

# “Sexing African Time and Space”: the Fetish of the Colonial Gender

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## ABSTRACT

*This article examines how Alain Mabanckou uses sexual allegories in his novel Broken glass (2010) to express (neo)-colonial realities in which Africa is charmed by the West into assuming the role of the sexual subaltern. Mabanckou appears to reinvigorate the sexual allegories of rape and prostitution for expressing the penetrative tendencies of colonialism by affixing their connotations of exploitation to the harsh socio-economic and political realities of (neo)-colonialism, thus creating a motif which is termed in the article as the fetish of colonial gender. Its coalescent value might be of great interest in postcolonial studies since it reveals how neo-colonialists ascribe the subaltern's time and space with exploitable sex through the charm of global economy. The critical discussion is built on textual research methods and it highlights on the fabric that holds the neo-colonial relationship between the West and Africa.*

*Key words:* colonial gender, (neo)-colonialism, sexed time and space.

## Introduction: Why the Fetish of Colonial Gender?

The writing of time and space as sexed bodies appears to be ingrained in the very nature of human language. From the dawn of history, the linguistic categories of masculine, feminine and neuter have existed in both oral and written literary imaginaries in a way that romanticises time and space. In the Middle Ages, for example, long before the physiologists demonstrated that by reason of our glandular structure there are both female and male elements in all of us, it was said that ‘every man carries a woman within himself’ (Jung, 1964, p. 31). Importantly, then, Feminist and Masculinity literary theories question, among other things, the textual singularity of time and space that is assigned to either female or male and the attendant gender relationships of power. Thiong’o (2009, p. 71) revealingly argues that during the African middle ages, encompassing the entire slave and colonial period, ‘Africa was dismembered from its past’ of wholeness in terms of cultural existence. Since gender is a cultural concept, cued by Thiong’os argument of dismemberment of Africa, how the West assigns exploitable sex to the African time and space appears to be a fundamental critical strand for enriching the multi-faceted postcolonial literary inquiry.

Feminism resonates with post-colonial discourse for ‘both patriarchy and imperialism ... exert analogous forms of domination over those they render subordinate [and, hence] there have been vigorous debates in a number of colonized societies over whether gender or colonial oppression is the

more important political factor in women's lives' (Ashcroft, 2007, p. 93). Normally, theoretical debates equivocate in search for an apropos sign for signifying a given concept. In this case, the feminist debates on colonial and gender seem to invite not an exclusionist perspective but rather attempts at affixation of the two factors. Therefore, the colonial gender is a term meant for interrogating how Mabanckou charts a unique signifier in *Broken Glass* in which sexual connotations and the harsh social realities of (neo)-colonialism are coalesced into renewed potency for addressing the ambivalent postcolonial relationship between Africa and the West. In the (neo)-colonial context in the novel, the space and time of Africa are perpetually ascribed with tendencies of becoming the sexual subaltern.

Subsequently, the colonial gender portrayed in the novel communicates the idea that colonialists lure those they plan to subordinate through seemingly charming projects of development, such as global capitalism. Therefore, the sign for the colonial gender finds expression in the word fetish. Donham (2018, pp. 28-32) states that explanatory concepts peculiar to the idea of the fetish originated on the Coast of West Africa during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Marx and Freud imported the idea to describe respectively, the formation of capitalist economies and European psyches. Accordingly, the fetish of the colonial gender signifies the way the West charms post-Independence Africa into perennially assuming roles of the sexual subaltern for fending the machines of modernity for the West. In the feminist discourse, the sexual subaltern has majorly been described as the female such that the male is accused of dominating the world. However, in the 1990s a number of feminist critics, led by McClintock and Ann Laura Stoler, 'Produced critical points of departure for bringing Feminism to the study of colonialism – not only gendering empire but also calling for detailed analysis of the interweaving of sex, gender, and the economic and cultural practices of imperialism' (Cowan, 2015, p. 2). Colonial experience could thus be investigated as a sexual metaphor. Significantly, 'A common, obvious sexual metaphor for the empire equates it with rape; yet empire, to some, has felt at once like rape and like seduction' (Cowan 2015, p. 1). So, how does the ambivalent colonial sexual image relate with time and space as both seduction and rape?

Conceptually, the fetish of the colonial gender works by charming the subaltern into an apparently new age of global economy in which their best stakes seem to be in the West. In painterly sense, the (neo)-colonialists subtly paint the time and space of Africa in a spousal relation with the West but the African ends up being the sexual subaltern. The colonial gender could thus be said to function by affixing cultural tones of blackness and whiteness to the body of the subaltern. Curiously, in painting, combination of the black and white colours results in grey which functions as the threshold for (a)chromatism, since mixtures of all colours also come out grey: 'Thus, the achromatic triangle with white and black at the base and grey at the apex is the epitome of painting; the base delimits the very condition of printed space ... While grey at the apex signifies the mode of functioning of painting' (Vallier, 1970, p. 290). The socio-economic and political complexities of (neo)-colonialism for Africa appear to lie in the 'grey' plane of the achromatic triangle. The permanent consequence of this is that the time and space of Africa becomes a murky sexual imaginary for the West.

In Physical terms, the West's sexual imaginary of the African time and space could be conceptually made clearer through Tolman's Model of the universe, in which time is perceived as imaginary with the radius of the universe as its function. Penrose (2010, p.167) observes that the distinguished American Physicist Richard Chace Tolman came up with a model that characterises the universe as a semi-circle whose radius is a function of time; it implies that time is imaginary, hence it operates as a sign. Accordingly, on the Tolman's model, the categories black and white would lie along the radius of the universe while grey is at the apex of the axis of time. The psycho-politics of colour in the achromatic triangle of (neo)-colonialism conciliates with a gender relationship in which the African male wants to be white by marrying a white woman (Fanon, 1986, p. 3). Therefore, black and white can be reasonably replaced with male and female respectively, as shown in the conceptual triangle in the diagram below:

In the triangle, assigning of spatiality for the male and female gender precedes chromatic toning. Perceived in a literary sense, then, the achromatic, as a (neo)-colonial factor, is founded on the narrative sensibility that appears to be organised through the Dependency theory. Kufakurinani et al (2017) maintains that Dependency theory arose in the 1960s as a reaction to modernisation theory and free trade

policies, which originated from the West. While a variety of perspectives existed within the broad school of dependency theory, they all rejected modernisation theory’s ahistorical approach to development and criticised its failure to account for the importance of the role of global economic and political structures. In *Broken Glass*, for instance, the Pampers guy and the Printer are gendered to serve as machines for capitalism. Broken by the wiles of capitalism, they lament about structural exploitation upon which their masculinity is colonised by a local female collaborator and a French white female, Céline respectively. The colonising female allegorises the working of the colonial gender.

### **Sexed Time and Space in Mabanckou’s *Broken Glass***

In Mabanckou’s novel *Broken Glass*, there is a Westernised African character by the name the Stubborn Snail whose embodiment in his bar ‘Credit Gone West’ represents the (neo)-colonial signifier and its attendant sign for turning the space and time of Africa into a sexual subaltern. Apart from being the proprietor of the bar ‘Credit Gone West’, he also acts as the literary executor for the manuscript that he commissions Broken Glass, the eponymous narrator, to write about the patrons, majorly African males, who have been turned into sexual subaltern by their Westernised African and/ or White female spouses. Therefore, the frame of the colonial signifier is built through the body of the Stubborn Snail together with the epistemology it embodies in the bar ‘Credit Gone West.’ Broken Glass, the narrator, describes the Stubborn Snail as having been schooled in the epistemology of the West: ‘he was at school with the present agriculture minister, Albert Zou Loukia ... it’s even been said he was brilliant, quite a brilliant pupil, he loved dissertations, geography, arithmetic, all that jazz, and he can still recite whole poems from memory’ (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 55). The narrator’s description means that the Stubborn Snail resonates with the ethos of the West. His stand as a colonial image reads complexity due to ‘the duplicity of [the] signifier [as] meaning and form’ (Barthes, 1991, p. 86). In essence, the Stubborn Snail’s duplicity of form and meaning arises from his African identity and the self-effacement of that very identity through Westernisation. More importantly, this duplicity is evident in the way in which he transforms himself and/ or he is transformed through colonial education into the (neo)-colonial sign represented by his bar. Barthes (1991, p. 77) observes that the signifier is empty while the sign is full, and it is the meaning. In tandem with Barthes’ assertion, the Stubborn Snail operates as the empty signifier and he accordingly claims to be married to his bar ‘Credit Gone West,’ which seems to presage that the bar is the dominant spouse while he himself is the sexual subaltern.

However, as the colonial sign he is full of meaning and, what he does in the space and time of the bar is the sign. Broken Glass explains, thus: ‘it’s true that sometimes he’s been seen disappearing upstairs with a woman, often well-endowed women, flat-chested women don’t interest him, so yes, sometimes, he’s been seen to shut himself in up there, and then come back down again later all out of breath’ (Mabanckou 2010, p. 55). In this context, the Stubborn Snail acts as the colonial sign because he is sexually loaded with penetrative imagination for well-endowed female bodies which represent the socio-economic and political potentialities in the sexualised space and time of Africa. Noteworthy, sexual allegories of penetrative imaginations for the female body have widely been used in postcolonial literature to describe the project of (neo)-colonialism. Uniquely, Djébar (1993, p. 57) describes the colonial invasion of Algeria as a penetrative vision thus: ‘This alien world, which [the colonialists] penetrated as they would a woman, this world sent up a cry that did not cease ... Africa is taken, in spite of the cries that she cannot stifle.’ Djébar’s sexual allegory of the rape of the female for expressing colonialism suggests that Africa has been configured by the West as a female body for their unities of imperialistic tendencies. In this light, the Stubborn Snail is the local collaborator for these unities.

Djébar’s description of Africa as a female subaltern who is assigned exploitable sex despite her protestations is a powerful allegory for expressing the continent’s crushing social realities of colonialism in postcolonial literature. However, as expressed in postcolonial writing there also seems to be a body of Africa that readily gives itself to the colonial gender. This ambivalence of sexual consent is represented in *Broken Glass* through the female character by the name Robinette, who is sexually attached to the Stubborn Snail but she could, at the same time, answer to whatever other sexual whims that come her way. She has even consented to his plan to bundle her up with the eponymous narrator, Broken Glass:

‘the Stubborn Snail comes close and says quietly “my offer still stands, you go upstairs and sleep in my place, take the keys, you can go up with Robinette if you like, I’ve spoken to her already, she’s up for it”...’ (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 158). Here, Robinette seems ready for sexual matching with Broken Glass despite being the Stubborn Snail’s bedfellow. Allegorically, she is a local collaborator with the colonial master, and more importantly she represents the space and time of Africa that have been transformed into a sexual body for the lure of the West’s modernity.

In fact, Robinette appears to represent the fetish which the Stubborn Snail uses to assign the time and space of the bar *Credit Gone West* with colonial gender. Through her, Broken Glass is enticed into sexual craving despite his advanced age. He admits that he would not mind being with Robinette for he has not had good company for a while but he is a bit nervous: ‘I don’t even know if I’d go the whole way with her ... women like Robinette ... you’d have to keep jogging away for hours ... it wouldn’t have felt right, perched on top of her, imagining the Stubborn Snail himself jiggling around on her like an epileptic rabbit’ (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 66). Broken Glass has such a romantic vision for Robinette that he seems to doubt his own manhood. Baden-Powell, a distinguished British colonial military officer, dismissed the nineteenth and early twentieth century African men as ‘sluggish and lifeless’ (Uchendu, 2008, p. 9). Broken Glass’ feeling of being timeworn appears to suggest a reading of the African men by the colonialists.

However, exploding with the vision of being sexually enchanted, Broken Glass decides to go to the Rex district to find a trick: ‘a few days ago when I walked out of *Credit Gone West* having resolved to take a break, stop writing, not read back what I’d written, I wandered into the Rex district, in the shade of those young girls in flower ... I felt like treating myself for the first time since the good old leap years’ (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 81). Curiously, Broken Glass describes the sexual attractiveness of the girls as time and space ‘in flower,’ because they are young and beautiful. The ‘girls in flower’ are therefore his fetish.

Nonetheless, none of the ‘girls in flower’ acknowledges Broken Glass’ advances. Instead, they deflower him with a most virulent tirade, thus: ‘you’re too old, you can’t get it up, you’ll be wasting my time, go and try somewhere else, watch some porn, get yourself to an old folk’s home, you’re a drunken boat, you stink, you talk to yourself in the street, you never shower, you can’t stand up straight’ (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 81). Here, the sign of rape appears to be directed at Broken Glass, an old African male. The rape of man “is at odds with the usual clichés of rape and prostitution as allegories of colonialism” (Hayes, 2000, p. 80). The rape of man by prostitutes, girls in flower, albeit through sexual tirade, is even more at odds with the clichés of rape and prostitution.

Donham (2018, p. 29) states that it is easily thought that the master fetish would be the father’s phallus, but for Freud it is actually the mother’s. More precisely it is the “disavowal” that the mother lacked a phallus. Accordingly, Broken Glass suffers ‘disavowal’ of the phallus and, he seems ready to go to any extent to reassure himself, is he still a man? He muses, thus: ‘though at sixty-four I can at least get an erection like a once-glorious racing stallion who’s been put out to graze, it’s frightening the way people think they can go round underestimating dinosaurs like me, sending them back to Jurassic Park where they came from’ (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 81). Broken Glass’ musings about his waning prowess introduces an anthropocentric ring to the sexual allegory for (neo)-colonialism. He feels that the ‘girls in flower’ perceive him as an animal that once healthy and strong is welcomingly engaged for human labour but later when it becomes old and feeble, it is condemned to a park for old animals.

Moreover, Broken Glass appears not to get any solace even in the park of the olds where someone is signalling to me from the side of the street. He recounts, thus: ‘I walked [there] and saw that it was a prostitute nearing retirement age, perhaps with one foot in the grave, and I did hesitate for a moment, wondering if the game was worth the candle, even the candelabra, but I stopped anyway, my curiosity aroused.’ With the ‘girls in flower,’ Broken Glass is dismissed contemptuously as a dinosaur, but when he comes to the time and space of the old prostitute, he is the one who writes her off.

He follows the old prostitute to a prehistoric shack, and then, asks her, ‘is this your place then,’ and she retorts, “hey what am I getting into here, have you come to get laid or to hear my life story?” (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 82). The old prostitute seems to be put off by her client’s failure to play by the rules of her trade. Being a prospective writer, Broken Glass appears to become more interested in hearing the

old prostitute’s life story than following through with his erotic mission. Perhaps, this passion for filling his notebook with other people’s sexual stories lies in the fact that writing is a unique process and, “at each moment of being produced the writing is that which is responding to itself so that writing is also a reading process. In that case, a piece of writing has a reading within it, and the writing process is often a process of working out what it is you want to say” (Rooney, 2000, p. 92). Rooney’s observation implies that the old woman is trying to block the client from reading her life of being a fetish. Chilala (2019, p. 17), albeit on a different breath about the culture of writing in postcolonial Zambia, aptly observes that like Achebe, the famous Nigerian writer, a majority of Zambian writers, and indeed most African writers, ‘face the challenge of adjusting the [English] language to the African surroundings without however breaking the grammatical rules of the language.’ Therefore, through the strained relationship between Broken Glass and the old prostitute Mabanckou appears to raise the question about the strain between the sexed grammar of writing and the representation of the African realities of exploitation.

Like Broken Glass, the old prostitute experiences a crushing sense of time and space due to her lost youth. Consequently, lifting her skirt, the type worn during the German occupation, she brags to Broken Glass: ‘gnashing her false teeth, “Alice is what they call me, if you want to go to Wonderland, ask me, not one of those young misses still suckling at their mother’s breast, come on now darling, come close to me,” but of course my desire was gone’ (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 83). By allegorising her trick as Alice in Wonderland she seems to ascribe her sexual time and space with unique textual ramifications. Kalsson (2010, p. 4) observes that Alice is a seven-year-old girl who enters a world of fantasy where she uses her imagination to play games and competition that are not governed by any set rules but ‘in which satisfaction comes from playing itself, rather than winning.’ Perceived from Kalsson’s observation, the old prostitute intends to use her imagination in order to sexually charm Broken Glass. Given that the temporal setting for Carroll’s novel is the European Victorian age, allusion to Alice’s unique sensibilities for navigating in Wonderland is resplendently symptomatic of the working of the fetish of the colonial gender. Deductively, then, the (neo)-colonial sign emerges from writing of erotic texts that postulate a reading of the West as glamorous.

In this case, murmuring sweet nothings to him, the old prostitute promises to rejuvenate the sixty-four-year-old Broken Glass until he feels as though he is twenty: ‘I’m used to it, believe me ... and she began reminiscing about her days as a young prostitute, when her hands could still drive some miserable, suicidal wretch wild, but her movements were as weak as those of an albatross captured for a joke by the crews of a ship in the high seas’ (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 84). The use of ‘an albatross’ to signify the old prostitute’s fading sexual appeal allegorises the West’s dual-character for a fading direct control over her former colonies and, a sustained desire for subtly exploiting them. Coleridge’s *The Ancient Mariner* which the albatross seems to allude, ‘creates a dual-character Mariner who kills the slave-like albatross that brings the fog and the mist to save the crew’ (Abbasi and Anushiravani, 2011, p. 1). The killing of the albatross by the British sailor seems to represent the end of good fortune for colonialists. Nonetheless, the colonialists look for subtle ways of exploiting their former colonies. Accordingly, the old prostitute entices Broken Glass to remember his youthful days: ‘I tried to think about the last time I’d done a spot of mountaineering on a mound of Venus, but my recollection was so cloudy’ (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 84). Then, it follows that the fetish of the colonial gender operates by emptying the subaltern’s memory of exploitation and, then lures them into new forms of exploitation.

Mabanckou uses prostitution as a sexual allegory for (neo)-colonialism in such an efficacious way as to address ambivalent memory of sexed bodies which appear to be frozen in time and space. In the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow (Spivak, 1988, p. 287). Here, Spivak itemises two important categories for the subaltern: erasure of history and gagged speech. In *Broken Glass*, the subaltern, both female and male, cannot speak and they are in the shadow since they operate as customers at the signifying bar of what Samir Amin, a pioneer of Dependency theory, calls ‘the law of value’ in the ‘global historical materialism’ (Kufakurinani et al 2017, p. 12). Human relations are, thus, commoditised and, henceforth they are read against the law of value which, according to Marxist global materiality, points to socio-economic and political inequality.

Within this framework, Broken Glass' sexual encounters with the 'girls in flower' as well as with the old prostitute could be interpreted as a discourse of the problematic of historical materiality. Having an erased memory and gagged speech, the subaltern experiences a crushing sense of abortive vigour in socio-economic and political situations. For the subaltern, envisioning the future, allegorised by the 'girls in flower,' is pitched through the value system. As the subaltern attempts to read archives as a way for reassuring themselves, they seem to be dislocated even further. Accordingly, Broken Glass recounts that when he tries to evoke memories of his youthful days he could only catch the occasional sunny spell, which unfortunately lacks value for pumping back life into a poor old thing that is running on empty. Refiled by the 'emptiness of the old thing,' the old prostitute stands up in a huff and accuses Broken Glass, 'you're wasting my time, you're just a poor, sad old fool' (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 84). At this instance, rebuffed by both the 'girls in flower,' and by the old crone, Broken Glass, as an African male, is even more cast in shadow.

The allegory of prostitution in *Broken Glass* seems to read beyond Spivak's assertion that the subaltern as female is even more in the shadow. Here, at least the subaltern as female is able to redeem part of herself by casting her shame at the male whom she accuses of being timeworn and stupid. Contrastingly, the male appears to be under historical siege. Broken Glass explains how he futilely tries to use materiality to redeem himself from the failed trick: 'so then I stood up too and held out two 10,000 Congolese franc notes and she said 'keep your cash, cretin, the humiliation you have subjected me to does not cost 20,000 Congolese franc' and Alice practically pushed me out.' Broken Glass seems to suffer multiple humiliation within the (neo)-colonial structure. Firstly, he is emptied of memory such that despite being male, he could not operate as a man any more. Secondly, he is subjected to colonial tirade, such as 'cretin' and 'old sad fool,' thereby robbing him even the kicks of his dying horse. Thirdly, and more telling, his altruistic gesture via materiality is met with virulent rebuff.

The literary beauty in *Broken Glass* is initiated by the sexual allegory for (neo)-colonialism that materialises in time and space in such a way that revamps clichés of prostitution and rape hitherto used in postcolonial discourse, exploding in multiple facets of the characters' lives. Within the domestic space and time, male characters lament at being sexually dispossessed by their female spouses. Broken Glass meets them at the bar Credit Gone West and listens at their laughable memoirs, occasionally noting in his notebook. He thematically describes one of the males as 'the man who'd been turned out of the family home like a mad dog ... a pathetic guy who now goes round wearing Pampers nappies, like a newborn babe' (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 21). At this juncture, Broken Glass' description portends a reading of historical debasement of the man at the family level. The man recounts, 'Broken Glass, life is so complicated, it all began the day I came home at five in the morning, I swear, and that day I noticed the lock had been changed, because I couldn't get the key in, so I couldn't get into my own house, that I'd rented myself' (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 23). Here, the symbol of 'key and changed lock' seems to ascribe the domestic space and time, for the African male, with the sign of being dislocated, even after footing the bills.

The man claims that he has been steadily supporting his wife and their six children: 'I stumped up twelve months of rent including this one ... I was the only one with a job, I'm not even going to talk about my wife now, or I'll get mad ... she is not a wife, she is just a pot of faded flowers.' Interestingly, Broken Glass refers to the young girls at Rex as 'girls in flower' to indicate their sexual appeal. Therefore, when the Pampers guy describes his wife as 'a pot of faded flowers' he appears to mean that she has lost her erotic charm which excludes her from the qualification of being a wife. He further laments: 'she's not a woman, I tell you, she's just a whole sack of problems, and there she was, living as easy as a potato from Bobo Dioulasso, easy as a capitalist, just sat there waiting for me to bring home readies.' The man laments about his wife for her not being sexually agreeable to his desire despite manly providing for her materiality. Theoretically, the narrator initiates dialectics of Dependency urgings that partly inform the postcolonial discourse, especially debates on inequalities of development at both global and local systems. The Marxist theory of materiality accuses capitalism of being the colonial structure that props Dependency (Marx, 1976, pp. 543-547).

A brand of feminism has often put forth a charge that women characters are expected to behave in a certain way towards men: ‘There is an assumption that women are not only seeking to have their bodies inscribed by heterosexual sex, marriage and motherhood but that this is their only reward’ (Mckay et al 2014, p. 15). While McKay’s observation may have feminist merit, in *Broken Glass* it is given new dialectics for addressing the dependency theory in the context of the characters’ ambivalent (neo)-colonial realities. The Pampers guy, hence, accuses his wife of hanging out, ‘chatting from morning till evening with divorced old bags and widows from Trois-Cents, old witches wrapped in stinking pagnes, evil bitches who whiten their skin, shrews who straighten their hair to look like whites’ (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 23). She appears to gravitate towards Eurocentric aesthetics that calls to mind the dialectics of Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* whose main thesis is that due to the historical psychology initiated by colonialism, ‘The black [woman] wants to be white ... to reach a human level’ (Fanon, 1986, p. 3). Curiously, for the black female to transform herself into a white woman she seems to lord it over the African male.

The core dialectics of Dependency theory is to challenge Modernisation theory whose explanatory power, ‘basically amounted to blaming the victim,’ (Kufakurinani et al 2017, p. 49), in the body of Africa and other regions of the global South that are tugged as underdeveloped by the global North. In *Broken Glass*, there is accusation and counter-accusation across the time and space for the spousal male and female. The Pampers guy accuses his wife of locking him out of the female erotic space to pursue her modernistic cravings such that one day she pushed him off determined not to miss the last episode of Santa Barbara: ‘well then my engine just cut straight out, no life left in it, batteries flat, nothing working, I mean nothing at all, I was impotent, just watching my tool losing altitude and turning into a poor little flag at half mast, then finally a tiny little thing no bigger than a premature baby’s’ (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 27). In this context, gender politics appears to be at the behest of the spousal time and space. The woman seemingly straddles at the seat of spousal dynamics in a way that robs the male of his sense of being a man.

The Pampers guy seems to allegorise the socio-political and economic body of Africa which is locked out of the West’s fetish of foreign aid for protesting against exploitation. His experience jogs to memory the fate of Ghana in 1965 when the, then, President Kwame Nkrumah wrote the book *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. Puzzlingly, the publication of the book initiates reprisals from the global North: ‘It earned a prompt rebuke from the US State Department and the cancellation of \$ 25 million of American ‘aid’ to Ghana’ (Kufakurinani et al, 2017, p. iii). In the case of the Pampers guy, then, the discourse of the global economy is played out at the very interior unit of the family.

Nkrumah maintains that neo-colonialists operate ‘subtly not only in the economic field but also in the political, religious, ideological and cultural spheres’ (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 239). The subtle working of (neo)-colonialism at the religious sphere is also shown to play out at the family unit. The Pampers guy recounts to *Broken Glass* that there is some serious fornicating going on in the local churches: “no better place for an orgy, some group sex, no better place than the so-called houses of God that sprout up everywhere, everyone knows, even the government people, some of whom finance these holy sex dens, but they’re not real churches” (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 24). Here, the (neo)-colonial religious space is ascribed with debauched sex. The Pampers guy explains that his wife, ‘got caught up in all this shit with [the] guru [of religion], she just worships him to death.’ The point being made, at this juncture, is that in the (neo)-colonial context religion is rewritten into a fetish for the colonial gender. The Pampers guy further explains that the local churches as led by warped people ‘who exploit, pervert, rewrite, dishonour, seize hold of, abuse and profane the Jerusalem Bible.’ It follows, then, that it is not religion per se which is under sanction but its rewriting into a fetish of the colonial gender.

Peculiarly, the description of the religious space is a reading of the way the colonial gender works by desecrating humanity of the subaltern. The Pampers guy describes the sexual relations that are emergent from the colonial rewriting of the Jerusalem Bible as “real-life orgies with the faithful, men and women, yes, not to mention the homos, the paedophiles, the zoophiles and the lesbians, all going at it between prayers, between Hail Marys, they do it when they go on pilgrimage too.” Pampers guy appears to be challenging the pious perspective of the (neo)-colonialists who feign sincerity at saving the souls of

the subaltern but in real sense they are charming them into becoming objects for exploitation. There is a unique tie between the projects of Christianity and colonialism: '[T]he missionaries of the Christian Church have commonly assumed that Western civilisation and Christianity were two aspects of the same gift which they were commissioned to offer to the rest of mankind' (Taylor, 1963, p. 5). Noticeably, Christian values as contained in the Jerusalem Bible appear to be at odds with the western civilisation and its tendencies for debasing the other's space and time. Therefore, the emergence of theoretical trends, such as the queer theory for gay and lesbian spaces, in the West contemporary literary imaginary postulates a weird rewriting of the Jerusalem Bible, which hitherto the Christian missionaries have ascribed the sign for healthily gendered humanity in which all are equal before God.

The fetish of the colonial gender is expressed quite uniquely by the Pampers guy when he describes his sexual experience with his wife, thus: 'fourteen years of calvary and the missionary position, she'd gone and changed the locks, now I wasn't going to sleep out in the street just because she'd changed the lock with the help of her brother-in-law, a well-known locksmith' (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 29). Changing the locks implies political sanctions against the male. The sanctioned male experiences an engulfing fire and, redeemably 'called the fire brigade.' The firemen break the locked door but soon the man's wife emerges from the bedroom and lords it over him, despite his protestations: 'I wanted to speak first because I'm the man, but my wife slapped me and told me to shut my filthy womanising mouth' (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 30). Here, the woman uses her colonising femininity to silence the man. It follows, then, that the reversal of the gender character within the spousal time and space speaks of the way the colonial gender is formed by rewriting the man into the subaltern.

Accordingly, the Pampers guy's wife lies that 'the matrimonial judge for Trois-Cents had ordered [the man] out of [the matrimonial home] months ago' (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 30). Therefore, the firemen desecrated the man as a 'sad mythomaniac and a sad troublemaker, [ordering him to get out], 'the law is tough but it is the law,' that's what they said.' Here, the colonial gender is propped by the law that seems to be skewed towards the female. The man refuses to bulge but the firemen call the police. The wife accuses the husband of being 'a dangerous ... serial killer ... an ex-convict, and a thief, [who] dealt in cannabis and Columbian cocaine' (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 31). One of police officers of 'the female persuasion pushed [him] up against the wall and called [him] a bastard, a paedophile, a sadist, she said she'd crush [him] under her boot' ((Mabanckou, 2010, p. 32). The man is finally taken to Makala Prison where he spends two and a half years, being raped by inmates.

Within the colonial gender, therefore, Feminism together with its legal reading as the female persuasion is used to dislocate the man from his masculinity. Locked in the prison of the colonial gender, the man is desecrated into a feminised gay by the other inmates who rape him with the full approval of the prison warders. The man is raped until his bottom is spoilt such that now he wears pampers napkins. The rapists claim to avenge Amelie, the man's daughter whom he is accused of defiling. Hayes observes that the memory of being raped, by an indigenous collaborator, 'challenges [a man's] masculinity as well as the family structure policed by the,' the colonial gender (Hayes, 2000, p. 81). The rape of the man, hence, allegorises the desecrating continuities of (neo)-colonialism which hinder the subaltern from speaking their lives into new narratives of imagined freedoms.

At the international domain, the fetish of the colonial gender works by luring African males to work and live abroad. Mabanckou effortlessly creates the story of the Printer, a black man who leaves Africa for France, in *Broken Glass* for allegorising this ensnaring character of the colonial gender. The Printer meets 'Céline at Timis, a well-known black nightclub in Pigalle, in Paris,' (Mabanckou 2010, p. 39), and he is so enthralled with her that he proposes marriage. She immediately takes him to her parents in order to formalise their courtship. However, her father is a bit off the beat but Céline 'quickly talked her parents round, they're not racist, they always voted communist in the municipal and regional elections' (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 41). Here, the description of Céline's parents suggests the end of the history of (neo)-colonialism. Bosteels and Ciccariello-Maher (2017, p. 1) states that the most recent attempt to recruit Hegel for the task of declaring history over – Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History* – took much the same form of Hegel's own pre-emptive dialectical closure nearly two centuries prior, due to being blind to the internal tensions of globalising capital. The point being made here is that in a



globalising capital, history cannot come to a closure but attains the character of re-inventing itself into novel dialectics.

Céline’s parents are welcoming to the Printer despite his being black. They profess their love and reverence for Africa: ‘they loved deepest Africa, the real Africa, mysterious Africa, the bush, the red earth, the wild animals skipping about in the wide open spaces, adding that only fools thought that black Africa was heading for disaster, or that Africa was anti-development’ (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 42). Their tone appears to be quite since and they even apologise for the mistakes of the past, ‘in particular, the slave trade, colonialism, the problems with independence, and all that other shit.’ This really looks like the end of history. They are enthralled to hear that he comes from Congo and they were all questions: ‘which Congo ... the Belgian Congo ... if it was French Congo,’ but the Printer reiterates that the French and Belgian Congo no longer exist. Céline’s father is excited to learn that the Printer comes from the little Congo which is their beautiful, illustrious former colony. However, he is cautioned by Céline’s mother to desist from using the word colony upon which he makes a correction to territory. Nonetheless, he is further warned that ‘colony’ and ‘territory’ are completely interchangeable.

Céline is mortified by the discussion on ‘colony’ and territory, and she, ‘flew into a rage and said we hadn’t come to talk about interchanges or geography or history.’ The matter appearing to be settled, Céline marries the Printer. Realising that mixed marriages do not thrive well in Black France, the couple ‘wanted to live away from the hubbub of Paris and the envy of other negroes, and the whole classic comedy’ (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 44). The couple appears to do quite well and there are no racial tensions: ‘I didn’t need to wear a white mask to hide my black skin, I was actually proud to be black, I always will be, till my dying day, I’m proud of my black culture, you know what I mean, Céline respected me for that, everything was going fine, I was a good father to my family.’ In colonial psychology, the black man wishes to be ‘acknowledged not as black but as white ... a white woman can do this for [him]’ (Fanon, 1986, p. 45). Therefore, by marrying Céline, the Printer feels as though he is white and, hence, he does not require any white mask. The Printer allegorises the post independent Africa while his spousal relationship with Céline indicates how the West lures Africa into a dependency through the fetish of global economy.

However, after some blissful time with Céline, a West Indian woman with whom the Printer has had a previous relationship comes in the open and sues him for neglecting their son. Strangely enough, his French wife comes to his aid and even suggests that they take up the young man. Later strange things happen. First, the son announces to his father that ‘he’d seen Céline with some local Africans, and one of them, called Ferdinand was [her] lover’ (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 45). This piece of damaging information does not prick the Printer’s psychology much for he trusts Céline as a respectable white woman who cannot cheat on him with some poor Africans. Nonetheless, he is unsettled when he discovers ‘a condom floating in the toilet of [their] green house, a really big condom, about twice the size of [his] dick, which is itself enormous’ (Mabanckou, 2010, p. 46). He decides to ignore the sad fact for he does not have any prove against Céline and in any case he suspected his son, not his wife. A few days later he comes by another enormous condom in the toilet, and he decides to investigate without raising a storm.

He tells Broken Glass that what he discovered looked like something taken straight from the movies: ‘I saw Céline and my son in bed, all tangled up in the poor Christ of Bomba position, but Céline was the one on top of my son, holding the whip, and they were drenched in sweat ... I lunged for my son ... but he flipped me over ... set about me with the whip’ (Mabanckou, 2010, pp. 49-50). Here, Céline allegorises the colonial gender since she lures the Printer, an African male, into a blissful spousal relationship only to break his heart by sleeping with his son. The strangest thing is that ‘setting on him with the whip’ suggests that Céline and the Printer’s son jointly rape him. The Printer’s son, therefore, stands for the future of post independent Africa, a future not only espoused by the West’s fetish of global economy but also made to work against the African continent.

## CONCLUSION

From the foregoing critical discussion, it is evident that Mabanckou effortlessly reinvigorates sexual allegories for expressing the lure of (neo)-colonialism through a unique motif that affixes colonial sexual connotations of rape, prostitution and seduction to the harsh African socio-economic and

political realities resulting from centuries of oppression under European colonialists. The reading of Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* indicates that the fetish of the colonial gender works by charming the African male into Westernised female space and time supposedly for a democratic spousal relation that puts behind the history of colonialism. Then, through structural strengthening, the Westernised female space colonises the African male's masculinity, in the local and international cultural planes. Africa's grim of underdevelopment, and blink of hope for development which the West's spousal imagination creates, sets the continent into the colonial trap of sexual subaltern. Precisely, then, the fetish of the colonial gender appears to operate through the charm of the global economy. The question whether, in the context of (neo)-colonialism, African males are men, gains new dialectics within the fetish of the colonial gender. Mabanckou beautifully shows in *Broken Glass* that in the context of (neo)-colonialism, Africa is the sexual subaltern whose vitality of socio-economic and political potentialities is perennially exploited by the West through the charm of global economy. The African male in Mabanckou's novel, therefore, is an efficacious allegorical figure for expressing (neo)-colonial exploitation in which the memory of being 'the man' has been accordingly emptied by the gendered dialectics. Is the course for Africa as the sexual subaltern, then, completely lost? If the subaltern were completely incapable of any kind of speech, then the course would be lost. However, in Mabanckou grants the African male subaltern space and time in *Broken Glass* for narrating their ordeal of colonial exploitation and thus they are able to cleanse themselves, in a narrative sense, of the colonial scatology.

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