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Is the Postcolonial Dead?—Stuck in Miss Havisham's Mirror

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Abstract
Since the 1970s, Postcolonial theory has held sway over discussions particularly in the human and social sciences. Its popularity was however the aggregation of previous research whose major "flaw" was that it had not been attributed a scholarly tag in the form of a theory. From Frantz Fanon through Walter Rodney to Edward Said, there was already significant work in the direction of dismantling imperial and colonial agencies with regards to their impact on what became global enclaves. By the time Bill Ashcroft et al came to the scene, pioneer African writers were already transiting from the colonial period into, and interrogating, independence realism. This paper therefore argues that the term "postcolonial" is not only a conceptual misnomer but has already exhausted its apparent potentials in claiming and describing a grafted scholarship, especially so because unlike other theories, postcolonialism does not support an ideological base, as was wont to be the case, for the postcolony. In conclusion, the paper suggests that the postcolonial delusion must give way to a more functional research paradigm (after decades of mirage scholarship) that harnesses the postcolony toward acceptable global relevance.
Key words: *postcolonial, postindependence, theoretical opportunism, neo-native, theory-ideology partnership*

1. Introduction: the immaculate birth of postcolonialism

The imperative of theory in any critical assessment relates to the fact that every theory is supposed to derive from and defend an ideological position. Having broached this subject generally already (Mbuh, 2018), and aware of its alarmist nature, I recently felt vindicated after reading Nelson and Olin (1980, p. 4) who already stressed the connection, almost half a century ago, as "the most crucial fact about theory". With a multiplicity of variables in every field of study, such a position may broadly be nationalist or globalist, where the doctrinal value is either overt—as in political theorization—or implicit as in activist-reactionary "movements" like feminism or narratology. Insisting on why historical analyses

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cannot be credible without a theoretical trough, Nelson and Olin (1980, p. 2) explain how "only through the use of theory can a statement of any general applicability be made or tested". As a signpost, then, theory leads or convinces us to accept a specific or comparable ideological stance.

I am deliberately speculative—reason why my worry is interrogative—to highlight the areas in our research that have been rendered into dormant activism that transforms postcolonialism into a cliché-discourse. I engage the scholarly declarations that make the theory irrelevant today in a practical sense, and only affirmed by scholarship that accepts the convenience of easy parallelism. I also highlight what I consider to be a more realistic name, *after* the colonial moment. Unfortunately, the varieties of *post* (Ashcroft, Boehmer, Loomba, etc) are agreed on the backward glance, but not so much on the aftermath of colonisation. This discursive upshot is the troubling space for investigation because the synonymous tags—postcolonial, neocolonial, decolonial—that are supposed to define its interface with ideology also make it vulnerable to interpretive opportunism. Postindependence speculation therefore apportions blame where it belongs—African political leaders, scholars, religious personalities, advocacy groups—and sees the intervention of former colonial "masters" as normal diplomatic praxis which we have failed to master because of no commitment to dissociate from mega-narratives. In fact, we are so enamoured with *postcolonial* that we even fail to realise Achile Mbembe's (2001) perceptive use of "postcolony" as an alternative to the wilted term. I remain convinced that the over-hyped relevance of postcolonial theory is not helping in the advancement of African futures.

The perspectival orientation of my analysis does not necessarily provide closure on the rhetoric of the topic under discussion. T. S. Eliot's (1963) metaphor of an in-between life and death existence for J. Alfred Prufrock, the representative of Western man in the aftermath of World War I, informs my view of the African postcolony and its sapped energy today. Unlike in the West where the inadequacy of traditional values necessitated the invention of alternative means of representation and self-imaging, the African postcolony never recuperated its fallowed systems and thus had to adapt to strange dance steps of infantile pedagogy. The suspended form of existence which still characterises life in every sector is the result of indulging a strange make-up even when every diagnosis reveals a gap of exhausted potentials that has degenerated into a

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systemic stalemate. The problem is not the comatose state of postcolonialism; rather, it is the fact that its sympathisers revel as cheer-gatherers of its lethargic misrepresentations. Colonial acclimatization tends to be nuanced within postcolonial stigmatization, which itself needs to focus more inclusively today on colonists who became vulnerable to the exotic sights, sounds, and tastes of the natives. Inclusively so because even the hardened ones in reality like Rudyard Kipling and in fictional representation like Winterbottom have to be reassessed with the aim to accord them a reprieve as perpetrators of the same systemic "darkness" which Conrad's (1993) Marlow describes at the start of *Heart of Darkness*.

The main reason for the duplicity is that postcolonialism serves no distinct ideological niche and its origins, unlike those of mainstream theories, are caught in a maze of ideological trespasses within imperial, colonial, and anti/neocolonial brackets that continue to determine the way the postcolony is imagined and sustained in perpetuity beyond colonial landmarks. Nelson and Olin (1980:4) phrase it very cogently: "As human creations, theories derive from and reflect their creators' ideologies; that is, they are conditioned by the assumptions, beliefs, and ideas with which their creators envisage the world, both as it is and as it should be"—that is, for us in the global South, theory constitutes the endorsement of a form of christianising condescension through the coloration of its data from the lived experiences of indigenous scholarship into the messianic conceits of alien mediators, the constructs of its tenets as a mentally-clad doctrinaire for our programmed pedagogy, and the dependent spillovers. Postcolonial activism, then, is the reactivation of imperial genes through ideological reformatting so that the theory asserts a prefigured African personality in the twenty 21st century. What may pass as "forebears" to the theory are the voices of pioneer protesters which transit from (anti)colonial to postindependence agitations. The opportunism of associating Edward Said with postcolonialism is typically prochronistic of such scholarship; just as, strictly speaking, Gayatri Spivak cannot be pigeonholed into a limiting theory because her interrogation of theory as a whole defies analytical boundaries and the certainties which they uphold.

Understood as enabling strategies to the code-giver, the emphasis on postcolonialism's "forebears" encourages the stymization of possible perspectives, transferring critiques of the colonial excesses and independence

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failures into a postcolonial dead end. Said's (2003, p. xii) preface to his seminal book implicitly recognised Frantz Fanon and Walter Rodney as precursors to continuities in cultural awareness by "clarify[ing] what I believed I had and had not said". Considering that *Orientalism* focuses attention on the strategies that were utilised by imperial and colonial actors to stage various forms of aggression against their relative peripheries, it is therefore erroneous to assume that Orientalist discourse—the foisting of a Western-Christian imaginary on the Orient—is synonymous to "postcolonial" by which we indoctrinate our students with the delusion of a theoretic full glass that needs no filling.

It is important too to emphasise the distinction between naming the theory (to which we will return) and the ploy to prey on its data or corpus. The latter predates the former, and that is where the student of postcolonial studies assumes and is limited by a false partnership without the vital link with modernism whose destabilisation of traditional methods of cognition in the European imagination liberated the artist and critic into Freudian hemispheres where *meaning* is recognised as a flux of relative variables. The seduction of postcolonialism thus leads us into the temptation of embracing postmodernism, like poststructuralism, uncritically, ignoring the blank spot in a precipitated transition that blurs their status as a decoy which Western scholars—notably the postmodernists—use in a programmed definition of universalist culture. Because the post-discourse often inspires the student to skip the modernist interventions in analysing colonial distortions of native data and into the "post" contexts, he begins to accept the mediations from scholars like Noam Chomsky (2008) (whose Universal Grammar is a vested programming that offers us the language acquisition device, LAD, as a panacea to linguistic ineptitude), Jean-François Lyotard (1979) (who restricts the postmodern to highly industrialised economies), Roland Barthes (1977) (who advocates the death of the author in order to ensure critical ascendancy), and more. In fact, the description of postcolonialism as the failure of decolonisation (Spivak 1991; Brett Neilson 1997) together with Spivak's (1999, p. 291) juxtaposition of "victimage" and "cultural heroism" as further evidence of "the rift of the failure of decolonization" confirm my contestation and reinforces my bias for Wiredu's (2004) conceptual decolonisation, which rationalises our precolonial and postindependence backgrounds rather than accept the graft and its adaptations. Ultimately, Spivak's (1999:358) critique of "the broad strokes of cultural-political

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narrativizing" concretizes my suspicions of our theoretical inclinations: "Elite 'postcolonialism' seems to be as much a strategy of differentiating oneself from the racial [or tribal] underclass as it is to speak in its name". Our consumerist approach to theory is marred by an elitist entitlement that initiates native chasms of difference within an ideologically fractured postcolony.

Again, there is confusion here between the "emergence" of the *name* and the exploitation of the data which primarily targeted colonial-era excesses in the case of Fanon, Cesaire, and Rodney, and more specifically the independence elite who had the choice to provide a clean slate for collaborative development as was the case in India, but failed to do so. To talk of the need to highlight "identifiable ideological and intellectual standpoints" (as one of the reviewers of this paper stated) is to accede to the neo-*tabula rasa* mindset that was embedded in the transitional progression of such standpoints so that, consequently, "anti-colonial nationalism" became a copy-and-poorly-pasted continuity (that was caught in a Marxist delusion whose envisaged revolution has failed to liberate Africa), and which Achebe (1988) satirises in *Anthills* by referencing our rush after European/colonial utensils. My argument is that the anticolonial/postindependence data which Africans were providing after (1957)-1960 focused not so much on *after*-colonialism, but on *after*-independence. Why scholars escape from the reality of this latter phase and instead focus on the obsolescence of the former is the main reason why I think that postcolonialism is unavailing today.

Ultimately, the making of the postcolonial unbeliever (Mbuh, 2012) hinges on a diagnosis of lived experience within the same period in contention. The postcolonial slate, that is, the totality of such consciousness, with its grafted imprints of ideological vagueness, has produced a vortex of scholarly innuendoes as "us-them" testimonies of wrong and the endurance of victimhood—where the purported victim is happy to exist in that state. Most of them—the vintage Ashcroft et al (1998) on the subject, Bart Moore-Gilbert et al (1997), and Igor Maver (2009), etc., are indicators of how temporality, binaries, and notions like migration and the diaspora lump together as *post*colonial long after the colonial moment. They do so within a time-fixation or fluidity on dated or forced data—typically reading what should be postindependence experience as a barometer of *post*colonial culture. It will be fair to note that while colonial histories are temporally exhaustible, they were dissolved into ideological continuities for

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bi/multilateral engagements within progressive political structures (Mbuh 2020). And I use "time-fixation" deliberately to underscore the fact that the structural continuity between colonial past and "postcolonial" present is the continuum of obsolete, unprofitable angst that seems to be active mainly in African "postcolonial" scholarship. The curious analytical continuum through the repetitions of same and a monotony of tautological expressions that only help to further stagnate the subjugated mindset, implies that cliché-representations of the hybrid, self/other, subalternity, and even creolization must bloom into the stranglehold of decolonial reprieve. The patterned zone of comfort for the postcolonial scholar is therefore one of permanent hurting, in which open-ended speculations, say on Spivak's subaternal discourse, are given closure as a frustrating pathology of casualness in negotiating even self-induced dependence on historical wrongs that continue to feed the marginal location of postcolonial "evidence".

The state of scholarly dependence on the questionable theory therefore thrives on the postcolonial scholars' voluntary perpetuation of marginality by weaponising history as a constant, based on how such scholars also propagate colonial domination as the basis of structured epistemic dependency when, in fact, epistemes are not etched in igneous rock but evolve according to relative priorities. The comfort zone of acceptance and replication alienates the curious mind that attempts to wander prospectively across the blank spaces in postcolonial hermeneutics. We have been too receptive in our romance with alien theories, generally, and the best we can boast of is the recycling of déjâ-vu nomenclatures in the guise of indigenising someone else's lens. The "self"-induce analyses thus recur in the recurrent attribution of responsibility for *our* fate to historical systems, where the need to critique systemic oppression (even in the postindependence space) depends on a need to represent a plaintiff constituency that always dangles on the margin of progressive modernities. A growing tendency in the dissemination of postcolonial ambiguity is therefore the acceptance of second-hand patents as native such as we observe in the indigenization of feminist avowals, theological doctrinaire especially of Christianism, and analyses of cultural frameworks that are permissive to prostituting postmodern into postcolonial consciousness even in the 21st century. Such scholars are always the last to acknowledge the potency of their cultural values, often cuing behind Western adjustments. Sylvia Tamale's (2024) title,

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"Rethinking African Feminisms in the 'New' Normal" implicitly endorses the theoretical graft on indigenous consciousness by suggesting that a *new* take-off point for new demographics is necessary for sustaining the construct.

Tamale's suggestion that the world has suddenly become "unrecognisable to activists who came of age in the 20th century" is intimidating to any observer who is concerned with the fact that such a generation has become one of native illiterates mainly because activists not only ignored the roots of gender difference as per precolonial modernities, but have also misconstrued it into performative agencies that terminally displace the female from her relative pole position. The trajectory of sponsored confusion begins with the psychologist, John Money's (1955) coinage of "gender roles"—whose "lifelong rejection of 'the brutality of manhood'" as John Colapinto (2013) claims; is part of the systemic fallacy—through Robert Stoller's (1960) corroboration into "gender identities", and finally formalised in Judith Butler's (1990) crucifix of "performative gender". In the making of theory as such, male-female complementarity is flagged against a pervasive materialism that cheapens and commodifies even the very activists who cry foul to being so designated. Benefitting from this false rationalism, the African postcolonial-Christian scholars in particular are notorious in their purist reference to African Gods as fragile and man-made, representing them in lower case simply because they have been converted into the belief that the authentic God is an uppercased, lily-coloured Santa Claus prototype.

2. Naming and foster parenthood—or the university, theory, and ideology

The formal relevance of theory begins from the University and is revealed through the realism of its praxis. As such, to understand why and how postcolonial difference migrates into cultural shame or affirmation, we need to ask why "clumsy" Johnny English is still a national monument in Britain, while still alive, whereas Jean Miché Kankan remains a consoling agent to the Fanonian constituents in the Cameroon postcolony. As a parody of James Bond in anti-espionage enactment of Cold War diplomacy or the thriller of children fantasies as Mr Bean, Johnny English personifies the globalisation of theory's agents whereas in Cameroon Kankan transforms national pain/embarrassment from which Ali Baba bandwagons continue to reroute trans-Mediterranean/Atlantic miseries while intellectual bulldogs mangle convenient theories.

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Soon after Said's 2003 preface to *Orientalism*, I was having a discussion on the place of theory with my PhD supervisor at The University of Nottingham where I was postcolonising D. H. Lawrence. Although I argued then that Lawrence was one of the pioneer "postcolonial" novelists in England based on Elleke Boehmer's (1995) timeframe for the theory, I eventually concluded that he was obsessed with the possibility of dismantling the vestiges of Anglo-imperialism at home and abroad. The discussion related to my suspicion of theories which to me, even then, either constrain perspective or transform it into reactionism. Ironically, this is also a virtue of the theoretical imperative, whether in affirming an ideological position or acquiescing to an apparently privileged inclination.

When Nelson and Olin (1980, p. 5) note that "the importance of ideology in the construction of theory should not be construed as an argument for ideology as the determining factor in history"; with the clarification that "approaching the problem of theory from the perspective of ideology enables us to discern 'clusters' of theories about the causes of war and to reveal how each of those theories is rooted in fundamental assumptions about human beings and society", they are arguing from the advantageous position of the code-giver. If we consider the global instabilities during the second Trump presidency, it will be fair to say that while ideology (the American Dream) complements individual theory (MAGA as a subset of the Dream; and Trumpism, which I prefer to call Trumprealism, that is, the illusion of believing one's delusions), it is the definition of "human beings and society" that is in contestation here. This context comes with a baggage of condescending assumptions that condition the manner in which international law—just one example—is defined and applied and how, in the process, "human beings" lose their relative cultural autonomy in favour of the ideological godhead. From the global South, then, our engagement with theory should caution us that there are power nuances implied in the task of theorising and we cannot just apply a theory for explanatory convenience. North-South global dynamics are obvious, or supposed to be, in this case, and replicate themselves through apparently sympathetic ideas that ensnare us. The name-giver controls the narrative of the name-bearer—every development scar in the postcolony testifies to this—and without considering this conscripting strategy, African scholars have been taken in by the fanged inclusiveness of globalizing notions.

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Linguistically, the causal relationship between theory and ideology is vital in any assessment of how the duo applies to African scholarship in particular. Consequently, the exclusive way in which we comment on ideological meeting points reflects the convenient reception of its complicit implementation. For instance, when CRTV's Ashu Nyenty described the newly constructed Cameroon National Assembly during President Biya's swearing-in ceremony in 2025 as a symbol of the "fertile and fecund fruits of Sino-Cameroon relationships", it becomes clear that we are still caught in the mirage of the Havisham mirror with its kaleidoscopic gifts. A sustaining metaphor of colonial control and postindependence comfort, the mirror condemns us to a monocular vision. In other words, the mirror symbolises colonialism's conjecture of misnomers as evolutionary reality in the postcolony and the Chinese mirror is more disconcerting for Africans today than those of 19th and 20th centuries Europe.

In its causality with ideology, theorization is an endeavour in speculation but can become fatalistic in its retention of progressive memory. While theories do not have a defined life span and often rejuvenate from the ashes of neglect, the buds of recalcitrance, and shift into new assumptions; and while no one can anticipate a requiem essay for any theory beyond the transitional red flags that must be raised in acknowledgement of its exhausted potentials, it is easy to explain my interrogation of a frame which has been praised and vilified simultaneously.

The necessity to rethink theory/postcolonialism in Africa is the result of global changes that always seem to bypass Africa, given our ambivalent fixity and pliability toward othering ideologies in every area of development. And this is when Ashcroft et al (1995, p. 1) transmit the suturing gloss: "Once colonised peoples had cause to reflect on and express the tension which ensued from [the] problematic and contested, but eventually vibrant and powerful mixture of imperial language and local experience, post-colonial 'theory' came into being". Here, the theory is presented as a necessity borne of linguistic flexibility, without convincing justification regarding such amiability in precolonial languages and the causes of anticolonial activism. The fact that the inheritors of colonial booty pose today as the agents of a theoretical frame with which to redress colonial abuse, speaks to the strategic perpetuation of control, whether as perpetrator or mediator. Therefore, to propagate postcolonialism as "a continuing process of

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resistance and reconstruction" (2) is to solidify the determinism that will stagnate the societies still caught in this induced impasse. The postcolonial scholar endorses this fallacy by blending coloniality as postcoloniality, thereby confusing neoliberal bi/multilateralism with colonial exploitation, and therefore apply the same diagnosis of a specific historical moment and its medication to an evolving pathology. By acknowledging the manner in which continuities from imperial backgrounds still condition these so-called postcolonial societies and seduce us to attribute every intellectual sneeze or discomfort in national imaging to colonialism and its afterlives, we tend to respond robotically to Ashcroft's (2001) solo-continuity of "post-colonial futures". The Ashcroft School in particular attempts to neutralise this imperative.

Another brief explanation regarding my view about the theory-ideology fraternity aims to highlight the embarrassment that results from the neglect of this vital clue. The leeway to ideological imposition, postcolonialism is perhaps the only theory that has no ideological orientation. The reason for this gap is because the theory was designed and mediated from "outside", where the name-giver determines identity and, in the process, either distorts the data or trivialises its organic base. In addition, easing postcolonial discourse into epistemic violence is escapist on the part of the scholar who is not interested in the introspective strategy to be vindicated from the template of victimhood. The humiliation which Africa in particular has been subjected to is largely the result of epistemic relevance whose hotpot is now being forced down our throats specifically in educational, religious, political, and educational outfits. Consequently, epistemes that only footnote Africa into their vision(s) or encourage us to do so, and then adjust accordingly when the pushback is too much for them to pretend otherwise, continue to serve the intellectual culture of false disclaimers.

If we agree that theory is intricately linked to ideology, the question to answer is, which ideology is served by postcolonialism and, by extension, who are its beneficiaries? It may be embarrassing to insist that postcoloniality had no ideological base because its propounders or name-givers were generally hybrids to the "post" consciousness which they attempt to rationalise, while those who are supposed to spearhead the theoretic trajectory are instead magnetised to the foil of colonial reconditioning. That is what postcolonialism in the mediated state represents—a ruse to accommodate both anticolonial agitation and

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independence illusions into an apparent nativism. In fact, it is for this reason that the postcolonial native does not exist because the experiences that should serve as mortgage for his activism are as dispersed as the imperative to encode them is hijacked by the very agents of systemic difference. Not that there were no thoughtful reflections in the former colonies in relation to the fraud; rather, the reactions that were still in gestation, and already profoundly perceptive, were preyed upon and formally coded by ambiguous mediators with favourable proximity to mega publishing houses that determine and control the global market of scholarship; and whose scholarly enthusiasm was the smokescreen for them to stage intellectual conversions that replicated the intimidations of their religious forebears some two centuries before. The partnership between theory and ideology can thus best be described casually as a necessary evil, beginning with individual biases; one that determines one's native thought process as it migrates across challenging frontiers where meaning is affirmed, countered, and reimagined.

In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Spivak 1999, p. xii), there is the suggested need for "a training in a literary habit of reading the world" in order "to put a curb on…superpower triumphalism only if it does not perceive complicity as an inconvenience. Spivak's analysis "is therefore a 'critique' in that it examines the structures of the production of postcolonial reason". On my part, it is the manner in which (mis)alignment and (mis)application of these structures as paradigmatic beams of ideological constructs affects the emergence and perception of the global South that undermines the relevance of postcolonialism in the 21st century. Spivak further suggests that theory is the illusion of sublimated thought or thinking, one which speculates beyond the "boundlessness" of apparent limitlessness: specifically in Kantian terms, she argues, the "proper supplement" that is named God "is what fills the abyss of fearful infinity with sublime denomination" (Spivak, 1999, p. 23). The boundless space is represented by "the place we were drawn from—nature's womb—and the grave—the devouring mouth", linked ultimately to ideological preferences of those who inscribe these notions into general cognition. Thus, "the abyss of the infinity of Nature being re-inscribed as the boundlessness of the concept of freedom" (24) seeks to convince us about the commonality of concepts which otherwise will be understood from relative standpoints, and not the universal aggregation which colonial education grafted on the global South.

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Understood otherwise, the definition of freedom in homologous terms is constrained to a deterministic radar that targets matchbox crafts whose flight paths at night do not align with "established" routes. While Spivak seems not to be very concerned by this overlap, it is the endorsement of what already shapes up as theoretic pillars that derails any attempt to voice alternative perspectives. We are therefore not expected to contest the further suggestion that "theory (analyzing the sublime) is *always already* normed by practice (having to assume a moral being)" (24, italics mine). The linchpin of theoretical conservatism—"always already"—justifies the causality between "the sublime" and its "normed" interfaces. My views on postcolonial theory are framed against this existential familiarity, the seductive assumptions around global citizenship (which Spivak however critiques in "Resident Alien" (2012), whereas in reality, the cultural intersections are iron-clad in exclusive films that are "always already" hidden in plain sight and synchronised from a monolithic consciousness: these are the ideologies that are camouflaged in theoretical frills that seek to determine responses from the global South to what is "normed" from the global North.

The dearth of the theory-ideology partnership in Africa (see Mbuh 2018) is thus a consequence of the accreditation of individual-into-collective experiences, and explains, for example, the convenience of Franco-Cameroon diplomacy. The one-sided display is a consequence of limited or aligned interrogation of policy by a predominant postcolonial mindset, and therefore explains why Africa is still confined to the Cold War mentality when new interests have overwritten previous ones: every continent striving for global space in geopolitical and economic strides must boast of a unique trading bloc that is supported by an availing ideology. No wonder then that only Africa fails in this gross assessment especially because her scholars who mostly rely on alien theories that fail to prop an Africanist ideology are also excluded from policymaking gatherings. The background of the Biya-Macron press conference on July 27, 2022 spoke to this concern and its implications. While the flag of Cameroon highlighted Biya's national position, Macron's was underscored by both the French and European Union flags. In any duel of interest, bloc arsenals always prevail over those of a nation. Imperatively, then, Africa needs to endure a roots-determined transformation, beginning with an acknowledgement that theorising the continent predominantly from abroad has failed us, and that the

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complicity between theory and ideology has to be revaluated in terms of their functional benefits.

3. Theorising for theory's sake?

I have so far implied a frivolous disposition in postcolonialism, a frame whose "cure-all" propensity (Hall, 1990) can easily be viewed as theocritical prostitution that deflects innovation. This wantonness generally reflects the state of applying theory prodigiously in both global spheres; and in Africa the status of the researcher-theorist underlies this. The typical treatment of Cheikh Anta Diop, unlike say Francis Fukuyama and even a leftist like Chomsky, in defining national and continental policy represents the way theory is either casually or functionally related to the ideology that determines national and bloc futures. Fukuyama's (1992) precipitated conclusion about the end of history begs for a basic question—whose history, and how does it apply to *my* space? A common definition of history as "the events that have shaped our world through the eyes of people who were there" ("Witness History", BBC.com) still insists on a *pastness* that drags us into the global villagization of space, revives the historical space and moment through the ideological voice of a former perpetrator, casually described as "our times". This inclusiveness makes the discipline a living concern. The past, relative or not, reinvents itself not only from our collective unconscious, but also from individual experiences which are then stretched into interpretive recollections of how living history is accommodatable to the (glocal) future. The fossilized moment is the stuff of archaeology, whose impact, as Diop's (1974) research reveals, is often resisted in its recuperation from imperial and colonial distortions in attempts to pattern it along relevant nationalist ideologies for global outreach.

Reading British novels as foils for the colonial encounter, it is worthy of note that the imminent death of postcolonialism is inseparable from its valorisation of *appropriation* in the form of mimicry. The problem with appropriation is that it presupposes the non-existence of the idea in the native culture, or advertises a higher quality to which we should adhere. Specifically, writers and critics apply it differently where the one, like Achebe, nativises the appropriated codes, whereas the latter, say Ashcroft, is comfortable with the mediation. There is also a common confusion over synonymity as same, when (as it happened when a colleague challenged my contestation of "appropriation"

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at a conference in Yaounde) arguments are advanced that one cannot appropriate without making it one's own, thus vindicating the colonialist agent in a hooded linguistics. A clear example to the contrary is that Africa's problem with notional democracy is primarily one of mimic appropriation. We have embraced the Lincolnian brand to the extent of claiming that "Democracy has spoken" as CRTV reporter, Bennet Buma Gana, declared after the proclamation of presidential results by the Constitutional Court on October 27, 2025; and in this way ignored two facts, that is, a combination of abrogation and appropriation (which Ashcroft et al., 2002) describe as synonymous to *resistance* continuities in indigenous identities) and customisation (which they ignore). For appropriation to be less corrosive, it has to be customised, made one's own as in the Rushdiean (1982) sense of "New Englishes", and not merely tout "master" narratives or opinions as in the definition of democracy or submission to a colonial version of God as *our* father.

If the University remains the nursery for theory to bloom in alignment with ideology, it is ironic that first, the institution has been transformed into a space of jingoistic myth-makers in the name of criticism; and second, even with its popularity, postcolonial theory's non-alignment with a nationalist ideology serves the interest of neoliberal technocrats. Elsewhere, schools of thought are nurtured in the amphitheatre and across picket lines within the same environment, and in fruitful debates that dissect contemporary thoughts and begin a necessary discrimination that may serve as a guide to refocus our attention and intellectual resources more pragmatically.

4. First defence witness and status of the postcolonial neo-native

Today, even with Achebe's significant reminder that Africans did not hear of the word culture for the first time from Europeans, it is the *learned* African-Christian postcolonialist who declaims African traditional religious rites, further confirming Achebe's assertion that the aggressive stranger will need the collaboration of a kinsman to undermine the homestead. A reminder that culture is the root of ideology, this brings us back to the manner in which Africans have appropriated versions of other cultures without customising them. We had strong democratic institutions in Africa prior to colonisation, and while they still exist today, they have been greatly weakened to the extent that African Kings,

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the natural custodians of precolonial power, are considered mere auxiliaries of the proto-colonial administration. Postcolonial theory would have been viable if it inspired and clarified economic, political, and diplomatic futures for the continent as a continuity from independence initiatives like Nyerere's (1968) *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism* and Ahmadou Ahidjo's (1979) "Planned Liberalism" in Kenya and Cameroon respectively. If this were the case, we would be arguing today that Paul Biya's (1987) *Communal Liberalism* is a logical modification of his predecessor's *Political Philosophy* (Bory, 1968), already shifting from Cold War determinism to the indigenization of political theory and ideological praxis. Instead, African leaders have generally constituted a vague and misleading category that has failed to map out visionary continuities due mainly to their alienation from the University, as already noted, where theory blends with ideology for visible prospections. The postcolonial advocate cannot provide the prospective and redemptive energy necessary for an Africanist reset because of his/her bias predisposition.

Fonlon was a young PhD—the first in Cameroon—when he wrote his treatise of hope, and wondered, right from the title: "Will we Make or Mar?" This was the watershed of his fears about the future of the newly independent state, given the complexity of its colonial background and the diplomatic conspiracies which the United Nations in particular orchestrated, with the blessings of Britain and France. Although Fonlon remains the most impactful cultural scholar in Cameroon, his theoretical footprints were abandoned where he left them, and the difficulty of soliciting his vision as guide in critical exchanges today is mainly because he himself was conditioned by Cardinal Newman's paternalism and its linguistic "standards", and campaigned for a Pan-Africanist utopia from which leadership gradually dissociated its vision. Yet, there is no postindependence scholarly document which is as self-evidently responsible and empowering regarding cultural Cameroonianisms, at least indicatively, as Fonlon's piece. Speaking in the immediacy of independence expectations and doubts, his anticipation of the future can only be compared to his patriotic fervour in the national anthem which he *rewrote*. His "version" of the rallying call hints at the fate of Cameroon's binary consciousness, already tilting toward a colonial inheritance that dispossessed and othered the Anglophone the same way that Europeans othered Africans, but functionally relevant in roots awareness.

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Although scholars have addressed the authenticity and nationalist implications of translation on the anthem (Nug, 2010; Takougang, 2014; Dze-Ngwa, 2014)—without elaborating on the complicit reference to slavery in original French version written in 1928—I see in the English version—adopted in 1978 after Fonlon's "translation"—significant identity markers that follow on the satire on slavery, and offer possible reflection on a national ideology. If the national anthem is a patriotic call, then Fonlon's vision constitutes the ideological roots of such engagement, already tracing the country's space in national, continental, and, by implication, global positioning. In this regard, I will suggest that the adjective "true" in the second stanza may be replaced by the noun, "truth", in order to signal a shift from descriptive ease to the actualisation of what should inspire not just nation-building but the sustenance of the task. In this way, the successes and/or failures of Cameroon as a postcolony are easily identifiable with the generalised symbolisation of what Benedict Anderson (1992) describes as "the imagined community" where, in the French version of the anthem—adopted from the 1928 manuscript in 1957—the imagined space is not propped by any identifiable landmark, but is *only* meant to be recognised and hailed as the fatherland. This Andersonian non-committal imaginary that motivates the conceptualization of individualism as a variable of what constitutes nationalistic polity in the West can be contrasted with functional socialization in the typical African village where forms of contact and interaction are more than imaginary.

This distinction is the basis on which Fonlon's intellectual militancy—resisting the postcolonial cliché—could have initiated a conceptual guide for the budding political space, vaguely expressed in "Res Una Publica". The failure to propagate this resulted in the glossy endorsement of Pan-Africanism whose reactionary orientation, together with disagreements between Anglo-French blocs that were already activated, limited its intervention in intellectual and global matters. Consequently, Africa blundered into the Non-Aligned Movement without an ideological guide, Pan-Africanism being more of a propaganda tool, when India was already exploiting the ideas of Mahamat Ghandi (like China those of Mao Tse-Tung) to theorise on an inverse capitalist paradigm which was also the reinvention of Socialism, based on making the fortune at the base of the pyramid (Prahalad, 2005). Global transactional arrangements took over according to the favoured or privileged "World Order", although in most cases it was and remains a combination of many such outfits. In many ways, Africa's

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stagnation is self-inflicted by a postindependence elite that still bows to the evolving dictates of self-serving ideologies from former colonial centres, after which failure should no longer be attributed to convenient ancestries: self/communal introspection warrants confession on the part of leadership for failing to encourage and promote nationalist research endeavours. A typical example was Ahidjo's (1979, p. 19) desire to "celebrat[e] the civilisation of books" in the hope of "restoring an African tradition", but which fizzled out by 1982 when his regime suppressed the Reunification anniversary edition of *Abbia*.

In his enthusiasm to valorise theory, the postcolonial scholar still resists the intimately strategic connection between theory and ideology which the Western politician and scholar use to determine our acculturation as global citizens. Beyond our present-moment of Fonlon's forecasting, we can apply the other two inflectional views of time—past and future—to his rhetorical worry in order to wonder also: what have we done with the resources that were finally ours, at independence; and how shall our progeny fare from the wanton waste of the same resources now being exploited by a new "master" from Beijing? When we cling to colonial shadows in defence of our inabilities, how do we reconcile such façade with the present prostitution with neoliberal partners? Clearly, the postindependence neo-native is the child of postcolonial ambivalence whose nationalist epithets proffer no enduring selfhood. There is a form of escapist redundancy in narrating our colonial history as a trend that ended with flag independence, ignoring the fact that independence was meant to be a new, more responsible departure. Caught in the hydra hug of *entente coloniale*, however, we are still to adjust to fiscal constraints that map out our growth initiatives with France. In 2000 during a banquet in Paris, President Biya not only turned down expectations to renew the colonial agreement with France, but also announced the diversification of Cameroon's trading partners. When African postcolonial scholarship dwells on "colonial agreements" whereas others have either revised or rejected these elsewhere, then "flag independence" becomes both a convenient alibi in justifying the sham that was independence and the swansong to our becoming. "Colonial" remains a terminal tag only to stagnating postcolonial scholarship that fails to engage affirmatively with neoliberal duplicities; and also because we lack to courage to confront present and future realities as an independent people, based on a national or continental ideology.

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5. The Stranglehold of Postcolonialism

If I have always been suspicious of theories, it is not just because it fails (particularly so in Africa) to serve an ideology or actually serves one with anarchical designs; but also because while they provide relative perspectives for analysis, they also risk transforming the critical voice into that of a believer-scholar when embraced with the enthusiasm of faith. In many ways, ironically, Fonlon embodies the ambivalence of presence in relation to agency in the postcolony. His preference of British Standard English and his militant affirmation of the Christian creed are just two of the factors that limited his impressive advocacy in what would emerge as postindependence hermeneutics.

Africa will never "emerge" (no geo-political and economic space does) as long as we remain and reason as postcolonial heroes at home and abroad. Otherwise, our efforts will be tantamount to theoretical defeatism, that is, a situation in which we embrace every theory with its collateral background even when the respective cultures have made strides over the centuries to overcome their plight. It is ludicrous that the very person who offered us a stagnating theory which hijacked our postindependence consciousness has already moved forward past neoliberal speculations that aim to neutralise our originary efforts, while we make disclaimers that continue to lubricate the "colonial" handshake. In our representative approach to Orientalism, subalternity, liberation theology, etc, we have internalised them into part of our legitimate grievance and the retardation in African development is a consequence of this. For instance, when Orientalism is applied as synonymous with postcolonialism, it is embarrassing particularly for scholarship south of the Sahara because while the Orient as an economic and even ideological bloc has evolved to the point of salvaging us from the self-induced misery, we continue to make unconvincing plaintiff appeals and assertions, forgetting that our willed dependence makes us complicit in our fate.

The present continuous tense-analysis of colonialism is part of the reason for postcolonialism's stranglehold on its scholars. Such analyses which still couch colonialism and its "post" and "neo" brands in contemporary configurations is a distortion of both historical and diplomatic data, and offers undeserving leeways to the very authoritarian structures which such critiques endeavour to enunciate. The continuous harping on colonialism is thus the swansong of our development, a confession that we have either never been independent, or did not understand the responsibilities that come with such

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transition. Of course, acolytes of incumbent ideocracy in the postcolony are pleased with intellectual outputs that continue to regurgitate what was in vogue since the pushback from Tousaint Louverture to Marcus Garvey's idea of "back to Africa" that birthed the Rastafarian ideology for liberation. Dated intellectualism is as dangerous as a poorly diagnosed ailment to which the wrong medication is administered.

Postcoloniality is not an unlimited panacea for cultural friction, just as its ismatic frame cannot be a theoretic magic wand; its declining momentum perpetuates an endless sense of victimhood and progress. Of all colonised spaces, Africa still laps colonial milk the most not because precolonial institutions were weak but because those who were charged with the transition became and have generally remained compromised. A consequence of this calibrated outcome is dire underdevelopment, and camouflaged in institutional collaboration as indifference toward earthly things. While there is hope that we can rehabilitate our postcolonial consciousness by diversifying our critical outlook beyond the symbolic boundaries, it is also disheartening that the postcolonial grip has condemned African practitioners to mark time according to colonial memory. They expect nothing more than a nod of approval from the perennial Self and seem to be intimidated with voicing antithetical narratives even if these speak to native realism. Not only are they scared of being contradicted, they seem to be contented with shifting the responsibility of thinking to a "superior" consciousness for them to merely apply. Resulting from the ideologies which Africans inherited at independence, our educational system was conditioned to replicate the colonial image. Consequently, the African student was, and is still being taught, to believe without interrogating theory; reason why, with its external configuration, postcolonialism was logically framed to puncture the radicalism of anticolonial sentiments. Complementary theories are therefore endorsed as empathising with the othered constituency and valorised for celebrating "our" common humanity.

6. Conclusion: weaning the etherised patient

It is imperative for us to rethink our relationship with the postcolonial mantle and be more tolerant toward reflections that undermine its over-hyped status in academia because, ultimately, its disinterest in ideological positioning orchestrates our flirtation with controlling ideas. We then return to Eliot's split-

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consciousness character in a euthanasic approximation of a consciousness that is necessarily liberating and from which we must disconnect in order to reconnect engagingly in Afroglobalism. We cannot continue to deny the fact that African *post*colonial scholarship had been hackneyed for too long by a ridiculous infatuation with the relics of colonialism and their evolved afterlives. Why this is not the case in other former colonies can be explained by the collaboration between researchers and policymakers, the degree of intimacy with precolonial culture, level of even Lincolnian democracy, and freedom of speech in such places. Discussions around the fact that the weaponisation of victimhood is allowed the Jews but not Africans ignore the fact that no people have betrayed their sense of history and selfhood like Africans. The Jews, on the contrary, have never abandoned their shrines even as they make billions every year from Christian tourists. Africans confuse contexts of evolution and evaluation, and therefore unable to accept the fact that a film like *The Internationals* reveals the extent to which neoliberal politics has overwritten colonial landmarks with which some of us are still obsessed. If the work of postcolonial scholarship gives voice and agency to the colonised, as some colleagues still insist during conference presentations, I am convinced that the affirmation of such a delusion amounts to running on the spot, if not in reverse, considering how we have failed to get out of the box of postcoloniality after almost 70 years. Once this intellectual conspiracy is clarified, we can then go beyond theoretical redundancy into ideological leveraging of our priorities and accept the failures of (post)independence as our collective heritage, and no longer the clone of colonialism and its constructs of "post" dead-end.

To imagine the aftermath of postcolonialism is indeed a daunting task. For the discourse of confrontation from more progressive scholarship in Africa to succeed today in the diplomacy of conquest, we need more than a strongman-messiah in policymaking: we first have to conceive of an ideological base and of complementary theories whose data, like that which was gathering around independence grievances before Ashcroft gave it a Christian name, has always been part of our 20th and 21st centuries collective unconscious. It is only when this is groomed to a respectable level of self-reliance that we can be weaned of induced inferiority, and begin to reassess the theoretic/Christian name that was imposed on data by indigenes. For, we cannot continue to imagine the future through adaptive ideological lenses.

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