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Colonial Criticism

Postcolonial literature attempts at narrating the forced colonial rule and the use and abuse of postcolonial spaces by the colonizers to build the colonial literary canon. Likewise, identity issues and narrative power still remain the highly debated points in the postcolonial literature because these two factors set postcolonial studies apart from the colonial literature. Besides, the identity of colonized people suffered a lot of added burden in lieu of racial stereotypes and colonial rule. They were neither given the right to speak for themselves, nor was their cultural essence kept intact by the colonizers since they wanted the latter to assimilate into their culture. Postcolonial authors specifically placed their works around these issues and described their perspective because their experiences were a firsthand representation of colonial tyranny on the colonized lands. Chinua Achebe, who is a famous postcolonial writer and critique, talks exclusively about the White supremacist mindset in his essay *Colonialist Criticism* and shares personal anecdotes about his first book, receiving a derogatory review from a White literary journalist. She overlooked his talent and was surely driven by her colonial ideologies of racial prejudice and an added sense of superiority over the Africans. The African identity is associated with racist words such as “negro”, the intellectual abilities of Black people are judged against their race and ethnic boundaries. Besides, Achebe proclaims that English literature or journals have always glorified their own cultural heritage against the African literature. This describes the colonial control over the native past of Africans.

Female identity issues within the postcolonial space have always been problematic because in colonial literature, these women are both marginalized and exoticized. Likewise, Minh-ha, in her critique on identity issues relating to the third world female identity, says that it cannot be viewed in isolation because it is formed under a certain ideology. Postcolonial identity spaces are in search of their true identity, aligned with their ethnic boundaries, and a sense of cultural belonging. However, in the westernized portrayal of third world female identity, they are always seen helpless and their body is exoticized to make it look appealing for their Western colonial master. In reality, they are double colonized, first by their own patriarchal system and secondly under the hegemonic control of colonial masters. Grace Nicholas describes this double colonization in her poem, *Skin Teeth* as, “If you see me smiling/when you pass/if you see me bending when you ask” (Nicholas lines 3-6). These verses carry a patronizing tone that allow male members of the society to manhandle women because they treat them as submissive beings, unable to decide what is best for them according to their own needs.

Minh-ha discourages these practices of manhandling the female identity and states, “How am I to lose, maintain or gain a female identity when it is impossible for me to take up a position outside this identity” (Minh-ha 372). She takes a stance against the western hegemonic control and proclaims that difference should not be viewed as a threat, instead it should be treated as being diverse and still relevant. Difference by no means legitimizes one culture’s superiority over another culture nor does it justify the colonization of a land based on cultural and ideological differences. Similarly, Achebe shares his experience and asserts that his novel, *Things Fall Apart* was critiqued by the western literary market on the basis of female identity in the third world. He shares this experience in his essay as, “These bright Negro barristers….. who talk so glibly about the African culture, how would they like to return to wearing raffia skirts……….. How would novelist Achebe like to go back to the mindless times of his grandfather” (Achebe 1). This demeaning tone of the reviewer suggests that White identity politics is so prevalent and toxic that it pervades the literary market and even raises question at the intellectual abilities of writers from the third world. In the opinion of colonial masters, postcolonial literary cannon is too good to raise voice and concerns for them. Colonial masters take advantage of their central position and keep on bringing the debate of cultural superiority. Likewise, they also question the female identity within the third world because in their opinion, they are treated as submissive beings in their culture and it is up to the Western culture to civilize the African culture. This cultural attack stems from the misunderstandings developed by the first world and their so-called idea of “white man’s burden”.

The first world, stereotypes the third world as uncivilized and heathens and consider it their responsibility to represent voices from the third world because they cannot speak for themselves. In the poem, *Skin Teeth*, Nicholas opens her poem with these verses “Not every skin-teeth/ is a smile “Massa” (Nicholas lines 1-2) these verses represent the idea of colonial hegemony and self-imposed White man’s burden to justify the control of other land and culture. Postcolonial literature also serves as the motivation that the repressed and colonized half has now come together to preserve their culture experiences and their unique voice. They have taken it on themselves to recall their native past and present it for the world to see. As shown in the poem, *Skin Teeth* with these rebellious verses “Know that I smile/ Know that I bend/only the better/to rise and strike again (Nicholas lines 7-11). These lines show the revolution which is the sole aim of literature produced by the third world countries that only they can tell their side of the story. Besides, the western idea of third world female identity is flawed and exaggerated since their identity is not endangered within their ethnic boundaries. It is with the Western models of a third world female identity that they will continue to think about these women as repressed entities. This so-called excuse allows them to violate the boundaries of postcolonial; space in the lieu of female empowerment. In reality, they ruled over both the freedom of land and freedom of speech off these women in their colonial rule. Under strict terms and conditions of slavery, they were forced into prostitution and their children were taken away from them. Likewise, in colonial Africa, they were not allowed to practice their communal values and spiritual acts by the Imperial authorities. This symbolizes the western flawed concept of controlling the rights, a woman can have in our domestic spaces. Minh-ha also describes this hegemonic control in the background of Black female identity and says that Black women are torn apart between the domestic as well as the home culture and its values. Modern woman has to face a lot of changes in the era of modernization as she constantly seeks assimilation in her home culture and cannot get distant from her native culture. Moreover, she also suffers the loss of her civil liberties and her rights over her body in a so-called liberal state such as America. The colored identity cannot transform into White identity henceforth how can the White supremacist authorities decide for the African Americans to live their lives according to their home culture when they deny the latter any acceptance into their culture.

Last but not the least, in both the essays, Achebe and Minh-ha extensively deals with the problematic representation of third world female identity in the colonial literary market and in the avenues of white supremist ideology creation.

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