



Research Article

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Sammy Oke Akombi's *The Raped Amulet* and the Colonial Ideology

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ABSTRACT

Colonialism continues to affect and influence creative production in much of the ex-colonised world. Like Edward Said (1999) argues, creative works, especially the novel, have been instrumental in the representation of ideologies that affect relations between cultures and races. Our reading of Sammy Oke Akombi's *The raped amulet* (2008) reveals that the novel adopts the colonial ideology though set in postcolonial times. In this paper, I argue that *The raped amulet* is a novel of encounter between Cameroon (most especially the territory that was under British tutelage) and Britain. Furthermore, that in this encounter, the British are represented as the master that have silenced the Cameroonians. I hinge these arguments on the views of George Lamming and Frantz Fanon who have both attempted to understand the psyche of the ex-colonised and come out with the conclusions that the idea or the myth of Europe remains enshrined in the mind-set of the postcolonial individual.

Keywords: Colonialism, Encounter, Ex-colonised, Ideology, Other

I

Sammy Oke Akombi's *The raped amulet* is a narrative that clearly captures issues of migration and cultural mixing. Yet, a close reading of the narrative shows that it is a cultural mismatch that is visibly "evident in Dion's single-mindedness as a Western-educated, but still naïve character... Such ignorance imposes a silence on his own culture's perception of, and reactions towards, contemporary debates" (Mbuh, 2015: 17). Mbuh Tenu Mbuh's claim is not a simulation because Dion's nativity is the central idea in the text.

In this paper, I seek to demonstrate that Akombi's *The raped amulet* is constructed based on George Lamming's conception of the myth or idea of Europe. Lamming contends that the *myth* or *idea* of Europe is an ideological construct that puts Europe, in the eyes of the "other" better. Lamming explains how this *idea* or *myth* is so enshrined in the non-European mind. He explains that "This sudden bewilderment had sprung from his *idea* of England: and one element in that *idea* was that he was not used to seeing an Englishman working with his hands in the streets of Port-of-Spain" (1992: 27). This mentality became so powerful that it, for many decades have dominated all forms of knowledge acquisition and dissemination in Africa. Thus, René Devisch and Francis Nyamnjoh (2011) are right when they affirm that the "biassing Eurocentric rationalist, modernist development theories that dismiss any active role to African peoples' genuine local cultures in their self-critical and endogenous emancipation" (2011: 1) continue to abound in Africa's knowledge production. In this connection, this paper hopes to answer the following questions: how do the narrators in the novel represent Europe? What is the influence of the European on the non-European in the text? How do both ideologies relate in the novel? And finally, does the space/typology of speaking affect the world view of the speaker?

The paper affirms that *The raped amulet* is a narrative of encounter between Cameroon and Britain. Also, Cameroon and Britain share a historico-cultural space that can be traced from the colonial ideology. This only confirms Lamming's claim that it is difficult if not impossible to dismantle the colonialist idea of "us" as seen in the eyes of the European coloniser.

The paper handles the colonial ideology as Europe provincializing the rest of the world. It becomes more intriguing that even literature created by non-Europeans is “concerned with colonial perceptions and experience, written mainly by metropolitans, but also by creoles and indigenes” (Boehmer, 2005: 2). The inclusion of indigenes to this category of writing reveals that the colonial ideology – Europeans being the best and the rest of the world being the burden on them to transform (*la mission civilisatrice*) – has tacitly been programmed into the psyche of some ex-colonised individuals who end up mimicking the “former master”. The novel is an example of “the epistemology of alterity and exogenously generated and contextually” programmed to justify western dominance of Africa. (Devisch and Nyamnjoh, 2011: 3). The paper hinges, amongst other discourses, on Lamming’s idea of the occasion for speaking as it focuses is on the fact that ex-colonised individuals are inspired to speak when they are out of the homeland. But even more, I am, by reading *The raped amulet*, interrogating the way the novelist and his characters interpret and “see” Europe especially as they both continue to promote the *European lie*. This is seen in the strong colonial epistemological historicity that occurs throughout the narrative.

II

Dion Ekpochaba, the main character in the novel, is obliged to go to Britain to further his studies. Winning the scholarship makes him a hero who can represent his people; he becomes “the window on the world for the entire family” (Akombi, 2008: 7). In the spirit of the narrative, Britain is the chosen land because it has a long-standing connectivity with Cameroon, being the latter’s colonial master. Therefore, Dion’s going to Britain is governed by ironies. The reason being that it is expected that the scholarship will empower him – generate Caliban-like resistance of Prospero. But Dion become a symbol of servitude and remains the other (the Ariel-like traitor).

This section argues that the narrative exposes Britain’s continuous connectivity with her former colony and that in this relationship, the former colony remains the “other”; subjected to a kind of silencing in the face of the “master”. This silencing looks so permanent and almost difficult to critique and that is why Lamming calls it *myth*. To him,



It [myth] has little to do with lack of intelligence. It is akin to the nutritive function of milk which all sorts of men receive at birth. It is *myth* as a source of spiritual foods absorbed and learnt for exercise in the future. This *myth* begins in the West Indian from the earliest stages of his education. (1992: 27)

What this means is that the idea of European supremacist culture is a fact that can hardly be taken off the ex-colonised person's being. Lamming uses the imagery of food and milk (to show how the colonial idea of being the best, the most authentic and the civilised has gradually and totally taken over the whole being of the non-European who is in the habit of always desiring to be like the European) to accentuate the nurturing nature of the colonial philosophy on the former colony and ex-colonised.

The raped amulet is a metaphor of an ex-colonised Anglophone Cameroonian going to study in Britain. Interestingly, the home he leaves is not an unhomely space (Bhabha, 1994) as he belongs to that locale and feels proud and fulfilled in it. Dion is presented as a child and an individual who understands his culture and is very welcomed by his kith and kin. But studies happen to be the pull factor that is taking him away from the homeland to a host land that is the former "mother country". However, the ironic twist in the narratives comes as he forsakes everything that made him proud of an identity and happiness to run after education in Britain. The narrator narrates that "When he returned to his room, it was to bend over his books. They had become his main companions. They were really many. Fat ones, plump ones, skinny ones and even senile ones. He had to accept them all because he had come to England for their sake" (2008: 2). The attitude that one reads here demonstrates that one of the manoeuvres that Europe has continually used to endorse imperialism is education. This is so that former victims of colonialism win British and other scholarships, abandon the comfort of home, go to Europe for the sake of books of all sizes. The scholarship to Europe and the west, as has been colonially constructed, goes with prestige and the premium too is enticing. In this connection, Europe and the west becomes the avenue for speaking by ex-colonised people which raises epistemological and ontological issues as is the case of Dion.

While we do not know what Dion studies in a British University or see him in a lecture hall situation, we are intrigued by the schooling he receives from Tom Jones; an education whose curriculum only goes to prove to Dion that he is inferior to his “British superiors.” In the novel, he begins with his intention to study at a university in Britain, then learning takes place only when Jones, a colonialist who served in Cameroon, becomes his teacher. This is after they meet by the lake and end when he returns to the university to read books. By this structural timeline, Dion’s adventure is still long and the hope to return is not even in the horizon.

Dion is entrapped by the seemingly unbroken bond between Europe [Britain] and Africa [Cameroon]. This renders the colonial subject an alien and further subject him into silence. This, in no way, discards completely colonial education. It means that Africans and Cameroonians have benefitted from Western styled education a lot. Yet, it is also true that this education has assimilated them to be “zombies” as Achille Mbembe puts it or in worst case scenario mimics. Therefore, I think, like Basil Davidson, that even the education that Dion goes to get in Britain only promotes the “colonial crisis” (1983: 182) as it renders him, and his likes, to be in a continuous state of servitude and dependency on Europe. This leads to a kind of “subjectivity” that continues to give Europe the status of cultural “purity” and “authentic identity” as opposed to the inferiority and porosity of the culture of the rest of the world.

Bill Ashcroft has extended the postcolonial debate into arguing that colonialism and its education did not entirely subsume the colonised individual for it somewhat led to a transformation of the colonised personhood. Ashcroft writes that:

The question of subjectivity lies at the heart of any exploration of political and cultural resistance, and the postmodern rejection of Enlightenment notions of selfhood is a particularly significant issue for colonial subjects. The development of influential theories of subject construction by ideology, discourse and language in the works of Althusser, Foucault and Lacan seems to provide very effective models for the construction of colonial subjects by a dominant imperial culture. But their practical weakness, which stem from a difficulty in accounting for the subject-



forming power, become exposed by the experience of colonized people.
(2001: 35)

Ashcroft's arguments are founded and valid. But unfortunately, colonial transformation, for the most part, only further erase the ex-colonised ontology and imposes a subjectivity on him/her. It is even unfortunate that scholars of counter postcolonial discourse like Clive Whitehead think that anti-imperialist critics may sound unreal and unjust in their reading of what colonial educators did to the colonies. He writes:

It would have been difficult not to be impressed by the dignity and wisdom of a deeply religious man like Frank Ward, and little wonder that he was greatly respected for his forthright honesty as a British delegate at UNESCO meetings. He, and others like him, cared deeply about the welfare of Africans and other indigenous peoples but there was only so much they could do. To suggest that men like Ward, and Arthur Mayhew, two most knowledgeable men of their generation about the problem of extending western education to Africa and India respectively, were cultural imperialists in a pejorative sense as many anti imperial critics would have us believe, is surely to stretch to breaking point. (2003: xiv)

Where Whitehead accentuates his debate is very much Kipling-like and the stress is on the fine Europeans who faithfully carry their burden to the darkness of the world to spread "the light" of Europe. Whitehead fails to understand that before his "fine Europeans" took the risky trips to carry their God-knows-where burden, colonised people were being educated and that their education also produced fine people.

The question of the European showering care for non-Europeans and Africans much more is abusive as Whitehead and other colonialist continue to see the ex-colonised people as untamed, childish and animalistic which Kipling masterly sings in his verse. Jones in *The raped amulet* is a true believer of this kind of discourse. Jones, on hearing about the Lake Nyos disaster and the fact that the people of Fang were affected, tells Dion that

I had helped rehabilitate the people of Fang after the Second World War. They had been devastated by the war and like the Jews the people of Fang had been scattered all over the country homeless. One of my assignments

after the war was to rehabilitate them. I was then a young exuberant soldier, serving in the British colonial army. (2008: 31)

Jones even in the 1990s where the text is set still holds strong to the ideology of Europe ever caring for the rest of the world. To him Britain is Great Britain because it assists or “cares” for other countries. He says “It sure did, it sent aid, this Great Britain of ours. It’s not for nothing that it’s great” (2008: 30). That pride and the arrogance, in his tone, does not only celebrate British imposed greatness but worse of all, the fact that the rest of the world acknowledges this greatness because Britain always comes to help. Jones’s rehabilitation discourse portrays his idea of the helplessness of the Fang people and Cameroon at large. This seems to me the most devastating effect of colonialism as Europeans always think that non-Europeans need their help. Whitehead’s “fine Europeans” who “cared” and still “care” for Africa have an agenda to silence Africans. One of the finest of these Europeans, Thomas Macaulay, had his justification for colonial education. It is his justification that anti-imperialist discourse appreciates. Macaulay’s kind of education was based on dehumanising the Indian or the ex-colonised person and thereby producing zombies that can be manipulated at any time by the master. It was training where the ex-colonised person will remain a servant since servitude is ascribed to him/her and authority belongs to Europe.

Dion remains attune to this subjectivity though many seem to think that he is transformed by the fact that colonial education is there to empower him. But this is the fundamental problem, the ex-colonised person like Dion cannot act as an agent. Instead, he is a zombie who ends up mimicking the master.

The narrative voice is built on the repeated tone of nostalgia for the homeland as the speaker keeps comparing life in Britain to life in Cameroon “such a phenomenon would never have existed in his own country if they had even one fifth of the facilities that were provided workers in the United Kingdom. That was a place where even the jobless were paid a salary, not even at the end of the month but at the end of every week...decent toilet facilities” (2008: 35). The tone here sounds childish as the speaker seems to be mesmerised by the so call beauty of the British

space as compared to the Cameroonian space. This is a mentality that continuous to give the picture that Britain is better than Cameroon even in infrastructure. Even if that is true, it will be expected that an ex-colonised Cameroonian should be preoccupied in the process of studying the wonders of Britain to bring back home and not simple childish admiration. And so, Akombi continues to foster the oppositional binary of Europe is better and Africa is worse.

The presence of these ex-colonised people in Britain is a celebration of Britain's multiculturalism. As a multicultural place, Britain is supposed to be a place of cultural mixing. Mbuh maintains that "multicultural encounters in these works [*The raped amulet* and Manjoh's *Snare*] depend on setting and juxtaposed a consciousness of escapism/ridicule/ignorance with a sense of retaliation" (2015: 10). The connectivity between Cameroon and Britain in the novel fosters this blend in cultures and normally, these cultures co-exist. On the surface, *The raped amulet* represents Britain as a place of freedom. A country where cultures and races can co-exist. On the contrary, we realise that the narrative makes known the British culture as working hard to subsume every other culture that is found under the British sky and even beyond. Again, Mbuh adroitly holds that "multiculturalism is not a panacea for racism" (2015: 11). The amulet, in this narrative, stands as an artefact that symbolises the very essence of the *Cameroonianity*. Dion, at different times, describes the amulet as "something precious. In fact, very precious to me...It's not a piece of jewellery, like your dictionaries might say. Rather, it's a piece of leather strewn into a bloat. In it are some dried up forest plants and other traditional paraphernalia. This object represents the presence of my ancestors around me" (2008: 22-23). The amulet that we find in this narrative is what seems to identify and protect Dion. In may seem an even more serious artefact than the chain that links Salie and the grandmother in Fatou Diome's *Le ventre de l'atlantique*. But like the chain, the Amulet is what Dion uses to see himself. In the novel, describing the amulet is one of the rare times that Dion attempts to define himself and in contrast to the others here. From his discussion, we learn that amulet as a word may be identified as one thing, but it means different things to different people. While Tom and other British people see it as jewellery, to Dion the amulet



defines him, protects him and connects him to his roots. Dion's state of mind, while describing this, is desperate as he fears that the worse may happen if this part of him is not found. Unfortunately, in a multicultural setting like Britain, this amulet loses its potency. What one finds hard to understand is whether it is this connectivity between Cameroon and Britain that causes the loss of potency in Dion's amulet. In any case, Akombi's position is colonialist. Akombi sees the Western rituals as being more powerful than those from Africa and the rest of the world. This kind of shift shows that the relationship between these two civilisations is complex. But unlike Dion, other black people who migrate to Europe like Teeton in Lamming *Water with berries* and Doumbe in Mbella Sone Dipoko's *A few nights and days* are not passive in their interaction with European culture.

Dion's amulet is not given the respect it deserves under the skies of the British country. Dion gradually forgets about his origins. For instance, his oblivion of the supernatural powers on the Amulet he brought from Cameroon. Dion goes to Britain with that cultural identity from Cameroon but even when he loses the Amulet, he is worried about what catastrophes this loss can cause.

In this section I have focused on the connectivity that has been created between the west and Africa because Britain's former colonies are now migrating to Britain. The section has proven that unlike writers like Dipoko and Lamming who battle hard to change the status quo of western superiority, Akombi's Dion is completely swallowed up by the host land's civilisation.

III

Having discussed the connectivity between Cameroon and Britain in the first part of this paper, from the ideological and spatial conception, this section seeks to examine how colonial history and historicism is constructed in the narrative based on the *narrating* of the dominant voices that one listens to in the text. The section contends that Akombi's *The raped amulet* recreates the historicity and history of Cameroon's encounter with Britain with the ideological frame being what Britain had forced



Cameroon to know and to accept. In other words, the history we see in the text and the historicity is what the colonialist has prescribed.

In their introduction to the section on history in *The post-colonial studies reader*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin write that, “the emergence of history in European thought is coterminous with the rise of modern colonialism, which in its radical othering and violent annexation of the non-European world, found in history a prominent, if not *the* prominent, instrument for the control of subject people” (2005: 316). At this point, history becomes not only recording of events but a discourse of mankind’s evolutionary ideologies (Fukuyama, 1989: 1) especially as the domain has come to exist as a western discipline that has become a source for civilizational growth. The westernisation of history has further complicated the histories of the colonised people and further their silencing. In this case, the colonised people’s history begins with the moment of colonialism. In Cameroon, history begins with the first encounter with the white man and this is what is thought in all schools. There is reason for us, therefore, with this kind of thinking, to understand where the idea of Africa’s untameable ideology was born. When Hegel (1956) dismisses Africa as having no history, he, by every means, is saying that Africans have no minds or consciences that can build up a thought. In short, there is no civilisation from Africa and no evolution in Africa. Hegel’s refusal of history from Africa is clear. Francis Fukuyama, referring to him, writes that “the contradictions that drive history exist first of all in the realm of human consciousness, i.e., on the level of ideas” (1989: 3). This construction was held as truth by Europeans for a long time and even now, which of course, is most misleading and has been one of the principal reasons for colonialism especially as the white man’s burden became one of giving the African a history thanks to “master” Hegel’s faulty allegations. It seems evident that to the colonial conception, non-Europe has come to exist or to be historicised thanks to the fact that non-Europeans had been colonised since their history “is the same as what it means to have a legitimate existence: history and legitimation go hand in hand; history legitimates ‘us’ and not others” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2005: 317).



My focus in this section is to demonstrate that in Akombi's narrative, history and historicism is built largely on colonial lines. This view is accentuated in accurate terms in that the Cameroon that we find today is very much a colonial construct and its structures are fundamentally colonial. In the very first encounter between Dion and Tom, the latter makes the former to understand that Cameroon is a territory he knows and understands. Of course, this is not strange because the Cameroon that Dion claims to be his homeland is constructed by Tom; the national boundaries of Cameroon are colonially constructed, the administrative mappings of Cameroon remain very strangely colonial after more than half a century of self-rule, the name of Cameroon has colonial roots, the economy and money is colonial, the languages of instruction in Cameroon are colonial. But what is more intriguing about Tom's revelation is Dion's response

"Can the world be this small?" Dion wondered aloud. "Imagine me in a sea of white people, with a sprinkle of blacks here and there, never hoping any of the whites had set foot in Africa, talk less of Cameroon, my dear country. Here I am standing face to face with a white man who defended the interest of his people from the brutality of another European country on the soil of my country. (2008: 21)

Dion's show of surprise is strange. He, at this point, forgets that there is a historical connectivity between Cameroon and Britain as a colonial power whose empire extended to Cameroon. His surprise shows that he is naïve. He fails to understand that the colonialist continues to labour hard that the historical link between him and his collapsing empire continues to be strong with Britain playing the "matron/patron" role in the "Commonwealth of Nations". Dion is naïve to think that colonialism in Africa had ended over a decade ago and that his country, as the narrator puts it is a young country that will grow.

Dion's discourse, in the above quote, shows a kind of pride that he can see a British man who had come to Cameroon. Tom's coming to Cameroon makes Dion to feel important. As I elaborated in the first section, we find that the governing principle of the *idea* of Europe continue to guide the minds of the narrators and author in this narrative.



While talking about the Second World War, this narrator does not give the Cameroonian version of the war. What he gets is Britain's version that Britain has told claiming to free Britain and the world from the tyranny of Fascism. That is another colonial lie. Interestingly, Dion's acceptance of this discourse only makes him a colonial mimic who has accepted the status quo and quite different from Roger Mais, the earlier writer and anti-colonialist who criticised the British discourse as sheer hypocrisy. Mais wrote in an essay "Now we Know" wrote that:

That man of brave speeches (referring to Winston Churchill) has told the world again and again that he does not intend the old order to change; that he does not mean to yield an inch in concession to anyone, least of all to people in the colonies. Time and again he has avowed in open parliament that...what we are fighting for is that England might retain her exclusive prerogative to the conquest and enslavement of other nations. (1974: vii)

Mais's essay came to be anti-institutional and so, he was punished with a jailed term. But one thing is clear that Britain never went to war to fight against any brutality or any uncivilised civilisation. She went to war to protect her interest in the world and to keep her colonies, who still suffer from the legacies of her nefarious occupation directly and indirectly today. Dion's refusal to questions the colonial discourse of World War II is central ideology that governs the narrative. In this case, the colonial victim sheepishly abides to the discourse of the colonialist *idea*.

Dion's contact with Tom is colonialism reborn and Dion rightly sees it this way. He says "I had thought that all the ashes of colonization had been blown into the great oceans. Now, it stares me in flesh and in blood, in the person of a certain Tom Jones" (2008: 21-22). The interesting thing is that this colonial contact is now in the heart of the "mother country" and not in the "heart of darkness". What is amazing is that Dion is, by this encounter, powerless and instead finds satisfaction and pride by the colonialist knowledge of him. The narrator says, "a ray of hope swept through the mind of Dion Ekpochaba as the Englishman spoke so intelligibly about his country" (2008: 22). The narrator just displays one truth that Edward Said aptly explains in *Orientalism* to show how Britain

succeeded to capture the world. Said argues that Britain employed two strategies – knowledge and power (1978: 32). Interestingly all through *The Raped Amulet*, the relationship between Dion and Tom is built on these strategies with Tom still using them to dominate and rule over Dion. From the narrator's voice cited above, Dion finds hope and satisfaction that Tom knows about Cameroon or that he has knowledge of Cameroon. It beats the imagination of any reader why this should give him hope and his decision to open only betrays him and from that first encounter to the end of the narrative, Tom has power and knowledge over Dion. There is a clear display of British colonial power and knowledge manifested in the recreation of the colonial encounter between Dion and Tom. Tom handles and overcomes Dion's fear of his raped amulet with threats. He says,

"You see this dog. It can be as wild as a wolf if I let it loose. I suppose you'd prefer a more subtle death than be torn apart by an angry dog. It has missed its lunch because we have been out here and now it is very hungry. So if I make a signal to him this minute, you'll be turned into minute pieces of meat and clean bones. If you don't want that to happen to you, drop the idea that is lingering on your mind." (2008: 26)

This is clear use of force and the power of manipulation to make one succumb. What is outrageous is that Dion bows to these threats without any form of resistance and so, it is extremely hard to see him as a postcolonial subject and not even the one that is undergoing the transformation that Bill Ashcroft discusses in his brilliant book. Dion's quick submission to Tom's threat further shows that he lacks knowledge of himself and so, it is hard for him to defeat Tom who has knowledge of himself and the "other" in this case Dion. That is why Dion even ponders on what issues to discuss with him as the English man seems to have knowledge and better knowledge on several issues about Dion.

In this section, I have focused on *The raped amulet* reconstruction of history as a colonial discipline. Through the analysis in the section, I have justified that Cameroon or the colonial space in the narrative comes to be a place only thanks to colonialism and since history "legitimizes", the homeland of Dion exists because of Britain. I have also discussed here of the need for Cameroon and Dion to recreate their own historicity using their own tools

for that is the way forward for independence and the construction of the Cameroonian civilisation. The recreation of such history and historicity becomes clear when Dion and Tom meet in Britain and the same apparatus of colonialism are employed to silence the African.

IV

In conclusion, I argue that Sammy Oke Akombi's *The raped amulet* places the author as an emerging writer from Cameroon; especially from the perspective of what is politically represented as Anglophone Cameroon. What attracts my attention in the novel is that it discusses the colonial and ex-colonised relationship with the colonised being in the metropolis. Akombi's narrative therefore follows a rare road that few Anglophone writers like Francis Nyamnjoh, Mbella Sone Dipoko, Prescillia Manjo and Gil Ndi-Shang to mention just these have trodden on. Given that this paucity of discourse between the Anglophone Cameroon and her former coloniser – Britain reveals the itchy postcolonial situation of the Anglophone Cameroonian who seems swallowed up by the dominant French presence and the quasi *francophonisation* of the country. Akombi's *The raped amulet* as narrative only re-enacts the colonial ideology of "us" (Britain) better than "they" (Cameroon).

The narrative only leads to the conclusion that the African cannot speak and that even the Lammingian occasion to speak when one enjoys the pleasures of exile is absent when faced with this ex-coloniser. Though Europe is presented as "old" in the novel and Africa seen as "young," one realises that the notion of "old Europe" is just rhetoric when it comes to non-Europe especially with respect to its ex-colonies in Africa and the Caribbean. Europe remains in charge and Akombi's *The raped amulet* has just demonstrated this fact as we find the African enjoying the teaching he gets and the authority that Europe still has over him.

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