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What Is Postcolonial Intellection to Us: A White Scarecrow in the Field?

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Abstract

Given that postcolonial theory has come to meet a chequered reception in many postcolonial locations, particularly in Africa, it has become imperative that we examine a number of arguments for and against the theory. In the Babel of Voices that has been stirred by this theory, there are still scholars who posit that postcolonialism is a highly relevant theoretical framework for the discursive and historical tenor of African literature. They have argued that the postcoloniality of the African experience falls within the ambit of the theory. This essay supports postcolonialism by canvassing for its proper application. A proper application will be that which respects both the integrity of literary texts and the density of history in the texts. Keywords: Postcolonialism, Postcoloniality, Postcolonial Theory and Africa.

This essay is not so ambitious as to claim the capacity to settle the apprehension of a section of African scholars concerning postcolonial theory. The drive here is to throw a few more drops of fuel into the inferno, and to hope that the fire will be sufficiently purgatorial to cleanse some things of their fog.

What is postcolonial intellection to us? “Is Africa contributing efficiently and sufficiently to the growing and monstrously disparate body of knowledge we all now refer to as postcolonial theory?” (Adesanmi 35) Adesanmi’s question calls up Wole Soyinka’s response to a question asked, by a senior member of staff of the University of Port Harcourt, at the 2010 edition of the Garden City Literary Festival. The question was on the suitability of applying postcolonial theory to African literatures. Soyinka’s reply was mostly dismissive. *Africa is not postcolonial yet. Africa is not yet free of imperial influence.* And more of that sort. It appears that the significance of that statement was lost on the audience. Such a statement from one of the icons of postcolonial Africa and letters ought to have generated a lot of interest, if only for its thrust of irony. Now, to tell the truth, Soyinka is not alone in this tangle of irony. We are all in it.

Postcolonial theory is the Native Child which many African scholars are hesitating to claim – the Native Child which is treated as a White Scarecrow in the field. And the situation is not likely to change soon. So, the question is: Why do some of us insist that the theory can be applied to African literature(s) against the wisdom of eminent African scholars like Soyinka and others? Have we been foolish to mistake a scarecrow for a Native Child? Have we been trying to give a scarecrow a foothold in the homestead? Many statements have been made concerning postcolonial theory. It has diverse roots and diverse destinations. This situation is in itself a source of conflict. In this case, is there a possibility of locating an African strand? Is it possible to take what is ours and leave the rest? Is it possible to adapt some elements from the other(s)? What do we do with this Native Child which continued to lay its claim on us?

Postcolonial theory has come to attract what Sangeeta Ray describes as a “many-sided take on [its] status” (574). Similarly, Gaurav Desai and Supriya Nair have chosen to describe the theory in a plural sense: *Postcolonialisms*. “We refer to ‘postcolonialisms’”, Desai and Nair say, “in the plural not only because of the differences between the actual histories of colonialism in various world contexts but also because our aim is to foreground the variety of work that is carried under this name” (2). Furthermore, they observe that patterns of meaning can still be made from the multiplicity of perspectives that have attended postcolonial studies and postcolonial theorization. “If the sheer multitude of historical experiences means that it makes sense to talk about ‘postcolonialisms’ or even perhaps of ‘(post)colonialisms’ – to invoke that once popular bracketing gesture”, Desai and Nair state that “it is also the case that the plural form is appropriate to an enterprise that by now has moved in several directions, and one that has always had multiple legacies” (2). “And yet”, they posit that “while insisting on multiple, even competing ‘postcolonialisms’, as well as on postcolonial theories that have significant,

irreconcilable difference with one another,” there are existing anchors, and “we can still usefully map out the field in terms of recognizable patterns, shared family resemblances, and common genealogies” (2). It is obvious that Desai and Nair see the rise of “postcolonialisms” in positive light, much like Henry Schwarz’s position on the subject. Schwarz notes that even as “one is struck by how much more difficult it has become to describe postcolonial studies”, this is “a very positive development. Anyone looking for a single, simple definition of this field will be disappointed”(1). This is to say that postcolonial studies have followed the path of other literary theories. There is no literary theory that has not undergone a “many-sided take on [its] status”, to quote Ray again (574). Literary scholarship, by nature, always tends to escape the sterile limits of uniformity as much as it insists on the validity of its ideas. Both the strength and the weakness of literary scholarship are caught in this mould. The path of wisdom is that which avoids the borderline of excess.

The multiplicity of perspectives which is noted by Schwarz, Nair and Desai has grown in proportion since the 1990s. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin have argued that since the first edition of *The Empire Writes Back* in 1989, “postcolonial theory has proven to be one of the most diverse and contentious fields in literary and cultural studies, and “‘postcolonialism’ has come to mean many things and to embrace a dizzying array of critical practices” (193). This is healthy to the extent that it respects the diversity of experience, but not to the point that it gets so cloudy as to lose touch with substance. It is often in the habit of literary/cultural theories to court opacity, and postcolonialism is on that route. The problem is hardly with the subject. The postcolonial condition is real in societies that have been colonized and also in societies that have colonized others. But discussants are wont to blur reality with their anxieties, with their understatements and overstatements, with their totalizations and theorizations. What is expected of the rest of us (especially the critics from postcolonial societies) is – rather than throw in the towel – to “map out the field”, as Desai and Nair say (2).

This is not expected to be easy but it is the way to go because there are still valid grounds for applying the theory to African literatures. It is great news that while some have dwelt on its minuses, a number of other critics understand the need to appropriate postcolonial theory and its multi-links. For instance, Ato Quayson admits that “postcolonialism designates a critical practice that is highly eclectic and difficult to define”, but he goes on to posit “a possible working definition” which holds that postcolonial studies/theory “involves a studied engagement with the experience of colonialism and its past and present effects, both at the local level of ex-colonial societies, as well as at the level of more general global developments thought to be after-effects of empire” (93). He also adds that the scope of “postcolonialism often involves the discussion” of a wide range of experiences “such as those of slavery,

migration, suppression, and resistance, difference, race, gender, place, and the responses to the discourse of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy, anthropology, and linguistics” (94).

Quayson’s view agrees with that of Abrams. Abrams posits that postcolonial theory is “the critical analysis of the history, culture, literature and modes of discourse that are specific to the former colonies of England, Spain, France, and other European imperial powers” (245). He says that some scholars have extended postcolonial studies, beyond the Third World countries of Africa, Asia, South America and the Caribbean, “to the discourse and cultural productions of countries such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand” (245). Other modes of reading also look, beyond the counter-narratives in the poems, plays and fiction of formerly colonized peoples, to examine the literature and other cultural products of the colonial powers. There is the example of how some postcolonial scholars, including Nigeria’s Chinua Achebe, have probed “aspects of British literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” to reveal “the ways in which the social and economic life represented in that literature was tacitly underwritten by colonial exploitation” (Abrams 245). Abrams’ points are very clear. Postcolonial criticism is concerned with the literature (and culture) of ex-colonies, particularly as it counters the hegemony of colonial culture. By this, it means that postcolonial criticism will discuss the manner in which the literatures of formerly colonized societies represent the experiences (the past and the present) of such societies. Two, postcolonial criticism is also concerned with the literature (and culture) of the colonial powers to show how it has reinforced the project of imperialism. How has colonial literature textualised the programme of colonialism? What is the self-assigned image of the colonialist in relation to the colonized? In this strand, as in the first, the colonial and postcolonial are linked because they throw light on each other. The point here is that no nation that has been once colonized has clearly escaped that history – the weight of its history either bogs it down or it stokes its aggression against its past and present. And no colonial power has escaped its past: they all find it difficult to break the habit of plunder (which is still noticeable in the various guises of neo-colonial programmes), to say nothing of the actual stench from the past which still fouls the air. The pains of colonialism still persist in the after-effects of colonialism. This is the fact that has continued to fuel the currency of postcolonial literature.

“Literature”, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, “offers one of the most important ways” by which postcoloniality is “expressed” by formerly colonized peoples (1). “What each of these literatures has in common beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics” – Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin say – “is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial, and by emphasizing their

differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre” 2), for this is what makes the literature “distinctively post-colonial” (2). Postcoloniality touches a very wide spread of peoples: “more than three-quarters of the people living in the world today have their lives shaped by the experience of colonialism” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1). Postcolonial studies are built on/around the postcoloniality of these peoples, and this situation has given a force of value to how the postcolonial is enunciated in their cultural products.

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin say that the word “postcolonial” covers “all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression” (2). They also “suggest that it is most appropriate as a term for the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is constituted” (2). It has been a conflictual approach to say that the “postcolonial” takes its range from the moment of colonialism to the present. This is why Ashcroft himself seeks to clarify that point in his essay, “Postcoloniality and the Future of English”. He says “if we understand the post-colonial to mean the discourse of the colonized rather than a discourse post-dating colonialism,” then the perspective will be clear, and we shall come to appreciate how “post-colonial analysis becomes that which examines the full range of responses to colonialism, from absolute complicity to violent rebellion and all variations in between” (19). It is clear that postcolonial theory reaches to the core of literary productions from ex-colonial societies. But it appears that the more scholars debate the applicability of this theory to literature and other cultural products, the more it is greeted with suspicion by even critics from the societies which it is supposed to favour. The reasons for this suspicion, and dismissal, are various. And this attitude is really high amongst African scholars.

To name one example, Nigeria’s Niyi Osundare has queried the definition of postcolonialism and its attempt to put works “as far apart as *When Love Whispers* (1947), *The Palmwine Drinkard* (1952), *Fragments* (1969) and *I Will Marry When I Want* (1982) in the same Post-colonial Bag” (7). He seeks to know what amounts to post-colonial – is it “beyond-colonial, post-colonial, free-from-colonial, anti-colonial or simply not-colonial” (6)? He asks: “What makes a work ‘post-colonial’, the time and place of its author or its own intrinsic subject” (9)? Of course, he admits that of all “terminologies of the ‘post -’ variety, ‘post-colonial’ is a highly sensitive historical and geographical trope” which raises the issues of the relationship “between the West and the developing world” (4), but he also dismisses postcolonialism as the ploy “by Western Theory” to put a “nomenclatural handle on their epistemic spheres of influence” (8). Osundare does not deny the postcoloniality of postcolonial societies. He is worried about the theoretical framework that is

applied to African postcolonial experiences, and he dismisses the theory. And no one denies him the right to map out his own preferred markings for postcolonialism given that even today the theory is still open. If other scholars have created what Gayatri Spivak calls “the South Asian model” (xv), why should there not be an African or a Nigerian model? Why stop at dismissal when we can chart a pathway? Osundare’s position re-echoes one of the intellectual failures which Biodun Jeyifo has noted. Jeyifo observes that “the contemporary understanding of theory,” particularly by African scholars, I dare say, “not only renders it as an exclusively Western phenomenon of a very specialized activity but also implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) inscribes the view that it does not exist, cannot exist outside the High Canonical Western orbit” (in Okunoye 79). It is not fortuitous that Okunoye himself states that postcolonial theory “reveals that possibilities of theory cannot be limited to Western experience” (79). The possibilities of application demand that African scholars, like Osundare, should exercise the liberty and competence to “cook” a new brand or to simply stand on the postcolonial platform that generations of African scholars have built.

Like Osundare, Chidi Maduka says it is wrong for African scholars to adopt “the fanciful ideas” which are “encoded” in a theory like postcolonialism “without closely examining their appropriateness for the study of African literature and culture” (9). Maduka says that postcolonialism “derives its premises from post-structuralism” and it “extends the frontiers of...Commonwealth Literature” (23). He further adds that “post-colonial criticism constitutes a danger to comparative literature because it virtually negates the existence of African languages...” (25). Is there a perfect theory for African literatures and languages?

Besides, how could Maduka have missed the difference in the outlook of Commonwealth Literature and postcolonial literatures? Is it not clear that whereas the former is a faux pas that pretends that the project of empire is still a big harmonious pack; the latter even at its weakest-point posits the essence of Otherness? And how does postcolonial theory negate comparative literature and African languages? The failure of postcolonial societies to promote indigenous languages is not the fault of postcolonial theory. In fact, postcolonial theory notes it as the hangover of colonialism. Moreover, colonialism, resistance-to-colonialism and the after-effects of colonialism cut across many languages and cultures; if this situation is not a boon for comparative literature, then what is? Or is there a theory which is specifically pro-comparative literature? There is indeed a proclivity, among African scholars, for pointing to the actual and imagined weaknesses of postcolonial theory in order to justify the dismissal of the theory. Tejumola Olaniyan avers: “I know of no African scholar – and, perhaps, very few scholars of Africa too – who would not invoke the ‘posts’...without an automatic rush to qualification, if not outright dismissal” (637).

This, as in the examples of Osundare and Maduka, is often based on the perceived influence of Western Theories, particularly poststructuralism/postmodernism, on postcolonial studies. This interface should not be straight-jacketed. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin have noted that postcolonial theory intersects in “several ways with recent European movements...” (153). And Roger Webster says that “poststructuralist theories, with their emphasis on deconstruction and decentring, have informed the rise of postcolonial theory...” (119-120). The proponents of this view, according to Simon Gikandi, aver that the failure of postcolonial theory - “to periodize and historicise the colonial experience and the role of decolonization as a specific narrative of liberation” – is caused by the “close affinity” it shares with poststructural theory (614). Who has decreed that postcolonial theory cannot/should not historicise or periodize experience? If it suits one’s postcolonial reality to historicise and periodize experience, would one need authorization from western academes to do so?

Gikandi also notes a second side in the debate. This second group of critics rightly refutes that postcolonial theory has come to represent “the separation of culture and political economy, or that acts of reading, especially ones informed by shifting theoretical notions of hybridity and difference,...negate categories of nations and nationalism” (614). One critic who holds this second view is the Nigerian, Olaniyan, who argues that in spite of the “three major arguments against postmodernism from the perspectives of its African critics” – namely “its decentring of the subject, its privileging of culture, and its abstruse language” (637) – the study of Africa stands to gain a few insights...from the practice of postmodernism... (644). The features of postmodernism are not cast in stone. Is the interface between postmodernism and postcolonialism absolute? Of course it is not absolute because it can be determined by each scholar’s chosen pathway, temperament and style. The only constant is the fact that colonialism was a programme of pillage which even hegemony has failed to mask with its spurious logic. That colonialism has altered many societies. The affected societies have responded to and represented their affected conditions in ways that the world cannot ignore. Some of the weapons of colonialism have been appropriated by postcolonial societies and used against the villainy of hegemony. Those who fear the influence of postmodernism do not seem to know the process of interpolation. In fact, Olaniyan has stated that “it is from the practice of postmodernism that the best of postcolonialism, in spite of ideological differences of particular articulations, has borrowed” (644). Olaniyan implies here that the tropes of postcolonial theory, in spite of the so-called weight of influence, can be applied to the service of periodization and historicisation.

Anthony Alessandrini takes the argument even further. He “simply acknowledges the historical overlap between these two intellectual phenomena” (431). Alessandrini

upholds Warren Buckland's assertion that "postmodern discourse and postcolonialism emerged [at] the same historical moment – the decentring of Europe in the second half of the twentieth century" (363). The emergence of these theories from the same cleft womb (of time) has no doubt affected the reception which postcolonial theory has got. It has been difficult for many to tell the point of departure between the theories. The assertion of postcolonial truth coincided with the collapse of Eurocentrism. It is a pity that many scholars have got stuck in the *post-trap* of Derrida and his ilk, and have come to assume that the decentring of Europe (and the collapse of Western omnivocality) must necessarily mean the decentring of Man and the world. This is as terrible as those who are scared of this intellectual scarecrow called Western Thought, they are so scared that they can hardly touch their own faces. This brings us to the strength of Homi K. Bhabha which is his discernment to draw from poststructuralism when necessary and to maintain his march into postcolonial positions ("Introduction" 4). This possibility has also been stated by Olaniyan and Quayson who posit that theories could share a few traits and yet be different. And they have asserted very strongly that "whereas some versions of postmodernism emphasize the inherent instability and playfulness of identity", postcolonialism is different because even while it draws "inspiration from similar sources in early linguistic turn", it still "refracts the crisis of globalization in terms of unequal power relations and insists on struggles for equality that are at once material and discursive" (593). Olaniyan and Quayson imply that postcolonialism may, like postmodernism/poststructuralism, show the same impetus for questioning existing "orders" but it actually moves to establish truth. Whereas decentring is the end of other "post-varieties", it is sometimes the route of postcolonial theory. Another point raised by the duo is that postcolonial theory does not, and ought not to, privilege discourse over historical materiality as some theorists are wont to do. Hoogvelt has pointed to Arif Dirlik's observation that there is "the release of postcoloniality from the fixity of Third World location" which "means that the identity is no longer structural but discursive", which is to say "it is the participation in the discourse that defines the postcolonial" (168). This implies that words like "discursive" and "discourse" have become problematized in postcolonial studies, and they must now be used advisedly. As far as postcolonial reality is concerned, the measure of good interpretation cannot be the flourish of discourse, but the Dissemination of reality.

The "release of postcoloniality from the fixity of Third World location" is understandable since certain non-Third World polities – like Ireland, New Zealand, Australia and even Canada - have come to see aspects of postcoloniality in their own experiences. The Native Indian too can read his experience in the light of extended colonialism in the United States, to say nothing of those who see postcoloniality in the relationship between the American settler and Britain. All these mark the differences in experience but they cannot amount to only discourse. If the West seeks

to institutionalize and promote postcolonial theory as a guise for alienating the theory from the peoples to whom postcoloniality is a daily live experience, then those of us who cannot afford the luxury of empty discourse must heed Zawiah Yahya's warning. Yahya warns that discourse "is a great seducer and as thinking readers we must willfully resist this seduction" (11). Yahya adds that the seduction is particularly strong when "it is backed by the discipline or institution that sanctions its utterance" (12). This is why Hoogvelt's observation should trigger an alarm. So that we can re-examine every use of the word "discourse" in the definition of postcolonial theory, even the usages in the earlier cited definitions by Abrams, the Ashcroft fold, and even Bhabha. For no matter the attractiveness of the dress of discourse, postcolonial conditions stand naked in the ethnic nationalities and nation-states which experience them. Fortunately, Bhabha's use of the term "DissemiNation" foregrounds both historical-materiality and discourse in the narratives of "agitating" nations (*The Location* 201). And this should settle the tendency which, Hoogvelt has observed, tends to divorce discourse from *nation(s)*. DissemiNation cannot be divorced from *nation(s)* and their histories. In stating this point, we recall that Terry Eagleton has said that "post-colonial theory is directly rooted in historical developments. The collapse of the great European empires, their replacement by the world economic hegemony of the United States"; the conflicts and "the steady erosion of the nation state and of traditional geopolitical frontiers, along with mass global migrations and the creation of so-called multicultural societies"; and the aggressive and "intensified exploitation of ethnic groups within the West and 'peripheral' societies elsewhere"; the often abusive programmes and "formidable power of the new transnational corporations: all of this has developed apace since the 1960s, and with it a veritable revolution in our notions of space, power, language, identity" (204).

Historical developments are at the root of postcolonial concerns (not just discourse, as Hoogvelt "fears"). The essay that Hoogvelt refers to is Dirlik's "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism". It is a highly disturbing piece which shows attempts by the popular currency of Western academe to hijack postcoloniality. The essay's opening is downright dramatic and polemical. It is built on Ella Shohat's troubling question. "When exactly...does the postcolonial begin?" queries Ella Shohat in a recent discussion of the subject. Misreading the question deliberately, I will supply here an answer that is only partially facetious: "When Third World intellectuals have arrived in First World academe" (561). Of all that Dirlik says, he must, however, be praised for admitting that, whereas the visibility of Third World intellectuals in First World institutions is credited as the rise of postcolonial theory, "most of the critical themes that postcolonial criticism claims as its fountainhead predated the appearance, or at least the popular currency, of postcolonial" (562). This is to say that the rise (in Western institutions) of Edward

Said, Gayatri C. Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha – the trio, that has been described by Robert Young “as [the] ‘Holy Trinity’ of postcolonial critics” (qtd. Moore-Gilbert 451) – can be read as the rise of theorization but not the origin of postcolonialism. And it should be noted that never have the trio been intellectually derelict in their commitment to the DissemiNation of their root. They have inflicted their thoughts on the West (Adesanmi 52). In fact, they have carried their root into the “hallowed” halls of Western academe. The West could not help but recognize them because they have shown that they understand the main thrust of Western Modernity. “Modernity”, as Ashcroft notes, “is itself the expansive and persuasive signifier of the dominance of Western culture since the Renaissance. Yet new conceptions of modernity lie at the heart of the process of transformation itself, for the modern can be ‘used’ and ‘resisted’ at the same time” (*Transformation* 2). Ashcroft also says: “Strategies and techniques may be used without necessarily incurring the wholesale absorption into the *culture* of Western modernity” (*Transformations* 23). In this light, Postcolonial theory, at its best, establishes what Stephen Slemon describes as “an oppositional, dissidentificatory voice within the sovereign domain of the discourse of colonialism” (in Ashcroft, *Transformations* 33).

Western societies have “stolen” and appropriated the legacies of African knowledge (and those of other postcolonial societies) for centuries. Western societies have survived on the human and material resources of other peoples. They have built their institutions by their enterprise of pillage in Africa and the rest of the Third World. Why is anyone troubled today that Third World scholars are making use of Western facilities on the march to punching holes into Western hegemony? The efforts of these scholars may not answer all the questions but they are progressive; it may have a bit of ambivalence, but the ambivalence also has “the ability to appropriate colonial technology without being absorbed by it” (Ashcroft, *Transformations* 23). Come to think of it, is this not why Third World scholars have often appropriated the dialectics of Marxism and Feminism without much fuss? Why should postcolonial theory be an anathema when it sheds light on the experiences of postcolonial societies? The strength of postcolonial theory is that it comes from the root of the postcolonial societies; it is particularly provoked by the histories and cultural products of those societies.

Many scholars have hailed Said’s *Orientalism* as the bridgehead of postcolonial theory. Even Spivak and Bhabha have acknowledged “Said’s work as their immediate inspiration” (Moore-Gilbert 451). Many more scholars have followed the footsteps of Said, Spivak and Bhabha but many have not been thoughtful like Peter Barry (193) and Roger Webster (119) to trace the ancestry of postcolonial theory to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, published in French in 1961. Fewer critics are like C. L. Innes who has looked beyond Fanon, Said, Spivak and Bhabha - the

“four thinkers” who are believed to “have shaped postcolonial theory” (3). Innes posits that “postcolonial literary studies owe their origin chiefly... to the enormous and exciting efflorescence of creative writing which first came to the attention of readers and critics in the 1950s and 1960s, and coincided with a series of states in Africa, South East Asia and the Caribbean moving from colonial to postcolonial status” (3). The point which Innes makes is that the “popular currency” of postcolonial theory is, to use the words of Desai and Nair, a “belated project” (2). It is like naming a child that has been born. This shows that the root of postcolonial studies is lodged deep in the histories and processes of postcolonial societies.

Desai and Nair note the very important contributions of Said and his wave of theorists but they also strongly state that “‘postcolonial studies’, referring as it often does to the rapid growth in the eighties of scholarly interest in colonial relations and nationalism, is at best understood” in relation to its root. “It is based on a long history of debate about issues such as the struggle for independence...” (2). The trouble today is that some scholars are bent on divorcing theoretical practice from the postcolonial root. Much of “postcolonial scholarship in its contemporary guise is no longer...connected to the struggles that defined its early period”, and it is losing its root in “the institutional rise of literary theory in the western world” (Desai and Nair 3). This proves that while the new waves of theorists have come to “worship” Fanon, Said, Bhabha and Spivak, the “worshippers” have missed the root of their postcolonial concerns. And it has become important for scholars from postcolonial nationalities (like those of Africa) to reclaim the soul of postcolonial studies, and take it back to root. There is however a need for openness on this task. Olaniyan, to cite but one, has shown that we ought to freely learn a thing or two from Theory (644), and still exercise the judgment to link those strategies to what Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin have referred to as the nationalist and social-functionalist tenor which runs deep in Africa’s postcolonial literature (124-31). Bhabha, to name an Indian example, has not been afraid to “subvert” the strategies of poststructuralism by insisting that literature bears the narratives of nations. His position that literature has the capacity to posit *nationness* and to repudiate hegemony agrees with the principle of social function (*The Location* 201, 246). This view is not new to African literature. Africa should count itself in. The significance of African contribution to postcolonial studies will be obvious through the praxis of infliction (Adesanmi 52).

Africa has contributed immensely to the postcolonial world. African literatures provide some of the most impressive sites of articulation for postcolonial studies. All indices of postcolonialism have been enunciated in African writings: slavery, displacement, colonialism, race, resistance, independence, dependent independence, postcolonial disillusionment and conflicts, hybridity and mimicry, migration; just name it. The shame is this: where the creative writers have excelled, the literary

critics have failed. The critics are incapacitated by their anxiety over Western influence. In a world where everyone either creates or buys, or borrows or steals, why is the African critic still pretentious about purism? What is the locus of this fear of contamination? We are already permeated by the world. And we only need a clear sense of judgment to admit only that which does not aim to bury postcolonial conditions under the sham of discourse, to note that such attempts to muddle the reality of postcolonial conditions run contrary to truth.

Postcolonial conditions are the experiences of actual peoples. Poems, plays, novels, theories, etc are testimonies which must be examined on the basis of how close or far they stand in relation to postcolonial reality. Let no one be deceived by those who, for the sheer elixir of discourse, think that truth can be de-centred. A many-sided approach to postcolonial studies may express the many-sidedness of experience and the multiplicity of voices, but it does approximate the de-centring of truth. Truth stands like the Elephant among us even when we prefer the “convenience” of blindness. In all the spaces of postcolonial tension/contention, the actors know the truth and the lie, the actors know the Oppressed and the Oppressor, even those who bully their way to the top on bolsters of falsehood or contrived legality know their false status. So if we muddle up postcolonial reality, it is not for want of evidence. It is because we prefer the security of contrived blindness or ignorance – two weapons of fraud by which oppression has run its course for ages. If we muddle up postcolonial reality, it is because we have come to love our own voices rather than listen to and/or render the cries of the subjected nations. If we muddle up postcolonial reality, it is because our discursive practices are cloudy. And cloudiness has been the smokescreen for the falsehoods that have oiled the fraudulent wheels of both external and internal suzerainty in postcolonial societies through the ages. While we all show respect to differences in experience, we must also be vigilant against all attempts to de-centre truth. Such attempts could be the last safety-net of those who have lost the hold on monocentricism and are now poised to make fetish of polyvalence because they fear that truth has stripped the culture of repression and hegemony. We must guide against every kind of fetishization, be it the fetishization of discourse or “the fetishization of theory itself” (Ashcroft, *Transformations* 10), which blur the anguish in postcolonial societies. Care must be taken by those of us who guide the gate of truth: we must not open it to falsehood, and we must also shun the easy attitude of only castigating the West for all the twists in postcolonial studies when in truth we are not doing enough to air our views. The West deserves our suspicion, no doubt. And there is no doubt that “postcolonial writing and literary theory” - as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin say – “intersect in several ways with recent European movements, such as postmodernism and poststructuralism, and in both contemporary Marxist ideological criticism and feminism” (153). That is only a problem when we fail to stand up and be counted. We have to mark our own strand among others. Does

life in Africa not intersect with life in Europe and the world? Let Africa stand up and take the world. Has Africa not learnt a thing from its own history? We live in a world where you either take from others to add to yours, or you are stripped of even your loincloth.

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