

**Brute Power Relations between The Orient and The Occident: A
Postcolonial Reading of Laming's *In the Castle of My Skin***

BY

Aliyu Sambo Alhassan

Department of English and Linguistics

Federal University Dutse, Jigawa State

08065454988

asambo1010@gmail.com.

And

Dauda Saidu PhD

Department of English

Yusuf Maitama Sule Federal University of Education Kano

08187941259

Abstract

In Postcolonial discourses, the two terms of Orient and Occident are used to refer to the sociocultural, geographical, politico-economic and ideological constructs that exposes or reflect the complexities of the relationship of the Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian Western colonisers and their colonies. In the ambit of postcolonial studies, a good and comprehensive understanding of the two terms helps in the better analysis of the kind of power dynamism, the cultural paranoia and schizophrenia that existed between the colonizer and the colonised. The discourses of terms have developed over time to become concepts. And they are central to the magnum opus of Edward Said's text, *Orientalism* (1978). The text essentially critiques the West's patronage and the distorted representation of the Occident by trying to not only legalise but also legitimise the Orient's heartless and dehumanising colonisation that forcefully occupied the territories of the occident and grabbing their land as well as and displacing them from their rightful places. These areas that were forcefully occupied by the colonisers were hitherto referred to as places of negation by the same orients. Therefore, the paper tries to look at the nature of the relationship and interactions that existed between the two distinct entities and of different cultures, geography and political settings as presented in Laming's *In The Castle of My Skin*.

Key Words: Postcolonialism, Occident, Orient, Subalterns.

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Introduction

The literature of the subalterns, the hybridists and the occident are always cradled and weaved in the Postcolonial discourses. The novels of the immigrants, the Afro-Americans, the ex-slaves, the colonised and the other third world writers provide the premise for the application of postcolonial theory with a view to foreground a special discussion on the psychoanalytic disposition of the writers. They are very peculiar in their plots and style. Their central discourse is largely about exposing the psychological and physical feelings of the colonized people the world over. One realises that the writers are either are directly intertwined with postcolonial concern.

Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*

Written by George Lamming, the Barbadian novelist, *In the Castle of My Skin* is an autobiographical fiction of an immigrant that accounts for a story of the mundane events in the life history of a young boy growing in a village and in fact the larger society that witness dramatic and crude changes to their amazement. The text has a total of 14 chapters in all and was first published in the year 1953, in London, just some five years before Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. *In the Castle of My Skin* prides on some features of the modernist narratives such as the tropes of shifting perspectives as well as suspense and unreliable mode of storytelling to recount the childhood life of a fictitious boy growing in a traditional setting. The major character is presented to a reader as special and exceptionally intelligent child that was growing under the watch of an overprotective mother. The story implies that the attributes of being intelligent and high sense of maturity should have been exhibited by a child that grew

up with the elderly, but the young **G.** grows up in the midst of his peers yet he exhibited, some remarkably different traits that were entirely different from those of his age mates.

George Lamming's preoccupation is not to foreground or prove the capacity or ability of **G.** but rather **G.'s** story provides a window to showcase some of the legacies or excesses of colonisation and indeed modern brand of slavery in Barbados and the entire Caribbean communities, societies and nations of the mid 20thC. The story is beyond the protagonist, he is rather a mirror through whom the reader sees the evils of colonialism in feudalism, capitalism, neoliberalism, labour unions and movement, education of a colonially protected nation, riots and above all, life and movements and the entire lives of the emigrants in the Caribbean societies. The novel exposes one of the most heinous crimes of the colonialist masters, which is the act of land grabbing. A reader is told that the white Landlord character in the story of the novel owns the whole village, where **G.** and his mother come from, the white landlord was the owner of the whole village by virtue of the fact that his parents, the initial colonizers displaced the original inhabitants to the hinterland and converted the village into a farmland. He owns the village because he inherited the land from his parents. The colonial land law provides that the white colonialists that first occupy a certain place for farming, the whole area that people were hitherto living there and are settled there even during the occupation, automatically belongs to the occupiers. So even when the place became fully occupied by people as a result of influx, the inhabitants become the tenants of the land and the occupiers then become landlords. Among the ills of colonialism is the eroding of the values of the colonised, in the sense that a communally knit society shouldn't be found to be having its inhabitants caught in the act of having sex in the street. The, central character of the novel's father is hibernated, he is not referred to in the story at all, and his mother, though a disciplinarian is so inconsequential such that she is never mentioned by her name at all. Women in a typical cultured society play very strategic and important roles in

their communities; but in the setting of this novel, women are passive characters. In the last analysis, the Caribbean nations got their best brains emigrating to the west.

Postcolonial Theory

Postcoloniality, Post colonialism or Postcolonial study is essentially an amalgam of thoughts, views and opinions of the scholars and critics of the formerly colonized societies or other scholars who venture to write on the subject. These critics are classified into two broad groups in accordance with their line of arguments on the impact and consequences of colonialism and the manner the colonized societies would possibly escape from the negative impacts of the elements that buttress the evil of colonialism or even what could now be termed as imperialism. In this regard, Gikwandi, S. in Olaniyan and Quayson (2007:614) provides that:

On one hand, there are those critics who would demand that postcolonial theory accounts for the specific conditions in which colonialism emerged and functioned. They also wish that the theory explains the role of decolonization as a specific narrative of liberation... To these critics, the pitfall of postcolonial theory inheres in its inability to periodize and historicize the colonial experience and to account for the role of colonized subjects as active agents in the making of culture and history. Because for them, postcolonial theory's primary failure is its inability to account for the history and process of decolonization. The above groups are essentially concerned with those specificities that led to what made the orient to be termed as such and to delineate those steps that could be followed in combating the evils of colonialism that were inherited from the colonizers much after the so called independence.

But the second group of the postcolonial critics reject that claim that theory represents the separation of culture and political economy, or that the acts of reading that are informed by the shifting of theoretical notions of hybridity and difference compellingly negate the categories of nation and nationalism to post colonialist scholars like Homi Bhabha post structuralism and or postmodernism is a very strong shield against "the prison-house" of European humanism and the decolonized mind as a polity that is no more legitimate to this age of globalization and migration. To Bhabha and the other scholars that shares his thoughts on this concept of post colonialism is, 'rather than being ahistorical and apolitical, detached

from the concerns of the postcolonial subject, a postcolonial discourse is formed by post-structuralism and it provides a powerful vista into the modern world system and its moment of crisis...’ postcolonial criticism “bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural and social authority within the modern world order”.

Diverse as these two arguments on what constitutes a postcolonial discourse may seem, their area of convergence is their agreement that postcolonial discourse emerged within the larger institutions of European theory or theories that evolved after structuralism. This union also raised further unsettled questions. Hommi Bhabha provides an encapsulating definition of the concept of hybridity as another power ploy of the culturally privileged Western elites to produce a discourse of the ‘*Other*’ and which re-enforces its power- knowledge equation on the hybridized". (*The Location of Culture* 20-1). This definition attempts to come to terms with the nature and implication of colonial modernity from the dual vantage position of decolonization and migration.

In a nutshell, this brief definition of what constitutes postcolonial discourse and its central concerns, that includes Habib's (272) submission as presented below, provides the basis and the justification for adopting post-colonialism as the theoretical framework of this study. For instance Habib enumerated the following points as the core values of postcolonial discourse: a) to cover all cultures affected by the imperial process, from the moment of colonialism to the present day on account of the continuity of preoccupations existing between the colonial and postcolonial period, b) to determine the economic, political and cultural impact of colonialism on both the colonized peoples and the colonizing powers; c) to analyze the process of decolonization; and, above all, d) to participate in the goals of political liberation of forms of domination and articulation of political and cultural identities.

Based on the submission of critics and proponents of postcolonialism, it is an umbrella term of post-structuralism, and it targets, among others, the existence of hidden articulators that are

embellished within some assuredly monadic totalities; i.e. the exposures of those hidden articulators, and thus, it is to these assumptions that this research-based its conceptual framework. The major concern and the fundamental preoccupation of this work are, as earlier stated elsewhere in this research, to subject the reading of the texts of reference to the ideals of post-colonialism with the view to see how this critique reveals some of the factors for Nigeria's predicaments, as it tries to relate and connects the ellipsis.

The paper also reveals its perception of autobiographical writing as a class of writing, primarily as it affects Shagari's *Beckoned to Serve*, and Achebe's *There was a Country...* Hence this informs the application of Postcolonial theory as the theoretical framework of this research. Because as *ibid*, Smith (1996) submits, the Postcoloniality fits into most theories and thus:

For Derrida, autobiography is not so much a subjective and self-reflexive in relation to the --- 'Other', it is not so much a general condition of thought as it is a general condition of writing, what he calls the autobiography of writing--- which mocks any self-centered finitive of living and dying in this context, and the use of literary-critical, philosophical discourse through Derrida's texts... destructively, to analyze... writings (South, 02). The central agreement here, and as could be inferred from Derrida, is that, as far as a text or texts explore or derive the properties of language through writing, which always has properties like transcendentalism, arbitrariness, and inter-textually and cannot lay claim to closure. So it, no matter how much it tries, cannot deny or avail itself of fictional qualities even if it has initially declared itself factual. Perhaps, this may even be the spirit behind Norris' submission that since all writings, irrespective of what they decidedly declare themselves, could not escape literary properties like exaggerations, ellipsis, gaps, silence, absences, and aporias; therefore...texts (factual) are in no way different from novels or poems and should therefore

be read chiefly with an eye to their covert metaphors, picture strategies, and structures of historical implications (Norris, C. 182-3).

The term Postcoloniality, postcolonialism or postcolonial discourse as it is interchangeably used, is basically concerned with offering of a critical discourse of fictional or factual texts by the colonized and about the postcolonial concern. Postcolonialism has been, (Jeyifo, B. 1996:47) used by scholars of the colonized domains as being critical of third-world nationalism, while relating the discourse to the major concern of Postcoloniality. Thus the concern of this paper is to critically analyse the text in relation to traits of postcolonialism in Africa. Post-colonial criticism and theory is a political critical approach to literary interpretation that drew critical attention of critics in the late 1970s, and it is essentially concerned with the economic, cultural and psychological effects of colonial activities and imperialism on the colonized, and also as critics tried to challenged colonialism and imperialism as well as moved to fight for the liberation of the colonised against the antics of the colonialists, and equally struggled for the emancipation of the colonised nations from colonial (mis)rule and domination. This is because postcolonial theory is rooted in the history of colonialism and imperialism. The real sense of it is that there are at least three major phases of colonialism globally. From early 15thC to the mid of 18thC, Spain, Portugal, England, France and the Netherlands established colonies and empires in the Americas, the West Indies and India. And, in the same vein, from the early 19thC to the period immediately after the World War I, there was an aggressive scramble for imperialistic power and the partitioning of Africa between Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal and other European nations.

By the end of the nineteenth century, more than one-fifth of the land area of the world and a quarter of its population were brought under the British Empire. Some of the British colonies are India, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Burma and Sudan, to mention but a

few. The next largest colonial power was France, whose occupations include: Algeria, French West Africa, Equatorial Africa, and Indochina. Germany, Italy and Japan also entered the race for colonies. In 1855 Belgium established the Belgian Congo in the heart of Africa, a colonization whose horrible effects are expressed in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Finally, the period during and after World War II, saw a struggle involving both the countries just mentioned as well as a conflict between America and the Communist Soviet Union for expansionist control, power, and influence. It is pertinent to note that, these imperialistic endeavours have survived up to the present day, only that the forms and faces of imperialism changes with renewed vigour.

The primary motive behind the imperialist colonization of Africa is the exploits of the economy of the colonized nations. And after the first, another is second motive is to use the subjects of the colonised nations as ready tools for the security of the colonisers' nation states. A third motive is related to various versions of social Darwinism. Figures such as Machiavelli, Bacon, Karl Pearson, Hitler, and Mussolini saw imperialism as part of the natural struggle for survival. Postcolonial literature and criticism could be traced to the mid-20th century after the struggles of many nations in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere for independence from colonial rule. The year 1950 saw the publication of seminal texts on Postcolonialism: The examples of Aimé Césaire's *Discours sur le colonialisme*, and Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*. The example of Chinua Achebe for instance, who published the novel *Things Fall Apart*, George Lamming published *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) and Frantz Fanon wrote *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) are some of the few literary productions that are effectively against colonialism.

Fanon's classic text analyzed the conditions for effective and colonial revolution from a Marxist perspective, modified somewhat to accommodate conditions specific to colonized

nations. It also articulated the conditions between races. Indeed, Fanon pointed out the utter difference in historical situations between the European bourgeois class, a once-revolutionary class which overturned feudalism and the African bourgeoisie emerging as the successor to colonial rule.

According to Robert Young, the "founding moment" of colonial theory was the journal the *Tri-continental*, which was launched by the Havan Tri-continental in 1966, and which "initiated the first global alliance of the peoples of the three continents against imperialism" (Young, 5). Edward Said's *Orientalism* appeared in 1978. More recent works include *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, Gayatri Spivak's *The Post-Colonial critic* (1990), as well as work by Abdul Jan Mohamed, Hommi Bhabha, Benita Parry, and Kwame Antony Appiah. Robert Young sees Postcolonialism as continuing to deprive its inspiration of the anti-colonial struggles of the colonial era, both having certain common characteristics such as; "diaspora, transnational migration and internationalism" (Young 2). Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin also use the term postcolonial in a comprehensive sense, "to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day," on account of the "continuity of preoccupations" between the colonial and postcolonial period.

Furthermore, postcolonial criticism has embraced several aims: most fundamentally, to re-examine the history of colonialism from the perspective of the colonized; to determine the economic, political, and cultural impact of colonialism on both the colonized peoples and the colonizing powers; to analyze the process of the colonization; and, above all, to participate in the goals of political liberation, which includes equal access to material resources, the contestation of forms of domination and the articulation of political and cultural identities (Young, 11). Early voices of anti-imperialism stressed the need to develop or return the indigenous literary traditions to exorcize their cultural heritage of the spectres of imperial

domination. Other voices advocated and adaptation of Western ideals towards their political and cultural end. The fundamental framework of colonial thought has been furnished by the Marxist critique of colonialism and imperialism, which has been adapted to their localized contexts by thinkers from Frantz Fanon to Gayatri Spivak.

In a nut-shell, all of these discusses have challenged the mainstreams of Western philosophy, literature and ideology. It is in this sense, that the work of African American critics such as Henry Louis Gate Jr., of African American formal novelists and poets, of commentators on Islam such as Fatima Mernissi and Aziz Al-Azmeh, and even of theorists such as Frederick Jameson, is virtually linked to the multifarious projects of Postcolonialism. Thus this research operates under the post-colonial theory, its background and its sole aim.

Postcoloniality and Hybridity

The concept of Postcolonialism as a school of literary theory stems from the unfortunate history of the forceful and brazen agnatisation and occupation of hitherto independent city-states in Africa, North America and some parts of Asia which include India by the European colonizers. The discourse of Postcoloniality concerns itself with issues of reconnection with the past, recollecting the past and or asserting the self. There exist deliberate fiction and grand narratives by the Western scholars to the effect that, the colonized territories were animists, barbarous, prehistoric and uncultured! Another very serious violence on the so called colonies was the deliberate and forceful separations of the hitherto, homogenous city-states and at the same time amalgamation of those cultures and ethnic that shared nothing in common!

Perhaps apart from the exceptions of say, Ousmane Sambene, Armah Ayi Kwe and some very few African and Caribbean writers; a sizable majority of the African and the Caribbean writers that were hitherto known and were referred to as those who held and expressed strong views against colonialism and the colonial masters; the self-acclaimed postcolonial writers and the bearers and promoters of the colonised culture and history of the colonized...those African writers and cultural intelligentsia, lived a life of contradiction, deliberately chosen to be what Bello-Kano refers to as, the western émigré, that is, to live their entire life in the same Europe they spend their intellectual lives condemning as the colonizers! Despite their so much-vaunted 'anti-colonial critiques, they raised their children in the west and America! Their kids attend the occident's schools and institutions. And thus, they hand over their future and posterity to the colonizers for the latter's economic and social trainings. One cannot help but to see the open contradictions and a seeming hypocrisy in this action, which belie their anticolonial discourses pretensions. This act of migrating to the coloniser's abbot thereby abdicating one's place is consequently referred to as Performative contradictions. One finds a huge corpus of their strongly critical works against the western scholars' discourses of identity and difference against Africa, yet they abandon Africa and the other colonizing or oriental places to migrate, live, work and teach in the colonizer's land! Gayatri Spivak, Hommi Bhabha, Salman Rushdie and many of them for instance, would never go back to India. Chinua Achebe lived and died in the America, Ngugi will soon follow, and he is a close neighbor to 90 years! This is case with Ben Okri, Ngozie Adicie, Emecheta, Bakederemo, Soyinka, Bandele etc., who had lived and died or are still living in the same places they negate and attacked for racial and other forms of segregations or have written 'Grand Narratives' against Africa!

These African and other colonized intelligentsias the African and other colonized or non-western writers may be using their so called post-colonial critiques and narratives or even

theories, to attract an academic legitimacy and attention for themselves and their allies. Most, if not all, of these crop of writers, if not for authors like Aijaz Ahmad, Franz Fanon or Edward Said (whose native land of Palestine came under the Zionist imperialism, the catastrophe of exile), lived or are living a life of denial, a life of perspectival self-deception or sheer hypocrisy.

Like Bello-Kano (ibid) would insist “Indeed one cannot critique racism, colonialism and imperialist discourses, and still fail to find an alternative in their choice of ‘home and dwellings’ or in their choice of career opportunities”. At this point, some specific examples are relevant. The example of Achebe, Ngugi and Farah are at the nick of the bud. Perhaps apart from his very brief stint at University of Nigeria Nsuka, Achebe lived and died teaching the colonizer students in Europe and America (UK & US to be précised). The same applies to Farah, Ngugi, Emecheta, Nwafa, Laye, Mahfouz, Salih, Kane, Adichie and a lot more.

One could argue that this theory or discourse of the common wealth or the postcolonial theory rather an aberration or even intrinsically hypocritical, or lightly put, self-contradictory or even what, again Bell-Kano would refer to as “Conscience-assuaging and a pernicious Performative cultural contradiction”. These realities and others tend to threaten the ingenuity and the validity of Postcolonialism. This is couple with the fact that, if one is to situate the autobiographical works of these pioneers, one cannot help but to conclude that there seem to be no stability in the discourse of what is poscoloniality.

Perhaps it is likely that a new perspective be considered from say: Albert Memmi’s seminal work titled, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965; After having been rejected for so long by the colonizer, the day has come when it is the colonized who must refused the Colonizer”(pp128); or Robert Young, *White Mythologies: History Writing and the West* (1990); C, Bartolovich & N. Lazarus, *Marxism, Modernity, and Postcolonial Studies* (2002);

and E. San Juan, *Beyond Postcolonial Theory* (1999). For instance, Linda T. Smith's text *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People* (1999), offer a wide range of new perspectives on the limitations of nativists and mainstream Africanist, Postcolonialist, discourses of identity and adherence.

Conclusion

In the last analysis, Caribbean Literature, like the Commonwealth and other nations that experienced different forms of colonialism ranging from Anglophone, Francophone, Luther phone, apartheid and many others, will almost always have some peculiar stories to tell. The paranoid and schizophrenic feelings and belongings are always manifested in their stories. Colonialism of the orient, the subalterns, the hybridised and the apartheid always make it an obligation to attack the colonised minds, brains, hearts and psychologies. They bastardised and caused grievous injury or even damage to their victims. This is a general phenomenon and the same tradition in different forms.

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