

Abstract

This thesis discusses the process of consciousness re-formation and ideology affirmation of the illiterate social subjects that happens in an implicit manner based upon observing and experiencing. The thesis studies this process of consciousness re-formation and affirmation of the ideology of the lower classes and the colonized social subjects in two books of poems, the Ugandan *Song of Lawino* and the Egyptian *The Letters of Heraji Elgot*. The thesis proves that the two texts belong to the category of tendentious literature whose writers function as organic intellectuals and committed writers. In delineating the process of consciousness re-formation of the illiterate social subjects, the thesis sticks to the Marxist framework of reference that gives due importance to the study of the term ‘ideology’ as well as other related terms like Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), ‘hegemony’, ‘organic intellectual’ and ‘traditional intellectual’ that help in studying the ideology of the illiterate.

Key words Marxist literary theory, ideology, consciousness re-formation, illiterate, proletariat, Gramsci, hegemony, organic intellectual, traditional intellectual, new intellectual, Althusser, Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), Acoli tribe, Uganda, Okot p' Bitek, traditional literature, oral literature, tendentious/committed literature, Lawino, Egypt, Abdul Rahman Alabnudi, the High Dam, Heraji Elgot, letters, epistolary technique in poetry.

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Chapter One

The Theoretical Framework of Reference

Chapter Two

Lawino: The Nationalist Sage, Exposing Colonial Capitalism

Chapter Three

New Consciousness of the Egyptian Illiterate Proletariat

Chapter Four

Different Faces, Same Features:

Song of Lawino Compared to

The Letters of Hiraaji il-guṬ

Besides being a philosophy that opposes any form of manipulating the lower classes by the higher ones that possess the capital, Marxism is the philosophy of revolt. It calls the proletarians to rebel to change their unfair socio-economic conditions. We can say that Marxism calls for a social revolution that changes “the system of ownership or the economic system” or what Marxism regards as “the ‘mode of production’” (Heywood 182).

This chapter is an exploration of the effects of the 1952 Revolution and its socio-economic consequences upon the Egyptian couple Ḥiraaji il-guṬ and his wife FaṬnah Ahmed Abdel Ghaffaar whose exchange of letters constitutes Abdul Rahman Alabnudi’s *The Letters of Ḥiraaji il-guṬ*. The chapter explores how the illiterate acquire ideology in an implicit manner based upon observing and labor, whether those illiterate proletariat are aware or unaware of the changes that the revolution brought and the way they re-view and reform their beliefs as a result of these changes. The chapter introduces both Ḥiraaji and FaṬnah as advocates for a

cultural revolution in their village that is a symbol of Egypt as a whole in a transitional moment.

The Technique of *The Letters of Ḥiraaji il-guṭ*

The Letters of Ḥiraaji il-guṭ is an epistolary book of poems. It consists of twenty-four letters all in all; thirteen letters sent from Ḥiraaji il-guṭ the worker in the High Dam to his wife Faṭnah Ahmed Abdul Ghaffar in the Egyptian village of Jabalaaiyt il-Faar and eleven answers sent by Faṭnah to Ḥiraaji's letters. In the preface of *The Letters of Ḥiraaji il-guṭ*, Alabnudi mentions that the text first written in 1966. However, the manuscript was confiscated after the poet was arrested. Alabnudi had to rewrite *The Letters of Ḥiraaji il-guṭ* in 1967 after the defeat of the Six-Day War and during the War of Attrition while being in Suez among peasants like Ḥiraaji and Faṭnah (8). This epistolary technique allowed for continuity; Alabnudi was able to add more letters to the book that was published in 1968 or two years before the end of the High Dam project.

The exchange of letters between Ḥiraaji and Faṭnah allows the book to have two protagonists: Ḥiraaji, the male protagonist and Faṭnah, the female protagonist. As such, the book reaches the reader through two voices and two viewpoints that differ according to the gender, the worldview and the past experiences in the High Dam. Ḥiraaji in his letters offers his firsthand experience to Faṭnah in the small Upper Egyptian village. The poems are written in Upper Egyptian colloquial Arabic that helps the reader to identify with the protagonists and the text to achieve an air of reality.

The letters echo emotional and ideological aspects of both Ḥiraaji and Faṭnah. They show stages of ideological development of the male and female protagonists. For Ḥiraaji, there are three stages of ideological development. First, there is Ḥiraaji the villager carrying pebbles; second, Ḥiraaji becomes the semi-skilled worker using dynamite and finally the skilled worker cutting pipes in which he developed into the semi-socialist worker.

As for Faṭnah, the letters show four stages of her ideological development: First, there is Faṭnah who does not know anything

outside Jabalaaiyt il-Faar; second, there is Faṭnah who transforms Ḥiraaji's experience to their people in the village; third, she turns into a new woman who starts reforming her ideological mold by adopting an addition role as a peasant. Finally, Faṭnah ends by viewing the High Dam as an exploitative entity.

Egyptian Economy under the British Colonization

To understand Ḥiraaji's and Faṭnah's economic situation that shapes their consciousness we need first to understand the economic situation before the 1952 Revolution. In his book *The July Revolution and the Game of Social Balance*¹, Gamal Magdy Ḥasaneen depicts a picture of the bad conditions under which the Egyptian peasant lived pre the Free Officers Movement. The Egyptian economy, governed by the British colonization, depended mainly on agriculture and services and 70% of the working Egyptians were working in the agricultural field while 75% of the industrial projects and workshops were working on manufacturing agricultural products (18). Ḥasaneen adds that according to the statistics of 1947, the total number of the working force in the

agricultural field was 7,554,000 and that only 1/3 of this number was required which means that 2/3 of it was not functional (23). About 78% of the inhabitants of rural Egypt did not own land or had means of production; the farmers in 1945 lived under harsh and exploitative and hard circumstances with an annual income that did not exceed 4 Egyptian pounds (15-25)²

In his book *The Humanist Stimulant for the Socialist Cooperative Democratic Tendency*, Abdul Rahman Abou al-khair draws a picture of how the British ruled Egypt. He says that they propagated the myth that Egypt is only capable of agriculture not industry and used education to promote this idea. The British also fought the educated people who propagated the idea of a revolution that called for the welfare of the working classes and used its local agents to enforce its fist (51-2).

In his book *The Free Officers' Revolution in Egypt*, F. Kovtonovitch explains the Great Britain's trials to turn Egypt into a producer of "primary materials especially cotton" to export it to the English textile factories (17). Kovtonovitch goes on and

explains how colonization with its local agents helped in fossilizing the Egyptian economic system and banning its development which badly affected the everyday life of the Egyptian peasant which was deteriorating because of this lame agricultural system and because of the high taxes they had to pay (18-9).

In *The Egyptian Countryside* published in 1936, ʿaaʿishah Abdul Raḥmaan illustrates the pathetic conditions the Egyptian peasant lived under during her journey to a typical Egyptian village. In the book, she calls king Farouk take actual steps towards enhancing the conditions of the countryside as the peasants at that time did not trust the officials' promises of a better life (46).

The colonization as a capitalist exploitative force managed to maintain these circumstances to exploit the Egyptian lands and social subjects. Such circumstances created the semi feudal comprador which constituted 0.5% of the Egyptians that owned 50% of the national income (Karanjia 46). To guarantee its interests and the status quo this comprador oppressed the proletarians and

lower classes. Both colonization and the Egyptian comprador depended on each other to control and exploit the lower classes³.

The 1952 Revolution came to end colonization and to create a social change that helped the proletariat, who were mostly farmers, to live under better conditions⁴. The revolution introduced the Egyptian proletariat to industry and construction; however, the Egyptian worker remained connected to his village and found it difficult to live alone in the town where he worked, away from his whole family (Ḥasaneen 40). In spite of the fact that Egypt was trying to shift from being mostly an agricultural country to being an industrial one as well, the shift from capitalism to socialism did not come right after the beginning of the revolution. The change from capitalism to socialism, or as some may call the capitalism of the state, came in 1961 with the July socialist laws. These laws marked the beginning of the change from one economic system to another that later affected the Egyptian lower/working class represented in the text by Ḥiraaji and Faṭnah.