

DECOLONIZATION IN HERMAN MELVILLE'S MOBY DICK:  
DIALECTIC ENCOUNTER BETWEEN EUROPE AND  
WILDERNESS (AMERICA)

I. INTRODUCTION

The study starts with a short introduction to decolonization, its strategies, a short analysis and tracing decolonization in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*.

II. DECOLONIZATION AND ITS STRATEGIES IN LITERATURE

As a process which is the very practical consequence of post-colonial discourse, decolonization is the only alternative way of removing the heavy burden of empire colonization which has invaded colonized countries both culturally and naturally. But to perceive decolonization as the central concern of the study, first it is necessary to discuss the decolonization itself. Then, various kinds of decolonization, that is, Early, Present, in Settlers and Invaded colonies, strategies, and colonies will be presented. Consequently, decolonization in the settler colonies will be followed by analysis of the above mentioned novels.

A. Definition of Decolonization

Decolonization, in general, is a revolt, whether implicit or explicit, against imperial axiomatically legal domination. In other words, it is a kind of awareness against the imposed oppression and inferiority like what was done in Marxist movement against master class by slaves (working class) or by Feminist against patriarchal societies. Being different in early and present involvement and engagement, like them, decolonization is divided into two stages: first or early phase, as will be referred to in the next parts, which was started by African decolonizers derived from the works of political theorists like Frantz Fanon (1959, 1961, 1967) and Albert Memmi (1965) who located its principal characteristic in the notion of the imperial-colonial (colonizer-colonized) dialectic itself. In this respect. The early involvement and engagement of decolonization as Ashcroft puts, is 'a profound complicity with the imperial powers from which they sought to emerge as free agents' (p.56), that is, freedom and emancipation as free subject. Writing in the 1950s during the Algerian struggle for independence from French colonial rule, Fanon, through psychoanalysis of colonial subject produced the ways in which the colonial subject's identity is shaped by the colonist. In his famous and influential essay (Fanon, 1986, pp.109-40), Fanon shows the impact of racism on the construction of the subject and the production of identity. In this essay which is an interior monologue, Fanon (1986) uses the constructed identity of the oppressed narrator by the racist oppressors as: ' "Dirty nigger!", "Negro!"' and eventually he puts this construction as the

construction of an object among the other objects not a subject:

'I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found I was an object in the midst of other objects. Sealed into this crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others. . . . I stumbled, and the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self' (Fanon, 1986, p. 109).

As a result, early decolonization seeks to invert the structures of domination and substituting the tradition of the colonized nations in place of imperial-dominated canon. Therefore, the early decolonization is dialectic of subject/object, self/other which is resulted in a national revolt and in Parry (1987) term 'nationalist liberationist narratives'...(p.37).

But in the present or advanced stage, decolonization criticism is extended by Edward Said into the area of challenging and undermining absolute and axiomatic principles upon which the world classification into superiority of the occident and inferiority of the orient is established. Such classifications in Said's (1978) view are man-made, not absolute (p. 5); consequently, they are used for domination by Europe. Therefore, decolonization has turned away from simple inversions towards a questioning of forms and modes, to unmasking the assumptions upon which such canonical constructions are founded in a way that it moves first to make their cryptic bases visible and then destabilizes them:

'decolonization is the process of revealing and dismantling colonialist power in all its forms. This includes dismantling the hidden aspects of those institutional and cultural forces that had maintained the colonialist power and that remain even after political independence is achieved. Initially, in many places in the colonized world, the process of resistance was conducted in terms or institutions appropriated from the colonizing culture itself...(Ashcroft, 2007, P.56-7).

*B. Decolonization and its Strategies in The Setter colonies:*

In the settler colonies like the **United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia**, land was occupied by European colonists who dispossessed and overwhelmed the Indigenous populations. Consequently, in these colonies, decolonization which is possible through Agency, Nationalism, Appropriation and Abrogation is different from the invaded colonies. In such colonies, according to Ashcroft (2004),

'the first task seems to be to establish that the texts can be

shown to constitute a literature separate from that of the metropolitan centre. A vast and impressive body of literary histories, thematic studies, and studies of individual literary traditions has accrued over the last one hundred and fifty years or so in the white cultures of settler colonies. The task of compiling a national literary history has usually been an important element in the establishment of an independent cultural identity (p.131)'.

This decolonization which was the central task of early decolonizers can be seen in H.M. Green (1961); Carl F. Klinck (1965), a large body of text in the United State (Russell Reising 1978), and many others. Therefore, the early stage of decolonization is a kind of consciousness through which settler colonized people perceive themselves as individuals who can freely and autonomously initiate action and construct their own identity, that is, Agency which

'refers to the ability to act or perform an action. In contemporary theory, it hinges on the question of whether individuals can freely and autonomously initiate action, or whether the things they do are in some sense determined by the ways in which their identity has been constructed. Agency is particularly important in post-colonial theory because it refers to the ability of post-colonial subjects to initiate action in engaging or resisting imperial power' (Ashcroft 2007, p.6).

In the later stages some decolonizers try to develop their self-assertion through independent national literature in a controversial way as in L. Kramer (1981) and W.H. New (1989), Charles Brockden Brown (1799) and Fenimore Cooper's works in America. But, the problem to which they meet is lack of a national and local language as their own language. In other words, the language through which they want to establish and express a separated independent national cultural identity is metropolitan language:

'The colonial writer does not have words of his own....Try to speak the words of your home and you will discover – if you are a colonial – that you do not know them . . . perhaps our job was not to fake a space of our own and write it up, but rather to find words for our space-lessness . . . Instead of pushing against the grain of an external, uncharged language, perhaps we should finally come to writing *with* that grain' (Lee 1974, pp. 162,163).

Therefore, the real concern is the control over the means of communication, that is, power of writing in the colonial situation as has been discussed by Tzvetan Todorov (1974). But how is it possible while the only dominant language as the medium of power is the language of the centre? In other words, post-colonial

writing only can define itself by seizing the language of the centre: 'The crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that post-colonial writing defines itself by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place' (Ashcroft, 2004, p.37). It is because language is the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and conceptions of truth, order, and reality become established. Post-colonial writing is going to reject such power and; therefore, post-colonial writing is the process by which the language, with its power, and the writing, with its signification of authority, has been seized from the dominant European culture. Post-colonial writing does this through two processes of

"the abrogation or denial of the privilege of 'English' involves a rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication" and "the appropriation and reconstitution of the language of the centre, the process of capturing and remoulding the language to new usages, marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege. Abrogation is a refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or 'correct' usage, and its assumption of a traditional and fixed meaning 'inscribed' in the words. It is a vital moment in the de-colonizing of the language and the writing of 'english', but without the process of appropriation the moment of abrogation may not extend beyond a reversal of the assumptions of privilege, the 'normal', and correct inscription, all of which can be simply taken over and maintained by the new usage (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2007, p. 37).

Therefore, post-colonial text is itself a site of struggle for linguistic control which has resulted in the appropriating discourse. This struggle extends to the disputes concerning theme, form, and genre definition, implicit systems of manner, custom, and value.

Now, the question is that may we say that language constitutes reality? Paradoxically, the answer is yes! But where is the center of reality, that is, its axiomatic center according to which the other realities by other languages are constructed? The answer is that there is not any centre of reality just as there is not any pre-given unmediated reality and control over the means of communication determines the center of reality; therefore, the colonized nations through appropriation of language of metropolitan centre-- 'to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own' (Rao, 1938, vii), or makes it 'bear the burden' of one's own cultural experience (Achebe, 1975, 62)-- and self-assertion abrogate its centrality and they define themselves as the centre and they may reconstruct reality according to their own pattern of conventions, expectations, and experiences, that is, establishment of the link between the

received English and place or in Emerson's phrase, , their 'original relation with the universe' (Emerson 1836: 21)

In a sense, eventually, abrogation through appropriation, which was operated by some decolonizers, is a kind of deconstruction. Because they use language in a way which it disrupts its binary structuration. This pattern of binary structuration in European and many other languages, for such critics among whom Wilson Harris (1985) is well known, lies at the root of the continual pattern of conquest and domination that has formed the structure of human history; therefore, tracing *aporia* in such a pattern is possible.

### III. Decolonization in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*

A theme of the novel is openly undermining Starbuck normality and docility by Ahab who are metaphors for European normality and American violation of these norms for more metaphysical investigation and development the borders of knowledge. Ahab's initial disagreement with Starbuck - dialectic encounter between Ahab and Starbuck- occurs on the quarter-deck (Ch. XXXIV) regarding the ship's mission. Later in the voyage, Ahab and Starbuck have another confrontation, again concerning duty, in the captain's cabin (Chapter CI). Starbuck is a sincere Quaker with a hierarchy of loyalties, that is, European Docile body. He feels a duty first to God, then to his employer (who supports Starbuck's family), then to his captain. When Starbuck discovers that some of the barrels in the hold of the ship must be leaking oil, he reports the situation to Ahab (Ch. CI). The first mate expects the captain to stop the ship and turn all hands to a check of the casks because the ship's official mission is to capture whale oil and bring it home safely. As he says, 'What we come twenty thousand miles to get is worth saving, sir.' Ahab sardonically responds, 'So it is, so it is; if we get it' (p. 384). Starbuck means the oil; Ahab means the White Whale; thus he is mocking rigidly traditional docility. Starbuck reminds Ahab of the owners' interests-'What will the owners say, Sir?' ( p. 384)- but the captain could not care less about the owners. He points a loaded musket toward the first mate and declares that there is 'one Captain that is lord over the *Pequod* (p. 384).' Starbuck returns to the deck, and Ahab soon decides it is more prudent to stop the ship and make repairs. It is clear, however, that the captain feels only one duty on this mission, and that is not to the owners or even to God but to Ahab. He will pursue his own monomaniacal goal in defiance of whatever gets in his path. When Starbuck as a docile and obedient person, has an opportunity to shoot the old man, with the same musket that Ahab pointed at him, the duties become confused in his mind. He has a duty to his family. How is that duty best served? He has a duty to the men who may well die with Ahab. But Starbuck feels a higher duty—to himself, to God, perhaps simply to decency. He is unable to pull the trigger, not through weakness but due to his own system of values. Because Starbuck cannot kill his captain, he must serve him.

Another challenge between Ahab and Starbuck is in the scene in which Ahab announces his serious mission to find Moby Dick every where that is deviation from the ship mission as well as challenging nature:

I'll chase him round Good Hope, and round the horn, and round the Norway maelstrom, and round perdition's flames before I give him up. And this is what ye have shipped for, men! To chase that white whale on both sides of land, and over all sides of earth, till he spouts black blood and rolls fin out. (Ch. XXXIV, p.130).

That is Starbuck who reminds him the 'owner expectation and the ship mission' and Moby Dick as a part of nature or weaker than human: 'Vengeance on a dumb brute!' cried Starbuck, 'that simply smote thee from blindest instinct! Madness! To be enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab, seems blasphemous'. (p.131) But, challenging all dominant visible and invisible authorities whom he names as masks or limitation, Ahab betrays the very dilemma which has cajoled him to this mission:

All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sine wing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him. Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me. For could the sun do that, then could I do the other; since there is ever a sort of fair play herein, jealousy presiding over all creations. (p.131)

Ahab sees the White Whale as a mask, a facade, as his real enemy, - How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall or it is the 'inscrutable thing' behind the 'mask' which limits Ahab's role in the world. - which is an authority, that is, current European axiomatic religious and social norms that rules over Ahab and Ahab refuses to accept. Moreover, we can conclude- I'd strike the sun if it insulted me- that it is the order of nature or Determinism of Calvinism, which Ahab sees as evil because Ahab insists on being placed higher in nature than a mere man can be. Certainly Ahab is mad; even he knows that his monomaniacal obsession is not

'normal.' But he strikes us as not being a man who would want to be normal. Ahab strikes back against the inscrutable figure behind the mask because Ahab sees no justification for submitting to it. He rebels with anger because he wants to be more than he is, that is, cajoling and proposing a social deconstruction and anti-docility and aspiring mind of Renaissance man who seeks more metaphysical investigation. Ahab defies whatever authority there is and stands against it with a soul that can be killed but not defeated. To understand Ahab, we must understand that it is this force behind the mask that Ahab really wants to kill. Ahab believes that the force wants to injure him, to limit his role in the world. He, unlike sheepish obedience traditional limitation for knowledge and self-analysis, tries to develop the borders of man's knowledge both in the physical and psychical world. On the whole, undermining and abrogating the very axiomatically nonnality and docility of Europe has been exaggerated in order to express and differentiate American identity, that is, decolonization.

Another face of this challenge is demonstrated in Undermining traditional religions through Ahab's Defiance against Father Mapple's Pulpit's sermon of obedience as well as Misleading toward death by Fadallah and Sinking Fadallah and all beliefs but Ishmael. Father Mapple, as a christian person, presents the principals of worship and shipmate duty and position in the world. For Father Mapple, the first duty of any shipmate is to God. We can serve our professional obligations only within that larger value system. Father Mapple prepares us for a consideration of defiance with his sermon about Jonah in Chapter VIII. Jonah suffers from the sin of disobedience. When God asks him to submit to God's will, Jonah attempts to flee from god. He thinks that he can find some country where God does not rule. What he learns is that he must set aside his own wishes, his own vanity, if he is to follow God's way. Father Mapple puts it like this: 'And if we obey god, we must disobey ourselves; and it is in this disobeying ourselves, wherein the hardness of obeying God consists (pp. 33-35).' Whether he is fighting against God or the rules of nature or some sort of perverse evil authority, Ahab is a defiant man; thus, Melville is challenging religious and social norms of Europe. The sermon centers on the Old Testament story of Jonah and the whale. Its theme is that we must serve God by transcending our own self-interests: 'And if we obey God, we must disobey ourselves; and it is in this disobeying ourselves, wherein the hardness of obeying God consists,' Mapple states. This chapter cements the connection between the physical and metaphysical, the worldly and the religious, the actual and the metaphoric. Jonah's story parallels Ahab's in that it represents man's relationship with his universe and his god or gods. Jonah's approach was more God centered; Ahab's is more man centered. This man-centrism which is against God-centrism, in the novel, is evident in the scene in which when Ahab says he is no longer in control of his fate:

What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me; that against all natural lovings and longings, I so keep pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all the time; recklessly making me ready to do what in my own proper, natural heart, I durst not so much as dare? Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm? But if the great sun move not of himself; but is as an errand-boy in heaven; nor one single star can revolve, but by some invisible power; how then can this one small heart beat; this one small brain think thoughts; unless God does that beating, does that thinking, does that living, and not I. By heaven, man, we are turned round and round in this world, like yonder windlass, and Fate is the handspike. And all the time, lo! that smiling sky, and this unsounded sea! Look! see yon Albicore! who put it into him to chase and fang that flying-fish? (Ch. CXXII, pp. 441-2).

Melville is exaggerating Calvinism and fatalism through destiny of Ahab and he tries to release human from such a meaninglessly dark determinism which has disabled him. In other words, possibly, Melville is going to show the influence of religion emphasis on evil which has been resulted in deviation of human from normal reasonable life and devotion of man's most of lifetime to his shadow and finally death and sinking instead of living. Possibly, Ahab, as a sacrifice, is removing all superstitions, which is necessity of American Dream. Ahab, we will come to learn, has no connection to any other person or thing beyond the White Whale. Furthermore, as American Scapegoat who is going to fight against all natural limitations which have restricted human being, he is willing to sacrifice anything including: the *Pequod*, the profits from the successful hunts, his duty to the ship owners and his crew and anybody, including the lives of every man aboard his vessel, for revenge or for removing such European dominant axioms (decolonization).

Challenging and undermining the dark shadow of Fate- European Calvinism belief- is betrayed by Ishmael in the very beginning of the novel when he speculates that

I should now take it into my head to go on a whaling voyage; this the invisible police officer of the Fates, who has the constant surveillance of me, and secretly dogs me, and influences me in some unaccountable way—he can better answer than any one else. And, doubtless, my going on this whaling voyage, formed part of the grand, programme of

Providence that was drawn up a long time ago [Determinism, Calvinism] (p.4).

But, the speculation is not ended in this predetermined map of providence because Ishmael discusses his role in the world as a creature with free will:

Though I cannot tell why it was exactly that those stage managers, the Fates, put me down for this shabby part of a whaling voyage, when others were set down for magnificent parts in high tragedies, and short and easy parts in genteel comedies, and jolly parts in farces—though I cannot tell why this was exactly; yet, now that I recall all the circumstances, I think I can see a little into the springs and motives which being cunningly presented to me under various disguises, induced me to set about performing the part I did, besides cajoling me into the delusion that it was a choice resulting from my own unbiased freewill and discriminating judgment... I love to sail forbidden seas, and land on barbarous coasts (p.4).

Another scene in which Ahab is challenging and defiance of religion is the baptism ritual that would please Satan in which Ahab covers the barb with blood and speaks a Latin alteration of the Christian sacrament: "*Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli!*" ( Ch. CV, P. 398) which means; I do not baptize thee in the name of the father, but in the name of the devil.

Challenging seriously ancient religious doctrine of fighting against evil, Melville selects Fedallah, an ancient Asian whom Ishmael compares to a type of ancient, ghostlike figure, which one might find among the unchanging Asian communities (Ch. XLVII, pp. 183-4) , he is reported to be a Parsee (Ch. CIX, p. 406) who is a man of mystery, a non-Christian, and Ahab's guide. As a prophet who offers the captain an important prophecy (Ch. CIX), Fedallah is symbol of old, traditional religions especially Parsee as Ahab's spiritual guide whom he directs to a tragic death and destruction of all members for the sake of Ahab's ambitions. Thus, Melville, implicitly declares American reaction to such notion of evil from the view point of religions and proposes open minded persons as Ishmael and Queequeg who can keep their balance and he undermines and abrogates them as narrow minded principals for Dream Land.

#### V. Conclusion

In this study, a number of decolonization techniques were applied to Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* respectively to see how decolonization can be accounted for in terms of literary development.

In *Moby Dick* decolonization as proposed by Said and recently by Ashcroft, was strategically and essentially used. The important point is that the novel is metaphorically replete with dialectic encounters between America and Europe. In the beginning these dialectics are evident. Therefore, decolonization at least

can be applied to these early American novels. Dialectic encounter between the characters as Ahab and Starbuck and Father Mapple is purposely challenge of European axiomatically superiority in the novels by Melville in a way that thoughtful readers will notice its significance as soon as they start reading the novels. In these dialectic, shortcoming and weakness of European (Starbuck) and temerity, boldness, and impetuosity of American and the Americanhood (Ahab and Ishmael) has been depicted.

To actualize abrogation of the absolutely centrality of Europe, we traced the very plot of American myth in the masterly spiritual and physical heroism and the high capacity of Ishmael and Ahab as the embodiment of melting pot in the novel.

The important point is that Ishmael and Ahab whose particular attitudes and behaviors are the novelist purposely establishment of the prototype ideal American individual and violation of all selfish European individuals are both characters and symbols. He uses them to symbolize the myth of the hero woodsman because they define the characters by their relationships to nature. Actually, they are matured and self-reliance characters. Through these genius tasks, they establish the prototype and archetypal model for American character and differentiate it from European Character, that is, abrogating and undermining European literature and characters as the universal superior literature and characters or declaration of independence of America through literature, that is, decolonization.

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### **Ապագադուրացունը Հերման Մելվիլի «Մոբի Դիք»-ում. դիալեկտիկական բախումը Եվրոպայի և Անապատի (Ամերիկա) միջև**

Մոյն հետազոտության նպատակն է բացահայտել ապագադուրացման երևույթը Հերման Մելվիլի «Մոբի Դիք»-ում: Հեղինակն իր ստեղծագործության մեջ գործածում է շարադրման այնպիսի տարրեր, որոնք հստակորեն մատնացույց են անում ապագադուրացման գործընթացը: Հայտնի է, որ պատմվածքների շարադրման մեջ կարելի է տեսնել այլաբանություններ, ինչն ընդլայնում է մեր դիտանկյունը, օգնում տեսնելու նոր իմաստներ և կոնցեպտուալ մեկնաբանություններ: Տվյալ հետազոտության առանցքային նպատակն է ուսումնասիրել ապագադուրացման մակարդակը, աստիճանը և մարտավարությունները (մայրենի լեզվի փոփոխումը, մետրոպոլիաների կառուցվածքները, ինչպես նաև Եվրոպայի գերիշխանության մերժումն ու ամերիկյան մշակույթային անկախության հռչակումը) քննության ենթարկելով Ամերիկյան և Եվրոպյան խորհրդանշող կերպարների դիալեկտիկական բախումները: