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Locating History, Geostrategy and Geopolitics in Postcolonial Studies: A Perspective from Africa

Saliou DIONE[1*], Mandoumbé MBAYE[2]

[1] African and Postcolonial Studies Department of Anglophone Studies Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar (Senegal)

[2] Doctoral Candidate African and Postcolonial Studies Department of Anglophone Studies Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar (Senegal)

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***Corresponding author:** Saliou DIONE
African and Postcolonial Studies Department of Anglophone Studies Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar (Senegal)

Abstract

From the nineteenth to the twentieth century, European colonial powers dominated and ruled some parts of the world known as colonized territories. Thus, from Africa to Asia, many peoples experienced Western domination through British, French, Portuguese, Spanish and Belgian colonization. This article aims at analysing the historical and geostrategical, geopolitical transformations engendered by Western imperialism in the works of two key figures of postcolonial studies, Edward Said's Orientalism (1978) and Homi Bhabha's The Location of Culture (1994). Using Ngugi wa Thiong'o's theory of postcolonialism, Enrique Dussel's theory of transmodernity and Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, it unearths how the colonial discourse used history to legitimate Western subjugation of other geographical spaces and races, but also how imperialism has reshaped the geography of the world and influenced the geopolitical relations.

Keywords: *Imperialism, History, Geostrategy, Geopolitics, Post/Colonial, Hegemony, Transmodernity.*

INTRODUCTION

From the nineteenth century up to the twentieth century, European colonial powers dominated and ruled some parts of the world known as colonized territories. Therefore, from Africa to Asia many peoples have experienced Western domination through British, French, Portuguese, Spanish and Belgian colonization. The British, for instance, shifted from a kingdom to an empire because of colonization. The phrase "The Empire on which the sun never sets" to refer to the British colonial Empire is a perfect illustration

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of Western political, economic, and cultural domination over the rest of the world, particularly countries of the global south. In fact between the seventeenth and the nineteenth century, almost one-quarter of the world was ruled by Great Britain. These territories included India, West Indies, The Settler Colonies (Canada, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Australia, Kenya...), part of the Middle East, and some other colonies in West Africa. This made it a super power in Europe in particular and in the West in general. France, for its part, ruled some large territories that covered a large part of the African continent and remote territories in the Caribbean islands, some parts of which known as over sea territories French has ruled so far. These areas include Mayotte, Martinique, and Guadeloupe, which made France have some difficulties to swerve from its colonial past. The former colonized territories demand the true version regarding some aspects of their past colonial history as assignation and torture of resistance fighters. The France's dark and shameful episodes of colonialism expose the country' barbaric past which resurface as a result of a demand for the recognition of colonial crimes in those ancient colonies by a young generation smitten with justice, equality and freedom. Admittedly, such claims aim at deconstructing the colonial discourse that sustained colonisation but also at marking a cultural revival among these oppressed people.

Actually, colonization was not only an economic enterprise but also a source of glory and national greatness for the countries involved in the business: England, France, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Italy, etc. Consequently, these colonial powers not only subjugated colonized territories but they also totally subverted their culture, economy, history, politics, and geography within the framework their geopolitical strategies of territorial occupation and domination. From then on, history, geography, and geopolitics become key mechanisms in Western imperialism because colonization is a historical fact that occurred at given moment and in specific places. It is in this context that both Edward Said and Homi Bhabha have been concerned with approaching the intersection of place/geography, temporality, and geopolitics, respectively, in *Orientalism* (1978) and *The Location of Culture* (1994). How can then one locate these three elements of history that have contributed in (re)defining the colonized subject and their space(s) in the contemporary world? Obviously, cultural colonization goes hand in hand with the distortion of history and place/space. Therefore, colonial discourses and practices have greatly influenced the history of the colonized people. The colonial discourse of Western imperialism legitimation has constructed a history for the colonized as it, at the same time, has modified the geography of the colonized territories. Hence, the need to seek to locate history, geography and geopolitics from an African perspective.

Delving into Ngugi wa Thiong'o postcolonialism, Enrique Dussell's transmodernism, and Antonio Gramsci's hegemony, as theories and transmodern positions that reconstruct a universal ethics and transmodern way of thinking, this article brings to light how both Said and Bhabha display the intersecting factors of past and present. Using a comparative approach, it analyses history, geography, and geopolitics, as mechanisms used in Western imperialistic and colonial enterprises, to better dominate and exploit the colonized people.

I. Alienating the Holism of History, Geography, and Geopolitics in The West-Rest Trans-Relation

The Berlin Conference (1884-1885) is a perfect example of the interaction that exists between history, geography and imperialism. From December 1884 up to February 1885, the representatives of the colonial powers in competition in Africa met in Berlin under the lead of German Chancellor Bismarck to decide for the fate of Africa. That historical event has totally changed the geography of the African continent, its history, and its place in the world geopolitics. During that meeting in which no African country was present, Africa was divided into colonial territories like a cake without taking into account its cultural, ethnic, historical, and environmental realities, and above all its needs. To grasp the intersections between history, geography and geopolitics in Edward Said's *Orientalism* and Homi Bhabha's (1978) *The Location of Culture* (1994), it is necessary to rest on holism, the theory that parts of a whole are in intimate interconnection in that they cannot exist without reference to the whole. It also allows approaching the understanding of the human mind and behaviour that focuses on looking things as a whole and opposes reductionism.

Indeed, history, geography, geopolitics and empire are extremely (inter)connected in Western imperialism philosophy. They are used in a highly sophisticated manner by the imperialists to assert their hegemony. According to Robin George Collingwood, history is the past as created in the present (Crowcroft, 2018). Based on this definition, one can state that Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) are historical texts that analyse imperialism and its subsequent discourses. History, taken not as an academic discipline, has key aspects that are chronology, past and time. The colonizers used the first one to arrange events in their order of occurrence in historical timelines. The second, which refers to the totality of events that occurred before a given point, serves to relate present and future. The third served as a measurement tool aimed at ordering from the past through the present into the future and telling the duration of events and their intervals.

In the Western conception, history by chronology is composed of the 'Big Bang,' the formation and the evolution of the solar system, the history of the word, universal history, ancient history, the classical antiquity, the modern age, and the contemporary era. In this framing, ages of history are prehistory and history. Prehistory or Stone Age is divided into three major periods: palaeolithic, pesolithic and neolithic. For them, the discovery of metals and the invention of writing mark the end prehistoric era and the beginning of history which ages are the Bronze Age and the Iron Age. However, every society, according to its culture, beliefs, and location, has its own understanding of history and its own way of recording and remembering it. For example, Africa, being a continent dominated by orality, has as historians the *griots* and the elder people who are the guardians of the collective memory of societies. They are considered to be reliable intellectuals, whose speeches and accounts are 'sacred.' It is in this context that Guinean writer Djibril Tamsir Niane, in *The Epic of Sundjata*, the Malian *griot* Mamadou Kouyaté states:

> Since time immemorial the Kouyatés have been in the service of the Keita princes of Mali; we are vessels of speech, we are the repositories which harbour secrets many centuries old. I will give you my father's words just as I received them; royal griots do not know what lying is (Niane 1965, p. 1).

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This statement is an oath that the *griot* takes in front of his audience to put their minds at rest about the authenticity and the veracity of his speech. However, the colonial discourse has always depicted Africa as a continent without history, culture and civilization, as *a tabula rasa*. Therefore, in order to assert their domination, the colonizers have (re)written the history of the colonized people. In this perspective, the latter's history, which is marked by orality, is denied by the Western colonialists and intellectuals involved in the colonial enterprise of subjugation, destruction, and exploitation. Although the Iliad and Odyssey were rightly regarded as essential sources for the history of ancient Greek, African oral tradition, the collective memory of peoples who hold the thread of many events marking their lives, was rejected as 'worthless.' In writing the history of a large part of Africa and Africans, *"the only sources used were from outside the continent [...]* " (Boahen 1985, p. xix). In fact, Amadou Moctar Mbow shows the important of history in a colonial context. Whether written or oral, for him, it is crucial to a society, for the memory of the past can help to build the present and the future.

Regarding geography, it is a field of science that studies the lands, the features, the inhabitants of a place and the phenomena of earth. As a discipline, it comprises many branches, among which human geography and Physical geography. The former is the study of people and their communities, cultures, and economies, as well as their relation with and across the space. The latter deals with the study of processes and patterns in the natural environment like the atmosphere, the biosphere and so on. Meanwhile, geopolitics is the study of geography and its impacts on politics and international relations. It is the intersection of geography, power, and foreign policy. Geopolitics focuses on peoples, states, natural resources, environment, trade, routes and so on. In fact, history, geography, imperialism and geopolitics are then intertwined.

These tools of Western imperialism, which are geography, history and geopolitics, are central themes in Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) postcolonial narratives. Orientalism, as conceived of by Said, is a historical fact and a discourse by the West about a given geographical area, the Orient, and its people at a given period for imperialist purposes. About that, he argues that:

> [...] the history of Orientalism has both an internal consistency and a highly articulated set of relationships to the dominant culture sur-rounding it. My analyses consequently try to show the field's shape and internal organization, its pioneers, patriarchal authorities, canonical texts, doxological ideas, exemplary figures, its followers, elaborators, and new authorities;[...] (Said 1978, p. 23).

Said locates that colonial discourse in the past in which he recalls the date 1798 which marks Napoleon's expedition in Egypt. The year marks the starting point of what he calls '*modern orientalism*.' In fact, such a historical event links Napoleon to Egyptians, Egypt to France and by consequence the Orient, the West, and their people. In doing so, as for Said, the West has invented a temporality and a new sense of history for the people of the Orient as conceived of by those of the [dominant] West:

> For my purposes here, the keynote of the relationship was set for the Near East and Europe by the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798, an invasion which was in many ways the very model of a truly scientific appropriation of one culture by another apparently stronger one. For with Napoleon's occupation of Egypt processes were set in motion between East and West that still dominate our contemporary cultural and political perspectives (Said 1978, p. 43).

Admittedly, Western imperialism has put together peoples of different races, different geographical areas, different civilizations, and different histories. However, that encounter between those different peoples is marked by an unjustified dominant-dominated relationship in which the issue of authority emerges between the colonizer and the colonized subjects. In fact, the colonizers appropriate the history of the colonized. Like the "*lion and the gentle of the jungle*" by Jomo, Kenyatta, (1938), the colonizers tell the history of the colonized people, a history that they have written and which is marked by elision and intrusion. Said proposes to the colonized peoples a deconstruction of that history and the reconstruction of an authentic history that will take into account the cultural realities of the place in real time:

> [..] history is made by men and women, just as it can also be unmade and re-written, always with various silences and elisions, always with shapes imposed and disfigurements tolerated, so that "our" East, "our" Orient becomes "ours" to possess and direct (Said 1978, p. xv).

Actually, from imperialism up to the discovery and knowledge of Ancient Egypt, as the starting point of modern civilization and the cradle of Mankind, the science of Egyptology, as a discipline, has displayed to the modern world the pharaohs that are represented in Western cinema as white people. That distortion of the history of Ancient Egypt and Egyptian civilisation, which Senegalese scientist and historian Cheikh Anta Diop in *Negro Nation and Culture* (1954), denounces Western histories for providing false justification for European imperialism and perpetuating notions of the inferiority of Black peoples. In this path-breaking monograph, Diop has demonstrated that the first population of Ancient Egypt as black instead of white, as many Western scholars pretended for the sake of hegemony. This is history- repetition insofar as the same thing happened to the colonized people in their colonial discourses of demonization and history falsification.

Therefore, one of great symbols of Ancient Egypt, which are the obelisks, were robbed by European colonial administrators in connivance with the archaeologists and taken to Europe. Those objects, which reflected the identity and culture of the people they colonized, still stand in Western cities like 'Western cultural symbols.' So distorted was the history of the colonized people in the colonial discourse that it seemed that the history of the colonized space began with colonization, thus creating a new temporality and reinventing a new geographical space for the justly dominated beings. Colonization, as just a part of the history of brilliant and very civilizations, has buried important parts of the history of the colonized people. In his book *The Destruction of Black Civilization* (1974), Chancellor Williams states that:

> They have, therefore, had a free and unchallenged hand in reordering the Land of the Blacks as they saw fit, classifying and naming people, places and things just as they pleased. The Blacks were nonpersons or nobodies in their own land. From one end of the continent to the other black youth saw great monuments and statues of Europeans only, European and Arab names for African

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> roads, hills, lakes, towns and cities.[...] "But why are our great men forgotten? We never hear about them (Williams 1974, p. 190).

For Western historians argued Christopher Columbus discovered the Americas in 1492 as if before the date of discovery, the Americas were an empty place with no inhabitants. As for the Afrocentrists, Abu Bakr II discovered the Americas 181 years long before Columbus. Therefore, when writing the history of the Americas, Western historians had chosen to leave out the presence the "*Olmec*" people, who were Blacks, the Maya and Aztec civilizations. As Ivan Van Sertima has mentioned it in his book entitled *They Came Before Columbus: The African Presence in Ancient America* (1976), stating that:

> The most remarkable examples of this evidence are the realistic portraitures of Negro Africans in clay, gold and stone unearthed in pre-Columbian strata in Central and South America. It has only been within the last decade however that evidence has begun to filter down the general public when in 1862 a colossal granite head was found in the Canton of Tuxtla [...] (Van Sertima 1976, p. 26).

Van Sertima's statement shows how Western imperialism uses history to assert its domination. In so doing, history becomes a subjugating tool insofar as it is resorted to as a weapon to disconnect the target people from their past, sense of memory, and temporalities. Today, the United States of America, Canada and Australia, which belong to the West, are considered White people's lands though people of different races live there. They were colonized lands inhabited by non-white people called Indians and Aboriginals millennia before the arrival of European colonizers.

Likewise, Orientalism is a distorted history of the Orient and of its people. That way of featuring that geographical area and its inhabitants has evolved for years in Western literature, anthropology, sociology, history, philology, among other academic disciplines. The falsification enterprise has created a distinction between the West and the East/Rest, thus creating dichotomies, othering, and differentiation, which leads to confrontation and conflict in the end as their people start interrogation about their selves and their identities. That is, then, one of the reasons why Said links Orientalism to geography with the discourse of differentiation that emerged in the West when Western imperialism reached its peak, recalling that it:

> The period of immense advance in the institutions and content of Orientalism coincides exactly with the period of unparalleled European expansion; from 1815 to 1914 European direct colonial dominion expanded from about 35 percent of the earth's surface to about 85 percent of it. Every continent was affected, none more so than Africa and Asia. The two greatest empires were the British and the French; [...] (Said 1978, p. 41).

Said argues here that Orientalism is full with a considerable geographical ambition, with spatial (physical) and psychological (mental) domination. The discourse of Orientalism enables the West to dress boundaries between it, as the West, and the Rest. Therefore, Eurocentrism, which puts the West at the centre of the world, provides it with a "*poetic of space*" (Bachelard 1964, p. xxxviii), a concept Said borrows from Gaston Bachelard to show how the colonial discourse has created an imaginative geography and history for the dominated people. Warraq Ibn rejects this description of the relationship between the Orient and the Occident in his book *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said's Orientalism* (2007). According to him, historically, Europe had been exchanging with the Orient, arguing, "*I am at pains to underline the constant to and fro of intellectual exchange between the Occident and Persia, and India and the Occident and Islam do not develop in isolation. The West has has always been willing to learn from others"* (Warraq 2007, p. 556). In fact, it seems that Said and Warraq are not talking about the same West. The latter is dealing with the West before its imperialist project, at a moment it treated other peoples with respect and consideration. In addition, the title of Warraq's work clearly indicates the trajectory of his analysis of Said's writings. Obviously, his reading of Said's is from a Western perspective. However, Warraq criticizes Said for his exclusion of non-Arabs when talking about the Orientals, stating that:

> Said seem to use the term orientalist for one who, on the whole studies the Middle East, that is, the Muslims population of the Middle East. The person who studies the Jews or the Zoroastrians, is not in Edward Said's view an orientalist. For Said, the non-Muslims and even the non-Arabs hardly exist, are occasionally mentioned, are never discussed or acknowledge as Orientals with a history and presence. There are no Copts, no Maronites, no Mandaeans, no Samaritans, no Assyrians, no Greek Orthodox Christians, no Chaldeans, no Berbers and of course no Jews in the Orient (Warraq 2007 p.13).

As scholar originated from the Middle East, Said is aware of the cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity in the region but he puts emphasis on the way Arabs are treated by the imperialist West.

Focusing on the geographical aspect of Western imperialism, like Said, though with different perspectives, Bhabha denounces the absorption of colonial space by the Metropolis, the colonial space played out in the imaginative geography of the metropolitan space, the repetition or return of the postcolonial migrant to alienate the holism of history. Bhabha argues that the postcolonial space is now 'supplementary' to the metropolitan centre; it stands in a subaltern, adjunct relation that does not aggrandize the presence of the West but redraws its frontiers in the menacing, agonistic boundary of cultural difference that never quite adds up, always less than one nation and double (Bhabha 1994, p. 168). Bhabha delves into the relations that exist between the colonized space and the Metropolis in a geographical sense. That interaction between the two spaces, marked by domination, has a negative influence on the history of the postcolonial world. In the same vein, to show the interaction between what he terms *the imperialist space* and the *imperialized space*, Said raises a concept similar to Bhabha's *Third Space* or space liminality that is the '*overlapping territories.*' For Said, the colonized territories and the Metropolis are intertwined so that their history becomes a common one, with one tagged on the other:

> So vast and yet so detailed is imperialism as an experience with crucial cultural dimensions, that we must speak of overlapping territories, intertwined histories common to men and women, whites and non-whites, dwellers in the metropolis and on the peripheries, past as well as present and future; these territories and histories can only be seen from the perspective of the whole of secular human history (Edward, Said 1993, p. 61.).

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Imperialism is not only the occupation and the administration of a given territory by more powerful foreign forces. It engenders a type of space-based relation with a dominant and dominated space, a Centre and a Periphery or Margin. In that asymmetrical relation in which the two entities are not equivalent or equal because, the former is in a position of authority while the latter is in a position of *subaltern*, submission, and obedience. Geographically speaking, between the Metropolis and the post-colonies, the colonized space becomes an extension of the former.

Consequently, the colonizer imposes his history, space, and time on the colonized people. In the French colonies, for instance, the students were taught in history classes '*nos ancêtres les Gaulois*' - *our ancestors are Gaulish* [...]. In that asymmetrical pedagogical relation between the colonizer-teacher working for the interest of the empire and the colonized-student, the teacher knows that the information he is giving is false and the student knows that the teacher is telling him lies. The two subjects then live in a conflictual situation with themselves, whereby obedience becomes the survival motto. Since the colony is an extension of the Metropolis, its history, also an extension of the Metropolis, is replaced by colonizer's history.

Nonetheless, contrarily to Said who lays more emphasis on the history of Orientalism and its different actors from Napoleon up to the new Western Orientalists called the Middle East experts, Bhabha is broader in his approach. He focuses on the history of Western imperialism through literature by exploring the history of postcolonial migrants, the Diaspora and so on. Bhabha shares the postmodernist idea of history, which is based on the non-universality of truth and the limits of Western epistemology and episteme. Bhabha rejects the chronological approach of historians who record and tell the events and sometimes exclude the minorities he calls the *subalterns*:

> The present can no longer be envisaged as a break or a bonding with the past and the future no longer a synchronic presence: its discontinuities, its inequalities its minorities. Unlike the dead hand of history that tells the beads of sequential· time like a rosary, seeking to establish serial, causal connections, we are now confronted with what Walter Benjamin describes as the blasting of a monadic moment from the homogenous course of history [...] (Homi Bhabha 1994, p. 4).

According to Bhabha, the history of the minorities must be taken into account and literature plays a key role in the dissemination of the postcolonial minorities' narratives. Actually, Bhabha conceives the postcolonial novels as historical documents. To substantiate his arguments, he gives the examples of the literary works of South African writers, of Toni Morrison, Salman Rushdie and so on:

> [...] the South African novels of Richard Rive, Bessie Head, Nadine Gordirner, John Coetzee, are documents of a society divided by the effects of apartheid that enjoin the international intellectual community to meditate on the unequal, asymmetrical worlds that exist elsewhere; Salman Rushdie writes the fabulist historiography of post-Independence India and Pakistan in *Midnight's Children* and Shame [...] Toni Morrison's *Beloved* revives the past of slavery [...] (Homi Bhabha 1994, p. 5.).

Since fiction is always based on the combination of reality and imagination insofar as literature follows the evolution of society, postcolonial writers deconstruct the colonial discourse that has distorted the history of the colonized people. They use the novel to rewrite the history of their people in a way that adapts to their culture. In *Things Fall A Part* (1958), for example, ,Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe tells the history of the Igbo people before their encounter with the British colonizer and how colonization has made that once-well-organized-society collapse. In *Xala* (1974), Ousmane Sembene depicts both the colonial and post-colonial Senegalese societies using a chronotope that edicts a past, present, and future through his characterization of the three protagonist's three wives and the metaphoric use of the title of the novel '*Xala*.' The title, in Senegalese Wolof term, means impotent to refer to not only to the asymmetrical relation between the former colonizing countries and colonized countries, but also the impossibility of the latter to break the dependency and domination yoke.

In fact, if historians use calendrical time and historical time, writers, for their parts, use characters, settings, and events to give an account of history and their temporalities. Bhabha draws an example from Tony Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and states that:

> For Morrison, it is precisely the signification of the historical and discursive boundaries of slavery that are the issue. Racial violence is invoked by historical dates - 1876, for instance but Morrison is just a little hasty with the events 'in-themselves', as she rushes past 'the true meaning of the Fugitive Bill, the Settlement Fee, God's Ways, antislavery, manumission, skin voting [...] (Achebe 1958, p. 16).

Thus, postcolonial literature, for Bhabha, is a literature of restoration of the distorted history of the colonized people. It tells the original history. Like Bhabha who is aware of the importance of history and geography in the Western imperialist project, Said also addresses them in his essay *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) by drawing his ideas from Fanon's writings and philosophy. Said shows how the colonist is interested in making the history of the colonial lands in that it helps him to make the colonized lands his homeland, his own geographical space. He reprises Fanon's statement:

> The settler makes history and is conscious of making it. And because he constantly refers to the history of his mother country, he clearly indicates that he himself is the extension of that mother country. Thus, the history, which he writes, is not the history of the country, which he plunders but the history of his own nation in regard to all that she skins off, all that she violates and starves (Said 1993, p. 270).

Admittedly, for Said, the colonizer does not only occupy the lands but he also intends to colonize the subalterns' minds through the manipulation of their national history, national identity, memory collection, and self. Since history is very important in nation-building processes, a distorted history can break up a whole society and its future. In so doing, the colonizer would be able rewrite the history and redefine the geography of the colonial space through the politics of '*emptying place'* which Bhabha refers to here, writing that:

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> The colonial space is the terra incognita or the terra nulla, the empty or wasted land whose history has to be begun, whose archives must be filled out; whose future progress must be secured in modernity. But the colonial space also stands for the despotic time of the Orient that becomes a great problem for the definition of modernity and its inscription of the history of the colonized from the perspective of the West (Bhabha 1994, p. 246.).

In using history and geography, the colonizer gives himself authority to decide for the past, the present and the future of the colonial space. The former is the cement that permits to build a strong nation at the basis of a shared common past, memory, and identity, and to implement the desire to build a better future while the latter contributes in giving an identity to those who live there. The idea is to highlight that the intersections between space, power, memory, and identity are necessary mediated by symbols that communicate intangible ideas, values, feelings, spirituality(ies), etc. There exists in the mind of the colonialist a place of power, which is a vehicle for power in the spatial order and for space in the order of power. Both Bhabha and Said approach the symbolic mediations between the two orders of reality as they produce and interpret them within the imperialist space-paradigmatic conception. The postcolonial thinkers share the same position regarding history and geography that conceive first as colonial tools and second as *postcolonial* subjectivities to produce a counter-hegemonic as efforts aimed at resisting a hegemonic order and seeking to reform or replace it.

To address the geopolitical aspect of Western imperialism, Said creates the concept of '*imaginative geography*' (Said 1978, p. 49). He uses the term to refer to the means the West uses to control the colonized territories and their populations. The concept of '*imaginative geography*' is built around power, knowledge, and geography. That is one of the reasons why geography is a central concept in his theory and critique of imperialism. For him, the geography of the imperialism is based on arbitrary facts:

> [...] this universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is "ours" and an unfamiliar space beyond "ours" which is "theirs" is a way of making geographical distinctions that can be entirely arbitrary. I use the word "arbitrary" here because imaginative geography of the "our land—barbarian land" variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction. It is enough for "us" to set up these boundaries in our own minds; "they" become "they" accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from "ours" (Said 1978, p. 55).

To agree wholeheartedly with Said, François Debrix highlights the use of maps, atlases, narratives, and the media by the West, as geopolitical means aimed at asserting its hegemony over the rest of the globe. In fact, the boundaries that separate the imperialist world from the imperialized world, are just constructed frontiers in the Westerners' minds but real in those of the dominated subjects. This geography of differentiation, as a discriminatory mechanism, is a means to legitimize Western imperialism and domination of the world. Maps, atlases, and their accompanying narratives become undoubtedly powerful instruments of popular geopolitics as François Debrix (2008) states in *Tabloid Terror War, Culture and Geopolitics*. As the result, one cannot talk about geopolitics in Orientalism without mentioning Israel that stands as a geopolitical and geostrategic state, as well as the vanguard of Western civilization in the Middle East, a fictitiously constructed place.

II. The Middle East in Western Imperialism: Between Politics of Toponymycide and De-Arabization

Historically, geographically, culturally, and politically Africa is connected to the Middle East. The Suez isthmus links the African continent to that part of the Asian continent. For centuries, as a network of trade routes that crossed the Sahara Desert in Africa, connecting the Mediterranean coast to the West African savannah and the sub-Saharan region, the trans-Saharan routes facilitated religious, cultural, and intellectual exchanges between the two geographical entities. What they have in common is that they both experienced Western imperialism. However, the traditional support of many Africa countries towards Palestinian people is due to the colonial background they share. As Masahla states, "*the Palestinians share common experiences with other indigenous peoples who have their narratives denied, their material culture destroyed and their histories erased or reinvented by European white settlers and colonizers*" (Masahla 2012. p. 97). A deep analysis of the history of Israel from the 1917 declaration of Balfour up to now shows that this state serves the interests of the West and vice versa. On November the 2nd 1917, Arthur James Balfour, the then British Prime Minister addressed a letter to Lord Rothschild, a Jewish leader in London in which he declared:

> His Majesty's Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country (Balfour 1917).

Balfour's declaration was a decree signed by the British colonial power that bequeathed Palestine to the European Jews. Thus, thirty years after, in 1948, the state of Israel was born in the Palestinian lands. It was the beginning of what Palestinians called the Nakba, which means catastrophe in Arabic. The term refers to the mass exodus of Palestinians in 1948. In fact, the creation the state of Israel is the Nakba for them, for it marks the beginning of ethnic cleansing and the destruction of the Palestinian society and lands.

Therefore, many Arabs of Palestine origin have left their homeland and by the way have lost their lands after being forced to go into exile because of Israel's politics of *toponymycide* that is used to erase place names in Palestine and their replacement with Hebrew (Jewish) names; as a form of cultural genocide. The erasure of the geographical identity of a place, involves name-changing from original into foreign settler. That is why on each May of the 15th when Israel celebrates its independence, the Palestinians are commemorating a national tragedy. Israel's invention of Zionism as a superior race, aiming at making all others inferior, allows the state to use all means to control the space. Zionism, as a political movement and ideology emerged in Europe in the later nineteenth century, particularly in the Jewish community, is the roots of the Nakba. It started in 1896 with the publication of Theodor Herzl's *The Jewish State* (1896) in which

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he discusses the political and historic rational for such a homeland, becoming, then, as a road map for the Israelis. In 1897, the first Jewish Congress was held in Basel and the Jewish leaders started finding a place where they can establish a homeland, where they can make a home, between Madagascar, Uganda, and Palestine. They finally chose Palestine because according them it is *the promised land*. Some Jews believe that to inhabit Palestine is a return to exile and it enables them to reconnect with the "*biblical oriental roots*" (Ohana 2008, p. 12).

In 1948 under the support of Great Britain, the Jew create,d in the Palestinian lands, the state of Israel, referred to by the Western media as a democratic country in the midst of dictatorship. The Jewish state serves then as vanguard of Western civilization in the Middle East, which also enables the West to control that strategic part of the world for geopolitical and geostrategic reasons. That is why David Ben Gurion, the first Israeli Prime Minister openly delivers that:

> Although we are Eastern people we have become a European people, and we wish to return to the Land of Israel only in the geographical sense. Our aim is to create a European culture here, and we are at any rate linked to the major cultural force in the world as long as the cultural basis in this part of the world does not change (Ohana 2008, p. 12.).

Ben Gurion's statement is very powerful and full of insightful symbols as it shows that Jews who left Europe and settled in Israel were more European than Oriental. This then reflects their claim of a western identity. In fact, Israel is the representative of Western Civilization in the Middle East insofar as, as Nur Masalha has recalled it, the Jewish state is a creation of Western imperialist powers. :

> Zionism as a European settler ideology and movement would not have been able to achieve its goals without the overall support of the Western imperialist powers. The Israeli state was and still is central to the West's project of the East (Masalha 2012, p. 27).

This is to ascertain that Israel is also a colonial power in Palestine because of its politics of domination, which it exercises towards the Palestinians, bears every aspect of Western imperialism, mechanisms, and strategies, such as land grabbing, politics of naming, misnaming and renaming, oppression, economic *apartheidization*, racial segregation, and spatial discrimination, etc. The Zionist political leaders carefully mould these imperialist practices to exert their country's hegemony over with a view to undertaking a politics of destructing of Palestinians' civilization, history, and homeland, memory, and memory spaces. Thus, the Jew settlers consider the Holy land of Palestine to be their proprietorship. For them, it is the '*promised land*,' the land of the '*chosen people*' with reference to the Bible:

> On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham and said: "to your descendants I give this land from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amonites, Canaanites, Girgasthites and Zebusites. Biblica, (The International Bible Society 1809, *The Holy Bible*,).

This idea of a *promised land* does not tally with the Zionist slogan that says "a *land without people for a people without land*" (Muir 2008, p. 55). Muir rejected the Jewish alleged right on the land because Palestine was an empty territory. The Arabs had lived the area long before the Jewish settlement.

Thus, the Zionists use religion to justify their imperialist project of the creation the Great Israel that stands from the Nil River to Iraq. Indeed, it is through those bigoted ideas that Zionism, as a colonial doctrine, tries to rewrite the history of Palestine by putting aside the Arabs. This is what Nur Masalha (2012) calls the "*de-Arabization* (Masalha 2012, p. 98), which is, according to him, the continuation of European colonialist methods by the Zionists. He argues that in the Palestine of the nineteenth century, geographical renaming of Palestinian Arab place names became a powerful tool in the hand of competing European powers. The British were the first to recognize and exploit the power of tautonymy and to link it to geographical renaming with biblical archaeology and colonial penetration in Palestine (Masalha 2012, p. 100). This has led to the erasure of ancient Palestinian names and their replacement by newly coined Zionist and Hebrew ones.

Yet, even if there is a politics of history falsification and erasure for imperialist purposes, the Arabs' belongingness to Palestine is a historical fact and, above all, an undeniable historical reality that Said recalls when writing that:

> What is the most important in the continuing avoidance or ignorance of the existence of about four million Muslim and Christian Arabs who are known to themselves and to others as Palestinians. They make the question of Palestine and if there is no country called Palestine it is not because there are no Palestinians (Said 1980, p. 5).

The land called Palestine has existed long before Israel has. It has been the name of the territory before and during the British colonial rule. Israel, for its part, is a nickname given to the prophet Jacob, the Father of the twelve tributes of Israel. That name is bearer of a new Jewish identity for a people who have suffered from oppression and racism in Europe. Even the name of the capital city of the Jewish state, Tel Aviv, which means the old new world, is a way for them to be reconnected with their history. This politics of naming and renaming is a well-known colonial practice that Ngugi tackles in his book *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance* (2009). For him, the memory of place has a capital importance in the colonial enterprise:

> Memory resides in language and is clarified by language. By incorporating the colonial world into the international capitalist order and relations, with itself as the center of such order and relations, the imperialist West also subjected the rest of the world to its memory through a vast naming system. It planted its memory on our landscape. Egoli became Johannesburg. The great East African Lake, known by the Luo people as Namlolwe, became Lake Victoria (Wa Thiong'o 2009, p. 113).

One reality that also needs pointing out is the historical link between the Jewish people and Jerusalem, the Biblical land, the homeland of their Prophets, from Abraham to Moses. However, this connection should not mean belongingness of the holy land to the Israeli. The history of the area has been distorted with the

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support of the Western countries that strategically link the Zionist settlement in the Middle East because culturally Israel is a Western country even if it is located in the East. Therefore, the Zionist return to the East is just geographical, for in Said's view, Israel has played and is still playing a key role in Orientalism:

> Aside from his anti-Zionism, the Arab is an oil supplier. […] which principally benefitted Western oil companies and a small ruling Arab elite) with the absence of any Arab moral qualifications for owning such vast oil reserves. Without the usual euphemisms, the question most often being asked is why such people as the Arabs are entitled to keep the developed (free, democratic, moral) world threatened […] (Said 1978, p. 287).

Zionism allows Western countries, particularly the United States of America to control the Middle East and its rich oil reserves. Another aspect that accounts for the unconditional support of the West to Israel and its will to control the Middle East is the Suez Canal. The latter is an artificial sea-level waterway located in Egypt, connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea through the Isthmus of Suez and dividing Africa and Asia. A man-made waterway, it permits a more direct route for shipping between Europe and Asia, effectively allowing for passage from the North Atlantic to the Indian Ocean without having to circumnavigate the African continent.

To focus on the geopolitical aspects of Western imperialism, Said tackles this issue he connects to imperialism and gives it an imperialistic connotation when he writes that:

> In the Suez Canal idea, we see the logical conclusion of Orientalist thought and, more interesting, of Orientalist effort. To the West, Asia had once represented silent distance and alienation; Islam was militant hostility to European Christianity. To overcome such redoubtable constants the Orient needed first to be known, then invaded and possessed, then re-created by scholars, soldiers, and judges who disinterred forgotten languages, histories, races, and cultures in order to posit them […] (Said 1978, p. 92).

According to Said, Suez Canal is like an umbilical cord that links the East to the West and puts them together. In the same vein, he adds that:

> De Lesseps and his canal finally destroyed the Orient's distance, its cloistered intimacy away from the West, its perdurable exoticism. Just as a land barrier could be transmuted into a liquid artery, so too the Orient was transubstantiated from resistant hostility into obliging, and submissive, partnership. After de Lesseps no one could speak of the Orient as belonging to another world, strictly speaking. There was only "our" world, "one" world bound together […] (Said 1978, p. 93).

In so doing, Said focuses on the geostrategical and geopolitical aspects of Israel while Bhabha goes on further analyzing the relationship between First world and Third world as that of a exploitation. For Bhabha, such a geopolitical division serves the interest of the West, insofar as, as he writes it, "*I am convinced that in the language of political economy, it is legitimate to represent the relations of exploitation and domination in the discursive division between the First and Third world, the North and South*" (Bhabha 1994, p. 20). Bhabha carries on with his analysis and denounces the confiscation of international diplomacy by both the United States of America and Great Britain:

> I am equally convinced that, in the language of international diplomacy, there is a sharp growth in a new Anglo-American nationalism, which increasingly articulates its economic and military power in political acts that express a neo-imperialist disregard for the independence and autonomy of peoples and places in the Third World. Think of America's 'backyard' policy towards the Caribbean and Latin America, the patriotic gore and patrician lore of Britain's Falklands Campaign or, more recently, the triumphalism of the American and British forces during the Gulf War (Homi, Bhabha 1994, p. 20).

Contrary to Said who contents himself with denouncing some imperialist practices, Bhabha proposes solutions. For him, postcolonial or the *subaltern* people must use the power of literature to overcome imperialism and its methods and mechanisms. In this sense, the Suez Canal should be adapted to his notion of *bridge*, which, according to him, gathers. He argues, *"always and ever differently the bridge escorts the lingering and hastening ways of men to and fro so that they may get to other banks […]. The bridge gathers as a passage that crosses*" (Bhabha 1994, p. 20). Bhabha's *bridge* concept is a cultural paradigm that relies on the 'translation of culture' and culture (un)translatability as a way of putting together the history and the geography of the colonial.

Indeed, colonialism has established a domination system based on race, culture, and violence. In the name of modernity and racial/white supremacy, the colonial system has legitimated the use of power whether political or military to constrain the *subalterns* to accept their status. This obviously means that the colonized subjects are not empty ended face to the colonial power. They have organized difference types of resistance in that asymmetric war against the colonizer. From the peasant's revolts to the deconstruction of colonial narratives by the colonized intellectual and political elites. According to both Said and Bhabha, the colonized peoples have never been passive. They have struggled to save their lands, their civilization, history, memory, and their race. Since the beginning of colonialism, the West is permanently reinventing its system to assert its hegemony. Thus, Western Modernity is essentially Eurocentric for in all the stages of its Evolution, it places the West at the centre of history, geostrategy, and geopolitics. An analysis of some colonial texts leads Bhabha to this remark according to which:

> what we encounter in all these accounts are proposals for what is considered to be the essential gesture of Western modernity, an ethic of self-construction or as Mladan Dolar cogently describes it; what makes this attitude typical of modernity is the constant reconstruction and reinvention of the self [...] The subject and the present it belongs to have no objective status, they have to be perpetually (re)constructed (Bhabha 1994, p. 239).

Bhabha being deeply influence by Fanon borrows its concept of humanism to dismantle the Eurocentric perception of man that still prevail in the West.

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> What Fanon shows up in the liminality of those ideas – their ethnocentric margin- by revealing the *historicity* of its most universal symbol- Man. From the perspective of postcolonial belatedness, Fanon disturbs the *punctum* of man as the signifying, subjectifying category of Western culture, as unifying reference of ethical value. Fanon perform performs the desire of the colonized to identify with the humanistic enlightenment ideal of Man. 'all I wanted was to be a man among other man men. I wanted to come lithe and young into a world that is ours and build it together (Bhabha 1994, p. 237).

In fact, Ngugi, Fanon, Said, Bhabha and their counterparts in the field of postcolonial studies have deconstructed the long-term Western imperialist discourse that mitigated according the geostrategical and geopolitical contexts. Thus, resistance to Western hegemony implies at the third world level or global south level the will to be actors in the World order.

CONCLUSION

The article has shown how the discourse of legitimating Western right to dominate non-Western countries and to exploit their natural resources has marked Western imperialism has been. It has also analysed its sustaining ideology, which is based on the 'supremacy of the white race,' constructed, and theorized by Western Eurocentric intellectuals before being exported to the colonized territories to justify the colonial enterprise's practices. In this perspective, the Western capitalist elite in partnership with some 'dishonest' scholars and scientists have totally distorted the history of humankind in order to place the West at the gate of human history. Unfortunately, this discourse has been perpetuated as a 'sacred construct,' for a long time and it is reactivated according to the circumstances, the need of the time, and the interests to preserve, whether, political, economic, and diplomatic. Therefore, to assert that political, cultural and economic hegemony, the Western imperialism ideology and practices have subverted the history and geography of the dominated territories using very sophisticate geopolitical means. In fact, in the colonized world, history has been rewritten and geography reshaped through policy of (re)mapping, naming and renaming.

In addition, the comparative study has proven that Said and Bhabha have deeply unearthed the role history and geography in imperialism. It has displayed how colonization has modified the history and social structure of the West. It is, then, obvious that the West is now a "*Third Space*" (Bhabha 1994, p. 37) inhabited by the Diaspora of former colonized lands, descendants of former enslaved Africans, autochthonous, and descendants of former colonizers, thus turning it into a space of "*hybridity*" (Bhabha 1994, p. 6). These aspects curb the vague desire of cultural and racial purity, and stands as a nightmare for the ultra-right political parties and white supremacy ideologies prevailing in Europe and the United States of America.

However, this can be a real advantage for the countries of the global south to lean on the Diaspora that is connected to the homeland historically and culturally to create an equilibrium in the relations with the West. A cultural and historical revival in the former colonies is necessary to end Western paternalism that grazes also the imperialized countries' national sovereignty and prosperity. In fact, the West's interventionist policy in its ancient colonies, mainly in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, is a geopolitical strategy that perpetuates neo-colonialism through neo-colonial strategies aimed at better exerting western hegemony and influence around the globe. The West's colonial age has caught up with it along new emerging historical preoccupations in the former colonies, demanding for the true version of Western shameful colonial history. The main reason is that this reminds it of its horrible past and deeds in an era when human rights, democracy, economic self-determination, globalization are the mottos and at a time when the *subalterns* speak, write, and express their subjectivities. Consequently, it would be then a great mistake for people of the former colonized countries to believe in the end of Western imperialism. The permanent presence of Western military forces and interferences in some armed conflicts or political upheavals in their former colonies is a factual indicator. Therefore, the West is still 'supremacist' insofar as history, geostrategy, and geopolitics are still being used by in the context of globalism and neo-colonialism politics.

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