

Crossing the Borders: Comparing Postcolonial Fiction Across Languages and Cultures

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Abstract

Reading literary production from different literary and cultural backgrounds has been enabled by the growth of postcolonial studies. Postcolonial studies and its comparative perspective, however, have focused almost entirely on literary production from the British Empire. This paper aims to address these limitations by engaging with the work carried out by scholars on the links between postcolonial studies and the new comparative literature, and by exploring the possibilities that this engagement offers. This kind of work leads to an active exploration of a dialogue between writers, theorists and scholars working on the British and French empires, so that a truly comparative literature might emerge. The other aim of this paper is to translate this kind of comparative literature into an exploration of the links between postcolonial African fiction of French and English expression.

Keywords: comparative literature; postcolonial studies; Francophone/Anglophone postcolonial fiction, identity.

Critical Introduction

The explosion of postcolonial studies in the 1980s and 1990s saw the publication of key texts in the field such as *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) and *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (1995), among others, whose focus is almost entirely on postcolonial writing from the British Empire, and whose primary interest, as stated in the latter text, is on "the impact of postcolonial literatures and criticism on the current shape of English studies" (p. 4). Postcolonial theories of literary production have indeed brought 'fresh air' into English studies by offering challenging readings of texts created in colonial and postcolonial situations, and by enabling us to be more aware of the systems of representation that operate on the postcolonial writer as he/she addresses and struggles with the legacies of the colonial systems. Key themes have been: the position of the postcolonial writer navigating a course between the conflicting demands of two or more cultures and languages; the written language of the coloniser imposed upon the colonised population, and the devalorised and repressed oral traditions of the language of once colonised populations; the problem of writing in the language of the coloniser; the situation of the plural hybrid in the face of 'repressed' hybridity in anticolonial discourse; the difficulty of addressing the question of women's emancipation without identifying oneself with the values of the coloniser; the various strategies of resistance to the hegemonic language and culture of the coloniser, and to the marginalising and the representational logic within the once colonised culture or the newly independent state itself.

Another important aspect of postcolonial theory is in the way in which it has, in a sense, as Apter (1995) states, "usurped the disciplinary space [comparative literature] that European literature and criticism had reserved for themselves" (p. 86). Work that looks comparatively at postcolonial cultures and their literary production, as Bill Ashcroft *et al* (1989) put it, is indeed the way forward in the world in which we live: "... the strength of post-colonial theory may well lie in its inherently comparative methodology and the hybridized and syncretic view of the modern world which this implies (p. 36). The relationship of postcolonial theory to the new comparatism has been debated vigorously by various scholars. The 1993 Bernheimer report on "Comparative Literature at the Turn of the Century" demonstrates the decolonisation of the discipline and calls for new paradigms of comparative literature that would reflect the contributions of postcolonial and cultural studies (39-48). As the report emphasised, the "comparative" in comparative literature should include:

comparisons between artistic productions usually studied by different disciplines; between various cultural constructions of those disciplines; between Western cultural traditions, both high and popular, and those of non-Western cultures; between the pre- and post-contact cultural productions of colonized peoples; between gender constructions defined as feminine and those defined as masculine, or between sexual orientations defined as straight and those defined as gay; between racial and ethnic modes of signifying; between hermeneutic articulations of meaning and materialist analysis of its modes of production and circulation; and much more (p.42).

In the same year, Susan Bassnett (1993) makes the following statement: "Today, comparative literature is in one sense dead" (p. 47), a belief that was also to be shared by Gayatri Spivak (2003). Bassnett and Spivak do not tell us that comparative literature is at an end. On the contrary, it continues to exist but under different guises such as cultural studies, postcolonial studies, gender studies, and translation studies. Bassnett rejects traditional "Eurocentric"

comparative literature and argues for "a post-European model of comparative literature, one that reconsiders key questions of cultural identity, literary canons, the political implication of cultural influence, periodization and literary history and firmly rejects the ahistoricity of the American school and of the formalist approach" (p. 41). In this respect, as she further notes, the new comparative literature "opened by post-colonial theories of literary production is much more in keeping with the pluralism of the post-modernist world of the 1990s" (p. 86).

Reading texts from different literary and cultural backgrounds has thus been enabled by the growth of postcolonial studies. Postcolonial studies, however, cannot be truly comparative if it continues to focus almost exclusively on texts from the British Empire (African, Caribbean, and Indian), or, as Harish Trivedi (1999) puts it, to have "ears only for English" (p. 272). There is a need for a dialogue between writers, theorists and scholars working across cultures and languages, on and beyond the British Empire, so that a truly comparative approach to empire might emerge. Postcolonial studies, as Charles Forsdick & David Murphy (2003) argue in their volume *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*:

must be truly comparative if it is to develop, opening itself up to, among others, French, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, Turkish experiences. We must look beyond certain triumphalist discourses of a globalized, Anglophone uniformity in order to understand better the complexity and diversity – linguistic, cultural, political – of the world in which we live. As the rhetoric of empire seems increasingly to occupy a prominent place in public discourse, the urgency of such a project becomes ever more apparent (p. 14).

Dialogue across cultures and languages can lead to the emergence of radical and creative responses to "the rhetoric of empire" and the assumptions on which that "rhetoric" is based, and to a genuinely comparative approach to empire.

The limitations of both French studies and postcolonial studies, as well as an active promotion of the relationship of postcolonialism to the new comparative project, are central to Forsdick and Murphy's volume. "The urgency of such a project", as will be discussed below, will make it indeed possible to come to a wider and better understanding of postcolonial identity, as well as the complexity and diversity of the postcolonial world and the voices of writers, scholars and theorists working on empire and writing in languages other than English, whose work is not well known in postcolonial studies. The border between the study of Francophone and Anglophone literatures, for example, is puzzling when one considers the reliance of postcolonial studies on poststructuralist and feminist literary theory written originally in French by theorists such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva and the Moroccan Abdelkébir Khatibi, among others, as well as theorists of colonialism such as Frantz Fanon (Martinique/Algeria) and Albert Memmi (Tunisia). The centrality of these critics to postcolonial theory is undeniable. As Robert Young (2001) has pointed out, Anglophone postcolonial discourse is "a *franglais* mixture" (p. 18). Young points out that few poststructuralists "have been '*français de souche*'" (p. 415), and that many of those who developed the theoretical positions "subsequently characterized as poststructuralism came from Algeria or had been involved in the war of independence" (p. 413). Their critique of Western philosophy is indebted to their childhood experience of colonialism in the colonised Maghreb, and the struggle for independence. According to Young, poststructuralism "associated with these names could better be characterized as Franco-Maghrebian theory, for its theoretical

interventions have been actively concerned with the task of undoing the ideological heritage of French colonialism and with rethinking the premises, assumptions and protocols of its centrist, imperial culture” (p. 414).

While there exists a relatively new discipline called 'Francophone postcolonial studies,' and, among others, journals such as *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* within the British academy, and the same within the American academy, there is, as Belinda Jack (1996) points out, "no comparable francophone academy within which a comparable francophone discipline might emerge" in France (p. 3). As the French scholar Jean-Marc Moura notes in his paper to the Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies conference in London (2002), the term 'postcolonial' is “resisted” by "les études littéraires françaises” (p. 64). "Les études littéraires françaises" (French literary studies) subsume Francophone literary texts from the French empire and apply the same techniques of textual analysis: the focus is on text, not on context. Textual analysis can of course provide significant clues to the meaning of texts, and is an enabling factor. But it would be wrong to restrict Francophone postcolonial texts only to textual analysis. With very few exceptions of scholars working on Francophone literary production, including Jean-Marc Moura himself, it is difficult to understand French literary critics' reluctance to engage with postcolonial studies as a more helpful framework, particularly when 'Francophonie' could benefit from one of the most interesting aspects of postcolonialism, that is, the recognition of regional and territorial specificity of each 'Francophone' literature. One possible explanation can be found in the literary histories of France and the 'Francophone' world: 'Francophone' literatures are generally treated, analysed and taught as an extension of French literature that does not need to be situated to be understood. Insisting on the specificity of and situating postcolonial texts linguistically, anthropologically, sociologically and economically before even analysing them is a prerequisite in postcolonial studies. France, unlike Britain and the USA, is still obsessed with its colonising and assimilationist model, that is, the ignorance of the existing cultural specificities and differences in the so-called 'Francophonie.' Within France itself, the emphasis, echoing the colonial era, continues to be on immigration and assimilation of cultural difference: banning Muslims from wearing *hijab* (the headscarf) in French schools and workplaces, among other things, for example.

This paper is a contribution to the links between postcolonialism and the new comparative literature, and to an active exploration of a comparative literature whose focus is not only on postcolonial writing in English, but on writing across languages and cultures. The aim of this paper is to contribute to this process by drawing on a research I carried out on postcolonial African writing of English and French expression (Dahhan, 2004), by highlighting the possibilities that this kind of work offers. My interest lies in North and sub-Saharan African writing. I believe that there is a lot to be learned from putting Francophone and Anglophone writers and theorists in dialogue with one another, and from scholars of African literature working on both the British and French empires. This paper will not undertake a comparative analysis of literary texts; rather, the aim is to present and discuss the links between these two literary spheres, as well as my findings and conclusions.

The emergence of Francophone and Anglophone Postcolonial Writing in Africa

African literature of French and English expression exists as a direct result of French and British colonisation of much of North Africa and sub-Saharan areas. The emergence of this literature can be attributed to several factors, the most significant of which was the educational policy that was posited on the assumption that a small number of the indigenous inhabitants

could be transformed into model French or British citizens. All the writers under consideration belong to that generation of African children who received most of their education during the colonial period: Abdelkébir Khatibi and Tahar Ben Jelloun from Morocco, Assia Djebar from Algeria, Chinua Achebe and Flora Nwapa from Nigeria, and Nuruddin Farah from Somalia (in the case of Somalia, both the British and the Italians colonised the country). It is noteworthy that this historical circumstance affects in similar ways their education and later their works. The school curriculum in the colonies must be understood as one of the ways in which colonial powers such as France and Britain both asserted their cultural superiority, and undermined indigenous cultures.¹ However, it would be naive to assume that the effects of colonial education on African schoolchildren are identical, as the colonial strategies of France and Britain are radically different.² While both France and Britain showed a great concern with the success of education in their respective colonies, differences in colonial policy, as Bob White (1996) states, were conditioned by "the moral stances underlying colonial practice" (p. 9). There are two important features which can be said to characterise French colonial education in Africa: first is the use and spread of the French language;³ second is the policy of assimilation.⁴ As part of the French '*mission civilisatrice*' (civilising mission), schools in many French colonies followed closely the French curriculum. The French policy of assimilation, as Kamal Salhi (1999) notes in the context of Algeria, "had the effect of breaking down the cultural identity of native children who entered the system" (p. 44). The schoolchildren who attended French schools in French-speaking colonial Africa, as Abdou Moumouni (1964) --one of them-- notes, were taught that their ancestors were the Gauls: "Nos ancêtres Gaulois [...] dans ses colonies la France traite les indigènes comme ses fils" (p.56).⁵

By contrast, the focus on religious education, as well as the collaboration between the British government and the missions, characterised British colonial education in the history of the British African colonies.⁶ Another important feature which characterises British colonial education in Africa is the importance of integrating local languages and customs into the educational process. Unlike the French policy of assimilation, the decentralised approach of the British is clearly manifested in the British state policy of 'Indirect Rule'.⁷ However, postcolonial critics such as Ngugi (1972) and many others criticised the British colonial education system for the ways in which it devalued indigenous African religious and cultural practices while at the same time asserting its values as the best or most true (p.14). The centrality of the French language and values to the French coloniser (Khatibi's *La Mémoire tatouée*, 1971) and the focus on religion in the British colonial education system (Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, 1958) are posited as determining factors in alienating African schoolchildren from their cultures. The existing differences between the cultures of North African and sub-Saharan regions were thus exacerbated by different colonial strategies. In all cases, however, the issue of constructing an identity in the colonial and the postcolonial situation with a view to emphasising their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre is a key issue.

For many African authors in the (post)colonial situation, writing not only enables the writer to address the harmful effects of colonisation - the effect on the coloniser has yet to be fully explored-, but also to regain control over his/her historical discourse, using it to subvert the discourse and effects of colonisation. As Edward Said (1986) writes:

Between colonialism and its genealogical offsprings, there is thus a holding and crossing-over. Most of the postcolonial writers bear their past within them - as scars of humiliating wounds, as instigation for different practices, as potentially

revised visions of the past tending towards a future, as urgently reinterpretable and redeployable experiences in which the formerly silent native speaks and acts on territory taken back from the colonialist (p. 55).

Why read North African and sub-Saharan postcolonial writing together?

Postcolonial African literatures in English and French, with the exception of very few studies, are usually studied and discussed in isolation from each other. This perspective may carry with it potential pitfalls. First, it may not generally distance the critic from the process of making Europe the absent centre around which postcolonial Anglophone/Francophone literatures revolve, and thus perpetuate hierarchical relationships. This, in turn, might reinforce the argument that contemporary African cultural issues and modern identities are massively fashioned and determined by the workings of colonialism. Of course colonialism was a very significant influence, but it is only one influence among many others. Jawaharlal Nehru's (1997) description of India as "an ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been hidden previously," is relevant to many societies with a history of colonialism (p. 169). African literature of French and English expression emerges out of multiple cultural inheritances. The question of the relationship of the postcolonial writer to language and culture is central to these inheritances which, in turn, as we will see below, lead to the creative collapsing of borders and of ideas of unitary identity. To read postcolonial literatures together then enables us to place more emphasis on the shared concerns in the postcolonial situation. The significance of a horizontal, comparative reading of postcolonial literatures written in European languages is one way of dislocating Europe as a centre. This enables us to focus on the alternatives which postcolonial writers seek out. The questioning of existing boundaries and definitions is taking place not only in postcolonial theory, but also in the fictions and essays of many 'third world' writers. This comparative approach to Francophone and Anglophone texts together, then, is a challenge to any exclusive definition of the 'postcolonial'; it offers the means of thinking comparatively about the various representations/situations emerging from different colonial traditions, calling for an attention to the specific; and it also challenges the reluctance within the French academy to acknowledge the relevance and importance of the theoretical and political agendas associated with the term 'postcolonial.'

Another reason for reading North African and sub-Saharan Francophone and Anglophone writing together is consistent with the crossing and the transgression of borders: the crossing of the Sahara desert which is traditionally used in literary discourses as the cultural and geographical border between North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. The socio-economic, political and cultural implications of colonialism have been the concern of Arab, Berber and Jewish writers in North Africa, just as they have been the concern of sub-Saharan African writers. It would be false not to admit the existence of cultural differences between the two geographical spheres. Indeed, the Arabo-Berber reality of North Africa is reflected in the traditions, the customs and the cultural life of the people. The geographical position of North Africa adds to this difference by being a crossroads of Mediterranean, Arab and African cultures. But these differences are not specific to North Africa because many countries south of the Sahara also have strong Arab and Islamic cultures such as Mali, Sudan, Mauritania, Somalia and even partly Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana and Kenya. Moreover, complexity and diversity – linguistic, cultural, political – exist in sub-Saharan Africa. It would be naive to assume that West African cultural life is similar to the East African, as Achebe (1975) argues:

Those who in talking about African literature want to exclude North Africa because it belongs to a different tradition surely do not suggest that Black Africa is anything like homogenous. What does Shabaan Robert have in common with Christopher Okigbo or Awoonor-Williams? Dr Mongo Beti of Cameroun and Paris with Nzekwu of Nigeria (p. 94).

What is the basis for comparison of literatures of French and English expression from north and south of the Sahara? A commonality exists between North and sub-Saharan Africa as regions with cultural links and a common experience of Empire, without erasing or minimising their differences. What is the nature of these similarities and differences? Would a sustained crossing back and forth between North African and sub-Saharan literatures open up a space for a wider and better understanding of postcolonial identity, and the complexity and diversity of the postcolonial world?

Key themes and concerns in African texts

The emphasis throughout this study is on paired readings of authors and their texts. The approach is thus comparative, aiming to combine close readings of individual authors and texts with careful framings in terms of history and politics. In this way, a sense of dialogue and difference, of shared concerns and local distinctions, is drawn out and discussed. In light of the writers' concern with the cultural politics of their respective countries (Morocco, Algeria, Nigeria and Somalia), and in order to read their literary texts fruitfully, It would be helpful to understand the intertextual relation between literature and other parts of African discourse. For this reason, it is crucial to consider the history of critical approaches to African cultural identity in North and sub-Saharan Africa, and the crucial debates they engender about authenticity and hybridity, the nation, ethnicity, language and national literatures.

***La Mémoire tatouée* by Abdelkébir Khatibi, and *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe**

Achebe and Khatibi's desire for an African narrative is, as they tell us in their respective texts, initially motivated by the loss or repression of an African tradition under colonialism. This loss, in turn, generates narratives such as *Things Fall Apart* and *La Mémoire tatouée* that rewrite African culture. It was precisely their alienation from their ancestral traditions that made them writers. Both Khatibi and Achebe, in spite of the cultural, linguistic and colonial differences in their respective backgrounds, are aware that political or tribal independence in no way guarantees decolonisation and freedom. Both know that the writer is the one who must explore the implications of the problem, not only for himself/herself, but for those who cannot ask the questions that must be asked.

In this section I consider the role of history and memory in shaping postcolonial cultural identity. One of the most vexed questions in postcolonial studies is the agency of the colonised subject, or 'subaltern,' and whether it can be recovered and represented by postcolonial intellectuals. Khatibi and Achebe's treatment of the intersection between history and culture provides a valuable insight into the problematics of cultural identity and representation highlighted by postmodernism and poststructuralism. An important reason for the comparison of these texts and these two authors is the significant insight that may be gained into current debates in postcolonial studies through comparison of authors not only from completely different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, but from two different postcolonial positions.

Although Khatibi and Achebe come from two different formations of African postcoloniality, one appropriating poststructuralism (Khatibi), the other espousing cultural 'nationalism' (Achebe), they both interest me in the way in which they use almost similar tropes, which are associated with the process of decolonisation. To create something new, Achebe (1975) uses the figure of "the crossroads of cultures" (p. 67) as the juncture where the Igbo tradition intersects with the colonising structure. His reading of Onitsha market and its literature provides further clues to his writing. Onitsha, like the figure of the crossroads, is a site of doubleness and reversal: "It can be opposite things at once: It sits at the crossroads of the world. It has two faces—a Benin face and an Igbo face—and can see the four directions, either squarely or with the tail of an eye" (pp. 90-91). For the Igbo, says Achebe, "Wherever Something stands, Something Else will stand beside it. Nothing is absolute. 'I am the truth, the way, and the life' would be called blasphemous or simply absurd for it is not well known that a man may worship *Ogwugwu* to perfection and be killed by Udo" (p. 94). This dualism, a dynamic relationship between opposites, offers remarkable parallels with Khatibi's conception of the Maghreb, and could well be the key to understanding Achebe's and Khatibi's textual practice in their texts.

Khatibi's (1983) conception of the Maghreb is understood in terms of his philosophical "bilangue", which is associated with his 'pensée autre', a 'thinking otherwise': a space in which native and foreign languages, feminine and masculine sexualities, voice and writing, as well as hegemonic and marginalised cultures, may mingle and mix without merging to form a new unity (pp. 177-207). Khatibi often evokes the dynamic heritage the Maghreb has acquired because of its geographic location between the West and other parts of the world, between European visions of the world and those of Africa and Asia. According to Khatibi, and as Robert Young points out above in the context of the origins of poststructuralism, the Maghreb might well serve as the catalyst for new ways of thinking. It is for this reason that Khatibi writes about the links between the postmodern and postcolonial world, and about the need to recognise the common bond that links decolonisation with French thought, including deconstruction (pp. 47-48).

Achebe's figure of the 'crossroads' is one that is a composite of Igbo tradition and European culture; it participates in two worlds. Khatibi's notion of 'bilangue', however, is more radical; it is created of multiple sources and is positioned in-between, emphasising its fluidity and its disregard for linguistic, cultural or sexual borders. 'Bilangue' and the figure of the 'crossroads' underline the potentiality of a cultural space that opens boundaries between cultures and among people within the same cultures.

Benjelloun's *L'Enfant de sable* and Farah's *Maps*

This section looks at how margins contain their own centres. Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable* (1985) and Farah's *Maps* (1986) are sites of the dilemmas and contradictions of emergent nationhood. Both writers challenge the nation, explore and expose the artifice of gender construction and the formation of national identity in the new nation by interrogating the essentialising subject positions inherent in imperialism and nationalism. Both authors are explicitly engaged in the process of a nomadic hybridisation, a process which underscores their shared 'postmodern' affinities. This section draws attention to the multiple ways in which the categories of race, culture, gender, colonialism and nation can be approached. These texts of the 1980s made an important intervention in the way in which they break with the structures and narratives of colonialism and nationalism. In light of my reading of *L'Enfant de sable* and *Maps*, nomadic hybridity is, for Farah and Ben Jelloun, part of identity construction. Apparently, this is indicative of the larger blurring of boundaries in postmodern discourse that is finding place in

African fiction. Postcolonialism and postmodernism have certain things in common such as, for example, the questioning of grand narratives. Nevertheless, the position that this study takes is that postcolonial writers may draw on whatever techniques and models in Europe or in their cultures to create space for a criticism that acknowledges differences and divergences, and to imagine an alternative subjectivity that is neither the universal nor the communal subject of modernist or nationalist discourse, respectively. An alternative such as this is one of the most important concerns in *L'Enfant de sable* and *Maps*. Farah and Ben Jelloun, however, do not erase the experience of their people from their texts, and they identify intimately with the human condition of their respective countries.

Asia Djebbar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* and Flora Nwapa's *One is Enough*

African women writers and critics face a triply difficult task because they belong to more than one group simultaneously: as woman in patriarchal discourse, as a 'third world' person, and as a writer who, with ambivalence, has to unsettle the colonial and patriarchal structures in the language of the coloniser. These are factors that come into play when the African woman writer writes or speaks. This section returns to the question of gender, voice and writing. Like Khatibi and Achebe, Djebbar's autobiographical novel *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1985), and Nwapa's realist and urban novel *One is Enough* (1981), are used to interrogate the gendered basis of authority and history. They both use their insider position in the home and in the new nation to subvert patriarchal/colonial discourses by challenging their objectification and the roles that they have been conditioned to play. Female solidarity/collective, writing, education, and economic independence enable the women who have been denied access to public space and speech. As two postcolonial women writers, they share the experience of being constructed as the sexual and cultural other, and both emphasise the commonalities between colonial and patriarchal structures in their texts and in their essays. In expressing their individual and collective identities as they write to and for the subaltern women as well as themselves, Djebbar and Nwapa, each in her way, interrupt the discourses that rendered the subaltern woman mute, and thus create a new space for challenging and disruptive voices. While the concerns in their fictions present complementary voices, the focus and the choice of alternatives in their writing can be seen to mark the different cultural, historical, political, and intellectual experience of women in their respective nations.

Conclusion

From one perspective the writings of Khatibi, Achebe, Ben Jelloun, Farah, Djebbar and Nwapa, have been partly read as a critique of Western discourses about Africa and the 'third world' as a whole. They are, in varying degrees, critical of simplistic or monolithic views of Africa, or the Orient, or Islam. This does not mean that 'writing back' is prevalent in these postcolonial texts. Although the issues of colonial history, colonial education and 'decolonising the mind' are more pronounced in some texts (Khatibi, Achebe and Djebbar) than they are in the others, they are only one part of a wider set of concerns.

The point of unity in the various responses/strategies in the texts is the writers' determination to end facile oppositional practices, by suggesting new paradigms of identity, both sexual and cultural, which go beyond oppressive definitions. Their articulation of a heterogeneous national and cultural identity undercut colonialist and nationalist claims to a unified self, and is in keeping with the pluralism of the world in which we live.

Reading postcolonial literature across languages and cultures opens up a space for an exploration of the responses and strategies developed by various writers and theorists for the

construction of postcolonial identity. What it does not offer, as Bassnett points out, "are clear cut answers and definitions" (p. 86). This comparison, therefore, is in keeping with the plural identities, voices and choices of the postcolonial world. It is a challenge to any exclusive definition of the 'postcolonial'. The conclusions reached do not claim that the selected texts are emblematic of any unified theory of African writing or are representative or illustrative of all postcolonial writing. Nor do they claim that these texts are typical illustrations of their respective nations. This comparative study has highlighted the dangers of such claims, while at the same time asserting the important work carried out by these European-language writers: their common determination to change how their world is imagined. The wealth of possibilities offered by this kind of work should not come as a surprise. What is surprising is the dearth of comparative literature that opens itself up to other languages and cultures. Finally, the framework of comparison of European-language literatures needs to be broadened. There is a need for further research to accommodate other voices from within African cultures. This can be done, for example, by linking literary texts with other types of cultural production such as film, newspapers, art and music. Only through a consideration of this polyvocality can one attempt to develop a more accurate understanding of postcolonial societies.

Endnotes

¹ In his discussion of colonial education in the colonies, John McLeod argues that "Colonialism uses educational institutions to augment the perceived legitimacy and propriety of itself, as well as providing the means by which colonial power can be maintained" (p. 140) In John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*: Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000) 140.

² We need to discriminate adequately between different experiences of colonialism, even when those experiences are linked to the same colonial power. As Belinda Jack points out in her discussion of North African colonies, indigenous cultures of Morocco and Tunisia, for example, "were less systematically undermined or destroyed than those of Algeria under French rule" (p. 185) In Belinda Jack (1996). *Francophone Literatures: An introductory survey*. Oxford: Oxford UP. Thus, as Ferhat Abbas notes in the context of Algeria: "Le colonialisme français n'a pas ménagé ses efforts pour asservir les Algériens, désislamiser et désarabiser l'Algérie. Tous les efforts entrepris durant le siècle de colonisation l'ont été dans ce sens [...] L'Algérie en 1830 a été déclarée terre vacante et l'Algérie musulmane inexistante" (p.23). In Ferhat Abbas. *La Nuit colonial*. Paris: Julliard, 1962.

³ The use of 'indigenous' languages as a medium of education was rejected in many French colonies. In the eyes of the colonisers, learning the French language is itself the education. This is precisely what Brevie, Governor General of French West Africa 1930, implied when he wrote that "the native's mind can become disciplined by the mastery of spoken French" (p. 14) Quoted in Bob White. (March 1996). Talk about School: Education and the Colonial Project in French and British Africa. *Comparative Education* 32, 9-25.

⁴ Assimilation, a key principle of French colonial policy, means that French civilisation is universally applicable, and implies that education will bring Africans to a higher level of civilisation. As Bob White states:

The French model corresponds more closely to the idea of cultural universalism.
The French 'mission civilisatrice' sought to bring all dependents together under

one roof and unify them through the French language and culture. The stated policy of assimilation (and later association) and the metaphor of the French family are good examples of the universalist trend in French policy (Talk about School, p21).

⁵ Moumouni, Abdou. (1964). *L'Education en Afrique*. Paris: François Maspero. Similarly, Frantz Fanon notes that this absurd situation obtained in the West Indies too, emphasising that the colonised is psychologically trained to think that the White is good and superior, that the White is the master (p. 147). In Frantz Fanon. *Peau noire, masques blancs*. Paris: Seuil, 1952.

⁶ African Education (1953), a joint study produced by the British Colonial Office and the Nuffield Foundation, reflects a strong belief in a Christian-based system of education in the British colonies: "there is a deeper confidence that the spread of enlightenment, which is the aim of education, is the surest means of leading a people to the truth" (p. 44). In Nuffield Foundation and the Colonial Office. (1953). *African Education: A Study of Educational Policy and Practice in British Tropical Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁷ It can be argued, however, as Bob White notes, that "a heightened awareness of cultural differences is itself a form of racism. The highly segregated social spheres in the British colonies are often given as an example" (24). Many British colonies had segregated schools. There were schools for whites and selected African students (academic institutions), and schools for the 'masses' where, in the opinion of the Nuffield Foundation, the "whole of the curriculum should be integrated with agriculture and other work in it" (*African Education*, 11).

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