The Development of Postcolonial Theory

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Elem Eyrice Tepeciklioğlu
Yaşar University, Department of International Relations
email: elem.tepeciklioglu@yasar.edu.tr

ABSTRACT

Post-colonial theory is a post-positivist/reflectivist/constitutive and non-mainstream International Relations (IR)\(^1\) theory which posits a critical thinking to dominant IR theories. It is assumed to offer an alternative to the Eurocentric stance and concepts of classical International Relations theories and carry a potential to move beyond these mainstream theories, even to restructure them. Post-colonial theoreticians, like all critical scholars, have tried to shift the classical thinking in the discipline and save it from the hegemony of Western conceptions by challenging “Western-theorizing” and “decolonizing” it. However, it is not a single theory but a set of different theories. There is an immense diversity of post-colonial theory which focus on different issues such as literature, art, music, linguistics, slavery, migration, discrimination, historiography and discusses different kinds of subjugation like racism, gender, nationalism and identity.

Both subaltern and post-colonial studies are based on the main aspects of colonialism and its pervasive effects which have persisted remarkably even after the end of the colonial rule. As the term implies, the historical phenomenon of colonialism, that is to say, colonial practices, the foundations of authority and imperial dominance in European colonies and/or protectorates is at the heart of the post-colonial writings. The literature, therefore, shows consensus in using the concept of post-colonialism to cover all practices used in the process
starting from the beginnig of colonialism till today. This paper aims to introduce some of the key arguments and issues of this theory -which was largely ignored by IR theoreticians- as well as the most important debates in recent post-colonial theory. The theory will be elaborated by analyzing the writings of the most important figures in the field such as Memmi, Fanon, Césaire and their successors like Said, Spivak, Bhabha and Chakrabarty. The influence of leading scholars as Foucault and Gramsci on the construction of many post-colonial critical accounts is the last concern of this study. In the conclusion, the potential of post-colonial theory to offer an alternative to classic International Relations theories and to create an egalitarian non-Western IR will tried to be analyzed.

**Keywords:** Post-colonial Theory, Subaltern Studies, Colonialism, Post-colonialism.

1. **The Concept of “Post-colonial”**

The term “post-colonial” may be assumed to be misleading since it refers to the period when the colonies of ex-European empires became independent sovereign states. However, this definition would only mean that the colonial rule ceased by its all means. Given that the political independence is even an illusion for these ex-colonies, colonialism continues in a neo-colonial mode after taking different forms. For these countries, the achievement of political independence did not solve the problems which was expected to be overcome by expelling colonial masters but instead, new forms of domination appeared. New élites in these independent countries emerged and sustained the rule based on the exploitation of certain classes and colonialism reproduced itself under the name of neo-colonialism. In other words, modern international system does only have a formal appearence of decolonization. The literature, therefore, shows consensus in using the concept of post-colonialism to cover all practices used in the process starting from the beginnig of colonialism till today.

Post-colonialism is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction and post-colonial theory, thereby, involves discussion about previously-mentioned experience of various kinds such as slavery, displacement, emigration, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, racial and cultural discrimination and gender; none of which is ‘essentially’ post-colonial, but together they form the complex fabric of the field. The term ‘post-colonial’ has come to stand for “both the material effects of colonisation and the huge diversity of everyday and sometimes hidden responses to it.” This word, then, represents the continuing process of imperial suppressions and exchanges throughout this diverse range of societies, in their institutions and practices. Like the description of any other field the term has come to mean many things (Ashcroft et all, 2003, pp. 2-7). The rich heterogeneity of this
theory and the immense range of studies from which the theorization of post-colonial literatures has emerged indicates that the task undertaken by the post-colonial theory is not an easy one.

Post-colonial and subaltern studies also point out the legacies of colonial era, particularly in the economic field, which reproduces the unequal relations between the metropolitain centres and their ex-colonies. Similar to the colonization period, ex-colonial powers import raw materials from these countries and sell high-technology products in return. The only area that the poor countries of the South can have comparative advantage is the agricultural products on which Western nations impose high tariffs. The main target of the current anti-globalization movements, therefore, is the World Trade Organization since it is argued that free-trade or economic liberalization is not in the interest of the South. These countries with no well-developed industries have to open their markets to the high-tech products of Western nations while their own products lack the capacity to contest in the international markets. However, these unfortunate outcomes of “economic globalization” for the Third World countries are the issue of another paper. In the next section, the wide diversity of post-colonial studies and the related terminology used in this literature will be elaborated by epitomizing the major works of the pioneering scholars including Memmi, Fanon, Césaire and their successors such as Said, Spivak, Bhabha and Chakrabarty after briefly analyzing the emergence of the post-colonial theory.

2. The Footsteps of a Theory

International Relations theories are assumed to be divided into two distinct traditions: The positivist/rationalist/explanatory theories of neo-realism, neo-liberalism and -as increasingly accepted by many scholars- social constructivism. The second tradition of post-positivist/reflectivist/constitutive theories is comprised of several different approaches which are only united in their opposition to the main claims of the mainstream IR theories and are listed generally as critical theory, historical sociology, feminism, normative theory, post-modernism and post-colonial theory. The former mainstream IR theories dominated the field for nearly the entire period since the conception of the discipline which is traced to the founding of a first chair of IR; Woodrow Wilson Chair at Aberystwyth, University of Wales and are more popular within the USA while the latter IR theories, purporting to offer an alternative to the positivist tradition of IR is popular outside the States. However, recent challenges, particularly after the Cold War era, made the emergence of new approaches which would eventually erode the privileged status of mainstream IR theories, indispensable. The rise
of critical approaches in the 1980s and especially after the 1990s, had heralded a new era in IR thinking and theorizing.

Post-colonial IR theory, like all critical approaches to IR, have gained popularity after the end of the bipolar system, when the ability of dominant IR theories to explain the nature of the international system relatively decreased. Although there were already leading studies on the post-colonial field, particularly following the independence movements of the colonial people, these studies were then not identified with a post-colonial theory. Academic community witnessed the explosion of post-colonial literatures, in the 1990s, when the critical approaches challenged the classical thinking and the dominant theories in the field of IR. Much of these thought-provoking and challenging works in the field is built upon the earliest writers such as Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Albert Memmi and Edward Said, who strongly contributed to the development of a post-colonial account, introduced main assumptions of post-colonial theory and laid the groundwork for a post-colonial terminology. In this part of this paper, which aims to provide an introductory guide to post-colonial theory, therefore, the contributions of these scholars to the field will be analyzed without going into details. Post-colonial studies are based on the main aspects of colonialism and its pervasive effects which have persisted remarkably even after the end of the colonial rule. Thereby, the historical phenomenon of colonialism, that is to say, colonial practices, the foundations of authority and imperial dominance in European colonies and/or protectorates is at the heart of the post-colonial writings. All of these writers, notwithstanding certain commonalities and a concentration on the negative and destructive effects of colonization on the colonized subjects, contain different emphasis. Starting from Fanon, the ideas of these influential and leading writers may be epitomized as following.

Fanon is one of the first figures that comes to one’s mind when the issue is post-colonialism. He was born in the French colony of Martinique and as a black intellectual, he was known for his analysis of the relationship between colonialism and racism. His medical and psychological practice enabled him to focus on harmful psychological effects of colonial administration and racist policies conducted under colonial rule. However, Fanon did not only concerned with the psychology of the colonized people but also with their colonial masters. As a psychiatrist, Fanon defines colonialism as a source of violence and focuses on its psychological effects on human conscious since he believed that only a psychoanalytical interpretation of the black problem can lay bare the anomalies of the effects of colonialism. Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (originally published in 1961), is a foundational text in post-colonial literature. In this book, Fanon considers violence, which, in his thought and
many of the post-colonial writers, has ruled over the ordering of the colonial world, as a destruction form of native social forms without reserving the systems of reference of the economy, the customs of dress and external life. To Fanon, this violence affirmed the supremacy of white values and the aggressiveness which has permeated the victory of these values over the ways of life. Fanon furthers his argument by holding that in the colonial countries, the agents of government speak the language of pure force and the means of oppression and/or domination brings violence into the home and into the mind of the native (1963, pp. 37-42).

In his Black Skin, White Masks (originally published in 1952), another significant work on post-colonial literature which Fanon defines as a book of a clinical study, he notes that: “There is a fact: White men consider themselves superior to black men. There is another fact: Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect.” Fanon holds that if there is an inferiority complex of the Black man, it is the outcome of a double process; primarily, economic and subsequently, the internalization of this inferiority. While attempting at a psychopathological and philosophical explanation of the state of being (emphasis in original) a Negro, Fanon tried to establish the attitudes of the Black man in the white world and concluded that a Negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro. This self-division, according to Fanon, wa a direct result of colonialist subjugation and the theories that have tried to prove that the Negro is at an early stage in the slow evolution of being a man (2008, pp. 3-8). Although Fanon noted that his observations and his conclusions were valid only for the Antilles, his writings strongly inspired anti-colonial independence movements particularly in the African continent.

As noted, Aimé Césaire who was also from Martinique like Fanon, was an influential figure in shaping the ideas of current post-colonial writers. In Discourse on Colonialism (originally published in 1955), which later become a classic text in post-colonial studies, Césaire holds that colonization actually dicivilizes the colonizers and brutalize them in the true sense of the word. By equating colonization with “thingification,” Césaire claims that what Western civilization cannot forgive Hitler for is not the crime in itself but the crime against the white man and the fact that he applied colonialist practices in the European continent. This prominent claim of Césaire is called a “pseudo-humanism” of European colonial powers again by the writer himself. Césaire also argues that colonization destroyed the great civilizations including the civilizations of the Aztecs and the Incas and ruined the cultures and institutions, religions and national economies of societies which were once democratic, cooperative and fraternal (1972, pp. 2-7). Césaire is also the acknowledged
inventor of the famous term “negritude” which was defined by him as “the simple recognition of the fact of being black, and the acceptance of this fact, of our destiny as blacks, of our history and of our culture” (Quotation from Vaillant, by Thompson, 2002, p. 144). Césaire, therefore, emphasized the need to the development of colonial societies and the resistance to the discriminatory policies of colonizers by their own sources. By doing this, he tried to make the native people who were alienated to their own culture under colonial rule and who were ashamed of being Negroes, to realize their internal strength. In his introduction to Césaire’s distinguished poetry book Return to my Native Land, Kunene notes that negritude was essentially a doctrine “which asserts the blackman as a man with his own culture, his own civilization and his own original contributions” (1969, p. 20). What Césaire desired was the recognition of Negros to their own achievements in social, cultural and economic terrains which was denied by the major colonial powers.ii

The best-known work of Albert Memmi, another influential writer of post-colonial critique, is The Colonizer and the Colonized which was originally published in 1957 when the independence movements in the colonies were active including his own country, Tunisia. In this thought-provoking book, Memmi analyzes the psychological effects of colonialism like Fanon and his analysis includes both the colonized subjects and colonizers themselves. As Sartre points out in the preface of this book, Memmi, a Tunisian, belongs to one of those native but non-Muslim groups that are “more or less privileged in comparison with the colonized masses, but… rejected … by the colonizing group.” Sartre, therefore, tries to explore “who Memmi really is?” and maintains that he would say “neither the colonizer nor the colonized” or “both”iii (2003, pp. 17-18). This spiritual “twofold rejection” and “twofold liability” nourished Memmi’s writings. Memmi notes that although it is impossible for the colonizer to be aware of the illegitimacy of his status, the simple truth is that they are not concerned about the life of the colonized subjects more than they are worried about the weather of the colony where they will reside. By asking for how long the colonizer fail to see “the misery of the colonized and the relation of that misery to his own comfort”, Memmi maintains that the colonizer actually realizes that this was an easy profit and it was so great only because it is wrested from others. He, therefore, discovers the existence of the colonizer and his own privilege at the same time:

If his living standards are high, it is because those of the colonized are low; if he can benefit from plentiful and undemanding labor and servants, it is because the colonized can be exploited at will and are not protected by the laws of the colony; if he can easily obtain administrative positions, it is because they are reserved for him and the colonized are excluded from them; the more freely he breathes, the more the colonized are choked… If he preferred to be blind and deaf to the operation of the whole machinery, it
would suffice for him to reap its benefits; he is then the beneficiary of the entire enterprise (pp. 51-52).

Nearly forty years later from the publication of *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, another significant work of Memmi entered into the post-colonial debate in late 2006: *Decolonization and the Decolonized*. In the introduction of this work, which Memmi regards as the continuation of *The Colonizer and the Colonized* to some extent, he acknowledges that nothing really seems to change for the former colonies after the years of national liberation and the independent states failed to solve the problems such as malnutrition, famine, political crisis, widespread corruption and tyranny (pp. x-xi).

The first version of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, which is also defined as a seminal work in the post-colonial field together with that of Memmi, Fanon and Césaire’s, was published in 1977. In Said’s analysis, the term orientalism, connotes “the high-handed executive attitude of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century European colonialism.” By taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point of Orientalism, he also defines the concept as a “Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.” Said claims that the presentation of the “Orient” by the Western world was used to justify the colonial ambitions of these powers. Moreover, the relationship between Occident and Orient is itself a relationship of power, domination and varying degrees of a complex hegemony. “In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse, whose material presence or weight, not the originality of a given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it.” In criticizing the misrepresentation of colonial people in the political-intellectual field, Said heavily draws the work of Michel Foucault. He explicitly notes that he finds it useful to employ Foucault’s notion of discourse as described by him in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and in *Discipline and Punish*, to identify Orientalism. He further argues that “without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage -and even produce- the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period.” It is perhaps in the nature of the creation of an identity itself to arrive at a definition of a “self” in contrast with “the other.” Said explores how European culture gained strength and identity by defining itself as against the Orient. Following Foucault’s ideas on the relationship between power and knowledge, Said defined Orientalism as a discourse which is produced with various kinds of power including power political, power intellectual, power cultural and power moral (1979, pp. 2-12, 94).
The ideas of the aforementioned writers have strongly influenced the current writers in the field and as all of these scholars pointed out, the main feature of post-colonial theory is the examination of the continued heritage of colonialism. Post-colonial theory discussed and theorized a wide range of issues like racism, slavery, nationalism, identity, migration and the legacy of European colonial and imperial histories as well as practices. The theory also questions the main concepts of mainstream IR theories such as power, hegemony, anarchy, discourse, norms and etc. The ideas of some major scholars in the post-colonial literature and the key concepts developed by these writers—which are accepted to be central to post-colonial theory—will also be elaborated within the following few paragraphs. These selected writers include Gayatri Spivak and the terms that she used frequently in her writings such as “subaltern” and “othering”, Homi K. Bhabha who coined a number of the post-colonial field’s neologisms including “hybridity”, “mimicry”, “ambivalence” and “stereotype” finally, Dipesh Chakrabarty who strongly criticized the historiography of Western scholars.

3. Contemporary Post-colonial Scholars

“Subaltern” is one of Spivak’s most-cited but also frequently misinterpreted concepts that she used in order to draw attention to the representation of the Third World within Western discourse. The term “subaltern”, meaning of “inferior rank”, is a term adopted by Antonio Gramsci to refer to those “groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes. Subaltern classes may include peasants, workers and other groups denied access to ‘hegemonic’ power.” Spivak emphasizes that the essential subjectivity of the subaltern was constrained by the discourses within which they are constructed as subaltern, in this respect, it would be misleading to assert that it was a simple matter of allowing the subaltern (oppressed) forces to speak.

Her controversial question “Can the Subaltern Speak?” was frequently misinterpreted to mean that there was no way in which subaltern peoples could ever attain a voice. In fact, Spivak’s essay is not an assertion of the inability of the subaltern voice to be accessed or given agency, but only a warning to avoid the idea that the subaltern can ever be isolated in some absolute, essentialist way from the play of discourses and institutional practices that give it its voice (Ashcroft et all, 1998, pp. 79, 215).

The concept of “Other” and characterization of colonial subjects through dominant colonialist discourses, discursive practices, or assumed “scientific” race theories which explain the inferiority of the colonized also have a crucial place in post-colonial literatures. In colonial era, with help of the “modern” sciences, the cultural basis of othering was laid through the notions of superior race and mission civilatrice. The term “othering” was actually coined by Spivak for the process by which colonial powers create their “others” through discourses. While the construction of the Other is fundamental to the construction of
the Self, the “Other” corresponds to the focus of desire or power in relation to which the subject is produced. Spivak draws attention to the process by which the other is the excluded or “mastered” subject created by the discourse of power. Othering describes the various ways in which colonial discourse produces its subjects and to Spivak, it is a dialectical process because “the colonizing Other is established at the same time as its colonized others are produced as subjects” (Ashcroft et all, 1998, pp. 171-172). Spivak points out that the discourses of the West created the subaltern through continuing construction and historical silencing. Not surprisingly, therefore, “subaltern cannot speak” (1988, pp. 271-275, 308). However, even the word “subaltern” is an invention for Spivak who points out that “simply by being post-colonial or the member of an ethnic minority, we are not subaltern. That word is reserved for the sheer heterogeneity of decolonized space” (1999, p. 310). Spivak shows how a particular representation of an object which may, as with Orientalism, is entirely constructed with no existence or reality outside its representation. “Where such history does not take the form of a representation, Spivak argues that it generally consists of a historical narrative, usually one written from the perspective and assumptions of the West or the colonizing power.” She gives the example of the history of India which, she argues is being represented by its imperial masters as a “homogeneous” entity. Spivak’s aim is to work against such imperialist representations and narrativizations of history and to introduce a true history instead (Young, 2004, pp. 200-201).

Bhabha is one of the most important thinkers in the influential movement in cultural theory called post-colonial criticism and his work develops a set of challenging concepts that are central to post-colonial theory that describe ways in which colonized peoples have resisted the power of the colonizer (Huddart, 2006, p. 1). Bhabha explains these concepts, all of which are highly related with each other and the colonial discourse, in his prominent *The Location of Culture* (1994). Let me start with how Bhabba evaluates the concept of “stereotype” - an increasingly important term in post-colonial theory- in the colonial discourse: While drawing attention to stereotypes that colonial discourse creates, Bhabba raises the idea that an important feature of this discourse is its dependence on the concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness. The process of ambivalence is also central to the stereotype and one of the most significant discursive and psychical strategies of discriminatory power in Bhabba’s analysis of colonial discourse (1994, p. 66). The stereotype, in Bhabba’s analysis, is the primary subjectification in colonial discourse, for both colonizer and colonized, however, it is also the scene where the desire for originality is again threatened by the differences of race, colour and culture. Here, Bhabba refers to Fanon’s *Black Skin,
White Masks and argues that his contention is caught in this book, “where the disavowal of difference turns the colonial subject into a misfit – a grotesque mimicry.. the stereotype is.. a false representation of a given reality… and a limited form of otherness” (pp. 75-77). However, the relationship between the colonizer and colonized is ambivalent since the colonized subject never completely opposes the colonizer. Ambivalence is therefore an unwelcome aspect of colonial discourse for the colonizer which suggests that complicity and resistance exist in a fluctuating relation within the colonial subject. As Ashcroft et al emphasizes, “ambivalence also characterizes the way in which colonial discourse relates to the colonized subject, for it may be both exploitative and nurturing, or represent itself as nurturing, at the same time.” Although the colonial discourse wants to produce compliant subjects who ‘mimic’ the colonizer, it produces ambivalent subjects whose mimicry is never very far from mockery (Ashcroft et al, 1998, pp. 12-13).

Mimicry, which connotes the ambivalent relationship between the colonizer and colonized, has also a significant place in Bhabba’s analysis. Although the colonial discourse encourages the colonized subject to ‘mimic’ the colonizer, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits but a ‘blurred copy’ of the colonizer. “Mimicry therefore locates a crack in the certainty of colonial dominance, an uncertainty in its control of the behaviour of the colonized” (Ashcroft et al, 1998, p. 139). Huddart notes that mimicry, in Bhabba’s writing, is an exaggerated copying of language, culture, manners, and ideas and here, the exaggeration means that mimicry is repetition with difference (Huddart, p. 39). To Bhabba, “Mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” (1994, p. 85). Colonial mimicry, which represents an ironic compromise, “is the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite, the colonized, therefore, become almost the same but not white” (emphasis in original). “The discourse of mimicry, which is constructed around an ambivalence, “emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal” (pp. 86-89). As Bhabba emphasizes, mimicry has a double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority (p. 88).

The term ‘hybridity’ has also been most recently associated with the work of Homi K. Bhabha (Ashcroft et all, 1998, p. 118). Bhabha stresses the existence of hybridity of cultures, or mixedness within every form of identity. In the case of cultural identities, hybridity refers to the fact that cultures are always in contact with one another, and this contact leads to cultural mixedness (Huddart, p. 4). Bhabba also notes that the language of the master also becomes hybrid in the practice of domination -neither the one thing nor the other. The
colonized subject under this domination is also incalculable - half acquiescent, half oppositional and always untrustworthy- and this hybridity, as Bhabha understands it, produces an unresolvable problem of cultural difference for the colonial authority (p. 33). The above-mentioned concepts that Bhabba developed are frequently used by many post-colonial scholars, whereas his contributions to the field are questioned by some writers who assert that he is only good at neologies, however the presentation of these critiques is beyond the scope of this paper.

The relationship between knowledge and power is also crucial in the post-colonial critique: As also emphasized by Said who followed the ideas of Foucault, colonial powers were holding the access to knowledge and power during the colonial era: While the colonial subjects were learning the European languages, culture, literature and history, they knew little about their own heroes since it was believed that these people enjoyed no historical records worthy of note before the conquest of colonial powers. This view ignored the great ancient civilizations established long before the European arrival. Chakrabarty, who is also an acknowledged important figure in the post-colonial critique explores the ways postcolonial discourse affects history-writing. By doing this, Chakrabarty does not only criticize Western historiography but also focus on the failure of “subaltern” to represent themselves. He asserts that post-colonialists have failed to write their own histories. While analyzing the idea of “Indians” representing themselves in history, Chakrabarty believes that as the academic discourse of history is concerned, “Europe” remains the sovereign subject of all histories and all these other third world histories, which are in a position of subalternity, including that of India’s, become variations on a master narrative that could be called “the history of Europe.” The subalternity of these non-Western histories is also nourished from the fact that third world historians feel a need to refer to works in European history whereas historians of Europe who produce their work by ignoring non-Western histories, do not feel the same necessity. To Chakrabarty, “the dominance of “Europe as the subject of all histories is a part of a much more profound theoretical condition under which historical knowledge is produced in the third world.” However, Chakrabarty also notes that this is not a peculiar to historians but instead, this ignorance is also available in literary studies (1992, pp. 1-2). The writers of The Empire Writes Back (originally published in 1989) tries to fill this gap by writing back to the center. Interestingly, these ex-colonial people uses the colonizers’ language when writing their own histories. The writers in this volume have all rewritten particular works from the English ‘canon’ with a view to restructuring European ‘realities’ in post-colonial terms (2002, p. 32). As McLeod notes, postcolonialism involves the challenge to colonial ways of
knowing, “writing back” in opposition such views although colonial ways of knowing is still present (McLeod, 2000, p. 32). There are obviously many writers who influence the post-colonial account with their valued ideas and scholars who expressed sympathy for the field as well as many critics, however, it is far beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the assumptions of all post-colonial writers, and the entire debates in the post-colonial field. A limitation was inevitable and focusing on the main representatives of the post-colonial critique was preferred in order to provide a better understanding for the terminology used in the paper.

4. Imagining a Post-colonial IR

Post-colonial theory offers a critical thinking to dominant International Relations theories while focusing on the main concepts and terminology used in the IR literature. While doing so, it uses many of the same terminology of critical theory. The post-colonial scholars in diverse fields, sharing different scholarly interests, generally focus their critique on the Western-centred thinking of the colonial world and they, therefore, intend to provide an alternative to the Western-theorizing. There is a growing body of post-colonial work, concentrating on issues including literature, language, art, racism, nationalism and so forth. The theory also involves discussion about the ways current IR theories analyze - but generally marginalize - the post-colonial world and emphasizes the requirement of a post-colonial theorizing. The post-colonial scholars further criticize IR for being a discipline which privileges the studies of Anglo-American scholars and academic terms of Western world. Although such post-colonial thinkers contain internal differences, as Neufeld emphasizes, “there is no reason that post-colonial theory should be all of a piece.” However, Neufeld also points out that conceptualizing and respecting that plurality and also constructing and representing a theoretical tradition - as “wholly other” is a problematic move (2009, p.2).

The post-colonial scholars criticize the ignorance of non-Western world both in international relations studies and IR theorizing. Neuman also notes that the role of the Third World in international relations is largely unexplored in the literature and International Relations Theory have been relatively silent on this issue. Moreover, even central concepts of IR theory including anarchy, the state, sovereignty, rational choice, alliance and the international system, as Neuman itemizes, are troublesome when applied to Third World countries. Mainstream IR theories are originated largely in the USA and interested exclusively what happens and happened in the West. In this respect, most IR theorists believe that “studying the Western experience is empirically sufficient to establish general laws” for
different units of analysis and few of these theoreticians look to the Third World to find evidence for their arguments (1998, pp. 1-2). It is essentially this Eurocentric attitude of Western theorists that many of the post-colonial and subaltern writers criticize. Post-colonial theory and the epistemological position of Southern countries are largely neglected in International Relations thinking. In fact, post-colonial approaches generally criticize the existing IR theories by employing the concepts that comply with the realities of the “core” countries but cannot explain the individuality of the post-colonial world. Moreover, since these theoreticians generally incline to treat their assumptions as universal, other cases which deviate from the general trend are regarded as a failure. For instance, since the theories of International Relations assume that the dominant actors in international system is the states, the states that cannot meet the Westphalian criteria have been accepted as illegitimate or simply being weak, failed, quasi; unable to provide the basic social and economic needs of their own citizens. International Relations scholarship is also concerned with the relations between the great powers whereas the underdeveloped parts of the system are not represented in the field. The discipline of International Relations is further criticized for being dominated by Western scholars and for not allowing many authors from non-Western countries to publish in IR journals. Simply put, post-colonial writers intend to indicate that dominant IR theories fail to understand the dynamics of the colonial world, therefore, the development of available approaches from below are necessary.

The Eurocentric thought in International Relations is criticized by many scholars by arguing that the standard reference points of the discipline are drawn from Europe’s “internal” history and the disciplinary canon consists of European classical thought. Jones notes that the colonial past is absent in IR’s self-representation although the discipline’s founding years coincides with a period when the colonial powers of Europe were occupying and controlling vast areas of the world. Moreover, the studies of IR have little to say about the decolonization period and therefore, one of the most important historical processes of the century is removed from the theories and substantive concerns of IR (2006, pp. 1-9). Krishna describes this systematic politics of forgetting of IR as a “willful amnesia” (2006, p. 89). Although the European state system and its role in world affairs since the sixteenth century is accepted as the root of modern international relations since “European history remains fundamental to our understanding of the contemporary world”, for most of the world, the major defining form of international relations is the history of colonialism and its pervasive effects on the ex-colonies (Jones, pp. 3-4 and Halperin, 2006, p. 43). For Jones, diminishing the importance of colonialism to the study of international relations is to diminish the significance of all peoples
who suffered colonialism. It is, therefore, a great necessity to contribute to a better understanding of international relations, its history and world order where unequal power relations prevail by confronting the colonial legacy that modern IR has failed to shed and by a critical survey of recognized IR by means of a broader form of critique that encompasses the discipline as a whole. Decolonizing knowledge and telling the real history of Europe has an important place in post-colonial and subaltern studies (2006, pp. 3-8).

4.1 Decolonizing IR and International Relations Theories

In 1977, Stanley Hoffmann depicted International Relations as an American social science and more than two decades later, in 2000, Steve Smith noted that although there were promising developments within the field, particularly in the UK, including the increase in the opposition to positivism in international relations and more openness in the UK academic community, it was the US academic community that still dominated the discipline and the mainstream US literature was anything like as open or pluralist. Vasquez had previously indicated in 1998 that the discipline is dominated primarily by the parameters of the realist paradigm and further, some of the fundamental assumptions of this theory are shared by most scholars in the discipline while the assertions of other approaches are confined to a narrower group.

Generally, the study of IR neglected the intellectuals of the global South and their roles in the continuity and change in the discipline. Mgonja and Makombe draws a postcolonial approach to critique the Eurocentric nature and character of IR discipline and its negligence on what happens or happened outside the West. The authors claim that IR privileges the Eurocentric world views as an integral to the ordering and functioning of the discipline and the aspects of ‘high politics’ at the expense of Third World or peripheries (Mgonja and Makombe, 2009, pp. 27-29). Dunn argues that the marginalization of Africa in the political field -a continent which has a long colonial history- has a correlation in the continent’s marginalization by the dominant (Western-produced) IR theories: “Africa has long been absent in theorizing about world politics.” Neorealism, for example, unabashedly focuses on the so-called “great” powers of IR. Africa and the Third World have no place in their systemic analysis (2001, p. 2). Chen also holds that here is apparently no non-Western IR theory in Asia: Re-envisioning IR in Asia is about “reorienting IR itself towards a post-Western era that does not reinforce the hegemony of the West within (and without) the discipline” (2011). As noted by Makram, relatively little research has been done on the regional, i.e. Asian, African and/or Latin American contribution to international relations
theories whereas the regionally dictated contextual factors shape both regional thinking and the choices of decisionmakers in policies and actions in international politics. Although the general view was that Third World countries, especially those with comparatively less resources, are not expected to be as proficient in academic research as those of the First and Second World nations, Makram examines the spectrum of Latin American contributions to IR theorizing (2006).

The post-colonial approaches mainly focus their critique on the dominant IR theory of the Cold War Years; realism, along with the theory’s state-centred and security-oriented analysis which mainly ignored the existence of the Third World and its intrinsic characteristics in international realm. Realism regards IR as a field about the politics of powerful states in the international system. The theory focuses on inter-state relations and the rise and fall of these powerful states while referring to the history of IR as successive struggles between Great Powers. The subject matter for realism, therefore, is to find the causes of war. Traditional IR theory concentrates mainly on the state while ignoring the significance of non-state actors, particularly in the post-colonial world.

It is acknowledged that the founding figures of classical and neo-realism were not in favor of including the Third World to their analysis. In his Theory of International Politics, Kenneth Waltz states that “it would be . . . ridiculous to construct a theory of international politics on Malaysia and Costa Rica... Concern with international politics as a system requires concentration on the states that make the most difference. A general theory of international politics is necessarily based on the great powers” (1979, pp. 72-73). In his textbook, Politics Among Nations, Morgenthau states that Africa, which was a “politically empty space”, did not have a history before the Second World War (1979, p. 369). The whole issue of power presented by Morgenthau is a representative of an entire set of western ideas and assumptions with little apparent reference to the Third World’s reality. Moreover, as Neuman argues, the prominent assumption of Mearsheimer’s neo-realism that “international system is anarchie” cannot be applied to most less developed countries who perceive the international system to be ordered by Great Powers and international institutions governed by these powerful states who ignore the other parts of the world. The idea of anarchy might well function within Great Powers, however, for the Third World, it sounds like a hierarchical structure that constraints their external behaviour (Mgonja and Makombe, and Neuman quoted, pp. 28-31). Anarchy loses its conceptual relevance when applied to weak countries since these states relate with the world under hierarchical conditions. Furthermore, international issues don’t always reside in the core countries, state is problematic as a primary category of IR and ignorance of what
goes on inside the state is assumed to be largely irrelevant in explaining developments within
the international system (Tickner, pp. 309-319).

While criticizing the traditional assumption of Orthodox IR that “historical recognition can
be achieved only through the assumption of national identity and state form,” Saurin also
asserts that the necessity to decolonize IR is as urgent as ever. He asks the crucial question of
“how many works in international theory take as their historical referent or object of inquiry
any non-Western states” and similar to Krishna, he argues that IR scholarship present the
colonized as much through omission (2006, pp. 24-33). Holsti evaluates this state-centric
approach in a rather different way and notes that wars can no longer be regarded as a contest
of arms between states -or between great powers- but the rise of non-state actors as
participants in wars is quite remarkable. By providing empirical data, Holsti affirms that
between 1945 and 1995, ninety-nine percent of the war casualties have occurred in the Third
World and the majority of these incidents are intra-state wars. As Holsti points out, wars
today are less a problem of the relations between states than a problem within states. Holsti
further argues that the realist and neo-realist prediction that in any system of anarchy, wars
must occur with some regularity is not borne out by the data since three regions -Western
Europe, South America and North America- have been free of interstate war for more than a
half-century and two regions, namely Europe and North America, have been relatively free of
all kinds of war during the same period (1996, pp. xi, 25, 141).

I argue with Malaquias, who takes Africa as a case to analyze the position of
contemporary IR theories, and argue that the mainstream IR theories devised to explain and
predict the behavior of Western states are not adequate for Africa and African(ist) theories of
international relations, thereby, it should be avoided to adapt essentially Western and state-
centric models of IR to Africa. In the continent, state formation is still ongoing and there are a
myriad of units of analysis other than the state itself, such as armed nationalist movements
and ethnic groups. While situating modern IR theory as the product of European historical
realities, Malaquias notes that in order to confront the hegemonic position of the state-centric
approach and replace it with more inclusive conceptualizations including fundamentally
different ideas about the appropriate units of analysis, the important processes, and the kind of
context within which actions and processes take place, African(ist) IR theories have to
develop new frameworks that take into account factors like nation and ethnicity as crucial
elements to explain and predict the behavior of African states (2001, pp. 11-16, 27).

Dunn is of the opinion that neo-liberals re-employ a similarly narrow “great-power”
focus in their own theorizing while critiquing neorealism. He also notes that the
marginalization of Africa by these theoreticians is based on their view that the continent lacks hegemonic power (p. 2). It is true that although liberals stressed the centrality of non-state actors, neo-liberalism -like neo-realism- takes states as the primary actor in world politics (Smith, 1997, p. 171). Liberal IR theory, as Moravcsik puts, is a theory which contends that state-society relations have a fundamental impact on state behavior in world politics and societal ideas, interests, and institutions influence state behavior by shaping state preferences. Moravcsik, argues that there are three variants of liberal theory, namely, ideational, commercial, and republican liberalism, while noting that “the configuration of state preferences matters most in world politics -not, as realists argue, the configuration of capabilities and not, as institutionalists (that is, functional regime theorists) maintain, the configuration of information and institutions” (1997, p. 513).

Nkiwane, who holds that liberalism has made a significant contribution to international relations theory, examines African challenges to liberalism in IR and question why liberal scholars have been silent with regard to Africa although in Nkiwane’s view, African examples and African scholarship lend important insights and critiques to the liberal perspective in IR. However, Nkiwane acknowledges that this negligence of Africa in theory building is not peculiar to the liberal tradition- To Nkiwane, the liberal IR theory does not take Africa seriously and African examples as well as African perspectives which are regarded as primarily of nuisance (emphasis added) value. Here, the main assumption, made by many liberal theorists is that Africa has little to contribute with respect to either liberal democracy or consumer capitalism. However, as Nkiwane puts, although liberal perspective emphasizes fundamental rights of individuals, these individual rights and freedoms advocated by liberal theorists were applied historically in a racialized and exclusive manner in the African context, with liberalism virtually silent on this selective application and further, in the case of liberalism, Eurocentric assertions are too often represented as fact. Nkiwane criticizes liberal theorists for dismissing an entire continent as irrelevant to a theory that expounds a “universal” message (2001, pp. 103-106, 111).

It is argued that critical theory also fails to address the Eurocentric nature of the knowledge production in IR, even though it interrogates many of the assumptions of conventional IR. Critical theory is claimed to ignore the Third World and its relevance in international politics despite its commitment on revealing and challenging global hierarchies and hegemonic power. Moreover, critical theory has engaged very little with postcolonial scholars who also offer a critical thinking to dominant IR theories (Mgonja and Makombe and Hutchings quoted pp. 28-34). Jones suggest that:
Even critical IR, which claims to be centrally concerned with questions of emancipation and social transformation, has turned almost exclusively to Europe’s heritage of critical thought (Kant, Hegel, Marx, Gramsci, Adorno, Horkheimer and Habermas). Critical IR has overlooked the histories and thought of anticolonial struggles—which surely constitute major historical struggles for emancipation and social transformation in the context of international relations. It seems remarkable that few of IR’s self-identified critical theorists have sought to learn from Fanon, Cabral, or Gandhi alongside Gramsci, Adorno, and Habermas (Jones, p. 12).

Marxism has clearly influenced the thinking of postcolonial scholarship. However, as pointed out by Mgonja and Makombe, Said noted that Marx was justifying Western imperialism by pointing to its potentially progressive effects. The ideas of Marx, especially on colonialism, is the main underlying reason behind the postcolonial argument that “the foundationalist and universalist assumption of Marxism need to be rejected to further a genuinely non-Eurocentric history” (pp. 32-33). However, it should also be noted that the afore-mentioned ideas of Marx and also his view that all societies go through similar stages in order to reach the last stage of historical development, namely communism and colonialism was a phase in the historical development of capitalism as well as in the national economies of the colonized territories, are criticized by the Marxist themselves within the Marxist theory.

Although in order to understand the nature of inequality, feminist approaches focus on gender politics, power relations and sexuality, Mgonja and Makombe question the relevance and applicability of these theories to non-Western women. As they note, many justify intervention by Western women in the lives of non-Western women, the idea which resembles the ideology of colonialism. Post-colonial feminists argue that this kind of ethical universalism is not only insensitive to different social contexts but also treats all women as in some sense modelled on a Western ‘norm.’ Postcolonial feminists also challenge the portrayal of women in non-Western societies as passive and voiceless victims while the Western women is portrayed as modern, educated and empowered. Mgonja and Makombe further asserts that while challenging gender oppression within their own culture, postcolonial feminists also fight charges of being “Western” (p. 33). Sudbury holds that feminist theory claimed to speak for all women while in fact ignoring black women and thus, a black feminist theory emerged since white feminists had generated their theorizing out of the experiences of white women (2000, pp. 721-722).

Anghie evaluates all initiatives of “sovereignty”, “good governance”, “democracy” or the “rule of law” (the imposition of which evokes the mission civilisatrice of colonial times) as a “transference of a set of institutions and practices that have ostensibly been perfected in the European World and that must now be adopted in the non-European world if it is to make any
progress” (2006, p. 125). The list of the post-colonial critiques can be extended by displaying different arguments of post-colonial writers, however, the emphasis of all these critiques would be the same: the legacies of the colonial era and the negative impacts of colonialism starting from the slave trade and continuing under a neo-colonial form. Post-colonial IR theory, aims not only to reveal the Eurocentric foundations of international relations but also to decolonize the discipline by employing a different terminology and developing reasonable approaches that is more relevant to the post-colonial world. Whether these scholars would be successful to offer an alternative to mainstream IR theories and decolonize them is a question of inquiry but for now, it can at least be asserted that the diversity of post-colonial studies is also their strength.

5. CONCLUSION

This main purpose of this paper was to introduce some of the key arguments and debates in the post-colonial literature which was largely ignored in International Relations Theory. While evaluating the place of post-colonial theory in the field of IR in the second part, which was also the bulk of this paper, the works of the most important figures in the field such as Memmi, Fanon, Césaire and their successors like Said, Spivak, Bhabha and Chakrabarty were also presented in order to provide a basic understanding of post-colonial terminology. Finally, the last part concentrated on the critiques of post-colonial scholars on the mainstream IR theories, predominantly, realist thought in international relations. Post-colonial writers intend to indicate how certain concepts of IR including hegemony, race, gender, anarchy or etc. has been treated both in International Relations literature and IR theorizing, how the histories of non-European peoples were ignored or misrepresented in international relations studies, how European models of state-building, democracy, sovereignty and good governance were exported to the ex-colonial states without even considering the sui generis characteristics of these states and why it is harder for the authors from non-Western countries to publish in IR journals.

The post-colonial critique suggests that the knowledge of IR is created and recreated by the Western scholars and thereby, post-colonial theory tries to offer important insights on the colonial legacies and the controlling discourses of colonization while focusing on all aspects of imperial process from the very beginning of colonial contact to the still ongoing inequalities of colonial power relations. The heterogeneity and the immense range of studies from which the post-colonial literatures are theorized, reflects the richness of these post-colonial studies. The great scope of the theory allows us to explore many different aspects of
the knowledge production although these approaches sometimes fall short of addressing some of the key concepts of IR theories. It can also be asserted that post-colonial theory does not offer an alternative to the mainstream IR theorizing but merely criticize them. However, it should also be accepted that criticizing something is also an attempt to change it although decolonizing IR knowledge is not an easy task. Further, while displaying their critiques both to both IR thinking and to theorizing and while challenging the traditional conceptions of International Relations, the post-colonial approaches also indicate how they will reconstruct the discipline.

REFERENCES


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i Within the context of this paper, “International Relations” is used to refer to a distinct discipline while “international relations” is the subject of analysis.

ii Césaire was also a politician, playwright and a leading Francophone poet. For his poetic career, see the illuminating work of Gregson Davis, Aimé Césaire, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

iii To Sartre, Memmi has understood the colonial system so well since he felt it first as his own contradiction: “he represents no one, but since he is everyone at once, he will prove to be the best of witnesses” (emphasis in original). As Sartre rightly points out, this masterpiece of Memmi, then, represents “a formulation of an experience: caught between the racist usurpation of the colonizers and the building of a future nation by the colonized, where the author ‘suspects he will have no place’, he attempts to live his particularity by transcending it in the direction of the universal” (p. 18).

iv The key instruments that the major colonial powers used to maintain their legitimacy include the hierarchy of races which is based in the inherent idea of Western superiority, and Eurocentric assumptions about identity and nationalism. For Fenton, the word of “race” and the ideas related to it have an important historical tie among the racist slavery, colonial domination and the political-economic coercion. In the post-slavery societies, the ideas related to slavery and colonial domination gained global dimensions and became a part of the black/white opposition (Steve Fenton, Etnisite - Irkçılık, Şınf ve Kültür, Çev. Nihat Şad, Phoenix Yaynevi, Ankara, 2001,
pp. 85, 101). Boyne and Rattansi also asserts that the economic and political domination was always accompanied by the formation of discourses in which the “otherness” of the peoples of Asia and Africa was apprehended and they were culturally colonized. This discursively produced cultural superiority established the “right” of a commercially expansive Britain, France or Germany to exercise political and cultural domination over the “Orient”, Africa and elsewhere (Roy Boyne, and Ali Rattansi, “The Theory and Politics of Postmodernism”, in Roy Boyne and Ali Rattansi (eds.), Postmodernism and Society, Macmillan Press, China, 1994, pp. 34-35). In that era, the studies of commissions that institutionalize “academic” approaches on races and the ideas of Comte de Gobineau, who is accepted as “the father of the modern racist theory”, on racism served as a quite useful instrument in legitimizing the foreign policy actions of the colonial empires and his vision of “a hierarchy of races” gained popular support in the colonizing efforts. In his prominent book, The Inequality of Human Races (1853-1855), Gobineau claimed that races were divided into three; the white, the black and the yellow and the superior one among those races was the white type (See Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau, The Inequality of Human Races (1853-1855), trans. Adrian Collins, G. P. Putnam’s Sons, New York, 1915). Further, in the so called academic congresses and conferences, scientists were declaring a hierarchy of races together with the sacred role of the White race on extending mission civiliatrice.

Tickner notes that when Third World scholars are cited by their Western counterparts, “it is usually because they are based at US or European universities, or because their texts have been distributed by publishing houses located in the US or Europe” (2003, p. 311).

