

**SUBALTERNITY AND LANGUAGE MASTERY: A STUDY OF THE NOVEL
'THE DEATH OF COMRADE PRESIDENT' BY ALAIN MABANCKOU**

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Abstract

Post colonialism falls under imperialism and colonialism respectively. The write-ups emerged during this period is called postcolonial literature. It often specifies the problems and consequences of the decolonization of the countries. It has too many keywords which support it very clearly. There are two keywords focused in this research: Subalternity and Language mastery. Subaltern refers the colonial people who are socially, politically and geographically independent from the imperial colony. This research aims to find out the impacts of subalternity through the explicative act of Congo people. This study further focuses the indirect superiority of European people on African with the reference to the two countries: Congo and France. Congo is the representation of the whole country and France replicates Europeans. Language is a significant debatable issue in postcolonial studies and it mostly represents colonial perspectives in decolonized countries. The language mastery is established to find out the influence of French in Congo and how colonized people are unable to overcome from the colonizers language. The encouragement episode of younger colonized society is portrayed to reach the aim of this study. This research is carried out to illustrate the colonized role of Africa through the superiority concept of Europe.

Keyword: Post colonialism, Subalternity and Language Mastery

Post colonialism is an umbrella term with numerous connotations and it mainly focuses the cultural, political, economical and social legacy of colonialism. It commonly represents the chronological marker and method of periodization. Joseph – Ernest Renan and Arthur de Gobineau colonial ideologues coined the term postcolonialism in 19th century but the history is very back from the noted year. Postcolonial studies came after colonialism and it is considered as response to colonial acts. Since 1980s, the literary and cultural academic realm of this particular area commenced. Pramod K. Nayar illustrates the concept as:

Postcolonial studies notes that the native individual under colonialism has been for so long humiliated, rejected and marginalized that s/he loses all faith in her/his abilities to carry forth a plan of action or make decisions. Institutionalized marginalization, in the form of racism for example, denies the social and political structures in which an individual can assert choices or make decisions. The continued absence of opportunities to fulfill one's potential means the loss of agency in such a situation. (5)

The above quoted passage records the voice of an individual under the condition of marginalization. It mainly elucidates that an individual under the colonization period could not exhibit the potentiality due to the absence of opportunities. It affirms the colonization in the form of institutionalization.

Subalternity was found and utilized in 17th century by Thomas Granger and Antonio Gramsci coined this term to recognize the cultural dominance. It was derived from Latin word „*Sub*’ and it was adopted for the purpose of military in the 18th and 19th centuries. Subaltern studies group strived hard to find the space in the vocabulary realms of the postcolonial studies and it was made popular by Gayathiri Spivak. It is illustrated as “subalternity is constituted within particular discourses such as nationalism, class and patriarchy wherein some groups, individuals, languages and forms of thought are deemed to be „subordinate””(145). It denotes the hegemony inside the particular nation especially some groups“ domination over the others. It does not confine with the singularity whereas multidimensional perspectives of domination. The reasoning line of Spivak was strengthened by Joanne Sharp through notifying the Western intellectuals. The subaltern natives are supposed to accept the Western ways of knowing otherwise they are not given the opportunity to exhibit their native ways of knowing. They must express their knowledge through the Westernized perspectives. This theory is adopted to find out the supremacy role of Europeans over Africans.

Language mastery is accounted in this research to study the language governance role of Europeans in the life of Africans. The language aspect is debatable in

postcolonial studies. The colonizers inflicted their dominant language on the colonized people and they went to the stage of forbidding the native languages of colonized people. They did not allow the colonizers to speak their mother tongue in the common place. Most of the famous writers were educated under the colonization and they very often recollect the condition of the students who studied under the colonization. They start expressing how they were demoted, manipulated and beaten for speaking native language. The language dominance is expounded in *A Thousand Plateaus Capitalism and Schizophrenia* as:

Doubtless, in the Austrian empire Czech was a minor language in relation to German; but the German of Prague already functioned as a potentially minor language in relation to the German of Vienna or Berlin; and Kafka, a Czechoslovakian Jew writing in German, submits German to creative treatment as a minor language, constructing a continuum of variation, negotiating all of the variables both to constrict the constants and to expand the variables: make language stammer, or make it "wail," stretch tensors through all of language, even written language, and draw from it cries, shouts, pitches, durations, timbres, accents, intensities. (104)

The above quotation untangles the hidden language dominance in the colonized countries. Though the quoted passage deals with the languages of German and Austrian but it refers the language role in the other country after the colonization. This concept is adopted to study the European language dominance on Africans.

Alain Mabanckou is one of the diaspora writers and his contribution to the African society is immeasurable in the aspect of literature. He is from Francophone literature though he was born in Congo. All his works replicate the voice of African diasporas and he never fails to strengthen his culture and society through his literary works. He conveys that Africans are the main cause for their unfortunate. He has written twelve novels in French but only nine novels have been translated to English. The chosen novel for this study is *Les Cigognes sont immortelles* written recently in 2018. It has been translated as *The Death of Comrade President* in 2020. The historical element of Congo after the immediate independence narrated by Papa Roger is accounted in this study to point out the subalternity role in Africa. Europeans do not leave Africa completely after giving the independence. They wish to subjugate them through the political power. Papa Roger elucidates to Michel that African people could not come out from the name French Congo. Though all the people celebrated their victory and independence, they fail to understand that they are not completely relieved from French. Michel is enlightened about the subjugation of Africans by notifying the political issues as:

But misery always hides behind the door marked “joy”: a few months after independence, the man who then still went by the name of Joseph Desire Mobutu, journalist, head of general staff and a member of Lumumba’s government, took power by force! No one understood what was going on because Lumumba and Mobutu were thought to be friends. Alas, with the connivance of the Belgian ambassador, this Mobutu first put Patrice Lumumba under house arrest in Kinshasa, then transferred him to the Katanga region. They put him there, where he was hated by the cronies of Moise Tshombe, President of the State of Katanga, a territory of the Belgian Congo with separatist tendencies, so he could be eliminated without trace and...(54)

The above passage delineates the condition of Africans after the independence. The role of subalternity is found clearly in the narration. The characters Lumumba and Mobutu are noted to elucidate the subaltern concept. Lumumba is the first prime minister after the independence and the people are joyful because they do not understand the misery which waits for them.

Lumumba and Mobutu seem to be close friends but Mobutu is influenced by Belgian ambassador and he is tempted to kill the peace of his country. In order to suppress the African people, he attempts to take over the political power through the forced condition. His temptation makes him to forget the friendship and patriotic feel. When the Belgian government understands that they could not interfere in the issue of Congo, they make an attempt to kill the power of Lumumba. Their choice is Mobutu to execute this act by giving him the desire of power. It is successfully done. Lumumba is taken under house arrest and he is transferred to the territory of Belgian Congo in order to kill him. So that the murder of Lumumba does not disturb the peace of the country and there may no follower with arms to disturb the common activities by the name of death of Lumumba. This episode deciphers the subalternity role of Europeans on Africans. Africans are not left independent after independence. The subaltern role continues till now and they are still subjugated in any one of the significant areas.

The language mastery denotes the rule of language in Africa. Though Africa has got the independence from France, the French does not leave Africa entirely. Most of the Africans still are influenced by Africans. They do not give preference to their native language while they speak among themselves. The French speaking Africans are highly respected in the society and most of the village people attempt learning French in order to get the respect from the society. Though they speak their native language, most of the words are from French. Michel delineates that:

She's back on her feet. She brushes the dust off her by flapping a bit of cloth about her knees and anywhere else where they show her there's still some left. Then they all embrace, talking in Bembe. Uncle Rene's Bembe is easy to understand: he mixes up so much French with it that you'd think French was copying words from our language, when in fact it's the other way round. (47)

This passage expounds the language manipulation in Africa because Africans are still under the colonization. They have the psyche that French are greater than Africans. This feel leaves them under the colonized role. This research explains that Africa is under the colonization ever after the independence. The postcolonial concepts namely subalternity and language mastery have been adopted to find out the existence of colonial rule. It further elucidates that Africans do not have the independent thought and they lose their self identity by having higher thought about France.

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