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**BRAJ KACHRU'S IMPERIAL DIASPORA AS A CHALLENGE TO
LOCAL IDENTITY AND PLURALISM IN OKOT P'BITEK'S
*SONG OF LAWINO***



Zahid Salim

*Assistant Professor of English Govt Superior Science College
Peshawar Higher Education Department Khyber
Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan*

zahidsalim@hed.gkp.pk/wittysting85@gmail.com

Abstract

*In this paper, the concept of imperial diaspora and its formidable threat to local identity and cultural diversity as presented in the iconic postcolonial epic *Song of Lawino* (1966) by Okot p'Bitek will be critically analyzed under the analytical framework of Braj Kachru's Three Concentric Circles Model. The British colonial project made strategic use of the idea of diaspora, in moving settlers into colonized African lands, as a means of establishing their domination over the native population. In P'Bitek's groundbreaking piece, this colonial mechanism is revealed through the agony expressed by Lawino, an Acholi woman who finds her native culture threatened by a westernized husband representing the threat of colonial cultural domination. With the use of Kachru's framework of indigenization and concept of imperial diaspora, this paper will illustrate how the outer circle voices resist the hegemony of the inner circle. Using the Kachruvian strategies of Lexical Innovation, Translation Equivalence, Contextual Redefinition, and Rhetoric and Functional Style, p'Bitek uses the English language to preserve, propagate, and exalt indigenous African culture, flora, fauna, and literature. This study reveals that indigenization is not only a linguistic process but also an effective strategy of cultural and political resistance against the threat posed by imperial diaspora on local plurality and identities. This paper adds yet another perspective to existing scholarship in that it considers imperial diaspora as the primary colonial mechanism targeted by p'Bitek.*

Keywords: *Imperial Diaspora, Indigenization, Kachru's Three Concentric Circles Model, Song of Lawino (1966), Local Identity, Pluralism, Postcolonialism, Okot p'Bitek, Decolonization.*

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

This research examines the extensive and devastating effects that colonialism has had on local voices and indigenous sociocultural worlds. The European imperialists systematically ruled the world to control and influence colonies and margins with the falsifiable precept of extending relationships on the bases of political, social, and cultural exchange. This connection tended to encompass social, educational, economic, political, and broad cultural contacts, with a hierarchical European settler class and a native educated elite class building layers between the European “mother” nation and the numerous indigenous peoples under their rule. Such a system promoted inherently ideas of racial inferiority and exotic otherness. However, the natives found a representation of their segregated voices through the manifestation of their native culture, flora, and fauna—a process that is fundamentally what Braj Kachru theorizes as indigenization.

The phenomenon of imperial diaspora was at the very core of this colonial enterprise. Rather than being a natural migration, imperial diaspora was a consciously orchestrated strategy by colonial powers to use human settlement as a weapon of cultural and political conquest. As Bakewell (2009) elaborates, diaspora entails movement from an original homeland to more than one country, sustained by a collective myth of an ideal ancestral home, a strong ethnic consciousness over time, and a sustained network of social relationships. The British Empire exploited all these dimensions of diaspora not for the welfare of settlers but to advance its own hegemonic agenda in colonized territories. Between 1815 and 1914, some 22 million settlers left the British Isles for colonial lands, including Africa (Cohen, 2002), carrying with them the tools of linguistic and cultural subjugation.

Post-colonial theory is a critical and theoretical approach that views imperial texts, disciplines, legislation, science, and other socio-cultural processes as racially based and uneven, with the colonial portraying the native as inferior and in need of “civilization”. Postcolonial theories began to arise in the 1960s as thinkers from former colonies began to create their own forms of knowledge and their own discourses to counter those of colonialism. As Klages (2006, p. 153) notes, these postcolonial discourses articulated the experience of the colonized, rather than the colonizer. It is one of the explicit agendas of postcolonial writers to question and challenge the imposed discourse of colonialists and imperialists on the native people—a discourse propagated through the deceptive narratives of civilization, culture, and education.

Owing to colonization, the white man was elevated to the pinnacle of mastery, and the natives were pressured to mimic him by wearing a “white mask” over his “black skin,” to invoke Fanon’s evocative expression. As Fanon (1967a, p. 60) argues: “In the man of color there is a constant effort to run away from his own individuality, to annihilate his own presence.” The colonized subjects adopt Western cultures, including colonial language and religious practices, while rejecting their own traditions. Simultaneously, their own morals and cultures maintain a powerful hold on them. As Nayar (2010, p. 2) contends, “Colonialism was never just an exploitative political or economic process; it was also a cultural conquest of the native whereby the native’s forms of knowledge, art, cultural practices and religious beliefs were studied, classified, policed, judged and altered by the European.”

It is equally important to observe that the colonized writers and intellectuals found their most potent counter-strategy in indigenization. As Antonie, Mason, Mason, Palahicky, and Rodriguez de France (2018) articulate, “The goal is not to replace Western knowledge with indigenous knowledge, and not merge the two into one. Rather, indigenization can be understood as weaving or braiding together two distinct knowledge systems.” P’Bitek’s *Song of Lawino* (1966) is a powerful manifestation of how ongoing marginalization of indigenous voices can lead to the devastation of local representation, and how literary resistance can reclaim that representation.

Furthermore, Rehman, Khan, and Khan (2021, p. 338) elaborate that “Indigenization is one of the fundamental components of decolonization adopted by postcolonial linguists to familiarize a local language in a race against the dominant language of colonizers.” This scholarly perspective reinforces the centrality of indigenization as both a linguistic and political act, the very act that Okot p’Bitek performs in *Song of Lawino* (1966) to challenge the cultural conquest effected by imperial diaspora.

Moreover, the study recognizes that language serves as one of the most effective tools to exercise power. As Ali and Masroor (2017) assert, the power of language cannot be underestimated as it even controls life and death. This insight deepens the understanding of why p’Bitek’s linguistic choices in *Song of Lawino* (1966) are simultaneously literary and political acts of resistance against imperial diaspora.

1.2 About the Author and the Selected Work

One of the most prolific and celebrated Ugandan postcolonial authors is Okot p’Bitek (1931 – 1982), who was renowned for his contribution to African poetry in the twentieth century. Some of his famous literary pieces in poetry are *Song of Lawino* (1966), *Song of Ocol* (1970) and *Two Songs* (1971). Besides poems, p’Bitek has literary pieces in several genres, including a novel written in Acholi that was later translated to English and titled as *White Teeth* (1989). Okot p’Bitek was the director of Uganda’s National Theatre and National Cultural Center from 1966 until 1968. Essays of p’Bitek regarding African culture were published in *Africa’s Cultural Revolution* (1975). In addition, he wrote a book of Acholi folktales called *Hare and Hornbill* (1978) and his book titled *The Horn of My Love* (1974) had poems in Acholi and English languages.

The immense love that P’Bitek held for his people, their culture and their traditional ways

was influenced by his extensive knowledge of Ugandan society. Being part of the Ugandan National Football Team, P'Bitek travelled all over Uganda and gained varied insight about the wealth of his people's culture, which would later serve as the foundation of his writing. A trip to Britain in 1958 with the Uganda Football Team marked the beginning of an era of education in which he obtained a diploma in Education and worked towards a degree in Law. At this point, P'Bitek lost his earlier passion for Christianity and shifted his attention from studying European culture to studying his native Acholi culture. This made him study social anthropology, enhancing his cultural awareness.

Song of Lawino (1966), p'Bitek's most renowned piece of writing, brings out clearly a major cultural collision through the domestic conflict between an uneducated native wife, Lawino, and her western-educated husband, Ocol. This poem serves as a fictional piece of criticism on the cultural incompatibility between the westernized African man and the sociocultural values of Africa. As far as a wider scope is considered, this poem can be read as a metaphor of the cultural incompatibility between the colonized and their colonizers. Lawino mourns over the western style of living adopted by her husband, including preferring Clementine to her and abandoning African culture. The poem is simultaneously a lament, a protest, and a manifesto for indigenous cultural dignity.

As Asein (1978) observes in his study of p'Bitek's literary contributions, African literary figures in the 1950s and 1960s began uniting to revitalize the cultural integrity of their societies, and *Song of Lawino* (1966) represented perhaps the most complete single project of African poetry in English, effectively tying the modern to the traditional through the use of realistic African symbolism, proverbs, laments, and oral literary devices. P'Bitek is renowned for his poetry's directness and accessibility, qualities that allow it to reach a broad readership while retaining its nuance and complexity (Salim, Rehman, and Jamil, 2025).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Okot p'Bitek is a reputed and internationally acclaimed postcolonial East African writer who drew the attention of scholars with his book-length poem *Song of Lawino* (1966). This talented creative writer and translator also garnered critical attention through three additional long poems: *Song of Ocol*, *Song of Prisoner*, and *Song of Malaya*. He has been considered a diversely gifted literary poet of the Acholi tribe for rendering into English the indigenous and local voices of Acholi poetic verses and folk tales. This distinctive achievement has attracted the scholarly attention of many researchers, critics, and writers to explore his art and works from multiple angles.

Muhindi (1983), in "In Memoriam: Okot p'Bitek," analyses that across colloquial expressions of indigenous content, p'Bitek was able to state profound cultural truths with appealing directness and gracefulness. It is therefore no surprise that he chose to promote the discourse on cultural freedom in realistic terms, playing immediately recognizable African tunes and melodies on the universal instrument of poetic literary style, rather than being drawn into abstract theoretical debates about *négritude*.

Ofuani (1985), in "The Traditional and Modern Influences in Okot p'Bitek's Poetry," asserts that Western literary traditions have indeed exercised certain influences on p'Bitek, evident in his use of verse lines, stanzas, and his choice to write in English. In his preference for the long poem and the dramatic monologue, one can also identify an unmistakable trace of influence from Western literary masters such as Robert Browning, whose influence permeated African university syllabuses in the 1950s. Nevertheless, one cannot overlook that the presence of oral literature in p'Bitek's works "distinguishes him from many of his fellow African writers" (Heron, 1976, p. 1), because while major African writers of his generation were deeply involved in the formal study of European literary tradition, p'Bitek remained grounded in the oral traditions of his Acholi people.

P'Bitek (1997), in "Indigenous Ills," reflects critically on the situation of African languages and cultures within the colonial educational system. He observes that if an individual does not

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speaking English, French, or Swahili, they cannot participate in parliament. Even the finest oral historians, traditional musicians, and poets are systematically excluded from universities and school curricula. He argues that African independence has in many instances merely replaced foreign tyranny with homegrown dictatorship practiced by individuals educated in Western traditions, resulting in an Africa where the majority of the rural population remains alienated from literary production.

Worugji and Simon (2007), in their joint study "Exploration of Cultural Conflict in Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* (1966) and *Song of Ocol*," declare that p'Bitek addresses issues of development through his characters because the educational and governmental systems in postcolonial Africa are fundamentally foreign. They argue that the old self-assurance and sense of unity and solidarity which shaped the traditionalism of African peoples in their local language worldview have been severely undermined by the education of the white men. They contend that for education to be meaningful to Africans, it must address class issues and provide a sense of direction for those who are straddling the boundaries of their native and foreign cultures.

Shakib (2011), in "The Position of Language in Development of Colonization," explores how the issue of cultural sovereignty and minority nation metamorphoses is most effectively approached through the medium of language. On one hand, colonial powers extend their dominant language along with the beliefs, culture, myth, and history embedded within it, thereby finding a way to impart and communicate colonial ideologies. On the other hand, the colonizer gradually erodes linguistic and cultural identity in minority territories by systematically imposing dominant culture and language.

Kahyana (2021) in "Introduction: On the Enduring Allure of Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* (1966)," most of the concerns brought up by p'Bitek in his poem continue to be quite relevant even today: the psychological hypnotism brought about by the colonized education system, the poor political governance of post-independence African countries, the sidelining of women in both private and public spheres of life, and the deception of the general population by the literate population.

Ntangaare (2021) in his work "Performance Elements that Keep Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* (1966) Alive on Paper, on Stage, and in Memory" explores how post-colonial Africa and her people find it hard to entirely discard Western culture despite appreciating their education and religion. P'Bitek brilliantly combines the two worlds in his work, appropriating proverbs, sayings, and similes from Acoli folklore, as well as the imagery and metaphors of oral song and dance. He simultaneously employs the English language, academic concepts, and elements of formal theatre, thereby transforming *Song of Lawino* (1966) into a public performance accessible to audiences both inside and outside academia.

Nyongesa (2017), in "Resistance in African Poetry: Postcolonial Perspective of Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* (1966) and Okigbo's *Labyrinth and Path of Thunder*," points out that after independence, Frantz Fanon (1961) emphasized the need for the marginalized group to resist Western dominant cultures. Before and after colonialism, African literary writers used literature to challenge the dominant colonialist discourses of the period. African literary writers adopted two resistance strategies: cultural fixity, which emphasized the glorification of Africa's past traditions to oppose colonialism, and cultural hybridity, which sought a middle ground between African and European styles. Thiong'o (1986, as cited in Nyongesa, 2017, p. 9) famously observed that "the bullet was the means of physical subjugation; language was the means of spiritual subjugation."

Rinsum and Boessenkool (2013), in "Decolonizing African Management: Okot p'Bitek and the Paradoxes of African Management," investigate how the spread of cultural and intellectual traditions was as important to the creation of the modern world system as economic exploration of non-European regions. They observe that P'Bitek embodies several identities—poet, atheist, Western-trained scholar, and cultural nationalist—representing a life-long process of the creolization of various cultural assumptions. P'Bitek is explicitly opposed

to the Western intrusive construction of African identity and sharply scrutinized colonial and neocolonial discourse while also critiquing his fellow Africans who uncritically embraced the postcolonial ideology of the 1970s.

Salim, Rehman, and Jamil (2024), in their study on the representation of African voices and indigenous culture in *Song of Lawino* (1966) as a challenge to the colonialist inner circle, argue that through the potent voice of Lawino, p'Bitek challenges the western imperial effects on African culture, identity and values. The study demonstrates that *Song of Lawino* (1966) is replete with indigenous language that has been used by the poet as dissent and demonstration against the invasion of Western culture. Lawino as a spokesperson of the poet comes up to voice for the misrepresentation of her own dear ancestral identity through the usage of African linguistic terms and titles, idioms, and figurative devices (Salim, Rehman, and Jamil, 2024, p. 1588).

Salim, Rehman, and Rehman (2025), in their study on Kachru's indigenization as a potent voice and pathway towards decolonization in p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* (1966), contend that through Lawino's countering voice and response to the incursion of European culture, p'Bitek has represented in his epic work an oral African text abounding with indigenous language and voices against colonialism. They demonstrate that the poet willfully follows the strategies theorized by Braj Kachru, employing fictional representations of indigenous cultures, language, and ideology as a pathway towards decolonization. Their study establishes that indigenization not only works for linguistic identity but also safeguards the socio-cultural and political identity of native Africans, arguing that through the representation of native culture and linguistic identity, Africans can redefine their relationship with imperialists (Salim, Rehman, and Rehman, 2025, p. 1908).

Mukundi (2021), in "Reading Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* in the Era of Postcolonial Technoscience," contends that the concept of resistance has become a much-used word in postcolonial discourses, and questions whether armed or ideological uprisings are the only possible meanings of resistance. Mukundi draws on Ashcroft's argument that resistance that refuses to acknowledge the possibility of social change informed even by ex-colonial powers risks becoming rhetorically oppositional but socially ineffective. This more complex interpretation of resistance is in agreement with the way p'Bitek employs literature, which aims at not denying everything but at affirming an indigenous identity in the mixed postcolonial world.

It is obvious after a comprehensive survey of the literature on p'Bitek and his writings that whereas various aspects of the poem such as performance, gender issues, resistance, and culture conflict have been explored by scholars, the particular issue of imperial diaspora, which is one of the methods of the colonial system posing challenge to the identity and pluralism of the people, has not been addressed yet. The current research attempts to cover this important lacuna in the literature.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The current research adopts the multilayer theoretical model by Braj Kachru, which is better known as the Three Concentric Circles Model. The theoretical model pays attention to indigenization, native/local language, socio-culture, and local voices. Furthermore, the adopted model takes into account academic, socio-cultural, and political issues related to non-native language users (Raisa, 2022). Language-use, indigenization, and the idea of imperial diaspora constitute the three core aspects of the model, hence, making it relevant for the current study.

Three Circles Model by Kachru includes three concentric circles including Inner Circle, Outer Circle, and Expanding Circle. The Inner Circle is comprised of countries where English is the native language such as Britain and America. The Outer Circle includes countries where English is a non-native and institutionalized language as a result of the period of British colonization, such as Uganda, Kenya, and some other African states. The Expanding Circle

includes countries where English is considered to be a foreign language and there is no colonial past there. This particular model is important for post-colonial studies because of the conflict between the imposition of English by the Inner Circle and its resistance in the Outer Circle.

In the context of the present study, the Inner Circle symbolizes the imperial center—the colonial power that imposed its language, culture, and values through the mechanism of imperial diaspora. The Outer Circle represents the colonized African peoples and their literary representatives, including p'Bitek, who resist and subvert this imposition through the process of indigenization. Kachru favors the preservation of indigenous language and understands indigenization as a natural and inevitable reaction of the Outer Circle against the Inner Circle. As Ali and Masroor (2017) argue, resistance against the hegemony of English is an inevitable strategy adopted by postcolonial writers and theorists to save and represent indigenous voices. Indigenization, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, refers to “the action or process of bringing something under the control, dominance, or influence of the people native to an area.” It is a method of appropriating and adapting exocentric values to local situations. The term “indigenization” is most frequently used to refer to the process of becoming African—adopting African values—in the context of Africa, where it is an approach to overcoming Western cultural imperialism. As Rehman, Khan, and Khan (2021, p. 339) clarify, “a language may be considered transplanted if it is used by a significant number of speakers in social, cultural, and geographical contexts different from the contexts in which it was originally used.” P'Bitek's indigenization of English in *Song of Lawino* (1966) (1966) is precisely this—the transplantation and transformation of a colonial language to serve indigenous expressive needs.

Kachru also identifies four key strategies of linguistic appropriation employed by postcolonial writers: Lexical Innovation, Translation Equivalence, Contextual Redefinition, and Rhetoric and Functional Style. These strategies form the analytical toolkit applied in the Discussion and Analysis section to examine p'Bitek's literary practice in *Song of Lawino* (1966).

3.1 Imperial Diaspora

The concept of imperial diaspora provides the second theoretical pillar of this study. A brief but foundational definition is offered by Bakewell (2009), who highlights four key elements that characterize diaspora and its relationship to local voices. These four criteria are: (a) movement from an original homeland to more than one country, either through forced dispersal or voluntary expansion in search of improved livelihoods; (b) a collective myth of an ideal ancestral home; (c) a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long period of time, based on shared history, culture, and religion; and (d) a sustained network of social relationships with members of the group living in different countries or settlements (Bakewell, 2009, p. 3).

Imperial diaspora, as distinguished from other forms of diaspora, is maintained and shaped by people who settle abroad in order to expand their economic interests, exploit natural and human resources, utilize manpower and labor, and extend the power of their empire. A relevant and historically significant example is provided by the British Empire, which followed this imperial diaspora in the furtherance of its socio-political and economic interests. As Cohen (2002) documents, some 22 million settlers left the British Isles between 1815 and 1914, most going to the USA, with smaller groups going to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Rhodesia, and South Africa. Although most of the colonization was by British settlers, the Netherlands, Spain, France, and Portugal nurtured their own imperial dreams by exporting colonists.

It was almost an ambition and objective of all imperial governments to launch emigration policies in order to promote their vested trade and economic designs and to implement their hegemonic agendas. These policies were laden with implicit objectives that went far beyond the ostensible welfare of the settlers. Rulers like King James I and Francis Bacon were found

to encourage the emigration of criminals and idlers, seeing a “double commodity” in the process: ridding their homeland of undesirables and simultaneously using the emigration of these individuals to advance colonial interests in foreign lands. Richards (2018), a renowned British historian, cautioned that British emigrants were often misrepresented as criminals rather than the law-abiding, sophisticated, and well-cultured individuals many of them were. What is crystal clear is that all the emigration policies introduced by imperialists transformed settlers into an instrument of imperial diaspora rather than genuine beneficiaries of colonial opportunity. Different policies—subsidized shipping, granting of lands, and other favors bestowed upon emigrants—were intended not to serve the local people’s interests but rather to promote the vested interests of imperial powers. Paul Gilroy’s work on British and Black identities in *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* (1987–2002) and *The Black Atlantic* (2002) shows that diaspora, multiculturalism, and cosmopolitanism constitute a new dimension of postcolonial theory. Gilroy argued that British identity has been constructed by the systematic exclusion of Blacks and Asians, and that Englishness has been associated exclusively with white culture while deliberately excluding all non-western cultures.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The undertaken study employs a qualitative approach to pursue the set research objectives through the analysis of p’Bitek’s *Song of Lawino* (1966). This section initiates an exhaustive discussion and explanation of the research framework and methodology, including the sources of data, collection procedures, and research tools applied.

Research is a disciplined pursuit that employs established methods for investigation and exploration of a problem—or to answer a question in detail—in order to add to the existing stock of knowledge by applying tested tools and methods. The basic aspect of qualitative research is to analyze non-numerical data that cannot be quantified, because qualitative data can be found in the study of human behaviors, actions, events, ethics, and norms. The qualitative approach represents data from the viewpoint of human beings, who are taken as the major source of data collection as they witness different circumstances in daily life (Bryman, 2004). Qualitative research is therefore grounded in a naturalistic approach to data generation and collection.

Textual analysis begins with a close reading of the text, wherein the researcher familiarizes themselves with the work and poses analytical questions about its genre, themes, metaphors, use of language, and narrative structures. Once a deeper grasp of these elements is achieved, questions about how and why the text employs them can be asked to ascertain deeper meanings and cultural discourse (Skains, 2018). Textual analysis and thematic analysis are therefore the two foundational qualitative methods that underpin this research. As Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009) articulate, the procedure and process of collecting data in a research method includes a full-length and complete activity covering the entire research design.

The study in hand aims at exploring the selected poetry—a piece of the renowned African oral literature—through its textual and thematic qualitative analysis from the lens of the applied theoretical model. This approach helps in carrying out a detailed study of the poem in terms of its morphological, symbolic and thematic interpretation. Moreover, the use of relevant figures of speech, motifs and settings of the poem is considered thoroughly. This dissertation includes two important sources of data gathering where the research questions and objectives form a focal point. The main source of information includes the text of *Song of Lawino* (1966) that has been considered comprehensively to conduct an in-depth study and analysis. The other source includes relevant books, published national and international literature, articles and theses to fill up the research gap.

5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Imperial Diaspora as a Challenge to Local Identity and Pluralism

As a central instrument of the imperial agenda, the British colonizers transported their own

citizens—carrying criminal records in their native homeland according to official imperial narratives—to African lands. Through this deliberate mechanism, the imperialists derived manifold advantages. Most importantly, they killed two birds with one stone: first, they purified their own nation by removing chronically criminal elements; and second, through this conscious and deliberate influx, the British systematically imposed their culture and language on African peoples. As Ali and Masroor (2017) maintain, language is one of the most effective tools to exercise power, and the power of language cannot be underestimated as it even controls life and death.

Furthermore, Kachru favors the preservation of indigenous language as a natural and necessary reaction of the Outer Circle against the Inner Circle. Along with Kachru, other postcolonial theorists affirm that resistance against the hegemony of English is an inevitable strategy by postcolonial writers and theorists to save and represent indigenous voices. As Vakunta (2011, p. 20) articulates, ex-colonized writers tend to respond to the colonial legacy “by writing back to the imperial center from the empire in a bid to express otherness.”

This section of the research attempts to unfold the layers of imperial diaspora in *Song of Lawino* (1966) as a strategy used to colonize African people and their lands. The work of Lawino, a communal and typical public character within the poem, adheres to indigenous culture, traditions, and customs, while Ocol is presented as an abhorrent representation of the Western traitor, turncoat, and perfidious lover (Ojaide, 1986). Their domestic conflict is, at a deeper level, the conflict between the colonized peoples and the cultural values imposed upon them by imperial diaspora.

The four key elements of imperial diaspora identified by Bakewell (2009) are all traceable in the sociocultural dynamics of *Song of Lawino* (1966): the forced departure of British settlers from their homeland to African territories; the colonial settlers’ sense of connection to a mythologized ancestral home in Europe; the settlers’ sustained ethnic and cultural consciousness that they sought to maintain and impose in African lands; and the networks of social and political relationships that constituted the colonial social structure. The colonial regime deliberately denigrated the African people’s identity and their rich cultural pluralism by imposing on them the idea of monolithic Western culture that believed itself superior in every respect.

In a remarkable way, through the voice of Lawino, p’Bitek opposes the cultural dominance established by the colonizers. According to Salim, Rehman, and Jamil (2024), the speaker who represents the poet in Lawino opposes the distortion of her own ancestral identity by utilizing African linguistic elements, terms and titles, idioms, and figures of speech, which in Kachru’s view serve the purpose of challenging the Inner Circle from the Outer Circle. It is, therefore, a literary act as well as a political one in the sense of reassertion of cultural pluralism in opposition to imperialist diaspora.

Four such strategies are used by the poet p’Bitek in his poem “*Song of Lawino*” (1966) to resist the challenge of the imperialist diaspora to local identity. They include Lexical Innovation, Translation Equivalence, Contextual Redefinition, and Rhetoric and Functional Style.

a) Lexical Innovation

Lexical Innovation is the process where postcolonial writers use the mixture of lexical items, words, and phrases from one language and combine them with the other language. This strategy brings about alternative ways of expression that cannot be translated but have to be interpreted in the cultural context of their mixture. P’Bitek uses this strategy quite widely in his work *Song of Lawino* (1966) where he integrates indigenous words from Africa in the English text thus creating an African literary style as seen below: “dance the rumba,” “sumba the dance,” “orak dance,” “kabir millet,” “shea butter,” “alwiri spear,” “obiya grass,” “oduggu shrubs,” “ororo snake,” “lutururu hills,” “jok dance,” “lango stove,” “baptized Benedeta,” and “ojibu taboo.”

P'Bitek consciously uses these mixed linguistic terms to prove that the linguistic concepts are related due to culture similarity. Each Acoli term embedded in the English text asserts the presence and validity of indigenous culture within a language that was imposed by the colonizer. The lexical innovation thus represents, in miniature, the resistance of the Outer Circle against the Inner Circle's cultural hegemony.

Among the most striking examples of lexical innovation is p'Bitek's representation of indigenous insects such as the "ojuu" insect, which Ocol uses to demean Lawino, and the "odir and oenne" insects, which form part of African culinary tradition. As Salim, Rehman, and Jamil (2024) observe, P'Bitek never forgets to represent indigenous flora and fauna, and these representations are potent reactions that allow indigenous voices to come to the surface as a resistance to imperialist forces, as argued by Kachru in his famous model of indigenization.

b) Translation Equivalence

Translation Equivalence is a strategy that postcolonial writers employ to indicate the untranslatability of definite behaviors, settings, emotions, and feelings. This strategy acknowledges that certain indigenous cultural realities cannot be adequately captured in the language of the colonizer and must instead be rendered through a kind of approximation that retains the original cultural meaning. P'Bitek employs this strategy throughout *Song of Lawino* (1966) through lines such as:

Now you compare me with the rubbish thing (p'Bitek, 1966, p. 34)

You are not a dead fruit (p'Bitek, 1966, p. 34)

Stop treating me like a salt-less ash (p'Bitek, 1966, p. 35)

My husband pours scorn (p'Bitek, 1966, p. 35)

That has dipped its mouth in blood (p'Bitek, 1966, p. 37)

These and many other lines and expressions in *Song of Lawino* (1966) are purely African terms and represent African native culture. P'Bitek uses such terms to show the true picture of indigenous local life through the medium of English language, demonstrating that the English language can be made to carry African cultural meaning even when direct translation proves inadequate. This creative tension between language and cultural experience is itself a form of resistance against the colonizer's monopoly on meaning.

c) Contextual Redefinition

Contextual Redefinition is a strategy that employs certain English terms in accordance with native settings, or redefines them as they are used in native contexts. P'Bitek pens many terms in *Song of Lawino* (1966) in accordance with their African settings, contextualizing ideas to suit indigenous cultural realities rather than Western ones.

For example, daughter of a bull (p. 49) and son of a bull and Agik (p. 113) are expressions used for the wife Lawino and husband Ocol respectively, representing cultural terms that express relational identity in indigenous terms rather than Western ones. The expression *lyonno lily* (p. 35) is employed to convey the bitterness of Lawino's husband's tongue; the *orak dance* (p. 42) refers to the dance Lawino loved and performed with skill; *shea butter* (p. 52) is a traditional paste that p'Bitek treats as possessing great cultural and physical value; and *ororo* (p. 54) refers to a poisonous snake familiar in the African ecological imagination. Such African words carry entirely different meanings in colonizers' contexts and societies—by embedding them in English-language text, p'Bitek redefines the very language of the colonizer to speak African cultural truth.

As Salim, Rehman, and Rehman (2025) affirm, the poet through the process of localization and indigenization in his works attempts to get the English language adapted to the requirements of the natives, imparting African cultural and linguistic appropriation. This process first requires the abrogation of imperial English in accordance with local African

linguistic needs, producing a metalanguage that incorporates elements of both the original and imported languages while remaining culturally distinct.

d) Rhetoric and Functional Style

The fourth Kachruvian strategy is Rhetoric and Functional Style, which employs the trans-creation of local style writings into English. The entire poem *Song of Lawino* (1966) is set in local rhetorical style while being written in English. P'Bitek purposefully employs this strategy to represent the native expressive tradition and to give voice to local social and emotional realities. The poem opens with Lawino's lament in a register that is simultaneously oral, rhetorical, and deeply rooted in African performative traditions:

Husband, now you despise me
Now you treat me with spite
And say I have inherited
the stupidity of my aunt (p'Bitek, 1966, p. 34)

With the rubbish in the rubbish pit,
You say you no longer want me
Because I am like the things left behind (p'Bitek, 1966, p. 34)

Who has discovered the
medicine for thirst? (p'Bitek, 1966, p. 40)

Is lawala not a game?
Is cooro not a game? (p'Bitek, 1966, p. 49)

The rhetorical structure of the poem, characterized by repetition, direct address, rhetorical questioning, and oral performance conventions, is drawn directly from Acholi oral tradition and is trans-created into the English text. Ntangaare (2021) aptly observes that the dramatic elements have made the poem to be acted, dramatized, staged, and performed, and that the effect of indigenous dramatic elements translated into English language has a long-lasting impression on readers and general public viewers. P'Bitek takes the traditional oral literary structure—which is a cultural product of the indigenous African community—and employs it as a counter-discourse against the cultural uniformity imposed by imperial diaspora.

5.2 Language as a Site of Resistance: Outer Circle Challenging the Inner Circle

P'Bitek's epic is the masterpiece of African oral literature, replete with indigenous language that the poet employs as a vehicle of resistance against the invasion of western culture. Most of the postcolonial literary authors and critics have contended that language played a decisive role in African decolonization. Along with p'Bitek, other writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Gabriel Okara, and Frantz Fanon wrote as resistance and challenge to English language hegemony, producing nationalistic narrative expressions and utterances (Ali and Masroor, 2017).

As Jasen and Nayar (2010, p. 10) observe, the blacks had to create their own history and write their own stories to break free of the colonial shackles in what Fanon envisaged as a deeply humanist project: "A national culture, believed Fanon, must return to African myths and cultural practices so that black identity can be resurrected." This resurrective cultural project is precisely what *Song of Lawino* (1966) achieves through its linguistic choices.

Lawino's husband, Ocol, had been educated in Western societies and Western universities to satisfy his academic and pedagogical ambitions. This education led him to despise and look down upon his own ancestral norms, values, and identity. Fanon (1967a, p. 60) writes, "In the man of color there is a constant effort to run away from his own individuality, to annihilate his own presence." Ocol embodies this alienated consciousness: the colonized subject who seeks

to mimic and copy the colonizers in terms of religion, values, culture, and language, using such mimicry as an escapism from his ancestral background.

P'Bitek, through Lawino's vigorous and clamorous voice, represents her as the spokesperson of African people and society who challenges the distorted notions of Western cultural supremacy. Although Lawino's husband values Clementine as a sophisticated and modern woman rather than his own wife from his own fraternity, Lawino does not lose heart or abandon her cultural convictions. This narrative choice by p'Bitek enacts the resistance of the Outer Circle: rather than succumbing to the cultural hegemony of the Inner Circle, the indigenous subject—represented by Lawino—maintains her cultural dignity and asserts the validity and worth of her own identity.

The matter of fact is, *Song of Lawino* (1966) is replete with more African vocabulary, discourse, terminologies, titles, proverbs, idioms, and local names than it is with English. It is thus flavored more richly with African language than with the English in which it is formally written, as Salim, Rehman, and Rehman (2025, p. 1909) observe. The above linguistic situation brings out what Kachru terms indigenization, whereby English becomes a vehicle for transporting African culture, thereby reversing the linguistic dominance of the Inner Circle through the creativity of the Outer Circle.

5.3 Indigenous Flora, Fauna, and Cultural Practices as Resistance

One of the most striking characteristics of the book *Song of Lawino* (1966) is the portrayal of the rich indigenous flora, fauna, food, dance, and culture as indigenous identity that acts as resistance against the cultural homogenizing tendencies of imperialism. In this way, P'Bitek through the voice of Lawino has made visible the indigenous things that were being ignored such as flora, fauna, and insects in the entire African ecological and cultural imagination (Salim, Rehman, and Jamil, 2024, p. 1592).

Festivals and dances play a significant role in this cultural resistance movement. It is through the strong voice of Lawino that the significance of celebration and indigenous dances is shown by P'Bitek. The names of orak, jok, ogodo, and moko are mentioned again and again for the dances to emphasize indigenous cultural specificity:

You once saw me at the orak dance

The dance for youths

The dance of our People (p'Bitek, 1966, p. 42)

Lawino's evocation of these dances is not merely nostalgic but politically charged. In highlighting the cultural worth of the indigenous dances that Ocol does not respect, Lawino is challenging the cultural agenda of the imperial diaspora, whose aim is to replace the pluralism of Africa's cultures with a homogenized Western culture.

Food is another critical site of cultural identity in the poem. Lawino's husband, as the representative character of Western culture, has begun to denigrate African food, calling it tasteless and inferior compared to Western cuisines. Lawino protests over this attitude, which she understands as an internalization of the colonizer's contempt for indigenous culture:

They are for warming up

Tinned beef, tinned fish,

Tinned frogs, tinned snakes,

Tinned peas, tinned beans,

Big broad beans

Tasteless like the cooro! (p'Bitek, 1966, p. 58)

The comparison of processed Western food with the indigenous cooro plant inverts the colonizer's hierarchy of taste and civilization, asserting the worth of indigenous knowledge, food culture, and ecological relationship against the standardized, industrialized culture of the imperial center.

The religious dimension of imperial diaspora's challenge to local identity is also powerfully depicted. Ocol, as the colonized subject who has absorbed the religious values of the colonizer, calls his own people kaffirs who do not know the ways of God, and gives preference to the Western religious authority of the Padre over the indigenous spiritual traditions of his own people. The imperialists came with the Bible in their hands to preach Christianity among African peoples whom they considered pagans, looking down upon their faith by calling them kaffirs, superstitious, and heathens, as Desmond Tutu (2007) famously observed: "when the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said, 'Let us pray.' We closed our eyes. When we opened them, we had the Bible and they had the land." P'Bitek very beautifully depicts this very symbolic image of the church and the priest, while Lawino's protestation remains adamant against the criticism of her husband who starts abhorring any faith, culture, and society other than Western.

What emerges from this analysis is that Song of Lawino (1966) constitutes a comprehensive literary critique of imperial diaspora's challenge to local identity and pluralism. The poetry of P'Bitek's depiction of native flora, fauna, foods, dances, language, and religions is more than just a description; it is an opposition of what is alive, diverse, and valuable about African pluralism to the monolithic culture of the colonial center. Indigenization, as theorized by Kachru and practiced by p'Bitek, thus becomes the most potent literary and cultural response to the destructive force of imperial diaspora.

5.4 Indigenization as a Pathway towards Decolonization

Through Lawino's countering voice and response to the incursion of European culture, p'Bitek has represented in Song of Lawino (1966) an oral African work abounding with indigenous language and voices that collectively constitute a vision of decolonization through indigenization. As Salim, Rehman, and Rehman (2025, p. 1908) affirm, the poet willfully follows the strategies theorized by Braj Kachru, knowing the power and significance of language and therefore preferring to employ fictional representation of indigenous cultures, language, and ideology.

As Mbembe (2015) contends, decolonization is basically a rejection of the belief that the West is the real cause of African cultural identity and heritage, a negation of the assumption that Africa is the creation of imperial powers. P'Bitek's Song of Lawino (1966) enacts this rejection by asserting the autonomy, history, and value of African culture on its own terms, rather than in relation to Western standards.

Smith (1990) has shed light on the term indigenization, arguing that it is a way to know theory and practice from the perspective of natives. Thiong'o (1994) and Tuhiwai Smith (2012) observe that colonialism in Africa disconnected people from their histories, landscapes, language, social relations, and their own ways of thinking, feeling, and interacting with the world, while also destroying existing structures and social support systems through the introduction of capitalist economic structures (Smith, 2015). Laenui (2000) adds that colonization and decolonization are social processes even more than they are political processes: governance over a people changes only after the people themselves have sufficiently changed.

P'Bitek's indigenization of English in Song of Lawino (1966) contributes to this social process of change by restoring to African readers a literary mirror in which they can recognize their own culture, language, and values as worthy of celebration and defense. The study after an exhaustive analysis of the representation of indigenized flora and fauna and African voices in the poem affirms that indigenization is a strategy suggested by the Kachravian model that will go a long way towards the decolonization of African people. This is the only way left with the colonized to travel the road to freedom, liberty, and identity (Salim, Rehman, and Rehman, 2025, p. 1910).

It is one of the common characteristics of postcolonial writers to indigenize and appropriate the language of imperialists to decolonize the system and mind. P'Bitek's literary project in

Song of Lawino (1966) represents the fullest realization of this characteristic in East African postcolonial literature, making the poem not only a literary masterpiece but also a foundational document of African cultural decolonization.

6. CONCLUSION

This study, after an exhaustive analysis, concludes that Okot p'Bitek, as a prolific postcolonial African writer, projects indigenous culture as a potent form of resistance against the onslaught of the imperialist agenda, specifically the mechanism of imperial diaspora, for the identity and freedom of local Ugandan and broader African society. The study has benefited from the application of Kachru's Three Concentric Circles Model as its theoretical framework for achieving the set research objectives, and the key objectives have been successfully attained through the analysis of *Song of Lawino* (1966) in the light of this model. The study has explored the negative and unproductive impact of the imposition of imperial culture on the life and culture of local Africans through the specific mechanism of imperial diaspora. The poet offered a way forward by representing local voices and indigenous culture in his art—voices that had been purposefully silenced by imperial masters. *Song of Lawino* (1966) emerged as the mouthpiece of the segregated, colonized subjects who had no say in the affairs of their own country. The fictional representation of Western culture in conflict with local culture functions as resistance and challenge to this imposition. The wailing and protest of Lawino, p'Bitek's protagonist, demonstrated the inevitability of projecting one's own identity and the necessity of its recognition.

The study has contended that the effect and impact of colonialism and imperialism on the sociocultural, political, and religious realities of African peoples are far-reaching and deeply embedded. The poet adapted his literary practice to voice for the marginalized and silenced realities through the selected piece of literature. Through Lawino—the spokesperson of African society—p'Bitek never leaves any stone unturned in resisting the imposition of imperial and colonial culture on indigenous culture. Throughout the selected epic, the poet, an adamant supporter of African indigenization and identity, pens down his own culture that was under severe attack from imperial powers mediated through the instrument of imperial diaspora.

Most postcolonial writers and critics contend that language has a key role to play in the representation of a society. Similarly, the study has explored the reputed Ugandan oral literature through the lens of Kachru's model to highlight the challenge posed by the Outer Circle to the Inner Circle through the usage of Acoli language and vocabulary. The poet depicted even indigenized plants, animals, and insects to show his solidarity with the indigenous culture. Through the four Kachruvian strategies—Lexical Innovation, Translation Equivalence, Contextual Redefinition, and Rhetoric and Functional Style—p'Bitek demonstrates how a postcolonial writer can appropriate the colonizer's language to serve indigenous expressive and political needs.

The study has also argued that imperial diaspora proved literally a challenge and impediment to local pluralism and identity. Through this vested design of imperial diaspora, the rulers were cashing many advantages while systematically dismantling the cultural plurality and self-determination of African peoples. The four fundamental elements of imperial diaspora, as probed by the study in the selected work, all converge to support the argument that *Song of Lawino* (1966) is both a record of cultural assault and a manifesto of cultural resistance.

The final and most important research goal achieved through the study is to prove that indigenization, as suggested by Kachru and employed by p'Bitek, is an extremely powerful tool for decolonization. With its representation and depiction of the native African culture, the *Song of Lawino* (1966) becomes the strongest tool for the liberation of the African people from the cultural stereotypes of colonization. The current research, by emphasizing imperial diaspora as the main colonizing technique which was questioned by p'Bitek in his literary works, brings to the academic discussion a new aspect in the studies devoted to this

masterpiece of poetry.

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