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# THREE

## **Re-contextualizing the decolonization discourse: a critical reading of selected post-independence African narrative texts**

**Mawuloe Koffi Kodah**  
University of Cape Coast

### **Abstract**

Issues of the decolonization of the African continent remain intractable, decades after the independence of African countries from Western colonialism. Contemporary sociocultural, economic, political and ideological discourse in African academies is endlessly posited within the analytical framework of colonisation and decolonisation. Whereas there has emerged a school of thought among African scholars that holds the view that persistent reference to historical processes marked by colonialism and decolonisation is misplaced, there is another group of scholars who maintain the position that persistent reference to colonization and decolonisation is the surest way to a better understanding and interpretation of contemporary development challenges confronting African countries and people of African descent in the Diaspora. The topic of decolonization is mostly articulated within the Manichean compartmentalization of the World between Blacks and Whites, darkness and light, bad and good, South and North, underdeveloped and developed, subject and master, etc. which informed the relationship between Western colonisers and the colonised African people in African spatiality before the era of

African Independences from colonial rule. This paper seeks to re-contextualize postindependence decolonisation discourse as processes geared toward the removal of all traces of hegemonic construct akin to colonialism devoid of colouring in the African spatiality at independence. The paper argues on the basis of critical analysis of textual data from Ngugi wa Thiong'o's (1965) *The River Between*, Chinua Achebe's (1966) *A Man of the People*, Ayi Kwei Armah's (1968) *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Ahmadou Kourouma's (1970), *Les Soleils des Indépendances*, Ousmane Sembène (1973) *Xala*, Sony Labou Tansi's (1975) *La vie et demie*, and Amu Djoletto's (1975) *Money Galore* that decolonization is not a physical process of replacing one group of coloured-people by another group of coloured, but rather a systemic mental process toward the elimination of mental slavery, a condition sine qua non for the installation of real independence, self-determination, freedom and justice for sustainable human development in African societies.

**Keywords:** Alienation; Decolonization; Localized-imperialism; Postindependence; Re-contextualization.

### **Recontextualiser le discours sur la décolonisation : une lecture critique d'une sélection de textes narratifs africains post-indépendance**

#### **Résumé**

Les questions relatives à la décolonisation du continent africain demeurent insolubles, des décennies après l'indépendance des pays africains du colonialisme occidental. Le discours socioculturel, économique, politique et idéologique contemporain dans les académies africaines s'inscrit sans cesse dans le cadre analytique de la colonisation et de la décolonisation.



Alors qu'une école de pensée a émergé parmi les universitaires africains, selon laquelle la référence persistante aux processus historiques marqués par le colonialisme et la décolonisation est déplacée, un autre groupe d'universitaires maintient la position selon laquelle la référence persistante à la colonisation et à la décolonisation est le moyen le plus sûr de mieux comprendre et interpréter les défis contemporains en matière de développement auxquels sont confrontés les pays africains et les personnes d'ascendance africaine dans la diaspora. Le thème de la décolonisation s'articule principalement autour de la compartimentation manichéenne du monde entre les Noirs et les Blancs, l'obscurité et la lumière, le mal et le bien, le Sud et le Nord, le sous-développement et le développement, le sujet et le maître, etc. qui sous-tendait la relation entre les colonisateurs occidentaux et les peuples africains colonisés dans l'espace africain avant l'ère des indépendances africaines. Cet article cherche à recontextualiser le discours de décolonisation postindépendance en tant que processus orienté vers l'élimination de toute trace de construction hégémonique apparentée au colonialisme dépourvu de coloration dans l'espace africain au moment de l'indépendance. L'article se fonde sur l'analyse critique de données textuelles tirées de *The River Between* de Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1965), *A Man of the People* de Chinua Achebe (1966), *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* d'Ayi Kwei Armah (1968), *Les Soleils des Indépendances* d'Ahmadou Kourouma (1970), *Xala* d'Ousmane Sembène (1973), *La vie et demie* de Sony Labou Tansi (1975) et *Amu Djoletto*, de l'auteur de l'ouvrage "La vie et la mort", et *Money Galore* d'Amu Djoletto (1975) que la décolonisation n'est pas un processus physique de remplacement d'un groupe de personnes de couleur par un autre groupe de couleur, mais plutôt un processus mental systémique vers l'élimination de l'esclavage mental, condition sine qua non de l'installation d'une indépendance réelle, de

l'autodétermination, de la liberté et de la justice pour un développement humain durable dans les sociétés africaines.  
Mots clés : aliénation ; décolonisation ; impérialisme localisé ; postindépendance ; re-contextualisation.

## Introduction

The accident of history makes us what we are today, but we can work to shape the course of our future if we give ourselves the trouble to know what it takes. [...] If the present configuration of African space is so demonstrably harmful to the continent's population, and yet has powerful agencies actively maintaining it and extending it into the future, it is logical to wonder why. What purpose was the system designed to serve? Why, in spite of its lethal toxicity, didn't Africans of the post-Independence generation abandon it, to replace it with a humane, intelligent, African system?<sup>1</sup>.

The above extract from Ayi Kwei Armah (2010) opens the debate on the failed Independence in Africa. It is a verdict on unsuccessful decolonization and the contributions of Africans of the post-Independence era to maintaining and running the inhumane lethal system designed by Europe and America to annihilate them.

The debate on whether colonization and its counter-discourse, decolonization, are dated topics in African Studies and African development discourses continues to engage the attention of

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<sup>1</sup> Armah, A. K. (2010). *Remembering the dismembered continent: Essays*. Penguine: PER ANKH. pp. 9 & 13.

African scholars on the continent and in the Diaspora. This debate is therefore far from ending any time soon. This is as a result of the expressed position of some scholars that colonialism ended with the proclamation of Independence in the then British and French occupied territories in Africa. As such, anything thereafter is post-colonial/post-independence, and has nothing to do with colonialism. In that regards, the noun phrase “postcolonialism” should be spelt as a hyphenated word, “Post-colonialism”. This position is vehemently contested by another group of scholars who hold the view that there is an intrinsic relationship between colonialism, independence and thereafter. To them, “Postcolonialism” is therefore in one word. It is a continuum, a historical process which has present and future ramifications for the sustainable human development efforts of colonized peoples in Africa and across the world. According to Leela Gandhi (1998),

Whereas some critics invoke the hyphenated form ‘post-colonialism’ as a decisive temporal marker of the decolonising process, others fiercely query the implied chronological separation between colonialism and its aftermath – on the grounds that the postcolonial condition is inaugurated with the onset rather than the end of colonial occupation. Accordingly, it is argued that the unbroken term ‘postcolonialism’ is more sensitive to the long history of colonial consequences.<sup>2</sup>

Gandhi further underlines the preference of some other theorists for “the existential resonance of ‘the postcolonial’ or of

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<sup>2</sup> Gandhi, L. (1998). *Postcolonial Theory*. Australia: Allen & Unwin. p. 3.

‘postcoloniality’ over the suggestion of academic dogma which attaches to the notion of postcolonialism” in the following words:

On a different though related note, some theorists have announced a preference for the existential resonance of ‘the postcolonial’ or of ‘postcoloniality’ over the suggestion of academic dogma which attaches to the notion of postcolonialism. In the main, the controversy surrounding postcolonial vocabulary underscores an urgent need to distinguish and clarify the relationship between the material and analytic cognates of postcolonial studies. In its more self-reflexive moments, postcolonial studies responds to this need by postulating itself as a theoretical attempt to engage with a particular historical condition. The theory may be named ‘postcolonialism’, and the condition it addresses is best conveyed through the notion of ‘postcoloniality’. And, whatever the controversy surrounding the theory, its value must be judged in terms of its adequacy to conceptualise the complex condition which attends the aftermath of colonial occupation.<sup>3</sup>

Considering the significance of history in the understanding and interpretation of social phenomena, it is our considered opinion that the view of critics who argue “that the unbroken term ‘postcolonialism’ is more sensitive to the long history of colonial consequences”<sup>4</sup> is more tenable within the context of African development discourse. It is against this background that the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. pp. 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> Gandhi, L. (1998). *Postcolonial Theory*. Australia: Allen & Unwin. p. 2.

paper will examine the issue of re-contextualizing decolonization discourse to make it more relevant as an ongoing discourse on sustainable human development in Africa in particular.

Discourse, as Foucault theorizes it, is:

a system of statements within which the world can be known. It is the system by which dominant groups in society constitute the field of truth by imposing specific knowledges, disciplines and values upon dominated groups. As a social formation, it works to constitute reality not only for the objects it appears to represent but also for the subjects who form the community on which it depends. Consequently, colonial discourse is the complex of signs and practices that organize social existence and social reproduction within colonial relationships.<sup>5</sup>

Postcolonial African literature encompasses literary texts (poetry, drama and prose) written and published in European languages (English, French, Portuguese, Spanish) which reflect African realities and experiences from the colonial period through independence and beyond. This period covers the colonial era, the period of decolonization, political independence and the period beyond political independence of the African continent from colonial administration. It is however important to bring to the fore the unending debate among scholars in the field on the spelling and orientations of theories on postcolonialism. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2013) assert that the

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<sup>5</sup> Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G. & Tiffin, H. (2013). *Postcolonial Studies: The Keys and Concepts*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. London: Routledge. p. 51.

term “postcolonial” is used to cover all cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonialism to the present day.”<sup>6</sup>. This position is informed by the very fact that there is “continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by the European imperial aggression.”<sup>7</sup>. Postcolonial critique or discourse therefore embraces “all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day.”<sup>8</sup>

Decolonization is the process of revealing and dismantling colonialist power in all its forms. This includes dismantling the hidden aspects of those institutional and cultural forces that have maintained the colonialist power and that remain even after political independence is achieved. Initially, in many places in the colonized world, the process of resistance was conducted in terms or institutions appropriated from the colonizing culture itself. This was only to be expected, since early nationalists had been educated to perceive themselves as potential heirs to European political systems and models of culture. This occurred not only in settler colonies where the white colonial élite was a direct product of the system, but even in colonies of occupation. Macaulay’s infamous 1835 Minutes on Indian Education had proposed the deliberate creation in India of just such “a class of ‘brown white men’, educated to value European culture above their own. This is the locus classicus of this hegemonic process of control, but there are numerous other examples in the practices

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<sup>6</sup> Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G. & Tiffin, H. (2013). *Postcolonial Studies: The Keys and Concepts*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. London: Routledge. p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Brydon, D. (2000). *Postcolonialism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge. p. 9.

of other colonies.”<sup>9</sup> This process invariably produced an army of people imbued with a sense of entitlement and ownership of colonial inheritance by virtue of colonial education and acquisition of inordinate taste for western culture and way of life. These are the heirs of colonialism. The study examines the heirs of Colonialism, Africanization of colonial system at independence, personality cult, maintenance and reinforcement of colonial boundaries at Independence, and impact of failed decolonisation in the attempt to re-contextualize the decolonization discourse in African for sustainable human development.

### 1. Heirs of colonialism

African elite at Independence only assumed the positions erstwhile colonial administrators vacated. The seemingly comfortable nature of those positions and the sense of entitlement resulting from the long association of the African elite with the Western colonialists during the colonial era made them Eurocentric and created for them the euphoria of upstarts mimicking colonialists and colonialism. They became heirs of the system they pretended to have mobilized the common people to fight against and to change radically from top to bottom. The Eurocentrism of the African elite is, according to Fanon, a colonial illness requiring a specific cure inseparable from actual revolutionary activity. Cabral agrees, and names the cure, calling it re-Africanization.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ashcroft, B. Griffiths, G. & Tiffin, H. al (2013). *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. London: Routledge. 3rd Edition. pp. 73-74.

<sup>10</sup> Armah, A. K. (2010). *Remembering the Dismembered Continent: Essays*. Popenguine: PER ANKH. p. 109.

The colonial aftermath is marked by the range of ambivalent cultural moods and formations which accompany periods of transition and translation. It is, in the first place, a celebrated moment of arrival – charged with the rhetoric of independence and the creative euphoria of self-invention.<sup>11</sup> This mood heralded African Independences from Western colonial dominance and appears to have doped the sense of urgency required for the serious work imposed by the quest for real independence.

The people in the nascent African nation-States at Independence were full of hope and aspiration for a brighter and glorious future under self-determination and freedom from all the ills of colonial rule. These expectations however soon turn into a nightmarish unending odyssey. Independence produced a prototype of colonial leadership which only took over the colonial institutional structures and stated running them. This situation is what informed Frantz Fanon’s narrative text *“Peau noire, masques blancs”* translated into English as *Black skin white masks*.<sup>12</sup> The African elite at Independence appeared ill-prepared to run the real race of decolonization, re-Africanization, with African people, having sacrificed the required sacrifice for true independence for negotiated and compromised freedom. In the words of Ahmadou Kourouma (1970),

*Les soleils des Indépendances s’étaient annoncés  
comme un orage lointain et dès les premiers  
vents, Fama s’était débarrassé de tout : négoce,  
amitiés, femmes pour user les nuits, les jours,*

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<sup>11</sup> Gandhi, L. (1998). *Postcolonial Theory*. Australia: Allen & Unwin. p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Frantz, F. (1967). *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated from the French by Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, Inc.



*l'argent et la colère à injurier la France, le père, la mère de la France. Il avait à venger cinquante ans de domination et une spoliation. Cette période d'agitation était appelée les soleils de la politique. Comme une nuée de sauterelles, les indépendances tombèrent sur l'Afrique à la suite des soleils de la politique. Fama avait comme le petit rat de marigot creusé le trou pour le serpent avaleur de rats, ses efforts étaient devenus la cause de sa perte car comme la feuille avec laquelle on a fini de se torcher, les Indépendances une fois acquises, Fama fut oublié et jeté aux mouches. Passaient encore les postes de ministres, de députés, d'ambassadeurs, pour lesquels lire et écrire n'est pas futile que des bagues pour un lépreux. On avait pour ceux-là des prétextes de l'écartier, Fama demeurant analphabète comme la queue d'un âne.<sup>13</sup>*

The suns of Independence had announced themselves like a distant storm and from the first winds, Fama had got rid of everything: businesses, friendships, women to use nights, days, money and anger to insult France, the father, the mother of France. He had to avenge fifty years of domination and a spoliation. This period of turmoil was called the suns of politics. Like a swarm of locusts, independence fell on Africa following the suns of politics. Fama had, like the little backwater rat, dug the hole for the rat-eating snake, his efforts had become the cause of his downfall because, like the leaf with which we finished wiping ourselves, Independence once acquired, Fama was forgotten and thrown to the flies. Still passing-by were the posts of ministers,

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<sup>13</sup> Kourouma, A. (1970). *Les Soleils des Indépendances*. Paris : Éditions du Seuil. p. 24.

parliamentarians, ambassadors, for whom reading and writing is not futile as rings for a leper. These were pretexts for them to dismiss him, Fama remaining illiterate like the tail of a donkey.<sup>14</sup>

Fama's status in the above extract is akin to that of the nascent nation-States of Africa following Independence. This status is indicative of the false start of Independence seen as a unique opportunity for the re-Africanization of the African continent. It also points to the failed nature of the processes of decolonization right at Independence. This compromises the very ardent desire of African people to re-Africanize the African continent, as "Fanon thinks the process of re-Africanization is something the majority of Africa's people want."<sup>15</sup> Contrary to this position, the Westernized African elite thinks otherwise, as it dreads re-Africanization which will deny it all dreamt of privileges that come with replacing the Western colonizers in the helms of affairs in the ex-colonies now Independent nation-States. Indeed, in the words of Armah (2010),

The majority of Africans want the institutional re-Africanization of the continent, but the elite class is against any such regenerative process because such an outcome will destroy it as a class, along with its Eurocentric philosophies. In other words, for the generality of the Westernized elite, re-Africanization can only be a catastrophe.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Kourouma, A. (1970). *Les Soleils des Indépendances*. Paris : Éditions du Seuil. p. 24. Our translation of the above quote, p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> Armah, A. K. (2010). *Remembering the Dismembered Continent: Essays*. Penguine: PER ANKH. p. 110.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

In the pursuit of its selfish need for self-preservation and self-aggrandisement as an elite class, this Westernized elite constituted the greatest danger to the processes of decolonization crystallized in the concept of re-Africanization. In this regard, Armah (2021) intimates that:

The most serious obstacle in the way of re-Africanization is the elite itself, which has self-preserving habit of sabotaging any possibility of democratic decision-making. It prefers mystificatory, colonial-style, bureaucratic manipulation to voluntary participation. This preference is explainable: the elite is the minority of the population whose values are derived from Western way of life. Democratic decision-making would severely limit its ability to channel public majority resources into minority agenda. Its values prioritize individual and familial interests, the maximization of personal perquisites, and minimization of personal sacrifice, to the point of avoiding hard work, the source of productivity.<sup>17</sup>

This verdict on the Westernized African elite is pronounced in Ngũgĩ's (1965) *The River Between*, Achebe's (1966) *A Man of the People*, Sembène's (1973) *Xala*, Djoletto's (1975) *Money Galore*, and Tansi's (1975) *La vie et demie*.

In Achebe's (1966), Chief Honourable M.A. Nanga M.P. is the most important person in his village and constituency not by

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<sup>17</sup> Armah, A. K. (2010). *Remembering the Dismembered Continent: Essays*. Popenguine: PER ANKH. pp. 111-112.

virtue of his productivity but by virtue of his sheer eloquence and mystificatory and manipulative ability among his people who are in the majority ignorant of their power. His sophisticated status is expressed in the accumulated titles with which he prefixes his name. All the same, Chief Honourable M.A. Nanga M.P. always pretends to be unsophisticated by speaking the language of the people, pidgin English. Invited to a coffee by his friend, the Hon. Simon Koko, Minister of Overseas Training, Chief Honourable M.A. Nanga M.P. demonstrates that. According to the narrator in the company of Chief Nanga,

Chief Koko, a fat jovial man wearing an enormous home-knitted red-and-yellow sweater was about to have coffee. He asked if we would join him or have some alcohol. 'I no follow you black white-men for drink tea and coffee in the hot afternoon,' said Chief Nanga. 'Whisky and soda for me and for Mr Samalu.'<sup>18</sup>

Cynically, Chief Nanga's sophistication which is a mark of his westernization and failed decolonization is brought to the fore in the choice he makes here: 'Whisky and soda'. These are equally western drinks and are associated with elitism. So, Chief Honourable M.A. Nanga M.P.'s choice does not make him less "black white-man" as he describes his colleague Chief Koko. They are both product of the same system they pretend to abhor while reflecting all its characteristics hypocritically. In fact and in deed, all the narrative texts selected for this study point to the fact that the colonial system in place before African independences has not seen any substantial rejection. Rather, it has simply been

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<sup>18</sup> Achebe, C. (1966). *A Man of the People*. London: Heinemann. p. 22.

Africanized by the African elite for its convenience and comfort following independence and the presumed departure of the Western colonial administrators from the African spatiality.

## 2. Africanization of colonial system at independence

Independent African countries failed to galvanize the energy and goodwill of their citizens to develop resilient and sustainable values and principles of patriotism required for nation-building through urgent and drastic transformational agenda at independence. The emerging leadership at Independence rather appropriated to itself the institutional structures of colonial oppression and exploitation and settled to run with it, having been tacitly trained during the colonial era to do so. This development is what this paper terms Africanization of colonial system at independence. The Africanization of the colonial system at Independence produces pseudo-colonial structures for the hegemonic comfort of a minority clique of African elite in “white masks.”<sup>19</sup> This situation invariably stifles the nation-building spirit and creates pseudo-colonial entities working as agencies of a dysfunctional, discredited and inhuman colonial system, rather than actors of change and reconstruction.

It should be stated that colonialism is a hegemonic spatial infestation, domination and control of territories and resources of the conquered. Independence is therefore a radical reversal of that state of affairs. Unfortunately, the required drastic reversal of the ill-fated system never happened as people resort to celebration over the opportunity to take over power then from the Western colonialists and be in charge of the hitherto positions

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<sup>19</sup> Frantz, F. (1967). *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated from the French by Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, Inc.

and public structures occupied by Westerners. This is the situation depicted in the opening scene of Sembène's *Xala* as the Senegalese businessman see their assumption of the leadership role of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry as a monumental achievement that requires celebration.

Les « Hommes d'affaires » s'étaient réunis pour festoyer, et marquer ce jour-là d'une pierre blanche, car l'événement était de taille. Jamais dans le passé de ce pays, le Sénégal, la Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie n'avait été dirigée par un Africain. Pour la première fois, un Sénégalais occupait le siège de Président. Cette victoire était la leur. Pendant dix ans, ces hommes entreprenants avaient lutté pour arracher à leurs adversaires ce dernier bastion de l'ère coloniale.<sup>20</sup>

The "Businessmen" had gathered to celebrate, and mark this day with a white stone, because the event was of size. Never in the past of this country, Senegal, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry had been led by an African. For the first time, a Senegalese occupied the seat of President. This victory was theirs. For ten years, these enterprising men had fought to wrest this last bastion of the colonial era from their adversaries.<sup>21</sup> Having choked this victory, they failed to appreciate the level of seriousness required to maintain their gains in a sustainable manner. Profligacy and ostentation quickly become their lifestyle

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<sup>20</sup> Sembène, O. (1973). *Xala*. Paris: Éditions Présence Africaine. p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Our translation of Sembène, O. (1973). *Xala*. Paris: Éditions Présence Africaine. p. 7.

in a Western-like fashion. For instance, at end of the first meeting of the Chamber to celebrate their historic victory over their foes, the President announces an invitation to a member's marriage ceremony to which they are invited. He intimates:

*Nous sommes les premiers hommes d'affaires de ce pays. Notre responsabilité est grande. Très grande ! Nous devons nous montrer à la hauteur de la confiance de notre gouvernement. Afin de bien achever notre journée mémorable, je vous rappelle que nous sommes tous conviés au mariage de notre frère El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye.*<sup>22</sup>

We are the first businessmen of this country. Our responsibility is great. Very tall! We must live up to the trust of our government. In order to complete our memorable day, I remind you that we are all invited to the wedding of our brother El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye.<sup>23</sup> The admonition of the President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry that: "We are the first businessmen of this country. Our responsibility is great. Very tall! We must live up to the trust of our government." appears to have lost its significance immediately with the reminder of the marriage invitation as announced. Conscious of the fact that El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye's decision to take another spouse, a third one, is not compatible with the new era and their responsibilities, the President conveniently adds: "*Si nous sommes pour la modernité,*

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<sup>22</sup> Sembène, O. (1973). *Xala*. Paris: Éditions Présence Africaine. p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> Our translation of Sembène, O. (1973). *Xala*. Paris: Éditions Présence Africaine. p. 9.

*cela ne veut pas dire que nous avons renoncé a notre africanité.*"<sup>24</sup> This words translate as "If we are for modernity, that does not mean that we have given up our Africanness." Indeed, the celebrations that heralded the Independence era foregrounded the very bad characteristics of failure. Personality cult is one of those bad attributes as highlighted in the narratives texts.

### 3. Personality cult

Personality cult is defined as excessive public admiration for or devotion to a famous person, especially a political leader.<sup>25</sup> The colonial administration created a centralized public service with positions and titles as part of the reengineering of the African spatiality for dominance and control. This arrangement produced what can be termed 'personality cult' where public servants expected to serve the people became demi-gods by virtue of their titles, association and allegiance to Western colonizers. They are virtually worshipped not for their service to the people, but for what they could do illegally with their titles. For instance, in a dialogue between Teacher and the man in Armah's (1968), the latter decrying corruption in high places mentions the name of one 'Koomson'.

- 'My wife has seen the true salvation.'
- 'How do you know?'
- 'She talks about it. Teacher. It is the blinding gleam of beautiful new houses and the shine of powerful Mercedes cars. It is also the scent

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Personality cult. <https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/> [Accessed 2/12/2022]



of expensive perfumes and the mass of a new wig.’

- ‘Money, you mean.’
- ‘Yes, Teacher,’ the man said, ‘money, but not only money. Power, too. And these days it is all coming together in the person of Koomson.’
- ‘Careful, man. Big names must not be mentioned naked. *His Excellency Joseph Koomson, Minister Plenipotentiary, Member of the Presidential Commission, Hero of Socialist Labor.* Is that the dignitary you mean?’
- ‘My wife and her mother think he is about to make them rich.’<sup>26</sup>

Interestingly, Teacher, the educated person, is the one urging the man to indulge in personality cult as a mark of respect for the despicable public servant Joseph Koomson in this instance.

In Achebe’s (1966) *A Man of the People*, Personality cult is also a manifest feature of Africanization of colonialism at independence. The man character, accumulates titles to shore up his personal status and grandeur in the eyes of his constituents. He is referred to as “Chief the Honourable M.A. Nanga, M.P.”<sup>27</sup> At very beginning of the narrative, he is introduced by the narrator to foreground the significance of his role in the entire novel.

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<sup>26</sup> Armah, A. K. (1968). *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. London: Heinemann. p. 56.

<sup>27</sup> Achebe, C. (1966). *A Man of the People*. London: Heinemann. p. 3.

Indeed, the narrator reveals the centrality of the character of “Chief the Honourable M.A. Nanga, M.P.” in the following words:

No one can deny that Chief the Honourable M.A. Nanga, M.P., was the most approachable politician in the country. Whether you asked in the city or in his home village, Anata, they would tell you he was a man of the people. I have to admit this from the onset or else the story I'm going to tell will make no sense.<sup>28</sup>

This initial introduction of the protagonist also set the tone for the unfolding significance of the title of the narrative text which reflects the overbearing presence and significance of the Chief Honourable M.A. Nanga, M.P. The narrator’s abhorrence of personality cult is also quickly expressed as he deplors the praise-sing activities of the Anata women’s groups who turn up to welcome the son and member of Parliament due to address staff and students of the Anata Grammar School where the narrator teaches. He states as follow:

That afternoon he was due to address the staff and students of the Anata Grammar School where I was teaching at the time. But as usual in those highly political times the villagers moved in and virtually took over. The Assembly Hall must have carried well over thrice its capacity. Many villagers sat on the floor, right up to the foot of the dais. I took one look and decided it was just as well we had to stay outside---at least for the

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<sup>28</sup> Achebe, C. (1966). *A Man of the People*. London: Heinemann. p. 3.

moment. Five or six dancing groups were performing at different points in the compound. The popular 'Ego Women's Party' wore a new uniform of expensive accra cloth. In spite of the din you could still hear as clear as a bird the high-powered voice of their soloist, whom they admiringly nicknamed 'Grammar-phone'. Personally, I don't care too much for our women's dancing but you just had to listen whenever Grammar-phone sang. She was now praising Micah's handsomeness, which she likened to the perfect, sculpted beauty of a carved eagle, and his popularity which would be the envy of the proverbial traveller-to-distant-places who must not cultivate enmity on his route. Micah was of course Chief the Honourable M.A. Nanga, M.P.<sup>29</sup>

Not only the women of Anata village are guilty of the slavish hero worship of Chief the Honourable M.A. Nanga M.P., the members of the famous Anita Hunters' Guild also add their glamour to the occasion in their full regalia to mark the significance of the occasion. According to the narrator,

The arrival of the members of the hunters' guild in full regalia caused a great stir. Even Grammar-phone stopped ---at least for a while. These people never came out except at the funeral of one of their number, or during some very special and outstanding event. I could not remember when I last saw them. They wielded their loaded

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

guns as though they were playthings. Now and again two of them would meet in warriors' salute and knock the barrel of their guns together from left to right and again from right to left. Mothers grabbed their children and hurriedly dragged them away. Occasionally a hunter would take aim at a distant palm branch and break its mid-rib.<sup>30</sup>

The narrator's revulsion for what he is witnessing and describing results from the fact that he knows the other side of the man being eulogized and deified by the ignorant villagers. In his opinion, Chief Honourable M.A. Nanga M.P. is a dubious politician who does not deserve the kind of eulogies being sung in his honour, but for the ignorance and cynicism of the villagers. The narrator reveals his resentment through a kind of interior monologue in the following words:

As I stood in one corner of that vast tumult waiting for the arrival of the Minister I felt intense bitterness welling up in my mouth. Here were silly, ignorant villagers dancing themselves lame and waiting to blow off their gunpowder in honour of one of those who had started the country off down the slopes of inflation. I wished for a miracle, for a voice of thunder, to hush this ridiculous festival and tell the poor contemptible people one or two truths. But of course it would be quite useless. They were not only ignorant but cynical. Tell them that this man had used his position to enrich himself and they would ask you---as my father did---if you thought that a

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<sup>30</sup> Achebe, A. (1966). *A Man of the People*. London: Heinemann. p. 3.

sensible man would spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune placed in his mouth.<sup>31</sup>

Nepotism and corruption associated with Chief Honourable M.A. Nanga M.P. is the root cause of the narrator's revulsion about the people adulatory stance toward the former. In another episode, the Prime Minister who dismisses the Minister of Finance and two-thirds of his Cabinet Ministers for proposing a reasonable and professional plan rather than an irrational and political to address an impending economic crisis, is healed and eulogized by people like Chief Nanga and his likes. "He was called the Tiger, the Lion, the One and Only, the Sky, the Ocean and many other names of praise."<sup>32</sup> These adulatory attributes are meant to invigorate the Prime Minister to assume an over-towering stature of invincibility and power to carry on his irrational and ill-informed decision in the pursuit of his parochial partisan interest. This decision creates division and social boundaries akin to situations in the colonial era.

#### **4. Maintenance and reinforcement of colonial boundaries at Independence**

The balkanization of the African spatiality resulting from the 1884-1885 Berlin Conference on the partition of Africa remains one of the main historical ills of colonialism maintained and reinforced by African elite at Independence. Despite the artificial nature of these boundaries, they succeeded in reconfiguring the African spatiality into unrealistic social entities unsuccessful in becoming nation-States since the presumed end of colonialism at Independence.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Achebe, C. (1966). *A Man of the People*. London: Heinemann. p. 5.

Fama's anger in Kourouma's *Les Soleils des Indépendances* is partly linked to the division of the territory of his ancestral kingdom of Horodougou into two antithetical geographical entities called countries, La Côte des Ébènes now a capitalist country; and *La République socialiste de Nikinai*. As a result, Fama's identity is mutilated between the two new countries. He has no allegiance to none as he remains angry and oblivious of the changes. Under the new dispensation, he is expected to possess a National Identification Card to cross from one country to the other. A situation he considers nonsensical, inimical to his aristocratic status, and unacceptable to his royal lineage and as a descendent of the original owners of the now divided territory. This situation is revealed in the following words:

*Le dernier village de la Côte des Ébènes arriva, et après, le poste de douanes, separant de la République socialiste de Nikinai. Là, Fama piqua le genre de colère qui bouche la gorge du serpent d'injures et de baves, et lui communiquent le frémissement des feuilles. Un bâtard, un vrai, un déhonté de rejeton de la forêt et une maman qui n'a surement connu ni la moindre bande de tissu, ni la dignité du mariage, osa, debout sur ses testicules, sortir de sa bouche que Fama étranger ne pouvait traverser sans carte d'identité ! Avez-vous bien entendu ? Fama étranger sur cette terre de Horodougou !<sup>33</sup>*

The last village of the Côte des Ébènes arrived, and after, the customs post, separating from the Socialist Republic of Nikinai.

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<sup>33</sup> Kourouma, A. (1970). *Les Soleils des Indépendances*. Paris : Editions du Seuil. p. 101.

There, Fama stung the kind of anger that clogs the snake's throat with insults and drools, and communicates to it the quivering of the leaves. A bastard, a real, shameless offspring of the forest and a mother who has surely known neither the slightest strip of cloth, nor the dignity of marriage, dared, standing on his testicles, to take out of his mouth that a foreign Fama could not cross without an identity card! Did you hear right? Fama a foreign on this land of Horodougou!<sup>34</sup> These words highlight the significance of the balkanization of the African spatiality and the redefinition of identities primary on the basis of legality rather than on that of sociocultural norms and practices, and shared-values of the people concerned. Fama's situation is permanently that of many Africans since 1884-1885. This situation continues to threaten the stability of many African countries as sections of citizens in those countries continue to be treated tacitly as aliens for the political expediencies of political actors, and are denied economic and social rights.

Indeed, this very issue of identity card raised innocuously in this narrative in 1970 is what saw a hype in the Ivorian State policy of *Ivoirité* meant to exclude some citizens from political office that led to the Ivorian political crisis and civil war in 1999. According to François Gaulme (2011),

*La Côte-d'Ivoire a longtemps prétendu, sous la direction de son premier président, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, donner d'elle-même une image de paix intérieure et extérieure. Mais tel n'est plus le cas depuis la crise surgie des*

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<sup>34</sup> Our translation. Kourouma, A. (1970). *Les Soleils des Indépendances*. Paris : Editions du Seuil. p. 101.

*interrogations sur l'identité nationale et la question de l'« ivoirité ». Le divorce intérieur du Nord et du Sud, encouragé par la xénophobie dans un pays de forte immigration, s'est aggravé après le coup d'Etat du 24 décembre 1999 qui aurait dû, espérait-on alors, permettre le retour à la concorde nationale. Des violences et une tension sans précédent ont marqué finalement le retour à la démocratie représentative, lors de la naissance de la « Ile République », à la fin de l'année 2000.<sup>35</sup>*

The Ivory Coast has long claimed, under the leadership of its first president, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, to give of itself an image of internal and external peace. But this is no longer the case since the crisis arose from questions about national identity and the question of "ivoirité". The internal divorce of the North and the South, encouraged by xenophobia in a country of high immigration, worsened after the coup d'état of December 24, 1999 which should have, it was hoped then, allowed the return to national harmony. Unprecedented violence and tension finally marked the return to representative democracy with the birth of the Second Republic at the end of 2000.<sup>36</sup>

The predictive nature of literary narrative finds expression in this case. This situation of alienation and frustrated multiple identity

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<sup>35</sup> Gaulme, F. (2001). L'« ivoirité », recette de guerre civile. *Perspectives sur le monde*. S.E.R. | « Études ». 3 Tome 394. p. 292. <https://www.cairn.info/revue-etudes-2001-3-page-292.htm>

<sup>36</sup> Our translation. Gaulme, F. (2001). L'« ivoirité », recette de guerre civile. *Perspectives sur le monde*. S.E.R. | « Études ». 3 Tome 394. p. 292. <https://www.cairn.info/revue-etudes-2001-3-page-292.htm>



remains a perpetual challenge to national development in Africa. There is no doubt that historical antecedents always have links with the present in determining the future. However, how those antecedents are used in shaping the present will determine the sustainability of the future. The tendency to normalize the wrongs of the colonial era in the independent African spatiality is also a significant attribute of the failed decolonization. The ills of colonialism have simply been normalized as ways of life and art of statecraft in the African countries. The wickedness and barbaric dictatorship of Sanyal Labou Tansi's *Le Guide Providentiel* has everything to do with colonial atrocity and dehumanization of African people. It creates the legitimate grounds for the rise in level of impunity associated to democratic accountability and leadership crises in African countries since independence.

That, *Le Guide Providentiel*, an African given the opportunity to lead fellow Africans to a better sociocultural, economic, political and ideological self-determination will become that callous, uncaring, brutal and bloody to the point of a cannibal, as depicted in *La vie et demie* is just mind-boggling.

Religiosity, entrenchment of dated sociocultural practices in the name cultural identity and purity of "customs of the tribes and its wisdom"<sup>37</sup> as expressed in Ngũgĩ (1965) and Kourouma (1970) such as female circumcision, disloyalty and betrayal, partisanship or constitutional dictatorship marked by one-party rule, arbitrariness, unlawful arrests and incarceration of citizens, senseless killing are reminiscent of colonial rule. These practices should have ended with the advent of Independence to mark real

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<sup>37</sup> Ngugi, w. T. (1965). *The River Between*. Portsmouth: Heinemann. p. 78.

decolonization in order to pave way for re-Africanization of the continent. It did not happen, hence the failure of decolonization.

African civil and public services remain bureaucratic in the image of colonial institution, providing white-collar jobs to very few graduates and certificated citizens who complete high education in their thousand across the continent on yearly basis. Many of these young men and women remain unemployed or under-employed for years after graduation.

### **5. Impact of failed decolonisation**

Disillusionment in Independence and the growing sense of alienation that have become permanent running themes in many African narrative texts of the post-Independence era have direct ramifications from the observed and experienced impact of failed decolonization in Africa. The nature of formal education which produced colonized subjects in the colonial era remains fundamentally unchanged following independence. Consequently, the processes of producing mentally enslaved, disoriented and vulnerable African subjects continue with the Africans themselves fully in charge of preparing themselves and posterity for modernized global slavery.

The rapidly growing army of disoriented and vulnerable people in African countries are also victims of ideological prostitution. The balkanization of the continent brought in its wake imported ideologies. The nation-States are either perceived to be of a Capitalist persuasion or Socialist/Communist, tradition or modern, Christian, Islamic or circular persuasion, etc. without any clear understanding of what those words and doctrinal persuasions really mean. This is a ground for misapplication of principles and theories without the expected development

outcomes. Ideological prostitution has greatly impaired the processes of real decolonisation through the decades following Independence. It continues to be the case and is the bane of sustainable human development. This reality is manifest in Ngũgĩ (1965), Achebe (1966), Amarah (1968), Kourouma (1970), Sembène (1973), Tansi (1973), and Djoletto (1975) as it culminates into corruption of institutions and values in the entire African social fibre.

Corruption provides prevailing conditions in many post-independence African nascent nation-States. It is one of the characteristics of failed decolonization of the African spatiality. It is pervasive and inherent in the colonial institutions that the African elite appropriated to themselves at independence and perfected over time. Indeed, corruption permeates the entire sociocultural, economic, political and ideological fibre of the characters in the textual spatiality in the narratives. It is significant to note that the bane of sustainable human development in African countries is found within this social wrong as it produces all the other ills. Its resultant significance is the state of disillusionment that characterizes the atmosphere in the various narrative texts and points to failed independence and decolonization.

Kourouma (1970) decries failed independence and decolonization through his lead-character Fama in *Les Soleils des Indépendances*. The lexical items “bâtards”<sup>38</sup>, “bâtardise”<sup>39</sup>, and

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<sup>38</sup> Kourouma, A. (1970). *Les Soleils des indépendances*. Paris : Editions du Seuil. p. 11.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

the invective Malinke lexical item “*Gnamokodé*”<sup>40</sup>. The account on the number of unemployed Malinke businessmen who have lost their trades following Independence in La Côte des Ébènes in *Les Soleils des Indépendances* also points to the destructive impact of corruption and failed decolonization in that textual universe which is a prototype of the reality in most African nation-State where the prospects of Independence and decolonization have become an unending nightmare. It is significant that military coups d'état serve as the last resort palliative in Achebe's (1965) *A Man of the People*, Amah's (1966) *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, and Djoleto's (1975) *Money Galore* to save the nation-states from further degeneration. Unfortunately, however, the military regimes also turn to be disappointing on many occasions. In the case of Ngugi's (1965) *The River Between* and Sembène's (1973) *Xala*, the ordinary people take the fight to their leaders to avert the unpalatable sociocultural, economic, political and ideological circumstances created through bad leadership and unproductive Westernized elitist mentality.

## Conclusion

Decolonization is not an end in its own, it is a mean to an end. It is not a state resulting from the physical departure of Western colonizers from the hitherto colonies; rather, it is a holistic process consciously designed and deployed to deconstruct the systemic hegemonic edifice of mental oppression, subjugation and perpetual exploitation associated to postcoloniality. This deconstruction should be geared toward sustainable human development in the continental African spatiality and the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

diaspora. Decolonized sustainable development is conceptualized in its positive sense as an enhancement of one state of being to another. It is a comprehensive alteration in the quality and quantity of the state of matter or a phenomenon. It is both abstract and concrete, spiritual and physical. Considering the diverse nature of the state of being, spatiality, temporality and modality which inform human experiences, development cannot be a single prescribed distinctive uniform to be worn by all, inconsiderate of their pluriversality and intersectionality. From concession to death, human beings are products in process, defining and redefining themselves by the day in the face of challenges and solutions to them so as to enhance their state of being in a sustainable manner. That is development. It is not a preserve of one group of people or a section of humanity. It is “pluriversal and not universal.” The first real point of departure toward sustainable human development on the basis of African realities, is a conscious realization by African people of their Africanness, the basis of their identity and the source of their strength for sociocultural, economic, political and ideological take-off.

Real and sustainable decolonization of any kind which is another word for re-Africanization should be geared toward tackling the “social wrongs”<sup>41</sup> inherited from Western colonialism and perpetuated by African people themselves following Independence, which have dire ramifications for sustainable human development quests. In the words of Fairclough (2013), these wrongs include injustices and inequalities which people experience, but which are not necessary wrongs in the sense that,

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<sup>41</sup> Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical Discourse Analysis*. New York: Routledge. p. 226.

given certain social conditions, they could be righted or at least mitigated. These might be, for instance, matters of inequalities in access to material resources, lack of political rights, inequalities before the law or on the basis of differences in ethnic or cultural identity.<sup>42</sup>

The prevailing situations in all the selected narratives in this paper highlight these wrongs. This sets the tone for the continued debate on the relevance of decolonisation discourse in contemporary African Studies. What is been proposed in this paper within the framework of a re-contextualization of the decolonization discourse is what the study terms *Neodecolonization*, defined as a critical review of the state of development discourse in Africa following Independence under the leadership of African elite and African people themselves. Neodecolonization is conceived as an objective assessment of the processes, institutions, public and private policies, and strategies deployed in African nation-States since Independence toward achieving sustainable human development devoid of oppression and exploitation akin to the colonial era. It is a deracialized critique through literary narrative texts which examines the recolonization of African by African people themselves through the appropriation and use of ex-colonial structural and administrative systems inherited from the departing Western colonialists at Independence. Neodecolonization is therefore a counter-discourse to Neocolonization proceeding from Neocolonialism, the last stage of Western Imperialism<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Nkrumah, K. (1966). *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. New York: International Publishers Co. Inc.

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