

BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE: POSTCOLONIAL DISCOURSE AND THE CHALLENGE OF THE SELF-EXISTENCE OF AFRICAN LITERATURE[1]

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ABSTRACT »»»

While postcolonial studies have been at the centre of intellectual reflexion in Anglo-Saxon universities during the last three decades, many African researchers feel sceptical toward its theoretical background. They are reluctant to use the term "postcolonial" in their analysis of the social and cultural situation of people formerly colonized by the West. It is as if postcolonial studies were evolving without the contribution of African intellectuals. The aim of this paper is threefold. First, we recall the different theoretical orientations of postcolonial studies and the confusion brought by the term "postcolonial" in academic research. Secondly, we underline some of the reasons why African scholars working in African institutions show less interest for postcolonial thinking. At last, we stress the effort of some African writers who endeavour to write in African languages to avoid the marginalization of African culture.

Key words

Postcolonial, Africa, orientalism, subaltern studies, cultural studies, language

RESUME »»»

Alors que les études postcoloniales sont au centre de la réflexion intellectuelle dans les universités anglo-saxonnes depuis les trois dernières décennies, de nombreux chercheurs africains doutent de leur apport théorique. Ainsi, c'est avec beaucoup de réticence qu'ils utilisent le terme « postcolonial » dans leurs analyses de la situation politique, sociale et culturelle des peuples anciennement colonisés. A travers une approche synthétique, cet article étudie trois questions principales liées à leur développement. Dans un premier temps, nous rappelons certains concepts fondamentaux des études postcoloniales et la confusion entretenue par le terme "post-colonial" dans la recherche universitaire. Ensuite, nous analysons les raisons pour lesquelles la pensée postcoloniale occupe très peu de place dans les travaux de certains chercheurs africains. Enfin, nous mettons en exergue l'effort de certains africains qui ont opté pour l'écriture en langues

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africaines afin d'éviter la marginalisation de la culture africaine provoquée par la pensée postcoloniale.

Mots-clés
Postcolonial, Afrique, Orientalisme, Subaltern Studies, Cultural Studies, langue.

INTRODUCTION »»»

Africa needs back its economy, its politics, its culture, its languages and all its patriotic writers.
W. T. Ngugi, Decolonising the Mind, p. Xii

That Algeria offers itself as one of the leading African country in the questioning of the theory and practice related to postcolonial studies is not a wonder to any scholar who knows the Algerian history. In fact, today it is needless to assert that decolonization has not been an easy task for African countries; however, only a few countries have known an anticolonial struggle comparable to that of Algeria. This is why any debate on the past and the present condition of the ex-colonized organized in Algeria will always take on an important symbolic dimension. Such are the cases of intellectual academic gatherings organized by Algerian universities in this decade. First, *African Literature in the XXth Century: Leaving the Post-colonial Behind* was the theme of an international conference held at the University of Algiers in April 2007. One of the aims of this conference was to approach the questions of literary criticism and critical terminology which want us to define African literature as being 'post-colonial' after more than fifty years of political independences. The organizers wanted to see if there was an ideology behind the marker of time 'post'. Other important related issues were: is it always relevant today to speak about post-colonial literature? Do we have to invent and propose a new terminology? Should we go out of the constant reference to colonialism or is it too early to make it? In December 2012, that is to say a little more than five years later, the same problematic is renewed in the same country, at the University of Oran, through another international conference entitled *Colonial and Post-colonial Studies: Between Objectivity and Subjectivity*. The originality of this conference lays on the assumption that the countries of the South, the countries which had been colonized and continue to suffer from its consequences after their independences, show a certain lack of interest in colonial and post-colonial studies. However, the questions on the object and methods of this field of knowledge appear as one of its central issues. This is why we would like to recall some of the different theoretical



orientations of postcolonial studies and the confusion brought by the term 'postcolonial' in academic research. Secondly, we would like to underline some of the reasons why African scholars working in African based institutions have strong reasons to show so little interest in postcolonial thinking. At last, we would like to stress the effort of some African writers who endeavour to write in African languages to avoid the marginalization of African culture.

I. DEFINING THREE KEY CONCEPTS: POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES, SUBALTERN STUDIES AND ORIENTALISM

When speaking about the term "postcolonialism", two certainties forcefully emerge: their origin and their field of study. In fact, they were born in the seventies in Anglo-Saxon universities when the intellectuals of the Third World arrived in Western universities. Since that time, they have never represented a specific discipline as scholars from different fields of studies such as social sciences, humanities, geography, anthropology or literatures show strong interest in many of its aspects. This is why it is better to describe them as a current of thought or a discourse. However, there is some confusion which seems to be inherent to the study of postcolonial discourse. The less disturbing point is probably the translation of the concept "postcolonial studies" into other languages, mainly in French. Like most of the fields of knowledge originated from the Anglophone countries (such as cultural studies and gender studies), there is a tendency to keep it in English because it seems to lose something when translated. However, since their appearance, the first important obstacle met by the scientific and university circles is the spelling of the word 'postcolonial' in which the suffix 'post' causes a kind of trouble. Indeed, do we have to write post-colonial or postcolonial? In scientific books and articles, there is no unanimity on this matter and this is one of the major sources of a certain academic carnival as asserted by Jean-François Bayard through the title of his book *Les Etudes postcoloniales: un carnaval académique*[2]. As an example, the Indian-American anthropologist Akhil Gupta, whose research has focused on the anthropology of the state and of development as well as on postcolonialism, defines 'postcolonial' as what comes chronologically after colonization and 'post-colonial' as the term which is used to think of the postcolonial and all which proceeds of the colonial fact, without distinction of temporality[3]. This definition is different from that of Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin whose book *The*

[2] Jean-François Bayart, *Les Etudes postcoloniales : un carnaval académique*, Paris: Editions Karthala, 2010
[3] Akhil Gupta, « Une théorie sans limite » in Marie Marie-Claude Smouts, *La Situation postcoloniale. Les postcolonial studies dans le débat français* (Paris : Presses de SiencesPo, 2007), p. 218.



Empire Writes Back is a major reference in the study of postcolonial discourse. For them, the term 'post-colonial' covers "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression[4]".

In spite of this orthographic difference, most influential researchers on postcolonial discourse agree on the fact that the literatures of Africa, Australia, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, New Zealand, Canada, Malaysia, Malta etc. are all postcolonial literatures. According to the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*, that of the United States of America also falls in the same category even if "its current position of power and the neo-colonizing role it has played, its post-colonial nature has not been generally recognized".[5] In fact, it is obvious that its relationship with the metropolitan centre as it evolved over the last two centuries has been paradigmatic for post-colonial literatures everywhere. However, in this second decade of the 21th century, is it appropriate to consider that the United States of America and Canada are situated at the centre of the universe or is it better to locate them at the periphery? Do Americans and Canadians feel today that their cultures are crushed by imperial cultures?

In *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*, Robert J.C. Young asserts that postcolonialism tries to answer this question:

> *Do you feel that your own people and country are somehow always positioned outside the mainstream? Have you ever felt that the moment you said the word "I", that "I" was someone else, not you? That in some obscure way, you were not the subject of your own sentence? Do you ever feel that whenever you speak, you have already in some sense been spoken for? Or that when you hear others speaking, that you are only ever going to be the object of their speech? Do you sense that those speaking would never think of trying to find out how things seem to you, from where you are? That you live in a word of others, a world that exist for others? How can we find a way to talk about this? That is the first question which postcolonialism tries to answer.*[6]

Indeed, the fight between the centre (the West) and the periphery (the non-West) is undoubtedly at the core of postcolonial discourse. With regard to the present economic and cultural situation of the world, we can assert that

[4] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures*, 2nd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 2.
[5] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures*, Ibid.
[6] Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.1.



postcolonialism involves first of all Africa, Asia, Latin America, that is to say the three non-Western continents which are in a situation of subordination to Europe and North America. Accordingly, it is not surprising that the main currents of thought of this theory were born in these continents. Among these, there are *Subaltern Studies* and *Orientalism*.

According to Jacques Pouchepadass, the term 'Subaltern Studies' indicates at the same time a series of collective works, published between 1982 and 2004, on the history and society of South Asia (India and nearby countries), the collective of researchers and scholars[7] who assured the publication and, more widely, a movement of ideas which, from an attempt to renew the historiography of colonial India, contributed in a considerable way to the development of the postcolonial studies. It is not either about a doctrine, or about a school, but rather about a current of thought which, from a core of about ten researchers and scholars whose leading figure was the historian Ranajit Guha, gathered some of the most brilliant Indian intellectuals. In India and her Diaspora as in the other areas of the formerly colonized world, the idea which was then developed among the historians was that a real history from below implied a break with the nationalist paradigm of the dominant historiography which darkened the antagonisms of classes in the name of the national unity, so extending the official political line of the fight for independence. On the whole, through the Subaltern Studies, Indian intellectuals intended to restore the people as the subject of its own history by refusing to conceive it as a simple mass of labourers manipulated by the elites[8].

The same intellectual orientation is also found in Edward Said's *Orientalism*, one of the major source books in the study of postcolonial discourse. Said is convinced that the relationship between the Orient and the Occident is a relationship of power and domination. He defines the term 'orientalism' in the introduction to his book:

> *Unlike the Americans, the French and British - less so the Germans, Russians, Spanish, Portuguese, Italians, and Swiss - have had a long tradition of what I shall be calling Orientalism, a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western Experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to*

[7] These researchers, who specialized in modern India and worked in the United Kingdom, India and Australia, were the historians Ranajit Guha, Shahid Amin, David Arnold, Gautam Bhadra, Dipesh Chakrabarty, David Hardiman, Gyanendra Pandey, Sumit Sarkar and the political analyst Partha Chatterjee.

[8] Jacques Pouchepadass, « Les Subaltern Studies ou la critique postcoloniale de la modernité », *L'homme*, N° 156, 2000, p. 165.



define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles[9].

In this book, which is a criticism of Western discourse on the East, the Palestinian–American literary theoretician strongly highlights the fact of representing the Other is not different from manipulating him and that the concept which essentialized the Oriental at the age of the European expansion had been the instrument of a submission. His analysis offers itself as a study based on the re-thinking of "what has for centuries been believed to be an unbridgeable chasm separating East from West"[10]. Through a re-reading of canonical cultural works, it challenges the idea that difference implies hostility, war or imperial control. As a consistent critique of Eurocentrism and patriarchy, it aims at helping the reader to rethink and reformulate major historical experiences which had once been based on the geographical separation of peoples and cultures and on the differences between races. We better understand why it is considered by many scholars and researchers as a foundational text of postcolonialism.

As such, Orientalism has the same theoretical background as Subaltern Studies, for both represent major intellectual and epistemic steps in the development of postcolonial studies. Nevertheless, we cannot conclude this section on the key concepts of postcolonial studies without mentioning the works of the Martiniquan psychiatrist Frantz Fanon (1925–1961) who can be perceived as the father of postcolonial thinking. His works *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952)[11] and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961)[12] are seen as foundational texts on racism and colonialism. Through a detailed study of the psychologies of both colonized and colonizers, he provides a theoretical and practical background to help the native intelligentsia to restructure the society by taking into account its cultural values. In the same way, 'Fanonism' came to be known as a term for both the anticolonial struggle and the liberationist critique and Fanon's work in Algeria a leitmotiv for all the wretched of the earth.

[9] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), p. 1.
[10] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), p. 350.
[11] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated from the French by Charles Lam Markmann, New York: Grove Press, 1967. First published in 1952.
[12] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated from the French by Richard Philcox, New York: Grove Press, 2004. First published in 1961.



II. THE POSTCOLONIAL MALAISE: TOWARDS THE SEARCH FOR A NEW INNOVATIVE THEORETICAL TERM »»»

Within the world's scientific circles, many people dislike the term 'postcolonial'. As underlined by Robert Young, one of the reasons for this stem from the fact that it "disturbs the order of the world. It threatens privilege and power. It refuses to acknowledge the superiority of Western culture. Its radical agenda is to demand equality and well-being for all human beings on this earth"[13]. After slavery and colonization which are two practices the immoral and inhuman character of which needs no further underlining one may wonder the concern for equality for all the peoples of the world would raise a problem. Does a certain nostalgia for the imperial process find its justification at a theoretical level?

One could mention the fact that it is disturbing to describe the history, the present and the future of formerly colonized countries by a phenomenon their people find inevitably painful. In fact, nobody can deny or forget colonization. Its psychological effects and its economic impact are still vivid in such a way that it has become a historical reality that tends to be constantly recalled. However, should this implacable reality bring the ex-colonized to place its aftermath at the centre of his preoccupations? Indeed, 'colonialism' and 'postcolonialism', the two key terms frequently used in postcolonial discourse, imply an unpleasant temporality. This is why many Africanists have stressed on the vexing nature of the theoretical term 'postcolonialism'. In fact, it creates a discomforting feeling or a kind of malaise for scholars and researchers. For instance, the questions of temporality and spatiality are among the issues forcefully articulated. Stressing the pitfalls of the term 'postcolonialism', Anne McClintock rightly argues that postcolonial theory has never supported the binaries of Western historicism. She wonders however why it currently postulates the totalizing binary of colonial-postcolonial and subordinates the ex-colonized multiple histories and cultures to colonialism and European time. While doing so, colonialism becomes a determining marker of history, which means reserving a place of honor for the history of Europe, while it is exactly this idea this theory is supposed to fight. In the conclusion of her article, McClintock asserts that it is necessary to find a new term that suits all the discourse developed around all that concerns the countries which were the victims of the imperial process initiated by European countries:

[13] Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.7.



> *There is some urgency in the need for innovative theories of history and popular memory, particularly mass-media memory. Asking what single term might adequately replace "post-colonialism," for example, begs the question of rethinking the global situation as a multiplicity of powers and histories, which cannot be marshalled obediently under the flag of a single theoretical term, be that feminism, marxism, or post-colonialism.*[14]

For his part, Young notes that there have been some attempts to replace this term. The first term that was proposed was 'third world'. To justify the parallel between 'postcolonial' and 'third world', he recalls the history of international relations. As is known, the world was divided into two major political systems: capitalism (the first world) and socialism (the second world). The remaining countries, which were new independent countries such as Ghana, Egypt, India and Indonesia, defined themselves as being non-aligned, in other words, they were neither socialist nor capitalist. They constituted a third independent block known as the 'third world' and developed a third world perspective on political, economic, and cultural global priorities since the Bandung Conference of 1955. So, instead of speaking about 'postcolonial discourse' or 'postcolonial literature', scholars and researchers would have been able to turn to the term 'third world discourse' or 'third world literature'. However, as underlined by Young, that third way was slow to be defined or developed and "gradually became associated with the economic and political problems that such countries encountered, and consequently with poverty, famine, unrest: 'the gap' "[15] .

It was only eleven years after the Bandung Conference that a new term appeared during a conference held in Havana in 1966. As it brought Latin America, Africa and Asia, it was called the 'Tricontinental Conference'. During this cultural gathering, writings by major writers from the third world (Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral, Che Guevara, and Ho Chi Minh) and by influential postcolonial theorists (such as Jean Paul Sartre) were presented. The terms 'third world' and especially 'tricontinental' were then preferred to 'postcolonial'. According to Young, "as terms, both 'tricontinental' and 'third world' retain their power because they suggest an alternative culture, an alternative 'epistemology', or system of knowledge"[16]. However relevant this assertion may be, we have to recognize that these two terms are not currently

[14] Anne McClintock, "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-Colonialism'," in *Social Text*, No. 31/32, Third World and Post-Colonial Issues (1992), p. 97.
[15] Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.17.
[16]Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.17-18.



used in the communities of scholars and researchers on the literatures of these three continents. Like other restrictive terms such as 'Commonwealth literatures' and 'new literatures in English', also used in some university courses, these limited and pejorative terms do not appear as theoretically and politically appropriate.

Finally, four decades after its appearance in academic circles, we can notice a terminological impasse which has led to the implanting of the term 'postcolonialism'. For Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, it "is finally to be preferred over the others because it points the way towards a possible study of the effects of colonialism in and between writing in English and writing in indigenous languages in such contexts as Africa and India, as well as writing in other language diasporas (French, Spanish, Portuguese)"[17].

III. POSTCOLONIALISM AND THE CHALLENGE OF THE SELF-EXISTENCE OF AFRICAN LITERATURE

> *Postcoloniality is the condition of what we might ungenerously call a comprador intelligentsia: of a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained, group of writers and thinkers who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery. In the West, they are known through the Africa they offer; their compatriots know them through the West they present to Africa and through an Africa they have invented for the world, for each other, and for Africa*[18].

In the definition above of the postcolonial condition, Kwame Anthony Appiah stresses on the role of African intellectuals and presents them as cultural mediators between Africa and the West. Appiah, who is among the few African theorists whose books are authoritative in African American studies, emphasises the difficulties of these African scholars who are almost dependent on African universities and the Euro-American publisher and reader, a position he finds uncomfortable. However, this double dependence seems to be less anguishing compared with their almost absence from the field of postcolonial theory. When we analyse the location of the producers and the production of postcolonial theory, we can notice that only very few of them (Achille Mbembe for instance) are African. And even, most of those who specialize in the field do not work in African-based academic institutions. One

[17] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 23.
[18]Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (London: Methuen, 1992), p. 149.



might wonder how African literature can be promoted without the contribution of authoritarian African theorists. Indeed, while African writers of fiction (such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi and Leopold S. Senghor) are among the most well-known postcolonial writers, postcolonial theory is largely dominated by Indian thinkers whose thought is now central to the field. But, perhaps this phenomenon keeps pace with the continuing exile of major African writers. Indeed, producers and thinkers of African literature tend to see the West as an unavoidable destination (or crossroads). As a consequence the attention of postcolonial criticism is drawn at first on diasporic writers, neglecting by the same token the African-based ones. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza stresses on this point when he argues:

> *The result is that postcolonial theory has become increasingly conflated with diasporic writers, identities, and representations. The association of postcolonial criticism with writers based in the global North and writings in European languages leads to the continued repression and marginalization of African language literatures and authors based on the continent, as well as African literatures in European languages whenever their concerns cannot be absorbed into the postcolonial obsession with empire*[19].

One of the solutions to this problem is undoubtedly the search for identity to African literature. In fact, the term 'postcolonial literature' seems to be too totalizing and does not allow a thorough readability of writings from Africa. Perhaps, no African writer has claimed for this identity more than the Kenyan writer Ngugi. For him, writings by African authors are generally known as 'African literature' while it should be termed as Afro-European literature for the simple reason that it is written in European languages. In a long and detailed footnote from *Decolonising the Mind*, a book he describes as his farewell to the English language, the Kenyan writer shows his contempt on the use of the term 'African literature' to qualify writings by Africans in foreign languages:

> *The term 'Afro-European literature' may seem to put too much weight on the Europeanness of the literature. Euro-African literature? Probably, the English, French and Portuguese components would then be 'Anglo-African literature', 'Franco-African literature' or 'Luso-African literature'. What is important is that this minority literature forms a distinct tradition that needs a different term to distinguish it from African literature, instead of usurping the title African literature as is the current practice in literary scholarship. There have even been arrogant claims by some*

[19]Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, "The Troubled Encounter Between Postcolonialism and African History", *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société Historique du Canada*, vol. 17, N° 2, 2006, p. 101.



> *literary scholars who talk as if the literature written in foreign languages is necessary closer to the Africanness of its inspiration than similar works in African languages, the languages of the majority. So thoroughly has the minority 'Afro-European literature' (Euro-African literature?) usurped the name 'African literature' in the current scholarship that literature by Africans in African languages is the one that needs qualification*[20].

On the whole, Ngugi militates in an energetic way for the development of a literature written in African languages. In fact, while French, British, American and even Chinese, and Japanese are producing works of fiction in their own languages, Africa can be said to be a continent where the functions and potentialities of local languages are not fully used. This is why, as underlined by the Kenyan writer, the African continent doesn't need back only its economy, its politics, its culture, its patriotic writers but also its languages[21]. In *Moving the Centre*, his second theoretical book, he defends the same principles, for he refuses the hegemony of Western languages over those of ex-colonised countries. Through this book, he struggles for the cultural freedoms of nations from the periphery. As indicated in the preface of his book, he had one deep conviction:

> *I am concerned with moving the centre in two senses at least. One is the need to move the centre from its assumed location in the West to a multiplicity of spheres in all cultures of the world. The assumed location of the centre of the universe in the West is what goes by the term Eurocentrism, an assumption which developed with the domination of the world by a handful of Western nations.*[22]

However, as we know, the debate over the language of African literature is not new. Since the emergence of African literary writing in European languages, it has been constantly recalled in cultural and intellectual Africanist circles. Many Africanists, writers and intellectuals have underlined the fact that these European languages are inadequate to express the African cultural and philosophical reality. However, until now, only very few writers (such as Ngugi and Boubacar Boris Diop) write in African languages. The languages of the colonizer remain the writing languages of most of them. In theory, the defenders of the writing in African languages are many, but in practice, even at this beginning of the second decade of the 21th century, only few African writers dare to write in their mother tongues. In spite of a clear linguistic awareness, most of them know that they will have a larger audience

[20] Wa Thiong'o Ngugi, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Curey, 1986), p. 33.
[21] Ibid, p. Xii.
[22] Wa Thiong'o Ngugi, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (London: James Curey, 1993), p. XVi.



by choosing to write in the coloniser's language. Let us note all the same the existence of a literature in African vernacular languages in the languages of East and Southern Africa. Through the whole continent Gikuyu, Shona, Xhosa, Sotho or Zulu literatures can be perceived as islands of authentic africanity in an ocean of books in European languages.

CONCLUSION »»»

Although neglected by African universities and scholars, postcolonial studies do not need to be explained since they have existed for more than four decades in the Anglo-Saxon and French universities. As a discourse, postcolonialism stands at the intersection of debates about race, colonialism, gender, politics and language. This study has shown us that many academics have specialized in this field of analysis which is especially marked by the Indian thinkers who stand as the voices of the former British and French colonies. Even though it does not represent a specific discipline, it constitutes a general discourse the first objective of which is to list and to analyze the writings which allow the former colonies to 'write back' as indicated by the title of one of the books by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin. In this general theory which contests the supremacy of Eurocentrism and the centrality of the West in the world knowledge, the voice of Africa does not seem to be clearly audible. Indeed, while authors from Africa are among the major contributors as far as writings are concerned, its theorists and scholars are almost absent from the framing of the epistemologies. This lack of interest by Africanists and African scholars is well established. However, as underlined by Pius Adesanmi, "the trouble with Africa is not so much in the area of production as in the area of naming and privileging what has been produced"[23].

Judging from current reflection and discussion among African scholars, it appears that some of the reasons of this absence are to be found both in the orthographic and semantic imbroglio brought by the term "postcolonial" and especially by its vexing nature. To avoid all the anxieties provoked by such a situation, some African writers such as Ngugi have advanced the question of the identity of African literature. They speak in favor of the promotion of a literature written by Africans in their mother tongues. Indeed, until now, writings in African indigenous languages had a marginal status in the analysis of postcolonial literature. This is why it seems important to many defenders of African cultures and languages that a literature expressing the authenticity of African thoughts and philosophies would deserve better the term 'African literature' more than a literature written in English, French or Portuguese. For

[23] Pius Adesanmi, "Africa, India, and the Postcolonial: Toward a Praxis of Infliction", *Arena Journal*, N° 21, 2004, p. 176.



practical reasons, we may wonder how this objective could be reached as we know that the westernization of the African societies did not stop increasing even after colonization. Even the works of the fiercest defenders of this approach to African literature are notified to the African public through translations in Western languages. This tells us about the margin between theory and practice and the length of the way to go through in order to establish the existence of an indigenous African literature. Finally, taking into account all possible linguistic and materialistic theories, should we be considered as Afro-pessimistic or rather Afro-pragmatic if we come to share Ricard's assertion according to which "it is not language itself that is important, but its cultural and ideological uses"[24]?

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