

A Study of the Compendium of Post-Colonial African Literature with its Anthological Relation to the Terms ‘Colonised’, ‘Colonists’ and ‘Colonisation’

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Abstract- This study attempts to examine the post-colonial African literature’s position in the modern time in terms of its relation and correlation with the exposure of colonial history and its legacy in present. It aims to analyse post-colonial African literature’s response to the (former) colonisers. It investigates its role and capacity in exposing the loss and suffering during the colonial past and its aftermath in contemporary African societies. The study examines the notable works of some key figures of African literature that are considered the mouthpiece of Africa. The analysis comprises the historical background and the contemporary appeal of the works of those African writers who pioneered the post-colonial African literature. The study tries to assess post-colonial African writers’ contribution in highlighting the values, traditions, beliefs and the unique status of African ways of life. It tries to throw light on their contribution in attaining the world attention in the contemporary environment of globalisation, digitalisation and rapid advancement in all walks of life.

Keywords: Africa and African Literature, Colonialism, Post-Colonialism

I. INTRODUCTION

This study attempts to examine the position of common convictions about Africa and African literature. Keeping in view Africa as a huge continent, its literature is simply perceived differently by different people. Some consider it a new genre in world literatures, for others it is merely a supplement of French and English fiction and some others regard it a volume of political document against the colonialists’ unlawful occupation of their lands. In addition, this study analyses the possibility of individuality in African literature’s response in the modern time. As the world literatures reflect new trends and new themes, the question is if African literature has gained the capacity to convey the concerns of its people to the former colonisers? This study endeavours to minimise the general impression about the ‘weak voices’ of Africa in the age of digitalised and modern ways of communication. With the spread of awareness and information, African peoples being aware of the human loss and looting of their resources, hold the colonisers responsible of their exploitation and they want remedial compensation of their deprivation and sufferings during the colonial period. Fomerand (2021) opines that there is a continuing debate among colonisers and colonised about all the effects of colonialism. But the human toll of colonialism and decolonisation has been horrendous...some 50 million died in Asia and Africa from 1900 to independence...there have been demands for apologies and reparation – by and large unheeded (p: 204).

At the same time, African people, like the people of other former colonies, have been experiencing a ‘transition phase’ in terms of newly emerging definitions of nationalism and national identity. Millions of Africans are among the migrants who enter Europe and America every year in pursuit of a new life, hence to embrace new hybrid identity which is at the mercy of racial, socio-political and psycho-social factors in the host societies of their former colonisers.

Post 1990s literary environment produced numerous writers in the world literatures who are struggling to redefine the meaning of colonialism. They are also re-evaluating the concept of nationalism with respect to their national identities. The contemporary literary and critical discourse of many African writers has shown the same shift of giving new meanings to the old terms. As Gover et al (2000) opine that during the last thirty years, African writers have been re-evaluating their own cultures as well as their attitudes towards Europe and the west (p: 1).

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

A brief historical background is presented for understanding the history of African colonisation, decolonisation and the birth of African post-colonial literature. It is important to understand that Africa is

not an easy subject to understand. In many respects it is a complex region which holds unusual external relations. For Clapham (1996), “Any study which seeks to appraise the relations between African states and their external environment must thus go some way beyond the confines of any narrow conception of international relations (p: 7).

Africa is the second largest continent after Asia. Its covered land is more than the collective land masses of Japan, India, China, America and most of Europe. It is the home of biggest genetic diversity anywhere in the world. Such distinct features and its huge area make it, as many believe, the home of most diversified cultures, traditions and tribes. A modern day student of history or humanities would generally try to trace back African colonisation to the 19th or the 20th centuries. But it started in the pre-historic or medieval time, in 1100 B.C. Johnston (1899) explains, “On the whole, the most fruitful of the pre-Roman invasions of Africa (as it was almost the earliest) was the foundation of Utica (about 1100 B.C.) ...what is now Tunisia” (p: 5). It was Greeks who pioneered the earliest connection between Africa and Europe in 600 B.C. And one after another, different nations came to Africa to conquer whatever land they could, according to their invasion capacity. Africa holds many surprises and amazing facts. Mahajan (2009) maintains that Africa is a continent full of surprises (p: 7). There are also many stereotypes, misunderstandings and myths about Africa. Especially, a big number of people in the Western European countries and America still hold the myths as true. There is a long history behind all this but there are many things which are a part of the documented knowledge which triggers hate among Africans towards their former colonisers. Mwakikagile (2007, p: 108) quotes one of the Ku Klux Klan’s poems that narrate the Klansmen’s expression of rejoicing at eating the flesh of the Negro,

No rations have I
but the flesh of man,
and love niggers best.
Eaten legions,
still go hungry.

Chinua Achebe’s excerpt, quoted by Emenyonu (2004, p: 146) “until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter” provides an immediate direction, a philosophical prompt and analogical implication to anyone who wants to study African (post-colonial) literature. The quote’s relation with the three initial words (colonised, colonists and colonisation) of this study further describes the way forward to analyse post-colonial African literature. The reference of the three keywords becomes as lions-colonised, hunt-colonisation and hunter-coloniser. The keyword ‘lions’ gives a double impression that Africans are brave like lion but they were imprisoned by the hunters (colonisers) through their system (colonisation). The quote implies the weakness of African ‘voices’ in literature and (media too) which could not present the African counter narrative against the prejudiced and one sided perspective in the literatures of the former colonisers. Achebe incites the African writers and historians to produce counter history and counter narrative of what has mostly been portrayed in the literature produced in the former coloniser countries. He suggests introducing genuine African viewpoint and genuine African perspective to tell the world about African traditions, cultures, beliefs, values and heritage. He suggests highlighting African peoples’ sufferings which they experienced during the colonial time. Many American and Western writers have also produced credible works by depicting genuine African ways and valued their traditional beliefs. Such efforts create positive progress in minimising the gap between the Western and African peoples. But the irresponsible and pompous utterances by some key political figures affect such efforts. For example, former American president George W. Bush generalised the whole Africa as a single nation and attributed it with the land of disease when he said in 2001, “Africa is a nation that suffers from terrible disease.” His statement triggered criticism everywhere and many writers and media men would try to balance out his statement by lame sort of excuses. But American government’s official record exposes George Bush’s conviction about Africa. The record reveals Bush’s thinking when he linked HIV with Africans. Office of the (American) Federal Registrar’s (2010) archives disclose George Bush as saying that more than half of all AIDS cases arise in the African American community. This disease is spreading fastest in African American women (p: 1430). His statement shows the so-called white superiority complex which is evident in many anti-black incidents which commonly take place in America. May be because of some realisation and to minimise the mistrust between Americans and Africans, Mr. Bush’s government, in 2003, initiated a comprehensive health programme to combat HIV/AIDS in Africa, named ‘The President’s Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).’

As a natural phenomenon, the huge diversification results in diverse and rich cultures, traditions, languages and beliefs which in turn are reflected in literature. Interestingly, the term ‘African literature’ has been wrongly interpreted as a literature of colossal nature in terms of cultural and civilizational representation of its people. On the contrary, it manifests a heterogeneous representation of more than 3000 ethnicities that speak more than 2000 languages and live in more than 54 countries and several islands. There are

many myths and misconceptions about Africa, its people, culture and traditions. Western historians and writers also present many questions about Africa. Jenkins et al (2020, p: 25) opine, "What if European enslavers and colonizers had never ventured into the African continent?...What if African nations and peoples had successfully rebuffed generations of plunder and theft?" .

African post-colonial literature emerged in the world of literature, for the first time as noticeable genre, in 1970s. Since then, a number of writers from almost every African country won literary acclaim. During the 1970s and 1980s, African literature was added as a discipline in many European and American universities. Despite all the diversities, the underlying theme of (post-colonial) African literature's response to the colonial experience gives an impression of sameness. The literature produced after the post-independence of African countries manifests the influence of that peculiar sameness. It does not mean that there is imaginative and philosophical sameness in the literatures of African countries. But it shows the sameness of the feeling of pain, suffering and loss because of unlawful occupation of Africa by the colonials.

III. KEY FIGURES, THEMES AND TRENDS IN POST-COLONIAL AFRICAN LITERATURE

No literary discussion on contemporary African literature is complete without Chinua Achebe (1930-2013). He is commonly considered as the father of modern African literature. He extended a considerable contribution in post-colonial theory as the discipline that has been striving to achieve a respectable position among the global literary approaches. Jagne and Parekh (1998) opine that post-colonial theory has made tremendous strides into becoming a respectable academic discourse. (p: ix). He was a Nigerian writer, novelist, critic and poet. His most famous works are his novels *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, *A Man of the People* and *Arrow of God*. He gave a renascent status to post-colonial African literature. Kasuka (2013) quotes great African anti-Apartheid leader Nelson Mandela commenting on Achebe's death in 2013, that Achebe brought Africa to the rest of the world and he was the writer in whose company the prison walls came down (p: 381 & 383). Achebe's first novel and a masterpiece *Things Fall Apart* is the most read book in Africa. His later works include novels, short stories, poems and literary criticism. His works present various themes but the mainstream and central theme that can be felt running all through his writings is Igbo (/i:bou/) life and culture. Igbo is a traditional way of life which is not related to one African nation or one people but it gives wider implication. It is attributed to the peoples and tribes living in modern day Nigeria to Equatorial Guinea. Achebe's reference to Igbo is in relation to two basic perspectives. First, it gives importance to genuine traditions, values, identity and the philosophy of life of a nation in its native country. Second, it becomes more important when the native land, hence the original people of the land come under foreign occupation. It becomes a scenario of originality versus coloniality. Coloniality comes as a wider system of colonialism which subjugates the local people of the land along with their language, traditional values, beliefs and ways of life and it tries to 'declare' them as inferior and 'other.' Kamugisha (2019) comments on Western coloniality or colonial system as, "The terror of Western colonial reason creates "other subtypes of otherness" out of "this ultimate mode of otherness based on 'race,'" which include "the lower classes as the lack of the normal class,...all other cultures as the lack of normal culture, that is Western culture" (p: 185). Some other important themes in Achebe's works include clash between traditional black African civilisation and white Western civilisation, power of destiny, language as an important cultural manifestation, divide in generations, the struggle between tradition and change and repression.

Ayi Kwei Armah (1939) is a Ghanaian writer who is well-known for his novels, poetry, children books and essays. He is known for presenting his viewpoint in a polemic way. He is also a cultural activist. He has been presenting a thorough investigative concern about cultural crisis in the present day Africa. His novels seem to advocate an intellectual campaign about the worth and originality of African values, beliefs, heritage and ways of life. He advocates for an institutionalised educational system to reform African spirit in culture and literature. He admits African backwardness in educational ideology and stresses the need to renovate African system. He criticises colonial powers for deteriorating the image of African values and cultural heritage and devastating African ways of life. He believes that colonists only strived to maintain their unlawful occupation and they did nothing for educational, social and cultural development of the African people. His debut novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* awarded him with high fame like Chinua Achebe. The central theme of the novel is intellectual awareness, not physical or individual, about being African. His other novels include *The Healers*, *Fragments*, *Why Are We So Blest?*, *The Revolutionaries* and *Two Thousand Seasons*. He adopts a bitter critical approach to the colonials and their systems in Africa. He also presents the way of African renaissance by urging African intellectuals to work as 'system-makers' and 'cultural workers' to combat the destructive aftermath of the colonial experience and to redefine African philosophy.

Mia Couto (1955) is a Mozambican writer. He is multidimensional literary personality as he is a short story writer, novelist, essayist, children books writer and biologist. His debut novel *Sleepwalking Land* has been awarded as one of the best African books of the 20th century. He presents revolutionary optimism and genuine voice of his generation. The son of a Portuguese immigrant family, Couto's white skin is an apparent 'mismatch' with African skin colour. The difference of his skin colour, however, has nothing to do with his genuine feelings, sentiments and emotions for his native Mozambique. He is an advocate of African voices and his writings are full of criticism for the European colonialists. He remembers his parents' emotional memorabilia in Portugal but he was devoted to Mozambique independence movement. His perspective about African literature is different from other African writers. Inspired by Brazilian literature, he considers African literature as more imaginary and less physical. He thinks that, contrary to European literature, there are many African literatures like so many Africans. He considers African literature in different entities like Francophone, Lusophone and Anglophone because of European colonisation. He thinks that the doors are open for African writers to strive for a standardised and comprehensive African literature to combat the European and Western versions of Africa. Apart from *Sleepwalking Land*, his other famous novels include *Under the Frangipani*, *O Outro Pé da Sereia* (Portuguese), *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* and *Jesusalém*.

Ama Ata Aidoo (1942) is a Ghanaian playwright, novelist, poet and professor. She has a strong resolve to providing education to all. Following her commitment, she resigned just eighteen months after she was appointed as the minister of education in 1982. She is a torch bearer of women rights in Africa and she struggles for greater and more effective role of women in contemporary African society. Though a staunch believer of African nationalism, she has introduced a different point of view. She opines that African nationalism is an entity which is 'seduced' by the former colonisers. She believes that African writers have not fully canvassed and propagated African concerns to the world. She is convinced about a distinct African identity but she thinks that it has been influenced by neo-colonialism and also because of weak role of African writers. Her academic experience as a fellowship in creative writing at Stanford University California provided her the opportunity to glance at African concerns and African nationalism from American or Western perspective. She also worked in the circles of academia in Zimbabwe, Germany and England. A documentary film *The Art of Ama Ata Aidoo* was made in 2014 in recognition of her academic profile. Her notable works include *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, *Birds and Other Poems*, *No Sweetness Here and Other Stories*, *Our Sister Killjoy: or Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint*, *Changes: A Love Story* and *The Girl Who Can: And Other Stories*. The key themes in Aidoo's writing revolve around a sort of 'clash of civilisation' philosophy. She is much concerned about the stark difference and confrontation between African and Western European beliefs, values and traditions. She holds the colonialists responsible of the crises of identity and nationalism in Africa and its impact on the life of Africans. She is an advocate of a strong political awareness in post-colonial Africa with relation to its colonial past. She names the pains and confusions of contemporary Africans as 'hypersensitivity.'

Driss Chraïbi (1926-2007) was a French-Moroccan writer and he is considered as the father of contemporary Moroccan novel. He wrote in French language. He enjoyed a multidisciplinary experience of working as a journalist, radio producer, commentator, novelist and dramatist. Born to a merchant family in 1926 in Morocco, Chraïbi studied at a French high school in Casablanca, the capital city of Morocco. Later, he studied neuropsychiatry and chemical engineering at a French university in Paris. His intuition influenced by his literary passion led him to become a writer. His works have been translated in Arabic, English, Italian, Russian and German. His debut novel *The Simple Past* published in 1954, gained a paradoxical acclaim. It was a success in France but it was banned in Morocco for more than twenty years. The publication time was the time of independence of Morocco and it inspired the volatile political circumstances in North Africa. His novelistic technique is considered as semi-autobiographical. His works include novels, short stories, children's books and mystery fiction but he is best known as a novelist. Some twenty novels are in his credit. His most famous novels are *The Simple Past*, *The Butts*, *The Donkey*, *The Crowd*, *The Flutes of Death*, *From All Horizons*, *The Ass*, *Heirs to the Past* and *A Friend is Coming to See You*. Chraïbi's novels, mainly, deal with post-colonial theory but they also describe the relationship of colonial past and post-colonial present. The key themes in his novels are about the clash of Eastern and Western civilisations, clash of colonialists' culture and beliefs with the culture and beliefs of the colonised and the clash of political and social interests of the developed world and the Third World. He wrote about the plight of Arab immigrants in France at a time when this issue was not widespread in international media. He also wrote about the clash of Arab and French cultural traditions. In a Muslim Morocco, he was also criticised for being one of the pioneer writers who exposed the oppressed situation of women and children in male-dominated Islamic society. His name remained in a paradoxical position of being labelled as a traitor (for exposing the reasons of French presence in Morocco) and also as the best loved writer by his native people. Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), a well-known French West Indian post-colonial writer, is known for many things. He is not an African but his reference is given in this study to highlight the relativity of his race and

literary philosophy with African race and post-colonial literary philosophy. He is also mentioned to highlight the impact of Western colonisation from Africa to the Americas including most of the Caribbean islands. His father Félix Casimir Fanon was a descendent of African slaves. Frantz Fanon belongs to Martinique, one of the Caribbean islands, but his political and literary wisdom stands by and supports African post-colonial literary theory. He is considered as an influential and radical writer for his analysis on colonisation, decolonisation, neo-colonialism, racism, anti-black hate, slavery and alienation. Apart from his literary career, he was a war veteran, psychiatrist, philosopher and radical Marxist. He exerted impact in critical theory along with his post-colonial contribution. As an intellectual and Pan-Africanist, he keenly observed the impact of colonisation and its aftermath in Africa. He was known as a revolutionary activist and father of decolonisation. The movements working for the rights of black people around the world get inspiration and spirit from his works. His first-hand experience of working in French army and then leaving it because of its 'racist' agenda helped him in composing his comprehension of racism of the European whites against African blacks. His notable works include *A Dying Colonialism*, *The Wretched of the Earth*, *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Negro and Language*.

Some other notable works in post-colonial African literature include *Purple Hibiscus* by the Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (1977), *So Long A Letter* by the Senegalese writer Mariama Bâ (1929-1981), *From a Crooked Rib* by the Somali novelist Nuruddin Farah (1945), *The Memory of Love* by the Sierra Leonean author Aminatta Forna (1964), *Burger's Daughter* by the South African writer Nadine Gordimer (1923-2014), *Black Bazar* by the Congolese novelist Alain Mabanckou (1966), *A Grain of Wheat* by the Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1938) and *Season of Migration to the North* by the Sudanese novelist Tayeb Salih (1929-2009).

There are several other themes and trends in post-colonial African literature. They focus on the notorious Apartheid (in South Africa), dual nationality, psychological clash between black and white communities, deprivation of local people from national resources, financial crisis, corrupt political systems, racism, communities' integration in metropolitan environments and negritude etc. Nevertheless, every post-colonial African writer is considered as 'two people'. As per common global perception, he is tribal, ignorant, traditional, stereotype, rigid, socially categorised, ritualised, quixotic and parabolic. On the other hand, the historical developments especially the experience of colonisation and decolonisation has made them aware of reasoning, practicality, conceptualisation, analytical and scientific approach, rationality, logic and the knowledge of time-honoured contemporary discourse of life.

IV. CONCLUSION

Before summing up the conclusion, it is important to note that Africa still remains different from other parts of the world in terms of its foreign relations and economic, political and socio-cultural aspects. There are many factors which contributed in pushing this huge continent in dark. The internal factors are not less significant than the external factors like colonisation and its aftermath. Clapham (1996) reveals that Africa's external relations cannot be divorced from post-independence trajectories which were not entirely determined by the pre-colonial and colonial inheritance and the influence of the outside world, but which were also affected by the actions of African rulers and peoples (p: 7).

Most of the African writers have been careful in dealing with emotionally sensitive subject of evocative depiction of Africans' slavery by white colonisers. They concentrated their responsiveness on cultural, psychological, intellectual, racial, social and political confrontation with the colonisers. They establish a paradigm of post-coloniality that has a global appeal like in other colonised parts of the world. They also constitute a singular and atypical set of comprehensive frame that encompasses the relation between African nations and the European (largely British Commonwealth) colonialism. They have introduced a kind of metanarrative in presenting the colonised state of African nations under the umbrella understanding of African colonialism. Lesser attention has been given to paint an individual nation's colonial experience. The credit of presenting a collective 'case of Africa' in the world literatures goes to the father of African post-colonial literature-Chinua Achebe. Since 1950s, post-colonial African writers have been engaged in engraving their literary stature by producing counter narrative, counter discourse and debunking approach. The most substantial of its kind is Achebe's stance against Conrad's point of view in his novel *Heart of Darkness*. He terms him as "bloody racist" and he refuses to accept his novel a master piece. Shankar (2001) quotes Achebe commenting on Conrad's 'prejudice', "Conrad saw and condemned the evil of imperial exploitation but was strangely unaware of the racism on which it sharpened its iron tooth" (p: 80). Hammer (1990) quotes Achebe's words about his understanding of the relation of the colonised Africans with their white colonisers. He says that Africa is "a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognisable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril" (p: 124).

In the end, the reader's attention is invited for wider contemplation on the effects of colonialism in post-colonial African literature, by presenting Frantz Fanon's historic remark on the relation between coloniser and colonised. Mthembu (2021) quotes Fanon as maintaining, "There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born." (p: 62). Fanon's terms 'zone', 'nonbeing', 'sterile and arid region' and 'utterly naked declivity' may be understood with relation to colonised condition, hopelessness, non-productivity and ignorance respectively.

The study ascertained that the significant academic contributions of African literature and more specifically post-colonial African literature are from Eastern, Western and Southern parts of Africa. Rhodesian or Zimbabwean literature is also a key contributor. Naturally, these variants are different from each other because of cultures, languages, tribal traditions, beliefs and political history of their respective societies. But they have certain common characteristics which make them a huge literary body called African literature. The study reveals some most striking commonalities. Most of the authors are either young or they are middle aged, born during or after 1920s. They produced quite enlightened and documentary literature. The writers who wrote in English are engaged both with their people and with the Western readers. They convey the Africans' feelings to their former colonisers to negate and counter the latter's prejudiced perspective about the former. They try to portray the big picture of reverberation of the colonial experience in Africa to the colonisers. Most of the writers who wrote in French try to present rich cultural traditions of Africa to the colonisers and the rest of the world. The writing style, message and literary approach of these writers are different from the literary approach of the ones who wrote in English. They tend to highlight the diversification and beauty of African culture to the Europeans by suggesting that African literature is not less in literary value and quality than the Western or European literatures. They also suggest Africans to understand the contemporary norms and trends and try to promote and elevate their social, political, traditional and literary status among the nations of the world.

Because of the huge territorial characteristic of Africa, the experience of colonisation has been different in different areas. In the far flung rural areas, the locals were least bothered who ruled them. Their traditional and tribal ways of life were not much disturbed. But in the urban areas the impact of colonisation was very serious. The alien culture really challenged their traditions, beliefs, values and to an extent their language. The 'clash of civilisation' phenomenon has been equally portrayed by the African writers of French and English languages. The time of colonisation has been put as a tragedy in all spheres of life. A great number of writers highlighted the issues related with social change, nationalism and identity crisis. Some wrote about the new challenges like neo-colonialism and the need for political and economic renaissance. The dark history of slavery and forced labour has been significantly presented to create abhorrence and detestation against the colonials. That is why the history of displacement and its physical and psychological consequences have been given apt representation in many works. Another important feature of post-colonial African literature has been the call for liberation and resistance. It means that the peoples of African countries have been inspired and motivated to strive for change in their ways of life and move forward to gain a respectable position among the global societies by adopting modern economic, political, social, educational and philosophical doctrines. For them, this is the best strategy to come out of the impact of colonial legacy and neo-colonial challenge. But there is no tendency of showing any compromise on the unique African identity, African tribal culture and indigenous values and traditions.

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