

Post-colonialism and Identity in Africa: The Lingering Impact of Colonial Languages

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The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities 2025
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The processes of social and cultural integration resulting from colonialism has significantly reshaped Africa's identity since it involved the forced adoption of foreign languages, values, and institutions. Contemporary African societies still confront the consequences of these interruptions which perpetuate conflict over identity formation. This research seeks to analyse the impact of the legacies of colonization on African identities, and how the processes of identity formation pattern stability and change within the postcolonial context. Stuart Hall's cultural identity theory and Paul Gilroy's concept of the Black Atlantic offer the lenses for analysing identity as a fluid and dynamic construct shaped by diverse historical, cultural, and transnational factors. This study is a literature review, and it analyses six key scholarly works on identity formation in postcolonial Africa. Thematic analysis has been applied to organise the findings into three main themes which are: The enduring impact of colonialism on the construction of African identity, Cultural and identity reclamation activism, and the role of migration and globalization on contemporary African identities. The findings indicate that colonialism fundamentally constructed the African identity by marginalising indigenous cultures and replacing them with Eurocentric cultures. Nevertheless, African cultures have also resisted these identities through cultural amnesia, memory, and decentralised defiance.

Keywords: African identity, colonial legacies, cultural resistance, decolonization, postcolonial identity

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Introduction

Young (2018) depicts colonialism as a life altering experience for Africa, exploring its effects on identity formation on both individual and socio-cultural levels. This suggests, as Bhambra (2021) points out, colonialism was not merely an economic and political domination; it further accelerated the socio-evolutionary changes towards the European model on Africa. The consequences of this, as Wariboko (2018) notes, is the destruction of cultures alongside the indigenous languages and social systems which, over time, weakens the identity of the people termed African.

Olivier (2019) highlights that Africa faces the peculiar challenge of re-establishing their identities while contending with decolonization's haunting colonial relics. This conflict is framed by the reality of trying to reclaim culture, grappling with traditions, and the- modern world-spirit of global capitalism that did not exist before colonization (Nwosu, 2023). Hence, identity construction in postcolonial Africa, which is an ongoing process, is an aspect of hybridization because the remnants of colonial rule are blended with local culture (Olivier, 2019).

In this case, the objective of the study is to explore the colonial influences and the responses to those influences to analyse the formation of identity in postcolonial African societies. Hence, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How have colonial legacies shaped the individual and collective identities of African peoples?
2. In what ways have African societies resisted and redefined these imposed identities in the postcolonial era?
3. How do the processes of identity formation in postcolonial Africa reflect both continuity and transformation in the context of colonial influence?

Theoretical Framework

This paper looks at the concepts of Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy and uses them as the theoretical framework of this research. Hall views cultural identity as a theory and maintains that identity is fluid and it is constructed through sometimes crisis-ridden, historical, and social processes (Harman, 2016). This asserts an understanding on the evolving identities of postcolonial Africans. Hall's position is that identities are constructed, not as an essence which is given, but as an outcome of representation. These identities are, moreover, always in the process of being reconstructed relative to the setting of the person or society (Hall, 2020). This approach demonstrates what the legacies of colonialism have profoundly impacted, combined with the quest for self-identity in Africa is like. Gilroy rejected the idea of identity as a static entity which is anchored to specific territory and instead, promotes fluidity of attachment (Milazzo, 2022). It particularly focuses on the transnational aspects and black identity formed with the life story of slavery, colonialism, and migration (Gilroy, 2020).

Colonial Legacies and Identity Formation

One important way in which colonialism influenced identity was through the creation of what is described as new social categories and hierarchies (LaFleur, 2020). Hence, colonial powers divided the African societies along several lines including racial, ethnic, and religious lines which contributed towards the reinforcement of the divisions which had not previously existed prior to their arrival (Bates & Huerta, 2024). It was these divisions that were

institutionalised into the fabric of the African society through the introduction and imposition of colonial policies and practices which includes the system of indirect rule, which relied strictly on the local elites as they were the ones to govern the people on behalf of the colonial power (Cappelen & Sorens, 2018).

Another point to note is that of the politicisation of ethnic identity because the legacy of the colonial divisions shape's identity even in postcolonial Africa as the several ethnic and racial categories which were introduced by the colonial powers have become key to the way people perceive themselves as well as others thereby leading to conflict (Nicasius, 2017). One example is the Rwandan genocide of 1994 which can be traced to the colonial era in which the Belgian authorities engaged in the classification of Rwandans into the distinct ethnic groups which were the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa, and further institutionalised the divisions through the use of identity cards in particular (André, 2018). The impact of the colonial categories on Rwandan identity and the conflict that ensued is a typical reminder of how long-lasting the effects of colonialism has been on identity formation among Africa societies (Goehring, 2017).

Also, the introduction of this western education played a key role in creating tensions between the educated elite and the local population, as the educated elite found themselves caught between two worlds which were the one defined by their African heritage on the one hand, and on the other, the one by their European education (Masinire, 2020). This led to a dual identity which became the source of both opportunity and alienation (Prevost, 2017). However, it was an alienation because they were often seen as strangers in their own societies. These tensions were often captured in literature especially in the writings of African intellectuals which includes Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o who often wrote about the challenges of defining an African identity especially as it has been influenced within the context of a colonial legacy (Staphorst, 2024).

The Postcolonial Condition in Africa and Resistance in Shaping Postcolonial African Identities

The postcolonial condition in Africa is explained by Bereketeab (2020) as being characterised by a paradoxical relationship with the colonial past. This is because while the end of colonial rule was often celebrated as a moment of liberation in the history of Africa, the point that is worthy of note is that the legacies of colonialism have continued to shape African societies in several impactful ways. One of the most significant impacts of colonialism is explained by Kamwangamalu (2016) as the imposition of European languages and education systems which has directly impacted on the African identity. This is evident in many African countries where the colonial language such as English, French, or Portuguese, is still the official language of the country as well as the government, education, and business (Wolff, 2017). What this had led to is a situation in which Africans in their infancy, are educated and socialised in a language which is not their mother tongue and this creates a complex dynamic in which the colonial language is not only seen as a tool of empowerment (Kwaku & Slemmon, 2017).

Colonialism was also the reason for the restructuring of African societies through the imposition of new social and political hierarchies based on race, ethnicity, and class. These hierarchies, as explained by Young (2018), were designed to serve the interests of the colonial powers but they also persisted into the postcolonial era thereby influencing everything in the society leading to ethnic conflicts and a confused sense of national identity.

This is because of the arbitrary borders drawn by colonial powers which lead to the grouping of disparate ethnic groups together while also splitting others thereby further complicating the entire process of nation-building in Africa (Foucher, 2019). As a result of this, many African nations have become characterised by a mosaic of identities in which the national identity is often in contrast as well as in tension with ethnic and also regional loyalties (Benyera, 2019).

One point to note as well is that despite these challenges with identity during the colonial as well as in the postcolonial period, there are also efforts in the postcolonial period to reclaim and redefine African identities (Olivier, 2019). An instance of this is during the struggle for independence in many African countries which was accompanied by a cultural renaissance in which artists, writers, and intellectuals often expressed their views as well as their identities through literature, music, and other forms of cultural expression (Young, 2018). It is also this period that witnessed the emergence of a new generation of African leaders and thinkers such as Kwame Nkrumah, Nelson Mandela, Jomo Kenyatta, and Patrice Lumumba who had sought to create a distinctly African modernity which is directly rooted in the indigenous traditions on the one hand, while on the other, ensuring that the modernity is engaged with global ideas and practices (Campbell, 2018).

However, resistance to colonialism has played an important role in shaping postcolonial African identities especially from the earliest days of colonial rule when the African societies engaged in various forms of resistance, ranging from armed struggles to cultural and intellectual movements (Said, 2022). These acts were of paramount significance because they were not only aimed at overthrowing colonial regimes but also intended to reclaim as well as redefining African identities in the face of colonial oppression (Olivier, 2019). One form of this resistance in the African context was the Pan-Africanist movement as explained by Aniche (2020). This movement was aimed at uniting people of African descent across the globe so that they can be in a shared struggle against all forms of colonialism as well as racism on the continent (Jaji, 2020). Pan-Africanism is the ideology which played a key role in the decolonisation process as it inspired many African leaders and activists to fight for independence with the goal of promoting and enshrining African unity (Aniche, 2020).

Identity Reclamation in Postcolonial Africa

Reviving the indigenous cultures in Africa was a significant as the Negritude movement which emerged in the 1930s and 1940s, and this reveals how cultural revival was used as a form of resistance (Ukande & Igba-Luga, 2019). This was led by figures such as Léopold Sédar Senghor who ensured that Negritude was seen as a literary and ideological movement aimed at celebrating African culture and identity (Senghor, 2022). The emphasis of the movement was on the beauty, richness, and uniqueness of African cultures and this was intended to counter the colonial narrative which had depicted African societies as being inferior and primitive (Anozie, 2016). In this light, Negritude played a key role in ensuring the development of postcolonial African identity through the provision of a framework for resisting colonial cultural imperialism and assertion of a distinctly African identity (Senghor, 2022).

The reassertion of African languages was necessary because during the colonial period, European languages such as English, French and Portuguese, was made the dominant means of communication in many African countries, and this was at the expense of indigenous languages (Ukande & Igba-Luga, 2019). However, during the postcolonial era, there has been an effort to revive as well as to promote African languages as a means of reclaiming cultural

identity (Kwaku & Slemon, 2017). This is evident in the work of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who often advocated for the use of African languages in literature and education and argues that since language is a key component of identity, there must be the use of African languages as this would lead to the decolonisation of the mind (Ngũgĩ, 2020).

One point to note is that the resistance to colonial rule in Africa was not limited to the cultural sphere alone as it also included political movements which was aimed to overthrow the colonial regimes and to establish the independent nation-states (Miyoshi, 2022). It is these political movements that played an important role in the redefinition of identity in postcolonial Africa, as they provided a platform which was useful in articulating new visions of African identity and sovereignty (Young, 2018). These movements were based on the idea of pan-Africanism, which had an emphasis on the unity and solidarity of all people of African descent (Miyoshi, 2022). Therefore, Pan-Africanism was both a political as well as a cultural movement as it aimed to resist the divisions created by colonialism and promote a sense of shared identity among Africans (Aniche, 2020). Evidence of this is in the writings of Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, and Frantz Fanon who often reflected on the centrality of identity in the anti-colonial struggle as they argued that the liberation of Africa needs not only the removal of colonial rule but also the creation of a new African identity which would break Africans free from the legacy of colonialism (Williams, 2019).

Also, when the African countries gained independence, the leaders tried to create a sense of national identity that would unite the diverse ethnic and cultural groups within their borders (Maseland, 2017). What happened in this case was the adoption of symbols, which includes the national flags, anthems, and also the implementation of public holidays that were intended to promote a sense of national unity such as Independence Day, Founder's Day, among others (Manu-Osafo et al., 2021). However, the creation of national identity was not always a straightforward process because it often involved tensions between different ethnic and regional groups as not all groups wanted to see themselves as belonging to a Nation (Marmon, 2022). As a result, the challenges of nation-building in postcolonial Africa highlight the complex relationship between resistance, identity, and the state.

Methodology

The study employs a comprehensive literature review approach to systematically identify, select, and critically analyse existing scholarly works relevant to the topic of postcolonialism and identity in Africa. The literature review process involved a structured search strategy to identify relevant studies. Academic databases, including JSTOR, EBSCOhost, ProQuest, and Scopus, were used to locate peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and book chapters that addressed key themes related to colonialism, postcolonialism, identity formation, and resistance in Africa. The search results were refined, and a total of six studies were initially selected based on their thematic relevance and scholarly rigor. These identified studies were further screened using a defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, ensuring that only the most relevant and methodologically sound studies were retained for analysis. The inclusion and exclusion criteria, as well as the selection process, are presented in the table below.

Table 1
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Geographic Focus	Studies focusing on postcolonial African societies	Studies outside of the African continent
Thematic Focus	Studies that discuss the influence of colonial legacies and resistance on identity construction in postcolonial Africa	Studies that do not address the relationship between colonial legacies, resistance, and identity formation in postcolonial Africa
Temporal Focus	Studies that examine the postcolonial era (after the 1960s)	Studies focused solely on the colonial era or pre-colonial African societies
Research Methodology	Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods studies	Purely theoretical or conceptual studies without empirical data
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and scholarly monographs	News articles, and unpublished manuscripts
Language	Studies published in English	Studies published in languages other than English

To analyse the selected studies, this research applies Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis framework, a widely used qualitative approach for identifying patterns and themes in qualitative data. Reflexive thematic analysis was chosen for this study because it allows for a flexible and in-depth interpretation of how identity is constructed, contested, and transformed in postcolonial Africa. The analysis followed six key stages. First, the selected studies were thoroughly read and summarised to extract key arguments, methodologies, and findings. Second, initial coding was conducted to identify recurring ideas related to postcolonial identity, third, themes were developed by grouping related codes into overarching categories, leading to the identification of three major themes: (1) colonial legacies and identity formation, (2) cultural resistance and reclamation, and (3) migration and transnational identity. Fourth, the identified themes were reviewed and refined to ensure coherence and consistency with the research objectives. Fifth, themes were clearly defined, named, and linked to theoretical frameworks, particularly Stuart Hall's cultural identity theory and Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic concept.

PRISMA Framework

The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework was used for this study to ensure a comprehensive and transparent review of the literature concerning postcolonialism and identity in Africa to minimise bias, ensure thorough reporting of the selection process, and clearly outline the methodologies employed in the review. The PRISMA framework is important because it provides a structured approach to synthesising research findings, thereby enhancing the reliability and reproducibility of the review process (Pageet al., 2021).

In this review, six articles were selected based on their relevance, rigour, and contribution to the discourse on postcolonialism and identity in Africa. The selection process involved a comprehensive search across multiple databases, followed by a screening of titles, abstracts, and, where applicable, full texts to ensure that each article met predefined inclusion criteria. This approach not only illuminates the multifaceted nature of identity in postcolonial Africa but also highlights the ongoing implications of colonial histories in shaping societal dynamics today.

Figure 1
PRISMA Framework

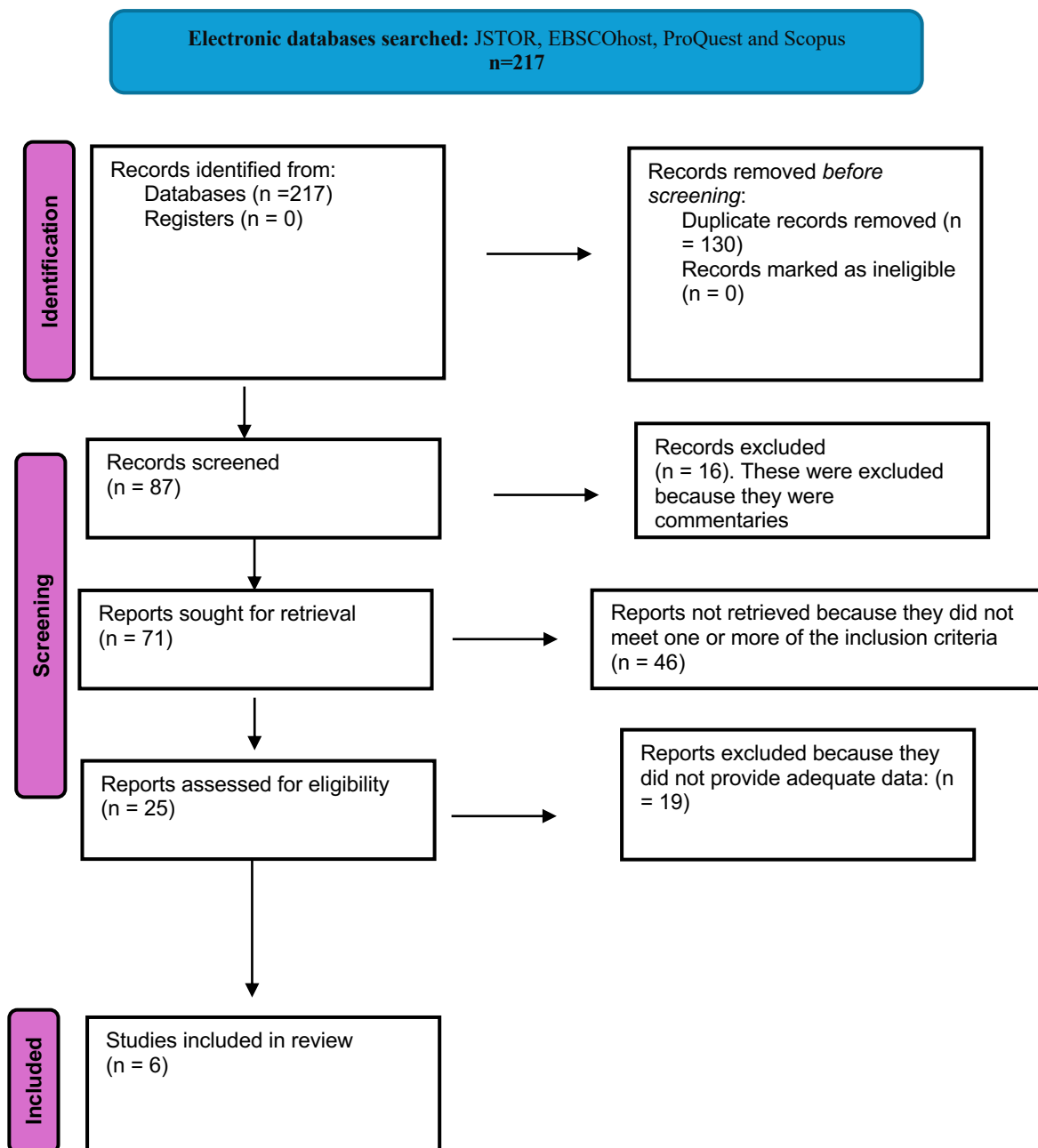


Table 2
Characteristics of Studies Table

Author & Year	Country	Research Design	Objective	Key Findings	Limitations
Dlamini et al. (2020)	South Africa	Systematic Literature Review (PRISMA framework)	To review place identity studies in post-apartheid South Africa	Identified four key themes: identity and belonging, social identity and discourse, cultural symbolism, and social inclusion/exclusion. Mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion shape identity.	Limited to studies published in English, may not capture all perspectives.
Eegunlusi (2017)	Nigeria	Conceptual and Historical Analysis	To examine colonial alienation and its impact on African identity and morality	Colonial alienation has eroded African moral values, contributing to crisis and instability. Calls for a return to indigenous moral frameworks.	Focuses mainly on Yoruba culture; lacks empirical field data.
Lundgren & Scheckle (2018)	South Africa	Participatory Research (Photovoice method)	To explore identity formation among South African township youth	Identity shaped by democracy, family, present context, and culture. Young people actively construct their identities in a post-apartheid framework.	Small sample size (13 participants), limited to one township.
Montle (2024)	Africa (Literary Analysis)	Qualitative, Literary Analysis	To analyse the identity crisis in postcolonial Africa using <i>Things Fall Apart</i>	Identity crisis persists due to lingering colonial influences. Western cultural dominance continues to marginalize African identities.	Based on a single literary text, may not fully generalise across different African contexts.
Njwambe et al. (2019)	South Africa	Multi-sited Ethnographic Study	To examine rural-urban migration and identity among Xhosa-speaking migrants	Migrants maintain strong ties to their rural homes, shaped by cultural, emotional, and spiritual connections. The rural home remains central to identity.	Focuses on one ethnic group, limiting broader applicability.
Wolff (2017)	Various African Countries	Theoretical and Linguistic Analysis	To explore language ideologies and politics in postcolonial Africa	Colonial languages still dominate, affecting identity formation and governance. Language policies play a crucial role in shaping national identity.	Lacks empirical case studies to illustrate broader theoretical claims.

Findings

Based on the six studies, three major themes emerge in relation to postcolonialism and identity in Africa. These are as follows:

1. Colonial Legacies and Their Impact on Identity Formation
2. Resistance, Cultural Resurgence, and the Reclamation of Identity
3. Migration, Place, and the Fluidity of African Identity

Each theme captures a crucial dimension of identity construction in postcolonial African societies and highlights how individuals and communities cope with their identities in response to historical and contemporary challenges. The themes are discussed further below:

Colonial Legacies and Their Impact on Identity Formation

One of the most persistent themes in the studies is the impact of colonialism on African identities, particularly through cultural alienation, language policies, and systemic marginalisation. This is extracted from the following studies:

Eegunlusi (2017) examines how colonialism disrupted African identity by imposing Western cultural and moral frameworks, leading to what the author terms as mental alienation. The study argues that the erosion of indigenous values has contributed to social instability, corruption, and moral decay in contemporary African societies. The study also calls for a revival of African ethical and philosophical traditions as a means of restoring a more authentic identity. Montle (2024) takes a literary perspective, analysing *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe to explore the root causes of identity crises in postcolonial Africa. The study argues that despite the end of colonial rule, Western cultural dominance continues to marginalise African traditions and create conflicts of identity. The findings suggest that the legacy of colonial encounters remains deeply embedded in African societies, making the negotiation of identity an ongoing struggle. Wolff (2017) focuses on the role of language in identity formation, analysing how colonial languages continue to dominate official and educational spheres in Africa. The study argues that the preference for colonial languages over indigenous ones reinforces cultural alienation and hierarchical power structures, making it difficult for Africans to fully reclaim their historical identities.

Resistance, Cultural Resurgence, and the Reclamation of Identity

While colonialism left a lasting impact, many African societies have actively resisted and redefined imposed identities through cultural resurgence and collective resistance. Dlamini et al. (2020) examine post-apartheid South Africa and how place identity has been reconstructed in the context of racial segregation and historical exclusion. Their review of literature reveals that social identity in South Africa is shaped by themes such as belonging, discursive practices, cultural symbolism, and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. The study also finds that despite efforts toward desegregation, identity in South Africa is still largely defined in relation to 'the other,' reflecting both continuity and transformation in identity formation. Lundgren & Scheckle (2018) discusses how South African youth in townships construct their identities in a post-apartheid context. Using a participatory research approach, the study finds that young people actively negotiate their identities based on democracy, family, and cultural heritage. The study suggests that while apartheid-era divisions still influence identity formation, younger generations are engaging in new forms of self-definition that incorporate both historical experiences and contemporary realities.

Migration, Place, and the Fluidity of African Identity

Another significant dimension of identity formation in postcolonial Africa is migration and transnationalism, which complicate notions of fixed identities by emphasising their fluid and dynamic nature. Njwambe et al. (2019) investigates rural-urban migration among Xhosa-speaking South Africans and its impact on identity. The study finds that despite long-term residence in urban areas, many migrants continue to define their identity in relation to their rural homes (ekhayeni). Also, the emotional and spiritual connections to the rural landscape remain central to their sense of belonging. The findings support Paul Gilroy's concept of the *Black Atlantic*, highlighting how African identities are shaped by mobility and the interaction of multiple cultural spaces. Lundgren & Scheckle (2018) also touch on migration indirectly by discussing how youth identities are influenced by global and local cultural interactions. The study reveals that young South Africans navigate multiple cultural influences, both local and global, when forming their identities, demonstrating the fluid nature of identity in a globalised world.

Discussion

The studies by Eegunlusi (2017), Montle (2024), and Wolff (2017) highlight the far-reaching impact of colonialism on African self-perception, cultural expression, and language use. These findings align with broader postcolonial literature that argues colonial rule not only imposed political and economic structures but also reconfigured the very ways in which Africans understood themselves. An example of the dominant ways in which colonialism influenced African identities is through cultural alienation, a theme explored in Eegunlusi (2017). The study argues that the introduction of Western moral, social, and political ideals displaced traditional African value systems, leading to identity fragmentation. This echoes Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (1986) concept of *decolonising the mind* (Brinkman, 2024), which suggests that colonialism sought to erase indigenous ways of thinking and replace them with European epistemologies. Similarly, Frantz Fanon highlights how colonial subjects internalised the inferiority imposed upon them, leading to a fractured sense of self (Fuss, 2023).

The alienation described by Eegunlusi is also reflected in Montle's (2024) literary analysis of *Things Fall Apart*, where Achebe illustrates how colonial encounter disrupts indigenous identity, replacing it with an imposed Western framework. Also, regarding language which is a powerful tool in identity construction, Wolff (2017) emphasises the enduring dominance of colonial languages in postcolonial Africa. The study notes that despite gaining independence, many African countries continue to use English, French, or Portuguese as their official languages, reinforcing colonial hierarchies. This is in line with Reed (2019) who argues that linguistic imperialism has prevented African societies from fully reclaiming their indigenous identities. Similarly, Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas (2017) suggests that language policies in Africa reflect an ongoing colonial mentality, where African languages are marginalised in formal education and governance. Additionally, Hall's cultural identity theory helps explain this phenomenon by emphasising that identities are constructed through representation (Harman, 2016). As a result, if African identities are continuously represented through colonial languages, then the process of self-definition is inevitably tied to colonial frameworks. This supports the argument that African identity formation remains an ongoing struggle against imposed narratives as maintained by Wolff (2017).

Dlamini et al. (2020) discusses the place identity in post-apartheid South Africa and reveal that identity is continuously negotiated through inclusion and exclusion mechanisms. The study finds that despite efforts to dismantle apartheid-era divisions, spatial segregation continues to shape social identities. This finding aligns with Lundgren & Scheckle (2018)'s argument that place is not just a physical location but a site of meaning-making where identities are forged and contested. Similarly, Eyerman (2019) argues that collective memory plays a crucial role in identity formation. This is because collective memory allows individuals and communities to connect their past experiences to their present identities, thereby ensuring a sense of belonging and continuity. Also, in postcolonial Africa, cultural symbols, rituals, and narratives serve as mechanisms of resistance against colonial legacies as explained by Ohaja & Anyim (2021). This is evident in how South African communities attempt to reclaim historical spaces and redefine their meanings in a post-apartheid context.

Further, Lundgren & Scheckle (2018) focus on South African youth and highlight how young people actively construct their identities by blending historical experiences with contemporary realities. This finding supports Oyedemi (2021) which suggests that postcolonial identities are not simply about returning to a pre-colonial past but rather about creating new, dynamic identities that merge multiple influences. The study also reinforces Hall's argument that identity is fluid and continuously reshaped by social conditions (Harman, 2016). What this means is that young people in South Africa are engaging in a dynamic process of identity formation, where they draw upon both their cultural heritage and modern influences to create a sense of self that is relevant to their current circumstances (Lundgren and Scheckle. 2018). This illustrates that African identity is not static but an evolving negotiation between history and modernity, reflecting the mix between tradition and change in a postcolonial context (Botsis & Bradbury, 2018). This demonstrates that African identity is not static but an evolving negotiation between history and modernity.

Njwambe et al. (2019) finds that rural-urban migrants in South Africa maintain strong emotional and cultural ties to their ancestral homes, illustrating the enduring importance of place in identity formation. However, despite living in urban areas, many migrants continue to define their sense of self through their rural origins (Brankamp & Daley, 2020). This is because these migrants navigate multiple identities that are informed by their rural roots while adapting to the urban environment, highlighting the fluidity of identity in the context of migration. This reflects Gilroy's concept of the *Black Atlantic*, which argues that Black identity is not fixed to a single place but is shaped by mobility and transnational experiences (Milazzo, 2022). This is important because it highlights the idea that identity in postcolonial Africa is shaped by diverse experiences, allowing individuals to draw strength and meaning from their origins while also engaging with new urban realities, ultimately contributing to a richer, more complex understanding of African identity in a globalised world (Njwambe et al., 2019).

Further, the findings of Lundgren and Scheckle (2018) further highlight how globalisation and migration shape African identities. The study notes that young people in South African townships engage with global cultural influences while maintaining local traditions, demonstrating that identity is constantly being reshaped by new experiences. This aligns with the study by Norton and De-Costa (2017), which emphasises that postcolonial identities are formed through a synthesis of local and global influences, allowing for a more balanced understanding of self (Eze, 2017). As a result, by living through the complexities of their environments, these young individuals actively participate in the creation of hybrid identities that reflect both their cultural heritage and the realities of a globalised world (Lundgren and

Scheckle, 2018). This dynamic interplay illustrates that rather than being static or solely rooted in the past, African identities are continually evolving, shaped by the interactions between tradition and modernity (Milazzo, 2022).

Limitations of the Study

Although this study provides valuable insight, one limitation is the scope of the selected studies as the research analysed six key articles, which may not fully capture the diverse experiences of identity formation across different African regions and cultural groups. This is because Africa is a vast and heterogeneous continent with multiple ethnic, linguistic, and historical contexts. Another limitation is the reliance on postcolonial theories, specifically Hall's cultural identity theory and Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* concept. While these frameworks provide a strong foundation for understanding identity formation, additional perspectives could offer further depth to the analysis and a more interdisciplinary approach incorporating sociological, linguistic, and psychological perspectives could yield a more balanced understanding of identity construction in postcolonial Africa.

A further limitation is the lack of empirical fieldwork as this study relied on secondary sources rather than first-hand qualitative or quantitative research. It would have been more useful to incorporate fieldwork, interviews, and ethnographic research to provide direct perspectives on postcolonial identity formation. This is because engaging with individuals and communities directly affected by colonial legacies and migration could offer richer, more grounded data into the lived experiences of African identity. Lastly, the study is limited by language bias as many academic sources on African identity are published in English or French, potentially excluding valuable perspectives written in indigenous African languages. Since language is a crucial aspect of identity, the reliance on Western academic literature may have inadvertently reinforced some of the epistemic biases that this study seeks to critique.

Recommendations

Given these limitations, several recommendations for future research emerge. First, future studies should adopt a comparative approach by analysing identity formation across different African regions. As a result, a cross-national study comparing identity struggles in former British, French, and Portuguese colonies could provide more useful knowledge into how different colonial experiences have shaped identity differently across the continent. Also, additional research could focus on the role of digital globalisation in shaping contemporary African identities. This is because social media, diaspora networks, and global popular culture play a significant role in identity formation today. As a result, investigating how African youth deal with these digital spaces and construct their identities in an increasingly interconnected world would be a valuable contribution to postcolonial studies.

Conclusion

This study has been able to achieve a comprehensive understanding of how colonial legacies continue to shape African identities while also highlighting the active role of African societies in resisting and redefining these imposed identities. By engaging with key theoretical perspectives and empirical studies, the research has demonstrated that identity in postcolonial Africa is neither static nor singular but is constantly negotiated through historical legacies, cultural expressions, and transnational experiences. The study has also contributed to the discourse on postcolonial identity by showing that the process of decolonisation

extends beyond political sovereignty to include cultural, linguistic, and social dimensions. As a result, through the integration of Stuart Hall's and Paul Gilroy's theoretical frameworks, this study has provided a more balanced perspective on how African identity is shaped by both historical oppression and contemporary agency. Ultimately, the research highlights the need for continued efforts in education, policy-making, and cultural preservation to ensure that African identities are authentically represented and celebrated in the postcolonial era.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

I declare that Grammarly, an AI-assisted writing software, was used in proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. I further declare that, apart from Grammarly, no other AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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