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Narratives of Reclamation:
Deconstructing Misrepresentation of Africa and Africans in selected British Novels through African Literary Perspectives

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Abstract

Racial stereotyping, colonial ideology, and Western epistemological hegemony have significantly influenced the portrayal of Africa and Africans in British literature. Colonial novels, particularly those by authors such as Joseph Conrad (1899), have contributed to the construction of Africa as a dark, mysterious, and barbaric continent. This depiction has been strongly challenged by postcolonial African writers, most notably Chinua Achebe (1958), who critiques such representations as racist, distorted, and ideologically motivated to justify imperial domination. Drawing on postcolonial theory, especially the concept of the "colonial library" developed by V. Y. Mudimbe (1988), this study examines the evolution of Western misrepresentations of Africa from the colonial period to the present. It also explores the counter-discourses produced by postcolonial African authors who seek to challenge, subvert, and reframe these inherited colonial images. By analysing selected works of both British and African literature, our study highlights the enduring power of colonial discourse and the literary strategies employed to resist it.

Keywords: colonial library, counter-discourse, postcolonialism, representation, stereotypes

Résumé

Les stéréotypes raciaux, l'idéologie coloniale et l'hégémonie épistémologique occidentale ont profondément influencé la représentation de l'Afrique et des Africains dans la littérature britannique. Les œuvres coloniales, en particulier ceux d'auteurs tels que Joseph Conrad (1899), ont contribué à construire une image de l'Afrique comme un continent sombre, mystérieux et barbare. Cette vision a été vivement contestée par des écrivains africains postcoloniaux, notamment Chinua Achebe (1958), qui dénonce ces représentations comme racistes, biaisées et idéologiquement motivées pour légitimer la domination impériale. En s'appuyant sur la théorie postcoloniale, notamment sur le concept de « la bibliothèque coloniale » développé par V. Y. Mudimbe (1988),

cette étude examine l'évolution des représentations occidentales de l'Afrique, de la période coloniale à nos jours. Elle explore également les contre-discours élaborés par les écrivains africains postcoloniaux, qui cherchent à contester, subvertir et reconfigurer ces images héritées du colonialisme. À travers l'analyse d'œuvres littéraires britanniques et africaines, notre recherche met en lumière la persistance du discours colonial et les stratégies littéraires mobilisées pour y résister.

Mots-clés : bibliothèque coloniale, contre-discours, postcolonialisme, représentation, stéréotypes

Introduction

Colonial ideologies, racial stereotypes and Western epistemological dominance have long shaped the representation of Africa and Africans in British literature. From the late nineteenth century through the height of imperial expansion, British authors frequently portrayed Africa as a primitive, chaotic and uncivilised space. Sometimes, an empty landscape onto which European desires and fantasies were projected. Within this literary tradition, Africa is not represented as a lived and complex continent, but rather as a metaphor for darkness and radical otherness. Influential works such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Henry Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, and Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* exemplify this representational pattern.

The central problematic of this study lies in the persistence of colonial imaginaries in British literary representations of Africa. These narratives continue to shape contemporary understandings of the continent. This influence remains even when the texts claim to criticise imperialism. Some readers interpret these works as anti-imperialist. However, postcolonial scholars such as Chinua Achebe, Edward Said, and Frantz Fanon criticise them for their dehumanising portrayals of African people and cultures. Conrad's (1899) depiction of Africa, for instance, reduces the continent to "a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognisable humanity." This portrayal shows that literary aesthetics often serve imperial ideology rather than neutral artistic choices.

Methodologically, this article is situated within the framework of postcolonial literary criticism, with particular emphasis on Valentin Yves Mudimbe's concept of "the colonial library." According to Mudimbe, "the colonial library consists of all Western knowledge, such as literature, anthropology, and philosophy, that has historically relied on Eurocentric perspectives to define and misrepresent Africa." V. Y. Mudimbe (1988). This theoretical framework allows for a critical re-examination of how Africa has been textually constructed and manipulated, from the colonial period to the present. It is in this context that this article poses one central research question: In what ways does colonial heritages still influence portrayals of Africa in various literature? This mains query generates two subsidiary ones: To

what extent does the colonial imaginary continue to impact contemporary representations of Africa? Is it arguable that postcolonial narratives successfully dismantled the enduring legacies of colonial discourse about Africa?

The current study addresses these questions by analysing the evolution of Western representations of Africa in British literature, from imperial-era writings to more recent texts. To address these inquiries, the work is organised into two main sections. The first section analyses the representation of Africa in British literature, illustrating the long-standing misrepresentation of Africa and its people in British colonial literature. This section traces the evolution of Africa's portrayal, transitioning from imperial narratives to critical reassessments. The second section investigates the ambiguities and contradictions present in both colonial and contemporary narratives. It emphasises that colonial narratives serve as sites of disruption and inconsistency regarding the portrayal of Africa. Additionally, this section elucidates how postcolonial African narratives continue to navigate the tensions between colonial memory and counter-discourses aimed at reclamation.

1- The Representation of Africa in British Colonial Literature

In early British colonial literature, Africa was rarely depicted as a complex and autonomous continent; rather, it was constructed as a symbolic space upon which colonial ideologies could be projected. Often described as the "Dark Continent," Africa was portrayed as a vast, untamed wilderness, mainly mysterious, hostile, and devoid of civilisation.

1- 1- Misrepresentation of Africa in British Colonial Literature

The representation served to naturalise the colonial project by showing Africa as a land in need of European intervention and control. Mudimbe highlights this point by stating: *"Africa, as a concept, was invented within the context of exploration and conquest. Its identity was shaped by explorers, missionaries, and colonial administrators who defined it as a tabula rasa, a site of emptiness and potential to be filled by European values and institutions."* (V.Y. Mudimbe, 1988: 26)

What Mudimbe attempts to demonstrate here is that Africa's identity in the Western imagination is a colonial invention, constructed not on African realities, but on colonial needs, fears, and fantasies. This "invention" for him served to justify colonial domination by denying Africans' agency, history, and complexity. As far as Africans are concerned, they were depicted through reductive and dehumanising stereotypes. They are often considered savages and incapable of self-rule. Most of the colonial books portrayed African characters as naive figures, mainly dependent on colonial

authority, or as voiceless. All these literary portrayals denied African culture and individuals, reinforcing the racial hierarchies that justify imperial ideology. The most notable are Henry Rider Haggard, Joseph Conrad, Joyce Cary, and Elspeth Huxley, who collectively form a literary tradition that reduces Africa to a symbolic area of primitiveness, danger, and exoticism.

In Henry Rider Haggard's *King Salomon's Mines,* for example, he describes Africa as "the wild country… a vast desert… the waterless desert…a great sea of sand," (H. R. Haggard, 1951: 55-65). These repeated evocations of the African landscape are not mere descriptions but deeply ideological. These assertions form part of a larger colonial discourse that shows Africa as geographically and symbolically empty. This way of insisting on barrenness, danger, and untamed nature situates the continent as a wild area in need of Western exploration and conquest. Edward Said, in his *Orientalism,* calls this rhetorical construction the "European imaginative geography of colonisers." (E. Said, 1978: 57). By the word "wild," Haggard, through his white character Quatermain, removes the possibility of recognising Africa as a place of existing societies. Africa is for white people, a mythologised and primeval void, which is outside of time and progress. The African desert, as Quatermain describes here, is not simply a climatic zone but a metaphor for lifelessness and incomprehensibility. These narrations construct a symbolic death, suggesting that nothing of value lives or grows in Africa unless transformed by white people.

The main narrator goes on with an imaginary narration about a journey in Africa when he states: "We are going on about as strange a journey as men can make in this world. It is very doubtful if we can succeed in it. But we are three men who will stand together for good or for evil to the last." (H. R. Haggard, 1951: 64). This assertion illustrates a colonial construction that mystifies the landscape of Africa, reducing it to a symbolic obstacle. The "strange journey" is ultimately not strange in itself, but made strange by a discourse that erases African reality in favour of European myth-making. In this statement, the journey through Africa is portrayed not as a mere expedition but as one of the strangest possible experiences on earth, a suggestion that transforms the landscape from a real, inhabited, and historical space into a place of mystical otherness. The "strangeness" of the journey is not just about geography; it is about a confrontation with an imagined alterity. Africa is thus depicted less as a physical place with people, languages, and cultures. For Quatermain, Africa symbolises death. He clearly reveals his colonial ideology in the following assertion: "It seemed to me that to undertake such a journey would be to go to certain death, and putting other considerations aside, as I had a son to support, I could not afford to die just then." (H. R. Haggard, 1951: 25).

Like Henry Rider Haggard, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* also degrades Africa as the darkest place in the world. Through his white character, Marlow, Joseph Conrad portrays Africa as the most dangerous continent, which arouses fear and revulsion. Marlow expresses this biased image of Africa by considering its landscape as "a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet." (J. Conrad, 1899: 57). This sentence transports the reader not only geographically, but temporally and psychologically, into a space where time itself seems suspended, distorted, or regressed. In perceiving the earth as an "unknown planet," the narrator reveals his negative image of Africa, because of the colonial mindset that frames his understanding of the continent. Another narration he describes Africa with is as followed: "Paths, paths, everywhere; a stamped-in network of paths spreading over the empty land, through the long grass, through burnt grass through thickets, down and up chilly ravines, up and down stony hills ablaze with heat; and a solitude, a solitude, nobody, not a hut." (J. Conrad, 1899: 30).

This is a negative perception of Africa through a Eurocentric and colonial lens. He describes the continent as a "prehistoric" place, full of "darkness," "savagery." These depictions dehumanise both the land and its people, projecting Africa as the opposite of European civilisation. This is in line with colonial ideologies that viewed Africa as a place to be conquered, tamed, and exploited. Marlow's "negative image" of Africa arises from a cultural and ideological framework that defines Africa as the "Other." His perception is shaped by inherited discourses of exoticism, fear, and superiority. In the same context, Marlow sees the Congo River as a gateway into the heart of an uncivilised and dangerous world. For him, "going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. (J. Conrad, 1899: 54). Joseph Conrad's description of Africa in *Heart of Darkness* and that of Joyce Cary in *Mister Johnson* present Africa through a colonial view that often reduces it to a mysterious, primitive, or backward space against which European characters define themselves. Both authors, though writing in different styles, reflect a European literary tradition that situates Africa as a challenging and exotic environment, less as a real, inhabited continent.

In *Mister Johnson*, the narrator accounts: "he wades through half-dried swamps, from dawn to dark, in clouds of tsetse" (J. Cary, 1939: 35). This narrative portrays the African environment as hostile, exotic, and picturesque. The focus is not on African people or cultures, but on the physical difficulty of the land. Words like "swamps," "dawn to dark," and "tsetse" are elements that evoke an atmosphere of exhaustion, struggle, and danger. The African continent becomes a kind of ordeal, an almost mythic

area for the European protagonist, rather than a real sociopolitical or historical space. This mirrors Conrad's portrayal in *Heart of Darkness*, where the African landscape is described as "a prehistoric earth." (J. Conrad, 1899: 60). Africa is not only physically remote, but imaginatively situated outside of time, as if it belongs to a pre-civilisational world. The quote from Joyce Cary's work contributes to the colonial narrative by portraying Africa as a place of discomfort and danger that defines the European experience as heroic, sacrificial, or burdened. This negative perception of Africa as swampland or wilderness, filled with disease and devoid of recognisable civilisation, serves to justify the colonial control. The following description of Africa helps understand colonial misrepresentations. The narrator states:

> He looks round at the huge bush houses, each alone and unprotected in the scrub, like sulky and dangerous beasts, at the guard-room with its crooked white eyelash, at the rag of pink and blue hanging over it, at the mysterious pattern of the barracks, and his flesh shivers. He steals away from the incomprehensible, terrifying place, as from devils. (J. Cary, 1939: 10)

In this passage, Africa is not only depicted as a "terrifying place" but also as "diabolical." Such representation is not something new. As Valentin-Yves Mudimbe argues in *The Invention of Africa*, colonial discourse constructs Africa through "the grid of Western thought and imagination" (V.Y. Mudimbe, 1988: 25), which defines the continent as the opposite of reason, order, and civilisation. He states in this same perspective that, "Western interpreters as well as African analysts have been using categories and conceptual systems which depend on a Western epistemological order." (V.Y. Mudimbe, 1988: 10)

Cary's metaphorical language serves this epistemological order. Africa is reduced to a stage for European psychological drama, a space of horror and confusion. What is notably absent in these writers' descriptions is any acknowledgment of African culture or history. Joyce Cary's language here reflects and reinforces a colonial worldview in which Africa is projected as the bush. In the same context, Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* offers a vision of African village life based on a colonial ideology, the one that emphasises degeneration, disorder, and a perceived lack of cultivation. This is particularly evident in the following passage:

> Every tree has been cut or burnt down. The soil has been cropped and then left to blow about in dust. Close to the mat walls of the three compounds, large rubbish heaps throw a powerful stench of fish refuse down wind. These rubbish heaps are also village latrines. The paths to the village wander through and over them. No one has planted a shade tree, much less a fruit tree, but the sticks supporting the mat walls of the compounds have insisted upon taking root, so that in the village itself, thanks only to Nature, there are patches of green leaf and blue shade. (J. Cary, 1939: 20)

The quotation above constructs the African village as a site of environmental degradation. This image of Africa makes it both unsanitary and a place where humans have failed in their responsibility to take care of their land and recognise their own traditions. Such depiction is what Valentin-Yves Mudimbe (1988) identifies as the "colonial library," which is a colonial system of representation that defines African societies as primitive. He denounces the colonial machination that portrays Africa as an underdeveloped territory and a failure. African villages are projected as devoid of aesthetic care. All these descriptions illustrate the central mechanism of colonial misrepresentation: constructing Africa as a failed space. It is all the same in Elspeth Huxley's memoir, "based on her childhood experiences in colonial Kenya around 1913." (J. Hopkins, 2025)

In *The Flame Trees of Thika: Memories of an African Childhood*, Elspeth Huxley describes the Kenyan landscape through the eyes of a British settler child. Her descriptions often carry the weight of a colonial mindset. Throughout the entire work, the natural environment of Africa is repeatedly represented as wild, chaotic, and unproductive. Even though the language is often lyrical, it reinforces the idea that the African land is somehow threatening and not yet civilised. One of the manifest examples that best illustrates these degradations comes when Huxley describes the area her family has moved into to start a coffee farm. She then states: "The country was a blank on the map, and beyond it the land roared and smoked and breathed heat like a furnace. Nothing had yet been done to it." (E. Huxley, 1959: 7). This sentence is full of colonial assumptions. Referring to the land as "a blank on the map" immediately suggests that it is unknown and uncivilised. Here, Elspeth Huxley describes the nature by building an image of a continent that needs to be tamed and transformed. These kinds of descriptions clearly reflect the broader colonial ideology of the time, which saw Africa as a space waiting for European improvement. Elspeth Huxley's description of the African environment as being hostile to European life sums up white writers' construction of Africa. As a child of about six years old, her depiction of Africa might lie in the naivety of her young age. Then, it is necessary to state that Elspeth Huxley did not see Africa from her psychological maturity, but rather from her youthful enthusiasm. She merely represents Africa from a child's eye view of colonial life.

1- 2- Evolution in Representations: From Imperial Narratives to Critical Reassessment

Literature has long served as a medium through which empires have justified conquest, domination, and cultural superiority. Nowhere is this more evident than in the literary representations of Africa during the colonial period. These representations, often built on exoticism, dehumanisation, and binary oppositions, helped construct an image of the continent as wild, backward, and in need of

European intervention. Over time, however, writers and theorists who consider literature as a battlefield for cultural self-assertion contest this narrative. From the imperial propaganda of Henry Rider Haggard and the racialised "darkness" of Joseph Conrad, to the assertive counter-narratives of Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and Tsitsi Dangarembga, we can observe a powerful evolution in the way Africa and its people have been depicted. It first starts with the function of representation. In colonial works, representation served to rationalise European expansion. Africa is depicted as an empty, chaotic space in need of Western civilisation. In *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) by Henry Rider Haggard, the African landscape is portrayed as a dangerous and strange area. Africans are savages and cowards, while European characters dominate the narrative. Haggard's protagonist, Quatermain, sees himself as a rational man bringing knowledge to a mysterious world. Similarly, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) uses Africa as the darkest place in the world. Such representation empties the space of Africa of its history and humanity.

By contrast, postcolonial writers, through their works, critique the motives and ideologies behind these portrayals. Chinua Achebe's famous essay *"An Image of Africa"* (1977) condemns Joseph Conrad's biased depiction of Africa and Africans, arguing that *Heart of Darkness* is not simply a critique of imperialism, but a work embedded in racism. He writes: "Africa is a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognisable humanity." (C. Achebe, 1977: 783) Achebe's own novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) confronts this depiction by restoring the African world to historical and cultural specificity. Through Okonkwo and his Igbo community, he paints a society with laws, customs, debates, and even political organisation. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o pushes this further by advocating for African languages in literature. In *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), he argues, for example: "Language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture." (T. W. Ngũgĩ, 1986: 13). His determination to write in Gikuyu shows his struggle to refuse to let European languages mediate African experiences, restoring an authentic voice to African characters and readers.

In addition to this, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o subverts Western writers' descriptions of the African environment. In *Petals of Blood* (1977), he shows "how land has been scarred by colonial capitalism and post-independence betrayal." T. W. Ngũgĩ (1977). The story is set in a village whose people are exploited by colonisers. Then, the land becomes a site of resistance. Similarly, in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966), the Nile is not portrayed as a mysterious river like the Congo River in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, but "a source of life, conflict, and symbolic return." T. Salih (1966). In this work, the narrator's journey back to Sudan becomes a reckoning with both colonial heritage and personal history.

Regarding all this analysis, it is important to assert that the shift in representation is the result of critical theories that reveal how literature participates in systems of power. Edward Said's *Orientalism* exposes how Western knowledge of the East and Africa is constructed. He writes: "The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences." (E. Said, 1978: 1). This insight forces readers to question the authority of colonial works and recover suppressed perspectives. Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* argues that "colonialism distorts both the coloniser and the colonised." F. Fanon (1961). His call for decolonisation includes not only political liberation but also cultural and psychological recovery. Homi Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture*, introduces the concept of hybridity that develops the idea according to which "colonial encounters produce mixed and unstable identities." H. Bhabha (1994). The evolution from imperial narratives to critical reassessment marks a fundamental transformation in how Africa and Africans are represented in literature. While colonial writers use strategies to stereotype and dominate, postcolonial writers re-center indigenous voices, reclaim cultural identity, and critique the legacy of empire.

2- Ambiguity and Contradiction in Colonial and Contemporary Narratives

The evolution of African representation is not only a shift from a mere imperial ideology to critical reassessment by African voices, but also includes the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in colonial narratives. These contradictions often reveal moments where the colonial narrative breaks down or where the authors inadvertently expose the violence, absurdity, or moral instability of the colonial project. These ambiguities are significant because they predicted postcolonial critiques, even before anti-colonial resistance started making progress in literature.

2- 1- Ambiguity and Contradiction in Colonial Narratives: A Site of Early Disruption

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness,* although often read as colonial fiction, is replete with ambiguity. Marlow, the narrator, both participates in and critiques the colonial mission. He considers Africa, especially the Congo, "the heart of darkness." This phrase has a double meaning because it refers to the African jungle but also the darkness within European civilisation. The moral confusion of Marlow and the madness of the white character Kurtz reveal a deep incoherence in the colonial worldview. The same contradiction is apparent in Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*. Here, the narrator attempts to present an African character with complexity, but the result is ambivalent. Then, Mister Johnson is both enthusiastic and foolish, loyal and tragically self-destructive. Cary seems unsure whether to praise or mock him. In the end, Mister Johnson is killed, and the British character who

executes him feels a mix of regret and necessity. This narrative embodies the tension and contradiction at the heart of colonial discourse. The contradiction reflects an underlying anxiety about the colonial relationship.

As Abdul JanMohamed argues in "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," many colonial books show "moments when the 'other' is too close, too human, which threatens the colonial hierarchy." (A.R. JanMohamed, 1985: 45). His idea here reveals that, colonial writers are not always at ease with the ideologies they project. In this perspective, postcolonial critics like Edward Said and Homi Bhabha have emphasised the complexity of colonial discourse. For them, it is never pure because it always contains anxieties and ambivalence. Homi Bhabha's concept of "colonial mimicry" shows how colonised subjects are portrayed as "almost the same but not quite" (H. K. Bhabha, 1994: 89), which threatens the coloniser. This fear often surfaces as a contradiction in narrative, where colonised people must be both inferior and admirable, savage and noble.

2-2- Contemporary Narratives and Colonial Memory

Despite significant strides in global literary awareness and the proliferation of African voices on the world stage, Africa and Africans continue to be misrepresented in contemporary literature. These misrepresentations, rooted in centuries of colonial ideology, have not entirely vanished but have instead adapted to new forms, often subtle and concealed within liberal or humanitarian discourses. While the overtly racist tropes of colonial literature have been largely discredited, the legacy of these stereotypes persists, shaping how Africa is imagined, narrated, and consumed, particularly in Western literary markets. Africa remains frequently portrayed as a place of crisis, war, famine, corruption, and disease. Such depictions dominate global news narratives and often permeate novels, travel writing, and film. The notion of the "Dark Continent" may no longer be explicitly stated, yet it endures in the portrayal of Africa as a continent perpetually in need of salvation.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie critiques this mode of representation in her TED Talk, *The Danger of a Single Story*, where she asserts: "The problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete" (C.N. Adichie, 2009: 27). For her, "the single story" reflects the danger of hearing only one narrative about a group of people, such as the portrayal of Africans as primitive, impoverished, and savage. This perspective presents Africa as a place characterised by suffering, violence, and a lack of civilisation. Such narratives are perpetuated not only in fiction but also in literature, aid campaigns, and some memoirs authored by Western visitors to Africa. In this same talk,

Adichie reveals Western representations that depict Africans solely as impoverished, passive, or dependent on Western charity. She states: "If I had not grown up in Nigeria, and if all I knew about Africa were from popular images, I too would think that Africa was a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, and incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS" (C.N. Adichie, 2009: 32). She critiques how Western narratives homogenise Africa, treating all African countries, cultures, and peoples as indistinguishable through literature.

This analysis supports the notion that African narratives are often filtered through Western expectations. Publishers and international awards sometimes favour stories that conform to themes of exoticism, victimhood, or tragedy. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o discusses this issue in *Decolonising the Mind*, asserting that "the language and structure of literature are not neutral; they are rather ideological tools" (T.W. Ngũgĩ, 1986: 20). For him, literature is shaped by historical power relations. Texts written in European languages for Western audiences are often subject to the biases and assumptions of that readership, which can distort the authentic voices of African authors or marginalise those who write in African languages.

Although the same logic of othering and distortion continues to shape representations of Africa in modern works, a vibrant body of contemporary African literature has emerged to counter these depictions and reclaim the right to self-definition. In response to these enduring misrepresentations, a powerful wave of African authors has arisen to redefine Africa on their own terms. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) intricately presents the complexities of Igbo society prior to colonialism, showcasing its rich traditions and values while illustrating the profound impact of European colonisation on African identities. The narrative tells of "Okonkwo as a proud and ambitious Igbo leader whose life unravels as colonialism disrupts traditional life" (A. Chinua, 1958). Achebe illustrates the richness of Igbo culture before European colonisation, emphasising that African societies were not merely victims of colonialism. By focusing on personal and communal struggles, Achebe humanises characters who are frequently depicted as mere victims. In turn, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (1977) critiques the aftermath of colonialism in Kenya, highlighting the exploitation and corruption faced by the populace. The narrative follows "four characters, Ikuemsi, Wamala, Gikonyo, Mukuyu, grappling with post-colonial disillusionment and exploitation" (T.W. Ngũgĩ, 1977). Through the lives of these characters, Ngũgĩ critiques the socio-economic conditions in Kenya post-independence, foregrounding local voices and the struggle for justice against corruption and colonial legacies. His characters navigate socio-economic challenges, providing insight into the

struggles for identity and justice while emphasising the necessity of local voices in shaping African narratives.

Similarly, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) explores gender and colonialism through the lens of a young girl. "The protagonist Tambu's journey reflects the intertwined nature of gender, colonialism, and personal growth" (D. Tsitsi, 1988). Tambu's journey illustrates the intersection of personal and political struggles, ultimately challenging the notion of a monolithic African experience by presenting diverse perspectives. In a similar vein, Aminatta Forna's *The Memory of Love* (2010) interweaves personal and historical narratives set in Sierra Leone, revealing the complexities of post-conflict identity as her characters grapple with trauma and memory, thereby countering simplistic views of Africa as merely a site of suffering. Additionally, Alex Wheatle's *The Dirty South* (2008) offers a fresh perspective on the British Caribbean experience, linking it to broader African diasporic narratives while addressing issues of identity, belonging, and cultural heritage; his characters embody resilience, challenging reductive portrayals. Furthermore, Chigozie Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities* (2019) narrates the quest for love and belonging of a Nigerian man amidst traditional and modern conflicts, weaving folklore with contemporary issues to illustrate the richness of Nigerian culture and thus providing a counter-narrative to depictions of Africa as stagnant or primitive.

Other contemporary authors, including Nnedi Okorafor with *Who Fears Death* (2010), further push the boundaries of African storytelling by employing satire and speculative fiction to expand the literary possibilities for representing Africa and Africans as dynamic, rich, and globally engaged. Another approach through which African writers counter misrepresentation is via the portrayal of modern African life. Additionally, Teju Cole's *Every Day Is for the Thief* (2007) restores the image of the "dark continent" by utilising narratives that humanise everyday African experiences. "The protagonist's return to Nigeria unveils the everyday realities of urban life" (C. Teju, 2007). Cole humanises the contemporary African experience, transcending stereotypes of darkness. Focusing on gender, political awakening, and identity in postcolonial Nigeria, Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) subverts Western notions of African women as voiceless or marginal. The novel presents "the life of a young woman navigating societal expectations and personal aspirations in Nigeria" (A. Sefi, 2005). Atta challenges Western stereotypes by amplifying the voices of African women and their agency. In Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* (2013), Africa is depicted not as a burden or source of suffering, but as a wellspring of connection, beauty, and rebirth.

Each of these seminal works counters misrepresentations of Africa by providing nuanced portrayals of African life and culture, effectively challenging entrenched stereotypes. Collectively, these works emphasise the diversity and richness of African experiences, offering a vital counterpoint to reductive portrayals prevalent in mainstream narratives. These narratives resist the Western obsession with tradition, presenting a view of Africa that is connected, critical, and cosmopolitan. They portray Africa not as a place trapped in the past, but as a force of global imagination, innovation, and futurity.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the representation of Africa evolves significantly from British colonial literature to contemporary narratives. In colonial novels, Africa appears as a primitive, silent and uniform space. It functions mainly as a backdrop that supports European authority and self-definition. Africans are often denied voice, history and complexity. Yet, these representations are not fully stable. Colonial texts contain tensions and ambiguities. At certain moments, African figures appear human, familiar and emotionally present. These moments reveal early fractures within the colonial imaginary itself. The study also shows that the colonial imaginary continues to influence contemporary representations of Africa. Colonial stereotypes do not disappear completely. They persist through inherited narratives, global expectations and cultural memory. Contemporary writers, therefore, write in dialogue with the colonial past. They engage with it critically rather than reproduce it.

Postcolonial and diasporic writers actively challenge colonial discourse. They reclaim narrative authority and redefine African identities on their own terms. Their works dismantle the idea of Africa as silent, ahistorical, or homogeneous. Instead, they present Africa as diverse, modern and historically grounded. Through complex characters, urban spaces, diasporic experiences and hybrid identities, these narratives resist fixed images. However, the study suggests that postcolonial narratives do not simply erase colonial legacies. They confront, revise and transform them. This process shows that dismantling colonial discourse is ongoing rather than complete. Contemporary literature uses memory, rewriting and critique to heal from the past. Therefore, the transition from colonial misrepresentation to critical self-representation confirms literature's power to expose, challenge and reshape dominant images of Africa.

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