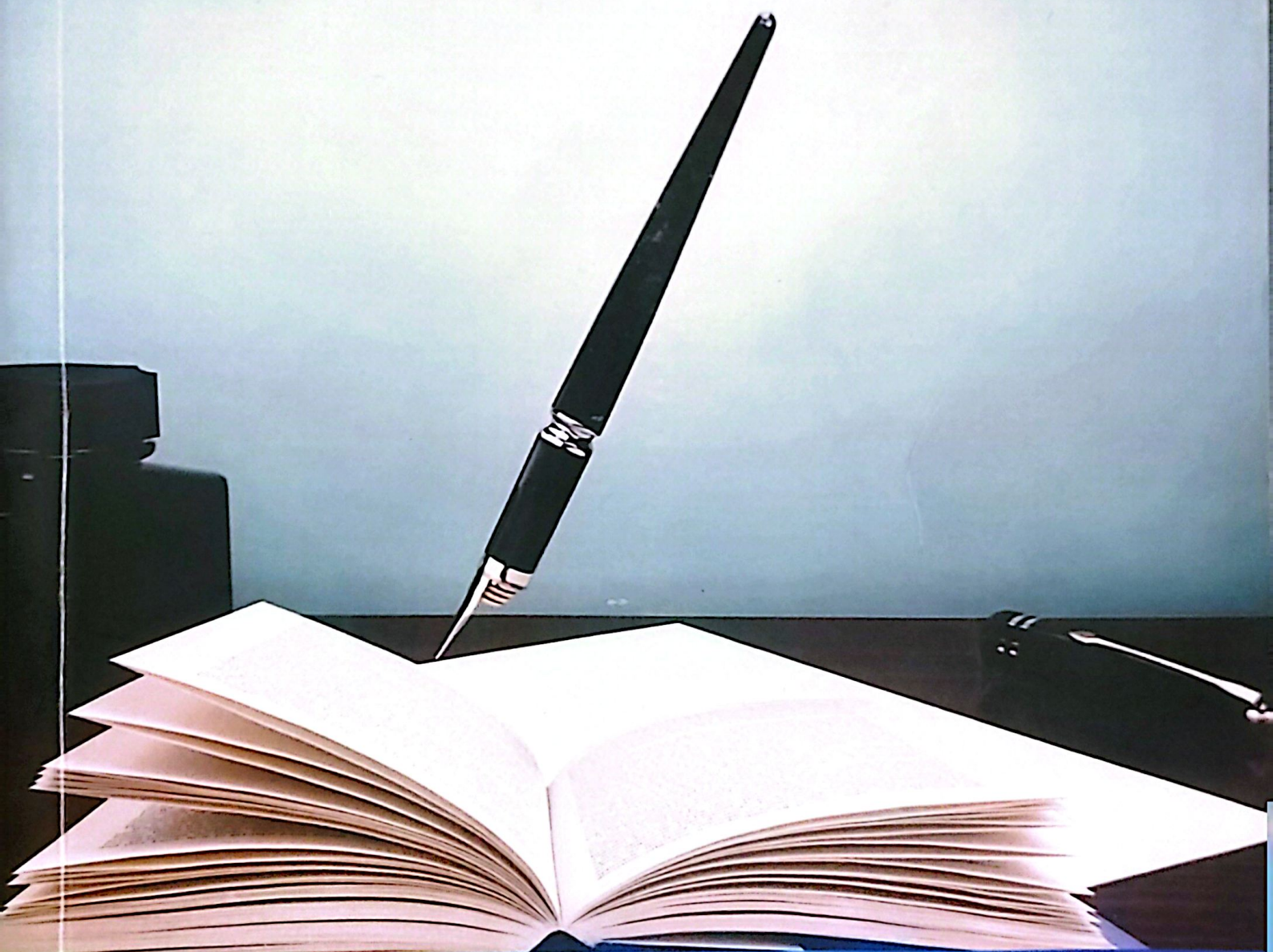


PERSPECTIVES ON CONDUCTING AND REPORTING RESEARCH IN THE HUMANITIES

Second Edition



Edited by
Domwini Dabire Kuupole
Isaiah Bariki
Taofiq A. Alabi
Stephen B. Kendie

Dongmo Adelaide

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ISBN: 978-996-4313-29-6

Published by

**Faculty of Arts, College of Humanities and Legal Studies,
University of Cape Coast, Ghana and UCC Press, Cape Coast**

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FROM THEORY TO PRAXIS: FUNDAMENTALS OF LITERARY ANALYSIS

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INTRODUCTION

Theoretical knowledge is the bedrock of analysis in virtually all fields of research. The role of theory to the research process can never be overemphasised. It connects the researcher to existing knowledge, gives him a basis for his hypotheses and choice of research methods. It also helps to identify the limits to any form of generalizations in findings. In all fields of research the importance of theory is ever visible. It helps design a research question, guides the selection of relevant data and the interpretation of the data. It also proffers explanations of underlying causes or influences of observed phenomena. Therefore, research and theory are interwoven. A theory comprises logically defined set of concepts, assumptions and generalizations that can serve to describe, explain and interpret. Theory plays a crucial role in research. Praxis relates to its practical application. The word “praxis” is derived from Ancient Greek and refers to the process by which a theory, lesson, or skill is enacted, embodied, or realized. It also refers to the act of engaging, applying, exercising, realizing or practicing ideas. There is a significant difference between practice and praxis; practice is the repetition of an activity to improve skill while the concept of praxis is the blending of theory and practice and can be understood as the process by which theory is embodied. Praxis is theoretically grounded actions. If theories inform the researcher before a study is undertaken as well as the reader before learning of the author’s findings. Theories are integral part of connecting the dots between theory and our empirical findings. Moving from theory

to praxis in literary analysis is a road that seems difficult for most researchers because the peculiarities of theory and method in literature. Literary analysis involves working from different established grounds that keep on shifting because of new emerging theories. Before going into the thrust of the paper, there is a need to state that a literary theory refers to set of ideas written by literary critics that explains observed facts or phenomena, or which sets out the laws and principles guiding a particular literary interpretation. A literary analysis is "the act of studying, analysing, interpreting, evaluating, and enjoying the work of art. Bressler (2011, p 5) This chapter brings to light the fundamentals of literary analysis, lays down some steps to follow in analysing a fiction, and provide a model of analysis using postcolonialism as a theoretical framework. This work shall be pursued in two phases namely, a brief overview of fundamentals of literary analysis and the presentation of a model of postcolonial analysis based on the novel *Purple Hibiscus* of Chimamanda Adichie.

I. Fundamental of Literary Analysis.

Fundamentals of literary analysis are tips designed to develop and strengthen researchers 'skills in writing, literary interpretation and critical thinking. These tips make the researcher to become familiar with the elements of narrative fiction, the tools to analyse literary works productively with attention to form, content, and style. A literary analysis is therefore a work of art that closely examines a particular text, its power structure and its aesthetics. It is an in-depth argumentative essay that focuses on a piece of literary writing, such as a novel, a play, a poem. A literary analysis is based on a theory called literary theory that constitutes a framework of the analysis.

Literary Theory: Importance, Implication and Overview

Literary theory is a corpus of literary knowledge that offers a variety of methodologies that enable readers to interpret text from different perspectives. Such theorizing does not only empower readers to examine texts accurately but also give a scientific foundation to literary analysis. Thus, Eagleton (1996) affirms that theory is the body of ideas and methods used in the practical reading of texts while dealing with

literary analysis. Theories therefore provide the underlying principles by which we attempt to understand literature.

Therefore, the content of any literary analysis depends on the particular kind of theory or school of criticism that the researcher espouses. Thus, to know how to analyse a text is to discuss its literary elements. Sorting out the literary elements requires the mastering of the formal study of literary theory which enables the researcher to explain his responses to any text and allow him to articulate the function of literature in an academic and personal way. Therefore, literary criticism rests on literary theory's concepts, ideas, and ever-developing principles. Bressler, (2011, p.17) emphasizes this point of view when he affirms that whenever the literary theory is unconscious, incomplete, ill-informed, and eclectic the researcher's interpretation can:

easily be illogical, unsound, and haphazard. A well- defined, logical, and clearly articulated literary theory consciously and purposefully enables readers to develop their own methods of interpretation, permitting them to order, clarify, and justify their appraisals of a text in a consistent and logical manner.

It is important to note that there are various theoretical positions or schools of criticism, enabling researchers to become knowledgeable critics. Below is an overview of some of the literary theories for researchers to be acquainted with diverse approaches to textual analysis. Such literary theories are formalism, reader-oriented criticism, structuralism, poststructuralism, modernism, postmodernism, psychoanalytic criticism, feminism, marxism, new historicism, postcolonialism, African-American criticism, queer theory (gay and lesbian criticism) and ecocritism to mention but a few. The above literary theories help the researcher to construct the literary criticism that is often found in chapter three of any notable research work in literary studies. The following paragraphs give and in-depth of a prototype of analysis using postcolonialism as a case study.

II. From Theoretical Framework to its Praxis: Using Postcolonialism as a Case Study

After choosing the literary theory that suits well the text to be studied, the researcher proceeds with the analysis of the text. Below are examples of steps to follow while going for a postcolonial study of a given fiction.

One interesting way to open one's analysis is to point out why the chosen theory is particularly appropriate for the text to be analysed. It is noteworthy to point out that postcolonialism as a literary theory deals mainly with the study of literary productions of the group of people that have been victim of colonialism, oppression, and subjugation. To portray this, H. Bhabha (1994) writes: "it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history—subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement—that we hear our most enduring lessons for living and thinking." Therefore, the postcolonial analyst must establish that in the world of the text there are two groups of characters: the dominant that rule, subjugate and the submissive that have been colonised and suffered all forms of oppression. Literary productions like: *Things fall Apart* of Chinua Achebe; *Le Christ selon l'Afrique* of Calixthe Beyala; *La Sainte ni Touche* of Adelaide Fassinou; and *The Wretched of the Earth* of Frank Fanon can be analysed with postcolonial theory because these different fictions deal with colonial subjugation and the landscapes covered by the books have faced the turmoil of colonial and postcolonial affliction. « A major feature of postcolonial literature is the concerned with place » writes Bill Ashcroft (1989, p. 8). Moura (1999, p. 22) brings more light to the above assertion when he affirms that « l'insistence sur l'espace d'énonciation est une donnée avérée de l'œuvre postcoloniale. La distinction de l'espace autochtone et de l'espace de la culture dominante est dès lors un trait fréquent » "The emphasis on the place of enunciation is a major feature of the postcolonial novel. The distinction between the area of the indigenous people and that of the dominant culture is a frequent characteristic." (our translation)

Thus, the researcher might posit for instance this as a justification for the suitability of a postcolonial study of *Purple Hibiscus*:

A close reading of the novel *Purple Hibiscus* shows the description of two worlds. The world of the colonizer in the person of Father Benedict which is Britain and that of the colonized represented by the people of the congregation of Saint Agnes Church of Enugu in Nigeria fully represented by the character of Eugene Abike. These people so much esteem their priest country of origin that he is still being referred to as their new priest after seven years in Enugu:

Even though Father Benedict had been at St Agnes for seven years, people still referred to him as "our new priest" ... perhaps they would not have if he had not been white ... his British nose was still as pinched and as narrow as it always was, the nose that had had me worried that he did not get enough air when he first came to Enugu p. 12

The two worlds of the novel are Britain; the center and Enugu; the periphery. Britain which is the center is considered to be the model to be followed by Enugu whose way of life must be abandoned. The clash of culture in religious activities is seen right from the arrival of the white priest. "Father Benedict had changed things in the parish, such as insisting that the credo and kyrie be recited only in Latin; Igbo was not acceptable... songs in Igbo, he called them native songs." p.12 The clash of culture is manifested by the rejection of the use of the Igbo language in some specific religious activities because being the language of the colonized, it is of a lesser value: a native language which is not fit to commune with God but could be allowed in offertory. According to postcolonial theory, when a race is dominated by another there is a loss of identity by the submissive race. Therefore, Ngugi, (1986, p.3) says:

the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against the collective defiance of the colonized is the cultural bomb. The effect of the bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their unity, in their heritages of struggle, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves.

"The cultural bomb" (Ngugi, 1986, p.3) had indeed annihilated the belief of Eugene Adike's cultural heritage. He hardly speaks his Igbo language, when he does, it is to send a bad signal. Talking of Eugene Adike's attitude toward his language, the narrator says:

he hardly spoke Igbo, and although Jaja and I spoke it with Mama at home, he did not like us to speak it in public. We had to sound civilised in public, he told us; we had to speak English. Papa's sister, Aunty Ifeoma, said once that Papa was too much of a colonial product.

The shattered identity of Eugene Adike is seen in the upbringing of his children, Kambili; the narrator and Jaja who must speak only English language in public to prove that they are civilized people. Being brought up by white missionaries who deny him his language by brainwashing him, he lost his critical thinking as it is connoted in the following passage:

I didn't have a father who sent me to the best schools. My father spent his time worshipping gods of wood and stone. I would be nothing today but for the priests and sisters at the mission. I was the houseboy for the parish... Reverend Sisters and priests had taught him, things he would never have learned from his idol-worshipping father.

The colonial ideologies which he received cannot be questioned. His indigenous African way of worship had been taxed by his colonial masters to be paganism that can never be accepted by God. Such beliefs cannot be seen in the life of his sibling Aunty Ifeoma whose behaviour is radically antagonistic. The way Eugene sees things is different from the way Aunty Ifeoma does. To Eugene his Father papa Nnukwu is a pagan and must be converted to benefit from his riches while to Ifeoma, papa Nnukwu is a traditionalist who believe in the indigenous God of Igbo people proving that African belief is not evil.

Power Structure Analysis using Postcolonial Literary Theory

Postcolonial theory is also suitable to study fictions that deal with the subjugation of one group to another even though there is no evidence

of colonialism. What happens when a group of people are dominated by another? This is one of the vital questions that should be raised and answered by a postcolonial analyst in his study of the world of the chosen fiction. Postcolonial analysis is marked by its concern for ambiguity and loss of identity. The researcher focuses his attention on the ambiguity or loss of identity. He does investigate the clash of cultures in which the western culture deems itself to be superior and imposes its own practices on the less powerful one. The researcher must portray his argument by bringing out of the studied novel instances where the indigenous people of the society described in that novel are victim of a denial of their indigenous way of life. The real job of postcolonial criticism says Hellen Tiffing cited by Dobie (2012, p. 207) is "to investigate the means by which Europe imposed and maintained ... colonial domination on so much of the rest of the world" The researcher might begin his analysis on the cultural angle by providing answers to the following questions:

- i) in what way the colonizer did replace the practice and beliefs of the native culture with their own values and belief in the studied fiction?
- ii) In what way the native protagonists of the studied fiction come to see their cultural practices as inferior
- iii) in what aspect the colonized imitate the culture of the colonizer as assumedly superior? (Here the researcher looks at the imitation of language, behaviour, dress, pronunciation)

As example from *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili, the narrator says: "Papa liked it when the villagers made an effort to speak English around him, he said it showed they had good sense" (p.60). The colonialist mentalities can be identified in the life of Papa. They were inculcated and maintained in his life through formal education and religion. Papa has unconsciously absorbed colonial attitudes while living with reverend Father. The duality of Papa's cultural root is seen in the value he places on his Igbo language. He has been subtly informed and made to believe that Nigeria was inferior to Britain so are its respective cultural values.

A postcolonial reading is a complex mixture of contesting discourses, social hierarchies and power structures and should not be seen simply as a temporal concept that has to do solemnly with colonialism.

The postcolonial analyst can as well attempt to reveal discuss and expose what independent nations make of themselves even after the departure of the colonial master. In this case, the researcher looks at the level of corruption, dictatorship, exile, exploitation, political oppression, leadership poverty, cultural alienation and religious indoctrination, cultural and political impact within.

The postcolonial critic deal with the political, economic and cultural interaction to bring out the way in which colonialism affects and continues to affect the colonized societies causing alienation, migration, exile and hybridity in identity.

The level of corruption can be depicted in *Purple Hibiscus* at various points: Eugene Abike is a human right activist. His hard labour has fetched him a human rights award given by *Amnesty World* (p. 13). Thus, the postcolonial analyst can identify the oppressive power structure made up of the military governments that took the power by force from the civilians through a military coup (p.32).The fiction reveals that military coups have become a norm in the world of *Purple Hibiscus* since the sixties.

coups begat coups he said, telling us about the bloody coups of the sixties, which ended up in civil war...A coup always began a vicious circle. Military men would always overthrow one another, because they could, because they were all power drunk. Of course... the politicians were corrupt...cabinets ministers... stashed money in foreign bank accounts, money meant for paying teachers' salaries and building roads. But what we Nigerians needed was not soldiers ruling us, what we needed was a renewed democracy. *Renewed Democracy*.

A critical look of the above quotation shows the level of corruption of the leader who believed more in the hegemony of the western culture than themselves because of indoctrination. As a result they preferred to steal and stock the money meant for the payment of teachers and building of roads in foreign bank (west). Political oppression, leadership deficiency

can also be pointed out to show how human rights is trampled upon by the powerful group made up of military personnel, the politician and the cabinet ministers which constitute the ruling group.

The political and economic interaction in *Purple Hibiscus* point out the way in which colonialism affects and continues to affect the colonized societies which were established by the colonizer. These new power structures reject in one way or the other the traditional leadership structures of old, brought about a sort of cultural disorientation, alienation, hybridity in identity, migration or exile. This power structure is contested by the subaltern group. Papa used "The *standard to speak* the truth even though it meant the paper lost advertising...Eugene spoke out for freedom" (p.13) In the same vein, Ade Coker, the jailed editorialist affirms after his release by the military force that attempted to silence his voice: "My pen would not, could not, stop writing the truth" (p. 50).

Aesthetic Features of a Postcolonial Fiction

Touching the form and the style known as postcolonial aesthetics, the postcolonial analyst should note that the postcolonial writer does not fit into the canon of Europeans. A postcolonial fiction is a sort of melting pot in which can be found the elements of drama and poetry. The language of discourse in a postcolonial fiction is unique. Its uniqueness comes from the fact that the elitist language of the metropolitan imperial master is mixed with the language of the colonized to give a local colour to the literary production of the postcolonial writers. By having postcolonial aesthetics that is separated from and not dependent on the colonizer's attitudes, principles, and practices, it goes a long way to renounce the assumption that the colonizer's experience is the model to follow. Postcolonial literature announces itself as itself, not as a copy of other literature. By so doing, it legitimizes the community it comes from and to some degree can be seen as revolutionary. The written narrative often comes from an oral tradition that features folktales, common expression.

Looking at the aesthetic features of *Purple Hibiscus*, the postcolonial analyst should point out that the novel is written in what could be called Nigerian English. The writer legitimates the community the novel emerges from which is Igbo land. The elitist language of the

center is mixed with the Igbo language to give a local colour to the literary production. Some examples of extracted words and expressions are: “kedunu”(p.63) “ ke kwanu”(p. 19) “ biko”(p. 37) “ ofe nsala”(p.23) “Ome mma chineke o me mma”(p.47) “o di egwu” (p.57) to name but few. In the same vein sentences like: look at her “How many heads does she have? (p. 54) is a pure transliteration of the African mother tongue.

Deconstruction of the Pseudo Hegemony of the West

The researcher examines how postcolonial heroes respond to the changes around them, to the dual culture in their life and the hybrid nature of their new identity. Hence he finds out in what way the heroes deconstructs the Eurocentric assumption of the colonizer. He can therefore find the answers to questions like: In the world of the studied novel, in what way those that the colonized deemed to be of lesser status reject the European culture as the standard for what any culture should be?

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Auntie Ifeoma's family, Papa Nnukwu and Jaja responded differently in the face of the oppression brought by The Whites based on their eurocentric assumption of the colonizer in their mode of perception of things and of worship. When the White Man sees in Papa Nnukwu “an idol worshipper” (p.55, p. 86), “a heathen father” (P.70), or a pagan (p.89) Auntie Ifeoma deconstructs it and sees in him “a traditionalist” (p. 89)

When “the mmuo festival” is regarded by Eugene Abike as “a ritual of pagan masquerades” (p. 93) or “a devilish Folklore”, Auntie Amaka sees it as “a Festival” that is worth washing for it is the soul of their culture and tradition. The Igbo songs are used in Auntie Ifeoma's house to worship unlike in Kambili's, the narrator where Igbo language is regarded as the language of lesser people. Auntie Ifeoma stands on the truth and rejects every form of unreasonable thinking of his senior brother prone to colonialism, she does not believe that the church must verify the authenticity of the apparition of the virgin Mary before she could go there for pilgrimage. Unlike the brother, she rejects all forms of dogmatism and opts for reasonable attitudes in her way of believing in God. Talking to Mama, she affirms:

Have you forgotten that Eugene offered to buy me a car, even before Ifediora died? But he wanted us to join the Knights of St John. He wanted us to send Amaka to the convent school. He even wanted me to stop wearing makeup! I want a new car ...and I want to use my gas cooker again and I want a new freezer and I want money so that I will not have to unravel the seams of Chima's trousers when he outgrows them. But I will not ask my brother to bend over so that I can lick his buttocks to get these things. (p.103)

Aunty Ifeoma refuses to submit to the unreasonable doctrines for Eugene's riches, showing to all that the subaltern group can speak and still has a choice.

In what way is the practice of othering reversed in the studied fiction? Put differently, in what aspect does the colonizer take the position of the colonized in the studied fiction? Here the researcher looks at the interaction of culture that brings about mixtures of native and colonial identity, a process called hybridity or syncretism. Here the analyst searches the fiction being studied to bring out the shortcomings of the dominant culture and condemn them. He does the same with the colonized culture to bring out the hybrid nature of the new emerging culture in postcolonial societies. Therefore, the research must show how the heroes re-define their culture and create a new form of self-expression to stop the increasing cultural and political impact of the western or local culture on the victim.

Aunty Ifeoma represents a prototype of the new emerging culture in *Purple Hibiscus*. In as much as she defends African culture, she has a critical look on both the African culture and western culture. She believes that a female child is as worthy as a male one and can aspire to become a great personality unlike the old generation represented by Papa Nnukwu, Mama who are hostile to reforms with their conservative attitude.

The analyst can as well portray the fact that the colonized have and will forever have the best heritage. The postcolonial analyst can also register the displeasure of the narrator or protagonist over the decay individuals, families and societies live due to acculturation which is describes as loss in moral values to cross cultural imitation. He can also

illustrate through examples carefully selected from the text. The researcher must show that the fiction under study is a counter-discourse to a European colonization and hegemony. The battle against the center should be examined, the concept of seeing the colonized as the inferior race is therefore reversed and annihilated. The destruction of the western ethos is seen as a way out of depression. A postcolonial analyst must bring out through textual analysis the attempt of the heroes to re-articulate distorted identity and in doing so reclaim the lost value and heritage.

In the world of *Purple Hibiscus*, the lost value is reclaimed by Auntie Ifeoma, Obiora and Amaka to name but a few. Auntie Ifeoma believes that her Father, Papa Nnukwu deserves to be loved despite the injunction of European missionaries saying that the unbelievers should be treated as heathen or pagan and must not be associated with. Amaka rejects the catholic law that makes it compulsory for African believers to pick an English name for the confirmation as if the indigenous names do not glorify God. (p. 246). In the same vein, Amaka loves and listens only to indigenous musicians: "I listen mostly to indigenous musicians, they are culturally conscious; they have something real to say" (p. 126)

The critic must illustrate how the binary categorization of the world which depicts the western world as the center / developed / first / civilized and the East as the periphery / under developed / third world / uncivilized is not realistic and Eurocentric. Pejorative stereotypes created of the peoples unlike the whites to justify military, economic or cultural conquest must be demystified in the analysis based on the principle of Edward Said in *Orientalism*. The view of the "other" (Black people) is based on the personal, cultural, economic and political perspective of the White that sees the colonized as inferior, objectionable, dirty, lazy, irrational, deceitful and sees himself by contrast as: good, educated, intelligent, rational, faithful, upright, moral is to be challenged in a postcolonial fiction by the narrator or protagonists.

The postcolonial analyst can say that *Purple Hibiscus* depicts a world that deconstructs the pejorative stereotypes created of the back. A white man is an oppressor who sees in a black man "a second class citizen" (p. 249) or "a monkey who had developed the ability to reason" (p. 249). Papa Nnukwu discards these stereotypes. According to him: "The

white man is a liar" (p. 179). He does lie to the black about the inferiority of the black culture. "The white man teaches us to disregard our father" (p. 179) concludes Papa Nnukwu therefore, he must never attract our attention through his riches.

He can also show how the intellectual achievements does not really give the West peace of mind and that western world is now coming back to the former colonized to learn a better way of life. This discovery should lead to the conclusion that the colonized were not barbaric. On the contrary they had the best culture that enables them to be at peace with themselves and their environment. As a matter of fact, when Auntie Ifeoma's family landed in America, Amaka affirms that "in America people don't laugh because there is no time to laugh, people of the same family don't even see one another" (p. 305).

Conclusion

This chapter shows how postcolonial theory can be used to understand and analyse a studied fiction. It examines how the researcher can move from theory to praxis using postcolonial literary principles to engage in counter-narrative with a view to deconstructing the colonial history (postcolonial reading). Examples are carefully selected from *Purple Hibiscus* to portray the analysis. This chapter concludes that the mastering of the analysis of a literary research is rooted on the selection of the appropriate theory and the understanding of its principles which can lead to a good analysis of the chosen fiction. As recommendation, the chapter encourages the researcher to study and master the principle of literary theory; read the selected fictions before embarking on the analysis in order not to impose a theory on the fiction and endanger the analysis.

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