I.2 On Postcolonial Theory

“O Colonialismo é um espelho deformante onde todas as motivações suspeitas se podem branquear e vice-versa.”

The independence movements that led to the creation of several nation states in Africa and granted self-rule to the Indian subcontinent finished a long period of European imperialism. This historical change does not mean the world was cured from neo-colonial enterprises, but, undeniably, a new world order reigns. Europe had to re-think its imperial identity (and post-modernism is more than obviously the intellectual and artistic search for new epistemes and new patterns of Western identity) and the postcolonial states had the challenge to become a functional reality (some have been struggling for decades, which testifies to the complexity of such processes).

Some of the territories colonised by European nations had an ancient written literature, but its modern form was born under colonialism: firstly, as a replica of the coloniser’s culture, encompassing the local contributions to colonial literature, but, gradually, as the means of expressing an emergent postcolonial awareness which took momentum during the nineteenth century. As this second trend grew stronger, the birth of an autonomous canon, which the postcolonial nations claim as their own modern literature, took a distinctive shape.

My working definition of postcolonial literature is complex and I will return to it, in the following subsections. However, three elements of it can be established from the above paragraphs. It is related to the historical process of de-colonisation, it contributed to the assertion of an independent national identity and it consolidated as the local brand of modern literature, regardless of previous traditions.

Two factors were fundamental to mark literary difference, and mind that in a postcolonial context, difference was the measure of the correspondent cultural autonomy from European imitation in the making of autonomous literatures. This was achieved, basically in two ways: by subject matter, resisting colonisation and projecting a model of identity for the future of the (post-independence) nation; in aesthetic terms by re-discovering, praising and promoting one’s culture, one’s non-Western life-style, local ways. Both of these strategies amounted to what I call “territorialisation” of the text, linking literature to a society, a culture (or a set of cultures in these multi-ethnic societies) and a landscape. What is special about postcolonial literature is that this normal gesture of taking inspiration from one’s culture implied the effort of resisting the assimilation of Western civilisation, in a colonial context where the education system, if there was one, would be state oriented, meaning, oriented in agreement with colonisation. Taking this state of affairs into account it is easy to understand the political commitment of these emerging literatures to the struggle for independence, and the vital contribution of writers in the assertion of postcolonial national projects.

Note that I am not denying neither the existence nor the importance of exquisite literary heritages from pre-colonial cultures, either in its written form or as oral literatures. What happened is that during colonialism these literatures were partially destroyed, corrupted, or at least, marginalised by Eurocentric governments. Hence, a huge work of

74 Colonialism is a deforming mirror with the ability to white-wash all unclear motivations and vice-versa.” Eduardo Lourenço, “Retrato (Póstumo) do Nosso Colonialismo Inocente”, revista Critério, nº2, ano 1984: 8.
recovery, and even re-creation, has been taking place in many postcolonial societies. Anyway, apart from these ancient, surviving manifestations of local literatures, the raising of nationalist awareness and the struggle for independence were fundamental sources of inspiration for the consolidation and growth of local, modern, literatures, which have been received in the West under the name of “postcolonial”, linking their visibility to the historical and political circumstances of their birth. In this research, I am only dealing with written literatures, but I should add I recognise the wealth of modern songs of praise or of story telling as fundamental actors in the local literary systems, for instance in Mozambique and also in Cape Verde. Nevertheless, I feel the adequate development of critical tools to address these literatures from a more internal, aesthetic point of view still is quite tentative (i.e. usually these texts are approached from a cultural, sociological perspective, while its literary form, in terms of genre, narrative structures and aesthetic values are not addressed), though Brown and Sidikou have been quite successful in framing the function of such literary forms, stressing their interactive, performative qualities.

As far as postcolonial written literatures are concerned, I take resistance to colonialism and the self-assertion of an independent (national, ethnic, regional) identity as two of the main sources of motivation for many writers who took the pen in colonised territories. Naturally, decades after independence, postcolonial literatures have evolved and diversified. Nevertheless, because of such link between writing and activism, I see the worth of such a concept as “postcolonial” to refer to an historical frame that indeed had a foundational influence on these (modern and postmodern) literatures. “Postcolonial”, though it invokes a historical change that affected both colonisers and colonised, is a Western concept, framing the reception and reviewing of the diverse literatures flowing from former ex-colonies.

Since the 1960s, the quality and fecundity of the so called “commonwealth literatures” prompted a critical reaction from the British and American academies. The concepts and categories developed by these institutions as a response to the new objects of study soon had a normalising impact world-wide, influencing European academies in the study of other postcolonial literatures written in French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Dutch.

To the eyes of artists and thinkers in postcolonial states, like Cape Verde, Mozambique or India, I doubt this “postcolonial” label is as equally meaningful and practical. Local intelligentsia may use it to dialogue with an international audience, but is it not their own writers and literatures they are referring to? Would they not prefer to call them national or regional literatures, depending on the frame of collective identity they relate to?


76 Still, these two features, namely, resistance (to both foreign homogenising interference and internal exploitation) and self-assertion of national/regional identities (the recovery of local traditions, and the management of differences and divisions) are central issues for the literature I claim as postcolonial, including the literature currently written to resist neo-colonial threats. The transition from formal colonialism to neo-colonial practices (like the globalisation of transnational capitalism) was correspondingly accompanied by “cultural warfare” as a form of resistance (evolving into most subtle and refined forms), and a continuous necessity of repeating self-assertive gestures. These continuities, in old threats of old dichotomies, reclaim “postcolonial” as a relevant concept to keep a critical perspective on current postcolonial literatures.


78 In the 1980s, Bruce King already calls these literatures “New English Literatures”, instead of, “Commonwealth literatures”. He confirms that the beginning of a more serious critical reviewing of literatures in English started around the 1960s, either for Africa, the West Indies or India. In Bruce King, The New English Literatures – Cultural Nationalism in a Changing World Order, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1980.
Still, international acknowledgement of postcolonial literatures fulfils a cultural dialogue that is vital to promote these literary universes abroad. In this sense, local critics and writers may accept the relevance of the label on the grounds of its positive potential.

International cultural dialogues across the reading and writing of postcolonial literature pose the risk of promoting a few writers as the representatives of a national culture that is much more complex and multifaceted. In the essay “Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist”\(^\text{79}\), Salman Rushdie comments on the development of such Western critical labels as an ontological impossibility since you cannot name and divide literature according to the passport of the writer, as if she/he were going to stand for the exotic national culture of her/his non-Western country.

Though critical labels, as systems of classification, can be misleading and hide amazing variations from sight, they are equally useful, and they structure the first attempts to create room for new areas of knowledge. In the case of postcolonial critical debates, the problem is that the point of view that is legitimised through these concepts is mostly the Western one, where all these labels were coined in the first place, and the subsequent canonised, current, one-sided perspective on, for example, African and Indian literatures, may be incomplete or distorted, and can be resented by writers whose aesthetic perspective and cultural references do not coincide with established critical views in the West\(^\text{80}\). The problem of applying limited models (postcolonial critical theory) to an extremely polymorphous object (postcolonial literatures) is that, as Rushdie points out, the gain in knowledge may amount to no more than a distortion of reality, taking a part for the whole (hence the ontological impossibility of a referent for such a thing as Commonwealth literature). Yet again, I would say, it depends on how you use theory and what kind of knowledge you seek. If one inscribes this awareness of variation in the research object as an extra source of knowledge and insights, instead of reading it as a factor upsetting the credibility of the theory, then this tension disappears, …but so do universalising classificatory systems. This research went around this problem by dismissing the relevance of a classificatory table. Rather, the study is structured as a set of situated approaches “talking back” to a set of guidelines that may or may not prove the adequate conceptual tools to answer each text. Please accept this statement for the time being, suspending your disbelief that a sound theoretical conclusion can come out of such an open, flexible frame.

Salman Rushdie’s problem with “Commonwealth” is also a matter of power. A decentralised, nomadic approach as the one I am developing does not establish certain institutions and theories as being in control of the direction of postcolonial studies. I just offer a perspective of theory as “a kit” or “set of tools”, which I think is important to keep the openness and translatable of this critical frame across cultures. The discussion of this point, comparing ways of looking at theory as “school of thought” versus “mind travelling”, shows once more that when talking about “postcolonial literatures”, there are historical and political susceptibilities to be handled with care, and that the same old struggles for power go on. The contribution of such critical voices as Salman Rushdie’s is extremely important


\(^{80}\) Biodun Jeyifo defends that there is a whole set of positive possibilities in the cross-fertilisation between local/ situated approaches to literatures and their international reception. The only problem may be the difference of reviewing patterns between local critics (for example more concerned with nationalist and political priorities) and Western reading perspectives, more dependent on theory. Jeyifo commends a clearer theoretical definition from local academies and, for Western scholars, a sounder awareness of the implications of reading and writing in particular, situated contexts. Biodun Jeyifo, “The Nature of Things: Arrested Colonisation and Critical Theory”, in Padimini Mongia (ed.), Contemporary Postcolonial Theory, Arnold, 1996.
to correct Western-egocentric points of view, and increase one’s ability to communicate across different cultural landscapes, minding difficult historical memories that may divide us.

To counterbalance the prominence of the Western perspective and its normalising effects (which may imply generalisations, distortion, simplification) one of the possible solutions is to advocate, as I am doing in this research, the greater relevance and adequacy of situated, context bounded approaches, which combine established theory with a greater concern for local history, politics and socio-cultural issues addressed by specific texts, shifting from a more abstract, post-structuralist perspective towards a more material and concrete approach. The tension here, between situated approaches and self-referential uses of theory, springs from the influence of Derrida, Lacan and Michel Foucault through the works of Homi Bhabha, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak mostly resented by Marxist critics, who see the influence of French theory as a loss of the revisionist potential of postcolonial literary criticism (because of the interruption in the process of ideological decolonisation implied in certain forms of a-historical, disembodied knowledge). A greater attention to local context and recent socio-historical processes is fundamental to link art forms to the “multiple material and intellectual contexts which determine its production and reception”:

“In related fashion, postcolonial criticism has challenged hitherto dominant notions of the autonomy of the aesthetic sphere, helping to gain acceptance for the argument, advanced on a number of fronts since the 1960s especially, that ‘culture’ mediates relations of power as effectively, albeit in more indirect and subtle ways, as more public and visible forms of oppression.”

(Moore-Gilbert, 1997: 8)

The important connection established by Moore-Gilbert is that self-referential critical theories are very convenient to wash away the power of literature and other works of art as forms of political intervention and ideological reflection. In the case of postcolonial literatures, consolidated through the struggle for independence, appropriated by nationalist or Marxist lobbies in the post-independence period, and currently committed to social criticism and post-euphoria reactions to current realities, the importance of power relations and historical processes is fundamental to understand the reach, aims, particular forms and meaning of postcolonial literatures, such as they have been evolving in the nineties.

In this research the contribution of high theory is not taken as a “system of belief” (which would close as many mental doors as it opens). On the contrary, the set of theories I offer below makes explicit to the reader the kind of journey she/he is invited to join, having me as serviceable guide and fellow-traveller companion. It is a journey in terms of imagination, reflection and acquisition of insights. The chosen narrative texts will become a sort of road or map to know a bit more of a set of particular postcolonial locations.

82 Aijaz Ahmad considers “postcolonial” an empty category because of its theoretical generalisations which amount to a loss of “analytical power”. In order to counterbalance such abstractions, Ahmad suggests the necessity of concrete historical frames of reference. The problem with rampant, abstract theory is that it denies all possibility of political agency outside of the rhetorical game, (“The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality”, 1996: 276 – 291); Arif Dirlik, reduces postcolonial criticism to “marketing strategies” by third world intellectuals to promote themselves in Euro-American universities, claiming to be experts on areas the West wants to know, analyse and control, as part of the project of globalisation, (The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism”, 1996: 294 –321). Both papers in Padimini Mongia (ed.), Contemporary Postcolonial Theory, Arnold, London, 1996.
The aesthetic dimension of literature will be read as the set of techniques that refine and expand the ability of the text to mean, by interfering with emotions, pleasure and feelings, beyond the rational set of ideological arguments presented by the text (I believe a great piece of literature is the one that seduces you, while provoking thought and intellectual development).

On each location, I will follow the invited set of guidelines from the set of possible lines of work which I have assemble in these two theoretical critical models. They do not offer a method, but an alternative set of multiple possibilities. In the end, this study will be able to conclude which categories were more operative, providing some explanations for that fact. This means that this theoretical section establishes a provisional starting point (actually a multiple starting point, because it will include a simultaneous set of possible alternatives) to think within a postcolonial model of literary analysis. Not all the same steps will be followed. Criticism has to respect the differences of different texts.

I will focus on the main socio-political issues affecting each of these locations and I will also analyse the available constellation of cultural references (including interpretations and discussion of local collective history) that provide the experience of living on these postcolonial universes with meaning and value. This comment on current societies works for both local and international readers, but obviously, a local reader has a richer set of references to dialogue with the text than I have. My limits are compensated by critical theory. Others have tried this same journey before. The set of guidelines suggested by the model of postcolonial critical analysis I assembled from the research of an extensive set of experts will help me to get solid points of reference, a sort of technique to find one’s way in the desert, by reading certain signs, following certain clues.

I chose to look at the particular position of women, and their relation to men, on these locations. This apparently private dimension of social interaction has proved a straight road to look at wider issues. For example, it tells of patterns of distribution of power, establishes recognised markers of status and privilege, identifies forms of social segregation and exclusion, detects power/political alliances and it also enables you to assess the importance of religion and tradition. Hence, just as micro-politics can affect international relations and macro economic models affect micro family business, in the same way, colonial histories, de-colonisation, nationalist mobilisation, postcolonial crisis, international capitalism, all of these encyclopaedic, worldly issues can disrupt life in a small village in “the middle of nowhere”. What happens in small, private universes, contains wider questions, and deserves proportional attention.

Apart from the tension between abstract theory and situated approaches to postcolonial literature, I would like to recall the importance of positive notions of “difference”, meaning “diversity” and “wealth”, instead of “deviance from the (European) norm”, to deal with postcolonial literatures. This is an important strategy to demonstrate the individuality of postcolonial literatures and underline the provisional and partial status of the explanatory abilities of theory. To opt for a comparative study, which handles the extra knowledge provided by “differences” as a measure of success, is to avoid homogenisation.

It is because of my interest in difference and diversity, as a challenge to critical theory designed to think beyond the particular, that I have chosen such disparate case studies as India, Mozambique and Cape Verde: India is in Asia, the other two in Africa, India was eventually dominated by the British, Mozambique and Cape Verde were Portuguese until 1975. Besides, the pre-colonial cultures of these countries were themselves very different, and Cape Verde is a special Creole case since it is a hybrid society from the very beginning (the islands were not inhabited and both slaves and white colonisers were de-territorialised when they moved there). With such choice of research objects, I will be straining the
effective hold of postcolonial critical theories across diversity, while engaging in a situated reading of different instances of postcolonial literature. I will follow each text as a sort of “window” on a local postcolonial society, as a fragmented glimpse of the local atmosphere, accepting the worth of the insights contained in the fragments to learn about the whole. Remember that micro-universes intersect with and contain traces of wider realities.

Apart from differences among postcolonial literatures, there are several similarities grouping these texts, which enable me to define them as cases of postcolonial literature. Basically, postcolonial literatures are the national literatures of post-independence nations, still branded by the experience of colonialism and the challenges of autonomous self-definition and self-consolidation. But...there are many angles to a definition of postcolonial literatures. Below, I will look at a set of themes, linking perspective and subject matter to historical and political circumstances, in order to structure a working definition, which is neither an easy nor linear task. In other words, say, a love poem that can refer to a couple anywhere in the world is not necessarily postcolonial literature only because it is written in a former colony. It is not a matter of the physical contingencies surrounding the author (or the passport, according to Rushdie). It is a matter of the content of the text and the inscription of local atmosphere, the marks of a certain position or set of co-ordinates. For example, the creation of the three postcolonial literatures of India, Mozambique and Cape Verde was deeply dependent on the particular process of nationalist self-assertion and the subsequent independence struggle (naturally, the precise decades one might refer to, depend on the concrete liberation process of each of them). However, generations after independence, nationalist projects seldom remain the main force inspiring local literary trends. Similarly, the deconstruction of colonial discourses as a sort of “answering back” to colonialism also seems to have lost its central appeal. Moreover, during the nineties the situation has evolved and diverse literatures have matured in differentiated ways, according to specific intra-national problems, recent historical events, and cultural context. It is this stage, a few decades after independence, that I am going to address, looking at current representations of national/communal identities, after the initial euphoria of the independence moment. This postcolonial critical frame will run on a parallel line with the feminist research topics discussed in the previous section.

I also want to clarify that since I am dealing with social critique and the (re)construction of collective identities in postcolonial contexts, I am not addressing the diasporic dimension of the postcolonial debate, more centred on the emergence of emigrant sub-cultures in Western cities, expressing their own split identity between a culture of origin and a host culture. I find the increasing visibility of emigrant literatures and their representation of cultural hybridity (by exposing the mixed identities of emigrants divided between segregation and partial assimilation, mobility and rootlessness) as an important source of new ideas. This part of the debate has brought about powerful self-reflexive discourses to address the changing identity of post-imperial Europe. However, I am looking at what his happening in postcolonial locations. I am travelling in the opposite direction.

All these considerations bring us back to the question of settling my working definition of postcolonial literature and clarify my position in relation to the main themes and categories I will use as guidelines to organise my thinking and reading.
I.2.1 Chronological Undecidabilities and Elusive Geographical Borders

The advent of postcolonial literatures can be mistaken for a subject that refers exclusively to the post-independence period. This is a limited, chronological view of postcolonialism, which collapses the moment you want to apply it to concrete cases.

The prefix “post”, as formulated by Lyotard⁸⁴ does suggest the idea of “a simple succession”, but in order to note the succession, something has to change, and be identifiable as a new direction, a different stage: the advent of the “new” implies the definition of what is left behind, starting “a procedure of analysis” that marks rupture and discontinuity through the distance to think ‘outside’, ‘after’ what has been. Consequently, the postcolonial stage starts the moment you can think beyond and against colonial logic, not when you reach formal independence.

According to Sandra Ponzanesi⁸⁵, “postcolonial” is a state of awareness, and not a legal/chronological term referring to the strict historical moment when different colonial societies became independent. Ponzanesi argues convincingly that all the literature linked to the struggle for independence, or connected to the promotion of national self-awareness, is already postcolonial because it instigates the definition of the postcolonial ideal and defines the identity of the colonised people outside of the discourses of the colonial regime.

Benita Parry⁸⁶ and Ania Loomba⁸⁷ also extend “postcolonialism” from “after” the independence moment to a previous stage, including the struggle for independence and the rejection of colonialism. This is also my position since all the deliberate practices against colonialism were forms of resistance that already had the postcolonial stage as aim.

Another important element in this working definition of postcolonial literature is that both the modern literature being produced in ex-colonies and the literature of diaspora, representing the experience of emigrants living within the borders of the Western world, are regarded as “postcolonial”. The corollary of this state of affairs is that the classification of postcolonial literature is not determined by rigid geographical references, either. This amounts to say that chronological and geographical borders cannot be settled in theory, a priori. On the contrary, each concrete study has to define the locations it is considering, clarifying why a text be considered postcolonial and why to think through postcolonial critical theories is deemed relevant to approach that text or set of texts.

In spite of what I have said in the previous paragraphs, I admit the postcolonial debate may be framed as an epochal discussion in the future, concerning a specific transitional period. What a writer would consider his/her own contribution to national or regional literatures is still received in international terms as “postcolonial” literature because of the recent and powerful impact of independence. However, as these (national or regional) literatures mature and diversify I wonder if such a label will be the most relevant reference to approach them in the coming decades. Still, postcolonial critical theories will certainly hold for these first decades of consolidation of modern literatures in former European colonies. Yet again, self-assertive practices, resistance to globalisation and neo-colonial international politics will probably keep postcolonial theories a useful frame of analysis in future ideological debates (“post”, implies, after all, an “after” on which some continuities with the “previous” may live on).

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⁸⁵ Sandra Ponzanesi, Paradoxes of Post-colonial Culture, Ph.d dissertation, Utrecht University, 1999: 11.
In this research, the integration of the selected texts in their historical, cultural and socio-political context will indirectly fix their respective geo-chronological co-ordinates. As for the conceptual leap beyond a colonial worldview, it is tackled by the analysis of the narrative plots as ideological arguments represented through fiction. For example, anti-colonial resistance is one of the forms of postcolonial self-awareness, while the wish for the advent of the new (to paraphrase Lyotard) can be materialised in the struggle for independence, or the presentation of a project for the postcolonial nation.

I.2.2 Revisionist Practices in Postcolonial Critique and Literature

An overview of the current postcolonial debate immediately reveals that there is scholarly disagreement concerning basic issues like the adequacy of the word “postcolonial”, its political implications and the range of its application.

The term “postcolonial” seems to be taken as a chronological reference to the end of a historical period, as a frame to discuss the presence of emigrant communities within Western states, and, as a “methodological revisionism” following post-structuralist theories and their deconstructive drive. In this last sense of the word, “Western structures of knowledge and power” are the object under revision, due to the critique of history and politics carried out through postcolonial theory and literatures.

The form taken by this “methodological revisionism” is suggested by the works of Edward Said or Homi Bhabha, who deconstruct colonial discourses as a deliberate distortion of the identity of other (non-Western) peoples so as to justify the interpretation of “difference” as “inferiority”, not only to assert and protect Western-centric values and perspectives, but also to justify power claims over these peoples.

In critical terms, revisionist practices inspired by Edward Said carry out a re-evaluation of the responsibility of scholarly discourse, including colonial literature, in reinforcing racist prejudices by representing colonised peoples as unable to rule themselves. The perverse aspect of this staged misapprehension of Oriental (or African, or Native American) identities is that it would be converted, in political/imperial terms, into a complacent justification for the exploitation and enslavement of these peoples.

The coherence of the racist stereotypes permeating colonial discourses created by the West to interpret and represent other cultures, be it through novels, anthropologic essays, biological studies, travel notes, antiquarian guides, painting, business relations or promotion of exotic commodities is further evidence of the ideological bias underlying all these “expert” productions.

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88 The invoked historical period covers the European colonisation of extensive territories in Africa, Asia and America, from the XVth to the XXth centuries.
92 Edward Said’s Orientalism (1978) focuses on “the East” as a recurring image of “the other”, creating an opposition between East and West which is thoroughly complicit with the dominating, imperial intentions of Europe in relation to India and the Middle East since the late XVIIIth century. Said also assesses Europe’s discourses concerning the East as the articulation of an old rivalry between Islam and Christianity with sad, fundamentalist undertones. Orientalism thus amounts to an ontological and epistemological model to understand and perceive oriental peoples and cultures. This model has been mostly developed by French and British intelligentsia during colonialism, though the United States have currently taken the leading role in the production of derogatory and racist stereotypes to diminish other cultures (currently equating “Arab” with “Islam” and “terrorist”). Said’s explicitly claims his work as “revisionist”, with the central aim of “unlearning” the dominant mode of the West.
Colonial discourse is marked by a sense of superiority and purity, as if the Western, white race embodied the standard of civilisation and humanity. Within the binary logic that has been central for Western thought, the assertion of the myth of white superiority implied the suppression of positive Eastern or African identities, annihilating assertive aspects of these cultures. In Orientalism (1978), one of the foundational texts for postcolonial criticism, Edward Said deconstructs several colonial fallacies which prevented serious knowledge of oriental people, denouncing them as a sort of "energising myths", to borrow Elleke Boehmer’s fortunate formulation. As forms of promotion for ideologies that became dominant, these myths had a very useful impact on public opinion: they hid the violence of imperialism from sight, promoted urgently needed racist myths (and their corresponding ego/Eurocentric delusions), and thus, legitimised a fundamentally capitalist enterprise as a civilising mission to “improve” other cultures. Colonial literature, more specifically, compiled a set of metaphors “to represent the degradation of other human beings as natural, an innate part of their degenerate, barbarian state”, screening out from metropolitan awareness the acknowledgement of achievement, resistance and agency among indigenous peoples.

Homi Bhabha - who has been concerned with the self-articulation of minority cultures in Western cities and their deconstructive impact on monologic, homogenising concepts of “the nation” - also wrote several papers on the colonial encounter, and the exchange of gazes between colonised and coloniser’s eyes. For the discussion at hand, his paper “The Other Question” is quite useful. In it, Homi Bhabha exposes the political importance of creating and promoting racist stereotypes to stir prejudice against other peoples. The fact that “difference” was represented as “degeneration” instigated racist fears to the extent of a phobia (that is, an unbearable repulsion for those that did not conform to the Western norm) because it made “difference” stand for a threat of contamination and corruption. Any possibility of dialogue and mutual respect was safely prevented, since to treat the “other” as the same would put white superiority (and mankind’s best hope of global progress) in jeopardy. The revision of these racist phobias, linked to the threat of miscegenation, has been particularly addressed by feminist researchers working on representations of the white female body (in need of protection from contamination) vis a vis stereotypes of native men as rapists.

In fact, within the frame of colonial mentality, dark and brown men tended to be conceived of as the “primitive native”, of Africa and the Americas, or, the decadent barbarian of Asia. Since the opulent and urban civilisations of Asia could not be called “primitive”, and since the despotic, egocentric construction of the white, imperial self could not contemplate equity with those it intended to dominate, Asian men were perceived as degenerate and decadent. In both stereotypes, the idea that Western civilisation is better and superior is established: the first were accused of “a lack of civilisation” and the latter were to blame for “an excess of it”. Simultaneously, dark and brown women were often used to personify conquered territory, as willing and complicit lovers, a trope which promotes the idea that colonised land, had it a choice, would prefer to be ruled by white men. The extent

97 Homi Bhabha, “The Other Question”, in op. cit. Mongia, 1996.
of the impact of postcolonial revisionist practices is materialised in the distance between the credibility of these racist stereotypes and current notions of cultural relativism, which have made mainstream Western culture see racism as “wrong” and “politically incorrect”, in the last decades of the XXth century: take postmodern literature and its emphasis on relativism, the erosion of established ideas and the playful revision of history (usually re-written from the margin or from below) as evidence to support this claim.

The above discussion claims the work of Bhabha, Said and Loomba as revisionist, in so far as they are writing to unleash a conceptual change in Western mentalities, through the deconstruction of racist and imperial myths. In this way, they are creating new patterns of thought to perceive different cultures. This is, for me, one of the most seductive promises contained in postcolonial studies, embodying the innovative potential of the discussed revisionist drive in postcolonial studies.

Now, I would like to turn to the same story, but on a different scenario. In colonial contexts, very far away from Western academies, long before Said’s foundational attempt at renewing the Western view of Eastern societies, the struggle for the independence of colonised territories had led to the emergence of self-assertive, postcolonial awareness, among colonised peoples. Without the dream of a nation free from European rule, the fight for independence would never have taken off. Thus, from the point of view of the colonised, postcolonialism starts with the first attempts to think “after colonialism is over”, when “white foreigners” are made to leave.

In order to assert national consciousness, the intellectuals committed to the freedom fight had to start, (like Said) by deconstructing white men’s racist discourse and denounce it as false and deliberately humiliating for the colonised. The next (or simultaneous) strategy was to promote ethnic pride to create a sense of national identity worth to fight for. Hence, it is important to connect the development of national ideals to the activist revision of colonial discourses and their subsequent loss of credibility to the eyes of the colonised. The role of literature in the formulation and promotion of both of these processes is an essential one.

If the whole enterprise of forging national identities to fight back colonialism was, in part, dependent on an inversion of racist, colonial discourses, then, it is necessary to expand postcolonial revisionist theories to include acts of appropriation, self-assertion and subversion on the part of the colonised, which is a different kind of revisionist practice than the ones aimed at deconstructing colonial discourses (like Said and Bhabha’s). The difference is that self-assertion does not have to “answer back” to colonial discourse. It reconstructs and praises local cultures.

The negative representation of colonial settlers, revealing the wrongs, the deviousness and the pathetic in their behaviour, is a frequent anti-colonial move, which works as a revisionist practice to assert nationalist pride and overcome the political apathy of colonised peoples. The difference between national self-assertion and postcolonial revisionist practices is that while self-assertion turns to local culture and its history to stir postcolonial awareness, the revision of colonial myths depends on colonial discourse to define its opposite identity. One thing is to confront the West and revise colonial mentalities, promoting a world order less permeated by racist notions. Another thing is to fight back racist colonial discourse.

Although I do not deny the strategic importance of re-writing racial identities through the eyes of the colonised, I doubt that at fundamentalist extremes, the nativist dimension of “answering back” to colonial rhetoric and mythologies will ever deliver innovative ways of thinking the relation between the West and the new states, outside of old colonial binaries. However, postcolonial literature can be critical or ironical towards colonial
ideologies and memories, without being necessarily trapped within a reversed (nativist) logic.

On a more general level, one has to consider the impact of postcolonial revisionist practices on current notions of history. New points of view on past events mean that the perception of established narratives of European glory and conquest have changed, revealing a less biased and complacent picture. New insights on the human cost and the unforgivable facets of the imperial enterprise have replaced self-flattering, Eurocentric accounts of our collective past.

To conclude, I would recall Stuart Hall’s100 wise suggestion to look at the “postcolonial” not only as a national category but also as a transnational one101, referring to both ex-colonised and ex-colonisers. This formulation of postcolonial studies provides an episteme to think through the post-imperial age, after the formal ending of European colonialism. It encompasses a basic revision of national identities and collective discourses reflecting the challenges created by the event of independence.

The literary pieces analysed in this research include both intra-national social criticism and international dialogues, aimed at exorcising colonial history and resisting neo-colonial threats. The existence of these two dimensions prove the worth of Hall’s argument.

I will assess the contribution of the studied pieces to revise Western prejudice from several angles. The representation of the white settler through postcolonial eyes, and the alternative interpretation of the colonial encounter is, naturally, a possible guideline of analysis. Secondly, to acknowledge miscegenation and hybridity as productive and creative processes is a step beyond Orientalist and colonial practices. The study of a Creole culture, like the case of Cape Verde, will take this discussion further. Finally, one can discuss the inscription of local historical resistance and the assertion of local cultural heritages as a means to “diminish” the exclusive status of Western culture, deposing its aura of model of civilisation. In this way, postcolonial writers are diluting the hold of Orientalist or “Africanist” views. Obviously, by reading these novels through a postcolonial critical frame, I am trying to prove colonial, Eurocentric perspectives inadequate, and in this way, I am offering a revisionist dissertation.

I.2.3 Self-assertion and Nativism

Above, I said that the revision of Western structures of knowledge and power was, in part, achieved through the self-assertion of cultures that had been suppressed during colonialism. I also mentioned nativism as a version of anti-thereness, similar to colonial racism. However, the two practices are very different and served different purposes in the consolidation of postcolonial literatures.

Nativism was an important strategy to promote anti-colonial resistance. Activists turned to the strategic necessity of constructing a motivating sense of national identity, opposed to colonialism, as a vital step in the process of mobilising popular support for independence. This amounts to say that as an anti-colonial movement, nativism appropriated and inverted racist colonial discourse, sanctifying local cultural traditions and demonising white influence as corruption and enslavement. People would only take up the independence

101 The postcolonial is, obviously, an intra-national category, as well. It depends on the frame one is considering to develop one’s argument.
fight if they felt they were, say, Mozambican people, oppressed by Portuguese colonisers. Hence, racial slogans, combined with “class” references and nationalist rhetoric created two clearly opposite sets of identity references like white/capitalist/bourgeois/foreigner, and, black/proletarian/working-class/patriot. A specific set of cultural traditions (including language and religion), and a genealogy of past history were equally important discourses to claim the right to a concrete territory, making of the respective national project, a credible idea. This is the logic explaining why the independence struggle relied a lot on nativism making of culture a site of war, the very basis for a sense of national awareness.

Although effective, the problem is that nativism took the revival of local cultures to a fundamentalist extreme, becoming a sort of inversion of European xenophobia by nativist hatred, which is not a healthy basis to reconstruct the subjectivity of liberated black peoples.

Frantz Fanon understood this clearly. In his Peau Noire Masques Blanks (1952), he wrote about the split, self-hating identity of the assimilated subject, posing the problem of asserting a positive black identity as a matter of self-confrontation, awareness and resistance. Fanon interpreted colonialism as a psychopathological disease that annihilates the sense of selfhood in the black/colonised men. The antidote for this disease is a sense of pride and allegiance to African histories, which would break alienation and self-denial. This positive turn towards an affirmative re-evaluation of the “coloured” self should transcend the simple inversion of racist discourses, otherwise, the narcissism that makes the black subject deify African cultures is still trapped within the unhealthy logic that made colonised people aspire to be white and white people aspire to stand for the universal norm102. As a concrete example of an advisable alternative, Fanon defended the necessity of creating a national literature to consolidate a sense of national consciousness and heal the wounded self-esteem of a colonised ego by revising colonial mythologies. Following this same line of resistance, self-assertive strategies, aimed at reviving ancient cultural heritages (pre-colonial), seem a more balanced alternative to enable non-Western people to recover, consolidate and strengthen a sense of collective identity, linked to a history, a place and a community. In this way, postcolonial societies can nurture the feeling of “belonging” that will make up for a traumatic history of abuse and dispossession.

Self-assertive strategies have other advantages as healthy basis to negotiate the consolidation of postcolonial societies (often multicultural). Firstly, self-assertion is not cancelled by hybridity or contamination because the recreation of local identities is compatible with current processes of modernisation and international exchange of influences. Secondly, self-assertion does not demand the suppression of internal cultural variants. On the contrary: this cultural heterogeneity constitutes an extra source of inspiration and knowledge, to consolidate a multiple and articulated account of local cultures and local histories. Thirdly, it may include certain forms of (contained) nativism, imbuing certain traditional mythological figures or rituals with enhanced meanings and a more dramatic popular appeal (the recovery of a traditional culture that may have been disfigured beyond recognition has been a process of “mending” and gluing together the remaining pieces). What is at stake is a strategic platform to provide postcolonial societies with a distinctive voice and identity, enacting a claim for more “room” to co-exist outside of globalising influences, and that gesture is very important. In this sense, self-assertion does not have to be translated into negative or aggressive political acts (though it surely remains a political act), meaning that in spite of the threat of nationalist appropriations, not all celebrations of tradition or nostalgia for myths of origin are reactionary.

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Nativism made a lot of sense at the moment of the liberation struggle, but once independence is achieved, practices of resistance and (national, collective) consolidation stand to earn more from the concern for cultural self-assertion.

Benita Parry\textsuperscript{103} claims residual re-enactments of tribal life as a means to reach for empowerment, since self-representation of one’s cultural references is a way of rejecting colonial/imperial attempts to speak for/represent the culture of the ex-colonised people. Parry is making an important distinction between the negative retrograde value of nationalist cultural revivals and cultural manifestations which are “imaginative reworkings” of cultural memories, with no other aim than to recognise and articulate constitutive elements of one’s hybrid and fragmented cultural identity.

The crux of the matter is that both nationalist propaganda and self-assertive strategies may turn to a positive re-evaluation of local cultures, but they are not the same thing. Although there is something of a shared agenda between them (both attempt a reversion of colonial discourses, changing the terms of the diminishing comparison between European cultures and their African or Asian counterparts), the exaggerated and aggressive dimensions implied in nativism as a form of inverted colonial racism are not constitutive of self-assertive cultural practices, rather focused on the valorisation of local culture \textit{per se}.

Since this research deals mostly with second generation, post-independence postcolonial writers, nativist practices, associated to the independence struggle, no longer are very inspiring for the considered texts. As for explicit self-assertive discourses (by writing, the studied authors are already asserting the national or regional culture represented in their texts) embedded in the analysed texts, they vary according to location, cultural heritage and recent developments in local circumstances. It is premature to guess the forms any self-assertive strategy may take. Close reading of each case study in parts II and III will answer this topic.

\textbf{1.2.4 We All Live in a Postcolonial Age, But You Do Not Disseminate Before You Consolidate}

“(…) One cannot deconstruct a subjectivity one has never controlled. Self-determination is the first step of any program of deconstruction.”\textsuperscript{104}

Historically, the ending of colonialism meant a new beginning for ex-colonised peoples. This beginning was about building a new nation and organising an independent civil society. However, social tissue is something that cannot be created through law and bureaucracy. It requires bonds between individuals, agreed patterns of lifestyle, shared references. It requires, in a word, a sense of unity, and that is something many of the states inherited from colonialism did not have. There was a certain consensual unity around the necessity to fight for independence, but, when it came, the post-independence government seldom represented more than the interests of a fraction of the population. Different cultures, different languages and different religions have kept rival groups apart, both in India and in most African countries.

One has to understand that the process of creating a nation-state in postcolonial contexts is neither easy nor quick (and probably, the nation-state is not the best model to organise power in these contexts). European nations fought internal and international wars


for centuries, until the complex mosaic that is now Europe gained stability. This amounts to say that the end of the imperial age has left colonisers and colonised with very different processes to settle. Currently, the modern Western states are discussing multiculturalism and the emergence of emigrant communities as active sub-cultures disseminating homogeneous, centralised notions of the state, while postcolonial states are still struggling for an adequate solution to consolidate (as a nation, or federation, or set of nations, or city states) to their concrete realities and priorities.

Here, I would like to take a detour to discuss the way Homi Bhabha sees possible processes to narrate “the nation”, so as to promote it in the mentalities of the people whose allegiance it seeks. Although Bhabha addresses the presence of emigrant communities in Western cities (and not the construction of the postcolonial state), he discusses a set of socio-cultural strategies for the definition of a sense of collective identity, which I find very interesting.

According to Homi Bhabha105, the cultural landscape of contemporary Western cities is definitively “multicultural”, due to the presence of diasporic emigrant communities, the massive number of which has started a process of dissemination of national references, scattering the homogenising model of the modern nation across diverse minority cultures. In order to clarify this process, Bhabha talks of minority cultures at some length and reflects on the ideological mechanisms which create homogeneity and inculcate in the individual a certain willingness to conform to the rules of the group, managing, in the most successful cases, a serious commitment to uphold the distinctive identity of the community. This argument is developed according to some principles that are worth quoting in detail106.

Bhabha sees “the nation” as a metaphoric construct (“a form of social and textual affiliation”) whose foundational references are more dependent on ideology and discourse than on territory and history. This move is quite logical, since Bhabha writes against an essentialist concept of nationalism, exploiting the narratives around the definition of “nation” as a set of “complex strategies of cultural identification”107. In order to clarify how these complex strategies work, Bhabha analyses narrative structures as a rhetorical device to build cultural identity, by “teaching” people to recognise and identify with certain social habits, rituals or values that represent the experience of living within, and according to, the nation/community. People assimilate collectively shared values by becoming familiarised with them, through everyday routines and interaction with other people of the community. But in order to be conceptualised, the social lesson to be learned has to be specifically talked about or written (by religious or legal texts, or literature for example), in a network of ideologies and values that provide it with meaning. These cultural references, usually presented as the heritage of tradition and history, consolidate “the nation” or “the community” as an authoritative principle, providing the cohesion of the group. This is what Bhabha calls “the pedagogic dimension” of the rhetoric strategies of social reference.

Together with the set of pedagogic strategies to narrate collective/communal identity, Bhabha has defined “performative strategies” as the enactment of assimilated ideologies. That is to say that by behaving according to a set of principles shared by the members of the community (and which constitute a notion of “tradition” and “common-sense”), one is performing a repetition of the assimilated cultural references, reinforcing the cultural identity of the community and one’s integration in it. For Homi Bhabha, the ultimate effect of this double narrative strategy is the ability to implement, in the individual, a strong

106 There is a previous reference to this same theory by Homi Bhabha in the section “Feminisms, Identity, Culture”. See above section I.1.2.
emotional response to the idea of belonging to a certain community. If nations are territories of the imagination, then, the fact that an emigrant community is living within a “foreign territory” does not annihilate the survival of the particular cultural identity of that community, kept alive by certain habits and life styles, according to the mentalities and values inherited from a place of “origin”.

I fully endorse these views but, at the same time, I have a serious problem with these theories. Let us go by parts. The anatomy of the mechanics inculcating national/communal allegiance in individuals is simply brilliant. But, the hold of a sense of community in diaspora, and its importance to the individual, varies greatly according to social class. Bhabha seems to turn a blind eye to the different position of cosmopolitan nomad élites, of which he himself is a member, and that of his less educated, proletarian compatriots. As Robin Cohen said in his study on diaspora, labour diasporas keep strong communal ties, and protect the distinctive aspects of their cultures like language (which they use at home), religion and family organisation. They also keep a mythical connection to their homeland as the focus of their emotional investment so that this sense of a geographically distant “home” compensates the high levels of social exclusion in the destination society. As Cohen suggests, social mobility is the first factor in a more successful integration in the host country. From above, “being different” does not make you feel excluded from a sense of home in your host country.

Secondly, there is a problem in Bhabha’s too optimist shortcut from the emergence of minority cultures to the hypothesis of multiculturalism. I think it may be true that cultural diversity challenges the exclusivity of a single pattern of civilisation, but, if you consider the case of emigrant communities as the ultimate example of such a process, I doubt that minority cultures are competing on an equal basis with the Western norm, when it comes to determine priorities in the life of cosmopolitan cities. There are serious contradictions between the proclaimed dissemination of the modern liberal nation and the obvious dominant role of the host culture towards the gift of cultural diversity proposed by underclass, underpaid emigrants.

Yet, Homi Bhabha’s theory concerning the mechanisms to narrate the nation or the community, as powerful references for collective identity, articulated through capillary, omnipresent, (pedagogic and performative) strategies, responsible for promoting social conformity and perpetuating hegemonic values and ideas, was absolutely inspirational for this research. It provided me with the adequate tool to track down different patriarchal traditions, their emotional hold on the individual and the political implications of encouraging certain types of collective identity, for instance ethnic, patriarchal and nationalist, instead of others, less fixed and hegemonic. Since my study on postcolonial literature is concerned with processes of self-consolidation and self-articulation taking place in postcolonial societies, Bhabha has addressed a topic that is very relevant for this study.

Through the narrative strategies defined by Bhabha one can assess patterns of collective identity available on the considered locations (for example communal tradition, religious allegiance or ethnic self-assertion) settling the way a specific literary piece negotiates its thesis on the history of a location, its mechanisms of hegemonic power and the position assigned to women in the represented social world. Furthermore, by making explicit pedagogic and performative codes of affiliation to patterns of collective identity it is possible to determine deviation and resistance in the behaviour of some characters. The internal

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conflict of deviating characters is very important for the postcolonial writer as it opens a narrative dimension to carry out social criticism, by exposing how, and in which ways, a society is oppressive for certain groups of individuals (like exploited classes, segregated ethnic groups, women). On a more general level, the representation of a given postcolonial society will map the direction of the post-independence process, including its tensions, contradictions and undecidabilities.

Between the effective hold of more or less functional postcolonial locations, and the social critique of their problems, there lies a path that has a lot to settle in terms of consolidation before it can afford comfortable disseminations and adjustments. I will return to these issues in parts II and III.

I.2.5 The Fabrication of Collective Identities

A helpful theory to approach current notions of collective identity in postcolonial societies was provided by Stuart Hall who argued that, for both ex-colonisers and ex-colonised, the relevant political frame to analyse postcolonial contexts is not exclusively dependent upon national units or international relations (and the change from the colonial system to international corporativism). Instead, one should look at internal conflicts and tensions, such as the ones embodied by hybridity, syncretism and cultural undecidability. These problematic features of postcolonial cultures unsettle a neat distinction between “local” cultural references and “foreign” contributions since these simply co-exist, together with colonial memories and pre-colonial rivalries between local subcultures.

Stuart Hall writes about a concrete case, that of Caribbean cinema, to address the possibility of representing cultural identity as fragmented, contradictory and hybrid. In this case, he identifies the co-existence of differences and continuity among the diverse and contradictory elements of Caribbean culture (the distinctive influences of Africa, Europe and America). By recognising the lack of homogeneity in cultural influences, Hall suggests that essentialist representations of Caribbean identity could only be untrue. He is certainly not generalising the form taken by Caribbean hybridity, which is the product of particular circumstances. What Hall suggests is that purist representations of cultural identity will be disregarding history and the complexity of the concrete experience of social life. In short, Hall defines two possible views of cultural identity:

- As a sort of “collective self”, embodied in the idea of a common experience “branding” those who share a time, place, culture and history. This is a static category, an ideological projection, which has been used by nationalist propaganda to uphold myths of unity and purity.
- As a sense of “position”, the intellectual subjective experience of improvising a sense of identity in relation to circumstances and local context. This is a creative, dynamic process in dialogue with available cultural references. Hall is more interested in this second strategy because it provides ground to understand cultural identity as the mixed, hybrid product it is.

Kwame Anthony Appiah echoes this distinction: he interprets purist constructions of collective identity as a logical strategy in a foundational stage, promoted by nationalist writings in the 1950s and 1960s, when high rates of popular mobilisation were necessary to make the independence struggle “take off”. However, to keep obsessively attuned to

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nostalgia for pre-colonial purity (i.e. “nativism”), in search for a past golden age, is out of touch with the reality of postcolonial contexts, failing to meet the actual experience of living in all its mixed complexity.

As a viable means to understand the articulation of individual and collective identities in postcolonial locations, Hall suggests that instead of departing from nationalist projections or international relations one should turn to the study of individual experiences, which embody one’s “sense of position” in current fragmented/ hybrid postcolonial environments. In other words, by looking at individual characters in the process of negotiating their choices and obligations (and their own marginalisation or integration) with the laws of their community, one gets a picture of the wider social world on a certain geohistorical location.

The narrative mode, as the representation of the evolution of events in the life of a set of characters moving in a social background, provides access to exemplary individual experiences, since the writer constructs characters as terms in an argument she/he is intent on defending. The problem with the claims to make fiction stand for truth is settled by the fact that I am not, obviously, taking the particular “life” of these characters as the final horizon of my thought. I am interested in the way the events in the life of these characters present a set of wider points about, for instance, cultural self-definition, interpretations of history, active patriarchies, national or communal self-assertion, social tension, distribution of power and dominant mentalities in the represented location.

Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani113, like Stuart Hall, suggest a “politics of location”, as an effective research strategy to reach an insight on what it means to be postcolonial in a certain context. The analysis of particular subject positions, in its junction with class, race, gender, private allegiances and socio-political context, allows for an insight on the distinctive nuances of current postcolonial conditions as exemplified in the identities of “South Asian Muslims in Britain” or “African Americans in the USA”, to use the diasporic examples put forward in their text. Obviously, this same strategy applies to the study of identities integrated in other postcolonial contexts, such as, within the frame of this research, different generations of women in Kerala or rural households in Cape Verde. Although all these positions are “postcolonial”, they are not postcolonial in the same way, and the only way to understand what “postcolonial” means in these different circumstances is to look at available representations of subject positions in the considered postcolonial locations.

What Hall, Frankenberg and Mani suggest is that by approaching micro-universes one understands the mechanisms of macro socio-cultural structures, crystallised in available codes and models, as a form of collective identity.

I.2.6 Postcolonial Hybridity

According to Robert Young114, the concept of “hybridity” springs from notions of race and “difference”, being as it was at the centre of long pseudo-scientific discussions on degeneration and the possibility of mixing the white race with Black, Hindu and Asian people. The origin of the word “hybrid” comes from biology, where it is used to describe the offspring of different animal species or plants. In the human case, it was applied to the offspring from parents of different races. The existence of children of mixed racial origin generated diverse intellectual reactions ranging from the “amalgamation thesis” (which

accepts the “new” products of interbreed as a normal fact) to racism, which relates interbreeding to human degeneration since “mixing” makes the races lose their “vigour and virtue”\(^\text{115}\). From a colonial point of view, the problem with mixed races or “race mixing” is that they mixed “self” and “other” when the distance between these two concepts was of extreme political (and economical) importance to keep certain scruples and moral problems at bay.

Nowadays, within the frame of postcolonial theories, “hybridity” is used to describe a cultural phenomenon\(^\text{116}\) namely the co-existence of diverse cultural elements that, through history, underwent a process of long and close contact, creating a new, mixed social environment. This mixture does not sort out contradictions, nor does it imply successful fusion. Both colonialism and postcolonialism (including its diasporic dimension through massive emigration movements into Western cities) are privileged instances of such cultural hybridity.

When one refers to cultural hybridism, one should be aware of which individual systems of cultural reference contributed to create current hybridity. In my case, as a Western-based critical reader, the colonial references will be more easily recognisable against the background from elements of local culture.

The notion of “cultural hybridity” implies a discussion of the meaning of culture. Robert Young lists several meanings for “culture”. It has been a word associated to intellectual life, in the sense of “high culture”, refinement and education; it invokes “civilisation” by opposition to “wild” or “barbarian”, and, in colonial and postcolonial discussions, it is used to describe the ideological and material systems of any society as the product of a particular history and cultures. Within the frame of colonial politics, “culture” meant the norm established by European civilisation, which was to be assimilated by the colonised. Hence the importance of schools and universities to bring the elites of colonised countries to agree with European views assimilating Western culture as the model of civilisation (colonies as clones \textit{avant la lettre...}). Obviously, part of this “European” view, implied the assimilation of “the nation” and its bureaucratic apparatus as the proper pattern of organisation for progress and modernisation, keeping colonialism as a necessary situation for the development of local colonies\(^\text{117}\).

In this research, I will use “culture” to refer to the set of references, moral values and mentalities, habits, social codes and life-styles which provide mental maps for the individual, granting him/her a sense of position within a certain social environment\(^\text{118}\). In certain cases, culture may mean “tradition”, and, in other cases, it may invoke hybridity and cultural undecidability. Contrary to “tradition”, mostly represented as a neat, coherent whole inherited from past experience, cultural hybridity exposes undecidabilities and diversity within the system of available cultural references, turning the process of individual (and collective) self-definition into a more difficult and, possibly, more liberating one. The reason for this liberating potential in cultural hybridity is that it implies a mixture of references that never attempts to replicate either original. It creates something new, and, in this sense, already subversive, because out of control in relation to any previous norm or model. Naturally, when discussing a hybrid you can trace the different origin of some of the mixed elements, but, at the same time, there is also an unsettling element of ambiguity about hybridity, for even though you can recognise its constitutive elements, the borders between the different sources that produced it are no longer clear or fixed.


\(^{118}\) A more complete working definition of “culture” is mentioned in the section “Feminisms, Identity and Culture”, See above, section I.1.2.
Hybridity proved the right category to assess successful instances of appropriation and indigenisation\textsuperscript{119} of international influences, which is to say, instances of “glocalisation” (i.e. of adaptation of international influences to local culture). Hybridity was equally relevant to identify some of the after-effects of colonialism.

Robert Young’s exhaustive genealogy of “hybridity” is helpful to deal with language, as well. In linguistic terms, “hybridity” is used to describe the integration of elements from different languages in a unique linguistic system, like in “Creole”\textsuperscript{120}. But, on a second level, linguistic hybridity is more than an organic feature recalling the diverse origin of linguistic elements. The mixed nature of hybrid languages can be made political and confronting (intentional hybridity) if one opts for exploring the double-voiced echoes in hybrid discourses as a form of subversion, making “one voice unmask the other”\textsuperscript{121}. This is an extremely interesting idea to approach postcolonial literatures because the colonial heritage is, undeniably, one of the key elements in double-voiced uses of language. The re-appropriation of the ex-coloniser’s language, within a postcolonial frame of mind that neither denies the past nor is imprisoned by it, has become a key point in terms of style for many postcolonial writers. I will discuss the use of an “appropriated” language by the selected postcolonial writers along these lines of thought.

I.2.7 The Appropriation of European Languages

In the context of the use of a European language as the current language among the people of an ex-colonised country, one has to discuss a scenario of linguistic appropriation and renovation, which goes on after the formal ending of colonialism. In fact, Robert Young\textsuperscript{122} considers that together with mixed progeny, language is one of the best examples of material hybridity.

In the realm of literature, contemporary postcolonial writers contribute to assert and consolidate local variants of Portuguese, French, Italian and English. When these writers disrupt “proper” English and Portuguese norms, bending them to fit the rhythms and the tones of local languages, they are expressing the fact that European languages are no longer playing a normative role. Particular linguistic hybrids, improvised across geographies, have reached full maturity. It is within this state of affairs that I think of the study of postcolonial literatures as literatures that happen to be written in Portuguese or English, and which have their own identity. This view, which acknowledges the worth of any situated literary system for its own sake, and, as the product of its own cultural genealogy, is a conceptual progress in relation to the traditional colonial view. Linguistically, any “incorrect” use of European languages was perceived as a degeneration of the European norm; aesthetically, the literary texts produced in the colonies were evaluated by comparison with their European counterparts; politically, this comparative criticism was convenient because it annihilated any independent sense of cultural/political identity:

“For Europe was regarded as the great Original, the starting point, and the colonies were therefore copies, or ‘translations’ of Europe, which they were supposed to duplicate. Moreover, being copies,


\textsuperscript{120} By \textit{Creole} is meant those who are descendents of settlers yet who are indigenous to their land of settlement in the sense of being native born. A \textit{Creole} is also a mixed language that has formed as a result of cultural contact. The specific meaning of the word “\textit{Creole}” varies according to the society one refers to. In Brazil it meant “negro slaves born locally”, and in Louisana it stood for the “white franco-phone population.” See \textit{op. cit.} Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies, 1998: 57, 58.


\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Ibidem}.
translations were evaluated as less than originals, and the myth of the translation as something that diminished the greater original established itself.”123

The challenge, from a postcolonial perspective, was to assert one’s culture so that you stop being regarded as a copy of something else. In this context, together with the deliberate effort to write a literature that is aesthetically autonomous, postcolonial writers have tried to make visible their appropriation of the coloniser’s language by creatively manipulating the linguistic system, disregarding metropolitan usage.

Some of the marks of linguistic hybridity in postcolonial texts are the borrowing of words from local languages, mixing them with the inherited European language; another possibility is to write as if you were reproducing oral speech directly (the “oralisation” of written language) and to use different patterns of sentence structure that resemble the speech patterns of local languages. In any case, the aim of all these strategies is to claim room for an “intervention” on the part of current postcolonial cultures, changing the use of the European language from a process of simple assimilation to a process of hybridity. When analysing the selected texts, I will come back to these issues, and I will try to identify particular strategies used by the selected writers to negotiate their appropriation of a former European language.

Usually, the former colonial language has kept its urban, “Westernised” aura on postcolonial territory. During the colonial period, translation and bilingualism were essential steps to promote and establish an effective network of power, employing local citizens in the colonial bureaucratic apparatus. This meant that the education of colonial subjects was carried out in-between languages, where the European language stood as the means to have access to a colonial career. Hence, since the colonial era, the part of the population who tends to be more familiar with a European language is urban and has some formal education. Due to the continuous investment in European languages as part of the educational system, their influence is far from decreasing, especially because many postcolonial governments take the European language they have at hand as a factor of unification and cohesion between regional cultures.

The nativist reaction to this tendency has been to reject European languages thoroughly, because of their colonial precedence. This is, for example, the position of Ngugi wa Thiong’o 124, who defends that African literature should only be written in African languages, in order to assert and enrich African local cultures, and, secondly, to break with the unavoidable colonisation of the mind that comes with the acquisition of a language branded by a colonial, European and capitalist worldview. By opposition, African writers like Chinua Achebe 125 have no problems in defending the appropriation of European languages by African writers, “speaking of African experience in a world-wide language”126. Achebe is thinking of the gains in reaching an international audience as an advantage to promote the coveted self-assertion, in more effective terms than isolated practices.

From a political point of view, most governments of Africa think that to rejected the available European language is not a very practical move because it goes against a concrete state of affairs in which former European languages happen to be current, frequently providing the necessary lingua franca for translations between local languages. Besides, as I

just said, these “general languages” are a powerful force of integration and homogenisation, which is not only a practical argument but also strategically important to counter ethnic intra-national tension.