

# Postcoloniality and the “Cultural Turn”

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## ABSTRACT

This essay discusses a significant theme in the field of postcolonial studies, that is, the paradox that culture as a political legitimization of identity is also subject to the violence of representation. Focusing on Kwame Anthony Appiah’s much-cited essay “Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?” as useful but limited meditation on this paradox, I highlight the importance of “the cultural turn” in postmodernity in entrenching the asymmetry between postcoloniality and other

fields in the humanities and the social sciences, with particular examples of the marketability of African and “non-European” experiences. This discussion enables me to contrast prevalent ideas of culture with classic texts (Cabral; Fanon) on the nature of national culture. In conclusion, I stress the becomingness and partiality of culture, at every historical point, as a set of practices that do not and cannot reflect the totality of social expressions of all sections of a given society.

## Introduction

From a simple word used to denote the formal ending of colonial rule in the two decades following World War II, “postcoloniality” is now a field of knowledge from which virtually no system of thought is immune. So far from an early and untroubled use of the term by the Nigerian sociologist Peter Ekeh as “modern post-colonial Africa” in contrast to “experiences of colonialism” (1), postcoloniality is more capaciously understood in these less-innocent days as “*signifying* the whole process of expansion, exploration, conquest, colonization and imperial hegemonization which constituted the ‘outer face,’ the constitutive outside, of European and then Western modernity after 1492,” according to the British cultural theorist Stuart Hall (249; emphasis added).<sup>1</sup> There must be very few fields of knowledge in the world today with a history of contentions comparable to what postcoloniality has undergone in the past three decades. As academic disciplines go, by now there ought to be a Department of Postcolonial Studies in some American or European university, but for the bind of irreducible paradox at the core of the field: a creation of the capitalist system which is at the same time more extensively focused on the fates of societies in the poorer parts of the world. It is with this paradox that the present essay engages.

In the reflections that follow, I shall attempt to discuss this paradox as a significant theme in the field of postcolonial studies by looking at it through the prism of culture. Being a creation of the capitalist system means that postcoloniality views culture as a phenomenon subject to the violence of representation, and the extensive focus in the field on the fates of societies in the poorer parts of the world implies a view of culture as a political legitimization of identity. While scholars in the field of postcolonial studies recognize and value the enormous institutional changes that have been brought about through work carried out in the field, they are also all too aware of the same progressive changes being subject to the violence of representation, in the realm of politics as well as of art. Representations may be social facts, as Paul Rabinow once

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1. Naturally, of course, this essay will not attempt an exhaustive or systematic discussion of the field, such representative undertakings being properly viewed as the task of anthologies, multi-volume companions, of which there are many already, and many more to follow.

famously declared (1986), but a representation, either as an artistic or as a political procedure is impossible without exclusion or, at best, selection. The act of selection involves a degree of violence in the sense that some details, groups, ideas, or practices are suppressed or ignored in order for there to emerge a coherent form.

Nearly twenty-five years ago, the Ghanaian writer and philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, about whom I have more to say momentarily, noted the importance of “African art as a commodity” (339), and admirably perceived commodification in objective terms. His views about the commodification of African art have turned out to be prescient, as I detail below. More recently—but also quite early in postcolonial time—the curator and critic Okwui Enwezor has described contemporary art as being “refracted [...] in a more critical sense, from the standpoint of a complex geopolitical configuration that determines all systems of production and relations of exchange as a consequence of globalization after imperialism” (58). As a matter of fact, what worries the more politically-invested of the postcolonial scholars (Shohat; McClintock; Lazarus) is the predilection in the field toward placing greater emphasis on culture and cultural practices than on politics and economy. This is the “cultural turn” which, as Tejumola Olaniyan has brilliantly noted, is a function of the field’s consolidation as an institutional ally of postmodernism. Writing further, Olaniyan assesses “the cultural turn” in relation to postcoloniality as “*culturalism* that dehistoricizes culture and demeans and sacrifices the concrete socio-political struggles that most African scholars believe to be where the solution to the continent’s unending exploitation by the West lies” (42; original emphasis).

The idea of the “the cultural turn” is central to the aim of the present essay. I determine this importance in the sense that the privilege the concept enjoys in postmodernity—such that Fredric Jameson, the great panjandrum of postmodernism, would use the phrase as the title of an important selection of essays without so much as an introduction—plays a significant role in entrenching the asymmetry between postcoloniality and other fields in the humanities and the social sciences, with particular examples of the marketability of African and “non-European” experiences. In other words, from the

point of view of the “soft” social sciences (anthropology, sociology), when “postcoloniality” is invoked, the restricted domain is that of culture, and primarily representable, consumable culture. Indeed, the taken-for-granted premise of Jameson’s book is the idea of the consumable object, whether image, text, or sound, as the defining feature of postmodernism or the *cultural* logic of late capitalism. Yet this idea of the cultural as a function primarily of the market is contrary to classic formulations on culture by figures such as Frantz Fanon (*The Wretched of the Earth*) and Amílcar Cabral (*Unity and Struggle: Selected Essays and Writings of Amílcar Cabral*). From the perspective of these revolutionary writers, culture is a matter of historical self-understanding, a powerful tool of revolutionary transformation of society. The paradox which this essay confronts therefore lies in the discrepancy between the excessive culturalism—the privileging of culture in postmodernist critique—from which postcoloniality derives its legitimacy in contemporary scholarship and the appeal of those classic and revolutionary formulations. The essay’s sight is set on the notion that culture is ever-becoming and partial at every historical moment, that it is a set of practices that do not and cannot (need not?) reflect the totality of social expressions of all sections of a given society, a point that Terry Eagleton has made perhaps with great elegance and even greater wit.

### Consumable Culture

In his essay “Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?”, one of the earliest and most influential attempts at exploring the connections between postmodernism and postcolonialism as valuations of the cultural form, Appiah dwells extensively on the perception that art as a particular refinement of culture is a commodity.<sup>2</sup> As he states almost immediately, one of the essay’s aims is to underscore the importance of “African art as a commodity” (339). Appiah brings this aim home with force by discussing the self-conscious but unpretentious

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2. First published in *Critical Inquiry* in 1991, the essay was later revised and included as a chapter in *In My Father’s House*, which came out the following year. Page references here are to the 1991 version.

views of David Rockefeller, a collector of African art, who is permitted “to say *anything at all* about the arts of Africa because he is a *buyer* and because he is at the *center*” (338; original emphases), while the views of Lela Kouakou, an artist and diviner from the Ivory Coast, are circumscribed by the parameters set by Susan Vogel, the curator of the exhibit in which Rockefeller and Kouakou are co-curators. Appiah argues that the process by which African cultural forms such as worked objects of art are incorporated into primarily Western museums is also one through which the distinction between high culture and popular culture is made. Although he cleverly debunks such a distinction by glossing an image of his own acquisition of a figurine, Appiah does not think that it is thus abandoned. He argues, in fact, that this distinction mostly makes sense in one domain where it “is powerful and pervasive: namely, in African writing in Western languages” (347). He turns eventually to an exemplary writing in this regard, focusing on *Le Devoir de Violence (Bound to Violence)* (1968), by the Malian writer Yambo Ouologuem.

In an elegant and stimulating discussion, Appiah holds up this novel as an example of “postrealist” and “postnational” writing in African literature, articulating those terms with postcoloniality in simply chronological terms. However stimulating the essay may be, it is in fact problematic and tendentious, and I would like to emphasize this by focusing on a number of issues in the essay that, if pushed further, will reveal gaps and silences in the analysis. First, Appiah’s choice of the novel form is clever and convenient, I think, because some dramatic works—like Wole Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel*, *The Strong Breed*, and *A Dance of the Forests*—stand to complicate the picture since they are doing exactly what he applauds in *Bound to Violence*, and are at least a decade ahead of that novel in the game. Of course, it could be argued that Appiah opts for the novel because the form lends itself more easily than drama to the kind of commodification through which the market calibrates cultural value. And indeed, as he says previously, the weight of analysis ought to be balanced between the novel and visual art in order to undercut the critical tendency to distort the “significance of postcoloniality” within those forms (346). However, the point is that even with the novel form, the choice of *Bound to Violence*

is also convenient and easy. Appiah's compatriot, Ayi Kwei Armah, has by the late 1960s, the period of so-called betrayal of nationalist politics, produced very powerful and equally controversial novels that fall outside the neatly periodized circle on which the essay's argument is based. Armah's novels dealt with the same issues of the broken promises of independence, but they were not all published within the period that Appiah delimits. Why does Appiah totally ignore these compelling works and their equally compelling author?

Secondly, the argument that Ouologuem "seeks to delegitimize the forms of the realist African novel [...] because what it sought to naturalize was a nationalism that, by 1968, had plainly failed" (349), cannot be sustained for the important reason that even a supposedly nationalist/realist novelist like Achebe attempts, in *A Man of the People*, a realist novel in 1966 (and which Appiah mentions), something far more critical of post-independence nationalism than Ouologuem's novel even suggests. In other words, a realist novel can very well represent the failure of nationalism, and time has very little to do with it. Periodization is important, but it is theoretically untenable to say that the historical value of a particular year/decade is enough to "delegitimize" a literary form. I think it is more tenable to argue that a form's legitimacy is eroded over time and that it can be replenished—this is a point that Appiah will accept easily, since he emphasizes the role of the market in the creation of artistic value.

Finally, to say that what we have in *Bound to Violence* is "not an aesthetic, but a politics," is also to confuse matters, using categories—postmodernism and postmodernization—which are not doing useful things together. Postmodernization is a term Appiah uses to characterize the dilemmas of failed political independence, but it has no bearing on the concept developed by Jameson and others, and it seems that Appiah's use of the term is informed by a teleological view of historical processes. In her judicious critique of the essay, the scholar Susan Andrade argues that Appiah conflates form and content in his analysis, passing realism off as representative of the nationalist phase in African literary history (185). This is because Appiah links the realist mode to a process of marketability (or commodification), according to which a novel is valued by how well it turns its back on

“originary” notions of nationalism. The point, it seems to me, is that the politics of *Bound to Violence* are insufficient for the purposes of Appiah’s argument, because the novel is not strictly about the failure of independence, and so a mixture of aesthetic and political considerations makes it attractive for a critique of realism. This point is easy to overlook, but the controversy following the novel’s publication, and the impact it possibly had on Ouologuem’s career, make it indispensable to an appropriate understanding of African literary history.<sup>3</sup>

Appiah’s understanding of the status of postcoloniality in relation to postmodernism is summed up in his definition of the term as “the condition [...] of a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery” (Appiah 348). This definition of postcoloniality is too literal and “teleological,” as Andrade notes (186), and it frames the relationship between colonialism and postcolonialism in the temporal terms of supersession, of one epoch transcending the other. Compared to the kind of theoretically challenging task that Stuart Hall sets for himself in his essay, Appiah’s nimble but literalist understanding of periodization gives a short shrift to the epistemological status of postcoloniality. It might be retorted that the field was still new and ideas about it were still fragmentary at the time of the essay’s composition. But the essay’s forceful argument rests on the political premise criticized by both Ella Shohat and Anne McClintock, who were writing at roughly the same time. In other words, even that early in the evolution of the field, there were scholars with a skeptical view of things.

Appiah’s premise is convincing on one count, though. By extending to the novel the sorts of evaluative standards usually reserved for the visual arts, he anticipates the current interest in the productive tensions between culture and commodification, in which scholarship in postcolonial art is very much invested. Sandra Ponzanesi’s *The Postcolonial Cultural Industry* is a recent example of this turn in postcolonial critique, but there is already a long history behind it, beginning with Timothy Brennan’s *Salman Rushdie*

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3. For a useful and sensitive recapitulation of the controversy, see Wise 6–9.

and the Third World. When it is reduced to the barest frame, the argument is something along this line: in artistic or worked forms, the anthropological idea of culture assumes values and practices that can be appreciated, judged, in short consumed either because they are different (exoticism, novelty), familiar (refinement, cherishability), or contentious (otherness, topicality). Within this frame, the Maori novelist Keri Hulme's *the bone people* provides an example of the first category, British writer Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* exemplifies the second, and Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*—which the Indian scholar Aijaz Ahmad characterizes as “selling certain novelizations of Islam to British and American publishing”—would be an example of the third category (Ahmad 34). Supplementary to this frame are two other currents which give the cultural turn in postcolonial studies an uncanny primacy. The first is the complex relationship between commodification and celebrity, through which a different kind of economy emerges to confer prestige on works and persons (as authors) which has little to do with thematic consideration in a given work (English). The second is the ability of a given writer to work with genre in such a way as to advance some sort of ethnographic authority, as Rob Nixon cogently notes with regards to the nonfictional writings of V. S. Naipaul.

In the first case, the reception of *The Satanic Verses* through the sensational events around the *fatwa* proclaimed by the Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran conceals the far more interesting insights into translocal identities in that novel. Thus, in spite of his traumatic personal experiences, the author, Sir Salman, could conceivably be a movie actor (who appears as himself) in the film *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001) and a guest lecturer who treats his audience at a university to stand-up acts in the manner of the comedian Steve Martin. In the second instance, the perception of postcolonial societies as horrible distortions of Western modernist values creates a different generic effect in nonfiction, but potentially more revered than in fiction because of the former's ability to combine the rhetoric of exploratory prose with the respectability of on-the-ground witnessing. Naipaul's repeated reports on Islam and Muslims (*Among the Believers*, *A Million Mutinies Now*, *Beyond Belief*) may be less worthy on historical and factual grounds than, say, Edward Said's singular *Covering Islam*, but there are few doubts about which of

the two authors will have the ears of the cultural institutions of prestige when the need arises for “industrial” information about Islam.

The paradox of culture as simultaneously a system of legitimizing identity and of authorizing a variety of representations is a central issue in postcolonial studies for the reasons advanced long ago by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, that is the modernist compulsion to subject all the expressive spheres of society to the logic of the industrial process. In addition, it is a central issue because the kinds of difference that cannot be rationalized into consumable tablets are simply abridged or ignored. Theorists of literary and cultural production have long resolved that the act of representation is an irreducibly violent one, that it is impossible to represent something without being selective, and in the process being exclusive (Macherey; Rabinow). It remains a debatable point whether the Joycean dream of inclusiveness (“Here Comes Everyone”) or the idea of a common culture in which everyone is an equal player (Eagleton; Said) is achievable. Much material force and cultural capital are nevertheless attached to the prevalent idea of culture as consumable tablets, and it is in this respect that the investment in culture, which binds postcoloniality to postmodernity, ought to give scholars a pause.

An example that seems instructive in this regard comes from a foremost shaper of cultural tastes in the world today. In a 2002 profile of Shimon Peres, the former Israeli prime minister, *The New Yorker*'s David Remnick recalls a conversation about the politician's untrustworthiness:

Despite his early successes, Peres's rivals and peers began to see him as slick and untrustworthy. Avishai Margalit, a scholar and a well-known writer on Israeli politics, told me that Rabin and Peres were once invited to visit the Kenyan leader Jomo Kenyatta in Nairobi: “On the way, they stopped in France, and Peres told Rabin how awful it was that he could not find a copy of Kenyatta's autobiography. He was in despair. Finally, when they got to Kenya and they approached Kenyatta, Peres said, ‘Mr. President, I was so touched by your autobiography. Especially the chapter about your childhood in the village. It moved me to tears.’ Kenyatta was so happy, because the book had not been especially well

received. After the meeting, Rabin said with admiration and disgust, ‘When did you read it?’ ‘I didn’t,’ Peres answered. ‘So how did you know about his childhood in the village?’ Peres said, ‘I didn’t. But what else can he write about besides his life in the village?’” (“The Dreamer”)

This is an interesting story, or stories, requiring glosses for a number of reasons, not least of which is the fact that it was published in *The New Yorker*. It may be pointless to speculate on whether or not there was ever such an incident, and the consequential place to look for evidence would be Margalit’s knowledge of the two politicians. Whether fact or fiction, however, the dramatic moments—of Peres’ regrets in France, of his willful but appreciable lying upon encountering Kenyatta in Nairobi, of the Kenyan leader’s reactions—are well worthy of textual analysis. Remnick is an extremely well-read journalist, with a keen interest in complex, sometimes seemingly obscure cultural details, and latterly a biographer of American president Barack Obama.<sup>4</sup> The whole narrative is based on a questionable premise: that there is, in fact, an autobiography, properly speaking, of Jomo Kenyatta, and one that Peres could have read. Even if the profile of a former Israeli prime minister in *The New Yorker* could hardly be expected to create a discursive space for evaluating the reception history of Kenyatta’s *Facing Mount Kenya*—the one book authored by Kenyatta but which is not an autobiography—the larger context of Remnick’s operations as author and editor (of a periodical which places a high premium on fact checking) would require that he be reflexive about at least two issues in the narrative. He obviously did not consider the possibility that there might not have been an autobiography of Kenyatta, well-received or not, and he was surprisingly indifferent to the benign racism in Peres’ final statement. The concern here is less with whether Peres’ statements, refracted from Margalit’s telling and calculated to charm a man (also a politician) he was meeting for the first time, were true or false, and more with Remnick’s decision to use them so unselfconsciously.

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4. See Remnick, “The Dreamer.”

Written as a thesis in social anthropology under Bronislaw Malinowski at the London School of Economics at a time when Kenyatta was also involved in anticolonial work in England, *Facing Mount Kenya* turned out to be a useful text in the anticolonial struggle in Kenya, where the issue of land control became the decisive rallying point. Although it was framed as a work of anthropology, contemporary accounts of the book’s reception highlighted the attention it received in political circles. In any case, for a book authored by an expatriated African political figure in the interwar years, the reception of *Facing Mount Kenya* was more typical than not.<sup>5</sup>

These criticisms should matter in the context of the cultural turn in postcoloniality because a magazine such as *The New Yorker* works with the assumption of being simultaneously industrial and culturally aware. It may not be the authority to which a scholar of postcolonial studies naturally turns to gauge the cultural temperature, but it is a visible organ for the buyer of African art who is also at the center and is thus permitted to say anything, to recall Appiah’s characterization of Rockefeller. It is possible for the magazine to adopt this kind of attitude because it does not imagine that the historical contexts out of which Kenyatta’s career as author and statesman have evolved could be useful to its readership. Or that they could be coeval with those of Peres and Rabin. In fact, in the interwar years, the three politicians were in the same cultural boat to the extent that neither Kenya nor Israel existed as an independent state. What seems important to Remnick is the humor in the example; a sense of culture as taste, never mind who is the butt of the joke. I will now turn to Frantz Fanon’s “On National Culture” and Cabral’s “National Culture,” two other writings whose primary focus on culture has been of immense benefit to postcolonial studies.

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5. See Polsgrove’s *Ending British Rule in Africa: Writers in a Common Cause*, chapter 2, for a very valuable account of the book and the contexts of its publication as acutely political decisions.

### Cultures in Common

Fanon's "On National Culture" was first presented to the Second Congress of Black Artists and Writers, in Rome, in 1959. This fact is relevant in terms of the genealogy of the thesis and the central role it has come to occupy in the annals of postcolonial studies. Of the different chapters of *The Wretched of the Earth*, this was composed for a specific occasion, although that fact does nothing to mitigate the coherence of Fanon's argument about the character of anticolonial revolution. It is the place where Fanon develops the evolutionary schema of the three phases of the colonial intellectual. What is at issue, and this is crucial to my critique, is how the three-phase schema has been played up as a typological capsule, to the neglect of the ubiquitous, but fraught, uses of "nation," "the people," "culture," and "the native intellectual" in the text. Although "national culture" is defined in the text as "the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence" (Fanon 233), the concept of "the people" itself escapes definition in class terms. This is related to the vagueness with which the term "native intellectual" is used in revolutionary registers that might encourage comparison with the Gramscian notion of the organic intellectual. But this figure is also "the native man of culture" (232), "the cultured native" (233), and further into the text, Fanon refers to the "colonized man who writes for his people" (239).

These generalizations are never fully clarified, and they bring up three fundamental issues in the methodological slippages perceived in this text. First, it is not clear what "nation" means in Fanon's usage, and one can only surmise from this usage that it is the opposite of the "continental" or "racial" because of the way that these other terms are invoked (214–17). An example of this occurs in the "continental" scope of the native intellectual who takes up arms to defend his nation's legitimacy, an undertaking which at the same time is said to be extra-national (211). The understanding of the nation slips from the bureaucratically segmented state—Angola, Mali, or Nigeria—to the psychological idea of selfhood (Negro) defined against the colonial authority. Thus, what Fanon presents as transnationalism (212) is more

convincing as a form of nationalism, for even in the example of the Arab League, cultural nationalism manifests as simultaneously continental and national-bureaucratic. Second, the *nationality* of the different political dominants (purportedly European) is hardly identified; it is often assumed to be self-evident as the primary rationale of colonial power.

Fanon offers a description of colonial dominance as systematic and well thought-out, an assertion validated by the nervous effect of colonial conditioning (so-called nervous condition). This is problematic because to take the colonial system as fully systematized is to overlook the contingency of the enterprise, its opportunistic revisions with respect to changing economic and political climates, including how anticolonial struggle constantly forces it to adjust. As an extension of this, there is finally a sense in which Fanon presents the specifically French responses to colonialism as generic. The ironic reading of René Depestre’s “Face of the Night,” a poem by a French colonial in which all the allusions are French, posits a critical attitude toward cosmopolitan literary politics whose context is expatriate French, and the reading is more political than literary (219; 226). This third point, the generalizing of the French model, is at the heart of the shortcomings that attend appropriations of Fanon’s three-phase schema.

Overall, Fanon’s argument in *The Wretched of the Earth* is so powerful for the legitimacy of postcolonial studies as to turn critical reflections on these slippages into little more than nitpicking. Indeed, the counteractive argument that “On National Culture” is meant to be read against the chapter titled “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness” only mitigates the criticisms. What the “cultural turn” does is to take positions such as Fanon’s (and Cabral’s, to which I now turn) as starting points in strikes against colonialism and its mostly negative aftermaths, rather than constitutive moments of a complex history in the making.

Cabral’s text was written at least ten years after Fanon’s, delivered as the Eduardo Mondlane Memorial Lecture at Syracuse University, in February 1970. In the lifespan of the liberation struggle, ten years is a very long time indeed. Halfway into “National Culture” and speaking in a definitional tone, Cabral characterizes national culture as the act of “the liberation movement [being] capable of distinguishing within

it [culture] the essential from the secondary, the positive from the negative, the progressive from the reactionary in order to characterize the key line of the progressive definition of *national culture*” (147; original emphasis). This is the same essay in which Cabral admonishes revolutionaries to return to the upward paths of their own culture “without underestimating the importance of *positive* contributions from the oppressor’s culture” (143). It is also the essay in which Cabral makes the hugely Hegelian proposition that political and economic colonialism cannot be combined with cultural oppression. Under colonialism, political domination operated invariably as economic domination, and Cabral’s argument is that the cultural domain is the domain where acts of anticolonial struggle were likely to be most effective. This logic played an important role in the conception and execution of guerrilla warfare, perhaps the most effective weapon that the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) used against Portugal in the war of independence.

Yet the evolutionary character of culture as a tool of liberation in this essay is very much in the mold of Fanon. At one point, Cabral writes:

Study of the history of liberation struggles shows that they have generally been preceded by an upsurge of cultural manifestations, which progressively harden into an attempt, successful or not, to reassert the cultural personality of the dominated people by an act of denial of the culture of the oppressor. (142–143)

Thus, whether he is arguing for the need to distinguish the positive aspects of a culture from the negative ones, or highlighting the progressive nature of the consolidation of dominated culture, Cabral’s well-known and sophisticated use of the dialectic is still caught in a bind. In its conception of the relationship between historical processes and the category of culture, the essay appears to foreshadow what will be criticized as overreliance on teleology in Appiah’s essay.

My argument is that Cabral’s idea of approaching liberation struggle from the primary position of a culture whose dimensions are, in fact, hard to delimit is akin to the slippages between the categories of “the

people,” “the nation,” and “culture” in Fanon’s analysis. As propositions developed in the heat of the battle—literally because the authors were active as revolutionaries even as they wrote, and metaphorically because the “nation” as such was largely inchoate in both cases—these two texts were inevitably shaped by these historical contexts. The main issue to take would be with the way that postcolonial studies has accepted these statements as critical starting-points, imbuing them with almost oracular powers. This is the case, I think, because of the attractions of the cultural turn in the field. The cultural turn certainly enjoys an unusual privilege because of what Olaniyan rightly perceives as its discursive character, embodying all the instruments of culture such as “meaning, interpretation, subjectivity, and understanding” (47). It is also because of the power of culture as the basis of self-consciousness, and this is no mean fact in postcolonial studies. Here is a field which not only derives its legitimacy from its position as the institutional redoubt of progressive scholars and intellectuals of different ideological persuasions (such as the author of the present essay), but which also does endless battles against two equally reprehensible targets: colonialism and neocolonialism/cultural imperialism.

Do the reflections of these theorists of postcoloniality have anything to say to contexts other than those two eternal and intimate enemies of formerly colonized societies? What if, instead of being viewed primarily as “the intellectual battleground” of the modern world-system (Wallerstein 159), culture were to be approached as a set of practices that do not and cannot reflect the totality of social expressions of all sections of a given society?

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