

**UNRAVELING THE COMPLEX TAPESTRY OF IDENTITY: EXPLORING THE
IMPACT OF COLONIALISM THROUGH DUL JOHNSON'S *DEEPER INTO THE
NIGHT***

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Abstract

*This paper delves into the intricate web of identity formation and its profound connection to the enduring legacy of colonialism. Through a critical analysis of Dul Johnson's thought-provoking novel, *Deeper into the Night*, and employing the lens of postcolonial theory, we illuminate the multifaceted dimensions of identity as they are affected by the historical, cultural, and psychological aftermath of colonial rule. It also sheds light on how individuals and communities grapple with hybrid identities, the politics of representation, and the power dynamics inherent in the construction of postcolonial identities. This study investigates how colonialism has left an indelible imprint on the identity of the colonized. *Deeper into the Night* serves as an apt literary canvas through which we explore the characters' struggles with their own sense of self in the wake of colonialism's destructive forces. By examining their experiences, we uncover the enduring consequences of colonial domination, including the erasure of indigenous knowledge systems, the imposition of foreign ideologies, and the fracturing of cultural identities.*

Keywords: colonialism, identity, culture, hybridity, history

INTRODUCTION

Colonialism and its Historical Context

Colonialism refers to the practice of one nation or state establishing and maintaining political, economic, and cultural dominance over another region or group of people. This era of European colonial expansion began in the late 15th century with the voyages of Christopher Columbus and continued into the mid-20th century. European powers, including Spain, Portugal, Britain, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, established vast empires through colonization.

One of the defining characteristics of colonialism was the disruption and transformation of indigenous cultures. Colonizers often imposed their own cultural norms, languages, and religious beliefs on the colonized populations. This led to the erosion of indigenous identities and the adoption of new cultural elements.

Literature has played a crucial role in reflecting and critiquing colonialism. During the colonial era, many writers from colonized regions like Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Chinua Achebe, and Mongo Beti used literature to resist colonial oppression and assert their cultural identities. For example, African, Caribbean, and South Asian writers produced post-colonial literature that explored the impact of colonialism on identity and cultural heritage.

Literature has been a vehicle for exploring the complexities of identity in colonial and post-colonial contexts. Writers often delved into questions of personal identity, cultural identity, and the tensions between tradition and modernity. Prominent authors like Chinua Achebe, Frantz Fanon, and Salman Rushdie, among others, addressed these themes.

Colonialism led to numerous struggles for independence and self-determination. Movements and leaders, such as Mahatma Gandhi in India, Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, and Nelson Mandela in

South Africa, advocated for the rights and identities of their respective nations and peoples. These movements often drew upon cultural symbols and historical narratives to foster a sense of national identity. Even after formal colonial rule ended, the legacy of colonialism persisted. Many former colonies continued to grapple with the challenges of forging new identities and reconciling their colonial pasts with their post-colonial realities. Issues of race, ethnicity, religion, and language remained significant in shaping national and individual identities. However, Post-colonial literature emerged as a distinct genre that examined the lasting effects of colonialism on identity. It often explored themes of hybridity, cultural syncretism, and the quest for selfhood in a post-colonial world. As a historical period, post colonialism stands for the post-second world war decolonizing era. The fact is that although colonialism vanished from political point of view, the cultural values of the colonial period remained and manipulated the lives of the individuals who were celebrating their independence and freedom. According to Bill Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin, "the semantic basis of the term 'post-colonialism' might seem to suggest a concern only with the national culture after the departure of the imperial power" (1).

Meenakshi Mukherjee also observes:

Post colonialism is not merely a chronological label referring to the period after the demise of empires. It is ideologically an emancipator concept particularly for the students of literature outside the western world, because it makes us interrogate many concepts of the study of literature that we were made to take for granted, enabling us not only to read our own texts in our own terms, but also to re-interpret some of the old canonical texts from Europe from the perspective of our specific historical and geographical location (3-4).

It seems that postcolonial theory has its roots in the frustration of the colonized and the tensions and clashes between their culture and that of the dominant group. It also deals with the oppressed group's fears, hopes and desires for their future and their own identities and by regarding them as individuals worthy enough to be discussed and talked about gives them the authority and political as well as cultural freedom to gain independence by overcoming political and cultural dominance. This wide range of applications and the interplay between various aspects of social life is the source of the affinities between post colonialism and the cultural studies, to the extent that many critics have considered post colonialism as a branch of the deep-rooted tree of cultural studies. Jonathan Culler in his *Literary Theory* defines the project of cultural studies as:

to understand the functioning of culture, particularly in the modern world:
how cultural productions work and how cultural identities are constructed
and organized, for individuals and groups, in a world of diverse and
intermingled communities, state power, media industries, and multinational
corporations (51).

If we compare the above definition with that of postcolonial studies by various critics who call postcolonialism a theory about "the significance of gender and sexuality; about the complex forms in which subjectivities are experienced and collectivities mobilized; ... and about the ethnographic translation of cultures"(13-14) Ania Loomba et al., it will be well justified that the former can include and encompass the latter.

Today, the themes of colonialism and identity continue to be relevant in literature and global discussions. Issues such as neocolonialism, cultural imperialism, and the effects of globalization on identity are explored in contemporary works of fiction and non-fiction.

Hence, colonialism and identity have been intertwined themes throughout world history and literature. The impact of colonialism on indigenous cultures, the struggles for independence, and the ongoing quest to define identity in a post-colonial world remain important topics of exploration in both academic and literary contexts.

Synopsis of *Deeper into the Night*

The central focus of the novel is the community of Gwangtim, named after its founder, and it's a place where a crisis of identity, consciousness, and survival unfolds. The primary character in the story could be considered the community itself. Mamzhi, the protagonist-turned-antagonist, is at the heart of this narrative, as his story of heroism and villainy is closely tied to the community's fate. He is the son of Nimfa, who is in turn the son of Old Gwangtim, the founder of the community. Mamzhi is Old Gwangtim's first grandson, and he's initiated into the traditional cult of power by his grandfather.

Upon Old Gwangtim's passing, leadership of the community reluctantly falls to Nimfa. Nimfa not only imposes himself as the community leader but also becomes attracted to the leadership system of the neighboring Hausa/Fulani/Muslim community, Karara. He forges a relationship with the emir of Karara, even obtaining a chieftaincy title, and adopts the emir's manner of dress, including wearing "mosquito net and big gowns." Nimfa's connection with the emir of Karara symbolizes the cultural contact and clash between the Hausa/Fulani migrants in Tarok land and the indigenous Tarok people in Plateau State.

Simultaneously, the nearby community of Taktim welcomes an important visitor, Alhaji Maiguguwa Nisa, who claims to be sent by the emir of Karara. Alhaji Nisa settles in the community with his family and property, establishing himself as a religious leader and gradually amassing

wealth and influence. The founding father of Taktim, Tyem Zhimak, confronts Alhaji Nisa, highlighting the tension between those who view themselves as native landowners and the strangers who initially arrive harmlessly but eventually become greedy colonizers. Tyem Zhimak points out that Alhaji Nisa came from Karara, not their community, and accuses him of taking their land and farms.

In response to what they perceive as intrusion and imperial control, as well as an actual threat from the powerful Hausa/Fulani/Muslim emirate, the Tarok communities of Gwangtim and Taktim unite in a remarkable display of warfare. Leading them to victory is the feared warlord Mamzhi, who had gained tactical knowledge from his time in the city of Jos during a religious crisis and spiritual power from his late grandfather.

This narrative underscores the struggle for identity, territorial control, and cultural clashes as these communities navigate the challenges brought by external influences and the quest to protect their way of life.

The Impact of Colonialism on Identity

The text explores issues that concerns the traditional world views of the community as well as how the individuals negotiate their identity in the phase of a growing crave for a hybrid identity by the younger generation. Identity is a highly controversial discourse in post-colonial communities. The complex nature of the concept is not totally clear of fixed. Mercer argues that “identity becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by experience of doubt and uncertainty.” (43). Tyem Zhimak who is described as the custodian of the people’s tradition, is on a quest to pass on this responsibility. Unfortunately for him, his older sons are given to drunkenness and do not fit into this position. Tyem is left with a last resort which

is Chirman who is cherished by both parents and envied by his siblings. Tyem's son gradually learns the history and the belief systems of the people through his father. By so doing, he becomes close to the father and it was easy to make certain demands. Tyem says this towards his son's request; "it was easy for Chirman to convince his father to let him go to school, he was only ten years old when he made the request, and his father had seen it as a sign of maturity. Tyem Zhimak was impressed after all education was no longer a threat to tradition" (18).

The quote shows the ease with which Chirman convinces his father to let him go to school at the age of ten. It mentions that Chirman's father sees this request as a sign of maturity and that education is no longer seen as a threat to tradition unfortunately for him, he loses his son to the colonial system. In many postcolonial contexts, the introduction of formal education by colonial powers had a significant impact on the identity of indigenous people. The colonial educational system is often aimed to replace traditional knowledge and cultural practices with European values and knowledge. In this case, Chirman's desire to go to school represents a shift in how education is perceived in the community, possibly indicating a departure from traditional ways of life.

Chirman's father's willingness to let him go to school reflects a changing attitude towards tradition within the community. The quote suggests that education is no longer seen as a threat to tradition, indicating that colonial education may have already eroded some aspects of the indigenous culture or that people are adapting their traditions to coexist with new educational norms imposed by the colonizers which Tyem clearly admits to. However, the fact that Chirman's father views his request as a sign of maturity may imply that colonial education is becoming a rite of passage or a marker of adulthood within the community. This transformation in how education is perceived can be seen as a result of colonialism's influence on the cultural and social norms of the community.

From a postcolonial perspective, Chirman's desire to go to school can also be seen as an act of resistance against colonial oppression. By seeking education, Chirman may be trying to gain knowledge and skills that could empower him and his community to navigate the challenges posed by colonial rule. Education can be a tool for resisting colonial domination and asserting one's identity. But his innocent desire changes his world view completely that he finds it demeaning to associate with his roots.

Tyem's acceptance of education as a non-threatening endeavor also suggest a process of reconciliation or adaptation between traditional and colonial systems little did he know that his son was going to make a mess of the opportunity. The following quote marks the beginning of their conflict;

The day had turned sour for both father and son –the beginning of of their problems. Chirmam had gone to a secondary school, Tyem thought and not a bible school. So what was this new idea consuming the boy? Had he made a mistake by in letting his son go to school? Was this thing turning his son into a moron? (22).

In many colonial contexts, the colonial powers introduced Western-style education systems that aimed to assimilate indigenous populations into European culture and values. This often led to a clash between traditional indigenous values and the values promoted by the colonial education system. In the quote, the father, Tyem, appears to be questioning the value of his son's education, suggesting that it might be turning the son away from their traditional beliefs and practices.

Postcolonial theory often explores how colonized peoples resisted colonial impositions and sought to maintain or assert their cultural identity. Tyem's concerns about his son may reflect a fear of cultural erosion or loss of identity due to Western education. This can be seen as a common

postcolonial theme where indigenous cultures are under pressure to adapt to Western norms. Postcolonial theory also examines power dynamics between colonizers and the colonized. In this context, Tyem's concerns may reflect a power struggle within the family. The father might feel that he is losing authority or control over his son due to the influence of Western education, which can be seen as an extension of the broader power dynamics between the colonizers and the colonized. Postcolonial literature often challenges the dominant colonial narrative and offers alternative perspectives. Tyem's doubts about the value of Western education for his son could be seen as a way of challenging the colonial narrative that education is universally beneficial. He may be questioning whether this education is truly empowering his son or turning him into something he disapproves of.

Complexities of Postcolonial Identities

Postcolonial theory also explores the complexities of identity in a postcolonial world. The tension between Chirmam's education and his father's expectations illustrates the multifaceted nature of postcolonial identities, where individuals may grapple with competing cultural influences and expectations. The author further unveils the impact of this ideology on Chirmam thus:

Chirmam. Iliya froze. Moments passed. Father, they have... I have changed my name.' changed your name!' Tyem Zhimak's response had come so sharp and unexpected that Iliya was lost for a while. Tyem forgot why he had started to call him...really? Who changed your name? I changed it myself...on the advice of my pastor.' I changed it to Elijah. But the pastor suggested I use Iliya, the Hausa translation, because... because...' why didn't he ask you to use the Tarok translation? (23).

Chirmam's decision to change his name to Elijah represents a shift in his identity. This shift is significant because it signifies a change in his self-perception and how he wishes to be perceived by others. Names carry cultural and personal meanings, and changing one's name can be a way of asserting a new identity or aligning oneself with different cultural or religious values. In this case, Chirmam's name change reflects his embrace of Christianity, which often comes with a redefinition of one's identity. Chirmam's decision to change his name is influenced by his pastor, who advises him to use the Hausa translation of Elijah. This reflects the influence of Christianity, a religion introduced by colonial powers, on the indigenous cultures and identities of the characters in the novel.

Postcolonial theory often explores how colonialism introduced new religions and belief systems that influenced the identities and worldviews of colonized peoples. The question raised by Tyem Zhimak about why Chirmam didn't use the Tarok translation of the name Elijah highlights the complexities of language and cultural identity. Language plays a significant role in shaping one's cultural identity, and the choice of translation reflects the power dynamics and cultural influences at play. The fact that the pastor suggested the use of the Hausa translation instead of the Tarok translation underscores the dominance of certain languages and cultures in the colonial context.

Chirmam's decision to change his name and the ensuing discussion with his father also exemplify the negotiation of identity in a postcolonial setting. Chirmam is navigating between his traditional Tarok identity and the newly adopted Christian identity, which carries with it colonial and Western influences.

His father's surprise and confusion highlight the tensions that can arise when individuals in postcolonial societies adopt new identities that challenge or diverge from traditional norms. The

passage also illustrates the complexity of postcolonial identities, which often blend elements of indigenous cultures with influences from the colonizers. Chirmam's choice of using the Hausa translation of the name Elijah is an example of this hybridization, where multiple cultural elements are combined to create a unique identity. Bhabha had developed his concept of hybridity from literary and cultural theory to describe the construction of culture and identity within conditions of colonial antagonism and inequity.

The foregoing explores the complexities of identity in a postcolonial context, touching on themes such as the influence of colonial religion, language, and the negotiation of identity in the face of cultural change. It reflects the broader postcolonial themes of identity transformation and the impact of colonialism on individual and collective identities.

The tensions and conflicts that arise within families and communities as a result of colonial education and its impact on cultural identity, power dynamics, and the questioning of colonial narratives. It reflects the broader themes and issues that postcolonial literature often addresses in the context of colonialism's enduring influence.

Communities may find ways to incorporate elements of colonial education into their existing cultural frameworks, seeking a balance between preserving their identity and accessing the benefits of formal schooling. Hence, the complex interplay between colonialism, education, and identity in a postcolonial context suggests that education can have both transformative and adaptive effects on identity, and also shows how individuals and communities negotiate their identities in the face of colonial influences.

The Impact of Power Dynamics on Identity

A closer examination of the historical context reveals that, prior to the arrival of colonial migrants, these communities lived harmoniously despite their diverse religious beliefs. They coexisted peacefully without any struggles or the need to conform to a singular identity. However, the onset of problems can be traced back to the arrival of migrants who came with their own agendas. In the narrative, Alhaji Nisa serves as a representative character symbolizing the conflicts that gave rise to identity issues. Nisa migrated from the Karara emirate, ostensibly in the name of religion. Prior to his arrival, Taktim consisted of a mix of Muslims, Christians, and practitioners of traditional beliefs, all sharing a common ground. The expectation was that Nisa would assimilate into the host community, adhering to its existing rules and norms. However, Nisa had his own predetermined agenda and was in a rush to execute it.

The initial point of contention that fueled the overall conflict was Nisa's approach, as he was notably focused on dividing the religious and traditional institutions. He introduced a divisive element by presenting his deity as distinct from the others, leading to the removal of the mosque from Gutus, whom he disapproved of. Since Nisa was not concerned about the well-being of the host community, he also disrupted their agricultural lands through mining activities, resulting in extensive damage to their farmlands. These actions highlight how colonialism had a profound impact on the community's identity, as it introduced divisions and disrupted their established way of life. Tyem in a dramatic confrontation to Alhaji Nisa reminds him saying;

“You do not come from here; you came from Karara, unless you lied to me. I gave you land to live on, now you take my land, and my farm” (49)

Deeper into the Night explores issues of identity within the context of land ownership and migration. The quote begins with the assertion, "You do not come from here; you came from

Karara." This statement highlights the importance of place of origin in shaping one's identity. In many cultures, a person's roots and ancestral land are integral to their sense of self. The quote also introduces conflict into the narrative. The speaker accuses the other person of taking their land and farm. This conflict is rooted in questions of identity and belonging. The speaker perceives the other person as an outsider who has encroached on their territory.

Land ownership is often closely tied to one's cultural identity. In many societies, the land is not just a piece of property but a reflection of heritage and tradition. When someone takes another's land, it can be seen as an attack on their identity and a disruption of their way of life.

The accusation that the person "came from Karara" suggests that they are a migrant or newcomer to the area. Migration can raise questions of identity as individuals and communities grapple with the challenges of assimilation into a new environment and the preservation of their original cultural identity. The phrase "unless you lied to me" adds an element of deception and mistrust to the situation. Deception can further complicate issues of identity, as it raises questions about the authenticity of one's claims and the trustworthiness of individuals. The quote also touches on power dynamics. Tyem who is the person making the accusation, is in a position of authority, and had gladly given land to Alhaji Nisa. This power dynamic can influence how identity issues are negotiated and resolved. Overall, the quotation above underscores how issues of identity are deeply intertwined with land ownership, migration, and conflicts over territory. It highlights the complexities of identity when individuals from different backgrounds come into contact, and it raises questions about authenticity, trust, and the impact of power dynamics on identity-related disputes.

Nisa's arrival in the narrative brings to the forefront a divisive element in the existing belief system practiced before his coming. He presents his God as entirely distinct from the traditional beliefs, which becomes evident when Tyem confronts Nisa in a heated argument, questioning the idea of a message for his God. Tyem's argument inadvertently turns back on him, revealing the conflict of beliefs within himself. Interestingly, in the pre-colonial era, there was no significant religious conflict. A single belief system defined the identity of the African people, setting them apart from other cultures. However, the arrival of colonial powers introduced a constant conflict over which religious affiliation to adopt. This has resulted in various forms of identity crises in the post-colonial era.

Furthermore, the author's use of an omniscient narrative technique provides insights into the characters. For instance, Ali's character is complex, who is Alhaji Nisa's son, as he grapples with an identity crisis. He faces the dilemma of aligning with his father's beliefs or engaging with his father's adversaries. Fate ultimately determines Ali's path. His relationship with Tyem's son, Iliya, illustrates the idea of communal living, where one individual's identity should not threaten another's. Additionally, the abrupt migration from Taktim to Gwangtim due to the crisis exacerbates the issue of identity crisis between Ali and Mamzhi. Iliya's description of Nisa's character highlights the stark differences between them. This passage underscores the impact of colonization on Africans. Instead of unity and progress, there is a struggle to identify and defend supposedly superior religions, sidelining the traditional belief system that once united the people.

This situation reflects the ongoing consequences of colonialism. The nation's predicament is tied to the religious identity conflict, which has fractured the political system. The rivalry between religious groups continues to weaken the nation, leaving it vulnerable to external influences and

potential re-colonization. In essence, the text underscores the enduring legacy of colonialism, which has created a religious identity crisis and ongoing divisions in post-colonial African societies, hindering political stability and progress.

In conclusion, the analysis of Dul Johnson's *Deeper into the Night* through the lens of postcolonial theory reveals the intricate tapestry of identity formation in the wake of colonialism's enduring legacy. As we have explored, colonialism left an indelible imprint on the identity of the colonized, manifesting itself in various ways, from the erosion of indigenous knowledge systems to the introduction of foreign ideologies and the disruption of cultural identities. Through the characters and events in the novel, we have witnessed the multifaceted dimensions of identity and the complexities that arise when individuals and communities grapple with the forces of colonial domination. The impact of colonial education on Chirmam's identity, the clash of religious beliefs symbolized by Alhaji Nisa, and the conflicts over land ownership all serve as poignant examples of how colonialism has shaped and reshaped identities in postcolonial contexts.

However, this exploration has shed light on the enduring consequences of colonialism, including religious identity crises, power struggles, and the erosion of communal unity. It is clear that the legacy of colonialism continues to influence the dynamics of postcolonial societies, both in Africa and beyond. As we navigate the complexities of postcolonial identities, it is crucial to recognize the ongoing struggles and negotiations that individuals and communities face in defining themselves in the aftermath of colonial rule. Postcolonial theory provides us with a valuable framework for understanding these dynamics and for acknowledging the agency of colonized peoples in shaping their own identities.

In an ever-changing world where the echoes of colonialism still reverberate, it is essential to engage in ongoing dialogues that challenge the dominant narratives and promote a deeper understanding of the profound impact of colonialism on identity. Through literature, such as Dul Johnson's *Deeper into the Night*, we can continue to unravel the complex tapestry of identity and explore the intricate threads that connect the past to the present, ultimately striving for a more inclusive and equitable future.

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