizer's influence on the colonized land, the movement of the colonizer towards the land intended for the process of colonization, and the ravages concurred by the colonizing masters. As opposed to this, there is another body of rather untold fragments of stories which are available in bits and pieces. The ones that talk about the movement of the colonized towards the colonizer, where the underpinning is of will and not force in Foucauldian terms and where the revilement does not necessary give us portraits painted in black and white. In the French-Algerian context, we have a movement of necessity, the colonization is not forces, or inflicted but willing and accepted. In another context of Afro-Italian, it is more about the surviving instinct of the so-called colonizing population, for them moving to a colony was the only possible, viable option. The paper intends to question the idea of devilry unwittingly attached with the process of colonization. Is it possible to have another aspect, another context, another meaning of under-stated narratives?

"A stranger here with the nerves of a stranger and yet a knowledge of the language and the history of language and writing. I felt that my presence in the old valley was part of an upheaval (.....)"

—V.S.Naipaul, *Enigma of Arrival* (1987)

THE QUESTION AROUND THE ITALIAN PRE-CONDITION

In the past decades Post-Colonial as a subject matter has gathered enough valences to snowball the whole purview of not just theory but literary practices. From the alley of an essentially responsive undertaking, it has branched out tremendously. So much so, that for us the debate has gone much ahead from the Orient/Occident debate. It has proven to be not just diverse but contentious and fraught providing a fertile ground for further formulations to take root and grow.

From the vary many aspects of the Post-Colonial, a rather intriguing picture presents itself when one takes the discussion to the context of French and Italian colonial conquests and more importantly its aftermath. One obvious thing, which familiarizes itself immediately, is perhaps the unusualness. Especially when one immediately thinks of Post-Colonialism as a matter of the "West" over the "Rest". (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 194) Although Edward Said remains the *de rigueur* with Bhabha and Spivak to boot the phenomenon. What we witness in the said matter tips the balance.

For once, in the French-Algerian context we have contra-motion. The colony or rather the people of the colony make a mass movement in direction of the

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colonizer. But before we get into that aspect, let us familiarize ourselves with the history of French dominance of Algeria. The fall of Algeria by the French Armada in 1830 gave birth to a long history of colonization, marginality, exile and racism. The project continued and resulted in mass migration which continued two centuries later so much so, that the 1993 Census records that there were no less than two million North Africans in France. Algeria was one of the most stable colonies of France, with infrequent bouts of resistance and their dependence of France for economic sustenance. Prof. Jim House (1985) records:

“The migration of the colonized Arab-Berbers from Algeria to mainland France was the earliest and most extensive of all colonial migration to Western Europe before the 1960s. Initiated in the late 19th century, accelerated by the presence of Algerians in French factories and the Army during WWI, male labor migration became an established component of the colonial economy from the early 1920s.” (House 2)

But the same phenomenon of migration acquires a very different and not too kind connotation when it makes the proverbial transition from the colonial to the post-colonial setting. After the Algerian independence in 1962, the migration did not deter but it came to pose a different set of challenges. For one, there was no going back. The meant an attempt to change the status. From the French subject to French national (it would be preposterous to use the term *citizen* for the Algerian migrant, just yet). This batch of people became according to sociologist Sayyad (1999) the “second generation” migrants who came with their families to claim home and hearth as in opposed to the “first generation” who were mainly male laborers earning to send the money back home. We witness in the second generation the enduring reality of a colonial power mechanism, we have with us that brand post-colonial which according to *The Empire Writes Back*, “refer to the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day”. (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2001).

Clearly, gaining independence from the Colonial power isn’t enough to make the colonial post-colonial. Teleology is deferred, definitions are debunked and structures unravel. We put at stake, much more than a sense of independence. In the wake of a migrated post-colonial subject the realities of History, Language, Culture and Religion all are uncomfortably jeopardized. And as Homi Bhabha (1993:223) reminds us frequently, redefining is a dangerous task. This is what he writes:

“To revise the problem of global space from the postcolonial perspective is to move the location of culture difference away from the space of demographic plurality to the borderline negotiations of cultural translation.”

The passage of previously colonized North Africans within the boundaries of French metropolis, which settled there, resulted not just in reordering of the urban space but also the presence of the previously colonial subject within the subjective space

of the French- mainland began a new chapter. Suddenly, the act of migration which was to avail comfort and economic stability for the French Metropolis in the wake of the daunting climate of World Wars, became a threatening project as colonized started carving personal space in the Colonizer's burrow. Like the fabled Ixion's wheel, the movement became troubling and in retaliation we witness some of the acutest identity crisis in the history of post-colonialism which threatened the second and third generation Algerians.

Traditionally the Colonizer remains blissfully unaware of its subject welfare, mostly by choice. Even *the white-man's burden* is merely a clever ploy of self-benefit that operated through magnificent lip-service. But in this French- Algeria migration manifestation, the vested interest of the dominant was challenged and threatened. This is colored differently from Appaiah's (2007: 27) analysis of migration in post-colonialism:

"Migration", she writes, "a condition in which a fair few were looking for thought and yet others were looking simply for food. Thorough going ignorance about the ways of others is a privilege of the powerful". Azouz Begag's (2007) most renowned novel *The Shanty Town Kid*, is an important achievement in this branch of post-colonial crisis. It deals primarily the problem of being an Algerian born in France and then being stuck in the jigsaw puzzle of identity-crisis that grips every one of his social standing.

Written from the perspective of a young child, living in a slum of Lyon it forces the unpleasant questions of belonging and claiming in a world where nothing comes easy and everything has a price of astronomical proportions. Torn between a mother who wants him to become a *"charming little French gentleman"* (Ibid, 61) and a father who expects him to cling to a ghost culture of a country that manifests only in the long forgotten anecdotes about a home, there isn't much choice.

Except that the opening, though far and few can be seen in gaining a social status of a successful man. But even then, it would be an unfairly reductive summation to claim that attaining it can save all problems. It can move the family out from the slum to the apartments but those are the apartments meant for the migrants. It a State- approved space, one can claim an identity but it will be essentially an assigned one. The migrants of a post-colonial set-up have to undergo a chain migrations. From Algeria to French slums, from slums to flats on the city out-skirts, before the process of assimilation can even take off. Till the time the status-quo is guarded closely by the threatened metropolis.

ITALIAN COLONIZATION IN AFRICA AND THE POST-COLONIAL CONDITION

The Italian presence in the horn of Africa began in 1882 with the occupation of Assab Bay and lasted until 1941, when the United Kingdom took command of the area. From the time when Francesco Crispi was Prime Minister, at the beginning of the Colonialist era, the *necessity* of Italian Colonialism according to the fascist

propaganda was linked to the search for a so called fourth shore (Quarta Sponda) for Italian migrants who were leaving the country en-masse during that period. In this case, we have the usual motion flow, the colonialist moving to the colony. But unlike other European powers that sent their men as representatives, here they went because there wasn't much choice. In the nineteenth century, population settlement came to be understood as colonial expansion courtesy of the Italian Liberals. Since, Italy was deprived of the capital that would facilitate plantation colonies for economic expansion, in a twisted way, Colonialism was linked with migration. This is what we know from Leone Carpi, the sociologist perspective:

"The Italian word colonia referred to settlements of emigrants in foreign countries, and also to overseas possessions. In this manner, emigration itself is a form of colonial expansion". (Choate, 2003:3)

This was a very clever ploy, as it served two purposes. The migration took the edge off the growing population of Italy, (which needless to say they could ill afford), second it brought into motion another post-colonial explanation mechanism, that of Ethnographic expansion. While temporary migrants brought home a few months' wages, permanent Italian settlements expanded Italy's opportunities for long term trade as well as overseas representation. In this manner colonial expansion became directly proportional to population outlet., emigration ensuring the enduring reality of colonialism.

But, this unidirectional flow was soon challenged. Migration continued but it moved from Africa to America. As Emilio Franzina (2000: 43) records, "*under the pressure of industrialization and changing markets, transatlantic emigration skyrocketed. Optimists regarded the expansion of emigrants across the globe more successful than the conquest of Africa.*" Not surprisingly, this became an enduring interpretive nexus, supported by Institutions and Politicians in Italy.

From this two directional and many dimensional approach of colonization emerges a new groundwork of postcolonialism. One that jarred with the available frameworks in interesting ways. We have with us a minority discourse which is still raw and uncrated but poignant in its originality. Furthermore, the entire narrative gives weight to the arguments made by Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd (1990: 234) who insist on "*minority cultures in place of multiculturalism*". This kind of a colonial history gives way to a postcolonial society where though the desire for assimilation is not dead, but the project made out of it is deeply suspicious.

The literature of this post-colonial setting is alive with Bakhtinian *dialogism*. The various acts of name-dropping, mixing languages, and innate sense of multiplicity now haunt the polyglot colonial metropolis. In the words of Elleke Boehmer (2009: 229):

"The post-colonial writers in English are able to express their view of a world fissured, distorted and made incredible by cultural clash and displacement." If the post-colonial text generally is to borrow from Homi Bhabha a "*hybrid object*", then the migrant text is

that hybridity writ large and in color. One of such is Ennio Flaiano's (2011) *The Short-Cut*. Set in Ethiopia during the Italian invasion (1935-36), the novel tells the story of an Italian officer who accidentally kills an Ethiopian woman and is distressed by the awareness of his act. This is one of the few Italian texts (constantly in print for sixty years) dealing with the misdeeds of Italian colonialism in East Africa.

The novel carries the strong post-colonial tone of censure and recollection. Memory plays a vital part especially that which deals exclusively with a history that has been distorted enough times in the wake of the colonial project. Memory of a colonial past is a kinetic space that allows migrations of reminiscences carried over by the post-colonial.

There are various tones of recollections and even more tenors of their substances. We do not have the comfort of taking sides. The colony and the metropolis, the dominant and the subject, the migrant and the resident all shift spaces relentlessly and it is no wonder that Post-colonialism as a theory is kept constantly on its toes in this blinding speed of changing perspectives.

From past couple of decades the direction of European post-colonialism seems to be geared towards a historical retrieval. Which Canadian writer Beatrice Culleton identifies as "*the ethical imperative of reconciliation with the past*". In this divided, displaced and uncertain field of post-colonial literary theory, we are faced with a photograph that has been washed in the rain. Discernible patterns are non-recognizable and the attempt now must be to trace semblances of belonging.

Writers like Azouz Begag (2007) and Ennio Flaiano (2011) amongst many others, create space of a new kind of sensibility to take root. One that looks away from broad categories of right and wrong and looks inward to discover what went wrong with the considered right. From the influx of migratory politics and resettlement debates we have arrived at the conclusion that it is no longer a stock exercise to assign blames. And also a niggling suspicions that the historians and theorists don't always get it right. So as Marquez (2008: 122) warned us in *Big Mama's Funeral*:

"It is time to get that stool by the door and tell the story, before the historians arrive"

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