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(POST)COLONIAL (DIS)ORDER – A PROBLEMATIC ISSUE

Postcolonialism emerged as a distinct realm by the end of 1980s. It is a relatively new strand of literature and there are divergent ways of perceiving and analysing it. Therefore, the aim of this article is to show differences in the categorization and understanding of postcolonial issues. Numerous definitions and opinions concerning the field will be introduced and set in order; discrepancies will be emphasized and analysed. The practical side of postcolonial studies will be presented in order to show their usefulness to practical analysis and academic discussion.

Searching for a point of departure for the discussion of postcolonial theory one has to go back as far as colonial times. Although postcolonialism seems to be a new phenomenon bringing light to the analysis of many texts which nowadays appear on the British literary market, its roots are to be encountered much earlier. Although the realm of study has become rather fashionable among readers, there is as much chaos as fascination among scholars worldwide. The features of so called “postcolonial texts” are difficult to define because there is no reliable and precise point of reference.

Looking back into history one discovers that obviously ex-colonial countries are the ones doomed to postcoloniality. Postcolonial literature is just one field in which the remnants of colonial past activate. It is also possible to find the influence of the discussed historical period in art, philosophy, anthropology, fashion. There are also “colonial” variants of the vernacular used in a given country affecting the mentality of its citizens.

To start with, it is vital to remember that one has to proceed with patience while studying theorists and their theories, definitions, and more or less popular views. Peter Childs and Patrick Williams mentioned in their “Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory” that it is possible to “[...] encounter such levels of frustration as to make you wonder why you didn’t stick to eighteenth-century poetry”.¹ Readers’ confusion is caused by the utter chaos

¹ P. Childs, P. Williams, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory* (Longman: Essex, 1997), p. vii.

which predominantly concerns definitions and categorization: both indispensable to follow the postcolonial texts.

The first discrepancy is the spelling of the key word itself. For some of the theorists it is common to use a hyphen (post-colonial), whereas others avoid it (postcolonial). Let us see what differences there are in the analyses of the term, and what arguments are used by the authorities while debating this issue.

John McLeod, himself using a non-hyphenated version claims in the introductory chapter of his book that "the hyphenated term 'post-colonial' seems more appropriate to denote a particular *historical period* or *epoch*, like those suggested by phrases such as 'after colonialism', 'after independence' or 'after the end of Empire'".² The hyphen then, seems to put an end, in McLeod's opinion, to colonial times and does not include neo-colonial practices present worldwide today. The two-word version puts forward the implication that a new period or epoch is being discussed, and "colonial" is forgotten and abandoned. In spite of the fact that "colonial" is inseparably a part of "the post-colonial", the hyphen creates an obstacle, a border to be mentally crossed. Nevertheless, in McLeod's view, it is indispensable to resort to colonial times and, consequently the hyphen in the key word does not allow undisturbed and free discussion.

Homi K. Bhabha, on the other hand claims that the need for the "post" words appeared because we tend to live "on the borderlines of the 'present', for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix 'post': *postmodernism*, *postcolonialism*, *postfeminism*".³ This living "in-between", or living at the turn of two epochs makes writers and theorists look for new methods of communication and a new theoretical background for their writing. The prefix in the word does not exclude the past. It must be also emphasised that "postcolonial" is future oriented and leaves some space for new categories and definitions which will also go under the umbrella term.

Leela Gandhi emphasised that the discussed hyphen is a "marker of decolonising processes." Gandhi chose the unhyphenated way of spelling claiming that "postcolonial condition is inaugurated with the onset rather than the end of colonial occupation," and the unbroken word is "more sensitive to the long history of colonial consequences".⁴ Following such an explanation, one notices that, as in Bhabha's discussion, the chapter of "colonial" is not to be closed. On the other hand, there exists the danger of looking back and not being completely objective in the analysis of what emerged later, after "colonial".

² J. McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2000), p. 5.

³ K. H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge: London, 1994), p. 1.

⁴ L. Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1998), p. 3.

Elleke Boehmer claims that since “colonialism is not a thing of the past,”⁵ it would be inaccurate to use the hyphen since it would suggest that it is a completely new phenomenon whereas it is only partially so. History has left its impression on modern times, and consequently literature, and it is impossible and unnecessary to avoid looking through the prism of the colonial.

Peter Childs and Patrick Williams do not hesitate to use the controversial hyphen as “there is a form of perverseness in taking the label ‘post-’ for a state which is not yet fully present, and linking it to something which has not fully disappeared [...]”.⁶ Such perception of the term justifies the spelling used by Childs and Williams. The hyphen represents a bridge between now and then, it allows for new things to happen with respect to the colonial.

An advantage of the broken word is utter objectivity to and preservation of, both literal and metaphorical space for the newly emerging political and social situation. Unfortunately, reading critical literature with a perspective of forthcoming changes in mind could lead the reader to a biased perception of the postcolonial text. Therefore, the author of the article chooses the non-hyphenated form in order to invent and rely on the link between colonial and modern times.

Before we concentrate on postcolonial literature, one more discrepancy must be explained. Many scholars claim that colonialism and imperialism are the same stimulating powers. It must be mentioned then, that colonialism is just “one form of practice” which is a consequence of the “ideology of imperialism”.⁷ Imperialism is a wider term although it includes colonialism as one of its results. One must be careful while using these two terms interchangeably because they are not synonyms.

A short introduction to the term “colonial” will help us to explain the difference between two kinds of literature: colonial and colonialist, which seem to be the basis of what we encounter today. Colonial literature was created during the colonial period by representatives of metropolis and indigenous inhabitants of colonies. The other kind of literature was “[...] written by and for colonizing Europeans about non-European lands dominated by them. It embodied the imperialists’ point of view”.⁸ What is more, the latter kind of literature supported the idea of jingoism, and confirmed the superiority and exceptionality of the metropolitan culture. It reflected “the Eurocentric universalism”,⁹ which took for granted that European is the only pattern to be followed by the indigenous peoples.

⁵ E. Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1995), p. 10.

⁶ P. Childs, P. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁷ J. McLeod, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁸ E. Boehmer, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁹ P. Barry, “Beginning Theory” (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2002), p. 193.

The question arises: when did the colonial end to give way to post-colonial? The simplest, although vague answer is: after decolonisation. McLeod¹⁰ divides decolonisation into three periods: the first occurred in the eighteenth century when America became an independent nation, the next by the end of the nineteenth century and at the turn of the twentieth. The status of "dominions" was offered at that time to countries like Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Very soon these nations became completely independent. The last period – after World War II, allowed countries such as India, Ceylon, Nigeria, and the Caribbean, to mention just a few, to achieve freedom. The placement processes seem to be facilitated now, although it must be mentioned that the point concerning America as a postcolonial country is liable to disagreement and discussion as it separated so early from Britain that it is difficult to analyse its achievements in the light of postcolonialism.

Arif Dirlik put forward a hypothesis that the postcolonial period starts "when Third World intellectuals have arrived in first World academie".¹¹ This opinion is partially true because only after the arrival of scholars from previously colonized countries to western universities, were postcolonial literature and criticism discovered, or to be more precise re-discovered. The late 1980s witnessed the emergence of postcolonialism as a distinct category. Nowadays, this discipline of studies is to be found at most universities in the company of gender or cultural studies.

What had been happening before the 1980s? In the 1960s A. Norman Jeffares, and in the 1970s William Walsh gained popularity as the first critics who became interested in this realm. Although they are criticised today for their selectivity of perception, it cannot be denied that owing to them much information was preserved and secured. If not for their activity the state of this literature would be more indigent and neglected.

Two more names cannot be forgotten: Franz Fanon and Edward W. Said. The first one, a black psychologist, published in 1952 a highly polemical work entitled: *Black Skin, White Masks*. He touched upon the problem of the impact of colonialism on millions of people who either experienced it themselves or were descendants of the colonised. Fanon was himself pointed out in a street by a white man, and later described this traumatic experience in the following way:

¹⁰ J. McLeod, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹¹ A. Dirlik, "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism", in: M. Padmini (ed.), *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory* (Arnold: London, 1996), p. 294.

On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a haemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood?¹²

Although Fanon's experiences were confirmed by his psychiatric studies he claimed that the psychic wounds of the colonized cannot really be cured by psychiatry since he did not feel that it was possible to treat one with the other. Soon Fanon's achievements appeared to be instrumental to the creation of Black writing theory in America and Africa.

Edward Said made more impact on European studies, and his most important work *Orientalism* published in 1978 changed views on colonialism and its results on people completely. Said, himself born in Jerusalem and educated in Egypt and the USA, paid more attention to the colonizer rather than to the colonised. His critical and radical opinions concern the lack of interest by the colonisers in the inhabitants of the colonies and their experiences. Said claimed that delusive reports produced by the colonizers created a stereotyped picture of uneducated, degenerate and primitive savages who are freed and saved by their masters, and would not be able to survive without this merciful and helping hand. In Said's opinion colonies were treated as the "collective Orient" and "only the vast anonymous collective mattered or existed".¹³ The East was represented as a homogenous mass deprived of the right of conscious choices.

Both Fanon and Said changed the way colonial and postcolonial studies were thought about. After their books became popular, the discussion over colonial/postcolonial theory was never the same. Both *Black Skin, White Masks* and *Orientalism* became academically fashionable and many universities started treating this re-born realm as a separate but key discipline.

In the 1990s postcolonial studies gained popularity again and it became obvious that this field had to be explored in detail. There have been many endeavours to define postcoloniality in its modern form. Elleke Boehmer quotes Ben Okri, himself a postcolonial writer who called this kind of literature the "literature of the newly ascendant spirit".¹⁴ It is then, according to Okri, a recently discovered trend in world literature which cannot be omitted while discussing the latest achievements of this discipline, especially since it is just beginning to rise in power.

Robert C. Young depicts different aspects of the term and claims that postcolonialism "seeks to change the way people think, the way they behave,

¹² F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, transl. Charles Lam Markmann (Grove Press: New York, 1967) p. 112.

¹³ E. W. Said, *Orientalism* (Penguin Books: London, 1995) (originally Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1978), p. 155.

¹⁴ E. Boehmer, *op. cit.*, p. 3-4.

to produce a more just and equitable relation between the different peoples of the world".¹⁵ The role prescribed to the realm confirms its importance. The ambitious meaning of postcolonial studies is not exaggerated as there are many countries with a multicultural net of society. The governments concerned do not find any solutions and do not give reasonable prescriptions as far as the functioning of different cultures next to each other is concerned. Postcolonial literature is to present and interpret life "after colonialism" honestly.

Leela Gandhi writes about "postcolonial amnesia"¹⁶ which is the trial of new born generations to make a new start so as to cut themselves off from the painful memories of colonialism and its results. Although memory can be a hindrance, it is unavoidable and necessary to look back and take advantage of the past. In order to learn from history, it cannot be ignored.

Gandhi's views on selective memory seem to be confirmed by Homi Bhabha who writes that remembering "is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present".¹⁷ The bridge built by human memory should have healing attributes rather than destructive ones. It might bring some relief and catharsis to interpret the roots and draw conclusions. The reader is continuously inclined to believe that postcolonial literature should stay in contact with its colonial past, although the painful reminiscences create fluid and unstable identities.

Postcolonialism, according to Simon During brings "the need in nations or groups which have been victims of imperialism to achieve an identity uncontaminated by universalist or Eurocentric concepts and images".¹⁸ The need to achieve uncontaminated views on life influences the way of writing and creating. As a result postcolonial writers are frequently hybrid in their opinions, and their literary output is placed somewhere "in-between". It appears extremely difficult to forget about tradition, even if the writers have never visited their ancestors' countries. Tradition is to some extent "inborn", it is frequently popularised at home by parents, it can be found in customs which are consciously or subconsciously continued and preserved, and finally it is in the way the hyphenated citizens perceive the world.

What principles should one keep in mind while looking at "the post-colonial"? To facilitate the process of postcolonial research the following points are worth taking into consideration:

¹⁵ R. C. Young, *Postcolonialism. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2003), p. 7.

¹⁶ L. Gandhi, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹⁷ H. Bhabha, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

¹⁸ S. During, "Postmodernism or Postcolonialism Today", in: B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (Routledge: London, 1995), pp. 125-129.

Colonialism does not end the moment a colony officially gains its independence.

Although many ex-colonies are free now, their economic, cultural and often political situation can be occasionally connected with and influenced by some imperial or, in other words stronger and more influential country (or countries). This control over the economy of a given country is known as neo-colonialism and there are still many examples of armed interference and occupations of particular areas of influence.

It is not possible or sometimes not necessary to isolate oneself from colonial achievements/memories.

This statement, so closely connected with the previous one concerns the values of the past. Needless to say, it would be a great loss to abandon or separate oneself completely from colonial writing and reading practices, its cultural treasures, or even suffered and experienced defeats. They have all become history and an achievement at the same time, and postcolonial writers are often shaped by the experiences of the nations they are said to represent. Aware of it or not, they benefit from this heritage and their literary output is conditioned by their parents' legacy. It is colonialism that brought almost all the postcolonial writers to the United Kingdom. All works concerning the consequences of colonialism belong to this branch of studies.

Postcolonialism's role is to challenge the colonial.

To accept the past does not mean to approve of it. Postcolonial writers obviously do "write back" or "counter". They do question the past and create predominantly out of rage. They do not agree with the colonial system and order, and they notice how human minds are influenced. *Can the Subaltern Speak?* was the famous question asked by Gayatri Spivak.¹⁹ The univocal answer of all postcolonial writers is: "Yes, they can". What is more, they do not have to be represented by any authorities because they are able to speak in their own name.

Who is postcolonial?

While organizing and dividing possible cases and varieties of "postcoloniality" one wonders whether to take into account the authors born in ex-colonies, who emigrated to metropolitan countries, or maybe the next generation of immigrants. Do the groups exclude each other? What about the colonial texts which concern the issues of slavery and subjectivity?

According to John McLeod, there are at least three groups of texts which can be accepted as postcolonial:

– "Reading texts produced by writers from countries with a history of colonialism, primarily those texts concerned with the workings and legacy of colonialism in either the past or the present.

¹⁹ G. Ch. Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, in: B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, *op. cit.*, pp. 24–28.

– Reading texts produced by those that have migrated from countries with a history of colonialism, or those descended from migrant families, which deal in the main with diaspora experience and its many consequences.

– In the light of theories of colonial discourses, re-reading texts produced during colonialism; both those that directly address the experiences of Empire, and those that seem not to”.²⁰

This division introduces some order to the chaos of definitions and theories.

The first group of texts accepts the writers who were born in ex-colonial countries and continue to live there. Their works deal, except for every day life problems, with the influence and legacy of the past. The characters can be settled either in a historical or present day context, but they do show their connection with colonial times and do not avoid discussing it. The writers representing this group write in vernacular languages or they refer to the language of an ex-colonizer.

The second group of writers accepted by McLeod as postcolonial, are those who emigrated from ex-colonial countries or who are descendants of such emigrants. If they are the second generation living in a metropolitan country, and at the same time the first generation born there, it is possible that only one of their parents represents an ex-colony. It is also less probable that they speak the vernacular or have been to their ancestors' country. Being mixed-family representatives they do have and describe their personal experiences of racial attacks, conflicts of cultures and the feeling of being in-between both identities. The writers know the native tradition they write about from their homes, books or short trips to their parents' land.

The last group of writers are the ones who worked and created during and shortly after colonial times. The only essential condition to be able to accept their texts as postcolonial is to find some “postcolonial traces”. These can be direct or disguised references to colonialism or its consequences. Although we usually do not put the authors of such texts under the heading of postcolonial studies, their works are frequently re-read today. In this context such re-reading practices sometimes concern authors who seemingly do not go under the discussed heading. For instance, Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* or William Shakespeare's *Othello*. Whether one agrees to the “postcoloniality” of the third group of texts or not, the division facilitates the analysis of the texts and makes further discussion possible.

The historical process of creation of what we today call postcolonial texts is a long and complicated one. Modern postcolonialism is enriched by new issues and problems which are encountered by “postcolonial generations”. Except for hybridity, split identity, and the feeling of being “in

²⁰ J. McLeod, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

between”, there is also an issue of conscious or subconscious mimicry, relations between “colonial” and “postcolonial” generations, and their attitude to an ever present tradition. As miscegenation and mixed families are frequent today, there is one more role ascribed to postcolonial literature: to preserve tradition and to emphasise the presence of other culture representatives without hiding their provenance. Although the new world context does not make way for the endorsement of “marginal” literature, as it is often perceived, the voice of the subaltern becomes more audible and stronger every time a new postcolonial novel appears.

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