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Quest for Identity and true self in *In the Skin of a Lion* and *Wild Cat Falling*A Postcolonial study

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Abstract:

Ondaatje and Mudrooroo use post-colonial theory as a tool to analyse and examine the life of the indigenous people and the marginalized immigrants in Australia and Canada. The characters in *In the Skin of a Lion* and *Wild Cat Falling*, after struggling with the problems of identity, try to find themselves and reconcile with their true selves in the colonial society. They want to adapt to the new life style by adopting the positive aspects of white culture. They further, retain positive aspects of their native culture and beliefs. Therefore, the paper explores how identity is reflected in the selected texts by taking postcolonial approach to the subject of the study. The study also examines the historical dimensions of post-colonialism and identity experiences, as well as their literary representations in the selected novels.

Key words; postcolonial theory, Ondaatje, Mudrooroo identity, white culture, *In the Skin of a Lion*, *Wild Cat Falling*.

الملخص:

يستخدم اونداجي و مودرورو نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار كأداة لتحليل وفحص حياة السكان الأصليين والمهاجرين المهمشين في أستراليا وكندا. تحاول الشخصيات في الروايات In the Skin of a Lion and Wild Cat Falling ، بعد صراعهما مع مشاكل الهوية والتعرف على الشخصية ، يحاولون أن يجدون انفسهم والتصالح مع ذواتهما الحقيقي في المجتمع الاستعماري. إنهم يريدون التكيف مع نمط الحياة الجديد من خلال تبني الجوانب الإيجابية للثقافة المجتمع الابيض. علاوة على ذلك ، يحتفظون بالجوانب الإيجابية لشقافة من خلال المختارة من خلال المختارة من خلال المعتمار في موضوع الدراسة. تبحث الدراسة أيضًا في الأبعاد التاريخية لتجارب ما بعد الاستعمار والهوية ، بالإضافة إلى تمثيلاتها الأدبية في الروايات المختارة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار، اونداجي، مودرورو، هوية ، الثقافة البيضاء، In the Skin of a Lion and . Wild Cat Falling

يوخته:

ئۆنداج و مودرورو رێبازی پۆستكۆلۆنياڵ بەكاردەهێنن بۆ خوێندنەو و به قوڵی تێڕامان له ژیان و كەسایەتی نەتەو و رەسەنەكان و نەتەو ، پښتی شێردا و بىتەو ، پښتی شێردا و كەسایەتیان لە ھەر دوو و لاتی ئوستورالیا و كانەدا. ئەكتەرە سەرەكيەكانی ھەردوو رۆمانی (له پێستی شێردا و كەوتنی پشیله كێویەكه) لە دوای روبەروبونەوى كۆمەللە كێشەيەكی زۆر دەربارەی شوناس و كەسايەتيان ھەوڵ دەدەن دوبارە كەسايەتى راستەقىنەی خۆيان بدۆزنەو ، لەو ولات و سیستەمەی كە داگیری كردون. بە ھەمان شێوە دەیانەوى لایەنە پەسەندەكانی كەلتوری سېی پێستەكان وەربگرن و جێگایەك بۆ خۆیان بدۆزنەو ، تێیدا. ئەم توێرینەو ، پەیوەست دەبێت بە شێوازی دۆزینەو ، و

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كليله وشه: ئة نداج، مو در و ر و ، بة ستكة لة نيال، شو ناس،كهلتو ر ، له بيستى شير دا، كهو تني بشيله كيويهكه.

Introduction:

The Canadian and Australian literature share a common heritage. Many Canadian and Australian literary critics have argued in favor of the comparative study of both literature, claiming that there is a direct connection between the two countries such as, political, economic and social presents. The two countries are also comparable in terms of geopolitical locations within the Western world, which mean that those who write about Australia or Canada can often be found navigating in harmonious directions around some of the same issues. Although their approaches to the colonial question have taken different forms (Polack, 2016). The same arguments could be made about their postcolonial literature. There have been many attempts over the past few years to reassess the literary approaches in Canada and Australia, but with little connections. In addition to right-wing political expediency, there are many advantages in comparing between societies, and more precisely, Canadian and Australian literature. Paul Sharrad stated that 'nations are like ships flying flags of convenience: crewed by people from everywhere and connected to all kinds of ports of call' (ibid).

Standing among multiple world is a complex mission that many native Canadian and Australian Aborigines face as they try to reconcile their tribal lives with inside home and outside world. The cultural diversity of their ways of life, traditions and religious practices were accepted in different sociocultural and geographical situations and this triggered the interest of others. Indigenous peoples feel separated, displaced and alienated, they cannot accept the cultures and values of the postcolonial white society (Jeevan & Albert 2020). These people in Canada, New Zealand and Australia share common issues over land with the white colonizers. Questions regarding these issues include how the land was settled? and how the Aboriginals voices were made? The issues remained the same till the end of the 19nth century and it developed differently in each of the regions. Indigenous peoples themselves continued, at the same time, to adapt to change the circumstances and to maintain their identity as sovereign peoples in a colonial society (ibid).

Michael Ondaatje shows his interest in "post-colonialism" in his post-colonial novel, *In the Skin of a Lion*, because he wants to demonstrate that the concept does not relate only to the period after colonialism. Ondaatje deals with the term as a literary genre which after a time of colonialism, describes man's global conditions. Ondaatje shows that the concept aims at investigating and exploring Western authority's different ways to control the colonized. His effort to unmask European power through such a concept is to concentrate on those without identity such as outsiders and minorities that feel lost in their society.

Therefore, Ondaatje writes in his novel to retell the story of Toronto's oppressed people that the colonizers use and dominate to construct Toronto but remain like outsiders. He attempts in connecting the story with characters like Caravaggio the thief, Nicholas Tamelcof the daredevil, Patrick the tunnel worker, and Alice the nun, he attempts to illustrate their own stories of how they were



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controlled, marginalized and humiliated by the colonial powers in a city they were looking for as their home. He shows how the language and the culture as obstacles keep these people back and trapped in the place of work (tunnel). Even, they were prevented from having the right to use their own language or to communicate in it. This is due to the rule of the city, a city that struggles with their values and traditions that imposed such limit. Their trade makes them known not their personalities, "A starrer of roads, a house builder, a painter a thief." (Amer, 2014)

Mudrooroo as an Australian Aboriginal writer decided to engage and rewrite the novel, *Wild Cat Falling* in a postcolonial dialogue to present the colonial discourse over the Aboriginal heritage. His novel is considered as the first young aboriginal work to address Australia. Mudrooroo's choice of unorthodox themes and characters was intent on reminiscent or archetypal of the hard conditions of human beliefs. He wrote the text to question the colonial discourse. In the novel, his protagonist the Wildcat hopelessly searches for a place in a white society and this shows his identity formation in a society considered as postcolonial that insists on relegating him to a marginalized place. It deals with the main character's dislocation in a white society, who rebels against them and explains, what does identity and sense of belonging means in the white society. (Ghatak, 2010)

Wildcat finds himself being marginalized by the non-aboriginal discourse, finding that the prison is the only place for him in this world. When he finished his days of imprisonment, he changed "the grey uniform of belonging" (Mudrooroo, 32), this shows that wildcat's exchange of uniform is an attempt to replace his Aboriginal identity to an Australian one. Whoever, wildcat is unable to wanders in the city looking for a place for himself. When one is not in a white skin or does not belong to white community, and he is scared of the rules of white community.

Postcolonialism; Introduction

The prefix "post" in Post-colonialism does not indicate that the process is now ceased to exist. Although the physical colonialism ended to some extent, yet the consequences of the policy still exist today (Loomba 7). Colonialism is not only the way an area is appropriated; it is also a literary perspective based on the colonized and colonizer's uneven relationship. In fact, one part of this relationship, namely the colonized, is almost completely avoided.

As postcolonialism focuses on the new perspective on individuals living in the former colonies. It means that when considering the postcolonial societies and cultures one cannot talk about one single history but about as many of them as there are people living there. As there is always a counter opinion to every theory, some critics of postcolonial theory blame it for these interconnections with poststructuralism. However, the purpose of studying postcolonialism is to present the whole variety of traditional cultures or to unite these cultures and societies immediately into a new "bundle" called multinational and multicultural that on the one hand takes into account the diversity but at the same time prefers globalism.

With Edward Said's book publication of *Orientalism*, the first post-colonial studies gained popularity in the 1970s. The book's main contribution was the critique of East or Orient's Western view that he considers to be a Western society development. In his opinion, Orient's analysis "was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted a binary opposition between the

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familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them")" (Loomba 47). Here again the conception of two opposing forces emerge that are attributed to binary oppositions, Said gives few examples such as rational vs. irrational, developing vs. static, etc. Loomba also, claims that the West actually for its own sake created these constructions. There appeared many critics of his ideas, mainly the reproach (expressed by Homi Bhabha) that he promotes a colonial relation in which "colonial power and discourse is possessed entirely by the coloniser and therefore there is no room for negotiation or change" (Loomba, 49). This is what postcolonial literary approach wants to change. Its aim is to let also the other side of the relationship coloniser – colonised speak on their own behalf and not only observe the status quo of their situation.

Deepika Bahri demonstrates that post-colonialism is subjective because it is composed of a variety of experiences, beliefs and issues (Amer, 2014). The purpose behind this confusion is using postcolonialism as a concrete representation of colonial societies and like a depiction of global circumstances after a time of colonialism. According to her postcolonial is a term and a literary genre that can give a meaning completely separate from a historical time. (ibid).

Both Ondaatje and Mudrooroo were interested in post-colonialism and it can be observed through their works. They focused on themes and issues of identity and cultural crises in their countries. Like Ondaatje focused on the cultural conflicts of the immigrants in Toronto and their quest for their identity and belonging. While Mudrooroo focused on the characters identity formation in a post-colonial society. In this study the concept of post-colonialism is used to discuss the problems of identity formation of the characters and ways of belonging approached in the selected novels.

Analysis

Michael Ondaatje shows his interest in "post-colonialism" in his post-colonial novel, *In the Skin of a Lion*, because he wants to demonstrate that the concept does not relate only to the period after colonialism. Ondaatje deals with the term as a literary genre which after a time of colonialism, describes a man's global conditions. Ondaatje shows that the concept aims at investigating and exploring Western authority's different ways to control the colonized.

In the introductory part of the story the epic of the Babylonian legend Gilgamesh is retold in the story as a figure of Patrick the protagonist of the novel, who roams in the city as an outsider. He was born in a village called Depot Creek, Ontario but knows nothing about it, "he was a watcher, a corrector" (Ondaatje, 156). Like his father he was a watcher, his life was quiet calm and peaceful until some changes took place in his town. He saw hundreds of immigrants arrived in his place carrying with them lanterns to work in the mills, he notices their physical strength they are the Finnish Loggers. He didn't trust them hide himself in the darkness behind the trees. Patrick realizes that these strangers may change his life later on. Later Patrick himself becomes a stranger when his father dies. He migrates from his town to the city, and feels stranger like the strangers he saw in his town. He feels a stranger because of the new culture, land and the language where the people speak different languages. Patrick remains as a searcher looking into the darkness of Ontario his city as an alien outsider. Ondaatjee through Gilgamesh myth wanted to show the themes and the real identity of the characters and the city of Ontario itself. Both Patrick and Gilgamesh have done a very long journey. Patrick fumed with Alice's death by the hands of those who control them and where the reason of

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Alice's death, decided to swim the waterworks to arrive in Harris office to avenge for his beloved(Amer, 2014).

Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*, searching for identity is a main theme due to its essential part which focuses on the characters transformation in the novel. Patrick was seen as a young boy, growing up in a village a village called Depot Creek, Ontario, who is much comfortable in darkness and also, familiar with insects, he loves them and the sound they make. Darkness represents his personality and individuality, it makes him to discover who is he, while insects representing the change in him and that occurs to him after that in the story. In the novel, Patrick, described as an isolated young man living alone in the world that surround him, "Born in Abashed, Ontario. What did that word mean? Something that suggested there was a terrible horizon in him beyond which he couldn't leap. Something hollows, so when alone, when not aligned with another-whether it was Ambrose or Clara or Alice- he couldn't hear the rattle within that suggested space between him and community"(Ondaatje, 157). His loneliness and isolation is shown in a metaphor within himself as a psychological and emotional obstacle.

The protagonist Patrick searches for his identity because he thinks that without it, he is one who lacks love and will not survive the world he is living in. At the beginning of the novel, Patrick immigrated to Toronto when he was twenty-one years old seeking for a new life, there he meets Clara and falls in her love. Clara introduced him to Alice the nun but as an actress. These two women play a main role in his search for finding his identity in the city of Toronto. Later in the story, Clara left him and joined Ambrose Small, Patrick is sad because of Clara. Alice brings love and joy into his life after his torture by Clara's love memory. Alice invites him to a show prepared by the workers in a hall in the waterworks. Patrick realizes his real identity, then become a political activist. He also, realizes the struggles of the immigrants and decides to fight for them. Alice's presentation gives a great impact upon Patrick who determines to be the voice of the voiceless workers.

Alice, Patrick's beloved, also, suffered from changing identity. Tamelcof, a Macedonian immigrant, jumps to save her when she was about to fall from the bridge into the river. She transforms her identity from a nun to an ordinary woman. Most of the time, he prefers to use gesture language to communicate with the other characters, due to the lack of English language, then he discovers that he doesn't have enough confidence in himself, so he goes to school to improve his English language with little kids, Temelcoff thinks that he may be lost without English (Polack, 2016). Ondaatje focuses on the marginalized immigrants searching for their identity from various places that are struggling to create new life for themselves.

Mudrooroo's *Wild Cat Falling*, is about an unnamed boy who rebels against the white society and explains what identity and sense of belonging mean in the white society, when one is not in a white skin or does not belong to white community, and he is scared of the rules of white community. The Wild Cat points out how a man with an aborigine blood views his life in the society of white people. The story is written in an autobiographical mode, it is an innovative and inspiring discourse presented by an aboriginal man in the literary history of Australia. The novel explores a young man who grows up on the rugged margins of a town in Australia. (Ghatak, 2010).



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The story is told by an unnamed narrator released from the jail and the events of the story take place in two days the character is out of jail. He says in the novel, "make chaps like me can't help breaking it whatever we do, and the likes of you (White) can hardly break it if you try." (Mud.43). He describes himself as a shape of a wild cat throughout the story and concludes with Wild Cat's arrest for his murdering attempt. Wild Cat retells the continuing entrapment of the minority Indigenous groups searching for a place in the white society.

In the novel, the main character seems positive when he thinks about the past of his brave reminiscences, but in fact he feels negative who has boldly decided to take an isolated life. He as a young aborigine does not feel or touch any difference between the life inside and outside the prison walls. He perceives that it is good for him to be a prisoner than to lead a worthless life in a town where he was marginalized and alienated (Janaiah, 2011).

The Wild Cat begins observing the other prisoners who are going to be out of the prison: some of them sense that they are not comfortable to confront the world, some are afraid to confront the world but Wild Cat asserts that the next step of his life will be difficult the moment he was out. He expresses his isolation with no hope for future when he is out of prison in the city of Fremantle. The day has come and he is out of the prison with so-called freedom. He searches for a place to settle after his release from prison to step into the society in which he faced the harshness of white society and their use of power on those who are under their control.

Mudrooroo wants to show a feeling of loss and abandonment a sense of belonging, in which the characters have their origin in a troubled teenage and traumatic childhood years spent in Australia's welfare institutions. The protagonist tries his best all the time to hide his identity and inheritance. When he changed his dress and stepped out the prison, he thinks that he is lost, not able to find a place to settle in the outside world. The protagonist is dislocated from his society both mentally and physically, he feels that life offers him only despair from the others (Polack, 2016).

The protagonist has suffered from his childhood about his life, he felt alienated when he was in school where he became like a laughing toy for the white children's happiness. He frequently disconcerts himself into memories of childhood incidents. He remembers his mother when she was reassuring him that everything would be fine. He would have concerned about his mother's suggestions and her words a representation to make his life happy for future in a society that belongs to the white once. "It was just this tribal relative idea that worried mom, because that side of my heritage must be kept from me at all costs. I must live white and learn to think with a white man's mind" (Mud, 122). His mother used to remind him to show his whiteness by getting the white education over his aboriginal education. In this education the matter is not the white learning tools such as paper and pen but stones and spears. But to impose their education policy on the aboriginal children, the colonial system disempowered them by its social control, it was impossible to retain their difference under the white control and this shows how the white culture sets and constructs the universal ideologies (ibid).

Problem of identity crisis is not only for the 'wild cat' but it is also a problem to his mother. His mother suffered when she had physical relation with Willy and desired to be changed from her aboriginality. Mudrooroo always in his writings keeps on the Aboriginal problems of pain and



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sufferings and the claims for survival of the Aborigine people from the invasion of White society. In his search for the identity, Mudrooroo discovers that he has his own culture and belongs to the extended Nyoongah family that have their own culture and land. His ambition conducts him to represent his family and people in a bitter community where the White people try to uproot their root and existence rom the society they live in. In his novel, Mudrooroo wants to distribute a connection with the Aborigine group which aides him to settle in the society. Both Mudrooroo and the protagonist search for identity, it is Mudrooroo's concern who wants to return home (Janaiah, 2011).

Through the protagonist Mudrooroo connects his psychic ties and his physical existence with the Aboriginal land. The song of the old Aborigine always reminds him in his original existence in the bushes even if he is far away. He bears the song which always keeps him close to his identity. Not only the protagonist, but it is also, Mudrooroo who wants to live in his land, and he finds a meaning in existence with his Aborigine life. 'I want to live more than I ever knew before. I even feel I might know just a little how to live'. (Mud, 130).

Conclusion

Post-colonial literature seeks to investigate and analyze various ways and expressions of white authority, such as the use of language as a tool and power to control the identity and the self of the colonized. Both writers are interested in studying marginality and identity issues in post-colonial theory. One of the underlying themes in postcolonial literature is the character's search for identity, Ondaatje focuses on the marginalized immigrants searching for their identity in various places that are struggling to create new life for themselves. Mudrooroo shows the identity formation of the characters in a postcolonial society that insists to relegate them to a marginalized subject positions. He decorated the suffering of the indigenous people in the main character's dislocation and displacement in a white society, who rebel against them and explains what identity and sense of belonging means in the white society.

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