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## THE DECOLONIAL POETICS OF THE COLONIZED

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### ABSTRACT

Colonialism, in its entirety, involves territorial, economic, political and cultural subjugation, appropriation as well as exploitation of another country and its people, with the intent and purpose of establishing one's dominance. In fact, colonialism was not restricted to the countries and peoples of the Third World, but it was also applied to many other contexts. Thus, Western hegemonic discourse, through its various mechanisms of control and various stages of development, has for years inflicted its language and culture on the colonised subjects thereby forcing them to refashion the colonised self's images and model as was given to them by the coloniser. Internalisation, self-abasement and loss of identity have become a reality when the colonized attempts, in the process, to outwit the colonizer. The social and literary evolution of former colonised spaces is often characterized by the affirmation of new voices emerging from indigenous peoples. In this context, a new tradition arose that seeks to reverse the historical binary thinking by which the West finds justification. In its agenda, its proponents have begun to elaborate and theorise their own new tradition; a discourse of the "other" whose aim is to rethink, re-read, and rewrite the coloniser's view of the colonised. The purpose of this paper is to discuss this theory as a search for a lost identity; though some detractors believe it still colonizes oneself in the process and show that language and culture imposed on the colonised, have traditions, social structures and textures that are not appropriate to what postcolonial writers or theorists wish to convey.

**Keywords:** Hegemonic Discourse, Language/culture, Outwit, Colonized, Post-colonial Literary Theory, Binary World.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Recent studies in literature and culture have given rise to a growing and contentious interest in a set of related theoretical approaches known as literary theory and literary criticism. For a long time, there have been literary theories about how literature works, what its meaning is and what it means to be an author. Critical approaches to literature, to my mind, reveal how or why a particular work is constructed and what its social and cultural implications are. Thus, reading literary criticism or theory inspires one to reread, rethink, rewrite and eventually formulate one's own point of view or respond to prejudices that stultify oneself. It is in this sense that the need for theory becomes a reality because our perception of the world in which we live is determined by our own culture, environment and the ideology prevalent therein. Discourse on "identity" has been the major focus of contemporary scholarship in colonised spaces all over the world. Their identity has been given to them by the coloniser in relation to his/ her hegemonic views. The colonised live in cultures, families, and communities with certain values they inherit. But in order to figure out who they are, they have to revisit those inherited values, and decide for themselves what to believe in or what to value in their attempt to debunk false

images in their quest for humanity. The aspects of the schools are not only found in literature, politics and history, but also in approaches to ideology, culture and identity. Furthermore, it extends its agenda to the question of identities, ideologies and cultures acting as an inevitable aftermath of the former colonial age. Indeed, culture, ideology and identity have always been dominant preoccupations of postcolonial writers. Postcolonial theory is an interdisciplinary field of study which fuses a set of other postmodern theories found among such texts as well as sub-texts of literature, philosophy and political science. As an intellectual literary movement, post-colonialism emerged around the close of the 20th century. As a matter of fact, many scholars relate its birth to the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978. The beginning of the school was characterized by its vigorous concentration on the cruelty of the colonizer and the pathetic state of the masses upon whom Europeans practiced their philosophy of violence.

Today, many scholars of post-colonial studies have been largely unanimous that many aspects of colonialism are hostile to the colonized and have for that matter debased them to a subhuman level, hence the need of an effective theoretical paradigm shift. Therefore, a postcolonial critic or theorist is much more interested in the fictional works of Daniel Defoe, Joseph Conrad, and Joyce Carry. These writers' colonial agenda consider the non-European characters they featured in their discourse as a standard of savagery to which European characters are contrasted. Post colonial criticism takes the form of literature composed by authors who critique Eurocentric hegemony in their attempt to debunk false allegations, descriptions and representations. The "self" contains elements that separate one person from the "other" and the roles one is supposed to play in a given society. All these are dictated by Europeans who force non-Europeans to internalise their hegemonic views. In the process, "selfhood", that is, the uniqueness and individuality of non-Europeans, is altered. Thus, this paper discusses the restoration and redefinition of the identity of the colonized as was given to them by Eurocentric's and its relevance to the promotion of their own identity. This way of correcting misconception about culture in relation to the question of identity considers culture as a way of life of a people and is made up of customs, beliefs, behaviour, dress, language which may vary from one society to another. It deals with post colonialism and the process of its unfolding and as well; tries to answer the questions that constitute its essence, providing the reader with its general definitions, its *raison d'être* as an identity and its development in colonised Third World countries by illustrating some background knowledge of its landmarks.

## 2. COLONIAL DISCOURSES AND THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY

Drawing on Foucault's discourse theory, Ashcroft et al. define colonial discourse as :

[...] the system by which dominant groups in society constitute the field of truth by imposing specific knowledges, disciplines and values upon dominated groups. As a social formation it works to constitute reality not only for the objects it appears to represent but also for the subjects who form the community on which it depends. Consequently, colonial discourse is a complex of signs and practices that organize social existence and social reproduction within colonial relationships. (Ashcroft et al. 2007, p. 37)

As a matter of fact, the imperialistic agenda of the colonizer strengthened binary oppositions like civilized/primitive, human/bestial and good/evil which set European cultures in an inherently dominant position over the cultures of the African tribes under colonial submission. Such grotesque manipulation of representations allowed for an utter negation of the existence

of the human values in pre-colonial African societies. This insight putatively rendered the process of colonial conquest and subjugation of people legitimate as it was performed under the guise of the noble mission of civilizing the cultureless, scarcely human, imperial subjects. The internalization of these false and destructive colonial representations by colonial subjects required a mental reshaping of natives' pre-colonial identity in the post-independence period. It is believed that throughout history, the demand for national independence had gone hand in hand with cultural survival (Wauthier, 1978; p. 18). One of the most striking causes leading to this trend is found in the question of race. "Race" has been used during the contact between Imperial Europe and the rest of the world as a serious criterion to distinguish between themselves and human populations all over the world. In this case, it was taken to suggest that differences in culture and social status are the product of biologically based differences among major ethnic or racial groups. This point of prejudiced differentiation as advocated by colonizing powers derives its power from supposed natural and physical traits, which unfortunately, lead to the dramatic idea of racial superiority. This was carefully and thoroughly elaborated or theorized to the point that it influenced economic and political decisions based on the way of classification human groups. Thus, groups within a society were classified in binaries or better assigned roles of domination and submission. This fanciful notion has been used to determine the so-called racial capacities, hence the birth of white supremacy over the rest of the races. The myth of white superiority developed in the process of European occupation and the construction of modern nations; a process which generated the sense of a superior who rules, in contrast, with the inferior masses who are ruled. In other words, the 'leaders' and the 'led', the 'conqueror' and the 'conquered'. This concept of master-servant society can be traced as far back as the beginning of the Christian period, i.e. during the Middle Ages where the concept of whiteness found its legacy; whiteness is contrasted with darkness. While whiteness connotes Christian purity and perfection, the other skin colours represent darkness with negative values of inferiority. Colonial expansion originally determined and is differentiated by their economic positions as tenants, merchants, or owners, the statuses of the colonizers became automatically associated with the white race. Race was theorized as the basis of natural law, and the so-called scientific reasoning was applied to the understanding of physical differences. From then onward, race was increasingly defined by such differences in physical traits and convincingly included those of language, customs, behaviour, and aptitude for civilization. The idea of racism, as it developed over time, posits that white superiority was clearly not a biological question of differences but a social construction needed to maintain dominance owing to the increasingly dominant presence of Europeans. This justifies, to a greater extent, the unfounded belief that whites have inherited a superiority that allows them to rule over inferior and uncivilized people who badly needed a master's hand to find the path of Christianity.

Today, Third World historians, anthropologists, sociologists, writers, scholars, ethnologists, etc., have come to terms with the fact that this idea of racial superiority has brought about profound changes and has even altered, to a greater extent, the European concept of humankind. In their struggle, they unite to revitalize the soul of their people by forging a national language, and committed to writing their own history from their own perspective; thus challenging Western hegemonic (Colonial) discourses forming the intersections where language and power meet. In fact, language is more than simply a means of communication for it constitutes our worldview by cutting up and ordering reality into meaningful units. The meanings we attach to things often tell us which values we consider important and how we learn to differentiate between superior and inferior qualities. In this sense, language does not passively reflect reality; it also goes a long way towards creating a person who understands

their own world and as well houses the values through which we live our lives. Unfortunately, under colonialism, colonized people are made subservient to ways of regarding the world which reflect and support colonialist values. The value system of the colonizing power is taught as the best and truest worldview to be adopted if one wishes to be accepted in the mainstream of *Enlightenment*. The cultural value of the colonized people is deemed as lacking in value, or even as being “uncivilized” and “barbaric”, from which they must be rescued. The Empire uses wherever necessary military and political force to get both colonizing and colonized people to see their world and themselves in a particular way, thus internalizing the language of the Empire as representing the natural true order of life. The internalization of colonial sets of values constitutes an effective way of disempowering people and was a source of trauma for the colonized. During the colonial period they were taught or made to look negatively upon their own people, their own culture and themselves. It was not till the 1950s that emerged much important work that attempted to record the psychological damage suffered by the colonized who internalized unconditionally these colonial discourses. Prominent among all these was the psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, who wrote widely and passionately about the damage French colonialism had wreaked upon millions of people who suffered under its power. In his essays, he carefully examined the psychological effects of colonialism, its mechanisms and its effects on those it ensnared.

From this standpoint, we may say that these theories of colonial prejudice have been fundamental to the development of post colonialism as an academic practice. They explore the ways representations and the modes of perception are used as fundamental weapons of colonial power to keep the colonized peoples subservient to colonial rule. Colonialism is perpetuated in part by justifying to those in the colonizing nation the idea that it is right and proper to rule over other peoples, and by getting the colonized people to accept their lower ranking in the colonial order of things, a process the Kenyan literary theorist, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, termed “colonizing the mind”. For him, colonialism establishes ways of thinking and operates by persuading people to internalize its logic and speak its language on the one hand and to perpetuate the values and assumptions of the colonizers regarding the ways they perceive and represent the world on the other. Theories of colonial discourse call attention to the role that representation plays in getting people to succumb to particular ways of thinking. It should be emphasized that colonial discourse created an identity of the colonized in relation to itself. Writers from colonized countries accused the West of viewing matters wholly through their own culturally determined and often limited historical perspectives. The social and literary evolution of contemporary Africa or former colonised spaces is characterized by the affirmation of new voices from indigenous peoples. In fact, no critical issue has influenced so much the theory and practice of African literary studies than the issue of using a foreign language to express one’s own concern. Initially confined to the analysis of literature, culture and identity, the choice of a foreign language like English, French or Spanish, inherited from colonialism, has been the centre of debate in modern African literature. In its endeavour, it sheds light on the position of the colonial language in African literature and as well captures some evidences and reasonable arguments from the literary works of contemporary writers.

Theoretical discussions on African literature have focused on many issues, especially that of language. The role languages should play have included questions of whether foreign language is relevant to expressing one’s views in a ‘borrowed language’ or theories or what direction it would take, if adopted uncritically. While common sense alone is not enough to interpret or analyse literary works produced by Third World Countries, theory, in its essence, allows us to explain it thoroughly; but whose theory are we using? Chidi Amuta (1989) notes that one of the consequences of globalisation is the creation of a global academic terrain

characterised by ‘producers’ and ‘consumers’ of hegemonic theory imposed on once colonised spaces. These, he says, are further characterised by different ways of practising theoretical practices and by different purposes and objectives in those practices. Some writers from these spaces, are outwitting the coloniser and thus puts him in the position of superiorization. But both Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong’o suggest that there is an urgent need to situate local epistemologies, approaches and experiences at the centre of Africans theorising to make sense of the existence of Africa and its past. It is only in this way that African literature can make the sense of African material culture in creating their own theories. Leading scholars in literary theory or criticism have asked where adopting hegemonic theory is going and what shape it will take in the future if we continue using them? For formerly colonised spaces, we specifically need to ask how literary theory interacts with changes in practice, political and social circumstances. Who should drive the change and what intellectual traditions are likely to emerge in the process? Plausible, laudable, fruitful and reliable new approaches underline their dissatisfaction with previous eurocentric approaches and their social construction. European literary tradition, for example, is strongly and firmly rooted in modernity, and its philosophical thrusts developed exclusively in the previous formative centuries of the discipline. Chidi Amuta suggested that we should no longer borrow interpretive approaches that are grounded in modernity to understand what is different from our own. The language of the past and, by extension, the construction of knowledge of Africa’s past should instead use new approaches to tell the story of the past of Africa (see Chiweizu et al. 1980). Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1993, 1989) observed that the language and the accessibility of publications in literary studies are fundamental. In that context, what could writers in Africa do to address the language and access needs of the public? Literary research in Africa is no longer simply an exercise in knowledge production. It should also be about the negotiation of such knowledge with local and indigenous communities. Although critical in setting new directions in literature, such a dialogue has been missing in literary studies and practice in Africa. This should not spell the end of literary theory, as some have suggested, but will change its course (Amuta, 1989).

### 3. CONSTRUCTING AND DEFINING IDENTITY

Nowadays the word “identity” has come to mean many things to many people. This complicated concept needs to be circumscribed in this paper before we make an attempt to claim our own “identity” as had been socially constructed either by ourselves or by other people in terms of racial prejudice. This has become a challenging and an exciting field of study. To start, our definition will follow the concept developed by the psychologist Erik Erikson (1950) in which the word identity refers to either (a) a social category defined by membership rules and (alleged) characteristic attributes or expected behaviors, or (b) socially distinguishing features that a person takes a special pride in or views as unchangeable but socially consequential or (a) and (b) at once). In the latter sense (b), which will suit this discussion, “identity” is a modern formulation of dignity, pride, or honour that implicitly links these two different social categories in terms of national, ethnic, gender, and state identities. In the context of this work, I may say the ongoing statement is more cognitive and provides us with the appropriate sense that can help us ponder the sense of identity. Thus, I can argue that this allows me to better understand how an “identity” can help explain political, cultural and social contradictions, actions, and language analysis as an essential tool in clarifying this concept which has strong roots in everyday speech. In fact, political scientists have always argued on this question of identity in terms of gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, and culture in relation to liberalism and its alternatives (Young 1990; Connolly 1991; Kymlicka 1995; Miller 1995; Taylor 1989). Given the centrality of the concept to so much recent research, I take

“identity” to label two opposing groups; one which is a social category of people marked by a label and distinguished by rules deciding membership and another group of people, an alleged characteristic features or attributes where personal identity suggests that a person takes a special pride in or views as socially consequential to the sources of an individual's self-respect or dignity.

From these considerations, the question of identity (who am I?), is important to all the people from the colonized world; specifically, countries that have been colonized. The identity given to them by the colonizer has been altered, degraded and denied them humanity. In the colonial context, the “identity” of the colonized is defined in negative terms by those in position of power. The colonized is forced to see himself not as a human subject but according to myths inculcated to him during schooling, with his own wants and needs; but as an object--a peculiarity at the mercy of a group that “identifies” him as inferior and less than fully human, subservient to their definitions and representations (McLeod 2002:21). This has been fully illustrated by Frantz Fanon (1952). As a French national and because of the colour of his skin the identity the coloniser made for him made him feel “abbreviated, violated, and imprisoned by a way of amputation” (McLeod, 2010:23). For him, identity made for him splits his very sense of self and the power of such description, of naming, and its internalization can be found in the relationship between language and him. Fanon (1952) explains the consequences of identity formation for the colonized subject who is forced into internalization of the self as the “other”. In the context of naming, the black man is deemed to epitomize everything that the colonizing French are not. The colonizers are civilized, rational, and intelligent, while the Negro remains the other to all these qualities against which colonizing peoples derive their sense of superiority and normality.

Fanon’s book explores the consequences for the colonized, who are doomed to hold a traumatic belief in their inferiority. One immediate response to such trauma is to strive to escape ‘it’ by embracing the “civilized” ideals of the colonial motherland. But however hard the colonized tried to accept the education, values and language of the colonizing country to don the white mask of civilization that will cover up the “uncivilized” nature indexed by their black skins; they are never accepted on equal terms. In fact, in Fanon’s contact with the whites or the white world, which he calls “the only honourable one”, he was barred from all active participation in human activities. Normally as a man he was supposed to behave like a man; rather, he was expected by the whites to behave like a black man. This imaginative distinction which differentiates between “man” (self) with “black man” (other) is an important devastating part of the armoury of colonial domination, that which imprisons the mind as securely as chains imprison the body. All these processes have their roots in a kind of system which advocates the destruction of indigenous belief systems, languages, and economics. This continues today to survive as serious weapons of domination in the world, thus creating the first, second and third worlds. Having trained in France as psychiatrist, Frantz Fanon a Black native of the Martinique experiences all these during his studies. This stands as a bitter experience of racism as a “black” Frenchman in the French society he lives; and this subsequently makes him feel a kind of disconnection between himself and his own personality. In fact, it is his working experience in the third world, mostly Africa, which has fostered his re-examination of “racism” and “colonialism” to the point of enabling him to comprehend and understand his own humanity and personality. In his works *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and *Black Skin White Masks* (1967), he tries as much as possible to reveal the ugly face of the binary world, thought and philosophy which is based on racial prejudice created by the colonizer. This has had an important psychological impact on him. With these books, he calls for a radical and violent

overthrow of the racism inherent explicitly in colonialism and imperialism. These books, to my mind, provided the fire that initiated what I think became today post-colonial studies or theory at the disposal of academics and writers. Both seminal works considered by many critics as ‘cardinal axioms’, looked deeply and critically into the white supremacist prejudiced ideology. Fanon’s writing and thought have produced what is believed to be one of the first Third World academic books on post-colonial studies; with the aim of educating his fellow citizens by inculcating national pride and moral values in their literary and art productions as part of their duties as human beings. This sparked off the quest for post-colonial literary aesthetics. This reform was based on the reaffirmation of indigenous history, tradition and culture that could have only been done by confronting the colonial discourse and subverting the dominant image of Africa, both at home and abroad. Ashcroft et al. state that a post-colonial writer is essentially an “ethnographer whose cultural location ‘creates’ two audiences and as well faces two directions wishing to reconstitute experience through an act of writing which uses the tools of one culture and society [those of the colonizer] and yet seeks to remain faithful to the experience of another [that of the colonized]” (Ashcroft et al. 2002, p. 59). Since the colonizer’s language was the medium of imperial oppression, it was only natural for post-colonial writers to employ it in their mission of alleviating the consequences of its misuse. But, not surprisingly, there is a debate among the post-colonial writers and literary scholars as to which language should be used to form a “counter-discourse” that would challenge the misrepresentations of the colonial discourse. One of the fiercest advocates of returning to indigenous languages as the primary medium of post-colonial literary production is the recognized Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong’o, who promotes this model of ‘decolonization’ because it supposedly discontinues the power relations with the former colonizer and makes the native literary works accessible first and foremost to people in a post-colonial writer’s community. In other words, Ngugi wa Thiong’o and his supporters believe that the use of indigenous languages “can [...] form a more effective bridge to the bulk of the population whose lives have continued to be conducted largely in their mother tongues” (Ashcroft et al. 2007, p. 57). Chinua Achebe, however, had a different vision of articulating Igbo social and cultural identity. The writer opted for the appropriation of the English language believing that the mentioned language, at the same time native and foreign to his compatriots, is unquestionably apt to “bear the burden of another experience” (qtd. in Ashcroft et al. 2007, p. 16).

#### **4. POST COLONIALISM: IDENTITY, ASSIMILATION AND THE IMPERIAL LANGUAGE**

Postcolonial criticism has embraced a number of aims: most fundamentally, to reexamine the history of colonialism from the perspective of the colonized; to determine the economic, political, and cultural impact of colonialism on both the colonized peoples and the colonizing powers; to analyse the process of decolonization; and above all to participate in the goals of political liberation, which includes equal access to material resources, the contestation of forms of domination, and the articulation of political and cultural identities. (Young, 2001, p.11).

Postcolonial theory is born on the one hand out of the colonized peoples’ frustrations, their direct and personal cultural clashes with the conquering culture and on the other their fears, hopes, and dreams about the future and their own identities. In this context, postcolonial theory comes into existence to empower and stimulate the colonized people to think and to write about their oppression and loss of cultural identity. Thus, the colonized respond to changes in issues like language, curricular matters in education, race differences, economic issues, morals, ethics and even the act of writing itself which becomes the context for the evolving theories and

practice of post colonialism. Postcolonial theory, as have seen, is an interdisciplinary field of study fusing set of other postmodern theories found among the texts and sub-texts of literature, philosophy and political science. As an intellectual literary movement, post-colonialism emerged around the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, most scholars relate its birth to the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978. The beginning of this school was characterized by its vigorous concentration on the cruelty of the colonizer and the pathetic state of the masses upon whom Europeans practiced their philosophy of violence. In the recent past, the schools' aspects have been extended to fields like literature, politics, history, culture and identity as well as approaches to ideology. Furthermore, the peak of postcolonialism is the violent clash of identities, ideologies and cultures as inevitable aftermaths of the former colonial age. Indeed, culture, ideology and identity have always been dominant concerns or preoccupations of the postcolonial writers. The question of language choice in postcolonial literature is controversial and has always caused a significant center of debate in literary criticism. Certainly, language and empire have always gone together as colonial powers were interested in increasing their own political interests and exploiting the colonies' resources. Moreover, they forced the natives to give up their cultural heritage and assimilate the colonizer's culture. This cultural colonization was meant to manipulate the colonized minds. In British colonies, the colonized had to convert to the Christian religion, adopt English language while studying William Shakespeare and other canonical texts; English literature written from English perspective was a compulsory.

From the foregoing, post-colonial literary theory or criticism includes discussions about a whole spectrum of experiences such as migration, representation, resistance, gender, and race. These are compiled in a variety of responses to hegemonic and prejudiced discourses such as history, philosophy, literature and art produced by the "coloniser", who has created, advocated, and imposed on the "colonised" a long tradition of false, persistent prejudice, and romanticised images of the latter in his/her own hegemonic structures of thought. This has served for a long time as an implicit justification of the coloniser's ethics and ideals. In this ruinous and denigrating context, post-colonial literary theory or criticism aims at rethinking, re-reading, and rewriting the coloniser's view of the colonised and the binary world s/he creates, combats and denounces the practice of those colonised who, mistakenly, internalized the coloniser's ideas and conception of their own culture, literature, philosophy and history. Thus, post-colonial criticism is a type of cultural criticism, as was said earlier, which usually involves an analysis of literary texts and other cultural discourses that emerged after the end of the colonial period produced in countries and cultures that have come under the control of European colonial powers at some point or time in their history. In other words, it investigates carefully the relationship between colonizers and the colonized in the post-colonial period. Alternatively, it can refer to the analysis of texts written about colonized places and people by writers hailing from the colonizing culture. For instance, academics and writers from these countries offer to contemplate, analyze and reflect upon the colonial conception of the colonized which is based on supremacist arrogance on racism. In my opinion, I think that this theory or criticism is an evolving and contentious field of study which gives way to the idea that recognizes that not all post colonialists are on the same page when it comes to the theoretical definition or practice of the postcolonial paradigm. While some academics or critics believe that it is an incoherent and insignificant theory which even gives much power to the colonizer and endows him with all the abilities to re-colonize them, others hold a contrary view. They believe that this theory is "hotbeds" for radicals to push stereotypical philosophical, social, political, and economic thought and belief inherited either from colonialism or slavery toward change so as to restore to the colonized their own "self". Many others consider the field as an uncritical condemnation

of the colonizer, his/her values and culture. In the context of identity, the concerns of post colonialism<sup>1</sup> are manifold and include universality, difference, nationalism, postmodernism, representation, resistance, ethnicity, feminism, language, education, history, place, and production. But since the people of the Third World have been removed from history, its major concern is the struggle that occurs when one culture is dominated by another. As the tenants of postcolonial critics point out, to be colonized is “to be removed from history”. In its interaction with the conquering culture, the colonized peoples’ culture is forced to be obliterated owing to myths. In this sense, post colonialism assumes that since different cultures have been in the process subverted, conquered, and removed from history, they have to respond to the conquering culture in diverse ways and no single approach to postcolonial theory and practice is possible. Post colonialists seek to empower the colonized people who have been stripped of power, dignity, and self-worth, and marginalized. As an intellectual artifact, post colonialism came into being during the period after colonialism and aims at changing the minds, and disrupting with dominant ways of thinking in its attempt to create or recover the colonised lost identity. To a greater extent, it tries as much as possible to question the very foundation of the identity of the colonising and the colonised countries as was given to them by the colonial power. Its fundamentals are the total deconstruction of old-fashioned perceptions and attitudes of power and oppression invented by Western hegemonic literature. In this case, post-colonial critics are much more concerned with both literatures produced by colonising powers and works produced by the colonized. Post-colonial theory, in all its articulations, looks at issues of power, economics, politics, religion, and culture and how these elements work to reinforce colonial hegemony. In the process, it also questions the role played by western literary canon and western history as dominant forms of knowledge making. The terms “first-world”, “second world”, “third world” and “fourth world” nations invented by western hegemonic discourse are questioned by post-colonial critics because they contribute to reinforce the dominant positions of western cultures and confers them first world status and consider Europe as the center of civilization. This critique includes the literary canon and histories written from the perspective of first-world cultures. So, for example, a post-colonial critic might question the works which reflect Western canon. A new generation of talented writers and influential theorists like Edward Wadie Said, Homi Bhabha, Sara Suleri, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Aimé Cesaire, just to mention a few, have decided to use the tools acquired through their encounter with the West to decode the deep-seated images of colonial representation and, subsequently, re-code new images of the “self” so as to escape stultification in their attempt to re-read canonical Western or European texts and cultural values. Owing to their commitment, they have become some of the major figures who have made significant, fruitful and numerous suggestions and contributions as well to post colonialist criticism or theory and to its theorization. Thus motivated, Chinua Achebe, Gabriel Okara, Aimé Cesaire et al set off to overcome the negative and stereotypical image of the “self” as constructed by the “Other”, and to restore to their own people their confidence in themselves and in their way of life. Hence, Achebe’s declared aim as a creative writer is to, “teach [his] readers that their past—with all its imperfections—was not one long night of savagery from which the first European, acting on God’s behalf, delivered them” (1975, p. 72). In *Orientalism*, Edward Waldie Said carefully

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<sup>1</sup> Postcolonialism (or post-colonialism—either spelling is acceptable, but each represents slightly different theoretical assumptions) consists of a set of theories in philosophy and various approaches to literary analysis that are concerned with literature written in English in countries that were colonies of other countries. Postcolonial studies concentrate on writings from colonized or formerly colonized cultures in Australia, New Zealand, Africa, South America, and other places that were once dominated by European cultural, political, and philosophical tradition.

explains that: "...my hope is to illustrate the formidable structure of cultural domination and, specifically for formerly colonized peoples, the dangers and temptations of employing this structure upon themselves or upon others" (1970, p. 25). Edward Waldie Said, who often refer himself to a "Christian wrapped in a Muslim culture", is a literary theorist and cultural critic whose ideas and findings have also influenced scholars such as Gyan Prakash, Nicholas Dirks, Roland Inden and literary theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Hamid Dabashi, Gayatri Spivak, etc. The message of his *Orientalism* has had powerful, profound, and transformative influence across human spectrum all over the West as he carefully theorizes many points raised by many third world critics. Both Fanon's and Said's arguments have had an important impact on the fields of both literary and cultural studies, human geography and history. Edward Said, the Palestinian literary theorist, is generally acknowledged as having paved the path or inaugurated the field of explicitly "Post colonial Criticism" in Western countries. The substance of his argument is that the concept of the "Orient" was just produced by the "imaginative geography" of Western scholarship which has nonetheless contributed a lot to the colonization and domination of other non-Western countries. In fact, the emergence of post-colonial literatures by the middle of the last century was preceded and accompanied by the spirit of national liberation and enlightenment that demanded swift and total decolonization. Political decolonization was all attained; but the independence of political entities hardly presupposed the "decolonization" of former colonial subjects' psychology. Reason behind such factuality was the irrevocable predominance of the colonizer's language that still served its purpose of creating a coherent mass of communicators within a multilingual society, as it had been at the time it was imposed upon the colonized. Despite doubtlessly heterogeneous nature of the means of subjugation, language was the European colonizer's primary tool for achieving and perpetuating his political dominance. By wielding the power of representation in his hands, the British used the English language for instilling in the minds of the colonial subjects false representations about themselves – representations which were essentially supporting the western conception of African people as inherently inferior to their European masters. The native's notions about their identity and culture were shaped within the colonial discourse, which operated on an imperial agenda that only sought to legitimize European claims on authority over indigenous peoples.

##### **5. THE TREND OF SEMINAL LITERARY MINDS: THEORISING DIFFERENCE**

Some seventeen years after the publication of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Edward Said, again focuses on the unhappy way in which the colonizing "First World" has invented false images and myths of the "Third World" which has come to be known as the postcolonial—stereotypical images and myths that have, hitherto, conveniently and totally justified Western exploitation and domination of Eastern and Middle Eastern and African cultures and peoples. In this, Edward Said examines carefully the notions of what he calls "Orientalism" which in the view of the colonized means the "different", the "exotic", the "mysterious" and the "less civilized" with all its colorations of racism as it appears in literature and culture. Accordingly, post-colonialists' works cannot only be seen as an attempt to articulate a history of "loss" and of "dispossession" but also as an effort to uncover the longstanding and varied geographical obsession with which Europe uses to define itself by being its opposite so as to combat those representations and open up new galaxies of ideas and create new literary spheres which vehemently refute the "assimilated identity offered them by their Western literary education". Post-colonial writers and critics in this context bear their past within themselves as scars of humiliation and denigration. It should be emphasized that during the period of colonization, European texts were premised on the silence of the indigenous or

native people and the arts and disciplines of representation dependent on the powers of Europe to bring the non-European world into representation, and better to be able “to see it, to master it, and, above all, to hold it” and this has been observed by Robert Young (2001, p. 11):

Postcolonial literature derives its inspiration from the anti-colonial struggles of the colonial era which stressed the need to develop or even return to indigenous literary tradition in order to exorcise their cultural heritage of the specters of the imperial and colonial domination.

In other words, this means the tenants and defenders of this new paradigm have to begin to dig into the depth of the tradition of their forefathers and to theorize about their own discourses. Europe has dominated Africa, Asia and the East politically, culturally, and economically to such an extent that Western texts on these areas are all permeated with a strong exploration and interpretation of hegemonic languages, history and culture appropriated for themselves. The West has thus written the past and history of these colonized countries and constructed its modern images and identities from a perspective that takes Europe as the “norm and the center” from which these exotic countries deviate. Post colonialists believe that Western hegemonic writings about the colony (and the colonized) depict it as an irrational, weak and feminized “other” as opposed to the rational, strong masculine West or “self”. In their attempt to understand the ideological subtext which hegemonic discourse, like any other critical theory, reflects and embodies on the one hand and the relation the subtext bears to the production of meaning on the other, they have in the process challenged not only hierarchical and binary oppositions such as West/East and North/South but also the notions of superiority associated with the first term or concept behind of each opposition. From this discussion, it goes without saying that post-colonial literature is a body of writing that represents a conglomerate of national literatures of the societies which were formerly under the colonial rule of European imperial powers such as Britain, France, Spain or Portugal. Writings of post-colonial authors, although distinct in their regional flavour, have all, “emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial, power and by emphasizing their differences from the imperial centre” (Ashcroft et al. 2007, p. 2). These oppressive, incentive and alienative ideas have been part of the conventional Eurocentric canons of literature and philosophy which were offered to the first non-European students in Third World countries or Europe during colonialism. In the process of education, they have not only been brainwashed but have also been taught to master the master’s “tools” and to outwit unquestionably their racist master if they were to be considered emancipated. This state of affairs has put the colonized in the position of dependence and of indentured servants to Europeans and mostly to Western tradition. So, the colonized work is:

“only an imitation of a foreign type and do not reflect [his] morals, manners, politics, or religion, not even [his] rivers, mountains, sky. They have not the smell of [his] ground in their breath”.

Alexander Crummel (as quoted by Gates, 2000, p.176) suggests that Western economic and political subjugation has inflicted upon us, Third World people, an ardent and willing desire to imitate, to please, to refashion our public discursive images of our...selves after that of the colonizer” and pushes us to be recognized. In an interview in the 1994-95 issue of *The Paris Review*, Chinua Achebe states that he became a writer in order to tell his story and the story of his people from his own viewpoint and believes that it is high time the colonized began to do this in his own tradition in turning to his own vernacular so as to redefine theory itself in refusing to grant credit to the racist premise that “theory” or “tradition” is something that is white-centered or a Western artifact which the colonized is doomed to copy off or imitate consciously or unconsciously. The picture given to Achebe during his schooldays about his own

people within the structure of the colonial power and which has been for many years unchallenged in both the Western minds and African minds was confounding and stultifying ! An image of a monolithic, cultureless African continent which is inhabited by barbarian tribes in a desperate need of a kind of enlightenment that only a civilized white Europeans could provide. Compelled by the necessity to offer a truthful, more complex history of his own people, he crafted relevant novels which act as a gem of postcolonial literature. They not only convey an unambiguously didactic message, which helps reinstating self-respect and self-acknowledgement in his compatriots and keeps rebuffing prejudices about Africans to this day. Using the most sophisticated critical theories and methods at his disposal, Chinua Achebe intends to reappropriate and redefine his own colonial discourse by explaining the danger of not having one's own stories through the following Igbo proverb: "until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter." In *Writers in Politics* (1997) another African creative writer and literary theorist, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, observes that "whenever a people's culture is controlled by others, those people will be seeing and evaluating their material reality, their economic reality, through the distorting focus of borrowed glasses. The result would often be a blurred vision". In his 1992 essay entitled, "Postcolonial Criticism", Homi K. Bhabha, another literary theorist from the Third World has demonstrated and shown how certain cultures (mis)represent other cultures, thereby extending their political and social domination in the modern world order and has for that matter vehemently questioned in this essay the binary thought that gives the West its foundations to justify its practices. Postcolonial studies, a type of cultural studies have an obvious historical relationship with "Post Colonial Criticism" in the sense that it refers more broadly to the study of cultural groups, practices, and discourses in the colonized world. Bhabha's central argument is that, throughout history, such factors as race, class, gender, nationality, religion, and ethnicity have been determinants in our lifestyles, behaviour and comportment toward others, and our thinking patterns. Homi Bhabha, just like Edward Said and many others have been exposed to the conflicts and congruencies of culture that characterize both colonized and colonizing peoples. As its name implies, postcolonial criticism refers to the period following the partial demise of colonialism. Although the term refers to the period after colonialism, Bhabha's and others' notion of post coloniality encompasses more than all that and has had an impact even on peoples who have never been colonized. As a critical approach, it concerns a collection of theoretical and critical strategies used to examine culture, literature, politics, and history of former colonies of the European empires, and their relation to the rest of the world. One of the many challenges facing postcolonial writers is the resurrection of their culture and, to a greater extent, debunking false preconceptions about their culture; it is therefore a discourse of resistance the aim of which is to counter the influence European languages and culture exert and continue to exert on Third World languages, literature, and political thought. The relationship between literary canon and cultural values are such that writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o have written articles with poignant titles as "On the Abolition of English Department"(1968) and "Decolonising the Mind" (1986) which advocates writing and theorising in African dialects which will enable them to reflect authenticity; thereby, rendering their cultural situation and experience in this local expression instead of allowing hegemonic literary tradition and language to continue acting as a foundation and norm of value in the literary field. Ngugi had asked in the former article, written together with Taban lo Liyong and Henry Owuor-Anyumba,

"If there is need for a 'study of the historic continuity of a single culture', why can't this be African? Why can't African literature be at the centre so that we can view other cultures in relationship to it?"

Acknowledging the influence of European literatures on African writing, Ngugi and his coauthors emphasized the importance of the oral tradition, Swahili literature, and the Caribbean novel and poetry. In fact, the West controls and shapes other cultures and their ways of thinking, defines the East and Africa as its Other(s), and constitutes their identities in opposition to both the East and Africa and; consequently, the knowledge the West produces about the East and Africa will/has become a tool for both of them to understand their own identities in the form of “self-colonization”.

## 6. SUBVERSIVE MIMICRY: LOOKING THROUGH A BLURRED VISION

Self-colonization in this sense becomes a reality when the colonized attempt to outwit the European by trying to speak and write his language as fluently as he does. In so doing he succumbs to the lure of Western hegemony, empowering language and critical theory considered as “universal”. Edward Said, as was said earlier, argues that the concept of the “Orient” or the “Other” as opposed to the “West” or “Self” as an imaginary geography has, for instance, been constructed to facilitate or ease the domination of other countries in an attempt to impose its own terms of trade, political ideals, and language and, for that matter, its cultural patterns on the colonised. Post colonial literature and criticism arose in this context and tries to reverse the historical binary thinking, i.e., center/margin, civilized/uncivilized, First and Third Worlds dichotomies by which the West finds justification and its *raison d’être*. In this perspective, a question of representation arises. How is the East represented in the West? Or the West in the East? These are questions that have constituted a center of debate in the 90s and tried to reject the claims to “universalism” as is made on the behalf of Western canonical literature. For instance, Chinua Achebe rejects the Western notion of “art for its own sake” in essays he has published between 1975 and 1980. Instead, he embraces the conception of art at the heart of African oral traditions and values: “art is, and always was, at the service of man,” Achebe has seriously written. “Our ancestors created their myths and told their stories with a human purpose”, hence, “any good story, any good novel, should have a message, should have a purpose.” The human purpose and message of his famous novel, *Things Fall Apart* is without appeal and opposed colonial texts which refuse to grant Africans characters humanity. The Western critical theory has a canon, as the Western literary tradition does. Those who think that Africans’ task is to master this canon of criticism, to imitate and apply it to the full run the risk of being colonised, i.e., self-colonisation. The fact of the matter is that Africa is for Africans and Europe for Europeans. Africa, Latin America and Asia have had experiences that are peculiar to them and must not make the mistake of allowing Europeans to give to the rest of the world their own picture. For instance, Africans have to turn to black tradition itself to develop theories of criticism indigenous to their literatures. Achebe’s revision of Joseph Conrad’s and Joyce Carry’s text’s parable of white interpretation and representation of Africa and Africans makes this point clear and tellingly. It has been argued that literature is the use of language to organize human life and the culture which acts as a guide to his life. This organised human life through literary art draws on models, codes, principles, and traditions which have been previously established by the tenants of literature as a written form since the novel form of depicting human life and his/her cultural patterns is an invention of the West. Fundamentally, the production of written literature itself is the result of influence from other art forms of the same genre.

In this case, if we see life in general, and cultures in particular, as a reproduction of the past as post colonialists contend, then the present cultural modes and behaviours are determiners of human productivity. In many cases, art in general is an inheritance from older generation in all its forms, characteristics or articulations. In this sense, writing a novel compels

the writer to conform to a certain number of regulations which are not optional, but rather the very characteristics of the art form chosen. For example, the novel form of a story telling is from the West; and writing a novel compels the writer to a number of regulations which are not optional; but rather the very characteristics of the art form chosen. Achebe's example in African literature is frequently given as a reception of that art from the West and inspired, as said earlier, by Joyce Carrey's *Mr Johnson* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In the light of all that has been said so far, Eurocentric believe that non-canonical critics, Africans or Third World critics to be precise, need the most sophisticated critical theories and methods available to redefine their own postcolonial discourses. Some non-Western academics internalise this idea to the extent of emulating the supposedly superior European civilisations thinking that it is normal doing so far as these theories and methods are relevant to the study of post-colonial literatures. This is what I call "self colonisation" or better "recolonisation" and pushes the critic or the theorist or the writer to think that only Europeans can do thinks for the rest of the World and for himself.

Classical Third World critics and theorists like Wole Soyinka and Lewis Nkosi, are of the view that since the African novel is an imported art, it has indices that can enable it to be put in the western mainstream tradition, i.e., western modes of analysis or critical tools. Scholars like Anthony Appiah, Toni Morrison, and Henry Louis Gates have recently brought attention to the dangerous problems inherent in applying the theoretical modes derived from Hegemonic or Eurocentric paradigms to Third World literature while at the same time trying to explore new interpretative strategies for understanding the vernacular traditions of racial groups that have historically suffered from marginalisation by the same dominant culture. As far as the question of identity is concerned, the Ghanaian theorist Anthony Appiah suggests that Africans must not ask the "reader to understand Africa by embedding it in European Culture" and believes that, "it is not necessary to show that African literature is fundamentally the same as European literature in order to show that it can be treated with the same tools..." To him, Ayi Kwei Armah and many others, the postcolonial legacy requires us to show that African literature is worthy of study precisely; but not only because it is fundamentally the same as European literature." If literary theory is considered as a body of ideas and methods we use in practical reading of literature, it goes without saying that it offers varying approaches for understanding the historical contexts in the interpretation as well as the relevance of linguistic and unconscious elements of the text and consequently needs adapted appropriate underlying principles or tools to explain the degree to which the text is more a product of a culture rather than an individual author and work to show how a text help create the culture of its origin. To my mind, I think that to avoid self colonisation, the concern of the Third World Critic should be to determine how critical methods can effectively disclose the traces of ethnic differences in literature. In this sense, they must analyse the ways in which writing relates to race, how attitudes toward racial difference generate and structure literary texts by Africans about Africans and Europeans about Africans.

To successfully reach this conclusion, the Third World theorist and critic should analyse the language of hegemonic criticism itself, bearing in mind that hermeneutic systems are not universal or even neutral. They should try to understand that any ideological subtext of any critical theory reflects a relationship between the subtext and the meaning it produces. As was said earlier, to use our own discourses by espousing or using Western critical theories uncritically is to substitute one mode of neo-colonialism for another which can even be worse. When we begin to elaborate on our own tradition, it goes without saying that we have started to theorize about a new tradition and the discourse of the "other" although hegemonic discourse has inflicted and continue to inflict its language and culture on us. This sometimes forces us to

be busy to “imitate, to please, to refashion our own colonised black self’s images” and model as was given to us by the white coloniser. The elaboration of our own Third World cultural differences will suggest that we are going to produce a theory which, I call, a “liberated black critical theory and aesthetic” which will be less derivative but confident enough to debunk the ideal that the text, as an imported art, must be submitted to European critical discourse if it is to be considered as literature independent of its own critical tools instead of being considered as its pale shadow.

Chiweizu et al (1980, p. 26) believe that the study of classical works by Herodotus, Cheikh Anta Diop, George James and Chancellor Williams suggest that in African literature there are both oral and written antecedents to the African novel and it can in no way be considered inferior to the European one because the continent was not totally unilliterate when Europeans set foot on it. This is true to some extent but the novel as an art form is imported with all its characteristics and needs to be adapted to African realities to give a tinge of African dimension and connotation. One of the most outstanding African writer, theorist and critic, Chinua Achebe suggests that African literature is an autonomous entity which needs its own tradition, models and norms. Thus, he has refused to grant the racist premise that theory is something peculiar to the white people and we have to imitate and blindly copy our white masters and in the process be slaves and “recolonized”. Therefore, he invents his own tradition and critical theory to assume his own propositions as a response to his detractors. The world is so big, he says.

Some people are unable to comprehend that simple fact. They want the world on their own terms, its peoples just like them and their friends, its places like the manicured little patch on which they live. But this is a foolish and blind wish. Diversity is not an abnormality but the very reality of our planet. The human world manifests the same reality and will not seek our permission to celebrate itself in the magnificence of its endless varieties. Civility is a sensible attribute in this kind of world we have; narrowness of heart and mind is not. (*Chinua Achebe, 1996*)

One of the main themes running through all of Achebe’s fictional works is that all knowledge is specific and culturally situated. An example is the ways in which Achebe has taken up European literary works and reframed the issues they raise. Chinua Achebe believes that critics will identify his texts’ linguistic and literary techniques based on oral tradition and analyze the relationship of oral elements to the meanings and messages of his novels. Achebe has done this to escape the mistake of accepting the empowering language of hegemonic critical theory as “universal”; for to universalize African literature is to negate African cultural values, methods and approaches and to place it under colonial hegemony. Indeed, Achebe and many others have mastered systems of critical thought and the canon of critical traditions and languages of their people. His novel reflects their morals, manners, tastes, politics, and religion. This is the satisfactory view of William G. Allen when he sought to fight intellectual racism in:

Who will now say that the African is incapable of attaining to intellectual or moral greatness? What he now is, degrading circumstances have made him. Past clearly evinces. The African is strong, tough and hardy. Hundreds of years of oppression have not subdued his spirit, and though Church and State have combined to enslave him, in spite of them all, he is increasing in strength and power, and in the respect of the entire world (Gates, 2000:180).

## 7. CONCLUSION

To conclude this brief discussion, we may say that Western mainstream tradition, which reveals itself as resting on the Enlightenment project of rationality, progress, civilization and moral agency, should stop labelling “Others” as consumers; i.e., as those who copy and import

ideas because they are less intelligent people. Although these negative images of backwardness, superstitions, intellectual impoverishment and moral incapacity have systematically affected literary fields, it is the task of the African critic and theorist to elaborate a canon by genuinely investigating Africa's own aesthetic canons and critical theory which are well consolidated in African culture. Post colonial criticism should offer a fundamental critique of the ideology of colonial and imperialist domination and seek to undo the "imaginary geography" of "Orientalist" 's thought that has produced conceptual as well as economic divides between the West and the East, civilized and uncivilized. For that matter it should be an activist and adversarial in its basic aims. This approach will bring and reinforce fresh perspectives on the role of colonial peoples-their wealth, labour, and culture in the development of modern European nation states and suggest a continued relevance for this field of enquiry.

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