

Postcolonialism Concepts in Brian Friel's play *Translations*

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Abstract:

This research aims to analyze the concept of Brian Friel's *Translations* (1980) in the light of postcolonial theory with an emphasis on the problem of language, identity, mapping and hegemony in society. This study consists of examples of conflicting discourses and events from the minority societies in play. The hegemony of the colonizers in this play is examined in the cultural, social, religious, and political aspects in the light of social culture, imperialism, and postcolonial culture. This study mainly focuses on exposing the injustices committed against the minority communities, especially in Irish society. For instance, they are described as backward, foolish, weak, and silent, which is the false image that colonial societies convey, which results in the loss of identity, one of the adverse effects of racism. As a result, it becomes apparent in the light of the analysis of this play that the writer tries to consolidate the image of their societies and give them complete freedom by raising their voice and exposing the pernicious goals of exploitation and the long-lasting effects of colonialism.

Keywords: (Postcolonialism, Language, Racism, Identity Loss, Hegemony).

1. Overview

Postcolonialism theory is one of the most important literary and criticism theories of a cultural and political nature because it links the discourse to the real political problems in the world. Thus, the two sides of the East and West are reviewed in the context of military, civilization, values, culture, and

science. This critical literary theory also explores the differences between East and West and sets patterns of thinking and looking at East and West together. The theory of postcolonialism is aimed at analysing all that Western culture has produced as a destination speech, with colonialist tendencies towards people outside the Western system. The term also suggests new colonialism that is contrary to ancient colonialism. Therefore, this colonialism requires dealing with it through a new vision, which is an objective and scientific counter vision.

In 1985, the Oxford English Dictionary defined post-colonial in three ways: In the twenty years since, despite its increasing ubiquity, the term has become rematerialized, feminized, and haunted by its very becoming. To say feminist is still to imagine that Marxist analysis of the formation of the colonial state faithfully reproduces a coherent sense of “the subject;” to imagine that the loving, un-women-izing embrace of the male colonized begets post-coloniality. After all these years, despite it all, non-Western scholarship (which has now to be coded “local”) is still often presumed to rewrite the West's Shakespeare (Huggan, 1997).

The neocolonialism of “postcolonialism” is nothing new. A few of the more common tropes get rehearsed here. For example, “the monolithic imperium of the West is at odds with its unformed plurality” carries a racial-everything road movie in its wake. “Reality checks” notwithstanding, all cultures may be read as multiple. Alternatively, the apparent intelligibility of the West's politics blinds it to “the West's internal and trans temporal heterogenetic

possibilities.” “Postcolonial” brilliance, like “Anglo-Australian racial blazonry,” survives only through these uneasy couplings of the newly re-imagined “the” and “West,” the refusal that comes to see with multiple possibilities via reconfiguring unfinished artifacts into “cultures.” A variety of locales still seeks, through the ongoing specificity of colonialism's contemporary reworking, to modify the kinds of concepts, revolutions, visions, conditions, states, programs, and economies that proliferate in postcolonial studies. It does not plan to appropriate imperial analysts into its midst.

The most well-known works in postcolonial theory includes Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretch of the Earth* (1961), Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) by Bill Ashcroft, and *Nation and Narration* (1990) by Homi K Bhabha. They are considered the most important and famous writers in the field of postcolonialism because they have clarified many ambiguous concepts in postcolonial area. Similarly, Postcolonialism is the study of the effects of colonization on cultures and societies worldwide.

2. Theoretical Framework

The study is going to explain Brian Friel's *Translations* in postcolonialism theory by applying some postcolonial concepts such as hegemony, language and culture, and identity. This study will discover the real purpose of the colonized who represent the British army in the play by analysing some

discourse between its characters for example, between Captain Lancey and Yolland on one hand and Owen and Manus on other hands. My aim in this paper is to make the reader understand the sequences of events followed by postcolonial concepts which are applied in Brian Friel's play *Translations*. It has been called by many seminal postcolonial plays. It is Brian Friel's widely masterpiece. It argues about the troubles in Northern Ireland which were more terrible than current by the colonized British Army.

In fact, hegemony means to be challenged by the powerful forces in a society, it means that people in authority, such as clergymen or minister of the catholic...etc. This term developed first by the Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci to assign the unconscious human mind's rule of ideology in society. Behaviours, dress up, expectations, and values are the dominating rules, which are, directed the powerful authorities in society, this is what the forces want to do, which are not individuals although they might be directed from other people. Especially people in power such as parents and teachers. In Marxist's philosophy, the hegemony means the cultural domination by the ruling class that manipulates the cultures of the other society. By creating and maintaining a new society and culture, Gramsci asserts that this needs to inspire a new consciousness. To illustrate more, colonial power is a constantly changing mentality collectively works only as far as members of the ruling class are told as well. This case is not envisioned by fully conscious colonists in absolute control over their actions and considering them as puppets. Through Hegemony, the colonists are collaborators, or subjective to the

authorities who are higher than them, or the judges, administrators, and missionaries. They are expected to regard themselves as rational adults and their colonial subjects as irrational children (Robinson, 1997, p. 77).

An example of Hegemony is Brian Friel's *Translations* in a three-act play. Its setting is in BallyBeg in a Donegal village in the nineteenth century. When Manus's father, who is the owner of a Hedge School, Hugh, appears with his domination upon his son Manus, he actually imposes his will, thoughts, and rules upon Manus throughout the play. Furthermore, the Hedge School, which is the only school in Ireland for the rural citizens, has been dominated by the British colonists and they force whole the students to learn and speak the English language instead of the Gaelic language. Moreover, there is another matter in the play, which is Yolland's control toward Manus when he falls in love with Maire, and here Manus is as in shame with her because first, she asks him for an employment in order to get married, but in fact, Maire goes to Yolland and the couple make love affair. In this case, Manus feels fragile by Yolland, so that he cannot get himself to do that. Furthermore, here in the play, the British colony becomes more in domination rather than the Irish people. They are forced to perform the British Army's laws literally and this is a conflict between the two countries, the Irish civilized people must subject to the British colonialists. In these quotations, we can see how domination appears from Captain Lancey towards the Irish students by saying:

“Lieutenant Yolland is missing. We are searching for him. If we don't find him, or if we receive no information as to where he is to be found, I will

pursue the following course of action. Owen: They are searching for George. If they don't find him__ Lancey: Commencing twenty-four hours from now we will shoot all livestock in Ballybeg. At once. Owen: Beginning this time tomorrow they'll kill every animal in Baile Beag__ unless they're told where George is. Lancey: If that doesn't bear results, commencing forty-eight hours from now we will embark on a series of evictions and levelling of every abode in the following selected areas." Hugh tells his son Manus to hand him a cup of tea, he says: "Indeed---(Shouts) Manus! Tea! (Shouts) Strong! Black!" (Friel, 1981, p. 27).

Here, we see that Hugh is controlled his son. As we also see that Captain Lancey, that he represents the British Army, is threatening them by his strong words.

Language and culture become more and more important worldwide, as follows the truth of something called a culture that exists as a historical fact and can be effectively represented as an important factor. Language is the medium of that representation, and the translation is the way in which an alien culture is represented both to others and, importantly, back to itself as a discrete culture. In substantiation, translation is one of the rules that occludes the violence of the way what is represented is made representable of the colonized people, who need to be "produced in such a manner as to justify colonial domination" (Niranjana, 2000, p. 234). In my own explanation, language is a significant element that makes the colonized folk understand others and can interact with each other, and of course, this is considered that

the two recognize the culture of the other country. In Brian Friel's *Translations*, here Friel uses language as a tool to highlight communication problems in languages, cultures, and generations. In fact, both the Irish and English characters in the play speak their own languages, but in fact, the English language is the most spoken language by the actors. This allows us as the audience to understand all languages as if an interpreter, Owen, translates all the words that the character say them into English in order to the English army understand the Irish language. Although all these facilities, they cannot understand each other well because there are no concessions from both, Irish and English to learn the language of others and this is a metaphor for the broader barrier between the two parties.

In addition to that, Lieutenant Yolland rejoices the Irish culture and he wants to learn the Gaelic language and think about living in Ireland as he considers it a new culture for him in his life. He discusses the beauty of the country, language, and people who are living in Ireland. At this instance, Hugh enters and discusses the richness of Irish literature and Gaelic language, from this point Yolland begins to love Ireland and its language and culture. After that, Yolland falls in love with Maire and they slide away together.

They are now alone communicating without understanding each other's language and recognizing that they love one another. To illustrate more, Hugh, who is Manus's father, learns Maire the English and he makes her recognize the English culture because she has asked for that from Hugh in order to get over Yolland. Even, a lame man, Manus makes Sarah learn the

language and she can say her name vigorously and actively without hesitate. In the following quotation, Manus is trying to make Sarah say her name proudly and with no shyness of herself.

“Manus: We’re doing very well. And we’re going to try it once more--- just once more. Now--- relax and breathe in... deep ... and out... in ... and out... Come on, Sarah. This is our secret. Nobody’s listening. Nobody hears you. Get your tongue and your lips working. ‘My name---- come on. One more try. ‘My name is---- ‘Good girl. Sarah: My... Manus: Great. ‘My name---Sarah: My... my... Manus: Raise your head. Shout it out. Nobody’s listening. Sarah: My name... My name is... Yolland: Do you think I could live here. Owen: What are you talking about. Yolland: Settle down here---live here. I’m learning to speak Irish, sir. Hugh: Good. Yolland: Rolland’s teaching me. Hugh: Splendid. Maire: Say anything at all. I love the sound of your speech. Yolland: (Eagerly) Sorry-sorry. Maire: George---water. Yolland: ‘Water.’ Water! Oh yes---water---water---water---very. Maire: I’m back again. I set out for somewhere, but I couldn’t remember where. So, I came back here. Hugh: I will teach you English, Maire Chatach” (Friel, 1981, p. 97-98).

Identity here means the way in which an individual one can define him or herself negotiations. Identity is important to self-concepts, social mores, and national understanding. It often involves implying some sort of group cohesion, or it is possible to say who belongs to the group and who does not say that. In my own explanation, Identity means, for example, that when as our birth, we receive our identity themes from our mothers. This means that our identity stays as it is, and no change will happen to that.

Another example in Friel’s *Translations* when the British army changes the names of the Irish places into English in order to be in touch with them easily. In this change, we consider it as changing in the names and identity also. In fact, the Lieutenant Yolland cinders this as deconstruction for the Irish culture when he translates the Irish names with the help of Owen because here, he

loves the Irish culture and wants to learn the Gaelic language. Here are some quotations to elaborate who Yolland and Owen want to change the names of places into English “Owen: Now where have we got to? Yes— the point where that stream enters the sea that tiny little beach there. George! Yolland: Yes. I’m listening. What do you call it? Say the Irish name again” (Friel, 1981, p. 36). And as Hugh indicates here that they must know those new names and places throughout Ireland, he says: “We must learn those new names. We must learn where we live. We must learn to make them our own” (ibid). In fact, Friel wrote his play set back in a sort of peasant play Irish tradition, and the great benefit of that. It gives some distance to look at Irish questions of language and culture and identity from some remove.

Friel used mapping and place name as a strong symbol of nationalism facing colonialism. According to the Translations the character of Owen, he is working for the engineers as a translator between British and Irish. Owen is seriously about his job and he is possible see places names unreal such as language. There is one scene they discussed where the priest lives, his father Hugh answers ‘Lis na Muc’ which Owen responds contradicting his father with new anglicised names without any clear feel of emotion to Irish language. He remembers whole series of an anglicised place names.

There is another example of mapping when Maire discusses about Yolland’s home in England. Maire has described the location of Yolland’s village and the close village and small town. Become larger her map she includes region and it's all location in England. In the following quotation she wanted to

explain “there’s Win farthing...and there’s Little Walsingham – that’s his mother’s hometown...and Norwich is in a county called Norfolk...and Norfolk is in the east of England” (Friel, 1981, p.60). This is an interesting contrast to the strict and offensive remapping of Ireland hold by the soldiers. She speaks more on the English places and how they seem to her. Maire remembered how Yolland has drawn a map on wet sand. I think, maybe Friel intended to focus on how the maps are temporary, they are not lasting, and able to easy deleted. Of course, the map has drawn by Yolland in the sand will be washed away.

3. Conclusion

To sum up this study, Friel’s *Translations* has been provided in the field of postcolonial criticism by applying some postcolonial concepts such as hegemony, language and culture, and identity. *Translations* play is considered a typical example of literary criticism work because Friel provides it as conflict of cultures. Yet, the present study illustrates the dominance of power culture which represent in British culture on the Irish. The concepts which have mentioned in this study represent all the colonization through Ireland country in Brian Friel’s *Translations* play. Similarly, hegemony is domination of the British Army towards the colonizes people in the Irish country. Beside that, Language and culture are the most significant elements in this paper because they illustrate that how Brian Friel has Irish and English speakers in

the play, everyone speaks English. In fact, this makes us as audience misunderstand the language of the characters. Even when the people speak in English, we also become miscommunicated with them.

Brian Friel's *Translations* is a prime example of postcolonial theory at play. Here's how the play explores this concept. The act of translation itself becomes a metaphor for the erosion of Irish culture. Gaelic names are stripped of their meaning and replaced with English equivalents, symbolizing the colonizer's attempt to erase Irish identity. Characters like Owen, who embrace English, represent the internal conflict of adopting the colonizer's language and potentially losing their own heritage. Manus, the hedge schoolmaster, clings to Gaelic and classical languages, highlighting the importance of language in preserving cultural memory.

The arrival of the British military survey team disrupts the power dynamics in the village. The Irish villagers are left confused and powerless as their land is measured and renamed. The play portrays the limitations of translation, highlighting the cultural misunderstandings that arise from the imposition of one language over another. The play explores how the characters grapple with their past under British rule. The decline of Gaelic and the erosion of traditional ways of life force them to confront a changing identity. The characters' struggle to remember and reclaim their lost heritage becomes a central theme, reflecting the postcolonial experience of reconstructing a national identity. Homi K. Bhabha's concept of cultural mimicry can be seen

in Owen's adoption of English, where he becomes a colonized subject performing the colonizer's language. The play can also be seen through the lens of scholars like Ania Loomba who discuss the effects of colonialism on language and cultural suppression. By examining these themes, "Translations" offers a powerful critique of colonialism's impact on Irish culture and identity. It highlights the struggles of a colonized people to retain their heritage and rebuild themselves in the aftermath of oppression.

The play explores the potential for language to be both a tool of oppression and a means of resistance. While the English language is used to control and redefine the Irish landscape, Gaelic becomes a symbol of cultural defiance and a connection to the past. Characters like Doalty, the hedge schoolmaster alongside Manus, represent the importance of oral tradition and storytelling in preserving Irish culture despite the decline of Gaelic. The British survey team approaches the land with a scientific, objective mindset, completely disregarding the rich history and cultural significance embedded in the original Gaelic place names. This highlights the way colonialism often devalues and disrespects the knowledge systems of colonized people.

The play subtly explores how colonialism affects women. Characters like Maggie and Maire struggle to navigate the changing social order brought by the British. The focus on language and land ownership can sometimes overshadow the impact on women's lives. "Translations" doesn't offer easy solutions. The characters grapple with the loss of their cultural identity and

the uncertainty of the future. The play explores the complex process of negotiating a new identity in a postcolonial world, where traditions are fading and the past is shrouded in a mist of loss and uncertainty. Consider the significance of specific symbols in the play. The hedge schools, where Gaelic language and culture are passed down, represent a form of resistance against colonial control. The hedge schools themselves are impermanent structures, reflecting the precariousness of Irish culture under British rule. You could delve into specific scenes that showcase these themes. For example, the scene where Lieutenant Yolland attempts to translate the Irish place names highlights the limitations of translation and the clash of cultures. Explore how the play might connect to the broader historical context of the Irish Famine, which began just a few years after the play's setting. By incorporating these additional elements, you can create a richer understanding of how *Translations* utilizes postcolonial theory to explore the impact of colonialism on Ireland.

The relationship between language and identity are based from the very beginning of the play. In particular, at the beginning, Manus teaches Sarah to say her name. In fact, teaching to say her special name to use language which means to communicate with the others easily and confirm who she is. For example, Yolland asks Owen about Maire, who is another person in Hugh's school. Owen answers that her name is Maire Chatch, so Chatch means "curly-haired," making Maire's name a reflection to who she is. Yolland and Lancey also made mistake when they called Owen "Roland," which means an

anglicized vision of his own name. In the beginning, Owen shows aggressive position towards this obvious sleight: “It’s only a name,” he tells Manus. Owen makes sharp behavior with Yolland about his reoccur mistake. Owen’s anger and retrieval of his name represented the affirm of Irish identity. Language reference to the significance of history, culture, and identity. Friel wants to focus on the names, after that, make known the major plot of the play, the rewriting of Gaelic maps participates to the wiping of Irish culture.

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