

## Rethinking Eurocentrism as a Human Drive in the Hermeneutical-Aesthetics Controversy of African Literature and New Digital Writings: The Case for a Specific Cultural Heritage and its Agency

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**Abstract:** This paper was hypothesized on the prospect of a hypertextual and psycho-dialectical model of critically reading African literature and its new digital writings in view of the Eurocentric metanarratives that richly flourish as a drive in its hermeneutical and aesthetics controversy. Conscious of the prospect of post-graduate students picking on this topic in the discipline, and drawing from a post-structuralist method, the paper arrived at the following findings as constitutive of Africa's cultural heritage and agency. The language question, the techno-text, Africanization of socialist criticism, Womanist commitment, postcolonialism and the publishing industry, pedagogy of literary theory and criticism in African schools and universities, Bolekaja criticism, re-inscription of African traditional codes of sexuality, situatedness of IMF-generation development discourses, and self-containment/ utopia of digital writings. The paper cautions, nevertheless, that these discourses are subject to new interrogations in the globalizing world.

**Keywords:** Eurocentrism, hermeneutics /aesthetics controversy, cultural heritage.

### INTRODUCTION

The decades from the 1950s to 1960s and from 1980s to present-day have been very important take-off periods for understanding the critical *reception* of African literature and new digital writings respectively as a developmental metanarrative that raises both foreclosed questions about its specific identity as well as open-ended questions about their propensity for *agency*, *'newness'* and *interstitiality* in processes of cultural contact and power. The historical circumstances that conditioned the critical reception of the discourses had to do with anti-colonial nationalism, the task of cultural decolonization and the construction of new institutions of higher education. These were also goals that the first nation state governments of Africa had set forth in order to achieve 'national development' as a background from which to assess the agency and power of their peoples' visions. African literature and new digital writings were configured as a metanarrative critical to – in the sense of setting the landscape for - forging a *new nationalistic* or *African identity* as well as to the task of *decolonization* of the academic curriculum and school institution inherited from the colonial educational system in order to interact productively with international and global discourse. As the new nationalist governments built schools for their people, there was an increasing necessity for materials or

content that could handle subjects from an *Afrocentric* or *pan-Africanist* perspective to be developed and this necessity caused metropolitan publishers to devote some of their resources to books written by Africans. With the increasing publication of new African works of art, particularly novels, this triggered a real need for critical writings that concentrated on these emerging texts. A number of books, journals, small magazines and other avenues for the publication of analyses of and commentaries on these literary writings began to emerge. For example, *Research in African Literatures*, *African Literature Today*, *Transition*, *Black Orpheus*, and *Présence Africaine* were created to meet these needs. In this way, the little attention that African works of art had previously received quickly transformed into a flowing 'river' of interests. Given these circumstances, it is easy to see why the nationalist, decolonization *ethos* of these years that laid the foundation for the emergence of a serious critical attention paid to African literature and, later on, to digital writings, also permeated into the criticism that emerged with them. The conditions of possibility that governed the emerging of serious critical attention to the African creative works also dictated a set of analytical and critical preoccupations that figured again and again in the reception of the works of art. This also explains why the critical reception of the literature and,

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and later on, digital writings turned on the question of *Africanness*, that is, faithfulness to African authenticity in the European genre of literature, particularly the novel. This question became one of the overarching problematics to which critical responses were to address themselves in one way or another.

The years from 1960s to 1970s became a time of sustained critical attention with the emergence of multidimensional patterns of critical engagement. These years, in turn, triggered new critical concerns that were clearly motivated by the quest to *indigenize* the critical tradition of the literature and new writings inherited from western tradition. In this way, the critical reception of the literature became a *binarized* reading of the spatial geography of reception dichotomized between African and western scholars. But, while the background reading highlighted this dichotomy between geographies and intellectual traditions that triggered a class politics - in the Marxian sense of the term - an exaggerated focus only on such a global Manichaeian reading can obscure intricate moments when responses coalesced over time around particular issues between the classes and the sequels of their struggles. Therefore, an obsession over a critical reception consecrated to the Eurocentric division between 'centre' and 'periphery', 'core' and 'margin', 'Us' versus 'Them', 'foreign' and 'local', etc, may not be very beneficial because there are numerous vexing questions about how to apprehend *locality* and *locus* that may be raised given differentiations in Africa itself not only over issues of economic development, racism and class struggles, but also over issues of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, bodies and disability, nation, regionalism, communication and language and so forth.

For example, on the 1950/1960s question of the 'authentic' critic, can a *Zulu* scholar in South Africa, who in all likelihood, has never seen a *nkwi* dish depicted in a Cameroonian novel become an efficient critic of that culinary African practice, any more than a European who has lived in the western part of the country, just because he is an 'African'? Therefore, a concentration on binary *clusters* may be beneficial only if it is not a watertight, pigeonholing category of critical scholarship, which should only be for the methodological purpose of identification of grand metanarratives or tendencies. The writings of African critics on the written literary genre and orality do not neatly fall on one compartment to the exclusion of the other; very often the writings and critical evaluations move into the *interstitiality* of the two (or more) discursive axes.

There is a powerful critical consensus according to which the oral tradition is the chief distinguishing factor of African written literature. For example, Emmanuel Obiechina (1975:55) argues in his book *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*, that the most noticeable difference between

novels by indigenous West African authors and novels by non-natives using the African setting is that, in the first case, a lot of importance is given to representation of the oral tradition whereas in the second case, there is an almost complete absence of the tradition. Similarly, Abiola Irele (2001:11) claimed in his essay *The African Imagination* that orality is the basic discursive reference and the principal mode of imagination in Africa. He added that it remains predominant and serves as the principal paradigm. Now, the question of place or role of the oral tradition is an issue that has remained predominant in the responses of the vast majority of critics because orality is actively present in the expressive traditions of African societies. This is often seen as indicative of the prospect that it will figure in the narratives of African writers, in one way or another. However, in this research, we argue that acknowledging the presence and difference that orality makes in African works of art is just one step ahead, the first one; but the more important, second step is to comprehend *what this difference signifies in the reading and analysis of African literary and digital works of art*. How is the distinctive identity of the literary art marked by orality and how are the marks of orality to be read meaningfully as agency of a 'newness' that is spiritually endowed? In this way, the critical challenge for African critical scholarship is how to conceptualize *differentiation* as induced by Eurocentrism/orality in the interpretation of African literary works of art, as well as how to read into the *interstitiality* of emerging discourses as autonomous writings taking a life of their own.

The metaphor of *domestication* of the oral tradition is important here because critical responses to written African literature often assume that African writers appropriate the written Eurocentric genre of the novel, for example, in order to speak to the African experience they wish to convey. This manner of invoking the oral tradition was an important way of inscribing irreducibility of *Africanness* in that form. This had the effect of domestication of the 'alien' genre of written literature by incorporating orality. Obiechina (Ibid:34) even claimed that the process of *domestication* is clear when examined against the background of inherited characteristics of the novel such as plot, characterization, setting and language. But, he put it crudely as a simple question of blending orality and the written tradition in order to create the distinctive local colour of the (West) African novel. This classification of the cluster of *positivist* orality assumed that the oral tradition is a cultural background from which culture can simply be transposed to the world of written fiction and back again. The approach came with a checklist of items such as every day ceremonies, rituals, folktales, idioms, proverbs and so on, constituting ethnographic materials that were assumed to be incorporated into novels, plays, poetry, etc. This cluster approach was adopted by critical scholars like Bernth Lindfors and Christopher Miller. They practiced the art of itemizing

religious beliefs, local lore, oral history, etc with detailed explanations on their meanings. This was appealing to western critics because their explanations provided an entry point for foreign readers who were not familiar with the oral – cultural and social - contexts of Africans. The approach became popular with foreign (English/American, European) audiences. Another cluster was marked by a positionality of discursive orality in which critics adopted a conceptual, theoretical and interpretive methodology consisting in seeing the oral tradition and its forms as providing an *overarching* framework where every novelist participated in *adapting* the culture to his own needs by refiguring, extending, modulating and transforming them in their own works. In this way, as opposed to the *reflectionism* approach, the *adaptationism* approach sought to make the conceptual point one of transformation, continuity and remediation.

Initially concentrating on the novel, this debate extended to all of African literature. Rand Bishop (1975) identified a set of themes that critics argued should guide critical standards for the evaluation of African literature. Based on the reflectionist notion as reference framework, it was agreed that:

- African writers should employ African languages by ‘doing violence’ to the dominant European languages in order to reflect the African world,
- African literature should be written for an African than a foreign audience,
- African writers should borrow primarily from oral tradition while showing discretion in their borrowing from western literary tradition,
- African literature must not ‘falsify’ the African reality,
- It must avoid art for the sake of art and prioritize commitment or engagement,
- It must be African in terms of reflecting Negritude or Africanness,

These concerns guided the reception of the literature during the high period of nationalist agitation. The focus was on *reflection* of reality as it ‘exists out there’. While it was agreed that it is possible to encode the African way of life into the literature, there was no consensus as to *how* to do it; what was the best way to do it. There was no consensus as well over the question of ‘intrinsic’ versus ‘extrinsic’ criticism; that is, the explanation of formal aspects of the literature such as characterization, setting, language as opposed to context, namely, history, politics, geography, culture and so forth. But other debates straddled both positions (Olakunle 2017). Abiola Irele (1981), for example, preferred textual exegesis through formalization whereas Solomon Iyasere was for a ‘cultural formalism’ that attached importance to both (Iyasere 1975). These ‘either/or’ critical responses depended on a series of methods borrowed from functional anthropology, Marxism, literary stylistics, empiricist sociology and

literary formalism. But the deployment of these methodologies was underwritten by the quest for establishment of literary standards that are *specific* to the African context; but, paradoxically, this quest was conducted by appealing to the authority of intellectual traditions with origins in the West. As some scholars have assessed it, the problem of theories is that while attempting to be spokesperson for a particular ideological - anti/colonial - moment, the critic is *unable to effect a conceptual break* from some of the theoretical categories (Appiah 1988, 1993). This opinion is understandable at an abstract level; but what is also evident is that it is in such contradictory moments of trying to construct an African authenticity discourse from Western categories that an occasion can be created to locate the *agency* of African literary criticism. Another point can be gleaned from here, namely, that African critics tried to use a reflectionist method that was tethered to the ideological theories of the West: the idea that literary structures are having a one-to-one relationship with social structures is an understanding of literature that is essentially flawed (Martindale and Martindale 1988). The *agency* of African literature and new digital writings as a discursive intervention does not have a particular or fixed location; it is in the immersing process itself; in a conceptually flawed but inherited and *dynamic* understanding of binary representation that an *Afro-centric* literary criticism offers a concrete example of an *agency -in- motion* discourse. This research report proposes to scrutinize these reflective and conceptual dilemmas not only as locus of specific cultural heritage but also as locations of *newness* and *agency*, from the 1950s to present day. Consequently, it posits a third cluster of *undecidability*, that goes beyond the reflectionist and the conceptualist paradigms.

The huge question raised by these paradigms of specific identity and newness/ *agency* is the issue of *language* in relation to literature, culture, society, nationhood, and subjectivity. Imperialism and colonialism broke down the harmony that existed before and this gave rise to a sense of *disjuncture* and *alienation* that have been the responsibility of the African writer to fix. Even though the race/nationalist (West/African) imaginary was widely accepted, it was simultaneously rejected by certain nationalist scholars who re-focused on the conservative representation of the ethnic, class, female gender, disability, sexuality, generational, literary and other experiences, for example. The feminist critics challenged the masculinist/patriarchal prejudices of the nation state project in Africa. They highlighted the patriarchal character of the nation state portrayed by canonical writers like Achebe, Ngugi and Soyinka. They found fault with the depictions of female characteristics and tropes, the subordination and silencing of women, with the likes of Elleke Boehmer, Florence Stratton, Molar Ogunidipe, etc, in evidence.

The 1980s came with another kind of reception of the literature in the continent. This time, it came from the West and was called critical theory and deconstructionism. In the wake of globalization and with the ascendancy of critical theory, a wave of theories usurped the authority of the nation state apparatus. The old certainties of self, nation and culture were disappearing under the sustained attacks of deconstructionists that questioned the metaphysics of presence and the idea of an autonomous self in harmony with the nation or society. Under the influence of post-structuralism, postcolonialism, postmodernism and postMarxism, the binaries of nationhood and the language of nationalist poetics mutated into a preoccupation with textual *intricacies*. Textual intricacies are values that have to be learned through institutions of education. The concept of ‘education’ and ‘learning’ was rapidly changing in the complex, globalizing world. Brooks and Brooks (1993) have explained that the constructivist theory argues that when students interact among themselves, with their teacher and with their environment, they create knowledge and meaning. Therefore, the problem we are raising here is how do we organize our online African literature course, for example, so that interaction can be optimized not only between teacher and students, but also between students themselves, and between students and their oral environment? Through a post-structuralist dialectics of Marxist materialism and aesthetics, this research programme proposes to *optimize* the hypertext intersecting the Eurocentric *base* of the digital technology where new African writings are produced and the *superstructures* that constitute the critical oral tradition and backgrounds from which students originate and can see opportunity to develop their own research programmes. This research is therefore a work of social outreach, that intends to suggest ways of hugely impacting on *reception* of the new and old generational writings, through insights of agency and creation of an e-learning model that prioritizes cognitive learning, easing of accessibility to alignment and promotion of networking with peers and literary communities.

The key argument here is that African literature and e-literature can be productively investigated only within the wider framework of the thesis, anti-thesis/dismantling and synthesis of the imperial/colonial or Western and orality hegemonies in Africa. In exploring the possibility of a dialectical, alternative critical base, we draw from both classical liberal/Marxist and other theoretical aesthetics and from post-liberal theories/paradigms as espoused, for example, by Fanon, Cabral, Ngugi, Achebe, Asante, Cheik Anta Diop, etc, etc. From these binary explorations, we postulate a new language of criticism, an aesthetic language of agency, newness and interstitiality, which is then applicable to works by African artists, writers, critics, as diverse as Achebe, Ousmane, Agostinho Neto and Dennis Brutus,

Chimamanda Addichie, Alice Walker, Nwaubani, Bivvanga Wainana and so forth. This research is therefore relevant not only to evaluating the literatures of Africa, but also for assessing theories of literary criticism bearing on debates about cultural expression in postcolonial Africa (Amuta 2017).

Questions of cultural self-representation in Africa and re-conceptualization of global relationships in response to contemporary changes are very critical in continental African literatures. Although the new era of global capitalism calls for the re-mapping of global relations, such re-mapping must be informed both by a grasp of contemporary structures of economic, political, and cultural power and by memories of earlier radical visions of orally oriented societies. Without these two conditions and the interstitialities they construct, the current preoccupation with, for example, ethnic diversity and multiculturalism, migration, foreign aid, the digital world, etc, will distract from issues of *power* that dominate global relations and that find expression in murderous ethnic conflicts, digital divides and so on. African literature and new digital writings offer a multi-*historical*, that is, a historically grounded conception of cultural difference, that seeks in different histories alternative visions of human society, and stress divergent historical trajectories against a future imperialized/colonized presently by an ideology of liberalism and capitalism. Liberal capitalism brought the question of the ‘local’ to the fore; but African literatures and new digital writings, point to *indigenism* not only as a syntagmatic but also as a paradigmatic source of social relations and relationships to nature, that can challenge the voracious developmentalism of capital that undermines local welfare globally.

## 1.2 Purpose of the Paper

This paper aims to support the post-graduate and Doctoral student to open up new areas for critical exploration and perspectives for discussions that can enable them to imbibe a comprehensive inwardness necessary to carry out independent research projects individually or collectively. This Janus-faced report casts a backward glance at African literature and digital writings and at criticism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries in order to look forward at the challenges of the criticism in the Twenty first century. This would enable students to undertake research in any area of creative production of literary or any other discourse by marginalized communities. This two-fold thrust of this research is to serve as a structural, theoretical, and scholarly bridge between African literatures, and African electronic literature (or African e-lit) and digital marketing scholarship attached to the discipline –this absence is evident in both parent disciplines: African literature and electronic literature. Despite the regular use of electronic technology in creating literature in Africa, very little research in African literary scholarship has covered the work being done. Similarly, research into electronic literature

scholarship lacks a noticeable sub-category that connects effectively with examples by African literary artists, as academic conversations gravitate toward other geographical and cultural regions. Because of the lack of research, a review of scholarship in a project like this research report benefits from taking a step back to broadly consider the evolution of research attached to both African literature, electronic literature and orature. And instead of pursuing the impractical route of surveying all African literature and electronic literature scholarship, it is beneficial to narrow the area of study to the technological relationship between oral culture and print /digital technology for African literature on the one hand, and print technology and electronic technology for electronic literature on the other hand. This focus is helpful because these technological relationships introduce African e-lit as the next logical step for both African literature and e-lit –both technologically, regionally and globally.

### 1.3 Statement of the Hypothesis

This paper is premised on the hypothesis that any intellectual discussion aimed at illuminating (modern) African literature and new digital writings, should, first, consider *Eurocentric theoretical philosophy* as *Signifier*, elucidated in terms of its remote or direct *impact* (its prejudices, critical standards, discourses, marketing strategies and scientific technologies); second, scrutinize African literature and criticism as the *Signified* that ‘writes back’ against the background of orature and its contextual environment to re-imagine the prejudices, critical standards, discourses, marketing strategies and scientific technologies. Third, both *Signifier* and *Signified* constitute a hypertextual *Sign* that, in its own turn, asserts itself as a *specific* and *autonomous* discourse with potential to re-invent itself into a prospectively new metanarrative of emancipation and civilization in the internationalizing and globalizing world. In this way, it is important to show *how* this hypertextual continuum that acknowledges Eurocentrism and orature is not only vulnerable to multiple and emerging discourses of ‘centredness’ and ‘periphery’, ‘core’ versus ‘margin’, ‘us’ versus ‘them’, metropolis versus colony, Master versus Slave, but is, by the same token, reconstituted into new vulnerable and/or empowered sites for the African people as their literature and writings come into contact with internationalizing and globalizing environments. Therefore, criticism of African literature and new digital writings should take on a new life of their own, constructed by but also reconstructing the social experience of Eurocentrism/orature, as well as of internationalism, globalization, glocalization and post-globalization movements.

When literary theory emerged in the 1970s, literary criticism was challenged to consider established traditions like the narrowness of formalism and *ahistorical* aesthetics. But theory does not just happen

from what critics decide; theory occurs within a broad ferment of world and historical developments such as anti-war activism and civil rights movements in the US, resistance against colonial rule in Africa, anti-Apartheid movements and so forth. In this way, advances in the first way of theory, that is, theory as it took shape in the 1970s and 1980s, emerged in an atmosphere of real institutional and political overdetermination. In turn, theory fed into and was reshaped by critical paradigms designed to address the particularity of African populations. In the 1980s and 1990s, postcolonial theory was located within these institutional developments. But beneath the chaos of vocabulary and methods as postcolonial theory erupted into critical theory, there was an attempt to grapple with the delegitimized European humanism, criticism of colonial epistemic violence and deconstruction of essentialized identities and origins. Post-colonial theory pushed furthermore the tenets of post-structuralism in order to consolidate a criticism of nation statist ideological formations and cultural nationalism.

The recent turn from postcolonial theory to the paradigm of literary globalism is one consequence of the exertions of theory. The turn to literary globalism is implicitly evidence of the *obsolescence* of postcolonial theory. Literary globalization is a move beyond the embattled paradigm of postcoloniality. Faced with real-world developments, that render obsolete Twentieth century anti-colonial politics, literary globalism sublates postcolonial studies. In this way, postcoloniality is a being rather than a doing-in-the world; nor is it a writing-in-the world. This simplistic opposition is a return to the old false binary whereby particularity is posited as the antithesis of universality.

The criticism of African literatures is now taking on an intellectual and political life of its own and thrives in a relationship of mutual strengthening as a part of the cultural products of global capitalism. This criticism bears out Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1989: 16-17) premise about literature and the nation state, namely, that:

*The nation state is being re-imagined in the literary structure, which like every ideological structure, refracts the generating socio-economic reality and does so in its own way. But at the same time, in its content, literature refracts and reflects the refractions and reflections of other ideological spheres (ethics, epistemology, political doctrines, religions, etc). That is, in its content, literature reflects the whole of the ideological horizon of which it is itself a part.*

The totality and structure of criticism of African literature and digital writings refract and reflect their neocolonial and post-colonial conditions.

### 1.4 Research questions

The burning question is: what constitutes the *specific* aesthetics of African literature and new digital

writings that remained challenging as ever. In other words: What is it that makes African literatures and new digital writings so *singular, particularistic* and *different* that one can easily distinguish them from other world literatures? The ongoing and unabating discussions have gravitated around certain key issues that remind us of the exclamations of the 'Blind men and the elephant'. Scholars have argued vigorously about the accuracy of their insights, but the scorching issue that remained unaddressed until now has been the *specific and aesthetic identity* of African literature and new digital writings: how can African literature and new digital writings be defined? What constitutes the 'newness' of African literatures and digital-born writings on the world stage of literatures? What is the appropriate language (European or indigenous homelanguages) that is suitable for their propagation? Who is the audience of the literatures and new writings? What is their oral (or orature) and technological base? What are the critical standards by which they should be judged? Who should be their accredited critics? What is their ideological orientation, their appropriate theory and their function (art for art or utilitarianism)? Lastly, how should the literature re-imagine the future of emancipation of the African people? How is one to determine in school whether one piece of work is better than another, and by using which criteria? In order to tackle this problem, African critics made recourse to a kind of contextualization of New Criticism.

The years from the late 1970s to the late 1980s witnessed the marginalization of the first generation of writers and the triumph of the second generation with Marxist criticism. This simply means that, while, on the one hand, African literature was embarking on a quest for a stable and aesthetics critical standard, on the other hand, it was also committed vigorously and eclectically to applying critical standards and aesthetics in the literature and new digital writings. In addition to Western critical practices, Western generic and epistemological categories were also being applied freely to African literature and digital writings. It is this multitudinous character of African literature and new digital writings that has always been a controversial issue: on the one hand, expatriate critics who treated the literatures as *annexed* to the Eurocentric one, charged that African literatures and digital writings employed thin plots, thin narrative structures and superficial characterization. It was also observed that African literature and new digital writings are a mixed grill: they were all at once oral, written in tribal or vernacular tongues, written in foreign tongues like French, English, Portuguese, German, etc. and within these foreign tongues, African literature and new digital writings were given a further taint of linguistic impurity with Pidgin English, Creole, Petit Nègre, technology-oriented, content partiality with the single story, etc.

African literature and new digital writings have suffered from this characteristic of indeterminacy

of its 'newness' and the critic has been faced with a huge challenge at this level. Because of this 'newness' and because the critics were in simultaneous existence with the writers, the problem of 'instant analysis' was posed because it provided African critics and expatriates with the *afflatus* to impose their own arrogant and supercilious standards on the criticism of the literatures and new digital writings. This controversy pointed to one major problematic, namely, that the theory and criticism of African literature and new digital writings, was undergoing an *identity and autonomy crisis*. And like with the literature and digital writings themselves, the theoretical and critical problematic stemmed not simply from the *language* problematic but also, especially, from the *psychoanalytical* question. The theory and criticism of the literatures and digital writings could not identify the exact source of the *linguistic* problem because of these various 'diversions' and 'false leads' that had to do with the *psychoanalytical* turn.

This paper maintains that a hypertextual and psycho-dialectical model of critically reading African literature and its new digital writings can be very productive in their potential to acknowledge the intersection of Eurocentrism and African orality, and, at the same time, re-imagine 'newness' in an evolutionary phase; it is grounded in Eurocentrism, orality and technology, but, at the same time, it is an open-ended discourse to new interrogations.

### 1.5 Methodology

This paper deploys post-structuralist methodology to explore the *intersection* of Eurocentric and oral African aesthetics in literary and digital writings, on the one hand, and critique, on the other hand, in order to generate a unique hermeneutical and aesthetic experience of the literature and writings as a sustained engagement with the specific ways African writers and a new generation of young writers deploy the written and participatory web /blogging technology to circulate literary forms of experience. This method recognizes the ways in which the modern and digital age enables new *writerly* possibilities; but it is also a method of *openness* that makes visible the *agency* of new voices, new sensibilities and new technologies. The research constructs an analytical space for the enunciation of literary works that invite us to rethink a new regime of visibility for new understandings of quotidian political and cultural processes.

### 1.6 Findings and Discussion

There is a need to re-define 'African literature' and new digital writings. The controversy over whether African literature and digital writings are literature in the same sense in which, say, the European literatures were identified as such had died down by the 1980s. On the question of the truth of literature as opposed to 'historical truth', the two in the various studies of African fiction as naturalistic and exact, with simple

identifications between textual existentialism and socio-historical ones, is to strip the work in question of its aims as literature. But this Eurocentric mode of writing has to be properly interrogated, in terms of whether or not it does justice to African literature. Rather African literary works were praised up until quite recent times for the exactness of their representations. This is seen, for, instance, in Elizabeth Knight's (1983: 151) 'Mirror of reality: The Novels of Meja Mwangi'. This is faithful to the real and historical, according to eye-witness accounts by General China and Njama, who vindicates Mwangi's portrayal. Are we therefore faced with facts in Mwangi's work or with the probable? With history or with literature? The technique of reading required for literature differs profoundly from the reading of historical records. The individual work is inaccessible; yet it is meaningful, and invites reading for this.

However, it seems that this literary meaning is not an existentialism to be discovered *somewhere* inside the text. The meaning is the work itself, the act itself (Derrida 1978: I I). Readers confirm the inaccessibility of the 'object itself' by seeking unconsciously to be guided into the work, either by way of 'the real', to which the text is presumed to refer, or by way of the authorial intention expressed somewhere else, or which the reader believes he can reconstruct in the act of reading itself, or by way of some theory postulating that literature is so and so. This controversy also gave way to another debate, namely, what approaches were most appropriate for the study of the new literature. The question continued to generate passion. Adebayo Williams (1991) reported that the 1990 edition of *Research in African Literatures*, devoted entirely to criticism failed to decide on this question. Rather the critics employed the forum to make as strong a case as they could in favour of their own individual theoretical and ideological affiliations. The mode of *understanding* oral literature in African literary theory was raised as an important issue that needs to be redefined because the same Manichean treatment was given to its analysis. For example, Ruth Finnegan, a European scholar, was of the opinion that oral literature can be studied in a *literary* rather than in an *anthropological* framework. Isidore Okpewho disputed the ways in which the literature was envisaged typically through Eurocentric terms that privileged classical literary history in favour of the mythical approach.

Another group of scholars comprised of Daniel Kunene, Elizabeth Gunnar, Karin Barber, Isabel Hofmeyr and Richard Taylor insisted that oral literature should be studied alongside written literature without giving precedence to written literature. They maintained that *oral and written forms* are interwoven in cohesive social contexts. Karin Barber studied the connection between the oral and the written in Nigerian Yoruba culture. This mode of understanding drew enormous attention to the need to avoid relegating oral literature to the past and disconnecting it from written forms in

African societies. They advised against the assumption that the written word is superior, a higher literary form than the spoken word. In order to complete the task of fully decolonizing African literature, Chinweizu, Madubuike and Jemie (1980) assaulted African critics and writers. They declared that the literature written by Africans was the literature of imitation and adaptation, and not a literature of imagination and invention. They drew attention to the extent to which African critics and writers were pervasively and deeply tied to the European literary apron strings and were never weaned away from the European literary breast. The text *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* carved out a *niche* in the critical annals of African literature as a way of enabling the critics and writers to get rid of the colonial hangover. After this call of the *troika*, the debate over the influence of Eurocentric criticism in African literature died completely. A new era emerged during which African scholars such as Joseph Okpaku insisted that the criticism of African art must come from Africans themselves deploying African standards. These various debates took place in journals such as *Research in African Literatures*, *African Literature Today*, *Matatu*, *Okike*, *Présence Africaine*, *Kunapipi*, *Black Orpheus*, *Transition* and in various in-house journals of English and French Departments of universities. However, the debates failed to resolve the burning question of *what* constitutes the *specific* aesthetic of African literatures; what is it that makes African modern literatures so unique that one can easily distinguish them from other world literatures? The ongoing and unabating discussions gravitated around certain key issues that remind us of the exclamations of 'The blind men and the elephant'. Scholars argued vigorously about the accuracy of their insights, but the scorching issue that remained unaddressed until now is the *specific critical identity* of modern African literatures: how can modern African literatures be defined? What constitutes the *newness* of modern African literatures and digital-born writings on the world stage of literatures? These controversies make the case that the literatures were suffering from an identity and autonomy crisis. What is the appropriate language (European or indigenous homelanguages) that is suitable for its propagation? Who is the audience of the literatures? What is their oral base or orature? What are the critical standards by which they should be judged? Who should be their accredited critics? What is their ideological orientation, their appropriate theory and their function (art for art or utilitarian)?

However, the major flaw of the *troika* Chinweisu *et al.*, in their book was that, their view which was quarrelsome, with an irreverent stance, was myopic, in the sense that it failed to state *where* we go to from when we ceased to be Eurocentric; or what directions in African literary theory we were to take when it came to the *language* question, for example.

### 1.6.1 The Language Question

One of the thorniest questions that confronted African literary critics in the Twentieth century was the language issue. It was not fully resolved even as we entered the Twenty first century. Even though Ngugi Wa Thiongo dissented against the use of European languages, the other writers such as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Ayi Kwei Armah, Mongo Beti, Ferdinand Oyono, etc, continued to write in these foreign languages. From the viewpoint of employment of language in African literature, the problem of the creative writer in Africa parallels that of his European counterpart during the *Renaissance* epoch. Like today, the Renaissance author was faced with the challenge of proper use of language (should it be vernacular or foreign?) in which to express himself or herself. Both the Renaissance and African writer suffered from an inferiority complex about the use of their vernacular languages. During the Renaissance epoch, there was a popular humanist theory that instructed that dialects of modernism were the language of plebeians, that is, the ordinary masses, that spoke *vulgar* discourses. The theory spread the belief that Latin and Greek were superior languages that only ancient ancestors could use. Consequently, Francis Bacon, who did not trust that the English language can stand the test of time, translated most of his works into Latin. Roger Acham (1544), explained in *Toxophilus* that he could not write his works in English because “to have written this book in Latin or Greek had been much easier.” In contrast, Mulcaster, who was an English contemporary of Acham, conducted campaigns to encourage English writers to write their works in English because, in his words, English was “the joyful title of our liberty and freedom, the Latin tongue remembering us of our thralldom.” Similarly, Du Bellay (1549) published a memoir entitled *A la défense et illustration de la langue Françoise* in which he appealed to the nationalistic feelings of fellow Frenchmen and women writers to write in the French language because it is their patriotic duty to enrich the language through learning and the French people are as good as any other people, whether ancient or modern. This same pressure was put on African writers on the grounds that their homelanguages were as good as any other language and their communities had nothing to envy from any other.

Dante became one of the greatest writers of all time not because he wrote in Latin, but because he published, for example, his *The Divine Comedy* in his vulgar Florentine. Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Petrarch's sonnets were written in vulgar Italian tongue even though these writers were all very efficient in Latin and Greek. By prioritizing Italian, the writers brought authority and dignity to their native language and catapulted it, as well as English and French, into world recognition. This was an expression of a healthy nationalism through the use of language in literary expression. The African writer has to know that through out literary history, no writer became great by insisting

on talking to his people through a foreign language, that is, through an interpreter. Therefore, the only way to internationalize their African languages was by writing in them. To assume a language is to assume a worldview. Therefore, it became misguided strategy for the African writer to write in a European language and yell curses back at Prospero through his language.

When the late Nigerian writer Ken Saro Wiwa (1992:155) formulated the question: ‘Why do we insist on having “an African literature” and debating what language it should be written in?’, he was right in following the footsteps of the Nigerian scholar Obi Wali who, in a 1963 article published in *Transition* declared that: ‘any true African literature must be written in African languages’. Since then, African writers writing in English, French, Portuguese, etc were asked to justify their choice under the risk of their works being tagged as ‘un African’ or as under the influence of neo-colonialism. The justification given was that African literature written in Eurocentric languages are inaccessible to the local audience of readers with little or no education in the languages or the European culture. However, this indictment attracted more criticism from literary critics and creative writers than praise. Chinua Achebe (1965:28) in an article ‘English and the African writer’ argued that even though his mother tongue is Igbo, a new English still in full communion with its ancestral origins, but altered to respond to its new African surroundings would be able to carry the weight of his African experience. What gave the ‘Achebe side’ of the argument an extra edge was the fact that Achebe was less ideological and more pragmatic, stressing on feasibility. In this light, Achebe (1965:28) persuaded that Africans with their multiple ethnicities needed a ‘manageable number of languages to talk in’.

Arguing with a Marxist twist, the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiongo'o (1986:22) recast some of Obi Wali's statements by deploring the petit-bourgeoisie readership automatically assumed by the African writer's choice of language. The writer argued that since language carries culture, the imposition of European languages on children, who were raised on their mother tongues would lead to colonial alienation. Therefore, for Ngugi, English was a means of spiritual subjugation and alienation in Africa. From this light, writing in Eurocentric languages is tantamount to reinforcing the neo-colonial spirit. Ngugi finally declared that, after *Decolonizing the Mind*, he would bid farewell to English as a vehicle for any of his writings, and would adopt Gikuyu and Swahili.

But neither Ngugi's resolve nor his passionate arguments were able to stand the test of time. Many scholars pointed out gaps in the reasoning of the Kenyan writer. For example, Saro Wiwa (1992) pointed out that African languages were no less prone to yielding unequal power relationships than English, and



the case of minority ethnic groups is an illustration of this. For Adejunmobi (1999) there is no such thing as the 'authentic' Africanness to which Ngugi is aspiring. Even Ngugi acknowledged the untenable position of his uncompromising proposition; he published a few theatrical pieces in Gikuyu but continued to give lectures and to write in English.

Since the 1960s when the language debate went virulent, a lot of opinion was expressed. Contemporary discussions have lost the heat that used to vibrate in the debate because most writers and critics are of the opinion that Achebe's standpoint is tenable, namely, that both Europhone and African-language literatures have a role to play in the continent's cultural development. But it is also important to note that the controversy impacted not so much on the literature as on the study of the literature. The statement by Obi Wali according to which African writing in Eurocentric languages was pursuing a dead end that will lead to uncreativity, sterility and frustration, foregrounded considerations on the linguistic specificities of African literatures in Eurocentric languages. With interests rising in the study of *form* of the literature, this enthusiasm translated into the linguistic-oriented study of African writings. Attempts were made to investigate the stylistic qualities of African novels, plays and poetry written in English, French, Portuguese and other languages. These studies set out to investigate the specifically 'African' elements found in the works. They were able to refute Wali's claims that African literature critics mindlessly enforced standards of the western academy. In spite of the upsurge, African literary studies did not result to the creation of a distinctive school of African stylistics. No attempts were made to approach the stylistic make-up of African writings in a systematic manner.

Because of reasons that have to do with epistemology, African stylistics could not develop with scholars' indecisiveness and disagreements over methods and sources of knowledge. The origin of the object of investigation and the origin of the discipline of stylistics itself became epistemological hurdles. Within this framework of skepticism, some studies considered the narrative significance of tropes like folktales and proverbs but without scrutinizing linguistically the texts containing them (Obiechina 1993, Griffiths 1971). Some studies focused on the influences of homelanguages on the verses or prose of African writers by thoroughly analyzing syntactical and semantic features (Bamiro 2006, Igboanusi 2001). But these studies were merely linguistic descriptions of excerpts from novels as opposed to their narrative reading. The impression this created was that formalist readings of African literature did not provide sufficient evidence that these studies were a decisive contribution to the aesthetics comprehension of these texts. Linguistic scrutiny consisted chiefly in considering literary extracts as examples of African English variety,

thereby bestowing on excerpts of fiction an aura of authenticity that erases the vital input of creativity of the 'anthropological fallacy' that Henry Louis Gates Jr (1984) had hypothesized about by disregarding aesthetic value of literary texts and evaluating them as simply anthropological treatises or sociological documents.

Nevertheless, some studies were done with the intention of focusing on the culturally-specific characteristics of literary texts through linguistic analysis without losing sight of how the formal traits of a text may sustain relevance to its poetic strategies. Chantal Zabus' (1991) *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone novel*. It handles a range of linguistic characteristics as well as the methodological incisiveness of West African literatures in English and French. For example, Zabus investigated how Pidgin passages found in Nigerian novels reflected the language as it was spoken in real life situations. She qualified the linguistic code as 'pseudo-pidgin' because these renderings betrayed English not typically associated with real life Pidgin. Zabus also shifted from questions of form to the question of functional fity of the linguistic presence within Nigerian creative art. Some of the writings gained insights into specific literary texts (Epstein and Cole 1998, *The Language of African Literature*). Even as the literary value of cross-cultural Europhone African literature was persuasively established thereby avoiding the 'dead end' scenario predicted by Obi Wali, other scholars were also writing about language as a signifier in context thereby obscuring linguistic traits that literature may have in common with traditions from other continents. With African literature gaining insights from its linguistic 'otherness', studies based on language started to lose their critical potency.

With the pervasive impact of the language debate causing scholars to pay scant attention to the literature's universal qualities, it is also true that there were other factors that defined the critical climate over a forty years period of time. Some European and American critics claimed to have revealed what they called 'universal truths', which were euphemism for Western truths (Kadiatu Kanneh 1997). In the 1970s, Ayi Kwei Armah (1976) condemned this as 'larsony' in reference to Charles Larson, who helped to spread cliché'-ridden significations of Africa. In the 1980s, Chinweizu, Madubuike and Jemie equally censored Eurocentric universalism and stressed on finding a system of aesthetic assessment based on what was referred to as 'authentic' African paradigms. However, Wole Soyinka (1975) countered their position by exposing their ignorance of Africa as a one dimensional stake. Henry Gates Jr (1984) emphasized the complexity of the 'double heritage' in Europhone literature. However, many scholars in Africa continued to deploy traditional approaches like poststructuralism

and postcolonial theory that were developed to address the specificities of formerly colonized territories in the continent.

Emmanuel Ngara (1982) attempted to deploy Marxist oriented approach in Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel in which he distanced himself from linguistic methodologies such as structuralism, functionalism and cognitivism, formalism and postcolonialism.

As George Lamming has rightly pointed out: Caliban and his future now belong to Prospero; Prospero now lives in the absolute certainty that language which is his gift to Caliban, is the very prison in which Caliban's achievements will be realized and restricted (*The Pleasures of Exile*, London, 109). For him, the tragedy of the African writer is that not only do they imprison themselves in the language of their European masters, but they also imprison themselves physically in the very land of their European masters. It became axiomatic that so long as we did not forget about our colonial past, so long the African personality was hung on to the Negritude aesthetics as a counterbalance. In the French speaking world, French imperial and colonial prejudices, critical standards, marketing strategies and scientific technologies constructed a direct control policy that was oriented toward total cultural assimilation. As the debate around the Negritude aesthetics debate waned, 'oppositional criticism' arose to replace it.

### 1.6.2 The Techno-Text

By the term *techno-text*, we are referring to the post-indiginist writings or African literature that emerged from the aesthetics ambience of technological, global, urban and post-modern culture as opposed to orature such as folktales, proverbs, myths, elegies, etc, and literature that articulated Africa's experience with modern colonial history. At the height of the frenzy with creative writings in the continent, expatriate teachers, critics and anthropologists from the West goaded African writers into generating ethnocentric texts as the unique signature of African literature. Later, postcolonial criticism emerged to celebrate these writings as protest writings aimed against colonialism through appropriation and reconstitution of the language of the coloniser. The idea was that African culture is a folkloric literature, including oral tradition, rituals, dance, music, etc, frozen in an idealized and static space and time, was entrenched in the continent's benchmarks. As Bgoya and Jay Walter (2013), Bgoya (2001, 2014) has rightly stated, little attention was paid to the creative writings that were created by an alienated, urbanized and younger class of African professionals. Their literature required a different set of criteria to interpret their literary reality. The African literary world had moved on from the stage of folktales to that of modernism and now the stage of postmodernism, popular culture, technology and global

media. Consequently, a new mode of representation is necessary to investigate this third generational literature.

The techno-text (post-indiginist) approach should entail a strategy that infuses literary languages with present day expressions in order to facilitate the communication of current themes. The criteria may be summarized as follows in post-indiginist language usage in Iyorwuese Hagher's (2012) *Aishattu*:

1. Literary language both represents and betrays the background and experience of a written.
2. Writers would normally employ a language in which they are competent
3. Literary language ought to reflect the contemporary situation and facilitate cross-cultural and communal communication

This section proposes to use techno-text analysis to investigate how and why a writer uses a language out of the option between his oral/mother tongue and a received colonial language or his oral/mother tongue and digital technology. In the case of Harry Hagher, he uses standard English in a very plain way without infusing his native Tiv language. An explanation for this style may be traced to his upbringing in a family that had taken to western education and the Church. His father was a primary school teacher in the 1930-1940s, a native of Kasar in the Katsina Ala Government Local Area of Benue State in Nigeria. His mother learned to read the Bible because of her zeal for Christianity. As a child, Hagher attended the Christian Reformed church with his family. In 1964, he attended a mission secondary school where he was introduced to western drama through William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth*. His early exposures included Onitsha market literature and the American cowboys films. He read English and Dramatic Arts up to Doctoral level at the Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Nigeria. As a playwright, Hagher uses the language in which he is most competent through his extensive education, namely, English language. In this way, writing in his Tiv mother tongue or transliterating it in his English language works was out of his reach given the circumstances of his upbringing.

Phanuel Egejuru (1978:69) observed correctly that:

*...by the time the writer reaches the age of logical reasoning, his line of thinking is gradually being shaped by the foreign language...by the time he graduates from university, all his academic thinking is done in the foreign language. Thus, the African writer does not really think in his mother tongue to write in English as some suppose. He thinks and writes in English because of his colonial education.*

Ejeguru's observations apply generally to western-educated African writers as well as to writers who produced techno-texts in electronic literature. The

normal inclinations of African writers educated in English is to write in plain standard English. But given that writers can endlessly manipulate their variety and structures of language, as pointed out earlier, African writers can create techno-texts by applying their research, materials and effort to that end. Otherwise, plain, unadorned English is generated as evidenced in Wole Soyinka's earliest plays *The Trials of Brother Jero*, *The Invention* and *The Lion and the Jewel*. James Ene Henshaw was another Nigerian, who had a western, university education. The *ethno-text* is an affected style by African writers influenced by western education. These writers create their writings in the standard English plain style that Hagher uses in all of his plays. Standard English is the variety employed in both the informal speech and formal writings by the educated, whose vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar and spelling are uniform globally with regional differences. A literary use of standard English in a current form facilitates cross-cultural communication and guarantees representation of the modern environment.

In Hagher's play *Aishatu*, standard English is used, but the experience or situation presented is typically Nigerian. The social geography is Nigeria; the social psychology is embodied by Wali (the corrupted Nigerian businessman) and Apeh (the outspoken critic). The social history is that of the well-known trend of corruption in Nigeria. The language employed is able to convey the Nigerian experience in its contemporary form to both foreign and local audiences that identify with signification of the wasteful and lavish lifestyles of corrupted Africans. Hagher also alludes to the contemporary environment of American cities with reference to multicultural symbols like five-star hotels. Nevertheless, Hagher's language usage is too plain from the light of Aristotle's *Poetics*, in which he explains that dramatic language is language that is adorned with different kinds of ornaments separately in its different parts. Literary language is adorned with idioms, proverbs, metaphors, and other figures of speech that are devices imbued with modern flavours in a modern play in contrast to the traditional ethno-text. Hagher employed Pidgin English in the language of his educated and uneducated characters such as Mama Tola, the unschooled corn seller and Rekiya, the educated one.

To recap, there are three major linguistic approaches in the African literature in general and playwrighting in particular, namely, writing in indigenous languages or the *indiginist essentialism*, writing by embedding indigenous languages in foreign languages or *indiginist hybridism* and writings in contemporary standard language usage or *post-indiginist realism*. The first practice is stillborn, the second is glorified and the third is muted. The embedded style is praised as the unique mark of black writing. The others are not attractive because African writers feel incompetent to exhibit sufficient skills or

knowledge about the cultures represented by these languages.

The *indiginist essentialism* approach was championed by exponents like Ngugi Wa Thiongo'o, Obi Wali and Frantz Fanon. These scholars maintained that African literature should be written in African homelanguages because language is so ideologically and culturally loaded that its imposition by colonial forces implies continuous mental control of the colonized masses by the imperial masters. This was seen as tantamount to propagating the worldview of the imperial forces. The audience of the literature was signified as the underclass users of a local language; therefore the purpose of writing in indigenous African languages was to galvanize support for a revolution against the forces of neo-colonialism. Within the spirit of cultural essentialism, the African writer was expected to cast off every linguistic influence of colonialism and to promote pre-colonial languages in Africa. The African culture was expected to be transmitted through the languages as an anti-thesis to the hegemonic cultural universalism of the West. Ngugi abandoned English and wrote in Kikuyu, his mother language. He wrote plays such as *Maitu Njugira* and *Ngahika Ndeenda* in Kenya and they were subsequently translated. Into English. Penina Mlama authored the play *Nguzo Mama* in Swahili, a language spoken in Tanzania and other neighboring African countries. These two writers opted to effect social change through the employment of indigenous languages and were referred to as the indigenous essentialists. Other writers who chose to use both homelanguages and foreign language included Rose Mbowa of Uganda, S.O. Amali, Akinwumi Ishola and Sony Akpan of Nigeria. Several African languages have been used to publish such as Zulu, Shona, Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa and Amharic. However, in most cases, the writers were school teachers who wanted to provide texts to their students. Unfortunately, these texts hardly attract any critical attention from critical scholars. Penina Mlama (1990) noted in an article entitled as 'Creating in the Mother Tongue: The Challenges to the African Writer Today', that literary production infrastructure such as the school, publishing houses, literary awards and prizes and book distributors have roles to play.

### 1.6.3 *Marxism and Africanization of Socialist Criticism*

A group of African ideologues, that is, critics brandishing the Marxist-sociological wand announced their presence with a lot of revolutionary fervour. They made the masses to become aware of their downtrodden status and the numerous inequalities they suffered from in society, and therefore, the need for a social revolution. In their theoretical construct, these radical voices committed themselves to discursive relations between the classes. They also politicized the cultural basis upon which the criticism of African literature was based. This group of young critics-cum-writers, who

were initially referred to as the *confess artistes*, was comprised of Jeyifo Biodun, Bode Sowande, Kole Omotoso, Femi Osofisan, etc. They created a critical Journal called *Positive Review* defended by Chidi Amuta, who published *The Theory of African Literature*. This book condensed the major Marxist theories on which their sociological approach to interpretation of African literature was hinged. Marxism and Deconstruction of Western Imperial Hegemony and Colonial Interests in African Literature. Amuta challenged the conventional critical assessment of African literature, with the key argument that African literature can be discussed only within the wider framework of the dismantling of colonial rule and Western hegemony in Africa. In exploring the possibility of a dialectical, alternative critical base, he draws upon both classical Marxist aesthetics and the theories of African culture espoused by Fanon, Cabral and Ngugi. From these explorations, Amuta derives a new language of criticism, which is then applied to works by modern African writers as diverse as Achebe, Ousmane, Agostinho Neto and Dennis Brutus. Amuta's highly original and innovative approach remained relevant for Marxist and postcolonial theories of literary criticism more generally. These critics with proletarian propensities such as Eddie Madunagu, Yemi Ogunbiyi and G.G. Darah found their critical quarry in the writings of fellow radical authors like Ngugi Wa Thiongo who published *Devil on the Cross* and *Petals of Blood*, Festus Iyayi's *Violence*, Femi Osofisan's *Kolera Kolej*, Ousman Sembene's *God's Bits of Wood*, etc.

On the question of western presence in Africa, the literature also shows that Africans should also take their own share of the blame. The turbulence of life imbued African writings with a 'spectacular' bent. Njabulo Ndebele (1986) used the term 'spectacular' to describe South African literature during the apartheid epoch. He explained that literature is 'spectacular' when it documents, it is demonstrative, and indicts implicitly. African literature 'writes back' by prioritizing the portrait of the 'exterior' order that oppresses over the 'interior' as required by Eurocentric literature; in this way, it keeps the larger issues of society in our minds and obliterates the details. African literature narrates itself as the literature of the powerless by identifying the principal factors responsible for the continent's powerlessness (Newell 2002: 137). In Wole Soyinka's writings such as *Madmen and Specialists* and *Season of Anomy*, and in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Osiris Writing* and *The Healers*, these factors prevail.

A second consequence of western presence in the African context of the literature was the preoccupation with *apostacy* or exile. This triggered a number of responses ranging from passionate embrace of tradition to moments of anger. The African writer was very sensitive to this issue because of earlier calls,

especially by Marxists, for him to play the role of a teacher and champion, with professed commitment for the improvement of conditions of life for the masses in society, and such a role could only be carried out from within society or the community than from Europe, America or any countries abroad. For example, Achebe was exiled and he sought refuge in the USA; how effective could he be as a teacher of Igbo from abroad. Although the level of education of African writers is relatively higher compared to the social average, the relevance of the writers was challenged because they were so unrepresentative of the masses (Griswold 2000: 45). Because of the strong sensitivity of writers on this issue, the tendency was for writers to show a sense of nativism or nostalgia in their writings, such as by making recourse to proverbs, folktales, dirges, myths and legends, for example, in their writings as a device to compensate for the writer's physical alienation, superior education or elitism and indigenize the imported and adapted genres like the novel. African literature became the artistic equivalent of the foreign luxury goods with which the ruling elites cut off from the masses (Derek Wright 1997:9). Nevertheless, whenever the African writer was seduced by the western aesthetics of style and narrative techniques of the former imperial oppressor in order to bewail the continued oppression of the African race, writing itself became an act of *betrayal*: in the sense that art was fashioned out to be interesting to the western audience that is primarily comprised of white readers. This art was crafted out of a defeated revolution. From the viewpoint of aesthetics, the writings were a success but from a political perspective, they were a failure.

On the other hand, exile/apostacy was fully treated by embracing it as the preferred mode of consciousness. It was in this guise that the challenge to issues of race, class, ethnicity, gender, identity, etc, were understood as a challenge that is invented and constructed. A long time before postcolonial discourse handled these questions, some African writers were already objecting to being identified as 'African'. For example, in the 1966 Dakar festival of African Arts, Christopher Okigbo rejected a prize that was offered to him on African poetry. Today, the writers have become celebrities and cosmopolitans (Brenan 1989). They prefer to be referred to as members of the multinational elite of letters. But in the 1980s, they were sharply rebuked to a point where they felt uncomfortable because they were taken to task by a group of Marxist critics and intellectuals. So, after the independence of African countries, there were deadly confrontations between rulers and writers and these contributed to the popularity and emergence of a critical School that demanded that writers should deploy their writings to nurture revolutionary change.

Leftist academics in the Universities of Ife and Ibadan were at the forefront of the movement. Their

influence peaked during the 1980s as other Leftists such as the *Bolekaja* critics (Chinweizu *et al.* 1980) lambasted Ayi Kwei Armah and Wole Soyinka for their ivory-tower preoccupations with the Western life style and their indifference to the conditions of the masses in their societies. African writers were charged with slavishly adopting Euro-modernist and Eurocentric styles, hewing to issues that were relevant to their class, instead of championing the causes of the masses, and clinging to particularly inaccessible versions of the imperial master's language. They were castigated for their lack of social consciousness because they preferred western bourgeois approaches rather than radical social analysis and their preference for an 'ethnic' rather than an 'etic' approach to social issues.

In 1985, Emmanuel Ngara published his *Art and Ideology in the African Novel* and in the same year Georg Gugelberger (1985: 11-12) published *Marxism and African Literature*, a collection of essays by major Leftist critics. Four years later in 1989, Chidi Amuta published a monograph entitled as *The Theory of African Literature*. Gugelberger classified the various Schools of criticism that had emerged in Africa up to the 1980s by Africans and westerners. The 'Larsonists' (after Charles Larson) pontificated on African literature as being annexed to European literature and founded fault with what they called its shortcomings. The 'African Euro-critics' were Africans, who had received training in European critical criteria and applied them to the literature. The *Bolekaja* critics also referred to as *Tarzanists* by Ogunist scholars argued against the Eurocentric approaches which they found to be obscure, and, consequently, demanded an autonomous African aesthetics based on orature. Pseudo-traditionalists like Wole Soyinka were Ogunist scholars who were actually individuals deploying the Eurocentric modernist convention but prone to neo-Negritude and Eurocentric formalism. The Marxist critics scrutinized writings in terms of their function and demanded social change and improvement of conditions of livelihood for the masses. Soyinka lampooned them as radical *chick-ists*. Marxists and *Bolekaja* critics shared everything with the writers such as level of education, class, language and alienation. The chief difference between them was that the writers were university teachers, who gave radical lectures to students that often joined in demonstrations against the authorities, while the others worked in the media sector.

The Marxists did try to get the attention of the writers though. Novelists like the Nigerians Kole Omotoso and Festus Iyayi; poets like the Ghanaian Atukwei Okai and leftists needed no persuasion. But the *bolekaja* critics urged the younger generation of poets such as Tanure Ojaide and Ofeimum Odia to take a different stance, while positioning themselves on the side of the struggling masses and railing against the rapaciousness of the established official order. Isidore Okpewho's (1993) novel *Tides*, together with works

spawned by the Nigerian civil war, did what the Marxists urged, but without proclaiming themselves as Marxists. Even Chinua Achebe's (1987) *Anthills of the Savannah* was written by following the Marxist blueprint, especially as it brings together taxi-drivers, students, trade unionists, illiterate women traders and so on, who would combine their efforts to shape the future under the enlightened leadership of Beatrice. Soyinka (1988) characteristically decided not to appease the Marxists, but rather to attack them through his paper: 'The Autistic Hunt; Or, How to Marximize Mediocrity'.

The Marxists also sought to persuade women, who, following their ideology, laboured under patriarchy, which was no where more oppressive and debilitating than in Africa. The female writers such as Buchi Emecheta, Ama Atta Aidoo, Flora Nwapa, Ogunidipe-Leslie, etc, focused much more on attacking the institutions of patriarchy. The feminist approach to criticism of African literature was an importation from the critical strand of Eurocentric literary theory. Feminism urged recognition of women's claims for equality of rights with men, from a marital, economic, political, cultural, social and legal viewpoint. Young critics such as Chioma Opara, Rose Acholonu, Chikwenye Ogunyemi, etc, took the cue from feminist writers like Flora Nwapa, Zaynab Alkali, Ama Ata Aidoo, Mariama Ba, etc, to redeem the image of women as portrayed by male authors like Cyprian Ekwensi, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe. These female critics maintained that male writers saw and portrayed women as dependent, helpless, good time girls, concubines and prostitutes or 'kept women' destined 'to carry foo-foo and soup to men discussing important matters' (Ogunyemi). The feminist critics were able to show that women were economically independent, industrious, possessed superior moral authority than men and were not parasites as often assumed.

Although Onoge (1985: 71) had argued that Marxists have "lost and found themselves among the people", in actual fact, it is that this projection is inaccurate and unsustainable. Radical Marxist critics and writers brought new instruments for interpreting the Marxist approach to literature, but the Marxist-socialist approach failed to trigger real revolutionary movements among the African proletarians. This was owing to the fact that, in the behaviour and orientation of the Marxists were just as extraverted as those of the ivory-tower writers. The Marxist-socialist ideology is utopian: that is, to reorder society in such a way that the dictatorship of the proletariat should take root in the African soil. The concept of criticism as a class warfare failed to materialize and succeed. The Marxist vogue lost much of its appeal after the fall of the USSR, the collapse of the East European economy and the ascendancy of postcolonialism.

#### 1.6.4 Womanist Commitment in Feminist Criticism

In order to identify the 'specific' character of African literature, Stephanie Newells' (2006) *West African Literatures: Ways of Reading* investigated West African cultural traditions through drama, fiction and poetry and in relationship to the political and cultural contexts of West Africa. In this work, Newell compares and contrasts literature from before independence with those of contemporary authors, who shifted from earlier nationalist concerns to more experimental models of writing. In a study of postcolonialism's effects on African narrative structures and experimental techniques, entitled as *After Colonialism: African Postmodernism and Magical Realism*, the author Gerard Gayland (2006) concluded that experimental techniques like magical realism can be useful for contemplating postcolonial Africa. Feminist critics often applied Eurocentric theory to overrule the patriarchal tradition that undermined the writings of Florence Nwapa, Ama Ata Aidoo, Efua Sutherland, Buchi Emecheta, Bessie Head, Mariama Ba and others. They used decolonization and postcolonial theory to illustrate the importance of gender difference in the investigation of colonial dictatorship in African literature. Critics pointed out that any feminist reading of African literature should take into consideration the double colonization of women both as subjects of imperialism and colonial rule and as subjects of the patriarchal structures of indigenous societies. Some perceptive critics even suggested that the patriarchal configuration of African traditional societies was created or encouraged by the respective colonial masters to strengthen methods of domestication of people. This is what inspired Nina Mba to rewrite the *histories* that male novelists and historians left women out of; this was a way of offering a re-reading of African literature and history (Whitley 2014).

The question of inequality between the races has been at the *root* of an ambivalence in the feminist criticism of African literature and digital writings. This ambivalence is found in the writings of African women writers; reflecting on the subject of 'the female writer and her commitment', Ogundipe-Leslie reports that the African female writer has to be committed as a writer, a woman and as a Third World person and her biological womanhood is implicated in all three. She is *committed* to her art in the sense that she seeks to do justice to it at the highest level of expertise. She is committed to her vision irrespective of the outcome and she writes to tell her own side of the truth. Artistic commitment in African literature involved social concerns and their expression in art. But being committed to their *womanhood* has been a major challenge for African women writers because the Eurocentric feminist tradition required that the male stereotypes of women should be destroyed and the patriarchal ideology should be eliminated. The writings of the women express deep concern and understanding for the experience and fate of women in African societies. Yet, at the same time,

they are preoccupied with various social predicaments in their nation states and they locate their awareness of challenges and their solutions in the larger global context of imperialism and neocolonialism.

As a support to arguments on literature as a socially significant art, a number of critical models were deployed such as the *synthetic* critical perspective grounded in theories of liberation in the expectation that they can be useful tools of analysis. Critical theory was often deployed in African literature because the literature found consensus around the social dimensions of literature, and this, in turn, opened the way for methods of syntheticism. But the gender variable was lacking in the debate and when it was introduced, it complicated matters even further for African and non-African feminist critics. Just as the female critic is a product of a male tradition of power, against which she pits a new awareness, so too are African women critics and writers. They are confronted with the implications of the need to liberate themselves from the strictures of patriarchal societies and of societies grappling with imperialism and colonialism. This led to the ambiguity in the position of African female critics as pointed out by Petersen, Ngcobo and Ogundipe-Leslie (Sougou 2002).

When Katherine Frank published her 'Feminist Criticism and the African Novel,' it was one of the early but useful investigations on the problematic of feminism in African literature because it was founded on the premise that feminism was a deeply individualistic philosophy and the idea of an 'African feminism' was a contradiction of terms. In African literature, feminism involves much more than the reductive definition that Frank provided in her paper. In most of its trends and forms, feminism stressed women's bonding. Both materialistic and socialist brands of feminism integrated class and collectivity. African feminist ideology came about from the particular conditions of women as a transformational current of international feminism. It challenged patriarchal tradition and strengthened the idea of family. It sought for an egalitarian partnership between men and women while acknowledging the struggle against imperialism, colonialism, racism and exploitation.

These Eurocentric approaches were altered to suit African literature. For example, African American feminists readapted feminist theory to black literature with Alice Walker's womanist aesthetics. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (1985), attempted an integrated approach for African and African American literature by drawing from the *womanist* aesthetics perspective. Carole Boyce Davies envisaged the theoretical framework of African feminism as a 'balancing act' including ideas of a synthetic approach. Boyce Davies suggested that African feminist critics should draw values from both mainstream feminist criticism and African feminist criticism bearing in mind that they are

offshoots of traditional Eurocentric literary criticism, but also in some cases its adversaries. The outcome from such an exercise cannot be reductive but refinement in order to create a critical machinery with sufficient sophistication to elucidate the complex and concrete situation of women's lives in Africa (Boyce Davies *Ngambika* 12-13).

Nevertheless, in this discussion, there was awareness that, as a male, the writer's position is that of the 'outsider', located beyond the intimate cultural zone of female experience. As a postcolonial critic, the writer needs the 'cultural inwardness' of females that Mukherjee talks about (Mukherjee, 1990, *Whose postcolonialism and whose postmodernism*). Even though he is a 'post-colonial critic', there are elements of the 'colonial' in his discourse that predisposed him as an 'outsider' when it came to discussing feminist issues. His 'outside' insights suffered from not being able to see things from within the feminist world even though he hoped that his writings would contribute to the effort of countering the politics of silence that is typical in colonial and patriarchal settings of women's writings like this one. But another intention behind this work was to take part in a dialogue between male and female African critics and writers. Florence Stratton articulated this concern by arguing that such an encounter is significant because it occasions a major change in the critical orientation of African literature; a turning away from the issue of *race* (that was central to Eurocentrism) to greater concerns with the question of *gender*. It also marked a turning away from interrogation of the European text to a greater interaction with and focus on the African text (Mineke Schipper 1987, *Mother Africa*). Women writers earned a place in African literary history as initiators of this dialogue. This position was denied them because *gender* was ignored as a factor in the development of critical scholarship in African literature. Boyce Davies also argued, along the same line, that African men who challenge the traditional political and social dominance of patriarchy and support issues of women are obvious partners in the struggles (Stratton 2020).

Buchi Emechetta was one of the female African writers, who expressed profound discontent with the situation of women in Africa and staged a revolt against it. Gender overshadowed questions of class, race, and culture, which are issues of Eurocentrism. Although Emechetta may not come entirely within the 'canon' of African writing, her works are not separable from the body of literature referred to as African literature in terms of content and areas of interest. Emechetta's writings are inscribed in the general framework of feminist discourse, with the difference residing in the African tone. Emechetta is a very peculiar writer in the sense that she was a Black writer in Britain. Her Africanness conflicted with the feminist outlook and with attitudes toward the mainstream feminism expressed in her writings. She

was the backcloth against which the conflict between the metropolitan capital and empire was played out. Emechetta published a number of works such as *The Joys of Motherhood*, *The Bride Price*, *The Rape of Shavi*, *Gwendolen*, *Naira Power*, *Double Yoke*, *Destination Biafra*, *The Slave Girl*, *In the Ditch* and *Second Class Citizen*.

For a long period of time, the image of the African woman was signified as negative, passive or naïve in the critique of the literature. In the literature generally and particularly, in the critique of major writings of East Africa, women were cast as sex objects to be consumed by men. Although politically committed literature invested women in the nationalist project, and even represented them as symbols of the motherland, the woman was not endowed with subjectivity or agency. Nici Nelson has shown that, but for a few examples, women in the city are depicted negatively as given to manipulation of their sexual seductiveness to men in order to entrap, tantalize and entice male characters. They are also signified as sexual objects with nothing to offer men than sex (Nelson, *Representations of Men and Women*, 1996:148).

Nevertheless, the emergence of a gender practice informed by gender analysis created some important changes during the 1980s with creative writers rethinking the role of women in politics, society and culture. Still, in the early stage of the criticism, critics were cautious not to be mistaken for western feminists. Energetic analysis of East African literature, for example, tended to emerge from abroad rather than from locally based critics in the continent. For example, Florence Stratton's *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* was the first attempt to redefine the role of women in African literature. Using the writings of Grace Ogot, Stratton demonstrated how women writers were marginalized or excluded from the male dominated canon.

The critic exposed a stereotyped representation of women even in the writings of the most progressive males. Elleke Boehmer ('Master's Dance' 189) also explored patriarchal blind spots in the progressive writings of male writers such as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, marked by neglect of the gendered role of power. This neglect worked to inhibit his rousing call for a new dispensation in Kenya.

Some of the feminist analyses of East African literature were criticized on the grounds that they construed universalization of feminism and its trafficking in western biases about Africa. For example, when Maryse Conde (1998: 142) investigated the writings of Grace Ogot. Ogot is portrayed by Conde in a typically Eurocentric fashion as lacking imagination and style; confused with respect to her traditional culture, blinded by her need to respect European behaviour, She sees her characters as neither credible

nor coherent. Conde argues that Ogot may think she is emancipated because she reads books, but what she offers as model to her country women is a disaster and dangerous because it enslaves and alienates them.

In Stratton's *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*, Conde's criticism was rejected on the basis that it was 'perverse' and it overlooked the historical and cultural specificity of feminism that she considers as universal. Gloria Chukukere's (1995) *Gender Voices and Choices* also criticized Conde's criticism of Ogot for misjudgment because she evaluates African writers against the background of the militant and aggressive forms of protest common among western feminists. In this way, the challenge for African feminist criticism was to reject western universalizing feminism and present gender difference in the writings as culturally, socially and historically constructed. Exploring the continuum intersecting colonial and postcolonial literature in portraying the continent as an enigmatic 'female'. They used the example of Wanja in Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* who hovers between symbolism in the portrayal of exploitation in Africa and realism. They argued that African women were always portrayed in relationship to men irrespective of whether they were wives or prostitutes. Their otherness to men was always prioritized. One hardly gets a glimpse of the African female functioning autonomously; nevertheless, this can be explained by the fact that women did not have access to land, markets and products. Critics such as Sophie Macharia () observed in her essay 'Freedom of Choice :Kenyan Women Writers' that women writers were hardly recognized although they treated all the themes that male writers had access to. Jean O'Barr in his 'Feminist Issues in the Fiction of Kenya's Women Writers' points out with evidence that female writers were marginalized.

Other writings that focused on how writings centering on women's experiences were excluded from the canon included Grace Achufusi's (1991) 'Problems of Nationhood in Grace Ogot's Fiction'. Achufusi observed that because most of Ogot's themes are on women's issues that have formed the matrix within which socio-political and socio-historical phenomena are discussed. Achufusi compared Ogot to male writers like Achebe, Ngugi and Soyinka. She showed that while they were focused on subjects like corruption that threatened nationhood, she was focused on matters of morality and relationships. Other feminist critics such as Schipper Mineke upheld the view that the solution to the problem of negative image in the works of male writers resides in the writings of women themselves.

Artistic groups like Femrite in Uganda were also formed in 1997 to champion the cause of women through the creation of websites (Women of Uganda Network, <http://www.wougnet.org/profiles/femrite.html>) and

through book promotions such as Ayeta Anne Wangusa's *Memoirs of a Mother* and Gorette Kyomuhendo's *Secrets No More*.

Catherine Frank's (1984) "Feminist criticism and the African novel" is one of the useful and early studies of the feminist discourse in African literature. It was premised on the hypothesis that feminism is a deeply individualistic philosophy and the concept of 'African feminist' is a contradiction in terms. My students who worked on feminism used their dissertations to prove that feminism involves much more than what Frank suggested reductively. They show that feminism in African literatures places emphasis on women's bonding in most of its trends and forms. Materialistic and socialist brands of feminism integrate the socialist dimension of collectivity and class. They argue that the idea of 'African feminist' is not contradictory because the ideology of 'African feminist' comes out of the particular conditions of African women as a transformational current of international feminism. The dissertations demonstrate how the 'African feminist' concept is deployed to challenge patriarchal tradition, and enhance the idea of the family.

Women in African literatures seek out an egalitarian partnership with men, while acknowledging the struggles against imperialism, racism, neo-colonialism and exploitation.

Drawing critical inspiration from Showalter's *Other Woman*, Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi, published *Gender in African Women's Writing: Identity, Sexuality, Difference*, in which, speaking from an implicitly excluded position, investigated the relationship between national women's literature outside the US and the UK to the feminist critical project. She observed that the writings of African American women had reached more critical prominence by the 1990s than those of African women often left out of comments and histories of African literatures. The problem of women in African literatures is that they were often expressed as representations of women in the writings by African men, who portrayed them in either idealized or subordinate roles. As Makuchi has demonstrated, African women writers have hesitated to self-identify as 'feminists' because of the western roots of feminist theory and practice. She deploys alternative terms used by African female writers such as *womanist* owing to the context of their distinctive psychological experience. In this way, in order to bring the canon of modern African women's writings in English to the limelight, she adopts a western feminist perspective as a strategy to develop a methodology suitable for her specific purposes.

As a metalanguage, imperialism was deployed to dominate and oppress on the platforms of gender as well as nationalism, culture, ethnicity, class, sexuality and bodies or physical features. In a strategic move to



exercise power and control, the dominant group used these structures to develop stereotypes of the dominated by which the dominated created intragroup and individual identities. But through deliberate distortions and the dehumanizing effects of colonial conditions, the colonized was reconstructed in terms of natural attributes as incapacitated it was through such conditions that the African peoples and those of the diaspora were seen. They were perceived as stupid, indolent and shiftless. By keeping colonized subjects apart and preventing them from knowing each other beyond the chasm of power and powerlessness, imperialism sustained its power. By controlling the forms and means of communication, and of social production and reproduction, imperialism enforced classic tactics of 'divide and rule' that were employed to tyrannize Africans.

The tendency has oftentimes been to homogenize the reception of white -based theory and criticism on women by treating white, African American and Black women as though they shared the same history whereas there are subtle but significant political and cultural differences between them and in terms of their methodological approaches. Although the white women belong to the same space of imperial conquest as the African American and Black women, the African American woman's historical experience with slavery and racial discrimination, as well as the Black women's history with female genital mutilation often excluded and yet they are crucial to them respectively. Similarly, to treat gender as though it were the only organizing principle for white, African American and Black women is to ignore the fact that imperialism and colonialism brought multiple levels of social and cultural destabilizations that impacted differently on these categories located at different spaces of the colonial continuum. So, even though colonial exploitation and oppression showed a certain commonality of experiences for white, African American and Black women across history, the politics of locations created important differences in terms of how they were oppressed by their respective patriarchal cultures. The way racial discrimination structured the dynamics of its overall power dynamics on African American and white American women was not the same way that the dynamics of imperial colonialism framed the dynamics of gender hierarchy and control over African women. The differences between them are significant and must be dealt with if any meaningful changes are to be envisaged. Deconstruction is a strategy of subverting power that was created as a Eurocentric and male focused tactic; its relevance to the investigation of African women's conditions of oppression has not been thoroughly elucidated. Unfortunately, white women's theories of universality and deconstruction tend to minimize the specific identity and experiences of women, who lived under what may be called 'double patriarchy'. African women had to endure the patriarchal conditions of men in their

own cultures in addition to the patriarchy of European colonialism and culture.

In the past, it was not possible for African and African American women to construct and produce knowledge about themselves within or outside the western experience and canon. Western and American mainstream feminism posited their theories and experience as normative and universal. But African and African American womenfolk are already beginning to reclaim their voice and re-inscribe themselves within contextual and relevant precepts. They have been exchanging critical ideas in Third World Women's forums and conferences without anyone being constructed as the exotic other under the imperial analytical gaze. Armed with this impetus, an evolutionist theory of gender oppression was formulated suggesting that western womenfolk had evolved into a civilized state of gender emancipation whereas African women were still in the primitive stage of oppression. By the 1980s, white women were accused of using their status within the class and racial system of discrimination to perpetuate the privileges of imperialism even within women's coalitions. Hence, there are manifestations of power hierarchy even among women traditionally marginalized within colonialism. In the intellectual circles of white American womenfolk, the norm has been that non-African should *speak for* or *speak of* African women when it comes to the production of knowledge and the construction of identity. Within the western hemisphere, Ama Ata Aidoo and Alice Walker are some of the writers who have made attempts to construct knowledge about Africans. For example, she wrote *The Color Purple* in which she makes allusion to Frederick Douglass who in 1845, made appeals for Africans to return to the continent and civilize it. Nettie, the authorial voice in it cries out why did they sell us? How could they have done it and why do we still love them? Sembene Ousmane in a short story titled 'Tribal Scars' reconstructs how a man becomes an accomplice in the slave trade in order to locate the whereabouts of his abducted daughter. In this way, Sembene condemns the slave trade and makes it clear that not all Africans who participated in the slave trade, did so out of malice or greed. The story is also an illustration of the fact that the slave trade continued not because of the absence of a communally inspired or positive resistance against the slave traders but and their local collaborators. Indeed, oral tradition in some parts of indigenous Africa holds that there were local struggles and protests against the destabilizing effects of slave raids on the psychology of communities, survivors and their families. There were also stories about female professional collaborators who became victims of their greed, were caught and sold into slavery. Aidoo explores the subtheme of retribution in the story of *Anowa* that marks the unending social upheavals of the slave trade. Using the rich lore of the Ashanti people of Ghana, Aidoo suggests that there was a conspiracy of silence that surrounded the slave raids

and that silence perpetuated the tragedy of the trade instead of taking away the pains that came with the raids. Anowa is the free-spirited heroine of the text who condemns the culture of silence around slavery in her community. She remembers the horror stories about the slave raids that her grandmother used to tell her and is tormented in her dreams by the screaming humans torn away from their loved ones and taken away. Thus, she is very prepared to reject the lure of power and easy life when the slave raiders approach her. Her husband joins the team of slave raiders and, in this way, identifies with the trappings of white power rapidly overtaking the Ashanti land.

### 1.6.5 Postcolonialism and the Publishing Industry

Postcoloniality and African Literature are discourses of culture and politics that have arisen in recent years with postcolonialism claiming the new African literatures as part of their field for theorizing. This claim is contingent on three arguments. First, these new literatures are comprised of various national literatures and is produced in a common international language. Second, within this language, these literatures share a complex of related tropes, themes and rhetorical strategies deployed for more or less identical political and cultural aims. Third, the discourses are products of the same imperialism; they have as much in common culturally as much as with the nations /continents by which they have been named. In colonial and postcolonial Africa, this is the logical development of both the character and history of the nation narration relationship.

Current postcolonial theories of western literature have impacted African literary criticism in a variety of negative ways. Theoretical investigations into African literatures show that they were influenced by writers that studied colonial discourse such as Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak and Edward Said and their critics such as Fredric Jameson and Leila Ahmed. In *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa*, Abdul JanMohamed intercedes into the discussions from an African critical light by arguing that there is an existential and negative relationship existing between hegemonic Eurocentric literature and the ways that the forms of the literature are appropriated for a counter hegemonic framework. JanMohamed, like many other critics, have suggested that there is a negative influence from this racially divisive past on the anti-racist discourses of the present. In this way, JanMohamed demonstrates how African literary works take themes from colonialist works and rewrite them in ways that destabilize imperial history and allow for alternative narratives.

Kwame Appiah (1993) offers a similar reading in *In My Father's House* by deploying a postmodernist cultural theory to read African history. He uses discourse such as 'invention of Africa' and 'nativist' that were employed by imperial figures like George

Padmore, Edmond Blyden and Alexander Crummell, to disrupt the race-focused labels that were constructed by slavery and in opposition to the slave trade in Nineteenth century America. But he points out usefully that the disruption of these labels depends on a language that traps the critic in a race-focused dialogue. As a result of the use of this language, African cultural structures rely on external influences. In this way, Appiah draws our attention to the problematic of achieving a truly pure cultural formation in the face of resilience of colonial history. Appiah's work is an illustration of how postmodern theory can impact on postcolonial work; how cultural relationship of opposition and recovery can develop in the light of imperial and postindependence epochs of history. In a similar fashion, the Zairean critic V.Y. Mudimbe (1988, 1995) published *The Invention of Africa* and *The Idea of Africa* in which he maps out the influence of theory about power and subjectivity when applied across cultural interactions. For example, Mudimbe scrutinizes the effects that missionary and anthropological discourses have over the structures of African identity; but he also argues that it is possible to go for an independent post-independence identify.

There is the question that opposes the *eulogizing* of metanarratives of nationhood as a concept in modern Africa literature against ethnic identities and the inevitable issue of the national identity question. The challenge for Africa is how to setup a sense of national pride and cultivate a spirit of togetherness as against propensities toward ethnicity. Theoretical and critical scholarship in African literature opens up this area for exploration and a number of my DIPES II students picked up this theme in their dissertations. In the dissertations, the students tried to understand the meaning of the concept of nationhood with a view to engage in its contextual relevance.

Nationhood is an edifice of power from which African nation states assert legitimacy (Indangasi, 2003). But the dissertations of the students show that it is also a tenuous concept that is difficult to define. It is difficult to define the notion of 'Kenyanness', 'Nigerianness', 'South Africanness', etc by expressing it with relative unanimity. This thematic opened up a new space for reflections on what it means to speak about 'nationhood. While proponents of nationhood focused on memory, critics of nationhood base their evaluation on identity. The memory /identity dialectic created a space of inbetweenness that inherited a flux of multiple meanings. Chinua Achebe has been cited as stating that; "a patriot is a person who loves his country. He is not a person, who says he loves his country. He is not even a person, who shouts or swears or recites or sings that he loves his country. He is one who cares deeply about his country and all its people" (53). Therefore, according to Achebe, a government does not need to raise issues about what is so obvious because the risk is the Swahili adage according to which: *chema*

*chajiuza na kibaya chajitembeza*: ‘a good thing /item sells itself [in the market) while a bad one needs to be advertised].

The debate about criticism of events on loyalty is significant in attempting to comprehend nationhood. In essence, nationhood has more to do with the ‘beingness of nationhood’. The association of the term with patriotism makes sense to the extent that it relates to one’s association and love for nationhood. Nevertheless, *being* patriotic is not about failing to raise issues of inappropriateness with nationhood; on the contrary, it is doing so and giving credit where it is due. Scrutinizing the historical record of nationhood in Africa, demonstrates that the problem with nationhood as a notion is with *representation* and with misreading of the history of nationhood. The state influences the historical records with the agenda of the nationalist project. Through state power, officially endorsed histories become the stories of the status quo favoring the unique entities of nationhood as opposed to the multiple realities that are manifest in a nation state. In this way, the positive aspects of inter-ethnic relations are conflated within the divisive forces of ethnicity, glossed over and projected as undermining the process of nation building and state formation. Therefore, the question is: is it not anachronistic and even meaningless to view nationhood under such a narrow perspective? Should we then ignore the history books that have been the critical repositories upon whose pedestal the analysis of rethinking theory and criticism is based? Therefore, *rewriting* history becomes an important undertaking.

In order to rewrite history, a certain number of questions must be answered about the centrality of state power in the process of production of knowledge. The concept of nationhood is often presented as a philosophical and ethical doctrine in which a country shares a common culture, descent, religion, language, etc. yet, viewed in this light, nationhood becomes a façade because it seeks to homogenize everything into the rhetoric of nationhood. In this way, far from eulogizing nationhood as a concept, it is necessary to appreciate the varied character of ethnic identities and investigate their contributions to national identity question. From this reasoning, there are many points of similarity across nationals, but there are also multiple points of difference at the level of ethnicity, gender, race.

Postcolonial criticism in African literature was a response to negative western censure with the realization that African literature is in need of more indigenous publishing in order to make the writings of indigenous critics and writers readily available to the outside world and therefore challenge the distortions and negative comments perpetrated by some western critics. As a result, many indigenous publishers emerged such as Fourth Dimension in Enugu, New

Horn Press in Ibadan, the Ghana Publishing Corporation among others like University presses in Lagos, Ife and Port Harcourt. Also contributing to the dynamics of African criticism through the development of African literary production were journals like *African Literature Today*, *Okike* created by Chinua Achebe, *Kiabara*, *ANA Review* and *Nigeria Magazine*. Outside of Africa, a number of journals and publishers made similar contributions that were transforming the landscape of the African literary and critical tradition. They included Heinemann, Longman, James Currey, Africa World Press, Hans Zell and Three Continents Press among the publishers and among the journals and magazines there was *Research in African Literatures*, *Kunapipi*, *The Literary Half-Yearly*, *Ariel*, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature and World Literature Written in English*.

### **1.6.6 Pedagogy of Literary Theory and Criticism in African Schools and Universities**

The idea of teaching theory and criticism as a history of critical thought starting from Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Longinus, etc, was *unacceptable* to African critics. Rather, they asked for what the sociology of literature, the history of literature, and the practicality of literature can do for students. When Ngugi Wa Thiongo’o, Taban lo Liyong and Henry Awuor-Anyumba were teaching at the University of Nairobi in 1968, five years after the independence of Kenya, they published a memo entitled as “On the Abolition of the English Department”. The memo, published in 1968, was intended to reform the study of African literature at the university of Nairobi; but it was also seen as being globally relevant to the reconstruction of canons of East African literature, modern African literature and even world literature. These scholars argued against the canon of so-called classics and *great* literature for which the legacy of T.S. Eliot and Arnold was well known. Ngugi and the others maintained that rather than being objective, judgments of literary excellence automatically imposed a particular Eurocentric perspective; and therefore, it is better for any group of people to study representative writings that reflect their society (Ngugi *et al.* 2001). They also maintained that the pragmatic function of a university literature Department is to illuminate the spirit animating a people, to show how it meets new challenges and pinpoint possible areas of development and involvement.

But to develop any of these perspectives, it was necessary to effect an initial reversal of the colonial and imperial distribution of positions of ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’. To continue to assume that the English literary tradition and its language are central to African literature is to continue with the assumption that Africa is an ‘extension of the west’ as opposed to African literature being at the ‘centre’ (Ngugi *et al.* 2001: 2093). The writers then decided to proceed with the hypothesis that oral African tradition is the primary root

of modern African literature and is its most significant source (Ibid: 2094). This hypothesis gave substance to the calls for African writers to re-orient their career: for example, James Ngugi decided to change his name to Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and started writing in his native Gikuyu language, beginning with *Devil on the Cross* that was translated into English. The hypothesis of the centrality of oral literature was intended as a way of triggering a vital, formalist, critical and methodological process. For example, unlike the Eurocentric literary tradition, in Africa, literature is intricately linked to dance, music and other forms of art. Consequently, the relationship between prose and poetry is very fluid or inexistent. African literature and digital writings should aim toward both social purpose and aesthetic pleasure, because they are intimately linked to oral societies and, at the same time, the spontaneity and liberty that mark oral transmission encourages a willingness to experiment with new forms and re-assess old or devalued forms. Unlike the elitist and cold aura that is generated by western theory in the literature, traditional literary practice endows the literature with the spirit of populism.

In the African setting, the teacher of criticism has to make space for the African material because students have not yet pondered so much critical material and may ask what is the relevance of Plato to their own situation. The task of the teacher of theory and criticism has therefore been a complex one because he is the mediator between two traditions and a source of various critical insights in psychoanalysis as well as philosophy, sociology, morality, culture, etc in the light of the African text. Chinweisu *et al.* (1980) adopted an African-centred approach documented in *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*. Ngugi Wa Thiongo (1986) also adopted the same and published a book titled as *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*.

However, the extremist nativist position of these texts is based on the staking of territoriality rights that present with limitations and are a highly debatable issue. As a result, the ideological position of these texts was attacked and since then, African literary scholarship has never been the same again. *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* was attacked because the authors adopted an extreme position in discrediting writers who borrowed literary techniques from European precedents. It was also critiqued for its reductionist point of view according to which literature generated in Africa is an entirely autonomous entity with its own norms and models and can therefore be assessed only by critics from Africa. The study of literature is a people's means of knowledge about themselves. This was a valuable critique but it posed the challenge of *what is and is not deemed as representative of society?* For example, are emergent, minority or dominant perspectives unrepresentative? Second, *what counts as a 'people'* is far from being

obvious or even stable: as a result, the writers avoided questions of tribal or national identities and focused on the need to develop an interlinked and broader East African, African and Black perspective. Nevertheless, whatever the counter-arguments, the texts are a significant landmark in the history of African critical discourse because they compel a recognition of the fact that what often passed off for African literature was, in fact, western literature that was Africanized. The book *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* also suggested that any attempt to deploy oral literature or orature demands a parallel need to develop a theory rooted in the dynamics of the oral culture and tradition. We have to acknowledge that these forms can be recovered and given a treatment as a legitimate enterprise of literary criticism.

In Ngugi's *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, the chief theoretical focus is the relationship between linguistic displacement and cultural displacement, and the intimate relationship between imposition of a colonial and alien language and mental colonization. Therefore, the process of 'decolonizing the mind' should involve a much more radical movement not only from the perspective of European modes of cultural production but also from the language of the oppressor that carries a culture specific worldview. Ngugi maintained that it is only through such a radical process that it will be possible to de-isolate literature as a phenomenon and reduce the distance between the people and a writer. Ngugi's own experience was successful when he created the Kamiruthu Peoples' theatre and from here he realized the implication of writing in his own homelanguage of Gikuyu in order to render more effective the struggle against the new elite class of Kenya whom he accused of being agents of neo-colonization. Ngugi saw the function of the critic as a political one and he insisted that social conscience should provide direction for both the critic and the creative artist. Similarly, the artistic step-child of Achebe, Chimamanda Ngozie Addichie, and author of *Americanah*, proposed in the years of 2000, an aesthetics of systematic rejection of the *singlestory* in new African digital writings.

#### **1.6.7 Bolekaja Criticism: Beyond Debts Owed to Eurocentric Epistemology and Role of Orature**

*Bolekaja* criticism was an alienation concept developed by Chinweizu, Madubuike and Jemie (1980) by which they acknowledged struggles between 'men and of their nations' and the 'stiffeners of their lives'. In Yoruba, *bolekaja* signifies 'come down let's fight'. Chinweizu *et al.*'s *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* is a manifesto for African literary criticism and production that is committed to an Afrocentric cultural nationalism. *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* starts by critiquing the universalist assumptions of Eurocentric criticism in the area of African fiction and poetry. In contrast to

Eurocentric criticism, it proposed a supporting role for the critic in which writer and audience were provided with knowledge of things valued in traditional African orature. Imitation was therefore a major term in this hermeneutics of support. In the same way, as writers were to depend on African oral discourse to simulate the flavours of African life, so too critics were to support their efforts by providing them with the raw materials of their craft; that is, with knowledge of things valued in traditional African orature. They decried the impact of Anglo-modernist sensitivity on some African writers and emphasized on the need for the autonomy of African literature, the pursuit of traditionalism and the preference for African dictions and idioms.

Joseph Okpaku (1970) is one of those scholars who tried to address the controversial issue in his edited work *New African Literature and the Arts*. He made a brave attempt to investigate how to derive from oral literature hermeneutical and aesthetic parameters that can be applied to the new literature, but he also pointed out the limitations that such an approach incarnates. After disposing of the idea of a western universal aesthetic, the scholar moved on to seek out standards in the area of common aspects of life that are frequently dramatized in audience response and in the arts. He discovered that in oral tradition, musical accompaniments are vital and central; so, he erected as criterion “rhythmical language”. But given that the language of the African novel, for example, is prosaic and is not rhythmical, in the main, Okpaku was able to find out that the form of the novel is *inadequate* for the fullest expression of the African literary talent. Another criterion Okpaku set up is that of African attitudes to love, death, birth, etc, but he was silent on how this anthropological and sociological criterion was to be implemented. The underlying difficulties embedded in Okpaku’s (1970: 5) efforts consisted in the fuzziness of his ‘Philosophy of the New African literature’ constructed from:

1. The change from the provincial to the universal,
2. The freeing of the African writer to develop a literature that is multi-thematic in the sense that his writing can embed a multiplicity of diverse themes, and
3. The emphasis on philosophical depth in African art and literature.

Many other critical literary legislators also failed to transfer successfully critical paradigms from the oral tradition to the written /modern literature because of the following reason: the modern writings to which the criteria of the oral traditions were to be applied did not systematically follow the oral genre conventions from which those paradigms were abstracted. Even with writers, who were closely influenced by the oral tradition, such as Okot p’Bitek and Masizi Kunene, it was mentally and physically impossible to apply the oral paradigm because if it were

possible, they would not be called writers but oral or artistic performers. Therefore, there will always be ‘gaps’ in the totality and execution of work, including in the material medium of transmission that such criteria cannot effectively deal with. The relationships between modern and oral literatures were often complex because, as Walter Ong has pointed out, what is involved is much more than a change in the technological medium of expression or transmission; the transition from orality to literacy is overlain with linguistic transference /translation (please see Chapter) and therefore these relationships cannot be as direct and simple as often assumed by advocates of traditional critical standards.

The critical factor here was language that Abiola Irele (1981: 32) recognized in his work ‘The Criticism of Modern African Literature.’ Irele explained by stating that discontinuity from oral to modern literature almost amounted to incompatibility between the aesthetic criteria and conventions of the old literature and those of the new literature. In this way, the opinion was that, in this transitional process, the African was being transformed not into someone or something else but into somebody or something new. The modern literature was perceived as a transposition of old scales of attitudes and feelings into a new key of expression.

All the new literary theories such as Marxism, feminism and postcolonial theory. were also represented as theories of politics and culture. They were signified as new instruments of reading literature by interrupting its supposed ontological identity, on the one hand, and insisting on its political and social determinism, on the other hand. This process was a way of interrogating the old basis of power and empowering the powerless. In particular, postcolonialism and feminism were seen to have potential to give intellectual ammunition to all that modern African literature stands for. But one would have expected African intellectuals to embrace them fully; that has not been the case. Instead, the intellectuals insisted that the theories were in drastic need of remodeling if they are to be meaningful to Africans. The reasons for this reluctance and suspicion were summarized by Jeyifo Biodun (34) as follows: a critical discourse can only acquire decisive effectivity when it is endowed with ideological, institutional and historical factors that make it a ‘master’ discourse that translates the will-to-truth into a consummated will-to-power. In this way, the ‘master’ discourse becomes the discourse of the ‘master’, whether in its conscious intentions, consequences or effects.

Scholars like the African American critic Louis Henry Gates Jr., Kwame Anthony Appiah and the Nigerian poet Niyi Osundare, rejected these theories. For example, Osundare (1993: 18) states that:

*Either as a result of the politics of their provenance or an inherent crisis in their methods and modes of analysis and application (or both), mainstream western poststructuralist theories have demonstrated little or no adequacy in the apprehension, analysis and articulation of African writing and its long and troubled context.*

The problem was not so much with the theories themselves, according to Osundare, but rather was with the articulations of the literature *in context*. Would the theories have been recognized if they acknowledged the peculiar case of Africa despite their source in imperialist, foreign and historical institutions? This point indicated the real difficulty of getting away from what is rejected and the even greater task of evolving new African alternatives. According to Abiola Irele, the problem will only persist so long as the criticism of the literature remains in Soyinka's symbol of a 'half-child'. Because the *indeterminate* character of the literature presented a challenge when it came to criticism, theorizing it was even more formidable a challenge. The literature was not only a 'half-child' when it came to choosing a European language over an African one, it was also, according to Christopher Okigbo's symbolic referent, a prodigal son on exile.

Chinweizu *et al.*, (1980) drew our attention in *Towards The Decolonization of African Literature* to the essentially Eurocentric character of Africa literature and its criticism and to the need for them to become Afrocentric. They went for the throats of African writers and critics in order to complete the task of decolonizing African literature fully. They argued that literature produced by African writers was not the literature of invention and imagination but the literature of imitation and adaptation. The authors tried to draw attention to how pervasively and deeply most African writers and critics were tied to and weaned from the Eurocentric literary breast. It is from here that *Towards The Decolonization of African Literature* was able to carve a *niche* in the annals of African literary criticism in order to cure the literature and its criticism from the colonial hangovers. After the debate raised by the *troika* on the expatriation of African literary criticism had died off, Joseph Okpaku insisted that the criticism of African creative art must come from Africans using African standards. Prominent among the academic journals that debated this critical issue in order to shape African literature were *Kunapipi*, *Okike*, *Matatu*, *Transition*, *Black Orpheus*, and *Research in African Literatures*. There were a host of other in-house journals in English and Literature departments of African universities. But the debates in these journals did not resolve the problem of what constitutes the African aesthetic in literature, what makes African literature so unique that one can easily distinguish it from other world literatures. The various debates sustained by the journals gravitated around ideas of critics but the major

issue of an African aesthetics in literature remained unresolved. A lot of words were poured out on:

- African literature and its definition
- The 'newness' of African literature on the international scene
- The appropriate language (Eurocentric or indigenous)
- The literature's critical standards by which it can be evaluated or judged
- The literature's oral base or orature
- The literature's audience
- What constitutes its appropriate theory
- What constitutes its ideology
- The function of African literature (utilitarian or art for art sake)
- Who are its accredited critics (Europeans or indigenous)
- What is its Negritude aesthetics?

Orality in the theory and criticism of the literature is also a recycling of Eurocentric prejudices against the literature and does not see any promotional prospect in its cultural heritage. Tapping (1990) in his "Voices off: models of orality in African literature and literary criticism" alludes to the need for transcribing the voices and experiences of indigenous inhabitants, linking the organic vision of an oral model to future transformation. He maintains that the technology of writing should only serve to transform the backward-looking model of orality. He appealed to the need for some extra-textual experience of a community to be integrally oral and, at least initially reciprocal, in its dealings with members of the community and the outside world. The model of the oral inscribed in a text, he continued, is a key marker of that text's political or historical theme, and of the writer's various technical strategies. The paper draws from Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*, Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*, or *Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint*, Walter Ong's model of the literate as post-oral, and Fredric Jameson's recent descriptions of African and Third World cultural traditions and consequent habits of mind as "archaic or tribal" to argue that critics of Amos Tutuola's fictions condescended to the richness of Africa's oral cultures, the signifying mark of African Otherness, in their enthusiasms for novels that "might be crude and unkempt" but reveal "an elemental vitality which the polished-writings of more sophisticated authors too often lack". He added that thirty years of writing about Tutuola's works has not revealed to his critics an awareness of the imperialist espousals in their critical analyses with appraisals such as: his work is "naive," "untutored," "unschooled," "un-willed," "trance-like," "natural," "uncorrupted," "intuitive," and "pristine". He cited the example of an American critic, who writes that one catches a glimpse of the very beginning of literature, that moment when writing at last seizes and pins down the myths and legends of an analphabetic culture.

Emmanuel Obiechina is one of the most productive writers on African literary theory and criticism. Whether in his (1975) "Amos Tutuola and the Oral Tradition," his (1993) "Narrative proverbs in the African novel" or his (1975) *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*, he discussed orality in the literature for a non-African audience by drawing from Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, in order to banish so-called notions of savagery and primitivism which, he thinks, haunt Western critical assessments. Obiechina's criticism has been evolutionary in character, integrating schooling and advanced literacy, as the next stage for the literature and its authors. He explains the presence of Tutuola's fables by appealing to an authenticating reality of context, that is, streets of Lagos, clock, petrol-drum, torch, bombers, telephones and technicolour. He argued that there are other models of orality which structure out African literatures. Referring to Ngugi, for example, he maintained that this author rarely employs the nostalgic dream of a communal past prominent in his criticism to structure his novels such as *Petals of Blood*, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and his co-authored work *I Will Marry When I Want*. He argued that Ngugi's oral model is the communal, verbal networks of the present through which his characters and communities exchange political and contemporary information about his "villains," bought into complicity with the economic neo-imperialisms of the superpowers and multinationals. This model of orality is the inscription of voices as they discuss, argue, and debate the past and the futures of a community. This gives form to Ngugi's fictions and dramas, which promise a project of retrieval of indigenous languages and cultural arrangements, predicated on a future based on mutuality and communally shared wealth.

Obiechina upholds the view that Sembene Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* is a reconstruction of the Senegalese Dakar-Niger railway strike action of 1947, via the employment of a similar oral structuring to convey the growing communal consciousness of racism and colonial exploitation. Referring to Sembene's film, *Camp de Thiaroye*, Obiechina extended this vocal model to retrieve a silenced history and revise the image of a pre-contact, otherwise helpless and mis-directed Africa. In the film, African soldiers return after the Second World War to base camp outside of Dakar and are literally isolated and silenced. Obiechina argued that his is a call for a cinematics of community and orality, voiced in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments*. He inscribed a nostalgic model of orality in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, *The Great Ponds* and *The Slave* and the elegiac novel, *The Concubine*. As for Bessie Head's *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*, Obiechina believed it is crafted on a future-directed oral model, that is recuperative and constructive. By so doing, he maintained, Head transforms the backward-looking model of orality into a futuristic one. The model of the

oral was thus seen as a key marker of the literature's political or historical theme, and the writer's various technical strategies, through intonations, free verse and typographical analysis of orality. He described written African literature as a dialectic of the oral/written in ways that privilege the written and silence the oral. For Obiechina, Soyinka's drama such as *Death and the King's Horseman*, employs European, private, social, Yorubaian, communal, ritual, and spiritual stages in his art. In that drama, Soyinka does not represent orality: it happens offstage, off the page, outside his text. Instead, his African characters, dejected at their inabilities to open the ears and minds of their European masters, evoke the radical Otherness of an oral tradition which is urgent in its practical and mystical demands. Soyinka's rhetorical armoury consists of an oral tradition that is radically Other. In *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Soyinka operates within the realm of the oral, translates directly from the oral, invoking inspiration and extra-textual guidance before commencing on his examinations of the written. Obiechina notes that Soyinka is grounded in the oratory of his traditional culture, ritually invokes the gods before commencing on his comparative literary criticism! Consequently, these orality-oriented critics of the literature were also preoccupied with the specific identity of the literature than with its promotional project.

By the 1980s, these critical issues remained unresolved despite the vast number of studies that were done (Wali 1963; Okpaku 1969; Iyasere 1975; Macebuh 1974; Nnolim 1972; Izevbaye 1975; Okpewho 1975). *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature* drew our attention to the need for these issues of the African aesthetics. But their major flaw is that they failed to state what becomes of the literatures once Afrocentricism has been achieved. It is not clear which direction theory of African literature should take.

However, because of its insistence on cultural specificity of African literature and its defense and pursuit of *difference*, *bolekaja* criticism was often castigated as an ethnic model. But, this critical model can be further elucidated by the fact that, although it castigated Eurocentrism, it tacitly relied on it. For example, its political inspiration derived from supra-ethnic (and therefore non-ethnic) 'imagined communities such as pan-Africanism, the African continent and the nation. *Bolekaja* criticism also owed debts to Eurocentrism in terms of its *Us versus Them* cognitive apparatus, its cultural nationalist ideology and its mimeticism. These debts were owed directly to Eurocentric theory (Appiah 1993), epistemology or history. Like Afrocentricism in North America, *bolekaja* criticism was a kind of nativism (Appiah 1988). As a result of the fact that it was caught up in the Eurocentric logic, it could not formulate a hermeneutics by which the expressive, linguistic and generic

eclecticism of African cultural practices could be most productively explicated.

### 1.6.8 Re-Inscribing African Codes of Sexuality

African codes of sexuality have been under-theorized in both online and offline contexts. Consequently, it is the representation of the sexual by several African writers that this research is questioning. As a matter of fact, it is using various examples relating to a critical examination of sexuality in African literature. For example, in Ada Uzomaka Azodo and Maureen Ngozi Eke's (2007) (eds) *Gender and Sexuality in African Literatures and Films*, a critical analysis of how contemporary writers and filmmakers have portrayed sex and gender practices is portrayed. The authors argue that the cinema and the printed book have not accurately captured changing sexual norms and gender practices in many contemporary societies, because of the perception that Africans do not openly talk about sex. Flora Viet-Wild and Dirk Naguschewski's (2005) edited a volume of *Body, Sexuality, and Gender: Versions and Subversions in African Literature*, Volume 1, in which they also provide a robust reading and interpretation of emerging texts on African sexuality, by focusing on the subversions of this literature. Neville Hoad (2007) likewise revisits the theme of homosexuality in African literature in the light of the claim among several African politicians like Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe that homosexuality is un-African.

While these theorists primarily focused their attention on sexual politics in literature in the print format, this research took the argument further by shedding 'new' light on the differences and similarities in the way in which the Internet generation treats the figure of the homosexual as well as the libidinal modern girl. While writers like Wole Soyinka and Ama Ata Aidoo provide one of the earliest portrayals of the figure of the homosexual, they did this by representing homosexuality as being foreign to Africa. Meanwhile, writers such as Cyprian Ekwensi and Ngugi portray prostitutes as an example of moral corruption brought about by colonization. Like their contemporaries, these writers use sexual politics to fight a culture war between Africa and the West. The *trope* of the homosexual and the figure of the sex worker are therefore deployed as a means of decolonising the African body. This research, however, argues that some of the emerging voices see these figures as being central to our understanding of African politics, and to a history of invisibility. This is because homosexuals and prostitutes have always been part of African history, but as 'shadows' in that history. In their attempt to subvert the political witch-hunt of Africans who are not one hundred percent straight, new writers like Shailja Patel, Unoma Azuah and Zanele Muholi are provocatively explicit. As the literary scholar Femi Osofisan (2008) observes:

*Up at least till the turn of the new millennium, you will observe, the exploration of romantic love or of sex as theme was remarkably rare in the output of our writers. Virtually no literary work dared venture, except in the deflected language of metaphor and refringent echo, into the contentious area of carnal experience. From Tutuola to Okpewho; Achebe to Iyayi; Soyinka to Sowande; Clark to Onwueme—we are talking of over four decades of writing—there is no instance of a memorable kiss...Thanks to this, the old notions of privacy, the consensual secretiveness and "holiness" that used to be attached to such matters as love and sex have long been axed and discarded as antiquated relic. Bashfulness, decency and self-respect have become casualties in the new ethos of the so-called "free society", where the reigning creed is to 'tell it all'."*  
([www.irnweb.org/en/journals/issues/outliers/download/.../31](http://www.irnweb.org/en/journals/issues/outliers/download/.../31))

Older writers treat the subject of sex with reverence because they want to preserve Africa's respectability and to counter the image of sexually-deprived Black bodies. In addition, sex is considered secondary to the task of explaining Africa to the rest of the world. So, while some members of the older generation often talk about sex in metaphors, several young writers are no longer using coded language in their attempt to challenge the authority as well as the modern attitude towards the sexual. The explicit is truth, and truth is ethical. Cyberspace allows for this provocativeness because it is free from censorship in addition to the fact that there are now many means of publishing and disseminating creative writing in this new media age.

### 1.6.9 Development Discourses of the IMF-Generation as Situatedness of Critique

Kopf (2021) scrutinized Binyavanga Wainaina's autobiographical writing *One Day I Will Write About This Place* (Wainaina 2011) as an ambivalent site of development theory and criticism. The focus is on Wainaina's use of life-writing as a genre to tell what he called the "story of the IMF-generation", meaning the children of a post-independence African middle class who came massively under pressure due to foreign-imposed structural adjustment programming in the 1980s and 1990s, and who became a driving force in democratisation movements after 2000. This article elaborates on how Wainaina reflected this African experience of neoliberal globalization and the related expansion of Western humanitarianism in his writing. This is explored through, firstly, a focus on Wainaina's engagement with the meta-discourse of development embedded in his narrative of the IMF-generation, and secondly, through his deconstruction of a humanitarian



grand discourse on Africa anchored on the colonizing centre/periphery ideologies of the global North and embodied in representatives of the *aid industry* metanarrative in Africa.

One can read these articles and dissertations, just like the autobiographical memoir of Wainaina, as a form of *situated* knowledge that enables readers from different regions of the world to understand their *locatedness within Eurocentric metanarratives versus African nation state and global/international power asymmetries* in the global political economy and in development at a particular historical moment, and this is the staple and basic stuff that our works against Marxism, capitalism, foreign aid, etc. are all about. There are power asymmetries from within online nation states themselves: Dube, Mutasa, and Mheta (2021) explore the messages that are created and expressed in alternative and generally the informal nature of platforms in response to the cultural practice of tabooing certain themes and language usage in the presentation and sharing of feelings and ideas about such themes. Third generation African writings have attracted a considerable attention, because, far from advancing narratives with deep roots in local African realities, critics fear many of Africa's most "successful" new writers *present a superficial, diasporicised, or Western-focused vision of the continent* with respect to, for example, the Zimbabwean writer NoViolet Bulawayo's (2013) *We Need New Names* and the Nigerian novelist Helon Habila, who was apprehensive in a review in the *London Guardian* that he was distributing "*poverty-porn*". Ikhede Ikhelelo, a popular Nigerian critic, regularly makes a parallel point. Nigerian writer Adaobi Nwaubani critiqued *the hold that the West has on Africa's book industry* in a much-circulated New York Times piece called *African Books for Western Eyes*. Adaobi Nwaubani's novel *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* was charged as being a dialogue with multiple texts, registers, discourses, and transnational networks of production and consumption in Africa and the diaspora that are entangled with *tropes of 419 fraudulent emails*. The digital space provides a new avenue to move the new literatures beyond the restrictions of book publishing on the continent. Writers are putting their works on cyberspace because communities are emerging from this space, and increasing numbers of Africans using the internet as part of their day-to-day engagement with their societies and the world,

Shola Adenekan explores this transformative development in Nigeria and Kenya, both significant countries in African literature and two of the continent's largest digital technology hubs. He observes that queer Kenyans and Nigerians find new avenues for their work online where print publishers are refusing to publish short stories and poems on same-sex desire.

Binyavanga Wainaina's rise to critical acclaim arguably started on the literary blog *Generator 21*. But, also, this raises the question of *class consciousness* in new African writings that articulate the difference in attitudes towards queerness (Yékú 2021).

*Class warfare* has been taking place in Africa since the mid-Nineteenth century but little attention has been paid to how African writings encapsulate class. It is in the online and offline writing spaces that we will be able to capture how a particular African 'middle-class' self is being engineered by writers of blogs, commentary, online poems, short fictions and essays; contributors to YouTube and other video posts (Adenekan and Cousins 2014).

Binyavanga Wainaina's autobiographical writing entitled as *One Day I Will Write About This Place* is a site about development theory and criticism. The concentration is on his memoir (Wainaina 2011), which uses life-writing as a genre to tell what he calls the "story of the IMF-generation", denoting the children of a post-independence African middle class, who came collectively under pressure owing to foreign-imposed structural adjustment programmes in the 1990s and 1980s, and who became a driving power in democratisation activities after 2000. Wainaina mirrored this African experience of neoliberal globalization and the related expansion of Western humanitarianism in his writings. This is explored through, firstly, a focus on Wainaina's engagement with development embedded in his narrative of the IMF-generation, and secondly, through his deconstruction of a humanitarian discourse on Africa anchored in colonising ideologies of the global North and incarnated in representatives of the aid industry in Africa, in general, and in Kenya, in particular. The memoir is a form of *situated* knowledge that enables readers from diverse regions of the world to understand their *locatedness* within asymmetries of power in global development at a particular historical moment.

The question of *situated* knowledge and *locatedness* of subjectivities within asymmetries of power in global development at the particular historical moment Wainaina is referring to, namely, from the 1970s to present day, has continued to inspire my research at a basic level. The challenge which I raised was to determine whether knowledge can really be *situated* or subjectivity *located* in development issues or more generally in economic questions where power asymmetries are the regulating force.

#### 1.6.10 *Digital Technological Utopia, Class Consciousness and Narratives of Otherness*

African critics rethink Eurocentrism from the perspective of the digitally technologised ideal world often referred to as the 'Utopia' of the Third generation and the role of the writer as *entertainer*, in the context of new born-digital African writings and critics, who

create scholarship based on Middle class consciousness and informed by a certain bourgeois professional identity as against the proletarian class of the masses. At the juncture of the critique, we would show that African printed or oral literatures are *hanging on* as 'authentic' versions that must be tethered in multiple ways to the online world of African e-literature despite its claim to self-containment and autonomy as third generational writings. The concept of generations of new African writings is one that can be explicated with the aid of neo-Marxist aesthetics. In his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Walter Benjamin (1942) takes a progressionist view of time, as one of the many famous examples that set up duality or the dialectic of "history" and "newness." Progress, he argues, is not just about looking forward but also about borrowing from the past by looking backward. Not so long ago, critical inquiries into the question of (post) modernity had to grapple with the tension between the past (that is, history) – and the present (which implies newness). In this research, we see several young writers hinting at the *utopianism* of the digital infrastructure; that is, the *freedom* that the Internet gives them as individuals representing a breakaway culture from the constrictions of the physical space and the expectations of the past. While we can see that some of the issues that literature is reporting online are not *new* at all, what is new is that fresh perspectives intersect with the utopian order bearing on capitalism, development, class, race, ethnicity, gender, homosexuality, prostitution and sexuality, bodies, generation, privacy, and orality and post-coloniality.

Raine Koskimaa (2007) urges us to bear in mind that the nature of the literature in the digital age is different from the cultural context of the past, especially with regard to the way it is being produced and distributed. He argues that we need "to see literature as a media operating amongst others." Koskimaa's argument is that the African writer in the Twenty-first century needs to be seen both as an artist (in the traditional way) and an ambassador for popular culture. This is because in order to fully grasp the context of what she is writing about, the conventions surrounding the online writing space in which a writer as a digital trendsetter is more intimate with his readers and audience than ever before, need to be fully acknowledged. What is peculiar to this Middle class professionals of writers is the idea of the 'private'. As a matter of fact, many young writers are 'friends' of their readers on Facebook and on Twitter. In social networking, the word 'friend' is simultaneously a noun and a verb for the writer and her readers. A reader can add a writer to his (the reader's) friend-list, which is to 'friend' the writer, or vice-versa. If the 'friend' request is accepted, both the writer and the reader become virtual friends, able to see each other's personal life in pictures and in videos. On Twitter, several African writers ask their readers to 'follow' them through tweets. Some of the writers regularly share family photos, day-to-day activities, political thoughts and

fashion tips with their readers on social media, alongside short stories and poetry. The idea of the private is often ascribed to the sexual (muted, spoken or represented as a metaphor) and while this is germane, the notion of the *private* as being used in this research, is however, actually about the writer's own personal life. The African writer's *private* lifestyle is now on display for readers in the social media and since many of these writers see the online space as liberating, fiction and poetry often reflect writers' personal views on various subjects including sexuality. In addition to this, writers use the social media to interact closely with readers in a way that could not have been possible during the golden era of the book, so much so that the daily personal life of a writer like Chika Unigwe, is wide open to her readers, many of whom are also her Facebook friends. When Wainaina's relationship with a lover ended, he blogged it as a Facebook status update on April 29, 2012, and this in turn inspired a few love poems posted on his Facebook page (Wainaina 2011). Sokari Ekine, Shailja Patel and Zanele Muholi's role as queer activists is often documented in pictures on Facebook alongside these two women's creative works (Adenekan 2013).

Real life characters in these images sometimes make it into creative works. Muholi and Ekine often post nude photographs from their various workshops alongside poetry. In the process, they are demystifying what Adichie (2008) sees as the stultifying sexual hypocrisy of contemporary Africa imposed mainly through Islam, Christianity and colonial modernity. Adichie's argument is germane. Olajubu (1972) in the *Journal of American Folklore* argues that there were more sexually explicit texts available in the open in pre-colonial Yoruba society than in the contemporary era:

*to the Yoruba, sex has a sacred function...[but] in spite of this, however, physical exposure of the sexual organs in life and in art, especially in carvings, is allowed... Obvious references to sex in words, gestures, and songs are also permitted on special occasions. On doors and veranda posts of temples and palaces can be found carvings of women with pointed, oversized breasts, and men with oversized penises. In some cases, for example, on the doors of Ife Town Hall, carvings of men and women in the sex act are depicted (Quoted in Femi Osofisan, 2008).*

Certain oral Yoruba texts are geared towards the ruling classes and powerful merchants, while other texts speak to the aspiration of those on the lower rung of the economic ladder. Yoruba people also recognise the instability of class as epitomised by the saying: *Ati ri omọ Qba to di eru ri, atiri Iwofa to di Olọla*. (Trans: "We have seen a Prince who became a slave, and we have seen a slave who rose to become very rich" (Adenekan 2014). Yoruba people see the condition of social class like the condition of texts as not being

permanent. Wole Soyinka's (1975) play *Death and the King's Horseman*, is loosely based on a true story, depicts some of the privileges enjoyed by the ruling classes and rich merchants, as well as how these privileges were disrupted by colonial rule. Theorists have been surprised with seeing African literature as mainly 'writing back' to the West. Good examples of this theory include Manthia Diawara (1998 & 2001: 114), who reads the works of Ousmane Sembene and Ngugi wa Thiong'o as representing "the rise of national consciousness in Africa to World War II, in which Africans fought next to white people.

With regard to these pre-colonial societies, Nkrumah (1970: 78) asserts that:

*In pre-colonial Africa, under conditions of communalism, slavery and feudalism. there were embryonic class cleavages. But it was not until the era of colonial conquest that an Europeanised class structure began to develop with clearly identifiable classes of proletariat and bourgeoisie. This development has always been played down by reactionary observers, most of whom maintained that African societies are homogenous and without class divisions. They have even endeavoured to retain this view in the face of glaring evidence of class struggle shown in the post-independence period, when bourgeois elements have joined openly with neo-colonialists, colonialists and imperialists in vain attempts to keep the African masses in permanent subjection.*

The point Nkrumah is making here is that class differentiation and economic production are not totally by-products of the colonial modernity project. What changed, however, is that colonialism brought about the decline of the once ruling classes, who were displaced by a new band of Africans, educated by missionaries. Assigned to work with, and often responsible for controlling African kings and chiefs, these Africans reported directly to European officials. Nkrumah also sees Africa's struggle against colonialism and neo-colonialism as the main factor for this oversight of the long history of class struggle in Africa. Nkrumah is probably right, because many the against fascism, xenophobia, and racism." But we can argue that Sembene and Ngugi use literature as a means of not only of replying to Western discourse about Africa, but to also fight (their) personal class (Marxist) war against the corrupt African bourgeoisie. Both writers also place their fictional heroes in rural settings against corrupt city environments created by colonial administrators. Lewis Nkosi (1981), who is arguably the only African intellectual to actually analyze class consciousness in African literature, aptly reads fictional narratives such as Sembene's *God's Bits of Wood* and Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* as two Marxist-leaning writers using fictional characters to fight the corner of the African working

classes against the bourgeoisie. Although, Nkosi's analysis is germane and poignant, he devotes much of his energy to suggesting that class consciousness is a minor by-product of the colonial experience rather than something that has deeper historical roots and values. However, one can argue that Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1959) is not only a depiction of the struggle between African tradition and the Euro-modernity project, but we can also read the rise of the novel's hero Okonkwo, from a poor background to that of a wealthy and influential member of his clan as representing class mobility within a traditional African society. On the other hand, the story of his grandson Obi Okonkwo in *No Longer at Ease* represents the dynamic of class aspiration in a Euro-modernist era. Like this fictional narrative, several novels published by some members of the second generation of modern African writers, especially books published in the popular Pacesetter series of the 1980s, reflect contemporary class concerns as well as the struggle between the urban middle classes and the less fortunate who work for them. But as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie argued in the Guardian article quoted in her TED talk, many literary theorists simply believe that class does not exist in Africa. One can put Forde (1956) as representing this line of thinking, when he argues "Although western skills and manners appeared generally to confer or symbolize high status among urban Africans, no close parallels with western class systems should be assumed or expected." (Quoted in Oshomha Imoagene, 1989: viii). Another reason is that some literary critics see the African middle classes as merely an extension of the West; class structure in Africa is therefore seen as largely mirroring the global exploitation of the non-West by the powerful West, through their African proxies. So some middle class African writers writing in the languages of former colonial masters are seen as buttressing the agenda of the colonial modernist project. For example, in their seminal book, *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* (1980 & 1985), Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike, the troika of radical literary critics known as Bolekaja critics, attack what they see as a Eurocentric approach to African fiction. They also attack the literature produced by notable literary figures such as Christopher Okigbo, J.P Clark and Wole Soyinka as overtly Euro-centric. But while they may have good reasons for criticising Soyinka and Okigbo, they also could have argued that these writers epitomise some of the privileges enjoyed by notable artists in many pre-colonial societies, who could have been classified as members of the elite class. Instead, these critics decorated a picture of a pristine pre-colonial Africa with beautiful poetry and where there is no class struggle. The argument this study is making is that some of the hypotheses put forward by theorists have failed to take into consideration that a form of capitalist class structure existed in Africa prior to colonialism and that it is this form of capitalism that brought about the trans-Atlantic and trans-Arabian slave trades. To simply see class as one of the bad legacies of

colonialism and Western capitalism is to partake in a myth that represents pre-colonial African societies as pristine and innocent

Just as Adichie sees this newly-found openness as reprising the openness of some pre-colonial African societies, Ori Schwarz (2011) likewise argues that new media technology is returning the world into a small village, in which gossip, as content, is the king: "In this allegedly emergent world, people are constantly aware of being potentially documented, lying makes no longer sense, and misbehaviour cannot be concealed, so much so that living under complete transparency is the least worst method of coping with 'mob vigilantism'." ([http://scholar.harvard.edu/schwarz/files/schwarz\\_2011\\_subjectual\\_visibility\\_and\\_the\\_negotiated\\_panopticon.pdf](http://scholar.harvard.edu/schwarz/files/schwarz_2011_subjectual_visibility_and_the_negotiated_panopticon.pdf)).

Most people did not know who Wole Soyinka's children are or who Ben Okri is married to or which party Ngugi attended in a previous week, but intimate details of today's writers' lifestyle are open to readers, and writers are using these digital interactions as a way of marketing their work and as a means of buttressing their position as digital cultural ambassadors. Therefore, literature that is produced under this condition of openness may be seen as reflecting 'the truth'. So, what was once considered as private to the writer is now commonly shared with readers. The result of this is that texts are arguably becoming grounded in reality as art no longer pretends that it is not striving to mirror real-life experience. Therefore, the nature of texts within the new media landscape and the close interaction between the writer and her readers within this medium probably means that the distinctions and value judgements associated with particular forms of publication are not as *strong* as they once were. In the process, readers are starting to embrace different values regarding literature beyond those validated through the more traditional ideas of a canon.

So, this research recognizes that every historical age is in one way or another driven by an impulse to distinguish itself from the past; hence the commonplaceness of *newness* as a figure of self-configuration. This research loosely divides African literatures into three generations: The first generation of modern African writers is mainly the canons - writers like Léopold Sédar Senghor, Augusto Neto, Wole Soyinka, Ama Aita Aidoo and Ngugi wa Thiong'o - who came into their own before and during the 1960s - Africa's decade of independence. The second generation is mostly writers who became established in the 1980s and 1990s, such as Ben Okri; and the third generation comprises emerging voices who are just coming into their own such as Binyavanga Wainaina, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and Petinah Gappah. Ogaga Okuyade (2014) rightly articulates the idea of three different generations of African writers as espoused by this research. Okuyade points out that "the

older generation novelists were too close to the colonial tensions in Africa, which made cultural conflict the dominant thematic concern of their creative engagements." The second generation of African writers include those born after the year 1960. This generation is what Okuyade refers to as writers who got disillusioned by the monumental failure of Africa's emergent leaderships, and who used their art to engage issues bordering on self-re-examination or appraisal. The third-generation of writers, according to Okuyade seems to be more versatile and more contemporary in their thematic preoccupations and is more global in their vision and style, especially in their exploration of issues like transnationalism, liberal sexuality, homosexuality, exile, and cultural regeneration. This group includes writers born from the 1970 onwards and who came into their own in the twenty-first century.

### Concluding Remarks

By way of conclusion, African literature and electronic literature are richly endowed with a cultural tradition that is very specific and has potential to elevate the literature to international reputation. The discussions in this paper identified a number of areas of literary aesthetics, namely, definition, language, orature, development, womanism, encoded sexuality, technology, and educational institutions. It also demonstrated that they are exposed to critical challenges. Post-graduate students would need to develop these areas even further. Hermeneutics and aesthetics are an exciting area for theoretical and critical scholarship in African literature and digital writings and it needs studies devoted to its development.

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