
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Black-skinned Intellectuals Wearing White Masks: A Neocolonial Study of Identity Crisis in Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*

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| ABSTRACT

Wole Soyinka, the first African writer Nobel Prize winner in literature in 1986, is famous universally, mostly for his plays. But one of his novels, *The Interpreters* (1965), has been acclaimed as well as criticized by many critics for some stylistic and ideological problems. The interpreters of Soyinka's novel are five intellectuals who have come back from abroad, mainly England, to their country, post-independence Nigeria. The critical perspectives of these interpreters towards predominant corruption and other social problems in most parts and institutions of Nigeria are clearly noticeable. The identity crisis, which is rampant throughout this novel, can be recognized as cultural and, in some cases, biological hybridity. Two social psychological identity problems, that is, identity and hybridity crisis, as well as 'neocolonialism' term, are the main concerns of this thesis. Neocolonialism, as a less debated term in comparison to two other dominant terms, postmodernism and postcolonialism, has been analyzed coherently. Having delineated the neocolonialism term and its connections with literature, this thesis has gone through the characters of this novel and has argued the manifestation of hybridity and identity in all aspects of their lives. Post-independence Nigerian as the context of this work reveals clearly these identity and hybridity crises through its characters. Destructive outcomes of identity and hybridity crisis, which left Nigeria a paralyzed country, and warning to avoid further crises is among Soyinka's concerns, as well as the main points which this thesis is searching to highlight. Not to be mesmerized by western culture and amalgamate it ineptly with one's own, as well as the highly valuable political intervention of literature to reflect psychological problems of suppressed societies would be regarded as a significant finding of such research.

| KEYWORDS

Neo-colonialism; identity; hybridity; colonizer; colonized

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1. Introduction

Literature has been occupied with political terms such as pre-colonialism, colonialism, decolonization, and post-colonialism, imperialism. Recently, the realm of literary studies has been involved with one more political term, neocolonialism, introduced by the president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, in his book, *Neocolonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965). According to his central idea, this is the last stage of imperialism and perhaps the most dangerous one. Literature and its social responsibility towards political injustices, specifically in the contemporary era, have been a successful medium in accelerating notable ideal political achievements. As the title, *A Neocolonial Study of Hybridity and Identity in Wole Soyinka's The Interpreters*, suggests, the writer of this remarkable novel depicts Nigeria after its independence from England.

In the words of the Nobel Committee, Soyinka, "with wild cultural perspectives and poetic overtones, fashions the drama of existence." A prolific and versatile writer, Soyinka is best known for his play *The Trials of Brother Jero* (1964). Soyinka believes that writers should not evade the present by exulting the past. In his Nobel speech, Soyinka observes that "the artist has always functioned as the records of the mores and experiences of society and the voice of vision in his own time" (reference needed). The last statement is a prominent position reiterated in his novel '*The Interpreters*', and this paper aims to explore the connections between these mores and experiences concerning how literature introduces these aspects in the post-colonial context.

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Neocolonialism or "neo-imperialism" is a political condition traces of which we could discover in Soyinka's *The Interpreters* and other post-colonial works. A few writers and researchers have invested in exploring various aspects of neo-colonialism in world literature. Nevertheless, there are some exceptions, including Jean-Paul Sartre in his *Colonialism & Neocolonialism* published in 1964 and the more prominent and influential *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism (The Political Economic of Human Rights: Volume I)* by Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman (1979). Therefore, these works require more attention, and they are fundamental works for this research's theoretical framework. The significance of exploring colonial aspects in the present era and reflecting them through the medium of literature has been encapsulated in this statement by Ashcroft et al. in *Empire Writes Back*: "More than three-quarters of the people living in the world today have had their lives shaped by the experience of colonization." (1) Therefore, this paper aims to shed light on post-colonial and neocolonial facts in Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* and support the research by discussing Homi Bhabha's theory about hybridity well-detailed in his seminal work, *The Location of Culture* (1994).

2. The Statement of Problem

This paper considers the complicated stylistic features of Soyinka's novel and other similar works. In his challenging style, Soyinka persuades the reader to analyze his works with curiosity and excitement to find more about his idiosyncratic world. On stylistic features of postmodern art, the researcher refers briefly to 'Postmodern Condition' by Lyotard and other postmodern proponents like Baudrillard, and Geertz, to name a few others. By analyzing these great thinkers and their seminal works, we would be able to answer some questions about how we should regard the new stylistic features of some postmodern works, such as *The Interpreters*. The problematic nature of Soyinka's work has become more complicated by combining postmodern elements and those specific to his own culture, which distinguishes the work even from other experimental ones. One of these elements is implementing Yorubaian, the mythology of South-western, North-central Nigeria, Southern and Central Benin in West Africa. Combining universal complexities with local specialties in various parts of the novel has made the work an exemplary piece for a new and exciting case study within the Postcolonial field.

The novel's characterization is among the prominent and promising parts of this novel to study. As one might describe them, these interpreters or critics are the agents through which Soyinka conveys his points of view and ideologies about corrupted society. They broadly interpret the current issues of their society. Therefore, discovering who these interpreters-characters are and what they intend to say or imply is among the most important aims of this study. Each character stands for one interpreter.

Moreover, everyone has a mission to accomplish or a message to convey, which is why the paper focuses on them. A prominent concern will be analyzing these interpreters' characterization to reveal and discover all those challenging social issues we are searching for within a Postcolonial context. Since most of these characters are intellectuals, who have recently returned from Europe and are influenced by the effects of the colonizer context, then it would be logical to analyze this work based on Homi Bhabha's hybridity theory, which has explored postcolonial subjects with numerous psychological problems and personality perplexities.

Soyinka is an outstanding author who has allocated a considerable part of his life to be and remain an unforgettable figure in his country. Thus in this paper, the most important aspects of Soyinka's *The Interpreters* will be scrutinized under paradigms of Neocolonialism. Through a descriptive analysis of this novel, the present study aims to answer these questions: How does Soyinka's novel convince the readers to regard it as a neo-colonial work? Which postmodern and postcolonial elements contribute to presenting the neocolonial novel? Finally, how do this novel's characters present hybridity and identity crisis in post-independence Nigeria?

3. Literature Review

Neocolonialism is a brand new topic related to postcolonial studies. Many research and studies pertinent to postcolonialism are easily accessible in databases and libraries. Therefore, postcolonialism has played a crucial role in the colonial discourse. In *The Interpreters' Cultural Politics, or Soyinka's Postcolonial Otherness* Mohammad Dellal Mohammad addresses the political aspects and experimental techniques in *The Interpreters*. He emphasizes that this novel demonstrates Aijaz Mohammed's point that the postcolonial realities of Africa cannot be put into one single narrative or framed in one simple format (Dellal Mohamed, xxxx, p. xx).

A more recent, significant study on Soyinka's novel is *The Interprets: Ritual, Violence, and Regeneration in the Writing of Wole Soyinka* (2014) by Hakeem Bello. Bello mainly explores ritual facts and social regeneration in Nigeria in this book. In addition to this study, it is noteworthy to consider Garry Gillard's lecture on Wole Soyinka, delivered at Murdoch University (during 1976-7). In this lecture, Gillard analyses *The Interprets'* characters as an extended demonstration of the selection of the title by Soyinka. Gillard's explanation of the characters is very helpful in the sense that readers can perceive the significant role Bandele, one of the most intellectual among interpreters, plays in selecting the title of the novel. He maintains that:

The reason for the use of Bandle as a model in the context suggested above can be inferred. Bandle is the character into whose mouth is put the title of the book: this, taken together with other indications, suggests he is the figure who has a kind of understanding and judgement not shared by the other characters. (Gillard, Murdoch University lecture)

Numerous studies have explored the very term postcolonialism in particular and colonial in general in this novel. Moreover, these studies have been extended in areas like unfolding postcolonial elements in a myriad of works written in this field. Perhaps one of the closest studies pertinent to the subject of this paper is Mpalive-Hangson Msiska's book *Postcolonial Identity in Wole Soyinka* (2007). Msiska analyzes the postcolonial identity of Soyinka's characters in all of his works. What distinguishes this research from other similar studies is its focus on neocolonialism and its effects. In fascinating and illuminating lines, Msiska argues that investigating the postcolonial identity in Soyinka's works is a major and imaginative contribution to the study of his fiction, African literature, and postcolonial cultural theory. Furthermore, in this approach, writing and creativity stand in fruitful symbiosis with the critical sense. "It should appeal to Soyinka scholars, to students of African literature, and to anyone interested in postcolonial and cultural theory." (177). Seminal works written on neocolonialism are illuminating enough to reveal all the necessary facts about neocolonialism. There are pivotal works written on the subject of neocolonialism, including Kwame Nkrumah's *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965), Jean Paul Sartre's *Colonialism and Neocolonialism* (1964) and Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman's *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism* (1979).

There would be a different topic to study in this research. Along with analyzing neocolonialism, this research aims to explore identity crisis and hybridity in a neocolonial context and, more significantly, apply this recent political phenomenon to a literary work that is par excellence in terms of hybridity and identity. From the outset of emerging neocolonialism studies, there are limited examples that have profoundly unravelled identity crises in neocolonialism and even less studied cases regarding hybridity in neocolonialism. This paper presents a comprehensive and well-defined study in respect of analyzing neocolonialism profoundly and manifesting identity and hybridity under such conditions. In addition, it will explore any possible interconnectedness between neocolonialism, and postcolonialism, postmodernism. Studies on Soyinka's works and his ideologies are more concentrated on his plays. This goes back to the reality that Soyinka's fame and reputation mainly rest on his plays, and despite all the different branches he practices, everyone knows him and respects him as a great playwright. Accordingly, other studies tend to unfold neocolonial strains in Soyinka's plays rather than his novels.

The concept of white masks worn by black skins is a predominant phenomenon among third and fourth-world populations, especially in African societies. In *Analysis of Wole Soyinka's novels*, 2019, Mambrol argues that "like other novelists in Africa during the years just before and after independence, Wole Soyinka faced the question of ethnic and cultural identity. Therefore, being occupied with the identity crisis is the primary concern for both postcolonial people and postcolonial writers. Similarly, writers like Wole Soyinka consider African societies' roots, originalities, and identity as the core of their writings. Crow and Banfield, in *An Introduction to Post-colonial Theatre*, argue that "Soyinka and Ngugi, themselves writing from different positions, have articulated the need to restore the African culture personality as a major element of social development, but what is it that must be restored? Nigeria and Kenya, as national entities, are the creation of British imperialism, the forcible amalgamation of different peoples with different languages and often widely diverse cultures".

Consequently, with all this in mind, Soyinka creates a character in his novel, Bandle, who embodies such pitiful duality and forcible amalgamation that, in the words of Singh, in his 'Understanding Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*', "is one of the neo-colonial half-breeds choking in their ties and looking ludicrous in their coattails. Bandle attends such parties because he cannot afford to stay away. If he did, he would become a non-person in a community that is acceptable to be a microcosm of the larger society". In another more illuminating quote, Singh brings this identity confusion to readers' attention: "interestingly, Monica, a foreigner, is more adapted to the Nigerian culture than Nigerians, who would rather bring London to Lagos." Soyinka is so concerned with the problem of identity that he depicts one of his non-African characters in *The Interpreters*, Joe Golder, as the epitome of such identity confusion: "I am Negroes. One quarter, in fact..... I wish it were more"(186), and somewhere else, he asks Kola, another main interpreter of the novel, to paint him as jet black, "the blackest black blackness" (217). After explaining such identity disillusionments, Soyinka criticizes his country's academic professors and intellectuals. In Singh's words, "Soyinka brings academia down to the level of the normal beasts in our bastardized setting, revealing academia crudeness and cruelty and their complicity in a sad situation in which everyone is guilty."

4. Theoretical Background

4.1. Postcolonialism

Bhabha believes that Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order. Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of the Third World countries. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic "normality" to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, and peoples. They formulate their critical revisions around issues of cultural difference, social authority, and political

discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the "rationalizations" of modernity. To bend Jürgen Habermas to our purposes, we would also argue that the postcolonial project, at the most general theoretical level, seeks to explore social pathologies- "loss of meaning, conditions of anomalies"- that no longer simply cluster around class antagonism [but] break up into widely scattered historical contingencies. (qtd. in Schwarz and Ray 94)

4.2. Hybridity

In the postcolonial context of *The Interpreters*, two terms of hybridity and mimicry should be precisely explained. Cultural hybridity occurs when two different cultures interconnect in a postcolonial case, one superior and another inferior. In this situation, the superior culture devalues the inferior, and the desire to imitate it begins to irritate the imitator because following another culture cannot happen simply through imitation. Thus, hybridity is a rather pejorative term that mostly emerges in postcolonial countries. On the whole, the modern period is confronted with predominant hybridity that is not exclusive only to the postcolonial field: "taking into account not only the involvement of colonial writers but also the new hybridity of aesthetic influence, modernism is therefore revealed as the beginning of a process of global transculturation in the literature that has continued to effloresce" (Boehmer 124).

The other term is mimicry, which is tightly interrelated with the previous term, hybridity. It is in the process of mimicry that hybridity reveals itself. A person who desires to imitate a superior culture and fails could be described best as an individual afflicted by cultural and psychological hybridity. The action of mimicry is often accompanied by "been to," that is, spending some time and living in the western culture, which persuades one to imitate them and then leads that person to a state of psychological hybridity. Unable to mimic fully and then unable once more to return to the previous condition of cultural mindset is the exact type of hybridity many theorists have argued about. This unpleasant form of mimicry can be ascribable to élites, too: "though never as severely marginalized, settler writers experienced in their own way anxieties about the cultural mimicry produced by metropolitan domination. And they too began increasingly to seek an identity distinct from Britain" (Boehmer 204). Hypocrisy is distinguished from hybridity in a way that a hypocrite suffers a psychological and mental disorder, in a way that reveals a severe sense of insincerity. Therefore, the main difference between these two terms is that hybridity is an unintentional sense of duality and undecidability, while hypocrisy is a complete intentional form of duality. Accordingly, the combination of these two types can be regarded as one of the postcolonial psychological severe mental disorders. Postcolonial writers try their best to depict this challenging aspect in their writings by demonstrating characters whose identities have been influenced by colonizers' impact: "to convince an independent national identity, postcolonial writers concentrated on developing a symbolic vocabulary that was recognizably indigenous-or at least other to European representation- and yet at the same time intelligible within the global grammar of postwar politics" (Boehmer 178-79).

4.3. Postmodern/Neocolonial Nature of The Interpreters

Implementing colonial dialectics by Soyinka can also go beyond the Hegelian and Kantian limitations and definitions of dialectics. In his work, *The Interpreters*, Soyinka adds a mocking dialectic towards religion and established beliefs to these contraries. In one of the most significant cases in which he combines contrary and his undervalued considering of religious beliefs, he shows the destruction of Lazarus's Church both by flood and fire. "The rain had begun early in the afternoon, washing out every landmark and submerging huts and the smaller market stalls" (220). Lazarus, who claims he has been revived from the dead by the power of God, establishes a church accompanied by his apostles. Soyinka subtly terminates this unreal Church and its followers, which undoubtedly stands for the real established Church, by simultaneous use of water and flood to introduce an amazing use of contraries. No one can believe the end of religion and all great values of religious concepts in a way that illuminates the concept of contrary in the best possible shape. Soyinka's indirect dubiousness of this church is evident in his poetic elaboration: "a dead goat, enormously distended, was wedged against a corner of the planks and two dogs tried to pull it out without wetting their muzzles. They held their noses against its stink and went forward" (220). Introducing the destructive power of water and fire by Soyinka undoubtedly implies a kind of uncertain attitude towards Lazarus's church: "and then he saw flames. From what had been until a moment before total darkness, a sudden heap of flames throwing flickering reflections on the corn-mill presence of the church. In an arc, framing a canoe which sat between two lines of flames, on water which danced madly with fires within but only pulsed gently on the surface" (222).

To add another instance of contrary and irony to this complicated situation of Lazarus, one can refer to the strange fact that he is a Lazarus model after the historical one whom Jesus Christ revived from death after being dead for four days. Surprisingly, this man takes the position of Christ himself, not merely Lazarus model and founded the established church, and ironically selected his apostles among rabbles. Two questions would come into the readers' minds: what does Soyinka mean and intend by all these contraries and implicit indications? What is the significance of using all these manipulations of literary, religious, and political realities?

Based on Hegelian's triad thesis, antithesis, and synthesis or dialectical method, the schematization of Soyinka's writing in this novel, specifically in the case of Lazarus, would be like the following scheme. First, the "thesis," which is an intellectual proposition, would be illuminated in the established realities of Christian beliefs that are perfectly received through centuries by a considerable population. Then, the next part, "antithesis", which is a critical perspective on the thesis, is highly noticeable in Soyinka's depiction of the destruction of Lazarus's church both by flood and fire. Perhaps some people cannot accept such an interpretation that Soyinka has not had a cynical attitude towards religion in general, but in some ways, this fact could be affirmed. In an interview, he confesses that "nothing is more satisfactory than the disappearance of all religions" because he believes most chaotic situations and unrests are due to the existence and biases related to the religious conflicts.

Therefore, Soyinka affirms this cynicism and, logically, the critical perspective against religion. Finally, the "synthesis" will solve the conflict between thesis and antithesis by reconciling their common truths and forming a new proposition. This last stage in Soyinka's dialectics is somehow different from those optimistic philosophers involved in such philosophical theories, e.g., Hegel, Kant, and Johann Fichte. On the contrary, his worldview is thoroughly postmodern and cynical, and, like Eliot's *Wasteland*, he looks into the world disappointedly. However, surprisingly, like Eliot, Soyinka shows a tinge of hope under the portrayal of the pantheon by one of his protagonists, Kola, at the end of his novel. Roughly, as in Eliot's final more optimistic words, Shantih shantih shantih (Line 433).

The postcolonial condition argues against the postmodern condition. Ironically, implementing those rules and norms has been founded on postmodernism itself. This mutual interrelationship creates notable postcolonial works, and the combination of such movements is the main reason for this distinctive form. Although this combination is ironic, this has enhanced these works' impressiveness and made them more fascinating. For example, by implementing postmodern techniques articulated by Lyotard and Nigerian mythology, Soyinka has created a novel that can be analyzed in many different ways. So this iconic feature of Soyinka's work is fascinating and can render a world of unsaid words and facts.

In a beautiful statement, the applicability of such a condition would be revealed: "like postmodernism, post-colonialism is obsessed with the issues of identity and subjectivity" (Schwarz and Ray 225). Undoubtedly, these conditions work entirely against each other. Postcolonial uses postmodern elements to reveal its imposed sufferings, and on the contrary, postmodern politics would not spare anything that can devalue people of this category. Postmodern and postcolonial conditions are intertwined, and in their coexistence, they introduce a kind of art full of challenges and new experiences. In *The Interpreters*, the postcolonial condition reveals itself in the form of postmodern features. This means that Soyinka amalgamates these conditions to affirm the interconnection of such conditions and movements.

Perhaps, one of the best postmodern theorists whose theories are related to colonialism or neocolonialism is Clifford Geertz (1926-2006). He divides postmodernism into two movements that came to fruition in the 1980s. He describes these as follows:

The first led off into essentially literary matters: authorship, genre, style, narrative, metaphor, discourse, fiction, figuration, persuasion; the second into essentially political matters: the social foundations of anthropological authority, the mode of power inscribed in its practices, its ideological assumptions, its complicity with colonialism, racism, exploitation, and exoticism, its dependency on the master narratives of Westerns self-understanding. (11)

Geertz's explanation of the nature of postmodernism and its division has a pretty close correspondence with Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, both in literary and political aspects. However, one of the pertinent postmodern issues about Soyinka's *The Interpreters* and its very title is 'intuitive interpretation'. This kind of interpretation is specific to postmodern writings, distinguished from the modern interpretation or any other forms of interpretation.

5. Discussion: the Paradox of Postmodern and Post/Neocolonial Discourse

From many perspectives, the paradox of postmodern and post/neocolonial discourse is remarkable in the general world of view and particularly in Soyinka's novel. To begin and continue exploring such paradoxes, we can set our minds in the very conception of "language" of these mentioned movements. For instance, the language of *The Interpreters* is English. A Nigerian writer wrote it, and to add some sense of paradoxical aspects; he wrote this text against Englishmen's consequences of colonial policies. Post/neocolonial literature, which has adopted a postmodern style to convey its literary language, is full of perplexing strategies.

Perhaps by using English, the writer, in our discussion, Soyinka, will tell the colonial world that I have learned and used English, a language you have always been insisting on teaching to me. Now I use it to inform the world of your policies' negative and exploitative aspects. Soyinka's applying English in *The Interpreters* and other works written by him is not simply just unsophisticated English. Instead, as Lindsfors puts it, "he became [Soyinka]- instantly and forever- one of the most important writers in the English speaking world" (Jeyifo 1).

Thus the mission of language here acts against the countries to which this language belongs. As a result, protesting writing in English is a means to convict the entire colonial world and, at the top of them, the English-speaking colonial powers. This is the exact sample of the paradoxical process in which many writers, perhaps one of the best among them Wole Soyinka, have been involved. If we consider language as one of the most remarkable and influential ways of communication, thus using English by the non-English to say something in order to demonstrate the "fakeness of imperialism," in other words "mocking the unreal identities of such an imperial world," by using their languages could be considered a paradoxical strategy. In Soyinka's works, there is something even more paradoxical, using his idiosyncratic writing style. Soyinka's language has a particular characteristic and even though written in English, in some parts is even unknown to the "master":

'Is he [Sekoni] mad?'

'Omotani?'

'Why do we employ these too-knows?' (27)

And the master here is the English-speaking world that cannot perceive all words posing by Soyinka, and those parts are related to the unique language of Soyinka himself, which is pertinent to the Yorubaian language and culture. Therefore, we are not dealing with pure English, the authentic and untouched language of the master, but an "un-English" specific to those whom the master has oppressed and injured. The author writes against the master in a special language that alluringly belongs to the master but repletes it with the enslaved person, slavery sense, and bitter feelings.

'Look at Egbo, enh. Have you nerve seen a woman before?'

'You can always tell them apart. Omoalufa, the greatest womanizers in the business'. (52)

The idiosyncratic style of Soyinka turns out to be "neo-Negritudist," which can come under the rubric of "writerly style". Soyinka is not just a literary man. He is the voice of the oppressed worldwide, specifically in his own country. He is an irreconcilable man in front of the enemies of these oppressed people, whether they are the leaders of his country or any other territories.

The last paradox is that Soyinka intentionally has called the novel *The Interpreters*, intending to place these characters as interpreters of this novel. As a matter of fact, these 'interpreters' intended duty' is to interpret the events and problems of the Nigerian society. However, these interpreters cannot interpret the corrupted situation of their society. Introducing the infectivity of such characters-the interpreters to be-Soyinka completes his introduction of paradoxes and, more subtly, presents the deconstructed postmodern stylistic features and postcolonial writing. Readers of this novel expect Soyinka's interpreters to interpret their society so that the reader would be able to have a comprehensive perspective of these characters and post-independence Nigeria. Their failure means we are faced with a paradoxical nature of work with the specific quality of the postmodern/postcolonial notion of paradox.

5. 1. Hybridity and Identity in the Characters of the Interpreters

In this part, some types of hybridities that can be ascribed to Soyinka's work will be introduced. Besides general implications, some more specifications of this term are primarily applicable to this novel. The three significant types of hybridity are linguistic hybridity, literary hybridity, and hypocrisy. The first one is 'linguistic hybridity', writing the novel in English while the author is an African by birth. There are various points of view about the way non-English writers use English:

Adopting English, the colonial tongue, writers, even at its early stage, sought to rework its meanings and structures. Yeats's belief was that Ireland's heroic history should be sung in a tongue at least adapted to the people's heritage, or in his words, 'in English, [but] with the accent of their own country'. (Boehmer114)

The point of the quotation by Yeats is obvious in Soyinka's novel, *The Interpreters*, in which he does not neglect the Nigerian language even though he is writing in English. Therefore, the term 'linguistic hybridity' can be related to *The Interpreters*. Written a novel in English by a non-English writer, more powerfully by employing native mythology supported by many elements of Nigerian mores and rituals, makes this novel one of the prominent instances of linguistic hybridity. The second type of hybridity, undoubtedly, more significant than the first one, is 'literary hybridity', that is, implementing western or postmodernism stylistic features like the first type in terms of paradoxical aspects. 'Literary hybridity' is excessively applicable to *The Interpreters* since Soyinka has not rejected any forms of postmodern stylistic features. Some instances of these elements are a nonlinear point of view, using many flashbacks/forwards, fragmentation, and allusiveness. Another example of 'literary hybridity', of course, significantly different from the nature of the first definition of 'literary hybridity', is a literary work within the novel, that is, the pantheon of Nigerian gods combined with Christian elements. This is a distinguished sample of 'literary hybridity'. This pantheon

has been drawn on a large canvass by the artist and intellectual of 'the interpreters'. Kola has created a significant status within the novel that cannot be disregarded easily.

The hybrid interpreters of the novel are mainly five intellectual friends, including; Egbo, Sagoe, Sekoni, Kola, and Bandle. These figures cannot achieve the intended meaning and identity they thought of as an ideal one. They are exhausted by the end of the novel by such a fruitless search. They constantly seek to find a place in Kola's pantheon, where every one of these interpreters chooses to take the place of one god. Actually, this pastiche form of a bizarre pantheon is a great model of hybridity, enjoying a unique place among other forms of hybridities. To accentuate this extraordinary model of hybridity, the pantheon, Soyinka, has made Kola place Simi, one of the characters, in fact, a very infamous and public prostitute, beside the pantheon of mythological gods and Christian figures.

Two types of hybridities have been introduced so far. 'Hypocrisy', the third one, is considerably ascribable to this novel. To plainly define the term 'hypocrisy', one can describe it as a state of dual and unreliable personality that some people practice when something else is in their minds. The most general meaning of hybridity is when someone has been characterized by more than one identity or attitude. This sense of hybridity is evident in the characters of Ayo Faseyi and Oguazor. These two characters display this form of hybridity excellently when both epitomize the sense of being culturally Anglicized. Simultaneously being a hypocrite and a hybrid is an appalling form of hybridity.

5. 2. Identity

A Turkish proverb indicates, "as the crow tried to imitate the partridge, it forgot its own walking style." At first glance, it seems strange to liken this proverb to the process of hybridity. However, it seems pretty logical when the imitator, in this case, would be likened to the crow of the proverb. Something exciting can be found in this proverb related to the black African subalterns and the characters in *The Interpreters*. The point is clear, "the interpreters" of Soyinka's novel are Nigerian black people (crow). Living abroad and in the beautiful western culture (partridge) had disillusioned them from their own culture. Therefore, the black African (crow) imitating the alluring western countries (partridge) could result in a crisis that reveals the corrupted nature of this type of imitation. Some notable hybrid characters in *The Interpreters*, who appear as Nigerian universities' corrupted academic staff, are good examples of this hybridity. One of these characters is professor Oguazor, who does his best to do everything in an English way. This is also true about Dr. Faseyi, whose primary concern is just like professor Oguazor to introduce himself as a complete imitator of the English life's manners and style. More interestingly, both of these characters have two English wives.

There remains an important question: why the process of mimicry would not stop its continuation despite all these destructive consequences? This question poses some realities about the recent signs of progress that might have been neglected. It is not logical to interpret every kind of imitation under the rubric of imitation or hybridization. Some of these imitations and desires to follow the western way of life result from globalization, westernization, and, more significantly, modernization. These referred processes are inevitable for modern humans, and they cannot resist being modern in the age of postmodernism. For example, Dehinwa, a female friend of interpreters, brings one of these interpreters, Sagoe, to her apartment and even sleeps with him. This, from the point of view of her mother and other relatives, is a shameful action. Nevertheless, Dehinwa disregards these negative interpretations and believes that if her way of life has changed, she can do whatever she likes. "So Dehinwa, this is what you people do in Lagos....is this decent for a young girl to be out?" (36) Dehinwa's reaction toward her mother and aunt's concern is this; "But mamma, you shouldn't listen to that kind of talk. Next time tell them to mind their business." (37) Some of these similar actions are out of the scope of classification of hybridity, but sometimes it would be challenging to distinguish these codes. Based on the analyzer's worldview, the final classification of such behaviours and actions can be circumscribed.

5. 3. Colonizer's Identity Crisis vs. Colonized's Identity Crisis

As the novel's title demonstrates clearly, these characters represent "the new generation of interpreters" who, along with many other things, represent a kind of social-psychological disease known as 'hybridity' in postcolonial terminology. In this novel, the idea of depicting an identity crisis is primary. This matter has been represented from the beginning of the novel. Egbo, one of the key characters or interpreters, is uncertain which one he should select, his ancestors' fairly glorious way or the bureaucratic position. In the early parts of the novel, Egbo reveals this harsh duality in his mind and bitterly asks himself, "what choice, I ask myself, is there between the ugly mudskippers on this creek and the raucous toads of our sewage-ridden ports: what difference" (14)

Therefore, Egbo endures the most significant unconvincing burden of undecidability that is a notable identity flux in neocolonial societies where people are wandering in an excruciating dilemma. From a political perspective, the dilemma mainly occurs between old and new. The old stands for one's roots and culture and the new for the modern world mainly created by "ex-colonizers". Another identity crisis is conspicuous in the novel when Bandle talks to Sagoe to inform him that Golder is waiting for him:

Bandle paused, latch-key in hand. 'I forgot to warn you. I have a guest, and you may not like him.'.....who is he?

'Some journalist hitch-hiking through Africa. 'English?'

'No, German, but he thinks he is American.' (133)

Although identity crisis can be a product of the predominant neocolonial ideology, it does not mean that other factors are not influencing this process. Some negative factors that can lead one person to such duality are passivity and receptivity. Again Egbo shows these reproachable characteristics during his childhood, "Egbo was discovered at midnight lying at the water's edge in the grove of Oshun, one ear against the ground. 'What are you doing there?' They asked. He said he was praying. So they beat him for paganistic leaning" (17). Different receptions and interpretations of ideas and deeds can lead people to confusion and undecidability. To illuminate this statement further, an excerpt below would be helpful:

Homi Bhabha's theory of 'mimicry' in contrast to 'going native' is a twin issue in many works of literature about the Empire. The colonizers did not simply impose their beliefs and values on the colonized; exchanges across cultural boundaries always involve two-way alterations in individuals' attitudes and behaviours. (Brantlinger 4)

5. 4. Re-invention of Identity

In postcolonial works, most authors or theorists try to re-invent the identity of the colonized, which has been hybridized or, borrowing postmodern jargon, deconstructed. As briefly noted earlier in this paper, deconstruction of identity refers to making identity quickly unstable. Therefore, it differs from hybridity, indicating instability because of the influence of a dominant superior culture. Re-invention of identity is highly obvious in Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*. All Soyinka's efforts to do this have culminated in creating a pantheon of Nigerian mythological gods and other notable figures by one of his protagonists, Kola. One of the ways Soyinka tries to re-invent his characters' identities can be seen in creating this painting in the form of such a pantheon. In doing so, the author's intention, Soyinka, is obvious.

The failure of Soyinka's characters to find their real identity makes Soyinka create an alternative place for these characters to fulfill their repressed desire by being part of this pantheon. Although the pantheon is a hybrid form of art, it is an appropriate place for them to see themselves in the most desired state. One of the most illuminating examples is Joe Golder, who begs Kola: "For God's sake, blacken me. Make me the blackest black blackness in your pantheon." (217) Joe Golder is an American and three-quarter white and can be regarded as one of the most notable characters in terms of hybridity. When he finds himself incapable of being black, which is another paradox, he decides to accomplish this desire using the pantheon.

This hybrid pantheon is something beyond usual pantheons. It is an extraordinary place to manifest unfulfilled identities, repressed desires, and being all the things that subalterns yearn for. The function of the pantheon in this novel can be compared with the 'unconscious' according to Freud's definition. Believing that most of these characters are, in one way or the other, affected by psychological and social complexes, such resemblance looks reasonable. The presence of Simi, one of the female characters, a very notorious prostitute, supports the idea of resembling the pantheon to the psyche. Simi can also be considered part of the unconscious, a repressed sexual desire. These types of unconscious play even a more significant role than the pantheon. Freud places the role of the unconscious as a significant part of human psychology, but interestingly this significance is much more in the pantheon of Wole Soyinka. Soyinka's unconscious or even this resemblance can be extended to the 'collective unconscious of Carl Jung, which has been placed in a highly immense position, that is, the pantheon. Regardless of any possible tendencies and approaches akin to the role of the pantheon, it is a manifestation place of repressed and lost identities.

The pantheon can be identified as an inanimate character serving as a reservoir of re-identification of all chronic hybrid characters. After Joe Golder, who longed to be depicted as the "blackest" in the pantheon, Egbo has been painted as drunken Ogun. Like Ogun, the mythological god of Yoruba, Egbo too inclines towards strength, sacrifice, masculinity, and destruction. These inclinations reveal themselves when Egbo kills the sacrificial ram for the feast on the occasion of Kola's exhibition or when he intends to kill his friend, one of the interpreters, Bandele, even when he sacrifices the virginity of the unnamed university girl on the rocks because he believed that these rocks are the feet of Ogun. Even worse, he intentionally left the naive boy, Noah, Joe Golder, leading the innocent boy to his tragic death. Another pivotal character among these 'interpreters' is Sagoe, the writer and journalist. Soyinka introduces the central part of his satire, as it was referred to as Soyinka's most potent weapon against corruption, through Sagoe. There is an apparent contradiction between Kola and Sagoe regarding their ways of introducing art. Kola, as always, has been depicted as an artist intellectual, notably in his immense work, the pantheon, which introduces his art in the form of high art. On the contrary, Sagoe tends to render his art through satire or extreme form, which ends up in absurdity.

The identity crisis Soyinka is also concerned with is 'cultural identity'. Therefore, by re-inventing identity, Soyinka accentuates the cultural elements of his nation while at the same time he does not neglect the contemporary issues of the Nigerian society. As Fanon argues in his seminal *The Wretched of Earth* (1961), only achieving independence is not sufficient to remove the colonialist distorting mirror and revive the original identity, which is hard to grasp again. Post-independence people could neither be reunited

with their pre-independence identities nor ultimately attain the colonizers' identity. This is a type of psychological instability in identity Soyinka and other postcolonial writers are most concerned about.

Such writers' obsession with identity crisis occasionally makes them depict some strange cases pertinent to this problem. In Soyinka's novel, one of the astonishing instances is depicted through the character of Lazarus. This character is a black person who revives from death in a strange and incredible situation but, surprisingly enough, in the form of a person with albinism. Besides this extraordinary change, he also identifies himself as Christ, and after this event, he starts preaching. The way of choosing his apostles is also as strange as his resurrection. These apostles mainly include outcasts who have chosen to be Lazarus's apostles. Such deviated examples or notorious religious displacements help Soyinka attack reproachable attitudes or some institutions and corrupted systems through bitter satire. The creation of the Lazarus scene and his bizarre resurrection by Soyinka can be interpreted as a means to achieve something beyond merely pungent satire.

Being a Negro before the resurrection and then albino after that and changing from being an ordinary man to a prophet all depict and support this reality of Soyinka's writing that almost everybody and everything in post-independence Nigeria is not stable or reliable. Above all these, Lazarus's case can be best construed as hybridity. This unique sense of hybridity is a masterful creation of Soyinka, which is identifiable as physical and religious hybridity. The case is clear in terms of physical hybridity: first, decolouration of a Negro and then turning into a person with albinism. Being an albino is having the vaguest colour a person can possess, having no solid colour, and having all colours in one place. This physical hybridity, religious hybridity, and having deviated and outcasted apostles is a monumental creation of hybridity in literary characters.

The characters of *The Interpreters* can be divided into two main groups. The first group of friends comprises Egbo, Sagoe, Sekoni, Kola, and Bandele, who are close intellectual friends referred to as "the interpreters" and play a significant role in this novel. Most events of this novel occur around this first group of characters. These characters are more critical of all Nigerian corruption and social ailments rather than interpreters. This first group of characters can be considered the constituent of Wole Soyinka's own character and point of view. For example, Soyinka's satirical points of view have been rendered through Sagoe, religious ones through Sekoni, artistic ones through Kola, his concern about ritual and mythology through Egbo, and his highly intellectual concerns through Bandele.

Therefore, this first group of characters, or critics, are literary representatives of Soyinka's critical points of view. In other words, these characters have been united to form a single voice to blame whatever they interpret as corruption. Although this single voice refers to the consensus belief and predominant problem in the Nigerian society, the novel can be best described as a hybridized polyphonic text. Even though this term is musical, Mikhail Bakhtin has used it as a narrative feature. Bakhtin considered Dostoevsky's prose as polyphonic, narrating a story from entirely different angles. The single voicedness of the above does not mean rejecting the polyphonic title for Soyinka's work; rather, it indicates the unanimity of these characters in terms of the way they look into the corrupted society. A hybridized polyphonic novel can be regarded as a proper entitling for the features of this novel.

The second group of characters forms a broader group consisting of those whose voices and actions are dominant throughout the novel. This group consists of Sir Derinola, Chief Winsala, the board members, and some intellectuals such as professor and Mrs. Oguazor, Ayo Faseyi, and his wife, Dr. Lumoye, Lasunwon, Joe Golder, and Peter the journalist. Others are Noah, Lazarus, Dehinwa's mother, Mrs. Faseyi (Faseyi's mother), Mathias, Pinkshore, Dehinwa, Simi, and the unnamed university girl. The roles of this group are less significant than the first group's. Moreover, they do not share criticizing society as the first group does.

On the contrary, most of these characters are the targets of attack by the first group. Each of these characters represents one caste of society that reflects the treatment of this part. For instance, professor Oguazor and Faseyi represent university faculties, board members Derinola and chief Winsala represent corrupted political members, and Noah and Lazarus represent deviated religious systems. Each of these characters shows a type of social ailments. This large number of characters indicates that Soyinka plans to analyze every part of society and scrutinize all aspects of society.

Besides these two groups, there are some more characters whose presence is very insignificant that cannot be considered the third group. Instead, they possess a neutral role, being neither critics nor being criticized. In other words, the omission of these characters would not affect this work notably. These characters consist of Salubi, Dwolabi, Alhaji Sekoni, Usaye, Kojekwe, Professor Singer, Mrs. Divern, Dejiade, and the taxi driver, to mention a few. Hybridity and mimicry are rare observable phenomena among this latter part of characters. They have been introduced into this novel to serve as a supplementary role.

6. Conclusion

This novel's neocolonial discourse discussed two key terms, 'hybridity' and 'identity'. Bhabha's theory of 'hybridity', mainly introduced in his seminal work *The Location of Culture* (1994), was used to support this research theoretically. The controversial term 'neocolonialism' was discussed by analyzing Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, the first African Nobel prize winner, in 1986. Along

with this key term in the present time, two more critical issues, hybridity and identity in this novel and related to its characters were also argued. Hybridity and identity are two psychological crises in neocolonial and postmodern predominance. These two problems undoubtedly are connected and related directly to neocolonialism. The characters of this novel are the victims of the neocolonial condition as the interpreters of this destructed society can neither interpret their own condition nor their society.

This novel can be regarded as one of the best instances of neocolonialism by introducing a text fraught with postmodern elements combined with Nigerian mythology and cultural aspects. The characters are the epitomes of hybridized individuals. In addition to the writing and publication time of the novel (1965), which is five years after Nigerian independence, all these would support the above evidence. These characters form a colourful range of personas that can serve as Soyinka's points of view related to the Nigerian political system, religion, mythology, culture, society, and government. Their significance is undeniable since they provide whatever we need to know or be familiar with in post-independence Nigerian and its predominant neocolonialism. Furthermore, they help us observe what is going on in every part of Nigeria during an era of pure chaos. The characters' various points of view create a juxtaposition of a lovely literary masterpiece due to its poetic prose combined with the bitterness of neocolonial realities.

The extremely malicious nature of neocolonialism and this, combined with postmodernism, makes the intervention of literary works more distinguished in comparison to other areas of this field. Accordingly, literature performs its duty to efficiently transform all these social problems, predominantly colonial issues. This occurs in the context of neocolonialism, specifically recent works, and this might make understanding such works difficult for some common and ordinary people. According to the reader-response theory, every individual has their own particular reading. Nevertheless, the above-illustrated point differs from this theory because reflexive and contesting works written in a highly complex writing style need to be analyzed meticulously to dig out their critical messages. For example, with its elusive and challenging style and language, *The Interpreters* is not an easy task to receive all the implicit world of Soyinka.

Another significant point throughout this research is analyzing two related concepts, hybridity, and identity, with postmodernism and neocolonialism. As much as neocolonialism is perhaps one of the most exciting debates in postmodern time, two concepts of identity and hybridity are famous as much. These two concepts are among the destructive consequences of postmodernism. The way identity is afflicted in postcolonial subjects and this described along with the identity crisis of postmodernism can be regarded as an excellent example of identity analysis in the mutual context of postmodernism/postcolonialism.

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