

Disruption of Modern Subjectivity as a History of Postmodern Objectivity

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Abstract – Postmodernism brings immediately to mind the ideas of fracturing, fragmentation, indeterminacy and plurality. For Hassan it is the ideas of new aesthetic formation. Lyotard and Harvey defined it as a conditioning. For Connor it is the part of culture. It is a set of artistic movement employing a parodical mode of self-conscious representation for Hutchinson. Postmodernism is an illusion for Terry Eagleton. Whatever the definition is the subjectivity of postmodernity rooted in several ideas that is not regarded as typical postmodern. Prior to Descartes human subject tended to be conceived as the product of external forces and plans (Devine). But these ideas are replaced by his concept of subjectivity. Immanuel Kant also describe a shared structure of subjective consciousness which are condition of possibility of objective knowledge. Freud and Lacan also tried to describe unconsciousness is the supplement of conscious mind. According to Fanon self-centered and self-certain universal subjectivity is impossible. It is generated through the interaction with others. Helene Cixous explained feministic subjectivity through the essay *Stories Out and Out*.

Objectives – The paper is an attempt to study history of ideas on subjectivity in postmodernism. This paper deals with some theories from its origin as these paved the way to its own postmodern shape.

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INTRODUCTION

If the term “humanism” is the product of modernism, the subject ‘I’ is a central category of modern thought. Many postmodernist thinkers have questioned the modern subjectivity fully or partially. Subjectivity has become a site of conflict between postmodern competing theories and practices. They questioned ethics, Politics and representations of the world especially since renaissance. According to Frederic Jameson, one of the key themes in postmodern discourse is the ‘death, of the subject itself that means postmodernist has rejected the concept of the individual, or ‘subject’ that has prevailed in western thought for the last few centuries. This is the aim of this paper that explores a central premise of modern philosophies of the subject: that at the heart of identity there is a ‘thinking I’ that experiences, conceptualizes and interact with the world. It will then go on to investigate some of the ways in which this ‘I’ has been questioned.

According to Frederic Jameson, since Descartes we witnessed subjectivity as a separate entity at first. Prior to Descartes human subject tended to be conceived as the product of external forces and plans usually a ‘divine’. But through the book *Meditation on the First Philosophy* he declared his decentering notion as he applied himself seriously and freely to the general distinction of the public. He

proved it is an internal element of human desire that define the subject, rather than any external ideals and he problematized the concept ‘I think there for I am’. Almost 150 years latter Immanuel Kant returned to the ideas of Descartes and provide a new subjectivity that was to describe a shared structure of our subjective consciousness which are the “condition of possibility”. Kantian task was objectification of knowledge. In other words, the problem, which he explored was, how we can be sure that, the type of experience and knowledge we have as individuals can be assumed to be same as others experience and thought, and therefore count as objective.

Kant undertake this task in three books that have become crucial resources for both modern and postmodern thinkers: *the Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) *the Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) and *the Critique of Judgement* (1790). The result of Kant’s three investigations was a de-substantiation of Descartes idea of subject, that means ‘I think’ and ‘I am’ is of experience. The result of this is that the modern subject ‘I think’ is unchanged but a slighter variation comes, that is the subject becomes much more a function of experience generated by the environment in which it exists than any natural or divine eternal essence. What this mean is that Kant’s philosophy disrupt Cartesian ideology of subject that ‘I am’ as a self identity. Instead from Kant onwards identity

become an experience confluences with diverse notions of culture and this paved the way for distracted notion of postmodern universe. This shift from a unified world to disunified was not sudden. The gradual shift of self-subjective notion affected differently on major discourses.

Arguably, the philosophical champion of Postmodernism, Jean Francois Leotard, in his book the *Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* dated the advent of postmodern age as the end of 1950s. But before the publication of this book, disruption of subjectivity or an incredulity towards metanarrative was their in the discourse of many other anti-foundational critics like Sigmund Freud, David Lacan, Helene Cixous and Franz Fanon. It is very important to notice that these ideologists were the representatives of the major discourses of later parts of eighteenth century. On other words, they were the forerunners of postmodern concepts of ideologies like psychic, anti colonial and feminist respectively. The reason for choosing to examine the aspects of these thinkers is that they demonstrate the ways in which modern subject is rather less stable and less sufficient than human might assume.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1936) is the first thinker to introduce an anti-foundational analysis towards the notion of conscious subjectivity. He states the unconscious of human mind is the supplement to consciousness. This notion disrupts and decenters the foundationalist principle of 'I think' in the sense that it is supplement to unconscious reserve. Unconscious is not the store where we put repressed thoughts and desires, but it is the constitutive part of every action undertaken by the subject. Jacques Lacan, the French psychoanalyst and the most influential successors of Freud replaced Descartes assertion of identity. He replaced Cartesian formula in to a more complex one, that is 'I think where I am not, there for I am where I do not think...I am not wherever I am the plaything of my thought; I think of what I am where I do not think to think'(Lacan:166). He was constituting an inter subjective self, that means what he said 'desire is the desire of the 'Other'. On other words we exist in the realm of language and culture, that he identified as 'symbolic order'.that means if our desires are generated by our cultural context, the desired person or object we pursue is produced as a fantasy conjured by the symbols and images of our culture rather than any fixities and deffinities. For the postmodern univers also we don't have any access to the self. We have some 'slippages' and 'spillages' instead of fixities and definites. These concepts of the unconscious and desire produce a profound challenge to the self-knowing, self-legislating subject of modernity.

The ancestry of postcolonial criticism can be traced to Algerian critic Franz Fanon, who was deeply influenced by disruptive mode of psychoanalytic theory provide a means to think the ways in which colonial identity is constructed by the colonist. Fanon

identified that the colonized subject were ambivalent in this world. They had an alienated identity, no Self and the Other but the 'Otherness' of the self. That means the colonial subject, caught in the oppressors gaze, is split, distorted, breached and disturbed, unable to reconcile his or her self image with the image that are projected back by others. To dismantle the otherness of the self, he identified, they should work more blatantly and this resulted in an identification of objectivity instead of turning in to an ambivalent subjectivity. It was a continual rebuilding of the self as the narrator moves from person to person, text to text in search for identity and subject hood. In extremely influential essay from the book *Black Skin and White Mask*, which is entitled 'the fact of Blackness' demonstrates that, self-centered or universal subject is impossible. The subjectivity is generated through the interaction with others, and if the culture itself is disjointed as it is in the colonial and postcolonial world then identity too will necessarily be fragmentary.

In feminist literary theory, the French philosopher and critic, Helene Cixous, founded the first center of feminist studies under European university of Paris. Cixous is best known for the article "The Laugh of Medusa," which established her as one of the early thinkers in poststructuralist feminist theory. Some of the most notable influence on her writings have been Jacques Derrida, Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. A related critique of modern subjectivity is developed in her essay 'Stories Out and Out'. This essay examines the constraints of modern subjectivity by examining the ways in which sexual difference generates identity position. According to her, sexual difference is not simply physical difference or a sexual 'I think' in physical body. Rather, because of its cultural history and production, it is much more problematic than the idea of straightforward binary distinction between male and female would suggest. In this Eurocentric masculine culture, Cixous argues, women identity is bound up with subordination as feminine. The response to this was neither an acceptance nor rejection of masculinity, but accepting an independent identity which should propose a multiplicity in all identities. To this newly oriented logic or the present form subjectivity as a structure of continual renegotiation of patriarchal discourse, she accepts differences and dispersal. As a theory, this foregrounds the importance of language for the psychic understanding of the self. In doing so, it goes on to expound the women, who may be positioned as the 'other' in a masculine symbolic order, can re affirm their understanding of the world trough engaging with their own outside elements also. To this end she presents the idea of a feminine writing, *écriture féminine*. That is able to affirm these differences and multiplicity. This also resists the male oriented logic and presents subjectivity as structure of continuous re

negotiation that transforms the categories of patriarchy.

What Freud's, Lacan's, Fnon's and Cixous's critique of modern subject open up is the senselessness of placing 'I think' as an origin of identity. If Immanuel Kant's reworking of Descartes, deconstructs the 'I think', the challenges by these later three critic demonstrate that the unconscious desires, colonial aspects and sexuality utilizes identity as tenuous and fragmentary structure that is inherited from social and cultural locus. Hence this multiplicity of voices is capable to destruct 'the bourgeois monad or ego or individual' that Frederic Jameson identifies with the postmodern. These critics reject self-identity and self-certainty of the modern notion of man as a representative of universal humanity. They undertake the notion that identity is only a performance. This performativity has explored by a number of postmodern theorist as identity is infinitely unpredictable rather than being a part of essential nature.

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