REPRESENTATION OF THE OTHER IN WESTERN HISTORY:
A POSTCOLONIAL READING

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Abstract

Much of the European discourse on the Other has been informed by canonical figures like Kant, Hegel, and Freud, who have misrepresented the non-European non-white with special emphasis on women who were believed to be generally inferior to men. This has urged postmodern and postcolonial writers like Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, Franz Fanon, and Luce Irigaray to counter those writers in order to rewrite the history and identity of women and the non-European. This paper traces the history of ideas regarding the representation of the Other and offers a postcolonial critique of theories advanced by Kant, Hegel, and Freud. Kant represented the Other as lacking judgment faculties whose taste and moral judgment cannot be compared to the wise European. Hegel excluded the Other from history and alleged that the only history is European since he believes that the Other is incapable of writing history. Finally, Freud portrayed the Other as savage and primitive whose mind resembles his neurotic patients. He also represented women’s sexuality as inferior to men. Such misrepresentations have resulted in a long history of dehumanization and prejudices towards the Other. This has triggered the emergence of the postcolonial discourse in order to balance the Othering process. For instance, Spivak attacked Kant for disempowering and excluding the non-Europeans from his Critique of Judgment. She also critiqued Hegel for creating Oriental stereotypes in his Philosophy of History. Hegel’s master/slave dialectic has been deconstructed by Franz Fanon, who argues that the black cannot attain self-recognition through the gaze of the white, since the black has always been portrayed as inferior in the white’s discourse. Irigaray challenged Freud by arguing that he lacks an understanding of female sexuality. Edward Said contradicted Freud’s ambivalent notion of the non-European. Such revisionist history aims at rewriting the Other’s image and identity.

Keywords: The Other, Postmodernism, Postcolonialism, Hegel, Kant, Freud, Representation, Feminism

INTRODUCTION

The postmodern current (1970s) has brought about several ideological changes where skepticism has become the source of meaning. Critics and thinkers like Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault urge the postmodern reader to discredit the dominant narrative and question the capital truth in favor of the marginalized narrative that has always been silenced by canonical voices. This inciting call has triggered the emergence of feminist and postcolonial discourse where critics like Gayatri Spivak, Luce Irigaray, Edward Said, and Frantz Fanon challenge and question the representation

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of the Other by white Western canonical patriarchal figures including Kant, Hegel, and Freud. Those influential figures in Western history have been considered the pillars of Western thought for their invaluable contribution to the formation of theories. Kant was considered “one of the greatest philosophers of all times,” whose theories in “epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics greatly influenced all subsequent philosophy” (Duignan & Bird). Hegel was “the last of the great system builders of Western philosophy and the greatest and most extravagant representative of the school of absolute idealism” (Knox). His philosophy inspired much of the 19th-century school of thought, including idealists and Marxists (Knox). He was also considered “among historians and classical scholars rather than among philosophers” (Knox). Freud is the founder of psychoanalysis, whose influence extends far beyond psychology (Jay). He has advanced a number of theories that revolutionized the field of psychology: the theory of the “unconscious,” the structure of the “Id,” “ego,” and “superego,” “the Oedipus Complex,” and the method of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, to cite a few. The high visibility and reputation of those eminent writers explain why their discourses have shaped the Western ideology pertaining to the image of the non-Western. However, those same philosophers have been viewed as racist and sexist by the postmodern logic due to the fact that their representation of the Other is questionable. This paper traces the views of Kant, Hegel, and Freud regarding race and gender, as well as employs a postcolonial reading in order to refute their arguments.

I. Immanuel Kant

Kant develops his racial theory in his article “On the Different Races of Man” (1775), where he identifies four races of human beings based on skin color. He theorizes that the climate is the reason for different physical variations and consequently inferiority. The importance of this racial division was further elaborated in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790) (Gray 397), where he argues that the beautiful is “the object of a universal delight” (42). However, Kant emphasizes that the concept of the “universal” differs from one race to the other. Thus, by “universal,” he means shared and common to the judgment and taste of the European, which would differ from “a black man” and a “Chinese person” (65). In Kant’s philosophy, judgment and taste are not cultural constructs but rather are inborn and inherent in each race. This is a crucial aspect that characterizes the Enlightenment thinkers as they believe everything is hereditary rather than culturally constructed, and genetics mark the superiority versus the inferiority of each race. Sally Hatch Gray defines the notion of the “normal idea” according to Kant by maintaining that the “normal idea cannot be universal for all humans…The different races will come to their own ‘Normalidee’ not solely
through the process of adding up experiences, but through a ‘universal’ subjective judgment” (408). This has led her to conclude: “Thus, it seems rather important to note that here ‘universal’ can also mean ‘European,’ and that, under consideration, this may not actually present any contradiction for the work as a whole” (408).

Kant, however, does not refer to other races in order to include them in his critique of the judging criteria, but rather to exclude them from being capable of making the right judgment, as shall be discussed. He devises a theory in which he seeks to fit everything. For this reason, he has to mention the non-Europeans, but only to exclude them and claim that they are incapable of making reasonable judgments (Spivak, *A Critique* 26). Kant ascribes great importance to man’s reason and wisdom, which he believes are the marker of civilization and superiority. Gayatri C. Spivak believes that the only significance of the presence of “the New Hollander or the man from Tierra del Fuego” in Kant’s critique is that they “cannot be the subject of speech or judgment in the world of the *Critique*” (*A Critique*26). This idea of exclusion is further elaborated and enhanced in Kant’s article “Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime” (1764), where he charts the degradation in taste and morality regarding other races, including the Arabs, the Japanese, the Indians, and the Negros, whom he considers the most inferior of all. This emphasizes Kant’s reasoning in excluding the Other from taste and judgment. According to Kant, the Arab is “the noblest man in the Orient, yet of a feeling that degenerates very much into the adventurous…His inflamed imagination presents things to him in unnatural and distorted images, and even the propagation of his religion was a great adventure” (54). As for the Japanese, he believes they “could in a way be regarded as the English men of this part of the world, but hardly in any other quality than their resoluteness - which degenerates into the utmost stubbornness - their valor, and disdain of death. For the rest, they display few signs of a finer feeling” (55). Contrary to the Japanese, the Indians “have a dominating taste of the grotesque, of the sort that falls into the adventurous. Their religion consists of grotesqueries. Idols of monstrous form, the priceless tooth of the mighty monkey Hanuman…and so forth are in this taste” (55). Kant also refers to the sati practice as “a hideous excess” (55). As for the black-skinned people, he sees them as the most

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3Spivak critiques the representation of the sati practice in the colonial narrative as a proof of savagery and brutality that was used to justify the colonization of India in order “to save brown women from brown men” (“Can the Subaltern Speak” 93). Spivak argues that the sati has been muted and misrepresented in both the colonial and the postcolonial narratives.
degraded of all, which was a common perception and allegedly proven scientifically⁴. He confidently declares that “the Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling” (55). He alleges that “not a single one [black] was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praise-worthy quality, even though among the whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world” (55). He even comments “this fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid” (57). If anything at all, Kant’s argument reflects the Western inclination to exclude rather than include, which marks the rise of Eurocentrism and white supremacy through the lens of taste and judgment.

In his lectures in Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View (1798), Kant further compares the Europeans to the Indians and the blacks, and stresses that the Europeans are superior to every other race through the lens of climate. In clear-cut terms, he states that “in the hot countries the human being matures in all aspects earlier, but does not, however, reach the perfection of those in the temperate zones. Humanity is at its greatest perfection in the race of the whites” (63). He also believes that the Indians and the Negros are “timid” and “fear many things,” which for him is exemplified in some incidents where “the Negro slave from Guinea drowns himself if he is to be forced into slavery. The Indian women burn themselves. The Carib commits suicide at the slightest provocation. The Peruvian trembles in the face of an enemy, and when he is led to death, he is ambivalent, as though it means nothing” (64). This view clearly highlights his incomprehension of the culture of the Other. The incident of the slave who drowned himself is reminiscent of Toni Morrison’s Beloved (1987), where Sethe kills her daughter to spare her a life of slavery, thus privileging death over enslavement. This stands in contrast to Kant’s interpretation and evokes meanings of courage, dignity, and freedom rather than timidity and fear. This shows how the postcolonial discourse reverses the argument by viewing it from the Other’s side.

Thus, with regards to the judgment of beauty, Kant believes that the criteria of beauty are predefined and inherited; therefore, the judgment of beauty is universal and common to all men of the same race. He later presents the same ideas of judging the beautiful in his Critique of Judgment. However, his lectures and earlier writings remain the premise of his Critique. In short, the Kantian criterion is “universal” in the sense that it could only be exercised by the wisest races of humanity, whom Kant believes to be the

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⁴The pseudoscience of race during the Enlightenment and modern periods alleged that the brain of the white is more developed than that of the black.
Europeans.

Kant’s view of the feminine is controversial since he reserves a special place for the woman as beautiful and delicate beings. However, he makes a clear distinction between masculinity and femininity, where all the qualities of beauty, tenderness, and delicacy are ascribed to the feminine, as opposed to strength, courage, and wisdom that are ascribed to the masculine. For Kant, the feminine beauty would be corrupted by learning that it should be reserved for the masculine. He writes,

Laborious learning or painful grubbing, even if a woman could get very far with them, destroy the merits that are proper to her sex, and on account of their rarity may well make her into an object of a cold admiration, but at the same time they will weaken the charms by means of which she exercises her great power over the opposite sex. (Observations 37)

Kant views the woman as a beautiful ornament to men. She “is always the agreeable object of a well-mannered entertainment” (42), who possesses all the beautiful and virtuous qualities. For this reason, he believes that some knowledge might corrupt her personality; therefore, a woman’s knowledge should be guarded by her man, who would expose her to the knowledge that suits her feminine nature. The philosopher of the age of Enlightenment announces that a woman’s “philosophical wisdom is not reasoning but sentiment” (38).

Moreover, Kant hypothesizes that the woman is always “embarrassed” by her lack of “lofty insight,” but she compensates for this “by demanding these qualities in her man” (Observations 48). On the other hand, the man “is compensated for the lack of book-learning and for other lacks that he must make good by his own talents” by his wife’s beauty and “naivety” (48). The two sexes, for Kant, have to be distinct from one another. This means that masculinity must be the opposite of femininity. For instance, “a man must never weep other than magnanimous tears. Any that he sheds in pain or over reversals of fortune make him contemptible” (39). He also alleges that even when a woman tries to excel in what he considers a man’s knowledge, “nature still always seek to return to its proper order” (48). This is because for Kant, “what is most important is that the man becomes more perfect as a man and the woman as a woman” (49). In Kant’s view, the greatest fault is when “men adopt feminine qualities, in order to please, and women sometimes (although much more rarely) work up a masculine demeanor, in order to inspire esteem; but whatever one does contrary to the favor of nature one always does very badly”
Thus, the discourse of gender segregation and division of roles has its roots in Kant’s philosophy. This has urged feminist postcolonial writers like Spivak to call for rewriting women’s identity in order to dissolve the binary oppositions between masculinity and femininity that has been consolidated by the philosophers of the Enlightenment. Inspired by the postmodern critical thinking, Spivak realizes that the concept of gender is tied to a whole body of epistemology that needs to be revisited in order to formulate a new discourse free of assumptions and prejudices. (A Critique of Postcolonial Reason; “Feminism and Critical Theory”). Spivak believes that “Feminism lives in the master text as well as in the pores” (A Spivak Reader 71). This idea illustrates how the image of “woman” has been established and regulated by those “master texts.” Therefore she concludes that the concept of gender as dictated by male canonical figures “must be rewritten so that there is new material for the grasping of the production and determination of literature within the general production and determination of consciousness and society” (59).

II. G.W.F. Hegel

Hegel’s contribution to philosophy remains one of the most influential in history. For this reason, his theories of race and gender acquire special importance and contribute to consolidating the image of the Other in the Western discourse. Despite his ingenuity, Hegel is still the product of the history of the racist ideas of his age. Regarding his view of gender, Hegel holds women in an inferior position to that of men in both “Spirit” and mind. In his book Philosophy of Right (1821), he states that man is “an independent, personal self-sufficiency, and knowing and willing of free universality” (144). On the other hand, the woman is dependent on her husband because her spirit is “subjective and passive” (144). For Hegel, a woman has no worth outside marriage and family life, “whereas man has another field than the family for his ethical activity. The sphere of woman is essentially marriage” (143). Moreover, he believes that women’s minds and intellectual faculties are inferior to men, and when they are placed in a position for decision making, undesirable

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5 Postmodern critics believe that biases are communicated through language and definitions. For instance, the simple sign “woman” evokes all the attributes, history, and epistemology that have been ascribed to it by the European patriarchal narrative. To explain, as a postmodern postcolonial Third World feminist, Spivak is concerned with the question of gender as deeply embedded in the Western ideology, which urges her to deconstruct canonical writings (Freud, Marx) in order to rewrite women into history and discourse (“Feminism and Critical Theory”).

6*Feminism and Critical Theory* is one of the articles collected in The Spivak Reader (edited by Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean).
effects could ensue. According to Hegel,

Women can, of course, be educated, but their minds are not adapted to the higher sciences, philosophy, or certain of the arts. These demand a universal faculty. Women may have happy inspirations, taste, elegance, but they have not the ideal. The difference between man and woman is the same as that between animal and plant. The animal corresponds more closely to the character of the man, the plant to that of the woman. (144)

Such views, very similar to those of Kant, establish and consolidate the gendered identity in the European consciousness, enhancing the binary division between the two sexes, which problematizes the feminist discourse.

Hegel’s views on race are also very controversial and problematic. His paradigm of representing the cultures and habits of different races, including the Negros, Indians, and Egyptians, cannot be overlooked. In his book *The Philosophy of History* (1837), Hegel depends fully on the accounts of the colonizers. This is clear in his use of sources: “An Englishman states that he also saw…” (167). *The Philosophy of History* is a book of essentialism that creates stereotypes of the image of the Other. In Hegel’s philosophy, “the Spirit” is the most important faculty that defines the culture as well as the history of peoples. For this reason, he aims to analyze the “Spirit” of each race in order to evaluate their culture and history. Hegel believes that the “Spirit” is the essence of morality and freedom, but it should be tamed and elevated by religion. As a result, those who do not worship a Supreme Being and worship material things or animals instead have a lack in both spirit and morality (111).

Like Kant, Hegel believes that the “Negro” is the most inferior and vilest of all races who “exhibited the most reckless inhumanity and disgusting barbarism” (*The Philosophy of History* 110). This degradation of the “Spirit” of the Negro is ascribed by Hegel to the absence of the belief in a Supreme Being, a belief that tames the spirit and the person into a “humbler being” (111). However, the “Negro”, according to Hegel believes himself to be in the position of the Supreme Being by believing in “sorcery”, which puts him “in a position of command over the power of nature” (111). Moreover, he alleges that “The Negro… exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state” with no “reverence and morality” that “there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character” (111). Hegel goes on to describe the savagery, inhumanity, blood thirst, lack of
feelings, and immorality that he associates with the “Negroes,” to the extent that he claims “Negroes indulge ⋯ that perfect contempt for humanity” (113). Thus, Hegel excludes the “Negroes” from humanity, highlighting their radical difference from the Europeans by associating them with cannibalism.

Furthermore, Hegel’s view of slavery and colonialism is very controversial. He not only justifies slavery and colonialism, but further suggests that they are the only means of education and, consequently, the liberation of the Other, who could then achieve “self-recognition” (master/slave dialectic). Hegel clearly states, “it was the European colonization that brought civilization” (*The Philosophy of History* 99). Although he argues that “slavery is in and for itself injustice, for the essence of humanity is Freedom” (117), he justifies the slavery of the “Negro” as the only means of his maturity and education. Additionally, he claims that the “Negro” cherishes slavery and views those who suggest the “abolishing” of slavery as his “enemies” (116), since the “Negro” is able to make money by selling his children and committing them to slavery because “among the Negroes moral sentiments are quite weak, or more strictly speaking, non-existent” (113).

Since Hegel believes that the “Negro” lacks “Spirit,” morality, and freedom, he views the “Negro’s” life as having no value. Therefore, in the most peculiar announcements, he concludes that it was “the Negroes who allow themselves to be shot down by thousands in war with Europeans. Life has a value only when it has something valuable as its object” (*The Philosophy of History* 113). Moreover, he states that the “Negro” has no political life or organization (113). He consequently states, “Africa is not a historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit” (117). He vehemently announces that “what we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World’s History” (117).

For Hegel, the natives of America are inferior “in all respects” (*The Philosophy of History* 99). However, those who inhabit Patagonia have “vigoruous natures,” but are “still abiding in their natural condition of rudeness and barbarism” (99). As for the Mongolians, “they are careless and provide nothing for the winter, on which account therefore, half of the herd is frequently cut off. Among these inhabitants of the upland there exist no legal relations, and consequently there are exhibited among them the extremes of hospitality and rapine” (106). Hegel believes that the laws and morality that govern the Oriental world are “external”, thus “nothing” is for them “subjective in the shape of disposition,
Conscience, formal Freedom...Justice is administered only on the basis of external morality, and Government exists only as the prerogative of compulsion” (128). He ascribes this lack of morality from “within” to a lack of religion since “God has not yet in the East been realized in consciousness, for our idea of God involves an elevation of the soul to the super sensual” (129). Asia too is “unhistorical” for Hegel (129). However, he shows admiration of both Indian and Chinese cultures, but still believes that they “lie...outside the World’s History” (133). For Hegel, “no People has a so strictly continuous series of Writers of History as the Chinese. Other Asiatic peoples also have ancient traditions, but no History” (133).

In his attempt to deny the other histories, he states that “the mythical and prehistorical is treated by Chinese Historians as perfectly historical” (The Philosophy of History 135). Similarly, the Indians are “incapable of writing History” (180). This is because they have “an Idealism of imagination, without distinct conceptions,” which makes them render “everything into the merely Imaginative”(156), and “all that happens is dissipated in their minds into confused dreams” (180). Hegel explains that writing history “requires Understanding — the power of looking at an object in an independent objective light, and comprehending it in its rational connection with other objects” where “individuals comprehend their own existence as independent, i.e., possess self-consciousness” (180). If the Other does not possess such faculties, then any writing of history is not to be acknowledged, according to Hegel’s philosophy. Spivak criticizes Hegel’s views on India. According to her, despite Hegel’s apparent admiration of Indian religious texts (the Gita), he is using it to recreate Oriental stereotypes of Indian culture, which she believes reflects “imperial axiomatic” (A Critique). Spivak’s critique highlights Hegel’s blind spot when it comes to the Other’s culture and identity.

One might think Hegel has a different view of Egyptians because he shows appreciation for the ancient Egyptian culture. Yet, it does not take him long to say that in Egyptian history, “The Mythical is blended with the Historical, and the statements are as diverse as can be imagined” (The Philosophy of History 220). Regarding the “Egyptian Spirit”, he believes that “the Egyptians are vigorous boys, eager for self-comprehension, who require nothing but a clear understanding of themselves in an ideal form, in order to become Young Men” (240). This view sums up Hegel’s colonial, patriarchal, and patronizing tone, since he views the Other as lacking maturity, implying that it is only through European civilization that the Other could achieve maturity. Comparing non-European adults to
European children is a recurrent notion in the philosophy of the Enlightenment. In short, Hegel believes that the only history is that of Europe, and that the only “Spirit” that is capable of writing history is that of the Europeans. This stems from his belief that the European “Spirit” is the only mature one that possesses morality, self-consciousness, and freedom. Colonialism and slavery, for Hegel, is what brought civilization and history to the Other of non-Europe.

The most influential and problematic of Hegel’s ideas remains his master/slave dialectic that he presents in *The Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807) under the title of “The Lordship and the Bondage.” The Hegelian dialectic evokes Otherness and differences when the Self encounters the Other, and it problematizes the concept of self-recognition since it can only be achieved through the recognition of the Other. The relationship between the Self and the Other is that of hostility from the first encounter: “each seeks the death of the other” (113). However, the powerful decides to spare the life of the Other provided that the Other remains a slave to the master and abides by *their* dictations. The slave who values *their* life accepts slavery as a means of salvation (115). Both the master and the slave achieve their self-recognition through the gaze of the Other, not from within (113). The master achieves *their* self-recognition by being superior to the Other, enslaving and urging *them* to be *their* servant (116). The slave, on the other hand, achieves *their* self-recognition later, through *their* work and production, when *they* realize that *they* are the producer of everything and not the master (117-118). Consequently, the master is enslaved by the slave’s work and production, and it is the slave who reaches *their* full self-recognition. The danger of Hegel’s master/slave dialectic is that it allows no dialogue when “a subject is perceiving an object,” as Robert Young puts it (*White Mythologies* 37). The Hegelian dialectic enhances the binary opposition between the Self/Other and the Subject/Object. Moreover, self-recognition is only attained through the gaze of the Other. Both the master and the slave need one another in order to attain self-recognition. The master, being the more powerful, needs the slave to be *their* opposite in order to confirm *their* superiority, and the slave needs a master in order to produce, struggle, and attain freedom or even mastery. This dichotomy is problematic and still outlines the power relations and binary division between the colonizer/colonized, East/West, Inferior/Superior, and Civilized/Terrorist. However, the real problem, Young argues, is that there is no alternative to this dialectic “because strictly speaking it is impossible, insofar as the operation of the dialectic already includes its negation” (*White Mythologies* 37).

The Hegelian dialectic, however, does not work for Frantz Fanon, who argues in
Black Skin, White Mask (1952) that the slave or the black never gets the promised self-recognition for their part in the dialectic, even after the end of slavery and colonialism. Since the only History is white, as Hegel maintains, the black is locked in white ideals. Fanon thus argues that rather than recognize a value and self-worth in their blackness, the black aspires instead to be white. According to Fanon, since self-recognition can only be attained through the Other in the Hegelian dialectic, the black can never attain self-recognition, but can only aspire for proof that they are “worthy of white love” (63). Fanon clarifies this by saying, “I wish to be acknowledged not as black but as white. Now-and this is a form of recognition that Hegel had not envisaged—who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man” (63). This idea has been reified by Morrison in The Bluest Eye (1970), where Pecola dreams that her eyes turn blue in order to receive recognition from the society. All the characters in the novel are locked in the white discourse instead of defying it. They adopt and appropriate it to the extent that they hate their blackness. The “Negro,” Fanon states, “from time to time has fought for Liberty and Justice, but these were always white liberty and white justice; that is, values secreted by his masters” (221). Thus, the problem of the Hegelian dialectic is that recognition is not achieved from within the person, but from the perception of the Other. Furthermore, Hegel’s master/slave dialectic valorizes slavery as the only means by which the slave can achieve self-recognition, since the slave only starts to be productive and achieve self-recognition when enslaved by his master.

It is highly revealing to read the Hegelian account of history through the lens of the master/slave dialectic, where Hegel, as the master, has imposed his own version of truth and history on the slave of Africa. The slave must accept Hegel’s version in order for both of them to reach the state of self-recognition through the gaze of the Other. Some critics have challenged Hegel’s opinion of accepting slavery to death by recounting incidents in history where slaves have sacrificed their lives for freedom. Paul Gilroy, for example, offers a “supplement to Hegel’s dialectic” by recounting the story of a slave who chose to kill her own daughter (Aching 914). Margret Garner “killed her youngest child to free her from a life of bondage. This incident famously retold by Toni Morison’s Beloved reverses the Hegelian dialectic, since “Hegel resolved this impasse by having the dependent or servile consciousness (slave) prefer the independent consciousness’s or master’s version of reality (the slave’s forced labor)” (Aching 914). The idea that freedom could be valued to
life deconstructs the Hegelian dialectic and his assumption of “a life-death struggle” (*The Phenomenology of the Spirit* 114). Thus in the postcolonial reading, the struggle becomes rather a struggle for freedom and individuality. In this version, the slave does not accept the master’s discourse by enslaving *themselves* in order to live.

### III. Sigmund Freud

Although the Enlightenment period witnessed a great privileging of mind, reason, and judgment, Sigmund Freud challenges those notions in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) by theorizing that the unconscious mind is responsible for all the actions of human beings. This means that past events and traumas that have been suppressed govern the choices and deeds of a person without knowing or understanding the reason behind certain behavior. Thus, Freud crushes all those apparently embellished ideas of the Enlightenment about man’s supreme judgment and reason. His theory of the unconscious remains one of his greatest achievements. It has always been an eye-opener and even contributes to the poststructuralist skeptical thought. Yet Freud was a misogynist who has significantly contributed to the image of women as inferior to men. He introduced this discourse to psychology in an attempt to prove that women are psychologically as well as physically subordinate. Freud was one of the main culprits responsible for the degradation of the position of women in European history and discourse. He aims to prove that women are sexually and, consequently, psychologically inferior to men by fabricating his hypothetical theory of “penis envy” (1925). Perhaps no one better than Freud has misrepresented women’s sexuality throughout history. The misrepresentation of female sexuality and psyche in Freud’s narrative has contributed to the silence and marginalization of women. This has urged many feminist critics including Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Sarah Kofman, Helene Cixous, Judith Butler, and Spivak to challenge Freud’s notions of women’s sexuality.

Freud focuses mainly on sexuality which he regards as the major impulse that governs the actions and lives of humanity. Although Freud was ignorant of female sexuality, which he admits is a “dark continent for psychology” (*The Question of Lay Analysis* 212), he theorizes and formulates women in relation to his knowledge of male sexuality. The problem that arises from such rendering is that it assumes an Other that should be understood in relation to the Self, which means that women should be like men but at the same time unlike them. Freud writes, “with little girls, so we have supposed, things must be similar, though in some way or other they must nevertheless be different” (“Some
Psychological Consequences” 250). This formulation problematizes Freud’s theory since women are rendered— in Freud’s discourse – objects that have been imagined in relation to the subject (Man). Such interpretation of the Other in relation to the Self is the point of departure from which every discrimination proceeds.

Freud explains men’s sexuality by proposing his theory of the Oedipus complex (The Interpretation of Dreams; Totem and Taboo) as a recapitulation point that is essential for the sexual development of all boys. He theorizes that all boys, at a certain stage, love and desire their mothers while seeking to get rid of their fathers as competitors. He bases such theory on an idea that he explains in Totem and Taboo (1913), where he theorizes that in the history of the primitive man, the father used to have all females for himself. This urged the sons to kill the father in order to make love with his wives (235). In Freud’s logic, what happens in primitive life must be experienced psychologically by all people. Consequently, he believes that all boys develop such sexual desire toward their mothers at a young age, as well as a sense of rivalry towards their fathers. However, they overcome such a phase through their fear of castration by their fathers (“Some Psychological Consequences” 250).

To redeem such an idea and make it applicable to girls’ sexuality as well, Freud proposes his “penis envy” theory as the turning point in the sexual development of girls. Freud turns his contempt for women into science by devising such hypothetical theory by which he has inscribed his phallogocentric logic to women’s sexual development and identity. Freud views the male organ as superior, and a symbol of strength and greatness, whereas the female organ is inferior and even “castrated.” He writes:

When a little boy first catches sight of a girl’s genital region, he begins by showing irresolution and lack of interest; he sees nothing or disavows what he has seen, he softens it down or looks about for expedients for bringing it into line with his expectations. It is not until later, when some threat of castration has obtained a hold upon him, that the observation becomes important to him: if he then recollects or repeats it, it arouses a terrible storm of emotion in him and forces him to believe in the reality of the threat which he has hitherto laughed at. (“Some Psychological Consequences” 251)

This view of the woman’s organ as lacking, according to Freud, urges the boy to develop “horror of the mutilated creature or triumphant contempt for her” (251). Since the female
organ is already castrated, when a girl notices “the penis of a brother or playmate, strikingly visible and of large proportions, at once recognize it as the superior counterpart of their own small and inconspicuous organ, and from that time forward fall victim to envy for the penis” (251). The girl thus, as Freud claims, develops a sense of “penis envy” since she “knows that she is without it and wants to have it,” which Freud names the “masculinity complex” (252). Freud believes that this complexity that the girl develops, as a result of her realization of the inadequacy of her organ compared to the superior boy’s organ, leads her in turn to develop “a sense of inferiority” and “to share the contempt felt by men for a sex which is the lesser in so important a respect, and, at least in holding that opinion, insists on being like a man” (252). Consequently, the girl develops hate for her mother as the person responsible for making her “insufficiently equipped” with an “unsatisfactory” organ. She also starts to become jealous when noticing that her mother is “fonder” of her brother for his being a male and possessing a penis (252).

While Freud’s analysis were taken for granted for centuries as scientific, the postmodern reader cannot help but refuting Freud for valorizing the sexuality of man as the main sex, while female sexuality becomes that of the subordinate sex. In other words, Freud projects his feeling as a man onto psychoanalysis by glorifying the male organ, which leads him to believe that the woman has to be jealous and yearn to possess it. The retrograde logic of Freud’s theorization is that he seeks to make everything fit into his proposed theory rather than try to understand and explain concepts that already exist. He does not take into consideration the point of view of the woman who might view her organ as the superior one. Had Freud treated both sexes on equal footing, he would have theorized that women, too, would experience a “lack of interest” (251) upon encountering the boy’s organ rather than a sense of inferiority and a lack. Such a view would have reversed the theory and led Freud to conclude that the woman does not yearn to possess a penis, but, on the contrary, fears and abhors the sight (just like the man). Such reversal acknowledges both sexes as equals, which consequently dissolves the sense of inferiority that Freud believes is psychologically felt by all women.

The misrepresentation of women’s sexuality has led Helen Cixous to coin the term “l’écriture feminine” in her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1976). In the essay, she argues that language has been controlled and dominated by phallogocentrism. She maintains that in order for women to represent themselves, they have to develop their own writing technique to re-inscribe their bodies and sexuality. Similarly, Luce Irigaray believes that “women’s social inferiority is reinforced and complicated by the fact that woman does
not have access to language, except through recourse to ‘masculine’ systems of representation which inappropriate from her relation to herself and to other women” (85). The Freudian discourse has inscribed women’s identity and image as lacking, inferior, and envious of the superior sex. Hence, European history and discourse need feminist revision and the deconstruction of women’s image and identity that have been marginalized and misrepresented by the patriarchal narrative.

Spivak deconstructs Freud by writing the womb into Freud’s theory of the penis envy (The Spivak Reader 57). She replaces the penis envy with the womb envy and questions the phallocentrism in Freud’s vocabulary, where “the genital stage is preeminently phallic, not clitoral or vaginal” (58). Spivak asserts that “the idea of the womb as a place of production is avoided both in Marx and in Freud” (58). Her discussion of Freud sheds light on the phallocentric domination encapsulated in Western discourse and language, where male organs are valorized to female organs. For this reason, Spivak offers supplementary to Freud’s theory by inserting feminist perspective. Moreover, Freud insists that in order for the femininity to develop, “the elimination of clitoral sexuality is a necessary precondition” (“Some Psychological Consequences” 253), where women’s interest in the clitoris will be shifted to the vagina. He justifies such shift by arguing that the woman’s psychological loss of interest in the clitoral masturbation would be caused by “her narcissistic sense of humiliation which is bound up with penis-envy, the reminder that, after all, this is a point on which she cannot compete with boys and that it would therefore be best for her to give up the idea of doing so” (253). Such misinterpretation of the clitoral pleasure has also been subject to heavy critique, since Freud has underestimated the vital role of the clitoris in women’s sexuality. According to Irigaray, “Feminine pleasure has to remain inarticulate in language” (77). For this reason she believes that women “should attempt to express their own pleasure” (77). Irigaray also postulates that Freud was unaware of the female “erogenous zones” since he recognizes only the penis as a sexual organ (23). Furthermore, Freud believes that women’s inferiority to men is essentially moral. This is because the woman’s superego has not developed like that of the man, when she realizes that she has no penis and, as such is inferior. He says: “I cannot evade the notion (though I hesitate to give it expression) that for women the level of what is ethically normal is different from what it is in men. Their super-ego is never so inexorable, so impersonal, so independent of its emotional origins as we require it to be in men” (“Some Psychological Consequences” 254). Irigaray aptly challenges Freud’s unequal treatment of
the unconscious in men and women. She wonders “whether certain properties attributed to the unconscious may not, in part, be ascribed to the female sex, which is censured by the logic of consciousness. Whether the feminine has an unconscious” (73). This has led her to conclude that, “leaving these questions unanswered means that psychoanalyzing a woman is tantamount to adapting her to a society of a masculine type” (73).

Freud’s view of other races as “savages” is most discernible in his book Totem and Taboo. Kantian influence is traceable in Freud’s book (Jones 273). Freud views the “aborigines of Australia” and “the Melanesian, Polynesian and Negro races of Africa” (21) as savage races. Like Kant (The Critique of Judgment), Freud discusses the aborigines of Australia as an example of the savage race, which he believes are the “most backward and wretched” (2). Freud’s knowledge of those races is secondary and based on anthropologist James Frazer’s descriptions in The Golden Bough (1890). He says,

The aborigines of Australia are looked upon as a peculiar race which shows neither physical nor linguistic relationship with its nearest neighbours, the Melanesian, Polynesian and Malayan races. They do not build houses or permanent huts; they do not cultivate the soil or keep any domestic animals except dogs; and they do not, even know the art of pottery. They live exclusively on the flesh of all sorts of animals which they kill in the chase, and on the roots which they dig. Kings or chieftains are unknown among them, and all communal affairs are decided by the elders in assembly. (2)

Freud refers to the culture and habits of the aborigines in order to analyze his neurotic patients. This idea of viewing the mentally disabled as similar to savages is a constellation of the evolution model7, where racial scientists8 believe that the Other’s brain is similar to the brain of the European child, woman, and mentally disabled. Thus, Freud reproduces the patronizing colonial narrative related to the discourse on the “savage” Other in his psychoanalysis.

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7 The theory of evolution has been proposed by Charles Darwin (1809 – 1882), where he hypothesizes that living beings evolved through the process of natural selection. Darwin’s work On the Origin of Species was published in 1859 which further consolidated his evolution theory. Scientific racism adopted Darwin’s evolution model in order to allege that Europeans are the more developed model of the Other.

8 Scientific racism is a pseudoscience that alleges that the Other is physically inferior to the European. It flourished during the Enlightenment period. See The Mismeasure of Man, by Stephen Jay Gould, and White over Black, by Winthrop D. Jordan for more information about scientific racism.
Freud analyzes the idea of the “totem” and the “taboo” in primitive savage races by discussing the restrictions that those races impose upon themselves in relation to incest (Totem and Taboo 6). Such restrictions reach the level of “avoidance” (17) where the daughter is not to stay home alone with her father. Furthermore, the mother is not to touch her son or hand him food but rather leave it on the table, and the brother and sister are to hide from one another in order to avoid any encounter or conversation (16-20). Freud argues that although “we surely would not expect that these poor naked cannibals should be moral in their sex life according to our ideas” (3), such restrictions are the result of sexual desires.

Freud formulates a rigid dichotomy between two categories, namely the civilized (European) versus the savage (other races). The reference to the savage in Freudian discourse is essential for the construction of a civilized Self (to echo Spivak’s critique of Kant), but more importantly for the exclusion of the neurotic from civilization. Freud, thus, appropriates colonial discourse that entails the exclusion of the Other as well as the disabled. However, the question of the Other in the Freudian discourse is challenging, since Freud, as a Jew, has been a victim of the Holocaust. Thus, he himself experienced a sense of Othering in Europe at some point in time. Edward Said critiques Freud’s ambivalent relation with non-Europeans. On the one hand, Freud has marginalized some races and labeled them as “primitive” and “savages,” yet, on the other hand, he idolized some figures as heroes (like Moses), who were also non-European Semites (Freud and the Non-European 12). Said writes,

To Freud, the Pacific, Australian and African cultures he took so much from had been pretty much left behind or forgotten, like the primal horde, in the march of civilization; and even though we know how much of Freud’s work is dedicated to recovering and acknowledging what has either been forgotten or won’t be admitted, I don’t think that in cultural terms non-European primitive peoples and cultures were as fascinating to him as were the people and stories of Ancient Greece, Rome and Israel. The latter were his real predecessors in terms of psychoanalytic images and concepts. (12)

Said argues that Freud’s views regarding the Other are “Eurocentric” (12). He also

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9The totem is a certain animal that is believed to be sacred and spiritually related to certain group of people. According to Freud, in savage life, the totem of each person is inherited from his parents. Members of the same totem are not allowed to have sexual relations even if there are no blood ties between them (Totem and Taboo 4).
questions Freud’s ambivalence regarding the Jews, since Freud insists that Jews are not
different from Europeans. To Freud, Jews “are not a foreign Asiatic race, but mostly consist
of the remnants of Mediterranean peoples and inherit their culture” (19). Said argues that
this view contradicts Freud’s argument in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939) where Freud
claims Moses was an Egyptian. It seems that for Freud the integration of the Jews into
European culture is essential, since he does not recognize other cultures as civilized.
Furthermore, Said also contemplates Freud’s ambivalent position as an atheist who insists
on his Jewish identity as if Jewishness is not a religion. Said describes such position as
“complicated” and “hopelessly unresolved” (16). Sandra L. Gilman argues that Freud
projects his sense of Otherness onto the discourse of femininity, where the Jews become
the “knowable” or the familiar, and the woman becomes the Other and the alien. Freud
thus naturalizes and incorporates the Jews into psychoanalysis, while displacing and
alienating women as different or “unknowable” (173). Consequently, it could be inferred
that the European straight man is the only subject of Freud’s psychoanalysis. This is
because his superego normally develops in contrast to the superego of the woman, the
homosexual, and the savage. Freud therefore marginalizes and misrepresents women and
the non-European in his psychoanalysis by excluding them from the category of the normal.
He denies women their pleasure as “masculine pleasure” and portrays them as lacking and
envious in his pseudo-scientific discourse.

**CONCLUSION**

The Other has been excluded from judgment (Kant), history (Hegel), and
psychoanalysis (Freud). This means that the monolithic Western discourse has
constructed a sovereign Europe and dehumanized the non-West by insisting that all
civilization, history, wisdom, and stable subjects are European. To conclude, theory is built
on identity politics, knowledge production, and the construction of the Self versus the
Other. This has produced a pressing need to present a counter-narrative by which the
Other comes to power and challenges the misrepresentation of their identity and culture.
This occurs by deconstructing the Western discourse and its representation of the Other.
The emergence of the postcolonial theory is a reaction against a long history of racism and
misrepresentation of the non-West. Kant, Hegel, and Freud are three of the most influential
figures who contributed to the racial attitude of the West towards the Other. Although those
three philosophers are canonized as the pillars of Western theory, the postcolonial reader
is urged to view them in different light as racists and sexists. Many postcolonial theorists,
including Spivak (*A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*; “Feminism and Critical Theory”), have
found it essential to revise and deconstruct the narrative of those philosophers, since they form the foundation of the Western epistemology regarding the image of the Other. This paper offers a different view of Kant, Hegel, and Freud by surveying and questioning their attitudes towards race and gender.

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