

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

DENOTING POSITIVE SYNTACTIC REPRESENTATION OF AFRICANISM AND DECONSTRUCTION OF BINARY OPPOSITIONS IN 21ST CENTURY AFRICAN AMERICAN NOVEL

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Dr. Abrar Ahmed, Saima Rani, Dr. Athar Farooq, Abdul Shakoor, Zafar Nazeer Awan. Denoting Positive Syntactic Representation Of Africanism And Deconstruction Of Binary Oppositions In 21st Century African American Novel-- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 20(1), 462-472. ISSN 1567-214x

Keywords: Africanism, Syntactic, Deconstruction, Positive, Stereotypical, Revolution and Identity

ABSTRACT

The African American community places a premium on diverse viewpoints to be called a pride of the United States. They have always been exposed to the constant stress of discrimination and stereotypical representation linked with negativity and poor standards. This discussion raises a question whether black people's proud reconciling experiences of racism, institutional discrimination, and the struggle for self-identity have been wasted in the United States or it bears some fruits. This paper analyzes positive use of language that denote constructive thought and presents better version of African Americans as portrayed by Nancy Johnson in *the Kindest Lie*. The study investigates the syntactic use of language to deconstruct stereotypical representation of black people and traces revolutionary idea in the selected text in the light of Derridean notion of deconstructionism. Textual analysis of the novel proves that African American authoress uses African version for everything to present and applaud Africanism and

uses positive syntactic expression to praise blackness and other socio-cultural objects associated with it.

INTRODUCTION

The heterogeneous views of African American community are concealed under their fragmented presentation in media because of the racial label. Interracial decisions and strong social links are woven into their flexible identities. However, they have been continuously replicating their predecessors' approach to develop the country. Traveling from the South to the North, participating in urban America, and moving into the mainstream are all evidence of their deep interest in defining global identity and enhancing the reputation of a diverse America. What makes them subversive is their passion and pride in their culture and heritage that they carry with them and continue to put it into practice. They are willing to serve any positive role for the country. Stakeholders must look past their media representation, recognize the reality and accept the identity of their proud race. The paper investigates the positive syntactic use of language to appreciate Africanism and deconstruction of stereotypical representation of blacken in the *Kindest Lie* by Nancy Johnson. She creates characters who instill racial pride, help in the formation of new transnational identities, and counter stereotypical negativity that undermines them in the society. She applauds African Americans' struggle for political triumph in a country in which the opponent group "focuses on the construction of the social privilege and power from which whites primarily benefit" (Jardina, 2019, p. 47). It is difficult to convey the facts that can answer this question as well as what these facts imply to the community whose forefathers built the country and are entitled to call themselves patriots. The realities are unfortunate because the country's constant rejection and misrepresentation in the media prevent it from serving them in the same way as it serves the other communities. Whites aim at gaining the power to control access to excellence by deciding who is included" (McNair, Bensimon & Piqueux, 2020, p. 5). Truth in this connection is relative and can be "judged through various frameworks" (Butler, 2002, p. 22). It is a pity that their true patriotism is not recognized, and the country does not treat them equally because of anti-black propaganda in the media. To understand their position, representation, and veracity one must "deny that final or true definitions are attainable (p. 170). Postmodernism is a paradigm demonstrating that all images and assumptions are political words by the dominant culture and all language systems are social constructs based on those words. These political discourses distort reality and false images replacing reality in the media. It changes the scenario beyond previous explanations of "false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle" (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 96). He also presents the concept of Hyper-reality elaborating that in the media, the actual is hidden and substituted with signs. As in the instance of the African American population, where race and the negative connotations associated with it are used to obscure their actuality and uniqueness proving political superiority over them. Their image must be redefined because the text in this dramatic arch is susceptible to a variety of interpretations, and the community has been working hard to transform it. The discourses set to define a particular culture are divided into many fragments "leaving it open to consumers to recombine those elements

in any way they wish” (Harvey, 1992, p. 52). The idea is referred as Trace which indicates that meanings are related but not dependent on reality all the time.

The exposure of whiteness gives an advantage to the white community. While contrary to this idea, negative connotations are associated with blackness that endorse a “notorious oppositional set within Western culture is white/black” (p. 113). We can say that Whites are white because of black people. Postmodern theorists believe that meanings can be reversed or undone. The idea of Supplementation adds something in original meanings “there is no direct clue to identity...we have to create its real meanings because we do not live-in reality, it is represented inside us” (p. 113). Text is free for any kind of interpretation and “Meanings became the property of the interpreter” (Butler, 2002, p. 24). Similarly, Derrida (1999) calls it Aporias that language cannot have full command over the subject matters. There is always confusion, and we can take better decisions in this situation because “reading is always a form of misreading, and, most fundamentally, understanding is always a form of misunderstanding” (p. 21). The purpose of this study is to examine the misrepresentation of black people and to deconstruct the negative images frequently connected with traditional blackness by reconstructing them to understand the concept of transnational blackness in the selected novels.

Statement of the Problem

Many African American writers through positive syntactic use language deconstruct conventional images and replace propaganda with a genuine love for their country and community in their writings. The papers investigate that wat Nancy Johnson employs a variety of tactics in *The Kindest Lie* in the backdrop deconstructionism, including verbal messages, storytelling, assertive conversations, and character sketches to influence race discussions and the negative connotations associated with black people by deconstructing their binary oppositions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the context of the pluralistic perspective of race and difficulties associated with it, parents are expected to spread positive messages about race and ethnicity to deal with these challenges. In this environment, African American families are required to play a crucial role in mobilizing the community and projecting a positive image of their culture and civilization to their children and the community. They need to inculcate racial pride and the love of culture in the community. It is understood that their reality has been distorted and presented negatively. Families have the dual responsibility of changing the current racial situation and preparing children for a better future. The study examines the messages that parents send to their children in the selected novels using the notion of a language construct. African American novelists like Toni Morrison and Nancy Johnson use positive words for African heritage, culture, and civilization.

Parents try to convince their children that they are negatively presented in media. They try to deconstruct previously presented image of race in their mind by asking question like “What guarantees the truth of your foundation?” (Sim,

2011, p. 20). This gives chance to represent the unrepresented groups of the society. They teach their children to be “fictive or historical – being offered as overtly politicized, as inevitably ideological” (Hutcheon, 1989, p. 13). Postmodern thinkers believe that “race was a concept and skin color was an image constructed through language in an act of mental understanding, to form the sign” (Sim, 2011, p. 19). In this regard, Bertens’ (2014) idea of deconstruction is worth reading because he believes a “text does not proceed by random doubt or arbitrary subversion, but by the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text” (p. 113). This process entails the explicit mention of previously hidden ideas followed by the evocation of previously absent additional ideas and terms that are vital for youngsters to learn and criticizes “a notorious oppositional set within Western culture is white/black terms” (p. 114). They highlighted certain terms that were privileged to support supremacy “Some terms have always been privileged – good, truth, masculinity, purity, whiteness – while others may be found in either the center or the margin” (p. 115). They never consider text as a final source of meaning which “literally means that its case can never be closed: there is no final meaning; the text remains a field of possibilities” (p. 17). A text is merely a “chain of signs that generate meaning, with none of these signs occupying a privileged, anchored (and anchoring) position” (p. 117). Parents need to present true images of their children and they use better words to teach them the value of their lives.

In this context, Jean Baudrillard (1981) introduces the idea of Hyper-reality and simulacra “where we could no longer differentiate between reality and simulation” (p. 21). The society of images has replaced the image of reality and one is never sure about the presented image. In this notion, one is not sure about the truth we are told because the text does not offer reality; it has the capacity “to generate new and unexpected meanings” (Sim, 2011, p. 19). In this connection, Derrida (1999) claims, “words are never stable and fixed in time” (p. 19). He further explains that language never touches reality and “we have to work with meanings that are produced with the help of ‘difference’ and do not directly derive from the world to which they refer” (p. 109). Words contain traces of other words. Similarly, Derrida says that the relation between signifier and signified are weak because “the word we hear or read – does stable enough, but what it signifies – the signified – is, according to Derrida, subject to an inherent instability, a condition that frustrates all attempts at definitive interpretation, at genuine understanding” (p. 112). Keeping in mind these views, the selected novels are analyzed to trace out the message of parents who used verbal, storytelling, assertive reasoning, explanation of their experience to give information about race and society to their children. They use text for their purpose because it is open to various interpretation (Butler, 2002, discussed in chapter two). The novels require an analysis to trace out true images of race and reality to make children aware of the truth about the community. Accordingly, Derrida’s idea of ‘Trace’ is useful and used to impart the message to the children that meanings are related but not dependable to reality all the time. Similarly, the idea of ‘Aporias’ is used to interpret certain messages which show that language cannot have full command over the subject matters it describes. African Americans have been facing many distorted realities, racially extracted images, and issues of name-calling in society that must be deconstructed. The researcher has used these postmodern notions during the analysis of the selected

texts that help decode previously implanted biased messages and encode new positive messages to inculcate love of blackness and realization of self in the community.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To dismantle the binary opposition in Nancy Johnson's novel *The Kindest Lie*, this paper analyzes the syntactic portrayal of Africanism in a positive way. Considering Derridean deconstruction theory, the study indicates a favourable perception of the African American population and highlights the good aspects of African culture and history. The idea dissects how the dominant social groups present themselves to control the weaker groups and force them to further their own agendas. The research is qualitative in character and concentrates on the utilisation of data in theory. The texts of the chosen novel have been examined using a textual analysis approach. To get the desired result, a thematic analysis of the text of the novel has been done while focusing on the study's aims. The information was gathered from the novel's text and reviews of it. In order to get the necessary information for the study, library, book reviews, research papers, and online sources are all taken into consideration.

DATA ANALYSIS

Nancy Johnson uses positive syntactic language to appreciate Africanism and deconstructs negative image associated with it. The entire community is ecstatic at Barack Obama's victory; however, they stay under the spell of victimization that had previously been their destiny. Ruth and Tess sit in front of TV watching the announcement and "Tess's fingers dig into her shoulders when television anchors finally pronounced Barack Hussein Obama the forty-fourth president of the United States" (Johnson, 2021, p. 13). At this point, Bertens (2014) a postmodern theorist, introduces the concept of Trace, which implies that language is related to but not reality. This figure piling is not only a jerk, but it also relates to a history of massive rejection that culminates today with the announcement of Obama's victory as a new black president. This pinch reminds them of the history of struggle from slavery to the presidency and "something they'd been doing long before Barack and Michelle made it cool to some and subversive to others" (p. 10). Nancy Johnson beautifully captures the juxtaposition of delight and reminiscences of old troubles here. This recollection is infused with the love of the most desirous moment. The election of the first black president is a proud event for the entire country. Tess wants to save these moments "and tighten the cap so none could seep out, ever" (Johnson, 2021, p. 13). She stands for the entire community in the hall that rejoices the unbelievable fact that their "new president is Black" (p. 228). Because it tends to replace slavery, the word president makes a good pairing with black. The concept of supremacy takes the place of a sense of superiority. Everyone is pleased and proud of his or her destiny, despite reflection of the images on TV and in the hall. A woman in the Hall praises "Barack Obama for marrying well, for choosing Michelle ... an inherent sense of confidence, and beautiful dark skin" (p. 24). This transforming language shows the prestige and power of African Americans who are seeing a new dawn of dream day. In the novel, Nancy Johnson effectively portrays black people's optimism and their expectation from the president to turn their victimized status into a position of bright prospects. The entire community appreciates the writers and political activists for this journey. In this scenario, African American parent's role in

supporting children and imparting them positive race lessons is crucial and unforgettable.

African American parents encourage their children during liberation and survival giving them the fortitude to deal with racial hierarchy. Polly, a friend of Ruth, remembers the way her father guides and she “learned patience from her father...the reassuring voice of a father who made you believe you could do anything” (p. 60). Parents pray and discuss race issues with their children to prepare them to resist and define their paths. Mama goes to great lengths to ensure the future of her grandkids. Eli is arrested and she prays, “God, can break the shackles and set him free. Through some miracle and maybe Mama’s petitions to the Lord, Eli got out fast” (p. 136). Parents’ support gives their children the courage to stand up to injustice perpetrated against them.

Ruth is leaning in the direction of creating a better life rather than begging for one. She discloses her secret and asks for forgiveness, but she pledges, “won’t keep begging you to understand me” (p. 55). She exudes total self-assurance. This is the new move for community’s progress, and it has the zeal and confidence to face the problems. She also learns to stand up to her university peers who dismiss African American pupils as “primitive” and filthy. Mama injects positive image of race in her, and she replies to hatters that we “may be poor, but we’re clean, Mama would admonish” (p. 59). She shifts the conversation from race that puts them at a disadvantage. Every year, she earns honor and in “The science fair trophies in fifth and sixth grades. Perfect report cards all through junior high. Her induction into the National Honor Society” (p. 139). It favors her in the school. Children earn respect in society by working hard and striving to achieve their goals. They aid in the transformation of their bad images into good ones, so that not only Blacks but also Whites begin to respect them. At the dinner in Lena’s house, Butch blames Papa for stealing and cutting corners. Lena snubs and shows trust in the black family and claims that they are “good men. Trust in that” (p. 150). Mama objects and speaks in defense of Papa and her children. She asserts that it is “all about doing what’s right by your child. Mothers sacrifice. We put our babies first. Before ourselves” (p. 283). She instills love in Ruth for her race and assures her that she is loved and trusted by the entire family.

The fact that African American families insulate favorable feelings about the black images is a source of immense pride for them. She encourages her to keep up the struggle and gives her confidence saying “my precious cake. Your papa and I poured everything we had into you. You still had a lot of rising to do in this world. I didn’t want you to fall” (p. 284). Parents know that they must wave off the spell of race, influence of discrimination and rejection from their children to support them in life. They support them and inculcate the love of being black in America.

The destiny of race is altered because of this gradual shift in the mode of the community. Children begin migrating to cities putting themselves forward to pursue careers in a variety of disciplines. Ruth enrolls in Yale and receives a bachelor’s degree in engineering. Natasha her friend applauds her struggle “Look at you now. An esteemed Yale graduate” (p. 136). According to Harvey

(1992) a postmodern theorist, language is available to consumers who can interpret it as per their needs. He goes on to explain that language must be deconstructed to articulate the voiceless groups rather than supporting ideology of a particular group.

Nancy Johnson portrays black characters with a positive connotation. She also used powerful adjectives to encourage society to think positively. The word esteem encapsulates the writer's positive intent as well as that of the people in the community. When she depicts black characters, her adjective exemplifies the beauty of the imagery. Similarly, she uses the word luminous to describe the entry of Ruth "luminous brown eyes caught people's attention first" (Johnson, 2021, p. 10). She goes to the Hall where they celebrate the victory of Obama. She further writes that it "had taken years for her to love her own dark skin" (p. 10). All these terms demonstrate that Nancy Johnson portrays black images and complexion in the story in such a way that attract readers towards their effectiveness.

People in the town begin to adore Ruth and extol her beauty. Natasha, her friend in the village tells her "You are so smart, her friend said, making Ruth stand even taller with pride, especially having the most beautiful girl as her friend" (p. 63). This fosters the love of blackness, and members of the community begin to respect one another. This substitutes the concept of internal hatred. After negative portrayal in the media, many people begin to believe that they have been presented poorly in the society. Jean Baudrillard (1981) documents his views about Hyper-reality that refers to the fact that signals and images have superseded reality. Similarly, the indication of 'black' color is used to convey a negative impression about race.

African American parents and writers instill the love of blackness in children and characters using positive phrases. Many black children/characters show that they deserve such praises. Ruth's mother is concerned that she may be denied employment because of her color and complexion. Ruth replies with confidence that they "hired me for my brain, not my hair. And my hair isn't wild" (Johnson, 2021, p. 83). Similarly, Corey also proves that he is a strong boy who can stand for the community and his parent must show trust in him. Verona informs Ruth "We'd do anything for him. Corey can be too trusting and naïve for his own good sometimes" (p. 277). African American parents adore their children and encourage them to be confident and self-assured in life. They show their children a sense of belonging and welcome them. Ruth's mother, Joanna, abandons her but she never hates her. Mama informs Ruth, "Hezekiah and I begged her not to take you. We knew she loved you kids" (p. 285). They foster the love of being black in their children. Despite her addiction, Mama does not abandon Joanna. She informs Ruth, "I wasn't playing God. I was loving you and your brother the best I could. I love Joanna something fierce" (p. 285). This offers them new direction to pursue their aspirations and gives them the guts to do so. They develop confidence, dignity, and honor as they start progressing toward the mainstreaming.

The most well-known phrase in Western meaning is the implication of white and black. The use of media power elevates the term whiteness while obscures

the concept of blackness. To speak the unspeakable, postmodern theorists employ a variety of linguistic methods. They believe that language is a construct that may be changed according to the needs and requirements of the interpreter. Text is neither the ultimate authority nor does it describe reality. Hence, the interpreters can shape reality and construct new identities depending on their subjective manifestation of language. According to Jean Baudrillard (1981). The power of media causes reality to be supplanted by signs. Color is a sign (imagery) that is blended with a race to provide a tool for the marginalization of less powerful groups. Victor, at the celebration of Obama's victory in the Hall, states that you "American Blacks are always consumed with the question of race. "Penelope shot back, "Since when is Detroit not in America? You were born in Detroit, right?" (p. 25). He asserts that black people are linked with color and location and both associations have negative connotation now. He is implying that race has enslaved black people and put them at disadvantage.

White supremacy, on the other hand, associated with the concept of black race as language generates a binary concept and it becomes famous and prestigious. Butch ridicules Ruth's uncle by saying, "It was like somebody talking trash about your crazy uncle" (p. 71). The word 'trash' conjures up an image of white people who are deplorable. Lot of negative connotations are associated with the black race, which put African Americans in a difficult situation. Weeping, complaining, and begging are among the terms which used to describe them. Their actions, too, reveal their bereavement. Relating the story of Alfonso, "Mama tilted her head up to the ceiling and closed her eyes. The living room felt small and tight, with a pall of melancholy covering it" (p. 153). The reality and severity of the pain can be traced to her action. She is in a state of severe grief. Similarly, Ruth objects to the "characterization of her son as a thug" (p. 251). These negative connotations are often associated with blackness and postmodern theorists criticize abusive language directed towards any subcultural group. They also introduce the term Aporia which refers to a state of ambiguity. Ruth visits Lena's house and she asserts that the only "respectable thing to do in Mama's mind—to knock on Lena's door" (p. 246). There is ambiguity while she makes such a perplexed comment, but history shows that black people have always shown a sense of differentiating between good and bad. Ruth meets Corey and finds him "exuded gracefulness and athleticism. He was everything she wasn't" (p. 214). Still, the meanings are obscure, but we need to look back at history to understand the meaning.

Ruth also uses language to greet her brother for supporting him. She acknowledges him saying thanks for "what you did to protect Corey. You went to jail for it. Thank you" (p. 218). Going to jail for someone here is merely a statement but delving deeper into the meaning reveals that it is a great deal to the community which has been treated unfairly. The true misery, pain, spirit, and zeal of the black community cannot be properly expressed in words. To understand the meanings, it is necessary to have a basic understanding of history. The text's deconstruction and use of binary oppositions aid in understanding many connotations in the context of black race. Derrida rightly emphasizes the deconstruction of language to reveal the hidden truth and experience the situation described in the text.

African American parents use both verbal and non-verbal strategies to communicate the positive messages about race to their children. They narrate the history of their leaders and liberation warriors to establish a favorable image of race and to set an example of bravery and truthfulness before their children. To boost children's spirits and confidence, they utilize positive words and appreciate the ideal work of their leaders for freedom. Mama talks about history, "Yes, we had good times all right. But all good things come to an end" (p. 152). She says that freedom comes after a lot of sacrifices of their leaders. On the wall of her house, she hangs the picture of "Jesus, Martin Luther King Jr., and President Kennedy, the other Holy Trinity for old Black folks....and in its place was one of President-Elect Obama, in a new ornate brass frame" (p. 84). She used to teach Ruth and Eli about their leader's struggle and existence. She wants them to work as hard as their leaders have done and instills in them the value of never giving up.

Mama celebrates New Year and the victory of Barack Obama with a "love note to Hezekiah and Harriet, W.E.B., and Booker T. And at the start of this New Year, Ruth imagined the ancestors dancing somewhere right along with them" (p. 292). These incentives affect children, and they are ready to move forward in search of new identities. They chart their course and draw on their parents' experiences to help them progress. African American parents, community and writers are committed to turn stereotypical images into the love of blackness using positive connotations that help them shape new identities.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of Nancy Johnson's *the Kindest Lie* proves that she uses positive syntactic expression to applaud the Africanism and every object associated with it. She appreciates local version of African culture and recommends for the community to use and admire it. She praises the struggle of freedom fighters in a very positive manner and advises the community to support them. She portrays a community mobilizing system through presents that changes the racial discourse and gives them a new way to seek chances of success in the society. Parents utilize language as a social tool to assist their children to reclaim their identity and integrate them in society. Because the image projected in the media is gloomy and misinterpreted, the situation for the African American families is pitiful and difficult to transform. She deconstructs the negative images associated with Africanism and asserts that it needs a thorough structure to change this situation. Because it focuses on unrealizable meanings that act beyond reality, Derrida's idea of Trace (discussed in chapter four) helps the families in comprehending their state in a positive context. The scenario is not that terrible, but it is twisted to look down upon Blacks. Nancy Johnson uses the election of Barack Obama as an example to represent new booming period in the life of her community. He wins the competition and persuades the audience to follow his footsteps. Ruth, too, learns to recreate her life to live happily. She promises to establish a new life for herself. She hates her previous state of begging for lodging and adjustment. Ruth demonstrates bravery in her attitude towards social injustices and pledges to change this precarious situation. Because of her talent, she has been awarded trophies and inducted into the National Honor Society. She also wins distinction in scientific classes at her school and serves as a symbol of success for the community. African American

children like Ruth, become emblems of morality and kindness in society. Mama instills enthusiasm and energy in her daughter to oppose the racist ideas and racial proceedings in the society. The African American parents show respect for their children. Mama refers to Ruth as my honey and my cake. She assures Ruth that she and her parents have given her everything they had. She encourages her to avoid falling. They also call her as one of our esteemed children. The term shows respect and regard for their children. Mama calls her luminous showing token of respect for Blacks. Ruth says that it took her years to embrace and cherish her dark complexion after Obama's victory in the election as a President. This is also a powerful metaphor for the love of brown people, leaders and elders of the black community. Ruth dismisses Victor's claim that they are questioning of race. She also opposes them for using a bad term thug for her son. Aporia is a term coined by postmodern theorists to describe this type of ambiguity that causes misunderstanding in meanings. Mama shows her love for the community, she keeps the images of Jesus, Martin Luther King Jr., President John F. Kennedy, the Holy Trinity, and Obama an elected President of the United States in a huge victorious manner. Both African Americans and the writers use positive connotations for the black community to give them courage and respect to move freely towards mainstreaming.

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