



M. NOURBESE PHILIP AND PROBLEM OF MOTHER TONGUE*

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Abstract

Antilles has brought in resonant figures like Fanon, Césaire and Walcott for post-colonial studies. M. Nourbese Philip, from Tobago, is one of the recent ones as an innovative poet with her postmodernist demotic style. Because foreign language education in colonial lands and in today's neo-colonial world is not widely studied for post-colonial field, this study examines her poem *Discourse on the Logic of Language* to demonstrate how language of colonizers damages original language/s of a colony. With help of unproportional force considering not only a military power, colonizer metropolises do not merely exploit lands but also deconstruct their culture and language to be able to remain there even after decolonization for their imperial goals. The most principle of them is making English dominant over local languages and so replacing primitive culture with an English taste in time by means of literature in oriental education systems in colonies. On the basis of a Western canonized world, Philip responds to its colonial discourses by struggling for clues of her African origin to be able to construct a tradition devoid of less Eurocentric norms. In her mother country, English is not a second language but a mother tongue which is still controversial in her poetics. And, because languages of past is wiped out; a life without English seems not possible in spite of her great literary endeavour. In short, she has no other choice; Philip has only English to express her own experiences.

Keywords: Colonialism, Language, Literature, Education, Remembrance, Memory.

1. Introduction

Together with history and philosophy, linguistics is one of the "master discourses of Imperial Europe" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1995, p. 2). In that discourse, language of mother country is superior to conquered region's language/s on account of being essential tool for 'civilization', 'enlightenment' and 'modernism'. As "colonial process itself begins in language" (p. 283) control over local languages by colonizers endures because of neo-colonialism in that to speak in a metropolitan way means prestige in society. Through the assimilation process, colonizers firstly take what locals know, the way they structure their world and its meanings by power and knowledge. The power gives rise to domination of colonized land. The latter, knowledge, is obtained by "intellectual and moral leadership." (Gramsci, 1999, p. 45) Both open the path leading to cultural domination operated by consent which is professionally organised with help of language and its literature. Literary texts are one of the screens that communicate with society not only due to their artistic internal matter, but also for being part of education from school ages to higher steps of personal growth. As the most critical institution after family, education constructs a cultural taste, in that foreign cultures may be exposed to the other ones through poems, plays, novels and short stories especially for imperial goals to constitute cultural authority over the others. After The English Education Act in 1835, one of the metropolitan men T. B. Macaulay who played a dominant act in introducing English and European values to education in India says for the project designed to "civilize" whole Indian nation that "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect." (2012, p.1642) In this way, to achieve such a goal is not surely an uncomplicated task until making colonized people desire unconsciously the 'taste' of being English. Schools are one of the principal 'apparatuses' of ideology through which people internalize the objected idea unawares. Position of the students in their classes is just like workers of a factory as Althusser claims that they "act all by themselves, without there being any need to post a policeman behind each and every one of them." (2014, p. 177) And, with help of teachers who are "unwitting stooges" (Philipson 308), the students internalize the ideology presented by English language and literature. However, religion as "the opium of the people" (Marx, 1979, p. 127) is the best way of narcotising socially, Christian missionary actions begin to harass people of India because they have other religions such as Islam and Hinduism. Then, colonizers find a more secular way for a cultural ideal which leads colonizers to socio-political control of the colony. So, literature becomes the key figure of liberating Indians from canons of religion by presenting universality of a collective consciousness:

Comparisons were on occasion made between the situation at home and in India, between the 'rescue' of the lower classes in England, 'those living in the dark recesses of our great cities at home,

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from the state of degradation consequent on their vicious and depraved habits, the offspring of ignorance and sensual indulgence', and the elevation of the Hindus and Muslims whose 'ignorance and degradation' required a remedy not adequately supplied by their respective faiths. Such comparisons served to intensify the search for other social institutions to take over from religious instruction the function of communicating the laws of the social order. (Wlswanathan, 1995, p. 434)

Since learning a new language and its literature sounds unsuspecting, connection among ideology, language and literature may imply a problematic situation at first glance. Yet, by the time Saussure developed Structural Linguistics in early twentieth century, language began to be handled 'synchronically' therein causes or origins of individual words lose its significance whereas a structural system of connections among them comes into prominence. Structural linguistics leaves 'diachronic' approach behind and focuses on how language functions in structure. According to this function, speakers of the language produce meaning by structuring the world in terms of binary oppositions. The structure of language has a sign system formed by 'signifier' and 'signified'. In this sense, the East becomes the binary opposition of the West to be able to construct their Eurocentric world. While the West is the signifier, 'the other' is the signified. One is civilized, modern, advanced, enlightened and the other is primitive, traditional, underdeveloped and dark. Moreover, "the Other is located most fundamentally in language, the medium for representing selves and others." (Jernudd, B. H., & Shapiro, M. J.1989, p. 28) Therefore, language does not only carry a discriminative role but also it has the power of linguistic impoverishment against others through constructing a cultural authority. Within this direction, Fanon pursues that "To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization." (2008, p. 8)

The time when signified people of colonized lands could be educated to be able to see the world from the perspective of the signifiers, it means that colonizers would manage to accomplish their civilization mission in appearance. Accordingly, literary texts were the rare (due to underdeveloped publishing technology at the time of colonies) but perfect tools of language to adopt such an imperial organisation as a "technology of colonialist subjectification." (Ashcroft et al., 1995, p. 426) This technology insists on "representations of Western literary knowledge as objective, universal, and rational" (Wlswanathan, 1995, p. 436) while placing the other (native) as national, rural, uncivilized and nonmodern. Literature, then, is best place to discover comparison and contrast between the signifier and the signified:

Ever since Plato, it has been acknowledged that literature mediates between the real and the imaginary. Marxist and post-structuralist debates on ideology increasingly try to define the nature of this mediation. If, as we suggested earlier, language and 'signs' are the sites where different ideologies intersect and clash with one another, then literary texts, being complex clusters of languages and signs, can be identified as extremely fecund sites for such ideological interactions. (Loomba, 2005, p. 63)

There is no doubt that theories of deconstruction and post-structuralism have helped to comprehend complex connections among power, ideology, language and literature since mid-twentieth century. So, it is crystal clear today that language and literature are both cornerstones in shaping a binary opposition standing opposite to Eurocentric norms. Therefore, culturally colonized people have not only tasted language and literature of colonizers but also they are unconsciously exposed to representation of themselves and their lands in discourses of colonizers. English language has derived numerous words from other languages in particular during colonial period enabling colonizers to encounter with new world of words which has been transformed into colonial discourses in time to legitimate their invasion far lands. When Amerindian people were there, 'cannibalism' was one of them that belongs to the West Indies (also a sign of colonial discourse with its reconstructed name by colonizers) where 'hurricane' exists as another sign and characterise its places as Hulme clarifies:

Similarly, from the 1520s 'canibal/cannibal' was derived from the Latin *canis* (dog)...So by the early sixteenth century scientific etymology had supported the evidence of 'empirical observation' that the native cannibals of the West Indies hunted like dogs and treated their victims in the ferocious manner of all predators, tearing them limb from limb in order to consume them. (1986, p. 4)

Derived new words have their own resonances and connotations in mother tongue and colonizers consciously misrepresented the other to show how they were right to invade their lands. While doing this, it was necessary to trivialize culture, value, belief, life system and styles of the other with help of language, literature and colonial discourses in them. Macaulay shows that how he positions England in the highest point of civilization with its language by treading on others:



It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgement used at preparatory schools in England. (2012, p. 1641)

Until Phillipson such a “linguistic imperialism”, firstly coined by him (1992), has been neglected by many linguists of English and its instructors. This imperial struggle is a kind of linguistic discrimination also called as *linguicism* and *linguagism*, and predominates over other languages especially in science, business, media and other branches of mass communication around the globe specifically in former colonized lands. However, colonialism ends after World War II progressively, dominance of language of the old empire on which the sun never sets still continues. As Popham sets forth that “While the engine of colonialism long ago ran out of steam, the momentum of its languages is still formidable, and it is against their tyranny that the smaller languages fight to survive.” (39) Moreover, Phillipson claims that “linguicism refers exclusively to ideologies and structures where language is the means of effecting or maintaining an unequal allocation of power and resources.” (55) In such a complicated case, language becomes useful to transfer ideology of the native speakers:

What is at stake when English spreads is not merely the substitution or displacement of one language by another but the imposition of new “mental structures” through English. This is in fact an intrinsic part of “modernization” and “nation building,” a logical consequence of ELT [English language teaching]. Yet the implications of this have scarcely penetrated into ELT research or teaching methodology. Cross-cultural studies have never formed part of the core of ELT as an academic discipline, nor even any principled consideration of what educational implications might follow from an awareness of this aspect of English linguistic imperialism. (Phillipson 166)

In today’s world, language has become one of the repeatedly desired tastes of the West that paves the way through construction of a consumer monotype by global capitalism. Creating a popular culture is the primary principle of the new phase of post-modern world’s capital order. And, commodities of culture industries function just as the ones of Ford Industry in both there is “commodification, standardization and massification.” (Kellner 2) Unqualified mass workers are replaced by commodification of the globe, standard production is replaced by standardization of consumers and mass-production is replaced by massification of people. As a result, global consumerism is born after the strong relationship between control and domination of social order by constructing dominant patterns of desires, thought and behaviour to end individuality in that individuals are enculturated by mass society. Marx’s *grundrisse/circuit* (1969): production-distribution-consumption-production reworks in post-modern epoch but in a different manner. This time, capitalism draws infinite circles for circuit of popular culture. Lyotard utterly generalise that post-modern condition: “One listens to reggae, watches a western, eats McDonald’s food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and retro clothes in Hong Kong.” (1984, p. 76) On each turn of fashion today, one may replace the names and see how Lyotard continues to be right at present time. Besides, English language has become the key figure of the circuit of culture industry over time. Today, from t-shirts printing to names of malls and shops with playing music in them; English means popularity and prestige in society. People learn it to get better jobs and to express themselves in various fields of life from business to academy. The first heroes children learn are Spiderman, Batman, Ironman and etc. which causes end of their own cultural imagination and unconscious direction to blue and red colours of customs of most American heroes as their first colours they paint their world. It is only through language we transfer our experience to next generations and if it is taken from us the result is what English books have caused in Caribbean:

And in terms of what we write, our perceptual models, we are more conscious (in terms of sensibility) of the falling of snow, for instance-the models are all there for the falling of the snow- than of the force of the hurricanes which take place every year. In other words, we haven’t got the syllables, the syllabic intelligence, to describe the hurricane which is our own experience, whereas we can describe the imported alien experience of the snowfall. (Brathwaite, 1995, p. 310)

By the time colonizers left colonies, they had legated a colonial experience to new native rulers who began to form a class structured by no interest to change British norms but they were keen to stabilize them to be able to civilized, to become modern, prestigious and elite. In this sense, remaining second language constituted works of areas, schools, governmental issues and whole life in short but it was not sufficient alone since British interests had been imposed to stabilize the colony even after decolonization. For this reason, colonial organisation was planned professionally:

The rise of literary studies as a ‘discipline’ of study in British universities was in fact linked to the perceived needs of colonial administrators: English literature was instituted as a formal discipline in



London and Oxford only after the Indian Civil Service examination began to include a 1000 mark paper in it, on the assumption that knowledge of English literature was necessary for those who would be administering British interests. (Lomba, 2005, p. 75)

After those historical experiences, Phillipson explores how English has become a dominant international language through language practice and pedagogy. As a homogenous language, "English has become not just a national language used internationally, but rather a true international language." (Kameda, 2015, p. 70) In 1989, McCallen presents English as a "world commodity" which has an "economic exchange value" (Cameron, 2012, p. 352) in global linguistic market and creates its own industry: ELT industry which transforms into a form of *culture industry* which Horkheimer and Adorno use the term for the first time in the book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. (1947) In the post-modern consumer mass society, English is consumed like a "credit card" (Thiong'o, 1994, p. 12) that is key to success climbing steps through higher classes the dominant ideology imposes. This linguistic dominance "is asserted and maintained by the continuous creation of cultural inequalities between English and other languages" (Phillipson, 1992, p. 47) just as it is clearly confessed by Macaulay in colonial period that he says "Sanskrit language is less valuable..." (2012, p.1641) As Lomba asserts above, its literature plays the key role for its 'high' position and administering English predilections:

Literary education was now determined by the dominant language while also reinforcing that dominance. Orature (oral literature), in Kenyan languages stopped. In primary school I now read simplified Dickens and Stevenson alongside Rider Haggard. Jim Hawkins, Oliver Twist, Tom Brown - not Hare, Leopard and Lion - were now my daily companions in the world of imagination. In secondary school, Scott and G. B. Shaw vied with more Rider Haggard, John Buchan, Alan Paton, Captain W. E. Johns. At Makerere I read English: from Chaucer to T. S. Eliot with a touch of Graham Greene. Thus language and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds. (Thiong'o, 1994, p. 12)

After independence movement of India began, Thomas Carlyle claims and thus approves Thiong'o that "Indian Empire, or no Indian Empire; we cannot do without Shakespeare! Indian Empire will go, at any rate, some day, but this Shakespeare does not go, he lasts forever with us." (1996, p. 101) He portrays how English taste may remain in globe. Claire Harris, a remarkable Trinidadian and Tobagonian-Canadian poet, sets forth that the education system in Trinidad and Tobago does not contrast with Thiong'o's Kenya. She depicts that "We learnt English folk songs, put on Gilbert and Sullivan. British gym mistresses taught us Morris dancing among other skills." (Hunter, 1993, p. 259) For her, "poets whose sense of the art is essentially rooted in the English tradition" (Ibid 259) cannot escape that tradition but merely may remain "imagination" from inheritance. Still, Caribbean space has to be set aside in all above discussions because no other place leaves astern its language and so its culture, experience and memory in history of Africa or India. All Caribbean have only colonial languages without their mother tongues because "every owner of slaves shall, wherever possible, ensure that his slaves belong to as many ethno-linguistic groups as possible. If they cannot speak to each other, they cannot then foment rebellion and revolution." (Philip, 2014, p. 30) Accordingly, Tobago of Philip has only one language: English.

2. M. Nourbese Philip

As a "bridge-building" (Hunter, 275) writer Nourbese Philip, having her origin from Caribbean where "was a theatre of war for all of ...European powers" (Philip, 2004, p. 686), connects memory before colonialism and present time to be able to construct a Black Writing tradition bereft Eurocentric norms but prompted by Afro-centric tradition in which colonized people build their own images and words due to the fact that "Africans in the New World were compelled to enter another consciousness, that of their masters, while simultaneously being excluded from their own." (Philip, 2014, p.81) For her, "to speak another language is to enter another consciousness" (81) in that one expresses his/her distinct cultural experiences differing from metropolis of that language. Eventually, the contradiction what Du Bois coins "double consciousness" (see *The Souls of Black Folk*) show up in lives of people who lost their own language during colonialism. One part of the double always colonizes the other because it has linguistic power dominating the latter which has only memories differing culturally from its other and presenting its identity to prevent becoming fully English. Dominator conscious constructs education system in that "English fairy tales and nursery rhymes; stories like *Alice in Wonderland*- like the Greek myths these were very much part of our linguistic landscape." (Philip, 2004, p. 687) That's why; Philip develops a choral approach "crossing through British manned checkpoints" (Johnston, 2003, p. 124) to her writing style for a more accurate representation of mixed Caribbean to destroy the canonized classical Western linear logic and to replace it with a fragmented "polyvocal, multivocal chorus." (Philip, 2004, p. 686) Philip does not pursue the goal of



constructing a nation language like many other postcolonial critics; instead she appreciates a “demotic” language which is “bad English, broken English, patois, dialect” (2014, p. 83) and “a language that moves, like the Carnival band, through space rhythmmed by time” (Philip, 1997b, pp. 130-1) to alter collective consciousness of Caribbean and to make people perceive differently. She uses it in her poems to subvert “the standard English lyric voice with frequent interruptions in Trinidadian English speech.” (Verhagen, 2007, p. 83) She does not romanticize her endeavour and rejects anachronist approach for post-colonial criticism: “We can't pretend that Europe does not exist; if we do so, we do so at a great risk.” (2004, p. 696) Philip insists on a more Janus-face perspective that “although we are African, we are also of the West, very much so. Again, I think Caribbean people carry the potential of being both/and.” (697) Because “nation is a male discourse” (Philip, 2004, p. 684), she favours a more tribal, rural and local society for Caribbean dating back to Africa which is a “mothering presence” (697) and still alive in Antilles:

In the one case you have a father who, if you want to be very brutal, who raped a mother, attempted to kill her and bury her; somehow the mother survives and the child maybe hears the mother crying and realizes she is still alive somewhere and begins to search. (Philip, 2004, p. 696)

“Linguistic rape and subsequent marriage between African and English tongues” (Philip, 2014, p. x), then, creates “incestuous words” (p. 56) spelled in a gendered language causing to operate psychological memory by the time they uttered. In that psyche, caused by “collective violence” (Bay, 2012, p. 30), there are rape, killing, humiliation and amnesia all of which have their unique meaning for colonized people.

They have their own dictionary meanings constituted by not universal grammar of Chomsky. Parsing means “the exercise of dis-membering language into fragmentary cells that forget to re-member” and raped means “regular, active, used transitively the again and again against women participle into the passive voice as in, ‘to get raped’; past present future-tense (d) against the singular or plural number of the unnamed subject, man.” (Philip, 2014, p. 40) Philip decolonizes English language through describing how specific words of colonizer language sounds to people as they hear them. In her raped memory, there is always father tongue in mother’s mouth. And mother means memory, culture, originality and essentiality but she always speaks in father tongue because Philip cannot remember the time when her ancestors speak their own language bereft of colonial experiences. She is not after her own actual mother, but mother of their African culture who was expected to transfer their lost but original language.

However, colonizer father still colonizes “tongue” of native mother, her poem tries its language; its silence softly breaks by stuttering “lan, lan, lang, language.” (2014, p. 30) In her “unsilencing” (McKittrick, 2000, p. 223) individual resistance, she needs help: “I had so disrupted the lyric voice by interruptions, eruptions, digressions, and a variety of other techniques, that the text had now become a polyvocal text, requiring more than one voice to give voice to it.” (Philip, 1997a, p. 126) Her non-linear style is an alternative mood of writing in non-Western world. In this space, Cuban Benítez-Rojo conceptualises “polyrhythm” that vivifies ceaseless rhythms replacing Western canons with a fresh Caribbean style: “rhythms cut through by other rhythms, which are still cut by other rhythms.” (1996, p. 18) Philip contrasts universal grammar with contingent grammar that is against canonized linguistic categorization and thus, her poem becomes “triumph[h] over the uni-voiced, uni-verse-all, white forces of the English language, Christianity, and tradition.” (Hall, 1989, p.1) In her literary progress, setting out on an African journey to find her roots and memories allows for such a “triumph” consisting of many sorrows. In *Zong* (2008), she depicts how her ancestors were transported to Middle Passage for slavery and many of them massacred on the route. Besides that, it is not a mere physical nonexistence but of cultural and lingual annihilation “to wipe clean the mind of the African slave” (Philip, 1992, p. 56) and to “ensure passive workers and guarantee good Christians.” (56) Because transferred slaves from Africa “belong to as many ethnolinguistic groups as possible” (Philip, 2014, p. 30); it would be nonsense to expect her writing shaped by monopoly of any languages and of its writing styles. Accordingly, due to the fact that image is “fundamental to any art form” (2014, p.78) , she theorises a split image which is “i-mage” (like *I image* or *my image*) “privileging the I” (78) to resist against Western structured Caribbean thought “denying any validity to the African world view” (Philip, 1992, p. 56) and to alter images that comprised the African aesthetic as “primitive, naïve, and ugly” (2014, p.79):

The only way the African artist could be in this world, that is the New World, was to give voice to this split i-mage of voiced silence. Ways to transcend that contradiction had to and still have to be developed, for that silence continues to shroud the experience, the i-mage and so the word. (Philip, 2014, p. 82)

Philip’s theory is an imperative action for her poetics that “writing begin to recreate our histories and our myths, as well as integrate that most painful of experiences – loss of our history and our word.” (Philip, 2014, p. 91) What is lost after slave trade and colonization is “word”, words of a past language and



what is left is their imagination and remains of remembrance. However, “the bridge that language creates, the crossover from i-image to expression was destroyed.” (p. 80) So, English is the only way to express colonized people’s images. Her *i-image* is similar to Walcott’s emphasis on “imagination” against what he calls amnesia for the things have died away during colonialism, and then amnesia becomes “true history of the New World” (2014b, p. 39) where it “clears a space where imagination can operate.” (Bery, 2007, p. 160):

In the Caribbean history is irrelevant, not because it is not being created, or because it was sordid; but because it has never mattered, what has mattered is the loss of history, the amnesia of the races, what has become necessary is imagination, imagination as necessity, as invention. (Walcott, 1974, p. 6)

Africans were decontextualized by English’s destroying power. Language, therefore, may dispossess expression of a nation’s experience and meaning through which one can construct his/her own world. Yet, there is still fragmented epic memory in Antilles. Then, how can the history of this West Indian be written? Is there still something to find after slavery, colonialism, famine, economic exploitation, patronage, contempt? By trying to remember what is forgotten “from what we have always known, nothing?” (Walcott, 1987, p. 286) Is there any chance to create in that absence? These all questions are answered by Naipaul:

The history of the islands can never be satisfactorily told. Brutality is not the only difficulty. History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies. (p. 20)

Still, absence is the space. “There is too much nothing here.” (Walcott, 2014a, p. 107) “History as fiction” (Walcott, 1974, p. 13) is the main source of imagination. But “without memory can there be history?” (Philip, 2014, p. 71) There are remained images originated by oral tradition as a memorised culture that remains in rhythms in Caribbean music and dance which do not need any words. So, colonizer language could not have chance to wipe it out. Accordingly, oral tradition leads to creolization and it creates space however Caribbean locals have to use colonizers’ languages due to the fact that there is no chance to rebuild the past languages by anyone and so literary people of the space have to express themselves in colonial language. This paradox is “the rift in the soul” (Walcott, 1992, p. 319) causing double-consciousness one of which is superior to the other because of the amnesia for that other. However, “senses of amnesia as psychic scar of historical violence and as release from historical burden” (Breslin, 2001, p. 249) clears the way to writing back, subversion and rewriting. And “language is a wound partly because the one that Walcott is using is a legacy of colonial history, and a cure because it allows the writer to deal with the pain of the wound.” (Bery, 2007, p. 175) So, “poetry was her (Philip’s) natural habitat” (Shockley, 2014, p. iv) in which she faces with past and rehabilites herself but in English language. The question, then, is Philip really speaking or is it a pantomime or a silent mimicry of foreign experiences of colonizer language because “the bridge that language creates, the crossover from image to expression was destroyed.” (Philip, 2014, p. 80) In spite of temporospatial differences in our world, time and place is “our bridgeheads to reality.” (MacNeice, 2002, p. 224) And so, our time and place’s language makes what we are. Because Philip’s was cleansed, she has just memories constituting existentialism of her poetics by saying that “memory makes us human” (Philip, 2014, p. 61) and “memory is essential to human survival.” (p. 61)

“Philip’s main concern is related to what is done with language, rather, what language did...” (Corrêa, 2014, p. 141). She also opposes today’s “public discourse of Western Indies-sun, sea and sex” (2004, p. 689) depicting plantation life of Antilles from perspective of European realism. The same Eurocentrism rejects publishing one of her works, *Harriet’s Daughter*, because “it did not have enough interest for general readers, or as Philip herself states elsewhere, because it had black children in it.” (Hunter, 1993, p. 274) Her poems collect memories to build a museum of silence which “does not tell the story that is missing from the archive so much as indicate the limits of telling.” (Sharpe, 2014, p. 466) Yet, her metaphorical museum is not build on Western structured “archive memory” but on a deconstructed “affective memory.” (see Sharpe, 2014) Her moving, rhythmic and demotic challenge is to recreate images behind certain words or phrases like ‘flattened nose’, ‘thick lips’, and ‘kinky hair’. She opposes alien tales of English written on them. By saying “If not in yours/ In whose language/ Am I/ If not in yours/ Beautiful” (2014, p. 27), Philip searches for her own consciousness in that beauty is described by not in a Platonic or Aristotelian way but by their unique experiences.

3. Conclusion

In her “signature poem” (see Philip’s performance in at the *Words Aloud 7 Spoken Word Festival*, 2010) *Discourse on the Logic of Language* of *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Break* collection, Philip chases up a linguistic memory before colonialism. Neglected silence of colonial memory sounds her literary works just as Judith Wright does in *Blind Man’ Song*: “I have made silence speak; I found/ for the night a sound.” (pp. 67–68) Philip sounds silent spaces of history by collecting “missing pieces of a counter-history” (Sharpe,



2014, p. 430) to construct a Caribbean space that “captures ontologically ways of being in the world.” (Davies, 2013, p. 1) Still, their world in which colonized people struggles for existence is the colonized space of colonizers:

Essentially, therefore, what the African would do is use a foreign language expressive of an alien experiential life—a language comprised of word symbols that even then had affirmed negative images about her, and one which was but a reflection of the experience of the European ethnocentric world view. (Philip, 2014, p. 82)

At the end of the poem, there are multiple-choice questions on what tongue is and how it means to colonized people like Philip who were made forget their language by “the overseer’s whip” (p. 33) and began to speak his language. “In man the tongue is/ (a) the principal organ of taste/ (b) the principal organ of articulate speech/ (c) the principal organ of oppression and exploitation/ (d) all of the above.” (p. 33) In choice (d), she questions logic of language by saying “the tongue contains ten thousand buds, none of which is sensitive to the taste of foreign words.” (p. 33) Using colonizer’s language silences natives and the only time they manage to speak, “father tongue” (p.30) is uttered. To her, it is not speaking but lapsing into an inevitable silence:

Nothing in nature is silent, they taught me, naturally silent, that is. Everything has its own sound, speech, or language, even if it is only the language of silence (there I go again — ‘even if’), and if you were willing to learn the sound of what appeared to be silence, you understood then that the word was but another sound – of silence. (Philip, 2007, p. 35)

Philip experiences three columns in one page and reader needs rotating the page to reach each of them. It needs oral performance and due to idiosyncratic rhythm and spaces in stanzas it is hard to perform but by foreigners because oral tradition in Africa and Caribbean poetry is just like dance and music. Her ground-breaking extraordinary poetry is not a formal revolt on its own but signifies a research for a linguistic memory. In her interview with Philip, Mahlis comments on *Discourse on the Logic of Language* that:

And in that fragmenting of the lyric voice into one that is multivocal, it does seem that the mother and the daughter start switching positions; the *she* of the poem becomes the daughter searching for the mother, not just daughter, not just the mother searching for the daughter. This seemed to indicate the poet looking for the mother tongue, what is lost, perhaps irrevocably, because it’s so unresolved. (Mahlis & Philip, 2004, p. 687)

In response, Philip recommends that “the poet looking for any number of things—the mother tongue, the mother country, that essential mother.” (687) During the journey, poet is in anguish because she has no other choice than English. She writes, asks, critics and lives in that language. That’s why; English becomes mother tongue/ father tongue/ another tongue/ languish/ a foreign anguish. But, she needs to hear Heaney saying “Stop just licking your wounds/ Start seeing things” (1991, p. 74) “because yesterday ended last night.” (Padmore Enyonam Agbemabiese, *Strong Black Woman*) She tries hard, then, to reassemble “broken vase” (Walcott, 2014b, p. 69) of fragmented images, on which “white scars” never disappear however it is colourful, authentic and masterful, by prompting a Black Writing tradition generated by split images of Caribbean people to change African aesthetics as primitive, naïve and ugly described by Western universality. However, she still expresses her experiences in the colonizer language; it does not unsilence her but makes that silence speaks.

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