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**Department of Letters and Foreign Languages Course : African Literature**

**Section of English Lecture : Postcolonial African Literature**

**I- Definitions and Historical Foundations:**

In his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, Neil Lazarus pointed out that before the 1970s; postcolonial studies did not exist as academic study field. Nowadays, this field has its place all over the world and in different universities. Many centers concerning postcolonial studies have been established not only in the literary field, but also in other fields such as: culture, history, and so on. Many journals began to see light under the broad term “postcolonialism” dealing with notions like postcolonial theory and literature. In addition to the considerable publications, articles, books and criticism which concern postcolonial studies.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that works on the postcolonial question did not exist before the 1970s; there have existed records on anticolonial movements and leaders. As Neil Lazarus emphasizes in his book:

***“Post-colonial” (or “postcolonial”- the American variant), in these usages from the early 1970s, was a periodising term, historical and not an ideological concept. It bespoke no political desire or aspiration, looked forward to no particular social or political order. Erstwhile colonial territories that had been decolonized were “postcolonial” states. It was as simple as that.*** (Lazarus 2004: 02)

Even for writers who were described as being postcolonial, the reference was historical. For instance, Chinua Achebe was recurrently described as: ***“an Igbo writer, a Nigerian writer, an African writer, a Commonwealth writer, a Third-World writer, but seldom if ever as a “postcolonial” one”*** (Lazarus 2004: 03).

According to Depika Bahri, Associate Professor in the English department at Emory University, in her article *Introduction to Postcolonial Studies (1996),* it is known that postcolonialism is a reaction against colonialism which exercises power on natives to abuse their wealth. However, many say that postcolonialism is about the social and cultural changes which take place after colonialism, especially after the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* in 1978. This ongoing interest in postcolonialism was reinforced by the publication of *The* *Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989), which diminished the use of such terms, as: Third World, Commonwealth…etc.

Another factor that helped in the spread of postcolonial literature is the wide expansion of the European Empire and its fall after WWII when many countries got their independence.

The culture and society of colonized countries before colonization help us understand more the colonial mechanisms and the new culture and society of the post-colony. Thus, the term postcolonial may also include colonized countries or minorities belonging to the First World countries. However, the term “Commonwealth literature” presupposes that only literature written in English or belonging to the “Empire” has got an importance.

In *Postcolonialism: Introduction*, Marie Rose Napierkowski says that postcolonialism refers to the representation of culture, race, ethnicity, and identity in the modern world where many countries became independent. While many critics refer to it as the: “culture and cultural products influenced by imperialism from the moment of colonization until today” ( Napierkowski 1998, Literary Movements for Students).

Imperialism occurred through different ways and procedures which depended on certain situations, a thing that led to the unexpected. The colonizers tried to take control over, not only the land and the wealth of the colonized, but also the culture of these peoples. But with the emergence of the process of the colonization, these peoples regained not only their lands but they also got rid of the imperial cultural control. In addition, the newly decolonized people used their culture and language together to challenge and replace the colonizer’s culture. So, postcolonialism began within the beginning of colonialism, “***it is the discourse of oppositionality which colonialism brings into being”*** (Ashcroft et al 1995: 117). Nevertheless, this ongoing interest in postcolonialism grew up with the emergence of postmodernism a fact that made people confuse between the two concepts.

In the introduction of *Colonialism-Postcolonialism*, the writer Ania Loomba proclaims that the term postcolonialism is so heterogeneous and it is almost impossible to define and describe it in a satisfactory way due to, according to her, the interdisciplinary nature of postcolonialism. Meanwhile, the term postcolonialism has certainly some drawbacks, for that, Loomba has classified these problems as follows: The first one lies in the fact that in English departments it is accepted to discuss cultural differences but it is not allowed to talk about economic exploitation. A second problem that presents itself is that the postcolonial is presented as footnotes in the syllabi. A third problem seems to relate to what she calls “The race for theory”, this wide range of theories and theorists may confuse students in terms of understanding the term itself.

Loomba thinks that we have to consider postcolonialism as the opposition to colonial rule so that we can include within the postcolonial studies the peoples who were displaced by colonialism such as African-American or people of Asian or Caribbean origin in Britain as postcolonial subjects despite the fact that they belong to the metropolitan centers, we can also include modern opposition to Western and imperial cultures.

Moreover, in the view of George Alva, postcolonialism should be strongly linked to the view of poststructuralism which says that: ***“there is no single history but a multiplicity of histories”*** (cited by Loomba 1998: 13). This is argued by Appiah that postcolonial societies had a history and culture before colonialism, a thing that people always neglect so that we have the feeling that these societies had no culture or history, they are always delimited with the day of their colonization.

To fully understand the postcolonial, though, one has to understand first the process of decolonization and thus, colonialism itself. The colonized countries have fought against colonialism each in his own way and according to the conditions and situations of colonialism in each place. Aimé Césaire thinks that the colonizers legitimized their colonization by claiming that they wanted to “civilize” some countries. He disclaims this belief in the civilizing mission. On the contrary, he sees that colonization “uncivilizes” the colonizer and draws him down to savagery and bestiality.

According to Rothermund a decolonization operation took place in the twentieth century in the period between 1947 and 1960, Senghor once said that: ***“the Africans wanted to assimilate and not be assimilated”*** (Rothermund 2006: 2), while he himself couldn’t interact with some of his own people in their native language, so he had to use the French language to address them. This could be a strong sign that decolonization should not occur only in the limited scope that we find in dictionaries and other sources. So, the notion of “decolonizing the mind” gained ground and the term postcolonialism appeared to discuss this notion, as Rothermund points out: “there have been lively debates on “hybrid culture” and on the relation between power and knowledge as exemplified by “Orientalism”. (Rothermund 2006: 2). He also thinks that the works about the transfer of power which glorify nationalism are not of a real importance for nowadays readers, that’s why a social and cultural aspect of decolonization is rather needed to more understand the reasons and effects of this phenomenon. That’s why the field “subaltern studies” emerged to speak up for the oppressed people.

But this did not satisfy scholars at that time, so the field of postcolonialism emerged within ***“writers who expressed the quest for an identity which had been submerged by the colonial impact”*** (Rothermund 2006: 51). This notion had been strengthened by the work of Edward Said: *Orientalism* which added a new meaning to the “decolonization process” meaning. That is, people fought for their political independence, but after the emergence of postcolonialism, and under the influence of Said, postcolonialists as Rothermund pointed out fought for their intellectual and spiritual self-determination.

On this idea, and according to Dirlik, colonialism refers to ***“the political control by one nation of another nation or of a society striving to become a nation”*** (Dirlik 2000: 430). Neo-colonialism is ***“where a colony had already achieved formal political independence but still could not claim full autonomy due primarily to economic but also ideological reasons”*** (Dirlik 2000: 430). While postcolonialism might be interested in the national and cultural identity that resulted from.

**II-The Postcolonial Theory:**

*The Blackwell Companion* begins in part three, claiming that postcolonialism and postmodernism emerged almost in the same period that is why people may confuse between the two terms ***: “one of the claims frequently made about postcolonial theory is that it is, in one way or another, the “child” of postmodernism”*** (Schwarz and Ray (Alessandrini) 2000: 431). They also give the example of Dirlik’s statement that postcolonialism is a child of postmodernism. Dirlik also goes far by criticizing post colonial theorists for their “residual classical Marxism”. For them, postcolonial theory does not exist only in the field of post colonial studies, but also in the field of globalization and other areas of study since it is relevant to feminism, ethnic and cultural studies…etc.

Ania Loomba criticizes the postcolonial theory for being so dependent on post-structuralist or post-modern perspectives. According to her, this theory insists on the idea of “multiple histories” which blurs the mechanisms by which these histories work together. She also criticizes it for changing emphasis from locations and institutions to individuals and their subjectivities which is due to its reliance on literary and cultural criticism and post-structuralism.

However, Duncan Brown in *The Concise Companion to Postcolonial Literature*, says that among the debates about postcolonial theory is its theorization of the silencing of the colonized “within the colonial encounter”. But he says that despite the attempt to ***“silence the other”, “the colonized have continued to speak, often in unofficial ways and from unofficial spaces, but also from the centers of their societies”*** (Chew and Richards 2010: 47).

In postcolonial theory we find a focus on how hybrids are conceived. Hybridization is seen in a binary way, the mixing of races and the alienation of some races to point at ***“the Victorian extreme right which regarded different races as different species […] according to Robert Young”*** (Loomba 1998: 173) and this also gives ground to criticism arguing that the notion of “hybridity” underestimates ***“the clash between the colonizer and the colonized and therefore misrepresent the dynamics of anti-colonial struggle”*** (Loomba 1998: 181). And again she gives the example of nationalist movements like “negritude” which are alienated and cannot conform to such a notion as hybridity. Another criticism to this theory is that it has a pessimistic tone since it is, as the writer says, the child of postmodernism.

On the importance of using postcolonial theory, Lang’at, A. K. in the article presented to the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) in 2005, relying on the views of many scholars like Gandhi, summarizes it into the following points: rethinking “self”, deconstructing the discourse of the “regimes of othering”, reconstructing “historical self-invention”, and recreating or deleting the “painful memories of the colonial era” and its consequences after independence like the imperial linguistic, literary and cultural domination.

In addition to that, Martin Denyer, a visiting lecturer in visual culture at Middlesex University, in his essay entitled *What* *and Where is Postcolonial Theory?*, says that it examines the European domination of non-European peoples, lands, and cultures. However, it examines essentially the immanent views implemented by imperial colonization about Europe being superior to the countries it has once colonized, and the damages it has caused to their self-identity. He adds that the issues of ethnicity, hybridity, and displacement … etc constitute only three topics in postcolonial theory which lead to discuss the vast topic of the diversity of cultural identity. So, this makes of national identity a main issue in postcolonial theory.

It is known that this theory has emerged with the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* in 1978, which in fact, according to Leela Gandhi, developed in a quiet poststructuralist environment incarnated by the figures of Derrida and Foucault. She argues that Said’s ideas relied essentially on the work of Foucault, and that Spivak’s work dealt with ***“the task of dialogue and negotiation with and between Derrida and Foucault”*** (Gandhi 1998: 26-27). So, it is due to poststructuralism and postmodernism, and their relation to Marxism that postcolonial theory exists. She blames this theory for its limited constituency and its excessive focus on politics rather than theory.

Gandhi adds to this that its first phase is Orientalism. Postcolonial theory is concerned with defending the “marginalized other” living within “repressive structures” of domination. It is also concerned with reversing the existing order of gender, culture, and race. In a way or another, Gandhi tries to say that postcolonial theory is an extension to western theory. In the section entitled The *Limits of Postcolonial Theory* she says: ***“postcolonial theory is situated somewhere in the interstices between Marxism and postmodernism/poststructuralism”*** (Gandhi 1998: 167).

Postcolonial theory tries to answer questions about the notions of language, home, identity, hybridity and so on, on the basis that the colonizer wants to achieve his control and effect on those notions through the process of “knowing” the other, as Ashcroft says in *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*: “to name the world is to “understand” it, to know it and to have control over it” (Ashcroft et al 1995: 283). And as David Washburn in his essay thinks that ***“knowledge is power, and words, whether written or spoken, are the medium of exchange, using words incurs responsibility”***.

As mentioned in *The Empire Writes Back*, the very idea of a postcolonial theory comes out of the incapacity of the existing European theory to handle the complexity and cultural diversity of postcolonial writings. According to it, the political and cultural monocentrism of the colonizer emerged as a consequence of the “representation” system of Europe. So, the notion of expansion grew up in Europe which caused a cultural subservience. The reaction to this was the development of what Ashcroft et al call “identifiable indigenous theories” which was the cause of a growing national consciousness.

The attempt to “marginalize” the colonized world directed the fight of the colonized people towards achieving plurality, multiplicity, and uncentered position, and so, ***“marginality […] became an unprecedented source of creative energy”*** (Ashcroft et al 2002: 12). It is true that Europeans presented these ideas before postcolonialists through poststructuralism; but, being actually marginalized socially and culturally, the postcolonial world came to this situation in an earlier time and in a direct way. According to Ashcroft et al, these ideas and thoughts are present in postcolonial texts from the moment of colonization till now. In this book they say also that even if postcolonial theory was based on European theories and even if it followed their steps, it has done so “cautiously and eclectically”.

Many theorists and critics see that the point that gives postcolonial theory its strength is its comparative methodology and its way of viewing the world in a hybridized and syncretic view. Ashcroft et al proclaim that one has to bear in mind that postcolonial theory cannot be seen as using the other European theories as “contexts” in its development. They say that the European theories form ***“the conditions of the development of post-colonial theory in its contemporary form and […] the determinants of much of its present nature and content”*** (Ashcroft et al 2002: 153). But this fact, according to them, may be some how dangerous to postcolonial theory because European theories have the ***“tendency to reincorporate post-colonial culture into a new internationalist and universalist paradigm”*** (Ashcroft et al 2002: 154). They also say that the European theories which wanted to encompass postcolonial literature and put it within a postmodern frame, are themselves affected, if not shaped, by the colonial era and the era of decolonization. Although Said and Spivak have rejected the term postcolonial for various reasons, their works together with the work of Bhabha, paved the way to postcolonial theorists and helped them in a way or another.

About the validity of postcolonial theory, Ashcroft et al have been asking many questions like ***“has post-colonial theory […] served to re-colonize the post-colonial world by re-incorporating its agendas into the metropolitan academic concerns […]?””Who reads the “postcolonial” texts?”*** (Ashcroft et al 2002: 203). Then they give us an answer that its validity is in its efficacy; that is, its validity depends on the way it has contributed to empower postcolonial intellectuals and to the decolonizing process in general. They add that one of the ways by which the strategies of decolonization work is language which has formed a debatable area in postcolonial studies. Intellectuals have shown uncertainty towards postcolonial theory.

**III- Postcolonial Literature:**

Whenever we hear the names: Chinua Achebe, Homi Bhabha, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Wole Soyinka, Gayatri Spivak, Franz Fanon, Buchi Emercheta … etc we directly think of postcolonial literature. Mark Stein, in his book, *Black British Literatures: Novels of Transformation*, said: ***“Post-colonial literatures can be defined as those Europhone literatures that have arisen in the wake of European colonialism”*** (Stein 2004: 201). However, according to [Paul Brians](mailto:brians@wsu.edu), the problems with these definitions is that the process of colonization in itself is not the core of postcolonial studies, and that many postcolonial works were written during colonization so it would not be correct to say that it is the set of works written after the independence of these countries. Besides, most of the independent countries are still dependent on their former colonizers in a way or another. Another fact is that saying that postcolonial writers were influenced by western studies is not exactly how these writers wanted to be remembered.

History has become a crucial issue in literature thanks to postcolonial literature, and we can see that through its definition. Cultural and ideological implications of a literary text also have become important since the emergence of postcolonial studies. The postcolonial text serves as a vehicle to transmit the identity and national interest of a society. Besides, postcolonial literature attempts to get rid of the fact that it has no history or literature, a quality which was attributed to it by many imperial texts. These facts make the themes in postcolonial literatures widely varying: place and displacement, language, hybridity, identity, colonialism, resistance … etc.

With time, scholars have tried to refine the definition of postcolonial literature to make it more plausible. Other scholars say that the postcolonial writers subvert the colonial discourse by using specific techniques such as telling a known story from the view of an oppressed character in it. Also, it is generally recognized that the main characters in postcolonial literature are always struggling to construct their identity feeling trapped between their native culture and the newly hybridized dominant culture.

To strengthen this idea we can look at other definitions. John Lye defines it as follows: ***“postcolonial literature is often (but not inevitably) self consciously a literature of otherness and resistance, and is written out of the specific local experience”*** . Leela Gandhi in her book *Postcolonial Theory* defines it as follows:

***a contentious category which refers […] to “literatures in English”, namely, to those literatures which have accompanied the projection and decline of British imperialism. This academic privileging of postcolonial literature is informed by recent critical attempts to postulate the colonial encounter primarily as a textual contest, or a bibliographic battle, between oppressive and subversive books.”*** (Gandhi 1998: 141).

Another important definition is that of Ashcroft et al in *The Empire Writes Back*, who think that, semantically speaking, the term postcolonial literature is used to describe the literatures interested in the national culture after independence. To point at national literature people used to say “modern Canadian writing” or “recent west Indian literature”.

However, for Ashcroft et al, the term postcolonial literature is used to denote all literature covering the culture influenced by imperialism from the beginning of colonization till now. On another hand, they hesitate to place the literature of the United States under this category, and they argue that it is due to its relationship to a colonial centre (Britain) that it could be seen as postcolonial.

What is important is that these literatures share the characteristic ***“that they 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 assumptions of the imperial centre”*** (Ashcroft et al 2002: 2) and this is the quality which emphasizes their postcoloniality.

According to *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, postcolonial literature faces a great dilemma which is replacing ‘English literature” by “world literature” through the process of charging “Anglo-centric assumptions”. For Ania Loomba, books written on postcolonial literatures concern themselves only with ***“literatures written in English, or widely available in translation, or those that have made the best-seller lists in Europe and the United States”*** (Loomba 1998: 93), a fact that has to be reconsidered. In the *Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism*, Coyle et al say that postcolonial literature is passive and subjugated in the view of Anglo-European studies, but in their own view this literature is neither passive nor isolated, and we cannot account for it appropriately without taking into consideration its textual relations.

Chew and Richards say that: *“ the concepts of ”writing” back and re-writing are well established, both in postcolonial literature itself and in writing about it”.* (Chew and Richards 2010: 71). Before the establishment of this notion in postcolonial literature, writers were concerned with the image of their culture and history as represented by colonial views. And here, they give the example of Achebe and Conrad. They say that Achebe tried to “write back” to respond to the colonial view about the colonized, and to “rewrite” a certain ***“ colonial text by revisiting its plot and/or characters”*** (Chew and Richards 2010: 72) .

Postcolonial literature went through phases matching the development of the national uprising and strong desire to split from the metropolitan centre. During colonization writings were produced in the colonizers’ language by ***“a literate elite whose primary identification is with the colonizing power”*** (Ashcroft et al 2002: 5). These texts were primarily produced by writers who represent the colonizing centre: settlers, travelers, soldiers … etc. These writings, according to Ashcroft et al, cannot be classified under the category of indigenous culture or native culture, despite the fact that they write about the colonized countries, they seem to privilege the colonizing centre. And these literatures’ loyalty to imperialism is hidden under their claimed objectivity which hides the imperial discourse where they were born.

After that period, the “natives” and the “outcasts” produced a literature which was given license only by the empire. Like the ninetieth century literature produced by the “English educated upper class” and the “African missionary literature”. Such a category of writers felt they were advantaged because they had at hand the colonizer’s language and education.

These literatures did deal with subjects like ***“the brutality of the convict system […] the historical potency of the supplanted and denigrated native cultures […] or the existence of a rich cultural heritage older and more extensive than that of Europe”*** (Ashcroft et al 2002: 6) but they could not fully develop the theme of subversion or explore their anti-colonial orientation. These literatures were produced under colonial control which granted permission concerning what is appropriate or not, and concerning the distribution of the work, Ashcroft et al add to this: ***“texts of this kind come into being within the constraints of a discourse and the institutional practice of a patronage system which limits and undercuts their assertion of a different perspective”*** (Ashcroft et al 2002: 6). The literature produced by those who wanted to end these restrictions and use their writings for different and more efficient objectives appear in what Ashcroft et al call “modern post-colonial literatures”.

Besides the issues of language, hegemony and what have been discussed before, postcolonial literature discusses the issue of place and displacement in which, as Ashcroft et al think, ***“the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place”*** (Ashcroft et al 2002: 8). So, and as Lazarus postulates, to say that a writer or a piece of writing is postcolonial was to date it back to a certain moment or to relate it to a specific period in time, or to relate it to a certain community or identity, but with time, this scope has broadened and the reference has changed, and this could be seen in its relation with the world.

On the relationship of postcolonial literature with the western literary canon, John Marx in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* says that he identifies three sorts of relationships but he deals only with two of them which he thinks are familiar to everybody else. The first one is that postcolonial literature repudiates the canon. According to him, the universal audience has become experienced and well trained in considering the colonized literature as the “antithesis” of the literature of the canon and as an effective way to restore the traditional literature and culture that the colonizer tried to erase.

The second point is that postcolonial literature is trying to make a revision of texts and concepts belonging to the canon. And here Marx explains that the audience considers that postcolonial literatures criticize Western literatures by using many techniques like rewriting some works, or appropriating some genres … etc. He adds: ***“the fact that a writer’s capacity to represent a place and its people is widely considered relevant to determining canonicity suggests how dramatically postcolonial literature has changed what we mean when we say “the canon””*** (Lazarus 2004: 85)

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