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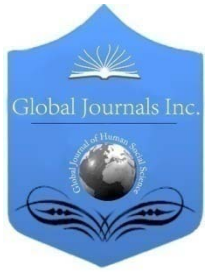

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Manifestation of Resistance through Caliban in Aimé Césaire's *a Tempest*

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Abstract- This research paper explores different layers of resistance in Aimé Césaire's A Tempest through the characterization of Caliban and how Aimé Césaire de-mystifies the notions of the representation of colonial politics in a counter discursive way. Caliban, who was not a focused character and was applied in The Tempest as an antithesis to Prospero, in broader sense the so called "rational", "civilized" colonizers, has been given voice by Césaire to retort back to William Shakespeare. In this sense this adaptation for the black theatre is a commentary of the original text. Actually Aimé Césaire comments on the misrepresentation of judging and generalizing the "black" as savage, lustful and irrational. Moreover, this research addresses how the vocal resistance of Caliban is related to the author's philosophy of negritude. This paper also discusses how the language of the colonizers can be interpolated to the process of self-representation without any spectacle. Caliban's urge for reestablishing his identity can be seen as the recuperation of the distorted "black" identity caused by the aggression of the colonial power and cultural domination. Caliban's utmost strive to go back to the root is synonymous with the endeavor of the colonized people to fight back against colonial modes and manipulations through negritude.

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Manifestation of Resistance through Caliban in Aimé Césaire's *a Tempest*

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Abstract- This research paper explores different layers of resistance in Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest* through the characterization of Caliban and how Aimé Césaire de-mystifies the notions of the representation of colonial politics in a counter discursive way. Caliban, who was not a focused character and was applied in *The Tempest* as an antithesis to Prospero, in broader sense the so called "rational", "civilized" colonizers, has been given voice by Césaire to retort back to William Shakespeare. In this sense this adaptation for the black theatre is a commentary of the original text. Actually Aimé Césaire comments on the misrepresentation of judging and generalizing the "black" as savage, lustful and irrational. Moreover, this research addresses how the vocal resistance of Caliban is related to the author's philosophy of negritude. This paper also discusses how the language of the colonizers can be interpolated to the process of self-representation without any spectacle. Caliban's urge for reestablishing his identity can be seen as the recuperation of the distorted "black" identity caused by the aggression of the colonial power and cultural domination. Caliban's utmost strive to go back to the root is synonymous with the endeavor of the colonized people to fight back against colonial modes and manipulations through negritude. However, through contrapuntalism this research is designed to portray different layers of resistance by both Caliban and the author against colonial domination, cultural superiority, misrepresentation and the dominant discourses about the "black" people.

Keywords: *resistance, representation,* hegemony, *identity,* neocolonialism, *de-mystify, negritude, black theatre.*

I. Introduction

Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest* portrays strong resistance through the character of Caliban. Caliban is very much vocal in the adapted play while he had been portrayed as a lustful, savage, monstrous creature in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* mumbling incoherent words expressing irrational thoughts. In *A Tempest* Caliban is not a submissive character, rather he fights back and answers points of the misrepresentations about him. Caliban's resistance can be seen as his quest for identity. Caliban in Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest* is very much conscious about his rights. He is the voice of a colonized personality who suffers by the domination of colonial power, Prospero. Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest* is an attempt to counter the ideas given by the prior text of William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* from the black point of view with a major change in the characterization of Caliban. He changed two of the major characters in his *A Tempest* from the play which had been written in the early 17th century by William Shakespeare. In this sense it is a contrapuntal endeavor to *The Tempest.* Besides, the situations of the two societies of two different time settings are totally diverse. The process of colonization has changed a lot. Domination of years got the shape of cultural hegemony and the "native" culture was distorted by neocolonial tools. In this sense Caliban is a revolt who wants to go back to the root that is the native culture. The thing that is important in case of Caliban is that though he is the product of a neocolonial situation, there is no ambivalence in him and he is strict in his mission of life. Moreover, Caliban's vocal resistance can be seen as a colonized person's fighting back against cultural hegemony, misrepresentation, ideological domination and neocolonial situation.

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II. Operational Definitions

Resistance: The concept of resistance provides a primary framework for the critical standpoint of post-colonialism. In postcolonial criticism and theory, resistance signifies any opposition to, or subversion of, colonial authority. There are several faces of resistance in postcolonial theory. The first face of resistance is the cultural resistance framework which is used in postcolonial literature. Resistance-as-subversion is the second face of resistance which "undermines the hegemony and authority of colonial knowledge production by subverting the binary thought and essentialist identities produced by colonial knowledge" (Jefferess, 2008, p.163). The third face of resistance is the resistance-as-opposition framework which "constitutes organized political and military struggle against colonial rule and the structure of the colonial economy" (Jefferess, 2008, p.171). The fourth face of resistance is the resistance-as-transformation framework. The resistance of Mahatma Gandhi and the South Africans can be seen as transformation framework.

Representation: Representation is an important term to understand the politics of the narrative in literature. Representation in general terms, can be expressed as describing something. But when we put the term in the socio-economic context it turns into a political term. For example, a feminist critic may see "representation" as a

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weapon to exploit the women in a patriarchal society. But Edward Said's *Orientalism* gives a new dimension to this term, 'representation.' 'Representation' can be defined as "stereotypes and general ideology about 'the Orient' as the 'Other', constructed by generations of Western scholars" (Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker, 2005, p.220). 'Representation' politics produces the familiar, long term myths about laziness, deceit and irrationality of Orientals. We can see this fact from the power-knowledge point of view also. Michel Foucault argues that certain authorities who possess power in society produce knowledge about those who lack power (Nayar, 2008, p.55).

Négritude: Négritude is a theory of distinctiveness of African personality and culture. Leopold Sédar Senghor, Birago Diop and Aimé Césaire developed the theory of négritude in Paris before and after the Second World War. The Négritude writers found solidarity in a common black identity as a rejection of perceived French colonial racism. They believed that the shared black heritage of members of the African diaspora was the best tool in fighting against French political and intellectual hegemony and domination. *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies (1998)* says about negritude, "These critics insisted that African cultures and the literatures they produced had aesthetic and critical standards of their own, and needed to be judged in the light of their differences and their specific concerns rather than as a mere offspring of the parental European cultures" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 1998, p.161). Senghor defined it, négritude encompassed "the sum total of the values of the civilization of the African world" (Diagne, 2010).

III. Manifestation of Resistance

The characterization of Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* has always been related to colonialism. In Shakespeare's time, Caliban, depicted as half animal, served to represent the "Other" in an emerging colonial discourse. As opposed to Shakespeare's character, Césaire's Caliban is deliberately black and oppressed. Césaire indicates that *A Tempest* is an adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* for black theater. As an adaptation, the play reinterprets the figure of Caliban to express postcolonial attitudes of the time. In this sense *A Tempest* can be seen as a "counter discourse". Helen Tiffin in her essay "Post-colonial Literatures" argues that "Processes of artistic and literary decolonization have involved a radical dis/mantling of European codes and a post-colonial subversion and appropriation of the dominant European discourses" (Ashcroft et al., 1998, p.95). Aimé Césaire retells the story with a change in the characterization of Caliban probably, in order to retort to Shakespeare through contrapuntalism. The "what if" factor was considered when the play was being written by Césaire and the "what if" Caliban was a black slave is told in *A Tempest*.

In *A Tempest*, Caliban wants freedom and utters it when he first appears in the play by saying "Uhuru" which means freedom. He is vocal from the beginning for the thing which he thinks his right. Prospero, according to Caliban, is an intruder in the island which was once owned by Sycorax. Caliban starts speaking up more accurately and deliberately against the oppression of Prospero. He fights back when Prospero calls him an "ugly ape!" and answers by calling Prospero "an old vulture with a scrawny neck". This is a vivid demonstration of resistance against the white 'gaze' constructed and politicized by the very white concept of beauty and expresses the view of the so-called 'others', i.e-the blacks, through which they also 'see' the 'others' to them, i.e-the whites.

Later, Caliban strongly presents his premise of rejecting Prospero's order. He cannot be persuaded by Ariel and says he wants "Freedom now!" Moreover, he describes the nature of Prospero to Arial by saying that Prospero was getting "more demanding and despotic day by day". Here we find a colonized black slave describing the colonizer from his own perspective in the language of the colonizers. While Arial is more submissive being a mulatto slave, Caliban is utterly vocal about his own demands. The use of words like "crusher", "pulveriser," "ape," "vulture" and so on shows the hatred of a colonized slave towards his master (!). This is a kind of resistance towards the domination by the master/authority. Besides, Caliban is also conscious about his own identity. He expresses his will to preserve identity when Arial makes him known about the power of Prospero. Caliban says, "Better death than humiliation and injustice" (Césaire, 1985, p. 23). This single sentence is enough to demonstrate how strong the urge of Caliban to safeguard his identity and self-respect is. Here Caliban represents the whole colonized people and their distress.

a) Rejection of the Name and Language by Caliban

The strongest resistance we find is where Caliban rejects the name which has been given by Prospero. Caliban's declaration that he does not want to be called Caliban any longer is a total rejection of the authority (Prospero). Caliban says, "It's the name given by your hatred, and every time it's spoken it's an insult". The name that had been given actually by William Shakespeare in *The Tempest* is countered in *A Tempest.* The debates regarding Caliban's name in *The Tempest* and different connotations of the name are "fore-grounded" by Aimé Césaire in the play. The reference to "Cannibal" by Prospero when he asks Caliban whether it would suite him, indicates the representational politics of the colonizers about the colonized. It is also an urge of a "slave" to reclaim the cultural identity which has been distorted by the colonial domination and oppression.

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Caliban prefers to be called as "X". This is also an indication to the distortion of the cultural identity of the African people and the response of a conscious "black" person from the colonized group. "X" indicates nothing which can be seen as a loss of identity. Caliban says that Prospero has stolen everything from Caliban, even his identity. Moreover, X refers to Malcolm X who was an African-American Muslim minister and human rights activist (Rider). He was a courageous advocate for the rights of blacks. He also indicted white America in the harshest terms for its crimes against black Americans. May be, Caliban in *A Tempest* has reincarnated as Malcolm X who wants to save his race from the domination and distortion of cultural identity.

Caliban's strong sense of resistance has also been portrayed in *A Tempest* by the rejection of Prospero's language. Prospero usurped Caliban's native language for his own benefit. Prospero's hatred towards Caliban's native tongue can be seen as an aggression to the native culture. The colonial power, Prospero also colonizes the tongue and does not acknowledge the indigenous language of Caliban as a language either. Caliban says, "You didn't teach me a thing! Except to jabber in your own language so that I could understand your orders: chop the wood, wash the dishes, fish for food, plant vegetables, all because you're too lazy to do it yourself" (Act I, Scene 2).

We find interpolation by the writer here. Caliban curses Prospero by the language he had taught Caliban for the ease of communication. Language is an important tool to fight back and to represent the self and own race. The language in which Prospero commands Caliban is also used by Caliban to fight and show resistance verbally. Here the word "jabber" carries a lot of importance as the meaning of the word is to talk indistinctly and unintelligently. Prospero scolded Caliban for uttering "Uhuru" in his native tongue and tagged the language as "mumbling". This may suggest two things: Prospero does not understand the language and at the same time he does not want to understand the meaning of "Uhuru" as it is a threat for him because once the language is accepted as intelligible and worthy of rational meaning, it will claim the same status as Prospero's own. Caliban's language is attacked by Prospero while he tags it as "mumbling". Caliban's answer in this instance is stronger and he fights back labeling the language of Prospero, the colonizers, as gibberish. Caliban's language seems mumbling to Prospero and at the same time Prospero's language is nothing more than gibberish to Caliban. Besides, Caliban's rejection of the taught language is a representation of the rejection of the colonial authority and culture by the new generation "black" people.

b) Resistance by Négritude and Retort to William Shakespeare

Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest* tries to present Caliban from the African perspective. Through Caliban's voice he presents the distinctiveness of African personality and culture. Césaire questions the politics of the representations and "othering" through the character of Caliban and more importantly focuses on the African values in the play. The mis-representation of the "black" as "savage", "dumb animal", "beast" and "lustful" has been fought back and answered through this character. Janheinz Jahn in his essay states that Negritude in *A Tempest* can be defined as "the successful revolt in which Caliban broke out of the prison of Prospero's language, by converting that language to his own needs of self-expression."

Aimé Césaire depicted Caliban in such a way that he seems to be the mouthpiece of the black people. The history of colonization and enslavement of the "black" people have been indicated and critiqued in *A Tempest.* Prospero responds to Caliban's statement saying that "There are some family trees it's better not to climb!" This response triggers us to the fact the colonizers distorted the indigenous elements from the colonized areas as these were threatening for them to practice power over the colonized. Aimé Césaire further points out to the nature of the colonizers when Caliban says that once Prospero have squeezed the juice from the orange, he tosses the rind away. This one is a significant critique of the colonization process. Like Prospero, the colonizers once invaded the native lands, sought help from the native people and last of all when their economic desire was met tossed the native people.

The important change that Césaire makes in *A Tempest* is the transformation of Caliban from a deformed and sorry creature into a revolutionary hero. The ending of the play which Césaire gives to the play and the last words of Caliban suggest a revolution from his part. In William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* Caliban's last words are, "and I'll be wise hereafter /And seek for grace" (Act V, Scene 1.) which indicates that Caliban becomes an obedient and passive slave. In the last scene of *A Tempest* Césaire's Caliban refers to Shango who is the Yoruba god of thunder. Caliban sings a war song that starts with "Shango marches with strength /along his path, the sky". Caliban's invocation to the god of thunder suggests that he is not submitting to Prospero and the relationship between the master and the slave is going to be changed. Moreover, it is also important in case of Caliban is that apart from physical violence he is more devoted to the volcanic eruption of the words to show his resistance.

Moreover, Aimé Césaire shows resistance through the portrayal of native culture of the African people. First of all, the title of the play is a deconstruction of the title of William Shakespeare's play. Césaire replaces the article "the" with "a" suggesting a

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singular storm rather than a universal one. This title may suggest that the storm is not a creation of any magician rather it is a natural ongoing process and a regular phenomenon. Besides, it may also suggest the change in the black society through destruction and regeneration. Secondly, references to Shango, the god of thunder; Eshu, a black devil god and some native words like Uhuru in several places of the play make it distinctive. The cultural heritage of the black people has been referred to by the use of native words. However, songs sung by Caliban are the proof of the fact that Africa has cultural elements like poems, songs etc. which counters the "othering" by the West. Aimé Césaire's use of native words and representation of the native gods show his negritude that fight back against the representational politics about the "blacks". The native language and the gods are the shared cultural heritages of the "black" people which unite them to represent themselves as they are. Last of all, Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest* retorts William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and it is another site of resistance as it is an opportunity to represent the African people from their own perspective. The politics behind the naming of Caliban in Shakespeare's play is harshly criticized in this play. The name Caliban undoubtedly evokes criticism as it may refer to cannibal. It may be true that there were cannibals somewhere in Africa in Shakespeare's time. But it is not necessarily true that all the Africans were cannibals. The age old myth about the Africans had been vindicated by William Shakespeare as he named Caliban in his play. Aimé Césaire says, "I was trying to 'de-mythify' the tale". In *A Tempest* the writer de-mythifies the age old myths about the Africans as savage, animalistic, lustful and childlike people and tries to portray them as they are through the characterization of Caliban. While Prospero in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* may refer to the writer himself, Caliban is the mouthpiece of Aimé Césaire in the de-mythyfying process. In this way it is certainly a retort to William Shakespeare's *The Tempest.*

IV. Conclusion

There are four major races in the whole world namely, white/Caucasian, Mongoloid/Asian, Negroid/ Black, and Australoid. This is based on a racial classification made by Carleton S. Coon in 1962. But there is no universal classification of "race". However, these races are considered to be accepted by the entire world. The shock is that there is only one "race" that is Negroid which has a slang "nigger" to be called. This discriminative attitude is showed because of the colour of the "race". Through negritude Aimé Césaire tries to counter the myths about the "black people" or the "niggers" through the characterization of Caliban in a counter discursive way. In Tiffin's language it can be said that he has involved a radical dis/mantling of the dominant discourse about the "blacks" through negritude by adding African gods in the play to represent the continent as it is. However, he has appropriated the western discourse by retelling William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in his own style and de-mythifying the myths about the "black" people. The character of Prospero of *The Tempest* is thought to be the alter-ego of Shakespeare. Similarly Caliban can also be the mouthpiece of Césaire as the tool through which he counters Shakespeare is certainly Caliban. What Caliban utters and does against Prospero is the mirror image of what Césaire does to Shakespeare. Caliban is very much spoken rather than being silent like Ariel and is a resistant against the misrepresentation about the "blacks" by the whites like William Shakespeare.

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