Original Article

Representations of the postcolonial state in the childhood metaphor in selected postcolonial texts

Oduor Tony Laban*, Michael Wainaina and John Mugubi

Department of Literature, Kenyatta University, Kenya

*Corresponding Author

Oduor Tony Laban
Department of Literature,
Kenyatta University,
Kenya
E-mail: oduor@yahoo.com

Keywords:

Postcolonial literature,
Literature,
Metaphorical concepts,

Abstract

In the analysis of postcolonial literature, there is no systematic construction of a framework to factor in childhood as a metaphor. Postcolonial criticism has not been engaged further in the enterprise of literary analysis, particularly on form. Consequently, this research fills the need to recast the focus of postcolonial criticism to the analysis of form in literature" (through the use of metaphor of childhood). Hawley picks out one author, Salman Rushdie who is often studied under postcolonial criticism. He singles out that postcolonial critics *look only* for Rushdie-like characteristics. It is in the interest of this research to apply childhood as a different set of characteristic or criterion to profit the agency of postcoloniality. This research also, therefore, contributes to this critique by establishing further that postcolonial criticism embodies a wider canon and that postcolonial texts are not a 'handful and recurring'. This research introduces pericolonial zones as well as exposing further 'the list' to include the selected texts; *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, in addition to *The God of Small Things* and *Nervous Conditions*. A sifting of childhood metaphor, in relation to postcoloniality, engenders further appreciation on the analysis of the literary context and beyond.

1. Introduction

Metaphorical concepts can be extended beyond the range of ordinary literal ways of thinking into the range of what is called figurative (Lakoff and Johnson 460). This assertion helps to realise the certainty of a metaphor's functionality. The urgency then is the identification of a metaphor. Conceptual metaphor theory currently represents the dominant theoretical framework in the academic study of metaphor (Gibbs, *Evaluating Conceptual Metaphor Theory* 530). Thus it was employed in this study. More about arguments surrounding Conceptual Metaphor Theory are raised in the literature review of metaphors later on.

To identify a conceptual metaphor, it should be known whether "the semantic elements of the content of a text are from the same domain of knowledge or not" (Steen 23). The content of semantic elements is the context within which the comparison element of metaphor identification occurs. The domains of knowledge or the context for this research are childhood and postcoloniality or postcolonial experiences. They (domains of knowledge) supply the context for the function of a metaphor and this is corroborated by Cameron's observation that there is a context involved in the interpretation of metaphors.

The implication of Steen's suggestion for this research is that to speak of childhood as a metaphor in postcolonial literature, there needs to be a set-up of a non-literal comparison. By virtue of the two referential elements (childhood and postcolonial relationships) premised on two different domains of knowledge, there is no direct applicability of their foundational constituencies and decontextualised contents. There is no direct referential application of childhood to postcoloniality. This creates the need to set up a framework of non-literal comparison. After such comparison, the decontextualised content of childhood may hold referential value on postcolonial criticism, in literary portraiture.

1.1 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are;

(a) To examine how childhood is an analytic concept in *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, *The God of Small Things*, and *Nervous Conditions* as postcolonial literary texts.
(b) To establish in what way(s) childhood has been engaged as a metaphor, in *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, *The God of Small Things*, and *Nervous Conditions*.
(c) To interrogate the (in) effectiveness of childhood as a metaphor in the representation of the postcolonial state.

1.2 Justification of the study

To identify a metaphorical implication from a discourse, Kittay proposes that the reorganisation of meaning that the conceptual oddity forces may also, in the end, direct us to new conception of the world, either to new theories about the actual world or t o a new vision of the world as reflected in a poem or novel (187). The conceptual oddities which are a reference to metaphors are additional ways of looking at a discourse: childhood in post-colonial literatures. In implication, Kittay also admits that metaphors are meaningful. The fact that a metaphor contains meaning is however not debated upon, and she further states that there is an agreement on the ability of the metaphor to bring new insights.

2. Research Methodology

This research is an examination of the selected literary texts with a close focus on the construction of childhood as a metaphor. Data is obtained from critical and creative literary output. The data generation involved reading, interpreting then qualitatively analysing the selected texts through mapping as constructed in the conceptual framework.

The primary texts have been purposively chosen on the basis of not only their diverse geo-cultural backgrounds but also similarities in the aftermath effects of colonial experience. This also applies to a nation such as Ethiopia which was not colonised like other nations and whose texts are under study herein.

The metaphor mapping process constructed in the conceptual framework is instrumental in dissecting the dichotomies of the rulers versus the ruled, weak versus strong, and adults versus the children. The conceptual framework is a constant in the examination of both childhood and postcolonial criticism within the constraints of a metaphor. The study was a library-based research majorly undertaken in Maseno University Postgraduate Library, Kenyatta University's Post Modern Library and on-line resources such as peer-reviewed journals and data bases.

This study was based on literary texts from postcolonial geopolitical areas. Its intent was to examine the metaphorical construction of childhood in the selected texts. It was limited to specific tenets of postcolonial criticism as discussed above. It is equally limited by the inability to use all the constituent elements of childhood and postcolonial criticism.

The selected texts were chosen on different but consciously purposive grounds. To have a more inclusive historical perspective, *Nervous Conditions* was chosen as it was published in 1988 and *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* came out in 2010. In addition, Maaza Mengiste's text, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, gives a taste of Ethiopian pericolonial experience in relation to postcoloniality. The wider geographical spread of postcoloniality necessitated the inclusion of *The God of Small Things* 1998 from the Indian sub-continent.

3. Results and Discussion

The focal point of this study was representations of the postcolonial state through the medium of childhood metaphor in the selected postcolonial texts. This Chapter ties up the research with respect to the objectives set out for this research. It presents the summary, conclusions and recommendations from the research.

"Childhood'' as an academic concept is not a product of literary studies, as was shown in this study earlier on. Some of the traditional forms or tools in the study of literature as a discipline include stylistic components, point of view, character analysis, plot construction and thematic investigation in literary exploits. The reins of childhood as systematic and metaphoric tools present a firm challenge as it falls within the province of other disciplines such as anthropology and psychology. The study was pegged on a conceptual framework systematically formulated from elements of postcolonial theory, childhood and metaphor.

Through the construction of and analytically working on the conceptual framework, this study demonstrated how childhood is metaphorically used in the appreciation and analysis of the postcolonial literature. This analytical tool brought together the constituents of childhood and postcolonial theory under the umbrella of metaphor. The study used the laid-down corresponding conceptual qualities of childhood domain to map onto postcoloniality. From and during the mapping, findings were derived of which a summary follows below.

One of the objectives of this study was to examine how childhood is an analytic concept in the selected texts, *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*, *The God of Small Things*, and *Nervous Conditions.* The conceptual framework which was constructed was effectively important in the analysis of the metaphor of childhood. Of much import, from the conceptual framework, was the idea of mapping through which postcoloniality was analysed in terms of childhood. The conceptual framework greatly aided the understanding of what a metaphor is as well as isolating the characteristics of not only childhood but also postcoloniality. Thus analysis of the texts was predicated on the parallel of features of the two conceptual domains. The study found out that childhood as a metaphor can then be used to open new analytical vistas in the appreciation of the literary.

Some postcolonial concepts constructed in the conceptual framework easily lend themselves to metaphorical implications than others. It is evident in the construction of this thesis that certain concepts are easier woven in a metaphorical correspondence than others. Marginalisation in childhood is applicable to the marginalisation of the citizen by their own government or the native by the coloniser. Hybridity could not easily find corollaries in the post-colony as it does on the global scale. Thus in this inquiry, hybridity has not been included in the third chapter which analyses the post-colony.

The use of the metaphor of childhood brings to fore literature addressing political, social, and cultural relationships both in the post-colony and in the global arena as already discussed. This was in line with the second objective which sought to address the consequences of childhood when engaged as a metaphor in the selected literary texts.

It was realised that decolonisation is a resilient exercise, both within the post-colony and within the global realities of postcolonial approach to criticism. In view of the injustices and atrocities committed in these two spheres, there is a deliberate and concerted effort to initiate change. The fight for change was found to be part of decolonisation, a project of postcoloniality.

The examination of childhood as a metaphor in the postcolonial nations helped realise that there is not a homogenous condition in postcolonial nations. This is so because, in childhood, there is an erasure of socio-economic boundaries. This is in a manner that makes the adult to view, at times, no social categorisations among children, as seen in the previous Chapters. Having been categorised by their inaccessibility to instruments of power by the adult society, the child seeks solidarity and understanding through socialising with peers. Thus, through a metaphorical inference, the oppressed view themselves, in solidarity, as equals. However there may be interpersonal differences. To add more within childhood itself, there are different categorisations such as Sophie Mol who is half-Indian and half-English. The diversity in childhood connotes a metaphorical presumption of heterogeneity of the postcolonial population considered as the other.

The research also found out that analysis of the postcolonial approach in literary studies does not have to be necessarily about a stock set of interpretations and texts. This is evident in the range of application and construction of childhood as a metaphor. This study has shown the necessity, to those interested in the crafting of political landscape in postcolonial worlds from a multidisciplinary perspective, that childhood has an illustrative function in a variety of concepts as has been made manifest herein.

Moreover, in the employment of childhood, particularly in the post-colony, it was discovered that there is a preferential treatment of those close to the centre of power, in comparison to those further away. The rulers of the post-colony treat citizens better in the same way that parents treat their own children better than the others. The ones further off are treated as subjects.

The interests of the (neo-) imperial powers and the rulers of the post-colony were found to be preserved at the expense of the marginalised party, as brought out in the metaphor of childhood. It is tactfully done such as the case of the policemen, Baby Kochamma, and Estha and Rahel during the unlawful arrest and extrajudicial killing of Velutha in *The God of Small Things*.

The study realised that childhood has been used as a stylistic technique to echo the cultural and socio-political themes of the time. It is, therefore, a conclusion that the authors' choice in the use of childhood is, and to a great length, an effective narrative technique. Childhood has been used to bring out the linguistic condition of the nations under which the texts have been authored.

It is interesting that in all the three target texts under inspection herein, the child is a victim of adult cruelty on several instances. This can be metaphorically equated to the mistreatment of the post-colonial nations, before and after the end of proper colonialism. Even though the child character is forced to give in to such cruelty, the

child portrays a resilient attitude in response. As well, the child retains the mark of being the morally-upright party. Thus, childhood is a representation of not only the collective resilience in face of the unbalanced realities in the postcolonial societies but also the continuity of life among such peoples.

Besides, the study established that literary artists use childhood metaphorically to transcend political, social and cultural barriers that devoice the masses in post-colonial nations. Berhane and Tizita play like equals, even though their parents are not socio-economically equal. Tizita's parents employ Berhane's mother as a house help. The texts employ childhood symbolically to transcend political barriers that devoice the masses in the texts.

The interrogation of childhood as a metaphor in postcolonial literature and nation found out that it is a pivotal construct in political, social and cultural discourse as constructed in *Beneath the Lion's Gaze, Nervous Conditions* and *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*.

The use of childhood as a metaphor in the postcolonial literature examined herein portrays it as a *disputed* zone of formation of new social and cultural realities. Africans, as an illustration - this may include other geopolitical zones - found out that they remained the subject of the now independent states (Chabal 90). Thus, the people who were called natives, by the coloniser, find themselves subjects of the new governments. They also find themselves in a new global political reality. Childhood thus largely signifies a continuity of subjecthood and a desire to break free.

It was also observed that childhood has been deliberately devoiced by the adult so as to echo the cultural and socio-political themes of the time, which have been discussed above. It is the contention of this inquiry that the choice of childhood was, to a great length, an effective narrative technique. *Nervous Conditions*, *The God of Small Things*, and *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* use the term metaphorically to transcend political barriers that devoice the masses in the novels. In so doing, 'childhood' is thus a way of figuratively [re]presenting the postcolonial society. Childhood has, therefore, been used to portray the masses who cannot openly express themselves, even though they try, in the face of an oppressive condition in the selected novels.

Childhood as a metaphor in the selected texts, shows that there is no similarity in the colonised cultures and colonial experiences. Different countries have different experiences with postcoloniality. The Ethiopian case is as distinct from the Indian scenario as from Zimbabwean case. Each country had a unique sense of postcoloniality.

In addition, this inquiry has realised that the social, cultural and political struggles in the national front are made manifest through the analysis of childhood in a metaphorical space. The Derg dictatorial regime in *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* cruelly treats a child in its attempt to hold back dissenting voices. The Kochamma family's treatment of Estha and Rahel serves to suspend childhood in the child characters in *The God of Small Things*. The inconsiderate treatment of Tambu and Nyasha is an example of highhandedness by adults who have authority above the child. The option of using the child characters is a way of privileging the marginalised. Childhood has been used to give a voice to the subaltern.

The third and final objective of this study was the question of effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the metaphor of childhood as an analysis of the postcolonial state. Weak nations have little influence in global matters just like the children who have been marginalised in texts that were examined in this study. To the length of such a discovery, then the metaphor of childhood in regard to the postcoloniality is an effective tool to view the pericolony and the post-colony.

The associations of the weak states or nations are a convenient assembly on the basis of comfort for one another. Such associations also help in resistance against the powerful and often domineering neo-imperial powers on the global front. This was metaphorically manifested through the children who gather in a league of their own which excludes the adults or the adult world.

The exertion of fear to subjugate the marginalised nations came out through the analysis of the metaphor of childhood in representing the postcolonial state. The fear arises out of the perceived influence that the powerful nations have. This was viewed through the mapping of Tambu's fear of her overreaching uncle on the postcoloniality.

The use of violence prevalently in the post-colony is a tool that is meant to instil fear in the ruled. Consequently control is achieved over the ruled who then effectively becomes othered from the process of government. The effect of the violence is long-lasting as has been illustrated in depth in Chapter Three in this thesis. In effect, the metaphor of childhood thus is important in detailing further the condition of the post-colony.

The performance of power is used in exclusion of the subjects from the process of government. In the process of exclusion, the rulers favour themselves. The end result is the subaltern agency of the ruled as they occupy an inferior rank in the post-colony. Having been relegated to an inferior position, the subject then engages in acts of resistance. The thesis established that these acts of resistance can either be passive or active or even both as evident through the depiction of childhood metaphorically.

4. Conclusions

This research used a conceptual framework which linked the three elements of this study: metaphor, childhood and postcoloniality. It was instrumental in the analysis of how childhood as a metaphor can be a tool in examining postcoloniality.

It is notable through the metaphor of childhood, the postcolonial state takes the role of a theatre in which power relationships are staged and executed as well. Such executions of power are to the detriment of those who do not hold the instruments of power. In view of the difficult terrain of postcoloniality, the metaphor of childhood points out the existence of hope and the interest and ability to initiate desirable changes.

To the extent of showing new ways of appreciating postcoloniality, the metaphor of childhood, in representation of the postcolonial state, is quite effective modus operandi. The parallel that can be drawn between postcoloniality and childhood indicate a great level of similarity. Thus postcolonial states can be effectively represented using childhood as a metaphor.

5. Recommendations

After the inquiry carried out herein, there is a recommendation that the scope of this research be carried out in other postcolonial texts. This research did not make use of other genres of literature, specifically poetry, the short story and drama forms. Thus a wider area of research using this study as a springboard is still possible. This study recommends that the literary tools constructed herein may be used to analyse other literary genres such as poetry, short story and drama as well as other novels as well.

In addition, using the constructed framework, an investigation can be carried out to ascertain the significance of childhood as a metaphor using other theories in literature, given that there are many other theoretical approaches in the enterprise of literary analysis. The scope of the postcolonial approach can as well be narrowed for a further study.

Apart from the use of metaphors, other stylistic techniques such as symbolism and other figurative use of language can be interrogated within the available framework while manipulating the other variable factors in a given study. This would further enhance the impact of literary studies.

A detailed study of other pericolonial nations or situations, such as the black populations in the U.S, Australian aborigines, inter alia, was not possible given the scope of this thesis. In effect, a study of pericoloniality (both literary and non-literary) is necessary as it will unearth a supplementary comprehension of the human condition.

References

[1] Ada Pauline Uwakweh. "Debunking Patriarchy: The Liberational Quality of Voicing in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions."* *Research in African Literatures.* 26 (1995): 75-84. Web. 25th Aug. 2012.

[2] Allison, James and Alan, Prout (eds.). *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood, Contemporary Isuues in the Sociological Study of Childhood.* London: 1997.

[3] Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities, 2nd ed.* London:Verso 1991.

[4] Appiah Kwame Anthony. *In My Father's House; Africa in the Philosophy of Culture.* New York. Oxford University Press. 1992.

[5] Aries, Philippe. *Centuries of Childhood; A Social History of Family Life.* New York: Alfred A.Knopf . 1962.

[6] Bradford, Richard. *Stylistics.* New York: Routledge, 1997.

[7] Bulcha, Mekuria. "The Politics of Linguistic Homogenization in Ethiopia and the Conflict over the Status of 'Afaan Oromoo'" *African Affairs* 96 (1997): 325-352. Web. 23rd Feb. 2013.

[8] Cameron, Lynne. *Metaphor in Educational Discourse.* New York: Continuum, 2003.

[9] Clay M.M. *Change over Time in Children's Literacy Development.* Auckland New Zealand: Heinemann, 2001.

[10] Cohen, Ada. "Childhood between Past and Present: Introduction." *Hesperia Supplements* 41 (2007): 1-22 JSTOR. Web. 16th Mar. 2012.

[11] Dabydeen D. And Nana Wilson-Tagoe. *A Reader's Guide to West Indian and Black British Literature.* Sydney: Rutherford Press, 1987.

[12] Donaldson Davidson "What Metaphors mean." *Metaphor* 5 (1978): 31-47. Web. 8th Mar. 2012.

[13] Edwards D. Justin. "*Postcolonial Literature, A Guide to Essential Criticism.*" New York, 2008.

[14] Esben Leifsen. "Childhoods in Shifting Analytical Spaces: Cross-Cultural, Biocultural, and Human Ecological Perspectives." *Reviews in Anthropology.* 38:3 (2009):197-216. Web. 14th Dec 2012

[15] Hetherington E., Mavis and Ross D. Parke. *Child Psychology: A Contemporary Viewpoint* 5th ed. Revised by Ross D. Parke and Virginia O. Locke. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1999.

[16] Heywood John, Elena Semino, and Mick Short. "Linguistic Metaphor Identification in Two Extracts from Novels" *Language and Literature.* 11:1 (2002): 35-54 SAGE Publications. Web. 17th Mar. 2012.

[17] Hobsbawm, Eric and Ranger Terence (eds). *The invention of Tradition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983. . Huskinson, Janet. Constructions of Childhood in ancient Greece and Italy. *Hesperia Supplements* 41 (2007): 323-338 JSTOR. Web. 16th March 2012.

[18] Innes, C.L. *Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English.* Cambridge: C.U.P. 2007.

[19] Jackie, Marsh. *Childhood, Culture and Creativity.* Sheffield: Sheffield University, 2010.

[20] Jenks, Chris. "Editorial: Many Childhoods?" *Childhood.* 11:5 (2004) 5-8 SAGE Publications. Web. 14th Dec. 2012.

[21] Childhood; Key Ideas. Routledge London. 1996. E-book

[22] Kebede, Messay. "Eurocentrism and Ethiopian Historiography: Deconstructing Semitization Author(s): Reviewed work(s)" *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies.* 1:1 (2003): 1-19. Web 23rd Feb. 2013.

[23] Keysar Boaz and Glucksberg Sam. "Metaphor and Communication: Aspects of Metaphor Comprehension" *Poetics Today.* 13:4 (1992) 633-658. Web. 7th Dec 2014

[24] Kim E. Stone. "In the Bedroom: The Formation of Single Women's Performative Space in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions." The Journal of Commonwealth Literature.* (2006): 111-126 JSTOR. Web. 23rd Aug. 2012.

[25] King, L. Margaret. "Concepts of Childhood: What We Know and Where We might Go." *Renaissance Quarterly* 60 (2007): 371-407 JSTOR. Web. 16th Mar. 2012.

[26] Kittay Eva Feder. "The Identification of Metaphor.*" Synthese* 58 (1984): 153-202 Springer. Web. 16th Mar. 2012.

[27] Knowles, Gianna. *Ensuring Every Child Matters, A Critical Approach.* London. SAGE, 2010.

[28] Kovecses Zoltan. *Metaphor; A Practical Introduction.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. Print

[29] Kraftl, Peter. "Utopia, Childhood and Intention." *Journal for Cultural Research*, 13:1 (2009), 69-88. Web. 23rd Nov. 2012

[30] Kurtz J. Roger. "Debating the language of African literature: Ethiopian contributions" *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 19:2 (2007) 187-205. Web. 23rd Feb. 2013

[31] Lakoff, George. and Johnson, Mark. "Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language."*Chicago Journal of Philosophy* 77, 1980. Web. 8th Mar. 2012.

[32] Metaphor in Everyday Language. London: University of Chicago Press, 1980 Afterword Universityof Chicago © 2003.

[33] Lindsay P. Aegerter. A Dialectic of Autonomy and Community: Tsitis

[34] Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions.* Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature 15, 2 (1996): 231-240 JSTOR. Web. 23rd Aug. 2012

[35] Maiti, Prasenjit. "History and Counterhistory: Novels and Politics" *Economic & Political Weekly.*35:27 (2000): 2382-2385 JSTOR. Web. 24th Sep. 2012.

[36] Mbembe, Achille. *On the Postcolony.* California: University of California Press, 2001.

[37] Mbiti S. John. *African Religions and Philosophy.* Nairobi: E.A.E.P., 1969.

[38] McGlone, S. Mathew. "Hyperbole, Homunculi, and Hindsight Bias: an Alternative Evaluation of Conceptual Metaphor Theory" *Discourse Processes.* 48:8 (2011) 563-574. Web. 24th Sep. 2012.

[39] Mengiste, Maaza. *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*. London: Vintage, 2010.

[40] Mielke L. Tammy. "Literary Constructs of African American Childhood in the 1930s American Children's Literature." Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Coventry. 2006.

[41] Mintz, Steven. "Why the History of Childhood Matters." *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 5.1 (2012): 17-28. Web. 31st March 2012.

[42] Mussolf, Andreas. "Study of Metaphor as Part of Critical Discourse Analysis, The." *Critical Discourse Studies* 9:3 (2012) 301-310. Web. 24th Sep. 2012.

[43] Nandi, Miriam. "Longing for the Lost (m)other – Postcolonial Ambivalences in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*" *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 46:2 (2010) 175-186. Web. 24th Sep. 2012.

[44] Neil Lazarus (ed.) *Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

[45] Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind;The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Nairobi: E.A.E.P., 1981.

[46] Richards I. A. *The Philosophy of Rhetoric.* London: OUP, 1936.

[47] Said W. Edward. *Orientalism.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.

[48] Schipper, Mineke. *Imagining Insiders; Africa and the Question of Belonging.* London: Casell, 1999.

[49] Young J. C. Robert. "What is Postcolonial?" *New Literary History*. 43 (2012): 13- 25. Web. 12th Dec. 2012.