
Africa the Heart of Light: Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible*

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Introduction :

Barbara Kingsolver (1955-) is a Young Adult fiction writer who combines both her awareness of sociopolitical issues and her love of nature to produce works that both educate and entertain her young readers. Kingsolver's work, *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998) addresses the issue of finding spirituality in midst of war, turmoil, and clash of cultures.

Until the publication of *The Poisonwood Bible* the image of Africa in the western literature has been that of an uncivilized place torn by political conflicts, economic crises, ignorance and filled with spiritual darkness. Kingsolver shatters that image by asserting the cultural richness of Africa. She celebrates the diversity of cultures and religious beliefs there. *The Poisonwood Bible* tells the story of the Prices, a missionary family from Georgia, who are sent to the Congo in 1959 to "save Africa for Jesus". In Africa the spiritual values of the Prices are tested and found lacking when measured against the supposed savagery of the Africans. The paper discusses how Kingsolver challenges the stereotypical representation of Africans by distrusting the materialism brought by western civilization and hailing the Africans' spiritual belief in nature which ultimately overpowers the Christian beliefs of the missionary family that prove to be unsuitable for the natives' needs.

Barbara Kingsolver was born in Maryland, Kentucky for Dr. Wendell R. Kingsolver, a navy physician and Virginia Lee Henry, a mountaineer and a lover of nature who advocated living in a natural healthy environment(Snodgrass 7). Ever since her childhood, Kingsolver had an intimate relation to nature. Besides living in a rural area, her maternal and parental grandparents lived in an urban neighborhood in Lexington. They had a half- acre lot planted with vegetables on one half and flowers on the other. Accordingly, she invested gardening. She had her own yard planted with vegetables and flowers when she had owed a house in Tucson (Beattie 153).

When she was a child her home was the fields and marshes surrounding her family's home back in Kentucky. She spent her childhood and young-adulthood in Carlisle, Nicolas County. It was a

small town in rural Kentucky which combined the rich and the poor, the privileged and the deprived, and people of different races. This environment opened her eyes to the prevailing materialism and political conflicts, themes she usually addressed in her writings (Snodgrass8).

Mary Jean DeMarr, the author and writer of a series of critical companions to popular contemporary writers, describes Kingsolver as a:

person with strong convictions which she is unafraid to voice and to live by, convictions which suffuse both her writings and her private life. A public person who values and strives to keep private her personal life, she avoids writing bibliographical fiction and yet she gives events and observations from her life to her characters, some of whom speak with voices rather similar to her own (1).

In an interview with the famous writer and teacher Crystal Wilkinson, Kingsolver answered the question that many of her readers may ask about how her study of biology helped her in her writing. She clarified that biology served her in realizing that "we're only one species, among millions. Every wren and groundhog and mosquito believes devoutly that its species--not ours--is the one that matters. I'm well aware of my dependence on other kinds of beings"(39).

Kingsolver's involvement in many fields is reflected in her complicated plots. Readers can trace different layers of interpretations. Readers can also detect many themes and problems in her novels. Her works uncover interest in environmental issues and keenness on raising the awareness about the threats on nature. Another area she shows interest in is the political issues like Vietnam's War and colonization in Congo. Thus, her novels can be read on different layers and can be analyzed in many ways. She pays a lot of attention to the details of her novels which adds colors to her plots (Sharp 876). In her novels, Kingsolver discusses many themes that are related to the general concerns of people in her community. She is interested in the obstacles facing Latin Americans and Native Americans. She thinks that one's culture is important and valued no matter how different it is from the others' (Austin 180).

She is also a technical innovator in matter of style. In her applauded novel *The Poisonwood Bible*, she did not have one narrator or two but four different narrators. Each one of the main characters narrates the events from her own point of view (Leader 12). She usually uses animal imagery since she is deeply affected by her study of biology and love for nature. She also uses an accurate detailed description of natural phenomena. In her writing, she makes use of the

scientific methods of research which she learned during her academic study. She starts her novels with a question. Then, she spends the rest of her time trying to answer this question and reach its final conclusion (DeMarr 10).

The Poisonwood Bible is much influenced by the British novelist Doris Lessing (1919-2013). Kingsolver is inspired by Lessing's works on Africa and devoted a whole novel *The Poisonwood Bible* discussing the political, social, and spiritual problems there. Kingsolver is influenced by Lessing's devotion to women's problems. She gives them voice and addresses their issues. She is interested in presenting women characters who believe in connectedness. Both writers share the belief in the power of words to change the world (Wagner-Martin 13).

The Poisonwood Bible tells the story of the Prices, a missionary family from Georgia, as they try to construct a life in the Congo during the father's missionary work there. Reverend Nathan Price and his wife Orleanna along with their four daughters Rachel, Adah and her twin sister Leah and their youngest sister Ruth May decide to go there to save people from darkness and introduce them to the enlightening teachings of Christianity. They start their journey taking too many things which are totally unsuitable for the way of life there, including their own spiritual beliefs.

The story is narrated by the mother and her four daughters giving the reader a wider point of view of the events. Through the course of twenty years from 1960s till 1980s, we follow the dramatic changes of the Prices' lives and their own maturation. Their Congo experience affects and moderates their own set of beliefs. The death of the five-year old Ruth May constructs a turning point in the lives of the characters as the family falls apart and each member follows his/ her own path away from the rest of the family. Kingsolver asserts the importance of the unity and cooperation in the community to survive. The Prices can never survive from the troubles they face without the help of the Congolese around them (Abney 182).

Kingsolver makes use of her own memories as a child when she spent some time with her family in Lucia, in the Caribbean in writing about Africa. She starts writing her novel with a question: We as Americans or Europeans are proud of the colonies in Africa and other parts of the world as we try to change their world and enforce our own civilized set of beliefs and values on them, but how do people who live there feel? (Leader 21).

Kingsolver also had to read King James Bible many times to use it properly in her novel. The Prices' tone of speech depended heavily on the effect of the Bible on them. Kingsolver used biblical verses as an opening to each of the novel's seven books to develop the plot

smoothly and subtly. She also had to read about the Congolese Language "Kikongo" to grasp the beauty of the language so as not to make any misunderstanding or mistranslation (Wagner- Martin 106).

The novel is divided into seven books; each one of them is divided into chapters equally narrated by the mother and her four daughters. Each epigraph used sheds light on the main theme of the events of the book. The titles of the books are allusions to stories or chapters from the Bible except for book Seven. It is entitled "The Eyes in the Trees" which refers to the narrator of the chapter, the voice of the late Ruth May. Book Two is named "Revelation" in which the differences between the American and the Congolese cultures are revealed. Book Three is entitled "The Judges" in which there is a clash of ideas and beliefs of the American and the Congolese culture. "Bel and the Serpent" is the title of book Four. It has two implications: first, it refers to the choice the villagers make to preserve their own cultural and spiritual values and second: it emphasizes the death of the youngest daughter; Ruth May by a bite of a snake, which biblically symbolizes the devil. The snake had been put in the kitchen by Tata Kuvundudu and thus, the allusion highlights the false idol represented by Tata Kuvundudu. Book five is titled "Exodus" in which the characters start their journey in the wilderness seeking salvation after the ant attack. In book Six, the girls contemplate their life and what they have accomplished over the years. Thus, it is entitled "Song of the three children".

The novel is full of Biblical allusions and Biblical parallels which enrich the spiritual atmosphere of the novel. The ants' attack is similar to a plague hitting the village or when the mother weeps over the powdered cake-mix, carried from America, having been 'transfigured like Lot's poor wife' by the humidity. Olivia Glazebrook suggests in her article "Abandoning the Code" that these references "Biblical rather than religious... are crucial to the children and show us their startlingly fundamental moral code, taught to them in America, which Africa forces them to abandon as they grow up"(38).

*And God said unto them,
Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth,
And subdue it, and have dominion,
Over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air.
And over every living thing that moveth upon the Earth
Genesis 1:28[italics in the original]*

Kingsolver uses these lines as the opening part of her novel. From the beginning, these lines shed light on the main theme of the novel which is domination. Kingsolver discusses two kinds of domination: the physical domination represented by the Belgium domination over the Congo (Later Zaire) and the psychological domination represented by

Nathan's domination over his wife and daughters. In this novel, Kingsolver criticizes two long established systems and presents two of the themes she is most passionate about: the social and political problems facing the society. By silencing the father, the novelist gives voice to the unprivileged women as each one of them speaks for herself at a time where women were deprived of their right to speak out loud and decide for themselves. (Hausegger&Stocl 175).

Kingsolver aims at giving Africa a voice to speak out for itself. Until the publication of *The Poisonwood Bible* the image of Africa in the western literature has been that of an uncivilized place wrapped in darkness like that of Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*. Kingsolver asserts the fact that African culture and the Congolese traditions including their dream of liberation from colonialism, must be respected and celebrated (York 138).

The theme of spirituality is very important in the novel because not only it sheds light on the popular culture of the Congo but also it demonstrates the pressure exerted on the Congolese to change their culture. Kingsolver celebrates their savagery because this savagery is the essence of nature. By savagery, Kingsolver refers to their innocence, innateness, simplicity, and modesty. They are all positive qualities the Congolese enjoy. They live a simple life and work hard to provide for the day. They do not struggle with the complexity of life brought by materialism and western civilization. They cherish the true freedom Belgium advocates, the freedom of deciding their own future and having their own traditions and beliefs. The western view of Congo, and Africa in general, is that of a wild jungle which is "lodged into the heart of darkness" (244). This is the view that Lumumba, the Congo's Prime minister, rejects in the first speech he gives in the novel. In his speech, he declares that "We are going to show the world what the *homme noir* can do when he works for freedom. We are going to make the Congo, for all of Africa, the heart of light" (225).

Kingsolver does not give male characters a voice since the male point of view represents the domination she does not tolerate. Her male characters are being presented and described by the words of the female narrators. Domination is one of the important themes in the novel. Orleanna thinks that male domination is imposed by God in the Bible. She compares herself to the Congo the whole time describing it as "poor Congo, barefoot bride of men who took her jewels and promised the Kingdom" (244). The Congo is looted and exploited by the western "profiteers" (11) the same way Orleanna is exploited by Nathan who left her suffer loneliness and hardship in Africa.

Kingsolver discusses many challenges facing women but we surprisingly see women take part outside the roles they were expected

to perform inside their houses. She puts them in a harsh environment where they have to support their men. They work hard to provide their daily necessities. This trains them to deal with the real life of the Congolese. Thus, they are more comprehensive to their traditions and beliefs. They do not try to impose their own ideas on the Congolese like their men but they work together to survive. Demory suggests the difference between The *Poisonwood Bible* and Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* "is that Kingsolver doesn't leave her women characters at home, decorating their houses and rhapsodizing, as Marlow's Aunt does, about educating the masses; she takes them to the heart of Africa" (3).

Nathan uses religion to control his wife who is silenced by her fear that God supports him, which is exactly like the strategy used by colonizers to subdue Africans. It never occurred to her to resist or fight back. She is a typical mother figure in young- adult novels. She is preoccupied with her own life and miseries and does not practice an active role in her children's lives. When she reflects on herself in the past as if she admires a far- fetched image of a woman, she realizes that "She is inhumanly alone" (6). But unlike her, the Congolese fight back to get their freedom from Belgium. Her daughters, on the other hand, do not surrender to this oppression. Though they were raised in a conservative religious environment, their choices in life differed completely from that of their mother. However, their planning for the journey to spread the word reflects their narrow perspective for what is waiting for them in this "savage land".

Since the commence of their journey, the Prices are not fully prepared for what is waiting for them. They leave the United States taking things they would never need in the Congo leaving the spirituality they need most behind. The mother gathers "in addition to the cake mixes, ... a dozen of cans of Underwood delivered ham, Rachel's ivory plastic hand mirror with powdered- wig ladies on the bag.." (15). The material things they carried with them suggest that materialism is taking over the world changing its ethics. Their intellectual, psychological, and religious luggage is "ill prepared". Adam Muller elucidates that the American materialism which Kingsolver highlights in this novel reflects a "self-deceived and morally corrupt society". She asserts the idea that America is taking advantage of other countries like the Congo destroying its culture and its set of traditions. By doing this it destroys the Congo's freedom of living their life as they please. The concept of freedom and cultivating the savage countries is deviated from its main principle like the American Dream is deviated from its main concept as we see in *The Great Gatsby*(209).

Kingsolver invests her fondness of nature to enrich the novel with animal imagery. She uses the symbol of the crocodile to highlight the difference in the environment that creates challenges to the Congolese different from the challenges Reverend Nathan may have experienced. He does not expand his horizon to embrace the differences while he focuses on his beliefs and the way in which he will enforce them on others. He is an Anglican Missionary who is devoted to his values. Preoccupied with his mission, Reverend Price does not pay attention to his family or even to the Congolese he is addressing. He does not understand the population he is trying to persuade nor does he show any respect for their beliefs and traditions. He tries to impose his "ideal Christian civilization" on his family and on the Congolese. He insists on baptizing the children in the river near Kilanga although this river is full of crocodiles and it is dangerous for their children to be close to it (Rubble 154).

His daughter Leah believes in her father's mission to bring salvation to this misguided land. However, living in Kilanga changes her views. Seeing her father failing in growing his seeds -as a symbol of failing in accomplishing his mission- shakes her idealized picture of him. The image of sunset is used to describe this change in her attitude as she confesses this truth saying: " I felt so many different things right then: elation at my father's strange expression of tenderness, and despair for his defeat. We had worked so hard and for what? I felt confusion and dread. I sensed that the sun was going down on many things I believed in." (99) She dreams of being a missionary, but unlike her father, she would embrace nature and worship God by "glorifying" His creation.

Leah is fascinated by nature in Congo too. " Oh, it's a heavenly paradise in Congo and sometimes I want to live here forever" (126). She is yearning to start relationships and to bridge the gap between her American family and the people around them. However, the Congolese do not welcome her or her family since they believe that the Prices' presence in the village brings curse on them. They have strong faith in their traditions and superstitions which they refuse to change, the same way they refuse to submit to the Belgium. She realizes the huge difference between the American world and the Congolese one as the Congolese children are looking for the basic needs of their life instead of enjoying their childhood. Their games include searching for food and distinguishing the poisoned one. Her friendship with Anatole, a Congolese translator who helps Nathan with his sermons and whom she marries at the end, is crucial to her. He helps changing her perspective and developing her awareness. As she becomes part of Africa, she travels to the United States only to gain more education

which helps developing her environment along with her husband, Anatole.

Nathan's and Anatole's lives are as different as their belief system and their characters. Nathan's dreams open the novel, as he takes his family on an ill-conceived mission to the Congo; Anatole's hopes are at the heart of the novel's conclusion. Nathan's life looks towards the colonial past and Anatole's life looks towards a more hopeful future (DeMarr 133).

To Leah the father confesses that he realizes the reason behind people's fear of baptizing. It is because of a girl who was eaten by a crocodile, thus they do not accept baptizing their children there "even to be washed in the Blood of the Lamb." (99) He also neglects their apathy in embracing Christianity. And yet, he insisted on baptizing them! He does not have a flexible character that is able to comprehend the villagers' lives, fears, concerns and beliefs. His devotion blinds him from seeing the environment around him. He also neglects the warning of danger on his family and the necessity of evacuating them from there (Rubble 155).

The Congolese are attached to nature surrounding them. Their love for nature is shown in their reaction when the ants invade their town. They worship and sanctify each and every element of nature as they see God in them. They act in a spontaneous flow when the ants attack the town helping one another to reach the safe side across the river. They do not oppose the natural phenomenon but go with the flow calmly and peacefully.

THIS AWFUL NIGHT is the worst we've ever known: *the nsongonya* [ants]. They came on us like nightmares...*Ants*. We were walking on, surrounded, enclosed, enveloped, being eaten by ants. Every surface was covered and boiling, and the path like black flowing lava in the moonlight... the grass had become a field of dark daggers standing upright... we walked on ants and run on them. we just ran as fast as we could alongside our neighbors. Adults carried babies and goats; children carried pots of food and dogs and younger brothers and sisters, the whole village of Kilanga.(368)

Then Anatole explains to Leah that this is not God's wrath on the Congolese; it is part of their nature " Don't blame God for what ants have to do. We all get hungry. Congolese people are not so different from Congolese ants" (385).They work together to save children and their cooking equipment while the missionary family fails to learn the lesson. They could not find ties that bound them together, nor find ties to bind them to the nature around them. They could not

comprehend it. Each one of them is thinking of saving himself or herself even Leah who is the most spiritual girl in the family leaves her sister behind seeking safety (York 142).

Nature symbolizes truth, concrete aspects of life, and answers for Adah. She sees nature scientifically trying to find answers, i.e. medications for diseases in Africa. As a believer, she goes to Sunday schools and does her religious duties properly. But she always has her own doubts. She wonders how the place of birth could help sending children to Heaven or to Hell. If a child is born in the Congo, does that mean he is condemned to go to Hell since he is not born in Christian. Her inability to find answers to her questions makes her lose her faith in religion gradually. She believes in science as it has conclusive answers to her questions. It is through science Adah is reborn without any deformation in her brain or body. When she was studying medicine, her professor tries a new method of treatment in which she acts as if she is an infant in order to reprogram the brain and heal its deformation. She follows the doctor's orders and within one year she is able to walk again without any limping. She is healed completely and devotes her life to study germs and diseases in Africa. She, like Leah, is perceptive of what others endure to have a peaceful, independent life. She dedicates herself to help people in Africa too though she does not find her place in there. She thinks that it is better to be in America helping the Congolese in the field of medicine (Abney 183).

This kind of salvation Rachel misses in the Congo. She is attached to her materialistic, civilized life in Georgia. Her ivory plastic mirror exposes her narcissist materialistic character. She is interested in appearances like Anatole's face and the diamonds found in the mines of Congo. She seeks to prove her identity as a young woman, independent and grown up. When her father quarrels with Anatole, she never leaves the room because she considers herself an "adult" who can stay with grown-ups. It is also a sign of the change of the society as women are now part of the men's world. They do not have a separate world of their own.

Like her mother, Rachel appreciates the body and its needs. Her creed is that of blood and flesh not the soul. She could not comprehend the natural savage life of the Congolese. For her, it is hell on earth because there is no sign of civilization and the materialism she worships. She expresses her disgust of this place when the hunting was organized because of lack of food.

IF YOU EVEN THINK you can picture how awful it was, you are wrong. Lambs to the slaughter. We were, or the animals were, I don't even know who I feel sorry for the most. It was the most despicable day of my life. I stood on that burnt- up field with the taste of ashes in

my mouth, ashes in my eyes, on my hair and my dress... I stood and prayed to the Lord Jesus if he was listening to take me home to Georgia, where I could sit in the white Castle and order a hamburger without having to see it roll back in its head and the blood come spurting out of his corpse. (334)

She prays to God to return to her easy materialistic life without having these hardships of finding food. She criticizes her father for not providing for them properly "like the Good Lord intended and cares for others" (420).

Leah's conversations with Anatole increase her ability to understand those who differ in their affiliations and extend her horizon. She also thinks of sin and salvation. She has nightmares of devils. The Prices come to bring salvation to people living in darkness. In the end, each one of them ends up searching for his own salvation away from the others. The brutal, primitive life they have experienced in Kilanga spontaneously conjures the human nature inside them. It binds them to their innate humanity. The hardships they have gone through like Ruth May's illness and their father's decision to stay in the country after the announcement of independence and the death of Prime Minister Lumumba, have changed their perception to life and the kind of spirituality they are raised to glorify (DeMarr 125).

Anatole believes in his people's freedom to practice their traditions. He is a schoolteacher who believes in his country's freedom. He spends his life defending the stolen rights of his people. He refuses the American presence in the Congo and works for freeing his homeland. He helps Leah comprehend the world of the Congolese. The scars on his face tell the story of his sorrow along with the sorrow of the Congolese. Unlike her father, Anatole used to ask Leah for her opinion. He discusses her politics, religion, life, and future of the Congo. He is jailed twice for his political activities. This leaves Leah alone to raise their four children. Yet, she accepts their fate as she believes in his cause and their love that will withstand any challenges they may face.

The father does not exert a kind of understanding in offering "The Word". He would have attracted the Congolese to his views instead of pushing them away. He is used to combine words of Kikongo, the Congolese native tongue, with English in his speeches without realizing the specific nature of this language as he does not understand the human nature of the Congolese themselves. The Kikongo words have more than one meaning and it depends on the pronunciation of the word to determine the specific meaning. Thus, he misuses the word *Bangala*:

"TATA JESUS IS BAGALA!" Declares the Reverend every Sunday at the end of his sermon... he throws back his head and shouts these words to the sky, while his lambs sit scratching themselves in wonder. Bangala means something precious and dear. But the way he pronounce it, it means the poisonwood tree. (339)

His peaceful, mild voice which charmed them when he first arrived is turning into shouting to impose his beliefs on them. He aims at eradicating the old Congolese traditions of worshiping and replacing them with his own spiritual beliefs (Shureteh&Al-Khalili, 4).

The title of the novel refers to the ill- version of spirituality presented to the Congolese. Reverend Nathan Price tries his best to "win" the Congolese' appeal to Christianity. Yet, all his actions make them repel him. He keeps using Congolese words in his sermons every week. He ends up his sermon by saying " Tata Jesus is Bangala." He wants to say that Jesus is good but the way he pronounce it gives the meaning of a poisonous plant which causes skin burns. At the end, Nathan leaves people and heads to the woods to live on his own. This is an interesting irony because on his way to save people and bring them to light, he is lost in the jungle and in the darkness (Rubble 154).

Opposite to the conservative image of the strict Reverend, is the character of Tata Fowls who is a previous Reverend in the village of Kilanga. He is more tolerable and more comprehensive of the Congolese beliefs and spirituality. They see God in nature surrounding them. This is similar to the mystical concept of spirituality. Nature, animals and all creatures are signs of God and being close to them is being close to God Himself. This is what Tata Fowls explains to Leah who once shares the same stereotypes about people in the Congo as her father.

Tata Fowls can realize the kind of spirituality the Congolese embrace. For them, knowing God lies in their hearts and in their everyday struggle to survive. The simplest blesses of their lives are evidences of God's grace surrounding them. He is an example Kingsolver uses to prove that there are some white men who do not embrace the ideology of "American superiority". He believes in their right to choose their own set of morals and practice their culture freely. While Reverend Nathan uses the verses of Bible as a punishment for his daughters, they could see God's grace in the hardships and they go through every single day(Demory4).

He explains to Leah his point of view saying:

I think the Congolese a world of God's grace in their lives, along with a dose of hardship that can kill a person entirely. I happen to think they already knew how to make a joyful noise unto the Lord a long time

ago... Have you heard the songs they sing here in Kilanga?' He said.' They are very worshipful. It's a grand way to begin a church service, singing a Congolese hymn to the rainfall on the seeds yams. It's quiet easy to move from there to the parable of the mustard seed. Many parts of the Bible make good sense here if only you change few words (296).

Nathan Price is a typical religious character which is found in the Young Adult Literature. One of the main elements of dealing with the theme of spirituality in the Young Adult Literature is that there is no balanced religious character. This creates bigger perplexity and problems to the young adults as they lack a religious role model. Many books which tackle the theme represent the religious characters and institutions negatively (Campbell & Crowe 1).

When a large number of ants attack the village, Rachel rushes to save the precious things she owns in Kilanga,

While everybody was running from the house, I cast around in a frenzy trying to think what to save. I had time to save one precious thing, something from home. Not my cloths, there was no much time and not the Bible – it did not seem worth saving at that moment so help me God. It had to be my mirror(363).

Rachel's self-image is very important to her. She does not want to break her image in the mirror. Rachel, who is engaged to Eeben Exelroot, sees him as her best chance to escape from the Congo. She leaves with him to South Africa where he works in the diplomatic mission there. By living there, she returns to the materialistic world she misses greatly in the Congo. She enjoys wearing fashionable designs and expensive accessories and going to tea parties. This is the world where she belongs. She makes use of her husband's money to buy a resort and run it by herself. This resort becomes her own world in which she is " a crowned goddess". She expresses this by saying, "Finally, Rachel, this is your own little world. You can run it exactly how you please." (551)

Leah who escapes with Anatole discovers that his love is the true purification for her soul. Though she loves her father but his love is poisoned. It throws her into doubt and wonder unlike Anatole's love which brings her peace and salvation. She decides to stay with him and move to Kinshasa leaving her mother and twin sister Adah travel back to the United States. Anatole is her "first prayer to Creation answered." (511) They come from different worlds with different miseries but it does not take them long to realize that their salvation lies in their relationship. As she grows up years later, she loses her faith in her home country and in politics as she has lost faith in her

father's version of religion. Ten years later, she still hopes for finding "a place I can claim as home" (607). She transformed gradually to be the wisest character of the novel. She ends up living peacefully in Africa after she reaches a final realization that spirituality has more than one face and not necessarily be her father's version of Christianity.

In comparison with their father, the girls along with their mother, feel compassionate with the natives in spite of the difference in color and ethnicity. When Nathan is defeated, he withdraws to the woods and lives there alone. The Congolese blame him for the boat incident when a boat full of the Kilanga children was overturned by a crocodile. Thus, they call him "the white witch doctor named Tata Prize." (582) they accuse him of being the reason for the disaster and death brought to their village. They follow him to the fields where he hides in the witch tower. His end comes when the families set fire into the tower and the Reverend is burnt to death (Shureteh& Al-Khalili 7).

Africa achieves victory in spite of the fact that it is an undeveloped place and lacks education and political strength. Rachel describes Africa as a recognized force " you don't have to like it, but you sure have to admit it's out there. You have your own way of thinking and it has its... you just don't let it influence your mind" (521). It triumphs by the strength of its people's spirituality. They demolish Nathan's dreams in Christianizing them and the American dreams of controlling them. They remain faithful to their culture, spiritual value, history, and ancestral roots. While Nathan's quest for his delusive dream leads him to insanity "Africa is a strong and ambiguous force"(Abney 182).

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افريقيا قلب النور: رواية بربارا كنكسولفر "انجيل الشجرة السامة"

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تمزج روائية ادب اليافعين بربارا كنكسولفر (١٩٥١) وعيها بالقضايا الاجتماعية والسياسية بحبها للطبيعة لتقديم اعمال تثقف وتمتع قراءها اليافعين. تناقش روايتها "انجيل الشجرة السامة" (١٩٩٨) قضية الروحانية في خضم الحرب والفوضى وصراع الحضارات.

كانت تصور افريقيا في الادب الغربي قبل نشر كنكسولفر روايتها "انجيل الشجرة السامة" بانها مكان متخلف تمزقه الصراعات السياسية والازمات الاقتصادية والجهل ويملؤه الظلام الروحي. حطمت كنكسولفر هذه الصورة بتأكيدا الثراء الثقافي لأفريقيا. فلقد احتفلت بالتنوع الثقافي والديني هناك. تروي "انجيل الشجرة السامة" قصة عائلة ال برايس، وهم عائلة تبشيرية من جورجيا يرسلون الى الكونغو في ١٩٥٩ "لإنقاذ افريقيا من اجل المسيح". في افريقيا تختبر الاعتقادات الروحية للعائلة، وتثبت عجزها مقارنة بالمعتقدات الروحية للأفريقيين الذين يعتقد انهم متوحشون. يناقش البحث تحدي الكاتبة كنكسولفر التمثيل النمطي للأفريقيين من خلال التشكيك في المادية التي جلبتها الثقافة الغربية، والاطراء على اعتقاد الروحي للأفريقيين بالطبيعة، ذلك الذي تفوق في النهاية على المعتقدات المسيحية للمبشرين والتي اثبتت عدم ملائمتها حاجات السكان المحليين.