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Original Article

Emerging Evils in Post-Colonies

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ABSTRACT

The colonial and postcolonial are two different ideological eras in the colonized peoples' history, which are taken up by post-colonial literature. Without rehashing the ex-colonized beings' painful past from a rebellious and revanchist perspective, postcolonial writers' literary projects aimed at revitalizing the ex-colonized beings' experience in the form of collective memory. In such a creative art, the narrative devices in force decry retrograde and dehumanizing practices. In terms of vision, the call for improving the relationship between ex-colonizers and ex-colonized subjects is highly prescribed. All neocolonial policies and related influences are systematically proscribed, thus favouring the creation of a global village free from inequalities, exclusions, and other injustices. In essence, the poetization of "Bournehills" in The Chosen Place, The Timeless People and "Kosawa" in How Beautiful We Were is part of those narrative techniques. Today, in a disguised form, Westerners, with their seducing offers or projects, corrupt tiny groups of undeveloped people won over to their cause and keep the masses in misery. In this context of political paradigm shift and sociocultural mutation, the study of the forms of life in the post-colonies remains a challenge. This helps to disclose on the one hand how the former colonial maintains their ex-colonies in perpetual dependence and on the other hand, highlight how the ex-colonized beings or heirs react and overcome neo-colonial policies. To account for the features of neo-colonialism, the use of Perussetian semiotic approach will be helpful. This will contribute to looking into the prevailing forms of life in both fictional imaginaries. Two points of interest will be scrutinized: "post-colonial order features" and "ex-colonized beings' resilience".

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INTRODUCTION

Studying a novel is an act of meditation over a specific vision of the world; which is always the echo of a cultural era or ideology.

A novel is never neutral; it is an aspiration, a desire, a trend, or a dream. Unlike a newspaper, which informs objectively, a novel informs subjectively. This means that, instead of transmitting social facts as they occur, it uses semiotic codes. In essence, that semiotic transformation provides the text with varied significance and values. Therefore, the conveyed facts are no longer objective. Despite that difference, a novel is an essential channel for shaping human minds. It helps readers learn about distant times and contributes to expressing points of view on situations. One of its functions is to decry social shortcomings. Metaphorically, a novel is a *buzzing fly*, which bothers individuals whose actions jeopardize cohesion and harmony in societies. Through its characters, it proposes an ideal of a good society. In terms of features, it deconstructs pre-established norms and reconstructs others. This dynamism enables it to appropriate other fields of knowledge.

The novelistic works under investigation are *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969) and *How Beautiful We Were* (2021)[1]. The former is published in the second half of the 20th century, the latter in the first half of the 21st century. Although those publication dates are different, the socio-historical background described here is identical. Both texts fictionalize the post-colonial era in Bournehills and Kosawa. The inhabitants of those areas are opposed to the Western projects. To them, the Western projects do not bring fair development; rather, they fuel corruption and enrich a tiny group of native elites, keeping most of the population in poverty. Both novels depict two female characters (Merle Kinbona and Thula) who are involved enough. Educated in Western schools, they vigorously reject the idea of implementing a Western scheme in their respective villages. Merle Kinbona and Thula are aware that those investment projects do not promote economic independence; they aim at inscribing the ex-colonies in perpetual dependence. Through both characters, the postcolonial features of both novels are more visible. Interrogating the term "postcolonial", Robert J. C. Young avers,

> A lot of people don't like the word postcolonial . . . It disturbs the order of the world. It threatens privilege and power. It refuses to acknowledge the superiority of Western cultures. Its radical agenda is to demand equality and well-being for all human beings on this earth (Young, 2003, 7).

Before accounting for those literary projects, it is relevant to consider some of the critical studies already done on the novels under consideration. The purpose of such an analysis is to point out the advances achieved by other critics and researchers, and then identify new perspectives. Examining the cultural significance of Bournehills in *The Chosen Place*, Stelamaris Coser maintains, "the village may be an isolated community that has preserved memories of the African past, as in the novels just mentioned, or an imaginary seventeenth-century Maroon settlement in the hilly forests of Brazil, as in Gayl Jones's Song for Anninho" (Coser, 1995, 15). Moreover, Eugenia C. DeLamott is interested in the double feature of silence in *The Chosen Place*. According to her analysis, "silence as a sign of dispossession but also of resistance – of defiant self-possession" (Delamott, 1998, 3). Furthering the study on the theme of silence, Simone A. James Alexander avers, "by giving their protagonists voices, the writers empower them to reclaim their history and selfhood. They, the

[1] For any other references to the novels under consideration, we will use *The Chosen Place* and *How Beautiful*.

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protagonists, in turn, rewrite (…) themselves back into history" (Alexander, 2001, 196).

Besides, Nada Elia, another critic of Marshall's fiction interrogates the Western schemes for ex-colonies. According to her approach, "the plan would deprive the people of their best stretch of beach as well as any eventual revenues since their poverty prevents them from the initial investment in the resort scheme" (Elia, 2001, 99). Elia's critical study discloses the neo-colonial characteristics of Western schemes. Along the same lines, Arlene R. Keizer digs into the opposition of Marshall's characters to the Western aid scheme. Indeed, "for [those characters] who worked the land but couldn't lay claim to it, land ownership and the freedom to cultivate that land as they see fit is too precious to relinquish without the absolute certainty that what's being offered in exchange is as valuable as what's being surrendered" (Keizer, 2004, 82-83).

Some of Marshall's critics are interested in her heroines who organize a strong resistance against Western projects. Moira Ferguson looks into Merle Kinbona's trajectory. To Ferguson, Merle received Western education, but "[she remains attached to her heritage]. Her equally symbolic, religion-tinged jewellery, the anti-colonial history of the Caribbean that she teaches her students, and the eclectic mix of furniture, books, and art in her bedroom collectively enhance the profile of a magnificent rebel" (Ferguson, 2013, 16-17). In line with the same argument, Yuri Stulov shows how symbolic Merle Kinbona is. Stulov qualifies Merle Kinbona as "the spirit of the island" (Stulov, 2018, 77). This means Merle Kinbona's nationalist and traditionalist commitment inspires her fellow citizens.

In addition to that, Brian Bartell deciphers Merle Kinbona's political involvement. Bartell considers her as "the novel's primary anti-imperial and historical voice" (Bartell, 2020, 27). It should be noted that Marshall's fiction revitalizes blacks' cultural identity. Through a critical analysis of cultural makers, Ashma Shamail reveals the significance of carnival. According to Shamail's approach, "carnival stands out not just as a celebratory enterprise but facilitates and promotes kinship bonds between the dispersed people and their families in their home islands" (Shamail, 2021, 8). Furthermore, one of the critical works of Florentina Roșca underlines that memory and location occupy a prominent place in Marshall's fiction. Her characters are concerned with the construction and promotion of their cultural identity. To that end, some locations acquire symbolic value, namely Bournehills, sugar's bar, and the elite beaches. Preserving those locations helps Marshall's characters remain connected with their past. Looking into the issue of memory, Roșca avers, "the need to remember implies a struggle against forgetting, and these landmarks of compressed personal or collective history serve as material support in the act of tacit remembering" (Roșca, 2023, 78).

Like Marshall's fiction, various other critics are interested in Mbue's fiction. For instance, in one of his articles, Okache C. Odey examines the theme of migration in Mbue's novels. With reference to his view, "Mbue's novel offers a solution (…), we need to change the way we think, the way we do things, and most importantly, the leaders need to change or be changed" (Odey, 2022, 68). In other words, African youth should develop a mindset of independence. As far as Musaib Junejo and Tania Shabir Shaikh are concerned, they reveal how Pexton's officials nurture an "unreal dreams of progress [to Kosawa's villagers, thus maintaining them in poverty]" (Junejo & Shaikh, 2022, 76). By the same logic, Brygida Gasztold points out the unwholesome feature of the relationship between ex-colonies and ex-colonial powers. To him, Mbue's writing decries Western projects, which prevent progress in the ex-colonies. Deciphering those schemes, he asserts, "projects such as the novel's fictional Pexton oil drilling company (…) affect Kosawa in similar ways to other countries from the Global South by pushing them into economic bondage" (Gasztold, 2022, 198).

To continue the current study, it should be underscored that the theme of land acquires a cultural stage in Mbue's novel. In accordance with

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the critical approach of Teresia Muthoni Biama and various others, "the people of Kosawa believed that the land was given to them by their ancestors" (Biama, *et al*., 2022, 317). To put it another way, the exploitation of natural resources by Western companies has a double consequence. In their critical work on Mbue's fiction, Goutam Karmakar and Rajendra Chetty affirm, "mega-extraction projects are, due to their characteristics, often accountable for the perpetuation of environmental injustices. When the local communities are deprived of their natural resources and the extraction company supersedes or diminishes non-capitalist systems of production, this explicit inequity results in the marginalized people" (Karmakar & Chetty, 2023, 129).

In the same vein, Benedicta Adeola Ehanire shows that the exploitation of natural resources in the ex-colonies is conducted without the native populations' consent. Not only does this provide them with any development, it also jeopardizes their lives. In one of her articles, Ehanire avows, "insensitivity is utilized in *How Beautiful We Were* by the American oil company as they perpetrate their uncharitable actions against the desire of the Kosawa people. When viewed as a weapon, insensitivity assumes a psychological dimension and the results are far-reaching even though not physical" (Ehanire, 2023, 112). Within that same mind, Chiara Xausa examines the influence of Western projects on nature in the ex-colonies. To Xaura," in Kosawa, a fictional West African village [Kosawa] where the American oil company called Pexon is causing extreme environmental degradation" (Xausa, 2023, 198).

Delving into the issue of ne-colonialism in Mbue's novel, Motsusi Nare, Peter Moopi, and Oliver Nyambi assert, "through corporate neo-colonialism, the relations of violence and dispossession characterizing Pexton's relationship with post-independence rulers like the character called His Excellency, results in the apocalyptic devastation of Kosawa's environment and the precarity of communal health and livelihoods" (Nare, 2024, 354). Better still, resistance against the formal colonial power in ex-colonies is rampant. Scrutinizing that issue in *How Beautiful*, Robert Mwaga, Stephen Mutie and Murimi Gaita affirm, "Konga is painted as the lead champion of ecological consciousness by his schemed actions that shock his village mates and who against the treatment of the villagers who despise him as the village madman, leads his fellow villagers in seeking redress for the ecological damage done to their village" (Mwaga, *et al*., 2024, 166).

A close look at this critical review of literature helps to ascertain that Marshall's and Mbue's novels receive a positive critical reception. The growing number of studies on their literary visions shows how substantial their creative art is. In other words, the above review provides valuable results, which contribute to advancing research on both women novelists. However, as time goes by, new forms of colonization resurface, thus calling into question the roles played by the local governments to ensure fair, sustainable development to their people. Toponyms, such as Bournehills and Kosawa epitomize implicit values, which deserve thorough reevaluation. Thus, from *Perussetian* semiotic perspective, the forms of life emerging in those ex-colonies will be deciphered. In his critical book titled *Sémiotique des formes de vie. Monde de sens, manière d'être*, Alain Perusset maintains,

The term 'form of life' is quite remarkable, as it encompasses at least two distinct yet inseparable realities: the act and its author. In this first part, we first recognized the form of life as a set of acts, with the form that life takes when perceived in experience, as a syntagmatic scheme. Gradually, however, we also came to use the term form of life to designate the living organism, which performs those sequences of acts, i.e. the actant-author. When evaluating a form of life, therefore, we cannot separate the act from the actant-author: to evaluate a form of life, as a semiotic ontology, is to evaluate an act as well as the actant-author (2020, 103-104).

As detailed above, Western projects will be considered as acts and the characters who are in

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charge of conducting them as actant-authors. In this perspective, particular attention will be devoted to the forms of resistance organized by the inhabitants evolving in both ex-colonies. To carry out this study, it will be structured in two stages: Post-colonial order features and ex-colonized beings' resilience.

POST-COLONIAL ORDER FEATURES

This stage probes the forms of life in two fictional spaces: Bournehills (Caribbean) and Kosawa (Cameroon).

Historically, those regions are part of the former Western colonies; they were devastated by colonization. Today, their respective people face speckled troublesome situations. For example, in both areas (Bournehills and Kosawa), the prevailing sociopolitical era is fraught; the political figures who are supposed to promote modern politics are corrupt. Colonization, through the most brutal form, is over; however, the new political order holds the ex-oppressed Beings or their descendants in bondage. In terms of standard of living, poverty is persistent. Thus, the ex-colonizers adopt new strategies, which do not help the native individuals to have access to their domestic resources.

Certainly, the relationship between the ex-colonized individuals and the ex-colonial powers has changed. Communication between them is reset up. Both entities talk to each other, giving the impression that there is fair collaboration between them and that the ex-colonized individuals are free and liberated from the mind of dependence. However, the prevailing practices in the ex-colonies are purely veiled. Examining the concept of *practice* in one of his critical works, Alain Perusset writes, practice is a semiotic activity (...) the idea behind this proposition is to recall that a practice is created as soon as an acting body activates itself in a given situation, doing that is – new information-using, in some way, surrounding elements (2020, 119). The ongoing *situations* in both Bournehills and Kosawa are similarly catastrophic. Indeed, the inhabitants' economic and educational conditions remain unwarrantable. In Bournehills, various children are uncontrolled. As a result, most of them live on fruits. The passages below confirm that underprivileged reality,

She [Merle] was seated on a bench beneath the large silk-cotton tree which offered the only shade to be found in the yard, and grouped around her on the ground were the dozen or so children of the almshouse, the orphaned and abandoned. From her gestures and their laughter, it was clear that she was telling them a story, one of the things she did as part of the rather loosely defined job which Lyle had secured for her. (Marshall, 1959, 224) / Please, you must do something, one of our aunts cried to the Leader, her baby limp in her arms. It was the poison –the baby was too pure for the filth in the village well's water, the toxins that had seeped into it from Pexton's field (Mbue, 2021, 9).

As described above, the children of Bournehills are worthless and hopeless. Merle Kinbona, one of Marshall's intellectual characters is back home; she tries to provide those children with hope by entertaining them. In terms of profession, Bournehills's people are farmers. Growing sugar, cane bananas and other fruit trees (mango tree) is their guaranteed income stream. As far as Kosawa's people are concerned, they are also farmers, but their environment is polluted because of Pexton's mining activities. This threatens their lives and prevents them from growing food. In front of that tragic scourge, no inhabitant seems to be immune. As the days, months, and years go by, the rate of Kosawa's infected inhabitants sharply increases. Clearly, the prevailing climate in the ex-colonies is uncertain. The textual clues below, describe the concerns of Kosawa's folks,

Two years had passed since Wambi died, but we thought about him still – he was the smartest boy in arithmetic, and the quietest one too, except for when he coughed. We'd been alive for centuries combined, and yet we'd never heard anyone cough the way he did. When the cough hit, his eyes watered, his back hunched out, he had to hold on to something to steady himself. (…)? We say to him, laughing the careless laugh of healthy children. We knew not that some of us would soon

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start coughing too (…)? That several of us would develop raspy coughs and rashes and fevers that would later find out. (Mbue, 2021, 8) / We should have known the end was near. How could we not have known? When the sky began to pour and rivers began to turn green, we should have our land would soon be dead (Mbue, 2021, 3).

Both excerpts show that Kosawa's beauty and tranquillity are respectively altered and disturbed. Beauty has given way to ugliness. The metaphor of beauty inscribed in the title of Mbue's novel is thoughtful. Indeed, the implicit value related to *How Beautiful We Were* is that before the implementation of Pexton's mining project, Kosawa's environment and its inhabitants were wonderful. Nevertheless, with the advent of Pexton's scheme, the social conditions of Kosawa's folks have negatively changed. Kosawa's children suffer from unknown diseases. Pexton's mining activities are the cause of those strange infections. The prevailing mood is no longer happiness, but unhappiness. Here, the concept of beauty transcends the physical appearance of Kosawa's inhabitants. It rather refers to the ecological crisis, which prevails in Kosawa. Indeed, the *ungrammaticality*, which emerges from that title, is that all living Beings in Kosawa suffer from the *side effects* of Pexton's mining project. The title of Mbue's book epitomizes the regrettable feelings of Kosawa's people. More importantly, Kosawa's inhabitants and their environment are in a despondent state.

Likewise, Bournehillsians' living conditions go downhill, because of the colonial exploitation; their arable lands have shrunk. This negatively influences the native community. In essence, the vegetation of Bournehills is precious; it helps the inhabitants grow crops and guarantees their survival. Indeed, in Bournehills, sugar cane is used to make agricultural rum – a traditional beverage whose spiritual virtues are incorporated in most of Marshall's fictional works as intertextual devices. In her novel titled *Praisesong for the Widow*, rum plays varied roles. Lebert Joseph uses it to make libations and implore the ancestors' clemency to watch over the *Carriacouans* and other African descendants. In *The Chosen Place*, Delbert shares Lebert Joseph's values. He holds the ancestors in high regard. With reference to his words, the living beings act thanks to the ancestors' spiritual guidance. Therefore, to beseech their spiritual support, he uses rum. One of Dorothy Hamer Denniston's critical studies on Marshall's novels, corroborates that spiritual practice as follows,

We meet Delbert, the local shopkeeper, who is described as the chief presiding over the nightly palaver in the men's house [rum shop]. Consistent with this African imagery is an earlier passage in which Delbert substitutes white rum for the palm wine with which he kept the palaver and made libation to ancestral gods. … Each time he filled the glasses arranged before him on the counter, he made a point of first pouring a drop or two of the rum on the floor (Denniston, 1995, 105).

Obviously, due to colonization, Bournehills is undeveloped; its environment has undergone several forms of exploitation. Despite those difficulties, its inhabitants remain irrepressible. That is why Marshall poetically names them "timeless people". They settle for the minimum, hoping to improve when necessary. In terms of belief, their connection with their ancestors and nature provides them with hope. Those boundless and solid cultural connections help them be interdependent. A close look at the trajectories of some of Mbue's characters discloses the same love and devotion. Indeed, Kosawa's inhabitants are proud of their social conditions. Certainly, their village is underdeveloped, but they stand on their own feet, promote the mindset of independence.

During the different meetings with Pexton's Leaders, none of Kosawa's inhabitants would like to be counted out of any eventual decisions concerning their future. The citizens' massive and effective attendance at the village meetings corroborates their anxiety or apprehension. However, despite the excessive number of meetings, doubts begin to creep into the hearts of Kosawa's inhabitants. They realize that Pexton's leaders are liars and that their chief (Woja Beki) is a collaborator. Instead of protecting and

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defending the cause of his village, he dupes his fellow citizens. The passage below is illustrative of his unfair and irresponsible collaboration with Pexton's officials,

Woja Beki walked up to the front and thank for coming. My dear people, he said, exposing the teeth no one wanted to see, if we don't ask what we want, we'll never get it. If we don't expunge what's in our bellies, are we not going to suffer from constipation and die? We did not respond; we'd known for years that though he was our leader, descended from the same ancestors as us, we no longer meant anything to him. Pexton had bought his cooperation and he had, in turn, sold our future to them. We'd seen with our own eyes, heard with our own ears, how Pexton was fattening his wives and giving his sons jobs in the capital and handing him envelopes of cash (Mbue, 2021, 5).

Through this passage, the narrator describes the system of corruption set up by Pexton's leaders. The support provided to Woja Beki (Kosawa's chief) aims at convincing him to stay on their side and settle the dispute between them and Kosawa's inhabitants. In essence, this excerpt decries the reckless deeds of Kosawa's chief towards his fellow citizens. For instance, instead of promoting nationalist and protectionalist policies, the chief Woja Beki is rather interested in invaluable advantages. His address to his fellow citizens is full of contempt and dishonesties. Similarly, Pexton's representatives express no real compassion for Kosawa's inhabitants. Nor do they take any concrete initiative to resolve the problems posed or engendered by projects. The narrator revitalizes some of the highlights of his words as follows,

We waited for him to say something that would make us burst into song and dance. We wanted him to tell us that Pexton had decided to leave and take the diseases with them. His smile broadened narrowed, landed on our faces, scanning our stillness. Seemingly satisfied, he began speaking. He was happy to be back in Kosawa on this fine day, he said. What a lovely evening it was, with the half-moon in the distance, such a perfect breeze, was that the sound of sparrows singing in one accord? What a gorgeous village. He wanted to thank us for coming. It was great to see everyone again. Incredible how many precious children Kosawa has. We had to believe him that the people at headquarters were sad about what was happening to us. They were all working hard to resolve this issue so everyone could be healthy and happy again. He spoke slowly, his smile constant, as if he was about to deliver the good news we so yearned for. We barely blinked as we watched him, listening to lies we'd heard before (Mbue, 2021, 6-7).

By contrast with Woja Beki (Kosawa's chief) who welcomes Pexton's mining project, Merle Kinbona disapproves of the new project of investment in Bournehills. From an interpretative point of view, both projects are incredible. They enrich a tiny group of natives whose main role is to make possible the implementation of the Westerners' companies, thus keeping their own people in long-term dependence. More importantly, Marshall's and Mbue's novels thematize neocolonial policies, whose features differ from those of colonization, but they promote dominant ideologies and briberies whose harmful drawbacks on the native peoples remain similar to those of colonization. Interrogating the post-colonial issue in Marshall's fiction, Ada Savin avers, "if Bourne Island is a paradigm for impoverished, post-colonial countries it also acts as a resonance chamber, echoing past and present vicissitudes, perpetrated there and elsewhere" (Savin, 2022, 177-198).

Apparently, what matters for the ex-colonizers is their economic interest. For instance, whether the ex-colonized subjects are poor or dead, Pexton's officials have no remorse. Indeed, after the weird disappearance of a group of six individuals, whose mission was to meet Pexton's Leaders in Bézam and urge them to find resourceful ways out to help Kosawa recover from its pitiful situation, Kosawa's inhabitants require further details from Pexton's representatives. Instead of reassuring and easing the latter, they unveil the unfair features of their development policy as follows,

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When they did not return after ten days, we began fearing that they'd been imprisoned. Or worse. A second group of men traveled to Bézam to search for and bring home the Six, but they came back empty-handed. Months later, the Pexton men arrived for their first meeting with the village. When our elders asked the Leader at that initial meeting where he thought our vanished men might be, he told them that he knew nothing. Pexton did not involve itself with the whereabouts of the citizens of our country, unless, of course, they were its workers (Mbue, 2021, 10).

In terms of aesthetic scope, the novels under investigation describe, in a controversial tone, the retrograde practices inherited from colonization, which do nothing to eradicate poverty in the ex-colonies, but rather reinforce the obstacles to fair and sustainable development. In view of the above, Bournehills and Kosawa are toponyms used by Marshall and Mbue to Western unfair development projects. Both writers respectively codify the shortcomings affecting post-colonies, namely bribery, exploitation of natural resources, poverty, and hypocrisy. Not only do those new threats pose a danger to today's people, they also jeopardize the future generations' lives. Thus, to cope with those persistent threats, the people of Bournehills and Kosawa undertake a number of palliative measures, which will be analyzed in the ensuing stage.

EX-COLONIZED BEINGS' RESILIENCE

This point interrogates the resilience of the inhabitants of Bournehills and Kosawa. Those villages are geographically distant from one another, but share almost identical histories.

To begin with, those peoples' first resilient deed is apparent through their perseverance. Their ability to remain united on their ancestors' lands provides them with courage and vision to defend themselves. They take collective action to fight against corruption. In terms of organization, they voice virulent and vehement critical views, sometimes destabilizing and contradicting both their corrupted leaders and Western officials. In this sense, the novels *The Chosen Place* and *How Beautiful* offer some edifying teachings, whose literary scope is not merely textual, but crosses the fictional boundaries, thus crystallizing in the ex-colonies where masses are victims of tortuous and destructive policies. One of the most striking examples is found in the passage below,

Their gratitude for the hills between us was evident, the separation of our suffering from their new serenity. But nothing Pexton did could compel the parents of the rest of us to leave Kosawa. Most huts in Kosawa remained full and boisterous, and young women from other villages continued marrying Kosawa men and moving here to add to our numbers. Now that we were getting closer to manhood, we could have left of our own accord, we could have fled for a poison-free life, but we were determined never to give up our land, not then or ever, and the Restoration Movement and Sonni reminded us of this, that it was our land, come rainy season, it would always be ours (Mbue, 2021, 196).

The homodiegetic narrator's voice timbre shows that Kosawa's young people are bold enough to struggle and bring Pexton's officials to heel. With Sonni's appointment as Kosawa's new leader, one can infer that the corrupt leaders' reign is over, and the one of upright individuals (youth) has begun.In other words, the struggle for Kosawa's liberation is in progress. Henceforth, at every meeting, Kosawa's young citizens require from Pexton's representatives a clear acting plan, which defines their definitive leave from their village,

The village still met with the Sweet One and the Cute One. They rarely had much to report except for the fact that things were moving, slowly but certainly. They claimed that as soon as discussions between the Restoration Movement and Pexton were completed, the pipelines would be mixed and the waste swept off the river and the gas flares reduced. For now, though, they said, it would be best if we focused on the fact that children were dying less often, thanks to the bottled water, and buses were taking boys to Lokunja to acquire knowledge. Before we knew it, Kosawa would be Kosawa again. When we had asked them, at the last meeting, when they thought

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Pexton would, would it be years or decades, they had replied that, well, that was a tough question to answer. Our best option for now, they said, was to learn how to be good neighbours with the corporation. We told them that Pexton could never be our [neighbour] because the land wasn't theirs (Mbue, 2021, 205-206).

The struggle of the Kosawa's inhabitants is compelling and unyielding. In a sense, it is an expressive symbol of their nationalism and patriotism. They want to be the true actors of their progress and development. With the appointment of Sonni as their chief, the young people of Kosawa are committed to consolidating their gains and taking bold action against Pexton. To that end, Kosawa's youth plan to march on Pexton's headquarters to dislodge the officials who are responsible for the destruction of Kosawa's vegetation, including its people. The fierce opposition of Kosawa's youth against Pexton's officials is justified by their exclusive and unfair policy, which maintains Westerners in the status quo – the one, which defines them as Masters and others as subalterns. In accordance with that former relationship, the ex-colonized individuals are deprived of any decision-making power. Worse still, that relationship overlooks the common interest to the detriment of individual one. Kosawa's inhabitants call for its complete overhaul.

In terms of priority, they defend the general interest; the new Leaders work hard to meet their expectations. Through the following excerpt, the desire of Kosawa's youth is openly expressed, "our young men started shouting. We'll march to Bézam and burn down your headquarters, the said. We'll hurt you the same way you're hurting us" (Mbue, 2021, 9). Noticeably, the resilience of Kosawa's youth is similar to that of Bournehills. In *The Chosen Place*, *Bournehillsians* stand on their own feet; they avoid begging for food. To feed themselves, they grow sugar cane on small plots in their backyards. That ingenious strategy enables them to overcome starvation, thus guaranteeing their quietude. Besides, *Bournehillsians* are so dynamic that they are not interested in any Western investment. Indeed, the colonial ill-treatments are still vivid in their minds. The British colonists' brutality and dehumanizing acts towards them remain psychologically unaltered. That is why they are hostile to the development projects initiated by the Westerners. The textual clues below exemplify their indifference,

I trust you will forgive this rather emotional display. I assure you; we are not people given to such outbursts as a rule. We're much too British for that. But the subject of Bournehills does tend to evoke a strong reaction on the part of some like my young friend and colleague here –he playfully shook Cecil Hinkson's shoulder. There're a bit sensitive about it. We all are. Bournehills, you see, is the thorn in our sides, the maverick in our midst, the black sheep of the family, if you will, which continues to disgrace us in spite of all our efforts to bring it into the fold. In other words, while we have been making quite considerable progress on this side of the island it has remained a backwater even with the large amounts of money that have been poured into it. The place is really quite unique in that respect (Marshall, 1969, 61-62).

Bournehills symbolizes a vestige for its inhabitants. From that point of view, any development project aiming to erase its past is doomed to failure. Indeed, Merle Kinbona's behaviour contributes to showing that, despite having spent several years in England, her connection with Bournehills is still profound and sincere. Merle Kinbona is aware that her village is a priceless treasure. It contains enormous useful resources and is one of the most substantial markers in the process of identity construction. In other words, her coming back home helps her reconnect with her ancestral past. Through a comparative approach to the *Banana Bottom* and *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People,* Monica Fernández Jiménez unveils the importance of Bournehills,

Merle (…) goes back to Bournehills, an apparently backward area where the inhabitants' rudimentary farming of sugar provides their daily means of subsistence. (…) she is shown in her everyday environment, struggling to drive up a

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hill because of the muddy mess that the rain had caused, and described in comparison with the hills, which were the reason why a slave revolt had been possible in that area, an event, which the villagers of Bournehills keep remembering and incorporate into their cultural identity (Jiménez, 2022, 5).

To put it differently, Bournehills is the metaphor of resistance. The myth of the colonizers' invincibility is debunked in that village thanks to Cuffee Ned's tenacity. Despite the Westerners' desire to falsify the history of Bournehills, its inhabitants, such as Merle Kinbona jealously protect it. In *The Chosen Place*, she is one of the depositories of that valuable past. Other Bourne Islanders unsuccessfully exhort her to give it up. Through the passage below, she revitalizes that memorable past,

Cuffee Ned did it. He sent the whole thing up in flames during a little fracas we had down here sometimes back – back, she repeated with laugh, in the days when the English were around here selling us for thirty pounds sterling. You wouldn't think it, but one of the biggest estate houses on the island used to be right on top that hill. People say it stood like a castle there. It belonged to Percy Bryam, the man who owned all Bournehills and everyone in it in the beginning. People used to have to get down on their knees when he passed. Bryam's Castle they call it. But I know Cuffee put a match to it one night, she said. The entire hill up in flames now! Castle and all. The very sky that was on fire, they say (…). And do you know that hill burned for five years (Marshall, 1959, 101).

Like the *Bournehillsians*, Kosawa's folks are extremely attached to their land and are prepared to defend it at great sacrifice. In *How Beautiful*, Konga's bold action towards Pexton's Leaders can be regarded as a great humiliation. Not only does this discredit the chief Woja Beki's trustworthiness, but also challenges the authority of Pexton's officials. By spitting on the chief's face and ordering him to shut up, in front of all the villagers, including Pexton's representatives, Konga tramples on Woja Beki's dignity. Better still, the villagers' refusal to preclude Konga from committing that rebellious deed illustrates their indirect complexity. Here, the villagers approve Konga's revolt; together, their support aims at compelling Pexton's Leaders to leave their ancestral lands. The ensuing textual clues describes Konga's revolt,

Never had we seen the Leader so stunned as when he turned to Woja Beki and asked what Konga – why was a madman disrupting the end of meeting. Never had we seen Woja Beki as devoid of words as when he turned to face Konga. Before all us stood a never-before-seen version of our village madman. As if all authority on earth belong to him, Konga barked at the Pexton men, told them to sit down, hadn't they heard him, were their ears so full of wax that sound couldn't penetrate it? The meeting wasn't over, it was just beginning. The Leader, maddened by Konga's audacity, and running short on the decorum he'd brought from Bézam, reciprocated the bark, asking how dare a madman speak to him, Pexton's representative, in that manner. Konga chuckled, before responding that he had the right to speak to anyone any way he like (Mbue, 2021, 12).

As farmers, the inhabitants of Kosawa care about their survival and social well-being. That is why they take part in all meetings, whose purpose is to resolve the difficulties affecting their village. Knowing that the village's wealth is based on agriculture, they are keen to find efficient solutions to the evils caused by Pexton's mining activities. However, after various meetings, they realize that the commitments made by Pexton's officials are not being met. Hope of a peaceful Kosawa grows slimmer with each passing day. The textual clues below describe the bitterness of Kosawa's citizens,

We washed iron pots and piles of bowls after dinner; left our huts many minutes before the time the meeting was called for – we wanted to get there before they strode into the square in their fine suits and polished shoes. Our mothers hurried to the square to the square too, as did our fathers. They left their work unfinished in the forest beyond the big river, their palms and bare feet dusted with poisoned earth. The work will be there

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waiting for us tomorrow, our fathers said to us, but we'll only have so many opportunities to hear what the men from Pexton have to say. Even when their bodies bore little strength, after hours of toiling beneath a sun both benevolent and cruel, they went to the meeting, because we all had to be at the meetings (Mbue, 2021, 4).

Kosawa's folks are fed up with Pexton's mining activities, which poison their village and destroy their environment. Their emancipatory struggle, whose scope is ecological, historical and humanistic, is also recurrent in Marshall's fiction. Merle Kinbona unconditionally contributes to that struggle. Her indifference and umbrage towards Dr. Amron symbolize her opposition to an eventual urbanization project in Bournehills. Indeed, Merle Kinbona is convinced that such a project can destroy Bournehills's culture and tradition. That is why she does not embolden its promotion. Through her words, the cultural significance of her village turns more apparent, "Bournehills is the way it is for a reason – that you people in town are too blind to see" (Marshall, 1969, 210) / "there were other, more profound, even mystical, reasons for the place being as it was" (Marshall, 1969, 215).

Neither *Bournehillsians* nor any other Caribbeans can deny the benefits of modern development. However, the land of Bournehills embodies the ancestors' memory. From that point of view, allowing Westerners to urbanize it could destroy the villagers' collective memory. According to Merle Kinbona's view, history is relevant in constructing cultural identity. As such, it must be preserved and passed on to younger generations. Confirming that idea, Ada Savin avers, "the island reverberates with the turbulent history of the Caribbean" (Savin, 2022, 177-198). On both sides, the growing awareness of the inhabitants of both Bournehills and Kosawa provides an energetic impetus to the fight against neo-colonial projects, which on the one hand, impoverish Bournehills's populations economically and culturally and, on the other hand, kill those of Kosawa. Indeed, the homodiegetic narrator expresses the villagers' patriotism as follows,

Now that we were getting closer to manhood, we could have left of our own accord, we could Have fled for a poison-free life, but we were determined never to give up our land, not then or ever, and the restoration Movement and Sonni reminded us of this, that it was our land, come rainy season or dry season, it would always be ours (Mbue, 2021, 196).

Despite the evils, which beset Kosawa, its folks' patriotic love remains intact. Arguably, that feeling even grows stronger. Thanks to Thula's unconditional help, the struggle for Kosawa's liberation is internationalized. Indeed, that female character is one of Kosawa's citizens who is granted an American scholarship. In spite of the distance separating her from the homeland, she cares about her community's sorrow. Therefore, she takes concrete action to incriminate Pexton for its criminal activities. Thula is convinced that the American society is committed to freedom. By exposing Pexton's illegal and criminal activities, she therefore hopes to spark a global outcry and gain the support of American politicians. Thula's deed is a sort of lobbying whose aim is to exert greater pressure on Pexton so that its Leaders could give up their felonious project. The following passage reveals Thula's commitment to finding the solution to her village's problem,

We knew we were weak, lack of knowledge our greatest incapacity. My father, my uncle, all those who stood up for Kosawa and lost their lives, I thought they failed because they were unschooled in the ways of the world. I promised myself after the massacre that I would acquire knowledge and turn it into a machete that would destroy all those who treat us like vermin. I badly wanted to grow up so that I could protect Kosawa and ensure that children of the future never suffer like we did. Knowledge, I believe, would give Kosawa power. These Americans, with their abundance of knowledge, how could they be powerless too? How is it that their government, which is supposed to be their servant, is acting as their master? From the books I read in our years at Lokunja, I'd come to believe that if we could design a democratic government, just as is the case in America, our

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country would be a wonderful place to live in (Mbue, 2021, 208).

Obviously, Marshall and Mbue do not belong to different cultural backgrounds; neither do they share the same historical experiences. What unites them is literature. Indeed, both novelists incorporate the issue of young females' education in their respective texts. While radical ideologies stubbornly maintain that women's role is to take care of her household, both novelists deconstruct that stereotypical idea, which defines female figures as passive beings. Through Merle Kinbona's and Thula's socio-political involvement, Marshall and Mbue restore women's dignity – they restore women's good image and symbolize as protecting power. In their respective literary imaginations, their female characters are intellectuals and take positive action to liberate their villages from neo-colonialism. Through their constructive visions, they promote social equality, justice, independence, and love.

CONCLUSION

Accounting for the evils undermining the post-colonies was an ambitious analytical exercise. Bringing together two women novelists: Paule Marshall and Imbolo Mbue, the purpose was to appraise the negative impacts of neo-colonial policies on life in the post-colonies. To that end, two fictional spaces were examined, Bournehills and Kosawa.

To conduct the study, two points of interest were defined, post-colonial order features and ex-colonized beings' resilience. Built upon *Perussetian* semiotics, the current study revealed that the Western projects allocated to both ex-colonies, do not offer them the opportunity to free themselves from Western dependence. On the contrary, they foster corruption and enrich a tiny group of officials of the local governments, keeping the majority in paucity or poverty. In line with the properties of the methodological tool, the Western schemes were perceived as acts. Thus, the study indicated that their implementation influences the environment, tradition, culture as well as the populations' health in the ex-colonies. From an interpretative standpoint, Western projects were qualified as the foremost cause of the evils of Bournehills and Kosawa. The analysis of the textual clues contributed to establishing that the populations of both villages are connected with their ancestral lands for varied reasons.

On the one hand, they help them produce raw materials and other foodstuffs, and on the other hand, construct their cultural identity. Given the relevance of the ancestral lands, the inhabitants of Bournehills and Kosawa fiercely fight against the Western projects. On both sides, the female characters' patriotic and intellectual commitment was worthy. That was defined as a pledge contributing to the preservation of the natural and cultural resources of both villages. In terms of results, it is worth noting that *Perussetian* semiotics firstly helps to identify the harmful feature of neo-colonial practices in the ex-colonies and, secondly, the need to educate Bournehills's and Kosawa's youth to defend their fellow citizens' interests. An observant look at those results shows how helpful the methodological tool is.

However, despite that substantial contribution, which furthers reflections on both women novelists, values such as paratextual and decolonial devices, spatial metaphor and symbol of madness are innovative fields of research whose analysis could significantly shed light on Marshall's and Mbue's creative art.

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