

# Postcolonial Expression in Music

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(Received 13 March 2020; Revised 31 March 2020; Accepted 23 April 2020; Available online 30 April 2020)

**Abstract - Post colonialism forms a composite but a critical movement that renewed the perception and understanding of modern history, cultural studies, literature, and political economy. Although it started as an approach to the study of commonwealth literature, it broadened out to include other aspects of north-south relations making an impact on a wide variety of subjects including cultural studies, anthropology, geography, history, and politics. Despite the successful inclusion of the theory in the mentioned fields, the difficulty of mapping it in the field of International Relations (IR) is still evident. As a literary discourse, post colonialism, from the time of its entry to academia has incorporated various themes and issues in burgeoning its growth. However, this attempt has considerably failed to get deserved attention. While the theory has continued the investigation into the ways in which the subaltern voices are silenced in both the local and global arena, little attention has been placed in the role of music. What this article, therefore, seeks to address is the relevance of music in an enhanced understanding of postcolonial theory. By and large, the zest of the article is to conceptualize music as a serious component of postcolonial theory and to explore a possibility wherein a meaningful linkage can be established between the two.**

**Keywords:** Culture, Identity, International Relations, Music, Post colonialism.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The postcolonial approach in IR builds their argument keeping the west centric character of mainstream IR as its base. This emerging group of scholars argues that the interpretation of it on an international affair is profoundly grounded on western experiences and discursive practices (Griffith, 2007). They hold that some of the poorest countries of the world today were the recent colonies and many wars and conditions of civil unrest and underdevelopment overshadowed them. Yet IR, with its longstanding preoccupation with relations of great powers, does not have the interest or the tools to broaden its scope to groups, cultural movements, knowledge, and locations that would encompass the people of former colonies (Sylvester, 2011). What post colonialism, therefore, focuses on, is in bringing these issues to a larger whole and internalizing it in the system. This, it tries to do by including the relation of gender, race, culture, inequality, exploitation, and colonization as part of a larger IR ecosystem. They further contend, that any understanding of contemporary IR requires a careful account of multiple and diverse power relationship that links the north and the south, both in the colonial past and the postcolonial present. As such, the

Postcolonial theory encourages a refocusing of IR away from the traditional domain of the state, militaries, and diplomacy towards people, identity, and resistance (Griffith, 2007).

Post colonialism, in general, is the study of interactions between the European nation and the societies they colonized in the modern period (Young, 2003). Although there is considerable debate over the precise definition and parameter of the field, succinctly, it can be summarized as a post-modern intellectual discourse that focuses on the direct effect and aftermath of colonization. It forms a composite but a powerful intellectual and critical movement that renews the perception and understanding of modern history, cultural studies, literary criticism, and political economy. To quote Richard R. Dippiro, post colonialism is the continual shedding of the old skin of western thoughts, influence, and discourses and the emergence of new self-awareness, critique, and celebration. It voices in favor of destabilizing the western way of thinking and creating a space for the subaltern or marginalized groups to speak and produce an alternative to the dominant discourses.

Post colonialism as a literary discourse from the time of its entry to academia has tried to incorporate various themes and issues in burgeoning its growth to make it an intellectually promised discourse. However, this attempt has considerably failed to get deserved attention. While there is no doubt that the subaltern study groups, as well as the postcolonial theory, has continued the investigation into the ways in which the subaltern voices are silenced in the local and the global arenas, little attention has been played on the role of the music in creating this area of silence (Romanow, 2005). Music, in general, has been less associated with academic of intellectual discourses and hence under-appreciated, and this is all the more pronounced in the realm of IR. Although the relationship between music and orientalism is widely acknowledged to be an important one, the literature on the topic remains under-researched. As aptly stated by Matthew Head, 'the relationship between the troping of music as other and orientalism's concentration of otherness requires further research' (2003).

When it comes to IR music is a highly marginalized realm. What however has not been realized is that music/songs can also offer an understanding of various postcolonial themes and tenets. For instance, identity and culture, the most important themes of post colonialism can be understood in

proper if it is juxtaposed with music, as music too is a reflection of one's identity and culture. Similarly, other themes important to the theory can also be explained in-depth through careful analysis and interpretation of postcolonial songs and music. Such an effort will not only enrich the discipline but will also make it vibrant and interesting. This is important considering the fact that post colonialism still remains in a peripheral zone as far as the study of IR is concerned. In fact, such an attempt has already been made by some African scholars who have taken up music as an important tool for highlighting the unequal power relation and dominance that exist between the north and south. Therefore, based on this premise and mostly depending on secondary sources such as books and articles, what this article attempts to do, is to problematize this exclusion and offer an explanation to show that music in actuality can offer a great deal to a more comprehensive understanding of postcolonial theory.

## II. BRIDGING POSTCOLONIALISM AND MUSIC

Reviewing the history of mankind helps us to understand that cultural forces such as literature, music, art, drama, language, storytelling and dance forms play an important role in bringing consciousness among the people i.e. of its cultural uniqueness and collective identity, which makes them different from the others.

These powerful forces were at time, used as a mode of expression of protest against oppression, exploitation, and colonialism<sup>2</sup>. Of these cultural forms, history has proven to show that music has profoundly shaped the goals and objectives of people moving towards a collective identity, cultural nationalism, and political independence.

Music, in general, has immense worth for our society and has been an integral part of human beings and its culture since its evolution. Not only has it been used as a mode of entertainment but also as a portrayal of one's culture and traditions. Needless to say that it is deeply embedded in human culture; and just as there isn't a culture that does not have a language, there isn't one that does not have music.

Music, as noted by Cook, 'somehow seems to be natural, to exist as something apart- and yet suffused with human values, with one's sense of what is good or bad, right or wrong. Music, as noted by Cook, 'somehow seems to be natural, to exist as something apart- and yet suffused with human values, with one's sense of what is good or bad, right or wrong. 'Moreover, music encompasses elements that take as many forms as there are cultural or subcultural identities. Thus, when we speak of music we are talking about a multiplicity of activities and experiences such as food, location, culture, etc (cook, 2005).

A socially contextualized analysis provided by Ballantine (1993), Erlmann (1991), and Taylor (1995) places music in a historical, political, and social matrix with an understanding that goes beyond the musical notes with close

linkage with culture, identity, location, etc. Placing it in the context of post colonialism it is important to note that while there is no direct bearing of music with the theory, it nevertheless provides a setting for its interpretation. Music as such can be taken as an invaluable reference point in understanding, analyzing, and reflecting postcolonial tenets, themes, and concepts or in brief postcolonial theory in totality.

Post colonialism as a theory deals with varied concepts such as identity, culture, hybridity, ethnicity, authenticity, mimicry, resistance, etc. It is important to understand that many of these concepts overlap in its understanding and usages with subtle differences in its categorization. Therefore it should come as no surprise if the narratives below overlap while addressing these concepts parallel to music.

'Identity' is one of the key themes addressed by postcolonial theory, which is expressed in myriad ways. The clothes we wear, the food we eat, and the languages we speak are all an outward projection of who we are (Miller and Shahriari, 2009). Initially, biological factors, namely race and sex were often cited as the source of a person's identity; but in the contemporary world, cultural factors are held equally important. Music as such is an expression of one's identity and plays a fundamental role in its assertion. In many cultures, the expression of identity through music is an essential aspect of daily life wherein the individual uses it as a way to assert their unique ethnic identities and qualities in relation to others. Understanding and appreciating musical activities can be considered as an important part of getting to know how a person from different culture thinks or act (Miller and Shahriari, 2009).

An example of the assertion of one's identity through music in contemporary time can be taken of Jamaica, wherein music played a vital role in furnishing emotion and ideological cohesion, fuelling the excitement and sustainability of nationalism identification leading up to and following independence (Freeland, 2012). The employment of musical form 'Ska' in a national struggle movement generated a sense of nationalism and provided strength for independence that sustained throughout the manifestation. Popular songs produced then, such as, Al T. Joe's 'Rise Jamaica Rise; Independence Time is Here', Lord Creator's 'Independent Jamaica' and Derrick Morgan's 'Forward March', created a metaphorical and emotional meaning, which created a platform through which the Jamaicans expressed their dissatisfaction with the political and cultural priorities practiced in Jamaica and the Caribbean. Musicians in Jamaica evoked an awareness of their socio-structural realities and prospects for the future while the general populace, in turn, imbibed the messages and rhythms from music in their everyday lives.

Rex Nettle ford, in his writing on 'Caribbean identity', advocated, that there is a fundamental link between culture and people that are rooted in their historical experiences

(1985). The cultural arts he argued, forms the basis of the resistance and cultural survival, and should, therefore, be expressed in ways that advance self-awareness and social changes as the creative imagination lay beyond the clutches of the worst kind of oppressor (Nettleford, 1985). In the song 'Freedom' by Eccles, we find enough expression on subjugation and the desire for independence, which can be discerned from the following lines: 'Freedom oh freedom, well I want freedom over me, before I be a slave, I skip over my grave and go home to my father and be free, No more crying, no more crying, No more crying over me, before I be a slave, I skip over my grave....'

The indigenous 'Yolngu' in Australia can be taken as another instance who vigorously used music and its performance to 'maintain a separate identity' in order to resist colonial influence. This was done by asserting a cultural ideology of youthu-yindi/mother-child relationship wherein music was used as a tool to structure both the external and internal relationship. The tribe openly called for unifying ancestry knowledge to strengthen their identity while actively speaking out against Euro-Australian political power (Strokes, 1994). A quote by Stephen Yunupingu; *'Through words and feelings in the song we show our political history. We claim the river and the land through song. You can change the song but not the land. The land is our marr (essence)- it stays forever,'* helps us to understand the importance of songs in their expression of demand and their rights and undeniably unique identity.

For postcolonial scholars, 'culture' is another important focal point. For Franz Fanon, under colonialism, western culture was deemed to be superior to the local indigenous culture of the colonized. This created a strong sense of inferiority complex among the colonised, consciously forcing them to become alien to their own culture. Likewise, Edward Said in his celebrated work 'Culture and Imperialism' explains, how 'the cultural representation were central to the process of colonizing others land, and then again to the process of obtaining independence from the colonizer' (Said, 1997). Thus, he asserts, that postcolonial independence involved not only the recovery of geographical territory but also the reclamation of one's culture. When interpreted from the prism of music it can be understood that the superiority projection does not necessarily cease with a cultural assertion but bypass other areas too. If we analyze the global music scenario the non-western music is not given its due importance, with most of the charts dominated by the western musician and little to almost no representation of the artist belonging to other or nonwestern world. This has forced the non-western musician to adopt or incorporate western style into their own which has not only made them ignorant of their own musical forms but have made their music hybrid which when brought out to the world has been justified through the narrative of fusion (Taylor, 1997). The implication of such fusion is that the indigenous music has lost its relevance in a fast track pace to oblivion.

Music as a tool has often been accepted to be used by the west to promote and propagate western culture. In fact for Salman Rushdie, music is 'precisely one of those viruses with which the almighty west has infected the east, one of the greatest weapons of cultural imperialism' (Rushdie, 1999). Further, Theodor Adorno in his concept of 'culture industry' explains how culture is being commoditized and imposed upon the people making them a passive consumer. In the making of these industries, big corporate are involved consciously allowing the market to intervene and help spread the ideology of particular location (Strokes, 1994). In the midst of growing trends to commercialize local cultures through popular festivals and performances an indigenous understanding of the place and culture is divorced from the experience and left behind for the benefit of becoming a palatable commodity for both the local and global audiences. For both the bands and fans alike, music that emerges from this amalgamation actually silences any genuine national voice, for the power and the influence of the British and American music continually play over the spaces where the native might speak (Strokes, 1994).

Akin to both identity and culture is the concept of hybridity, which is referred to as an important yet contested theme in the postcolonial theory. It was first placed at the heart of postcolonial studies by Ashish Nandy in his work, *The intimate enemy: loss and recovery of self under colonialism*, wherein he has stated, that 'colonialism, first of all, is a matter of consciousness and needs to be defeated ultimately in the mind of men' (1983). The psychological and cultural impact, rather than the political or economic are placed at the heart of analysis, drawing attention to the continuity and longevity of colonial power as embedded in the postcolonial self.

Hybridity in post colonialism is mostly associated with Homi Bhabha who through the usage of the term has exposed the unauthentic nature of identity in one hand, and the failure of the west to completely dominate the east, on the other. According to Ashcroft, 'hybridity has holistic implication and applies to linguistic, cultural, political and racial form, with reference to the creation of new trans-cultural form within the contact zone produced by colonization' (2007). The term in this sense has both negative and positive implication as an understanding of it requires consideration of both the colonizer and the colonized. While Robert Young emphasizes on the negative attribution of hybridity in playing its part on influencing the colonial discourse on racism, others such as Ashcroft and Bhabha focuses on positive, professing it as a strength rather than weakness with mutuality of the process free from replication of past model of oppressor obliterating the oppressed (Ashcroft, 2007).

Interpreted through the prism of music, hybridity connotes to a creation of a new world sound that cannot be compartmentalized according to the land, language, and political borders. It relates to mixing and combining various musical forms in the moment of cultural exchange.

However, this exchange tilts more towards west influencing the 'others' leading to what Edward Said professes as 'cultural imperialism'. Hybridity in music, therefore, can result in withering away from authenticity. It can be seen as a cultural invasion that has effectively and progressively flourished in the postcolonial world. Just as there has been the institutionalization of clothes, products, and food, music too is being institutionalized.

The narratives of successful postcolonial musicians reveal an inclination toward hybridity and toward the inevitable westernizing of local and national music, where the subaltern voice is again silenced. However, hybridity in music too has its own inherent ambivalence, as it also signifies the failure of the colonizer to fully dominate its subject and show their creativity and resilience (Griffith, 2007). This can be aptly illustrated by the non-western musical bands who although have adopted the western style of music yet cling tenaciously to their own native music. Ravi Shankar and Zakir Hussain two of the big names from the Indian music industry, for instance, have been instrumental in fusing classical Indian music with western sounds by collaborating with various western artists, but at the same time keeping the soul of the music via traditional Indian instrument intact. Thus says Bhabha, 'mastery is constantly asserted, but always incomplete always slipping' (Ashcroft, 2007). However, it is important to note that hybridity in music has its own inherent ambivalence i.e. while some are of the view that mixing of culture and producing a hybrid form goes parallel with the globalization of cultural forms, other views it in a way that threatens and gives way to the silencing of marginalized voices, making their culture redundant.

Ethnicity is another important theme of post colonialism. The term is closely associated with the notion that postcolonial identities are of hybrid nature. Useful as this may be, it is nevertheless important to understand that the concept of ethnicity and identity has changed progressively. While ethnic groups were once understood as being culturally isolated, lasting effects of colonialism, as well as the change in cultural flows worldwide, have rendered this way of thinking obsolete. In today's world, many people are reshaping their own identities in a constant negotiation between their ethnic roots and their present-day existence in modern, postcolonial society.

To trace the element of ethnicity in the realm of music, in 'don't sell your black man's stool to sit on a white man's chair: negotiating identity through performance in Suriname's Ala Kondre Dron Ensemble,' Caleb Bannet, seeks to examine the process of identity negotiation through music making with the Ala Kondre Dron<sup>4</sup> (All country drums) ensemble of the Suriname crate by late Henk Tion, the group performs at a regional festival as a representation of Pan-suriname identity.

Bennet demonstrates, how through the process of planning, rehearsing, and performing the group members come to understand their own ethnic boundaries as well as those of

Suriname's other ethnic group. Through this process, Ala Kondre Dron has managed to create both the music and identity that is uniquely Suriname's while at the same time maintaining strong ties to the ethnic roots that makes up this richly diverse postcolonial society. Thus, ethnicity as Edwin Ardener points, 'is positively demanded to be seen from the inside,' which also holds true for a musical strategy as it can never be understood outside the wider power relation in which they are embedded (Strokes, 1994). Therefore, understanding the local condition and language becomes important to understand the practices and meanings attached to it.

Authenticity is another concept which constantly finds its place in the postcolonial debate. The idea of authentic culture is one that has been persistent in debates concerning postcolonial cultural production. In particular, the demand for a rejection of the influence of the colonial period in programs of decolonization has invoked the idea that certain forms and practices are 'inauthentic' and that there is a need for the recuperation of authentic pre-colonial tradition and customs (Ashcroft, 2007). However, the problem with such a claim to cultural authenticity is that they often become entangled in an essential cultural position in which fixed practices become ionized as authentically indigenous and 'others' are excluded as hybridized or contaminated. This has in its corollary the danger of ignoring the possibility that culture may develop and change as their condition changes. However, authenticity as an idea cannot be neglected as in certain cases; the cultural authenticity of certain groups or regions plays an important role in asserting one's unique identity. Tibetans in exile all over the world, using their cultural identity as a unifying force in their resistance against China and its domination can be taken as a case in point.

In music, authenticity relates to an assumption of the original, untainted way of music king and sounding. Though postcolonial musicians claim of authenticity, it cannot be denied that the music they produce is replete with hybridity and any effort to authenticate their music has proven to be more or less failure. This can be attributed to the depleting interest among the listeners who favor western over their own indigenous music, which have again been strengthened by the western music industries by celebrating hybridity and debunking the idea of musical authenticity. However, it is imperative to note that it is always the natives and the nonwestern music that is branded as a hybrid. Musicians at the metropolis rarely make music that is heard as hybrid and even if they do, they are placed in a more prestigious category and praised, as was Paul Simon for 'Graceland': 'Simon reinvented himself artistically and successfully engineered a creative re-birth' (Taylor, 1997). These musicians who collaborate with musician from other parts of the world are never described as makers of hybrids and demands of authenticity are not made of them and their music (Taylor, 1997).

Mimicry is another concept that is crucial for understanding post colonialism. The concept, similar to that of hybridity addresses the ambivalent relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Homi Bhabha describes mimicry as ‘the process by which the colonized subject is reproduced as almost the same, but not quite.’ While the colonial discourse encourages the colonized subject to mimic the colonizer by adopting their cultural habit, assumption, institution, and values; the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits but a blurred copy of the colonizer that can be quite threatening (Abrahamsen, 2007). This is because mimicry as Bhabha asserts is never far from mockery. Through this process of cultural modification and reform emerges what Bhabha calls as a ‘mimic man’ embodying a figure who replicates the behavior of the colonizer, yet remain ‘native’.

Reflection of a characteristic of mimicry can be witnessed in most of the bands (both major and minor) operating in the world today, where the link between the native music and western form is celebrated by both the music critics and fans alike. This can be seen in the local band’s own desire to retain and mix national and traditional music with the western musical forms, consciously infusing the English language. The fans and the musician, indeed become ‘appropriate object of a colonialist chain of command, authorized versions of otherness’, as they consume and generate a cultural product, which both aligns them with the west and simultaneously produces them as ‘mimic men’ and the other (Romanow, 2005). Therefore, the postcolonial musicians re-enact colonial mimicry, where the desire to emerge as authentic through mimicry through a process of writing and repletion is the final irony of partial representation. This attribution is seen in today’s musicians where the link between native music and western forms is celebrated to such an extent where they, to quote Bhabha, ‘inscribe the colonial text erratically, eccentrically across body politics’ (Romanow, 2005). It is therefore important to understand that the mimicked music which is being produced in the postcolonial nations, and sung primarily in English, creates a conflictual space wherein the postcolonial musicians sing in a language which is not theirs, their identity negotiated with the certainty of the power of the mimicked art form, their voice lost ‘between the lines’ (Romanow, 2005). In replicating the western models the subaltern voice of the postcolonial musician is drowned out by echoing the western voices which pervade the construction of the music in itself. This is what Bhabha calls ‘the metonymies of presence’; ‘those inappropriate signifiers of the colonial discourses-the difference between being English and being anglicized’ (Romanow, 2005).

### III. CONCLUSION

Post colonialism as a theory highlights the concern of identity and culture which was mostly ignored by the mainstream IR theories. It, similar to most post-positivist theories help shift focus from a static view of IR to more a dynamic one, encompassing a vibrant socio-cultural understanding of world politics. It also brings to attention

the concern of the first world- third world relationship which was unaccounted for, bringing the third world into the purview of IR. Although important in its own right, the main concern of this paper is to highlight the importance of music in a better understanding of the theory and to expose the binaristic relationship between the first and third worlds to be prevalent in the realm of music too. Although the above-mentioned issues dealt by postcolonial theory have helped create idiosyncratic terms which have a close bearing with postcolonial music, what has not been considered is how music can offer a great deal to a more comprehensive understanding of postcolonial theory. Therefore, what this work has attempted to do in a nutshell is to establish a meaningful linkage between post colonialism and music.

### End Notes

1. It is imperative to understand the ambiguity inherent in the term as it is expressed in two different ways- post-colonialism and post colonialism. These two words connote a different meaning. The hyphenated term post-colonialism seems more appropriate to denote a particular historical period or epoch, like those suggested by phrases such as ‘after colonialism’ or after independence or the end of an empire (McLeod, 2011). However, the other term stands not just in terms of strict historical periodisation, but refer to disparate forms of representation, practices, and values. Hence, it becomes important to accept the plural nature of the word post colonialism, as it does not simply imply the period after the colonial era or decolonisation but entails a much more vivid and in depth study of it as epistemology, ethics and politics-addressing the matter of identity, gender, race and ethnicity.
2. Indian Peoples Theatre Association (1943) can be taken as one of the instance of the earliest attempt to use cultural forms as a systematic articulation of protest. The movement is said to have roots deep down in the cultural awakening of the masses of India catering to revive the rich but lost cultural heritage by re-interpreting, adopting, and finally integrating among the people.
3. Music also serves to function as a symbol of national or regional integrity; for instance, émigré or expatriate communities cling tenaciously to their traditional music in order to preserve their identity in foreign countries.
4. Ala Kondre Dron is a group made up of members from the major ethnic group such as Maroon, East Indians, Creole, Amerindian, Javanese and Chinese.

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