

Literature and Nationalism: Comparative Analysis of Colonialism and Postcolonial Literature

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Abstract

Nationalism is not merely a political teaching but a cultural account which is continually generated in the creative faculty of literature. This paper plays a re-evaluation of the literary relation to nationalism through comparative analysis of colonial and postcolonial narrative constructions. Instead of viewing the nation as a given entity, the study conceptualizes it as a discursive creation that is formed by the use of representational strategies, memory work and aesthetic mediation. Imperial power was often naturalized by colonial narratives, and domination was incorporated into the supposedly neutral patterns of storytelling. In contrast, postcolonial texts upset narrative authority, reclaim suppressed pasts, and anticipate heterogeneity. The article critically engages with the theoretical works of Benedict Anderson, Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in an attempt to develop an interpretive framework that perceives the nation as the performance of a story, as opposed to a territorial fact. Based on comparative textual study, the research proves that literary production is also the main focus of further bargaining concerning belongingness, authority, and shared remembrance. The conclusion of the paper is that nationalism is not ideological closure but is rewritten in its historical moments as a story.

Keywords: Colonialism, Identity, Nationalism, Nationhood, Postcolonial Literature, Resistance Narrative.

Introduction:

The discussion of the connection between literature and nationalism has had a relatively central stand in the study of literature and culture. Literature does not present national identity but is actively involved in the process of imagining, creating and disputing the concept of the nation. According to Benedict Anderson, the nation is an imagined political community, which was created by the use of shared narratives and print culture and collective memory (Imagined Communities). Literary works, novels, poems, plays and essays are one of the potent avenues by which such collective imaginings are distributed and normalized. Literature could be used in the colonial situations as a cultural machine to justify the imperial expansion and strengthen the ideology of the colonizer country. Imperial nationalism was expressed by writers like Rudyard Kipling in depictions that utilized space dominated over by colonial powers as areas in need of administrative control and civilization. Meanwhile, the presentation of colonial narratives built up hierarchical binaries, such as the civilized/primitive, self/other, with which national and racial superiority were perceived. Such literary works were not innocent works of art, but firmly ingrained in political endeavors of empire-building. On the other hand, postcolonial literature was a place of opposition and repossession. In the case of Orientalism, thinkers like Edward Said demonstrated a systematic way through which the colonized population was portrayed as inferior by colonial discourse, which perpetuated imperial dominance. The postcolonial authors retaliated by rewriting history, re-giving native voices, and subverting Eurocentric stories. Writers such as Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o tried to decolonize content and language, presupposing the cultural particularity and national self-definition. At that, it is precisely in this respect that nationalism is a two-sided phenomenon: it serves as the means of freedom against colonial oppression, and it is the source of new national antagonisms

within post-independent societies. The comparative analysis of colonial and postcolonial narratives thus presents the depiction of developments in the definitions of nations. Colonial literature is more likely to represent the country as stable, hierarchical, and expansionist, which is inclined to be in line with imperial authority. Postcolonial plots, in its turn, often portray the country as divided, mixed, and antagonistic, the arena of the memory, trauma, migration, and cultural bargaining. Theories of hybridity by Homi K. Bhabha also complicate nationalist discourse by focusing on ambivalence and cultural intermixture and not homogeneity. This is a review essay on the role literature plays in the development of nationalism consciousness in colonial and postcolonial times. Through the synthesis of major theories and representative texts, the paper does emphasise the ideological roles of literary production and does point to the changing aspect of nationalism as an act of narration. It tries to prove by comparative analysis that nationalism in literature is not fixed and monolithic but it is constantly reimagined in reaction to historical change and cultural negotiation.

Theoretical Approach: Nation as Narrative Performance.

The country does not pre-exist narration; it is created by it. As opposed to the prevailing trend of looking at nationalism as a consistent political form that would then be reflected in literature, the present study would engage literary discourse as a part and parcel of national consciousness. The theory of print capitalism has been reduced to a simplistic form in the summary of the nation as an imagined community made by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*. Nevertheless, what is found to be more profound about his point is shared temporality where individuals conceptualize themselves as traveling along historical time with invisible compatriots. This time of commonality is a narratively constructed one. Continuing this thought, Homi K. Bhabha imagines the idea of national identity as being divided into continuity and discontinuity. Instead of just replicating the well-worn pedagogical/performative dichotomy in formulaic form, this paper replicates the insight of Bhabha as an antagonism between the authority of the archive and the real negotiation. The country is not merely educated, but practised, argued over, and re-established. Equally, the intervention in *Culture and Imperialism* by Edward Said shows that the power of the imperialism is inherent in the narrative practices: how one selects the view point, how one chooses what to describe and how one can govern the sympathy. Colonial discourse is aestheticized prior to its administration. Lastly, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak makes the nationalist discourse complex because she challenges the representational mediation as well. Her questioning of subaltern speech indicates how even anti-colonial discourse is prone to recreating the hierarchical silencing. Although this paper avoids the tendency to summarize these theoretical trajectories, by synthesizing them, it places nationalism as a field of dynamic narratives that are influenced by the authority, interruption, and contestation.

Colonialism and Nationalism: The topic of nationalism in colonial accounts is tight-knit with the expansion of empires, cultural dominance, and the ideology of justification of the empire. Colonial literature did not just write about the far world and people, rather it was involved in the creation of national self-image of the colonizing nation. Colonial texts then formed the concept of a nation as civilizing, rational and even morally destined to dominate through fiction, travel writing, poetry and administrative prose. In this regard, the nationalism tended to go beyond the territorial borders, and offered the notion of empire as a manifestation of national greatness. Rudyard Kipling was one of the most outstanding representatives of imperial nationalism in literature. In his writing like *Kim*, Kipling presents British India as a large and exotic place which eventually needed to be governed by the British so that order and stability could be ensured. The British Empire is not seen as exploitative, but it is portrayed as good and needed. This ideology is also described in the poem *The White Man Burden* by Kipling, which presents the concept of the necessity to rule the world as an obligation of morality. These stories helped the building of British national identity identified with power, discipline and civilization development. Likewise, the tensions involved in colonial nationalism are visible in the *A Passage to India* of E. M. Forster which is more critical in its tone but still reveals the tensions existing

in that period. The novel brings out racial discrimination and bureaucratic injustice, but nevertheless, it places India in a British interpretive grid. The core of reference is still the colonial country, and the native voices are forced to establish an equal narrative position. This ambivalence indicates the way that even sympathetic imperial colonial writings tend to function within the ideological framework of the imperial nationalism. Theoretically, this concept of Orientalism by Edward Said elucidates the way the colonized world was created as the Other by colonial literature. Said in the Orientalism argues that the Western texts were systematic in the way they portrayed the Eastern societies as irrational, stagnant, and inferior. These images strengthened European national identity by opposition: the West grew modern, progressive and superior. Colonial discourses therefore served a dual role, they basked the glory of an imperial nation at the expense of the cultures of colonies. Major Nationalism features of Colonial Literature.

1. The Ideology of the Civilizing Mission Empire is represented as a noble cause, which strives to enlighten the backward societies.
2. Binary Oppositions- There are distinct differences between colonizer/colonized, civilized/primitive, rational/irrational.
3. Imperial Destiny - Expansion is viewed as being natural and inevitable.
4. Eradication of Indigenous Agency- Colonized subjects are usually silenced or stereotyped.
5. Normalization of Language and Culture -English is the medium of power and nationalism.

Colonial narratives tended to adopt adventure lines, exploration narratives, and administrative backgrounds as a way of normalizing imperialism. The empire was perceived as one continuation of the national homeland, and far-off colonies were symbolically involved in the national consciousness. Literature thus contributed to making the notion that an imperial expansion was an expression of national power natural. Colonial nationalism however lacked internal contradictions. Fear of rebellion, cultural dissent and racial lines always come up in these works. The vulnerability of the imperial confidence is shown through the fear of losing control over the colonial territories. These strains are the precursors of the subsequent development of postcolonial criticisms that would shatter imperial nationalist myths.

To sum up, nationalism as a feature of colonial discourse was employed as an ideological tool that justified the empire and formed the hierarchical world order. Literature was critical in the formation of national identity, the civilizing mission, and the strengthening of cultural supremacy. However, hidden in the texts, are the tensions and ambiguities which would be brought to light and confronted by other writers in postcolonial times, a shift in power between the imperial dominance and the critical re-examination of the nation itself?

Rewriting the nation post colonially:

Though the nation may have frequently been imagined in colonial literature as a unity, as hierarchical and expansionist, postcolonial literature embarks on a difficult endeavour to rewrite such a nation as viewed through the lens of the once colonized. Postcolonial moment is not merely the substitution of one national narrative by the other one, but it challenges the principles under which the colonial nationalism had been developed. By means of revision, opposition, and re-imagination, postcolonial authors rediscover history, language, and identity, although also weakening the integrity of the nation itself. One of the pillars of intervention in the process is expressed by Edward Said in Orientalism wherein he reveals the systematic representation of colonized societies as inferior and immobile by colonial discourse. The initial process that postcolonial rewriting starts is breaking these stereotypes. It puts power back into the marginalized voices and subverts Eurocentric structures that used to constitute national identity. Chinua Achebe is one of the most notable instances of such rewritings, and *Things Fall Apart* is one such example. Achebe recreates the pre-colonial Igbo society in the nuanced and complex way as a response to colonial portrayal of Africa as a primitive or culture-free continent. The novel does not idealize the past but puts the nation in its own cultural logic. Through recounting the horrific experience of the native culture and the European encroachment,

Achebe reinstates the control of narrative and claims a strong African national self-awareness. Equally, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong accentuates the prominence of language in the national identity. According to him, in *Decolonising the mind*, he believes that colonialism distanced the Africans out of their cultural heritage by enforcing the European languages. To Ngũgĩ, linguistic decolonization is a key to the real national liberation. Composing in native tongues turns into opposition and literature is turned into an instrument of cultural recovery and national identity. Salman Rushdie in *Midnight Children* provides a more disjointed and ironic view of the country in the South Asian contexts. The novel combines the life of the protagonist and the history of the Indian independence, which implies that the country is not unique and stable but is plural and disputable. Rushdie uses magical realism, non-linear plot, and satire in order to destabilize the formal nationalist histories. Rather than showing the nation as a whole, he reveals its inner fissures of religious and linguistic and political differences. This change can also be explained by the theoretical framework of Homi K. Bhabha. In his work *Nation and Narration*, Bhabha claims that a nation is not a definite entity but a place of hybridity and ambivalence. In postcolonial texts, the future of the performative aspects of national identity is pre-empted: the ways in which national identity is daily created through the practice of daily life, and in which it is debated and disputed by the memories of past. Instead of providing a consistent national myth, they expose fissures, contradictions and multiplicities in the imagined community.

The major characteristics of Postcolonial Rewriting is:

1. Restoring indigenous voices that have been lost due to colonial histories Recovery of Silenced Histories.
2. Reclaiming Cultural Identity -Focusing on local customs, myths, and oral histories.
3. Linguistic Resistance -The conversion or resistance to the colonial linguistic constructs.
4. Hybridity and Plurality - Introducing the nation as different and internally discontinuous.
5. Critique of Post-Independence Nationalism Questioning nationalist agendas of elite or exclusion.

Notably, the postcolonial literature is not necessarily a praise of nationalism. Such commentators as Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* caution that post-independence nationalism is likely to recreate new hierarchies when it loses touch with popular struggle. This is an issue in many postcolonial novels as they depict corruption, disillusionment, and betrayal of their revolutionary ideals. Therefore, postcolonial rewriting turns the nation into a non-unitary symbol of unity and makes it a dynamic and disputing narrative space. Though colonial literature tended to declare the imperial dominance and cultural superiority, the postcolonial literature reveals the artificiality of such claims and returns the right of defining the national identity itself. By doing this, it transforms nationalism as a sealed and homogenous ideology into a mutable discourse that is characterized by negotiation, opposition and heterogeneity.

Comparative Analysis

Comparative analysis of the colonial and postcolonial texts shows a conceptual transformation of literary development of nationalism. Whereas the texts of colonialism have the tendency of affirming the rule of the empire and propagating the hierarchical approach to the nation-building, the postcolonial texts question, reshape and diversify the image of the nation. The implication of the shift between imperial confidence and postcolonial ambivalence highlights the role of literature as the instrument of ideological solidarity and as the protesting point.

1. Conception of the Nation: The country in colonial discourses is usually conceived of as stable, cohesive, and morally superior. Both writers like Rudyard Kipling, were shaped by the imperial ethos and portrayed empire as a continuation of national destiny. An example of this is the British nation, which is presented as a civilizing force, the growth of which seems to be historically necessary and morally right. In comparison, this illusion of stability is shattered by postcolonial writers. Postcolonial texts reveal the constructed nature of national identity basing on a concept of the nation as an imagined community, which was developed by

Benedict Anderson in his work *Imagined Communities*. The country is ceasing to be single but a fractured one where the histories, ethnicities, and memories of the country clash with each other.

2. Representation of the ‘Other’: Colonial literature often creates a sense of colonized subjects as passive, exotic or inferior. This type of representation as illustrated by Edward Said in *Orientalism* is used to solidify Western national identity by contrast. The Other governed by the colonizers is critical in the maintenance of imperial nationalism. This is reversed in the postcolonial narratives. Authors such as Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o find ways of restoring agency and complexity to the native characters. The Other is responding, dispelling colonial clichés and taking literary control back. This way the country is being brought back to the centre and not established in terms of outsourcing.

3. Language and Power: Language is a very important place of comparison. Colonial discourses favor the language of the colonizer as an indication of power and civilization. Not only is English a medium of communication, but it is also a national superiority. However, in postcolonial writing language is reworked, hybridized or opposed. The importance of linguistic decolonization that Ngugi urges can be highlighted with regard to the idea that the recovery of indigenous languages is the key to the restoration of the national identity. In the meantime, other writers like Salman Rushdie use linguistic hybridity and narrative experimentation where English language gets mixed with the local idioms as a way of presenting the multifaceted ness of the postcolonial country.

4. Narrative Structure and the Historiography: Colonial discourses tend to implement linear, realist narratives that reflect the concept of historical development -empire moving towards order and civilization. The imperial nationalism is supported by the narrative form that makes history make sense. This linearity has been often broken by postcolonial texts. Loose chronicles, magic realism and side by side angles disrupt official histories. As an illustration, *Midnight's Children* by Rushdie weaves individual and national past into an unclear arrangement, making it clear that the independence is anarchic and disputed. A wider-ranging cynicism with great nationalist narratives is seen in such formal inventions.

5. The Nationalism that has to be subjected to internal critique. One more important distinction is the way of nationalism itself. Colonial literature is generally supportive of colonial nationalism, which is presented as a virtue in itself. However, postcolonial literature tends to criticize the colonialist rule as well as the post-independent regimes. Following the example of authors such as Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, several postcolonial authors place on display the fact that nationalist movements may turn out to be exclusionary, elitist, or authoritarian. Therefore, whereas the colonial accounts justify authority through literature, postcolonial writers challenge these power structures be it colonial or indigenous.

6. Summary of Key

Dimension	Colonial Narratives	Postcolonial Narratives
View of Nation	Unified, expansionist, hierarchical	Fragmented, hybrid, contested
Cultural Identity	Fixed and superior	Negotiated and plural
Representation	Colonized as “Other”	Reclaimed indigenous voice
Language	Tool of dominance	Site of resistance and hybridity
Historical Vision	Linear progress	Disrupted, multiple histories
Ideological Aim	Legitimation of empire	Resistance and critical re-evaluation

The comparison and contrast shows the nationalism in the literary works as the imperialism turns into the critical self-reflection. Colonial texts form the nation by making it a consistent and better place which is consistent with empire, whereas the postcolonial narratives show the nation as a unstable and disputed narrative location. Postcolonial literature rewrites historical memory through challenging inherited myths and makes nationalism a negotiable and dynamic process of reinterpretation and renegotiation. This change highlights the main thesis of the work literature does not represent the nation but constantly reconstructs and transforms it within the framework of the historical circumstances.

Gender and Subaltern Nationalisms: Elite, male-dominated discourse on nationalism, both colonial and postcolonial, has frequently been dominated by the similarities between the nation and its people, while glossing over their differences. Nevertheless, the feminist and subaltern studies have shown that the country is not equally experienced by all its subjects. The marginal or peripheral characters in nationalist histories are often women, peasants, lower classes, indigenous peoples and other marginalized groups. Upon writing a critical analysis of gender and subaltern nationalism, the literature may be seen to enforce and critique these exclusions. Among the voices that have impact is that of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak whose essay titled *Can the Subaltern Speak?* raises the question as to whether we can possibly give voice to marginal voices through mainstream discourses. Spivak posits that nationalism movements usually seek to represent the subaltern yet they end up silencing them. Women in colonial settings were often portrayed as passive victims who had to be rescued, a cliché that qualified the intervention of the imperial forces. They were frequently turned into ideal figures in postcolonial nationalism as they were viewed as bearers of cultural purity and tradition, but were not granted political agency. In the same way, Partha Chatterjee shows how nationalism ideology in colonial India divided the world into the external (material, political) and the internal (spiritual, domestic) worlds. This is because women were placed as the caretakers of the inner world which represented the cultural soul of the nation. Literature contributed to creating this gendered nationalism, in which the nation was feminized as a mother country, Mother India, and actual women were kept in the home. These depictions have been objected to by feminist literary critics through foregrounding the experiences of women in the nationalist struggle. Authors like Toni Morrison and Buchi Emecheta are able to show the interactions of race, gender, and class in the formation of national belonging. Their books show that national liberation does not necessarily become gender equality. Even in the societies that have become independent, patriarchal systems are duplicated in the societies long after the colonialism has ceased. Mahasweta Devi, among other writers, in the South Asian context, puts the subaltern communities on the center stage. Her fiction brings to fore the plight of tribal people and marginalized women who are still not part of mainstream national discourses. These writings confuse the rhetoric of independence jubilation by revealing internal order of things in the nation.

Contemporary Perspectives: The interrelationship between literature and nationalism in the twenty-first century is in a new and more complicated stage due to the effects of globalization, migration, digital media and re-emerging identity politics. The contemporary literary discourses are no longer concerned with nationalism in a colonial/postcolonial opposition but they address how nations are being redefined in transnational, diasporic, and global situations. The country continues to be a strong emotional and political aggregation, but it is also becoming more fluid and contested, and subject to the global forces. The emergence of transnationalism is one of the greatest changes in the modern literature. Jhumpa Lahiri and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie among the writers discuss migration, hybridity and the issue of cultural negotiation. Their works portray characters that inhabit several cultures in their spaces at the same time and challenge the traditional nationalist constructs. In these stories, nationhood is also not determined by a place but is defined by movement, memory and displacement. The country turns into an element of a multiplicity of affiliations instead of the main place of belonging. Diasporic writing also questions the homogenous national histories. Rather than offering the country as a singular cultural experience, diasporic writings expose broken identities influenced by exile, nostalgia and acculturation. This is similar to the definition of hybridity by Homi K.

Bhabha, through which cultural identities are constructed in between spaces. Modern writers tend to emphasize the way in which the nationalism of the homeland is negotiated with the global cosmopolitanism by the diasporic subjects. The other modern phenomenon is the revival of ethno-nationalism and populism nationalism in different regions of the world. Literature is critical of these movements through unveiling their exclusions and contradictions. The question of nationalism as a means of marginalizing minorities, censoring civil liberties, or renewing colonialist mindsets under new labels is being asked in many modern novels. In this case, the legacy of Frantz Fanon can be still used, specifically, his caution that post-independence nationalism can reproduce domination structures in the event that it is dogmatic or authoritarian. Also, in the modern literature, the concept of intersectionality is discussed more and more, as nationalism is confronted by gender, race, class and sexuality. The writers anticipate voices, which were never represented in national histories, and the value of pluralism is placed more than unity. The individual is not presented as a homogenous cultural entity but as an unstable and changing social structure that represents the nation. Production and circulation of nationalist discourses have also been revolutionized through the digital technology. New modes of storytelling across national boundaries lie on online platforms, social media, and digital publishing. The contemporary literature tends to speculate on the way media and globalization transforms the national consciousness. The so-called imagined community, as described by Benedict Anderson, becomes re-informed in the digital era during which communities have been imagined in the virtual realm as opposed to being limited to print culture. What is more, the modern ecological crisis has also brought eco-nationalism and environmental issues to the literary discussion. The climate fiction (Cli-Fi) often portrays the country as delicate in globalist ecology, and thus the isolationism of nationalism is challenged. It is no longer about territorial sovereignty but interdependence of the planet.

Conclusion

As this comparative study of colonial and postcolonial texts reveals, literature has a central place in forming, authorizing, opposing, and redefining the nation. Literature is not a reflection of political reality, it is an active contributor of the nationalistic consciousness. Literary texts bring the abstract notion of the nation to life and make it an emotively charged and personally experienced phenomenon through the narrative form, language, symbolism, and characterization. Imperial nationalism to a large extent was based on colonial discourses. They portrayed the civilizing, rational and morally superior nation of the colonizers and inferior or stagnant colonized societies. According to the theories of Edward Said in *Orientalism*, such representations did not just happen to be of the aesthetic type, but rather the ideological construction to strengthen the imperial power. The colonial literature helped to visualize the idea of the empire as a continuation of national destiny, and hierarchical binaries were introduced into the structure of narratives. These are however, interrupted and rewritten in postcolonial literature. Using the idea of the nation as an imagined community, which is expressed by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*, postcolonial authors reveal an artificial and disputed character of the national identity. With the books written by Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Salman Rushdie, the country is not presented as a cohesive or homogenous country but as a fragmented, hybrid and the creation of conflicting histories. Theories of hybridity that Homi K. Bhabha developed take the idea of the national identity one step further by pointing out the idea that it is negotiable and not fixed.

In addition, female and subaltern criticisms have shown that both colonial and postcolonial nationalisms tend to marginalize women and the grassroots. Predicting gendered and subaltern stances, modern literature tries to break the monolithic myths of nationalism and promotes more inclusive images of belonging. The country which used to be viewed as a stable and unified one turns out to be a dynamic and plural environment with tension and negotiations. Literary manifestations of nationalism are still changing in a modern environment marked by globalization, migration, and digital media, and resurgent populism. The country is still a strong symbolic building, but it is being represented more and more as overlapping with transnational and global forces. Literature is therefore still a vital place in which national identities are challenged, rewritten, and

redefined. Finally, this review confirms that nationalism in literature is not a predetermined ideology but a process of narrative. Colonial texts built the nation as a way to justify empire; postcolonial texts reworked it into a place of resistance and cultural recovery and the more recent writings bring a complex angle to it by taking into account intersectionality and transnationalism. Comparing these changes, we see that literature does not merely describe the nation, but it constantly transforms how communities conceive and conceive of themselves and their position in the past.

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