

Oroonoko: Royal or Slave; Bakhtinian Reading of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*

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Abstract

Having had its protagonist in a carnivalistic world, Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* provides a polyphonic atmosphere in which different attitudes toward colonization can be heard. Oroonoko, who used to be the prince of Coramantien, is doomed to live as a slave in Surinam; a British colony. This degradation, beside other elements of Bakhtinian carnivalesque, makes his language a unique one, belonging neither to aristocrats anymore nor to the slaves, but simultaneously representing both. The subtitle of the story, *The Royal Slave*, can be implied as referring to this paradox. Additionally, his relationship with the slave society lets their

different beliefs and ideas be revealed to the reader despite the author's will. Aphra Behn, the author, intends to impose her monolithic view on the readers. As a Tory proponent of her time, she defends the colonization and tries her best not to stand against. She attempts to portray her protagonist as the one who believes in social hierarchy; what defines a gentleman from the narrator's viewpoint. On the surface, Aphra Behn and her hero seem to be of the same opinion toward monarchy and accordingly its policies. They both respect it and believe in its need for the society. A Bakhtinian reading, however, can disclose other messages.

Adding to all that, having employed first point of view as the narrator, Behn provides an opportunity for herself to enforce her political attitude to the story. All miscellaneous details of the story are under the control of this monolithic voice. Therefore other characters including the hero can speak only after her permission. Nevertheless, the scope of the novel does not let her be meticulous enough and sporadically, other voices can be heard from different lines of the story. The Bakhtinian reading of this story can bring these hidden voices to the surface.

Keywords: Bakhtinian Reading, Monolithic View, Colonization, Protagonist, Social Hierarchy.

1. Introduction

Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* provides a good opportunity to zoom in on British Empire's policy of colonization from different viewpoints. Half of the story is set in an African country where Oroonoko, the protagonist, is a prince. There, he looks at the world from the perspective of a typical member of a royal family. For instance, he sells people as slaves to colonizers regardless of their feelings. The rest of the story, however, drives him to change his mind. In the second part, Oroonoko is a slave in Surinam, dealing with slavery from the

opposite viewpoint. Nevertheless, his charismatic appearance and noble behavior make him single-out among other slaves. This is what attracts Aphra Behn to listen to him and write his story. Oroonoko is a nobleman distinguishable from other slaves. As the narrator declares, he enjoys his life among colonizers, since they treat him respectfully. Despite all respects, he cannot stand lack of freedom. Therefore, he ends his story by revolting against colonizers leading till his death.

Aphra Behn who narrates the story has been a royalist (a Tory member) and consequently speaks on behalf of the policy of colonization while the slaves of the story represented by Oroonoko, the protagonist, have their own voice. Meanwhile, the reader is encountered with an atmosphere filled with various voices which remind us of Michael Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia. Bakhtin believes there is a "dialogic" tendency in the scope of novel, which allows the "word to become the arena of conflict between two voices" (Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics 106). Thus, Heteroglossia as "a double-voiced discourse" (Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination 324) is privileged in the novel, and accordingly the author's monolithic view is undermined. He believes novel's characters can enjoy their chance to reflect their own opinion toward different issues regardless of author's will. This provides an opportunity for the reader to scrutinize the contextual society of the story. These reflections of ideas might be shown implicitly and in the author's words or explicitly and in the story's dialogues, both of which can be traced in *Oroonoko's* case. Beside Aphra Behn's words, thanks to Oroonoko's direct speeches, the audience can have direct access to the ideas of the protagonist. As an aristocratic degraded to a slave, Oroonoko experiences a radical shift of idea that is significant for this study. During his degradation, which is a reminder of Bakhtinian concept of carnivalesque, Oroonoko represents different classes of people.

Carnavalesque is another Bakhtinian term referring to "the temporary suspension of hierarchal rank". In this festival, ignoring "established order", people can speak freely and

experience “gay relativity” of orders and truths, and accordingly “a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crowning and uncrowning” might happen. (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 11).

Although in this story, no carnival festival is involved, the whole atmosphere centralizing Oroonoko is similar to this Bakhtinian concept, different elements of which can be observed in this story. In this regard, this paper in its first part elaborates on these elements and in its second part, seeks to explain the dialogic characteristics of this work focusing on the opposite attitudes toward colonization and the possible change of thoughts to which the carnivalistic world of this story leads.

2. Methodology

Late 20th century literary criticism experiences a period of having text as the matter of study. In this regard, one of the most influential scholars is Michael Bakhtin. Bearing social matters in his mind, he tries to have close reading of the text, which was introduced by Russian Formalists several decades before. In comparison with his compatriot scholars, he does not believe in self-sufficient characteristic of a text. To him, the context is the matter of importance. In other words, he scrutinizes the text in search of some social hints. He uses the carnival metaphor to innovate a new theory in literary criticism. Based on his theory, a good story has to provide opportunity for several voices to be heard, the same as carnival festival in which different groups of people are allowed to reflect their ideas freely. In carnival, one’s identity is relevant to others and the whole festival. Characters feel the same, in dialogic novels. Bakhtin finds this a convenient way to study the contextual society.

3. Background Studies

Thanks to Bakhtin's innovation, novel, which used to be studied based on conventions of other genres, enjoys an especial form of analyzing. He believes the scope of novel can provide the best atmosphere of carnivalisation. From this viewpoint, he studies Dostoyevsky's and Rabelais' works. Later on, many critics such as R. B. Keshner (1989), Michael Dunne (1995) and Ronald Knowles (1998) have followed him in reading of Joyce's, Hawthorne's and Shakespeare's masterpieces. These studies have paved the way for other Bakhtinian studies.

Accordingly, this paper tries to read the story of *Oroonoko*, written by Aphra Behn, in a scope similar to what is now known as novel about several decades before the innovation of this genre.

Furthermore, the life and career of the prolific restoration writer, Aphra Behn, have been interesting for many academics to choose a subject of their pieces of researches, a few of which are gathered in *The Cambridge Companion to Ahra Behn* (2004), edited by Derek Hughes and Janet Todd. This paper finds different articles of this book useful to understand England Restoration era, the context in which *Oroonoko* is written. Furthermore, *Aphra Behn Studies* (1996), *Aphra Behn: A Secret Life* (2017) both written by Janet Todd, are other sources of information for this paper. The narrator of *Oroonoko* is highly believed as the author herself. These two books gather the details of Behn's life and her attitude toward different issues.

Moreover, *Oroonoko*, as the first attempts of modern English novel, has been interesting to be chosen as the subject of different researches. "Mrs. A. Behn and the Myth of *Oroonoko-Imoinda*" (2001) by Robert A. Erickson, "The Contexts of Behn's *Oroonoko*, and its Role in the Canon" (2006) by Ben Progan and "Direct Style and Rhetoric of Freedom in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*" (2014) by Violetta Trofimova are some important instances.

However, none of these scholars have studied *Oroonoko*, Behn's first story, in a form similar to novel through the lens of Michael Bakhtin; what the present paper attempts to do.

4. The Carnivalistic world of *Oroonoko*

Bakhtin does not coin the word carnival. Instead, he builds this notion on "the ancient tradition of Saturnalia, a Roman celebration" that mocked the political hierarchy of its time by reversing it for a while (Dobie 40). A common person and the king swapped their places for one day. In other words, the insider and outsider replaced and the one who had no voice could give the orders he wanted. Therefore, the main concept of this event is uncrowning. As Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* mentions, the "primary carnivalistic act is the mock crowning and subsequent uncrowning of the carnival king" (Bakhtin *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 124).

In carnival, the king is exchanged and a common man is crowned and it continues only up to the end of the carnival. Afterwards, the king comes back to its position. It means during the carnival, the uncrowning king remains the king. In other words, crowning and uncrowning exist simultaneously. The same is true about the Bakhtinian theory. For him, these two do not necessarily stand in contrast to each other; instead one may lead to another easily.

When it comes to *Oroonoko*, he is the apple of his grandfather's eye; the only grandson of "a man of a hundred and odd years old" (Behn 2316) who has lost all his thirteen sons at wars. Having had special training, Oroonoko becomes a general at the age of seventeen; "one of the most expert captains, and bravest soldiers that ever saw the field of Mars" (Ibid. 2318), an adorable royal general for whom an old experienced one, Imionda's father, sacrifices his life. Everything seems brilliant to him. Nevertheless, in spite of knowing Oroonoko's love to Imionda and the reality "that Imionda was most certainly mistress to the Prince Oroonoko" (Ibid. 2319), the king ignores his respected prince and wants Imionda to be his mistress. This

event can be considered as the very beginning sign of Oroonoko's uncrowning, which has never happened conspicuously in his homeland. Even after having affair with the king's wife, no punishment hurts him but receiving the wrong news of his beloved's execution.

On the ship to Surinam, however, he experiences a harsher uncrowning suddenly, not to an ordinary man but to a slave. He is a royal slave, here. The cast cannot stop treating him respectfully, since the fact that "he had nothing of barbarity in his nature" (Ibid. 2317), is distinguishable to all of them. His noble behavior and appearances stop Trifty treat him like a slave on the island, as well. The same happens to other colonizers including the narrator herself. She trusts him as her protector from both fierce animals and violated Indians. She says: "Those adventures [to Indian towns] are oftentimes fatal, and at least dangerous: But while we had Caesar in our company on these designs, we fear'd no harm, nor suffer'd any" (Ibid. 2341). She trusts him and chooses him as the one who can keep her safe from the other slaves. It means even as a slave he stands above others. He is treated like a prince, but it does not last forever and his uncrowning continues up to the point that he is called by Aphra Behn a "common slave" (Ibid. 2335).

Finally, the prince of Coramantien, who used to sentence his enemies to slavery and learns the language "of the Spaniard, with whom he traded for slaves" (Ibid. 2317), is murdered as a slave. Even after death his uncrowning continues. "They cut Caesar in quarters and sent them to several of the chief plantations" to teach all Negros a lesson and govern them much easier.

Oroonoko's "adventure" begins from the top of hierarchy of power and ends to the bottom of it; from the only hope of his people as the successor of an old king to the one who "should die like a dog, as he was" (Ibid. 2358). These changes of attitudes toward him lead to paradoxical behaviors toward/from him. It is another consequence of carnivalistic atmospheres, which is called by Bakhtinian Gay relativity.

In carnival “all that is ordinary, commonplace, belonging to everyday life, and recognized by all, suddenly becomes meaningless, dubious and hostile” (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 39). In carnival festival, different levels of society get together and put all conventions and boundaries aside. Hierarchy becomes meaningless and the king is treated as an ordinary man. Thus, an anarchy and opposite ideas become available at the same time. Based on this fact, paradox is one of the characteristics that can be followed in the carnivalistic novels.

Swaying between honor and revenge is the main motif of *Oroonoko*. Having been in dilemma between the love of Imionda the girl that all people are “extolling her, and heightening ... the beauties they had found in her” (Behn 2318) and the honor to his country and its need to Oroonoko, “whose soul and body were so admirably adorned” (Ibid. 2318), the king of Coramantien chooses the former one. Despite being aware of Oroonoko’s affliction to Imionda, the king sends her a gift and “call(s) her to court, where maidens never came, unless for the king's private use” (Ibid. 2319). In this situation, Oroonoko, who “had right notions of honour” (Ibid. 2318), cannot forget his love to Imionda and on the other hand, he does nothing to stop his grandfather marrying her and remains honorable to the king. “For they [Oroonoko’s people] pay a most absolute resignation to the monarch, especially when he is a parent also” (Ibid. 2321). Having faced with the reality, he declares

I wou'd venture through any hazard to free her: But here, in the arms of a feeble old man, my youth, my violent love, my trade in arms, and all my vast desire of glory, avail me nothing. Imoinda is as irrecoverably lost to me, as if she were snatch'd by the cold arms of death: Oh! she is never to be retriev'd. If I wou'd wait tedious years, till fate shou'd bow the old king to his grave. (Ibid. 2321).

Neither can he live without his love to Imionda nor can he revolt against his rival who is both his grandfather and the king. Paradoxically, Oroonoko wants to be honorable to both

his love and conventional hierarchy, haunted with rebellious action, though. This makes him to be close to one of his subjects named Otan to find a solution. Meanwhile a good opportunity is provided for the readers of the story to be familiar with the world of the low-class in the Coramantien society and the difficulties they are facing with.

Similar experience has happened to Oroonoko in White world again. The White men treat him as if he is one of them, nevertheless, the same as his grandfather, they misuse him for their own purposes; the captain misuses him to make aboard slaves calm, other colonizers behave the same to keep their labors obedient. On the other side, the captain of ship, Trifty and the narrator give him the words, while knowing they will not fulfill. When Oroonoko always tries to be honorable to the white people, their paradoxical behavior, pushes him to the other side of the society and their muted voices. In his “adventure”, his honor to hierarchy of power is replaced by “obeying [his] heart in what it had designed” (Ibid. 2357). In other words, the one who encourage others to be obedience is pushed to be a rebellious one.

Disobedience is one of the fundamental features of carnivalistic world, since in carnival “a new mode of interrelationship between individuals, counterpoised to the all-powerful socio-hierarchal relationships of non-carnival life. The behavior, gesture, and discourse of a person are freed from the authority of all hierarchal positions” (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 123). The day of carnival is the day of ignoring everyday conventions and disobeying the hierarchies. Accordingly, a carnivalistic novel offers the same condition.

Although Aphra Behn attempts to depict so obedient a character, this element of carnivalisation can be still traced in her novel as well. Oroonoko’s love to Imionda makes him put into question family discipline and stand in front of the royal standards. After Imionda’s receiving gift from the king, she becomes both Oroonoko’s grandfather and his king’s wife. His love to such a girl, in its nature, is a rebellious action and puts simultaneously the

conventions of political hierarchy and family in danger, let alone entering her apartment and sleeping with her.

Additionally, right after being slave, he starts respecting the new institutional hierarchies. “He would engage his honor to behave himself in all friendly order and manner, and obey the command of the captain, as he was lord of the king's vessel, and general of those men under his command” (Behn 2333). Because the power is in the hands of the captain, he stands at the top of power hierarchy and Oroonoko has to respect this fact. This obedient manner continues on the land, but Imionda’s pregnancy gives it a radical change. “And Oroonoko, whose honor was such as he never had violated a word in his life himself, much less a solemn asseveration” (Ibid. 2332), now

“he accus'd himself for having suffer'd slavery so long: yet he charg'd that weakness on love alone, who was capable of making him neglect even glory itself; and, for which, now he reproaches himself every moment of the day”(Ibid. 2348).

Imionda’s pregnancy wakes him up. His child may not have the charisma that he enjoys and as a father, he is responsible to provide it freedom without which he prefers his family’s death. This idea is reflected in his lecture addressing Negroes:

My dear friends and fellow-sufferers should we be slaves to the unknown people? Have they vanquished us nobly in fight? Have they won us in honorable battle? And are we by the chance of war become their slaves? This would not anger a noble heart; this would not animate a soldier's soul: no, but we are bought and sold like apes or monkeys, to be the sport of women, fools and cowards; and the support of rogues and runagates, that have abandoned their own countries for rapine, murders, theft and villainies (Ibid. 2348).

He puts all colonizers' actions into question and tries to wake all slaves up and face them with the reality that they are treated like animals. He likes to collapse the up-down relationship between colonizers and colonized and changes their attitude. At the end of the story, he sacrifices himself, in this regard, what sounds easy to him because he always considers death as an alternative for freedom.

Bakhtin holds the same idea. Based on his theory, death and rebirth happen subsequently; it means death is not considered as a scary fact anymore. The same process happens for all idealistic phenomena. They downgrade to the earth but it does not end to diminish but to rebirth (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 19).

Death is a challenging concept in *Oroonoko*. The heroic rebellious action of Oroonoko has no punishment but the death. The white men send each quarter of his corpse to different Indian towns to inform all the slaves what is the end of his revolt action. By killing him, colonizers assume he is severely punished. However, as Bakhtin mentions, "degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 24). In other words, death is not merely negative but gives rise to a rebirth and regeneration. For Oroonoko, it is a way of being released from slavery. As he addresses the white men and says "you will find no more Caesars to be whip; no more find a faith in me: feeble as you think me, I have strength yet left to secure me from a second indignity" (Behn 2358). After death, he will be strong since no white can govern him anymore. His grandfather mentions to his subjects, for Oroonoko, accepting death is far easier than accepting slavery. He accepts death with open arms as if it is a rebirth rather than ending of life. The death he desires is not a natural one. He believes;

If we must die, let us meet death the noblest way; and it will be more like
Oroonoko to encounter him at an army's head, opposing the torrent of a

conquering foe, than lazily on a couch, to wait his lingering pleasure, and die every moment by a thousand racking thoughts (Ibid. 2330)

After receiving the news of Imionda's death, he wishes such death, but it comes to him after experiencing slavery and seeing his beloved as a slave.

The evidences of the story construct a new Oroonoko; the one who has his own standards of living. Although before violating against the White, he always magnifies death comparing to the living accepting cruelty, only at the end of story he can put it into action. His death gives an end to the carnivalistic atmosphere of the work. Afterwards, all positions in the society are fixed and institutional hierarchies will be respected again. However, the author (intentionally or unintentionally) has provided the chance of various ideologies to be revealed that the next part of paper is allocated to studying them.

5. Different attitudes toward colonization available in *Oroonoko*

Aphra Behn depicts her story in 1688, in an era known as the epic of British Empire colonization. No serious abolitionary movement has been begun yet and the Great Britain is still boastful of his introducing the pious religion and civilizing savages; two big reasons to justify the policy of colonization.

Aphra Behn is not only white and accordingly on the side of colonizers, but she is also known as a Tory member who used to propagandized the royalist policies of Charles II and his succeeding brother James II in her prolific pieces of writing (Todd Introduction). *Oroonoko* is one of her innovations: a story, which has been written in the form of novel when the rise of genre would happen in the next century. Continuing her royal-defending career, she might desire to intensify her political desires to this story, too. In addition, as Rachel Carnell believes "frequently Behn's innovation is a formal structure appear to have political motivation or foundation" (46). The scope of Novel, however, cannot be as safe as other genres, in this

respect. As Bakhtin believes, the author of a novel cannot control all details in her work and consequently different voices can be heard, against his/her authority. Aphra Behn desires the audience to consider Oroonoko an obedient subject and protector of monarchy. From the beginning up to the end, she chooses all words in this regard. Oroonoko is respectful to his grandfather, the captain of the ship and Trifty on the island; the ones on the top of the power hierarchies. Even his rebellious action is explained as a problem with one of the white men called Byam. His rebellious action is belittled that he was angry at Byam since he breaks his promise. He does not provide some facility for Oroonoko and his family to go back to their homeland. Despite all these efforts, not only Oroonoko but also other slaves of the story find opportunity to show their opposition to the monarchs and their utilitarian policies. This is the atmosphere, which “expresses simultaneously two different intentions” (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 324) and a reminder of Bakhtian term, heteroglossia.

Heteroglossia is a concept used by Bakhtin to exult the existence of various voices in a novel. By voices, he does not mean several characters but different ideologies and perspectives. Based on his theory, an acceptable novel needs to be dialogically providing the convenient atmosphere for opposing alternatives to reflect their desires and feelings (Brooker 110).. Thus, instead of facing the readers with a conclusion, the text offers them several ongoing interpretations. Furthermore as discussed in previous part, *Oroonoko*, through his adventurous life, has surpassed different classes of society, it is another factor to regard this story as a suitable case to study the concept of heteroglossia.

Defining heteroglossia as a centrifugal force, Bakhtin declares relativism makes it “push [things] away from the center”. While authority does its best to standardize its only accepted language, an individual (in the scope of literature, a character) may have his own language to interrupt the dominant one (Dobie 39). Bakhtin glorifies novel as the best genre to provide this opportunity for its characters. Different voices are accessible in the

carnivalistic atmosphere of the novel. However, it does not mean all novels are at the same level in this respect. Bakhtin himself compares Tolstoy's works with those of Dostoyevsky and comes to the conclusion that didactic approach of Tolstoy makes his works monolithic which "does not recognize someone else's thought, someone else's idea, as an object of representation" (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 79), while Dostoyevsky privileges polyphony; depicting a world consists of different perspectives and voices. Bakhtin eulogizes Dostoyevsky for not concluding his stories and put them open to the readers (Brooker 112).. *Oroonoko* looks more polyphonic than monolithic. In spite of narrator's all attempts to speak loud enough not to let other voices be heard, the concept of heteroglossia looks significant in it.

As mentioned before, the British Empire used to justify his colonizing policy with the help of two excuses; offering civilization to savages and introducing Christianity to pagans. In Charles Abbey words "Christianity and progress have hitherto been inseparable and it is our [British] colonies that we especially look for confirmation of the same hope for distance future" (4). When he believes that these two are "inseparable," David Livingston claims that Christianity, commerce and civilization needed to go hand in hand to reach their target (Ashcroft et al. 115). Having an up to down look toward colonized people let colonizers to play with these concepts.

As the narrator of *Oroonoko* believes, all the colonized and slaves are savages. Colonizers cannot help worrying about their danger. The narrator refers to traveling to Indian's town as "adventures", which "are oftentimes fatal and at least dangerous" (Behn 2341) which alludes to this fact. Her protagonist, Oroonoko, is totally different though. She adores Oroonoko. He is a slave but a noble one what she recalls it repetitively. "He had an extreme good and graceful mien, and all the civility of a well-bred great man. He had nothing

of barbarity in his nature” (Ibid. 2317). Neither his behavior nor his appearance is similar to black people. Recalling their first meeting, the author describes him like this

His face was not of that brown rusty black which most of that nation are, but of perfect ebony, or polished jett. His eyes were the most awful that cou'd be seen, and very piercing; the white of 'em being like snow, as were his teeth. His nose was rising and Roman, instead of African and flat. His mouth the finest shaped that could be seen; far from those great turn'd lips, which are so natural to the rest of the negroes (Ibid. 2317).

She portrays different details of his face, emphasizing its differences from other slaves' and black people's ones. Whatever refers to Oroonoko is not African as she depicts. It is obvious that the author is not interested in her protagonist's originality. She always admires his European characteristics, trying to ignore the African background. He used to be in touch with “a Frenchman of wit” (Ibid. 2316) because of which he knows several languages and is aware of the history of European countries, as well. All in all, “he had nothing of barbarity in his nature” (Ibid. 2317), as quoted before. All of these details are employed by the narrator to make Oroonoko distinguishable from other slaves; otherwise retelling his story would be worthless. Additionally, the revolting action done by Oroonoko cannot be acceptable from other slaves. The strategy of admiring Oroonoko's characteristics might have this purpose in the background.

In contrast to him, the audience is witnessing two marginalized group being discriminated in words of the narrator. Despite the narrators' words, the audience finds these people so skillful that colonizers are often in need of them. Indians “supply [colonizers] with what's impossible for [them] to get' and Negroes that they “make use of in [their] plantation of sugar” (Ibid. 2315). Referring to the former group, Behn starts her story by propagandizing British discipline (Rosenthal 161). "Those we live within perfect amity without daring to

command 'em, but on the contrary caress'em with all the brotherly and friendly affection in the world" (Ibid. 2313). She declares they have lived together happily but later on she reveals the real reason like this: "we find it absolutely necessary to caress 'em friends, and not to treat' em as slaves; nor dare we do, their numbers so far surpassing ours in that continent" (Ibid. 2315). Although the surface meaning of these words refers to brotherly and friendly behavior of the colonists, the hidden reality is the opposite. The natives are the one who receive their unwanted guests friendly and help them to live next to them easily. As Bakhtin declares: "It is in fact not the neutral linguistic components of language being stratified and differentiated, but rather a situation in which the intentional possibilities of language are being expropriated" (*The Dialogic Imagination* 289). The situation in which the narrator talks about "caress'em with all the brotherly and friendly affection" is the native's homeland where colonists cannot live without the help of local people. Such utterance shows how arrogantly the colonists used to look at their colonized; they are the ones with the mission of civilization and accordingly deserve high respect.

When it comes to Oroonoko, he has his own story dealing with this European mission. At the beginning of the story as an aristocrat who sells slaves, he is happy with himself for being knowledgeable based on European standards. Nevertheless, through his degradation, he understands there are far more valuable things to be respected:

Caesar [Oroonoko's Christian name] told [Byam] there was no faith in the white men, or the gods they adored; who instructed them in principles so false that honest men could not live amongst them; though no people professed so much, none performed so little. (Behn 1351)

He admires honesty here, addressing Byam but meaning all the white people. Honesty is highly respected to Oroonoko and his people, while it can be rarely seen in the white world; either in their knowledge or in their religion. The marginalized voice, in these lines,

refers to the fact that colonist beliefs are nothing but hypocrisy. In practice what colonized believe in is way more moralistic. In this sense, the white people would better receive colonized's ideology rather than enforcing their own religion.

Spreading Christianity is the next excuse for Britain to invade new lands and enslave their people. John Locke argues for mission of Christianity. The word "mission" shows his attitude toward the colonized religion. Based on his opinion, with the help of British colonizers, colonized people can get familiar with the pious religion and the way of salvation (Miura 114). Behn seems to be in the same opinion. The narrator represents the loud voice of colonizers in *Oroonoko*. She recalls changing slaves names with these words "their native ones being likely very barbarous" (Ibid. 2336). Thus, their names need to be replaced with Christain's ones. Moreover, she desires to make Imionda familiar with true God by telling her the story of Nuns and Trifty tries to do the same with Oroonoko. They do believe slaves are doomed because of their unawareness of Christianity. At the beginning of the story, the narrator compares the native of Surinam to Adam and Eve, the symbols of innocence. However, the original sin will not let anybody reach salvation unless believing in Christianity. In Aphra Behn words, not even all slaves are capable of receiving this pious religion. "Religion would here [among colonizers] but destroy the tranquility they possess by ignorance... they would better let be alone" (Ibid. 2315).

The idea of the marginalized group, on the other hand, is interesting to follow in the same lines. It can be considered as a good example of heteroglossia in this story. It "is another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author" (Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 324). While from the narrator's viewpoint, this reality resembles the fact that colonized people are not mature enough to

receive the pious religion, the natives and slaves hold a different opinion. They believe that their lifestyle is not spoilt like that of the white people. They prefer to put their honor into practice rather than speaking loud and acting the opposite. Accordingly, next to their lifestyle, the hypocrisy of colonizers is highlighted in these lines. “They have a native justice which knows no fraud, and they understood novice and cunning, but when they are taught by the white men” (Behn 2315). It seems without Christianity they are far more pious in comparison to colonizers.

Oroonoko’s opinion is fascinating and unique in this regard. As an aristocrat, he has experienced betrayal once in his homeland when his grandfather’s selfishness ruins his life. As a slave, he is facing with another kind of betrayal, this time with the label of Christianity; Trifty has “Christianized” Imionda to abuse her and the captain of ship asks [Oroonoko’s] “sworn in the name of great god” (Ibid. 2333) not to be too violent. All these behaviors that sound normal to the colonizers make Christianity an abusive device to the sight of slaves. As a result, not only does Oroonoko prefer to remain honorable to his own standards but also desires “to be whipped into the knowledge of the Christian gods to be vilest of all creeping things... he had rather die to live upon the same earth with such dogs [Christians]” (Ibid. 2351). To him, Christianity is neither the pious religion nor the way of salvation and happiness but equals to cruelty and injustice.

Different voices available in this story represent their own discourses; meanwhile, the reader can study the context of the society of Aphra Behn era and opposite attitudes toward Colonization in it like an analyzer. Although at first glance, one might conclude that Oroonoko as a prince is the only one who has found his slavery hard to stand employing Bakhtinian lens shows it has been true about all the slaves.

6. Conclusion

This paper has followed a Bakhtinian reading of *Oroonoko*, a novel written by Aphra Behn in 1688. Behn lived in Restoration era of England and had a close relationship with the court; therefore, it seems that her depicted hero must advocate monarchy and its conventional hierarchy. Oroonoko always respects these conventions and even his rebellious action, which leads to his death, is against Bynm not all of the whites or the system. However, applying the literary theories of Bakhtin on this story helps opposing voices of inferior parts to be heard.

Slaves have their own beliefs and desires that all of them are ignored; they cannot even have their own names. Therefore, power seems in the hands of colonizers; in reality, the opposite is true though. They have their own beliefs and style of living; if not better than what British Empire offers to them but at least more suitable to their culture. Referring to this fact, Laura Rosenthal believes that *Oroonoko* is the sign of a radical tactical shift in Behn's political approaches. She calls it "an admission that a historical era [the Stuarts] has ended" (Rosenthal 161). It means that at the end of Stuart era, Behn decides not to advocate the court anymore. This paper has not found any evidence to support this claim; instead it can conclude that the scope of novel gives slaves their own voice to speak.

Overall, Bakhtian reading of *Oroonoko* provides an opportunity to go through colonized and slavery society of English Restoration era and understand more about their feelings, desires, and beliefs what this paper has sought to do.

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