



# Perceptions of Some Africans about Post-Colonialism as Depicted in Jomo Kenyatta's "The Gentlemen of the Jungle"

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## Abstract

Every human being, in addition to having his or her own personal identity, has a sense of who he or she is, in relation to the larger society. It seems that after independence is achieved by African states, one main question arises: What is the new society, culture, and identity? Africans are faced with cultural clash owing to the fact that they have been too much exposed to the colonizer's (European's) way of life. The identity of most Africans is gradually eroded as there is a proliferation of Westernization. This content analysis design paper, employing Jomo Kenyatta's short story, "The Gentlemen of the Jungle", as the main data, has examined the main theme, post-colonialism, from four sub-perspectives. These perspectives are: alienation and exclusion, retributive justice, the colonizer's language as a tool of dominance, and double standard and abuse of power. The significance of this paper is to facilitate the shaping of new identities in African communities after the obliterating of colonialism and European imperialism. The essay is structured into four main parts: introduction, the method, the themes, and the conclusion.

## Subject Areas

Education

## Keywords

Post-Colonialism, Alienation, Retributive Justice, Double Standard, Colonizer, Colonized

## 1. Introduction

Jomo Kenyatta's fable-like short story is one that can perfectly be used to talk about post-colonialism from the African standpoint. The author opens the story by introducing the central character, man, and one of the villains, the elephant, to the readers. The early relationship between the two prominent characters is one of cordiality, warmth and rapport as man allows his friend, the elephant, to put his trunk in man's little hut owing to torrential rain. However, there is a conflict of interest, when the elephant cunningly relocates the owner of the little hut to the outer space. This ill-treatment leads to tension. The nervousness between the two elements heightens, leading to antagonism, bad blood, and animosity. There is a turn of event when the trust that man has in the King of the Jungle, the Lion, shatters; as the lion's ministers constitute a one-sided Commission of Enquiry to look into the case involving the man and the elephant. The verdict was stolen for the elephant. This ushers us into the falling action; where all the animals take the man for granted by displacing him of what is rightfully his. This act eventually takes us to the denouement of the story; where man completely exterminates the animals from the forest by setting them ablaze.

## 2. Method

Content analysis design was employed for this study. This design involves the organized reading of a body of texts, images, and symbolic matter, not necessarily from an author's or user's perspective [1]. Unlike other kinds of social science research, content analysis does not require the collection of data from people. It seeks to study recorded information in texts, media, or physical items. Specifically, conceptual analysis, a type of content analysis, which is also known as thematic analysis, was used. The main goal of conceptual analysis is to examine the occurrence of selected terms in the data. Consequently, the main concept discussed in this paper is the theme of post-colonialism.

## 3. The Post-Colonialism Concept

The concept of post-colonialism has always been problematic in terms of providing a uniform definition; since it is a subject matter that has been looked at from diverse perspectives. Post-colonialism (or often postcolonialism) is the historical stage in which some continents of the world (mostly Asia, Africa and the Caribbean) which have been freed from the control of European imperialism (since the middle of the 20th century) need to repair their pre-imperial cultures, assess the cultural, linguistic, legal and economic impact of the colonial system, and establish new governmental and national identities, with the collapse of imperialism. Post-colonialism, thus, deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies [2]. The effects are both positive and negative effects. Post-colonialism translates a deep concern for the perspective of persons from regions and groups outside the hegemonic power structure. That is, its interest is in the oppressed minority groups whose presence is not only crucial to the

self-definition of the majority group, but also critical, placing the subaltern group in a position to subvert the authority of those who have hegemonic power [3]. Looking at it from another angle, post-colonialism is used as a chronological marker, referring to the period after official decolonization. In spite of the fact that much of what has come to be qualified as postcolonial does indeed belong to this period, post-colonialism has very little to do with era marking, looking at it from a different perspective. Thus, it involves the writings that deal with issues of decolonization or the political and cultural independence of people: Africans, Australians, Asians, and Caribbean, just to mention a few, who were formerly subjugated to colonial rule. This is to say that post-colonialism refers to the study of literatures that cover the periods of colonial period up to the present time. The objectives of post-colonialism from the African writers' viewpoint are, therefore, to: one, correct the negative images of the colonized subject; and also to respond to the negative impressions created by authors who wrote literature in the colonial period. Two, reclaim the humanity of the colonized person whose image was dehumanized so much so that his or her culture—dancing, music, language, food, etc.—were considered barbaric. Most African writers (for example, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Ayi Kwei Armah, Wole Soyinka, and Chinua Achebe) have therefore opined that the story of Africa belongs to Africans, and Africans should be allowed to tell their own stories from their outlook. Three, appropriate the erroneous impressions that Africans are inferior to Europeans. Four, and most important, form new regional and national identities; by encouraging Africans to patronize their own products, motivating them to be proud of their own rich cultural heritage, inculcating in them a sense of patriotism, and helping deal with discrimination within the African fraternity. Most of the historical and social issues, and the objectives we have enumerated, are rooted in Jomo Kenyatta's "The Gentlemen of the Jungle". The most popular proponents or movers of post-colonialism as explained from the African perspective are: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (who was formerly called James Ngugi), Ayi Kwei Armah, Wole Soyinka, and Chinua Achebe. Among the numerous sub-themes in the African's version of post-colonialism concept are:

### 3.1. The Theme of Alienation and Exclusion

Alienation is the state of being isolated or detached. Alienation is a purely intellectual phenomenon for Hegel and Feuerbach. It is the consequence of viewing the world in an erroneous way. But, for Karl Marx, it is a material and social process. He uses the term *Entfremdung* (estrangement) which is his "Alienation Theory" which delineates the separation or detachment of beings or things that are or have been naturally united together [4]. Alienation and exclusion as a single unit, is a keysub-theme in the text. This theme brings reminiscence of the colonial era in Africa and its environs. The theme of alienation and exclusion from one's society, identity and cultural heritage is clearly displayed in the text. The man, we are told, "had a little hut at the edge of the forest" [5]. The "edge of

the forest” and the “forest” are two different geographical regions. The edge of the forest represents Africans’ societies and the forest represents the regions Africans gave to the colonizers when they first came to Africa. Most colonizers were given the “evil forest” as their dwelling place [6]. Apparently, this decision was to escort the colonizer into the hands of the “devil or the evil” which lived in the forest. The “devil” “scared” most Africans away from the forest. For example, in some of the African communities, anytime any African woman gave birth to twins or triplets or more babies at a go, the innocent babies were dumped in the evil forest, since the babies were believed to be abomination [6]. However, the colonizer succeeded in demystifying his new environment—the forest. The ‘evil or the devil’ in the forest could not destroy the colonizer. This gave the colonizer powers to migrate to the edge of the forest where the indigenous Africans were settling. In the text, the elephant pleaded for his trunk to be put in man’s little hut owing to the torrential rain. This depicts the innocent ways and means the colonizer used in penetrating the virgin societies of Africa. In the process, most societies were broken. The question is was there not enough shelter in the evil forest the colonizer demystified? The coming in of the colonizer led to resettlement of many natives. In the text, we are told that “as soon as the elephant put his trunk inside the hut, slowly he pushed his head inside, and finally flung the man out in the rain.” The pushing of the head represents the introduction of the colonizer’s leadership. The new leadership denied man of what is genuinely his. The new leadership succeeded in encroaching the better parts of the lands of Africans. The new leadership made Africans abandon their rich cultural heritage and in the process they lost their identity. The “little hut” represents the man’s way of life, his culture, his language and his identity. The colonizers thought the way of life of Africans was barbaric and that it was their (colonizers’) duty to show Africans better way of life.

### 3.2. The Theme of Retributive Justice

The law of retributive justice is another conspicuous theme in the story. Retributive justice, in law, is related to the institution of criminal punishment [7]. Retribution involves the imposition of an appropriate sanction or punishment for violation of the penal law [7]. Thus, human beings suffer the consequences of their own actions. Retributive justice is related to cause and effect essay. Most writers on “cause and effect” essays have conceptualised this method as a way of explaining a phenomenon and its outcome [8] [9] [10] [11]. “Cause and effect analysis may be used to explain the reasons why things are, the way they are; to identify and explain effects or consequences of an event, action, decision, discovery, or invention; and to explain other causes and effects together [8].” It is “a tool by which we reflect upon and learn from our past ... [10].” It is one of the expository writings that focus on the reasons why something happens or the results an event or situation will produce [9]. “By examining the causes or effects of an action, we seek to understand and explain things that happen in our lives

[11].” In the text, the elephant, the initiator of this atrocious behaviour and his colleagues paid dearly for their incalculable “sins”. The elephant at the onset pleaded for a space to safeguard his trunk: “My dear good man, will you please let me put my trunk inside your hut to keep it out of this torrential rain?” [4]. The craftiness on the part of the elephant portrays how the colonizer arrived in African states and exploited Africans. The oppression, exploitation, and discrimination were enormously horrendous for man as he completely annihilates all the animals at the final stage by setting them ablaze. The demise of the animals illustrates the enforcement of this nature’s law of retributive justice.

### 3.3. The Colonizer’s Language as Tool of Dominance

Language is “the necessary means of communion; it is the one indispensable instrument for creating the ties of the moment without which unified social action is impossible” [12]. This suggests that there is a symbiotic relationship between language and society. Language is an aspect of culture, and culture is an aspect of language. The two are intertwined Language assumes a social group who uses it as a means of communication [13]. Language mainly has three purposes known as instrumental, symbolic and cognitive [14]. In its instrumentality function, language controls access to power, opportunity and material resources. Language carries an enormous political, social and economic power. In its symbolic function, language decides identity. In terms of the cognitive dimension, language serves to influence the belief and thought systems of the speaker. Therefore, before colonization, African languages served unique purposes of instrumentality, power and cognition. However, when the process of colonization led to the creeping in of the colonizer’s language, they (the languages of the colonial masters) became important tools of dominance. In the story, Mr. Elephant had more time to talk, but in the case of the man, it wasn’t so. The languages of Africans were perceived as *noise* and that the colonizer “thought it wise” to give Africans a suitable language. In the light of this, some African writers have suggested a rejection of the colonizers’ language. While Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o extremely endorses this claim and decides to write in his local language, Chinua Achebe sees English as a tool to explain and promulgate his culture to the western world.

### 3.4. Double Standard and Abuse of Power

Double standard is a set of principles that are applied differently and often unfairly between two individuals, items, or groups, especially when applied to the standards of behaviour considered acceptable and unacceptable for one group of people as compared to another [15]. If you accuse someone or an institution of applying double standards in their treatment of different groups of people, you mean that they unfairly allow more freedom or behaviour to one group than to another [16]. Double standard can lead to a situation where power is abused. Abuse of power is the act of using one’s position of power in an abusive way. This can take many forms, such as taking advantage of someone, gaining access

to information that should not be accessible to the public, or manipulating someone with the ability to punish them if they do not comply [17]. Double standard and abuse of power are evident in the text. Double standard is clearly depicted when the elephant is seen among the other ministers who appoint the members of the Commission. Abuse of power is continually displaced as the man is forced out of the several huts that he builds subsequently. This depicts how the colonizer at a point forcibly took possession of property that belonged to native Africans. Anytime the man builds, he is forced out of the hut: "... no sooner had he built another hut than Mr. Rhinoceros charged in with his horn lowered and ordered the man to quit ... This procedure was repeated until Mr. Buffalo, Mr. Leopard, Mr. Hyena and the rest were all accommodated with new huts" [4]. The rebuilding of huts at separate locations and the subsequent forceful evictions stand for discovery of land and resources by natives and the unlawful (or sometimes lawful) possession of these resources by the colonizers.

#### 4. Literary Devices

Literary devices are the technique, style, and formatting used by authors and speakers to skillfully emphasize, exaggerate, or strengthen their artistic works. They can refer to lively methods employed by comedians to make us laugh [18]. They can also include the tools of influence that authors use to convince and drive audience to action. Literary devices include influential metaphorical language that authors use to summon emotion ranging from guilt to rage to ecstasy, and to allow us to see the world in new and magical ways. Words can be arranged to give poems, songs, and prose alike, rhythm and musicality [18]. These devices can animate a story with such wealth of detail, character development, and action that as readers, we are taken by a story, and feel as if the people on the page are real. Literary devices have a wide variety of application, from the poet's beauty, to the speaker's persuasion, to the novelist's story development [18]. Kenyatta uses several literary devices in his fable for some effects. First, the animals in the jungle are supposed to be "the Gentlemen of the Jungle" but paradoxically they are not. It is rather the man who acted gently at the initial stages of the oppression. The colonizer entered Africa in a tender loving manner, but latter he became an oppressor. This is situational irony. Second, Jomo Kenyatta uses allegorical framework to depict racial discrimination—"Four legs good, two legs bad" [19]. All the animals in the jungle have four limbs as against man's two limbs. This portrays how man is discriminated against on grounds of race, colour, ethnic, class, and religion. The next device is characterisation. Each character in the text represents a specific idea. For example, the members of the Commission: "1) Mr. Rhinoceros; 2) Mr. Buffalo; 3) Mr. Alligator 4) The Rt. Hon. Mr. Fox and 5) Mr. Leopard" are animals which are powerful in terms of strength and agility [4]. They stand for bureaucratic haughtiness and injustice that characterised the colonial era. The man and his protest stand for innocent citizens who were constantly victimized by governments. This is evident in the

way and manner the man complains about the membership of the Commission: “On seeing the personnel, the man protested and asked if it was not necessary to include in this Commission a member from his side. But he was told that it was impossible, since no one from his side was well enough educated to understand the intricacy of jungle law”. The King of the Jungle, Mr. Lion, stands for tyrant and wicked leaders in the society. The elephant, which is the only domestic animal among the animals mentioned in the text, is a round character. He has more dimensions to his personality. When he first makes friendship with the man, he is referred to as “*the elephant*” [4]. This displays his innocence and astute nature. But, when he is called before the Commission, he is labeled “*The Rt. Hon. Mr. Elephant*” [4]. The titles and the initial capitalization of his name at this point suggest pride, arrogance, change of behaviour as a result of power. The elephant, hence, represents the two diametrically opposed behavioural traits of some leaders (parliamentarians, politicians, and people in authority); that is, gentle behaviour is portrayed before attaining power; but rude and affluent life style is portrayed after attaining power.

## 5. Conclusion

Looking at post-colonialism from the colonizer’s point of view, one begins to wonder whether the colonizer did the colonized more harm than good. In the text the elephant considered it necessary, in his friend’s own interests, to turn the undeveloped space to a more economic use by sitting in it himself. That suggests that the colonizer, in spite of the oppression, racial discrimination, segregation, erosion of identity and culture, misuse of power and the rest of the negative issues leveled against him, left Africa a legacy—formal education, infrastructure, erosion of the negative components of our culture (like: damping of twins into the evil forest [6]), technology, and economic development—which every African in his accurate mind can testify. We see these as a positive side of post-colonialism. Therefore, in our bid to form a new identity, Africans should not take post-colonialism and colonizer issues to the extreme; otherwise, Africans may be antagonistic and might turn to be averse to everything about the colonizers. If due care is not taken, as the colonizer becomes more loving, the colonized may become more hostile. In spite of everything, we among ourselves are not “*living happily ever after*” after the colonizer was eliminated from our land. In this 21st century, everybody needs everybody. We, the colonized, need the colonizer as they also need us. This will make the world, a better place to dwell in.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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