

# Oscillating between Racism, Colonialism, and Digital Colonialism: towards Theorizing Digi-Africanism

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**Abstract:** From Hegel's (1822) description of Africa as a "... dark mantle of Night" and Kipling's (1899) insistence on the savagery of Africans and the White Man's Burden to civilize Africa, Western theory has inundated and orientated the African intellectual sphere such that Franz Fanon's *Black Skin White Mask* still holds true. From modernism (here exemplified with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*), post modernism and now the much talk about the death of postmodernism and the rise of Digi modernism, Africa has been ignored, such that the Hegelian "nocturnalization" of Africa still holds true especially in the sphere of digital theory. Such discourse goes unnoticed due to the crumbs of technology making its way into Africa serving as the people's opium in the face of digital orientalism, colonization and the third generation exploitation (data). What is the image of Africa in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*? How does this denigrated image appear in Western contemporary media and theories? What theory or concept can aptly present African reality in the digital age? The analyses in this study are realized through a review of critics of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and a review of theory with attention to Frederick Jameson, Jean Francois Lyotard and Alan Kirby. The analyses deconstruct the relevance of contemporary western theory on Africa as well as demonstrates the inapplicability of predigital African philosophies and theories to the dynamics of the digital age, towards establishing a case for Digi-Africanism as a concept that best presents the African reality in the digital era.

**Keywords:** Modernisms, Digital Colonialism, Image of Africa and Digi-Africanism.

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This section encompasses the definition of modernism through to postmodernism and to post postmodernism (digimodernism) towards tracing the trajectory that brings in digital colonialism and therefore providing a conceptual background to the study. Modernism was among others a literary movement that lasted from the late nineteenth century to around the mid-twentieth century, and encapsulated a series of burgeoning writing techniques that influenced the course of literary history. Influenced by worldwide industrialization and the First World War, literary modernism was an emotional and experimental style that challenged the claims of traditional writers in the way they depicted a rational and orderly world. The events that culminated in the First World War convinced writers and artists that a new style was needed to understand and represent the irrational part of the human psyche of humans. This movement was not only welcome in literature but in arts in general, architecture, film and overall life style. Concerning the features of modernism, Roger Griffin in "Modernism and Fascism. The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler" points to the fact that; "this partly distinct though self-reinforcing set of processes included – in the realm of intellectual, cultural and ideological developments – the diffusion of rationalism, individualism, positivism, materialism, literacy, secularism, liberalism, the idea of progress, nationalism and imperialism." (45). To corroborate, Linehan T in "Defining Modernism. In: Modernism and British Socialism" adds that "in the sphere of institutional and technological development, representative democratic forms of government, bureaucracy and advances in science, transport and mass communications".(1). On the basis of these the paper considers modernism from the perspective of the shifting cultural ideologies at the time with a special focus on imperialism and consequent nationalism or the processes of decolonization and therefore looks at its bearing on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and how it elucidates the process of imperialism during the modernist era, the compromised image of Africa and the foil of such presentation.

After modernism follows postmodernism of which Frederick Jameson in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* discusses from the perspective of periodization of various capitalisms. In his argument, he leans on Ernest Mandel's classification of the three stages of capitalism and the last stage corresponds to postmodernism. Jameson asserts that

Machine production of steam-driven motors since 1848; machine production of electric and combustion motors since the 90s of the 19th century; machine production of electronic and nuclear-powered apparatuses since the 40s of the 20th century -- these are the three general revolutions in technology engendered by the capitalist mode of production since the "original" industrial revolution of the later 18th century.

These revolutions corresponds; some to modernism and the last to postmodernism. The trajectory from modernism to postmodernism therefore is based on technological advancement and consequently how that advancement affects development of each society in aspects such as the art, the culture, architecture and economics and in this study, Africa. Jean Francois Lyotard. in *The Post Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* advances Jameson/Mandel model based on the production of machinery and ascribes the field of knowledge in the postmodern era to the computer. He submits that;

It is reasonable to suppose that the proliferation of information-processing machines is having and will continue to have as much an effect on the circulation of learning as did advancement in human circulation (transport systems) and later the circulation of sounds and visual images (the media)...it is conceivable that the nation states will one day fight for the control of information just as they battled in the past for the control of territory and afterwards the control of access and the exploitation of raw materials and cheap labor. (4-5)

Lyotard complements Jameson and furthers the spectrum of late capitalism by factoring in the information age that supersedes the traditional media. Worthy to note here is the liberalism that abounds in this information age and that is why it is possible to foresee that nations shall one day fight to control such information, for the control of information equates to power. It is equally plausible to argue that he who controls this information becomes an imperialist as will be seen under digital colonialism. Jameson in the above highly celebrated book on late capitalism mentions Africa just twice whereas Lyotard doesn't even make reference to it at all. As such, the definition and characterization of either modernism or postmodernism begs the question: what stage of capitalism is Africa in at the moment? Is the negligence of Africa intentional or coincidental and therefore does Africa need its own cultural logic of its own capitalism?

While pondering on this flux and struggling to situate Africa in the trajectory of modernisms, it is alarming that Alan Kirby in *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure Our Culture*, is already announcing the death of postmodernism and suggesting digimodernism as an apt term to describe contemporary cultural reality. According to Kirby, digimodernism is the successor to postmodernism, which he says mainly ended around the beginning of the current millennium. Kirby argues that "The world has changed and theory must change with it". (32) By the world changing, Kirby implies advanced technology and its impact on the world as whole which should obviously have an effect on criticism both of society and of art. He gives a panoramic view of the kinds of texts that can be considered digimodernist and submits that; "Prime examples of digimodernist texts include the whole, blogs, reality television shows like American Idol where viewers decide the narrative progression, news programs which implies that in the digimodernist era, the reader or the audience of the artefact is no longer just the consumer of the postmodernist period, he consumes and contributes at the same time. To further elaborate on this, Stan Davis and Christopher Meyer in *The Speed of Change in the Connected Economy* discusses how the elements of connectivity, speed and intangibles will merge together to form a 'blur', a super connected world where "[e]verything is...electronically connected to everything else: products, people, companies, countries, everything" (5).

This demonstrates the connectivity that is part of the digital age which re-echoes the notion of the participation of the consumer in the making of theatre fact which he is to consume at the end. Laura Mulady in "Digimodernism; The Future is Now" corroborates this by postulating that in the Digimodern era, "We participate constantly, we don't simply watch" (49.) This implies that the audience is as important as the author in the analysis of a Digimodernist text. Here, the author loses

autonomy over copyright of the text since the content is gotten in the form of “crowd sourcing”. Inanut shell, it is “the act of taking a job traditionally performed by a designated agent (usually an employee) and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people in the form of an open call. In texts prior to the Digimodernist period for instance, the author gets the muse then develops the content of his text as well as the aesthetics the way he wants. Digimodernist writers do more than that; they get the muse and then bring it to a popular arena where the opinion is sought in the form of crowd sourcing. This is done through the blogosphere, Twitter pages, Facebook pages, WhatsApp group forums, video conferencing, reality shows on Tv, and group calls on the phone, Chat GPT and AI. This paper argues that the tendency for consumers to be part of the creation process of digital content is something that is advantageous for Africa to militate its own identity with consciousness of certain African ethics so as to avoid the assimilation and utopia seen with digital colonialism today.

The above definitions though representative of global reality appear at some point to leave out certain realities that are peculiar to Africa. Even when continental Africa is considered, it is considered largely from a western perspective and not the other way round giving room to digital colonialism. Danielle Coleman in “Digital Colonialism: The 21st Century Scramble for Africa through the Extraction and Control of User Data and the Limitations of Data Protection Laws” asserts that;

As Western technology companies increasingly rely on user data globally, extensive data protection laws and regulations emerged to ensure ethical use of that data. These same protections, however, do not exist uniformly in the resource-rich, infrastructure-poor African countries, where Western tech seeks to establish its presence. These conditions provide an ideal landscape for digital colonialism. (1)

Examples of such tech companies that Coleman talks of above are Google, Facebook, Microsoft, WhatsApp and others. The sad reality is that despite how beneficial these tech enterprises and their products are to the development and overall amelioration of living standards of the Africans, the downside is that their content does not only remind one of the colonial period as seen in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness but goes further to effect colonialism. This is seen as tech dynamics interfere with native culture and at some point compels them as in the case where Microsoft words does not accept native names until they are added to the dictionary despite the fact that the same letters that comprise the name added to the dictionary are already coded into the computer programs. Apps with filters such as snapchat, AI and Instagram orientate users especially African youths to idealize counterfeited black images that make them resemble Franz Fanon’s Black Skin White Masks. Big phone companies like Apple neither have apple shops in Africa nor do they have African customized versions of Apple phones as they have elsewhere – the result being cultural shock in the process of using them. All these show a new form of colonialism which takes the digital form and we are obliged to offer our own modest contribution in the face of that.

The clarifications made above provide a background from which we are going to argue and demonstrate first hand colonialism in Heart of Darkness, examine a panorama of discourses concerning the image of Africa in the text and 21st century co-texts, before proceeding to identify digital colonialism in view of theorizing Digi-Africanism.

## **2. ROOTS OF RACISM IN CONTINENTAL AFRICA - THE CASE OF CONRAD’S HEART OF DARKNESS AND THE IMAGE OF AFRICA POLEMICS**

Discourse surrounding the portrayal of the image of Africa and consequently, that of blacks in 20th century colonial literature appears to have received much intellectual attention through the work of Joseph Conrad, a novella about the expedition of Charlie Marlow into the Belgian Congo during the period of exploration and subsequent colonization of the Congo. In the text, the natives are presented with carefully selected language register with diction full of words that could sum up to hate speech in today’s language register. The natives are viewed as “ugly”, “savages”, “primitive”, “cannibals”, “evil”, “decadent” and above all even their kinship with the white man is styled ugly as with Marlow’s submission that; “They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity - like yours - the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough”.(41) Such a statement reveals the presentation of racism in the text, a theme that attracted varied responses from critics through time.

First to discuss (Conrad's excesses) is Chinua Achebe who in "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness" blows the alarm of Conrad's bias towards blacks because of his alleged racist undertones. Achebe begins his discussion by drawing our attention to an older man that he meets one day as he is going around campus in the West, who is surprised that one could be teaching either African Literature or History since to him Africa does not have such a thing and that's in 1961. Such a perspective appears to be a continuation of the Hegelian negation of the African reality to the point of being compared to a dark mantle of night same as Achebe questions "did Hugh Trevor Roper, also pronounce that African history did not exist?" (1). This to Achebe is no mere ignorance but a deliberate attempt to debase Africa, and such tendencies to him, owe their foundation or obtain corroboration from the racist undertones in Conrad's Heart of Darkness. He declares that "one might indeed say the need -- in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest" (2). Such is to say that Conrad's presentation of the reality of blacks as he does is a continuation of a project which is part and parcel of a Eurocentric ideology such that Africa becomes the antithesis of Europe demonstrated in the regret that the similarity in the humanity of natives and those of the narrator was ugly thereby confirming the accomplishment of the Eurocentric project of 'antithesising' Africa to Europe and its civilization so as to establish an inferiority and superiority debacle.

Therefore, what we find in Heart of Darkness is not accident but part of an enlarged project to tint the image of Africa and subsequently that of blacks. To Harris Wilson in "The Frontier on Which "Heart of Darkness" Stands", Achebe's allegations leveled (levied??) on Conrad for being racist are misplaced. This to him is because Conrad went an extra mile to expose the ills of the Belgians in the Belgian Congo and it is such exposition that writers embark on for criticism purposes especially in comedy of manners. He declares that "For comedy of manners is the basis of protest fiction, fiction of good guys and bad guys, racist guys and liberal guys. Comedy of manners is the basis of realism that mirrors society to identify refinements of behavior that are social or antisocial, heroic or antiheroic" (87). One wonders if Heart of Darkness is indeed a comedy of manners or is it indeed another insult as Caryl Philips will latter on trace the importance of people to tell their own story. Wilson appears to prescribe the type of criticism Achebe should embark with the assertion for instance about the creation of Kurtz that characters such as him are universal characters and not necessarily designed for Africa nor to act as antithesis for Africa. By implication therefore, he is prescribing for Achebe to engage in universalizing criticism, a thing which contradicts post colonialism in the first place – at least of the era in which Achebe wrote his paper on Herat of Darkness.

One can argue further that Harris Wilson is quick to identify Achebe's bias and short sightedness because he is not an African and because the colonial reality in South America was not and is not the same as Africa's. Infact, during the period of slavery and slave trade for example the aborigines of South America were not as enslaved as the conscripted slaves from Africa and thus they cannot feel the pinch to the degree that enslaved Africans felt. Such a critic who shares this view is Carryl Philips. He expresses his views on this in the debate between him and Achebe on the question "Was Joseph Conrad Really a Racist?" a stance which he pursues just like Harris Wilson looking down on Achebe's opinion before being convinced otherwise at the end of the debate. As Philips narrates Achebe begins his first submission by postulating the fact that "Art is not intended to put people down" (1) and that if a respectable writer such as Conrad could engage in such then he Achebe suspects his intentions – to denigrate not only the Congo but Africa and by extension the entire black community at large. After a respectable conversation between Philips and Achebe, the former is obliged to conclude that:

The realization hits me with force. I am not an African. Were I an African, I suspect I would feel the same way as my host. But I was raised in Europe, and although I have learned to reject the stereotypically reductive images of Africa and Africans, I am undeniably interested in the break-up of a European mind and the health of European civilization. I feel momentarily ashamed that I might have become caught up with this theme and subsequently overlooked how offensive this novella might be to a man such as Chinua Achebe and to millions of other Africans. (7)

This synthesizes the opinions of Conrad, Achebe, Harris Wilson and Caryl Philips as it indicates the fact that society shapes the writer (Conrad) and thus the prejudices of that society transcends into the writings of that author and on the part of the critics the biases of belonging to the society that is debased in a particular art piece can at the same time influence the analysis and conclusions of the



said critic (Achebe and Caryl Philips). Such is the view shared by Mbuh Tenu Mbuh in his paper “Joseph Conrad’s Other ‘Heart of Darkness’ on a Cubist Canvas” in which he posits that “the writer was also engaged in historicizing an earlier ‘heart of darkness’ from Roman Times, which is only complemented by the African version” (126). This implies that colonialism typifies a form of ‘heart of darkness’ that Europe encountered among themselves and later decided to export to Africa. This is therefore one of those societal biases that underpins Conrad’s writing of the text. Mbuh further justifies Conrad’s objectivism as a writer when he submits that “While decolonization has exposed the failure of such resistance [political resistance to racism], the idea here is to disavow the racist context of Heart of Darkness by arguing that Conrad was also writing Enlightenment fallacies and their colonialist provenance within and beyond Europe, which have kept us captive for so long” (127). Here Mbuh attempts to vindicate Conrad from the claims of being a racist just like Harris Wilson, yet they both succeed to lay the allegations of racism on the society in which Conrad writes from and it is the concern of this research work that in so far as we often hear both the voice of the society in which the author writes from and his/her own voice in any work of art, there is no possibility by which a society that is biased towards a particular group of people can produce an objective work about the ‘other’. Taking Conrad’s example therefore, this paper asserts that the presentation of the image of blacks/Africa in the 20th century is relatively derogatory whether it is the intention of the author or not. As such one finds latitude to continue from this to look at the image of Africa in the 21st century towards correlating with the image of blacks and consequently proposing a way forward.

### **3. FROM FICTION TO REALITY: COMPROMISED BLACK IMAGES IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN MEDIA**

After demonstrating the image of Africa in Heart of Darkness and related discourses it is important to trace the trajectory to the 21st century before going forward and thus the relevance of this section. Carolyn Martindalin “Changes in Newspaper Images of Black Americans” posits that blacks have before the civil wars year claimed that the image of blacks in the American newspapers have been negative with them being mostly stereotyped as “criminals” and as such it is important to investigate if the image has changed after this civil wars. He cites several studies between 1928 to 29 on the newspaper coverage of blacks all which conclude that “47 percent of news about blacks in 17 major American newspapers during 1928-29 concerned antisocial behavior” (2) and thus some form stereotyping which is a call for concern because of the ramified consequences which we see as in brutality against blacks such as the 2019 case of George Floyd. Basing on this Carolyn Martindal concludes that “Ever since slavery was institutionalized in this country, whites have perpetuated a dual image of the black man as either a savage -violent, sexually rapacious, dangerous -or a Sambo-lazy, stupid, feckless and carefree”(2). One cannot pass this without perhaps relating to Conrad and his Heart of Darkness for contributing to the seed of this denigration because by virtue of being among the first successful English novellas about colonialism, it/he may have succeeded in selling the negative image of Africa and consequently blacks. Such a negativity does not only underlie brutality but also goes further to form the bases of economic discrimination and the frustrations which is an unfortunate continuum in the reality of blacks across the globe.

The situation is not only exclusive to American newspapers as seen above – it transcends to the new media and that is the preoccupation of James Michira in “Images of Africa in the Western Media” in which he observes that just like blacks in American newspapers, the image of Africa as a whole is tinted bleak across various western media outlets be they traditional, modern or postmodern. Of the categories in which news about Africa falls are topics such as , “Africa as Homogenous Entity, Africa “The Dark Continent” Africa the Wild/Jungle, Hunger, Famine and Starvation, Endemic Violence, Conflict and Civil War, Political Instability and the Coup Cycle, Africa and HIV/AIDS” (2). It is glaring that none of these images is positive and thus especially in the 21st century could act as legitimization for the formation of global policies that look at Africa from largely the perspective of how it still requires Kipling’s “the white man’s burden” and thus providing a stance for so many neocolonial endeavors that are largely still negative to continental Africa. Michira goes further to give reasons for the justification of such an image and among others are “commercialization of news and the corporate factor”, “monopoly of ideas and opinion”, “the western audience”, “foreign policy and western interests in Africa”, “textbooks and the school curriculum”. These points indicate the fact that despite considerable improvements in racial relationships, there still exists certain factors that will oblige these media outlets to keep maintaining such an image in order to satisfy their desire to make profit.

The tinted image comes along always because of the desire to maintain white supremacy. Thus is the concern of Qurat-UI-Aine, Humaira Sarvat and Syeda Samina Tahira in “Racial Supremacy and the Image of Blacks in the American Print Media: A Critical Discourse Analysis”. They start out by asserting that this situation has been going on for a long while and that even of recent the:

Death of Floyd unveils the racial inequalities between whites and blacks in the United States. Afro-Americans are still considered second-class citizens of society and face racial discrimination in many aspects of life. During the time of the Corona Virus pandemic, the primary cause of the high death rate of African Americans was discrimination in medical care and access to health facilities Unemployment and uncertainty about the future increased during the lockdown. It arouses anger in people's hearts; besides this, the long lasting Racism that resulted in the nationwide protest (2).

The ensuing protests indicate the fact that blacks have had pent up anger and that is why the death of Floyd was a readymade opportunity to be exploited by the Black Lives Matter campaigners and that is why the protest went from the streets to the internet and other media outlets and later became almost a global phenomenon. The deplorable financial situation of blacks can be seen in novellas such as Ellison's *The Invisible Man* for the 20th Century and Adichie's *Americanah* in the 21st century, one of the possible reasons for their poor health conditions, a situation which shows up again during the corona virus pandemic which appears to be a continuation of what the eugenic movements did not accomplish.

These postulations on the way the media perceives blacks will be incomplete without a perspective on how these images are received or how they affect the perspectives of the viewers about blacks. Narissra M. Punyanunt in “The Perceived Realism of African American Portrayals on Television” is a work in which she sets out to evaluate the reception of these images in the audience. The results of her study establish two perspectives on how the viewers receive information on TV stations about blacks. Considering the successes of black celebrities like Oprah Winfrey and Obama “For that reason, television viewers may have felt that television portrayals did not accurately represent African Americans, because there are African Americans that have high status positions in society” (251). This is on the one part an indication that the image of blacks and or Africans is gradually being changed as society is evolving and as more as a number of blacks have succeeded to work themselves into the public domain albeit arguments that they are merely used by various establishments as a smoke screen whereas the real marginalization still thrives on. Conrad's novella and associated critical as well as media critiques exposes a reality that seemingly is backed in certain current theoretical postulation seen in the section that follows.

#### **4. CHANGING PHASES – DIGITAL COLONIALISM AS CONTINUATION OF BLACK DENIGRATION**

As seen above, the dynamics of digimoder modernism introduces a new phase in literature so much such that today we hear descriptions such as “digitriure” “twitriture” –in the days of twitter and others. As such, after examining the image of Africa in the traditional literature text and proceeding to examine the media both traditional and digital with either racism and colonialism and or the two standing out as major themes, one finds latitude to deepen the discussion of digital colonialism. Coleman goes further to say that “Digital colonialism refers to a modern-day “Scramble for Africa” where largescale tech companies extract, analyze, and own user data for profit and market influence with nominal benefit to the data source. Under the guise of altruism, large scale tech companies can use their power and resources to access untapped data on the continent”.(1) The collection of unpaid data which is unconsciously contributed by the citizens and its consequent sell to big data companies to exploit in advertisement and targeted ads which are paid for by companies that need them results in what this study will call third phase exploitation of Africa in the form of digital data – the first being the exploitation of the slaves of Africa as seen with the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and the second being the resources that were chartered out of Africa in successive periods of colonialism. Another phase in this light is the unauthorized digitization of African heritage in online museums and online platforms that are marketed without due acknowledgement and without due dividends to whom it is due.

Michael Kwet in “Digital colonialism: US empire and the New Imperialism in the Global South” reflects on the four stages of such digital colonialism. He examines the stages of digital colonialism with the first being the “monopoly of power of multinational resource extraction”, which is a new

form of economic domination, the control of the digital ecosystem beginning with the cables transmitting data to Africa and or the satellites to big data companies like Google, Microsoft and Apple, surveillance capitalism and tech hegemony (1). Such avenues permit colonialism a situation which as he continues further is accentuated by the indirect American persuasion and consequent inundation of the tech space - a situation which indirectly superimposes American lifestyle on the consumers of digital realities. Such situations have resulted in a kind of internet utopia that is demonstrated in the content produced in most of central and West Africa in the guise of following American content creators as if to say Africa is in the same level of development just like the Americans.

This internet utopia can be seen in the commodification of the African woman seen through the valorization of big boobs and big buttocks (bumbum) to the detriment of valorizing the real hard working farming and or career African woman whom Africa is to depend on for ultimate emergence. Men (young men) on their part are engaged in useless pranks, some so dangerous that they can lead to road accidents and or heart attacks, and to top that, the decadent cucumber pranks that present fake large manhoods to embarrass women in the street. The sad reality is that online platforms with such contents receive the most likes and followers than those that provide real content that can move Africa forward. This is worsened by the fact that most African countries do not appear in the zone for monetization of accounts on Facebook and You Tube for instance, compelling them only to consumers and not business people in such tech platforms. Worst still, a large following is garnered by pastors preaching fake prosperity gospels and fabricating miracles to entice the gullible youths. Such mishaps call for an Africa first digital philosophy which Michael Kwet attempts in his *People's Technology for People's Power*(2) in which he calls for a publicly owned and control of big data. This study shall however provide a relatively different perspective.

### 5. FROM DIGITAL ORIENTALISM/COLONIALISM TOWARD THEORIZING DIGI-AFRICANISM

Based on the need to deconstruct digital orientalism/colonialism as seen above, the proposal in this paper offers a way forward for the presentation of the image of Africa. This is anchored on the fact that the 20th and 21st century black narratives have already demonstrated that orientalism still thrives in this era by perpetuating an “other” in blacks be they of African descent or not. It is equally premised on the assumption that such Orientalizing tendencies have crept into digital platforms and theory as will be demonstrated in some theoretical works of the era and leaning on such bias to conceptualize an attempt towards militating for a conscious and dignified image. These landmark works draw universalizing conclusions on global tendencies in the postmodern and post postmodern eras totally ignoring the African reality thereby appearing literarily continuing the Hegelian ‘nuctunalisation’ of Africa thereby creating the gap for a new ‘white man’s burden’ to savage Africa in the digital era. This has already been seen through cartoons and other science fictions such as Marvel’s Black Panther where the occident tries to tell the Africa technology story using western lenses – an attempt to prove that African science was similar to Western with a danger being that it lays ground for copy work to the disfavor of ingenuity in African kids who are to watch and be inspired by such films. It is against this backdrop that I argue in “Deconstructing Digital Orientalism Toward Theorizing Digi-Africanism” that such digital orientalism can be countered only through Digi-Africanism. In this I opine the fact that digital orientalism is thriving at a time when the crumbs of technology are trickling in from the West and acting as the opium of the people while digital orientalism/colonialism is at its peak. Such orientalism is demonstrated already by western theorists who embarked on ignoring Africa as Hegel did before the advent of traditional colonialism. One of such a theorist is Jean Francois Lyotard who in his 1979 *Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, raises pertinent and universal questions but draws sweeping conclusions while ignoring the African reality. It is the focus of this segment to show that ignoring the African reality at this rate creates room for new denigrations on the basis of doing a service for Africa or a call for a second white man’s burden. Lyotard’s focus is on defining knowledge in a postindustrial society equipped with new media, instantaneous communication technology and global access to information via the internet. He also goes further to question to know who controls knowledge in the computer society and also the extent to which scientific knowledge can be legitimized.

These preoccupations are indeed apt and topical and Lyotard’s response, of course, is that the field of knowledge now is the computer which forms the knowledge economy. One is alarmed that a ground breaking book as this does not mention Africa, talk less of taking into consideration the cultural

values of the indigenous cultures found in the micro states of Africa (tribe and kingdoms) which are all parcel of the global society yet, not considered in Lyotard's sphere of knowledge. He equally does not consider the fact that the basic computer is still scarce (by ratio of the general population and the segment that actually possess and use computers) in Africa and therefore cannot aptly describe Africa's field of knowledge. As if this is not enough, Frederick Jameson Postmodernism , or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism follows suit on the negation of Africa's reality. He begins by intimating that postmodernism equals to late capitalism thereby raising the question on periodization in the modernism, postmodernism and post postmodernism trajectory. To lay down this quest to rest he adopts the division of capitalism into three stages by the German Economist Ernest Mandel in which he divides capitalism into the industrial age (steam engine age), electricity age and late capitalism which sees the introduction of the computer. To Jameson, eventhough it is impossible to draw a clear cut demarcation between these periods, it is possible to do so by looking at the culture produced in those eras and thus categorizing them according to the features of the modern, postmodern and post postmodern cultures. Whereas this idea sounds convincing, it raises further questions about the situation of Africa in this form of periodization. When one takes the examples of Europe's Android age that was in the 1950s compared to that of Cameroon which President Paul Biya only decalared in 2016 with his famous reference to the youths as "le generation androide – the android generation" one is marveled therefore if indeed Africa fits into this modernism trajectory.

Where does one situate Africa in all this, taking into account the fact that most African states are not yet modern and have therefore been caught unaware in the mesh of changing theories and universalising publications such as Lyotard's and Jameson's? At what stage of capitalism or modernism is Africa, given the fact that trickles of all the stages are still being imported into Africa and in most cases in fairly used forms? The answer can only be that Africa needs to raise counter theories aimed at conceptualizing the process of deconstructing especially digital orientalism since there is evidence of such both in technological innovations and theory. Allan Kirby in *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantles the postmodern* begs the question exposed above and pushes one to keep questing towards a concept that militates African reality in the digital sphere. This is because we are still grappling with modernism and postmodernism yet Kirby is already dismantling the latter to establish a new wave which of course still continues the negation of Africa.

The need for an African conceptualization of its reality in the digital sphere is therefore incumbent. To begin reasoning in this vein one is pushed to ponder on the previous African philosophies or concepts and to judge the extent to which they can present the African reality in the digital sphere. If one were to take say Negritude, it will not be able to squarely present an advantage for Africa since as a matter of time it has become obsolete .If one were to go by Nyerere's Ujama'a, in which Nyerere advocates for the creation of an African village, such an idea will still be incapable of presenting the African image in the digital sphere because it warrants Africa to start from square one and to be in a form of tech isolationism.

Despite this, Nkwame Nkrumah's Concienscism in which Nkrumah advocates for the adoption of what is western but giving it an African conscience appears to be apt to form the philosophical base from which one can attempt the idea of digi-Africanism. To proceed as such, it is important to assert that Kwesi Weridu's *Conceptual Decolonization of African Philosophy* points out three spheres of colonization; the first being religion, then education and democracy. Against this backdrop, this study adds the fourth sphere of colonialism which is the digital and thus, consequence of which we suggest digi-Africanism. Digi-Africanism asserts digital orientalism/colonialism but avoids delving into blame games in which a cross section of African critics thinks that all of Africa's problems originate from the West. Rather it celebrates the possibility for Africans to participate in digital content creation but advocates a critical African consciousness in the process. It is the reasoning that Africa needs a digital awareness in the digital era; an awareness that calls for documentation and propagation of the original African cultural elements which have still yet not found their way into the digital sphere. It is the reasoning that counters derogatory African images in the digital sphere and calls for valorization both by Africans and or otherwise. It does not have an absolutely Afrocentric outlook in which one would be advocating for a techsphere which is exclusively African as one may find in such advocacy in China, Russia and North Korea. No, Digi-Africanism asserts the benefits of globalization, while calling on the conceptualization of the African identity and reality in the digital sphere through appropriation of available digital tools.



Digi-Africanism therefore suggests the appropriation of the internet web and computer programs towards ceasing the space to tell the African story thereby denying the possibility of a second white man's burden after the negation seen in digital theory. The concept therefore advocates for the creation of digital repositories for African indigenous cultures for the purpose of documentation and unbiased or unapologetic publication or write ups so as to cease and tell our own digital story the way we want it and not the status quo. It equally advocates confidence in what is African and encourages governments to sponsor youths in the tech sphere so as not to make them mere receptors of Western content but also digital content creators and programmers. Politicians are equally called upon to make this part of their political manifestos.

Digi-Africanism further implores Africans to look back into our history to effect conscious documentation of certain essential cultural tendencies which have been neglected by our written history and literature due to the haste in producing reactionary material to counter cultural shock during colonialism till date. Such an endeavor will dig deep into and document our classical culture and history, an opportunity that can give inspiration especially for movies like Computer Generated Images (CGI) myth which is very pronounced in certain cultures in the digital age. We assert here that such documentation should be digital and thus facilitate propagation, a tendency that guarantees proper representation of the image of Africa online. Further, digi-africanism calls on scholars to engage in purposeful literary and critical endeavors so as to present a more dignified image of Africa void of blame game- this is such that apart from being a continent of hunger and starvation, we present a continent of arable land that favors the growth of a variety of agricultural products, also than a continent of poverty, we present a continent full of potentials. Furthermore, considering the usurpation of the African youth in most digital fora, a usurpation seen in the mundane content they create on tiktok, Facebook and Instagram for example, we suggest the coinage and promulgation of an African digital ethics that seeks to create awareness about the dignity of the African youth in digital fora. Furthermore, in the current data economy, Africa's data regulatory boards are indispensable as they are not only going to control what content we produce towards destabilizing the current tech hegemony but also guarantee that we reap economic benefits. Lastly, the concept looks forward to projects that assists in the creation of online repositories of what is written but does not yet have effective presence online.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This paper examined the various definitions of modernisms while tracing the trajectory right up to digimodernism in view of providing a background for digital colonialism. It equally demonstrated through Conrad's Heart of Darkness the experiences of Africans and especially the image of Africa during the period of exploration and colonialism of Africa towards complementing the contemporary image of blacks in not only contemporary media with the case of America and also the dynamics by which digital colonialism continues to enable the perpetration of African denigration. Progressively the paper showed how western theorists notably Frederick Jameson, Jean Francois Lyotard and Alan Kirby conceptualize digital reality without taking Africa into consideration, that negation giving leeway for Digi-Africanism as a way forward. Digi-Africanism finds its relevance on the fact that from the above mentioned theorists, one cannot locate Africa in their discourse of the various phases of modernism – a lacuna that Digi-Africanism attempts to fill. After underscoring perspectives on Digi-Africanism, the paper concludes with the contention of further research in expanding the various assumptions and tentacles of the concept.

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