

FAMILY IN CONTEMPORARY POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the portrayal of the concept of family in contemporary postcolonial literature in English. With the backdrop of postcolonial societies grappling with the remnants of colonialism, globalization, and cultural hybridity, this study delves into the intricate dynamics of family relationships as depicted in the works of postcolonial authors. The present paper explores how postcolonial literature portrays the complexities and transformations of the family structure, including shifting gender roles, intergenerational conflicts, diasporic experiences, and the negotiation of cultural identities. Analysing various literary works from different regions and cultures, it seeks to uncover how contemporary postcolonial authors navigate the concept of family and its significance within their respective socio-cultural contexts. The research paper investigates the multifaceted representations of family in postcolonial literature, including the impact of historical legacies, cultural traditions, and societal norms on familial relationships. It discovers the rigidities between tradition and modernity, the influence of colonialism and globalization on family dynamics, and how characters negotiate their desires and aspirations within the constraints of family obligations and expectations. It considers the role of the family as a site of resistance, resilience, and agency in the face of social and political challenges. Postcolonial authors engage with themes of patriarchy, matriarchy, filial duty, and the reimagining of family structures to challenge power dynamics, assert agency, and promote social change.

Keywords: *Postcolonial Literature, Family, Gender Roles, Cultural Identity, Diaspora, Resistance, Agency, Tradition, Modernity, Power Dynamics*

INTRODUCTION

The family, whether lovely or terrible, is a vital institution, and it is the primary social unit in any community, the individual's opening into the more comprehensive social network. As the first locus of development, the family nourishes the individual and sets the conditions for growth. The significance of family is profound and multifaceted, transcending geographical boundaries, cultural differences, and historical contexts. Family is the foundational unit of society, playing a vital role in shaping individuals' identities, values, and experiences. It is a source of emotional support, nurturance, and socialization,

providing a sense of belonging and connection to one's roots.

As the protector of tradition and memory, the family fulfils a vital function, transmitting and mediating the memories, mores, and myths of the preceding generations and the community. Rituals, customs, spirituality, morality and religion all have their place within the family structure, forming family fictions of a unique and, most often, communal nature. Literature provides a platform to examine families' diverse forms and systems, including nuclear, extended, blended, and chosen families. It delves into the intricacies of familial

bonds, highlighting the bonds of love, loyalty, and sacrifice and the tensions, conflicts, and fractures that can arise within family units. The family and its fabrications thus create the links in the chain between the past, present, and future in an ongoing narrative of both individualistic concerns and pursuits.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of a research paper on Family in Contemporary Postcolonial Literature in English can include:

- To analyze and understand the representation of family dynamics in postcolonial literature in English.
- To explore how postcolonial literature reflects the impact of colonialism on family structures, values, and relationships.
- To examine how postcolonial authors navigate and challenge traditional notions of family within their works.
- To investigate the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and ethnicity in shaping familial experiences and identities in postcolonial literature.
- To identify and analyze the family's role in decolonization, cultural revitalization, and resistance in postcolonial contexts.
- To examine the complexities of intergenerational trauma and its effects on familial relationships within postcolonial literature.
- To highlight the agency, resilience, and survival strategies postcolonial families employ in negotiating cultural hybridity and preserving their cultural heritage.
- To critically engage with the themes of power, authority, and hierarchy within postcolonial family structures.
- To explore the representation of marginalized and subaltern voices within postcolonial literature, mainly about family dynamics.
- To contribute to the broader understanding of the complexities of family in postcolonial

literature and its significance in shaping individual and communal identities.

These objectives provide a framework for conducting a comprehensive study on the topic, allowing for a nuanced exploration of family in contemporary postcolonial literature in English.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Qualitative Research design is used to focus on a thorough analysis and interpretation of literary texts. It will involve an in-depth examination of selected postcolonial literary works that explore the family theme. The study will employ a comparative approach, examining similarities and differences in portraying family dynamics across different postcolonial texts. Secondary data will be used for textual analysis of the selected literary works to identify and analyze the representations of family dynamics.

DISCUSSION

As a literary theme, the family offers a fascinating and complex area of research. In contemporary postcolonial literature in English, the family theme is vibrant and diversified. As the locus of tradition, the family in this literature may be explored as the place where the core values of the preceding generations and the ancestors are transmitted and lived so that continuity and growth are ensured. At the same time, the family, as a reflector and indicator of social change, offers a wide area of research for themes of conflict and reconciliation. The essays in this collection reflect this diversity of issues. The multiple problems of disrupted family lives, enforced family separations, political and personal violence within the domestic environment, and the symbolic value of family as a bulwark against contemporary society's socio-political and moral ambiguities.

The significance of the family in postcolonial nations is perhaps insufficiently recognized. Zimbabwean writer J. Nozipo Maraire sees the family as one of the core values and achievements of what is often still called The Third World. The powerful

northern countries ... measure us by the balance of trade, the gross national product, the per capita income, and the infant mortality rate. Our indicators of health care equity, education for all, the family, the drug-free schools, and expenditure on services for the people disabled - these have no place in their financial ledgers. Yet these reflect our values and our achievements.

The awareness of the family as an intrinsic, often underrated value and social constellation in the former colonies infuses the essays of this collection. The essays were first presented as papers at the conference on Family in Contemporary Postcolonial Literatures in English hosted by the Department of English, University of Groningen, the Netherlands, 17-19 November 2004. The discussion focused primarily on family fiction in work by indigenous authors, ensuring at least one common denominator in this dazzling range of literature. In the course of the conference discussions, it became clear that the literary representation of the family in postcolonial literature offers an immense and, as yet, little theorized area of study. It also became clear that a unified, overarching theory of the family in postcolonial literature does not exist, nor will in all probability ever be constructed, considering the extreme diversification of this theme. While the question of the use of theory is a topic of some discussion in the postcolonial field (a field that is notoriously caught up in critical debates and constant self-examination), at the Groningen conference, there appeared to be a common consensus on the effect that our traditional Western literary and cultural theories must be used with caution, out of respect for the contemporary nonwestern literary texts. We found that Freudian psychoanalytic theory on 'the family romance,' while offering illuminating insights, does not suffice as the primary theory. In analyzing, questioning, undermining or celebrating the family and its changes, they explore the contemporary postcolonial literary texts concerning concepts developed by significant theorists in the field of postcolonial studies, such as Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha and Achille Mbembe. Priority is given to the literary texts and

their respective contexts rather than particular theorists or theories.

Postcolonial studies on family delve into the complex dynamics of familial relationships in the aftermath of colonialism. These studies explore how colonization and its aftermath have shaped and reconfigured family structures, values, and identities within postcolonial societies. Colonial powers often imposed cultural norms, values, and gender roles on colonized societies, leading to disruptions and transformations within family structures. Postcolonial scholars analyze how these impositions and disturbances have influenced notions of gender, authority, and familial hierarchies.

Another area of focus is the exploration of intergenerational trauma and its effects on families in postcolonial contexts. Colonialism often wounds societies, and these experiences can reverberate within families across generations. Postcolonial studies shed light on how historical injustices, cultural erasure, and systemic inequalities have impacted familial relationships, identity formation, and the transmission of cultural knowledge. Postcolonial scholars also investigate the intersections of family, race, class, and ethnicity within postcolonial societies. They analyze how these intersecting factors shape familial relationships, power dynamics, and the experiences of marginalized and subaltern groups within families. These studies strive to challenge dominant narratives and uncover the hidden stories and voices within postcolonial family structures.

Postcolonial studies today to re-value fiction as the primary cultural expression, and thus to reject the use of fictional transition is, as Frank Schulze Engler rightly states, not the move from "tradition" into "modernity," but "a transition within modernity that has been greatly accelerated by globalization processes and that has led to the emergence of "reflexive" or "late" forms of modernity. Schulze-Engler quotes Rushdie's view of the novel as "the stage upon which the great debates of society can be conducted," since the novel "has always been about how different languages, values and narratives quarrel, and about

the shifting relations between them, which are relations of power". This tumultuous interrelatedness is explored in Matt Kimmich's essay on Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and what he terms 'its revisionist quasi-sequel *The Moor's Last Sigh*'. Kimmich argues that the emancipatory efforts of children (or offspring characters) in these novels to free themselves from actual and symbolic parents and their dominant discourse prove most successful (if ambivalently so) when the children endeavor to co-author their own lives and identities and at the same time inscribe their parents in a complex metafictional dialogue. Using and expanding Edward Said's concepts of filiation and affiliation, this essay reads Rushdie's two novels in tandem, providing similar themes and motifs yet divergent perspectives on postcolonial India.

Family structures, beliefs and practices vary from culture to culture. In Western nations, well-known contemporary social trends are rising divorce rates (along with high re-marriage rates) and still growing numbers of single-parent families. Scientific developments, such as in vitro fertilization and genetic engineering, have significantly impacted the family and increased domestic violence and child sexual abuse. Overall, the institutions of marriage and family in Europe and North America may well be, as Stephen C. Barton argues, in a state of crisis.

In the formerly colonized nations, the institutions of the family are also subject to various influences, from the tenets of the traditional cultural heritage to the political and economic factors that, in turn, are influenced by processes of decolonization and increasingly by modern-day Western trends due to the influences of globalization and trans-culturalism. Inevitably, the migrant or diasporic literature by contemporary British-Asian writers reflects many conflicting results on the family. Often the cultural heritage of the postcolonial nation is in disharmony with the pressures of modern-day Western society, sometimes reinforcing the image of the nuclear family but also challenging and evaluating it.

This process of fictionally formulating new modalities of being between the culture of origin

and the current British culture is explored in Janet Wilson's discussion of family narratives by the second-generation British-Asian writers Hanef Kureishi (*The Buddha of Suburbia*, 1990), Meera Syal (*Anita and Me*, 1996) and Monica Ali (*Brick Lane*, 2004). Wilson's discussion demonstrates that problems of social marginalization (such as racial discrimination, dispossession and reduced communication) contribute to the complexity and instability of the migrant family structure. Perhaps even more disruptive are the challenges and criticisms of the traditional cultural heritage expressed by the youthful protagonists and narrators. The hybrid subjects carry the processes of adjustment and intercultural development outward in society and inward into the domestic sphere.

Western influences on postcolonial literature have always been profound, not only via the actual processes of intercommunication but also expressed through literary aspects such as genre and style. Often seen as primary role models during colonial times, Western genres and literary styles have been imitated, altered, and subverted by colonial and postcolonial authors. Christine van Boheemen discusses a case study of African appropriation of European narrative models in her essay on Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. This first novel by a Black Zimbabwean female novelist contributes to developing a specifically African use of European literary models, as Van Boheemen demonstrates.

Adapting the Western topos of the "family romance" to the Shona family system, Dangarembga designs a specifically local vehicle to render the complexity and ambiguity of the "nervous condition" of African womanhood. Her use of family romance as the integration of African tradition and values with Western plot structure results in a fascinating hybrid family romance, which may be seen as part of the ongoing process of translation and negotiation between the literary, the socio-cultural and the familial in postcolonial literature.

Ritske Zuidema's essay on several Liberian novels from 1970-2000 also discusses processes of hybridity, translation and negotiation in the context

of the social and economic problems specific to the situation in Liberia. Throughout Liberia's recent history, the country's Americo-Liberian elite regarded the traditional family and its environment as obstacles to civilization and social advancement. Children were often separated from their families to safeguard their future careers and sent to missionary boarding schools or Americo-Liberian families. Some children left their families to "advance" in society by joining the rebel army. Zuidema traces this theme of family abandonment and its consequences through several texts, framing his findings with journalistic and academic analyses of the current Liberian crisis.

In exploring the intimate discords of family life in contemporary Caribbean literature, Judith Misrahi-Barak addresses the same theme of the burden of the past. In this literature, it is, in particular, the heritage of slavery, the influence of which has endured well into the twentieth century, that permeates human relationships in various physical and verbal exchanges. Misrahi-Barak's essay notes that the family has been a central and harrowing concern in Caribbean literature since the mid-twentieth century. In her analysis of Denise Harris's *Web of Secrets* and Austin Clarke's *The Polished Hoe* Misrahi-Barak points out the insidious ways in which the burden of the colonial past hampers specifically the women of the family and silences their voices.

Both novels have what Misrahi-Barak calls "the brutalization of the subaltern woman" as their central subject, and both explore the female strategy of silence as well as the breaking of that silence to lay to rest the spectres of rape and incest from the family past. In her analysis, Misrahi-Barak poses that the novels offer an "indirect but shrewd" response to Spivak's well-known and penetrating question, "Can the subaltern speak?"

What emerges as a distinct literary theme throughout this collection of essays is the concern with preserving traditional family structures and related aspects, such as cultural values, spirituality and gender roles. This preservation is by no means uncontroversial. As Heidi van den Heuvel-Disler argues, it is mainly the patriarchal repression

inherent in traditional societies, which was upheld and reinforced by the colonial systems, for instance, the Christian church in Samoa, that has impeded emancipation and that continues to damage families in particular women's lives within the family.

Van den Heuvel-Disler states the short fiction by Samoan writer Sia Figiel and Maori writer Patricia Grace may be read as cultural reference points for indigenous readers. Both authors have significantly contributed to the rise of their respective national literature by using orality and negotiating integration between tradition and modernity. The differences in their depiction of family life may be attributed to the differences in social cohesion between their respective nations. In Figiel's fiction, the family, as the basic social unit of Samoa's struggling, young and independent state, is depicted through the eyes of obstinate and critical teenagers. In Grace's short fiction, the New Zealand setting, where co-existence between Maori and Pakeha is a prerequisite, the Maori family is described in terms of wisdom, community and experience.

In a similar comparative essay combining works from two different kinds of literature, Irene Visser discusses Maori writer Apirana Taylor's *He Tangi Aroha* (1993) and South African writer Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* (2002). Set in times of social turmoil and historical indeterminacy, these novels share a common perspective on political and social injustice, which is to be addressed and redressed through the recuperative forces of creativity, community, love and charity. The traditional family is expressly not the locus of such healing powers; both novels make it unequivocally clear that the patriarchal repression inherent in conventional family structures enables domestic violence, hampers progress, and so continues to damage families from within. In their final pages, the novels both pose a new, transformed family constellation, which, Visser claims, forms the gateway to a more hopeful future in answer to the urgent call for change that permeates both novels.

While, indeed, after the early 1990s, a significant change has come in both nations, its

impact on the family, as reflected in literature, has often been ambivalent. South Africa, in particular, has seen a massive change heralded by the first democratic elections 1994. The transformation of South Africa has found expression in national literature that provides fascinating accounts of family life and sociopolitical change. Margriet van der Waal presents a brief overview of the various works of fiction that have recently appeared in South Africa and has the family as their central theme.

Her essay considers some of the meanings of "family". It investigates how, as a construct, it plays an essential role in identity formation, both on an individual and national and cultural level. Analyzing major literary narrative processes and mechanisms that establish and negotiate the relation between the family and identity, Van der Waal discusses the novel *David's Story* (2002) by Zoe Wicomb as an example of a fictive account that challenges and undermines simplistic constructions of racial identity through a reconstruction of family history. Her essay argues that this novel, like many of its contemporaries, emphasizes the process of reflecting on family history and relationships rather than on attempts to establish a factual truth about these issues.

Sam Radithalo's essay supports and further problematizes this view. He concurs that the thawing of grand apartheid and its impact on literary production has produced startling works of fiction that inscribe the independent nation with ambiguity. Having been spared a bitter "race" war in the interregnum period leading to 1994, Radithalo states, the country has since faced the scourge of internecine social ills located within the family - communal conflicts and crises of identity that show the lingering effects of the past. Using Achille Mbembe's *On the Post colony* as a theoretical basis, Radithalo's analysis of K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen*

Cents (2012) and Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* (2001) explores the problematic issues of family disintegration, violence, and the results of unresolved social and political identities.

Therefore, postcolonial families constitute fascinating areas of interpersonal and intergenerational relationships, conflicts, and reconciliations, played out against broader social and communal change. In literary studies and sociological and psychological research, family development patterns are a significant area of interest.

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