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AMY RUSHTON, TRAJİK AFRİKA'YI YENİDEN OKUMAK: KALKINMA, NEOLİBERALİZM VE ÇAĞDAŞ ROMAN, PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2024, SS. 195.

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Eren BOLAT
Asst. Prof. Dr., Hitit University, School of Foreign Languages, ernbltlit@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0001-8148-522X

Abstract: Having been the subject of several academic studies in terms of colonialism, Africa has been addressed in various paradigms in recent years. One such example is Amy Rushton's *Re-reading Tragic Africa: Development, Neoliberalism and the Contemporary Novel*. Placing her book at the centre of development and neoliberalism, Rushton covers contemporary African issues in the light of the contemporary novels by three authors of African origin. This paper aims to provide an academic book review of Rushton's work, which has six main chapters, incorporating an introduction and a conclusion.

Keywords: Africa, Neoliberalism, Contemporary Fiction

Öz: Sömürgecilik bağlamında birçok akademik çalışmaya konu olan Afrika, son yıllarda çeşitli açılardan ele alınmaktadır. Buna örnek olan çalışmalardan birisi de Amy Rushton'ın *Trajik Afrika'yı Yeniden Okumak: Kalkınma, Neoliberalizm ve Çağdaş Roman* adlı kitabıdır. Kitabını kalkınma ve neoliberalizm merkezine yerleştiren Rushton, Afrika kökenli üç yazarın romanına eserinde yer vererek Afrika'ya dair güncel meseleleri çağdaş roman ışığında ele almaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Rushton'ın giriş ve sonuç bölümlerinin yer aldığı altı temel bölümü içeren eserinin akademik bir kitap incelemesini yapmaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Afrika, Neoliberalizm, Çağdaş Roman

INTRODUCTION

Africa is often regarded as the continent that has faced the most significant marginalisation and neglect in global discourse. The continent, where people lived in accordance with their local way of life until the colonial period, was subjected to radical changes after the colonization process. Consequently, it has attracted the attention of numerous scholars and writers due to its dynamic structure and myriad turbulent events. Widely analysed especially in the sphere of colonialism and included in many academic

studies, Africa has been revisited by Amy Rushton in the context of development, neoliberalism and contemporary fiction. In *Re-Reading Tragic Africa: Development, Neoliberalism, and Contemporary Fiction*, Rushton, a lecturer in English at Nottingham Trent University and a scholar of African literature, peruses the dominant narratives surrounding Africa in global political and literary discourse. When considering the Western sources on Africa, it is not possible to say that Africa is reflected in an objective way. On the other hand, Africa, relegated to an inauspicious fate, has the potential to overcome the decolonization process within itself. Rushton addresses the reality of this potential within the scope of development and neoliberalism by referring to the works of three writers of African origin. From this vantage point, it can be said that Rushton deals with Africa from a particular standpoint. She elucidates how Western media, international policymakers, and aid organisations depict Africa as a 'tragic' and impotent continent. She postulates that this narrow viewpoint should be re-evaluated. Re-examining literary works comprising Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* (2000), Chris Abani's *GraceLand* (2004), and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), Rushton interrogates prevailing narratives about Africa, emphasising the continent's struggles, resilience, and potential.

***Re-Reading Tragic Africa: Development, Neoliberalism, and Contemporary Fiction* by Amy Rushton (2024)**

Rushton's book consists of six chapters in total. The concept of 'Tragic Africa' serves as a critical lens for Rushton. Through her analysis, she redefines this term to highlight the resilience, agency, and ongoing struggles of the African continent. In the first chapter, "Introduction: The Danger of the Single Reading", Rushton critically examines the idea of the 'single story' about Africa, a concept that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has particularly raised. The 'single story' of Africa, which is one-sidedly reflected and accepted, is conveyed in a tragic position with a negative tone. Aware of how Africa is portrayed globally, as the 'other' to Western norms, Rushton draws attention to Tony Blair's 2002 speech in which he described Africa as "a scar on the conscience of the world" (p. 2). In response to this perspective, Rushton prepares for a thoughtful re-examination of the stories told about Africa. In support of this, she underscores how geopolitical discourse pictorializes the continent as 'tragic' and incapacitated. Aware of the stereotypical view of Africa, Rushton criticises Western representations of Africa in the media citing The Economist's famous cover story (2000) "Africa: the hopeless continent" (p. 2). Further, she claims that this remark cultivates "a dominant macro-narrative of Africa-the tragic continent" (p. 3). In her analysis, Rushton benefits from world-systemic theory, inspired by Immanuel Wallerstein and Giovanni Arrighi, which allows her to frame African literature within the broader global capitalist system (p. 10). Rushton positions Africa not as a passive recipient or victim of global forces but as an active agent in the history of late capitalism. In doing so, she selects three works from Nigeria and South Africa. She believes that "*The Heart of Redness*, *GraceLand*, and *Half of a Yellow Sun* have the potential to intervene in commonplace understandings of tragic Africa" (p. 11). By engaging with these texts, Rushton posits that literature can challenge reductive narratives that often characterise Africa as a site of perpetual tragedy, crisis, and underdevelopment. Considering this, in this chapter, Rushton questions the monolithic representation of Africa and introduces a more comprehensive and detailed view of Africa's development and representation.

Rushton's Chapter 2, "Reading Africa in the Neoliberal World-System," focuses on the interaction between neoliberalism and African development. Rushton scrutinises the role of neoliberalism in Africa, stressing its impact on the regional economy. She asserts that neoliberalism has had a profound influence in shaping Africa's economic and political structure. In this chapter, she refers to Patrick Williams' claim that globalisation is merely "the latest mask or configuration of something with which we are already all too familiar" (p. 33). This notion implies that globalisation is not a nascent phenomenon, but the continuation of a prolonged system. She writes that neoliberalism "perpetuates the idea of Africa as a tragic, failed region to serve its own interests" (p. 34), which suggests that neoliberal ideologies create negative stereotypes about Africa to justify economic policies and interventions that advance global capital

interests. Neoliberalism can be regarded as an emerging form of colonialism, described as "another obstacle on the road to complete decolonization" (p. 34). While formal colonial rule may have ended, the power dynamics of colonialism persist via economic mechanisms. Neoliberalism, with its focus on free markets, privatisation, and deregulation, is seen as a continuation of colonial exploitation under a different guise. This places the concept of 'false decolonization' central to Rushton's argument, where the illusion of political independence is undermined by continued economic and political dependence. She further propounds that "Neoliberalism thrives by presenting its entrenched ideology as if it is a universal and predetermined system of thought and government" (p. 36). With this statement, Rushton disapproves the way neoliberalism positions itself as the natural inevitable model for organising societies and economies. Neoliberalism operates by normalising its own values, making it appear self-evident and globally applicable, even though it promotes specific interests, pre-eminently those of wealthy nations and corporations.

Another major aspect of the second chapter focuses on structural adjustment programs (SAPs) imposed on African nations by institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Rushton argues that, with such instruments, "Africa had, effectively, been recolonised" (p. 38). She proffers that the imposition of SAPs effectively placed African nations under external control once again, this time through economic mechanisms rather than direct political rule. Rushton's final argument in this chapter is that Africa has been a testing ground for neoliberal policies. She contends that "the neoliberal world economy continues to disenfranchise the vast majority of people across the African continent" (p. 38). She illuminates the exclusionary and exploitative nature of neoliberal policies in Africa. For her, the neoliberal world economy sustains the inequality and limits the ability of African nations to achieve true economic self-determination, trapping the majority of their populations in cycles of poverty and marginalisation.

In Chapter 3, "The Longer Walk to Freedom: South African Prophecy and Neoliberal Intervention upon 'Tragic Africa'", Rushton addresses the intertwining of democracy, neoliberalism, and development in postcolonial South Africa by conducting a detailed analysis of Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*. The novel "tells two stories set within Qolorha-by-Sea, a fictionalised coastal village located in the Wild Coast region of South Africa's Eastern Cape" (76). Rushton delineates that Mda's work provides a transformative narrative on democracy and development across Africa, notably South Africa. The plot centres on the relationship between neoliberal economy and territorial communal democracy and the landscape that emerges as a result of this relationship. For Rushton, Qolorha is a microcosm of the struggle Africa is witnessing. Rushton's reasoning is that modernity and traditionalism have led to a national and transcontinental clash, which has occurred in many African regions, including Qolorha. She contends that "Mda's novel rejects the neoliberal interventionist attempts to 'steer' democracy across the continent" (76). In other words, Mda intuits that foreign interventions remove the autonomy of native people and ignore their values and needs. Therefore, what is needed is a democratic approach that takes into account local values. Rushton's view is in line with the incomplete process of decolonization. Accordingly, prophecy of the character Nongqawuse about cattle-killing "functions as a device flagging up the incompletion of decolonization, development, and democracy" (p. 84). This calls attention to the persistence of colonial legacies, the failure of development to lift all segments of society, and the exclusionary nature of postcolonial democracy.

The subsequent Chapter 4, "Africa Awaits its Creators: Subverting Development Narratives", probes into the subversion of development narratives in African literature, using Chris Abani's *GraceLand* as a central text. Rushton opens the chapter by citing Bob Marley's song 'Africa Unite,' situating it as a retrospective call for African solidarity and creativity, contrasting the typical demonstration of Africa as a site of tragedy and dependency. Rushton underlines that "the presence and performance of music in *GraceLand* functions as an assertion of individual and collective power for its dispossessed characters" (p. 110). For these dispossessed individuals, music becomes a tool for both personal expression and communal

identity. “The novel highlights their resilience and resistance, without descending into parody” (p. 110). It avoids trivialising or oversimplifying their struggles, rendering them as multidimensional people rather than symbolic figures of oppression or insurgence.

In this chapter, Rushton investigates the lives of the poor in the West African country of Nigeria, as envisioned in *GraceLand*. She asserts that the current state of people living in misery and poverty is due to the failure of neoliberal and Western-centred development models. For Rushton, Abani’s work combines the themes of music, bildungsroman and slum, emphasising collective agency and cultural defiance. Rushton believes that *GraceLand* offers a discerning appraisal of externally imposed models of development. Nevertheless, African communities possess the capacity to create their own patterns of social and political organisation.

Rushton’s Chapter 5, “Back to Utopia: Retrieving the Past to Reclaim the Future”, delves into how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow* Sun revisits Nigeria’s Biafran War, challenging the prevalent profile of Africa as a site of failure and underdevelopment. Rushton remarks that contrary to what most people think, Adichie portrays the decolonization not as a failure, but as an evolving process. She makes it clear that the most prominent factor which disrupted this transformative and somewhat delayed process was the Biafran War, which took place within the country and resulted in the deaths of thousands of people. The war, as Rushton notes, “cemented the image of helpless, tragic Africa” in the global imagination (p. 149). She indicates that this war has contributed to the stereotype of Africa as a place defined by despair, tragedy, and perpetual crisis. Yet, Adichie’s realist fiction resists this exegesis by manifesting the wider global power dynamics at play.

As the title of this chapter implies, Rushton emphasises the viability of a utopian reawakening. This is why Rushton chose Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Despite its focus on a tragic conflict, the novel envisions the possibility of alternative models of solidarity and collective belonging that transcend ethnic or national identities. The formation of a ‘family-like group’ by the novel’s end, composed of characters from different races and social backgrounds, reflects a “shared responsibility to cultivate the future” (p. 149). This suggests that survival and healing in the aftermath of war are only possible with communal effort, empathy, and mutual dependence. Thus, Rushton observes, the Adichie subverts regnant narratives of African failure and tragedy by engaging with the prospects of utopian thinking.

In the concluding final chapter, “Conclusion: Towards a Kind of Paradise”, Rushton summarises the overarching arguments of her book, reiterating the critical need to rethink the prevalent ‘tragic’ narratives surrounding Africa. Through an analysis of key contemporary African novels—*The Heart of Redness, GraceLand, and Half of a Yellow Sun*—, Rushton reverses stereotypical representations of Africa, examining decolonization as an ongoing phenomenon, and its sperate promise for the future. She further advocates that Africa’s postcolonial period is not a failure, as clichédly reduced, but is a revelation that evokes optimism and progress. She emphasises that the incomplete nature of these initiatives is not a sign of failure but a sign of hope. This idea aligns with Edward Said’s reminder that “one must not only hope but also do” (p. 184). Rushton underscores the vital necessity of action as well as halcyon.

Conclusion

Rushton’s work is part of Palgrave’s New Comparisons in World Literature series. Her re-reading of tragedy is a vital contribution to the literary canon regarding Africa. She furnishes a fresh perspective on Africa’s status within global capitalism by digging deeper into traditional understandings of African tragedy. Noting that African voices are underrepresented in literature and academia, Rushton points out that these need to be taken more seriously and, in parallel, there needs to be a determination to strengthen them. Rushton’s analysis dovetails strongly with current debates on Africa’s changing socio-political and

economic landscape, especially in light of recent developments such as increased regional integration efforts, advances in technology, and ongoing struggles against inequality and environmental challenges.

Presenting a powerful observation in the context of literary works, Rushton delivers a serious rendition of reductionist interpretations of Africa that aligns with the continent's dynamic progress and challenges. She culminates by calling for a more comprehensive and nuanced approach to the continent's future, and for esperance despite all adversities. With her distinctive viewpoint, Rushton successfully combines literary analysis with geopolitical evaluation, showing how African fiction can function as a substantial tool for rethinking neoliberal narratives of failure and dependency. Her work bridges the gap between literary studies and socio-economic critiques of neoliberalism and development. Reversing stereotypes about Africa, Rushton's work can be considered a critical resource for various scholars and readers interested in the field.

References

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