

Arielisation: Silencing and Servitude in Victor Epie'Ngome's *What God has Put Asunder*

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Abstract

Much of the research that has been carried out on Victor Epie'Ngome's *What God Has Put Asunder* situate the play, and rightly so, as an Anglophone Cameroon play that allegorises the situation of the marginalisation of Anglophones by the Francophones in Cameroon. This paper attempts to shift from this seemingly dominant view of the play and argues that Epie'Ngome represents the post-independent Cameroonian in the state of servitude without the necessary tools to reconstruct and define self from what the colonialists had constructed. The paper assesses how Epie'Ngome in *What God has put Asunder* represent the relationship that exists between the colonised and the ex-colonised and the different reactions presented as a result of this encounter. Guided by the tenets of the postcolonial theory, the paper contends that Weka, Emeka like Garba (major characters in the play) are colonial victims that very well fit as figures of brainwash and dependency on the colonialist ideology.

Key Words: *Arielisation, servitude, post-independence, Anglophone*

I. Introduction

Victor Epie'Ngome's play, *What God has Put Asunder*, is one of the plays in Cameroon that has caught the attention of many critics. Shadrach A. Ambanasom sees the play as a representation of the Anglophone problem in present-day Cameroon. He thinks that "Garba's neglectful but exploitative attitude towards Weka represents the attitude of the Francophone leadership towards Anglophones in present-day Cameroon" (1996:219) and in his next work, he continues to express the same view about the play which he now sees as a play with "greater allegorical significance" (2002: 33). Ambanasom's view is shared by Gilbert Doho who has argued that "ce constat général ne saurait se confronter avec le problème particulier à la communauté anglophone qui, selon Victor Epie'Ngome, est consubstantiel au mariage que contractent les deux Cameroun...en 1961" [*this general observation should not be confused with the particular Anglophone problem which, according to Victor Epie'Ngome, is related to the marriage contract between the two Cameroons in 1961*]⁴⁸ (1993: 93). The same note of a historical metaphor describing the Anglophone and Francophone union in Cameroon by 1961 is shared by Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh

⁴⁸ The translation is mine.

who thinks that Victor Epie'Ngome handles the issue of Anglophone marginalisation in a "witty and hilarious" (1993: 105) manner. From what these scholars postulate, the play represents or interprets Cameroonian historicity on the consequences of what has become of the Cameroon of today. These critics have also expressed their sympathy for Weka – the female character who is being robbed of her all by her "husband" with whom coming together in matrimony is without her consent. How Epie'Ngome represents the relationship that exists between the colonised and the ex-colonised even after classical colonialism is the *problem* that I seek to handle in this paper.

With this, my aim is not to repeat the view of previous scholars but to accentuate the importance of the passivity of Weka, Emeka, and sometimes Garba to the issues that concern them. Furthermore, the continuous reliance and dependence on their surrogate parents in the different orphanages by Weka and Garba are markers that begin the postcolonial problem of continues servitude. Thus, guided by the tenets of the postcolonial theory, I argue that Weka, Emeka like Garba are colonial victims that very well fit as figures of brainwash and dependency on the colonialist ideals, what George Lamming calls the "Ariel Figure" (a concept in the postcolonial discourse that is explained later in this paper).

In postcolonial discourse, one is very often confronted with figures; especially when discussing issues of resistance and representation. Arielisation that I choose to discuss as a concept has its origin from the Shakespearean character, Ariel. This character in *The Tempest*, with Caliban, is imposed servitude by the escaping Prospero who finally finds himself and his crew on the island of Sycorax. These characters represent figures of colonialism in the representation given to them by colonialists and postcolonial critics. Ariel and Caliban, from a colonialist perspective, are treated as "wild men halfway between human beings and animals, we find nothing implausible in their introduction" (Spearing and Co, 1977: 15). Chinua Achebe has responded to this colonialist representation of non-Europe in these words: "I should perhaps point out that colonialist criticism is not always as crude as this but the exaggerated grossness of a particular example may sometimes prove useful in studying the anatomy of the species" (1990: 70). The picture Achebe paints is a summary of the colonial assignment that Europeans had invested in all of non-Europe. Thus to see Caliban and Ariel as "wild men" is to enforce the colonial prerogatives that even great writers of European civilization like William Shakespeare were to fall prey to. This unfortunate (mis)representation is based on European gross ignorance and refusal to learn. This representation is a clear indication that anybody in Sycorax's island, other than Prospero and his band of adventurers are wild and if we borrow from Edward Said, signifying "danger and a threat" (1978: 26) that must be dealt with. In this demonization of the "other", the European now put forwards the idea of civilising which is to make others be like Europeans.'

Talking about the “Ariel figure”, that is central in this paper, the colonialist has given an interesting interpretation of him. The first thing we notice is that in the colonialist view, Ariel does exist because he plays the role of Prospero’s moral conscience. A. C and J. E Spearing think that “Ariel’s role is to provoke forgiveness in Prospero” (1977: 17) and they further add that “This insight of Ariel’s marks a turning-point for Prospero, if even Ariel, who is ‘but air’ can feel compassion for the suffering voyagers, so will he, and he decides to take the part of ‘virtue’ rather than vengeance” (1977: 18). What can be seen is the European way of seeing. By describing the colonised person as untamed and possessing no virtue is an invitation for the colonialist to come in to civilise. Thus if Ariel is capable of displaying some marks of what the European considers as “virtue”, it becomes a challenge for Europe/Prospero, considered as the votary of all “virtue” and grand promoter of “civilisation”, to sit up. It could be said that Shakespeare’s dramatic vision, in *The Tempest*, is meant to greatly reform Prospero by making a “wild untamed man” his teacher. Thus, the colonialist representation of the “Ariel figure” makes him a wonderful and positive figure, well transformed and can even be a moral guide to his master Prospero.

But the postcolonial representation of him is that he is “Prospero’s source of information; the archetypal spy, the embodiment – when and if made flesh- of the perfect and unspeakable secret police. It is Ariel who tunes in on every conversation which the degradation of his duty demands that he reports back to Prospero” (Lamming 1992: 99). George Lamming’s description of Ariel gives us a clear postcolonial reading of who Ariel is. This begins my view of arielisation as an ambiguous figure. Though multi-faceted in view, arielisation, as I discuss it in this paper, has to do with the docility of the colonialist. It stands for mimic personality. Arielisation is the “lamenting [of] a neo-colonial situation which has meant the European bourgeoisie once again stealing our talents and geniuses as they have stolen our economies” (1981: xii). Ngugi’s revelation can be very disturbing because it makes us see arielisation as some kind of mental slavery. The ex-colonised African becomes a “sacrificial lamb to the white man” (Toh 2010: 276) and is bound to obey Western instructions on how to live and operate. Therefore, I discuss arielisation as the ex-colonised inability to assume complete responsibility of how he/she is and the constant return to the colonialist for mentorship which continues the strategy of subjugation and silencing after the “political independence”.

II. Colonialism and the Emasculation of Victims

Colonialism, especially European colonialism, was born from the conception that Europe and Europeans are at the centre of the world and had a mission, to subdue the rest of the globe and to “civilise” the heathens. According to Olufemi Taiwo (2010: 22), “colonialism is often cited as the principal cause of Africa’s continuing inability to move forward with the rest of the world”. Though the statement is true, my position now is that Africans need to go beyond the blame discourse of postcolonialism. The African mind-set needs to

shift from the victimhood lament to the hybrid construction of adapting and resilience (Ashcroft 2001). This is what most of the ex-colonise characters in Epie'Ngome's play fail to do. Garba like Emeka and Weka, fail to defend themselves as former colonial victims because they surrender to the practice of colonialism which Elleke Boehmer describes as "the consolidation of imperial power, and is manifested in settlement of territory, the exploitation or development of resources, and the attempt to govern the indigenous inhabitants of occupied lands" (1995: 2). Boehmer's description of colonialism leads one to conclude that Epie'Ngome's play has a colonial environment; metaphorically represented in the orphanages, headed by Rev Gordon and Louis. In terms of space, the orphanage plays a very central role in the dramatic world of the play. There are two orphanages in the play: the one that raises Miché Garba with Louis as Rector and the one that raises Emeka and Weka under Rev Gordon as Rector. As far as dramatic action is concerned, the orphanage that raises Emeka and Weka is dramatically realized on stage. Through the dialogue between Emeka and Weka, comments are made as to Louis's orphanage where Garba is raised. This, in effect, demonstrates that classical colonialism was almost the same thing in practice – to exploit and control other territories. This makes the colonialist a veritable "one armed bandit" (Rodney 1972: 247).

These orphanages are constructed for the training and bringing up of colonial victims. So, the leaders of the orphanages are Europeans and they play the role of parents. Rev Gordon refers to Weka as a child. Trying to tell her about her suitors, Rev Gordon says, "Listen, my child" (1992: 5). The image of the child shows that Weka is naive and in her ignorance should be guided; the reason for which the orphanage is created. Stuart Hall contends that "Where Africa was a case of the unspoken, Europe was the case of speaking – endlessly speaking us" (1994: 399). Hall enforces the "other's" reaction to the way Europeans have conceived and represented Africa as planned by the colonial agenda. Here, while Africa remains silent or is ascribed "silence" by being represented as "child", Europe is seen as the "powerful producer of identities, ideas, and images" (Newell 2006: 86). This is the project that will lead Rev Gordon and Louis to run orphanages in Njangaland.

The encounter between the "orphans" and their "parents" in the orphanage is built strongly on the difference between them. In the play, there is a clear demarcation between the Europeans and Africans, and the relationship in these orphanages is built on such binary opposition. Shockingly, the European, living in Africa with the "civilising mission" says or pretends not to know Africa. Sister Sabeth says, "Well, I thought in Africa everybody is everybody's cousin, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, father, mother..." (1992: 3). Rev Gordon adds, as he convinces Weka to get married, in these words, "Garba and Emeka are not such strangers after all. They are Africans just like you" (1992: 7). From the tone, these colonialists seem to mock the African communitarian system and misrepresent it. The homogenisation is the sad reality of "colonial lumping" for the colonialist interest and never at the interest of the colonial victim. The

lumping ideology leads to partitioning that makes that African states now find it hard to co-exist. In partitioning the continent, Europeans “failed to consider the ethnic, cultural, commercial, social, religious and political affinities or unity of the affected people” (Ngoh 2011: 1). This is to say that Garba and Weka's wedding is a colonial agenda that benefits the Rectors first and is based on the falsehood of homogeneity. Concerning the same issue, Stephanie Newell, limiting her study scope to West Africa recognises the heterogeneity of Africans, and though passively, she shows how Europeans landed the whole continent in the tragic situation of statehood by emasculating whole nations. Newell says, “Some groups, such as the Ewe, are connected *across* national borders by language and culture” (2006: 1-2).

We note that the binary is not only as far as people are concerned but in the representation ascribed the colonised. In Epie'Ngome's play, the colonised – Weka, Emeka, and Garba – are made to see their guardians in the orphanage as “civilised”. Weka asks, “Hasn't Sister Sabeth always reminded me how primitive we are?” (1992: 7) and Rev Gordon confirms Sabeth's claim, “Listen, Weka, it took us centuries to establish all those civilities, and this is a totally different setting” (1992: 7). There are some indications of the “self”/“other” construct here. The first is the claim of Europe's “civilisation” against non-Europe's primitivism. Of course, this primitivism is expressed in terms of time and age. Rev Gordon's claim of centuries to construct a civilisation reveals Africa's infancy or in purely Hegelian view of a lack of history or past. Thus, Weka, Emeka and Garba, all victims of orphan-hood and placed in the orphanages (colonialism), are reduced to barbarians or/and naive children who are instructed to ape and mimic the “civilisation” of their trainers and guardians. The tutoring that Weka and Garba get from their masters help them to view their masters with reverence and “silence”. When Weka tries to speak out she is hushed, “You cannot talk like that, Weka”... “Shut up Weka. You are being rude”... “And that's an insult to your education” (1992: 6-7). Thomas Macaulay's 1835 speech in defence of colonial education only goes to foster the colonial pronouncement of silencing and servitude on the colonised individual. Macaulay's education is to teach the colonial victim not the western tongue to civilise as was the case of Russia but to teach them language “to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect” (2011: 375). Macaulay's colonial educated victim was just an object of servitude and the education these people were to have is what Shakespeare experimented in *The Tempest* with the “Ariel figure”.

While conceptualising and/or theorising the “Ariel figure”, it is worth noting that it is only when Prospero comes into contact with Ariel that he is made visible and invisible. The duality of his presence is well defined by the European eye that sees him and makes him. Thus, silencing is a matter of uprooting the “other” and his/her inability to return to the pristine past. Epie'Ngome's play is psychical as the ex-orphanage pupils seem well versed with the mission of his/her training which is to “construe the colonized as a

population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, administration and instruction” (Bhabha 1994: 70). Applying to this logic, the “Ariel figure” accept his “degenerated state” as he/she completely relies on the “Prospero figure.” This reliance gives the colonialist the “power” to represent and to recognise the colonised. Bhabha is right also to contend that such representations, for the most part, are “partial”. This is because of their subjectivity. In essence, Weka, Emeka and Garba all represent victims of the “degenerated state” that Bhabha describes and so, as the potential occupants of the postcolonial African society. It is not strange that the society in the play and the African post-independent state remains a society of partial representation of recognition for the simple reason that Europeans define this society.

All through the play, Weka and Emeka are hushed when they decide to express themselves. The politics of silence becomes another weapon for dominion and the construction of hegemonic spaces. The silencing of Emeka and Weka brings to mind the kind of violence that Gayatri Spivak calls the “epistemic violence” which is a continuity of the *Grand Narrative* of Europe to perpetually assign non-Europe in the peripheral spaces. For Weka to speak, she is reminded that her outspoken nature is not in acquiescence to the education she receives. Rev Gordon, happy with the mission of degenerating his victims, describes her as the “most exemplary girl” (1992: 5). This comment is far from being a compliment because it ties with the same gaze that Prospero gives to Ariel. Gordon, like Prospero, in the quote, simply asserts his satisfaction for a job well done – reducing the victims to servitude, servanthood and silence.

The point I am making is that the ex-colonised African, like Ariel, is not only voiceless but lacks initiative and that places him in the state of what I call in this study arielisation. Weka’s refusal to marry ends in a verbal quip. Emeka’s protestation against the marriage gives him another representation as Unor, another character in the play, simply describes him and his actions as being too late. Africa, of course, remains too late in every state of human progress since the end of classical colonialism due to the same fact that its voice is not heard anywhere in the council of nations. There is no African seat in the Security Council of the U.N and all the “G groups” do not seem to have an African voice.

Unfortunately, Weka regards the training in this orphanage as a way of freedom when she angrily tells Sister Sabeth and Rev Gordon that: “Thank you for all that, Rev Gordon ... But let us not beat about the bush. If you have had enough of me in this orphanage ... just come out with it and I’ll go out and be by myself” (1992: 6). Weka’s pronouncements demonstrate the colonised person’s continuous servitude and dependency on the colonialist. She thinks she is free but still depends on the education that has been given to her. It should be noted that colonial education was just a strategy to construct real “Ariel figures” that may just end up in the impasse if we go by the Macaulay’s prescription cited above. Looking at the speech she makes, one may to confuse her for being resistant but she is not because she depends on the education that Rev Gordon and Sister Sabeth make her believe in. This means that the colonised can never

be trained to be like the colonialist. Thus Fanon's claim of suspicion between the two groups especially with the claim by colonialist of the colonised wanting to take their place is visible here. Fanon writes, "The colonized man is envious. And this the settler knows very well; when their glances meet he ascertains bitterly, always on the defensive, that: "They want to take our place. It is true, for there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place" (1968: 30). Weka's utterance makes her naive for thinking that listening to Sister Sabeth and attempting to practice what she teaches makes her be like Sister Sabeth. From their discussion, Weka learns that her Njangaland can never be and is not England and as Fanon also says, England is not ready and will never be ready to see Njangaland be like England. In recent times, Brexit in the United Kingdom and the *Trumpism* that advocates United States of American isolationism only go to justify that from the day of colonial contact the West has and will never accommodate the African even when the likes of Weka, Garba and Emeka do all to mimic them.

Life, in the orphanage, does not only reduce Weka, Emeka and Garba to servitude and servanthood but also reduces them to mimic men. In the dialogue between Weka and Emeka she says, "Listen, Emeka, you had just about the upbringing I had in the orphanage. So you of all should understand my predicament. Sister Sabeth told me that quite often it takes a good woman to pull a wayward man together" (1992: 35). These characters, like true colonial constructs, continue to mimic and are even haunted by the colonial values imposed on them. From Weka's claim, what she calls her predicament is not only hers, it is that of Emeka. It is that of Garba and it is that of the ex-colonised reduced to mimicry and silence – a true mark of servitude and permanent dependency on the Prospero figure.

III. Post Orphanage (Colonial) Trauma

In Jean-Paul Sartre's preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, he says, "The status of 'native' is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among colonized people *with their consent*" (1968: 17 the italics are Sartre's). A close look at Sartre's statement reveals that the postcolonial person and his society suffers a kind of mental imbalance. However, the shocking thing about this is that this condition is not without the consent of the colonised people. Sartre's conception of the colonial victim living in a nervous condition explains his alien nature and his belonging to no space. This lack of belonging is very important as the ex-colonised remains too attached to the coloniser. Garba, unfortunately, is a true "Ariel figure" as he remains continuously and shockingly happy; boasting about his total dependency on Louis. Weka tells Emeka, "And Louis taught Garba to feel like a member of his own family. To this day, even as an old polygamist and father of a brood of brats, Garba does nothing without asking Louis first" (1992: 37) and to prove that the orphanage's project is to make the orphans aliens and reduced to servants, Rev Gordon, now very old regrets ever giving Emeka and Weka a little freedom. He says, "But I think I should have maintained a certain

presence. Maybe not exactly like Louis, but at least a dissuasive presence – to deter him from his excess” (1992: 39). Rev Gordon’s statement and Louis’s action discussed do not mean they are protective but their continuous control and plundering of the orphans. Weka tells Emeka this, “Would you believe, for instance, that Garba lets Louis keep his money for him and cannot buy anything without Louis’ blessing?” Emeka’s response is “You mean even the money from your farms?” And Weka answers in the affirmative. “I was his to do just as he pleased” (1992: 38) and in front of Garba and Louis, she remained silent. This is neo-colonialism which, in concept and practice, is worse than colonialism. In the context of Epie’Ngome’s play, Louis is presented as an exploiter and forever reaping where he never sowed. But again, he has succeeded in creating a “zombie”. The “zombification” of the colonial victim is again clearly illustrated by Sartre as he says the colonial victim becomes a “dead soul” and it is the Westerner who is responsible for killing the soul as he, from every perspective controls the soul. Of course, there is no gainsaying that after more than five decades of “independence” African states have continually subjected themselves to the authority of the West and it may be interesting to note that this is done with pride and not shame.

The postcolonial society that Epie’Ngome presents is a society of trauma as none of the characters seems to function as “sane” humans. Epie’Ngome presents the post-independent person and society in the state of decline and moral decadence and so, reveals a hopeless postcolonial world. Neither Garba, Weka, Emeka, Sani, Fatou nor Kinge are presented as role models to represent a postcolonial society and character (a kind of modernity for Africa). They are presented as flirts, squander maniacs and petty naive politicians who depend on their trainers in the orphanage and new elite to survive.

Sani, Garba’s driver, and Kinge, a member of Garba’s party, work for Garba and see him as their leader. Yet Sani’s commitment to his master is superficial because he has an affair with his boss’s wife – Weka. Epie’Ngome ridicules the whole postcolonial society for turning hedonistic and people – ruler and ruled – all involved in the mad search for pleasure. What is most annoying is that this is done on the state budget. Garba, as a postcolonial ruler, says, “Must the institution live on the man and not the man on the institution” (1992: 23)? This is the kind of question that post-independent African rulers have as creed and so, feed fat on what rightly belongs to the “institution” with impunity. This is the justification for the endemic corruption in Africa.

Garba, is seen campaigning for an election and in his election campaign speech he says:

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, there cannot be peace unless we can share bread. Why are governments failing every day? Why are people fighting everywhere? How can there be peace and concord if some starve while others waste? What happiness can there be in a home where the woman works and the husband squanders the money living it up with prostitutes. (1992:16)

No doubt Rev Gordon appreciates him as being good in public speaking though he questions the sincerity of the things he says. Gordon tells Sabeth “Not bad. I mean, if he is really the sort of man that comes across in his speeches, then Weka will have no cause to regret her choice” (1992: 15). Rev Gordon’s questioning of Garba’s speeches may only reveal his appreciation empty speeches he is trained to make, but further shows Gordon’s refusal to understand Garba. It seems that nowhere in the world has political speeches by aspirants of power, and those who are in power have been so eloquently articulated like those in post-independent Africa. Yet, it is hard to judge anywhere in the continent where these sweet words have come to be realised.

In Freudian terms, Garba’s speech above and his actions divulge an individual in a schizophrenic state. It is shameful that African politicians since independence take delight to tell the masses who they are, as Garba is just doing, in the name of standing to fight and overcome them. Garba’s “shadowing” only reveals the fact that post-independent Africa, as Epie’Ngome presents it, is in the state of collapse because of half-baked rulers put by the colonialist to continue with their assignment of plundering the continent. Fanon justifies this view as he quotes President Mba’a, the Gabonese pioneer president, who said, “Gabon is independent, but between Gabon and France nothing has changed; everything goes on as before” (1968: 52) and in the same light, President Paul Biya of Cameroon declared himself President Mitterrand’s best pupil, Bokassa of Central African Republic termed De Gaulle as his father. This is what I term arielisation in this paper which has only placed the post-independent state and its masses in a very difficult state of disorder. Ironically, Garba’s questions are clear indications that his leadership at home and in the institution will fall and that is an extended metaphor for the collapse of post-independent African societies where poverty, heavy-handedness and backwardness are the order of the day. Africa remains a consumer and never a producer. When the likes of Garba speak, they mimic and are never taken seriously. Africa’s views in structures like the UN have not been taken seriously, because Prospero understands the kind of speech that Ariel, represented here by Garba, can make and so, the only thing that remains of Garba claims to his wife and children that he is the man who represents the general population of Njangaland.

IV. Conclusion

I have attempted to prove that the post-independent African societies are in a moral decline because of their colonial heritage and contacts with the West. This moral depravity, as I illustrate, comes from the kind of training and values that the West handed down to Africans. Epie’Ngome’s play traces the colonial and post-independent periods as a matter of helping the Africans to understand where the rain began beating them and to start making the right decisions that will enable them to shift from servitude to having a voice to command. The postcolonial discourse that was employed in the analyses enabled me to shift from what scholars have concluded about Epie’Ngome’s play and reveal that,

from the period of contact with the West, African societies have been lured and forced to silence. Also that this has affected their conditions at independence and this is even worse off with the fact that compradors of the colonialists, who for the most part are parvenus, are at centre stage helping to plunder the continent the more.

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