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Disputed Origins and Hybrid Blooms: Individuality, Confrontation, and Language Repossession in the Selected Postcolonial Poetry

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Keywords: Post-Colonial Poetry, Subaltern, Oppression, Hybridity

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Contents

Abstract

Postcolonial poetry transforms the legacies of empire into potent sites of resistance and identity formation. This paper argues that the poetry of Walcott, Bennett, Soyinka, Ramanujan, and Faiz employs distinct poetic strategies to expose colonial violence, psychological fragmentation, and cultural erasure while actively reclaiming agency through linguistic innovation and hybrid expression. Drawing on Homi Bhabha's hybridity, Frantz Fanon's decolonization theory, and Gayatri Spivak's subaltern framework, the analysis reveals how these poets navigate postcolonial ambivalence. Walcott's poems embody Fanonian alienation ("divided to the vein"), while Bennett's poetry weaponizes Jamaican Creole to subvert linguistic hegemony, enacting Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's decolonization of the mind. Soyinka's "Night" mirrors Fanon's "pitfalls of national consciousness" through metaphors of predatory disillusionment. Ramanujan's poem reclaims indigenous folklore to center female agency, countering Orientalist discourse. Faiz's poetry repurposes the Urdu ghazal to prioritize collective struggle over personal love, voicing Spivak's subaltern amid state oppression.

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Introduction

Postcolonial literature emerged after the fall of empires. It grapples with the heavy legacy of colonial rule (Awwad, Alshaer, Alkhayer, & Darwish, 2025; Ashcroft et al., 1989). Writers confront experiences of oppression and violence. They also address cultural erasure and the forced imposition of European languages. Crucially, this literature charts the difficult process of forging new identities.

Key themes define this field. These include the complexities of identity and hybridity. Language

becomes a vital site of resistance. The trauma of violence is a recurring subject. So is the powerful act of cultural reclamation. Nationalist hopes often meet disillusionment. Giving voice to the subaltern is essential. Examining gender under colonialism is also critical (Paul, Rahman, & Islam, 2025). Chouliaraki, 2024; Loomba, 2005).

This paper examines six poems by major postcolonial poets. Derek Walcott's "A Far Cry From Africa" explores deep conflict. Louise Bennett's "Dry Foot Bwoy," "Colonization in Reverse," and "Noh Lickle Twang" use Jamaican Creole brilliantly. Wole Soyinka's "Night" presents a stark vision. A.K. Ramanujan's "A Flowering Tree" draws on Indian tradition. Faiz Ahmed Faiz's "Don't Ask of Me, My Beloved" blends love and politics.

This paper argues that Walcott, Bennett, Soyinka, Ramanujan, and Faiz use distinct poetic voices. They expose colonialism's violence and psychological damage. More importantly, they actively engage in resistance and cultural reclamation. They achieve this primarily through linguistic innovation. They also explore complex hybrid identities. Their work embodies the deep ambivalence of the postcolonial condition. It also shows its generative power.

Key theories help analyze these texts. Homi Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and the "Third Space" are relevant to Walcott and Bennett's linguistic mixing (Bhabha, 1994). Frantz Fanon's ideas on violence and mental decolonization connect to Soyinka's imagery (Fanon, 1963). Gayatri Spivak's focus on the silenced "subaltern" and Edward Said's "Orientalism" inform readings of Faiz and Ramanujan (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988).

The analysis will show how each poet uniquely responds. Walcott embodies profound division. Bennett reclaims language and subverts power dynamics. Soyinka confronts brutal realities. Ramanujan revitalizes cultural memory. Faiz voices political dissent. Collectively, their poetry acts as a powerful site. It resists oppression. It negotiates complex identities. It preserves vital cultural memory against erasure.

Literature Review

Postcolonial literature fundamentally explores the consequences of imperialism. A central concern is identity and hybridity. Homi Bhabha (1994) argues that colonialism creates complex, mixed identities. He describes the "Third Space," an in-between area where cultures meet and transform (p. 38). This space challenges fixed ideas of identity. It is not simply mixing, but a new, ambivalent position emerging from colonial contact. Identity becomes a site of negotiation, not a given fact (Abbas et.al. 2024).

Derek Walcott's "A Far Cry From Africa" powerfully embodies this struggle. The speaker feels profound division, torn between African heritage and European culture. Lines like "I who am poisoned with the blood of both" show deep internal conflict (Walcott, 1962). Critics note Walcott's ambivalence reflects the Caribbean experience. Terada (1992) sees it as grappling with "unresolved historical trauma" (p. 87), while Breslin (2001) discusses his "divided inheritance" as both burden and creative source (p. 112). Louise Bennett also explores hybridity within the Jamaican context. "Dry Foot Bwoy" humorously critiques class distinctions and cultural snobbery within postcolonial society. "Noh Lickle Twang" directly confronts linguistic identity. The speaker proudly rejects imitating English accents, asserting Jamaican Creole as authentic. Cooper (1993) argues Bennett's use of Creole itself is a potent "marker of national and cultural identity" (p. 55), reclaiming a language once denigrated. Morris (1982) emphasizes how her work celebrates Jamaican speech as central to self-definition (p. 71).

Linguistic resistance and appropriation are crucial strategies in postcolonial writing. This involves reclaiming native or creolized languages. It also means using the colonizer's language (like English) in subversive ways. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) famously advocated for rejecting colonial languages to truly "decolonize the mind" (p. 4). He argued that language carries culture and mental control. Edward Kamau Brathwaite (1984) championed "nation language," the Englishes spoken by Caribbean people, as a legitimate, powerful vehicle for expression and resistance against standard English dominance.

Louise Bennett is a prime example of linguistic resistance. Her poems use Jamaican Creole not just for authenticity, but as a tool. "Colonization in Reverse" employs Creole humor subversively. It describes West Indian migration to Britain, ironically framing it as a new colonization. The vernacular voice challenges power dynamics. "Noh

Lickle Twang" is an explicit declaration of linguistic pride. The refusal to adopt an English "twang" is an act of defiance. Donnell (2006) highlights the "performative power" in Bennett's work, showing how Creole on the page asserts presence and challenges literary norms (p. 93). Walcott also demonstrates linguistic mastery. He uses English brilliantly while lamenting its colonial imposition. His complex relationship with the language shows both its burden and its potential as a tool for artistic expression and critique.

Anti-colonial critique and the legacy of violence form another major theme. Postcolonial literature directly confronts colonial brutality and its enduring impact. Frantz Fanon (1963) analyzed the psychological damage of colonialism. He also controversially discussed violence as a potential catalyst for liberation, though he warned of its corrupting dangers. Furthermore, Fanon foresaw the "pitfalls of national consciousness," where new elites replicate colonial oppression after independence (p. 148).

Walcott's "A Far Cry from Africa" unflinchingly depicts violence. It references the brutality of the Mau Mau uprising ("Kikuyu, quick as flies") and the reciprocal savagery ("corpses are scattered through a paradise"). The poem exposes the horrific human cost embedded in the colonial landscape. Wole Soyinka's "Night" presents a powerful metaphorical vision. Written after Nigerian independence, it depicts a terrifying, predatory darkness. Images like "The roof is rent" and "The beast is prowling" suggest profound disillusionment. The "beasts" symbolize the rise of new forms of violence, corruption, and oppression within the postcolonial state. This resonates strongly with Fanon's warnings. Gibbs (2007) discusses Soyinka's consistent "political engagement" and his use of potent imagery to critique failed leadership and societal decay (p. 204).

Cultural reclamation and folklore involve reviving pre-colonial traditions. This counters colonial attempts to erase indigenous cultures. Retelling myths, folktales, and oral traditions becomes an act of resistance. It asserts cultural continuity and offers alternative knowledge systems.

A.K. Ramanujan's "A Flowering Tree" exemplifies this practice. The poem is a retelling of a South Indian folktale. It centers on a young woman with the magical ability to transform into a tree. Ramanujan breathes new life into this traditional narrative. The poem subtly explores female agency within the constraints of the folk tradition. Dharwadker (1999), discussing Ramanujan's broader work, emphasizes his role in "recovering and re-presenting" Indian folklore within modern literature (p. 321). This act counters colonial and Orientalist dismissals of indigenous stories as primitive. It reclaims narrative authority.

Political oppression, disillusionment, and subaltern suffering critique conditions *after* formal colonialism ends. Postcolonial states often perpetuate authoritarianism, corruption, and inequality. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) famously asked, "Can the Subaltern speak?" She examined how the most marginalized groups (the subaltern) remain silenced within dominant discourses, even nationalist ones. Edward Said (1978) showed how Western representations (Orientalism) constructed the colonized as inferior, shaping power relations.

Soyinka's "Night" powerfully conveys disillusionment. The predatory darkness reflects the failure of independence dreams. The "beasts" represent new oppressors, suggesting the subaltern continue to suffer. Faiz Ahmed Faiz's "Don't Ask of Me, My Beloved" explicitly addresses political oppression. Written from exile or imprisonment, the speaker prioritizes the collective struggle ("the grief of the people") over personal love ("beloved"). He laments the "age of pain, the dagger's rule, the reign of torture." This voice speaks against state tyranny. Coppola (1987) discusses Faiz's "revolutionary romanticism," where love for the people fuels political dissent (p. 64). Both Soyinka and Faiz, in different ways, give voice to suffering and resistance against new forms of domination, engaging with Spivak's concern for the subaltern and Said's analysis of power in representation.

Discussion

Postcolonial poetry transforms personal and collective trauma into sites of critical witness and active resistance. By engaging deeply with colonial violence, linguistic oppression, and the complexities of hybrid identity, poets like Walcott, Bennett, Soyinka, Ramanujan, and Faiz expose the

enduring scars of empire while forging potent tools for cultural survival and defiance.

Violence and the Traumatic Aftermath

The brutal legacy of colonialism and its violent aftermath permeates this poetry. Derek Walcott's "A Far Cry from Africa" confronts the savagery of the Mau Mau uprising with unflinching imagery: "corpses are scattered through a paradise" (Walcott, 1962, line 21). This visceral depiction forces the reader to witness the horrific cost embedded within the colonial landscape, embodying Frantz Fanon's concept of anti-colonial violence as a "brutish necessity" born from absolute oppression (Fanon, 1963, p. 74). Walcott's internal conflict – "I who am poisoned with the blood of both," "divided to the vein" (Walcott, 1962, lines 26, 33) – powerfully manifests Fanonian alienation, the psychological fragmentation inflicted by colonialism where the colonized subject is torn from their own cultural roots and offered only a distorted reflection in the colonizer's mirror (Fanon, 1967/2008).

Similarly, Wole Soyinka's "Night" presents a landscape of pervasive terror, but one reflecting the disillusionment of the *post*-independence era. The poem's oppressive darkness is an active, predatory force: "Night crawls... towards the throats" (Soyinka, 1967, line 7). Images like "The roof is rent" and "The beast is prowling" symbolize the rise of new forms of state violence, corruption, and oppression within the newly independent nation. This grim vision resonates profoundly with Fanon's prescient warning about the "pitfalls of national consciousness," where the revolutionary potential of liberation curdles into predatory authoritarianism, replicating colonial structures of power and silencing dissent (Fanon, 1963, p. 148).

Faiz Ahmed Faiz's "Don't Ask of Me, My Beloved" juxtaposes the conventions of the Urdu love lyric (ghazal) with the stark horrors of political violence, likely referencing the trauma of Partition and subsequent military dictatorships in Pakistan. The line "my city wears a necklace of corpses" (Faiz, 1958/1971, trans. by author) transforms a traditional romantic image into a harrowing symbol of collective suffering. This collision exemplifies Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma as an event that is "not experienced fully at the time, but returns unexpectedly" (Caruth, 1996, p. 4). The speaker's inability to fulfill the beloved's romantic expectations ("Don't ask of me, my love, that love I once had") stems from the overwhelming, unprocessed grief ("the grief of the people") that consumes him. These poets refuse narrative catharsis; instead, their work maps the "open wounds" (Fanon, 1963, p. 51) inflicted by colonialism and its enduring, often mutated, manifestations.

Linguistic Resistance and Creolization

Louise Bennett's work stands as a monumental act of linguistic reclamation and subversion. She weaponizes Jamaican Patois (Creole), transforming a language once denigrated by colonial authorities into a powerful tool of cultural assertion. In "Dry Foot Bwoy," vernacular speech interrogates identity and class: "yuh gwine look lika man / Or same time back a yard?" (Bennett, 1966, p. 106). This direct use of Creole enacts Édouard Glissant's concept of the "right to opacity" – the right not to be fully transparent or assimilated into the dominant culture's understanding – asserting Jamaican identity on its own terms (Glissant, 1997/2020, p. 114). It performs the very "linguistic decolonization" championed by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), demonstrating that authentic expression and cultural integrity require rejecting the imposed colonial tongue.

Bennett's "Colonization in Reverse" masterfully employs ironic mimicry, a concept central to Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity (Bhabha, 1994). By describing the migration of Jamaicans to Britain in the mid-20th century using the colonizer's own rhetoric – "Wat a joyful news, Miss Mattie / Ah feel like me heart gwine burs... / Jamaica people colonizin / Englan in Reverse" (Bennett, 1966, p. 179) – she subverts imperial discourse. The humor exposes the economic realities of neocolonialism, showing migration as a consequence of colonial underdevelopment, while simultaneously empowering the migrant voice through its confident Creole delivery. "Noh Lickle Twang" directly tackles the psychological impact Fanon termed "Black Skin, White Masks" (Fanon, 1967/2008). The mother's lament – "yuh noh seh one ting fi mek / Dem sinting yuh a taak?" (Bennett, 1966, p. 218) – critiques internalized racism and the desire to mimic the colonizer's accent ("twang") as a path to social acceptance.

Bennett's pervasive humor becomes a crucial "strategy of resilience," transforming vernacular speech from a mark of stigma into an emblem of cultural sovereignty and self-definition (The Guardian, 2025; Donnell, 2006, p. 98).

Hybridity and Cultural Reclamation

Navigating the complex "in-between" space of postcolonial identity, Walcott and Ramanujan engage with Homi Bhabha's concept of the "third space" (Bhabha, 1994), though with distinct emotional resonances. Walcott's "A Far Cry from Africa" lays bare the anguish of hybridity: "how choose / Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?" (Walcott, 1962, lines 30-31). His torment acknowledges the deep pain of fractured heritage ("poisoned blood"). Yet, his very act of crafting sublime poetry *from* this conflict suggests a redemptive potential within art itself, forging a unified expression from divided sources.

A.K. Ramanujan's "A Flowering Tree," in contrast, embraces hybridity as inherently generative. The poem is a conscious retelling of a Kannada folktale, filtering indigenous tradition through the lens of modern English poetry. The central image of the young woman cyclically transforming – "a tree, a tree again /... flowering" (Ramanujan, 1997, p. 149) – becomes a potent symbol of cultural regeneration and identity's fluid resilience. Unlike Walcott's explicit anguish, Ramanujan's approach is one of quiet reclamation. He uses indigenous narrative forms and symbols not merely as artefacts, but as living systems of knowledge that resist monolithic Western narratives and Orientalist interpretations (Said, 1978). Both poets fundamentally refute notions of cultural purity. Walcott's art and Ramanujan's revitalized folklore assert that postcolonial identity is not a fixed state but a continuous process of "remaking" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2), achieved through the dynamic interplay of memory, adaptation, and creative synthesis.

Strategies of Resistance: Irony, Myth, and the Subaltern Voice

Resistance in this poetry manifests through sophisticated formal and aesthetic strategies. Louise Bennett's irony, as seen in "Colonization in Reverse," remains a powerful weapon, turning colonial logic against itself to expose exploitation. Soyinka employs dense, mythic imagery in "Night" ("beasts," "rent roof") to encode dissent against Nigeria's post-independence dictatorships, allowing critique to permeate oppressive regimes where direct speech was dangerous (Gibbs, 2007).

Ramanujan's choice to center a folktale, specifically one revolving around a young woman's transformative and vulnerable agency in "A Flowering Tree," directly engages with Gayatri Spivak's challenge concerning the subaltern voice (Spivak, 1988). By giving narrative space to a female protagonist within a traditional form often overlooked by colonial and patriarchal canons, Ramanujan works towards representing marginalized subjectivities and countering their silencing.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz demonstrates the revolutionary potential of repurposing traditional forms. He fuses the intensely personal conventions of the Urdu *ghazal* (addressing the "Beloved") with searing political critique: "My Beloved, my world is aflame" (Faiz, 1958/1971, trans. by author). This fusion transforms the love lyric into a vehicle for bearing witness to collective suffering ("the grief of the people") and condemning state oppression ("the dagger's rule, the reign of torture"). His poetry exemplifies how aesthetic forms can be reconfigured to expose power structures, articulate dissent, and imagine liberation, demonstrating the enduring power of poetry as a site of revolutionary witness.

Conclusion

The present study concludes that Postcolonial poetry engages critically with the enduring legacies of empire, transforming them into sites of resistance and identity construction. This study posits that the selected works articulate distinct poetic strategies that expose the violence, psychological fragmentation, and cultural erasures of colonialism, while simultaneously reclaiming agency through linguistic innovation and hybridized expression. Framed through Homi Bhabha's theorization of hybridity, Frantz Fanon's discourse on decolonization, and Gayatri Spivak's formulation of the subaltern, the analysis interrogates the ways in which these poets negotiate the ambivalences of the postcolonial

condition. Walcott's oeuvre exemplifies Fanonian alienation, voicing a fractured self "divided to the vein"; Bennett deploys Jamaican Creole as a subversive linguistic weapon, thereby enacting Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's imperative of decolonizing the mind. Soyinka's *"Night"* dramatizes Fanon's "pitfalls of national consciousness" through metaphors of predatory disillusionment. Ramanujan recuperates indigenous folklore as a means of foregrounding female agency and unsettling Orientalist paradigms, while Faiz reconfigures the Urdu ghazal, shifting it from a mode of private longing to a collective articulation of resistance, thereby amplifying the silenced voice of Spivak's subaltern within the context of state repression.

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