Review

What happened to post-imperial development in Africa during the last fifty years? Re-thinking the post-colonial turn in creative art, social 'writings' and films

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This paper argues that post-colonial theory in its classical usage is limited. However, when its premises are employed as a point of understanding, they can be very useful for comprehending the situation of contemporary developments in Africa. From this light, it contends that, after the fiftieth anniversary of Africa's independence, the continent's development could not really take off the ground because its anti-colonial strategy was prone to various susceptibilities. These included dependency on a new global order, a re-visitation of colonialism from the past, the dictatorship of ruling elites, the question of definition of development, misrepresentation, and the influence of power. It argues, nevertheless, that the continent is generating its own public narratives that are redefining the content of its development.

Key words: Centre-periphery, post-colonial theory, decolonization, dependency, under-development, African creative art, social writings and films.

INTRODUCTION

This interdisciplinary study re-thinks the premises and claims of the linguistic 'turn' of development studies referred to in critical scholarship as post-colonial (with hyphen) theory in the context of Africa's fiftieth anniversary of 'independence'. Drawing insights from contemporary 'writings', that is, works of art, film discourses and new social narratives, this paper proposes to re-assess the theory's reification of 'unevenness' ('centre' versus 'periphery', 'us' versus 'them') as found particularly in the celebrated writings of, for example, Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Arif Dirlik, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in order to challenge one of the theory's basic genealogies of historical causation, namely, colonial rule-nationalism-decolonization-autonomy-development.

This paper argues that such teleologically structured sequencings underpinning the theory, are useful as a guide, as a mode of envisioning lucidly the colonial *situation* in order to facilitate national action against oppression and underdevelopment. However, by themselves, such linguistically rigid perceptions of

colonialism as a *product*, do not help us to explain the complex *processes* of developmental history that took place in Africa prior to and after political independence. This paper suggests that the theory's overt and covert references to dichotomies of 'centredness' and 'peripherality' show only the 'small picture' and tend to eclipse the much 'bigger picture' when it comes to critically investigating the complex situation of Africa responsible for its under-developmental in the contemporary epoch of globalization.

HOW THEORY IS CAUGHT IN ITS OWN DEFINITIONAL TRAP OF DEVELOPMENT

During the past fifty years, development in Africa was virtually stunted. It was marked by poverty, failed states, disease spread, civil wars, high mortality rates, insecurity, environmental degradation, forced migration, refugee camps and underdevelopment. But more critically, the continent was faced with a great deal of *uncertainty* about what the concept of development in itself was really all

about in the first place. The postcolonial linguistic strategy, which sounded very rational, was that by putting an end to the 'us' versus 'them' conflict, by terminating European colonial rule, Africans would be able to draw from their ancestral wisdom and from modern history to manage their own national affairs of development and on their own terms (Abderrahmane, 2006). But there were many 'traps' within this linguistic definition of postcolonial developmental history. New questions arose over what 'development' really *meant* or could mean in Africa; so, 'development' itself became an *unstable* narrative 'flirting' between competing models such as the neo-classical, socialist, communist, the anti-secularist, non-alignment, pan-Africanist and indigenous forms. Indeed, virtually every act or process of development in Africa became *ambivalent*, contestatory and susceptible to new interpretations. The developmental visions took different directions in each of the nations, states and regions as represented by African writers. Ironically, at a time of anti-colonial and therefore anti -capitalist struggles in the continent, there were waves of support for the capitalist type of development as evidenced by the writings of Fagunwa [Igbó Olódùmarè (1949), Ireke Onibudo (1949) and Àdìitú Olódùmarè (1961)]. From the 1960s when most of Africa had gained their political autonomy from colonial rule, the term 'development' was re-deployed not in a strictly postcolonial sense to mean a return to 'indigenous development' or 'post-development', but was re-'articulated' in a *modernization* sense. When most African nations gained independence during the 1960s, Ekwensi (1964), who was born in 1921, witnessed the hysteria of that period and wrote '*People of the City'*, an *oeuvre* that portrays the sudden burst of neo-imperial capitalism through urban city growth. Ekwensi notes that during this time, school children, traders, truck pushers, junior clerks, prostitutes, musicians, taxi-drivers and pulp journalists, who had lost touch with ancestral customs, flooded into metropolitan areas where they embraced the sensational aspects of western modern capital and culture as reflected in American-style tabloids, characterized by freedom, fast food services, street trade, open source software, illegal drugs trafficking, sex, violence, etc. Africa also became the greatest testing ground for western democracy much more than any other continent in the world (The Economist, 1996, February 3: 17). This became evident to the extent that neo-patrimonial rule originating from African ruling elites was now considered by Africans themselves as a 'dictatorship'. Symbolizing this modernist trend, Makhaya in Bessie Head's (1968) *When Rain Clouds Gather* confirms that 'I do not think I approve of dictatorship in any form…Even if it is painstakingly slow, I prefer a democracy for Africa come what may.' These examples show that the indigenous form of development or post-development was not an absolutely foreclosed narrative during the post-independence era as anti-colonial nationalists had suggested and as the emancipated

masses had thought. But African writings also suggest that there were anti -capitalist attitudes in the continent as evidenced by Ayi Kwei Armah's (1979, 1968) *Two Thousand Seasons and The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, which address the questions of history, degeneration of social and public lifestyles and neo-colonial development but within an anti-bourgeois ideological frame work. After ending colonial rule, a significant section of the African progressive intelligentsia class with leftist sensitivities preferred a socialist system of development as evidenced by Sembene Ousmane's (1995, 1973) *God's Bits of Wood*, Xala and Alex La Guma's (1967, 1967) *A Walk In The Night and The Stone Country*. There were intellectuals with anti-Arabic Islamic and anti-indigenous sensitivities in their developmental orientation as in Yambo Ouologuem's (1968) '*Le Devoir de Violence.*

Just as Lenin's classical reading of imperialism shifted to Antonio Gramsci's notion of 'hegemony' (that is, from 'political domination' to 'ideological/cultural domination'), so too did the strategy of 'postcolonial development' lead to highly contested notions of 'neo-imperial development'. From this possibility of shifts in developmental paradigms, a new relationship emerged between the west (former colonial powers, the US and other developed countries) and African nations. African nation states were nominally politically independent, but their economies were now being appended to western business interests and social ideologies, which were sometimes supported by western military forces when these interests and ideologies came under threat in any part of the world. From thence, African countries lost their postcolonial autonomous status and became new subjugated nation states, ruled more by neo-imperial ideologues of development [for example, of aid (Rostow, 1960)] than by their own indigenous/nationalist governments. In this light, the postcolonial classical notion of development can be misleading when it is read to imply that colonial rule was over and done with from the 1960s with political independence and autonomy whereas, in fact, most African nations only moved on to a dependency relationship by *re-linking* culturally, ideologically and economically to western notions of industrialism, capitalism, democracy, consumerism and statehood.

But, as well, although the western experience of development had much power and influence in the imagination of Africans, the vast majority of the emancipated masses, who lived in the rural areas, thought of the postcolonial era in terms of indigenization of the framework of development with its long history of communal land use, environmental protection, traditional methods of animal husbandry, collective mode of production, etc. For instance, as Ekwensi's (1964) '*Burning Grass*' shows, indigenous masses like the Fulani community of cattle rearers in northern Nigeria continued to engage in nomading with a remarkable indifference to

the powerful emerging forces of neo-imperial development. In Spire's (2007a, b) *Mission and A Fool's Knot set* in Kitui District in Eastern Kenya, Kitui is still a traditional area of Kenya, where indigenous communities are involved in subsistence agriculture. But Kitui embodies all the traits of neglect and 'underdevelopment' in the modernization sense, namely, drought, hunger, etc, with its landscape alienating from the urban centres visited by tourists. This context of *indigenous* development that stood in marked contrast to the modern, urbanized context which was one of the major indicators of the development dilemma in post-independence Africa as an *ambivalent* narrative. The continent became the setting for experimenting western/modern models of development. Consequently, 'under-development' was unfairly *signified* as a problem caused by certain intrinsic qualities of African cultures and peoples such as primitivity, ungodliness, dullness, childishness, etc, instead of attributing it to the ambivalent confusion created by the conflictual contrast of diametrically opposed contexts of developmental models. The post-independence epoch in Africa was dominated much more by a situation in which Eurocentric conceptions of development that singled out the western experience of development as 'universal' and as applicable to the continent were overwhelming.

THE NEVER ENDING 'TIME' OF COLONIAL RULE

The term 'post-colonial' obviously implies the 'time' in Africa coming 'after' colonial rule. For most African countries, this corresponds to the time from 1960 to present day. But, the sense of ending of one kind of 'time' and emergence of another 'time' is problematical when viewed in the light of Africa's current predicament. Surely the era of most European colonial empires is over in most African countries. From this limited perspective, it can be said that 'post-colonialism' refers partly to the period 'after' colonial rule. However, as evidenced by African creative works of art, new perspectival questions emerge from here: one may speak of the end of colonial rule, but of *whose* colonial rule and of *which* empire? History shows us that there were many other types of colonial rules such as the Roman and Greek, the Arabic, the Spanish and Portuguese, the Inca, Chinese, etc. (Ahmad, 1995: 9). In Africa, the writings show that there was not just one kind of colonial rule (for example, German, British, French), but there were indigenous attempts as well to impose dynastic rules in various kingdoms in South Africa, North Africa, in West Africa like the Ashanti, Mali, Ghana, etc., and by various legendary figures like Shaka Zulu, Usman Dan Foudio, etc. The writings point to the fact that there were wars of conquest and counter republican movements in Africa. For example, Ouelegouem's (1968) '*Le Devoir de Violence'*, reveals an African world in which white imperialism is preceded by

black and Arabic colonialism. Ouologuem's work draws on the cultural history of the great medieval empire of Mali, by using Nakem as imaginary name of a country that was unified in the 13th century by the Saif dynasty. This dynasty ruled brutally and tragically by spilling the blood of opponents. The work shows scenes evidencing violence, eroticism, drama, sensuality, terror, despair, passion and cruelty as one tribe is subjugated to another. In this way, the attempt to represent the Germans, French or British as the only empires that colonized African history is Eurocentric or Anglocentric. In addition, in other parts of the world today, Britain still has control over many colonies such as the Falklands and Northern Ireland. Even during the 1960s, it was clear to many African countries that the former colonial powers were intent on continuing to exercise some form of indirect control, especially through economic, political, cultural and other 'cooperation channels' rather than through direct military occupation. The expansion of capitalism has been constant since the fifteenth century and now virtually every part of Africa is affected by it, as forces of the free market search for market outlets and cheap labour through the slave trade, colonial rule, internationalism and globalization. The European colonizing states were unjustly singled out by postcolonial theory. More coercive was the chieftaincy system of rule in indigenous African societies where human sacrifice was practiced and twins were thrown into the *evil forest'*as Achebe (1958) testifies in his *Things Fall Apart*. Today, the Chinese Empire is being welcomed by African leaders and it is now spreading its economic and social influence all over the continent, but critics have noted several cases of serious violation of human rights by the Chinese (Anup, 2010).

NEW DEPENDENCY EPOCH

When most African countries gained independence in the 1960s, the critical idea they had about the post-colonial era of development was that they would set up policy strategies to subvert imperial categories of thinking by creating space for the marginalized, subaltern African. The notion of the post-colonial was that Africans would 'speak' for themselves rather than having others to 'speak' on their own behalf. In this way, the anticipation was that they would produce *alternatives* to the dominant colonial discourse that crushed them in the colonial past. From this light, the term 'post-colonialism' was employed in a literal and idealistic sense to mean the epoch *after* colonialism. But, in this basic sense, the premises of postcolonial theory obscured and erased historical determination thereby prioritizing only linguistic idealization of the colonial experience. In fact, by rejecting the historical-materialist critique of imperialism in favour of a rhetorical claim to rescue the postcolonial subject from his own abject past, it failed by becoming an

alibi for intellectual acquiescence to capitalist hegemonic pieties. It became an ineffective tool for Africa that was faced with the material conditions of survival within the neo-colonial era. The orthodox versions of the theory represented by Frantz Fanon are insensitive to neocolonialism as a political regime with its own behavioral patterns (or *habitus* to borrow Pierre Bourdieu's term) based on continued dominance of nominally independent nation-states. This dominance is effected through neoliberal, transnational projects, and is mediated in complex contracts, agreements, negotiations and so forth through the World Bank, IMF, World Trade Organization, etc. Hence, this paper suggests that the 'post-colonial' years were not really a time of autonomy for Africans as the theory suggests, but were an epoch for the return to new meta-narratives of globalization and anglo-American triumphalism.

The so-called fiftieth anniversary of 'independence' were actually decades of neocolonialism marked by western capitalistic domination of African societies through the neo/liberal market and other ideological means, which had little to do with direct political rule as in the past. This is a thematic that African fiction and film enlighten us with. In Abderrahmane (2006), the film titled *Bamako*, an African *multitude* (with reference to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negro) comprised women, children and ordinary people takes the World Bank and the IMF to court to protest against the policies of impoverishment that these neo/liberal market institutions impose upon the continent. Ngugi Wa Thiongo's (2006) *Wizard of the Crow* portrays how the World Bank (used in text as the Global Bank) is failing African states and producing dictators in the name of leaders. Like in Asongwed's (2009) *Born to Rule,* the role of the leaders is to merely facilitate financial transactions by these institutions of global capital by appearing to endorse processes of democracy. In this global order, university graduates, who are supposed to be the privileged movers of development lose their place to 'illiterate' and incompetent leaders like Wan Nei in 'Born to Rule', and the masses, left on their own, use all sorts of social protest movements and devices to make their voices heard. Whether in Mambety's (1992) 'Hyenas' or in Sembene's (2001) 'Guelwaar' or 'The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun', neoliberal capitalism is shown to be devaluing the African nation state currency such as the CFA franc, creating wealthy entrepreneurs who take advantage of the poverty of their workers and dump expired products of capital such as used batteries, refrigerators, dryers, washers, fans, and toxic wastes, etc, into the market and the natural environment thereby degrading it. The example of the multi-national oil company *Trafigura* that offered a payout to settle a case relating to the dumping of toxic waste in Ivory Coast is still fresh in our minds. These texts, films and social 'events' show that neoliberal capitalism has its own 'capillary forms' of penetration (John Comaroff), that is, the potential to transform all

aspects of social life in Africa. The 1960s therefore gave the impression that Africa was 'independent' because of the disintegration of direct political rule imposed in the colonial past. But, as the *oeuvres* show, these were years of the practice of exploitation and oppression of the majority of Africa's labouring masses under the guise of democratic access to markets, the free flow of goods, commodities, technology, ideas, bodies, and so forth. The writings translate the abstraction termed as 'neocolonialism' into concrete empirical situations, specifying various lived experiences in every region or place where the ascendancy of corporate transnational capital generated effects of misery, violations of human rights, rape, malnutrition, genocide, and environmental degradation. For example, the short stories of the Nigerian playwright Ken Saro Wiwa [titled Adaku and Other Stories (1989), The Singing Anthill (1991), Nigeria (1991) and Similia (1991)] address the oppression of the Ogoni people. In 1992, Saro-Wiwa published *Genocide in Nigeria*. In this book, he openly accuses the Nigerian government of genocide because of its compliance with multinational oil companies. Asong's (2009) *Salvation Colony* portrays the multiplication of revivalist evangelical movements in Africa. Father Shrapnell's church of Limbo in the text works to 'recycle' Africans who have been impoverished and suffer from misery imposed by international economic hardship and discrimination.

These effects created by the global economy forced the migration of Africans to Europe and America where they thought they would find what is commonly called 'greener pastures'. Some Africans return home; like the protagonist of Salih's (2009) *Season of Migration to the North* who comes back to Sudan, but the majority of them do not. This, in turn, generated a global situation of uneven development. The point made here is that mainstream postcolonial theory cannot explain why several millions of African men, women and girls have alienated and are working in Europe, the USA, China and Australia as 'overseas contract workers', who are poorly paid, maltreated, sometimes raped and even killed, whereas they should have been in their own home countries working for the continent's development. Nor can the strategic theory explicate why millions of young African women frantically seek old European men through the internet to marry, as a way of escaping from economic poverty in their countries. In fact, few postcolonial theorists (perhaps with the exception of Ngugi Wa Thiongo and Edward Said) speak out militantly and openly in public against the ill-effects of migration and about the impact of US, Chinese and European foreign policies in the continent. Rather, they appear to have merely taken refuge in the material comfort of academic institutions and universities in the US. From this light, postcolonial theory as an essentialism does not strike one as a helpful guide to the emancipatory politics of development in the contemporary epoch; it serves only as perspective from which one can evaluate the evolution

evolution of the politics.

The concept of access to 'independence' as enunciated by the theory's premises is belied by events that took place after the 1960s. The question of changes in the power alignment of nation states was of pivotal importance during these years. With the end of the Cold War, the emergence of new international preoccupations such as human rights, terrorism, democracy, etc, came to overshadow nation state issues of autonomy, national identity, social welfare, national security and respectability. As a result, cracks were already beginning to appear on the edifices of the nation state fortress and Africans could not depend on them for their own economic protection or for their cultural safety (San Juan, 1998). From this light, the postcolonial premise based upon an 'us' versus 'them' dichotomy used as strategic paradigm to fight against the slave trade and colonial rule, was a poor predictor of political developments that occurred in the post-independence era. The critique against colonial rule was not simplistically a *continuous* indictment of what imperialism did to exploit, undermine and under-develop the continent. As the African writings show, the overarching context of post-independence political culture created a new discourse of dissidence aimed at uncovering the pathologies of governance in the continent that had contributed to the tragic unfolding of the postcolonial condition in Africa. In this way, the critical consciousness in post-independence development also meant turning against the actions of African leaders themselves, the elite class in particular and the behaviour of indigenous people in general.

THE WHITE MASK AND BLACK SKIN NEO-COLONIAL ELITES

The new states in African countries often adopted 'colonial' attitudes when dealing with the problems of their own peoples; in this way, blaming their colonial history as postcolonial scholars do systematically, is presenting a partial picture, and this does not enable us to understand the more complex developments that emerged during this epoch. After independence, the nationalist fighters of old now became new 'dictator' leaders and corrupt officials within their own politically independent countries using the same oppressive methods that the colonial masters they criticized had employed. Writings like Achebe's (1987, 1966) *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah,* testify to this fact. Soyinka (1967, 1984) satirizes the régime of Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana, 1957: 66) in its later years in *Kongi's Harvest* and that of Jean Bedel Bokassa in *A play of Giants,* respectively. Laye (1966) indicted the régime of Sékou Touré (Guinea, 1958: 84) in *Dramouss.* In Fantoure's (1972) novel *Le Cercle des Tropiques*, the author predicts a military *coup d'État* against Touré's regime although this never took place when he was in power. The governments of

Nkrumah and Toure were marred by economic mismanagement, corruption and the oppression of dissenting intellectuals, although it is also recognized that they played important roles in anti-colonial struggles. But, on the other hand, those of Idi Amin, Jean Bokassa, and Marcias Nguema of Equatorial Guinea (1968-1979) were extremely cruel and had no redeeming qualities. The years after 1960 were thus marked by the excessive use of brutal power against the African masses by African leaders themselves. Prior to the 1960s, and before independence, the optimism as articulated by postcolonial theorists was that, with political independence, African nation states would be able to rule themselves well, cooperate with one another and engage politically with the masses in some variety or other of liberation ideology in order to improve their lives. From this light, the anti-imperial movements from the 1940s were interpreted by post-colonial theorists in binary terms as struggles of poor African countries in the southern 'periphery' against the influence of rich colonial nations in the northern 'centre'. But the reality after independence was that, power was exercised viciously on the masses by the ruling elites themselves, who claimed to represent and protect them.

The theory's assessment of U.S. imperialist hegemony, especially in the Middle East, cannot be doubted when one refers to Said's (1979, 1993) *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*; however, it is silent about the negative effects of 'internal colonialism' in Arab countries and specifically in Africa itself. Many African empires existed in the pre-colonial era, such as the Ashanti, Ghana Empire and Edo Empire. Nigeria was domicile to the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo ethnic communities and Amadi's (1973) *Sunset in Biafra*, Achebe's (1971) *Beware, Soul-Brother and Other Poems* and Aluko's (1970) *A State of Our Own*, took up this history to construct a postcolonial national identity based on ethnicities tearing itself apart. Postcolonial theory is limited by its historical time/space coverage because it often confines itself to issues that came up only during the last eighty or so years. In this way, it excludes a sizeable chunk of Africa's rich pre-colonial history that could help to explain the larger picture of underdevelopments in the contemporary epoch in areas such as civil wars, inter-tribal conflicts and so forth. African indigenous societies were colonized at some time or another by larger or stronger ones with monarchical intentions but there was also resistance from such conquests as Ouelegouem's (1968) *Le Devoir de Violence* demonstrates. This text narrates the dynamism of indigenous history by showing that it was also as brutal with only rudimentary technologies used to effect violence as colonial history was with advanced technologies, even though nationalist writings by African intellectuals often romanticized that past in order to justify independence. Hence, it is arguable that African indigenous nations were already 'postcolonial nations' rather than merely 'effeminized' peoples at the time that

the first imperial powers attempted to subjugate them in 1884/1985 and that this history did not simply disappear in the post-independence epoch of the 1960s. With anti-colonial nationalist movements achieving independence for most of the colonies, political liberation as an effect of anti-colonial struggles soon dialecticized into a re-visitation of old ambitions of conquest and resistance. Numerous examples such as Angola, Katanga/Shaba in Congo, Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda and Burundi, Igbos and Hausas/Fulanis in Nigeria, southern natives and northern Arab populations in Sudan and other countries, etc., point to the omnipresence of this surviving monarchical and republican history of Africa in the contemporary epoch of ruling elites marked by the same old rivalries albeit re-fashioned by colonial contexts. Thus, in their different ways, writings like Saro Wiwa's (1994) *Sozaboy*, Iyayi's (1986) *Heroes*, Kourouma's (2000) *Allah n'est pas obligé*, Iweala's (2006) *Beasts of No Nation*, and Adichie's (2006) *Half of a Yellow Sun*, all deal with the phenomenon of ethnic violence in postcolonial Africa and the unsettling dimension it has assumed in contemporary African societies. It can be argued, though, that colonial contact sharpened the scope and elite rule increased the severity and complexity of inter-ethnic and inter-regional conflicts.

This situation led to an identity crisis of the elite class. For example, the leaders of many African countries refused to adopt the political practices of Western democracies (for example, single party rule of Wan Nei in *Born to Rule*), but, at the same time, they followed Western consumerist practices. Even the ruling elites of the poorest nations increasingly consumed Western-made goods, using them as additional symbols in traditional patrimonial hierarchy of power and prestige.

WHO 'SPEAKS' FOR WHO AND ON WHOSE BEHALF?

Postcolonial theory speaks to a very limited constituency. A corollary of the apotheosis of the postcolonial intellectual was the exaltation of intellectualism as the 'guide' in a colonial world of 'darkness'. As Gayatri Spivak points out in her work, 'Can the subaltern speak?', this form of intellectualism worked for the 'erasure' or subordination of the 'native agency'. Whether in the form of a movement, an alliance or a party, the intellectual claimed he could 'speak for the nation'; but this claim based upon the two categories of 'intellectual' and 'nation' was anchored on an *ambivalent* possibility, namely, the *nationalitarian* and the *nationalist* viewpoints (Neil Lazarus). This virtually means that there were times when the intellectuals were 'speaking to' the masses, times when they were 'speaking with' the people and yet other times when they were 'speaking for' them. This ambivalence compromised the 'exultation' of the intellect-tual and unleashed an 'intellectualist anti-intellectualism'

that raised the question of representation. Consequently, postcolonial Africa was characterized by a shift in the 'centredness' of representative power following the Foucauldian idea that power is never located in one place. The postcolonial idea of 'speaking for' the masses was replaced by the notion that behind this idea could be lurking a secret personal ambition and this subverted progressive projects in the continent, particularly, those that were headed by intellectuals. From thence, an ambiguous relationship emerged between the intellectuals and the African masses.

When Gayatri Spivak wrote the essay 'Can the subaltern speak?' her answer to that question was 'no'. Applied to the post-independence African context, it goes contrary to the postcolonial spirit because it means and points to the fact that despite the optimism of the anti-colonial strategy, marginalized Africans could not really represent themselves during the past fifty years because the critical question was *who* was to 'narrate' their own 'stories'. The obvious answer that came up to this question was their 'intellectual and political elites', the so-called 'book people'. But one also realizes that this answer falls into the trap of the 'deterministic fallacy'. Spivak's essay calls attention to the fact that literate and sophisticated scholars, who created fiction in English, French, Spanish, etc, were by *that* very fact disqualified from 'speaking for' the masses, who come from an oral tradition and whom they claim to represent. For example, although 'literate scholars' like Wole Soyinka, Ngugi Wa Thiongo or Chinua Achebe received international acclamation and recognition as sophisticated writers, they were censured, considered as not being representative enough and as being inferior to the 'invisible' but 'legitimized' spokespersons who are not literate but live with the masses on a day to day basis under difficult material conditions. Elite postcolonial writers were rejected not only as *individual persons* (through assaults, threat of life, rape of their wives, etc.) but also as a *group* because they had alienated from the masses by 'adopting the west' (via their new literacy skills, rational visions of life, new consumerist tastes, attitudes of superiority complex, changed behaviours, migration to the west as professors, etc.).

An important dimension of the tragic narratives of socio-political development in post-independence Africa was alienation of the intelligentsia *discourse* from official policy because it intersected with forced migration to the west. The postcolonial paradigm of 'us versus them' does not explain this post-independence development adequately; however, when it is critiqued, the 'we' category becomes problematical as a homogeneous essentialism. African leaders terrorized and even executed their own intellectuals, who were needed by their nations at this time of developmental challenge when the nationalist fighters now at the helm of power were intellectually limited and incapable of responding efficiently to the complex demands of the changing times.

The examples of torture in Soyinka's (1972) work *The Man Died* testify to this development. Wole Soyinka was forced into exile in 1994 by the Nigerian military dictatorship. Consequently, the intelligentsia class often sought refuge in England, France, Holland, Germany or North America, the former colonial powers which were criticized in the past for oppressing anti-colonial, liberation movements. Fleeing from African dictators within the 'us' now controlling authoritarian regimes, they were forcefully exiled into the 'them', that is, into the west where they found a more comfortable livelihood and receptive audiences (especially in universities) to their writings, and from where they sometimes called for the overthrow of what they described as 'native tyrants' now parading as 'neoliberationist' leaders in Africa.

When the Spivakian concept of the subaltern is extended to the political realm, it explains contemporary developments in Africa where political leaders, who were national heros, for example, in the anti-colonial struggles, became national enemies, the anti-heros. Nationalist fighters like Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, and Patrice Lumumba of the Congo, were rejected by their own 'us', sometimes with the connivance of western intelligence forces, like the CIA (Cesaire, 1966, *Une Saison au Congo*). Chief Nanga in Achebe's *A Man of the People* epitomizes the tendencies and processes that attend to these fallen African political heros. In francophone intellectual circles, a strong 'dystopian' current also found its most powerful expression in the theatrical writings of Tansi (1979, 1988), namely, 'Conscience de tracteur', which won the Concours theatral interafricain de Radio-France Internationale in 1979, and his novel *L'Ante-peuple*. The writings tell about an apocalyptic vision of intellectuals such as teachers, trade unionists, and medical doctors, whose ideas on liberty and self-respect are in conflict with those of African leaders considered as 'murderous' dictators, and these conflicts lead to pitiless repression and often times to their execution. Although critiques against the African leadership have been imputed to the by-product of colonial rule, the authors pursue the train of thought that essentially blames African, not foreign, rulers for mismanaging the national economies and social structures through military *coups d'État* as in Achebe's (1987) *Anthills of the Savannah* and through corruption as in Achebe's (1966) *A Man of the People* and Armah's (1968) *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. The critical attention also shifted in the writings from criminalization of the slavery era as in Olaudah Equino's *Equiano's* (1976) *Travels* to indictment of what indigenous African monarchs and Arab sultanates were doing to enslave the African masses themselves as in Oueloguem's (1968) *Le Devoir de Violence.*

The alternative to the colonial scenario would have been to have Africa's 'stories' narrated from the point of view of indigenous, 'legitimate' spokespersons. But for Spivak, whom I consider as both proponent and 'radical'

of postcolonial theory, this would not be satisfactory either on the grounds that, first, even indigenous 'spokespersons' did not speak for all members of indigenous communities but for just some of them (the elite groups). Secondly, African writings, like that of Yambo Ouologuem, probe into forms of oppression that existed and continue to exist within contemporary African cultures and traditions. Consequently, as feminist and Marxist critics remind us, life was not all roses during the pre-colonial epoch. Thirdly, the writings show that indigenous 'spokespersons' who were able to 'speak' about Africa's current situation, did so, but also faced problems because they had spent some time or had some position of authority within the colonial system that gave them access to all that knowledge. But their articulation of contemporary situations was also a translation from both their colonial and indigenous experiences of life. The writers show that Africans during the fifty years did not understand what their real identity was and tended to perceive themselves as 'strangers'. The last fifty years shows that the legacy of colonial rule in Africa was more mixed than merely 'bad' as postcolonial theory would insist (Ake, 1994). For example, there was an inevitable feeling that African colonies enjoyed greater intellectual freedom before independence and that this freedom disappeared after Independence.

THE STATE OF THE NATION: WHOSE NATION STATE?

The question of 'nation' was a heterogeneous and, consequently, a very problematical category, contra postcolonial theory's liberation sermons. As Frantz Fanon (1961) points out in his 'The pitfalls of national consciousness' in reference to the Algerian war of independence, nationhood could take any form, including the *bourgeoisie* form. But in the attempt to keep alive this 'nationalitarian' consciousness as an anti-imperial strategy, postcolonial nationalism became prone to the capitalistic systems of the neocolonial *bourgeois* state and this essentially meant abandoning the Marxist issues of class struggles and the socialist revolution. In addition, by investing in a Marxian notion of 'nationhood', African nation states adopted a character that was anti-thetical to the paradigms of nationhood in traditional societies. Consequently, the nation state in Africa was perceived throughout these years as a neo-imperial imposition rather than as an endogenously-generated, emancipating apparatus of development. In the light of these developments, one of the most challenging problems in Africa during this period has been how to unite African peoples under the banner of a 'nation' or how to form a pan-national movement in order to defeat the continuous and debilitating effects of neo-imperialism or at least minimize them. But even Gayatri Spivak recognizes that the postcolonial project is problematical, because any

presentation of a subaltern voice like pan Africanism tends to essentialize its message, thereby negating the heterogeneity of the subaltern masses. The inability of most African nation states to recognize, integrate and reflect their ethno-cultural diversity was quite obvious in the colonial past. Négritudism, for example, is a 'black pride' movement that was developed against colonial rule by Caribbean and African writers like Aimé Césaire and Leopold Senghor living in France in the 1930s and 1940s. But this obsession with the 'identity politics' of the glorified African in the past, albeit in a 'positive' sense, has shown its limitations in today's global environment overtaken by ideologies of capitalism, rationalism and individualism. This is so because, in this context, Négritudism tended to be restrictive to cultural legitimation, and was then interpreted as an oppressive form of culturally racialist 'essentialism'. Postcolonial theory and the studies that emanate from it are then beset by the dilemma of accommodating the contrasts between strategic *essentialism* and *individualism*, group *identity* and *difference*, corporate *distinctiveness* and *dissent*, conservative *passivism* and affirmative *action*.

The notion of a black ethnic group (us) against a white ethnic identity (them) began to collapse in what may be called the widening 'borderlands' (Anzaldua, 1987) of the postindependence era. In Dipoko's (1970) *A Few Nights and Days*, 'ethnicity' becomes no more than just a simple question of one cultural heritage against another in the postcolonial essentialistic tradition ('us' versus 'them'), but a dynamic and active 'frontier' in which a multiplicity of cultural and social influences met. In this 'borderland', cultures edged each other and racial entities like the native Cameroonian youth, Ndoumbe, and the French bourgeois belle, Marie Thérèse, shared romantic space, which potentially resulted in new hybrid or *métis* populations, the *mestiza* culture of Africans who had lived and studied in Europe, America and elsewhere for several years. What had earlier appeared as a postcolonial homogeneous movement of race and nation, united against a common 'enemy' of colonial rule, became, in the text, a new narrative of gender, sexuality and class struggling to assert its own particularistic concerns.

Women, who are barely mentioned in the writings of Edward Said (*Orientalism*, for example), and African women, in particular, responded by inserting their experiences and cultures as colonized and as those 'at home'. Writings like Bebey's (1978) *The Ashanti Doll*, Nwapa's (1966) *Efuru*, Beyala's (1987) *C'est le Soleil Qui M'a Brulée* and Bâ's (1986, 1981) *Une Si Longue Lettre* and *Scarlet Song*, show that the new category called 'African women' engaged in new anti-masculinist narratives and it did not matter whether these were African masculinities. This new African feminists de-centred the presumed privilege of a normative male subject of post-independence African nationhood over, for example, issues of better market conditions for

women (Bebey), polygamy, status of female judges, betrothal and exploitative sexual dealings, relations between African women and white men (Mariama Bâ), etc. This plethora of new thematics became a persuasive weapon to subvert the idea of constructing the 'nation' as only a male subjectivity against colonial rule.

In this so-called 'post-colonial epoch', western capitalist powers viewed the world not through an *egalitarian* standpoint between African and their own nations, but wholly through their own economically, culturally and historically-determined perspectives. The western powers lumped all African countries together into one geographical and economic bloc, such as the Commonwealth of Nations, the Lusophonie and the Francophonie, which held regular summits under the auspices of British, Spanish and French leaders. These organizations continued to strengthen relations of *dependency* rather than *independency* after political 'independence' and continued to overlook vital differences in history, political outlook, linguistic identities, and cultural and economic practices between Africa and the west. The west used these and other international frameworks to apply economic conditions (for example, structural adjustment programmes) and political coercion (For example, for violation of democracy, respect for human rights) on African leaderships. Consequently, African countries were often given or denied aid on the basis of economic compliance and democratic assessments that were 'blanket yardsticks' and were very simplistically applied.

Focusing chiefly on the premises of post-colonial studies presents a one-sided view of the world. Even though the image that the west constructed of Africa was distorted as evidenced by the works of Said (1979, 1993), an equally distorted view of the west prevailed in Africa during this era. Thus, over and beyond colonialism, was a larger problem of racial and cultural perception. It may well be true that history is always ambivalent. It is not easy to establish facts, which are themselves capable of being given many meanings. Reality is built on prejudices, misconceptions and ignorance as well as on perceptions of knowledge (Spiegel, 2003.) But it is another question to posit a blanket, deep-seated and entirely European flaw, and 'zip' the blame on the colonial historical record. History is a very complex narrative because it is not something that is existing 'out there' for the taking; it is something that can only be interpreted. Consequently, the real difficulties arise when one tries to look for 'hard' as opposed to 'interpretive' evidence, which literature provides to us. According to Edward Said's *Orientalism*, orientalist studies was created to serve political goals, produce a false description of Arabs, (Africans) and Islamic culture and define Europe's sense of self. But one can equally argue that the history of colonialism was not something that just existed 'out there', as pointed out earlier, so that it can be justified in advance by orientalists. Colonial rule is a historical

process that was appreciated as such (that is, as colonial rule) but in the hindsight of retrospection.

The outlooks of orientalist scholars were not entirely incorrect, following Said, and I am not suggesting here that they were not also tainted in many other ways. Rather, I am of the opinion that if they were completely 'erroneous' in their perceptions, as Edward Said suggests, the colonizing states of Europe would not have been even remotely successful, and these perceptions would not even have continued to be recognized as a legitimate basis for academic scholarship today. It is arguable whether the colonial masters had defined themselves against an Africanist (orientalist) 'other'. The colonial masters certainly considered themselves as 'superior' to Africans; however, they could not have possibly 'constructed' Africans as inferior 'other' in advance in order to define themselves against the outcomes of their reconstruction. The colonial history of nationalism in Africa is much more complex and cannot be reduced only to this kind of 'us' versus 'them' paradigm, because Africans also had the intellectual capacity to stereotype the colonial powers and their relationships with them in their own different ways. For example, the creative writings on African nationalism such as Ousmane Sembène's *God's Bits of Wood* suggest that colonial history as a whole, was much more complicated because it was from the 'outcomes' of *interactions* by both Africans and Europeans rather than from just one kind of (European) racial labeling, that the history was determined. These 'outcomes' varied with the years and the colonies or countries concerned. Sembène explains (Spiegel, 2003) how the initial stereotypes of the colonial community started to shift ad how this informed the nationalist spirit:

'The book is set in Africa, but looks at the situation in Europe after the war. For us it was a period of awakening. War is always unfortunate. But for us in Africa the war was a real catalyst. Before the war we were colonised, we were on our knees. As youngsters we took part in the war and we saw that the colonisers we had idealised were as *human as ourselves. They experienced fear. They had cowards and traitors*. We went to war with a herd mentality like sheep, but we were transformed by the time we came back. As well as this, we had made contact with peasants and workers in the West. We learned a lot from that' (my italics).

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to show that, because various geographical, historical, social, religious, ideological and economic concerns were intricately involved in the decolonization strategy, it is simplistically naïve to assume that decolonization, which is what classical postcolonial theory upholds, is only about the 'writing' of resistance. The term 'postcolonialism' is frequently understood in its rigid etymological sense as a temporal concept, that is, the linguistic idea of the time after colonialism has ended, or the time following the politically determined Independence date on which a country breaks away from its governance by another state (Gilbert and Tompkins, 1996). The theory's 'essentialistic' assumption based on stereotypical notions (such as 'centre', 'periphery', 'us' versus 'them', etc.) and movements (like Négritudism and pan-Africanism) by themselves cannot yield any insightful analysis of the dynamic processes underpinning the developmental conditions of Africa fifty years after its independence. The classical concepts of the theory such as 'orientalism', subalternity, 'imperialism' and 'colonialism' have lost their function as graphic terms capable of explaining this extremely volatile history of the continent.

However, this paper has argued that these linguistic concepts can be critically useful when they are employed as departure points for envisaging development. From this light, it has shown how the struggle against western colonial rule leads to a re-assessment of it. A critique of these theoretical premises evidences the fact that the issues they raise are contentious, and it is difficult to find a balanced position. Over and beyond the limits of the theory are the overall flaws of the decolonization policy in Africa. The nationalist fighters believed in simple answers to complex matters; they had a disparagement for evidence, and their ideological culture, namely, Négritudism, was poorly exploited in ways that obscured instead of illuminating the issues and even prevented debate altogether.

In fact, the decolonization strategy failed in Africa because it did not lead to a real state of political autonomy and economic control but rather disintegrated into new narratives of dependency, which are reflected in African works of art and film and in new public discourses. Postcolonial theory has greater critical potential in what it does not 'articulate' than in what it actually 'says'. What it does not 'say' is the continued dependency of Africa on the west in the post-independence era. From this light, the anxieties expressed over post-colonial theory as being fuzzy, polemical, lacking 'clarity', and as being too elastic and in danger of imploding as an analytical construct without any real cutting edge (Bart, 1997: 11) are understandable but exaggerated and, in this light, misplaced. The paper maintains that notions attributed to this field of developmental studies like 'fuzziness', nihilism, etc, on the contrary, hold a great potential for its critical epistemology because they give the field an advantageous *departure* point that is sufficiently flexible, 'open ended' and indeterminate rather than one that is fixed or 'foreclosed'. From this need for 'open-endedness', therefore, when one rethinks postcolonial theory, one realizes that, far from being a negative trait, using the theory dialectically opens up new avenues for illuminating the contemporary state of under/development in Africa. Any employment of postcolonial theory in the

'open' ended rather than the 'essentialistic' or 'closed' sense can be more useful in understanding Africa's underdevelopmental status (its events, issues, failures, successes, etc.) than critics would suggest.

Post-colonial theory should be employed by investigating how decolonization responded to more than the merely chronological construction of post-independence, and to more than just the discursive experience of imperialism (Juan, 1998). As a strategic way of reading fifty years in the post-independence, post-colonialism has been very problematical because the idealistic reality it defined in its theory was much different. The once-colonized African world was full of inconsistencies, half-baked processes, uncertainties, hybridities and liminalities that compromised the status of its 'autonomy'. The 'post-colonial' was not simplistically 'the period after the colonial era'; it also had a plural outlook: it was also the continuation of colonialism through new relationships of power embedded in the control and production of dependency knowledge systems.

Notes

[1] This optimism was reflected in Che Guevara's famous speech: "The final hour of colonialism has struck, and millions of inhabitants of Africa, Asia and Latin America rise to meet a new life and demand their unrestricted right to self-determination."— Che Guevara, speech to the United Nations, December 11, 1964.

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