THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO THE

AFRICAN NOVEL

Edited by F. Abiola Irele

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THE AFRICAN NOVEL

Africa's strong tradition of storytelling has long been an expression of an oral narrative culture. African writers such as Amos Tutuola, Naguib Mahfouz, Wole Soyinka, and J.M. Coetzee have adapted these older forms to develop and enhance the genre of the novel, in a shift from the oral mode to print. Comprehensive in scope, these new essays cover the fiction in the European languages from North Africa and Africa South of the Sahara, as well as in Arabic. They highlight the themes and styles of the African novel through an examination of the works that have either attained canonical status – an entire chapter is devoted to the work of Chinua Achebe – or can be expected to do so. Including a guide to further reading and a chronology, this is the ideal starting-point for students of African and world literatures.

F. ABIOLA IRELE is Visiting Professor in the Department of African and African American Studies and the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at Harvard University. His recent publications include *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*, edited with Simon Gikandi (Cambridge, 2004).

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EDITED BY
F. ABIOLA IRELE

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CONTENTS

Notes on contributors *page* vii
Acknowledgments xi
Chronology xii

1 Introduction: perspectives on the African novel
F. ABIOLA IRELE 1

2 The oral–literate interface
OLAKUNLE GEORGE 15

3 Chinua Achebe and the African novel
DAN IZEVBAYE 31

4 Protest and resistance
BARBARA HARLOW 51

5 The Afrikaans novel
CHRISTOPHER WARNES 69

6 The African novel in Arabic
SHADEN M. TAGELDIN 85

7 The francophone novel in North Africa
BERNARD ARESU 103

8 The francophone novel in sub-Saharan Africa
LYDIE MOUDILENO 125

9 The African historical novel
M. KEITH BOOKER 141

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10 Magical realism and the African novel
ATO QUAYSON 159

11 The African novel and the feminine condition
NANA WILSON-TAGOE 177

12 Autobiography and *Bildungsroman* in African literature
APOLLO AMOKO 195

13 The postcolonial condition
PHYLLIS TAOUA 209

14 New voices, emerging themes
DOMINIC THOMAS 227

15 The critical reception of the African novel
HARRY GARUBA 243

Bibliography 263
Index 272

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"The Unbearable Lightness of Being: Re-Figuring Trends in Recent Nigerian Poetry" (*English in Africa*, May 2005).

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DAN IZEVBAYE took BA and PhD degrees at the University of Ibadan. He taught at the University of Lagos, and for many years at the University of Ibadan where he retired as Professor in 2004. He has held visiting appointments at universities in the UK, the US and South Africa and was a 1989 Senior Fulbright Fellow. He currently teaches at Bowen University, Iwo, Nigeria, where he is Dean of the Arts Faculty. He is a fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Letters, of which he was President from 2001 to 2006. His publications include essays on the major figures of African literature.

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Apart from literature, his research interest includes communication and the entertainment media.

LYDIE MOUDILENO is Professor of French and Francophone Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Her work focuses on issues of identity in contemporary postcolonial francophone fiction. She is the author of a book on Caribbean literature, *L'Écrivain antillais au miroir de sa littérature* (1997); and two books on sub-Saharan African literature: *Littératures africaines 1980–1990* (2002) and *Parades postcoloniales* (2006).

ATO QUAYSON is Professor of English and inaugural director of the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies at the University of Toronto. His most recent publications are *Calibrations: Reading for the Social* (2003), *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation* (2007), and *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory* (with Tejumola Olaniyan, 2007).

SHADEN M. TAGELDIN is Assistant Professor of Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature at the University of Minnesota. She is finishing a book titled *Disarming Words: Empire and the Seductions of Translation in Egypt*. For her doctoral dissertation (University of California, Berkeley), she received the 2005 Charles Bernheimer Prize from the American Comparative Literature Association. Her most recent essay, on nostalgia and the poetics of postcolonial migration in Sakinna Boukhedenna and Agha Shahid Ali, appeared in *Comparative Literature Studies*. Two essays are forthcoming in *The Rise of the Arab Novel in English* and *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Naguib Mahfouz*.

PHYLLIS TAOUA teaches literature and cinema at the University of Arizona, where she is an Associate Professor of French and Francophone Studies. She is the author of *Forms of Protest* (2002) and numerous articles on French and African literatures, literary criticism, ethnography, and the politics of empire. She is currently at work on a second book entitled *The Dynamics of Dispossession*, which explores representations of loss in contemporary African literature and film.

DOMINIC THOMAS is Chair of the Department of French and Francophone Studies and Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of California, Los Angeles. He co-edited with Françoise Lionnet *Francophone Studies: New Landscapes* (*Modern Language Notes*, 2003) and with Alec G. Hargreaves and Nicki Hitchcott, *Textual Ownership in Francophone African Literature* (*Research in African Literatures*, 2006). He is the author of *Nation-Building, Propaganda and Literature in Francophone Africa* (2002) and *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration, and Transnationalism* (2007).

CHRISTOPHER WARNES studied in South Africa and the UK, and has been a lecturer at the University of Stellenbosch. He is currently Lecturer in Commonwealth and

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International Literature at the University of Cambridge. He has published several articles on South African literature, and his book, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel*, will be published in 2009.

NANA WILSON-TAGOE is a Visiting Professor of African and African Diaspora Literature at the Department of Black Studies, University of Missouri, Kansas City, and a member of staff in the MA program in National and International Literatures at the Institute of English, University of London, UK. She has taught African and Caribbean Literature at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London and at universities in Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya. In addition to several journal articles and book chapters, she has published *Historical Thought and Literary Representation in West Indian Literature* (University Press of Florida), edited *National Healths. Gender Sexuality and Health in Cross-cultural Contexts*, co-published *A Reader's Guide to Westindian and Black British Literature* and has forthcoming books on writers, Ama Ata Aidoo and Yvonne Vera.

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CHRONOLOGY

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL EVENTS	LITERARY AND CULTURAL EVENTS
Egypt: Old Kingdom (2500 BC)	Egyptian *Book of the Dead* (*c.*1500 BC)
Egypt: Middle Kingdom (1900–1500 BC); New Kingdom (1500–1200 BC)	*Hymn of Akhenaten* (*c.*1375 BC)
Kush, Meroe, Nubia	*Aesop's Fables*
Conquest by Alexander the Great (332 BC)	Herodotus, *History* (*c.*450 BC)
Greek conquest of Egypt (100 BC)	Terence (195–159 BC), *The Self Tormentor*, *Woman of Andros*
Roman conquest of Egypt and North Africa (30 BC)	Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* (*c.*155) Heliodorus, *Aethiopica*
	St Augustine, *Confessions* (400)
Introduction and spread of Christianity in North Africa (200–350)	
Axum (100–700)	Development of Geez script
Rise of Ghana (300–1200)	
Arab conquest of North Africa (640–700)	Poems of Antara
Spread of Islam in West Africa (600–900)	Composition of the *One Thousand and One Nights*, partly in Egypt (*c.*900–1700s)
Founding of al-Azhar University in Cairo (969)	Arab Chronicles: Ibn Battuta, *al-Rihla* (*c.*1355), Ibn Khaldun, *Kitab al-ʿIbar* (*c.*1375)
Islam in East Africa (1000)	Swahili *utendi*

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"Berber" Almoravid and Almohad dynasties gain control of North and Northwest Africa (from Egypt to Senegal) and Iberian peninsula (1073–1269)	
Rise of Mali (*c.*1200)	*Epic of Son-Jara*
Rise of Songhay (1495)	Leo Africanus (born Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan al-Fasi), *History and Description of Africa* (*c.*1513)
Rise of Kongo Kingdom (*c.*1300)	*The Mwindo Epic*
Rise of Benin (*c.*1400)	*The Ozidi Saga*
Zimbabwe (Monomotapa) (*c.*1500)	
Portuguese explorers on the West and Central African coasts (1450–1600)	
Ottoman invasions of Cairo (1517), Algiers (1518), and Tripolitania and Cyrenaica in present-day Libya (mid-1500s); Ottoman Empire annexes most of North Africa	
The Atlantic slave trade (late 1500s–mid nineteenth century)	
The Dutch in South Africa (late sixteenth century)	Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative* (1789)
The Haitian Revolution (1790–1804)	
Rise of Chaka and Zulu (*c.*1795), Mfecane (1817–47)	Zulu *izibongo*
French occupation of Egypt (1798–1801)	
Rise of the Sokoto Caliphate (1800)	
United States attacks Tripoli in present-day Libya (1801), Barbary Wars (1801–5)	
Muhammad Ali Pasha becomes Ottoman viceroy of Egypt (1805)	
Abolition of the slave trade: Britain (1807), France (1848), USA (1860)	

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Creation of Liberia	
Founding of Fourah Bay College (1827)	
French invasion of Algeria (1830)	
The emir Abd el-Kader (1808–83) organizes resistance against French colonization (1832–47)	Rifaʿa Rafiʿ al-Tahtawi, *Takhlis al-Ibriz fi Talkhis Bariz* (1834)
	Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi, *Aqwam al-Masalik fi Maʿrifat al-Mamalik* (1867–8)
	S. W. Koelle, *Polyglotta Africana* (1854)
Mahdi Rebellion in Sudan (1881)	
ʿUrabi Rebellion in Egypt (1881–2)	
British invasion of Egypt (1882)	ʿAli Mubarak, *ʿAlam al-Din* (1882)
Berlin Conference (Partition of Africa) (1884–5)	Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* (1883)
	Edward Wilmot Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (1887)
	ʿA'isha al-Taymuriyya, *Nata'ij al-ahwal fi al-aqwal wa-al-afʿal* (first "proto-novel" published by an African woman, 1888)
Boer War (1889–1902)	
Battle of Omdurman in Sudan (1898)	
Establishment of Anglo-Egyptian condominium in Sudan (1899)	Muhammad al-Muwaylihi, *Hadith ʿIsa ibn Hisham* (1898–1902)
Southern Mauritania becomes a French protectorate (1903)	
Maji-Maji rising in German East Africa (1908–12)	Joseph Casely Hayford, *Ethiopia Unbound* (1911)
Morocco and Tunisia become French protectorates (1912)	
South African Native Land Act (1913)	Muhammad Husayn Haykal, *Zaynab* (1913)
	Sol T. Plaatje, *Native Life in South Africa* (1916)
First World War (1914–18)	

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Egypt becomes British protectorate (1914)

Founding of the African National Congress (1917)

Du Bois and pan-African Conference, Paris (1919)

Egyptian Revolution of 1919, nominal independence of Egypt (1922)

Mauritania becomes colony in French West Africa (1920)

The Harlem Renaissance, *c.*1921–9

René Maran, Prix Goncourt for *Batouala* (1921)

Muhammad al-Qurri, *al-Yatim al-Muhmal* (1923)

Taha Husayn, *al-Ayyam* (1926–7)

Thomas Mfolo, *Chaka* (1930)

Sol T. Plaatje, *Mhudi* (1930)

Ibrahim ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Mazini, *Ibrahim al-Katib* (1931)

Tawfiq al-Hakim, *ʿAwdat al-Ruh* (1933)

ʿAbd al-Khaliq al-Turays, *Intisar al-Haqq bi al-Batil* (1933)

ʿAli al-Duʿaji, *Jawla bayna Hanat al-Bahr al-Mutawassit* (1935)

End of Ottoman Empire and abolition of caliphate (1924)

Italian invasion of Abyssinia (1936)

Leo Frobenius, *History of African Civilizations* (1936)

Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (1936)

Nnamdi Azikiwe, *Renascent Africa* (1937)

Daniel O. Fagunwa, *Ogboju Ode ninu Igbo Irunmale* (1938)

Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (1939)

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	Mahmud al-Masʿadi, *al-Sudd* (1940)
	al-Tuhami al-Wazzani, *al-Zawiya* (1942)
Italian annexation of Libya (1939)	Albert Camus's "Misère de Kabylie" and "La famine en Algérie," in *Actuelles III*, 1939 and 1945
Second World War (1939–45)	
Brazzaville Conference (1944)	
Popular upheaval and colonial repression, Sétif, Algeria, 8 May 1945	
Malagasy Rebellion and French Repression (1946)	
Pan-African Conference, Manchester (1946)	Founding of *Présence africaine* (1947)
Railway workers' strike in Senegal (Dakar to Bamako line) (1947–8)	
Mine workers' strike in South Africa (1948)	Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Chants d'ombre*, *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*, with Preface by Jean-Paul Sartre, "Orphée Noir" (1948)
Establishment of State of Israel, first Arab–Israeli War (1948)	Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy* (1949)
Independence of Libya (1951)	
Free Officers' Revolution and Independence of Egypt (1952)	
"Mau-Mau" Rebellion, Kenya (1952–6)	Mohammed Dib's trilogy *Algérie*, 1952–4
	Amos Tutuola, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952)
	Camara Laye, *L'Enfant noir* (*The African Child*) (1953)
	Cheikh Anta Diop, *Nations nègres et culture* (1954)
Jamal ʿAbd al-Nasir (Nasser) becomes President of Egypt (1954)	
Bandung Conference (1955)	
South African Freedom Charter (1955)	

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Suez crisis (1956)	
First clandestine Congress of the National Liberation Front, aka the Congress of the Soummam Valley, Algeria (1956)	
Independence of Tunisia and Morocco (1956)	Kateb Yacine, *Nedjma* (1956)
Loi Cadre, French African Colonies (1956)	First Congress of Black Writers, Paris (1956)
	Najib Mahfuz (Naguib Mahfouz), Cairo Trilogy: *Bayn al-Qasrayn*, *Qasr al-Shawq*, *al-Sukkariyya* (1956–7)
	Ousmane Sembène, *Le Docker noir* (1956)
	Albert Camus, Nobel Prize (1957)
	Albert Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé* (1957)
	ʿAbd al-Majid Bin Jallun (Abdelmajid Benjelloun), *Fi al-Tufula* (1957)
Ghana Independence (1957)	Kwame Nkrumah, *The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (1957)
	Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (1958)
	Nawal al-Saʿdawi (Nawal El Saadawi), *Mudhakkirat Tabiba* (1958)
General de Gaulle and Referendum on "French Community" (1958)	
Independence of Guinea (1958)	
Algerian War of Independence (1954–62)	Najib Mahfuz (Naguib Mahfouz), *Awlad Haratina* (1959)
	Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists, Rome (1959)
	Death of Albert Camus (1960)

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	Ballets Africains of Guinea (Fodeba Keita) (1960)
	Latifa al-Zayyat, *al-Bab al-Maftuh* (1960)
1960: Year of African Independence: Nigeria and several African countries	
Assassination of Patrice Lumumba (1961)	
South Africa: Sharpeville Massacre (1960)	
	Wole Soyinka, *A Dance of the Forest* (1960)
	Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961)
	Jean Pélégri's *Les oliviers de la justice*, Prix des écrivains de cinéma et de télévision, Cannes Festival (1962)
	Conference of English-Speaking African Writers, Kampala (1962)
Founding of Organization of African Unity (1963)	Albert Memmi (ed.), *Anthologie des écrivains du Maghreb d'expression française* (1964)
	East African Literary Bureau established (1964)
	Waguih Ghali, *Beer in the Snooker Club* (1964)
	Ama Ata Aidoo, *Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965)
	Grace Ogot, *The Promised Land* (first novel published by an African woman) (1965)
	Okot p'Bitek, *Song of Lawino* (1966)
	Dakar Arts Festival (1966)
	Gillo Pontecorvo, *The Battle of Algiers*, Golden Lion (Grand Prize), Venice Film Festival (1966)
	Tayeb Salih, *Mawsim al-Hijra ila al-Shamal* (1966)

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	Sunʿ Allah Ibrahim, *Tilka al-Ra'iha* (1966) ʿAbd al-Karim Ghallab, *Dafanna al-Madi* (1966) Najib Mahfuz (Naguib Mahfouz), *Miramar* (1967)
Six-Day War between Arab states and Israel (1967)	
Nigerian Civil War (1967–70)	Yambo Ouologuem, Prix Renaudot, *Le Devoir de la violence* (*Bound to Violence)* (1968) Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) ʿAbd al-Hakim Qasim, *Ayyam al-Insan al-Sabʿa* (1969) al-Bashir Khurayyif, *al-Dijla fi ʿArajiniha* (1969)
War of Independence, Portuguese colonies (1961–74)	ʿAbd al-Hamid Bin Haduqa (Abdelhamid Benhedouga), *Rih al-Janub* (1971) al-Tahir Wattar, *al-Laz* and *al-Zilzal* (1974) Ahmadou Kourouma, *Les Soleils des indépendances* (*The Suns of Independence*), 1968 in Canada and 1970 in France Agostinho Neto, *Sacred Hope* (1974) Nawal al-Saʿdawi, *Imra'a ʿinda Nuqtat al-Sifr* (1974) and *Imra'atan fi Imra'a* (1975) Mohammed Lakhdar-Hamina, *Chronique des années de braise*, scenario by Rachid Boudjedra, Palme d'or, Cannes Festival (1975)
Death of Nasser (1970)	
Arab-Israeli War (1973)	
Soweto Uprising (1976)	Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978) Sony Labou Tansi, *La Vie et demie* (1979)

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	Muhammad Shukri, *al-Khubz al-Hafi* (1979)
	Idwar al-Kharrat, *Rama wa al-Tinnin* (1979)
	Mariama Bâ, *Une si longue lettre* (*So Long a Letter*) (1979)
	Noma Award for Publishing in Africa established 1980 (won by Mariama Bâ)
Independence of Zimbabwe (1980)	
Assassination of Anwar al-Sadat (1981)	Ahmad Wuld ʿAbd al-Qadir, *al-Asma' al-Mutaghayyira* (1981)
	Abd el-Kader, *Écrits spirituels* (1982)
	Algerian novelist Rashid Bu Jadra (Rachid Boudjedra) announces his turn from French to Arabic (1982); publication of *al-Tafakkuk* (1982)
	Muhammad Barrada, *Luʿbat al-Nisyan* (1982)
	Senghor elected to the French Academy (1983)
	Layla Abu Zaid (Leila Abouzeid), *ʿAm al-Fil* (1983–4)
	Assia Djebar, *L'Amour, la fantasia* (*Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade*) (1985)
	Kateb Yacine, Grand Prix National des Lettres (1986)
	Wole Soyinka, Nobel Prize (1986)
	Tahar Ben Jelloun, Prix Goncourt (1987) for *La Nuit sacrée*
Zine el Abidine Ben Ali newly appointed Prime Minister deposes Habib Bourguiba, the first president and "Father" of Tunisia, and succeeds him as president (1988)	Festus Iyayi, Commonwealth Writers' Prize for *Heroes* (1988)
	Tsitsi Dangarembga, Commonwealth Writers' Prize (Africa) for *Nervous Conditions* (1989)
	Death of Kateb Yacine (1989)

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	Naguib Mahfouz, Nobel Prize (1988)
	Ahmad al-Faqih, *Hada'iq al-Layl* trilogy (1990)
	Ibrahim al-Kawni, *al-Tibr* and *Nazif al-Hajar* (1990)
Independence of Namibia (1990)	Nadine Gordimer, Nobel Prize (1991)
The Algerian military cancel national elections after first round victory by the Islamic Salvation Front, beginning of a civil war (1992)	Ben Okri, Booker Prize for *The Famished Road* (1992)
	Ama Ata Aidoo, Commonwealth Writers' Prize (Africa) for *Changes* (1992)
	Ahdaf Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992)
	Algerian journalist, poet, and novelist Tahar Djaout (*L'invention du désert*, 1987) assassinated (1993)
	Derek Walcott, Nobel Prize (1993)
	Ahlam Mustaghanami (Ahlam/ Ahlem Mosteghanemi), *Dhakirat al-Jasad* (1993)
	Idris ʿAli, *Dunqula: Riwaya Nubiyya* (1993)
	Kamau Brathwaite, Neustadt Prize (1994)
Nelson Mandela elected President of South Africa (1994)	Yvonne Vera, Commonwealth Writers' Prize (Africa) for *Under the Tongue* (1994)
	Noma Award to Marlene van Niekerk for *Triompf* (1995)
	Death of Sony Labou Tansi (1995)
Execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa by Military Government in Nigeria (1995)	Assia Djebar, Neustadt International Prize for Literature (1996)
	Calixthe Beyala, Grand Prix du Roman de l'Académie Française for *Les honneurs perdus* (1996)
	Nuruddin Farah, Neustadt International Prize for Literature (1998)

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Algerian Parliament passes the Civil Harmony Act (1999)

Death of King Hassan II of Morocco, Mohammed VI ascends to the throne (1999)

Funso Aiyejina. Commonwealth Prize for Literature (Africa) for *The Legend of The Rockhills and Other Stories* (2002)

Caine Prize for African Writing established (2000)

Death of Senghor (2001)

African Union (AU), new supranational organization as a successor to the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and African Economic Community (AEC) established (2001)

Raoul Peck, *Lumumba* (2001)

Ahmadou Kourouma, Prix Renaudot, for *Allah n'est pas obligé* (2001)

J. M. Coetzee, Nobel Prize (2003)

Death of Jean Pélégri (March) and Mohammed Dib (May) (2003)

Death of Kourouma (2003)

Tahar Ben Jelloun, International Impac Dublin Literary Award (2004)

Assia Djebar elected to the French Academy (2005)

Death of Yvonne Vera (2005)

Death of Mahfouz (2006)

Academy Award for South African film *Tsotsi* (2006)

Alain Mabanckou, Prix Renaudot for *Mémoire de Porc-épic* (2006)

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Orange Broadband Prize for *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007)

Death of Dris Chraïbi (2007)

Death of Ousmane Sembène (2007)

Chinua Achebe, Man Booker International Prize (2007)

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1

F. ABIOLA IRELE

Introduction: perspectives on the African novel

Although Africa has had a long and enduring tradition of poetry and drama, the novel is today, as almost everywhere else in the world, the dominant literary genre on the continent. Its privileged status as a written genre may be attributed to European influence and its association with an imaginative consciousness grounded in literate modernity. However, there can be no doubt that the appeal of the novel has to do with the integrative function that narratives have always played in African societies, a role that is well illustrated not only by the didactic and reflexive purpose of the folk tales and fables that inform the sensibility and define a primary level of the imaginative faculty in traditional African societies,[1] but also by the centrality of the mythical tale, extending to the great oral epics – as exemplified by the Sundiata epic of Mali and the Ozidi saga of the Ijaws – with the ideological and symbolic significance these varieties of the narrative form assumed in pre-colonial times and their continued relevance in the contemporary period. In short, the novel has acquired today a cultural significance that was once the exclusive province of the oral narrative.

The continuity with the oral tradition is evident in the novels written in the African languages, in which the derivation of content and mode is direct and immediate. But the oral–literate interface, in its various manifestations, can also be felt as a quality of the fictional works of many an African writer, reflecting either a conscious design or, as is often the case, the effect of a cultural retention determined by the African background. Thus, the genres of oral narrative and the aesthetics they illustrate – insofar as this involves the recital of texts in the living contexts of performance – can be said to provide the imaginative background and, often, the structural model for the appropriation of the novel genre by African writers, in both the indigenous languages and the imported European tongues. The concept of orality (or "orature"), which serves as the theoretical and ethnographic foundation for the discussion of the intrinsic properties (character types, narrative functions and rhetorical devices, as well as the role of metaphor and symbolism) by

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which the traditional narratives are structured can also be applied to the African novel, insofar as these properties have had a marked effect on the way African novelists have often conceived and executed their works, to the extent that we are sometimes obliged to identify in their works the signs of a textualized orality.

It is now customary to place the origins of the African novel firmly within the colonial experience – to consider its emergence as a direct consequence of the encounter with Europe, with the historical implications and the social and cultural factors that have conditioned the emergence and evolution of the novel as a literary genre on the continent. In this explanation of the rise of the novel in Africa, literacy and writing are represented as having developed largely as a function of Western education introduced by the various Christian missions in their evangelical effort. The centrality of the Bible to this effort has thus been advanced as the constitutive factor in the creation of a new literature by the elite that, over time, emerged from the African encounter with Europe, with its corollary of colonial domination and its cultural impositions. This view of the genesis of the novel and of modern literature generally, while valid, requires today to be qualified, insofar as literacy was first introduced into Africa by Arabs prior to the arrival of Europeans. The Arab presence in North Africa led to the early introduction of Islam to populations in Africa south of the Sahara, and has ensured sustained interactions between the two areas for a good part of the past millennium. The Koran has thus served for a much longer period than the Bible as a reference text for the protocols of writing and the formation of the literary sensibility in Africa.

However, the role of these sacred texts has obscured a point that needs to be remarked upon: the fact that the earliest works of fiction by writers either native to or associated with Africa predate the introduction of literacy in Arabic in the early period of the millennium, and, as the defining cultural mark of a Western inheritance, also predate the introduction of literacy in the European languages. The beginnings of the novel in Africa go back in fact to the formative period of Western literature itself, with works related to Africa constituting part of its early corpus of canonical texts. Of the works that have survived from this period, two in particular have an immediate bearing on the practice of fiction in Africa: the Greek masterpiece, *Aethiopica* by the Hellenic writer Heliodorus, and *The Golden Ass* by the Latin author, Apuleius. These works illustrate a phenomenon that was to assume significance many centuries later, namely, the appropriation by the African writer of a second language for expressive purposes, the deployment for literary ends of a foreign tongue serving as a dominant language of culture in its own time and place.

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In its depiction of the interactions of peoples in the Hellenic world, *Aethiopica* offers a graphic reflection of the historical and cultural context of its composition. Its projection, in a constantly shifting perspective, of manners and beliefs among several populations in contact in the Eastern Mediterranean and along the Nile valley – Greeks, Persians, Egyptians and Ethiopians – integrates within a comprehensive fictional framework the themes of romance and the quest for spirituality, set against a realism dominated by a relentless procession of scenes of violence and carnage, intended presumably to give dramatic effect to its expansive narrative development. This is underlined by its structure as a sequence of set scenes, culminating in the long account of a military campaign that pits Ethiopians against Persians. The fact that the final scenes of the novel highlight the military brilliance of the Ethiopian general has generated speculation as to the identity and biography of the author and his personal circumstances in the human universe that is reproduced in his work. But while the personal details of the author have remained obscure, the atmosphere of the narrative points to an African with possibly a racial and ideological axe to grind.[2]

In contrast, *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius is characterized by its linear structure, each chapter representing an episode in a series of transformations or metamorphoses undergone by its hero, involving a constant interplay between fantasy and realism. The element of realism and its satirical tone have earned the work the title of the "first modern novel," but the evocative power of its transformations and the visionary import of its final scene suggest a conception of fiction carried over from the traditional aesthetic of storytelling, with its slight adherence to an observable universe of facts, and its emphasis on an other-worldly dimension of experience. We might remark that the return to this mythic mode of apprehension, the departure from a strict order of realism, constitutes the basis of what has been called "magic realism" in the contemporary novel. It is thus possible to see *The Golden Ass* as the earliest example of this mode in prose fiction. In this sense, it can also be regarded as a remarkable antecedent to some of the most significant works in modern African fiction, such as Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, Kojo Laing's *Woman of the Aeroplanes*, Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and Pepetela's *The Return of the Water Spirit*.

The point needs some clarification. The conscious recuperation in modern African literature forms the background to what is now recognized as an African variety of "magic realism," which can be seen as inherent in the inspiration and cultural "embeddedness" of the African novels now grouped in this category. Here, the recourse to fantasy and myth translates not merely the need felt by the writers for a culturally grounded mode of the African imagination – a mode of perception that accounts for the atmosphere of

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experience that traditional esthetic forms seek to convey – but also for a governing metaphor which functions to give weight and comprehensiveness to the vision of life each writer seeks to project.[3]

Both *Aethiopica* and *The Golden Ass* appear to have been well known during the European Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Their long record of dissemination throws an interesting light on what may well have been a parallel development in Africa of written works and orally transmitted forms of fiction. For when their dates of composition are considered, it is possible to speculate that the written works antedate the longer narratives that we now associate with the oral tradition.

It was to take nearly a thousand years, however, before we were to witness the full emergence of the African novel as a literate genre. It is important to note in this respect the primary role played in this development by the African languages, which came to offer the writer the natural means of literate expression once these languages began to be reduced to writing throughout the continent in the course of the nineteenth century, mainly through Christian evangelical effort. As already remarked, this effort was focused largely on the translation of the Bible into the indigenous languages, often leading to the creation of a literary idiom for many of the languages.[4] In the circumstances, the first African novelists were products of missionary schools, so that a didactic and evangelical purpose came to predominate in this early literature, intent as the writers were on producing works of moral edification, as part of Christian teaching. Beyond this limited purpose of the writers, these mission-inspired works came to contain a larger cultural effect, for they bore witness to the profound transformation of values that the impact of Christianity had set in motion in Africa, a process in which the traditional religions and systems of belief came to exist in a state of tension with the new religion and with structures of mind associated with Western civilization. These texts were thus instrumental in the construction of a new mental universe indispensable for the emergence in Africa of a Western-inspired modernity.

Notwithstanding the formative role of the Christian religious text in the making of the African novel in the indigenous languages, the esthetic principle came to override the didactic impulse that motivated the early writers. For the expressive potential of the Old Testament and its recall of African orality proved influential in determining the narrative rhetoric and forms of fictional address in many of the indigenous novels. This creative process is well illustrated by Thomas Mofolo's Sotho novel, *Chaka*, composed in the Sotho language, a work which, despite its conflicted portrayal of the Zulu hero, derives its narrative impulse from its integration of the praise poem tradition into a prose narrative form, a re-creation compelled by its historical theme and cultural reference.[5]

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The association of Christian sentiment with expressive form in the Bible also explains the influence of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, which has served as what Isabel Hofmeyr calls a "template" for the construction of the written novel in Africa.[6] It is important to observe, however, that Bunyan's work was able to exert such an influence not so much through the Christian orthodoxy of its content as by virtue of its quest motif and its allegorical burden, which bore a recognizable affinity to the didactic and symbolic function of the African folk tale tradition.

The influence of these Christian religious texts has been paralleled by that of the Koran for Muslim writers, which remains a normative reference for modern African fiction in Arabic, represented by works such as Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, and in particular, the novels of Naguib Mafouz. The influence of the Koran extends, however, beyond the literature in Arabic. The so-called Afro-Arab literature in Swahili and Hausa which was enabled by the transcription of African languages into the Arabic script (*ajami*), was predominantly devotional in tone; narratives in this tradition turned on the articulation of an Islamic outlook on the world based on the teachings of the Koran. The novels in the European languages attest equally to the influence of the holy book of Islam; they take their bearings from a specifically Muslim tradition of literacy and the rhetoric of narrative it conditions. Muslim writers in North Africa and in Africa south of the Sahara are equally indebted to the Koran for their motifs and modes of narration, as demonstrated by the pervasive presence of Islam in Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure*, in which the meditation on religious experience – going hand in hand with the exploration of the hero's sense of cultural and spiritual exile – is informed largely by a sensibility that owes its force to Sufi mysticism. Equally striking is Mariama Bâ's deliberate borrowing from the Koran of the *mirasse* as a formal device for the recollections of her heroine in her novel *So Long a Letter*. In Ibrahim Tahir's *The Last Imam* (1984), the Koran is invoked as central to the novel's celebration of an enduring heritage of Islamic culture by which whole communities in Northern Nigeria have sought to define their place in the world. In all these works, the Islamic experience is presented as a distinctive current of a modern awareness and sensibility, and Islamic religion and tradition as essential components of a universal humanism.[7]

While the mythic sources in the traditional cultures and the influence of Christian and Islamic religious texts have played an important part in the emergence and evolution of the African novel in the indigenous languages, the dominant trend has been towards an appropriation of the genre as a means for exploring themes and issues of contemporary experience. As pioneered by Daniel O. Fagunwa, the Yoruba novel emerged as an amalgam of heroic

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adventure based on indigenous cosmology and cultural traditions on the one hand, and Christian moralism and symbolism on the other. But his successors have moved the Yoruba novel decidedly into a secular realm of understanding, in a transition that has also involved a profound transformation of the language as a medium of literate expression.[8] This movement of transition in the creation of a new literary tradition in the indigenous languages is well exemplified by the trajectory of the Swahili novel. As charted by Xavier Garnier in his study of the corpus, the evolution of prose fiction in Swahili has been marked by a pronounced shift from the reformulation of traditional fables that provided the substance of early efforts at prose fiction, towards clearly articulated narratives of modern life, focused especially on social and political issues. The Swahili novel has thus come to function both as a representation of contemporary realities and as a medium of public discourse.[9]

The transition to modernity registered by the thematic and formal evolution of the African novel in the indigenous languages brings the corpus into convergence with the works that have defined the trajectory of the African novel written in European languages, principally Portuguese, French and English.[10] The formal relation of these works to the Western tradition of written fiction is evident, dictated not only by the recourse to the language of the colonizer and the range of formal resources it offered in each case, but also by the colonial experience itself, constituting in all its comprehensive scope – political, socio-economic and cultural – the new context of life within which African existence came to be enclosed. The pressures inherent in this situation have been central to the genesis of modern African literature, most especially the "europhone" African novel which was called into existence by the colonial experience.

Given this background, it is perhaps in the nature of things that the oldest colonial empire in Africa should have provided the first indication of a new tradition of written fiction on the continent. In lusophone Africa, the beginnings of the novel are to be traced to "white writing" (to borrow J. M. Coetzee's term),[11] Evaristo d'Almeida's *O Escravo* (*The Slave*) published in 1856, being recorded as the first novel in Portuguese with an African setting. In the 1920s, *Camaxilo*, set in Angola, and written by Castro Soromenho, another Portuguese, confirmed the trend, to be followed by Baltazar Lopes's novel, *Chinquinho*, published in 1936. These works have been said to bear a close relationship to the novelistic tradition in Northeast Brazil, exemplified by the work of Jorge Amado,[12] although this does not preclude a genuine feeling for the African environment in the work of Soromenho, as Roger Bastide has pointed out.[13] The heavy burden of Portuguese colonialism provides the background and indeed the existential framework of the experience to

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which these novels testify, so that the novel came to serve as a major vehicle of anti-colonial protest and of a nationalist sentiment that also found intense lyrical expression in poetry.[14] This anti-colonial theme is developed in varied narrative perspectives, marked by great originality in each case, in such works as Luandino Vierya's *The Secret Life of Xavier Domingos*, Pepetela's *Mayombe* and Luis Bernardo Honwana's *We Killed Mangy Dog*. The lusophone African novel has not lost its power of evocation in the post-independence period, enriched as it has been by the virtuosity of writers such as Mia Couto (*Under the Frangipani*) in Mozambique and José Eduardo Agualusa (*The Book of Chameleons*) in Angola.

The roots of the francophone African novel in the metropolitan traditions are just as deep as is the case with the lusophone. The French colonial novel, of which *Histoire de Louis Anniaba* and *Ourika* are the earliest manifestations, provide the first signs of an African presence in prose fiction in the French language, later to be expanded upon by the practitioners of the French colonial novel or *roman colonial*.[15] However, the consistently negative image of Africa purveyed by the French colonial novel rendered it superficial as a representation of the peoples and cultures of the continent. Moreover, the entrenched racism and ideological motivation that shaped its conception, as in Pierre Loti's *Le roman d'un Spahi*, could not but provoke the reaction marked by René Maran's *Batouala*, published in 1921. Despite the derivation of *Batouala* from the French colonial novel, of which it retains many of the formal features, Maran's effort to render an African point of view, to create living African characters in a genuine context of life served as a model that was soon adopted by other writers. *Batouala* thus marks the beginning of the francophone African novel. Its inspirational role is evident in the works published in the 1930s, beginning with Ahmadou Diagne's *Les trois volontés de Malic* and Bakary Diallo's *Force-Bonté*, followed by the novels of Ousmane Socé, Abdoulaye Sadji, Paul Hazoumé and Félix Couchoro.[16] In retrospect, these novels cannot be said to count as more than works of apprenticeship, but they prepared the ground for the remarkable blossoming of fictional writing that took place after World War II, illustrated notably by the works of Camara Laye, Mongo Beti, Ferdinand Oyono, Ousmane Sembène and Cheikh Hamidou Kane. As in lusophone Africa, the novels produced by francophone African writers during the colonial period are in varying degrees polemical, intended to give persuasive form and force to their depiction of affective states and attitudes, and indeed to ideological positions related to the colonial situation. The interest of these novels is not, however, limited to their nationalist orientation but derives as well from their achievement in artistic terms, for they display a resourceful handling of a language and tradition of fictional writing taken over from the metropolitan masters.

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In this way, they were able to establish within the expressive framework of the French language a vision of Africa no longer determined by the *roman colonial*.

The parallels with anglophone Africa suggest themselves, even if the differences are just as striking. In this case, Aphrah Behn's *Oroonoko or the Royal Slave* published in 1688, appears as the ancestor to the colonial novel in English, though its liberal spirit contrasts markedly with the animating principle of the novels that were later to constitute the tradition, devoted as these were, as in the French *roman colonial*, to an unrelenting denigration of Africa and the black race generally. The novels of Henry Rider Haggard and Joyce Cary, and in particular Joseph Conrad's novella, *Heart of Darkness*, come readily to mind here. It is in this regard that Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* came to assume an innovative significance, as regards both theme and reference as well as narrative idiom, almost immediately upon its publication in 1958.

Much has been made of the character of Achebe's novel as a response to the fictions of empire. But the exemplary value of the work resides less in its polemical thrust than in the assured mode of its narrative projection of African life, carried through by a craftsmanship that introduced a new level of competence in the making of African fiction. It expanded the human perspective of the early novels in English, which had begun to take a measure of the drastic reordering of African lives by Western cultural impositions. The domestic and social themes of works such as *Marita or the Folly of Love* (written by an unnamed author and first published 1886), Joseph Jeffrey Walters's *Guanya Pau* (1891), and R. E. Obeng's *Eighteenpence* (first published 1941) turn on this conundrum and anticipate in many respects the concerns of the popular novel of the 1960s and 1970s.[17] More significantly, in terms of their ideological significance, Joseph Casely-Hayford's *Ethiopia Unbound* (1911), Sol Plaatje's *Mhudi* (1930) and William Conton's *The African* (1960) register the broader political implications of European presence and propose the vision of a new integration of the African self.

We cannot fail to consider here, as part of the exploration of the African experience in the novel, the singular perspective defined by the work of writers of European extraction in Southern Africa, who inaugurated a distinctive current of African fiction by substituting for the interest in landscape attested in the travel writing of the early literature in the region, an urgent moral preoccupation with the human drama that was being enacted in their world.[18] The acute dimension assumed by the race question and policy of apartheid, instituted practically as an enveloping system of the world, imparted to these novels a tone that issued directly from a humane consciousness. It is thus the passion for justice that animates their work, a passion that

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unites writers as different in their approach to fiction as Olive Schreiner, Doris Lessing, Alan Paton, Nadine Gordimer, and André Brink. The same passion connects them in a common cause with writers on the other side of the color line: Peter Abraham, Alex La Guma, Bessie Head, Es'kia Mphahlele, Mongane Serote, and Lewis Nkosi.[19] The depth of commitment and level of achievement of the South African novelists have ensured for their work a status broader in range than that of a regional school; their novels have, therefore, an immediate relevance to the narrative of struggle and survival on the African continent.

But it is in Achebe's work that the African experience is brought into definite focus, and assumes its full human and narrative scope in the modern novel. His redefinition of the terms of the fictional representation of Africa established the novel as a modern narrative genre on the African continent, indeed, as an autonomous mode of imaginative life in Africa. The native grasp of an Igbo ethos of communal living and individual awareness that underlies and legitimizes Achebe's imaginative expression has given powerful impulse to the effort by other writers to convey the sense of a specific location in the world that his work evinces. His influence in this regard has been evident in the work of the cluster of Igbo novelists who may be said to constitute a school spawned by his example. The names that come to mind include Flora Nwapa, Onuora Nzekwu, John Munonye, and most memorably, Elechi Amadi, whose compelling novel, *The Great Ponds*, represents the most convincing effort deployed by this group in the ethnographic grounding of the African novel.[20] But the example of Achebe has been extended in other directions by non-Igbo writers such as T. M. Aluko and especially by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, for whom an affective bond with Kikuyu culture and traditions provides the foundation for his imaginative reliving of the Kenya Emergency in his first three novels.

What these observations point to is the progressive emergence and *africanization* of the novel as a modern form of narrative, its relocation, so to speak, as expressive medium in an African environment. Here, we must draw attention to an aspect of African fictional writing that has been often overlooked: The fact that African writers have also proved accomplished practitioners of short fiction. Birago Diop and Bernard Dadié have drawn inspiration from the oral tradition and excelled in the *conte*, through their transpositions of the African folk tale into French, while other writers have employed the conventional Western form of the short story or *nouvelle*, constructed around a single incident or emotional moment of great significance. The principal figures in the development of the short story as a subgenre of the African novel are Ousmane Sembène (*Voltaïques*) and Henri Lopès (*Sans Tam-Tam*) on the francophone side, and on the anglophone,

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Grace Ogot, Charles Mungoshi (*The Setting Sun and Rolling Hills*), and especially the South Africans, who have excelled in the genre: Nadine Gordimer, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Richard Rive, Alex La Guma, Njambulo Ndebele, Mzamane Mbulelu. Outstanding recent work includes Funso Aiyejina's *The Legend of the Rockhills* and Anthonia Kalu's *Broken Lives*, a collection that connects directly with Achebe's *Girls at War*.

If in the beginning, this process of naturalization of African fiction was centred on the charged dialectic that marked the relation of Africa to Europe, so that the African novel could be read, as Jameson has suggested, largely as "national allegory,"[21] the formal end of colonialism has imprinted a striking new character on the thematic concerns of the African writer, commanded as these are at the present time by the dilemmas of the post-independence situation. The overarching context of political culture has provoked a new discourse of dissidence in the African novel, aimed at uncovering the pathologies of governance that have contributed so massively to the tragic unfolding of the postcolonial condition in Africa. The critical consciousness this has generated is reflected in what I've called elsewhere "the new realism" in the African novel, often given form as modern parables.[22] Thus, the postcolonial condition has determined a strong dystopian current that has found its most powerful expression in the novels of Sony Labou Tansi. Moreover, the war novel, with its focus on ethnic conflicts and the catastrophes that have ensued from them, proceeds from the profound anxieties induced by contemporary events and thus constitutes a distinctive current of the new realism alluded to above. Thus, in their different ways, Ken Sarowiwa's *Sozaboy*, Festus Iyayi's *Heroes*, Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas obligé*, Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*, and the work that has emerged as the masterpiece of the genre, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, all deal with the phenomenon of violence in postcolonial Africa and the unsettling dimension it has assumed in contemporary African life.

A notable factor in the broadening of the horizons of the African novel entailed by these developments has been the remarkable entry of the women. The thematic orientation of women's literature in Africa is provided by the changing perceptions by African women of their social condition in relation to such issues as polygamy and male domination, and their quest for fulfillment and for a meaningful place in modern society through access to education and full participation in the economic life and national politics in the new African states. These themes are encompassed in Mariama Bâ's *So Long A Letter* which also set the tone for a writing that consciously aimed to reflect a feminine sensibility, but it is the novels of Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta, and more recently Amma Darko that illustrate the full narrative possibilities of these themes and the concerns to which they give voice.

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For all its tragic implications, the changed context of African life in the post-independence period has not only extended the thematic horizons of the African novel but also infused a new and dynamic element into the genre. Since the late 1990s, which have witnessed a creative burst in the renewal of the African novel, innovative work has been coming from authors hailing from every corner of the continent. The roster includes Calixthe Beyala, Véronique Tadjo, Moses Isegawa, Patrice Nganang, Zakes Mda, Njabulo Ndebele, Alain Mabanckou, and in particular, what appears to be a formidable cluster of creative talent from Nigeria, represented by such writers as Chris Abani, Akin Adesokan, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Segun Afolabi, Sefi Atta, Helon Habila, and Helen Oyeyemi. With these writers, the novel has entered a new phase and assumed a new complexion in Africa. The raffia skirt and the kola nut have been left behind as indices of African life, along with the village environment; the focus has shifted to the new social configuration of the urban milieu which provides the significant context of experience in the post-independence period.

It is also significant to note that, as a direct consequence of the political and economic upheavals that have marked the postcolonial period, an increasing number of African writers have come to be based outside the continent. Some of them have elected residence in Europe or the United States as is the case with the Ethiopian, Dinaw Mengestu, author of *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* (2007), as expatriates in what has been called the "new African Diaspora" or "Global Africa"; others are second generation citizens of Western countries, offspring of African emigrants, whose contacts with Africa may appear to be tenuous and at best occasional. Part of the new writing by Africans domiciled outside the continent belongs therefore to the category of "immigrant literature," composed of works written in each case in the language of the host country, including German and Italian. Each of these expatriated writers has a quite particular relationship to the meaning and significance of "Africa" and many have retained a strong sense of their ethnic and cultural connection to Africa and draw upon this for their creative endeavors.

These, then, appear to be the main lines of evolution of narrative in Africa, from its traditional sources in folk tale and myth to the written form of the modern novel. A major interest of this evolution derives from the effort by African writers to represent the African world in terms that reflect the structures and values of the pre-colonial societies and cultures, and to capture the dynamics of the transformations these societies and cultures have undergone, along with the tensions involved in this process, in the specific historical context of colonialism and westernization. This has often involved a reappraisal of their cultural inheritance and its narrative resources. The thematic

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relation of the novel to the African environment has thus come to assume as well an important consequence in formal terms, for the incorporation by African novelists of aspects of the oral narrative within the literate form of the novel can be interpreted as an effort to lend the immediacy of oral performance to the written genre, in order to transcend the limitations of print as a medium of imaginative expression. It is in this sense that one might speak of what I've called the "naturalization" of the novel in Africa, which has paved the way for the institutionalization of literature as a constitutive element of the modern culture of African states, a process that has been propelled by the widespread adoption of African texts in the educational system, resulting in the progressive constitution of a significant local audience for the literature, especially for the novel.[23]

It thus seems legitimate to propose the label "African novel" as a generic term, covering written works in all the languages either indigenous to Africa or which have been in active use on the continent at various moments in history: languages that have enabled and continue to sustain the narration of the African experience as it continues to unfold in all its multiple dimensions.

NOTES

1. For an extensive discussion of the didactic function and ethical import of the folk tale in a traditional African society, see Michael Jackson, *Allegories of the Wilderness* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Harold Scheub stresses its esthetic dimension in *Story* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).
2. As the work's modern translator Moses Hadas has remarked: "In effect, the book is a glorification of a dark-skinned race, and an obscure sect. It is easy to believe that the author was a colored man, it is clear that he was attached to the gymnosophist cult." *Heliodorus*, *An Ethiopian Romance*, trans. with an introduction by Moses Hadas (University of Philadelphia Press, 1957), p. ix.
3. Brenda Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1998). Scheub has singled out as the governing principle of the narrative in African storytelling the constant interaction between these spheres of experience which function effectively as ontological realms in traditional African systems of thought. See Scheub, *Story*, pp. 24–9. For the importance of the lived atmosphere that lends credence to magic realist narrative, see Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic* (London: Verso, 1996), pp. 233–50.
4. Xavier Garnier and Alain Ricard (eds.), *L'Effet roman: arrivée du roman dans les langues d'Afrique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006). The point is well illustrated by the Oyo dialect of Yoruba, which became established as the written form and literary language, as a result of Samuel Ajayi Crowther's translation of the Bible into this dialect; this bears comparison with Luther's translation of the Bible into the Northern variety of German which now functions largely as the literary language.
5. See Chris F. Swanepoel, "Thomas Mfolo's *Chaka* and the Oral Legacy" in Janos Riesz and Alain Ricard (eds.), *Semper aliquid novi* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1990), pp. 287–96.

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6. Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan* (Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 191–216.
7. I am indebted for these insights to Shaden M. Tageldin who, in private communication, drew my attention to the influence of the Koran in African literature and more generally, to the nature of the Islamic factor in the work of Muslim writers. See also Kenneth Harrow (ed.), *Faces of Islam in African Literature* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann; London: James Currey, 1991); Harrow, *The Marabout and the Muse: New Approaches to Islam in African Literature* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann; London: James Currey, 1996); John Hawley (ed.), *The Postcolonial Crescent: Islam's Impact on Contemporary Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998).
8. Karin Barber, "Literature in Yoruba: Poetry and Prose, Travelling Theatre and Modern Drama" in F. A. Irele and S. Gikandi (eds.), *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 357–78.
9. Garnier, *Le roman swahili: la notion de " littérature mineure" à l'épreuve* (Paris: Karthala, 2006).
10. The African novel in Spanish emerged very late, and the corpus is still very restricted (see Mbare Ngom, "African Literature in Spanish" in Irele and Gikandi (eds.), *Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*, pp. 584–602). It is however represented today by a work that has been hailed as a masterpiece, Donato Ndongo's *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (*Shadows of Your Black Memory*).
11. J. M. Coetzee, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).
12. Jean-Michel Massa, "Mondes lusophones d'Afrique, écritures lusographes," *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, 77.1 (1993), 71–8.
13. Roger Bastide, *L'Afrique dans l'œuvre de Castro Soromenho* (Paris : P. J. Oswald, 1960).
14. Nationalist poetry in lusophone Africa, especially in the work of Agostinho Neto and Marcellino Dos Santos, was not only distinguished by its anti-colonial theme but was rung on a key that integrated an esthetic of commitment into its combative mode of address. See Margaret Dickinson (ed.), *When Bullets Begin to Flower: Poems of Resistance from Angola, Mozambique, and Guiné* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1972).
15. Roland Lebel, *Histoire de la littérature coloniale en France* (Paris: Larose, 1931); Alec G. Hargreaves, *The Colonial Experience in French Fiction: A Study of Pierre Loti, Ernest Psichari and Pierre Mille* (London: Macmillan, 1981).
16. Michel Fabre, "De *Batouala* à *Doguicimi*: René Maran et les premiers romans africains" in Riesz and Ricard (eds.), *Semper aliquid novi*, pp. 239–49; Ricard, *Naissance du roman africain: Félix Couchoro, 1900–1968* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1987).
17. Emmanuel Obiechina, *Culture, Society and the West African Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 1975); Ode Ogede, "Popular Literature in Africa" in Irele and Gikandi (eds.), *Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*, pp. 626–42.
18. Stephen Gray, *South African Literature: An Introduction* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1979).
19. Christopher Heywood, *A History of South African Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

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20. Ernest Emenyonu, *The Rise of the Igbo Novel* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1974).
21. Fredric Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text*, 5.3 (1986), 65–88. Jameson's notion of "national allegory" is obviously derived from Georg Lukács's designation of the epic as the representative form of ancient and closed communities, in which the dominance of the collective consciousness determines a vision of totality (Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. by Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1971), pp. 19–30), as opposed to the open and fragmented society reproduced in the novel.
22. F. Abiola Irele, "Parables of the African Condition" in Irele, *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), ch. 10, pp. 212–45.
23. This observation touches on wider issues of the production and reception of the African novel which we cannot go into here, except to remark on the ambiguity of Eileen Julien's assertion, to the effect that African novels in the European languages – at least the complex, sophisticated ones – are not written for or read by Africans. (See "The Extroverted African Novel" in Franco Moretti (ed.), *The Novel*, I, *History, Geography, and Culture* (Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 667–700.) Despite a formidable theoretical scaffolding, the central argument of her essay is undermined by the facts on the ground, which point to a fuller integration of these works into the cultural life in contemporary Africa and especially into literature curricula of African universities than is the case in Europe or America. This has ensured an extensive dissemination of these works over the years all over the continent, a fact to which the sales records testify. Thus, Achebe reports that in the year 1979, whereas 800 copies of his books were sold in England, over 10,000 were sold in Africa. The sales record indicates that the vast bulk of African texts have in fact been sustained by the African market. On this point, it is instructive to note that Heinemann closed down its African Writers Series when it became clear that the bottom had fallen out of this market.

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2

OLAKUNLE GEORGE

The oral–literate interface

Since at least the first half of the twentieth century when intellectuals from Africa and the black diaspora began to fashion an international voice that affirmed the comprehensive humanity of black peoples, the issue of orality and its correlate, literacy, has been of central importance. Today the orality–literacy dyad is a central trope in the work of artists and a recurrent category in analyses of African literatures. Based on statistical estimates regarding levels of literacy and formal education in contemporary Africa, it is safe to say that a majority get their intellectual sustenance and spiritual leisure from orally transmitted media rather than the culture of print. This fact gives considerable weight to the view of commentators who assign paradigmatic centrality to the domain of orature in African societies. Moreover, many influential writers acknowledge the importance of orature as background and context of their creative work within the culture of print. The oral–literate dyad invites our attention, then, as the site of deep existential investment for African peoples, and an analytical category in literary studies.

A certain relationship to the domain of orality also governs established accounts of the emergence of the novel in Western European literary history. In this account, the novel "evolved" as a literate mode from the domain of orature – the domain, in other words, of folklore, epic, and romance.[1] Versions of this understanding of the origins of the European novel can be found in theorists ranging from Ian Watt to the early Georg Lukács and Michael McKeon.[2] Indeed, Benedict Anderson's theory of nationalism as the consolidation, through print, of an "imagined community" also embraces this account.[3] Current Anglo-American literary criticism has shown how the classic account of the novel is compounded when we consider the deployment of literature as a nationalist and colonial weapon in the heyday of European colonial hegemony.[4] Against this background, the orality–literacy dyad as it pertains to African fiction can be posed on two levels: first, as reference to literary representation and the formal choices of writers; and second, as a

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conceptual node that draws the intense engagement of writers who take Africa as subject of intellectual and political commitment.

If many writers have tended to stress the oral backcloth from which African writing proceeds, it is because they share a related allegiance to African (as against narrowly ethnic or national) culturalism. A crucial role that the issue of orality has played is to enable a cultural-nationalist orientation to the way we think of African literature. The link with orality often serves writers as a rhetorically effective authentication of the labor of novelistic representation. Indeed, it is as though to stray too far from orality and its connotations is to give up a category that should ground modern African literary creativity. This mode of thinking can be found in an influential account of the "emergence" of the African novel. By this history, the African novel began in the form of romances or "proto-novels" and progressively devolved into the more institutionalized figures we read in African literature classes. On this view, writers like Daniel O. Fagunwa or Amos Tutuola in Nigeria, Sol Plaatje or Thomas Mofolo in Southern Africa, and Amadou Hampaté Bâ in Mali, would be antecedent figures of the African novel, in the same way that, say, John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, or Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, are antecedent to the English novel "proper." This conventional literary history of the English novel is traceable to the influence of Anglo-American formalist criticism of the 1940s and 1950s, and continues to impact the teaching of literature in the Anglo-American academy.

This linear construction of the rise of African fiction was useful as a pedagogical tool in the mid- and late twentieth century, when the field of African literary studies was being consolidated in black Africa.[5] However, as Eileen Julien has argued, the evidence of the novels themselves often shows something more complex than simple progression in mimicry of the history of the European novel.[6] It is true that Mofolo's *Chaka: An Historical Romance* may be read as a historical novel that is also a "proto-novel"; the text's subtitle initiates such a reading by labeling the work a romance. Likewise, Tutuola's texts might be approached as romance narratives, in so far as they operate in a picaresque mode and are built on episodic plot structure, rather than on the psychic interiority of characters. However, these classifications presuppose a linear unfolding of literary form, and do not exhaust what these texts have to offer. Moreover, the work of many later writers who fit easily into the traditional category of the novel disrupts the neat teleology upon which a traditional formalist account depends. As commentators have shown, although they each work differently in terms of theme and vision, Okara's *The Voice*, Ngugi's *Matigari*, or Kourouma's *Les soleils des indépendances* share at least one commonality: all of them deploy oral and folkloric rhetorical forms. In this sense, the linear-progressive account does

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not persuasively work for the unfolding history of African novels. What we have instead is an ongoing relationship of coevalness and simultaneity. In this chapter, my concern is to consider the esthetic work that the dimension of orality has played in African novels, where it operates, simultaneously, as descriptor of a communicative mode and sign of a continuing interaction between tradition and modernity. Many African novels offer us a glimpse of the interface where orality and literacy appear as coeval dimensions of modern African reality. In what follows, I sketch some ways in which the interaction between orality and literacy takes shape in the creative imagination and literary production of four writers who can appropriately be called canonical figures in the tradition of the African novel. The writers I take up are, in order, Fagunwa, Ayi Kwei Armah, Chinua Achebe, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

Fagunwa and Armah

I begin with Fagunwa, perhaps the most renowned writer to have employed the Yoruba language. Fagunwa provides for us a testimony to the moment of orality in its transactions with literacy. The writer figures this transaction in the frame he repeatedly adopts in his narratives, wherein the picaresque protagonist of the story to be narrated approaches a literate frame-narrator to serve as scribe. As Akara Ogun, the protagonist of *Igbó Olódùmarè* (translated as *The Forest of God*) says to the frame-narrator,

> Ki ọwọ́ bọ àpò rẹ, bóyá ohun ìkòwé le wà níbẹ̀, gọngọ á sọ lónìí; mo ní iṣẹ́ láti ran ọ si awọn ọmọ aráyé, nítorí ọ̀rọ̀ pàtàkì ń bẹ ní agbárí, bẹ́ẹ̀ ni ìmọ̀ran tí ó níláárí ń bẹ ní àtàrí mi, nítorí náà mo fi orúkọ àwọn èǹià dúdú bẹ̀ ọ́, jọ̀wọ́ dọ̀bàlẹ̀ lórí àpáta, kí á fi àpáta ṣe tábìlì wa, kí èmi dúró gẹ́gẹ́ bí alága, kí ìwọ dúró gẹ́gẹ́ bí akọ̀wé, kí ewéko igbó sì dúró gẹ́gẹ́ bi ọmọ ẹgbẹ́ fún wa.
>
> [Search in your bag; perhaps you would find some writing material there; an extraordinary event is about to happen today; I have a message to convey to humanity with your assistance, for an important matter dwells in my head, and pertinent counsel can be found in the back of my skull. Therefore, I urge you in the name of all black people, to please stretch out upon this rock; let this rock be our table, that I may stand as chairperson, you as scribe, and this surrounding vegetation members of our association of equals.][7]

The scene of frame-narration that is depicted here is a direct oral, person-to-person transmission, and Akara Ogun even imagines an immediate audience in his anthropomorphic conscription of the surrounding vegetation. This anthropomorphic conscription is not merely metaphorical, however. The culture that Fagunwa depicts retains strong animist beliefs, such that the

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forests he describes are populated by "spirits" with recognizably *human* yearnings, at times malevolent towards his questing heroes, at other times enabling for their unfolding self-knowledge and self-actualization.

We can also see the oral dimension at work in the texture of Fagunwa's language. Critics have over the years recognized the author's sheer delight in the cadences of the Yoruba language. Fagunwa mines the lyrical resources of Yoruba tonality so profusely that no translation of his best novels can do justice to the original. A quick example will suffice here. In one of the most famous scenes of *Igbó Olódùmarè*, Olowo-Aiye engages a ferocious spirit named Esu-Kekere-Ode in battle. Prior to their confrontation, the monster addresses Olowo-Aiye in a long charged peroration. Here is an excerpt from Esu-Kekere-Ode's address:

> Onísọkúsọ ń fi ikú ṣiré, onínàákúnàá ń fi ikú ṣiré, onírìnkurìn ń fi ikú ṣiré, onígbèéraga ń fi ikú ṣiré, onírìkíṣí ń fi ikú ṣiré. Nítorí kí ni ńkọ́? – Nítorí *Ẹlẹ́dàá* ń wo *ẹ̀dá* pẹ̀lú iṣẹ́ ọwọ́ *ẹ̀dá*, àti ìrìnkèrindò *ẹ̀dá* láàárin àwọn *ẹ̀dá*, bẹ́ẹ̀ ni *Ẹlẹ́dàá* kò ní ṣàìfi èrè iṣẹ́ ọwọ́ *ẹ̀dá* fún *ẹ̀dá* bí ó ti wù tí àyípadà dé tó, yálà ní òde ayé tàbí ní òde ọ̀run. (p. 11, my emphases)
>
> [The babbler trifles with death, the wastrel trifles with death, the drifter trifles with death, the braggart trifles with death, the pretender trifles with death. And why might this be the case? Because the Creator relentlessly watches His created-man, together with the handiwork of this created-man, and the peregrinations of this created-man in the society of other created-men; and so the Creator will not fail to reward created-man with the direct harvest of his handiwork, despite whatever turnarounds might come to pass, whether on earth or in heaven.] (my translation)

The effect of the passage derives from the assonantal coordination of the *dá* syllable in the noun "*ẹ̀dá*" [created-man] five times in quick succession, together with the possessive noun "*Ẹlẹ́dàá*" [Creator]. But somewhat paradoxically, the rhythm generated in this sequence is jarring, precisely because of its sonic insistence. In other words, the coordination of the repeated syllable "*dá*" also works as juxtaposition, such that the passage begins to sound beautifully perverse, even as it acquires pace and rhythm. This perverse beauty is exactly right for the context of the peroration, since the speaker is Esu-Kekere-Ode [midget-monster-abroad], a monster who can also be moved to pity by music played on a flute by Olowo-Aiye. Read aloud, Esu-Kekere-Ode's speech is a sensuous accumulation of sound, in which the repeated syllable calls attention to itself and, by doing so, points beyond assonance to dissonance. We might say that the passage points, immanently, from the harmony of Edenic creation to the conflict-laden site of human relations: the site of deeds [*iṣẹ́ ọwọ́ ẹ̀dá*], temporal twists and turns [*àyípadà*], action and retribution.

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Turning from a writer who used an indigenous African language to one of the great stylists of the African novel in English, Armah offers a different illustration of the aesthetic possibility of the orality–literacy dyad. *The Healers* (2000) is a historical novel that explores the decline of the Asante Empire and its defeat by colonialist Britain.[8] The novel begins with a rhetorical movement that serves to identify the narrating voice as that of a griot. The voice is self-conscious, self-effacing, yet confident of the illustrious heritage of the craft of narration. In the griot's narrative voice, we find combined the artist and pedagogue, the visionary who is as well chronicler and product of tradition. As the novel begins, this narrator gives us an overview of the story to be told; but then the consciousness of formal protocol intervenes, and the voice catches itself midstream, so to speak:

> But now this tongue of the storyteller, descendant of masters in the art of eloquence, this tongue flies too fast for the listener. It flies faster than the storytelling mind itself. Pride in its own telling skill has made it light, more than merely light. Pride has made this tongue giddy with joy. So the storyteller forgets this rule of masters in the art of eloquence: the tongue alone, unrestrained, unconnected to the remembering mind, can only carry a staggering, spastic, drooling, idiot tale ... Let the error raise its own correction. The speeding tongue forgets connections. Let the deliberate mind restore them. Proud tongue, child of the Anona masters of eloquence, before you leap so fast to speak, listen first to the mind's remembrance. (pp. 8–9)

The effect of this passage is to place Armah's labor squarely within an antecedent tradition exemplified by the griot – that is, the traditional bard or epic raconteur. Later in the novel, after the gruesome murder of the Asante prince, the murder that sets the story of Densu in motion, the narrative voice attaches itself even more urgently to a long tradition. Faced with the task of describing the violence of the prince's murder with the skill necessary to the task, Armah's narrator is momentarily daunted: "Ah Fasseke, words fail the storyteller. Fasseke Belen Tigui, master of masters in the art of eloquence, lend me strength. Send me eloquence to finish what I have begun ... Send me words Mokopu Mofolo. Send me words of eloquence" (p. 63).

We may, of course, point to the concrete inaccuracy of this construction, or even the philosophical problems it entails, to the fact that, unlike Fasseke (patriarch of the Kouyate lineage and Sunjata's griot in the Mande epic), Mofolo wrote as an early Christian convert and operated very much within the culture of print. From the perspective of Marxist critique, Neil Lazarus has pointed to ideological problems in the novelist's idealization of the past, or the recourse to an epic narrative voice to serve essentialist racial politics.[9] Over and beyond Armah's own understanding of the role of the storyteller in

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the ideal community of his imagination, his recourse to the oral and the epic is ultimately to be seen as a formal-technical gesture. What we have, in other words, is a younger narrator acknowledging, through the mediation of literary technique, the vocation and significance of precursors. In so doing, he establishes a community of concerns, a formal-technical affiliation, with a tradition of storytelling that straddles oral *and* literate domains.

Achebe and Ngugi

Let me turn now to Achebe, the novelist who is perhaps the most widely translated writer in the English language to emerge from black Africa. Another chapter in this book will focus specifically on Achebe; my interest here is to focus more narrowly on the sense in which his novels enact the oral–literate interface *immanently* – that is, in the figural motions of the texts themselves – as well as in the inter-textual dynamic between his novels and those of a writer like Ngugi. Commentators have shown that Achebe's reputation derives, in part, from the fact that he developed a prose style that distinctively captured folkloric dimensions of the Igbo language. However, as critics have also shown, Achebe's proverbs and folk tales achieve something more far-reaching than simple rendering into English of Igbo rhetorical patterns. Achebe transcodes folklore and popular discourses from their every-day idiom to that of novelistic introspection. The novels thereby mediate orality and literacy in two ways: first, by turning translations of folklore and discourses of the everyday into a formal literary device; and, second, by using this mediation to comment implicitly on culture and society in modern Nigeria.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo is a hubristic figure who does not quite understand the culture he is defending. As is well known, Okonkwo is an ideologue who uses tradition to serve his own inner struggle with his personal demons. This is brought about primarily by his father's failures and his own doomed attempt to avoid what he, in his misogyny, casts as effeminacy. We may see in each of the folk tales set out in the novel a critique of precisely the kind of hubris and misrecognition that Okonkwo reveals. The tale of the snake-lizard who killed his parent because the pot of vegetables shrank when cooked, only to encounter a similar fate when he tried his own hands at the cooking, is one obvious example. The implication of this parable for Okonkwo's situation becomes clear once we recognize that his contempt for his father (Unoka) is shown to be based on a misapprehension of the father, as well as the culture's own veneration of "manliness." This is staged earlier on in the text when Unoka tells Okonkwo that it is more difficult to fail alone, and Okonkwo, we are told, had no patience for this sort of talk.[10] But

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of course, Okonkwo's tragedy at the end of the novel is precisely because he fails alone. The people of Umuofia would not join him in his fight against the colonial intruders.

Another interesting story in this vein is that of the "quarrel" between heaven and hell – the story that, we may recall, is the young Nwoye's favorite. A couple of things are interesting in this folk tale. First, the vulture will turn out to be very much like Nwoye himself. In deserting his parents and joining the church later on in the novel, he "travels" to an alien dispensation and symbolically mediates two worlds: traditional Umuofia, on the one hand, and the colonial-Christian dispensation, on the other. At this point in the narrative, Nwoye's exposure to the narrative universe of folk tales and songs, the realm of the imagination, is made possible by his mother, even as his playmate Ikemefuna intensifies it. It is no wonder, then, that the killing of Ikemefuna by Okonkwo serves as the ultimate blow that irredeemably alienates the boy from his father. And yet, even as early as *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe's use of the story of the vulture demystifies the curious new world that Nwoye's alter ego, the mediating vulture, discovers in the course of his trip to the sky:

> Whenever Nwoye's mother sang this song he felt carried away to the distant scene in the sky where Vulture, earth's emissary, sang for mercy. At last Sky was moved to pity, and he gave to Vulture rain wrapped in leaves of coco-yam. But as he flew home his long talon pierced the leaves and the rain fell as it had never fallen before. And so heavily did it rain on Vulture that he did not return to deliver his message but flew to a distant land, from where he had espied a fire. And when he got there he found it was a man making a sacrifice. He warmed himself in the fire and ate the entrails. (p. 38)

It turns out that the new world to which the vulture is exposed is not radically incommensurable: He encounters a man making "sacrifices" very much as in the world he already knows. And he is able to do there what vultures do in the natural scheme of things: He feeds on the entrails of sacrifice. By means of this folk tale, the novel prepares us for Nwoye's desertion, and implicitly demystifies it. In the process, the novel demystifies the conceit of Christian (or European) uniqueness and superiority.

Achebe returns to the story of the quarrel between earth and sky in *Anthills of the Savannah*. This comes up in the form of the devastating drought that forces the people of Abazon to travel to the capital city (Bassa) to appeal to the President. It is this aspect of *Anthills* that inspires Ikem Osodi's "Hymn to the Sun." If Nwoye represents an emerging class of educated Nigerians who will later lead the independence movement and take over political leadership of the nation, the foibles of that class are at the center of *No Longer at Ease* and *Anthills*. In both novels Achebe draws on folk tales and proverbs. But beyond

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this, the novelist gives us a look at the everyday chaos and confusion of urban life – in Lagos as depicted in *No Longer at Ease*, and in the case of *Anthills of the Savannah* (1989), the fictional city of Bassa, capital of Kangan.[11]

In *No Longer at Ease*, the narrative is set primarily in the city, but we follow the protagonist Obi Okonkwo to his natal village Umuofia, when he first returns from England, and later when, as a civil servant, he travels home for vacation. *Anthills* is set primarily in Bassa, but we follow Chris Oriko as he flees from the city to the countryside in a commuter bus. On both occasions (Obi's travel to Umuofia and Chris's flight from President-for-life Sam), Achebe places his protagonists inside a commuter bus. He forces them to experience at close quarters the world of the teeming masses of less fortunate Nigerians. This allows him to present, through the eyes of his Western-educated heroes, the rapidly changing and adaptive perspectives of underclass Nigerians. Midway through *No Longer at Ease*, Obi Okonkwo is going back to his village:

> The journey itself was not very exciting. He boarded a mammy wagon called *God's Case No Appeal* and travelled first class, which meant that he shared the front seat with the driver and a young woman with her baby. The back seats were taken up by traders who traveled regularly between Lagos and the famous Onitsha market on the bank of the Niger. The lorry was so heavily laden that the traders had no room to hang their legs down … But they did not seem to mind. They beguiled themselves with gay and bawdy songs addressed mostly to young women who had become teachers and nurses instead of mothers. (p. 48)

In the lorry he listens to the traders singing at the back, and tries to translate one of the songs:

> The traders burst into song again, this time there was nothing bawdy about it. Obi knew the refrain, he tried to translate it into English, and for the first time its real meaning dawned on him … On the face of it there was no kind of logic or meaning in the song. But as Obi turned it round and round in his mind, he was struck by the wealth of association that even such a mediocre song could have … In short … the burden of the song was 'the world turned upside down.' He was pleased with his exegesis and began to search in his mind for other songs that could be given the same treatment. (p. 53)

In this scene, Obi is a kind of armchair ethnologist who moves from condescension ("such a mediocre song") to a self-important appreciation of the idiom ("the wealth of association") of a popular song. He is also an aloof cognitive subject, distanced from the traders at the back and the young mother beside him: in one sense, a kind of "God" in possession of the means of representation, or Adam, the one who names things by the act of interpretation. However, Obi is neither God nor Adam; indeed, what the

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novel dramatizes is that his specific historical location cannot be grandly inflated (which is to say, simplified) into categories of aloof transcendence. Thus, Achebe exposes Obi's personal flaws and complacencies, the cumulative effect of which is his downfall at the end of the novel.

The critique of the educated class typified by Obi Okonkwo in *No Longer at Ease* becomes even more intensified in *Anthills of the Savannah*. In the latter novel, Achebe invokes and refashions motifs encountered in earlier novels. Ikem Osodi's "Hymn to the Sun" takes up the story of the quarrel between earth and sky. In this retelling of the tale, the vulnerable people of rural Abazon are the ones who come to plead for rain from "the sun." They are compelled to do so because the sun – the carrier of sacrifice who should have been their mediator – turns out to be the cause of their suffering: "Great Carrier of Sacrifice to the Almighty: Single Eye of God! Why have you brought this on us? What hideous abomination forbidden and forbidden and forbidden again seven times have we committed or else condoned, what error that no reparation can hope to erase?" (p. 28). The great carrier, the "Single Eye of God" is now focalized as the political leaders, embodied by the dictator Sam – the President-for-life. Where in *Things Fall Apart* the mediator (vulture) pleads for rain on behalf of the earth and its inhabitants, in *Anthills* the mediator ("great carrier") is the source of the suffering. And power here derives from the absolutism – the single eye – of the elite's dictatorship.

While trying to escape arrest by the President, Chris Oriko travels in a bus named "Luxurious," bound for the town of Abazon. In a sequence that is highly reminiscent of Obi's journey, Chris notices the everyday life of food hawkers, bus drivers, and other impoverished denizens of the postcolonial urban space:

> The sign-writers of Kangan did not work in dark and holy seclusions of monasteries but in free-for-all market-places under the fiery eye of the sun. And yet in ways not unlike the monk's they sought in their work to capture the past as well as invent a future. *Luxurious* had inscribed on its blue body in reds, yellows and whites three different legends – one at the back, another at the sides and the third, and perhaps most important, at the masthead, on top of the front windscreen. Chris, now fully reconciled to his new condition as wide-eyed newcomer to the ways of Kangan made a mental note of these inscriptions. (p. 186)

Like Obi in *No Longer at Ease*, Chris Oriko spends time interpreting the inscriptions on the bus. He struggles to figure out the full implication (what he calls the "outrageous theology") of a cryptic, untranslatable Igbo aphorism: "*Ife onye metalu* – What a man commits" (p. 186). However, it is as though his new relationship to the philosophical complexity and inner contradictions of folk knowledge comes too late. In Chapter 11 of *Things Fall Apart*,

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Okonkwo's second wife Ekwefi tells Ezinma her daughter the story of the tortoise who could not fly, yet claimed to speak for all the birds (pp. 67–70). That story works in the novel to foreshadow the downfall of Okonkwo, who meets his tragic fate in part because he presumes to speak for all of Umuofia. In *Anthills*, the trio of Chris, Ikem and Sam constitute the educated elite who not only presume to speak for the new nation, but also conflate their individual stories with the narrative of the nation itself. As Beatrice Okoh reprimands Chris, "you fellows, all three of you, are incredibly conceited. The story of this country, as far as you are concerned, is the story of the three of you" (p. 60). At the end of the novel, all three major characters who represent the intellectual and political power-wielding class destroy themselves, thereby enacting the piece of folk wisdom set in place by Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*, namely, that no single individual or class should claim to speak for the masses: that is to say, for "all of you."

On the subject of the critique of the educated elite in Africa, no novelist has been as influential as Kenya's Ngugi wa Thiong'o. As is well known, Ngugi's writing has taken a significant shift in perspective from the moment of his first two novels *The River Between* and *Weep Not, Child*, to the third, *A Grain of Wheat*, and thence to *Petals of Blood*, *Devil on the Cross*, and *Matigari*. Simon Gikandi has shown that important continuities bind the earlier texts to the later ones.[12] Clearly, from *A Grain of Wheat* on, Ngugi begins to take on a class perspective in his reading of post-independence Kenya in particular, and black Africa in general. In his critique of the educated elite who took over from the colonial bureaucracy, Ngugi's ideological perspective can be distinguished from Achebe's. In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngugi has written of Achebe's importance to him when he was a young undergraduate and aspiring novelist at Makerere University College.[13] Beyond this relationship of forerunner and talented aspirant, the mature Ngugi can also be shown to be in intertextual dialogue with Achebe. A specific literary and thematic dialogue works itself out in the interstices of both writers' engagements with the reality of postcolonial Africa. The dialogue is both substantive and formal. Unlike the former's Marxist socialism, Achebe's political vision can reasonably be characterized as a left reformism. But if these two novelists differ at the level of overt political vision, their articulations of Africa's post-independence realities can be brought into productive alignment at the level of novelistic craft. The dialogue has an irreducible ideational content, and its articulation is consummated at the levels of theme and form. The ideational and formal-literary dimension of the dialogue can be accessed in terms of the interplay of orality and literacy.

An instance of thematic dialogue occurs in *Petals of Blood* (1991), in a scene involving one of the novel's central characters, the schoolteacher

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Munira, and his father Ezekiel Waweru.[14] The scene echoes and rewrites a crucial father–son scene from *No Longer at Ease*. In Achebe's novel, Obi is trying to convince his father Isaac to endorse his wish to marry Clara Okeke, by birth an *osu* – an "untouchable," so to speak, within traditional caste demarcations. Obi pursues his case by drawing on the authority of the Christian Bible, confident that his catechist father is unlikely to contradict biblical dicta:

> "We are Christians," he [the father] said. "But that is no reason to marry an *osu*."
> "The Bible says that in Christ there are no bond or free."
> "My son, said Okonkwo [the father], "I understand what you say. *But this thing is deeper than you think*." (p. 151, my emphasis)

In *Petals of Blood* Ngugi recalls this scene of father–son tension and gives it a different thematic and ideological inflection. To begin with, Ngugi's scene follows Achebe in invoking the Bible. As in the New Testament where Satan takes Jesus to the top of the mountain to tempt him, Waweru takes Munira to the "top of the ridge looking down upon the vast estate" (pp. 94–5). There, he urges his son to embrace the Kamwene Cultural Organization and take the oath of allegiance to the newly formed organization, one devoted, according to him, "to bring unity and harmony between all of us, the rich and the poor, and to end envy and greed" (p. 95). According to Waweru, all the "prosperity" and "hard-won freedom" that came with Kenya's independence is "threatened by Satan working through other tribes, arousing their envy and jealousy" (p. 95). Waweru had betrayed the anti-colonial struggle by denouncing the oath of loyalty during the independence war waged by the Kenya Land and Freedom Army. His denunciation of the oath of solidarity during the liberation struggle implies rejection of the community's legitimate national aspirations. However, after independence he turns around hypocritically to embrace an organization devoted to narrow economic self-interest disguised as cultural affirmation.

Contrary to his self-serving claims, then, Waweru is not the suffering Everyman, put upon by the machinations of Satan on earth. Rather, the novel casts him as a collaborator who participates in the colonial exploitation of Kenyan peasants, and remains an opponent of the yearning for an equitable society. This is what his son recognizes when he contests Waweru's posturing by citing the Christian dictum of man's equality before God. In language that directly echoes *No Longer at Ease*, Munira asks: "But before God there are no tribes. We are all equal before the Lord" (p. 95). And just like the father's response in Achebe's novel, Waweru uses specious patriarchal authority for justification: "I did not know that you had come to preach to your father. But I will repeat this. Go back and teach. *These things are*

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deeper than you think" (p. 95, my emphasis). What Ngugi achieves here is a resignification of the trope of generational tension, or father–son disagreement, set out in *No Longer at Ease*. In Achebe's novel the conflict is played out primarily in the personal sphere, but Ngugi transposes the conflict to the public domain of economics and interethnic politics.

In *Petals of Blood*, Nyakinyua (grandmother of Wanja, the central female character and one of its narrators) represents the old society of Ilmorog, prior to its disruption by capitalist neo-imperialism. If Nyakinyua embodies old Ilmorog and its self-sustaining values, the ritual beverage of Theng'eta illustrates and symbolizes that order. For Nyakinyua, the communal ritual that accompanies the brewing of Theng'eta is a lived reality, one that persists in her consciousness as powerful memory. In one scene, she shares her knowledge of the brewing and the circumcision ceremony that accompanies it with the younger characters. With the old man Njuguna, she enacts the ceremonial call-and-response in all its explicit celebration of sexuality and social solidarity. The novel thereby figures the socially replenishing role the ceremony plays in the pre-capitalist order of life. The political meaningfulness of the ceremony and its wholesome evocation of sexuality are contrasted with its debasement in the urban world of the bourgeois class. This emerges in the scene where Munira interrupts Raymond Chui's lascivious dinner party. There, in the city's exclusive neighbourhoods, the singing is abstracted from any social context: The comprador class idly chant the songs merely for their exotic effect, without any investment in its enabling social coordinates. If the novel stresses the importance of tradition, it also affirms the value of modern perspectives on nature and social organization. Ngugi points up the sense in which the domain of print literature is a condition of possibility for the novel's own esthetic accomplishment. *Petals of Blood* is framed with epigraphs citing canonical figures ranging from Derek Walcott to Walt Whitman, William Blake, and Amilcar Cabral. The novel invokes an inventory of classics of modern African writing, including *Things Fall Apart*, Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*, Ousmane Sembène's *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu*, Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya*, and Oginga Odinga's *Not Yet Uhuru*. Of these, Achebe's novel and p'Bitek's long poem are listed as part of Munira's meagre and dated library. It is a sign of Munira's passive attitude to life – the severe liability that defines his character in the novel – that he takes no action to update his library despite a wish to do so: "I had always thought of improving my library," he confides in his narrative, "but as in so many other matters, I dwelt in the twilight of doing and non-doing" (p. 47). In this way, Ngugi carries the insistent intertextuality of *Petals of Blood* right up to the level of characterization.

Given the substantive invocation of high literature and the culture of print in *Petals of Blood*, it is interesting that an oracular, epic voice periodically

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gathers up the flow of narrative in the novel. This serves in part to contain the multiple points of view of the central narrators within an overarching historical frame. We have seen Armah's recourse to the technique of epic narration in *The Healers*. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe dispenses with the omniscient voice (the point of view that obtains in his first three novels), as well as first-person-singular narration (such as we have in *A Man of the People*). Rather, *Anthills of the Savannah* adopts multiple narrative points of view and free indirect discourse. But the novel also acquires an epic cadence in Chapter 8, where the mythological origins of the goddess Idemili – "pillar of water" – is narrated, in tandem with the account of Beatrice Okoh's family background.[15] By adopting the epic voice in *Petals of Blood*, then, Ngugi gestures towards a formal device that African novelists use, not only to signal the persistence of orality in contemporary African cultures, but also to indicate conscious affiliation with an emergent narrative tradition that now straddles oral and literate spheres.

Part IV of *Petals of Blood* opens with an epic voice that is at once omniscient and first-person plural. The passage recalls the immediate present of the novel's time, but does so by reconstructing the historical pressure that generates the present:

> The Trans-Africa road linking Nairobi and Ilmorog to the many cities of our continent is justly one of the most famous highways in all the African lands, past and present. It is symbolic tribute, although an unintended one, to those who, witnessing the dread ravages of crime and treachery and greed which passed for civilisation, witnessing too the resistance waged and carried out with cracked hands and broken nails and bleeding hearts, voiced visionary dreams amidst sneers and suspicions and accusations of madness or of seeking pathways to immortality and the eternal self-glory of tyrants. They had seen that the weakness of the resistance lay not in the lack of will or determination or weapons but in the African people's toleration of being divided into regions and tongues and dialects according to the wishes of former masters, and they cried: Africa must unite.
>
> Live Noliwe's Chaka. Live Toussaint L'Ouverture. Live Kwame of the eagle's eyes. And thaai … thaai to Kimathi son of wa Chiuri. (p. 262)

In this passage, the novel's protagonist becomes a collective entity: that is, the masses of modern Kenya, figured as historical agents with the capacity to overcome exploitation. The rousing cadence connects the story of Ilmorog to a larger narrative whose historical scope is African-continental and yet global. The panegyric hailing of Chaka, Toussaint, Kwame Nkrumah, and Dedan Kimathi places the novel's vision within a global narrative of black aspirations in capitalist modernity. In this way, *Petals of Blood* turns, like the narrative voice in *The Healers*, or the oracular voice that narrates Chapter 8

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of *Anthills of the Savannah*, to the rhetorical form of the communal epic, where the storyteller names the challenge of the present by bringing the past into view in language. But, if with Armah and Achebe, the epic voice dwells in a world of legend and mythology, Ngugi, writing with a Marxist-socialist vision, locates his epic narrator squarely in documented history.

Conclusion

In the foregoing pages, I have indicated some ways in which African novels enact the transaction between orality and literacy in contemporary African societies. The importance of the orality–literacy problematic in African literature and criticism is indexed by the fact that it generates varied responses that range from endorsement to contestation. It has not been my aim to consider the persuasiveness, or otherwise, of the views set out in these novels regarding the political and epistemological stakes of the dyad. For our purposes, what needs to be stressed is the coeval relationship between the two. In the African novel, a tradition of esthetic practice has emerged that continues to unfold. It is a tradition that requires literacy and print capitalism to thrive as a public communicative forum. As we have seen, the intertextual conversation discernible in Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*, for instance, involves African as well as non-African writings and traditions. The writers are representing societies in which oral-expressive practices are predominant and culturally rooted. As F. Abiola Irele has stressed in "Orality, Literacy, and African Literature," the world being represented, and the characters who populate that world, are to various degrees formed by an order of life that is still overwhelmingly grounded in dimensions of orality.[16] Looked at from this perspective, the particular value of such texts as we have been discussing is that they illuminate this world immanently: that is to say, through the substance, as well as form, of the novels themselves.

NOTES

1. On this point, see Timothy Brennan, "The National Longing for Form" in H. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 44–70.
2. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957); Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. by Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971); Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600–1740* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).
3. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

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4. Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).
5. See Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 47–72; D. S. Izevbaye, "The State of Criticism in African Literature," *African Literature Today*, 7 (1975), 1–19; Eustace Palmer, *The Growth of the African Novel* (London: Heinemann, 1979).
6. Eileen Julien, *African Novels and the Question of Orality* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992).
7. D. O. Fagunwa, *Igbó Olódùmarè*, rev. edn (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd., 1982), p. 4; *The Forest of God*, trans. by Gabriel A. Ajadi (Ibadan: Agbo Areo, 1995), p. 32. Translation modified.
8. Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Healers* (Popenguine: Per Ankh, 2000).
9. Neil Lazarus, *Resistance in Postcolonial African Fiction* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 1990), esp. pp. 185–234.
10. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1985), p. 18.
11. Achebe, *No Longer at Ease* (New York: Doubleday, 1994); *Anthills of the Savannah* (New York: Doubleday, 1989).
12. Gikandi, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
13. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986), p. 5.
14. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Petals of Blood* (New York: Penguin, 1991).
15. I discuss Achebe's use of this oracular voice in Chapter 8 of *Anthills of the Savannah* in my essay, "The 'Native' Missionary, the African Novel, and In-Between," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 36.1 (Fall 2002), 5–25.
16. F. Abiola Irele, *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 39–66.

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3

DAN IZEVBAYE

Chinua Achebe and the African novel

People create stories create people; *or rather*, stories create people create stories.
Chinua Achebe

Chinua Achebe achieved canonization with his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, and he has retained his top ranking in the African literary canon. Given the notoriously unstable character of literary reputations, his reputation has retained a remarkably steady place in the canon through a whole generation, covering the last half of the twentieth century. But while objective proofs of his reputation are easy to produce – witness Lindfors's quantitative audit[1] and the anniversary celebrations (conferences, colloquia, Festschrifts) – these cannot be true indicators of his real achievement which can only be indirectly gleaned in the transformation of the fictive tradition and in the confessional complexion of the reception history,[2] or signs of the changing attitudes to the colonial image in the restructuring of school curricula. His essays are major contributions to the growth of postcolonial theory and indigenous knowledge systems. But these essays are primarily by-products of his creative practice which expressed itself in the novel form.

It is a tribute to Achebe's art that the studies of his novels, as well as his own essays, are among the landmarks of the scholarship on African literature. It is not that Achebe's writing is completely free from critical controversy and disagreements although, given the very nature of his achievement, it is remarkable that it is relatively so. Although his essay on Joseph Conrad, "An Image of Africa" (in *Hopes and Impediments*),[3] has continued to generate critical arguments and various re-evaluations of Conrad – and incidentally of Joyce Cary – his position is in fact less controversial than reactions to it suggest. Achebe is concerned not so much with Conrad's place in the English tradition as with the effect of his romantic view of language and reality on his representation of Africa.

It is not too difficult to see the connection between the colonial theme and the question of language. Language has become one of the key sites of the postcolonial contest. The language of African literature has been the other area in which Achebe's views and choices have provoked controversy, and his view on the language of African literature still splits the ranks of even the novelists themselves, especially since language is tied up with the question of

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identity and nationhood. But these are ultimately minor critical disagreements, given the broad consensus on his achievement, which may be attributed to his impact on three main areas of the literary culture.

First, he virtually invented the fictive language and form that has become normative for the literature. He has come as close to defining what many would consider "the archetypal African novel,"[4] partly by demonstrating that it is possible to shape literary English into the language of an ethnic experience far removed from the English homeland. This achievement is underscored by his stylistic antecedent: he made acceptable what began as a utopian dream for the African writer and an anathema for English scholars. Literary English began as a conservative medium – receptive to foreign lexical items but protective of its imperial prescription of the metropolitan standard for syntax and idiom. Early attempts to break through this bulwark were repelled as barbarisms, as when some early non-standard literary English usage from the British Commonwealth was described as "doing violence to the English language," surely a modernist subconscious evocation of a sixteenth-century ideal of English that is "written clean and pure, unmixed and unmangled with borrowing of other tongues." One has to concede though, that Achebe's stylistic breakthrough was made possible by the accommodative nature of English itself. Throughout its transformation into contemporary English, it continued to draw in influences from foreign lands as well as the margins of Empire, although it had no intention of giving up its territoriality despite this enrichment. There had been major stylistic experiments before and after Achebe, but these had not been successful for reasons of usage and acceptability. Amos Tutuola's unusual style in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is largely representative of the Onitsha tradition to which he is thought to belong, but unrepresentative of the mainstream canon to which he has been assigned. But the vexed question of the author's level of formal education is irrelevant to the effectiveness of Tutuola's style because of the near-perfect fit between the strange vision of the first-person narrator and his expressive if unfamiliar idiom. This formal decorum is also evident in *Sozaboy* where, like the author of *Huckleberry Finn*, Ken Saro-Wiwa taps into the narrative possibilities of the non-standard English of a particular social group. But those possibilities remain limited to certain situations and characters and have not yet had a major effect on the stylistic mainstream of African writing. Gabriel Okara's *The Voice* is poetic but mannered and not a practical option for other African users of the language. Wole Soyinka's language in *The Interpreters* is inimitable, and its imitators have remained merely experimental.

In the second place Achebe has had a strong and enduring influence on the production, publishing, and reception of African literature in English,

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especially on the teaching of the literature. Quite a few indigenous imprints were inspired by the success of the African Writers Series. Achebe has also inspired a generation of African writers, not so much in the popularity of the theme of culture conflict but in his handling of the material. He did not invent the theme. A. C. Jordan's *The Wrath of the Ancestors* had anticipated the theme of *Things Fall Apart* by nearly two decades. It is mainly Achebe's attitude and stylistic innovation that made the difference. Achebe's strong influence on the increase in the production of a specific genre, the novel of Igbo traditional life and the adaptation of English for African experience, has led Charles Nnolim to describe the producers of this genre as the "sons of Achebe,"[5] although it is still too early to determine the scope of Achebe's influence on African literary history. The idea of "sons" would not always imply the kind of indebtedness to which Nnolim was referring. A strong, independent voice can make itself heard within such a tradition. Such a writer would be an inheritor rather than a disciple, like the refreshing new talent of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the author of *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

The third, and perhaps Achebe's most important influence given his goal as a writer, is his contribution to the advancement of a new postcolonial consciousness, particularly as his fictions date from the eve of African independence, thus giving emphatic voice to the pan-African impulse that found political expression in African independence. It is in the novel form that Achebe has made his most enduring contribution as a postcolonial writer. The significance of his choice of this form has deep historical roots. For the novel form is both the product and medium of the historical process. It marks a historic stage in the evolution of human communication when the interaction of technology and social relations brought about a new consciousness and the need for a new form of literary expression, as has been argued in studies by historians of the effect of technology and changing social relations on human consciousness, literary production (such as Georg Lukács, Ian Watt, Arnold Kettle), and the communication media (Marshall McLuhan).[6]

Achebe himself acknowledges oral and written history as sources of *Arrow of God* and *Things Fall Apart*, just as his appropriation of Igbo proverbs for domesticating the English language recalls the practice of transcription and translation of the earlier period. But he transforms the archival character of the material by connecting the roots of wisdom that are reflected in the speech genres of African oral cultures with the age of literacy and the printing press. He thus gives voice to this age of transition. Such a mediator would have been educated in both worlds and would have assimilated the new communication culture without losing touch with the oral tradition. His biographers, Ezenwa-Ohaeto and Phanuel Akubueze Egejuru, emphasize Achebe's security in both

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worlds. Ezenwa-Ohaeto quotes Achebe's conviction that "you can be a Christian and yet be able to worship your own ancestors."[7]

Towards the end of the colonial period when new African urban cultures were being transformed by colonial activity, it seemed logical for the Western-educated African writer to turn to the ready-made tradition of the European novel for a formal model and an ideological site to be contested. For it was in Europe that the novel first became decisive as a representative genre of the new age, driven by the new print technology and a new class consciousness. It is the English line of this novel tradition that directly influenced the form of the novel that Achebe developed, and there are obvious resemblances and affiliations, from Achebe's ideological engagement with Conrad and Cary to his less polemical, more formal relation to Thomas Hardy who, like him, also writes about a culture in decline, and also works within the tragic mode that is tributary to the comic mainstream of the novel tradition. But even before Achebe, African realist fiction seemed mimetic of the English tradition: Cyprian Ekwensi is often compared to Daniel Defoe because his concern with the urban phenomenon as a cultural transformation of the Nigerian landscape and the growth of new social forms has some formal similarity with the urban realism of *Moll Flanders*.

African writers consider the European novel of Africa to be propaganda for the imperial cause, including even Conrad's critique of the colonial enterprise. Thus, the form which developed from the ideology of the middle class whose story it tells was extended to portray life in the new colonies and became a mirror of the other. This monopoly of viewpoints limits the essentially dialogic form of the novel. It denies the various peoples who are its subjects the right to tell their own stories, as Achebe puts it. Unlike the single vision of the European fairy tale, the modern novel has an inbuilt resistance to a monopoly of viewpoints because its distinctive form is dialogic – a "living mix of varied and opposing voices," as Mikhail Bakhtin puts it.[8] The publishing process also guarantees the response of a variety of interests because of the large reading public required for an economically viable production.

In telling his African story Achebe takes account of the historical process that transformed the traditional medium of storytelling into the modern novel form that he now employs. Perhaps the most important feature of this change is the new relation between the verbal artist, the art product, and the community in which it is produced and received. It created a new system of communication and a new community that is linked by new modes of expression and reception. This development is reflected in the technology-mediated evolution (or extension) of the terms of reception from hearing to seeing, from listening to reading, from *audience* to *reading public*. The consequences of this development are both social and psychological: the transition from the immediacy

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of the artistic experience and the solidarity and community that an audience implies, to the fact that the act of reading involves an absent author communicating with fragmented communities of isolated individuals.

A consciousness of the imminence of this change occurs towards the end of *Arrow of God*. Ezeulu is partly conscious of the socially transforming power of literacy when he tells Oduche of the wisdom of acquiring the literacy of the white man. Ironically, Oduche's alienation from his prescient father begins as he acquires literacy – that is, when he learns to communicate in silence with an absent interlocutor and can exclude his family from the "conversation" even when they are physically present, in contrast to Ugoye who is at the same time acquiring the traditional skill of communication by practising the art of storytelling before her family who can see and hear her.[9] It is true, as *No Longer at Ease* shows, that the scale of time and finance that a literate culture consumes implies the rise of a new elite class, at least in the short term. In the long run, however, the printed word, in contrast to the written, is destined to be democratic because it requires a relatively large reading public to sustain its production and give rise to new professions, like that of the newspaper men, Ekwensi's Amusa Sango in *People of the City*, and Achebe's Chris Oriko in *Anthills of the Savannah*, and because its distribution and readership cannot be effectively contained.

It is for this reason that the art of the novel is important for the Africa that Achebe inherited. That Africa was an Africa in transition and the inspiration for Achebe's first three novels. The fictions recreate two worlds in conflict: They present the twilight of an old world at the same time as they anticipate the new. In the old Age of Wisdom indigenous knowledge was rooted in experience and the transmission and continuity of ancestral knowledge, rather than the excitement at new discoveries. This literature of wisdom is found in the gnomic forms that succeeding generations learned, recycled, and transmitted, especially proverbs and related oral genres. In the Information Age, with which the dying Age of Wisdom interacts and competes, knowledge has come into its own and with it an emphasis on progress and development, the discovery of the new, and the superannuation of the old. The transition from Okonkwo's generation in *Things Fall Apart*, to that of Obi, his grandchild, in *No Longer at Ease*, marks the end of the Age of Wisdom and the early foundations of the Information Age. Fully aware of the ideological implications of this transition by writing their histories in his novels, Achebe tries to reunite the communication modes of both systems in *Anthills of the Savannah*, notably halfway through the novel in an inspired panegyric on the universality of "story" by a bearded old man, who is at once a type of the wise old man of traditional African narratives and an Ancient Mariner type.

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The specific nature of Achebe's tragic fiction can be explained by his interpretation of Igbo cultural history at the turn of the twentieth century with its positive reception of the technological offerings of the new age in education, technology, and trade. The core of that interpretation is the continuity of that specific Igbo cultural trait that V. C. Uchendu described as a readiness to accommodate change without giving up the essence of Igbo character.[10] By this world view, change does not have to be tragic; proverb after Igbo proverb reiterates the need for people to adapt to change. The adaptive nature of Igbo history is an important factor in Achebe's conception of tragic experience. Thus although the postcolonial experience presupposes a tragic mode as one of the major choices for African writers, in Achebe's fiction the emphasis is on the community's expectation of the continuity of life and its social detachment from the tragic hero.

Achebe opts for one of two tragic possibilities. In *Things Fall Apart* the tragedy is personal rather than communal: The focus is on the psychology of the hero rather than any tragic fate that may befall the community materially or spiritually. The survival instinct is ingrained in Igbo communal psychology, as we find in the framing incidents of *Things Fall Apart*: from the success story of the young, irrepressible and widely celebrated Okonkwo, to the tale of Okonkwo the suicide who damages his status in his people's cultural memory by that one act of abomination. His individualist defence of his people's culture fails at the historic turning point when he tries to be his people's champion against the white man's Goliath: "In a flash Okonkwo drew his machet. The messenger crouched to avoid the blow. It was useless.... Okonkwo stood looking at the dead man. He knew that Umuofia would not go to war."[11] The pathetic tone on which the story of Okonkwo ends (which is picked up in the ruminations of the District Commissioner as future author of a new genre) stands in sharp contrast to the tone of elation in the hero-narrative that celebrates the rising fortune of young Okonkwo at the beginning of the novel.

On the face of it, *Arrow of God* seems to chart a different direction. Its hero, Ezeulu, is central to the life of Umuaro in a way that Okonkwo is not; Okonkwo often breaches Umuofia's social expectations and norms. The Umuaro chief priest, Ezeulu, cannot be ignored, because he embodies their most fundamental religious and political mores. He is essentially an incarnation of his function as scapegoat, and after his ordination as Ezeulu – "Priest [of] Ulu" – even his natal name is discarded or forgotten. By its social charter, the economic and religious fate of Umuaro is so closely tied to the religious and political choices of its leader that, in the normal order of things, the community depends on the priest for its activities. The role of the Chief Priest was to "go ahead and confront danger before it reached his people" (p. 189)

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and thus act out his predestined role as scapegoat and save his community from catastrophe, as Achebe puts it in his Foreword to the revised edition of the novel. In the event of the failure of his functions, the consequences for the community might be tragic in the short term but would not be far-reaching or permanent. But the true test of the integrity of the charter and its resilience is not the brash, but ultimately inconsequential local challenge of the nature deity, Ezeidemili and his ally, Nwaka the politician, but the historically determined confrontation between the traditions of Umuaro and the new polity of the white man. The confrontation is the historic opportunity to test the strength of the interdependence of priest and community. This interdependence is the theme of the ritual drama of the Festival of Pumpkin Leaves. But when the priest's role failed, the effect was at first economically devastating because the priest would not adapt to this situation that was not anticipated at Ulu's inauguration. But the Igbo community soon adjusts in its characteristic manner to this challenge to their survival, and the effect of the conflict turns out to be ultimately transient.

Arrow of God is in many ways a different kind of work from *Things Fall Apart*, especially in the way it orders the relation between character and event in the confrontation of the two political cultures. But by ending with the alienation of the hero from his community and from authorial sympathy, it falls into the same kind of tragic mode as *Things Fall Apart*, where the tragedy lies in the personal fate of the hero rather than the enduring material damage to the community. Social survival is stronger than the tragedy that is tied to the fate of an individual and is largely of his own making. At the time of the composition of the novels of this period, Achebe's conception of tragic fiction is a reflection of the Igbo saying that no man, however great, is greater than his people. His tragic heroes are isolated figures at the point of tragedy, rising no higher in the tragic scale than the status of history's scapegoat so that the community may survive.

The scapegoat theme was widespread in West African writing during the period of the publication of *Arrow of God*. Its recurrence was probably due to its contemporary significance as a continuation of an indigenous concept that was reinforced by the ascendance of the two world religions whose creed centred on the sacrifice of a surrogate for the sins of individuals. If theologically the scapegoat ritual was represented as an advance – if not an evolution – on the practice of blood sacrifice, in literary terms it marked a cultural transition from earlier rites. In *Arrow of God*, as in Bolaji Idowu's theory of sacrifice,[12] such superseded, but not forgotten, rites are recalled at the moment of crisis when Ezeulu appears to resist the humane function for which he was initiated. That is the moment when Nnayelugo reaches for a last-resort solution to Ezeulu's intransigence: "Every offence has its sacrifice,

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from a few cowries to a cow or a human being" (p. 209). This transition was reflected in the genres of drama and prose fiction. Generically, the rite of sacrifice is essentially drama – especially when it takes the form of the scapegoat ritual. Ritual is closely related to drama. It could quite conveniently be transformed from religious experience into theatre by being translated from the customary setting of its performance and re-enacted on stage. Its stage presence is mimetic of physical reality. The narrative or myth that accompanies it is merely a correlative that can be dispensed with in drama. On the other hand, the novel takes over the myth and discards or merely narrates the ritual, although ritual can feature as a semiotic device – as distinct from a conscious social action, in a work like Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Myth is the natural choice of the new prose medium. The physical or visual representation appropriate to ritual lies outside its verbal resources. Like the new genre in which it appears, the history of the scapegoat ritual performed in *Arrow of God* is relatively recent compared with its antecedents. Although there is an aura of antiquity in Ulu's shrine, with its "skulls of all past chief priests" (p. 209), there is still a communal consciousness of the newness of the new dispensation not only as the basis of Nwaka's challenge to the authority of Ulu, but also because the inauguration of the ritual with the investiture of Ezeulu as the first scapegoat priest is recalled as if it occurred within living memory in Umuaro.

There is a sense in which literary genres are symbolic representations of their age. The tragic defeat of the protagonist of ritual drama in texts like *Arrow of God* and Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* anticipates the emergence of the anti-hero of prose fiction. The transition from the culture of tragic ritual-actors in Soyinka's drama prepares us for the emergence of the contemporary African anti-hero of *The Interpreters*, just as *Arrow of God* maps the social and psychological conditions that would produce the anti-heroes of *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People*.

That is an important situation for the emergence of the novel as a new form. Its roots are secular, in contrast to the sacred ritual forms on which the drama of this period bases its representations. Achebe's fiction records an old-world ideal that is now out of place in the new age. The erosion of the traditional values of community as a result of the economic and cultural colonization of Africa produced results in literature that were similar to those produced by the ascendance of a new age of prose realism that marked the end of the chivalric romance of the European Middle Ages. It can be argued from a purely formal point of view that while Miguel de Cervantes's invention of Don Quixote as an anachronism marks the beginning of prose realism and defines its character, the characterization of Okonkwo marks the end of heroic storytelling not only because Umuofia would not go to war against

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the white man, but because the story of the reception of the new European dispensation would now take new forms that are rooted in the kind of stories-by-women that Okonkwo disliked. Okonkwo's excessive attachment to his own reconstruction of the Igbo patriarchal code may be compared to Don Quixote's re-enactment of the medieval code of chivalry that had become purely textual by the end of the Renaissance when he lived. There are of course important cultural and generic differences between the Europe of Cervantes and the Africa that Achebe recreates. The difference between European chivalry and realism is a chronological one, while Igbo patriarchy cohabits with the feminist principle that is its necessary opposite.[13]

As spokespersons for transition, Cervantes and Achebe both take a realistic look at the present without devaluing the past itself, although they produced different results – characterized by comedy in one, tragedy in the other. The difference could perhaps be accounted for by their different cultural contexts. In Cervantes the confidence of comedy drew inspiration from a Europe that was becoming colonizer rather than colonized, while tragedy was the appropriate form for the story of colonized Africa. It is revealing that neither Cervantes nor Achebe considered satire an option, as Henry Fielding did. This is because an important residual respect for the old values survives their partial discounting of these values. These three makers of the novel were not directly recreating reality, but responding to the textual representation of reality, thus highlighting the difference between the world of the text and the reality that it tries to represent. There is an additional dimension in Achebe's project. Both Cervantes and Fielding were producing cautionary accounts of the psychological effects and social implications of literature as escape, of the psychological dangers of a religious indulgence in reading. Achebe's project begins from a different and more far-reaching angle. He begins with the assumption that reality itself is textually constituted, as he makes clear in *Home and Exile*, his Harvard lectures on the literary battles that are being fought for the soul of Africa.[14] Stories are the major source of our knowledge of reality. The knowledge of cultural and historical spaces can only be recreated and known through the stories we tell. So texts are important and potentially dangerous sources of knowledge. This is Achebe's intellectual elaboration of traditional Igbo ideas (of texts as sources of knowledge) that are already implicit in *Things Fall Apart* as a story of the social organization of Umuofia. Joseph Slaughter's reading of the novel suggests that "individual development in Igbo society entails, or at least is emblematized by, a coming into, and a facility with, language and stories",[15] with the corollary that the failure of Okonkwo, the man of action to whom speech does not come easy, is his failure to come to terms with the creative functions of speech.

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Achebe actually goes further in various essays in which he elaborates on this idea of the power and necessity of stories, summarized in "What Has Literature Got to Do with It?" in the principle, "*People create stories create people*; or rather, *stories create people create stories*."[16] He restates this principle in his statement that "Man is a Story-Making Animal."[17] For colonized Africans, the implication of this is that since the production of colonial literature "was largely an ancillary service to the slave trade"(p. 30), the major twentieth-century task for the so-called "Third World" is "the process of 're-storying' peoples who had been knocked silent by the trauma of all kinds of dispossession" (p. 79).

The two so-called novels of the past, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, are classics in the fundamental sense, as high art as well as completed ideological tasks to which not much more can be added. They deal with cultural wars that have had to be fought. But they also uncovered for a whole new generation of novelists a new tradition and conventions for handling language and indigenous culture. There is a sense in which their relation to the traditional heroic forms is too close for modern prose fiction. They privilege the heroic and the tragic, although in Achebe's uncompromising fidelity to the realist tradition he approaches social experience according to empirical values, and distances his work from an important aspect of religious life, particularly the supernatural. He thus closes out an important possibility for African fiction, the so-called animistic realism implicit in the convention of fiction whose line of descent comes down from Daniel O. Fagunwa through Tutuola to the Ben Okri generation.

No Longer at Ease is the work that marks the end of the Okonkwo era and the emergence of the new age. It marks a break with *Things Fall Apart* and, by extension, *Arrow of God*. So, although it is conceived as a sequel to *Things Fall Apart*, it is in fact generically closer to *A Man of the People* than to the two historical novels. The question for critical theory is why critics insist on reading it as if it is cast in the same mold as *Things Fall Apart*. Perhaps one should begin with a brief survey of the fictional situation. The city is the "natural" setting for the novel form, because it is the place where the main conditions of its production and consumption are completely met, including its primary subject, the new African middle class. To generalize about the average or mean conditions for the form is not to deny the responsibility of the African novel to speak for the rural population – *A Grain of Wheat* is an eloquent demonstration of that responsibility – or for the trauma of the colonial encounter, the central concern of *Things Fall Apart*. Again the nature of the age is presented in the relationship between the central character, who can no longer be called a hero in the old sense, and the community he represents, but to which he no longer truly belongs. Classic tragedy begins

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to thin out of contemporary narratives when a community is no longer able to produce its representative individual and the community no longer feels that its fate is connected to, or reflected in, that of the hero. *No Longer at Ease* is a self-conscious admission that the contemporary African condition was not conducive to the production of truly tragic form. The conventions of the form were already disappearing from the modern world by mid-century. The social conditions for the production of the heroic and tragic forms of narrative were present in isolated places and times as recently as the railway strike in Senegal, in Ousmane Sembène's *God's Bits of Wood*, and in Mau-Mau Kenya and pre-1994 South Africa where the seeds of tragedy were sown by the heroic drive towards freedom and democracy. However, elsewhere where freedom fighters had disappeared into national history after independence, the new social conditions were encouraging new pathetic prose forms rather than heroic narratives, a situation that is implicit in novels like *No Longer at Ease* and Mongo Beti's *Mission to Kala*.

Thematically, *No Longer at Ease* represents a logical progression in Achebe's development as a historical novelist. But it is the ideological imperative of postcolonialism that has forced it into this structural position. In terms of its cultural origins, it is a novelist's necessary response to the new urban culture that was Africa's response to modernism. The town, as a modern alternative to the African countryside, is the cultural home of the African novel, whether this takes the form of migrations from village to city or from tradition to modernity in the novels of Achebe, but also in those of Ekwensi, Beti, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Sandwiched between Achebe's two major novels of the tragic hero in colonial times, *No Longer at Ease* takes a form that encourages us to read it differently from how we would read the other two novels. Achebe inscribes into the later novels a psychological, if not spiritual, continuity between the village and the city, between the agrarian and the industrial, without ignoring the different origins and material conditions of the two settings. His poem, "Lazarus," opens by teasing the reader with reference to a common primordial fear of the resurrection of the dead that prevails among city dwellers as well as in the countryside, although we soon find a tragic angel lurking behind the villagers' kinship bond and code of honor.[18] But because it is in the countryside away from the constraints of law and order that the fear is acted out, it seems clear enough that the difference between city and countryside is environmental, not genetic.

The villagers who welcome Obi Okonkwo back to his father's house in *No Longer at Ease* would not, of course, think so. To them, their townsman, Obiajulu, is the true son of his (grand)father: "[H]e is Ogbuefi Okonkwo come back. He is Okonkwo *kwom kwem*, exact, perfect."[19] The elders who are present refer to him as the embodiment of their valiant ancestors. "He is

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the grandson of Ogbuefi Okonkwo who faced the white man single-handed and died in the fight"(p. 53). In the past Obi's performance at school had confirmed his pedigree. So, confident in the vigour and vitality of the genes of heroes, they had entrusted him with a specific modern task – to bring back knowledge in place of the human heads that the old Umuofia warriors used to bring back home (p. 10). Returning from his long stay in far-away England Obi becomes, like a famous folk tale character, "a little child returned from wrestling in the spirit world" (p. 51).

The intention of this welcoming party remains admirable and their perception logical, if one ignores the intertextual ironies: that Okonkwo did not die as a hero – he hanged himself and shamed his kinsmen; that Okonkwo's father had symbolically rejected his own father by running away to join the missionaries and was never a headhunter; that literacy and headhunting are two completely different kinds of social tasks, belong to different periods and produce different social and psychological results. In a similar manner, Obi had failed the hopes of his townsmen in Lagos, for the conditions in Lagos are quite different from those of Umuofia, requiring a high level of literacy and integrity, not valor and ethnic loyalty, as they will soon discover from Obi's rejection of their ideology. In other words, although the structure of Obi's career reflects that of his grandfather up to the detail of the racist sneer by the colonial officer at the end of his administrative tour, the modern conditions in the national capital are so different from those of a provincial village on the margins of an emergent postcolony that the literary forms that represent both experiences could not be identical.

The real conflict in *No Longer at Ease* is between the demands of clan loyalty in the fierce economic conditions of a modern capital city, and the making of an educated middle class entrusted with building a modern independent nation. The tragedy is that Obi fails both causes: He has not been able to remain loyal to the clan that trained him, or to the nation he was trained to serve. The tragedy is national, but that does not make Obi a tragic hero. It would not be appropriate to adopt a conventional tragic paradigm for measuring Obi's worth as a tragic hero since, given the level of his training and social responsibility, the failure of character weighs far more than the economic pressures often cited as the cause of his tragedy. Although the various literary allusions and definitions of tragedy in the novel may indicate the novelist's intention and the tragic standard by which to measure Obi, it seems more useful to consider Obi as the first in the literary lineage of anti-heroes who have to cope with the new conditions of an urban, industrial and national culture. *No Longer at Ease* anticipates *A Man of the People*, and belongs to the kind of fiction that is quite different from the tragic heroism depicted in the novels about the ruinous conflict that the colonial encounter

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has provoked within indigenous civilizations. In the modern nation state that colonialism brought into being, no national leader can perform the old role of community leader without compromising his moral integrity and national stature for, in a multi-ethnic state, such a sectional role can only be achieved and sustained by corruption and nepotism. This theme, only implicit in *No Longer at Ease*, becomes quite apparent in *A Man of the People*. Obi's failure reveals an early fissure in the postcolonial state and the beginnings of a dangerous decay in its moral fabric. That decay is fully exposed in *A Man of the People*.

There are thus two phases in Achebe's career as a novelist. The historical novels mix the narrative elements of oral genres, specifically the heroic tradition and the myths associated with rites of passage and cleansing rituals, with the realist conventions of the novel form. This mixing of genres may be described as transitional, since the themes and setting of the urban novels do not require the appropriation of the older genres in any significant manner, although novelists of city life can return to these older elements for figurative or symbolic uses. The mixing of genres is Achebe's fidelity to both his contemporary point of view and his historical subject. The point of view reflects contemporary assumptions about the world, with its scepticism towards all knowledge that is not verifiable. We find it in *Things Fall Apart* and Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* and *The Great Ponds*, and it occurs in a less sceptical form in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*. This modern attitude is also evident in Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments*, where the materials of the marvelous and the fantastic are tamed and aligned with the conventions of realism: The seasonal living dead, Aboliga the Frog's picture of the man-child, the unnamed persona's wandering through the wasteland of Accra, Koomson's ritual cleansing, the cargo-cult rituals and the myths of Mammy Water are all represented as parables. This approach to the knowledge systems of the past stands in contrast to forms of knowledge derived through the intuitive and the visionary, as we find in much of animist cosmology and the alternative tradition of myth with its trappings of the magical and the extraordinary.

The categorization of Achebe's historical novels set out above is purely generic and historical, and has no implications for the quality of the works in question. The next stage confirms the tradition of realism already evident in the writing of the two historical novels in which the non-realist genres of the oral tradition are assimilated into the basically realistic conventions of the urban novel. A provisional outline of the evolution of African narrative traditions would distinguish between two major traditions, the oral tradition and the modern scribal tradition. The transitional stage of the scribal tradition branches into paths that lead to two different possibilities: a realist

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tradition, to which Achebe has made significant contributions, and a so-called tradition of animist or magical realism that is exemplified in the line of writing that descends from the Yoruba language fiction of Fagunwa to Tutuola's English, and has left traces of its footprints in Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*. The cosmopolitan potential of this particular line of descent has been proved by the writing of its chief contemporary exponent, Ben Okri, with his short stories and his Azaro novels. The non-realistic strain seems to be particularly strong in West Africa, with writers independently combining their own traditional forms with European conventions, like the symbolist in Camara Laye's *The Radiance of the King*, the allegorical in Ousmane Sembène's *Xala*, or the postmodernist in Nuruddin Farah's *Maps* and Kojo Laing's *Major Gentil and the Achimota Wars*. Both of these branches spring from roots in the oral tradition, but differ in the extent to which they appropriate elements of the scribal culture of Europe.

Achebe's two historical novels bridge the gap between the oral and the scribal traditions, while his two urban novels develop what is arguably the realist mainstream of the African tradition of prose fiction. The dominant genres of each literary tradition are shaped by antecedent literary practices as well as the theories of personality and the psychological conceptions of character in their time. The characters of such genres are thus generated from contemporary situations. Traditional Igbo tales reflecting Igbo ideas of leadership, heroism, and social relations draw mainly on the wrestler, the warrior, the priest(ess), and the farmer as well as problems of kinship and gender. These are the basic types in Achebe's novels of the Igbo past. As one would expect, the new urban industrial conditions generate new professions and occupations from which a new psychology and new theories of personality and of character types develop, especially characters reflecting the emergent social structure. The journalist, the civil servant, and the teacher are prominent in the first set of Nigerian fiction from Ekwensi's *People of the City* to Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*. Later the politician and the soldier (in *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*) would reflect the class of professionals that have become important in the changing social setting. It is clear then, that the novel form, especially as conceived by Achebe, is profoundly implicated in contemporary social reality, particularly when one considers his assumption, quoted at the head of this paper, that *stories create people create stories*. Characterization is particularly important for a novelist like Achebe since, to paraphrase him, people and stories are the end products of the storyteller's storytelling. The old storytelling traditions that Achebe assimilated into his first novel tended to present their characters from the outside, not because the bulk of stories deal with action rather than reflection, and not only because storytelling is a communal performance that

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did not linger on the thought processes of characters, but mainly because characters fitted into molds that were shaped by cultural expectations and assumptions. In contrast to the oral tradition, the conditions in which writing takes place in the scribal tradition encourage isolation and individualism as well as reflection and a dwelling on the thought processes of characters. It is under these conditions that the interior monologue is represented in writing – a visual medium, as the logical correlative of thought, just as the soliloquy is presented in the theatre in an oral medium as the equivalent of thought. Thus the new prose form encourages greater interiority in characterization, with the interior monologue as well as the omniscient narrator's dissection of thought processes and inner states of mind as its integral units.

No Longer at Ease and *Arrow of God* go beyond the characterization of Okonkwo from the outside to explore the hidden motives of their central characters. This is because these are isolated, even lonely characters that may not be satisfactorily characterized by their social relations alone. Part of the complexity of *Arrow of God* derives from the fact that the omniscient narrator reveals much to the reader about Ezeulu's thought processes although, quite tactfully, he only hints at the actual motives of the priest. Achebe faces a more complex narrative challenge in *A Man of the People*. Here the situation requires a narrative voice to speak on behalf of the people, like the communal voice in *Things Fall Apart*. This is in contrast to the narrator's vision of the growing individualism of a new middle class in *No Longer at Ease*, or the detached narrator that explores the psychology of an elected representative speaking on behalf of his community in *Arrow of God*.

In *A Man of the People* Achebe withdraws from omniscience and shifts much of the responsibility for character analysis and judgment to a first-person narrator, Odili. Because Odili is himself a character, the moral privilege of the narrator does not free him from the reader's scrutiny and critical judgment, nor does it imply the author's complete surrender of his responsibility as the reader's moral guide. The author has merely assumed the maker's privilege like the dramatist who, because he has structured the action and shaped the characters, is still responsible for the moral center of the work in spite of his verbal absence as author. The novel's title defines the readers' expectations. This is to be a story of leadership and responsibility, and the values are to be determined in terms of the degree of the fulfillment of the people's social expectations. For that reason, the reader is expected to judge Chief Nanga, the man of the people, in terms of his performance as a political leader and by his provision of service for his people. Odili the narrator is to be the reader's immediate guide and watchdog over Chief Nanga, who is expected to serve the interest of the people, not his own interest. Perhaps because of Odili's closeness to Chief Nanga, and also because Odili very

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quickly becomes disillusioned with Nanga as a type of politician and is completely alienated from the politician and his politics when he loses Elsie to him, we never really get to see the implied charismatic side of Nanga, whose personality is filtered through Odili's eyes. Also perhaps because Odili is entrusted with the characterization of Max, the other important political figure in the story, Max never really emerges as a rounded, living character. He remains only a symbol of a political idea whose strivings evaporate in the final despairing words that close the novel. The despair is partly justified because of the futility of Max's ideology, since the "people" in Nanga's opportunistic politics and in Max's manifesto are revealed by the narrator to be different ethnic communities waiting for their political representative to bring back their share of the so-called national cake, in some respects reminiscent of the expectations that the Umuofia Progressive Union has of Obi Okonkwo as their representative in the nation's Civil Service. It is through the unfulfilled character of Max that the novel rises above Odili's sexual motives and private politics.

With the introduction of national issues other than Odili's bid for political power – issues like Max's socialist politics, political violence and a military coup – the narrative rises above the hitherto personalized politics of the first-person narrator and fits into the larger social concerns of the period that produced the new realism of the mid-1960s. The novelists of that period virtually instituted a literary movement whose weapon was satire and whose major themes fitted into a pattern of false leadership, political betrayal of the people through widespread corruption terminating in a military coup involving the sacrifice of politicians as scapegoats. After the experiment with the first-person point of view and the problems of political leadership explored in *A Man of the People*, unanswered questions remain, especially the question of truth and the proper direction of the nation. And these questions provide the starting point for the next novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*, published after Achebe had had time to reflect on the questions.

Anthills of the Savannah is in many respects a gathering together of the social issues and formal devices of the earlier writing, including the status and contemporary relevance of indigenous knowledge, the state of the nation and the nature of leadership, the gender question, the need for different interest groups to tell their own stories (presented here as multiple points of view), and the irrepressible nature of information even under a dictatorship. It is obvious from this that here, as in the other novels, Achebe has mapped out for himself new formal frontiers that he needs to confront as a novelist, including that of representative characters in contemporary contexts. The changing historical periods in Achebe's writing have brought into focus those characters that are most representative of the condition of their culture. These periods throw up a

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succession of characters, changing from wrestler, warrior, and priest(ess), to teacher and civil servant, to teacher and politician who, in turn, give way to a new generation of professionals – the writer-as-journalist and the writer-as-poet whose alternative voices and points of view challenge the soldier's will-to-power. In every case the author has placed one of such representative characters in the privileged position where he stands for the dominant viewpoint of the culture either as the novel's protagonist or its point of view, although the author usually remains as narrator or sometimes as moderator of the proceedings. But each of these central characters has appropriated the privilege of speaking or acting on behalf of their communities for his own individual ends. Since Achebe's method guarantees the complete volition and independence of his characters, it implies that history shows that the failure of Nigerian leadership is rooted mainly in private interests.

Achebe's technique in the last two novels is a clear departure from that of the first three where the narrator's omniscience and unqualified moral opinions about characters, communities, and events are evidence of the author's constant presence. He withdraws from the world of *A Man of the People*, trusting one of the characters to expose the absurdity of the characters and events in the novel, although this witness turns out not to be completely reliable. *Anthills of the Savannah* is a partial demonstration of the right of every group of people to have their story told and heard, including women, the underprivileged, and the ancestors. Many novelists use the technique of multiple narrators to empower an underprivileged class by allowing them to speak directly in their own voice, though they do not necessarily limit it to the disadvantaged class. Multiple points of view serve such a purpose in Lewis Nkosi's *Mating Birds* and Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*. It is evident from the power of empathy in the epistolary form of Mariama Bâ's warmly received *So Long a Letter*, how close readers can get to characters who are allowed to speak in their own voices by the novelist. Achebe's concern with the problem of leadership has influenced the particular form of multiple narrators adopted in *Anthills of the Savannah*. The novel is structured as a concert of educated voices – three first-person narrators, Christopher Oriko, Ikem Osodi, and Beatrice Okoh, with the author returning as omniscient narrator to reassert his privilege as moral guide and coordinator of a variety of stories and points of view, after his withdrawal from the world of the previous novel. As Jennifer Wenzel argues in "The Trouble with Narrators,"[20] this intervention of the omniscient narrator does not give the reader any assurance of the author's confidence in his first-person witnesses.

Achebe's stated aims, especially in recent essays, and his practice in recent novels, place considerable faith in the central role of texts in constructing our world. Part of the justification for this position rests on his view of the

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two historical phases of imperialism, a colonial period of brute force and a postcolonial period of literacy with its electronic extension into the Information Age. The initial colonial encounter of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, which took the form of physical confrontations symbolized by Okonkwo's machete against the guns of the colonial officers, has now entered its more subtle and deadly battle for the souls of Third World communities through the agency of texts. This case is slightly overstated in the sense that not only have the engines of the Information Age – the television, the computer, and the home video – overtaken literature as agents of cultural imperialism, there are other equally potent instruments of globalization – multinational finance and international fashion designed at the cultural capitals of the West, with the universality of jeans and chinos attesting to its most successful products. The reason for this is the glamour and convenience of industrial products and their ease of reception and assimilation: Jeans and television programmes and home videos require less training for their reception and appreciation than literature, which requires extended, often specialized training for its critical reception. Even the new generation of educated Africans now serve other gods before literature, the most popular of these being the less intellectually demanding, often narcissistic culture of reality television. Education in Achebe's sense of a literary education is a basic answer to this cultural problem. He tries to counter the global onslaught from foreign cultures by resorting to folkloric devices from the Age of Wisdom. The Idemili myth which he invokes in *Anthills of the Savannah* encapsulates his proposal for the reinvigoration of the African ancestral heritage, a distinct African consciousness and identity, a feminine renaissance, and the harnessing of political power to morality. It is an ambitious proposal with ambiguous implications. Like the English language at its most imperial, the insatiable Information Age is a voracious god that accepts and assimilates all offerings and sacrifices, but adapts or transforms them for consumption in the global marketplace of culture. Achebe the wise old man of African literature is an advocate of literature as a necessary medium for telling Africa's own stories and a vehicle for promoting its cultural products and ensuring that there is at least an African presence when, as Léopold Senghor prophesied,[21] the roll call of identities is made at the world's cultural center.

NOTES

1. Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Ngugi wa Thiong'o exchange positions at the top of Lindfors's statistical research into the critical reception of anglophone African authors. As Lindfors himself implicitly acknowledges by the tongue-in-cheek acronym which named the survey – "Famous Authors Reputation Test" – a purely bibliographical deduction from quantitative records of "the frequency with

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which an author and his works are discussed in detail in print by literary scholars and critics" must be as unreliable a test of literary achievement as any other. See Bernth Lindfors, "Big Shots and Little Shots of the Canon" in *Long Drums and Canons: Teaching and Researching African Literatures* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1995), pp. 61–75.

2. F. Abiola Irele has remarked, "*Things Fall Apart* provided [for us] the sign of that profound reordering of the imaginative consciousness ... in an Africa that was delivering itself of the colonial yoke and entering upon a new mode of existence." See F. Abiola Irele, "Homage to Chinua Achebe," *Research in African Literatures*, 32.3 (Fall 2001), "Chinua Achebe at Seventy," 1–2. In the same number, Simon Gikandi testified as to the impact of Achebe's work: "I read *Things Fall Apart* over one whole afternoon and it is not an exaggeration to say that my life was never to be the same again" (p. 3). See Simon Gikandi, "Achebe and the Invention of African Culture," *Research in African Literatures*, 32.3 (Fall 2001), "Chinua Achebe at Seventy," 3–7.
3. Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" in *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (London: Heinemann, 1988), pp. 95–105.
4. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1992), p. ix.
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8. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. by Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).
9. Achebe, *Arrow of God*, rev. edn. (London: Heinemann, 1974), pp. 189–91.
10. V. C. Uchendu, *The Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965).
11. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1958), p. 182.
12. Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare*: *God in Yoruba Belief* (London: Longman, 1962), pp. 118–25.
13. The gender issue is common to both *Arrow of God* and *Things Fall Apart* – the reinforcing of the patriarchal image by the subordination of women in the first novel and their relative absence in the second, except in one major ritual scene which emphasizes their collective presence even as individual characters are distinguished. This representation of the past was not acceptable to feminist critics, who found comfort in Flora Nwapa's *Idu* as a reinscription of the role of women in Igbo patriarchal society. Achebe eventually balanced his account by re-establishing women at the centre of social activity in *Anthills of the Savannah*. The critical reception of the novel on these grounds has been consistently positive.
14. Achebe, *Home and Exile* (New York: Canongate, 2006). The original edition was published in New York by Oxford University Press in 2000.

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15. Joseph R. Slaughter, "A Mouth with Which to Tell the Story: Silence, Violence and Speech in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*" in E. Emenyonu (ed.), *Emerging Perspectives on Chinua Achebe*, I, *Omenka: The Master Artist* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2004), pp. 121–49.
16. Achebe, "What Has Literature Got to Do with It?" in *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (London: Heinemann, 1988), p. 162.
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4

BARBARA HARLOW

Protest and resistance

I had no idea of the conditions, he said: these heads were the heads of rebels. I shocked him excessively by laughing. Rebels! What would be the next definition I was to hear. There had been enemies, criminals, workers – and these were – rebels. Those rebellious heads looked very subdued to me on their sticks.
Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1898)

Surrounding Kurtz's compound, much to the "horror" of Marlow, is a stockade impaling native heads. Marlow, Conrad's less-than-reliable narrator in *Heart of Darkness*, had been brought to the site by Kurtz's "admirer," the ship's-log-reading Russian harlequin. The exchange between the two disparately attired and differently attached, albeit interest-sharing, pursuers of Kurtz exposes, however, the lurking possibilities in the situation itself for a mobilized, organized African resistance against the European imperial project: "I had no idea of the conditions, he [Kurtz's admirer] said: these heads were the heads of rebels." And Marlow responds: "I shocked him excessively by laughing. Rebels! What would be the next definition I was to hear. There had been enemies, criminals, workers – and these were – rebels. Those rebellious heads looked very subdued to me on their sticks."[1] Subdued perhaps, even dead, impaled on sticks surrounding the compound of the nineteenth-century imperial representative feared to have "gone native," but representing nonetheless the momentous makings of twentieth-century protest and organized resistance to come: enemies, yes; criminals, depending on whose law and order; workers, indeed. Rebels.

Whether the recent history of the African novel as geopolitical genre is itself a narrative of protest and resistance remains a matter of debate. Indeed, the South African writer, critic and academic Njabulo Ndebele, in the waning decade of apartheid, warned his compatriot artists against the "entrapment of resistance in an unreflective rhetoric of protest,"[2] insisting instead that the "ordinary daily lives of people should be the direct focus of political interest because they constitute the *very content* of the struggle, for the struggle involves people not abstractions" (p. 57, emphasis in original). Imperative for Ndebele was that writers should "replace the necessary commitment to engaging the forces of oppression through paying critical attention to the concrete and social and political details of that oppression" (p. 63). The

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"enemies, criminals, workers … and … rebels" – representatives of protest and resistance even for imperial adventurers – figure prominently, however, as protagonists in African novels that recount separately and collectively the story of colonialism, anti-colonialism, national liberation, decolonization, and postcolonialism. As labor organizers on the railroads and in the mines, as lawyers, as schoolchildren, as militants in the armed struggle, and as political prisoners, these "rebels" waged a campaign, at once cultural and political and always militant, against the imperial agenda. In the transition to independence, those rebel roles were played variously by shebeen women in their informal drinking establishments, schoolteachers, demobilized militants, former colonists, aspiring politicians, and erstwhile national liberationists. In the postcolonial era, however, that once heroic resistance and protest has turned to re-examination of the once storied and now mined history of protest and resistance through truth and reconciliation commissions and international tribunals.

Colonial protest

Although *God's Bits of Wood*, an early novel by writer and film-maker Ousmane Sembène, was published in 1960, the year of Senegal's independence from France, its plot is set in the late 1940s, during the railway workers' strike on the Dakar–Niger line that lasted from October 10, 1947 to March 19, 1948. Senegal over the centuries had been variously contested by European countries, from Portuguese traders, to Dutch and French slavers, and British competitors, until the Berlin Conference of 1885 when Europe divided Africa amongst itself, and France took over the holding. In 1895 Senegal became part of French West Africa until 1958 when, as an autonomous republic, it became part of the French Community, and an independent republic in 1960 with Léopold Senghor, noted poet and spokesperson of Negritude, as its first president.

With its opening line, *God's Bits of Wood* looks ahead from its earlier setting to that dawning of independence: "The last rays of the sun filtered through a shredded lacework of clouds. To the west, waves of mist spun slowly away, and at the very center of the vast mauve and indigo arch of sky the great crimson orb grew steadily larger. … Striking brutally through the cloud curtain, like the beam from some celestial projector, a single ray of light lashed at the Koulouba, the governor's residence, poised like a sugar castle on the heights that bore its name"[3] The prevailing Hegelian paradigm for a philosophy of history that marked historical progress from the rising of the sun in the east to its setting in the west, a paradigm that decidedly excluded Africa from that narrative, is challenged here. "Africa proper," according to

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Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and his colonizing subscribers, "as far as History goes back has remained – for all purposes of connection with the rest of the World – shut up; it is the gold-land compressed within itself – the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night."[4] Sembène's novel, however, focuses emphatically on connection – the railway that was to unite Africa – and the challenge to imperial prospects from the workers themselves. When Ad'jbid'ji, Niakoro's granddaughter, goes to meet her father at the labor meeting as the sun sets, she must pass the structural edifices of colonial control – the police barracks and the prison – until she reaches the union building and the "anonymous mask of a crowd" (p. 41). There, the scene changed: "Among the strikers, [the strike] was a formless thing; a furtive astonishment at the forces they had set in motion, and an uncertainty as to how they should be nourished – with hope, or with resignation. Among the whites, it was a simple obsession with numbers. How could such a small minority feel safe in the midst of these masses?" (p. 75).

Women get involved in the strike actions and stage a march from Thies to Dakar, singing all the way: "Ever since they left Thies, the women had not stopped singing. … No one was very sure any longer where the song began, or if it had an ending. It rolled out over its own length, like the movement of a serpent. It was as long as life" (pp. 288–9). Their song includes the refrain: "The morning light is in the east; / It is daybreak of a day of history" (p. 264). There is a trial as well; Bakayoko, the strike's putative leader, returns to widespread acclaim from his efforts in Chad and western Sudan; battles are waged between police and strikers; negotiations with management include not only demands for improved working conditions and better wages, but also for family allowances. This latter issue underwrites the cultural–political divide, with French representatives objecting to the polygamous practices of their Senegalese workers: "How do you think we could possibly recognize all those children?" (p. 275).

Critical readers of Sembène's novel noted the dynamic roles played by the several constituencies mobilized in the historic railway strike of 1947–8: According to James A. Jones, "women, children, and elders set a precedent for social historians of Africa"; for Marian Aguiar, the "political commentary of the novel extends beyond questions of anticolonialism to related issues of modernization"; and Kwaku Gyasi argues that the novel's confrontations "opened up new contexts [for women] for the exercise of unverbalized power."[5] According to Frederick Cooper, however,

> The strike of 1947 had drawn its strength simultaneously from the communities of the railwaymen and the union's seizure of the institutions and rhetoric of

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> post-war French imperialism as the bases for its demands. The railwaymen now faced the question of whether their strength could serve a broader population or whether in attaching themselves to the cause of national politics the strength would be drawn out of the labor movement and into political institutions where their sense of community and their visions would be lost.[6]

Writing at the dusk of European colonialism in Africa and the dawn of Senegalese independence, Sembène voices that same ambivalence through his protagonist Bakayoko: "'We know what France represents,' Bakayoko said, 'and we respect it. We are in no sense anti-French; but once again, Monsieur le directeur, this is not a question of France or of her people. It is a question of employees and their employer'" (p. 277).

Two years before the railway strike in Senegal/French West Africa, in 1946, Peter Abrahams published *Mine Boy*, another account of labor action, albeit in this case below ground, in the mines of South Africa. Like *God's Bits of Wood*, *Mine Boy* opens with the critically historic marking of the passage of time, but now it is just before dawn: "Somewhere in the distance a clock chimed. The big man listened. One ... Two ... Three ... Three o'clock in the morning."[7] Xuma, against the grain of the modernization narrative and its Hegelian formatting, had come from the city to the country, looking for work in the mines. Ever since the diamond rush to Kimberley in 1870–1 and the gold rush to the Witwatersrand in 1886, minerals had been making magnates of European prospectors in South Africa – and they in turn were minting a disenfranchised labor force out of the native African population.[8] Xuma had much to learn, including that "[t]he only place where he was completely free was underground in the mines" (pp. 70–1), but also that "maybe crowds never die" (p. 183). Finally, however, as he tells Ma Plank who is urging the man to flee the retribution that must surely await him following the violence at the workplace, "there are many things I want to say too. I want to tell them how I feel and how the black people feel." Even if, as Ma Plank insists, "They know how we feel. They will do nothing," Xuma is no less adamant: "But they have not heard us say it. It is good that a black man should tell the white people how we feel. And also, a black man must tell the black people how they feel and what they want. These things I must do, then I will feel like a man. You understand?" (pp. 189–90).

Anti-colonialism: organized resistance movements: SWAPO and the ANC

"Political resistance," according to Cameroon critic Achille Mbembe, "in response to regimentation and coercion paved the way for a powerful

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narrative of freedom."[9] The narrative of freedom is composed in multiple versions, representing specific agendas of national struggles as well as the differences that generational perspectives provide. Following the rush of liberation that began with Ghana's independence in 1956 and culminated with the Portuguese departure from its African colonies of Mozambique, Angola, Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde in 1974–5, Namibia and South Africa were the last of the African territories defined and claimed by European powers at the Berlin Conference in 1885 to achieve national independence in the early 1990s, with Sam Nujoma (former SWAPO leader) assuming the presidency of Namibia in 1990 and Nelson Mandela (the African National Congress [ANC] leader released from 27 years in prison that same year) the presidency of South Africa in that country's first-ever democratic elections. The apparently extraordinary tardiness, itself perhaps an accident of history, was no less rooted in historical necessities. Geographically adjacent, the two countries' political fate was just as intimately abutting.

Not since the Anglo–Boer (or South African) War of 1899–1902 and the Act of Union establishing the Union of South Africa in 1910 has South Africa been ruled from Europe, but rather by an Afrikaner-dominated government – in what the ANC and its ally, the SACP (South African Communist Party), assessed as "colonialism of a special type" – incarnated as apartheid in 1948 following the National Party's electoral success. In 1915, during World War I, South Africa had launched the military and political takeover of its neighboring territory, Namibia, then South West Africa, and in 1920 the League of Nations granted South Africa, in the negotiations that distributed the spoils of World War I, a mandate to govern the former German colony. That mandate was disputed from the 1950s onward, to be resolved only after a protracted armed liberation struggle and UN intervention with the 1989 elections and formal independence in 1990.

Namibia

"The Namibian liberation movement," according to Colin Leys and John S. Saul, "constituted in an important sense one front of a much broader struggle – the 'Thirty Years' War against white minority rule that fanned out across the region between 1960 and 1990."[10] South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) waged its war against South African occupation of the territory largely from exile in neighboring countries such as Zambia and Angola. Indeed, as Chris Tapscott maintains, the "demands of the liberation struggle in Namibia served to differentiate Namibian society into those who opposed and those who collaborated with the apartheid regime, those who

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went into exile and those who remained, and those who attained rank and status within each of the opposing forces and those who did not."[11]

That same fraught history and fought-out geography haunts even the novels of Namibian national liberation. As Joseph Diescho poignantly suggests in his post-independence lecture, "The Effects of Colonialism on the Development of Local Self-Government in Africa," "the tears are not dry in the land."[12] Victor Kapache's 1994 novella, *On the Run*, thus tells the story of four young students who flee the country following the student boycotts of 1988 to join the resistance in exile. That crossing of the border – the trespass from Namibia into exile as well as the traversal from student to freedom fighter – provides the plot lines as well for Kaleni Hiyalwa's later novel, *Meekulu's Children*, but now the children appear as much a threat to their parents as liberators of their country: "They were afraid of them. The children were different from those who had left the land. They were soldiers who carried guns and behaved differently".[13] Later, however, as it happens in the short novel, "[c]onfusion was injected into the roots of society and set in. Some parents began to support whatever group their children participated in while others remained neutral" (p. 85). The political ambivalence betrayed in Kapache's and Hiyalwa's novellas are described in Diescho's lecture as those vacillations generated by "rulers [who] do not share the histories of the ruled," rulers who "lead against the past and not for the future." According to Diescho, from the perspective provided by hindsight, "the process of alienation which started with colonisation continues today under the aegis of state security and national patriotism."[14]

Born of the Sun, Joseph Diescho's first novel published in 1988 on the eve of Namibian independence, is written in anticipation of the achievements of liberation. The same labor protest issues that informed *God's Bits of Wood* and *Mine Boy* inflect *Born of the Sun* as well, but in the 1988 novel the relation between labor protest and anti-colonial national liberation resistance is written explicitly into the narrative. Like the two earlier novels, however, Diescho's narrative opens with a decisive, if recurrent, noting of the historic passage of time: "'Kirikiki, kirikiki,' the village cocks sing as they begin the second round of their morning choir, signaling that the work-loaded day is around the corner."[15] Dedicated to "the Freedom Seekers / of Namibia and South Africa who are / United in tears, purpose and action," *Born of the Sun* tells the only-too-typical tale of the young Muronga's journey from the Namibian countryside to the mines of South Africa. The subtitles to the novel's four parts summarize that tale: Relations; Going the distance; Between rock and gold – resistance; Difficult decisions. In Part I, "Relations," Muronga must distance himself from the complications created by his teachers and his parents, between a Christian God and the traditions of his forefathers, and decide

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to "climb the lorry" to betake himself by lorry, airplane, train, through compounds and translators, to be inducted into the mine labor system (pp. 82f.). In the mines, then, in "going the distance," Muronga finds himself "now in a different land" (p. 91), a land in which the "future will have its own rules," a land where "[y]ou do not ask what you will do to the bridge tomorrow – you will either cross it, or burn it, when you get to it" (p. 93). The choice in this "different land," between crossing a bridge and burning it, is, to be sure, a paradigmatic reference to the decisions made in the course of a personal itinerary, an individual biography, but bridges function no less critically in the narrative of a national liberation movement, as strategic targets for an armed struggle. Crossing bridges or burning bridges: Muronga has moved on, and in the third section of *Born of the Sun*, "Between rock and gold – resistance," the young Namibian is invited by his co-workers to attend the clandestine meetings of an emergent resistance movement. At one of these meetings, he is instructed murkily by a fellow Namibian on the contemporary history of their country: "You may have heard," Nkare reminds Muronga, "of the fighting that is beginning to happen in our land, between the so-called strange people from the bush and the white policemen. Those are people returning with strength. They go back under the name of the United People's Organization. We also call ourselves the United People's Organization. That is why you must be very careful with what you say, Muronga. Do you understand?" (p. 133). Muronga understands exceptionally well, so well that he is eventually imprisoned by South African officials following a demonstration protesting the death in detention of a leader of the Black Promotion Movement. Upon release, Muronga faces "difficult decisions" in the novel's final section. Deported back to Namibia from South Africa for his infractions, Muronga and his fellows are challenged en route by authorities in Botswana:

> "People all over Africa are waiting for your country's liberation, but it will not be that easy. Especially for you. You are marked men. The South African authorities in your country no doubt know everything about you, including when you are due to arrive home. They will watch you constantly. At the slightest move, they will arrest or try to kill you. You will not be able to speak about the United People's Organization without risking your lives. ... Once you have decided, either to go home or escape, there will be no turning back." (pp. 201–2)

Muronga finally must cross that bridge – *and* burn it – whether in Namibia or from exile.

Troubled Waters, the title of Joseph Diescho's second novel, implicitly refers to that bridge, crossed and/or burned, and the waters that flow still beneath or over it. Published in 1992, two years after Namibian

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independence, *Troubled Waters* is set in 1974, during the early days of the struggle following the UN General Assembly's recognition in 1972 of SWAPO as the "sole legitimate representative" of Namibia's people. Whereas *Born of the Sun* looks ahead to a new day – a sun of oppression that sets only to rise again on liberation – both in the rhetoric of its title and in the itinerary of its main protagonist, *Troubled Waters* takes advantage of a post-independence retrospective to reassess the years of struggle and resistance. Not the singular teleology of Muronga's enlistment, via the mines of South Africa, in the national liberation movement, but rather the complicated border crossings occasioned by South Africa's occupation of neighboring Namibia, determines *Troubled Waters*' troubled plot. Two protagonists disturb the reconstruction of the history of Namibian resistance and independence in the ill-fated love story of the Transvaaler Andries Malan, assigned by the South African Defence Forces to a teaching post at a black school in Namibia as part of their bush war, and Lucia, a university-trained Kavango woman whose education has served to alienate her from her own community. The novel's title is taken from "an old African story," told on the first page:

> When God created southern African soil he not only deposited on it green trees and lush grass, but above it he placed a totally clear sky with a bright sun looking down. He gave it a climate not too hot and not too cold, cool in the evenings and warm in the day. He placed on the land magnificent wild life. ... Around the land he poured great waters to protect the animals and wet the soil. Then he said, "I should put something underneath the soil." There he placed gold and diamonds and uranium. Seeing what God had done, a member of the heavenly host exclaimed, "Why give this one area so much – it is too beautiful." God looked down on the soon-to-be troubled waters and replied, "Wait until you see what the people I put there are going to do to each other."[16]

South Africa

In describing the "transitions from apartheid to democracy in Namibia and South Africa in the context of decolonization," South African historian Christopher Saunders argues that "one must ask the same questions as with decolonization elsewhere: How important were the pressures exerted by the liberation movement? What was the significance of international actors and of the international climate? What did the transfer of power mean? To what extent did the transition lead to fundamental change? What kind of democracy was instituted in the new order?"[17] Those questions discover, if not answers, at least analyses in the stories told, the novels written, from out of the maelstrom of protest and resistance.

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The 1988 school boycott that precipitates the flight into exile of the four young Namibian students in *On the Run* and propels as well the plot of *Meekulu's Children*, that over-determines Murango's initiation into the resistance movement and distorts the thwarted relationship between Andries and Lucia was anticipated in the cataclysmic uprising of South Africa's schoolchildren more than a decade earlier, a confrontation that began in the Johannesburg township of Soweto in June 1976 and quickly spread throughout the country. "Imagine," observe the riders on a passing bus, "a schoolgirl: she must have somebody inside. Who are all these people, anyway?"[18] The schoolgirl is Rosa Burger, not a Soweto student but a white child of privilege, and she is waiting outside the prison with other visitors for the doors to be opened so that she might visit her father, Lionel Burger, and her mother, his wife, bringing with her a green eiderdown and a red hot-water bottle. Her parents, communists who named their daughter in part after Rosa Luxemburg (Rosa's full name is Rosemarie, to include an aunt as namesake as well), had been incarcerated for their support of the African National Congress in its struggle against South Africa's apartheid regime. Rosa is the heroine of Nadine Gordimer's novel, *Burger's Daughter*, which tells her story as the legatee of resistance with a history of her own.

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), part of the controversially negotiated solution to South Africa's transition to democracy, was established in 1995 just after the 1994 elections. According to its mandate, the TRC was to investigate gross human rights violations committed by all parties to the conflict between 1960 and 1994. The tumultuous decade of the 1950s, years of activism for the Burgers, from the Defiance Campaign and the Freedom Charter in 1955 to the bus boycotts and women's resistance to the notorious pass laws, had culminated in the four-year-long Treason Trial from 1956 to 1960 of more than one hundred – black and white – opponents of apartheid and its policies. In 1960, however, when all charges against the Treason Trialists had been dismissed, seventy black demonstrators against the pass laws were massacred by police in Sharpeville and the ANC was banned. The following year, the ANC, now an underground organization, established an armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, led by Nelson Mandela and with a program of militant attacks on official installations. In 1964, at the conclusion of the Rivonia Trial, Mandela and seven fellow accused were sentenced to life imprisonment on Robben Island. Its leaders in prison or in exile, the resistance movement, some feared and others hoped, had been broken. Years later, Conrad, who is now courting Lionel Burger's grown-up daughter Rosa, is desperately curious to know just what it had been like, living through those heady days of resistance: "What'd you celebrate in your house?" the wooer inquired of his intended, and muses: "The occasions were

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when somebody got off, not guilty, in a political trial. Leaders came out of prison. A bunch of blacks made a success of a boycott or defied a law. There was a mass protest or a march, a strike … Those were your nuptials and fiestas."[19] But not only suitors were interested in Rosa's parentage; biographers too were seeking to write the history of resistance through the personal lives of its erstwhile champions, and Rosa is obliged to take a stand in determining the direction of that narrative:

> After Lionel Burger's death a number of people approached his daughter with a view to writing about him. As the only surviving member of his family, she would have been the principle source of information for any biographer. One she refused after the first meeting. Another's letters she did not answer. The one to whom she agreed to make material available did not find her very communicative. She had little to offer in the way of documentation; she said the family kept few letters or papers, and what there was had been taken away in police raids in the course of the years. She mentioned she had part of her parents' library but turned aside from suggestions that perhaps this in itself might be interesting to a biographer. (p. 88)

Eventually Rosa travels to the south of France and from there to London, where the Anti-Apartheid Movement is enlisting international support in opposition to South Africa's apartheid regime. In the end, however, she returns to South Africa and is arrested and imprisoned under the provisions of Section 6 of the Prevention of Terrorism Act. "The real Rosa believed that real revolutionary initiative was to come from the people; you named me," she speaks to her deceased father Lionel, "for that? This time it's coming from the children of the people, teaching the fathers – the ANC, BPC, PAC, all of them, all the acronyms hastening to claim, to catch up, the theory chasing events" (pp. 348–9). It is 1977 and Rosa has been working with the children of Soweto.

Both Sipho Sepamla's *A Ride on the Whirlwind* and Mongane Serote's *To Every Birth its Blood* are set in the Johannesburg townships of Soweto and Alexandra in the immediate aftermath of the Soweto uprising of 1976 and take up in their respective plottings the new directions impelled by the children's apparently spontaneous initiative when they took to the streets against the enforced use of Afrikaans in the schools. "When June 16th occurred," *A Ride on the Whirlwind* suggests, "and the role of the Soweto child displayed itself before the eyes of each family, father and mother were shocked into a new sensibility about their son."[20] Sepamla's novel, published five years after the uprising, opens with the arrival in Soweto of Mzi from military training in ANC camps in exile, only to encounter a new generation of insurgency on the ground, in the townships. As elderly Uncle Ribs tells the

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returnee, reflecting on dramatic changes wrought in the program of resistance and protest, "These young ones do not take us for granted any more. ... You see, brother," Uncle Ribs goes on, "until the children said 'Enough!' many of us despaired" (p. 26). The children nonetheless are seduced by Mzi's AK47. As Mandla, one of the guerrilla's new conscripts, tells him, "I must say carrying the AK47 like this knocks me out. The feeling of it is an experience all its own" (p. 47). That experience, as the novel's tale will tell, is not to be "all its own," and the choreography of children, guerrilla, parents, and police across the topography of turmoil stages a crucial, indeed "whirlwind," debate within the resistance over priorities, tactics, and strategies. In *To Every Birth its Blood*, also published in 1981, Mongane Serote is likewise engaged in mobilizing characters and setting – this time in the township of Alexandra – to assess plot-lines of liberation. It is told in both first- and third-person narratives, those of Tsi, journalist and theater activist, John, a dry-cleaner, and Dikeledi, another journalist who, like Rosa Burger, must live through her own father's detention and trial. His statement from the dock, however, becomes required reading for the new generation. As Oupa tells Dikeledi during her father's ordeal, "'Every one of us must make a cutting of this speech and read and study it. It has lots for us."[21] But Tsi's father too has a message for another generation, which Tsi and his comrades must come to terms with:

> "Yes, I could understand how it came about that every time he talked about Kaunda, Nyerere, Nkrumah, he became irrational, he became like a small boy, talking about heroes in a movie that he had seen. I understood now, as he sat there, that he could not afford to see any fault with his heroes, he had to believe that they loved him and were going to build Africa for him, that they were almost like god. Every time one of them made a statement in the press about South Africa, he seemed to memorise it word for word, and he would talk about the article to everyone he met, and then shoot them with the lines they had said. He had to believe that one day, his heroes, his supermen, were going to fly into South Africa and seize it out of the terrible grip that now held it." (pp. 62–3)

Culture as a weapon in the struggle

Novels, speeches, statements from the dock, biographies: What role did – could still – culture play as a weapon of protest and resistance in the struggle against colonialism and in the name of national liberation? Like the recent history of the African novel and the stories told in those novels, the changing constructions of "culture" in Africa's twentieth-century engagements reveal a narrative of their own, one reflected in and inflected by the writerly projects. Frantz Fanon, the West Indian critic who practiced psychoanalysis in France

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and participated in the Algerian Revolution, described in *The Wretched of the Earth* a three-stage development for the emergent writer of protest and resistance: In the first phase, according to Fanon, "the native intellectual gives proof that he has assimilated the culture of the occupying power."[22] By the second phase, "the native is disturbed; he decides to remember what he is," and, accordingly, Fanon goes on, "Past happenings of the bygone days of his childhood will be brought up out of the depths of his memory; old legends will be reinterpreted in the light of a borrowed aestheticism and of a conception of the world which was discovered under other skies" (p. 179). "Finally," writes Fanon, there comes the "fighting phase," in which "the native, after having tried to lose himself in the people and with the people, will on the contrary shake the people" (p. 179). Amilcar Cabral, leader of the Guinea Bissau liberation movement, the PAIGC, assassinated in 1974 on the eve of Portuguese Africa's liberation, maintained in the 1970 Eduardo Mondlane Memorial Lecture (in honor of the former president of Mozambique's resistance movement, FRELIMO, who was himself assassinated), that "culture is simultaneously the fruit of a people's history and a determinant of history"[23] and that, furthermore, the liberation movement is the "organized expression of the struggling people's culture" (p. 143). Albie Sachs in turn, on the eve this time of South African liberation, and having himself survived an assassination attempt in Mozambique, argued in a paper presented to an ANC in-house seminar in Lusaka in 1989 against what he called "solidarity criticism" and proposed instead that "our members should be banned from saying that culture is a weapon of struggle. I suggest," Sachs went on, "a period of, say, five years."[24] Five years later, Nelson Mandela was elected president of South Africa.

Transitions to independence: Kenya's Mau Mau

The east African country of Kenya won its independence in 1961, with Jomo Kenyatta as its first president. As in the cases of Namibia, South Africa, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Angola, and Zimbabwe, Kenya's independence came at the end of a protracted armed liberation struggle, called "Mau Mau," or Land and Freedom. As happened in those other African countries, Kenya's post-independence history has been riddled by the influence of that contestation, an influence that underwrites *Petals of Blood*, the 1977 novel by Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

Ngugi's novel opens with the detention and questioning of four Kenyans, on charges relating to a murder in Ilmorog, one of Kenya's "New Towns." Each of the prisoners – Munira the schoolteacher, Abdulla the shopkeeper, Wanja the prostitute, and itinerant Karega – carries the burden of a particular

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relation to the resistance struggle, a burden that they eventually recount as they make their way to the national capital to demand Ilmorog's share in the new dispensation. Section I of *Petals of Blood* is titled "Walking" – and the interrogations of the detainees do indeed lead back in time, to reconstruct the stories of national resistance as variously waged by the novel's protagonists, but forward as well, towards a retrospective critique of the implementation of independence. As Ugandan novelist Moses Isegawa describes it, the "journey of Ilmorog is the journey of Kenya after independence when it donned neocolonial clothes and put the interests of foreigners and traitors first and abandoned the people who had suffered and died for the land."[25] What now about education, about development – transportation and communication networks, commercialization? What about women? And the children? Part I of *Petals of Blood*, "Walking," leads "towards Bethlehem" (the title of Part II), in order "to be born" (Part III). As Munira describes that journey in notes he penned years later in prison, "'Yes, Ilmorog was never quite the same after the journey ...'".[26] Colonialism, anti-colonialism, decolonization – protest and resistance: in the end, in the last section of the novel at any rate, and disrupting the syllogistic dialectic, "again ... la luta continua" (Part IV). Abdulla and Joseph (Abdulla's adopted son) are found sitting "outside their hovel in the New Jerusalem, talking. Joseph was now a tall youth in a neat uniform of khaki shirt and shorts. He held Ousmane Sembène's novel, *God's Bits of Wood*, in his hands but he was not reading much" (p. 402).

Postcolonialisms: landmines and truth commissions

Landmines

Mozambique is one of the most dangerously mined countries in the world and the landmines that litter its terrain and maim and murder its people represent the still buried detritus, the unexploded ordinance (UXO) of the country's independence and, more importantly perhaps, post-independence struggles. Mozambique's national independence came in 1974 when, following a military coup in Portugal, the Lusaka Accord was signed and a transitional government established. In 1975 Samora Machel became president of Mozambique, only to face continued opposition from rival Renamo supported by South Africa. The Nkomati Accord in 1984 was supposed to end that hostility, but in 1986 Machel was killed in a still suspicious air crash. Landmines perpetuate the conflict and riddle still its stories.

In Mia Couto's 1996 novel, *Under the Frangipani*, for example, the narrator is a dead man resurrected to inhabit the person of a police inspector,

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who "sniffs at misdeeds which drip with blood,"[27] assigned to investigate a murder to which all the suspects confess. One of those suspects, a former soldier, explains his "extraordinary plan" to the narrator-inspector: "he was going to plant mines around the fort. He would bury the same mines that were being dug up along the road" (p. 109). According to one of Couto's readers, "his texts challenge the monism of the early years of the Frelimo regime as much as they rebuke colonialism."[28] *Under the Frangipani*, however, insists on contemporary currencies as well, and by the end of the novel, "[t]here was only one true reason for the crime: the arms trade."[29] Thus, in Couto's later novel, *The Last Flight of the Flamingo* (2000), landmines still jeopardize the territory that the protagonists of the historical narrative must traverse. In this novel, a tale told by a translator, it is not a single police inspector, but a full international delegation that has come to town to "investigate the case of the severed sexual organ."[30] The incident was not the first, it seems, and hence worried the "international community," the big donors who preferred a "population in all its hunger and with all its contagious diseases," and the local hosts who noted that "destitution is turning a good profit" (p. 56). But, as the translator discovers to his peril,

> What was happening was as follows: a proportion of the landmines that were found, were then returned to the same patch of ground. In Tizangara, everything was mixed: the war of business and the business of war. When the war ended, there were landmines left over, yes of course. Some. But not enough to prolong the mine clearance programmes. The money siphoned from these programmes was a source of revenue that the local leaders couldn't do without.

So, "landmines were planted and transplanted" (pp. 154–5). But those landmines pose crucial challenges – local and global – for the storyteller, the producer of narrative plots, who must keep the storyline moving and get his or her characters across settings, from one place to another. The terrain itself, the setting, is already littered with "explosive remnants of war," mutilating the physical integrity of individuals and dismembering the psychosocial relationships that connect characters to their setting. Nearly 20,000 people worldwide are killed by landmines every year and a ten-year-old amputee, if she survives another forty to fifty years, will need 25 artificial limbs in the course of her lifetime. The costs, if truth be told, are high indeed.

Truth commissions

"*Mother to Mother* is a book I did not plan," South African novelist Sindiwe Magona said in a 1999 interview. "It's a book I didn't write at the moment of the act that provoked it. I was shocked. I was saddened. But in the ways in

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which these things are; these things happen. You know, people get killed. My sadness, I must confess, was kind of distant and impersonal. Six months later, I went home for the elections, I discovered that one of the four young men implicated in her murder, who were then on trial, is the son of a childhood friend of mine."[31] Magona went on to describe the impetus and the imperatives that underwrote her fictionalized narrative of the 1993 death of Amy Biehl, a Fulbright student working in Cape Town in the years of South Africa's transition to democracy:

> Using my experience, and the experiences of women that I know in the township. And the urge to talk to the Biehls was there. I wanted to explain that, sometimes with the best intention in the world, there are situations where parents cannot be effective parents. And definitely during this time I write about. The government of South Africa was waging war against African families. If the father was working it was never for enough wages. So the mother had also to be working; the children were being brought up by who? And today we wonder that all these young people are lost. We were not there. The parents were not there to raise their children. I wanted to explain this to the Biehls. Not that it excuses the people who killed their child. (p. 285)

Mandisa, mother of the killer, Mxolisi (the name means "peacemaker"), begins her address with a confession of her own: "My son killed your daughter. People look at me as though I did it. As though I could make this child do anything."[32] But she goes on to raise another kind of question – hypothetical, rhetorical, but no less real – for Mrs Biehl, Amy's mother: "But, let me ask you something: what was she doing, vagabonding all over Guguletu, of all places taking her foot where she had no business? Where did she think she was going? Was she not blind to see there were no white people in this place?" (p. 2). What had begun as her next-to-last day in South Africa ended as Amy Biehl's last day. The car in which she was driving some of her friends, "comrades" they would say later, home to the township of Guguletu, was intercepted by chanting youths, toyi-toyi-ing in the traditional protest street rhythm; they had been recently exited from a political meeting in which they had been put, as one of them described it at the amnesty hearing, "in high spirits" and "politically motived" by the slogans and speeches they had just heard. The car and its occupants were stoned, and Amy, fleeing, was stabbed to death. "Oh, why did she not stay out? Why did she not stay out?" Mandisa pleads (p. 3).

But *Mother to Mother* is also Mandisa's story, a tale of the "forced removals" that had brought her as a child to Guguletu – a name which means "our pride," but which the residents translated instead as Gugulabo ("their pride") (p. 27). "What was she doing here," she again asks Mrs Biehl, "your daughter? What made her come to this, of all places. Not an army of

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mad elephants would drag me here, if I were her" (p. 48). But something no less brutal than an army of mad elephants had indeed bullied and dragged Mandisa there, the bulldozers and the police vehicles of the apartheid state, as it ruthlessly cleared the land of its native inhabitants, through forced removals, influx control, and a barricading barrage of pass laws, to serve its own purposes.

Magona, in her preface to the novel, describes the story that is to follow: "Are there lessons to be learned from knowing something of the other world? The reverse of such benevolent and nurturing entities as those that throw up the Amy Biehls, the Andrew Goodmans, and other young people of that quality? What was the world of this young woman's killers, the world of those, young as she was young, whose environment failed to nurture them in the higher ideals of humanity and who, instead, became lost creatures of malice and destruction?" (p. v). Was there really "no one to blame" – as the apartheid government would systematically respond when queried about the increasing incidence of deaths in detention? Or was there a history that could still be called up?

Mother to Mother's narrative moves between the hours of the two days, August 25 and 26, 1993, the dates of Amy Biehl's death and the apprehension of one mother's son, and the longer historical trajectory of apartheid's assault on the black people of South Africa. There is much blame to be apportioned here, as well as amnesties to be granted and denied, and perhaps further, fuller disclosures yet, in the personal accounts of political processes. Amy Biehl's killers were granted amnesty by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in July 1998 after arguing in their submission to the Amnesty Committee that they had acted out of political motivation, and the Committee's decision acknowledged that motivation: "Applicants said that they were all inspired by the speakers [at the rally] to such an extent that they left the meeting with many others in a militant mood. They marched through the township toyi-toying and shouting ONE SETTLER ONE BULLET, determined to put into effect what they had been urged to do. This is how they got involved in the activities ... which led to the killing of Amy Biehl."[33]

Enemies? criminals? workers? – or rebels? Literature, African novels for example, once waged as protest and resistance in the age of anti-colonialism and national liberation struggles is, in other words, being perforce reconstituted, rewritten really, for a postcolonial era of landmines and truth commissions.

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5

CHRISTOPHER WARNES

The Afrikaans novel

Early European settlement of South Africa was a piecemeal affair. The Portuguese were the first to round the Cape in the late fifteenth century, leaving us as reminders of their presence a number of stone crosses and a canto of Camoens's epic poem, *The Lusiads*. The Dutch Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), established a permanent outpost in the region in 1652, intending to restock ships plying the lucrative trade between Europe and the East. Within a decade, Company servants had become full-time farmers, and these early settlers had entered into conflict with the indigenous Khoikhoi. A trickle of Dutch and German immigrants was bolstered in 1688 by the arrival of French Huguenots fleeing religious persecution in Europe. From 1658, slaves were imported from both coasts of Africa, Madagascar, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. In 1806 the British took final control of the Cape, fearing its strategic position might be used against them by Napoleon. Organized migration from Britain followed in the 1820s, and, after diamonds and gold were discovered in the second half of the century, the region saw a steady influx of mostly British and Commonwealth immigrants. South African settlers thus fell largely into two groups: English speakers, most of whom maintained strong ties with Britain and other parts of its empire; and those who spoke Dutch, or a version of it, a group of mixed origins whose affiliations with Europe were largely severed by the nature of their migration, and by later recolonization by Britain.

Throughout the period of its control of the Cape, the VOC made it clear that Dutch was to be the official language of the colony. The French Huguenots were deliberately settled among the burghers, and slaves and indentured Khoikhoi were required to communicate with their masters in Dutch. The slaves brought with them their languages and their faiths, and elements of Malay and Portuguese found their way into the linguistic mix, while indigenous languages like Nama may also have exerted some influence. In general, the use of Dutch by slaves and the Khoi contributed to the restructuring of the language and the elimination and simplification of many of its features.

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However, the presence of large numbers of colonists meant that the language was never creolized to the extent it was in parts of the West Indies, for example. Some linguists claim that by the late eighteenth century, 'Cape Dutch', spoken widely across the colony, had essentially taken on the structure that characterizes the Afrikaans language today.[1] However, evidence of considerable linguistic variation as late as 1900 suggests that the emergence of a coherent language owes more to later standardization than it does to any naturally unfolding process. Either way, until the late nineteenth century Dutch was the only accepted medium of written communication, creating a measure of dissonance between educated city-dwellers and the mass of colonists and servants who only spoke the semi-creolized form of the language.

Evidence from the early eighteenth century suggests that the term 'Afrikaner' – meaning, simply, 'African' – was increasingly used to distinguish between immigrants and settlers born in the colony. But although Afrikaans has been closely linked with the efforts of European settlers to define themselves as an independent nation, the Islamic community of the Cape, largely descendants of slaves, made a considerable contribution to its development in the nineteenth century. Among the first Afrikaans works to be printed were religious texts written in Arabic script from the 1850s. Similarly, missionary attempts to spread Christianity to the indigenous communities of the Cape interior also provided an impetus for the printing of Afrikaans. Vernon February has pointed to the importance of the Moravian mission at Genadendal in this respect.[2] This mission established its first school in 1814, and boasted its own teacher-training college, printing press and newspaper. The Dutch-Afrikaans novella, *Benigna van Groenekloof of Mamre*, appeared here in 1873. Available at all Moravian mission stations, *Benigna* tells the story of Rosetta from her birth in 1752 through to her death at age 102. Orphaned at a young age and the victim of racial prejudice, the novella's protagonist, Rosetta, marries and has fourteen children, of whom only four survive. She joins the Christian Colored community at Groenekloof, and after her baptism changes her name to Benigna. The novella is a somewhat pious catalogue of baptisms, marriages, births, deaths, and natural disasters, but it is also poignant in its representation of prejudice and oppression, and prescient in its portrayal of a woman-centred quest for community.

In traditional Afrikaans literary historiography, 1875 represents a founding moment, for it was in this year that the Genootskap vir Regte Afrikaners (GRA – the "Society of Real Afrikaners") was established. The central linguistic aim of this organization, which grew out of an initiative to translate the Bible into a commonly accessible language, was to create the conditions of possibility for Afrikaners to write as they spoke. By doing this, the GRA intended to address the class division between speakers of Dutch and of

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Afrikaans, to counter the effects of anglicization, and to provide a means of responding to the derisive and patronizing attitudes of many English speakers in the colony. The main mouthpiece of the GRA was a newspaper, *Die Afrikaanse Patriot* ("The Afrikaans Patriot"), and along with nationalistic works of history, grammar studies, poetry collections, and children's stories, the organization published several works of prose. Among the most important of these were C. P. Hoogenhout's *Catharina, die dogter van die advokaat* (1879, "Catharina, the Daughter of the Advocate"), J. Lion Cachet's short fictions, which were collected in book form later in 1907 as *Sewe duiwels en wat hulle gedoen het* ("Seven Devils and What They Did"), S. J. du Toit's *Di koningin fan Skeba* (1898, "The Queen of Sheba"), and G. R. von Wielligh's *Jakob Platji* (1918). With the exception of *Catharina*, which won the first ever prize for Afrikaans literature, each of these works was serialized or published in either *Die Afrikaanse Patriot*, or in *Ons Klyntji*, the magazine that appeared from 1886.[3]

The publishing activities of the GRA can best be understood with reference to Benedict Anderson's claims about the role of the novel and the newspaper in constructing imagined communities. Nations are formed not in blood, Anderson claims, but in language. The novel "gives a hypnotic confirmation of the solidity of a single community, embracing characters, author and readers, moving onward through calendrical time," it presents "a sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside."[4] The reading of the newspaper reinforces this construction of an imagined community, since the combination of simultaneity and anonymity that characterizes this "extraordinary mass ceremony," like the novel, allows people to "think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways" (pp. 35, 36). Nations draw on a vocabulary of kinship, home, and love to make themselves appear timeless and inevitable (pp. 141–5). The emblem of the GRA, designed by Von Wielligh in 1877, renders these processes very clear: the words "United South Africa" arch above the motto, "For Mothertongue and Fatherland." Two flags bearing the names of the four states then in existence in South Africa flank an image of a heart containing a bible below a cross.[5] From the outset, an especially strong link between the elevation of the Afrikaans language, the production of newspapers and prose narratives, and the articulation of Afrikaner nationalism can be seen to be in place.

Each of the literary projects associated with the GRA was to introduce themes that would be pursued by later Afrikaans writers. Hoogenhout's novella, for example, explores anxieties around anglicization, taking a determinedly optimistic view of the future of Afrikaans. It also, as C. N. van der Merwe points out, actively valorizes the pious rural life of Oom Jan over that

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of the decadent urbanized advocate, thus articulating a tension between farm and city that constitutes one of the most visible themes of Afrikaans literature.[6] Lion Cachet's "devils" are sins, and the emphasis of his stories falls on the moralistic and the didactic, while Wielligh is best remembered for his paternalistic portrayals of the Khoisan. Du Toit's *Di koningin fan Skeba*, a novel that has obvious affinities with H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), is a travel narrative of a journey to the Zimbabwe ruins and, through the narrator's translations of the manuscripts found there, is also a historical romance of sorts. It is often claimed to be the first historical novel in Afrikaans, though an argument can be made that this title more accurately belongs to *Benigna*. In all of these cases, these works of prose were intended to stimulate an Afrikaans reading public, and by so doing further to develop an emergent Afrikaner sense of self.

Du Toit's fictionalizing of history provided a powerful precedent for the writers of the first two decades of the twentieth century. After the end of the bloody South African War (1899–1902), in which the British imprisoned in concentration camps many thousands of Boer women and children, as well as Africans, there was an increased motivation for Afrikaans writers to define and support the Afrikaner cause. One obvious way in which this could be achieved was through the invocation of an idealized past. Gustav Preller, who served on the Boer side in the war, published war stories and articles, historical sketches, editions of diaries, and biographies of Voortrekkers – those several thousand burghers who migrated from the Cape into the interior of the country in the mid-nineteenth century. J. H. H. de Waal, politician, grammarian, and publisher, set about translating a didactic nationalism into the genre of the historical novel. An investment in cultural nationalism did not always fall back on the invocation of idealized pasts and invented traditions. C. J. Langenhoven, who was at the forefront of the language struggle, was a multi-talented writer whose *oeuvre* includes popular ghost and detective stories, science fiction, children's literature, satire, comedy, drama, translations, and poetry, as well as historical and biblical sketches. His contemporary, C. Louis Leipoldt also produced a number of ghost and detective stories, autobiographical works, children's literature, and three novels, in addition to drama and poetry. Eugène N. Marais, author of the first major poem in Afrikaans, "Winternag" (1905, "Winter Night"), wrote nature studies and short stories – notably *Dwaalstories* (1927) – which the celebrated poet and critic, N. P. van Wyk Louw, was later to celebrate as "among the greatest prose in our language."[7] While Marais and Leipoldt are both best known for their writing of poetry, recent research has turned to their prose and illuminated their writings by showing how both drew on European *fin de siècle* estheticism and symbolism.[8] The connection serves as a reminder that both of

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these writers spent significant periods of time in Europe, were familiar with the literatures of several European languages, and created out of this experience works of considerable esthetic achievement that in some respects develop and transform the European models with which they are in dialog.

In different ways, de Waal, Preller, Marais, Langenhoven and Leipoldt all continued, after the South African War, the efforts of Du Toit and the GRA. Again, the main preoccupation was the valorization of Afrikaans in the face of Dutch and English linguistic hegemony, and in this respect the so-called Second Language Movement was resoundingly successful. Afrikaans was accepted as medium of instruction in schools in 1914, and by 1918 it was permitted in the Church. A number of publishing houses were established to support Afrikaans literary production, and the Hertzog Prize for literature was initiated in 1915. In 1918 the Afrikaner Broederbond, an organization founded explicitly to promote the interests of Afrikaners, came into being. It in turn was later to give birth to the Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Associations, a hugely important umbrella body for all cultural activities. The age of what Giliomee calls "the organisation Afrikaner" had begun.[9] The symbolic high points for language activism came in 1925 when Afrikaans was recognized as an official language of South Africa, and in 1933 when the first Afrikaans edition of the Bible appeared.

While the standing of the language was now guaranteed by statute and manifest in an expansion of literary production, the social and economic status of large numbers of white Afrikaans speakers remained precarious throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The majority of Afrikaners made a living through farming, but drought, rinderpest epidemics, and poor soil management had by the start of the twentieth century led to a crisis in agriculture. The situation was compounded by an inability to adapt to market-oriented farming techniques. Many farmers became heavily indebted and were forced off the land. Newly urbanized Afrikaners could not compete for skilled or semi-skilled labor with local or immigrant English speakers, nor were they willing to accept the wages and working conditions offered to a migrant black proletariat forced to work under wretched conditions. The so-called 'poor white question' became the single most important issue of early twentieth-century South African politics. It also provided Afrikaans prose writers like Jochem van Bruggen, D.F. Malherbe, C.M. van den Heever, Abraham Jonker and Abraham Coetzee, among others, with the material and the motivation for the further exploration of themes already introduced by Hoogenhout as early as 1875: the country versus the city, the relationships between belonging, duty, and belief, and the importance of the farm as foundational and sacred space.

The fact that *Afrikaner* and *Boer* (farmer) are often used as virtual synonyms immediately suggests the role that the farm has had in the construction

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of Afrikaner identity. The development of the *plaasroman* or "farm novel" in the decades preceding the coming to power of the National Party in 1948 constitutes nothing less than a fictional elaboration of a cultural ontology based in Romantic conceptions of the relationships between land and identity. Often – as in the case of Van den Heever, a poet, novelist and critic who was born in a British concentration camp, grew up on a farm, but spent most of his life working as an academic in Johannesburg – the recourse to the *plaasroman* served to elaborate an idealized cultural system of values, and to warn of the threat of other competing systems. In Van den Heever's 1935 novel, *Somer* (Summer), which is indebted to Afrikaans antecedents like Malherbe's *Die meulenaar* ("The Miller"), and also to the Flemish novels of Stijn Streuvels and others, the mysterious Wynand is tragically marked by the corruption of the city, preventing him from union with the blue-eyed, golden-haired farmer's daughter, Linda. By contrast, the farmer-father, Oom Tom, stands as a symbol of honest toil: he resents gossip and interference, he stands by his brother in his moment of need, he is suspicious of mechanization, he respects the strength of the earth and fulfills his duty to ancestors and future generations. The lyrical treatment of nature in this novel serves to reinforce Romantic conceptions of organic wholeness. Nature in *Somer* can be dangerous, as in the hailstorms that devastate the crop, but the real danger is not so much the elements as debt, market forces, middlemen, and the inability of farmers to unite, to resist temptation and avarice.

Also in 1935, Van den Heever published a collection of essays called *Die Afrikaanse gedagte* ("The Afrikaans Idea"), in which he fleshed out the philosophical aspects of his cultural politics through reference to the German thinker, Oswald Spengler, whose *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (translated as *Decline of the West*) had appeared in 1922. Spengler's pessimism about decadent Europe fitted well with Van den Heever's moralistic take on the corrupting cosmopolitanism of the city; his theories of cyclicality succoured a sense of the youthful healthiness of Afrikanerdom; his emphasis on rural Prussian values resonated with Van den Heever's own nostalgia for the farm. Most of all what Spengler offered was a modernized idealism, both philosophical and political, which enabled Van den Heever to reread the history of Afrikanerdom as the history of unfolding self-knowledge, and to elaborate a theory of literature in which writers are translators of the spiritual life of the *volk* (people/nation).[10]

If the GRA imagined a community founded in language, Van den Heever's idealism attempts to forge an ontological presence out of that idea. Still common are references to the Bible, the trek and the farm, but kinship and duty are now consolidated through recourse to a language of soulhood, spiritual values, national character, and destiny.

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The struggling farmers who people Van den Heever's novels are marginal and poor, but they are also on the cusp of recognizing their own power. In this respect Van den Heever is a product of his times, one of the Afrikaner intellectual elite who translated the trauma, anxiety, and resentment of the past into a unified ethnic identity anchored in history, buttressed by literature, mobilized and motivated. The political dimensions of this developing sense of cultural selfhood cohered in the 1930s and 1940s around the "Purified" National Party (NP), under the leadership of D. F. Malan. In 1939 Jan Christiaan Smuts controversially led South Africa into the Second World War on the side of Britain. Though a great number of Afrikaners served in the war, at home the idea of fighting for the former oppressor was repugnant to many. Pro-Nazi paramilitary groups like the *Ossewabrandwag* carried out acts of sabotage and assassination. Culturally, the ideal of an "uncompromising spiritual Afrikanerdom" deepened.[11] When Barry Hertzog and his followers left the United Party out of protest, the *Herstigte* (Reconstituted) NP was formed, considerably strengthening Malan's political hand. In 1948 this party, campaigning under the slogan of *apartheid* ("racial apartness") narrowly won the elections. The NP was to maintain political control of South Africa until 1994.

Apartheid was the central component of NP ideology, but the notion that segregation in South Africa was simply the product of an atavistic Afrikaner racism is widely discredited.[12] As Martin Legassick has shown, relations between trekkers and the indigenous peoples they encountered on the frontier in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were considerably less rigid than is often assumed. On the other hand, British imperial policy in nineteenth-century Natal was very close to the kind of segregation that was later to be practiced in South Africa.[13] Most significantly, throughout the twentieth century, racial segregation served the needs of white capital, English and Afrikaans, by ensuring a steady supply of cheap labor which was especially attractive to labor-intensive industries like mining and agriculture. Racial legislation predates formal apartheid by a considerable margin. Nevertheless, while there are continuities, apartheid was a more comprehensive, intensive and thoroughly planned ideology than any pre-1948 segregationist philosophy, and its racist exclusivity was undoubtedly related to the protection and entrenchment of Afrikaner ethnicity.

The sense of self produced by Afrikaner nationalism that emerges in texts of the 1930s and 1940s implied also a growing consciousness of the "other," particularly as defined in terms of race.[14] As Jakes Gerwel has shown, racial paternalism is present in the work of Malherbe and Van den Heever, and is most obvious in the *Toiings* trilogy of novels written by Mikro (C. D. Kühn) between 1934 and 1944.[15] Often, colored characters serve as sources of

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cheap laughs. Sometimes a deafening silence hangs over the treatment of race: as J. M. Coetzee notes of the *plaasroman*, "the constraints of the genre ... make silence about the black man the easiest of an uneasy set of options."[16] Alternatively, black and colored characters may serve as mirrors of white characters: the obsession with self-identity meant that there was little possibility for racial difference to be inscribed in any way other than as a foil for whiteness. But Afrikaans literature after 1948 increasingly registers a shift in its conception of race. F. A. Venter's 1952 novel *Swart pelgrim* ("Black Pilgrim"), often compared to Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948), tells the tragic story of a young Xhosa man who ventures to the city, but is forced to return to his rural home a broken man. Similar in some respects is W. A. de Klerk's 1964 historical novel *Die laer* ("The Laager") which returns to the well-worn material of the Great Trek, but this time from the perspective of a mixed-race character, drawing attention to the violent effects of Afrikaner nationalism.[17] By contrast with earlier writing, F. A. Venter and de Klerk can be seen to allow the problematic of race to interrupt the self-contained world of Afrikaner nationalism. In response to growing African nationalism and opposition to apartheid in the 1970s and 1980s, this theme was to become one of the central preoccupations of Afrikaans literature.

Though there are exceptions – Johannes van Melle, M. E. R. (M. E. Rothman), and Elize Muller are often singled out – on the whole Afrikaans prose of the first half of the twentieth century has suffered by comparison with the poetry produced by the likes of Uys Krige, N. P. van Wyk Louw, and Elisabeth Eybers. Between 1957 and 1961 Van Wyk Louw himself produced a series of lectures and essays, collected under the name *Vernuwing in die prosa* ("Renewal in Prose") in which he argued that Afrikaans prose had reached a point of "standstill, stagnation, death."[18] But even as he was criticizing what he saw as "cosy local realism" (p. 105), Van Wyk Louw conceded that signs of renewal were emerging in the work of C. J. Nienaber, Jan Rabie, Etienne Leroux, Dolf van Niekerk, and André P. Brink. With the exception of the former, these writers, together with Hennie Aucamp, Chris Barnard, and Abraham H. de Vries came to be known as the *sestigers* (generation of the 1960s) through their association with an avant-garde literary magazine of the same name which appeared between 1961 and 1965. Also associated with the movement were Breyten Breytenbach, Ingrid Jonker, and Adam Small, primarily known for their poetry, but who also produced works of prose, drama, and memoir.[19] The *sestigers* are credited with stamping the imprint of modernism on Afrikaans prose. Most of the major writers associated with the magazine had spent time in Europe, had read widely the works of European and American modernism, and no longer felt it was the task of the Afrikaans writer to support emergent Afrikaner language and cultural projects. Two

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important consequences of this movement were that the novel became, for the first time, the pre-eminent genre in Afrikaans literature, and that a rift began to emerge between writers on the one hand, and the literary establishment on the other.[20]

The rupture initiated by the *sestigers* is evident in one of the most celebrated early works of the movement, Leroux's *Sewe dae by die Silbersteins* (translated as *Seven Days at the Silbersteins*). *Sewe dae* is a parody of the traditional farm novel, though it is also far more than just this. Where Hoogenhout in the 1870s associated the farm with piety and order, Leroux's farm is deliberately represented as a place of diabolical decadence. Where Malherbe, Van den Heever, and others treated the farm as the place where transcendent notions of selfhood could be realized through work, family, and union with the land, Leroux's Welgenvonden turns out to be thoroughly mechanized, defiantly cosmopolitan, and orgiastically promiscuous. *Sewe dae* breaks with both the lyrical romanticism and the obsessive attention to local colour that had been the staple of so much earlier writing about the farm. In terms of form, it is open-ended, following the modernist practice of withholding certainty and resolution. The novel is philosophical, distinctly Jungian in orientation, and is packed with arcane speculation about the relationships between chaos and order, good and evil, occult and divine, and the nature of reality. Given the radical break with tradition presented by *Sewe dae*, it is not hard to see why a wave of protest greeted the award of the Hertzog Prize to the novel in 1964. It was averred of the novel "that it breaks with the values of the *volk*, will cause believers to stumble and is pornographic or immoral."[21] Clearly, by the early 1960s writers no longer felt bound to respect the premises of Afrikaner nationalism in the way they had in earlier, less secure times.

Sewe dae by die Silbersteins may have been controversial, but it was spared the kind of response that was to greet later works which deviated from state-authorized norms. A range of repressive measures and political conditions had, since the 1950s, served to restrict black writers, leading many to exile or worse. In 1963 the first of two sets of laws was passed governing censorship in apartheid South Africa. In 1974 the Publications Act extended the censor's gaze to "anything prejudicial to the safety of the State, the general welfare or the peace and good order."[22] In the very same year Brink's *Kennis van die aand* (translated as *Looking on Darkness*), a political novel of interracial romance, became the first Afrikaans novel to be censored. Many bannings were to follow, including Leroux's *Magersfontein, o Magersfontein!* (1976), censored for its irreverence towards language, religion, and the heroic past. It was not only texts that were to suffer from the state clampdown on dissent. In 1976 the Soweto uprisings were triggered by the government's attempt to enforce Afrikaans-medium education in township schools. In the course of

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the year police killed more than 700 people, many of them children. In 1977 Steve Biko was murdered while in police custody. In the same year a number of organizations were banned, among them the Christian Institute led by the Afrikaner church leader, Beyers Naudé. In response to repressive measures like these, many Afrikaans writers took up increasingly politicized positions. In 1975 the Afrikaans Writers Guild, under the leadership of Bartho Smit, Brink and later Rabie, was formed to protect artists and to resist censorship. Literary magazines like *Standpunte* began to take a more critical line on official policy.[23] The most dramatic stance taken by an Afrikaner writer saw Breytenbach, the leading poet of his generation, sentenced in 1975 to nine years' imprisonment for terrorism.

Not all Afrikaans prose of the 1960s and 1970s exhibited the pyrotechnics of Leroux or the politics of Breytenbach. Karel Schoeman, widely respected as among the most outstanding of South African writers, has for more than forty years been producing novels that are psychologically detailed and meticulously historical, without being markedly experimental or confrontational. Schoeman spent a considerable period of time living in Ireland, and his *By fakkelig* (1966), an historical novel set in a turbulent Ireland of the late eighteenth century, implicitly suggests similarities between the experiences of the Irish and Afrikaners with regard to British colonialism. *Na die geliefde land* (1972, translated as *Promised Land*) is perhaps Schoeman's most explicit comment on the political realities of the times. It tells the story of a character who returns from Europe to post-revolution South Africa to find the family farm ruined and the neighbours isolated and alienated from the new political realities, living a dystopic version of their previous lives. The novel is, as Roos puts it, "a disturbing prophecy of the total degeneration of Afrikaner nationalism in a new state system" (p. 68). Schoeman was to author three further political novels, but his most successful work is probably *'n Ander land* (1984 translated as *Another Country*), a novel that draws on his own historical research to evoke nineteenth-century Bloemfontein.

One of the most interesting of the Afrikaans novel's recognitions of the sociopolitical turmoil that was sweeping black South Africa was Elsa Joubert's *Die swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* (1978, translated as *The Long Journey of Poppie Nongena*), which emerged as a collaboration between Joubert and an Afrikaans-speaking Xhosa woman, who, for reasons of her own safety could only be identified by the pseudonym of the novel's title. The text was lucky to have escaped censorship, for it is a very personal chronicle of the suffering wrought by forced removals, pass laws, exploitation, and state violence. Joubert claimed that every detail of Poppie's story was true, having interviewed members of Poppie's family. Apart from being translated into several languages and turned into a play, the novel seems genuinely to have

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affected the mindsets of some Afrikaners. Joubert claims that when she was about to leave for Johannesburg for an awards ceremony, the wife of then state president, P. W. Botha, telephoned her to wish her luck, saying, "We are holding thumbs for you and *Poppie*." Another member of the government told her that walking down the street after reading the book he suddenly felt as if the population had doubled (suggesting that he was now seeing black people for the first time).[24] Often grouped with Joubert as a politically committed writer is John Miles, whose *Kroniek uit die doofpot* (1991, "Chronicle of a Cover-up") has a great deal in common with *Poppie Nongena*. Though his work is similarly concerned with everyday violence and its effects, Miles, recognized as one of the pioneers of South African postmodernism, is in fact more technically innovative, ironic, and self-consciously literary than is Joubert.

Elsa Joubert's early work includes the apocalyptic 1963 novel *Ons wag op die kaptein* (translated as *To Die at Sunset*), which anticipates what was to become a subgenre of Afrikaans writing, the war narrative or *grensverhaal* ("story from the border"). In 1975 Angola became independent from Portugal, a Marxist government took control in Luanda, and South Africa became embroiled in a war with a combined Angolan and Cuban force seeking to liberate Namibia from South Africa's grasp. *Grensliteratuur* ("border literature") was sometimes written by ex-combatants, as in the case of Alexander Strachan's *'n Wêreld sonder grense* (1984, "A World without Borders") and *Die jakkalsjagter* (1990, "The Jackal Hunter") or two of Koos Prinsloo's collections of short fiction. It also represented the perspective of those left behind at home, as in *Klaaglied vir Koos* (1984, "Dirge for Koos") by Lettie Viljoen (Ingrid Winterbach), a novel narrated by a woman whose husband has left her to take up arms against apartheid. The perspective that emerges in this subgenre is often critical of war, playing on the multiple meanings of *grens* as boundaries of all kinds (which by an interesting coincidence also means to cry or blubber) to explore constructions of gender, ethics, or existential issues. Only occasionally does the *grensverhaal* succeed in linking personal experiences of war with the historical and political underpinnings of particular conflicts. In some texts, such as the title story of J.C. Steyn's 1976 collection, *Op pad na die grens* ("On the Way to the Border"), such an awareness prompts a reactionary retreat into paranoid cultural nationalism. By contrast, Etienne van Heerden's pairing of short stories "My Kubaan" (1983, "My Cuban"), and "My Afrikaner" (1988) constitutes the first steps towards the fictional imagining of an ethical reciprocity.

Van Heerden's 1986 novel, *Toorberg* (translated as *Ancestral Voices*), returns to the conventions of the *plaasroman* in continuation of this ethical theme. While clearly drawing on global literary discourses of postmodernism

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and magical realism, *Toorberg* derives its narrative technique from a combination of Afrikaans literature's long-standing interests in the supernatural and the farm. It rewrites the classical *plaasroman* of the 1930s, but also reworks later versions of the genre like Anna M. Louw's *Kroniek van perdepoort* (1975, "Chronicle of Perdepoort"). The novel tells the story of four generations of the Moolman family living in tenuous isolation on the farm of the same name. Also living on the farm are the *skaamfamilie* ("shame family"), disinherited relatives of the Moolmans, exiled into poverty onto a dusty, barren, isolated part of the farm because of their skin color. When a child falls into a borehole dug to relieve ongoing drought, the crisis forces the two sides of the family into a moment of reconciliation, at which point the drought is miraculously, and temporarily, broken. The narrative emerges in the course of an investigation conducted months later by a magistrate sent to find out if a crime had been committed. The novel's central message, simultaneously political and metaphysical, is that there are no limits on the possible. In its emphasis on reconciliation, signaled dramatically in the face-to-face encounter when the entire family gathers around the borehole in which the child is trapped, it gestures towards a future that in 1986 appeared to many wholly impossible, yet one that was realized most visibly in the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the 1990s.

Afrikaans prose of the last two decades shows a remarkable diversity. In the 1980s, André Letoit, also known as the pop artist, Koos Kombuis, gathered something of a cult following with his experimental prose which includes *Somer II* (1985), a novel in which he returns to and revises Van den Heever's *Somer*. Following on the success of his parodic *plaasroman*, *Foxtrot van die vleiseters* (1993, "Foxtrot of the Meat-Eaters"), Eben Venter produced the highly acclaimed *Ek stamel ek sterwe* (1996, translated as *My Beautiful Death*), a novel that treats the topical themes of emigration and HIV/AIDS in original ways. Of particular significance was the appearance in 1995 of *Vatmaar* by the 72-year-old A. H. M. Scholtz, described by Gerwel as the first Afrikaans novel of literary significance by someone other than a white writer.[25] Established writers continued to produce meaningful work: in Schoeman's more recent work, especially the so-called *Stemme* ("Voices") trilogy – *Die uur van die engel* (1995, "The Hour of the Angel") *Hierdie lewe* (1993, translated as *This Life*) and *Verliesfontein* (1998) – once again, history, landscape, and the intimate detail of individual lives are realized with lyrical precision. Women writers are well represented in this period. Between 1982 and 2003, Dalene Matthee produced a number of very popular historical romances, while Marita van der Vyver's suburban fairy tale, *Griet skryf 'n sprokie* (1992, translated as *Entertaining Angels*), is one of the best-selling Afrikaans novels of all time. Jeanne Goosen, Eleanor Baker,

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Winterbach, Louw and E. K. M. Dido have all produced novels that have attracted critical interest. Elsa Joubert's *Die Reise van Isobelle* (1995, "The Journey of Isobelle") is an epic retelling of a century of South African history as experienced by four generations of a family.

The unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) and the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 triggered a process that was to culminate in the country's first non-racial elections on April 27, 1994. Registering these changes, some of the most critically interesting Afrikaans prose of the 1990s reflects a retrospective, evaluative stance on aspects of Afrikanerdom and its complicity with apartheid-era oppression, as is the case in Mark Behr's *Die reuk van appels* (1993, translated as *The Smell of Apples*), and several novels by Brink. For half a century, Brink has been producing literature that attempts in one way or another to comment on South African society and on relationships between the esthetic and the political. He translates his own work from Afrikaans into English, a practice that arose, at least initially, as a means of circumventing censorship by gaining an international readership. It should be noted, though, that his translations are loose, and are best thought of as related works. Brink is extraordinarily prolific, and has published more than 20 novels in addition to works of literary criticism, translation, drama, travel narratives, and works for children. His work has gone through a number of phases, though certain themes recur and his political commitment is constant.

In *Duiwelskloof* (1998, translated as *Devil's Valley*) he uses Khoi and Xhosa folklore to suggest new hybrid forms of Afrikaner identity. The novel tells the story of an isolated community of settlers who splintered from Gerrit Maritz's trekking party in the 1830s and settled in a remote valley in the Swartberg mountains of the Little Karoo where they have remained until the novel's narrator finds them in the 1990s. As an offshoot from the "Great Trek", largely uninterrupted by the world, the Devil's Valley community can be viewed as a thought-experiment that allows Brink to return to an early point in Afrikaner history and to explore the potential trajectories of certain dominant tenets of Afrikaner culture and belief. Though the novel is not allegorical, present are some of the central founding myths of Afrikaner cultural nationalism: the "hagiographizing" of the ancestors; patrilinear structures of memory; elaborate justifications of entitlement to the land; claims to divine preferment; the prevalence of Old Testament orders of justice and morality; isolationism and oppositional identity politics; the imposition of taboos and sanctions to maintain the blood purity of lineage and clan. *Duiwelskloof* is an important novel because of its explicit and polemical emphasis on the dispossession and miscegenation that have been forgotten by Afrikaner history, and for its calling into question the most exclusionary of Afrikaner narratives – myths of whiteness and purity themselves.

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The revisionary perspective, though by no means as explicit, is also present in Marlene van Niekerk's *Agaat* (2004), the most accomplished Afrikaans novel to appear in the current decade. Marlene van Niekerk made a name for herself internationally with *Triomf* (1994), a tragicomic novel set in the whites-only suburb of the same name, built on the ruins of the once-vibrant multi-racial Sophiatown which was demolished in the 1950s as part of apartheid's urban planning. *Triomf* returns to the 'poor white' theme of the 1930s, but satirically. *Agaat* continues to foreground questions of sexuality and violence, returning to the farm as setting, and entering the consciousness of a woman on her deathbed who is nursed by her servant, Agaat, whom she largely raised. *Agaat* is an altogether more ambitious, sombre, and lyrical novel than *Triomf*. It is concerned as much with the violence underpinning constructions of gender as it is with conducting one of the most intimate novelistic explorations of the embodied nature of consciousness ever undertaken. It is, at the same time, a self-consciously literary novel that incorporates a range of literary, cultural, and historical intertexts, while remaining attentive to the racial, gendered, and class-based dimensions of interpersonal politics – especially that between maid and "madam", care-giver and patient. In its complexity, vision, and poetry, it is a monument to how far Afrikaans prose has come from the days when the novel was considered a mere appendage of the national spirit.

NOTES

1. See Fritz Ponelis, *The Development of Afrikaans* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1993).
2. Vernon February, "Klein begin is aanhou wen" in H. P. van Koller (ed.), *Perspektief en profiel: 'n Afrikaanse literatuurgeskiedenis*, 2 vols (Pretoria: J. L. van Schaik, 1998), vol. I, pp. 3–20.
3. In writing this essay I have benefitted greatly from the literary histories of J. C. Kannemeyer and Henriette Roos. See Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse literatuur,* 2 vols. (Cape Town: Academica, 1978–1983) and *Die Afrikaanse literatuur, 1652–2004* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 2005); Henriette Roos, "Perspektief op die Afrikaanse prosa van die twintigste eeu" in H. P. van Koller (ed.), *Perspektief en profiel: 'n Afrikaanse literatuurgeskiedenis*, 2 vols. (Pretoria: J. L. van Schaik, 1998), vol. I, pp. 21–117.
4. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), pp. 27, 30.
5. The image is reproduced in Rob Antonissen, *Die Afrikaanse letterkunde van aanvang tot hede* (Cape Town: Nasou, 1964), p. 24.
6. C. N. van der Merwe (ed.), *Strangely Familiar: South African Narratives in Town and Countryside* (Cape Town: Content Solutions, 2001), p. 164.
7. N. P. van Wyk Louw, *Vernuwing in die prosa: grepe uit ons Afrikaans ervaring* (Cape Town: Academica, 1970), p. 136.
8. Roos, "Perspektief op di Afrikaanse prosa," p. 33.

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9. Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2003), p. 401.
10. C. M. van den Heever and P. de V. Pienaar (eds.), *Kultuurgeskiedenis van die Afrikaner*, 3 vols (Cape Town: Nasionale Pers, 1945–50), p. 30.
11. The phrase is N. P. van Wyk Louw's, quoted in Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p. 440.
12. William Beinart and Saul Dubow (eds.), *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth-Century South Africa* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 1–24.
13. Martin Legassick, "British Hegemony and the Origins of Segregation in South Africa, 1901–1914" in Beinart and Dubow (eds.), *Segregation and Apartheid*, pp. 43–59; Shula Marks, "Natal, the Zulu Royal Family and the Ideology of Segregation" in Beinart and Dubow (eds.), *Segregation and Apartheid*, pp. 91–117 (p. 94).
14. Ampie Coetzee, *Letterkunde en krisis: 'n Honderd jaar Afrikaanse letterkunde en Afrikaner-nasionalisme* (Johannesburg: Taurus, 1990), p. 19.
15. G. J. Gerwel, *Literatuur en apartheid: konsepsies van 'gekleurdes' in die Afrikaanse roman tot 1948* (Kasselsvlei: Kampen Uitgewers, 1983).
16. J. M. Coetzee, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 5.
17. Roos, "Perspektief op di Afrikaanse prosa," p. 45.
18. Van Wyk Louw, *Vernuwing in die prosa*, pp. 66–8.
19. André P. Brink, *Aspekte van die nuwe prosa* (Cape Town: Academica, 1967), p. 15.
20. See Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse literatuur*, vol. II, p. 229.
21. See *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 355.
22. Publications Act 1974.
23. Roos, "Perspektief op die Afrikaanse prosa," p. 75.
24. Lucy Graham, unpublished interview with Elsa Joubert, April 8, 2003.
25. This comment by Gerwel is on the dustcover of *Vatmaar*. See A. H. M Scholtz, *Vatmaar* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 1995).

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6

SHADEN M. TAGELDIN

The African novel in Arabic

As Muṣṭafā Saʿīd, the Sudanese arch-seducer of al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ's 1966 novel *Mawsim al-Hijra ilā al-Shamāl* (translated as *Season of Migration to the North*), plots to lure and destroy the Englishwoman Isabella Seymour, Isabella pops a question that could as easily be asked of the African novel in Arabic: "'*Mā jinsuka? Hal anta afrīqiyyun am asyawiyyun?*'" ["'What race are you?' ... 'Are you African or Asian?'"].[1] Indeed, to speak of the African novel in Arabic is to raise eyebrows and questions, often interested, but just as often skeptical: What is "African" about Arabic? What is the African or the Arabic "novel"? And what is "Arabic" to Africa? It is, in short, to name a border genre, one that – like the persona of Muṣṭafā Saʿīd, who ends up describing himself as "*mithla ʿUṭayl, ʿarabiyyun afrīqiyyun*" (p. 42) ["like Othello, Arab-African" (p. 38)] – stands at formal, territorial, and ethnolinguistic angles to the African usually given the stamp of "authenticity."

The African novel in Arabic is eccentric to Africa, in part, because the genre is eccentric to Arabic: in its modern incarnation, it owes a few genes to the colonial influence of the Western European novel. Certainly Muṣṭafā Saʿīd's reply to Isabella Seymour's question reminds us that the histories, the geographies, and indeed the ideas of Europe and Africa impinge on one another – his reference to Othello alone bears witness to the profundity of the impact of European cultural imperialism on Arab-African subjectivity and self-writing. But Muṣṭafā Saʿīd's words also suggest another truth, equally important to any conception of the African novel in Arabic: namely, that parts of Africa and parts of Asia have long acted upon one another – that it is possible, in certain contexts, to speak of the African and the Arab in one breath. For if the Arab conquest of Egypt in AD 639 triggered a transformation of vast stretches of North, East, and West Africa into Arabic-speaking or Islamic zones, so too did Africa – feared invader of pre-Islamic Arabia, just protector to the earliest Muslims fleeing persecution, plundered source of slaves and concubines for Arabian tribes – shape the Arab-Islamic, Arabic, and Arabness itself. Still, the African novel in Arabic remains largely a supra-Saharan,

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North African phenomenon, confined to Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and only as far south as the Sudan and Mauritania. As such, it has never quite seemed "African" enough to receive attention in mainstream African literary studies, which tacitly construes the African to mean only the sub-Saharan African, indeed only the "black" African, and Arabic to be as alien to indigenous African cultures as English, French, or Portuguese: a tongue that rings, like those introduced to Africa by modern European colonialism, with disconcerting overtones of empire and slavery.

No doubt such overtones have led some African intellectuals to dismiss the notion that the Arab-Islamic might represent at least one major face of "authentic" African identity. In *Decolonising the Mind* – a call on African writers to produce literature in indigenous African languages – the Kenyan intellectual Ngugi wa Thiong'o notes that his compatriot Ali A. Mazrui has classed Arabic with European colonial tongues and refused it the status of a "native" African language. Here wa Thiong'o challenges that classification, counting Arabic as African; in his later *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams*, however, he leaves Mazrui's assertion that Nobel Prizes in Literature have gone only to Africans writing in "non-indigenous" African languages – among these Arabic – strangely unqualified.[2] Yet Mazrui himself and other African intellectuals, including the Congolese philosopher V. Y. Mudimbe, suggest that both the Ghanaian Kwame Nkrumah and the Senegalese Léopold Senghor – major figures of African decolonization; first presidents of post-independence nation-states; and, interestingly, non-arabophone African Christians – defined Africa along lines that included Arabic, the Arabs, and Islam.[3] Indeed, to Nkrumah's philosophical consciencism, which sought a post-independence Africanness that would "allow the combined presence of traditional Africa, Islamic Africa and Euro-Christian Africa,"[4] and Senghor's Negritude, which entertained bold marriages of *arabité*, *africanité*, and even *européenité*, we might add the thought of the Martinican intellectual Frantz Fanon. In his 1961 *Les Damnés de la terre* (translated as *The Wretched of the Earth*), Fanon – who dedicated himself to the Algerian revolution – urged post-independence Africa to reject the temptation of the color line: the division of Africa into a "white" North and a "black" South and the demonization of Arabic and Islam as alien to African identity.[5]

If modern black African intellectuals are divided on the place of Arabic and Arab-Islamic culture in African cultural life, the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century inventors of the African novel in Arabic were equally so. The Arabic novel emerges in Africa as an indirect by-product of North Africa's first encounter with modern European imperialism: Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798. As early as 1834, Rifāʿa Rāfiʿ al-Ṭahṭāwī, who had traveled to France in 1826 with an Egyptian delegation sent to study the

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secrets that underpinned Europe's expanding empire, launched a translation movement that would import European thought and textual models into Arab Africa and, in so doing, radically transform modern Arabic literature. According to Sabry Hafez, al-Ṭahṭāwī's translation of François de Salignac de La Mothe-Fénelon's *Les Aventures de Télémaque*, published in Beirut in 1867, was soon heralded as one of a new genre of *rūmāniyyāt* ("novels," from the French *roman*) that might impart both morality and modernity to a changing Arabic-language readership.[6] Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, writers from Egypt to Morocco would not only translate European novels, but also novelize Arabic prose, moving it away from Arab-African literary conventions and closer to European ones. Often these early innovators hybridized the Arabic *musāmara*, or "evening entertainment," and *maqāma*, or "rhymed prose frame-tale," with the European novel – as did the Egyptians ʿAlī Mubārak (*ʿAlam al-Dīn*, 1882) and Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī (*Ḥadīth ʿĪsā ibn Hishām*, 1898–1902, 1927) – or married novelistic cues with dramatic or didactic religious forms, as did the Moroccans Muḥammad al-Qurrī (*al-Yatīm al-Muhmal*, 1923) and ʿAbd al-Khāliq al-Ṭurays (*Intiṣār al-Ḥaqq bi al-Bāṭil*, 1933).[7] Their texts anticipated those hailed as the first "true" Arabic novels in Egypt (Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal's *Zaynab*, 1913); Tunisia (Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī's novel-drama *al-Sudd*, 1940); and Morocco (al-Tuhāmī al-Wazzānī's Sufi novel *al-Zāwiya*, 1942). As the novel has gained ground in Egypt (1930s), Tunisia and Morocco (1940s), Libya (1950s), the Sudan (1960s), Algeria (1970s), and Mauritania (1980s), its inspirations and trajectories have multiplied. Today the tradition is vast.

This chapter does not attempt to survey the full sweep of the African novel in Arabic; it elides dozens of fine novelists and the histories, geographies, and life-worlds that their work evokes. Rather, it engages the assumptions that most readers bring to the tradition. Too often the African novel in Arabic – like African cultural production more generally – is read as "national" realism, "postcolonial" affirmation, or (Western-style) "feminist" critique. But what if it is none of these? This chapter will show how three pivotal novelists – writing of Egyptian, Sudanese, and Algerian experience – challenge us to read the African novel in Arabic anew.

On the margins of the nation

No study of the African novel in Arabic can ignore the long and prolific career of the late Najīb Maḥfūẓ (Naguib Mahfouz, 1911–2006), winner of the 1988 Nobel Prize in Literature. Some worry, indeed, that the decorated Maḥfūẓ has relegated novelists more radical than he to the shadows. Yet the

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perceived gulf between Maḥfūẓ and other novelists of post-1960s Egypt is artificial. From his earliest social realism to his more experimental post-1967 writing, Maḥfūẓ's treatments of novelistic time, space, and subjectivity have in fact anticipated the idioms of Ṣunʿ Allāh Ibrāhīm, Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī, ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim, Idwār al-Kharrāṭ, Yūsuf al-Qaʿīd, Raḍwā ʿĀshūr, Nawāl al-Saʿdāwī, and others too numerous to treat here. I cite as just one example the symbiotic relationship between Maḥfūẓ's writing and that of the Egyptian "Generation of the Sixties." From the 1966 publication of Ibrāhīm's novella *Tilka al-Rā'iḥa* ("That Smell"; translated as *The Smell of It*), which featured a manifesto signed by a group of young writers, that generation has styled itself an iconoclastic departure from the Egyptian literary mainstream. Clearly important differences, political as much as formal, separate Maḥfūẓ – a life-long civil servant within the Egyptian state apparatus – from signatories to the manifesto like Ibrāhīm (1937–) and Qāsim (1935–90), both of whom were imprisoned in the Nasser period for left-wing affiliations. Yet Ibrāhīm later acknowledged that Maḥfūẓ had paved the way for literary revolution from the early 1960s, when he "turned his back on Balzacian writing to plunge into interesting adventures, with which the art of the Arab novel leapt a full century forward" ["*wa aʿṭā Najīb Maḥfūẓ ẓahrahu li kitābatihi al-balzākiyyati, li yakhūḍa fī mughāmarātin muthīratin qafaza fīhā bi al-fanni al-riwā'iyyi al-ʿarabiyyi qarnan bi akmalihi*"].[8] Even after the challenge of the 1966 manifesto, Maḥfūẓ would continue to take the "new" and make it newer still. A case in point is Maḥfūẓ's 1975 novel *Ḥaḍrat al-Muḥtaram* (translated as *Respected Sir*). Like Qāsim's 1969 novel *Ayyām al-Insān al-Sabʿa* (translated as *The Seven Days of Man*), which may have inspired it, Maḥfūẓ's novel unfolds to the rhythms of Sufi Muslim devotion. Yet it is Maḥfūẓ's work – not the "radical" Qāsim's – that subverts those rhythms in the unfolding: Capturing a Cairo civil servant's ambition to rise to the rank of Director General, the text represents each successive grade in a corrupt state bureaucracy as a higher order on a Path that perverts that of Sufi enlightenment.

Typifying a recent tendency to discount Maḥfūẓ's radicalism, Samah Selim has argued that the author's early realism ensured his success in the Arabic-speaking world because it squared with Arab critics' insistence on "national reality" as the proper subject of the novel.[9] Certainly the realism of *Bayn al-Qaṣrayn* (1956), on which I focus here, is at least partly wedded to the imperatives of national literature. Written between 1945 and April 1952, just before the Free Officers' Revolution of July 1952 brought both British empire and Turco-Egyptian puppet monarchy in Egypt to an end, *Bayn al-Qaṣrayn* ("Between the Two Palaces"; translated as *Palace Walk*) is the first novel in Maḥfūẓ's celebrated *Thulāthiyya* ("Trilogy") of 1956–7, which also includes

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Qaṣr al-Shawq (translated as *Palace of Desire*) and *al-Sukkariyya* (translated as *Sugar Street*). As its Arabic title suggests, the novel unfolds between two palaces that imprison the would-be Egyptian nation during and just after World War I: that of the dying Ottoman Empire and that of the rising British Empire, which in 1914 declared Egypt a protectorate, deposed its last Khedive, ʿAbbās Ḥilmī II, and anointed a client ruler. It also unfolds between two other "palaces" central to our discussion here: on the one hand, the house of the merchant, patriarch, and playboy Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Jawwād, his long-suffering wife Amīna, and their children Yāsīn, Fahmī, Khadīja, ʿĀ'isha, and Kamāl, located in the medieval street of Bayn al-Qaṣrayn; on the other, the more distant "House of the Nation" (*Bayt al-Umma*) of the Egyptian nationalist leader Saʿd Zaghlūl, exiled to Malta in 1918 after requesting permission from British authorities in Cairo to travel to London and seek independence for Egypt. As the geopolitical upheavals of both British colonization and the Egyptian anti-colonial revolution of 1919 impinge on the timeless rhythms of everyday life in Bayn al-Qaṣrayn, that street becomes a metonym for the fate of all Cairo and, by extension, all Egypt.

Still, as tempted as one might be, following Benedict Anderson's correlation of novel and nation in *Imagined Communities*, to assume that *Bayn al-Qaṣrayn* charts the space-time, or chronotope, of the emerging Egyptian "national collectivity,"[10] I would argue that Maḥfūẓ's early masterwork is in fact a *post-national* text. Indeed, if the novel defines the "nation" at all, it does so pre-, anti-, or extra-nationally. In the historical world that inspires the fictional one of *Bayn al-Qaṣrayn*, Egyptian women were increasingly mobilizing themselves (and being mobilized) as symbols of the nation: as Beth Baron has shown, the famous Egyptian "ladies' demonstrations" of March 1919 led artists to represent "awakening" Egypt *as* "woman."[11] Yet most Egyptian women of the time, as Maḥfūẓ's novel insists, lived beyond the boundaries of this imagined "nation." Thus *Bayn al-Qaṣrayn* wakes not to the rhythms of the nation, but to those of the nation's margins. From its very first words, "She woke at midnight," its eyes open with those of an average woman: the matriarch Amīna, a woman who lives her life secluded in the home and who will be punished on the single occasion in which she ventures outside without her husband's permission. Amīna cannot "see" the nation well enough to tell its time; its chronotope is not hers. At midnight and again at daybreak – liminal moments both – she wakes in darkness and hears the nation only as street babble, as inarticulate speech; by day she glimpses the emerging nation only through liminal space, through the latticed enclosures of the windows of her home. Against the nightly tick of Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Jawwād's walking stick as he returns from evenings of wine, women, and song in the "palace" of desire and raps on the door and the staircase of the

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parallel "palace" of his home – a clock-like tick that marks both his approach and that of colonial (and national) modernity – Maḥfūẓ's narrator pits the traditional silent "intuition, like a conscious clock hand" ["*ʿaqrabu sāʿatin wāʿin*"],[12] that stirs Amīna each midnight.

It is precisely that "pre-national" intuition that makes Amīna collapse space and time in ways that confound the distinction between colony and nation, much to the chagrin of her aptly named son Fahmī (*fahm* means "understanding"): a student of secular law at the newly formed Egyptian University, a modern educated national subject (*effendi*) in the making, and the only truly committed nationalist in his household. Indeed, when Amīna does "see" the nation for the first time, she sees it *in the shadow of the colony*. In a later passage that echoes the spatial and temporal dynamics of the novel's opening scene, we find Amīna at the other end of night – daybreak – stirred once again by intuition, making out the first glimmerings of British presence in Bayn al-Qaṣrayn through the peephole of her sitting-room window. What is arresting about Amīna's first apprehension of the British encampment in Palace Walk, which represents the larger entrenchment of British colonialism in Egypt, is its echo of Egyptian space: the "indistinct human figures" Amīna sees are just indistinct enough that they could be Egyptian (although, of course, they are British officers), and the "things shaped like small pyramids" and "objects like short trees" she discerns – which turn out to be the clustered rifles and tents of the colonizers – evoke the palm-fringed pyramids of Giza that would join other Pharaonicist symbols as visual shorthand for Egypt in post-1919 nationalist iconography.[13] Metaphorically, then, the seclusion of a woman like Amīna from "history" proper – from the nation – enables her to see an epistemological continuum between colonialism and nationalism that bourgeois men of the period, immersed in "history," so often miss. While she cannot explain the occupation of Palace Walk in any rational sense, she "sees" it by an intuitive grasp of the imperceptible line that surrenders routine to rupture. In so doing she also "foresees" the final approach of nationalism as it homes in on her private life.

That the anti-national Amīna spies the hidden shape of Egypt – the real geometry of colony and nation – before even her son Fahmī does so is significant, given that Fahmī is the very voice of nationalism in *Bayn al-Qaṣrayn*. Throughout the novel, Fahmī distributes handbills that claim to speak with the voice of a unitary nation. Declaring, in ringing tones, that "there is no one ..., from one end of the country to the other, who does not seek independence" (p. 346) ["*lam yabqa aḥadun ... min aqṣā al-bilādi ilā aqṣāhā illā wa huwa yaṭlubu al-istiqlāla*" (p. 330)], one such handbill tucks all flyaway wisps of possible indifference to the nationalist project neatly away, insisting that no individual ("no one") and no geography ("from one end of

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the country to the other") exists or speaks – indeed can exist or speak – outside the boundaries of the nation. Significantly, the Arabic term that the handbill uses to describe the emerging nation – *umma* – is one traditionally applied not to bounded secular polities, but to the transnational "mother" community of Muslim believers. It is a word derived from *umm*, or "mother." Yet Amīna, the flesh-and-blood mother of *Bayn al-Qaṣrayn*, sees no part for the *umm* or the *umma* in Fahmī's nationalism. As Fahmī's exchanges with his mother make clear, the *umma*-as-nation holds no currency with her; it is "not worth the clippings from his fingernail" (p. 347). In fact, Amīna *uses* the concept of motherhood to envelop the colonial power within the national fold, abolishing the distinction between colonizers and colonized and thus at a stroke canceling both the colonial and the nationalist projects: "Aren't they [the British] people like us with sons and mothers?" she wonders, drawing explicitly on her own relationship with Fahmī to humanize a colonizer that – historical truth be told – so often did not extend the same humanity to her people (p. 347). Further, to Fahmī's nationalist charge that "[a] people ruled by foreigners has no life," Amīna counterpoises both the commonsensical chronotope of life in its most quotidian, anti-national sense – "But we're still alive ... I bore all of you under their rule" – and the historical chronotope of the pre-colonial, pre-national Islamic *umma*, the mother "community of Muhammad," which, she notes, flourishes despite colonization (p. 347).

The fact that two of the ʿAbd al-Jawwād family's three sons, Yāsīn and Kamāl, embrace their mother's ethos and survive – while Fahmī, the most radically opposed to her world view, dies in an anticlimactic moment of nationalist struggle – suggests that the so-called "naïve" politics of women might take a more accurate temperature of Egypt than the more historically "informed" politics of men. When British bullets finally find Fahmī, the confident nation of the handbills rapidly slips away. All that is left is his inner voice: "*Mā ashadda al-ḍawḍā'a, wa lākin bima ʿalā ṣurākhuhā? Hal tadhkuru? ... Lā shay'a, lā shay'a, ẓalāmun fī ẓalāmin, ḥarakatun laṭīfatun taṭṭaridu bi intiẓāmin ka daqqāti al-sāʿati yansābu maʿahā al-qalbu*" (p. 470) ["How loud the clamor is. But what are they screaming about? Do you remember? ... There's nothing. Nothing. Darkness and more darkness. A gentle motion's pushing with the regularity of the ticking of a clock. The heart is flowing with it" (pp. 492–3)]. What remains, in death, is nothing more than the darkness of Amīna's midnight and daybreak: a darkness in which the Egyptian subject must grope to "see" the colony, the nation, and the future of both imperialism and of the nationalist project – not by the clock of the national chronotope, but by the intuitive clock hand of the failing national heart. Through the questions that the dying Fahmī poses to the nationalism of

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1919, Maḥfūẓ's "realism" of 1952 reaches both its climax and its end at the birth of an independent Egypt.

The (post)colony refracted

I opened this chapter's exploration of the African novel in Arabic by showing how the protagonist of al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ's *Mawsim al-Hijra ilā al-Shamāl*, Muṣṭafā Saʿīd, explodes colonial binaries to expose the historical intimacies of the African, the Arab, and the European. Where Maḥfūẓ tests the limits of the nation, Ṣāliḥ (Tayeb Salih, 1929–2009) puts (post)colonial Arab Africa on trial for failing to recognize that colonial mindsets still shape national attitudes to the "triple heritage" of Africanness, Arabness, and Europeanness, determining which of those legacies nations choose to embrace and which they fight to disavow. Set in the Sudan yet migrating episodically to England, flashing from the colonial years between World War I and II to the post-independence period after 1956, *Mawsim al-Hijra* cross-examines the stories of two Sudanese men, one generation apart, when the pair meet in a village at a bend in the Nile: significantly, a point of crosscurrents where the river changes its customary south-to-north course and flows, instead, from east to west. Here the novel's narrator, a village native just returned from seven years of study in England – the naive face of what we might call post-independence "in-difference," seeing neither tragedy nor blessing in Western colonization, drawn to the Sudan's traditions yet estranged from them too – slowly recognizes himself within the frame of the older Muṣṭafā Saʿīd, a mysterious new arrival who represents the complex face of colonial passion, where irresistible attraction to and uncontrollable rage against Europe meet. Having received his education within frame after frame of empire in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan – first in colonized Khartoum, then in colonizing-colonized Cairo, and finally in imperial London – Muṣṭafā Saʿīd spends some thirty years in England as student, professor, activist, and serial seducer, more notorious for avenging the European rape of Africa with his penis than renowned for his incisive critiques of the economics of imperialism. Those thirty years, which witness the suicides of three Englishwomen (Isabella Seymour, Ann Hammond, and Sheila Greenwood) seduced by his strategic incarnation of England's Othello fiction, climax in his murder of Jean Morris: the only Englishwoman he marries, perhaps because her open racism challenges the delusion that he has overpowered his colonizer and reveals England to be the "hunter" it still is, and the Arab-African its "quarry."[14] The murder brings both his sexual and his intellectual careers to an end and earns him a seven-year prison sentence – a term that corresponds to the narrator's seven years of study in Europe. That coincidence re-embeds the false harmonies of the

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narrator's forgetful (post)colonial selfhood *within* the historical frame of colonial traumas, complicities, and resistances that Muṣṭafā Saʿīd's subjectivity represents. Inclined to write off British imperialism as a passing "phase" in the Sudan's past and to style England and the Sudan unproblematic "equals," the narrator no longer imagines the two a "stone's throw from the Equator" although a "bottomless chasm" of history separates them (p. 60).

Waïl S. Hassan rightly suggests that Ṣāliḥ's liminal origins at the border "where the Arab world merges with black Africa" and marginality "as an immigrant in London" led him to diagnose the "postcolonial" Arab world's relationship to the ex-imperial West as fundamentally *(post)colonial*, premised on illusions (*awhām*) of colonial origin.[15] One such illusion is the belief of many Arab-African intellectuals of the modern "awakening" (*nahḍa*) that the Enlightenment West whose literature and thought captivate them cannot possibly be linked to the imperialist or neoimperialist West that oppresses them.[16] Arguing, perceptively, that Ṣāliḥ's novel constitutes a "hidden polemic" (p. 84) against an entire tradition of modern Arab writing that represents the colonial West in the shape of the sexually desired Western woman – a "masculinist discourse of the colonized [that] feminizes the colonizer" and paradoxically leaves Arab men "epistemically castrated," their "Western mistresses ... endowed with phallic colonial power" (p. 100) – Hassan contends that Muṣṭafā Saʿīd kills Jean Morris in order to expose the ahistorical North–South romance in which too many Arab novelists have trafficked and to "castrate" its power in turn.

Less convincing, however, is Hassan's claim that Muṣṭafā Saʿīd's revenge "fails to grasp the metaphoricity of 'the rape' of Africa" (p. 92). For Muṣṭafā Saʿīd and the Arab-African history he represents, the "rape" of the Sudan is anything but metaphoric. Born in 1898, Muṣṭafā Saʿīd *is* the child of colonial murder and rape. For that year marks the battle of Omdurman in which both British forces and Egyptian troops (colonized by the British yet intent, in turn, on colonizing the Sudan, as Eve M. Troutt Powell has shown) subdued the anti-colonial resistance of the Sudanese Mahdiyya.[17] The massacre of at least 10,000 Mahdists forced many southern Sudanese slave women whose northern masters had been killed to re-enslave themselves to British and Egyptian soldiers (or Sudanese collaborators) in "consensual" relations tantamount to rape.[18] Since Muṣṭafā Saʿīd's father hails from a collaborationist tribe from the "Arab" (Arabic-speaking, Muslim, and often Arab-identified, although often phenotypically "black") north of the Sudan, and his mother is originally a slave from the "black" (non-Arabic-speaking, often non-Muslim) south, ostensibly freed only by her Islamization, she may in fact be one of the raped women of Omdurman. If no less a reader than Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak can say that Muṣṭafā Saʿīd has "violated and killed a few" white women,[19]

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when in fact he never actually rapes any and kills only Jean Morris (in a murder that borders on assisted suicide), it is clear that the structural logic of Ṣāliḥ's novel – walking the fine line between seduction and rape, suicide and homicide, willing servitude and forced slavery – invites readers to rethink the boundaries of "consensual" relations in the colonial and the (post)colonial. The limits of "consent" are tested not just in the war of one avenging Arab-African on the British-colonizer-embodied-in-white-woman, but also in the wars of colonizing British, Egyptian, and Sudanese "Arab" men on the Sudanese "black" women they might well be said, in real-historical terms, to have "violated and killed."

To the illusions that Ṣāliḥ attacks, then, I would add the illusion that Arab Africa can be imagined apart from the black – the very illusion that, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, has fueled the genocidal attacks of Sudanese "Arab" militias on Sudanese "blacks" at Darfur. Bringing blackness out of the margins and into the epicenter of what it means to be "Arab," Ṣāliḥ hints that "Arab" and "black" Africans are linked in relations of intimate enmity not altogether unlike those of England to Arab Africa, and just as often concealed with facile, anti-historical race fictions. He insists that, although themselves colonized and oppressed, "Arabs" have in fact also colonized and oppressed "blacks." Thus both Arab Africa and the Sudan are children of "Arab"-"black" love unions no less fraught with domination and subjection than the union of Muṣṭafā Saʿīd and Jean Morris, and Shakespeare's "blackamoor" Othello – being the English-mediated compound fiction of "blackness" and "Arabness" that he is – may not be a "lie" at all but the near-truth of (post)colonial Sudanese identity. Small wonder that ʿAwaḍ Shalālī, the protagonist of *Dunqula: Riwāya Nūbiyya* (translated as *Dongola: A Novel of Nubia*), a 1993 novel by the Nubian Egyptian writer Idrīs ʿAlī, explicitly invokes the intertext of Ṣāliḥ's *Mawsim al-Hijra* to contest his Nubian father's attraction to and demise at the hands of an *African* Jean Morris, this time a "white" woman of the Egyptian North who represents that region's past subjection of Nubia and more recent reduction of Nubian farmlands, villages, and monuments to submerged ruins by the Aswan High Dam.

ʿAlī's rewriting of *Mawsim al-Hijra* refracts the romantic "unity" of the Nile Valley through the prism of yet another vexed history, striving to correct the self-image of the Egyptian nation-state by returning its broken reflection from the sub-national territory of Nubia. In this it answers Ṣāliḥ's call for a historically mindful modern Arab-African identity. In the mirage-haunted world of the (post)colonial Sudan, where few people, places, or institutions are untainted by the contaminations of colonial power, mere self-reflection defeats self-recognition. It is only in self-refraction, Ṣāliḥ suggests, that the colonized subject may recognize the self. In *Mawsim al-Hijra*, the returned

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narrator's initial delusion that England has not alienated him, that "tradition" remains unbroken – "I was happy during those days, like a child that sees its face in the mirror for the first time" (p. 4) – epitomizes his naive tendency to indulge in surface ("*I* am") rather than symptomatic ("*I* am *that*") readings of his (post)colonial condition. After Muṣṭafā Saʿīd disappears from the village, presumably drowned, the shaken narrator finally enters and confronts Muṣṭafā Saʿīd's locked library of European books and gallery of British women: the English intellectual and psychosexual furniture that the (post)colony hides from view, the better to imagine itself "independent." The "natural" light of windows thrown open to the village sky fails to dispel the darkness of that room. Only when the narrator strikes a match – a Promethean replacement of nature with the modern artifice of fire – and thus concedes the intrusion of "modernity" on the supposed continuity of "tradition," does he begin, slowly, to see. Misrecognition changes into self *re*-cognition: "This is not Mustafa Sa'eed – it's a picture of me frowning at my face from a mirror," the narrator concludes (p. 135) ["*Hādhā laysa Muṣṭafā Saʿīd. Innahā ṣūratī taʿbasu fī wajhī min mir'ātin*" (p. 136)]. For the face the narrator sees is not *in* the mirror. It is not a self-reflection, but a self-refraction: a *picture* of his frowning face disembodied from the plane of the mirror's surface. Watching himself at one remove from his reflection, the narrator finally realizes that the (post)colonial self is not *what* it sees in the mirror, but what it does *not* see.

I have called the narrator – before this moment of awakening – the face of post-independence "in-difference," the embodiment of the (post)colonial nation's naive conviction that it is (or can be) purely self-determined, free of the traces of colonial subjection. Spivak reads the narrator's vague politics more generously. She argues that he is in fact "a vehicle of the undecidable" in the text, whose "signature is the interruption."[20] In a series of brilliant close readings, she shows us how the narrator's interruptions at key moments in *Mawsim al-Hijra* upend any neat assignation of "modernity" or "tradition" to the North or to the South, refusing a postcolonial politics that might become too "identitarian," too binaristic (pp. 55–6). Most critical for my purposes is an interruption in which the narrator leaves the ghost of Muṣṭafā Saʿīd behind in the library – telling the story that will reveal, at last, the murder of Jean Morris – and walks out into the novel's final scene with the words, "I did not let him complete the story."[21] With this act, argues Spivak, the narrator resists identification with Muṣṭafā Saʿīd on the basis of shared culture and – she intimates – shared history. I would suggest, however, that if the narrator's confrontation with his self-refraction in the mirror has taught him anything, it is not that he "is not Mustafa Sa'eed" – as he declares and as Spivak's reading of his interruption implies – but rather that he cannot

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banish Muṣṭafā Saʿīd from his frame of reference: that his "I" is a broken reflection of Muṣṭafā Saʿīd's unhappy colonial history and not the self-contained and self-content mirror-image of the "child" of independence. Just as the (post)colonial subject's true self-image is precisely the one it does *not* see, so too is its true story precisely the one that it does not wish to hear. As much as the narrator may wish to interrupt Muṣṭafā Saʿīd's story, he cannot; Muṣṭafā Saʿīd completes the story anyway, as Spivak herself concedes, in a narratological time and space "outside the encompassing frame of the novel,"[22] outside the narrator's telling of the tale. Thus, although the narrator – not Muṣṭafā Saʿīd – has the literal last word in Ṣāliḥ's novel, Muṣṭafā Saʿīd has the figurative one. If the narrator ultimately interrupts the binaristic logic that divides various "Norths" from "Souths," he does so by admitting – rather than repressing – the repetition of the colonial in post-colonial time: by assuming, not by repudiating, the voice of Muṣṭafā Saʿīd.

In the library of the "dead" Muṣṭafā Saʿīd, just before the novel's final scene in which he himself dives into the ambiguous bend of the river and begins to drown, the narrator happens upon Muṣṭafā Saʿīd's life story, blank save for an enigmatic dedication: "To those who see with one eye, speak with one tongue and see things as either black or white, either Eastern or Western" (p. 150) [*"Ilā alladhīna yarawna bi ʿaynin wāḥidatin wa yatakallamūna bi lisānin wāḥidin wa yarawna al-ashyā'a immā sawdā'a aw bayḍā'a, immā sharqiyyatan aw gharbiyyatan*" (p. 152)]. To a (post)colony that forgets colonization and thus sees with one eye, the MS of Muṣṭafā Saʿīd – the subtext of its selfhood – is unsayable. The autobiography of the (post)colonial subject, those blank pages insist, can only be told *through* the biography of the colonial – that is, through the colonial history that has left him or her with two eyes (black *and* white, Eastern *and* Western), two tongues (English *and* Arabic), and a recognition that these invade each other's presumed purities. That is why Ṣāliḥ's novel is, like the ending of Muṣṭafā Saʿīd's story, narrated "post-mortem," from the afterlife of a narrator who has ostensibly drowned (again, like Muṣṭafā Saʿīd) and is now reborn to see – and to tell – his story anew. What saves the narrator from absolute death is the return of his story in the form of history: the biography of Muṣṭafā Saʿīd.

Declaring memory, killing patriarchy

Muṣṭafā Saʿīd's cryptic dedication calls to mind the words of another Arab-African protagonist similarly torn between the colonial past and the (post) colonial present: the former revolutionary Khālid in *Dhākirat al-Jasad* (translated as *Memory in the Flesh*), a 1993 novel by the Algerian writer Aḥlām Mustaghānimī (Ahlam/Ahlem Mosteghanemi, 1952–). Khālid loses his left

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arm in 1957, during the Algerian War of Liberation against France. After his amputation he flirts with writing but chooses painting when he realizes that he can write only in French – an act that would betray the very struggle for which he sustained his war wounds. Virtually all of Khālid's paintings resurrect Constantine, the eastern Algerian city of his birth, through its bridges. In painting after painting of these bridges – which he conjures forth from exile in Paris, by gazing at the Pont Mirabeau – Khālid reoccupies the very passages that the French besieged as they invaded the mountain city in 1837. But in these acts of reoccupation he never escapes France. It comes as little surprise that when Khālid decides to break with France and return to Constantine for good, he does so by abandoning his bridges to the French mistress he is leaving – Catherine, the symbolic ex-colonizer whose body has filled his, as Jean Morris's does Muṣṭafā Saʿīd's, with nothing but the "ice" of the North and its legacies of colonial incomprehension of the Arab, the African, and the Muslim. "Some people," he tells her,

> are born on a suspension bridge. They come to this world between two pavements, two roads, and two continents. … I've just discovered that I don't like bridges. I hate everything that has two sides, two directions, two probabilities, and two controversies. That's why I'm leaving them to you. I wanted to burn them.
>
> [*Hunāka unāsun wulidū hākadhā ʿalā jisrin muʿallaqin. Jā'ū ilā al-ʿālami bayna raṣīfayni wa ṭarīqayni wa qārratayni. … Iktashaftu annanī lā uḥibbu al-jusūra. Wa akrahuhā kurāhiyatī li kulli shay'in lahu ṭarafāni, wa wijhatāni, wa iḥtimālāni, wa ḍiddāni. Wa li hādhā taraktu laki kulla hādhihi al-lawḥāti. Kuntu awuddu iḥrāqahā.*][23]

Strangely, Khālid imagines his final return to Algeria with precisely the one-eyedness and one-tonguedness that Ṣāliḥ associates with historical amnesia. Perhaps because Algeria suffered a profoundly effacing form of modern European colonialism, Mustaghānimī does not seem to share Ṣāliḥ's contention that decolonization requires a confrontation with doubleness. Colonial Algeria not only was incorporated into the physical geography of its colonizer – declared part of France – but also "lost" its Arabic to French policy, which sought to eradicate the language and supplant it with French. Thus reincarnated by colonization, Algeria has experienced doubleness all too viscerally; in fact, as the title of Mustaghānimī's novel implies, it carries that double condition within its body *as* memory. Here decolonization requires not a remembrance but a forgetting of French colonialism, and a realization in present and future space of the "re-Arabized" nation of which those who struggled for Algerian liberation could only dream. That realization, according to Mustaghānimī, requires an *aller simple* – a one-way ticket – back to

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Africa with no *retour*, or return, to France; it demands that any bridges linking the nation to its colonial antecedent be cut. (Where Tamazight, or "Berber," the pre-Islamic language of Algeria and mother tongue of one-quarter of Algerians today, fits in this reimagined Arab nation remains unclear.)

Not surprisingly, then, the severed bridge marks Khālid's turn from painting to his original dream of writing: of writing novels and writing them in Arabic, a language he taught himself after his amputation in Tunis but never put to literary use. The severed bridge not only avenges his lost left arm, but also restores his unused writing arm – a stand-in for the Arabic language itself, vital yet neglected – by giving it the *qalam*, the pen so closely identified in the Qur'an with creation. Beginning his first novel on November 1, 1988, thirty-four years after "the first bullet in the War of Liberation was fired" on November 1, 1954, Khālid – and through him, Mustaghānimī – ushers in the postcolony by refiring that shot of liberation, and refiring it such that it at once declares national memory and kills national patriarchy.[24] For Mustaghānimī's novel, the first of a trilogy published over a span of ten years – the others are *Fawḍā al-Ḥawāss* (1998, translated as *Chaos of the Senses*) and *ʿĀbir Sarīr* ("Bed Passerby," 2003) – is also the first Algerian novel in Arabic by a female writer. With its publication, Mustaghānimī both joins and challenges the male-dominated canon of modern Algerian Arabic literature. Like her male counterparts al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār, ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd bin Hadūqa, and the "ex-francophone" Rashīd Bū Jadra (Rachid Boudjedra), she reasserts Algerian identity by choosing to write in Arabic; unlike them, however, she uses Arabic to rewrite women into the nation in realist rather than fantasist terms. In so doing she also contests the largely francophone canon of modern Algerian women's fiction. Counting herself among those "Algerian writers writing in Arabic who confront unarmed the onslaughts of Francophony and its diverse temptations,"[25] Mustaghānimī hints that francophone women writers like Assia Djebar have embraced the delusion that French – the colonizer's tongue – can redress the (post)colonial wounds of Algeria and its women (Djebar's 1985 novel *L'Amour, la fantasia* puts a French *qalam* in the severed hand of an Algerian woman). Arabic, for Mustaghānimī, is a viable instrument of both Algerian national liberation and a specifically Algerian brand of "feminism"; French, a proper vehicle for neither. Thus, where Ṣāliḥ suggests that only double voicing can move the (post)colonial subject beyond the blank page of non-identity and reinscribe him or her in history, Mustaghānimī insists that silencing and revoicing are the answer. Since French has silenced arabophone Algeria for so long, Algerians must silence French in turn – even if this silencing renders them temporarily "mute" – so that their land can be liberated anew, this time in

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Arabic. Such is the gesture that the francophone Algerian novelist Malek Haddad, to whom Mustaghānimī dedicates *Dhākirat al-Jasad*, enacted when he refused to write in French after independence and allowed the resulting blank page to assassinate him, dying "a martyr for the Arabic language" ["*shahīda al-lughati al-ʿarabiyyati*"] he passionately desired but did not know.[26]

Mustaghānimī's arabophone "feminism," then, insists that the liberation of Algerian women is tied to the liberation of Algerian men, inseparable as both are from the struggle of all Algerians to end the enduring legacies of French colonialism. Witness the narrative economy of *Dhākirat al-Jasad*. While the novel ultimately rescues the Algerian female body from the disfiguring effects of local patriarchy, it does so first by restoring the maimed Khālid to wholeness through Arabic – and restoring, by extension, all Algerian men wounded in the anti-colonial revolt of May 8, 1945 (in which French armies massacred 15,000 to 45,000 Algerians, including two of Mustaghānimī's uncles) and the Algerian War of 1954–62 to the forgetful memory of 1980s Algeria. The latter is a nation that has sold the ideals of the revolution to crass materialism, egotism, and neocolonial repression. Nothing brings Khālid home to that national reality so sharply as the "ill-tempered customs official, as old as independence," who greets him at Constantine's airport with the pecuniary cry, "What have you got to declare?" ["*Bi mādhā tuṣarriḥu anta?*"].[27] Watching the customs official rifle his meager belongings as the nation's favored new sons pass uninspected, Khālid's body silently declares memory. "My body," says Khālid, "drew itself up as memory before him" ["*Kāna jasadī yantaṣibu dhākiratan amāmahu*" (p. 404; translation mine)], "but he could not read me. It happens that nations become illiterate" (p. 262) ["*wa lākinnahu lam yaqra'nī. Yaḥduthu li al-waṭani an yuṣbiḥa ummiyyan*" (p. 404)]. That Khālid's missing arm and scattered writings eloquently challenge the "illiterate" nation to *read* the lost memory of Algeria evokes Mustaghānimī's poignant wish, in the novel's dedication, that her now-dead father – all his life tormented by his francophone "monolingualism" – might find someone "who knows Arabic to read him this book, his book."

But Mustaghānimī's text also decapitates the pens – French or Arabic – that would write women as land and immobilize them in national nostalgia for the return of an "authentic" Algeria, rid of the marks of colonial history. Whereas Khālid's first return to Constantine from French exile finds him carrying his oldest painting of Constantine's bridges, *Ḥanīn* ("Nostalgia"), his second and final return to the city finds him carrying only the scattered draft of the novel he has begun to write – a text with whose writing *Dhākirat al-Jasad* opens, a text that *is* Mustaghānimī's novel itself. As Khālid gathers its

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scattered pages at customs, he gathers also "*ruʾūsu aqlāmin … wa ruʾūsu aḥlāmin*" (p. 404), a phrase rendered in English as "fragments of a book, fragments of dreams" (p. 262), but which literally translates as "the points of pens … and the heads of dreams, of *Aḥlām*." *Ḥanīn* is, of course, a painting whose completion coincides with the loss of Khālid's arm and the "birth" of the writer Aḥlām, the young Algerian woman with whom Khālid begins a romance of longing in Paris twenty-five years later, in 1982; as Ellen McLarney notes in her insightful analysis of Khālid's nostalgic projections, the conjunction of Aḥlām's "birth" and the painting's is a fact that Khālid mentions more than once to emphasize her embodiment of Constantine and the elusive "homeland" of Algeria.[28] The daughter of Khālid's wartime commander, Sī Ṭāhir, Aḥlām was born in Tunis while her father was away at the Algerian front; originally named Ḥayāt by her mother, she is patriarchally rebirthed when her father asks the wounded Khālid, bound for amputation in Tunis, to officially register her birth under a new name. In a metaphor for an Algerian liberation struggle that involved women as active co-revolutionaries yet consigned them to male domination after independence, Ḥayāt ("Life") becomes abstracted as Aḥlām ("Dreams") at the hands of both her father and his surrogate, Khālid, the would-be lover who regards her as "also, in a way [his] baby" (p. 70). With the turn from painting and toward the writing of this novel, however, Khālid's Aḥlām – this dream baby/woman/city/nation he hungers to repossess – is dead. On his first return to Constantine, Khālid relinquished Aḥlām's painterly "twin," *Ḥanīn*, as a wedding gift to the flesh-and-blood Aḥlām, herself given in marriage to a neocolonial state official and thus lost to him. Now, on his final return, he relinquishes even the residual bonds to Nostalgia that linger in the wake of *Ḥanīn*'s departure. This return actually *beheads* the national dreams that men like Khālid incarnate in women's bodies, and in so doing, it kills off the female protagonist – Dreams, *Aḥlām* – who has suffered the abstractions of his possessive paint-brush throughout. Thus, even as she recovers Arabic for Algeria by allowing the blank pages of silenced francophone compatriots to assassinate French, Mustaghānimī insists that the woman-canvas on which the male literary tradition of her Arabic-speaking compatriots has historically projected the nation be assassinated too.

"'We only write novels,'" says Mustaghānimī's Aḥlām to Khālid at one of their earliest meetings, "'to kill those who have become a burden to us. We write to finish them off!'" (p. 80) ["'*Naḥnu naktubu al-riwāyāti li naqtula al-ashkhāṣa alladhīna aṣbaḥa wujūduhum ʿibʾan ʿalaynā … naḥnu naktubu li nantahiya minhum*'" (p. 123)] – adding, however, that "'in the end we kill only those we have loved'" (p. 9) ["'*fī al-nihāyati lā naqtulu siwā man aḥbabnā*'" (p. 19)]. No better words capture the double edge of the African

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novel in Arabic, a genre that tells the love-hate stories of modern Arab Africa: its violation by Western colonialism and captivation by Western modernity; its pride in and ambivalence toward Arab, African, and Islamic traditions; its struggle to resolve these traces into a truly *post*-national, *post*-colonial, and *post*-patriarchal self dependent neither on the illusion of a superior West nor on the illusion of its own superiority. In the deft hands of Maḥfūẓ, Ṣāliḥ, Mustaghānimī, and countless others, the African novel in Arabic continues both to evoke and to kill off the many burdens of history that mark Africa's internal and external borders, leaving unresolved contradictions and untold injustices ajar for new voices to intervene.

NOTES

1. al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ, *Mawsim al-Hijra ilā al-Shamāl*, 14th edn. (Beirut: Dār al-ʿAwda, 1987), p. 42. Translated as Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, trans. by Denys Johnson-Davies (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1992), p. 38.
2. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1986), p. 30, n. 1; Ngugi, *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams: Towards a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 98.
3. Ali A. Mazrui, "Islam and Afrocentricity: The Triple Heritage School" in John C. Hawley (ed.), *The Postcolonial Crescent: Islam's Impact on Contemporary Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), pp. 169–84; V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 98–134.
4. Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for De-Colonization*, rev. edn. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), p. 70.
5. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, preface by Jean-Paul Sartre, trans. by Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), pp. 160–3.
6. Sabry Hafez, *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse: A Study in the Sociology of Modern Arabic Literature* (London: Saqi, 1993), p. 110.
7. Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq ʿAfīfī, *Al-Qiṣṣa al-Maghribiyya al-Ḥadītha* (Casablanca: Manshūrāt Maktabat al-Wiḥda al-ʿArabiyya, 1961), pp. 19–20.
8. Ṣunʿ Allāh Ibrāhīm, "ʿAlā Sabīl al-Taqdīm," introduction to *Tilka al-Rā'iḥa wa Qiṣaṣ Ukhrā* (Cairo: Dār Shuhdī, 1986), pp. 5–15 (p. 9), translation mine.
9. Samah Selim, "The Narrative Craft: Realism and Fiction in the Arabic Canon," *Edebiyât: The Journal of Middle Eastern Literatures*, 14.1–2 (2003), 109–28 (110).
10. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edn. (New York: Verso, 1991), pp. 24–6; Selim, "The Narrative Craft," 109–28 (110); M. M. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Toward a Historical Poetics" in Michael Holquist (ed.), Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (trans.), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 84–258. The phrase "national collectivity" is Selim's.
11. Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 40–81, 107–34.

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12. Najīb Maḥfūẓ, *Bayn al-Qaṣrayn* (Cairo: Maktabat Miṣr, n.d.), p. 5. Translated as Naguib Mahfouz, *Palace Walk*, trans. by William Maynard Hutchins and Olive E. Kenny (New York: Anchor, 1991), p. 1.
13. Mahfouz, *Palace Walk*, p. 369.
14. Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, p. 159.
15. Waïl S. Hassan, *Tayeb Salih: Ideology and the Craft of Fiction* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), pp. ix, 88.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
17. Eve M. Troutt Powell, *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003).
18. Ahmad Sikainga, *Slaves into Workers: Emancipation and Labor in Colonial Sudan* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), pp. 74–5.
19. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 62.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
21. Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, p. 166.
22. Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, p. 64.
23. Aḥlām Mustaghānimī, *Dhākirat al-Jasad*, 17th edn. ([n.p.]: Manshūrāt Aḥlām Mustaghānimī, 2001), pp. 401–2.

    Translated as Ahlam Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, trans. by Baria Ahmar Sreih, rev. trans. by Peter Clark (New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2004), p. 261.
24. Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, p. 12.
25. Ahlam Mosteghanemi, "To Colleagues of the Pen," trans. by Ferial J. Ghazoul, *Al-Ahram Weekly On-Line*, 409 (December 24–30, 1998), http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/1998/409/cu1.htm.
26. Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, p. [i]; Mustaghānimī, *Dhākirat al-Jasad*, p. 5.
27. Mustaghānimī, *Dhākirat al-Jasad*, p. 404; Mosteghanemi, *Memory in the Flesh*, p. 262.
28. Ellen McLarney, "Unlocking the Female in Aḥlām Mustaghānamī," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 33.1 (2002), 24–44; see especially pp. 29–33.

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7

BERNARD ARESU

The francophone novel in North Africa

Given the intellectual vitality and the political relevance of current novelistic production in French, Jean Déjeux's judgment according to which "'Maghrebian' literature is neither indigenous nor national"[1] stands in need of critical reappraisal. After reviewing the Euro-Algerian figures beyond whose tradition the North African novel clearly asserted its cultural specificity and established distinct cultural identities, the following analysis will cover the broad fictional trends which major figures, now part of an internationally established canon, have defined from the 1950s to the present.

Writing passage

Literary history has so far paid inadequate attention to the production of pre-independence European-Algerian intellectuals who have explicitly written against the grain of the master discourse of colonization. Torn by the irreconcilable constraints of their Algerian identity, their political liberalism, their sympathy to the aspirations of Algerian independence, and the singularity of their ideology, they wrote about "the colonial condition that inexorably rots everything."[2] Some of the works by Emmanuel Roblès (1914–95) and Jean Pélégri (1920–2003), both members of the so-called École d'Alger which also included Albert Camus, bear witness to the passage of an era and the beginning of another time, to paraphrase one of Pélégri's fully drawn Algerian protagonists. They best illustrate the dilemma of commitment and belonging that tore asunder the political consciousness of *engagés* European-Algerian writers who were heeding Camus's own observation, as early as 1939, that working conditions in Kabylie were in keeping with those of a slavery system and that the days of colonialism were numbered.

The frequent images of the mask and of physical debilitation that permeate such a novel as Roblès's *Les Hauteurs de la ville* (1948, "High up in the City"), for instance, coupled with the philosophical sense of absurdity that inhabits Smaïl ben Lakhdar, its Algerian protagonist, serve as an effective

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background to his will to inescapably violent action and to the major political incidents at the center of each of the novel's three sections, which deal with fascism, political sequestration and murder. Roblès once explained that the political content of his novel was dictated by the well-known Sétif events of May 1945, during which French forces violently repressed an anti-colonial upheaval and massacred several thousand Algerians. In that sense, Smaïl's action clearly prefigures, six years before the beginning of the war of independence, the commitment to action of a newly politicized Algerian class that will irrevocably turn the tide of history.

The absence of full-drawn, existentially realistic North African characters in Camus's fiction, as well as its occultation of the political and sociological roots of racial confrontation is a widespread grievance. By contrast, Roblès's meticulous and systematic exploration of his protagonist's psyche, particularly through the narrative device of the interior monologue, shows both deep humanistic acumen and political perspicuity. The motifs of the knife, of political rage and hatred, a sense of debilitating disgust and powerlessness – underlined by an almost existentially ocular awareness of one's shame and humiliation – paint a political landscape of quasi-Fanonian, almost unbearable but nonetheless accurate historical lucidity. "J'étais plein de honte, de colère impuissante, de dégoût" ["I was overwhelmed with shame, anger, and disgust,"] Smaïl exclaims early in the novel,[3] a situation that one can only transcend, in the colonial predicament, through political redemption, through the very elimination of the Sartrian "salaud," the despicable "bastard" whose corruption, power, and arrogance clearly embody stark colonial totalitarianism. As Rachid Mimouni, Yasmina Khadra, Boualem Sansal, and others did, at the turn of the millennium and under different political circumstances, Roblès thus makes a very effective use of the detective novel and of a narrative of political suspense anchored in historically significant contingency. He offers not only a vision of political emancipation but a tale of psychological liberation and metaphysical freedom too, as is made clear by Smaïl's ultimate and complete detachment after his arrest, when a simultaneous sense of indifference to the prevailing order and of ontological peace settles (p. 280).

Notwithstanding Driss Chraïbi's generous reference to Emmanuel Roblès as the elder of all Maghrebian writers of French expression,[4] Jean Pélégri seems to have probed to even greater depths and in more empathetic fashion the subconscious of fully drawn Algerian heroes crushed by the implacable political adversity of the colonial era. One of the epigraphs to his splendid but curiously ignored masterpiece *Le maboul* ("Sidi Slimane's Madness," 1963) thus lets Franz Fanon himself provide a key to its protagonist's enigmatic and tortuous confession. Although, in Fanon's own words, colonial

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violence "bouleverse et casse le monde" ["thoroughly disrupts and shatters the world"],[5] a promise of emancipation emerges out of the tension between the warring forces of the sacred and the secular, the religious and the quotidian, the mythical and the historical that agitate Slimane's complex if muddled consciousness.

Slimane is clearly trying to make sense of events and memories he has confusedly repressed from his childhood onward, in particular the closely intertwined political and personal conflicts that unfolded in and around the small colonial farm where he is employed as the Algerian war of independence rapidly draws to a close. Pushing to its naturalistic extreme the political and metaphysical meditation undertaken in *Les Oliviers de la justice* ("The Olive Trees of Justice," 1959), Pélégri undertakes a major study in psychopolitical conflict almost paradigmatic in its historical significance. The confrontation between Saïd, Slimane's nephew, who has joined the insurgency against the French, and Georges, the farm owner's son, motivated by colonial prejudice, offers a socially accurate, Fanonian, and brutally frank representation of race relations in colonial Algeria. Politically more audacious than Camus's better-known fictional landscapes, Pélégri's narrative is also refreshingly Faulknerian in its esthetic execution and historical interrogation. Indeed Pélégri lays brutally bare the violent currents of hatred and prejudice that underlay the pathology of race relations in colonial Algeria, as well as its societal etiology: machismo, racism, expected submission, ethos of domination, repression of violence, mechanisms of challenge and confrontation, of revolt and revolution. In Roblès's 1948 novel, the Algerian was a political activist. Although in Pélégri's, the Algerian is a victim, the context of political imbalance and domination that leads to his demise is explosively evoked and amounts to a scathing indictment of the colonial order. How the novel escaped controversy and censorship is surprising, as has its lack of literary recognition for so long.

Autobiography and decolonization

At the same time, however, the reality of "the weight and presence of a colonized, silenced, and suffering people"[6] found powerful voices in a generation of novelists who began writing their own histories of the nation – from a simultaneously social, political, and autobiographical perspective. Thus, we now turn to works by intellectuals who in the early 1950s lay the foundations of national and overtly anti-colonial literature (Mouloud Feraoun, Mouloud Mammeri, and Albert Memmi), paving the way for writers who, like Kateb Yacine, Mohammed Dib, and Assia Djebar, will soon after shape what now constitutes a powerful North African tradition of nationalistic fiction.

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Noting the general absence of autochthonous characters in European literature, particularly in works of authors whom, like Camus, he nonetheless considered "des messagers authentiques ... qui ont rompu avec un orient de pacotille" ["authentic messengers ... who have broken away from a counterfeit Orient"][7] Feraoun (1913–62) outlined the literary features that became the hallmark of a whole generation of writers: the subservience of form and esthetics to the documentary representation of cultural singularity, on the one hand, a strategy made necessary by the political shortcomings of writers who had heretofore merely observed North African society from the outside; and, on the other hand, the definition of literature as a political form, a medium for social advocacy and activism. What Feraoun sees as the consistent refusal of European writers to testify on behalf of politically and economically destitute Algerians made it thus necessary to "témoigner à notre tour et pour notre compte ["take our turn to take the witness stand on our behalf"] (p. 55).

Perhaps an apposite illustration of the *littérature de témoignage* and of the sociologically driven Algerian novel, Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre* (*The Poor Man's Son*, 1954) provides a detailed, clearly autobiographical account of rural life in Kabylia with the intent simultaneously to promote its sociocultural singularity and to rescue its sociohistorical reality from the limbo of colonial disregard. The narrative thus provides a detailed description of place and habitat, dwells on the sociology of age-old customs, rites, and practices, as well as on the endogamous structure of the society at hand. The history of the narrator's own *karouba* (extended family) plays an important part too, as does the socially binding function of such artisanal traditions as weaving, pottery, and storytelling. The narrative also evokes life at the colonial school and reflects on inheritance customs and on the chronic rivalries that poverty and the necessities of survival engender.

It would be a mistake, however, to read Feraoun's narrative as mere ethnological apologia for a threatened culture. The point is that despite his friendship with liberal European-Algerian writers, and in particular with Emmanuel Roblès, Feraoun explicitly decried their works' dearth of autochthonous representation. The importance of his own novel, furthermore, lies in his determination to "raconter sa propre histoire" ["tell his own story"], a project simultaneously egotistical, regional, and realistic. It is thus only semi-jokingly that Feraoun invokes, in the italicized preamble that constitutes the novel's first chapter, the inspirational agency of Michel de Montaigne, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Alphonse Daudet, and Charles Dickens.

Despite the sense of narrative artificiality they impart to the novel, the two sections that follow the more ethnographically conceived "La famille" ("The family"), namely "Le fils aîné" ("The elder son") and "War,"[8] both focus on the devastating economic disparities that nearly scuttle underprivileged

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young men's education at the teachers' school, on the issue of chronic, alienating material destitution, as well as on the tangled contingencies of European wars and colonialism. The thematic shift is enormous. It makes of Feraoun, assassinated in March 1962 by colonial extremists, a man whose literary engagement substantially strengthened the North African tradition of the novel of ideological awakening and political maturation.

To this tradition Mammeri (1917–89), also an Amazigh writer, will contribute an important trilogy that comprises *La Colline oubliée* ("The Forgotten Hill," 1952), *Le Sommeil du juste* ("The Sleep of the Just Man," 1955), and *L'Opium et le bâton* ("The Opium and the Stick," 1965). A journalist, an essayist, a novelist, and an anthropologist, Mammeri likewise geographically located the action of his novels in his native Kabylia. His internationally recognized linguistic and ethnographic work on Amazigh cultures throughout North Africa substantially invalidates, at the same time, his detractors' pious discomfort with what they perceive as his regionalist limitations. Despite institutional opposition, moreover, Mammeri's efforts as a methodical surveyor of his own society, of its language, culture, and identity contributed as much to the elucidation of what Sansal recently termed Algeria's millenary identity as to the much needed scholarly recording of his own ancestral civilization.[9] Furthermore, the thematic and formal progress of Mammeri's trilogy, which traces the evolution of a first nascent then systematically organized nationalist movement, suggests a lucid sense of history and a coherent political vision, particularly in the last two novels. Emphasizing the outwardly expanding movement of the trilogy, Mammeri once observed that while the first novel focuses on the universe of a happy, self-sufficient village life, the next two would foreground "l'insertion douloureuse dans la rigueur des choses" ["one's painful insertion into the urgency of events"].[10] Despite its occasionally academic self-consciousness, *L'Opium et le bâton* constitutes one of the most important chronicles of the Algerian war of independence to date. Although Mammeri's literary production has yet to garner the scholarly recognition bestowed on North African writers of sometimes less significance, it impresses by its pioneering treatment of issues paradigmatic to one's understanding of the changing tide of events in postwar Algeria. In short, the thematic evolution within Mammeri's trilogy is important in that it reflects, from *La Colline oubliée* to *L'Opium et le bâton*, the radical change that occurred since the time when humanistic social realism dominated Feraoun's testimony, his own contribution to the narratives of Feraoun's "authentic messengers."[11]

The issues of literary testimony and authenticity make it now necessary to turn to two figures central to the history of the North African novel in French, Memmi and Camus. A prolific novelist, sociologist, and essayist born in

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1920, the Tunisian Memmi is the author of *Portrait du colonisé* ("The Colonizer and the Colonized") a classic of decolonization and in its time a prophetic volume indispensable to one's understanding of the nexus of reciprocity that binds together and at the same time opposes colonizer and colonized, and of the inherently self-destructive nature of the colonial enterprise. Memmi also wrote subsequent volumes on Jews and Arabs, on racism, and, more recently in *Portrait du décolonisé* (2004) on decolonized subjectivity. Memmi has also dealt with his Maghrebian identity in several novels, of which the seminal *La Statue de sel* ("The Pillar of Salt," 1966) still remains the best known because of the problematic of race and class and the malaise of cultural alienation that it confronts in the form of still another autobiographical novel.

Memmi's narrative constitutes a drastic indictment of the stultifying dead end of economic exclusion and cultural erasure that threatens to engulf the protagonist, indeed, all colonial subjects at a time, the book makes clear, when colonial powers could renege on promises of emancipation and equality with impunity. Memmi's story microcosmically opens within the description of the protective, cocoon-like space of an "impasse" (a short, private dead-end street) seemingly destined to emblematize the integrity of both selfhood and identity in an ethnically fragmented, pre-national society. The conclusion of this colonial *Bildungsroman*, however, contests the existential primacy of the emblematic "impasse" in startling, pessimistic terms. It questions the very existence of that space to the point of completely reversing its initial symbolism. Ill at ease in his native land but possessing no other, living a borrowed culture, having divested himself of all religious and cultural traditions, Memmi's anguished protagonist, who now describes himself as a man in perpetual rupture, chooses to emigrate and, destroying the journal he has kept all along, erases the very genealogical projection of his identity. The existential distress and pessimism of this novel are apposite.

Apropos of a January 1956 meeting that brought together Camus with fellow Algerians *militantly* engaged in the war of independence, Mohamed Lebjaoui observed that Camus seemed "à la fois tendu et décidé, résolu, mais inquiet, net dans ses jugements, mais incertain sur les remèdes – et encore loin, surtout, des réalités du moment" ["both tense and determined, resolute but worried, clear in his judgments but unsure as to remedies – and still removed, above all, from immediate reality"].[12] The judgment throws an important light on the anguished quandary that runs through the notes of "Annexes," the section of *Le Premier Homme* (1994) that contains substantive references to the Franco-Algerian conflict, and which his accidental death in 1960 unfortunately prevented Camus from expanding. As is well known, Paul Cormery's search for filial origins, the history of the beginnings of

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colonization, and a sort of panorama of the culture of poor working class *pieds-noirs* occupy most of the novel. But the undeveloped notations in the "Annexes" section of the manuscript also return to concerns he had previously addressed with more lucidity than Lebjaoui is able to concede,[13] observations crucial to one's apprehension of the significant novelistic developments on the verge of taking place. Whether he was addressing the issues of economic dispossession, ideological doublespeak, police torture, ethnic violence, fratricidal alienation, the political mendacity of colonialism, or the need for wholesale land restitution to the dispossessed whatever the political cost, Camus was advocating a pluralistic vision of Algeria convergent with discourses of intercommunal complementarity at the core of current debates on national identity.

Narrating the nation

Of Camus and Memmi's North African autobiographies, however, it can be said that they do not engage situational and political conflicts on a discrete nationalistic or collective level. Neither do they reflect, consequently, the perception of colonies as imminent *nations* that pervades the works of their fellow North African writers. By contrast, a clear thematic rift, a major political transformation, as well as important esthetic shifts characterize the literary production of the following generation of novelists. As the Algerian war of liberation grew more intense, the national aspirations of a people translated into books of bold historical reassessment and explicit nationalistic affirmation that went hand in hand with a radical rewriting of novelistic traditions. The thematic of writing as a political, metaphysical, and individuating experience will also become central to the conceptualization of the novel. In contrast to Feraoun and Memmi's projects, and furthermore, the revolutionary lyricism of Kateb's fiction, Dib's blending of the political and the metaphysical, and the historically probative meditations of Djebar's novels, are striking both for the mettle and the depth of their systematic exploration of the genealogy of the nation. These projects paradoxically bring together the questions of origin and of modernity in ground-breaking narrative constructs that will pave the way for the subsequent reflections on national identity, particularly in the Algerian fiction of the 1980s.

More than any other pre-independence writer, Kateb (1929–89) was prophetically aware that at the core of the colony, to paraphrase Benedict Anderson, a nation was imagined and emerging.[14] It is the imminence of such a momentous historical change that *Nedjma* (1956) and to a certain extent *Le Polygone étoilé* (1966) relentlessly plumb. As a novel engaging, fictionally, politically, and against the grain of colonial denial, the very

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definition of the Algerian nation, *Nedjma* remains exemplary among the works of that generation of writers.

Exactly half a century after its publication, furthermore, Kateb's contribution to the esthetics of the novel remains extraordinary, owing to the rich textual diversification that emerges out of the collapse of traditional generic categories. Kateb's practice of a systematic *métissage* of the genre of the novel is dialogic and heterodoxical in its relationship to the poetry and political plays that he was also writing at the time. It is also intertextual in its often parodic reference to a host of writers and traditions, both North African and exogenous. As I have suggested elsewhere, the explosion of esthetic traditions that presided over the production of Kateb's texts goes hand in hand with the decentering role of a rich intertextuality.[15] Parodied, politically transformed, expressive of plurality and diversity, rewritten within what Abdelkebir Khatibi has described as "narrative[s] of translation,"[16] such intertextuality remains central to the modernistic elaboration of an Algerian text that dismantles every esthetic structure it has inherited. The multiplicity of Kateb's narrative strategies has long been documented: use of fulgurating surrealistic images, descriptive lyricism, intrusion of first-person diaries, as well as metaphysical amplification of narrative lyricism, whereby personal conflict or even cosmic description generate, through a process of textual drift, a terroristic allegorization of history, of protest and rebellion.

Through a rhetoric of narrative duplication and diffusion, a ceaseless movement of discursive disruption, through narrative progress and retreat, *Nedjma* (and later *Le Polygone étoilé*) ultimately fulfills two objectives: the weaving, on the one hand, of a convincing tapestry of the social and political ills that affected colonial Algeria, and, on the other, the liberation of a national imaginary through the subterfuge of a narrative amplification of the ancestral figure of Keblout whose legendary characterization becomes an emblem of sedition and resistance.

At the same time, however, the text weaves an intricate fabric of imagined (and historically symbolic) tribal relationships, both in the present and across centuries of invasions and displacements, an evocation that seeks to elucidate the problematic definition of the nation and that will leave its mark on subsequent generations of writers, from Tahar Djaout to Salim Bachi. Kateb's art of innovation and commitment produced a fundamentally new novelistic language that effectively harnessed the tension Roland Barthes has described as the fundamental inadequation of language and the real,[17] that is to say, in the case of political writers like Kateb, the incongruence of inherited discursive traditions with the reality of contemporary historical change.

Kateb's greatest legacy is that he gave the North African novel the imprimatur of a uniquely modernistic and hybrid form, and the first fully fledged

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literary expression of Algeria as a national entity, laying to rest Camus's anguished interrogations about the nation's past. Literary history may one day rightly decide, however, that the prolific Dib (1920–2003) remains no less a prodigious representative of such a tradition, particularly with respect to the novels that followed his Algerian trilogy. It is indeed astonishing that despite worldwide acclaim,[18] for the most part his novels are still awaiting English translations. Like those of many of his fellow Algerian writers, Dib's early novels realistically and sociologically depict the mostly rural Algerian society of the 1930s and 1940s under the yoke of hunger, poverty, and oppression, thus substantially contributing to the *littérature de témoignage*. Attempting to faithfully represent the life of the society that surrounded him, he felt united to his people through a tacit contract of political accountability.

It is in the esoteric representation of the cataclysm of war, however, that Dib formally contributed to a significant recasting of the North African novel in French. Because of the date of its publication, *Qui se souvient de la mer* ("He Who Remembers the Sea," 1962), for instance, constitutes a veritable turning point that systematically resorts to oneiric representation and a quasi-surrealistic grammar of images. As a deliberate producer of dreams, Dib's novel experimentally and quite successfully appropriates the combined mode of science fiction and fable in order powerfully to evoke, in conscious remembrance of Pablo Picasso's "Guernica" and in a deliberately quaint, rare, mythological, as well as coded language the brutal saga of military repression.

Le Maître de chasse ("The Lord of the Hunt," 1973) deserves special attention, however, because it exemplifies, eight years into the Boumédienne era of intense socialistic industrialization (1965–78), a process of interrogation that calls into question the humanistic failures of the revolution, in some ways a harbinger of the literature of dissent that will flourish in the 1980s and 1990s. Dib's mode of questioning, however, is philosophically, or more precisely mystically formulated. That myth and mythology intricately cohere with social preoccupations is perhaps made most apparent in that novel which, although published in 1973, refers to the Algerian sociopolitical landscape of the mid-1960s.

Privileging gaze, voice, gestural language, the novel evolves in the form of a series of concentrically arranged, theatrically uttered interior monologues replete with formulaic repetition. It relies from beginning to end on a process of narrative indirection and elaboration particularly apparent in the sequences foregrounding the illuminated Lâbane's intense dialogue with the novel's title figure, whose status remains fraught with numinous ambiguity the better to accomplish semantic pluralism.[19] Although recognizably set in post-independent Algeria, the novel remains essentially a novel of political

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and geographical atopia in that political allegory and social identity prevail over chronological or historical specificity.

In a telling confrontation between Kamal Waëd, the modern technocrat, and a dying *wali* ("regional officer") who embodies lasting faith in peasant-based revolution and agrarian values, Dib thus prophetically identifies the stakes involved in future internecine struggles for political allegiance, intuitively identifying the paradigm of deontological and political contradiction with which primarily materialistic thought systems and oligarchic power have failed to come to terms. A kind of authoritarian, neonationalistic unitarianism, for instance, poisons Kamal Waëd's distrust of the moderately religious Madjar. Through specious hyperbole, he thus warns the *wali* that Madjar's support of the peasants makes of him "un ravageur de civilisation, de valeurs morales" ["a destroyer of civilization and moral values"] threatening to return the country to its "barbarie originelle ["fundamental barbarianism"].[20] Unperturbed, however, the *wali* offers the countervailing and historically accurate observation that the maligned fellahs embody the nation's original clay, "la pâte originelle de ce pays" (p. 16).

Domestic political unrest, the failure of the single party regime, and the upheaval of 1988 violently repressed by the Algerian military will soon move to the forefront of novelists' preoccupations. In various narratives of origins, post-1988 writers will also fathom the rich historical and cultural plurality of Algeria's national heritage that Kateb had already forcefully evoked in *Nedjma*. Indeed the issues of national origins and historical determination become motifs central to the post-independence fiction of dissidence, filigreeing themselves into text after text, from the novels of Mimouni to those of Djaout, Sansal, and Bachi.

But an analysis of Djebar's unique contribution to the narrative of the nation and of her groundbreaking gendering of national discourse is first in order. So will be the survey – brief only for reasons of space – of other essential narratives of interpellant subjectivity by such prominent writers as Chraïbi, Khatibi, Rachid Boudjedra, Tahar Ben Jelloun, and Abdelwahab Meddeb.

Djebar has described on several occasions the narrative challenge she experienced and the creative process she underwent as a bilingual writer, particularly in the semi-autobiographical novels of the "Algerian Quartet." The latter collapses personal, gendered, and national narratives in which Djebar set out to give North African women a literary voice that would reverse the long repressed record of their social and literary exclusion, seeking to explode a personal space "éperdu de cris sans voix, figés depuis longtemps dans une préhistoire de l'amour" ["filled with desperate voiceless cries, frozen long ago in a prehistory of love"].[21] She has also carefully assessed the competing strategies with which her project must come to terms: the use of

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French as simultaneously the conqueror's language (*la langue adverse*) and the *langue de dehors*, the controversial language of unveiling that also presides over a translational return to "la parole traditionnelle comme parole plurielle."[22] The latter is the literary translation of the oral subterranean mode through which her subjects have traditionally spoken, as well as the North African writer's dualistic relationship with the language of the Qur'an and Tamazight (Berber), North Africa's pre-Arabic language. The novels thus illustrate the transformation of a genre that becomes fictional speleology, a probing narrative that conjoins at once the historical, the autobiographical, the archival, and the cinematographic. In turn, the themes of the veil, screen, and voice, for instance, play a crucial role. As a veritable architecture of images, the narrative shifts back and forth between the oral and the written, thereby recapturing history (personal and collective) in vivid pictorial and kinetic fashion, as well as through an impressive array of references to the emergence of voice and language. It also draws substantially from references to painting, empowering the observer, now able to gaze at the traditional gazer, ultimately to subvert and recast both colonial and patriarchal modes of representation.[23]

The interdependence of the written and filmic texts – Djebar is an accomplished cinematographer – makes of the sociographic and psychological treatment of her subject a richly dialogic and contrapuntal one. Personal life and colonial history provide the woof and the warp of *L'Amour, la fantasia*, which focuses on the dramatic fall of Algiers in the nineteenth century and on the authorial search for an individuating language of desire against the background of competing and seemingly exclusionary cultural traditions. In the story of the co-wives Isma and Hajila, *Ombre sultane*, the second volume of the quartet, pursues Djebar's reflection on gender emancipation within the parameters of simultaneous collusion and conflict and against the reterritorialized background of *The Arabian Nights*. In its reflection on Algerian society as well as its evocation of the unraveling of a married couple's life, however, *Vaste est la prison*, the third volume, returns more overtly to the historical and autobiographical mode of the quartet's first novel, interpolating, furthermore, the diary of the filming of *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua*, which is made to provide a collective amplification of the drama of the liberation of woman's voice.

In their alternation of personal and historical strands of narration, finally, the quartet's novels systematically pursue the reciprocal destabilization of traditional topoi and dichotomies – whether linguistic, literary, artistic, or pertaining to the discourse of love, a procedure made all the more powerful by Djebar's poetic, allusive, almost reticent, often recondite narrative processes. Djebar's narrative provides its own metaphorical definition of the intimate

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mechanism of such a strategy of poetic elusion and its apprehension of ontological emergence: "Mais je n'aspire qu'à une écriture de la transhumance, tandis que, voyageuse, je remplis mes outres d'un silence inépuisable" ["But as a nomad replenishing her water skins with inexhaustible silence, I only aspire to a writing of transience"].[24]

The self and the community

With independence and the challenge to conjure up, to paraphrase Nabile Farès, a North African history liberated of all the conquests it had experienced,[25] the novel quickly sought to establish its own ethical hierarchy within the pressing and sometimes conflicting actualities of the new political order. As Edward Said's concept of secular criticism aptly suggests,[26] institutionalized practices of power and authority naturally call for countervailing forces of resistance from individuals and social movements alike, thus making "texts" necessary, and possible. Such a mechanism of institutional scrutiny going against the grain of orthodox complacency will serve the North African novel well. As early as 1961, Malek Haddad (1927–78) starts questioning, in *Le Quai aux fleurs ne répond plus*, the power of intellectuals to bear upon the sense of history. From the late 1960s onward, such writers as Mourad Bourboune (born 1938), Farès (born 1940), and Boudjedra (born 1941) will put their stamp on a literature of dissidence which, while unabashedly contesting the new social order, continues to renew the novelistic genre with incessant and imaginative vigor. While the stuttering and atheistic protagonist of Bourboune's post-war, splendidly iconoclastic *Le Muezzin* (1968) struggles to make sense out of the seeming inanity of his forbears' involvement in the Revolution, Farès's *Yahia, pas de chance* (1969), *Un Passager de l'Occident* (1971), *Le Chant des oliviers* (1972), and above all *Mémoire de l'absent* (1974), attempt to map out, at times as if anamnestically, a pagan, authentic history of the nation that purports to counteract the sterility of its single-minded bureaucratic and technocratic commitment.

In Algeria, however, Boudjedra may remain one of the most important figures of his generation, owing both to the thematic breadth of his literary output and its substantial esthetic evolution. A prolific writer in both Arabic and French, Boudjedra is the author of approximately fifteen novels, which, from *La Répudiation* (1969, translated as *The Repudiation*) to *Les Funérailles* (2003), address issues of political corruption, patriarchal tyranny, and religious totalitarianism. Calculatingly disruptive and controversial, Boudjedra's narratives reflect a politically combative and poetically aggressive view of literature as a tool for subverting and reversing the dysfunctional structures of the social order. Such is the case of the partially autobiographical *La Répudiation*, for

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instance, a familial, oedipal novel ostensibly dealing with the search for the lost father but which also prophetically lashes out at the political bankruptcy of leaders torn between personal financial interests and the seduction of reactionary religion. The ludic, elaborative quality of Boudjedra's prose, furthermore, makes it open to a richly intertextual and citational strategy of writing that makes of him probably one of the most experimental, postmodern North African writers, although one not immune to the risk of falling prey to the kind of cultural mimesis with which he himself is wont to find fault.

Boudjedra's novels also concern themselves with the pathology of sexual repression. They almost psychoanalytically and often naturalistically stage women's poignant struggle against misogynous abjection. Adopting the mode of the diary, the 1986 narrative *Leiliyat imraatin arik*, also written in French and in English, indeed eschews the pattern of dialogic narration for which Boudjedra was well known thus far. The narrative collaboration of Céline and Rachid in the first novel comes to mind, as does Selma's incitement of Tahar El Ghomri's traumatized and confused remembrances in *Le Démantèlement* ("The Unraveling," 1982), a novel also about the elucidation of Algerian history and the attendant rewriting of history. Such patterns significantly change in *The Rain*, a story told by the voice of a single female character. "My pen scratches the smooth white paper, scoring it deeply. ... As if I wanted the words to become wounds which cannot heal,"[27] declares the lethargic young surgeon during the first of the six nights over which she completes the diary of a woman deeply aggrieved by a social environment whose sexual prejudices deny her the most basic sense of identity. Struggling to recover from the symbolic (and traumatic) injury of her brother's cruel slap when, as a child, she inquired about the first physical manifestation of her puberty, she morbidly spins, with at times almost Keatsian lyrical cloyness but above all with salutary determination, the dense web of the social barriers she encounters at every turn of her familial and professional itineraries. The ensuing psychic wound deeply conditions the therapeutic function of the speaker's account and underwrites the confessional mode of a narrative fundamentally psychoanalytical in its execution.

On the Moroccan front, the novels of Chraïbi (1926–2007), particularly in their earlier, inaugural phase, also belong in the tradition of polemical and contestatory fiction, particularly as they question the ruthless structure of North African patriarchal traditions. Chraïbi's first novel *Le Passé simple* (1954, translated as *The Simple Past*) may thus have indeed provided a template for Boudjedra's *La Répudiation*, although more a thematic than a formal one. Having utterly rejected the notion of identity crisis and of cultural *déchirement* ("devastation"), furthermore, Chraïbi advocated (and literarily practiced) a humanistic convergence of cultural modes while

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simultaneously affirming the cosmic primacy of his native soil as well as the personal, originative significance of Arabo-Islamic traditions. The better to affirm his sense of creative autonomy and his belief in the evolution of cultures, however, he also went as far as provocatively suggesting that one's definition of the self need not depend on either the state, a civilization, or even a society. In that sense, *Le Passé simple* remains emblematic of his enormous literary production, epoch-making in its virulent critique of a Moroccan society then still under colonial occupation. The novel also represents the crucible of forms, intertextual elaboration, and themes that will evolve and mature in subsequent works, from *La Civilisation, ma mère!* (1972) and *Une Enquête au pays* (1981), to the retrospective and autobiographical narratives of *Lu, vu, entendu* (2003) and *Le Monde à côté* (2001), and even the humorous narratives of the Inspector Ali novels.

As it depicts the internecine struggles and the psychological cruelties the male members of a dysfunctional family inflict upon their mother and on each other, the profound modernity of *Le Passé simple* lies in its linguistic innovativeness, its rupture from inherited novelistic forms, its caricature – daring for its time – of the sacrosanct figure of the North African father, as well as its representation of psychological conflict in terms of reactive occurrences frequently resorting to chemical or mathematical allusiveness. Indeed, entire sections of Chraïbi's novel bear such subtitles as "Le réactif" and "Le catalyseur" ("The Reactant" and "The Catalyst"),[28] and the use of figures of speech from the natural science register, not quite surprising from a novelist who originally graduated with a degree in chemical engineering, has the disquieting function of framing the sociological implacability and pathological sclerosis of the Ferdis' collective emotional disarray. With clinical ruthlessness, the novel erupts in an anarchical profusion of frequently embedded and repetitive narratives, flashbacks and flash-forwards that magnify its mordant irony, not to mention the intermittently sadistic comportment of Driss Ferdi, the best educated of the seven brothers and the novel's Gidian and polemical protagonist.

Mention should be made of the Tunisian Meddeb (born 1946), still another important figure not only for the grounding of his fiction in mystical discourse and his recent reflection on Islamicism, but for the literary significance of *Talismano* (1979), a novel that has been aptly described as part of "a single and complex literary discourse about the multiplicity and multilingualism of Maghrebi identity."[29] Similar to Djebar's and other North African novels, Meddeb's elaborates a speleology of the self that proceeds through the simultaneous affiliation with and contestation of plural and refracted origins.

As the recent publication of *Pèlerinage d'un artiste amoureux* (2003) suggests, the Moroccan novelist, art critic, and literary theoretician Khatibi

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has not ceased to remain at the forefront of a literary production that has textually examined, in such narratives as *La Mémoire tatouée* (1971), *Amour bilingue* (1978), and *Le Livre du sang* (1983), issues of erotic journeying and mysticism from the manifold perspectives of cultural history and of the idiomatic discontinuity and multilingualism that antedated the colonial condition. Citing what he sees as Kateb's "impossible *return* to his native language," Khatibi defines writing as a calligraphic process and the writerly practice of the narrative as a space of creative tension between two originally conflicting exteriorities, a process whereby "a foreign tongue is not added to the native tongue as a palimpsest but transforms it."[30] In *Agadir* (1967), *Le Déterreur* (1973), *Une odeur de mantèque* (1976), and *Légende et vie d'Agoun'chich* (1984), the Moroccan novelist and poet Mohammed Khair-Eddine (1941–95) also wrote his own history of Moroccan society, in turn virulent in its Rimbaldian representation of oligarchic failures, or celebratory in its evocation of Amazigh culture. Still in Morocco, Ahmed Sefrioui (1915–2004) had already provided, in *La Boîte à merveilles* (1954), a sociological vision of his country antithetical to Driss Ferdi's revolt and germane in terms of realistic measure to its feminist depiction in Fatima Mernissi's *Rêves de femmes* (*Dreams of Trespass*, 1994).

A similar sense of measure also pervades Ben Jelloun's fiction. Indeed, whether he addresses the issue of the Holocaust, the Palestinian condition, or the current Algerian tragedy, Ben Jelloun embodies that definition of the artist for whom, to paraphrase Said, writing and circumstantial reality become actualized in a text that bespeaks both sensuous particularity and historical contingency.[31] Ben Jelloun's sociopolitical narratives astutely intertwine the traditions of the Orient and the West, Arabic and French, contemporary politics and popular storytelling, political consciousness and metaphysical mysticism, poetic fabulation and historical realism.

Harrouda, his first novel (1973) thus loosely constructs a simultaneously fictional, historical, (auto)biographical, political, and theoretical narrative that derives strength and originality as much from poetic refraction and metaphysical interrogation as from the metaphorical corporealization of writing. The relentless effort to break up the mirror of narcissistic projection finds its strongest expression in *L'Écrivain public* ("The Itinerant Writer," 1983). Perhaps his philosophically most pregnant text, this work radically poeticizes and autobiographically fictionalizes Ben Jelloun's quest for the metaphysical liberation of the self through language. Moving the boundaries of the autobiographical genre toward a kind of metafiction that problematizes the process of self-writing, *L'Écrivain public* illustrates better than any other work the writer's self-conscious struggle against the trap of narcissistic representation. Simply designated as *récit*, its action conjures up an itinerary

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of displacement and quest located in a series of *autobiographically* significant places: Fez, Meknès, a military camp, Tangiers, Tetouan, Lebanon, Medina, the Greek port of Khania, as well as the islands of Chios and Crete.

Ben Jelloun's most popular works to date, the diptych of *L'Enfant de sable* (1985) and *La Nuit sacrée* (1987), concern the ambiguous and violent ordeal of a woman coerced by familial, patriarchal, and social domination to assume the sexual identity of a man.[32] Pursuing the metaphysical exploration of language and self, the two narratives deal with an alienating and destructive ordeal progressively reversed into an initiatory and re-originative experience.

Dissident histories

As the political unrest that led to the "new Algerian war" of the 1990s was gathering pace, novelists like Mimouni (1945–95), Djaout (1954–93), Khadra (1956–), Sansal (1949–), and Bachi (1971–) relentlessly and courageously started to question – sometimes at the cost of their own lives – the hypertrophic communitarianism and the systematic process of historical elision that had long dominated the single party's discourse of the nation. Economic setbacks, political scandals, factionalism, institutional monopolies, the practice of censorship, and disinformation as well as religious extremism are also factors that resulted in the silencing of *vox populi* and intellectual debate in what Sansal has described as "the blockade of thought." The civil war lasted roughly from the brutally repressed upheaval of October 1988 to the referendum on President Bouteflika's 2005 Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation.

It is against such a sociopolitical backdrop that as countervailing forces of ideological resistance, Mimouni's narratives were the first to advocate the need to rediscover the essential part of the national self and to decipher its actual idiom. Long before the full explosion of the civil war, Mimouni's novels were already indicting the diverting of history from the progressive premises of the war of liberation to self-serving structures of autocracy and oligarchy. Some of Mimouni's unforgettable Nietzschean caricatures thus reflect a sociopolitical order wherein the artful manipulation of power, truth, economic discrimination, and corruption reign supreme, in the hands of individuals that have come to embody the "conscience of pure beasts of prey." Mimouni's fiction lays the ground for a new generation of dystopian and dissident narratives such as Khadra's *Morituri* (1997), Sansal's *Le Serment des barbares* (1999), and Bachi's *La Kahéna* (2003).

The protagonist of *Tombéza* (1984), for instance, is the physically and morally deformed product of illegitimacy, depravity, and lust. Lending his very name to the novel's title, he metonymically embodies the social

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miscarriage of history and a landscape of ruthless opportunism and epidemic corruption. In the tradition of magical realism, furthermore, *L'Honneur de la tribu* resorts to the extraordinary and the fantastic to depict the destructive and vengeful return of a spurious prodigal son, Omar El Mabrouk. When the novel describes in mock-mythological fashion the forced implantation of technology into the heavily traditional and agrarian universe of the tribe, a series of oppositions between order and chaos, faith and ideology, as well as the transcendental wisdom of tradition and the disruption of modernity vividly evokes the crisis of the hour.

Before an assassin's bullet cut short a promising literary career, Djaout wrote an important monograph on fellow Amazigh writer Mammeri, co-edited a collection of short stories on the Algerian war of liberation, and authored four novels that also contribute to the neodissident trend that calls into question the truncation of historical discourse and the misrepresentation of national identity. *L'Invention du désert* ("Inventing the Desert," 1987), however, his most allegorical and poetic text, transcends the mere dystopian statement of contemporaneous facts into a thematically multi-layered narrative that seeks to push back the social and chronological borders of the nation beyond the date of 1830, according to which Algerian history only began with the French invasion. In the tentative, exploratory biography of Ibn Tumert, the twelfth-century zealous and inflexible reformer who brought down the Berber dynasty of the Almoravids only to see his own dynasty of the Almohads later collapse, Djaout attempts to reconstruct an apposite moment of "national" history altogether not irrelevant to the rise of religious extremism in the contemporary context. Both an agonic referent and a *tabula rasa*, Djaout's desert then becomes the objective correlative and cosmic site for the transhistorical elaboration of the image of the nation. Nomadic in its references and progression, Djaout's narrative cultivates stylistic and generic plurality, which includes the use of poetry and journalistic discourse. Significantly, though, the novel strategically eschews contemporary Algerian history, stitching instead, within the dynastic saga itself, a contrapuntal reconstitution of childhood memories, nostalgic, ludic, pagan, cruel too, the better to manipulate the story's nodal points of historical amplification.

If *L'Invention du désert* constitutes a hiatus in the explicit examination of contemporary society that Djaout had undertaken in other novels, it nonetheless relies on a process of interpretive multiplication that will also serve Khadra well, although within the narrower boundaries of a thoroughly different novelistic medium. Indeed, the novels by Khadra known as the Commissaire Brahim Llob trilogy exploit the convention that grants the police detective the special status of an ethical observer of his community

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and makes of him the moral interpreter of its complex ethos. Shocked by events personally witnessed, the novelist set out to write *Morituri* (1997), the first volume of the trilogy, in response to a sudden need to dissect the implacable mechanism of sectarian violence. The search for the missing daughter of a former government official who still wields significant power and influence then naturally turns into the depiction of an empire of corruption ruled, as President Boudiaf tragically pointed out in a now famous phrase, by the politico-financial mafia. In the Algerian detective novel of the 1990s, the quest for the elucidation of sociopolitical chaos supersedes the mere cognitive challenge of the traditional whodunit. Just like Roblès's hardboiled novel of political action and its focus on the inequities of colonial society, Khadra's detective story, with its repeated meditations on the decaying fabric of Algerian institutions, and which one must read along with his political essay *L'Imposture des mots* (2002), provides an unsettling discourse of want and destitution, and a moving portrait of individual fortitude as well.[33] With chapter after chapter enriched by the earthy puns and language of the underworld, it realistically relates the perversion of human dignity and the dereliction of legality that a self-deprecating man of integrity quietly sets out to undermine. Even as it inevitably draws from some of the conventions of the Western detective novel, Khadra's prose sparkles with Algerian immediacy and poeticisms, and its degree of stylistic denaturalization situates the novel within an unmistakably Maghrebian *episteme*.

Sansal's brilliant *Le Serment des barbares* (1999) also written in the style of the detective novel, seems to concur with Commissaire Llob's political diagnosis that "l'autodafé des serments" ["the auto-da-fé of oaths"][34] not so much bankrupted the revolutionary dream of collective national reconstruction as stultified the nation's very self-image. A stylistic antithesis to Khadra's lean, journalistic prose, however, Sansal's novelistic discourse radically diversifies the genre. A baroque mode of narrative amplification and a North African sense of oral profusion – one sentence runs over no fewer than eleven pages, for instance – splendidly bring about the kind of "return [of] meaning to the lost language, to literature, re-anchoring it in absolute alienation and dissidence" that Khatibi had eloquently advocated.[35]

Like Djaout's and to a certain extent Kateb's, Bachi's vision encompasses vast historical expanses while evoking both the malaise of failed political experiments and civil war.[36] Through its emblematic foregrounding of the legendary Berber queen, a symbol of age-old resistance and a marker of national syncretism, the novel *La Kahéna* (2003), above all, brilliantly revives the Katebian mode of lyrico-historical evocation that overturns the univocal representation of the Maghreb "cherchant à gommer le syncrétisme de ses peuples" ["seeking to erase the syncretism of its peoples"].[37]

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Djebar has frequently commented on the status of women writers experiencing "the loneliness of creativity" within communities hostile to deviation from institutional discourse. Djebar, however, had deemed it an urgent task to preserve the "source" of women's writing, a concept that in her mind subsumed both location and moment. In words that could describe the post-independence advent of a generation of women writers who have made a both substantial and distinctive contribution to the novelistic genre, she also remarked that feminine writing finds "son ancrage … dans le corps, corps de femme devenu mobile et, parce qu'il se trouve en terre arabe, entré dès lors en dissidence" ["anchoring in the body, the woman's body made free and, because of its location in Arab land, henceforth engaged in dissidence"].[38] The frequently autobiographical narratives of such writers as Hélé Béji, Mernissi, Malika Mokeddem, and Rajae Benchemsi, indeed constitute the many faces of a vibrant movement of gendered and dissident subjectivity. A both lyrical and satirical urban novel, Tunisian writer Béji's *L'Oeil du jour* (1985), for instance, excoriates the hollowness of mimetic modernity while painting a quasi-mythological representation of its narrator's grandmother's ancestral home. Blending sociological discourse with the narrative poetry of North African traditions and daring to imagine the unachievable, Moroccan sociologist Mernissi's autobiographical *Rêves de femmes* (1994) incisively depicts the intricate network of traditions and protocols a woman negotiates as she carves her own sociological and subjective space within modern society.

Such psychological narratives as Malika Mokeddem's *Le Siècle des sauterelles* ("Century of Locusts," 1992) and *L'Interdite* ("The Forbidden Woman," 1993), furthermore, painstakingly map out the anguished itinerary of a woman escaping the prison-house of family and clan-driven conformity, subsequently achieving individual liberation within the inviolable space of writing. Likewise, in her collection of ontologically driven short stories *Fracture du désir* ("Desire Ruptured," 1999) and novel *Marrakech, lumière d'exil* ("Marrakesh, Light of Exile," 2002), Moroccan writer Benchemsi brilliantly stitches modern philosophical traditions into subjective narratives of intense introspectionism. The recent publication of the provocatively erotic and ostensibly autobiographical narrative *L'Amande* ("The Almond") under the suggestive pseudonym of Nedjma,[39] finally, clearly underlines the extent to which gendered North African writing in French has carved its own autonomous space of existential and ideological discursiveness.

As the esthetic singularity and the ideological autonomy of its fictional production suggests, less than half a century since the inception of decolonization and since the emergence of the great novelistic voices of the 1950s, the evolution of North African fiction in French has resulted in a plurality of discourses that embody national traditions of their own, and

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whose mutations, present and future, can now take place within a luxuriant polyphony of styles and narrative processes.

NOTES

1. Jean Déjeux, "Francophone Literature in the Maghreb: The Problem and the Possibility," in Patricia Geesey, Guest Editor, "North African Literature," *Research in African Literatures*, 23.2 (Summer 1992), 5–19 (5).
2. Jean Pélégri, "Les Signes et les lieux : essai sur la genèse et les perspectives de la littérature algérienne," in Giuliana Toso Rodinis (ed.), *Le Banquet maghrébin* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1991), pp. 9–35 (p. 10).
3. Emmanuel Roblès, *Les Hauteurs de la ville* (Algiers; Paris: Charlot, 1948), p. 39.
4. Driss Chraïbi, "Emmanuel *Ben* Roblès, un homme de chez nous," *Revue Celfan*, 1.3 (1982), 24.
5. Pélégri, *Le Maboul* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), p. 11.
6. Pélégri, "Les Signes et les lieux, " p. 19.
7. Mouloud Feraoun, *L'Anniversaire* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1972), pp. 54–5. Such writers as Camus, Dib, Roblès, Feraoun, Pélégri, and Mammeri were quite familiar with and respected each other's works, and had sometimes collaborated on literary or journalistic projects of common interest. The literary history of these intersections remains to be written.
8. On the subsequent and inexplicable cuts from the original edition by the French editor, see James D. Le Sueur's introduction to Feraoun, *The Poor Man's Son*, trans. by Lucy R. McNair (Charlottesville; London: University of Virginia Press, 2005), pp. xxvi–xxvii. The American edition restores the novel to its original version.
9. Boualem Sansal, *Poste restante: Alger: lettre de colère et d'espoir à mes compatriotes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), p. 33.
10. Quoted by Djamal Amrani in *La nouvelle république* (15–16 March 2003), and reprinted in "Mouloud Mammeri," http://dzlit.free.fr/mammeri/html.
11. Feraoun, *L'Anniversaire*, pp. 54–5.
12. Mohamed Lebjaoui, *Vérités sur la révolution algérienne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p. 40.
13. See for instance the journalistic texts collected in the section "Terrorisme et répression" of Albert Camus, *Essais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), pp. 1865–72, which appeared as early as 1955.
14. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London; New York: Verso, 1991), p. 101.
15. Bernard Aresu, *Counterhegemonic Discourse from the Maghreb: The Poetics of Kateb's Fiction* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1993), pp. 3–72.
16. Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel* (Paris: Denoël, 1983), p. 186.
17. See for instance Roland Barthes, *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p. 11.
18. On Mohammed Dib, see, for instance, Naget Khadda's *Mohammed Dib, cette intempestive voix recluse* (Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 2003).
19. "Le maître de chasse" signifies both hunting master – stressing the supremacy of skill – and lord of the hunt – foregrounding that of authority.
20. Mohammed Dib, *Le Maître de chasse* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1973), p. 16.

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21. Assia Djebar, *L'Amour, la fantasia* (Paris: J. C. Lattès, 1985), p. 13; Djebar, *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade*, trans. by Dorothy S. Blair (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993), p. 4.
22. Djebar, *Ces voix qui m'assiègent* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999), p. 77.
23. I have discussed the esthetics of Djebar's convergent use of screen and voice in "(D)écrire, entendre l'écran: *L'Amour, la fantasia*," in Sada Niang (ed.), *Littérature et cinéma en Afrique francophone: Ousmane Sembène et Assia Djebar* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), pp. 209–24.
24. Djebar, *L'Amour, la fantasia*, p. 76, my translation.
25. Nabile Farès, in Charles Bonn (ed.), *Anthologie de la littérature algérienne* (Paris: Livre de poche, 1990), p. 128.
26. Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 1–30.
27. Rachid Boudjedra, *Rain: Diary of an Insomniac*, trans. by Angela M. Brewer (New York: Les Mains Secrètes, 2002), p. 10.
28. Driss Chraïbi, *Le Passé simple* (Paris: Denoël, 1954), pp. 115, 175.
29. Andrea Flores Khalil, *The Arab Avant-Garde* (Wesport, CT; London: Praeger, 2003), p. xxiii.
30. Anne-Emmanuelle Berger (ed.), *Algeria in Others' Languages* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 158.
31. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, p. 39.
32. On *L'Écrivain public* as well as on Ben Jelloun's diptych, see "The Narrative Made Flesh" and "Decolonizing the Body" in Bernard Aresu, *Tahar Ben Jelloun* (Saratoga Springs: CELAAN, 1998), pp. 25–35 and pp. 35–46 respectively.
33. Yasmina Khadra is Mohammed Moulessehoul's nom de plume.
34. Khadra, *Morituri* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), p. 178.
35. Khatibi, "Diglossia" in Berger (ed.), *Algeria in Others' Languages*, p. 159. Written in the form of an open letter, Boualem Sansal's *Poste restante: Alger: lettre de colère et d'espoir à mes compatriotes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006) takes on the related issues of repossessed memory and national malaise. My "Translations of Memory from Kateb to Sansal" (*L'Esprit créateur*, 43.1 (Spring 2003), 38–43), discusses some of the novel's major narrative traits.
36. Particularly in *Le Chien d'Ulysse* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001).
37. Salim Bachi, *La Kahéna* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003). Translation mine.
38. Djebar, *Ces voix qui m'assiègent*, p. 86.
39. (Paris: Plon, 2004), trans. by C. Jane Hunter as *The Almond* (New York: Grove Press, 2005).

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8

LYDIE MOUDILENO

The francophone novel in sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan francophone literature has evolved into a distinct area of literary expression and critical study, yielding an impressive body of texts in poetry, drama, and the novel. Starting in the first decades of the twentieth century, texts written in French by African authors have been successively gathered under the rubrics of "black writing," "Negro-African literature," "African literature of French expression," "francophone African fiction," or "francophone literature," and, more recently, "postcolonial literatures." A multiplicity of factors – such as political events, institutional practices, migration movements, literary trends, intellectual exchanges, and individual creativity – has determined the ever-changing contours of the field. While there is no doubt that it is poetry which gave francophone African letters its most famous figure, namely, Negritude poet Léopold Senghor, African francophone literature as we know it today owes much of its solidity to the novelists, who have continuously engaged the novel as a form in order to express the specificities of the African experience at particular moments in history. In so doing, they have created a new literary tradition, characterized by certain topoi and regularities, but also, within the genre itself, by a formidable diversity of voices.

What was once thought only in terms of marginality has in turn produced its own canon. First, if we agree with Roland Barthes that a "canon is what is taught,"[1] and if we consider North American syllabi alone, a significant corpus fits this criterion. Likewise, with the existence of at least a half-dozen pedagogical guides with titles such as *Les Classiques africains*, the re-editing of older novels, the choice of dissertation topics and the number of scholarly essays, there is no denying that authors such as Mongo Beti, Camara Laye, Cheikh Hamidou Kane, Mariama Bâ, and many others have been crucial to the shaping of francophone African fiction. Finally, as is typical of canon formation, the many and varied instances of intertextuality within the texts themselves keep confirming a number of authors' authoritative status, generation after generation.

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What I propose to do in this essay is to present some of the major novels which have contributed to the formation, visibility and strength of francophone African fiction since the first decades of the twentieth century. In so doing, I will situate each text within what French critic Jean-Marc Moura calls its "postcolonial scenography."[2] That is, its position within specific contexts that determines both the production and the reception of the text, ultimately affecting its longevity as a respected literary artifact. It is my hope that such an approach will offer insight not only into individual texts but also into a corpus which constitutes an essential archive of African literary production.

Francophone African fiction has its beginnings in the first decades of the twentieth century. Critics generally agree that the 1920 narrative *Les Trois Volontés de Malik*, by Senegalese author Ahmadou Mapaté Diagne, is the first work of fiction in French published by an African. A thirty-page tale consisting of a series of vignettes, it tells the story of a Senegalese boy's successful assimilation into his colonized environment. Written by a Senegalese teacher as a textbook for his students, the story reads like a tale of colonial exemplarity. It is also very visibly fraught with assimilationist rhetoric, glorifying the colonial "civilizing mission," urging Africans' collaboration and praising the value of technical training for young Africans. Despite these obvious weaknesses, the text is not without interest, however, precisely as a fiction of colonial propaganda.

Other novels from the early decades continue to open the field, falling prey to various ideological agendas. Among these are Senegalese Bakary Diallo's *Force-Bonté* (1926) about a *tirailleur sénégalais* (a colonial infantryman) and his experiences during World War I, Ousmane Soce's *Mirages de Paris* (1938), a novel about a young man who travels to France for the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Felix Couchoro's *L'Esclave* (1929), the story of a young boy's daily life in his owner's family, and Paul Hazoume's *Doguicimi* (1938), an epic novel set in pre-colonial West Africa.

Up until recently, critics have referred to these authors as the "precursors" or the "pioneers," in a way which situates them, almost invariably, as mere preliminaries to the more significant, or perhaps more literary endeavors of the post World War II era. They are only now beginning to be included in the canon of francophone African letters. Nevertheless, the stories imagined by Diallo and his contemporaries deserve attention precisely because they help to illuminate the early conditions of formulation of African writers. Thematically, these works forestall many of the paradigms and modalities which will continuously resurface in subsequent years. For example, beyond its patently assimilationist discourse, *Les Trois Volontés de Malik* stages a colonial trajectory akin to the later *Bildungsromane* of Ferdinand Oyono or

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even Kane. Here already, we encounter the archetypal figures of the village elder, the compliant mother, the orphaned schoolboy and the schoolteacher, to name a few. In Soce's *Mirages de Paris*, the encounter with the colonizer's world can be seen as a first instance of the "travel to the metropole," a theme which will prove an unrelenting source of inspiration for subsequent novelists, most recently in the migrant literature of the 1980s and 1990s. Similarly former *tirailleur* Diallo's autobiographical *Force-Bonté* deals with African troops' participation in European wars, an issue continuously revisited in subsequent years in fiction and film, such as: Oyono's novel *Le Vieux Nègre et la médaille* (1957, "The Old Man and the Medal"), Boubacar Boris Diop's play *Thiaroye terre rouge* (1981), Ousmane Sembène's film *Camp de Thiaroye* (1987), Bassek Ba Khobbio's *Le Grand Blanc de Lambarene* (1995) and, more recently, Daniel Kollo Sanou's semi-comedy *Tassuma* (2002).

In a still different vein, Hazoume's *Doguicimi* (1938), is the work of a respected ethnographer, winner of the 1937 Grand Prix littéraire de l'A. O. F. ["Oriental Africa's Great Literary Prize"] for his work on sacrifices in nineteenth-century Dahomey. Hazoume engages the genre of the epic novel to provide, in the French language, a historical account of West African kingdoms in pre-colonial times. Following different ideological agendas, writers like Djibril Tamsir Niane (*Sundiata ou l'épopée mandingue*, 1960), Yambo Ouologuem (*Le Devoir de violence*, 1968, "Bound to Violence"), and Ahmadou Kourouma (*Monnè*, 1994) to name a few, have in turn engaged the generic elements of the epic in order to fulfill their respective projects.

If most novels from the early decades were largely ignored upon release and have remained secondary since, there is perhaps one notable exception: René Maran's 1921 novel *Batouala*. Its auspicious beginnings were already facilitated by its initial release by the prestigious Parisian Éditions Albin Michel. Based on Maran's experiences as a colonial administrator in Central Africa, the novel opens with a highly charged preface by the author: "Civilisation, civilisation, orgueil des Européens et leurs charniers d'innocents ... Tu bâtis ton royaume sur des cadavres. Quoi que tu veuilles, quoi que tu fasses, tu te meus dans le mensonge."[3] ["Civilization, civilization, pride of the Europeans and their mass graves of innocent victims ... You are building your kingdom on corpses. Whatever you want, whatever you do, you are living a lie."] In spite of (or perhaps because of) this explicit attack on the abuses of French colonization, the French Société des gens de lettres decided to award *Batouala* the prestigious Prix Goncourt in 1921. Naturally, it increased the novel's circulation. It also added insult to the injury that many right-wing French saw in Maran's work: not only was the prize being awarded to a black man for the first time in its history, it was awarded to an overtly anti-colonialist black man.

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What is particularly striking here is the role of the Prix Goncourt in framing the novel's place in the African literary canon. As one critic puts it, "En couronnant *Batouala, véritable roman nègre* en 1921, les jurés du *Prix Goncourt* délivraient à la littérature noire d'expression française son certificat de naissance."[4] ["In crowning *Batouala, a true negro novel* in 1921, the jury of the Goncourt prize were handing to black literature written in French its birth certificate."] On the one hand, as Chevrier suggests, it takes a very prestigious French institution to grant African literature its "birth certificate." At the same time, that very same official recognition guaranteed that the novel was immediately banned in Africa by the colonial administration. With the "Batouala affair", the African novel enters into the literary world in a cloud of ambivalence, scandal, and suspicion, a cloud which, in a sense, it will never completely leave.

The general intellectual effervescence and the spectacular literary endeavors of the post-war period are the result of several converging factors. Some of these have to do with colonial policies. Others come from Africans themselves. Among the factors that facilitated the explosion of texts after the war were the new educational policies of the Fourth Republic in the Union Française which significantly raised the number of Africans educated in French. As per the new provisions of the Union Française, people from most French territories could now attend not only primary and secondary schools in Africa, but also universities in France. With a new system of scholarships in place, the end of the 1940s also inaugurated the era of the colonial *boursiers* ("fellowship students") of the French government. This experience would become prime autobiographical fodder for many authors of that generation.

New migratory movements in turn increased the circulation of ideas between an ever more diverse group of people of African origin. The post-war period brought together people not only from the old colonies, but also from all over Africa and the Americas. These new conditions created an atmosphere of intellectual exchange, political engagement and militancy that far surpassed anything that had previously existed. Paris was now a hotbed of thinking about pan-Africanism, decolonization, the African diasporic condition, with people recognizing their shared legacy and political imperatives as well as the essential necessity for cultural revival. Of particular importance in this regard was the founding in 1947 of the journal *Présence africaine* that would provide a significant platform for black voices from all over the world, while establishing a cultural dialogue with the West. In addition, this growing body of voices stimulated two historic literary conferences: the first at the Sorbonne in 1956, and the second in Rome in 1959. Published by *Présence africaine*, the proceedings of these conferences

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constitute priceless documents as literary manifestos that reflect the preoccupations of artists and writers at a particular moment in history.

Another significant phenomenon during this period was the marked shift from poetry to novel. The immediate post-war period unquestionably belonged to the Negritude movement initiated by the poets Aimé Césaire, Léon Damas and Senghor. By the end of the 1940s, with the publication of Damas's anthology *Poètes d'expression française* in 1947 and Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache* in 1948, it seemed only natural that the voice of the colonized should speak through poetry. A decade later, however, things have changed significantly. Contradicting Jean-Paul Sartre's assertion in his famous "Orphée noir" that the black man "ne dira pas sa Négritude en prose" ["will not proclaim his Negritude in prose"],[5] many black intellectuals turned precisely to prose in the wake of Negritude's powerful initial impact. By 1956, they seem to agree, rather, with Haitian Jacques Stephen Alexis's statement in the pages of *Présence africaine* that:

> Le roman est le genre le plus important de notre temps, c'est particulièrement dans le romanesque qu'il importe de montrer ce que nous sommes capables de faire … le réalisme est notre seule chance.
>
> [The novel is the most important genre of our time. It is in the novel in particular that we are called to demonstrate what we are capable of doing … realism is our only chance.][6]

The movement from poetry to prose also corresponded to the emergence of novelists from Central Africa. Among the most famous of these were the Cameroonians Beti and Oyono who would very quickly impose themselves as among the most important novelists of their generation.

A number of novels published in the 1950s are essential to any understanding of the francophone African canon. If any work exemplifies the complexity and ambiguity of francophone African canon formation, that work is *L'Enfant noir* (1953, "Boy") by Guinean author Laye. For this reason, it deserves a somewhat lengthy presentation. The novel was immensely popular upon release and remains a staple of curricula both in France and in the United States. It is also perhaps the best example of a text whose success among French readers was part of its design, that is, it deliberately addresses a French audience.

Written as an autobiography, the novel recounts the trajectory of a young boy from his childhood years in his parents' village to his departure for France as one of the first colonial students in the 1940s. The relatively simple and linear narrative form allows the author to fulfill a double agenda: first, to document the culture (caste social system, cosmogony, religious beliefs, and ritual practices) of his specific group, in this case the Mande of West

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Africa. In that respect, *L'Enfant noir* has been said to constitute a sort of counter-ethnography. Yet, others have argued that this unveiling of African "truths" is not without paradox. For how can an African writer both preserve tradition and disclose its constitutive mysteries to a Western audience? Indeed, the narrator himself poses the question, "Will we still have secrets?" as, in a now famous scene, he demystifies the initiation rituals he has been subjected to as a child – rituals whose efficacy relies precisely on secrecy. Second, the novel sets out to trace the transformative process brought about by colonization. In the process, the village remains a stable and unproblematic ancestral origin whose recuperation is only possible through idealized nostalgia.

Adding to the ambiguity of *L'Enfant noir*'s status in French and francophone letters are the persistent rumors of inauthenticity that have plagued the novel since its publication. Certain scholars have recently brought in new elements to support the rumors that Laye may not have been the sole author of the text, calling for a rejection of its status as an "authentic" African novel. Nevertheless, this argument ignores the ways in which the novel underscores the fundamental contradictions that are at the very heart of the francophone African canon: the ways in which consumer demand, political and historical conditions, editorial policy, esthetic and linguistic parameters all influence the writing of African authors. In any case, as critic Christopher Miller has noted, whatever the novel's fate in the light of recent revelations, "*L'Enfant noir* has probably been taught, read, analyzed more than any other francophone novel and has circulated widely in translation."[7] As such, it cannot be ignored and it continues to be perceived as exemplary of African literary production.

Cameroonian Beti's appearance on the literary scene is intimately linked with Laye's success. Shortly after the 1953 publication of *L'Enfant noir*, Beti, writing under his real name Alexandre Biyidi, attacked the novel in a critical essay penned for *Présence africaine*, "Afrique noire, littérature rose" (1955).[8] Speaking of "les écrivains africains spécialistes du pittoresque" and referring to Laye, but also Soce and Maran, Beti makes a very provocative connection between literary recognition and exoticism. Basically, Beti objects to Laye's representation of Africa as a response to European thirst for exoticism. What the tone of the essay ultimately shows is that by 1954, African intellectuals such as Beti are already deeply preoccupied with articulating a definition of "African literature." It also shows that issues of representation and exoticism were already at stake within the nascent field, as writers engaged in debates over the most efficient ways to exploit the French language and the resources of the novel as a genre. For Beti, African literature should consist of narratives exposing the crimes of colonialism and to do otherwise is to be complicit with

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colonial ideology. The Laye–Beti controversy staged a debate that would continue to preoccupy writers throughout the century, namely, the question of realism and of African novelists' engagement with contemporary socio-political events affecting the continent.

As if to demonstrate his point, at virtually the same time as he was attacking Laye's naive representation of the African quotidian, Beti was publishing his first novel, *Ville cruelle* (1954) under another pseudonym, Eza Boto. In many respects, *Ville cruelle* is an anti-*Enfant noir* in that it categorically rejects the romanticism involved in Laye's novel. Indeed, Beti's narrative sets out to exploit the resources of realism not to document tradition, or to engage in a nostalgic recreation of the past, but in order to denounce the physical and psychological abuses of colonial encounters. Through the story of a young cocoa grower who rebels against economic exploitation, Beti challenges the passivity – not to say collaboration – of the traditional elders, while leveling a virulent polemic against colonial occupation.

Beti, it could be argued, begins the most militant phase of the African novel, a phase which continues to mark African literary production. His status as francophone letters' most militant writer was further sealed by numerous polemical essays (such as "Main basse sur le Cameroon"), and his role as editor of the journal *Peuples noirs, peuples africains* (1978–91). At the same time, Beti continued to explore the form and content of the novel throughout his career, from his earliest work in the 1950s to his last two novels, *Trop de soleil tue l'amour* (1999) and *Branle-bas en noir et blanc* (2000). These last two works penned shortly before his death in 2001 experiment with the form of the crime novel. In the process, they testify to Beti's tireless effort to challenge literary expectations while maintaining his commitment to the representation of the African quotidian.

Of equal importance during the early period of anti-colonial writing are the novels of Beti's compatriot Oyono. Oyono's novels expose a universe of duplicity and violence whose primary villains are colonial institutions. Particularly effective in this regard is his first novel, *Une vie de boy* (1956), written in the form of a journal, which details the dynamics of domination–submission at work in the colonial universe. What distinguishes the novel is that, as the title implies, the protagonist is a houseboy. This choice of character thus allows for an elaborate and intimate portrayal of the physical encounter between master and servant. By choosing a servant as his protagonist, Oyono uses the resources of the novel to offer his readers both a voyeuristic depiction of the colonizer's world, and a detailed insight into the culture and experience of the colonized. His second novel returns to a similar theme except that the narrative perspective is shifted from first- to third-person indirect discourse, and goes from the vision of a boy/young man to

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that of an old man who can only barely grasp what is happening to him. *Le Vieux Nègre et la médaille* (1957) recounts in tragicomic mode the humiliations suffered by an old villager who is awarded a medal in recognition of his services to the motherland (France) since he has sacrificed his children to the war. During the medal ceremony, it becomes clear that his presence is merely symbolic as he stands in the hot sunshine, bereft of any protection, waiting for the officials to finally acknowledge his presence and pin the award to his chest. During the party that follows, the old man falls asleep and overstays in the white section of town past the imposed curfew. The colonial police then violently arrest him and subsequently expel him from the "white zone." As the narrative progresses, the medal thereby metamorphoses from a symbol of French gratitude to a token of colonial abuse and dishonesty.

Another significant feature of *Le Vieux Nègre* is its extensive use of a comic mode. Throughout the novel, the narrative's relationship to the protagonist is tinged with various forms of irony, sometimes laughing at him and at others with him. This importance of humor as a demystification of colonial power is made explicit at the end of the story with a communal burst of laughter. The African character takes over the power of narration, dictating (or at least imagining) the historical ledger, and the power of laughter begins a kind of exorcism in which the colonial stranglehold begins to loosen. Finally, the novel speaks to the relationship between colonizer and colonized so eloquently evoked by Albert Memmi. The characters in the final scene are on the kind of colonial threshold described by Kenneth Harrow[9] – thus already pointing ahead to the improvisational rewriting and hybrid product of the colonial encounter proposed by postcolonial critics today.

We perhaps best know Ousmane Sembène today as the doyen of African cinema. However, he started his career as a novelist, using realism to render his characters deeply immersed in their historical and material conditions of existence. Sembène has repeatedly declared that his main concern, his primary source of inspiration and his ideal audience are "the people." His most famous novel, *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* (1960) follows a major strike on the construction site of the Dakar–Niger railroad. Infused with Marxist ideology, the novel form allows Sembène to investigate the peoples' relationship to circumstances of production and to underscore the necessity for solidarity in the face of the oppressor. It is no coincidence, then, that Marxist critic Fredric Jameson (in)famously posits that: "All Third-world texts are necessarily … allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, even when, or perhaps I should say particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly Western machineries of representation, such as the novel."[10]

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Sembène is one of the "radical African writers" Jameson bases his argument on, making specific references to *Le Mandat* (1966), *Xala* (1973), and *Les Derniers de l'Empire* (1981) as "socially realistic third-world novels" (p. 67). *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* is Sembène's best-known novel, perhaps precisely because it fits so well the plot and structure of "national narrative," designated in Jameson's thinking. While equally preoccupied with issues of class, Sembène's first novel *Le Docker noir* (1956, "Black Docker") also interrogates the novel form itself. The primary character in *Le Docker noir* is a Senegalese man accused of two crimes: One is to have plagiarized the novel which he has indeed written and the other is to have murdered the white woman who has in reality tried to publish it under her own name. The entire novel can therefore be read, against the grain of Jameson's theory of the "third-world novel", as Sembène's early, and perhaps premonitory meditation on African writers' struggle for legitimacy as they appropriate the French language in order to express the specificities of their (post)colonial experiences.[11]

If the earliest works of Sembène and Beti are relatively easy to place on a historical and ideological continuum, another author, Kane, is considerably more difficult to locate. Kane's *L'Aventure ambiguë* (1961, "Ambiguous Adventure") gave African literature one of its most complex and most tortured characters, Samba Diallo. In addition, around this central figure the author set into orbit a number of archetypal characters each grappling in his or her own way with – and deeply puzzled by – the colonial encounter: the Koranic Master, the African Matriarch (*La Grande Royale*), the Madman (whose psychosis stems from his experiences in France), the sympathetic French Marxist girlfriend. It also offers the powerful portrayal of the old Diallobé chief's tormented choices he must make for his community in the face of colonial cultural penetration. As the Chief famously ponders in an oft-quoted passage which sums up the quandary of acculturation,

> Si je leur dis d'aller à l'école nouvelle, ils iront en masse. Ils y apprendront toutes les façons de lier le bois au bois que nous ne savons pas. Mais, apprenant, ils oublieront aussi. Ce qu'ils apprendront vaut-il ce qu'ils oublieront? Je voulais vous demander: Peut-on apprendre ceci sans oublier cela, et ce qu'on apprend vaut-il ce qu'on oublie?[12]
>
> [If I tell them to go to the new school, all will go. They will learn about the many ways to bind wood to wood, which we do not know. But, in the process of learning, they will also forget. Will what they learn be worth what they forget? I wanted to ask you: can one learn this without forgetting that, and is what one learns worth what one forgets?]

L'Aventure ambiguë is a heteroglossic novel in which the characters are essentially all philosophers, deeply self-conscious and perpetually in quest of

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a critical truth that will explain the present, and the proper choices to be made with respect to the future. Indeed, Samba Diallo is a philosophy student whose various dialogs make constant references first to African legend, religious tenets, and textual references drawn from the Qur'an, and as he becomes acculturated in the second half of the novel, to Blaise Pascal, Friedrich Nietzsche, and René Descartes. Significantly, the text's various meditations appeal both to the African dialectical mode of *palabre* or "palaver," and to the archetypal Socratic dialogue.

Samba Diallo's trajectory is ultimately an emblematic tragedy of both failed assimilation and failed return to the native land. While it retains the binary of colonizer and colonized that dominates the works of earlier authors, its hybrid structure and polyphonic approach looks ahead. *L'Aventure ambiguë* is, in short, a work of transition as well as a novel that transcends its place and time of production in ways accomplished by few other African novels. Particularly stunning, in contrast with other, more positive novels (such as the more militant novels of Sembène), is the narrative's ultimate suggestion that there may well be no negotiation, no median term possible between the old and the new, and ultimately, between a pre-colonial past and a postcolonial future.

After the elation of the early years of independence, many scholars have noted what Georges Ngal calls an "epistemological rupture" that begins after 1968.[13] Two major novels mark this shift: *Les Soleils des indépendances* (1970, "Suns of Independences") by Kourouma and *Le Devoir de violence* (1968) by Ouologuem. These two texts experiment with the French language and refuse to take for granted Africa's innocence in the colonial tragedy. In the case of *Les Soleils des indépendances*, the main character experiences the violence of an increasingly dictatorial regime. His inability to have others recognize his status as a traditional chief suggests the disruption between traditional values and contemporary politics. His own incomprehension will ultimately lead to his death. This latter narrative relies extensively on the irruption of the vernacular as an alienating device; and on the absurdist juxtaposition of tradition and modernity in keeping with what had already been tested by Oyono.

Equally cynical is *Le Devoir de violence*, a spoof of the traditional oral saga – which the author devises by combining the epic form with an ironic tone that, in the Malian context, a land largely defined by its Sunjata epic, approaches the blasphemous. In so doing, it refuses to celebrate some putative mythical past, preferring instead to suggest that violence and subterfuge characterized the behavior of the chief clans of the pre-colonial period. Ouologuem, whose first and most famous novel elicited accusations of plagiarism at the time of its appearance, produces what many have said is the first

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great postmodern African work. Its undeniable use of textual sources accumulated from elsewhere only adds to its ambiguous status as a challenge to Western conceptions of literary authorship and African self-righteousness. Wherever one chooses to situate his narrative within Western literary critical categories, it is clearly a distinctive challenge to the sacred cows of such movements as Afrocentrism or pan-Africanism in which all the ills facing the continent are foreign imports. Both *Les Soleils des indépendances* and *Le Devoir de violence* turn the page on the novel of resistance to colonialism and formalize the necessity for a critical assessment of the present by Africans themselves.

Whereas the early years of national liberation gave many hope, the ways in which the transition took place, in which many of the new African leaders were or became puppets of the old colonial regime, would lead to a growing bitterness. Writers now faced with the dictatorial regimes of autocratic rulers quickly returned to questions of politics and power as major sources of inspiration. This time, however, because the direct source of repression was home-grown, there needed to be a readjustment of literary strategies and ideological assumptions. The present Africa appeared increasingly fragmented, circular in its logic, not to say absurd. What writing or intellectual model could help an African author account for this completely unheard-of situation? The escalating sociotemporal dislocations of the postcolonial period lead to a radical turn away from the narrative linearity of earlier works, toward the "new novels" of the 1970s and 1980s.

While Kourouma and Ouologuem are clearly the fathers of the *roman de la dictature* ["novel of dictatorship"], its maturity would really belong to writers identified by critic Séwanou Dabla in 1986 as the "writers of the second generation."[14] Among the many texts associated with this literary shift one can cite Valentin Mudimbe's *Le Bel immonde* (1976), Tierno Monénembo's *Les Crapauds-brousse* (1979), Henri Lopès's *Le Pleurer-rire* (1982) or Sony Labou-Tansi's *La Vie et demie*. Nevertheless, of all of these authors, Labou-Tansi is certainly the most prolific, the most inventive and the most famous. As critic Boniface Mongo-Mboussa put it, the young Congolese author made an "entrée fracassante" ["an earth-shattering entry"] on the French literary scene with the publication of *La Vie et demie* at the Éditions du Seuil in 1979.[15] Indeed, Labou-Tansi's novel can be said to have revolutionized literary representations of Africa in at least two significant ways. First, by reclaiming the novel as a site of linguistic creativity. A striking feature of his narratives, in this respect, is his endless manipulation of the French language: Labou-Tansi's neologisms, such as *tropicalité*, are now integral elements of the francophone postcolonial critical lexicon. Equally spectacular is Labou-Tansi's interpolation of magical elements in his narratives, be it in

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La Vie et demie or in *Les Sept Solitudes de Lorsa Lopez* (1985) and *L'Anté-peuple* (1988). Labou-Tansi's use of magic within the novel performs yet another break: For the first time in a francophone context, the operative literary model is no longer the European novel. Rather, the cultural history of coexistence between systems of thought, the violence of autocratic domination and the new nations' overall regimes of excess point to other, more adequate literary ancestors, namely, Latin American magical realism.

The irony inherent in the work of Labou-Tansi is that, while his critique of the African autocrat and his European facilitators is perhaps as virulent as any ever heard from the continent, his use of such techniques as magical realism and his radical authorial voice have made him an almost mythical figure in both continents. Thus, his success is, once again, and altogether ironically, dependent on his having become the darling of a certain Western literary critical circle and of a particular left-leaning French readership. This contradiction is, of course, the essential conflict that troubles the history of African writing from the outset, as the question remains: Who will determine the voice, the reach, the value of African writing: Africans or Europeans? However one attempts to answer such questions, it is clear that one will have to contend with Labou-Tansi's *oeuvre*. Innovations within the genre clearly do not end with Labou-Tansi's esthetic revolution. On the contrary, Labou-Tansi's success has paved the way for more daring manipulations of the French language within the broader genre of the novel.

Economic, political, and cultural transformations both in Europe and in sub-Saharan Africa in the last twenty years have brought tremendous diversity to the broader category of the "francophone novel." While the thematic continuities I have outlined above are constitutive of the field itself, the heterogeneity of the whole remains nevertheless striking and resists easy reduction. In addition to the confirmation or revival of notoriety enjoyed by novelists of the earlier decades (authors such as Beti, Kourouma, Ouologuem, or Labou-Tansi), three further developments contribute to the dynamism of the field at the end of the twentieth century.

The first is the emergence of women, starting with Senegalese women authors Ken Bugul and Bâ, who use the French language and the generic potential of the novel to reclaim the specificity of their experience as female subjects. In *Une si longue lettre* (1979), for example, Bâ chooses the epistolary genre to give voice to an African woman's thoughts on love and feminism, as the narrator reflects on her betrayal by her polygamous husband. In contrast to stories by her male counterparts, Bâ does not underscore her disillusion with the political weaknesses of the post-independence era. Rather, her narrative focuses on the betrayal of the elites within the domestic sphere; focusing as it traditionally does on the expression of intimate feelings, the

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epistolary genre seems to capture most appropriately, from the woman's perspective, the psychological effects of the conjugal drama. By replacing issues of betrayal and disillusion in more private contexts, Bâ also calls into question the exclusive right of men to set the parameters of African subjectivities. For critic Odile Cazenave, what the novels of Bâ, Bugul (*Le Baobab fou*, 1983), but also Véronique Tadjo, Aminata Sow Fall and many others have in common is their discourse of rebellion against male domination.[16] Indeed, the very fact of their coming to writing constitutes one of the most ideologically charged subversions of the pre-1980 all-male canon.

The work of Calixthe Beyala, perhaps the most visible francophone African woman writer today, also inaugurated the emergence in the 1980s of what some now call *Littérature migrante* ("migrant literature"), that is, fiction whose themes, and sometimes authors, are defined by the experience of migration. This would be the second significant transformation of the field in the last twenty years. While travel to the metropole has never ceased to inspire African writers, half a century after Soce's *Mirages de Paris* (1937), it resurfaces with striking insistence in the works of a number of francophone writers from the younger generations. Indeed, between 1980 and 2000, more than a dozen of them offer narratives centered around what Frantz Fanon called "l'expérience vécue du Noir" in Europe.[17] To be sure, migration patterns have changed tremendously since the times of Ake Loba's *Kocoumbo l'étudiant noir* (1960), Bernard Dadié's *Un nègre à Paris* (1959) or Lopès's *La Nouvelle Romance* (1980). The new narratives of migration now feature new heroes (or anti-heroes) whose trajectories are inspired by the realities of an increasingly global and cosmopolitan world. The *sans-papier*, for example, seems to have become the postcolonial hero par excellence, as he appears in a central position in the novels of Alain Mabanckou (*Bleu-blanc-rouge*, 1998), Bessora (*53cm*, 1999), Nathalie Etoke (*Un amour sans-papier*, 1999), Jean-Roger Essomba (*Paradis du Nord*, 1996) and many others.

Along with their renewed representation of the metropole as a postcolonial city, one striking characteristic of these texts is in their explicit representations of sexuality. Here too, Beyala may claim some responsibility for this new trend. Her texts, along with those of Simon Njami, and Sami Tchak, show an increasing eroticization of the African text in ways that previous authors had largely shied away from. Tchak's *Place des fêtes* (1999) is exemplary in this respect. In radical contrast to earlier, more genteel – or perhaps even prudish – representations of African characters and family relationships, Tchak's provocative depiction of what can be called the "dysfunctional migrant family" includes a mother who is a prostitute, an impotent father, and adolescent children victims or perpetrators of rape and incest. Clearly, for authors like Tchak, taking liberties with the language and form of the novel also means

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willingly introducing the body into the narrative, thereby breaking taboos surrounding sexuality that have haunted much of francophone African writing since its origins. Beyala's work, in this respect, has been pushing the limits of provocation by constantly toying with a style that might be deemed, by some at least, as explicitly pornographic. Her *Femme nue femme noire* (2001), for example, deliberately draws on a famous poem by the canonical poet and father of Negritude, Léopold Senghor, to tell the story of a nymphomaniac African woman. The provocation and strategy could not be clearer.

Another equally important literary phenomenon has gained momentum in the last two decades: an increasing engagement with – and often outright participation in – the popular. In some cases this move is performed through a specific literary tradition, which appears to maintain the author's esthetic credentials intact. Such would be the case for Daniel Biyaoula who names Louis-Ferdinand Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit* as a major influence on his work. Like Céline, Biyaoula's writing emphasizes the vernacular, combines hyperrealism and stream of consciousness, and, as his titles *L'Impasse* (1997) and *Agonies* (1998) suggest, offer an extremely pessimistic vision of postcolonial identities.

Likewise, the American detective novel stands explicitly as a model for Simon Njami's first book *Cercueil et cie* (1985). Crime novels starting in the early to mid-1980s, with Abasse Ndione's *La Vie en spirale* (1984) and Njami, have become a privileged choice for a number of writers who explore the collective experience of the postcolonial in urban environments, whether in the former metropole or in the African city. More recently, such authors as Bolya (*La polyandre*, 1998), Aïda Madi Diallo (*Kouty mémoire de sang*, 2002), and Achille Ngoye (*Sorcellerie à bout portant*, 1998) have seen in this popular form a genre that allows for a particular kind of inventiveness, one that, throughout its history has increasingly introduced the vernacular, does not fear vulgarity or eroticism, explores violence in a style that is both ironic and serious, and a genre that is resolutely urban and modern. Finally, perhaps the most important aspect of crime fiction is that it has always had a troubled – not to say conflictual – relationship with literary orthodoxy. As such, it allows these authors to partake in a movement that challenges Western literary hegemony at its source and whose operative tropes make it particularly apt for depicting the corruption, materialism, trafficking, violence, and the simultaneously global and local preoccupations of the postcolonial quotidian.

The latest editorial and marketing success in francophone Africa has been the publication of romance novels. The phenomenon is particularly noteworthy because they are published in Africa and primarily consumed by an African readership. It is perhaps too early to perceive exactly where popular

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fiction fits into the whole. What it clearly reveals, however, is the extraordinary diversity of subgenres, statuses and modalities one can find today under the rubric of the francophone African novel.

NOTES

1. Roland Barthes, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Seuil, 2002), p. 950.
2. Jean-Marc Moura, "La Scénographie postcoloniale" in Moura, *Littératures francophones et théorie postcoloniale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), pp. 120–38.
3. René Maran, *Batouala: véritable roman nègre* (1921) (Paris: Albin Michel, 1938), p. 11.
4. Jacques Chevrier, *Littérature nègre* (Paris: A. Colin, 1984), p 26.
5. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Orphée noir," in Léopold Senghor (ed.), *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948), p. xix.
6. Jacques-Stephen Alexis, "'Où va le roman?' (débat autour des conditions d'un roman national chez les peuples noirs)," *Présence africaine*, 13 (April–May 1957), 81–101 (86).
7. Christopher Miller, *Theories of Africans: Francophone African Literature and Anthropology in Africa* (University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 125.
8. Mongo Beti, "Afrique noire, littérature rose," *Présence africaine*, 1–2 (1955), 133–45.
9. Kenneth Harrow, *Thresholds of Change in African Literature: The Emergence of a Tradition* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann; London: James Currey, 1993).
10. Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text*, 15 (1986), 65–88 (67).
11. Interestingly, the accusation of plagiarism in the novel echoes similar accusations throughout the history of African writing, evoked in such early novels as Ousmane Soce's *Mirages de Paris* (1938) and leveled against such authors as Camara Laye, Yambo Ouologuem and, more recently, Calixthe Beyala. As early as 1956, Sembène's *Docker noir* had begun to expose in fiction the ideological implications of accusations of plagiarism in the specific context of francophone literature.
12. Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *L'Aventure ambiguë* (Paris: Julliard, 1961), p. 44. Translation mine.
13. Georges Ngal, *Création et rupture en littérature africaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994), p. 26.
14. Séwanou Dabla, *Nouvelles écritures africaines: romanciers de la seconde génération* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986).
15. Boniface Mongo-Mboussa, *Désirs d'Afrique* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), p. 21.
16. Odile Cazenave, *Rebellious Women: The New Generation of Female African Novelists* (Boulder, CO; London: Lynne Rienner, 2000).
17. Frantz Fanon, "L'expérience vécue du Noir" in Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1961), pp. 88–114 (p. 88).

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9

M. KEITH BOOKER

The African historical novel

The historical novel has been a crucial subgenre of the African novel from its very beginning. For example, the earliest African novel to have received widespread attention was Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka*, drafted in the Sesotho language some time before 1910 (though not published in its full form until 1925).[1] *Chaka* is a historical novel based on the career of the great Zulu leader, Chaka (aka Shaka), who was the principal chief of the Zulu nation from about 1816 until his death in 1828, leading the Zulus during the time in a number of campaigns of conquest that led to the establishment of an extensive empire in southern Africa. This novel thus provides an early reminder of the historical development of sophisticated, large-scale social and political organization in Africa completely apart from European intervention. In this sense, an important forerunner of novels such as the Ghanaian Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Healers* (1978), which provides reminders of the achievements of the Ashanti Empire in the nineteenth century, though the events it narrates (most centrally the Anglo–Ashanti war of 1873–4) led to the collapse of that empire.

In addition to such examples of novels that center on specific events in African history, it is also the case that the African novel, as a whole, is more intensively engaged with politics and history than is its European counterpart. Among other things, the African novel itself received a tremendous injection of energy from the historical phenomenon of decolonization, which infused that novel with a sense of historical urgency and a desire to contribute to the construction of viable postcolonial cultural identities for the new African nations. As prominent African critic Emmanuel Obiechina puts it, writing when the phenomenon was still relatively fresh, "Because the West African novel has risen at a time when large-scale social and economic changes are taking place, the writers show an almost obsessive preoccupation with the influence of these conditions. This is the condition of life; these are the ways in which people feel its pressure; these pressures demand expression."[2]

In this sense, of course, the rise of the African novel has much in common with the rise of the European novel, which critics such as Ian Watt have

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demonstrated to have been closely associated with the rise of the bourgeoisie as the new European class, supplanting the medieval aristocracy.[3] Thus, it should come as no surprise that the historical novel was central to the rise of the European novel as well. In his highly influential study *The Historical Novel* (first published in 1937, though not translated into English until 1962), the eminent Marxist thinker Georg Lukács notes that the great historical novels of the early nineteenth century narrate the historical process through which the bourgeoisie managed to overturn the feudal-aristocratic order and to establish themselves as the new ruling class of Europe.[4] Lukács thus sees these historical novels as the quintessential literary expressions of the ideology of the European bourgeoisie in their period of gradual ascendance to power in the long historical process that Fredric Jameson would later call the "bourgeois cultural revolution."[5] In particular, Lukács argues that these novels uniquely captured the dynamic energies of this revolution. Lukács (echoing *The Communist Manifesto*) thus provides important reminders that the European bourgeoisie – by the 1930s widely regarded as culturally stodgy and politically conservative – was at one time a radically revolutionary class that wrought sweeping changes in European society. Moreover, in his discussion of the historical novel – and in his other influential discussions of European realism – Lukács reminds leftist writers that literature played a central role in the revolutionary victory of the European bourgeoisie over their feudal-aristocratic predecessors.

Lukács, of course, was writing at a time when there were good reasons to believe that the bourgeoisie themselves, with Western capitalism mired in a deep depression and Soviet power on the rise, were about to be swept out of power in a new socialist revolution. And he clearly believed that the power of the historical novel – and of the realist novel in general – transcended that of the bourgeoisie who had made the genre its own. His admiration for the revolutionary power of the bourgeois historical novel, then, can be taken to suggest that those who would now seek to employ literature as a tool of revolution *against* the bourgeoisie would do well to learn from the example set by their bourgeois predecessors. For Lukács the European historical novel arose at a time of the rise of historicity itself, becoming the ideal literary form for an emergent bourgeoisie bent on working historical change and building a new world in which they could operate free of the fetters of aristocratic control.

That the situation of the bourgeoisie in the early years of its rise to hegemony in Europe bears many similarities to that of the new, largely bourgeois rulers of postcolonial Africa should be patently obvious – though we would certainly do well to heed the warnings of Frantz Fanon that the former constituted a young, dynamic, revolutionary class seeking to build

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something genuinely new, while the latter were in many ways already decadent before they began, clinging to structures of power inherited from the colonial past. In his classic essay "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness," Fanon warns against the potential for disaster in postcolonial African nations if those nations, in independence, simply replace the ruling European colonial bourgeoisie by an indigenous African bourgeoisie, while leaving the basic class structure of the societies still in place.[6] In particular, Fanon argues that the African bourgeoisie lack the historical energy that had enabled the European bourgeoisie to defeat their feudal-aristocratic predecessors and to sweep into power in Europe in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. The African bourgeoisie are mere imitators of their Western masters, who themselves had already become decadent by the time of their full-scale colonization of Africa in the late nineteenth century. According to Fanon, the African bourgeoisie thus "follows the Western bourgeoisie along its path of negation and decadence without ever having emulated it in its first stages of exploration and invention. ... It is already senile before it has come to know the petulance, the fearlessness, or the will to succeed of youth."[7]

This issue of decadence is particularly relevant to the historical novel. Lukács, noting that the bourgeoisie retreated into conservatism and decadence after solidifying their power as the new ruling class in Europe in the middle of the nineteenth century, argued that this retreat also led to a substantial decline in the quality of bourgeois historical novels. At that point, rather than depicting the excitement and dynamism of the bourgeois cultural revolution, these novels began to focus on the past as a site of romantic (or lurid) adventure, featuring characters who were simply displaced figures from the present rather than products of their own time. A key example here is Gustave Flaubert's *Salammbô*, which depicts life in ancient Carthage as informed by sensational and abject violence, liberally illustrated with tortures, beheadings, crucifixions, and the like. As Lukács points out, Flaubert's disgust with the bourgeois society of nineteenth-century France seems to have driven him to attempt, in *Salammbô*, to escape into an exotic realm entirely divorced from his contemporary world. In order to effect this radical gap between ancient Carthage and modern France, Flaubert had to efface history from his text as much as possible, the resulting loss of energy being compensated for by sensationalism. The result, for Lukács, is a text in which "inhumanity, cruelty, atrocity and brutality become substitutes for the lost greatness of real history."[8] Further, the brutality and carnage that inform *Salammbô* are treated almost nostalgically by Flaubert as an alternative to what Lukács calls the "sordid triviality" of everyday bourgeois life in Europe (p. 183).

Fanon's warnings about the decadence of the postcolonial African bourgeoisie suggest the possibility that African historical novels might be similarly

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decadent from the very beginning, or at least from the moment of decolonization when the African novel itself began its rise to prominence in world literature. Indeed, the question of possible decadence is a crucial critical issue that must be addressed in relation to the African novel. There are certainly examples of African historical novels that would seem, at least on the surface, to bear out this suspicion of decadence. The text that immediately comes to mind is Yambo Ouologuem's somewhat notorious *Le Devoir de violence* (1968, English translation *Bound to Violence*, 1971), a work that does indeed seem to be decadent in a number of ways. Then, as a counter-example, one might consider something like Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973), which was in fact written partly as a response to Ouologuem's perceived excesses.

I will return at the end of this essay to the question of decadence and to the opposition between *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Le Devoir de violence*. For now, let me simply begin with a reminder that, numerous parallels notwithstanding, the European and African novels rose to prominence in very different historical settings, so that texts that otherwise appear similar might have substantially different connotations. For example, the emergent bourgeoisie of Europe, having in a very real sense invented history as we now know it, had among other things to make a case for historicity itself, and the historical novel helped them to convey their vision of a world (or at least a Europe) in constant and perpetual historical change (for the better, thanks to bourgeois ascendance), as opposed to the static world view of the medieval aristocracy. This notion of building a new world was also central to the predicament of African nations as they became newly independent, seeking (via the novel, among other tools) to attempt to build viable postcolonial cultural identities for their new nations.

However, rather than having to demonstrate the very notion of historicity, African novelists, as part of this project of cultural identity-building, have had to demonstrate the more specific notion of *African* historicity. That is, they have had to overcome the legacy of colonialist historiographies (dating at least back to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel) in which history was seen as a European phenomenon, while pre-colonial Africa was envisioned as a timeless and primitive land, yanked from its savage slumber and into the flow of history only by the salvational intervention of its European colonizers, who brought new energies and new knowledge to the previously dark continent.[9] Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch describes this phenomenon, noting that "colonialist histories have long perpetuated the myth of a sub-Saharan Africa conquered fairly easily and profiting from pacification. … The local populations, according to these histories, were finally delivered by the "colonial peace" from the internal struggles of little local rulers forever raiding their neighbors' territories in search of slaves or livestock."[10]

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Many African novelists have understood this phenomenon very well and have sought to overcome it in their work. For example, the Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o sees history as a crucial ground upon which contemporary African writers must challenge the cultural legacy of colonialism. In particular, the recovery of the Kenyan history of anti-colonial resistance becomes a central project of Ngugi's postcolonial fiction, which thereby seeks to help remind his fellow Kenyans that they have a useable past upon which to build a viable present and future. Ngugi has openly proclaimed that Kenyan history provides the principal inspiration for his fiction, especially in the sense that "the Kenyan peoples' struggle against foreign domination" is the "one consistent theme" of this history over the past four hundred years.[11]

One could make the argument that virtually all of the most important African novels have been historical novels – at least in the broadest sense of a novel whose events need to be understood as part of a larger historical process. For example, each of Ngugi's novels focuses on a particular moment in the history of Kenya, and together his novels constitute a sweeping historical narrative that tells the story of Kenya from the early days of British colonization to the contemporary postcolonial period (and even beyond in one case), focusing on the strong Kenyan tradition of resistance to oppression. His first two novels are set in colonial Kenya and detail the sometimes devastating impact of British colonial domination on the traditional societies of Kenya. *The River Between* (written in 1961, though not published until 1965) is a meditation on the conflict between traditional and modern values in the Gikuyu society of colonial Kenya, a conflict precipitated by the impact of colonization. Ngugi's first published novel (and the first modern novel to be published by an East African writer) was *Weep Not, Child*, written in 1962 but not published until 1964. This novel focuses particularly on the so-called Mau Mau rebellion against British rule in Kenya from 1952 to 1956, thus becoming the first of a number of Kenyan novels that would eventually focus on that crucial conflict, including Ngugi's own *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), though Ngugi's understanding of the Mau Mau as paradigms of anti-colonial resistance did not fully congeal until his turn toward a more radical vision in the later novels *Petals of Blood* (1977), *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini* (1980, published in English translation as *Devil on the Cross*, 1982), and *Matigari ma Njiruugi* (1986, English translation *Matigari* 1987). The first two of these later novels, substantially influenced by the work of Fanon, are set in postcolonial Kenya and are bitterly critical of the repression and corruption experienced by the Kenyan people during the immediate post-independence rule of Jomo Kenyatta, which Ngugi sees as a betrayal of the legacy of the Mau Mau. *Matigari* then takes the history of Kenya into an imagined future in which a former Mau Mau leader arises seemingly from the grave to lead

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the Kenyan people in an apocalyptic revolutionary struggle for genuine liberation.

In a similar (if less politically specific) manner, Chinua Achebe, in works such as *Things Fall Apart* (1958), seeks to provide his African readers with a realistic depiction of their pre-colonial past, free of the distortions and stereotypes imposed upon that past in European accounts. While famed for its ethnographic depiction of pre-colonial African society, *Things Fall Apart* is in fact a sweeping historical novel that narrates a crucial turning point in African history. The novel famously depicts a fully functioning Igbo society before colonization; it also shows the breakdown of that society under the impact of British colonization. Importantly, though, *Things Fall Apart* suggests that pre-colonial Igbo society was not a timeless utopia before the arrival of the British. Instead, it was a society in flux, already in a state of transition when the British arrived.

Achebe's subsequent novels then join *Things Fall Apart* to trace the colonial and postcolonial history of Nigeria, much in the same way that Ngugi's novels collectively explore the history of Kenya.[12] Achebe's second novel, *No Longer at Ease* (published in 1960, the year of Nigerian independence) is a sort of sequel to *Things Fall Apart* (the protagonist of the second book is the grandson of the protagonist of the first) that describes the tensions in a 1950s Nigerian society moving toward independence from British rule. *Arrow of God* (1964) is set in the 1920s (slightly later than *Things Fall Apart*); it describes a colonial Nigeria in which British political rule has been firmly established but in which many Igbos have still had relatively little contact with European culture. The villagers of this book thus continue to adhere to relatively traditional Igbo religious and cultural practices, but their lives are strongly informed by a sense that British control of Nigeria is firm and that they must learn to deal with the consequences of this alien rule. *A Man of the People* (1966) is Achebe's first novel to be set in postcolonial Africa. A political satire that exposes the widespread corruption that has plagued Nigeria and other new African nations, *A Man of the People* marks a turn in Achebe's career from an attempt to recreate the past to a critical engagement with the present. Achebe would not publish another novel until 1987, when *Anthills of the Savannah* appeared. From a Western perspective, *Anthills of the Savannah* is Achebe's most formally intricate work. A complex non-linear narrative that is partly a meditation on the power and function of storytelling in society, the book is another satire of postcolonial politics, describing a military dictatorship in a fictional African nation (Kangan) that obviously resembles Nigeria. Clearly influenced by the events of the Nigerian civil war of 1967–70, the novel is a powerful indictment of the violence and corruption that have informed the postcolonial histories of so many African nations.

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Numerous other novels have also been inspired by the events of the Nigerian civil war as well as works of poetry, drama, and non-fiction. However, the impact of that war on the fiction about it is often so direct that the line between fiction and non-fiction is extremely unclear. Thus, "novels" such as Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn* (1976) and Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty* (1976) derive largely from actual personal experience in the war. Nigerian civil-war literature has been dominated by writers from Biafra, much of it sympathetic to the Biafran cause. However, some of the most powerful depictions of the chaos and devastation of the war see the entire event as an outbreak of historical absurdity and insanity. Some of the most horrifying accounts in this vein appear in the works of the non-Biafran Wole Soyinka, such as the novel *Season of Anomy* (1973). In a mode reminiscent of European surrealism, Soyinka presents the war as a confusing and chaotic event in which there are no clear heroes and villains. An even more effective denunciation of the war appears in Festus Iyayi's *Heroes* (winner of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1986), which rejects the ethnic terms of the civil war as misguided, seeing instead class inequality as the crucial social phenomenon dividing Nigerian society. The central point made by Iyayi in the book is a simple one: The intertribal warfare that informed the civil war was instigated by a few powerful leaders on both sides who stood to gain both power and wealth from the war. Meanwhile, the common soldiers who fought on both sides were being manipulated by these leaders into slaughtering one another when in fact their real enemies were not the soldiers on the other side but the generals and politicians instigating the war from both sides. Iyayi's approach, incidentally, is substantially influenced by that of Soviet socialist realism. One might note, in fact, that the African historical novel as a whole has a great deal in common with works of socialist realism, some of the most important of which were also historical novels, also engaged in an attempt to help build a new cultural identity free of the domination of the European bourgeois past.

One of the richest veins among historical novels based on the African struggle for independence involves the Mau Mau rebellion. Ngugi here is the dominant figure, but the treatment of the Mau Mau movement varies considerably in the works of different writers. For example, Charles Mangua's *A Tail in the Mouth* (1972), while it is highly critical of the "home guards" (the Kenyan troops who sided with the British to suppress the rebellion) can be read as a satirical treatment of the Mau Mau freedom fighters, or even as a parodic response to Ngugi's positive vision of those fighters as paradigms of anti-colonial resistance. Meja Mwangi's novels *Carcass for Hounds* (1974) and *Taste of Death* (1975) are basically sympathetic to the Mau Mau movement, but focus on the suffering of both the

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freedom fighters and their opponents. In doing so, Mwangi's Mau Mau novels sometimes veer dangerously close to a repetition of colonialist myths of the Mau Mau as primitive savages driven by blood lust. The same might also be said for Godwin Wachira's *Ordeal in the Forest* (1968), which combines a biting critique of colonialism (especially through its depiction of the racist British officer Major Cook) with a seeming acceptance of a number of colonialist stereotypes about Africans. Meanwhile, the story collection *Potent Ash* (1968), by Leonard Kibera and Sam Kahiga, and the novel *Voices in the Dark* (1970), by Kibera, are also sympathetic to the Mau Mau cause, but focus on the nightmarish conditions in Kenya brought about by the rebellion and the British response to it and on the deplorable social and political conditions in the postcolonial Kenya to which the rebellion indirectly led. Charity Waciuma's *Daughter of Mumbi* (1969), on the other hand, is far more consistent in its support for the Mau Mau cause through a depiction of the justice of their opposition to conditions in colonial Kenya.

Such Mau Mau novels are indicative of the extent to which depictions of the struggle against colonialism (and the postcolonial extension of colonialist inequities) have been central to the development of the African historical novel. One of the classics of the genre is *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* (1960, English translation *God's Bits of Wood*, 1962), by the eminent Senegalese novelist Ousmane Sembène, which dramatizes the 1947 strike against the Dakar–Niger railroad in French colonial Africa as a moment of growing anti-colonial resistance. One might also note such examples as Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* (1989), which details the impact on its protagonist of the long struggle for liberation from white rule in Zimbabwe. Especially notable in this regard are the novels of the white Angolan writer Pepetela, who himself fought with the MPLA guerrillas in Angola's long war for independence from Portugal and who recorded this struggle in such novels as *Mayombe* (1980), while such novels as his *A Geração da Utopia* (1992) provide reminders (again recalling the work of Fanon) that independence itself did not automatically solve all of Angola's social and political problems.

The phenomenon of apartheid dominates the historical novel from South Africa. For example, the early novels of the black Communist party activist Peter Abrahams, such as *Song of the City* (1945) and *Mine Boy* (1946) actually pre-date the formal establishment in 1948 of the racial policies that would come to be known as apartheid, but they are strongly engaged with their own historical moment. Though written from exile in England, they show a strong awareness of the conditions that led to apartheid, though they are informed by a Marxist insistence that class-based oppression underlies the overt racism of South African society in the 1940s. Meanwhile, Abrahams's later *Wild Conquest* (1950) is a more properly historical novel that locates the

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roots of apartheid in the early history of encounters of Afrikaner settlers with the indigenous Matabele people during their "Great Trek" into the interior of South Africa in the 1830s and 1840s. Abrahams was an inspiration to any number of subsequent black South African writers, though his most important successor was probably the colored Communist activist Alex La Guma, whose novels explored the historical realities of apartheid and the need for resistance to it. Also important for her engagement with South African history is the white Nobel Prize-winning novelist Nadine Gordimer, whose works cumulatively trace the history of apartheid (and its aftermath) in South Africa.[13] Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* and *A Sport of Nature* are particularly interesting in that they greatly resemble, in a formal sense, the European historical novels praised by Lukács, even though *A Sport of Nature* actually extends into the future in its (prescient, as it turned out) vision of the end of apartheid.

South African novels of the post-apartheid era have tended to focus on the contemporary situation, though some seem designed to ensure that the past will not be forgotten in the new world after apartheid. This last project is crucial to Aziz Hassim's *The Lotus People* (2002), which focuses on the history of South Africa's Indian community in a mode that is clearly intended to help preserve the particular cultural past of this hybrid group. Among other things, this novel expands the black African vs. white Western cultural oppositions that have informed much African fiction, looking east rather than west to provide reminders of the truly multicultural nature of South African society. Though written in a largely comic mode, *The Lotus People* is a sweeping multi-generational historical saga that covers much of the twentieth century and shows its characters in relation to a number of historical events, especially apartheid.

Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* (2000) is a particularly interesting example of the post-apartheid historical novel in South Africa. Here, dual narratives relate events occurring in the same South African coastal town of Qolorha in the mid-nineteenth century and in the post-apartheid era, respectively. Mda's title self-consciously evokes Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), an important predecessor (if an antithetical one) to so much African fiction. The "redness" in Mda's title refers to the red ochre that some of the local women of the town rub on their skins (and to the red skirts they wear) as part of certain traditional rituals. The more "modern" residents of the town regard these rituals as markers of backwardness, making the "redness" of Mda's title, at least for them, a virtual synonym for Conrad's "darkness" as a marker of purported African primitivity.

The residents of Qolorha are starkly divided into "Believers" and "Unbelievers," whose differences date back to the events of the 1850s, when the community was ravaged not only by the increasing intrusion of

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the colonizing British but also by their own differences of opinion over the legitimacy of certain local prophets. The Believers accepted the prophecies of these home-grown seers, and their descendants to this day tend to lean toward respect for African cultural traditions. Descendants of the Unbelievers, who rejected these prophecies, tend to advocate modernization and a turning away from tradition. The post-apartheid narrative of the novel, in fact, involves a debate over the possibility of opening a new casino in the town in an attempt to stimulate the local economy. Predictably, the Believers oppose the project, feeling it will further weaken the traditional culture of the town, while the Unbelievers support the project as a way of helping to modernize the town and helping it to break free of the ignorance and superstition that many of them associate with the African past.

The Heart of Redness is thus structured to address fundamental issues of tradition versus modernity, issues that are central to history all over the world but that are particularly charged in Africa, where the history of colonization and its aftermath makes this issue one of indigenous culture versus Western culture. Thus, some proponents of modernization in Qolorha, such as Xoliswa Ximiya, the high-school principal, are driven by an uncritical (and uninformed) admiration of all things American that borders on worship. At the same time, Ximiya regards anything smacking of traditional African culture as primitive and embarrassing.

However, Mda's novel is far more than a simple critique of Ximiya's attitude. It presents the opposition between tradition and modernity in Qolorha as a highly complex one. Both sides have points in their favor and both have blind spots. In addition, the traditional local opposition between Believers and Unbelievers is complicated by the presence of Camagu, an American-educated man from Johannesburg, and John Dalton, a white man who runs the local trading post and whose ancestors have lived in the town for generations. Both Dalton and Camagu oppose the casino, though neither is otherwise aligned with the Unbelievers. And it is Dalton (acting on an idea first proposed by Camagu) who defeats the casino project by having the town declared a national heritage site by the government. As the book ends, however, the battle is far from over. There remains the possibility that the casino project will be resurrected in the future. In the meantime, the town becomes a destination for tourists who wish to view traditional African cultural practices – which are enacted for them by the locals in a way that makes them anything but authentic. It is, the book implies, impossible to preserve the culture of the past in pure form, even as it is important to draw strength from that culture amid the confusion of modernization.

Novels such as Gordimer's *None to Accompany Me* (1994), J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999), and Mda's *Ways of Dying* (2002) have focused more

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specifically on the travails of life in post-apartheid Africa, while acknowledging that the end of apartheid did not magically solve all social, political, and economic problems in South Africa. In this sense, these post-apartheid novels have much in common with those, such as Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* or Achebe's *A Man of the People*, that focus on the postcolonial period. All of these novels, however, are rightly regarded as historical novels. Much like the work of Honoré de Balzac (much admired by Lukács), they focus on their contemporary moment, but clearly understand this moment as one of intense historical transformation, however fraught with difficulties that transformation might be.

Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1969) is particularly notable among such novels, for both its intense (if allegorical) critique of the failures of Kwame Nkrumah's postcolonial government in Ghana and its specifically Fanonian viewpoint on the source of these failures. Armah depicts a postcolonial Ghana enthralled by the "gleam" of Western capitalism and thus trapped in the bourgeois ideology of its colonial predecessors. "The sons of the nation were now in charge," the narrator tells us early in the book, but it is striking "how completely the new thing took after the old."[14] Also notable among historical novels dealing with the postcolonial period is Nuruddin Farah's trilogy *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship*, which comprises *Sweet and Sour Milk*, *Sardines*, and *Close Sesame*, published over the period 1979–83. Using a complex mode of narration reminiscent of the works of European modernism, this trilogy details conditions during the Siyad Barre period in Somalia. It is somewhat unusual among African historical novels in that it deals in important ways with the influence of the Soviet Union on the Siyad Barre government during the period 1969–78, though it looks back to the influence of earlier Arab intrusions as well. The novel thus calls attention to the impact of the Cold War on postcolonial Africa, as the Americans and Soviets competed for the allegiance of Africa's new national governments, granting substantial amounts of aid but also demanding sometimes crippling forms of cooperation in return. (Interestingly, Siyad Barre lost Soviet support because of his expansionist attempts to annex the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. He then switched his allegiance to the United States in 1978, but his brutally autocratic policies continued unabated until his ouster in 1991.)

Farah's modernist style of narration differs substantially from that of the realist historical novels championed by Lukács. Other African historical novels have gone in different, more distinctively African–postcolonial directions. One might list here Ben Okri's much-admired attempt to capture the strangeness of modern Nigerian history through an Africanized fantastic magical realism in *The Famished Road* (1991) or M. G. Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack* (1989), which retells the history of Tanzania in a mode of

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magical realism more reminiscent of Salman Rushdie's magical realist narrative of the history of modern India in *Midnight's Children* (1980). Also focusing on the history of Tanzania is Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise* (1994), which is a sort of *Bildungsroman* in which the coming of age of Yusuf, the Muslim protagonist, includes a growing awareness of the European presence in his African world. In particular, Yusuf's experiences are set against the background of the beginning of World War I, the terms of which he is only vaguely aware. *Paradise* thus dramatizes the impact of German colonization on what is now Tanzania (somewhat in the mode of *Things Fall Apart*), but also provides a reminder of the Eurocentric biases of Western histories that allow primarily European experiences (such as the "world" war) to be considered the only important events of global history.

Particularly notable among attempts to construct a distinctively African historical novel is Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973), which employs a narrative voice intended to mimic the style of traditional Akan oral storytelling to relate the history of Ghana from the original migration of the Ashanti to the area, through the period of Arab intrusion and slave-trading, on into the period of European colonization and its postcolonial aftermath. The book places great emphasis on the traditional African "way" of reciprocity and communal cooperation as a utopian correlative to the competitive ethos of both Islam and capitalism, though it also acknowledges the complicity of Africans in their own subjugation by outside forces. Still, the book is far more optimistic than the earlier *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, looking forward to a positive Ghanaian future informed by lessons learned from the past.

In its sense of a past distinctively different from the present and of a possible utopian future that moves beyond the limitations of the present, *Two Thousand Seasons* would appear to avoid the decadence associated by Lukács with the late bourgeois historical novel and that one might associate with Ouologuem's *Le Devoir de violence* – which brings us back to the question of decadence in the African historical novel via a comparison of these two texts. Ouologuem's novel, awarded the prestigious Prix Renaudot in 1968, became one of the first African novels to receive significant critical acceptance in the West – though that acceptance was quickly followed by controversy. Employing a narrative voice reminiscent of the traditional African *griot* or storyteller (combined with a liberal dash of modern irony), the book tells the story of the fictional Nakem Empire, tracing its early conquest by Arab invaders, the later years of French colonial rule, and the postcolonial era in which it becomes the nation of Nakem-Ziuko. This historical scope allows Ouologuem to remind readers that the era of French colonialism was preceded by an earlier era of Arab conquest and domination,

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so that the history of his fictional African realm (like that of all of Africa) extends back much farther than the moment of European colonization. Moreover, Ouologuem suggests that the indigenous Saïf dynasty (which rules the Nakem Empire through techniques of murder and terror from the early thirteenth century onward) remains firmly in control even during the French colonial period. The Saïfs and the local "notables" who support them manipulate their naive French colonizers to their own advantage and even assassinate any French officials who fail to play along. Meanwhile, the common people of Nakem consist primarily of an abject underclass of *négraille*, or "nigger-trash" who suffer the same kinds of oppression regardless of the nominal identities of their rulers.

Ouologuem's text was extremely important for its inventive adaptation of the French language to an African context and for its sweeping historical scope. On the other hand, its subject matter is informed principally by abject violence and transgressive sexuality, recalling Lukács's descriptions of the decadence of *Salammbô*.[15] It thus threatens to confirm and reinforce negative European stereotypes about Africa – especially as Ouologuem is careful to attribute much of the violence and abjection in his depiction of African society to indigenous African cultural forces rather than to the impact of European colonialism. In addition, Ouologuem's textual appropriation of works by European writers like André Schwartz-Bart, Graham Greene, and Guy de Maupassant seemed to many critics an outright case of plagiarism, which might be taken as an enactment of Fanon's warnings against a postcolonial elite that merely mimics its European predecessors. Greene went so far as to file suit for plagiarism, causing the English translation of Ouologuem's book to be reissued in a "corrected" edition with certain passages corresponding too closely to passages in Greene's *It's a Battlefield* expurgated.[16] It is, however, the numerous similarities between *Le Devoir de violence* and Schwartz-Bart's *Le Dernier des justes* that have triggered the most controversy. On the other hand, Ouologuem has had numerous defenders as well; for example, Christopher Miller has argued that the cut-and-paste construction of *Le Devoir de violence* is an effective literary strategy that challenges the dominant position of European discourse. In addition, Miller has argued that Ouologuem's book represents an effective response to the stereotyping so prevalent in European discourse on Africa, rather than simply repeating those stereotypes.[17]

Lukács is probably correct that, in the escapist spectacles of cruelty that inform European texts like *Salammbô*, we can see the former dynamism of the European bourgeoisie beginning to go to seed. But the violence of so many African texts is surely an example of a fidelity to social reality of which Lukács could not entirely disapprove. The legacy of colonial violence in Africa is well

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known, and recent events in places like the Sudan, Somalia, Rwanda, and Liberia have provided vivid reminders that even the postcolonial history of Africa has often been one of carnage and brutality. It is thus not surprising that any number of works of African literature can rival even Ouologuem in their emphasis on such violence. In addition to the spectacular case of *Le Devoir de violence* itself, one need only recall Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*, Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*, or Farah's *African Dictatorship* trilogy to begin to realize the extent to which violence underlies the African historical novel – but the same can be said for African history itself.

Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* itself contains almost as many images of violence and cruelty as does Ouologuem's text, though in this case the scenes of violence can be read at least partly as a critique of the seeming fascination with violence in *Le Devoir de violence* (and of the violence in African history), much as violent films such as *Rollerball* (1975) and *Natural Born Killers* (1994) were intended as criticisms of the fascination with violence in American culture. Of course, this project is a precarious one, as can be seen from the fact that many have seen these films themselves as spectacles of violence, just as Lukács saw the concentration on violence and pathological states of psychology in modernist texts as signs of bourgeois decadence, even though these texts were often intended to reveal the hidden layers of violence and cruelty that lay beneath bourgeois piety and decorum.

In *Le Devoir de violence* Arabs and Europeans are both complicit in African violence, but violence and cruelty ultimately seem always already to be a part of African (and European) life, suggesting (almost along the lines of Sigmund Freud's indication of the instinct for aggressiveness in *Civilization and its Discontents*)[18] that such phenomena are fundamental to human social activity. On the other hand, for Ngugi, Achebe, and Soyinka (as for Fanon, for that matter), European colonialism is the major initial culprit in the African legacy of violence, though contemporary Western Cold-War manipulations remain important here as well, especially in Ngugi. Farah, in his largely negative focus on Muslim patriarchal traditions, begins to suggest sources in the more distant past of Arab intrusions into Africa, though he also places much of the blame for the violence of the Siyad Barre regime on their contemporary Soviet Cold-War masters.

Two Thousand Seasons provides an especially thoughtful and measured analysis of this question that escapes Ouologuem's universalization while at the same time acknowledging indigenous contributions to the baleful history of violence in Africa. *Two Thousand Seasons* echoes *Le Devoir de violence* in its use of numerous scenes of cruelty and violence in its characterization of certain aspects of African history, but, where Ouologuem's book might be

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accused of reproducing Africanist discourse, Armah's book places these images within the context of a perspective so anti-Africanist that it has been accused of racism in reverse.[19] Thus, Soyinka argues that Armah's book participates in the anti-colonialist discourse of African thinkers like Cheikh Anta Diop in the same way that the writing of Rudyard Kipling and H. Rider Haggard participates in the discourse of European colonialism.[20] Like Ouologuem, Armah employs a sweeping historical scope that allows him to indict both European colonialism and the earlier Arab intrusions (especially those involving slaving) as sources of destruction and dysfunction in African society. Indeed, to an extent Armah lumps Arabs and Europeans into the same category of "white" destroyers and predators. But Armah differs significantly from Ouologuem first in his suggestion of the possibility of significant change over time and second in his evocation (somewhat reminiscent of Ngugi) of a heroic African tradition of resistance to foreign domination. Neil Lazarus thus concludes that, whereas Ouologuem's text operates in a consistent mode of negative demythologization, Armah's is an attempt at a "remythologization of African history."[21]

Granted, Armah to an extent echoes Ouologuem in his insistence on the complicity of Africans in their own destruction from the very beginning. However, for Armah, the complicity is not inherent in African culture but occurs because the people of "Anoa" have themselves drifted from the African "way" of communal cooperation and "reciprocity" to such an extent that they are vulnerable to destruction from without. The people of Anoa are thus told that, for their tribulations, "there is one cause – all else are branches: you have lost the way."[22]

Ouologuem, in his fictionalized history of the African empire of Nakem, goes considerably further than Ngugi or Armah in his denunciation of African complicity with foreign invaders, placing most of the blame for the brutality and savagery that inform conditions in the empire on the machinations of the Saïf dynasty that rules this empire through techniques of murder and terror from the early thirteenth century onward. Moreover, where Armah's indigenous rulers (the corrupt king Koranche is the central figure here) are the mere decadent lackeys of foreign masters, Ouologuem shows the Saïfs and the "notables" who support them to be fully in charge, manipulating their naive French colonizers to their own advantage and even assassinating any French officials who fail to play along. However, such assassinations have little to do with the tradition of anti-colonial resistance that is so important to both Armah and Ngugi and are presented as purely selfish attempts to preserve the existing power structure.

Two Thousand Seasons draws upon African oral traditions in its consistent use of a griot-like narrative voice that helps to move the text beyond the

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conventions of European realism and into a more mythic mode of storytelling typical of African oral narratives. However, as opposed to the timelessness of myth the vision of *Two Thousand Seasons* is profoundly historical. Further, while Armah does emphasize the value of a useable past, this past is not something to be recovered so much as something to provide inspiration for the future, which remains open.[23] Thus, Armah's collective narrator repeatedly declares that "we are not a people of yesterday" (pp. 1, 2). And, while ending with an optimistic proclamation that "our people will live, and will necessarily destroy the white destroyers infesting us together with their helpers the parasites," this narrator also insists that this Fanonian destruction will be succeeded by "a vision of creation yet unknown" (pp. 317, 321).

The forward-looking vision of *Two Thousand Seasons* thus recaptures much of the utopian energy that Lukács sees as having been lost to the European historical novel by the late nineteenth century. Meanwhile, the rootedness of Armah's novel in traditional oral storytelling traditions is indicative of the way in which the African novel must undertake the special task of demonstrating that Africa even *has* a pre-colonial history. The novel is thus emblematic of the African historical novel as a whole, even as its very difference from works such as *Le Devoir de violence* demonstrates the range and diversity of the African historical novel, characteristics that match the richness of African history itself.

NOTES

1. Thomas Mofolo, *Chaka*, trans. by Daniel Kunene (London: Heinemann, 1981).
2. Emmanuel Obiechina, *Culture, Tradition, and Society in the West African Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 35.
3. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).
4. Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. by Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).
5. Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 226–7.
6. Frantz Fanon, "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness" in Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1968), pp. 148–205.
7. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 153.
8. Lukács, *Historical Novel*, p. 193.
9. For that matter, of course, medieval Europe was depicted in much the same way in bourgeois historicist discourse, thus making the emergent bourgeoisie the saviors of a Europe steeped in superstition and ignorance thanks to the rule of the aristocracy.
10. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Africa: Endurance and Change South of the Sahara*, trans. by David Maisel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 66.
11. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (London: James Currey, 1993), p. 97.

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12. In this sense, the novels of both Ngugi and Chinua Achebe might be compared to the novels of Honoré de Balzac's *Human Comedy*, which collectively narrate the peak period in the bourgeois cultural revolution in France.
13. For an excellent study of the engagement of all of Gordimer's fiction with South African history, see Stephen Clingman, *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1986).
14. Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (London: Heinemann, 1969), p. 10.
15. One might note that *Salammbô* is also set in Africa – and that the work of Flaubert is identified by Edward Said as a key example of European Orientalist writing. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage; Random House, 1979), pp. 179–90.
16. On the other hand, see Seth I. Wolitz who has compared the texts of Yambo Ouologuem and Graham Greene and concludes that the former is actually the more inventive. Seth I. Wolitz, "L'art du plagiat, ou une brève defense de Ouologuem," *Research in African Literatures*, 4.1 (1973), 130–4.
17. Christopher Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* (University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 216–45.
18. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930) (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2005).
19. Derek Wright, for example, argues that "the growing tendency to blame all Africa's woes upon the West, most pronounced in *Why Are We So Blessed?*, stiffens, in *Two Thousand Seasons*, into an explicit racism." Derek Wright, *Ayi Kwei Armah's Africa: The Sources of His Fiction* (London: Hans Zell, 1989), p. 233. On the other hand, for an argument that the racialism of *Two Thousand Seasons* is not a liability because the book treats race in a symbolic and mythological, rather than realistic, mode, see Robert Fraser, *The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah: A Study in Polemical Fiction* (London: Heinemann, 1980), pp. 72–3.
20. Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 107–8.
21. Neil Lazarus, *Resistance in Postcolonial African Fiction* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 216.
22. Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1979), p. 26.
23. Indeed, Armah's utopian vision corresponds in many ways to the notion of "open" utopia described by Raymond Williams in "Utopia and Science Fiction," *Science-Fiction Studies*, 5 (1978), 203–14. For a good discussion of the complexity of Armah's utopian vision, see Ato Sekyi-Out, "'Toward Anoa … not back to Anoa': The Grammar of Revolutionary Homecoming in *Two Thousand Seasons*," *Research in African Literatures*, 18.2 (1987), 192–214.

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10

ATO QUAYSON

Magical realism and the African novel

The term "oral traditions" is normally employed by Africanists to denote the field of non-literary or non-written resources. The term occupies the same semantic field as the term "orality" though the second term seems to have arisen in opposition to the implicit valorization of "literacy" in studies of non-industrial cultures and their differences from industrial ones. Orality was then extended to denote a set of conceptual skills which bear the same status as literacy in constituting a sense of cultural identity. In this usage it transcends the past-orientated sense of "oral traditions" to embrace a notion of generalized concepts, symbols, rhetorical capacities, and even unarticulated assumptions whose inspiration is the totality of oral culture. As F. Abiola Irele points out, it is significant also to remember that literary writing in Africa performs an integration of what he terms "aesthetic traditionalism."[1] Orality in Africa is not just a mode of speech different from writing, but undergirds an entire way of life. More importantly, the traditional esthetic forms that abound within African orality impact upon everyday environments as well as in more formal ritual contexts. The proverb, for example, opens up the "possibilities for mental processes and even cognitive orientation" and "represents a compaction of reflected experience and functions as a kind of minimalism of thought."[2] African writing takes inspiration from these resources of orality in order to establish a distinctive account of the African world.

Most contexts of orality exhibit a high level of polysemy in terms of the materials employed within each genre. In traditional African oral contexts, the dominant narrative genres that circulate have an element of the magical and the supernatural in them. These genres range from official myths of dynastic legitimation to cautionary and etiological tales of an explicitly fictional though didactic disposition. Myths, legends, and chronicles are normally considered as true in their various contexts, while trickster tales and other more "leisure"-oriented genres are taken as fictional. The only narratives that approximate realism as we know it from the Western novel are anecdotal exchanges between individuals, in which the objective is to secure a

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response or judgment on personal experience. The fact that most genres of orality retain a comfortable relationship to magical elements in the constitution of a cognitive response to the world suggests a contrast to the Weberian notions of disenchantment that are supposed to have marked Western modernity. Extended to the realm of literacy this enchantment then generates a particular response to both magic and realism such that the term magical realism gains a different kind of salience in African writing.

In one of the earliest attempts at exploring the place of magical realism in African literature, Kole Omotoso defines it in terms of the juxtaposition of one archaic economic system with a more advanced economic and social system, namely capitalism.[3] Omotoso prefers the term "marvelous realism" in his account and this echoes the terminology first suggested by Alejo Carpentier in a much-cited essay of 1949, which also served as the preface to his novel *El reino de este mundo* (*The Kingdom of this World*).[4] But Omotoso's definition also replays a dominant tendency in general definitions of magical realism in which a binary opposition is suggested between more traditional forms of knowledge on the one hand and the Western traditions of representation and philosophy on the other. Magical realism is then proffered as that mode of representation that challenges the Western tradition of realism, positing instead an alternative universe in which fantastical elements are placed side by side with the real in a process of establishing equivalence between them. By 2003 Harry Garuba was to coin the terms "animist realism," "animist materialism," and the "animist unconscious" to account for the continual re-enchantment and re-traditionalization of African thought, belief, and practice. For Garuba this re-enchantment finds expression not only in African literature but is also instrumentalized by African political and cultural elites for specific purposes. He provides a condensed definition of the terms towards the end of his essay:

> Within the animist worldview, as we have seen, the physical world of phenomena is spiritualized; in literary practice, it devolves into a representational strategy that involves giving the abstract or metaphorical a material realization; and in the social world of human relationships, and economic and political activity, the mediating meanings that animist thought posits as the currency of social exchange are instrumentalized, more often than not in ways that serve only local elites and their leaders. While the traditional elites do this by incorporating the instruments of modernity into traditional ritual practices, the new elites who control economic and political power within the modern state often prey upon the animist unconscious for spurious cultural instruments to bolster their authority and legitimacy.[5]

The echoes of Fredric Jameson and Raymond Williams in Garuba's terms are not accidental. He lays claim to direct inspiration from them, and makes

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his definitions more dialectical than Omotoso and other commentators on magical realism in the ways in which the opposed terms of tradition and modernity are seen to be mutually interconnected within apparently differing views of the world. Taking the fact of the re-traditionalization of African life that has been well noted by social scientists as a starting point, Garuba goes on to explain this not as a sign of resistant primitivism, but as the attempt to appropriate the tools of both traditionalism and modernity for explicitly strategic contemporary purposes. In his account modernity is revivified through the infusions of what might appear to some to be pre-modern animist and magical thought, thus removing the necessity of retaining the implicit opposition between the two terms in the first place. Furthermore, his definitions allow him to propose a fresh way by which to understand the mode of writing that passes under the term magical realism in general, thus hinting at a way by which the fertile productions from Latin America, South Asia, and Africa might be productively compared. For Garuba, "animist materialism subspeciates into the representational technique of animist realism, which may once again further subspeciate into the genre of magical realism" (p. 275). In other words in terms of a putative hierarchy, it is the animist unconscious and animist materialism that deliver both animist realism and magical realism, with magical realism being really a subgenre of the prior term. Without necessarily subscribing to his typology of levels, it is useful to dwell on Garuba's bold claim in outlining the place of magical realism in African literature and how this might be related to the mode of writing that goes under the term in discussions of world literature. As will be seen presently, there are other underlying dimensions of literary magical realism that go beyond the belief in a spirit world animating the objective universe.

The first qualification to Garuba's claim has to be made on the link he discerns between "animist materialism," as a practice of appropriation of the instruments of modernity for the process of re-traditionalization and re-enchantment, and "animist realism" as the literary representation of the sense that the world of objects and phenomena is inherently populated by spirits. Even if magical realist writers subscribe to the idea of the inherent animism of the objective world it may be argued that magical realist texts are not all united in articulating this sense of things, at least not in terms exclusively or indeed predominantly of the materialization of metaphor, which is how Garuba explains the matter. Rather, the perception of a labile reality of spiritual and other forms behind the visible world is explicable for magical realism in terms of the understanding that the world as we know it is inherently evolving, and that it is therefore both liminal *and* changeable. To take a lead from Wole Soyinka writing about African thought, we might argue that this understanding is marked by "an acceptance of the elastic

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nature of knowledge as its only reality, as signifying no more than *a reflection of the original coming-into-being of a manifestly complex reality*."[6] It is the foregrounding in literary narrative of this "coming-into-being" of complex reality that marks off magical realism from other forms of literary representation. The key here is that the movement of transition is articulated in the implication of liminality of which all objects, humans, and the environmental world are held to be expressions. This movement also finds voice in the specific ways in which this liminality is generated within the literary text, whether in the form of the continual and unpredictable shifts from the metaphorical to the literal, the obliteration of the boundaries between the spirit world and that of humans, the shifting nature of identity and the intersubjective dimensions of consciousness that undergirds this, and, what is often also the case, the degree to which a volatile proximity is established between the variously opposed binarisms that inhere within magical realist discourse. The world's liminality and changeableness is not asserted merely as an article of faith but is actualized in a literary form of writing that oscillates constantly between the real and the magical and thus seeks to obliterate the boundary between them.

A sense of the liminal exchanges of the forms of identity and value we have just noted is provided by Amos Tutuola, whose works may be taken as a precursor to African magical realism proper:

> After we won the war the whole of us were gladly marching to the town. But as the "Invisible and Invincible Pawn" woke up all the dead soldiers and replaced their heads which were cut off by the enemies to their necks and as my own was cut off as well, so he mistakenly put a ghost's head on my neck instead of mine. But as every ghost is talkative, so this head was always making various noises both day and night and also smelling badly. Whether I was talking or not it would be talking out the word which I did not mean in my mind and was telling out all my secret aims which I was planning in mind whether to escape from there to another town or to start to find the way to my home town as usual ... At the same time that I discovered that it was not my head which was mistakenly put on my neck, so I reported the matter to the mother, but she simply replied – "Every head is a head and there is no head which is not suitable for any creature."[7]

Here the understanding that identity is inherently interchangeable is given expression in the most extreme form, namely in the fact that one's consciousness can be replaced with that of another and that this must be taken as completely normal. Tutuola's is a form of proto-magical realism to the degree that the worlds of the fantastic and the real are clearly demarcated and the journey through the world of the fantastic is a rite of passage for the folklore

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hero. As we will come to see in the work of Ben Okri, the later writer seizes on this proto-magical realism for a productive template by which to launch his own magical realist experiment in his short stories and in *The Famished Road* and *Songs of Enchantment*, all of which bear animist and magical realist inspiration.

To attempt to describe any form of magical realist writing, whether African or otherwise, is also to face the necessity of outlining a theory of narrative. For without an at least provisional sense of what is entailed in narrative as such it becomes impossible to properly account for the magical realist mode of writing, and, what is also as important, to make internal differentiations between magical and non-magical elements within individual magical realist texts, and external distinctions between such texts and other genres of literary discourse. Narrative may schematically be said to be constituted by the presence of characters, of a story (expressible through different plot structures), of setting or spectacle (acting as mere historical/sociological/economic background or animated and adapted as part of characterization), and of a narrator who strikes up various types of relationships of proximity and distance between the characters on the one hand, and the reader or audience on the other. Language is the vehicle of all the other elements and it contributes a special medium which, as Mikhail Bakhtin has shown, allows for the intermingling of different class and social registers, world views, and discourses.[8] Along with these elements we must also note the specific structures of space and time, whether these reflect our understandings of space–time as usually taken from everyday life, or whether these are essentially porous and unpredictable, as is the case in science fiction and other non-realist genres. The labile nature of space–time may itself signal the recombination of emotion and perception as they move out of the characterological level of narrative to affect space and time as such. Such recombinations are most evident around affects such as love, envy, and guilt, all of which have both evaluative and emotional dimensions. No longer are such emotions merely lodged within the consciousness of the characters: they leak into space–time to make it a direct reflection of the problematic nature of the fraught nature of such affects.

Bearing in mind Irele's point about the integration of traditional estheticism into African writing, it is possible also to make a general distinction between magical realist texts from the continent and those from Latin America, South Asia, and elsewhere. A distinction is perceivable between magical realist literature that draws on well-known epic and sacred texts such as the Bible, the Qur'an, the Ramayana, classical Greek myths etc., and that which appeals to more local traditional oral sources, whether these have been subsequently codified in writing or not. Each group reveals a different conception of the

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configuration of the elements that go into magical realism, with implications for considering sacred time, character metamorphosis, and the interactions of the magical and the real. In the first group of writings would fall texts such as Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and *The Satanic Verses*, and Timothy Findley's *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, among various others. In the second group would fall Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Miguel Ángel Asturias's *Men of Maize*, and African magical realist texts generally. There are evident similarities between Morrison, Asturias, and African writers such as Ben Okri. These writers draw liberally on indigenous and non-Western oral discourses, thus importing into their texts the polysemy and porosity we noted earlier. This does not mean that there are no discernible crossovers in each type of magical realism, such as in the obvious appeals to the raconteur–audience dynamic of oral storytelling behind Salman Rushdie's Saleem Sinai, or the motif of Medea behind Morrison's Sethe, for example. However, what is also clear is that the dominant inspiration behind the texts has implications for the configuration of magical realism that is produced.

In taking account of African orality for an exploration of magical realism, what must be kept in view is that magical realism is first and foremost a literary mode in which equivalence is established between the code of the real and that of the magical. In this definition the real stands for the pragmatic and ordinary sense of everyday life as most people experience it and the magical is an umbrella term to denote elements drawn from mythology, fantasy, folk tales, and any other discourse that bears a representational code opposed to realism. But the central term of this working definition is the notion of equivalence. Equivalence is discernible in relation to the disposition of various elements such that there is no explicit hierarchy between the main discourses, whether magical or real. Thus, in magical realist discourse there should ideally be no sense of surprise or alarm shown by the characters within the text on the appearance of the magical.[9] In practice this is not always a straightforward matter, as initial surprise may then make way for a complete acceptance of what seemed odd and startling in the first place. Furthermore, the narrator (whether third-person omniscient or first-person participant) must not pass judgment on the magical in order to suggest an ethical or other hierarchy between that and the code of the real. Additionally, the magical realist elements are not posited as an escape from or struggle with the real, as was the case in Tutuola's work, or as an attempt at resolving a narrative or other impasse, as we find for instance when dreamscape sequences are proffered as resolutions of psychological crises in Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger* or Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*. Finally, when shifts take place between ordinary or empty space–time and

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changeable or saturated space–time they are not designed to establish a hierarchy between the two.

Often, as we shall see in a moment, the shifts between different notions of space–time within African magical realism are subsumed under the pressures of a national history or familial saga, thus converting the shifts between different modalities of space–time into an idiom of putative historiography. Despite the fact that these rules are frequently broken in literary practice, it is still the case that in texts that seek to pass as magical realist the notion of equivalence becomes a guiding principle that organizes all narrative elements. This applies both in the African instance and more generally. But to make a proper evaluation of whether a text is magical realist or not all the levels of narrative discourse we outlined earlier have to be taken into account. It is not enough just to focus on the magical elements and how they segue (or do not) into the realist elements. Rather, it is through the combination and recombination of elements across the codes of the realist and the magical and the persistent restoration of equivalence between them that magical realism establishes its distinctiveness from other literary codes of representation.

The paroles of African magical realism

Among those taken to be exemplars of magical realism in African literature, the most notable are Ben Okri, Kojo Laing, and Syl Cheney-Coker.[10] We may add to them the Angolan writer, Pepetela. This list does not take account of the many localized examples of magical realism that may be seen in writers such as Elechi Amadi, Soyinka, Marechera, Yvonne Vera, Calixthe Beyala, Zakes Mda and various other African writers. Apart from Laing, all the other major African magical realists I have mentioned draw on foundational sagas for the magical elements in their texts. This resource matrix then establishes a temporal-cum-fantastical framework for interpreting various elements in the text. Laing is exceptional in his *Woman of the Aeroplanes* in not turning to such a resource base for the magical elements in his novel. Rather, Adwoa Ade's flight across the skies of Accra is a material representation of popular ideas about witchcraft among the Akan and other African peoples. She is not an evil force but rather a "witch for Christ," since she balances the witchcraft bequeathed to her by her grandmother with a strong belief in God. When she flies over the city she crosses the lives of ordinary workaday people burdened with their petty worries and confusions. These people "pray" to her and address her as an agony aunt, telling her all their personal problems as she passes over them at night. But Laing is not so much interested in reflecting indigenous beliefs as in providing a surrogate for spiritual beliefs in general, be they indigenous or Christian. Aligning Adwoa's spiritual potential to a

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Christian basis ensures that the whole issue of spiritualism becomes relativized and problematic; thus there is no hierarchy among beliefs. The fact that her spiritual potential is projected outward and that she is seen flying by others disrupts the unity and coherence of the world for them, making them acknowledge an esoteric universe beyond that of their mundane existence. However, this disruption is beneficial rather than traumatic as they are allowed to momentarily escape their problems and enter into a dialogue with the spirit-realm represented in the flying Adwoa Ade. Irony attends this particular quest for spiritual solace because Adwoa herself has unresolved problems when she descends into the flesh. She is subject to the same earthly worries and tribulations. Her humanization acts as a mechanism for submitting her character to the process of equivalence we spoke of earlier. She is at one and the same time flesh and spirit, and both aspects of her identity are acknowledged by others beyond her. But perhaps most important from the perspective of magical realism is the fact that her flight across the skies is considered as normal, both by the narrator and the many people who bear witness to her nocturnal flight.

Pepetela's *The Return of the Water Spirit*, however, marries magical realism to elements of the mystery thriller. The story is set in a period just after Angola's violent civil wars, when the earlier communist government is transforming itself into a post-war capitalist bureaucratic order. The main realist emphasis in the story is placed on the progressive embourgeoisement of the character of Carmina Evangelista, who was a former cadre in the MPLA's (the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) Youth Wing and in the novel represents the disturbing transformation of the Angolan revolutionary class into a modern-day capitalist elite. Her husband João provides a lazy and skeptical counterpoint to the narrative of this elite. Interrupting the progress of this frame story is the baffling collapse of various apartment buildings around Kinaxixi Square. The buildings seem to collapse for no apparent structural reasons. What is more, the people in the collapsed buildings drift to the ground without ever getting as much as a bruise:

> Two elderly people also tumbled down, more surprised than actually frightened. As one can see, it was only the building itself which was destroyed – reduced to rubble. Neither the people nor the animals that lodged with them, nor the furniture nor the household appliances, suffered so much as a scratch. It was something which had never been seen before; people falling from a seventh floor, landing on the ground and feeling as though they had come down with a parachute … There was even the case of the two well-known lawyers who had been engaged in a ferocious argument in a flat belonging to one of them. They continued to argue it out after they had landed on the ground – that is, until a

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> journalist interrupted them to inform them of what had taken place. That was when, looking up, they both fainted with shock.[11]

The scramble for fridges, sofas, and other domestic possessions that ensues is complicated by the fact that in the era of communist standardization everyone had the same make of domestic furniture and appliances. In the novel what becomes of incremental interest is the reason for the mysterious collapse of the buildings, and the fact that a strange and eerie song is heard just before people fall down. From the very beginning of the story an expectation is set up for why the buildings might be falling down: "João Evangelista was married on the day the first building fell ... Afterwards they tried to find a cause-and-effect relationship between these two notable events, but this was much later, after the Luanda Syndrome had become headline news in the *New York Times* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*" (p. 1). The expectation that there might be a connection between the marriage and the collapse of the buildings turns out to be a completely false one. From the start, what this causal hint does is to set up a series of false leads with regard to the reason for the collapsing buildings. Researchers from the university, journalists from the local and international media, and ordinary people all provide possible explanations for the mystery. At one point even the CIA is a suspected culprit! Each one of these leads is given brief space in the narrative and then quickly superseded by the next explanation. The upshot of all of the failed leads is to suggest that the mystery of the collapsing buildings cannot be explained by means of rational veridical procedures (the researchers' measurements are an ironic case in point). This insight, however, does not make itself manifest to the consciousness of any of the characters in the novel itself; they each stubbornly pursue their various explanatory leads.

Alongside this discursive thread of the mystery thriller is set the more esoteric explanation for these unusual events. The first hint of this second thread is in the mysterious sorrowful song that rises from the ground shortly before and after a building collapses. Oddly enough this is heard only by Cassandra, a child in one of the apartments on the square. She is routinely dismissed by her family and the neighbours as a quirky child. However, Cassandra's quest to unravel the mystery of the song gets progressively more prominent until we discover that the song is connected to Kianda, the ancient spirit of the swamp that had been drained to make way for building Kinaxixi Square. Cassandra is told by a blind old man in the neighbourhood (a man from foreign parts himself and the only one who believed her), that Kianda manifests himself in many ways: "Sometimes it's a ribbon of the colours over water. Other times it's a team of ducks flying in a unique manner. Or it is the whistling of the wind. Why shouldn't it be a song?" (p. 83).

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Interestingly, the old man corrects Cassandra when she says she saw a painting of Kianda in which he was depicted as a mermaid. To him this classic image of the liminal fishwoman is not subtle enough to represent the spirit. As the old man is keen to point out, Kianda has a more ephemeral quality, best represented in the colors of the rainbow, the apparently meaningless formation of birds in flight, and the passing whistle of the wind. That the blind old man dismisses the mermaid as a potential avatar of the Spirit of the Water is odd, especially as the eerie song heard by Cassandra seems to have a distinctly feminine character to it. Might this interpretation not be the gender appropriation of a spirit that is essentially labile and impossible to pin down? However that may be, the liminal and transitory quality attributed to Kianda is precisely what cannot be acknowledged in a post-war Angola that is rapidly getting assimilated to the universe of global capitalism. The relentless trajectory of the capitalist narrative, as represented in the story of Carmina's rise is thus counterpoised to another narrative that appears timeless and resists easy closure and indeed narrativization.

Two things have to be noted in relation to the specific configuration of Pepetela's magical realism. First is what we have already noted about the various attempts at providing normalizing explanations for the collapsing buildings. The second is the direct opposite of rational procedures and shows itself in the Cassandra–Kianda narrative thread. Each of these symbolizes a radically different manner of verifying reality and they exercise a tug-and-pull dynamic within the larger frame narrative of Carmina and João's lives. However, strictly speaking the rational veridical procedures may readily be assimilated to the frame story itself, with Cassandra's pursuit of the magic voice of Kianda being left somewhat autonomous within the novel in general. The impression of the relative autonomy of the real and magical levels is further consolidated by the fact that all of the Cassandra–Kianda sections are separated out in the novel into different italicized sections. They tend to be short and somewhat cryptic, and deliver the mystery of the song piecemeal and in serial fashion.

Given this division, how does *The Return of the Water Spirit* qualify as a magical realist text? At one level the mechanism of equivalence is instituted within the realist frame narrative by the fact that the people who drop out of the falling buildings do not express any amazement at those unusual events. Once they get over the initial shock of losing their accommodation, the denizens of the fallen buildings immediately turn to the business of gathering their scattered possessions from the rubble. And for other observers the amazement is quickly overtaken by the confidence that there must be a rational explanation for them. In other words, there is no pause from the conduct of everyday life to be perturbed by what would seem to be unusual

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events; within the novel they are considered a part of reality. Furthermore, far from the italicized Cassandra–Kianda sections being just magical, they also harbour an allegorical message that is directly pertinent to the realist sections. These magical sections represent the esoteric haunting of Angola's past that has been subsumed under the rhetoric of economic modernization and capitalist acquisition. Since the rabid quest for material acquisition is now the key to the ruling elite's identity and is also played out in a somewhat burlesque and ironic form in the scrounging for missing possessions among the rubble of the collapsed buildings, the novel suggests that the people of Angola have no awareness of the determinants of spirit as encapsulated in Kianda and his sorrowful song. Those in the grip of acquisitiveness cannot even hear it. Indeed they are incapable of acknowledging the essential inadequacy of existing forms of rational explanation that have been inherently corrupted by the spirit of capitalism.

To complicate matters further, the allegorical message enshrined *within* the magical sections is paralleled by yet another allegory but this time from the realist sections. Pepetela's Cassandra bears echoes of her namesake in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. Like Aeschylus' prophetess, Pepetela's character is condemned to provide the chronicle of the collapse of the social order and yet is not believed by anyone. The link with Aeschylus is far from direct and is only made visible when we join Cassandra's position in the text to something else that seems completely unrelated and appears in the realist sections. These are João's frequently referred-to computer games in which he plays at founding nations. Romans, Aztecs, Germans, and various other epic nations are the subject of the computer-simulated games. What these epic games denote is the cycle and formation of nation-states, but this time transferred onto the domain of simulacra. The transfer then means that the games are utterly "pointless" in terms of any direct material effects they might have on reality outside the computer games themselves. And yet, the idea of the voicing and prepossessing of the future which is normally made manifest in all known epics through prophetic figures such as Cassandra and Tiresias (echoed in the novel by the blind old man) allows us to see that João's computer games are an allegory of the failed nature of Angola's nationalist project. Not only is João inordinately lazy, he is also a product of certain corrupt practices within the old regime. He is what might be described as a "ghost worker" and draws a salary despite hardly ever going to work. That he is given the mock-epic role of founding nations even as a form of escapism from happenings around him in the real world provides a comment on the apparent capitulation of the Angolan nationalist project to the false epic narratives of capitalism. In this respect his "dreams" of founding nations are the flip side of his wife's dreams of accumulating even more properties. They both represent the failures of the

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nationalist project but from radically different standpoints. The allegorical messages embedded in the realist and magical sections are then both cryptic messages of failures at different levels: first at the level of spirit and then at the level of action. To take these two allegories together we have to note that each term requires dialectical synthesis for Angola's imagined future. Thus the apparent separation and autonomy of the magical and realist sections is a sign of national tragedy encapsulated at the formal level of the narrative itself.

Whereas Pepetela's novel sets up two apparently autonomous narrative spheres that are then dialectically correlated at various discursive levels, in *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* Syl Cheney-Coker integrates mythical elements into the narration of a foundational saga that is supposed to bear historical significance for present-day Sierra Leone. His focus is more on magical realist characters, as opposed to events as such. Sulaiman the Nubian, a wizened prophet, arrives among the people of Kasila and foretells future events such as the arrival of diasporic Africans from across the seas, the founding of a new settlement (a veiled model of Sierra Leone), and the coming of the white colonizer, among other things. He "was old but his ageing was of a kind that had escaped the ravages of time and chronological oblivion."[12] Sulaiman is a figure of great magical prowess:

> Holding a drake by its neck, he rubbed hot ashes all over its body, spat on its head and threw it to the ground, after which it became dizzy and stretched out like a praying mantis. Then, facing the curious crowd, Sulaiman put a large calabash over its prostrate form. Working his mouth in some intricate pattern which made him more distant and awesome in that remote harmattan morning, he started chanting in an alien language and the spell was felt in the rhythmic movement of the calabash which, as if responding to its own involuntary force, rose from the ground to reveal to the startled crowd an armadillo which in that part of the world had disappeared and been confined to the remotest corner of existence. (p. 24)

If these details establish his credentials as a formidable marabout (a Muslim religious leader, often thought to be endowed with saintly virtues), the daughter he fathers with Mariamu, the barren and unsettled wife of his host in the town, serves to ground the magical elements firmly within the text. For Fatmatta is a truly magical realist creation. The diviner who comes to first wash her when she is born declares solemnly that she will "have the power of three women" (p. 31). As she grows up she begins to display remarkable powers. She is able to read the mind of others, see strange objects and figures invisible to everyone else, open doors merely by looking at them, and change the color of water just by touching it. To Mariamu her daughter is a witch; she tries everything to exorcize her yet her efforts are comprehensively defeated.

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But perhaps what is most pertinent about Fatmatta's character is that she is also a woman who arouses intense passions in men and yet remains tantalizingly out of reach to them. It is said that in her eyes could be seen "a scorpion with the predatory claws of ill-omen and the colour of a golden cobra" (p. 32). Fatmatta later falls in love with and marries a sudden arrival in the town. He turns out to be an albino. The strange man had "borrowed" the skin and face of another to be able to marry Fatmatta, but after the first night of love he immediately begins to lose his disguise. His life drains out of him and he crashes beside his new wife foaming at the mouth, dead. This albino character is reminiscent of Tutuola's tale of the "perfect gentleman," the main element of which involves a spirit that borrows body parts from other spirits in order to come to earth and woo a particularly recalcitrant local beauty who is famed for turning down the advances of all comers.[13]

Fatmatta's character is significant for interpreting the novel not just because of the delicate combination of female allure with tantalizing mystery but the fact that she exemplifies a particular problematic of womanhood that is assimilated to the magical realist register in *The Last Harmattan*. All women in the novel appear particularly strong and self-possessed and yet somewhat enigmatic. Mariamu expresses these qualities, as does Jean Cromantine to whom Fatmatta bequeaths her story on the sea journey back to Sierra Leone. Jean herself becomes an important matriarchal figure among the settler community and it is through her wisdom that they find a pathway through various difficulties. One problem with Cheney-Coker's representation of women in the novel is precisely the fact that they appear as ideal projections of male fantasies. All his positive female figures are described in terms of strong physical and esthetic presence. They also seem singularly at ease in their own sexuality. However, in Fatmatta's character the combination of allure and mystery places her in the company of other tantalizing female characters whose role it is to raise the poignant question of the relationship between sexuality, knowledge, and death. From the classical Sirens to the Loathly Lady of medieval romances to García Márquez's Remedios the Beauty and Isabel Allende's Clara, these women suggest the subtle yet intractable enigma inherent in women's sexuality and how this is interpreted by men. Thus, as they are assimilated to a code of the fantastic, such women symbolize a residual epistemological impasse that makes itself felt at more than one level of the magical realist text. At one level, it is the difficulty of how to understand the sexuality of strong female characters. But at another and more elusive level, it is the real difficulty of grasping the spiritual boundary that such strong forms of sexuality signify, forms which go beyond the human capacity for complete understanding. If later on in *The Last Harmattan*, this difficulty is seen to be contained within the dictates of

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the rational logic of a postcolonial politics, it is because this is essentially one that tries to evade the enchantment of the world in the pursuit of modernist and disenchanted modes of rational governance. But as is clearly evident from the political turmoil of the modern-day Sierra Leone as hinted at in the text, this evasion delivers only brutality and small-mindedness because of the failure to acknowledge what in effect are the elusive forms of national history.

It is with Okri that we arrive at what is indisputably the most sophisticated expression of magical realism in African literature today. Starting from some of the short stories in *Incidents at the Shrine* and *Stars of the New Curfew*, Okri sets out a mythopoetic schema that draws both on the long-established Yoruba literary tradition and on various eclectic sources from New Age mysticism to the Bible and other sacred texts.[14] The eclectic experiment first begun in the short stories comes to fruition in *The Famished Road*, which won Okri the Booker Prize in 1991. In several of Okri's short stories, such as "Stars of the New Curfew," "Incidents at the Shrine," and "Worlds That Flourish," there is a dual movement between the city and the forest or village and the trajectory of the characters' movement traces an increasing entry into the world of the esoteric whose strongest expression seems to lie outside the city. This trajectory is not to suggest a simple dichotomy between city and forest and real and esoteric, a dichotomy which was dominant in Tutuola's mode of storytelling. Instead, there is always the sense that the reality of the city itself is interwoven with esoteric significance. Indeed in "When the Lights Return" and "What the Tapster Saw," both to be found in *Stars of the New Curfew*, the stories are set either wholly or partly within one or other of city and forest but in such a way as to make their specific location completely open to the unpredictable effects of the magical.

The Famished Road brings to fruition all the narrative experiments that had been tried out in Okri's short stories. Central to the novel is the figure of the *abiku*. The abiku phenomenon refers to a child in an unending cycle of births, deaths, and re-births. Belief in the phenomenon is widespread in southern Nigeria with the name "abiku" being shared by the Yorubas and Ijos while the Igbos refer to them as *ogbanje*. It acts ethnographically as a constellar concept because it embraces various beliefs about predestination, reincarnation, and the relationship between the real world and that of spirits. In terms of the rituals that are geared towards appeasing the abiku, the concept also implies a belief in the inscrutability and irrationality of the unknown.

Okri's handling of the concept in *The Famished Road* is partly ethnographic in its lavish descriptions of rituals having to do with claiming the abiku child for the real world. The timbre of supplication dominates the mode by which Azaro's parents address him, even though they sometimes veer from this, much to their discomfiture. The entire human landscape is viewed

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through the eyes of the abiku child. Since the novel is narrated in the first person, with all events being focalized through the consciousness of Azaro, the universe of action is located simultaneously within both the real world and that of spirits. There is a suggested equivalence between the real world and that of spirits that cuts across various levels of the text. The narrative is constructed out of a dense interweaving of esoteric and reality passages with several different ways by which this interweaving is enacted. The nocturnal conflagration and the ensuing riots of the first night in the novel provide the initial impetus for the flow of all the narrative events generally. More importantly, the incidents of that night provide a take-off point for the first of numerous digressions into spirit passages. In the confusion of the riots, Azaro is separated from his mother and begins wandering belatedly in search of her. He is suddenly kidnapped by several women "smelling of bitter herbs" who carry him off to a strange island in the middle of a river along with a wounded woman they pick up on the way. After being warned by a "cat with jewelled eyes" about the threat to his life that continued stay on the island would bring him, Azaro decides to escape in a canoe and does so accompanied by the wounded woman brought along with him. The events of this digression run pell-mell for four pages to the end of Chapter 3.[15] But at the opening of Chapter 4 (p. 15), Azaro materializes under a lorry: "That night, I slept under a lorry. In the morning I wandered up and down the streets of the city."

The esoteric digression seems to have rejoined the first narrative almost at the same point from which it started. It is still night and since there are no other time indices we have no way of knowing whether it is a different night from that of the riots. At least we know that the events of the "cult of women" digression all take place at night so we can venture to imagine this reference to be to the same night but in a different part of the city. If that is granted, then it means that what the digression has accomplished is a filling of the interstices between two discrete moments in the narrative with a myriad esoteric events. This seems plausible also because the incidents of the first narrative do not have any relationship whatsoever with those of the esoteric digression. What this particular form of linkage suggests is that the spirit world remains a vital life operating *between* the arena of real events. And yet it is not a betweenness that interferes with the space or temporality of the real world. The only direct link between the esoteric events of these passages and those of the reality plane is that they are both experienced through the consciousness of Azaro. Okri varies the nature of the transitions between the real and the esoteric worlds, but the upshot of all the variations is to suggest that the passage between the two is both fluid and unpredictable.

At various points in the narrative, it is humans who take on the manifestations of spirits, thus additionally problematizing the distinction between

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humans and spirits. In the two instances when Azaro encounters lunatics, there is the suggestion that they share a curious kinship with the grotesqueness of spirit figures. Witness the description of the first madman whom Azaro meets at the marketplace and who expresses an uncanny interest in a piece of bread he is holding:

> There was a man standing near me. I noticed him because of his smell. He wore a dirty, tattered shirt. His hair was reddish. Flies were noisy around his ears. His private parts showed through his underpants. His legs were covered in sores. The flies around his face made him look as if he had four eyes. I stared at him out of curiosity. He made a violent motion, scattering the flies, and I noticed that his two eyes rolled around as if in an extraordinary effort to see themselves. (p. 17)

The impression that this madman's eyes have undergone multiplication because of a swarm of flies is unsettling enough, but what is even more troubling is that his eyes, much like the flies that surround them, cannot keep still. A second madman is encountered in front of Madam Koto's bar. His description is also striking:

> He had on only a pair of sad-looking underpants. His hair was rough and covered in a red liquid and bits of rubbish. He had a big sore on his back and a small one on his ear. Flies swarmed around him and he kept twitching. Every now and then he broke into a titter.
>
> ... He had one eye higher than another. His mouth looked like a festering wound. He twitched, stamped, laughed, and suddenly ran into the bar. (p. 84)

Certain implications derive from the specific interweaving of the reality and esoteric planes in *The Famished Road*. In the narrative shifts from the reality plane to the esoteric, with the same space simultaneously located within both realms, there is a suggestion that Azaro, and by implication the rest of nature and existence in general, is in a continually shifting conceptual space and partly at the mercy of those shifts. This affects the general notion of time and space and therefore the liminal thresholds and transitions that operated in Tutuola's narratives. Liminal thresholds are no longer conceived of as medial points within a process of transition from one status to another of perhaps greater significance. Those processes of transition are normally marked by acts of volition in the narrative space of the indigenous folk tale, and, within a larger cultural context, by acts of ritual self-preparation. The possibility of accessing the spirit world through ritual acts of volition or self-will is frustrated within the narrative of *The Famished Road*. And this is mainly because the shifts from one experiential plane to the other are no longer within the control of the central characters. Unlike what we saw operating

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in Tutuola's narratives, the spaces of reality and of the spirit world are no longer demarcated so that men can move from one to the other through their own volition. The logic of arbitrary shifts seems to take precedence over the volitional acts of the central characters.

As can be seen from the various examples of magical realism we have discussed, the configuration of elements differs from text to text. But the point is not so much that there are often such sharp textual differences but that all the African magical realist texts draw on the polysemy of oral discourse to establish the essential porousness of what might be taken as reality. In this they extend the real of such oral discourses while placing them in completely new literary contexts. To understand African magical realism then is perforce to engage with a full range of oral discourses: how they imbue, reshape, and ignite a sense of enchantment in a world that appears to be singularly disenchanted.

NOTES

1. F. Abiola Irele, *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 58.
2. Irele, *The African Imagination*, p. 32.
3. Kole Omotoso, *The Form of the African Novel* (Ibadan: Fagbamigbe Publishers, 1979), p. 26.
4. Alejo Carpentier (1949), *The Kingdom of this World*, trans. by Harriet De Onis (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006).
5. Harry Garuba, "Explorations in Animist Materialism: Notes on Reading/Writing African Literature, Culture, and Society," *Public Culture*, 15.2 (2003), 261–85 (284–5).
6. Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 53, italics added.
7. Amos Tutuola, *The Wild Hunter in the Bush of Ghosts* (New York: Three Continents Press, 1989), pp. 109–10. It is important also to note that Tutuola himself drew inspiration from D. O. Fagunwa before him. Fagunwa was a dominant figure in much of Yoruba literature from the mid-1940s when his books were introduced into the curricula in the then Western Nigeria. A direct borrowing Tutuola makes from the earlier writer is in the character of the hero and his quest. All the heroes of Fagunwa's books are hunters, who set out into the forest for one reason or another, encounter a host of challenges, overcome all these and return home more experienced. Tutuola borrows directly from this heroic format. Though Tutuola later makes some changes, his *The Wild Hunter in the Bush of Ghosts* (1982) is almost a literal translation (both in the sense of the title and the content of the novel) of Fagunwa's 1938 Yoruba-language novel *Ogboju Ode ninu Igbo Irunmale*. Fagunwa's novel was translated into English by Wole Soyinka as *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons: A Hunter's Saga* (1982 [1968]) and provides a useful point of comparison with the proto-magical

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realism of Tutuola. For more on this see Irele, "Tradition and the Yoruba Writer" in *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1981), pp. 174–97, and Chapter 2 of my *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing: Orality and History in the Work of Rev. Samuel Johnson, Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

8. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Marxism and Philosophy of Language*, trans. by Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (New York: Academic Press, 1986).
9. Despite many magical realist writers citing Kafka's *Metamorphosis* as a source of inspiration, the surprise expressed by Gregor Samsa's family on discovering he has been turned into a bug places it outside the realm of magical realism. The family progressively withdraws all familial sentiment, until they begin to use his room as a garbage tip and properly affirm his dung-beetlehood.
10. This is the view taken by Brenda Cooper in *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1998) and Pietro Deandrea in *Fertile Crossings: Metamorphoses of Genre in Anglophone West African Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), both of whom establish useful parameters for thinking about magical realism from the continent.
11. Pepetela, *The Return of the Water Spirit* (London: Heinemann. 2002), p. 4.
12. Syl Cheney-Coker, *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* (London: Heinemann, 1990), p. 19.
13. Redactions of this story are to be found across West Africa, but the particular element of a spirit borrowing body parts to come down to earth seems to be universal. A version of this is to be found in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, where Beloved has had to borrow her body to be able to come and live with the mother who had killed her eighteen years previously.
14. For more on this see Chapter 6 of my *Strategic Transformations*, and Douglas McCabe, "'Higher Realities': New Age Spirituality in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*," *Research in African Literatures*, 36.4 (2005), 1–21.
15. Ben Okri, *The Famished Road* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991), pp. 11–14.

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11

NANA WILSON-TAGOE

The African novel and the feminine condition

We must define the feminine condition beyond a biologically given feminine essence and a homogenous female experience. Women's lives within cultures are shaped not only by their biology but also by the material and social conditions of their societies, by their individual locations within communities and by the forms of power embedded in particular cultural norms. Our notion of the feminine should in addition encompass all those yearnings and desires of women that are never specifically named because communities do not acknowledge them in their understanding of the feminine. How all these situations are experienced, resisted and transformed through time should also be part of our conception of the feminine condition.

To explore the feminine condition in the African novel is to examine how these wider ramifications of women's lives are mapped, interrogated and reinvented in the medium of the novel. The novel's capacity to map and reorganize reality has made it the most convenient medium for African writers seeking to rethink their social worlds in transitional and postcolonial times. As a genre that encourages interiority and accommodates other genres, forms, and voices, the novel opens individual locations of struggle and desire and provides a flexible and discursive space for relating to the collective in new ways. While the feminine theme may be seen as part of this general reinvention of African worlds, it has been represented in the African novel through varying perspectives and ideologies and must be explored within an interpretive framework that can unravel both the discourse of the feminine and the politics of its representation.

A dialogic and intertextual approach to interpretation would reveal multiple thematic perspectives, open up sites of dialogue and contestation and situate texts within social networks of power. It is from such an interpretive framework that this paper examines selected male- and female-authored novels across different locations of African literary history. In reading Ousmane Sembène's *God's Bits of Wood*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* and Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* intertextually with the

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feminine-oriented novels of Nuruddin Farah and novels by women writers, Buchi Emecheta, Tsitsi Dangarembga and Yvonne Vera, the essay raises some crucial questions: How are representations of the feminine condition shaped by positionalities in narrative? How is a novelist's perspective, narrative, or language implicated in dominant values that structure the feminine condition? How can gender as a focus in narrative and a category of critical analysis interrogate and transform those apparently natural assumptions about the conditions of women's lives?

In the early male-authored novels of the 1960s and 1970s the feminine condition was frequently subsumed within dominant public and political themes even where it seemed poised to overhaul the social symbolic and its system of alliances. The strategy of exploring the feminine theme within the major themes of political and national struggles has been a particular ideological perspective of the modern African novel since the 1960s and 1970s. Most novelists of the time believed with Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral that it is within political and revolutionary struggles that new relationships and new sets of consciousness are developed. In such contexts, Fanon had argued, the significance of traditions changes; traditions "become fundamentally unstable and are shot through by centrifugal tendencies."[1] The decentering tendencies that Fanon envisages here are captured in varying ways in the African novels of the 1960s. How novelists map these intersections depends on their standpoints and the particular ideologies that guide their perceptions.

In his classic political novel, *God's Bits of Wood*, Sembène attempts to integrate political and feminine themes when he recreates the 1947–8 railroad strike in French West Africa as a political movement that redefines both colonial and patriarchal worlds. In presenting women as historical players transformed by their participation in the strike, Sembène opens spaces for probing systems (traditional and colonial) that determine women's conditions of existence in the community. The workers' strike is thus a paradoxical symbol that both unites and energizes the community for a common political struggle and at the same time reveals class, gender, generational, and ideological differences that threaten established social arrangements particularly in relation to women's place in the community.

How Sembène transforms these historical facts into fiction is itself a sign of the relationship between ideology and semiotic processes in the African novel of the 1960s. Most novelists of the period sought to create a genealogy of struggle as a usable past, believing that political novels are, as Gikandi argues, "informed by a belief that 'structure,' or 'history,' or the 'mechanics of society' provide man with referents which enable him to know himself and the world."[2] Thus Sembène condenses fourteen years of labor history in French West Africa into a year of intense activity while at the same time suggesting a

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large time span in which social and individual transformations could be explored. In *God's Bits of Wood* contexts of modernity and decolonization thus presuppose a decentered ideological world and a social flux within which old cultures and traditions are rethought in new ways. What the parallel modern worlds of Bamako, Thies and Dakar have in common is that they all demonstrate the paradoxes of changing pre-colonial, colonial and modern worlds and their impact on the conditions of women's existence in their communities. In all the three worlds the old framework that sanctioned caste and defined women solely in terms of their husbands seems no longer sustainable in a world characterized by new systems of power and new kinds of social crises. Colonial modernity may create the chaos, stench, and desolation of the city of Thies, but it also gives colonized people "access to symbolic resources for dealing with their own ideas, managing their own cultures in new ways."[3] This is the dynamic that facilitates the organization of the strike, and it is within the strike that individuals – men and women – define new relationships to colonial, social, and economic systems and to each other.

Commentators on Sembène's novel often remark on the extent to which women are empowered by their participation in the strike. But it is by examining how the discourse on the feminine condition coexists with other discourses in the novel that we unravel the gender implications of women's growth and empowerment. One of the most significant things about *God's Bits of Wood* is that while its main action – the railroad strike – is originally initiated and defined by men, it is redefined by women as they participate in it. The crucial tension in the novel stems from men's failure to recognize the major import of this phenomenon and from the narrative's inability to follow through its suggested gender themes. The male strikers develop a philosophy around the trains that defines the entire strike action in anti-colonial terms and in terms of a new modernity. The domain of the machine becomes then a male domain that is political and change-making but separate from the world of women.

Yet while it may appear as though the logic of the machines (the public domain) is the privileged arena of transformation, it is itself transformed by the intuitions, perceptions, and actions of the women. Male strikers interpret women's participation as practical contributions to the work of men, inspired by women's natural commitment to the domestic space. The authorial voice itself appears to collude in this view when it interprets the violence of Ramatoulaye's killing of Vendredi (the ram that eats up all the family's food) as inspired by "a cold fireplace in an empty kitchen."[4] But the violence of Ramatoulaye's new energy, contrary to this interpretation, is inspired both by her location in the domestic sphere and by her politicized understanding of the injustice that gives French colonialists power over the entire system, by a

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sense of outrage at the privileged status of her own brother, and by anger at the partiality of the entire police system in the cruel new time. The domestic space is thus not only equally politicized but actually proffered as a useful context for understanding and interpreting the new social reality and its transformative possibilities.

Indeed, as it turns out, a new generation of women will soon emerge who will collapse the boundaries of the political and the domestic as they reinvent themselves through political action. In celebrating commonly feminized and downgraded responses like song, intuition, and prophecy as sources of political and social insight, the women as a collective create other discourses and perspectives on the meaning of the strike. Their march from Thies to Dakar introduces a different form of social networking and different kinds of sensibilities into the hierarchy of discourses in the novel. While the male strikers privilege the book and the machine, the women marchers create their social bonding and "political" insights out of song, intuition, and prophecy.

The march is also both a physical and an inner journey that allows individual women to connect the larger politics with their inner striving. It is thus a context for the individuation of powerful characters like Penda and Maimouna, women outside the boundaries of their community yet able to transcend social stigma to define other powerful ways of being in the world. Penda, a known prostitute, becomes a strong and astute leader during the march to Dakar, just as Maimouna, the blind woman, reveals astonishing powers of intuition, perception, and prophecy. The insights she offers Penda about male–female relationships during the march may be seen as the novel's most serious attempt to complicate the logic of the machine, the philosophy that drives the politics of the strike. Her perception introduces a competing new layer of emotional intelligence that challenges the adequacy of the machine as the sole symbolic expression of the strike. As she warns the love-stricken Penda, "[That] man [Bakayoko] will occupy your heart, and then pass through it, leaving nothing but bitterness. He will destroy everything … The ones like Bakayoko will always be [women's] bane. They do with us as they will. Before you have time to say 'no,' you have already said yes" (pp. 195–6).

Though Maimouna speaks specifically to Penda her insights can be stretched to cover a general area of sexual politics, which the strike movement may be forced to address. The narrative's logic demands that we read Maimouna's insights and her song about the empowering story of the legendary woman, Goumba N'diaye, against Bakayoko's philosophy of the machine as a contending feminine perspective on the strike. If we do not see the full implications of these jarring and contending points of view, it is because the narrative's focus shifts quickly from Maimouna and Penda (who must either die or disappear) to the dominant space of the union building and the stories

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of the male strikers. Thus the after-effects of the women's march, the new tensions in gender relations, and the destabilizing impact of women's new power and solidarity remain as unfinished stories and gaps in the narrative.

Because the African problematic continues to be defined in terms of political empowerment and nation formation, there is often the temptation to conflate political and feminine themes in a single national discourse. This is what Ngugi attempts to do in *Devil on the Cross* by making the woman protagonist's personal story an allegory of the neocolonial condition in Kenya. But there is tension in this conflation. Wariinga's predicament derives not only from her neocolonial condition but also from her construction as a woman in her community. To see her individuation – her progress from a confused, exploited, and victimized woman in various relationships with men into a new woman able to define herself against imperialist and patriarchal ideologies – solely in political and economic terms, is to limit the impact of gender as a constitutive element in her social relations.

In *Devil on the Cross* however, the narrative of the feminine condition is sucked into and shaped both by the novel's political theme and by its reconceptualization of the novel genre in response to a new neocolonial context that can no longer be explored in straightforward realism through a lone protagonist. Thus, the telling of Wariinga's story moves in and out of different narrations as the narrative attempts to place it in different ideological situations. It is within these different narrations that the tension between the gender and political themes may be explored. When Wariinga retells her personal story objectively she is detached enough to see its wider gender implications and can grasp the fundamental ideology that constructs women's bodies in exclusively sexual terms: Yet throughout the novel her story is shaped by her confrontation with the larger political symbolism of the devil even though she continues to defy this thrust by seeing her predicament also as "the leprosy she has caught from men."[5]

In line with *Devil*'s strategy of exploring a communal regeneration, the narrative enlarges the national and political implications of Wariinga's story by relating it dialogically to other stories and forces in the novel. Here, economic exploitation not gender is the common denominator for reading social reality. The exploitation of the poor is the same as the exploitation of women, and it is as a worker and patriot that Wariinga plunges into the arena of struggle and discovers the strength for self-transformation. The "roaring spirit," Wariinga's self-questioning inner voice, confronts her with a political discourse that as always subsumes matters of gender within politics: "When the rich Old man from Ngorika snatched your body, what did you do? You decided that you wouldn't put up a fight. You said to yourself that since he had taken away your body, he might as well take your life too" (p. 191).

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Wariinga's struggle to rid herself of the assumptions behind the rich Old man's action is not a struggle to change the symbolic structures, languages, and ideologies that define women's bodies in the symbolic order but a simple collaboration with the struggle of "barefooted workers" on their way to attack the cave of robbers with sticks and placards. The tension between Wariinga's personal story and its allegorization thus remains as a gap in the narrative, robbed of the immediacy of narration that would have connected Wariinga's earlier life more credibly with her later life and created other productive tensions in a narrative of individuation.

Such simple conflations of gender and political themes, however, become more and more problematic as the concept of national culture and politics is itself further interrogated. There is some difference then, between the narrative of the feminine presented in *Devil* and the feminine condition as it is explored within Achebe's interrogative novel, *Anthills of the Savannah* (1991). Writing out of the crisis of the nation state, Achebe looks for new frameworks for reconceptualizing the nation from the varied conditions of its different constituencies. By decentering the old framework in which a dominant male elite assumed the right to imagine the nation and act in its name, *Anthills* appears to create a context for productive tensions between heterogeneous narratives of the nation's story.

But how fully can the feminine condition be explored in dialogic relations with other narratives when it is marginalized within a hierarchy of discourses in the novel? Influential commentators on *Anthills* are persuasive when they argue that the woman protagonist in the novel "is a representative of a new feminine presence, with a voice that must be listened to";[6] or that she offers "the possibility of sensing other historical rhythms, and of demonic or Utopian transformations of reality now unshakably set in place."[7] Indeed, Beatrice appears to signal a different relation to the postcolonial nation when she rewrites its history by first tracing her own gendered location within it. The challenge she faces as an agent of transformation, however, is how to interrogate and negotiate her gendered history within a postcolonial nation, and particularly, how to reposition her history in relation to ideologies that construct her as female and therefore marginal in the public and political domain. Gikandi sees her as beginning from a moment of silence and looking forward to the future. But the present from which the future may be gleaned hardly represents a radical rethinking that would disturb the "status quo" enough to effect a transformation. For Beatrice's narrative focuses not on "other historical rhythms" as Simon Gikandi suggests, but on her relationship with the very male witnesses who take up most of the novel's discursive space. While her narrative critiques the egoisms of the male witnesses and the kind of nation they preside over, it throws very little light on Beatrice's own

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location in the nation, on her fears and anxieties, on her relations with others in the community and on her differing political thinking.

It may be granted that the narrative signals Beatrice's singular location in the postcolonial nation when it metaphorizes her as the modern-day Idemili,[8] a symbolic and moral antidote to the unbridled power and egoism of the nation's male leadership. Yet as the third witness in an interrogative novel, Beatrice appears diminished in her narrative and seems to offer and accept stereotypically feminine and simple versions of her personality. Ikem and Chris see her unproblematically as both a modern woman and a traditional priestess, and Beatrice accepts this construction, apparently unaware of any possible tensions between the two roles. She interprets this duality as a mark of her combined spiritual and sexual power and of her ability to prophesy the coming tragedy. Yet her function in the narrative suggests that her duality would be much more radical and disturbing than the uncomplicated figure of Chielo, the woman priestess in Achebe's first novel, *Things Fall Apart*.

Because *Anthills* interrogates the notion of a postcolonial nation rather than consolidate a national community, the history of women within the nation is also a subject of intellectual discussion. Yet, even here, the power of articulation belongs to the male witness, Ikem. It is Ikem who theorizes women's oppression as part of his general rethinking of the nation even though it is Beatrice who gives him the insight in the first place. As it turns out, Beatrice contributes nothing to this theorization since in typical feminine fashion, she is too emotionally overcome by Ikem's powerful rhetoric. The problem in *Anthills* is that while the novel's crucial discourse on "the story" suggests that Beatrice's narrative would be an interrogative one, it is actually Ikem's narrative that delineates what is in the long run the novel's real preoccupation: the politics of the nation in the present and future. An interrogative novel may facilitate the coexistence of several social languages, but it is the novelist who must organize heteroglossia to create contestations that would produce new knowledge, and we do not see this happening in *Anthills*.

If the African novel has been overdetermined by the wider politics of national emergence and by a particular definition of the political, to what extent may its history and forms be reassessed if social and political realities are themselves read from the perspective of the feminine condition? One of the most profound interventions of feminism has been its redefinition of the very nature of what is deemed political. As a political project committed to changing unequal power relations between the sexes, it has transformed the notion of politics from its male conception as a change-seeking interest and made it an integral part of day-to-day relations between women and men. The political as redefined from this standpoint may be equally change-seeking in

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its transformation of ideologies, systems, and practices that construct individual and collective identities.

How then has a focus on the feminine condition reshaped the central esthetics of the African novel? How is discourse in the novel mediated by a foregrounding of commonly marginalized spaces and specifically feminine experiences? What narrative strategies have African novelists evolved to accommodate the increasingly complex meanings of the feminine condition? First, a specific focus on the feminine condition retrieves feminine histories from marginal locations in national narratives and dramatizes their variety and complexity. Even in *God's Bits of Wood* where social crisis blurs rigid boundaries between public and domestic spaces, no woman character is able to operate fully in both spaces. We do not have women's narratives of desire in any of the male-authored texts, nor do we encounter what Fredric Jameson calls the "libidinal,"[9] the psychological and emotional aspect of life that may still emerge in narratives however much it is circumscribed by the national allegory.

Yet, merely to add the feminine theme to the national narrative is not in itself a radical intervention and we should probe representations for their jarring impact and for their capacity to destabilize and reconstitute the normative categories that shape the feminine condition in the first place. A feminist political standpoint in the novel would go even further by conceptualizing reality itself from the vantage position of women's lives and probing the complex material and cultural forces that structure male–female relationships in the wider society. As a centered subject in the novel, the feminine condition introduces a heterogeneous range of themes that work to redefine new relationships to nation and history and impact on conceptions of space and time in the novel. It is possible that an intertextual reading of specific texts in relation to some of the novels already discussed would illuminate how this process works and with what impact on the African novel. How for instance, do the women-centered novels of Farah, Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Vera's *Without a Name* address larger political and sociopolitical issues through their explorations of the feminine condition?

Since most of these novels reposition national and private spaces in different ways, a general theory of private–public spaces and their gender implications would provide a common framework for analysis and interpretation. The so-called opposition between a public world of men and a domestic world of women would be too uncomplicated to take in the subtle and complex interconnections between the two spaces both in real life and in the novels. We should, in Niara Sudarkasa's words, "recognize two [overlapping] domains, one occupied by men and another by women – both of

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which were internally ordered in a hierarchical fashion and both of which provided personnel for domestic and extra domestic (or public) activities."[10] We should also consider the extent to which oppositions between domestic and public spaces are constituted through struggles over knowledge and power, and probe how such oppositions are interrogated and deconstructed in the novel.

In these kinds of intersections the early novels of Farah provide us with ample contexts not only for exploring the power relations that structure the relative importance of the two domains but also for investigating how the private domestic space can redefine and transform the public and political space. Such possibilities are hinted at in *God's Bits of Wood* and *Anthills of the Savannah* but they are not explored to fruition because the feminine themes in both novels are not fully integrated as contending themes in the public political narratives. Farah's success in making a feminist challenge equally political and public stems from the particular standpoint that shapes his narrative and from his willingness to exploit the novel's ability to integrate conflicting discourses and disparate modes of literary expression. Unlike most of the male novelists of the 1960s and 1970s, Farah probes his Somali society from the contexts of its different intersecting power structures. In his novels constructions of the feminine are imbricated in wide-ranging systems of oppression and power relations that are traditional, colonial, and postcolonial. Thus even where he conceptualizes reality from the vantage point of women's lives his perception of gender moves beyond the social construction of men and women to encompass various ways of signifying relations of power within the social symbolic.

To move from Farah's first novel, *From a Crooked Rib* (1970) to his third novel, *Sardines* (1981) is to encounter profound shifts in representations of the feminine condition. While the picaresque structure of the first novel introduces a feminine theme and politics that come to dominate Farah's later works, it is not until the third novel, *Sardines*, that these themes are narrativized as dialectical challenges to the ideologies that construct and limit women's potential as social beings. Here, the feminine condition becomes a major discourse sustained by a complex interaction of different and competing social languages and rhetorical genres. "[A]ny concrete discourse" in the novel, Mikhail Bakhtin has argued, "finds the object at which it was directed already ... overlain with qualification, open to dispute, charged with value, ... entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents."[11] *Sardines* exploits this heteroglossia to open a wider debate on gender not only as a way of signifying relations of power between men and women but also as linked to the political and cultural intersections in which gender is invariably produced and maintained.

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Discourse in *Sardines* thus moves beyond the personal politics of the woman protagonist, Medina, to encapsulate the personal histories and struggles of different women. As the narrative makes clear, women do not occupy the same positions within patriarchal structures of power. Medina may well argue that contrary to Xaddia's accusation, she is "*fighting for the survival of the woman in me, in her while demolishing 'families' like Idil's and regimes like the General's*,"[12] but she herself cannot always grasp women's subtle dilemmas and contradictions, and it is the narrative's structuring of contradictory and centrifugal forces that unearths such complexities.

Sardines is in this sense an interrogative novel that refuses classic realism's hierarchy of discourses and ensures that "no authorial or authoritative discourse points to a single position which is the place of the coherence of meaning."[13] Thus the patriarchal notion (championed by the matriarch, Idil) that Somali culture has a given solidity and coherence is challenged not only by the exposure of women's confined lives within its systems but also by the different perspectives and positions of women as they fight to be participants in Somali history. The bulk of the narrative enacts their uncertainties, self-doubts and constant struggles for self-understanding and affirmation. Medina's clear analysis of patriarchy and her uncompromising search for women's autonomy conceals an obsessive trait that may be almost as oppressive as the dictator's regime. Sagal dreams of a radical political action but her strategies are often confused and complicated by contradictory instincts and emotional pulls. Amina defies her father and the general by making her rape a political issue and taking control over her body and her fertility. Yet she eventually takes refuge in her father's house, compromising her defiant political act.

All the rebellious women accept that a "Promethean" intervention is necessary for changing a present order in which women are "guests" rather than agents in their own country. Yet the narrative's elaboration of the Promethean myth stresses its dual implications more than its single radical act. Prometheus was both a courageous rebel and a victim of his own boldness, and as Medina, Sagal, and Amina all ponder their futures as rebels during the festival of lights, this paradox is what the narrative leaves readers with. Its explorations suggest more questions and alternatives than answers as the women are forced to confront their own internal tensions as rebels in a combined patriarchal, religious, and political order. While this continual focus on women's internal tensions and contradictions as agents for change illuminates their vulnerabilities within cultural, religious, and ideological systems, it also deflates the feminist polemic which helped to situate the feminine condition in the forefront of literary discourse in the 1970s. There is thus a difference in thrust between Farah's novels of the 1970s and Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* which also reads the convergence of

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colonialism and patriarchy through the prism of feminine and domestic spaces.

In Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* the story of the woman protagonist Nnu Ego's failure to negotiate the changing values of patriarchal and colonial worlds centers on marriage, norms of family, motherhood, sex roles, and discourses on femininity and masculinity, but it is equally a story of colonial oppression, dependency, and the evolution of a colonial modernity that threatens the symbolic order with a new social economy. Emecheta's achievement rests on the success with which her narrative exploits these new fissures to present a major polemic on the feminine condition. Achebe's novels of the same historical period present the scenario of the colonial encounter differently as a drama of two male political dispensations locked in a struggle for power. The internal dynamic that determines the nature of the conflict in *Arrow of God* is an intellectual struggle within the male political aristocracy over interpretations of history and mythology. In *The Joys of Motherhood* there is no narrative of an internal political struggle and no overt confrontation between patriarchal and colonial powers. While *Arrow*'s logic of causality moves its narrative inexorably from pre-colonial time to a new Christian secular time, *The Joys of Motherhood* delineates the changing dynamics of gender relations in a new modern space, suggesting that changes in political and social structures correspond with changes in representations of gender and power.

The world of *Joys* is a world thrown into flux in spite of the apparent dominance of patriarchal values in day-to-day living. Characters encounter new languages, new symbols and cultures of employment, and the values of a new capitalist economy. The narrative uses its mapping of social spaces in the city to raise larger political and gender issues about the condition of the colonized and the changed meanings of manhood and womanhood in the colonial city. The realist mode of representation appears the most appropriate medium for such explorations. The woman protagonist must understand her world well enough to recognize her gendered position within it and be able to imagine possibilities beyond her immediate situation. But unlike the prominent public and political protagonists of Achebe's early novels who have a sense (however erroneous) of their destinies in the world, Emecheta's Nnu Ego is too limited and too much an object of satire to function wholly as Georg Lukács's "problematic individual of the realist novel, journeying towards a clear self-recognition."[14] The narrative's feminist project of changing existing power relations between women and men demands that Nnu Ego enact her gendered position, demonstrate her situation as a victim of patriarchal indoctrination and at the same time acquire the individuation that would enable her to know herself and her world.

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To achieve these narrative feats simultaneously the novel turns to language and symbolism and devises a technique of "doubling" as a strategy for exploring the complex and many-layered aspects of the feminine condition. For Nnu Ego the challenge of individuation is a process of revaluation and self-understanding: how to recognize that social power is never unified, how to balance normative concepts imbibed uncritically through language and myth with experiential knowledge gained in the colonial city. The city of Lagos is a context of paradoxes. Its new modernity opens spaces in which Nnu Ego can operate in the new capitalist economy as an individual player and as a different wife and mother. How can she sift through the city's paradoxes and understand her situation as a woman in a new space and possibility?

Because Nnu Ego is in danger of not always drawing out the implications of the city's paradoxes and recognizing its other possibilities for women, the novel's argument rests on the disjunction between her perception of the world and the narrative's deployment of new languages and symbols to draw out meanings. It is here in the semiotic world of the novel that the slave girl, reborn as Nnu Ego and as her *chi*,[15] becomes a conceptual narrative force in Nnu Ego's individuation. Commentators on the novel have not made much of the psychological potential of this doubling, though it is immense and can be expanded again and again. For, as a spirit with the power to manipulate events on earth, the slave girl is the force that instigates Nnu Ego's move to Lagos in the first place. Her coded dream messages to Nnu Ego urge her to grasp her new city context and its possibilities. In effect, she connects Nnu Ego's conscious and unconscious minds and therefore helps to enact the conflicting pulls of insight and regression that move Nnu Ego from blindness to some understanding of her world. Deploying the symbolism of the slave girl in this way means that the narrative can show up the negative pulls of Nnu Ego's absorption of gender and class values and at the same time circumvent this limitation by instigating and aiding her critical journey into selfhood.

For African women novelists, the struggle to represent such contradictory feminine realities has been the greatest spur to feminist interrogation and innovation in the novel. In Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* the doubling of women characters works in remarkable ways within a retrospective narrative in which the distance between the adult who narrates the story and the child who experiences it presents several narrative possibilities and layers of perception. As a mature narrator, Tambu signals from the very beginning that only a reading of social reality from the context of the feminine condition would yield a new history of the community. Her narrative thus displaces the family's foundational narrative of modernity as recounted in the story of the patriarch, Babamukuru. The story of how Tambu becomes a narrator – which is the story of the novel – is thus a story of displacements, new histories,

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a heterogeneity of voices and new forms of narration that challenge the monologic discourses of colonialism and patriarchy.

The dynamism of the novel genre accommodates this new narrative as it reshapes the classic *Bildungsroman* to reflect the various ramifications of the feminine condition. Instead of the lone protagonist's linear journey through a knowable world (as in early male autobiographical novels like Camara Laye's *The African Child*), the narrative presents intersecting stories of other women as they experience the combined burdens of womanhood, blackness, and poverty. It is here that the art of doubling, particularly its thematic and psychological ramifications, becomes a major narrative strategy. There is a sense in which characters, wherever they are located in the social hierarchy, are linked by common values and attitudes within patriarchy. For instance, Maiguru, Babamukuru's educated wife, and Ma Shangayi, Tambu's illiterate mother, are separated from each other by education and class just as Babamukuru and his brother, Jeremiah are divided by status and education. Yet both Maiguru and Ma Shangayi experience similar forms of subordination, powerlessness, and marginalization, and Babamukuru and Jeremiah, opposites as they are, are linked in their understanding of a woman's fixed place as subordinate and marginal. Tambu and Nyasha experience the same forms of control and powerlessness as women even though they are socialized in different contexts. What seems constant and enduring in the world of the novel then, is the consensus about women's social position and the limits of their power and possibilities. The value of rebellion and the meaning of "escape" and "entrapment" must be measured then in terms of how these systems of meaning and norms of definition are disrupted and what new histories and knowledge are produced in the process.

No character in *Nervous Conditions* seems wholly able to achieve such a disruption of normative assumptions, though the narrative itself comes close to this in the doubling of Tambu and Nyasha. Even Lucia, regarded by critics as the most independent and flexible of the women and the most successful in confronting and manipulating male authority for her benefit, hardly makes a dent in Babamukuru's understanding of male power and authority. In Babamukuru's view, the authoritative, straight-talking forcefulness that Lucia exhibits in her exchanges with men are established manly qualities that Lucia only stumbles upon.

A major aspect of discourse in *Nervous Conditions* is the narrative's attempts to complicate women's subjectivity by casting Nyasha and Tambu as doubles who represent the missing parts of each other's personality. This kind of composite characterization suggests the role of the "other" in the accomplishment of individual consciousness. The image we see in the mirror, Tzvetan Todorov would argue, "is necessarily incomplete … yet, in a way, it

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provides us with the archetype of self-perception; only someone else's gaze can give me the feeling that I form a totality."[16] The young Tambu sees an aspect of her hidden self when she encounters her cousin Nyasha at the Mission house. She resists this recognition by quickly defining her difference from Nyasha. Yet it is what she resists – the adventurous explorative part of her – that contributes most to the sharpening of her perceptions and to her courage in splitting her own personality up in order to defy Babamukuru's control. Nyasha, however, characterizes the "doubleness" in more complementary terms in a last desperate effort to reach out to Tambu and to the old complementarity that had helped to keep her feet on the ground.

It seems that Dangarembga uses the two backgrounds and personalities – Nyasha's hybridity and radical vision of colonialism's corrosiveness, and Tambu's grounded sense of place in the wider traditional world – to create a framework for exploring women's subjectivity and potential for agency. This possibility is always present in the novel though Tambu continually resists it when she bases her sense of home and belonging on stable unitary identities and configures Nyasha as an outsider. In resisting the wider possibilities of doubling, Tambu loses a radical critique of colonial politics and therefore forges only a limited subjectivity. The novel, however, retains this possibility in the subtext of Nyasha's narrative to suggest the necessity of multiple identifications. *Nervous Conditions* then presents its own dialectic: its exclusive focus on domestic spaces works to "politicize" frequently marginalized spaces while its discourse suggests that such spaces cannot and should not exclude the public politics of the wider world. It is only in the novel genre that such divergent perspectives can coexist contradictorily yet work to produce complex meanings.

The idea of the personal as political which feminists highlighted in the 1970s and 1980s to validate women's personal, private, and domestic spaces continues to be reinterpreted in different ways by African women writers. Vera's second novel, *Without a Name* (1994), introduces a new jarring discourse in the politics of the personal when it examines Zimbabwe's liberation struggle from the perspective of the feminine condition. In giving centrality to a woman's quest and trauma at the height of the liberation struggle, Vera's novel combines political and feminine themes in ways that situate the feminine condition problematically within Zimbabwe's liberation struggles. Sembène's women join the railway strike, but their participation hardly questions or destabilizes the coherence of the movement's ideology; Dangarembga's novel dialogues implicitly with the liberation struggle but never engages with it in a substantial way. In Vera's novel, however, feminine, political, and nationalist themes coexist and jar on each other, and the novel form expands its boundaries to accommodate the contending narratives.

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Liberation struggles often structure their pedagogies around the land and its extended metaphors. In real terms, the land is the physical space the people struggle for; in metaphysical terms it is the entity that conflates the different histories, desires, and aspirations of different people into a single unity. What the land means, what it can yield and how it can anchor individuals would thus always be a matter of contestation. This is what Vera demonstrates in the tortured, circuitous narrative of *Without a Name*. The novel frames its discourse around a number of central questions: What does the struggle for the land mean for a man and a woman? How does the struggle encode their different histories? In the protagonist Mazvita's view, the land is not only compromised by the fact of its conquest and occupation by white colonists; it is also the embodiment of male dominance and control since the patriotic metaphors that describe it also define the manhood of its men. How does a woman claim a place and subjectivity from it? Can she be anchored to it yet let off her own "blooms," "scents," and "colours"?

Mazvita's escape from the war-torn village and her search for other freedoms and untried realities have their basis in these differing identifications with the land. The relentless focus on personal trauma at a time of such national upheaval is itself transgressive. Yet the novel treats this quest with paradox and sympathy as it searches for new languages and strategies to dramatize the seemingly contradictory aspects of Mazvita's adventure. The kind of realism that works to uncover objective reality through a character's linear movement within its world is obviously not suited for a novel framed to assess the symptoms of history rather than its events. The novel then creates a new narrative strategy in which the main action – Mazvita's journey from city to village – is paralleled with several other scenes from her past, rearranged to dramatize how she re-experiences them in the present. Economical as these recollections are, they weave a narrative of the political and social landscape of the country. We get a sense of the construction and degradation of Africans in barbed-wire tobacco farms, the arrogance of freedom fighters and the one-dimensional perception of women as beasts of burden.

While Mazvita's burden of fear and her alienation from the land may be easy to comprehend and name, her other yearnings and desires are undefined and unnamable precisely because they are unrecognized by her community as legitimate aspirations for women. Vera has to find new self-conscious modes of representation that create spaces for describing Mazvita's yearnings. There is an entire network of metaphors and defamiliarized poetic language that name and validate Mazvita's hankering for "untried realities" and for other definitions of herself. Because the novel as a genre allows a free mixture of generic conventions, it absorbs all Vera's codes for endowing Mazvita's narrative with meaning, and it is from these narrative strategies that we

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grasp the paradoxes of Mazivita's groping for subjectivity. The adventure of untried realities leaves Mazvita homeless, abandoned, desolate, and overwhelmed with pain. Yet the adventure of subjectivity, Vera claims, is itself a source of insight into self and world. Mazvita's failure to secure her freedom gives her a critical insight about the war and about various debased conceptions of freedom and liberation in the city. Her pain and suffering inspire her to seek healing and renewal, and in tracing her steps back to the village she remaps the land and claims it anew, not in terms of the clichés handed down by traditional patriarchy and the new freedom movement but in terms of her own traumatic experience as a woman who can explore a different and healing relationship with the land.

Reading the feminine condition from such varied locations of the African novel is a revisionary exercise in itself. For while it reveals the extent to which the novel genre has mutated to accommodate the continued reinvention of African cultures and worlds, it also demonstrates how the history and forms of the genre in Africa have been shaped by the ideological perspectives of the male novelists who first framed its political agenda in the mid-twentieth century. Thus, once we read the canonical novels of African literature from a feminist interrogatory framework, we expose not only the ideological implications of ordinary plot structures and other narrative strategies but also the constricted definitions of the feminine itself. It is a useful strategy, then, to read texts intertextually from different ideological positions and standpoints. The different thrusts of the feminine theme in these texts reveal that the feminine condition is not simply an addition to national history but a destabilizing force that questions and rethinks fundamental assumptions behind the construction of women in society. It is in this type of exploration that we must look for radical innovation in the novel genre in Africa.

NOTES

1. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 180; Amilcar Cabral, "National Liberation and Culture" in *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches of Amilcar Cabral* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), pp. 39–56.
2. Simon Gikandi, *Reading the African Novel* (London: James Currey; Nairobi: Heinemann, 1988), p. 113.
3. Ulf Hannerz, "The World in Creolisation," *Africa*, 57.4 (1987), 546–59 (555).
4. Ousmane Sembène, *God's Bits of Wood*, trans. by Francis Price (London: Heinemann, 1986), p. 74.
5. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Devil on the Cross* (London: Heinemann, 1982), p. 136.
6. Emmanuel Obiechina, "Feminine Perspectives in Selected African Novels" in P. Egejuru and K.H. Katrak (eds.), *Nwanyibu: Womanbeing and African Literature* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1997), pp. 33–44 (p. 41).

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7. Simon Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe: Language and Ideology in Fiction* (London; Portsmouth, NH; Nairobi: Heinemann, 1991), p. 145.
8. In Igbo cosmology 'Idemili' is a powerful river goddess worshipped by communities along the Idemili river. A female deity ironically presented in phallic terms as a "pillar of water," Idemili had supremacy over male and female deities and spirits. In *Anthills* Chinua Achebe reinvents the myth of Idemili to explore political and moral themes. As the modern Idemili, Beatrice is the force that guards against unbridled power by highlighting the inextricable link between power and morality.
9. Fredric Jameson, "Third World Culture in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text*, 15 (1986), 65–88.
10. Niara Sudarkasa, "The Status of Women in Indigenous African Societies" in R. Terborg-Penn, S. Harley and A. Benton Rushing (eds.), *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1987), pp. 33–44 (p. 28).
11. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. by Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 276.
12. Nuruddin Farah, *Sardines* (London: Heinemann, 1981), p. 246. The italics are in the original.
13. Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Routledge, 1980), p. 92.
14. Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. by Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1971), p. 80.
15. The Igbo of Eastern Nigeria see *chi* as the guiding spirit, controller and determinant of an individual's fate and affairs in life. Achebe illuminates this concept further when he defines *chi* as an individual's "other identity in spiritland – his spirit being complementing his terrestrial human being." See Achebe, "The Concept of Chi in Igbo Cosmology" in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (London: Heinemann, 1975), pp. 93–105.
16. Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, trans. by Wlad Gdzich (Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 95.

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12

APOLLO AMOKO

Autobiography and *Bildungsroman* in African literature

This chapter offers some generalizations regarding the place of autobiography and *Bildungsroman* in African literature. Although there appears to be a radical opposition between the "factual" autobiography and the "fictive" *Bildungsroman*, there are considerable correspondences and convergences, at least in the African context, between the two in terms of context, content, and form. An autobiography refers to an account, typically in the first person, retrospectively documenting the life of a real person who serves as both narrator and protagonist. The term *Bildungsroman* refers to a so-called "novel of formation," that is, a fictional account tracing, usually in the third person, the spiritual, moral, psychological, or social growth of a fictional protagonist, typically from childhood to maturity. For all their normative insistence on literal truthfulness, autobiographies are carefully constructed esthetic objects. As Philippe Lejeune succinctly observes, "the paradox of the literary autobiography, its essential double game, is to pretend to be at the same time a truthful discourse and a work of art."[1] Under the guise of merely reproducing the story of a real-life character, the genre relies on a complex (and not always self-conscious) interplay among remembering, forgetting, revising, inventing, selecting, and arranging events. At the same time, even though the *Bildungsroman* – like any other work of art – normatively eschews literal truth claims, it nevertheless makes, under the guise of fiction, large truth claims about specific historical, political, and cultural contexts.

The two genres under examination seem invariably to enact, as part of their overall esthetic, broadly similar processes of temporal reversal by which the future comes, paradoxically, to be anterior to the past. Both genres seem, at some level, to begin at the end. Jacques Lacan provides an instructive explanation of counterintuitive temporality embodied in the notion of future anterior: "What is realised in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming."[2] Notwithstanding any number of plot twists and turns, the

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Bildungsroman invariably seems to require, in the end, the protagonist's formation (or *Bildung*). The fact of eventual, if not inevitable, *Bildung* becomes anterior to, if not determinative of, the innumerable twists and turns that constitute the rest of the narrative.

Since an autobiography typically records the author's growth or formation, it may be said to represent a kind of *Bildungsroman*. Autobiographies are life memories that proceed backwards in time (typically from triumphant presents to unlikely pasts) even though the stories they tell may seem to unfold, in linear sequence, from the past to present. According to Christopher L. Miller, the structure of the autobiography typically involves a "straightforward progression from childhood to adulthood, an unproblematic progression in which the distance between the narrator and the character of his childhood self diminishes, if incompletely." But the appearance of straightforward progression is misleading because the narrative of an autobiography is necessarily retrospective. "The mature narrator," Miller continues, "writing from the assurance of adulthood, describes his past as a path out of ignorance and into knowledge."[3]

Autobiographies and *Bildungsromane* participate in the same conversations regarding the fundamental nature of African societies in the wake of the encounter with colonialism. One measure of the correspondence between the two genres is the fact that at least three of my examples seem, perhaps self-consciously, to blur category distinctions. J. M. Coetzee's *Boyhood* recalls the early life of a pre-eminent writer, but the ostensible autobiography takes the form of a third-person novel of formation. Conversely, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* is a feminist *Bildungsroman* set in colonial Rhodesia, but the putatively fictional account of a girl's formation takes the form of a first-person autobiography. Moreover, a measure of category confusion remains evident with regard to the classification of Camara Laye's important but controversial classic, *The African Child* – a text documenting the formation of a young protagonist in colonial Africa. Some critics regard the work as a paradigmatic text in African autobiography.[4] Other critics regard the text as a work of fiction, a paradigmatic novel of postcolonial African formation.

With the notable exception of *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, all the texts I discuss were published during the second half of the twentieth century. These texts played important roles in the development of African literature as the continent struggled for independence from European colonial powers and then against the crisis constituted by colonialism's oppressive legacies in postcolonial nation states, characterized by fundamental contradictions, inequalities, and dependencies brought about by colonial rule. Literature has been at the forefront of documenting and attempting to transcend the crisis of colonialism in Africa, so much so that as

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Fredric Jameson suggests, hyperbolically perhaps, all these texts are "national allegories," in which "the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society."[5] Both autobiographies and *Bildungsromane* have provided important avenues for African writers to explore new ways of being in the colonial and postcolonial worlds. By telling stories of individual passages from childhood into adulthood, the authors critique the past and present and offer alternative futures.

First published in 1789, *Equiano* tells the remarkable story of a self-identified African who was allegedly captured as a child and sold to slavery in the New World. This revolutionary text represented the first instance in which a former slave wrote about his servitude, suffering, and eventual freedom. *Equiano* protests against slavery and seeks to give voice to voiceless millions. Published in 1953, Laye's *The African Child* is set approximately twenty years earlier in Kouroussa in French Guinea. It tells the story of the narrator-protagonist's transition from an ostensibly stable traditional existence to the apparently uncertain world of colonial modernity. His father is a gifted goldsmith, a respected traditional authority blessed with supernatural powers, most notably the gift of prescience. Early in the narrative (or should we perhaps more accurately say late in the narrative?), the narrator-protagonist recalls his emergence as his father's heir apparent. After disclosing important secrets pertaining to the "guiding spirit of the race," the father informs the young son (or so the son, now a grown man, belatedly remembers): "I have told you all these things, little one, because you are my son, the eldest of my sons, and because I have nothing to hide from you."[6] Even though the father is quick to proclaim his eldest his rightful heir, he expresses considerable doubt. The father worries that his son spends too much time attending the French school system; in fact, the father is said to have predicted his eldest son's gradual abandonment of tradition for modernity. By the end of the narrative (its conceptual beginnings), the father's fears prove prophetic. The narrator-protagonist leaves Kouroussa for further studies in France. Although he has undergone the ritual of initiation, his knowledge of the traditional world remains inadequate and incomplete.

In *Aké*, a 1981 autobiography, Wole Soyinka, one of the founding figures of modern African literature, returns to scenes of his childhood in late colonial Nigeria. He traces not simply his personal autobiography but also the emergence of anti-colonial nationalism led by aggrieved and overtaxed market women (including the author's mother). In *Weep Not, Child* (a 1964 novel), Ngugi wa Thiong'o, another of the founding figures of modern African literature, examines the volatile politics of late colonial Kenya. The novel tells the story of a family torn apart, on the one hand, by a militant

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anti-colonial nationalism (leading one of its members to join a violent revolt) and, on the other, by the attractions of Western education (simultaneously leading another family member to attend an elite colonial high school).

I examine several South African writers confronting the horrors of apartheid. Three autobiographies by black South Africans – Bloke Modisane's *Blame Me on History*, E'skia Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue*, and Mark Mathabane's 1986 autobiography, *Kaffir Boy* – are representative of a larger body of texts written between the 1960s and 1990s. The texts exposed the desperation and violence black people experienced under apartheid. They denounced the systematic disenfranchisement of the black majority by a white minority, as well as the injustices of the Group Areas Act (under which doctrine of racial separatism blacks were largely confined to overcrowded and deprived rural "homelands"), "Pass Laws" (which strictly regulated the influx of cheap black labor into white cities), "Bantu Education" policies (which, under the guise of acknowledging racial difference, consigned blacks to an inferior education and menial careers) and the anti-miscegenation laws (which prohibited interracial romantic relationships). Modisane and Mphahlele were originally based in the black township of Sophiatown, which was home to a community of like-minded writers. After overcoming extreme deprivation and violence as children, they educated themselves and worked as journalists for the tabloid publications *Drum* and *Golden City Post*. They were both eventually forced into exile by the increasingly repressive policies of the apartheid regime. Mathabane chronicles his remarkable rise from the squalor and violence of the black township of Alexandra to pursue university studies (through a tennis scholarship) in the United States. All three writers bear graphic witness to the horrors of racist oppression even as they each narrate the story of spectacular individual triumph.

A number of white writers provide a different perspective regarding apartheid. In *Boyhood*, Coetzee remembers growing up as a white boy in a small provincial town. Rian Malan's *My Traitor's Heart* (1990) is, in part, an investigative exposé of the volatility and violence that plagued South Africa in the late 1980s and early 1990s, on the verge of the formal dismantling of the apartheid state. The book is also autobiographical, chronicling the life and times of a conscientious white South African who had left the country in order to disavow its racist government. Disillusioned by life in exile, Malan returns home in order to confront the racist legacy of his own family.

Whether implicitly or explicitly, many of the male writers thus far summarized (most notably Sophiatown writers) are concerned with appropriate forms of masculinity in the context of oppression and violence. The experience of oppression takes the form of emasculation. Women writers contest

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this male narrative of individual triumph and retrieval of manhood by documenting the experience of oppression from the perspective of women. Published in 1975, *A Dakar Childhood* presents the autobiography of an ordinary woman in postcolonial Senegal. Part of a pioneering generation of educated women, Nafissatou Diallo was a successful working mother at the time of the autobiography. Even as she retraces the steps that led her to a successful professional middle-class life, she appears to lament the passing of the traditional Senegalese society. Following in Diallo's footsteps, another Senegal woman, Marietou M'baye, published the novel *The Abandoned Baobab* in 1981. Written under the pseudonym Ken Bugul, the novel chronicles the misadventures (but also the eventual redemption) of an assimilated African woman selected for a prestigious academic scholarship in Belgium.

Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) unfolds in the highly volatile polity of colonial Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) between the mid-1960s and the early 1970s. During that period, a minority white regime had declared independence from Britain, provoking violent resistance from the disenfranchised and dispossessed black majority. The novel tells the story of Tambu's (the narrator-protagonist's) apparently successful formation. Growing up in abject poverty in rural Rhodesia, under the authority of a domineering and sexist father, she remains determined to attend school. Subsequently, she moves to the city in order to be provided an education by an authoritarian and equally sexist benefactor, her uncle Babamukuru. The novel presents a narrative of (at least partial) triumph; it appears to tell the story of how Tambu and some of the women in her life (in particular her aunt Lucia) escape being trapped by "the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other."[7]

In an important study of the *Bildungsroman* in European culture, Franco Moretti argues that the genre codified a new paradigm under which, for the first time, youth came to constitute "the most meaningful part of life."[8] The protagonist in the eighteenth and nineteenth century European *Bildungsroman* was invariably a young man; his youthfulness was a decisive condition of formation. In relatively stable societies, youth is but the unremarkable and invisible prelude to mature adulthood: "Each individual's youth faithfully repeats that of his forebears, introducing him to a role that lives on unchanged: it is a 'pre-scribed' youth" (p. 4). However, in periods of radical transformation and social upheaval, youth takes center stage, supplanting adulthood. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were a period of radical social transformation in Europe. Due to modernization, industrialization, urbanization, secularization, democratization, and so on, traditional values were dramatically being cast aside. It was a period of significant progress, but also upheaval and uncertainty, as Europe marched into modernity, "but

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without possessing a *culture* of modernity."[9] In that context, Moretti asserts that youth achieved "symbolic centrality and the 'great narrative' of the *Bildungsroman* comes into being ... because Europe has to attach a meaning, not so much to youth, as to *modernity*." "Youth," he concludes, "is, so to speak, modernity's 'essence,' the sign of a world that seeks its meaning in the *future* rather than in the past."[10] Although Moretti addresses the historical European origins of the genre, his arguments apply with uncanny precision to the historical rise of the *Bildungsroman* in Africa. Like its European forebear, the emergence of the African *Bildungsroman* coincided with a period of radical transformation and social upheaval when, in the wake of colonialism, the traditional ways of being were seriously undermined, if not forever transformed. Like its European counterpart, the African *Bildungsroman* focuses on the formation of young protagonists in an uncertain world. In a sense, the genre marks the death of the father as a symbol of stable, unquestioned, traditional authority. As V. Y. Mudimbe contends, "[t]he father is tradition. He is what came before, and he incarnates the law of survival and the sign of the future. He thus enjoins: Fear not, son, this is the past of our people." Mudimbe underlines the weight of patriarchal authority: "The father's autobiography here becomes a kind of history. His word is accorded a permanence that follows us from place to place and across the years. It becomes the memory of the world. Hence the burden of the generations that is conveyed in the phrase, 'I am your father.'"[11]

With its focus on youth, the African *Bildungsroman* illustrates how, in the wake of colonialism, the father's authority is irreversibly undermined. In Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child*, for instance, the protagonist's father, Ngotho, purports to exercise patriarchal domination over his household. But colonial dispossession has compromised his traditional authority: For all his masculine bluster, he has been transformed into a landless and impoverished petty laborer for a white settler. The future of Gikuyu society belongs not to Ngotho and the static traditional values he embodies, but rather to his son, Njoroge: the young son who, at the instigation of his mother, opts to seek new values in Western education. Similarly, in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, Babamukuru ("the big father") seeks to reign uninterrupted as the patriarch of his extended traditional family in late colonial Rhodesia. But he finds himself increasingly unable to control the women in his life: his wife Maiguru (who after a life of submission comes to demand greater say in the running of the family), his sister-in-law, Lucia (an illiterate village woman who consistently defies Babamukuru before opting to pursue a Western education in the city), Nyasha (Babamukuru's defiant and rebellious young daughter), and Tambu (the young, initially naive and docile narrator-protagonist who, however, eventually comes to reject her uncle's values).

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Even as he looks back nostalgically to a past in which daughters – and wives – did not talk back to their fathers, the future has passed Babamukuru by; it now belongs to the likes of Tambu, Nyasha, Maiguru, and Lucia.

Laye's *The African Child* tells the story of a young man who opts to pursue a colonial education in France, thereby rejecting the ways of his father. The narrative concludes without establishing a definite future for its narrator-protagonist, but it is clear that he will not be heir to his father's traditional throne. The book unfolds as a nostalgic homage to a rejected tradition; a remembrance, so to speak, of things past. But the narrator-protagonist falls short of even this limited goal. While he claims to remember various rituals in broad outline, he forgets and/or does not understand important details because, as he dramatically exclaims, "I left my father's house too soon" (p. 12). Elsewhere in the narrative, he pleads ignorance regarding the significance of a particular custom: "I was not old enough or curious enough to ask my elders and betters, and when finally I wanted to do so, I had left Africa behind" (p. 45). The narrator-protagonist's formulation suggests that what is being left behind is as much a cultural identity and a way of being in the world as a geographical entity. Although the narrator-protagonist claims not to know the significance of certain traditional practices, he nevertheless attributes to them secret meanings kept in "the ancestral depths of heart and memory." Such remarks have provoked charges of essentialism and exoticism in Laye's depiction of Africa.

Moretti's insights extend beyond the *Bildungsroman* to apply, with some modification, to autobiographies. Although they would seem to be adult narratives, autobiographies invariably look back to the *formative days of youth*. In the African context, autobiographies – as much as *Bildungsromane* – seem to enact, at least in some measure, the rebellion of the youth against both pre-colonial and colonial tradition. Many autobiographies depict a young protagonist rejecting or outgrowing the law of the father; whether the father is understood figuratively as the custodian of tradition or literally as a biological entity in a particular patriarchal setting. In the three black South African autobiographies, for instance, the traditional patriarchal authority of fathers has been severely compromised by the deprivations of apartheid. Mphahlele, Modisane, and Mathabane variously record how their respective fathers became violent drunks while pathetically trying to retain the semblance of control within their households, despite being emasculated by the oppression they suffered as blacks in a racist polity. Even as they empathize with their fathers' humiliations, sufferings, and deaths under apartheid, the three writers come resolutely to distance themselves from the traditional values these men stood for. The future of South Africa lies in the hands of the young, not their diseased and dying fathers. As

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Mathabane explains, "*Kaffir Boy* is also about how, in order to escape from the clutches of apartheid, I had to reject the tribal traditions of my ancestors."[12] In many respects, *My Traitor's Heart* represents Malan's tortured effort to exorcise the ghosts of his racist forebears. From the other side of the apartheid divide, the son rejects the law of the racist father.

In his foundational study, Lejeune proposes, at least initially, a rather rigid but nevertheless instructive definition of autobiography: "retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality."[13] Autobiographies derive their fundamental authority from the evidence of personal experience. The inaugural slave narrative, *Equiano*, presents a paradigmatic example. From the outset, the author is at pains to emphasize that the book is a true account written by a real person concerning his existence. The text's full title is, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*. Equiano conspicuously designates himself an African as well as the author. As part of what Lejeune terms the "autobiographical pact" with readers,[14] Equiano performs an elaborate process of self-credentialization and authentication. The text opens with an explanatory preface addressed to the British Parliament. Equiano intends to debunk the institution of slavery and lobby for its abolition by providing personal testimony about its horrors. The preface prefigures a narrative detailing his forced removal from the idyllic African village of his birth, his horrific suffering during transit to the New World and in slavery, his indefatigable will to survive, his dogged efforts to become literate despite formidable odds, his skill and industry as a seaman in the face of a racist universe, his determination to secure freedom despite the treachery of various masters, his Christian conversion, and, finally, his emergence as a vocal leader against slavery. Equiano concludes by reiterating the veracity of an account that was "written by one who was as unwilling as unable to adorn the plainness of truth by the colouring of imagination."[15] In a gesture at once self-effacing and self-authenticating, he insists on a radical separation between fiction and autobiography, humbly classifying his work as the latter and not the former.

Although not nearly as explicit and elaborate as Equiano, more recent African autobiographers also seem to rely on a similar authority of authentic experience. Diallo begins her autobiography with a foreword presenting readers her credentials: "I am not the heroine of a novel but an ordinary woman of this country, Senegal: a mother and working woman – a midwife and a child-welfare nurse."[16] Much like Equiano, she is at pains to emphasize the literal truthfulness of her account as well as her ordinariness. She asserts that she was motivated to record the memories of her childhood and

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adolescence in the face of radical social change: "Senegal has changed in a generation. Perhaps it is worth reminding today's youngsters what we were like when we were their age" (p. ix). Under the guise of merely narrating one ordinary woman's life story, Diallo expresses nostalgia for a world gone by.

Much like Equiano's detailed personal testimony against the institution of slavery, Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue*, Modisane's *Blame Me on History* and Mathabane's *Kaffir Boy* all rely on the authority of personal experience to critique apartheid. Born in the extremely deprived black townships of Sophiatown and Alexandra, the three writers bear first-hand witness to the injustices and hypocrisies of racial segregation and discrimination. They debunk the myth propounded by the apartheid state of separate but equal development among South African racial groups. Through the example of their remarkable successes as writers, intellectuals, and journalists, they bear witness to the courage and humanity of black South Africans in general. Their texts derive ultimate authority from the fact that the wrenching and heroic accounts they provide are not simply literally true but also personally experienced.

Both autobiographies and *Bildungsromane* enact a reversal of the linear progression of time. Autobiographies enact this reversal quite explicitly. Part of the "autobiographical pact," Lejeune argues, is the proposal by an author to present the reader with a "discourse on the self … in which the question 'who am I?' is answered by a *narrative* that tells 'how I became who I am.'"[17] Thus, for example, we turn to the autobiographies of Coetzee and Soyinka in a bid to understand how they became two of the most accomplished and enigmatic African writers. As readers we seek each writer's primal moment(s), that is, the decisive event (or series of events) back in time that account for the prodigious literary talent we now confront. Coetzee and Soyinka oblige our readerly expectations by remembering, for our benefit, various scenes from their early childhood. In these recollections, the question "who am I now?" comes to precede and determine the question "who was I then?"; the latter exists largely as a memory (or construction) of the former. Putatively unremarkable childhood incidents and tendencies become meaningful only in the wake of remarkable future careers. We are reassured to learn that even as a young child, Soyinka displayed ample intellectual curiosity, and that he sought to attend school and attain literacy at an impossibly young age. We learn about an irrepressible spirit of curiosity that drove him, despite the threat of violent punishment by his father Essay, to follow a marching band to the seat of colonial power in Yorubaland. With the benefit of hindsight, Soyinka defines that visit as singularly important: "At the back of my mind … was a feeling that I had somehow been the cause of the excitement of the previous night and had, in some way, become markedly different from

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whatever I was before the march."[18] Subsequently, Soyinka remembers how, as a young child, incapable of fully understanding the political import of the events in question, he was nevertheless a keen observer of the stirrings of anti-colonial nationalism. Significantly, these events involve yet one more march, this time in the form of a protest led by market women, to the seat of colonial power. If, in his future, Soyinka was destined to become a fully conscious participant-observer who would document and protest the worst excesses of postcolonial African dictatorships, then that fact owes something to his childhood impulses – or so it retrospectively appears.

In *Boyhood* (as well as in the sequel *Youth*), Coetzee's pact with the reader is to provide some account of how he became who he is. As readers, we know Coetzee to be a superior literary talent, an extraordinarily learned intellectual, a vocal critic of oppressive regimes including the apartheid state and a restless thinker on questions of ethics. We are therefore interested to learn that he was born to a mixed family (with an English mother and an Afrikaner father), just as apartheid was being consolidated as the official state ideology. To what extent does the vexed double identity account for future literary complexity? We learn that, even as a young child in provincial South Africa, Coetzee was an intelligent high-achieving student and that the future anti-apartheid critic displayed intellectual curiosity and a contrarian spirit from his earliest days. At a time when the adults around him were uncritically reproducing the virulent anti-communism of the apartheid state, Coetzee embraced Russia. Even though the specific terms of that embrace appear naive in hindsight – he liked the sound of the letter R – it points to a future nonconformism. We learn that, despite being unable to articulate a coherent or consistent anti-racism, the young Coetzee distanced himself, almost instinctively, from the supremacy and prejudices of the adults around him. The seeds of his complex and unsettling ethical formation were seemingly sown early in the unlikely provincial scene of Worcester.

Instructively, primal scenes only attain primacy retrospectively, that is, in the time of future anterior. As Christopher Craft suggests, primal scenes invariably refer back to events that may or may not have happened in fact. If such events indeed happened, he continues, they were not and could not have been experienced as primal in the immediacy of their actual occurrence. Such designation could only take place well after the fact.[19] It is only well after the fact – as an accomplished writer remembering his childhood – that Soyinka can claim that an accidental march to the seat of colonial power had, somehow, fundamentally altered the course of his life. Similarly, it is only well after the fact – as a passionate anti-slavery campaigner – that Equiano posits the first few years of his life in Africa as formative. In a recent biography, Vincent Carretta challenges the historical basis of these claims.

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He uncovers two archival sources (voluntary statements made by Equiano after emancipation) suggesting that Equiano may in fact have been born in South Carolina.[20] He also suggests that Equiano's descriptions of Africa suspiciously reproduce contemporary anthropological commonplaces. What is the status of autobiography if some of its founding claims may not have happened in fact? What would it mean to concede that the foundational anti-slavery text was to a large extent a work of imagination, rather than memory?

Modisane's *Blame Me on History* posits three moments of primal significance. These include his father's humiliation by a racist police officer, his own subsequent humiliation while working as a messenger, and the violent destruction of Sophiatown by the apartheid state. From the vantage point of a triumphant present, these moments are endowed with a narrative significance and coherence they may not have had originally. Modisane claims these traumatic events helped shape his future militancy and determination. Growing up in a traditional patriarchal family, Modisane had come to think of his father as an omnipotent authority. He was therefore shocked to witness his father groveling pathetically before an arrogant white officer while desperately seeking to evade arrest for living in Sophiatown in contravention of apartheid law. Modisane was outraged by the racism that justified his father's oppression. But he was also driven by this episode to call into question the father's oppressive power in the life of the family. Subsequently, as a middle-aged reporter, Modisane witnesses at first hand the violent destruction of Sophiatown by the apartheid state. For all its extreme poverty, deprivation, and violence, Sophiatown provided residents with a community of survival until its 1958 destruction. Modisane remembers the forced dislocation of thousands of dispossessed blacks to even more deprived rural "homelands" as a defining traumatic event: "Something in me died, a piece of me died, with the dying of Sophiatown."[21] Significantly, the autobiography begins with the destruction of Sophiatown, before going back in time to detail the circumstances of his childhood, and then forward in time to include the story of his final escape and exile.

Modisane also remembers the scene of his own humiliation: When working as a messenger, he was required to use the back door reserved for *kaffirs* (a term of contempt for indigenous Africans). Writing many years after the fact, he contends that this episode had been defining: "I wanted to rise above the messenger bicycle and the back door; what I did not realize was that I would never, in South Africa, be able to rise above the limitation imposed on me by my colour, more eloquently articulated by Dr. Verwoerd: Natives should not be allowed to rise above certain levels of labour" (p. 81). There would seem to be an instructive discrepancy between "memory" and "history": Verwoerd's

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offensive speech occurred "in fact" seven years after the event (Modisane's epiphany) it is reported to have provoked. I am interested less in calling Modisane's credibility into question than underscoring the anteriority of the future in relation to the putative past in autobiographical discourse.

Unlike autobiographies, *Bildungsromane* seem to enact the reversal of linear temporality implicitly. Bugul's story in *The Abandoned Baobab* may be illustrative in this regard. She begins her life (her "prehistory" in the narrator's terms) in Ndoucoumane, a fictional traditional village, the authority of which is symbolized by a resilient baobab tree. Subsequently, she leaves the village to attend the French school system in which she excels scholastically. She is awarded a scholarship for further studies in Belgium. Her scholarship supposedly signals a new emerging spirit of cooperation between Africa and its erstwhile European colonizers. Despite having rather uncritically assimilated colonial values, Ken Bugul quickly feels out of place and marginalized as a black Muslim woman in an exclusionary and exploitative society. Her study plans go awry as she apparently surrenders to a life of drinking, drugs, and debauchery. On the verge of self-destruction, she learns important moral lessons outside the formal school system, eventually opting to go back home. The bulk of the novel is taken up by seemingly random accounts of drunkenness and debauchery. These incidents become meaningful, retrospectively, in terms of Ken's belated *Bildung* at the end of the novel.

The retrospective logic of *Bildungsromane* becomes readily apparent in Dangarembga's fictional autobiography, *Nervous Conditions*. In a pointed address to unidentified future readers, the narrator-protagonist, Tambu, seeks to establish a firm distinction between her present, fully-formed identity and her old, naive, self: "At the time though – and you must remember that I was very young then, very young and correct in my desire to admire and defer to all the superior people I found at the mission – at that time I liked missionaries" (p. 103). She goes on repeatedly to reiterate how she was young then, many years removed from the narrative present. Though she does not say how old she now is, she is no longer young. In this context, youth denotes less a particular age than a state of naivety or "pre-formation." Then, unlike now, she did not question such things as the existence of God. Then, unlike now, she was not "concerned that freedom fighters were referred to as terrorists" (p. 155). Then, unlike now, she was on the wrong side of Rhodesian history and politics – the side of the missionaries and colonialists. Remarkably, Tambu declines to specify the narrative "now," on the basis of which she retrospectively purports to recount the inadequacies and naivety of her former self. The future remains a mystery, even though it comes before and determines a particular version of the past. She does not disclose where she is, what she is doing, or indeed when now is.

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I have emphasized the fact that *Bildungsroman* and autobiography marked the demise of the symbolic authority of the father in the colonial and postcolonial African imagination. Even texts that would seem to honor the father emerge, on closer scrutiny, to mark his passing. Diallo concludes *A Dakar Childhood* by paying homage to her father. But she pays belated tribute to a dead man on the eve of her departure from Senegal to France. In *The Abandoned Baobab*, a chastened Ken Bugul returns home and prostrates herself before the symbolic authority of the father. But she bows before a now withered baobab tree. In short, African autobiographies and *Bildungsromane* seem to portray an important milestone: the decisive transfer of authority from fathers to their sons and daughters. Although the youth rises up to take charge from its fathers, the future it projects is neither certain nor triumphant. Thus, for instance, Laye's *The African Child* concludes with an image of the narrator-protagonist clutching a map that will help him confront an unknown and uncertain fate in France. More ominously, Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child* concludes with Njoroge disillusioned, his vision for communal salvation through Western education defeated, his community ravaged by violence. Nyasha, one of the youth rebels in *Nervous Conditions* is, at the conclusion of the novel, afflicted by both anorexia and a nervous breakdown. In short, these texts seem to depict colonial and postcolonial African worlds as societies in uncertain transition. They bring to mind Antonio Gramsci's famous diagnosis of moments of transition: "The old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms."[22]

NOTES

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3. Christopher L. Miller, *Theories of Africans: Francophone African Literature and Anthropology in Africa* (University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 126.
4. James Olney, "The Value of Autobiography for Comparative Studies: African vs. Western Autobiography" in W. L. Andrews (ed.), *African American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), pp. 212–23.
5. Frederic Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text*, 15 (1986), 65–88.
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8. Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The "Bildungsroman" in European Culture*, trans. by Albert Sbragia, new edn. (New York: Verso 2000), p. 3.

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9. Moretti, *The Way of the World*, p. 5.
10. Moretti. *The Way of the World*, pp. 30, 5.
11. V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 192.
12. Mark Mathabane, *Kaffir Boy: The True Story of a Black Youth's Coming of Age in Apartheid South Africa* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), p. xi.
13. Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, p. 120.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 120, 124.
16. Nafissatou Diallo, *A Dakar Childhood*, trans. by Dorothy S. Blair (Harlow: Longman, 1982).
17. Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, p. 124.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
19. Christopher Craft, *Another Kind of Love*: *Male Homosexual Desire in English Discourse, 1850–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. viii–ix.
20. Vincent Carretta, *Equiano, the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2005).
21. Bloke Modisane, *Blame Me on History* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1963), p. 5.
22. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), p. 276.

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13

PHYLLIS TAOUA

The postcolonial condition

The notion of the postcolonial gained currency as a category of experience in the Western academy during the 1980s, roughly two decades after decolonization in Africa, in the wake of Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* (1978).[1] Said's impressive survey of Western representations of the Orient inspired critics and theorists across many fields because of the way he linked up the politics of institutions and discursive formations with the cultural use of power and knowledge. This English literature professor of Palestinian origin helped initiate a paradigmatic shift away from criticism narrowly focused on texts and their formal aspects to the study of literature in its multiple contexts. This broadening of the critic's scope to allow for a consideration of the dynamics of empire was consolidated over the next decade with a number of collaborative efforts of which *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989) by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin stands out as a noteworthy example.[2] Rhetorical features of postcolonial discourse such as *mimicry* and *hybridity* proposed in *The Empire Writes Back* were subsequently expanded and refined by critics such as Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994).[3] Bhabha and the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* were also professors of English, which signals how important English departments were in shaping the emergence of postcolonial studies, but it is also useful to remember that French post-structuralism provided much of the theoretical basis from which they developed their common project.

The way these "First World" sources of inspiration and institutional structures shaped the point of departure for postcolonial studies raised substantial concerns about the relevance of this kind of theory and criticism for those who live and write in the "Third World" as Bart Moore-Gilbert argues in *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (1997).[4] Similarly, the ambiguous relationship between the postcolonial periphery and the metropolitan center to which the formerly colonized were supposedly "writing back" became the subject of legitimate debate. Another valid point of

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contention in the emergence of this field was the belated articulation of the important role gender played in the discourse of imperial conquest and in the Third World nationalism that emerged as a counter-discourse. An example of this is Anne McClintock's essay in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives* (1997), where she demonstrates how gender had been left out of discussions of nationalism, of central importance to postcolonial studies, well into the 1990s.[5]

The politics of identity formation now at the core of postcolonial studies were first articulated within the African context during the 1950s by Frantz Fanon in *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952) and Albert Memmi in *Portrait du colonisé, précédé de Portrait du colonisateur* (1957).[6] Fanon, a psychiatrist from the French West Indies, went on to formulate a critical theory of Third World liberation with essays on violence, nationalism, and culture in *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961),[7] which remains one of the most illuminating commentaries on the first phase of the postcolonial era in Africa. Writers who came of age during the anti-colonial struggle and who helped shape the postcolonial African novel cite Fanon most often as having had a direct influence on their work. Although pioneers of postcolonial thought were also inspired by French existentialism during the 1950s, postcolonial theory has been slow in attracting scholarly attention in France. At present, there are no equivalents in French departments, whether inside or outside of France, for the phenomenon of Said in terms of the range of his influence and the attention he was able to bring to the cultural politics of the colonial legacy.

On the eve of independence, Fanon issued an urgent warning about the necessity of fundamentally restructuring colonial economies in his essay on violence in *Les Damnés de la terre*. He argued that if the essentials of the colonial marketplace were to remain intact, the cost to newly independent populations would be profound and long lasting (pp. 134–5). Whereas much of what Fanon the psychiatrist predicted about the liberating effects of insurrectional violence ironically turned out not to be true, his emphasis on the need to restructure markets and to counteract Cold War politics proved more clairvoyant. It is significant that Fanon's subtle and penetrating analysis of the roots of dispossession winds up returning, in the end, to economic and historical factors. Fanon feared that the new political elite was insufficiently prepared by historical experience and that the socio-economic immaturity of this class made Africa's new leaders susceptible to external manipulation. Since Western economies had so much to lose if the ideals of anti-colonial liberation were realized, departing colonials sought to take advantage of the precarious situation. Fuelled by Cold War rivalry, France and England, joined by the United States, endeavored to shore up support with new leaders and to defend their territorial interests in Africa wherever possible. Defiant

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leaders who were unwilling to do business with former colonial bosses on Western terms and who actively cultivated popular support for genuine self-determination were often assassinated, as in the cases of Patrice Lumumba and Ruben Um Nyobé.

Since decolonization, there has been a gradual but steady evolution in the formation of identities away from a colonialist epistemology. The system of symbolic Othering that used to be organized by the outmoded colonizer–colonized binary has given way to a new set of oppositional identities that are decidedly more dynamic in nature. In situations where a legacy of traumatizing colonial violence persists, one finds former victims who have become perpetrators of fratricidal bloodletting at home. The process by which yesterday's victims have become today's villains is one that interests many writers across the continent from Assia Djebar to Sony Labou Tansi. At the local level, the terms with which postcolonial identities are formed and differences negotiated involve complex factors such as religion, ethnicity, language, and class that are embedded in circumstances often specific to the region. At the other end of the spectrum, the globalization of media images constitutes another source of pressure on the politics of postcolonial identity for African writers and intellectuals who wish to tell their own stories in their own voices from their own points of view. As a result, there is a strong tendency in contemporary African fiction to want to rectify the record by providing cultural narratives from indigenous viewpoints. Novelists frequently navigate between local contexts and an international frame of reference as they portray the complexities of postcolonial Africa.

While one could argue that it has been most common to view the postcolonial era in Africa as one continuous period beginning with decolonization in 1960, trends have emerged suggesting two distinct phases, with a break falling between 1989 and 1990. During the first phase (1960–89), African novels conveyed a gathering sense of disillusionment. Rather than contribute to progressive social renewal as anticipated by Fanon and other prominent writers who contributed to *Présence africaine*, the new literature lamented the betrayal of liberationist ideals in often dystopic terms. These novels of disillusionment depicted corrupt and repressive political systems that were seen as being trapped in a network of power relations manipulated by foreign interests from a distance, which left few opportunities for individuals to define their own lives. A strong sense of moral despair pervades novels of this first phase. Once Cold War rivalries in Europe no longer justified the sponsorship of dictators, the terms of political life in Africa changed substantially and so did the logic of cultural representation. While the process of opening up the political arena during the 1990s had regional specificities, the dynamic that swept across the continent was widespread involving National Conferences,

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elections, and in some cases armed conflict. Novelists have engaged with this effort to chart a way out of the wreckage left by the Cold War era by revisiting old questions of freedom and self-determination in fresh ways that posit individual self-definition and civil liberties as essential to any collective sense of meaningful freedom.

The Congolese novelist Sony Labou Tansi published six novels beginning with *La Vie et demie* (1979, "Life and a Half") and ending with *Le Commencement des douleurs* (1995, "The Beginning of Pain"). The novels that appeared before 1990 belong to the early phase of postcolonial disenchantment. Congo-Brazzaville, where he lived all his adult life, was one of many African countries to have a National Conference in the early 1990s, as part of a transition to multi-party democracy following years of military dictatorship. Sony entered local politics during the late 1980s helping to establish a political party that represented his ethnic group, the Kongo people, in their effort to regain power. During the resulting political turmoil that led to civil war he ceased publishing novels in Paris. The failure of this experiment in Congo-Brazzaville coincided with the author's growing illness and his death in 1995 as a result of AIDS. *Le Commencement des douleurs* captures Sony's impression of cataclysmic destruction in ethical terms that attempt to go beyond the old opposition between neocolonial villain and African victim that we find in his earlier novels. In order to have access to the moral complexities of this author's work, the reader must have some familiarity with his belief system, which is conveyed in coded and often surreptitious ways.

La Vie et demie is embedded in a Kongo world view, which served as the conceptual and ethical foundation for his novelistic discourse throughout his career. The plot involves a family allegory in which traditional kinship relations and modern political affiliations overlap. The patriarch, Martial, is a leader of the political opposition until he is assassinated by a monstrous dictator who is ironically called the Providential Guide. The novel opens with an astonishing scene of incestuous cannibalism, which sets the stage for the political and spiritual conflict that unfolds. In this dramatic introduction, the Providential Guide invites Martial's family to his table in the Presidential Palace where he forces them to witness the butchering of their father's body and then to partake in a sordid feast prepared with his remains. Yet, when the bloodthirsty tyrant attempts to destroy Martial's physical body with knives and guns, his victim's upper body hovers menacingly in the air as a sign that his spirit will endure. The assault on Martial's belly takes on charged symbolic meaning since the belly is the locus of a person's vital force within the Kongo system of belief. From Sony's syncretic perspective, eating one's enemy represents an attempt to consume their vital energy thereby destroying the wellspring of their power. The way the Providential Guide attacks Martial's

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source of life and power with an assault on his belly suggests that the dictator would like to revitalize his own compromised power. This theme of cannibalism should be interpreted figuratively since the act of eating and the predatory use of invisible powers overlap in the author's Kongo semantics. In keeping with the messianic tradition's view of martyrdom invoked in all Sony's novels, Martial lives on in the memory of his people who have survived dictatorial violence and continue the resistance. The message here is vividly clear: dictators can kill individuals who resist their power, but they will never eliminate the resistance. The terms Sony Labou Tansi uses to expose the nocturnal use of force within the bowels of the Presidential Palace to readers around the world constituted a daring act of political protest in 1979.

This martyr who refuses to leave his assassin alone condemns the Providential Guide to share his bed with the lovely Chaïdana, who is Martial's very own daughter. Whenever the Providential Guide initiates sexual relations with Chaïdana, Martial appears as a ghost whose haunting presence neutralizes the dictator's virility. Chaïdana, the symbolic offspring of the political opposition, claims that her flesh vibrates for more than just herself; it vibrates for one and a half bodies. Her unfulfilled desire is partly carnal, but it is also spiritual as signaled by the fact that her body becomes the medium through which martyrs of the resistance communicate with their assassins. In addition to this spell Martial cast on the dictator, the tyrant is also reminded of his losing battle against the resistance by the indelible black marks left by Martial on the Providential Guide's bed sheets, face and hands. So, it is in the intimate space of his bedroom that the dictator is made to contemplate the stains and sterility of his political violence while he is watched over by omnipresent bodyguards. This contest of wills waged in the realm of supernatural forces concerns the proper management of invisible forces of good and evil on which the community's equilibrium depends.

Within this context of repression and resistance, Sony goes on to elaborate a portrait of society under military dictatorship in Katamalanasie, which resembles Congo-Brazzaville. The moment Chaïdana wants to change her identity so that she can lead a normal life with a doctor she loves, an image of her father dressed like a militant prophet appears as a reminder of her mission among the living. There is no escape from politics, not even among the Pygmies in the rainforest to which members of the opposition retreat. The dystopic vision that runs through the novel culminates in a prediction of apocalyptic ruin for the region. At least two factors help explain such an ominous conclusion. First, in *La Vie et demie* differences between the holders of power and those who resist them are so profound that the offences resulting from the political conflict in which they both participate are seen to be irreparable. Martial's descendants wind up procreating with children from

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the dictator's regime, and their illegitimate offspring are a sign of ill-fated collaboration, the devastating consequences of which will be visited upon future generations. Finally, foreign political interests directly influence the state's affairs for purposes that have more to do with Western profit-seeking than anything else. Sony portrays the foreign-powers-that-furnish-our-guides with ironic humor, suggesting that an endless supply of Western-sponsored tyrants could be produced during the Cold War era.

Sony's other early novels also elaborate on various aspects of the themes of dictatorship and dissidence, with *L'Etat honteux* (1981) and *Les sept solitudes de Lorsa Lopez* (1985) being the most interesting. It was not until *Le Commencement des douleurs* that the author began wrestling with questions of wide-ranging importance for Africa after 1990. The questions that define the thrust of this narrative are: Where did this pain start? How did we end up here? In contrast to previous works by Sony, the nature of the dilemma in *Le Commencement des douleurs* is both collective and personal, even unusually autobiographical at times. Hoscar Hana, a middle-aged man, is chosen by his community to marry the virginal Banos Maya. A number of problems work against this union, beginning with the perception of the couple as being unnatural. In addition, Hoscar Hana goes too far when he kisses Banos Maya during a ceremonial ritual and this transgression of customary practice in public creates a disequilibrium that is never readjusted. The groom sees himself as a scapegoat when the community judges him badly for offending Banos Maya's innocence since his people chose him for the role and *bombance* (a feast in which the body and spirit revel), he says, pervades their culture. The novel's dramatic development involves a series of events that defer the accomplishment of their union, which does eventually take place after some thirty years of waiting and negotiation.

The marriage plot is elaborated with an emphatic use of sexualized language focused on the body. The exuberant laughter that inflects how one aspect of sexual relations is represented collides with another antithetical discourse defined by violation, illness, and malediction. The author's semantic play with ambiguous erotic terms explodes their meaning and opens the way to the novel's thematic polyvalence linking sexuality, politics, and spirituality. The fact that Banos Maya, the prized object of male desire, symbolizes a territory to be occupied – the longed-for Kongo nation – is typical of nationalist discourse. Similarly, her status as a possession traded among men fits within a conventional patriarchal scheme. However, the way her body is made to signify a community's collective experience resonates with Kongo spiritual values in a particular and charged way. For Sony, the life of the body has a spiritual dimension, so that when Hoscar Hana becomes ill and Banos Maya's physical integrity is violated, their symptoms are

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interpreted as the result of invisible evil forces. Thus, Hoscar Hana's public sin of sexual excess against Banos Maya carries spiritual consequences for the whole group. Banos Maya becomes a complex symbol: she embodies the lost innocence of future generations that will be forced to coexist with other ethnic groups within one shared political community. In *Le Commencement des douleurs*, the consequences of her violation are so catastrophic that the earth moans, the skies shiver and an explosive heatwave engulfs the atmosphere.

Hoscar Hana has the most moral complexity of any of Sony's protagonists; he is both victim *and* villain. For the first time, the opposition between foreign colonial aggressor and its Congolese victim gives way as the author assumes some responsibility for the current state of affairs. Since this novel attempts to come to terms with all the various causes of the community's present pain, there are multiple layers to the narrative including the legacy of colonial domination, the misuse of invisible forces and a dysfunctional cultural mindset of which personal culpability is also an important element. Sony's innovation in character development suggests that the author had one eye looking in the mirror with Hoscar Hana. These elements of self-description indicate that the effects of political dispossession on the lives of real individuals figured into the mix. For Sony, questions of political justice and spiritual equilibrium were formulated in absolute terms. Thus, the cosmic doom that envelops the story suggests that what he believed in did not work. In the end, the author's profound sense of disillusionment produced a longing for miraculous intervention by a divine force that could recreate a body without disease and an island without history.

The Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o, unlike Sony, does not espouse a traditionalist point of view from within his ethnic group. So when Ngugi's novels are nostalgic, as they sometimes are, they express a longing, not to return to a pristine pre-colonial state, but for a socialist utopia in which the liberationist ideals of the struggle for independence would be realized. Rather than get drawn into dysfunctional local dynamics as Sony did, Ngugi chose exile and his writing has become increasingly distant from his initial phase of militant engagement. Experimentation with various forms of novelistic discourse including writing in Gikuyu defines this novelist's literary career, while resistance to repressive state authority was the primary concern of Ngugi the activist.

In the late 1960s, Ngugi discovered Fanon's writing on the pitfalls of national consciousness and this prompted the first major turning point in the Kenyan novelist's career. Reading Fanon led Ngugi to reconsider the utopic undercurrent of the prevailing nationalist narrative of liberation and thus to contemplate all the ambiguities inherent in the process of

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decolonization. *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) represents Ngugi's first attempt to come to terms with the compromised legacy of decolonization in Kenya. It also marks the beginning of an esthetic shift away from a modern European style of realism toward a more overtly engaged socialist realism. This character driven novel dramatizes how the fates of individuals were intimately bound up with historical forces shaping the emergence of a postcolonial Kenyan nation. The love affair between Gikonyo and Mumbi is put to the test when the colonial administration declares a State of Emergency as the anti-colonial "Mau Mau" rebellion gets underway. Gikonyo is detained in a camp, while Mumbi is left to fend for herself back in their village where she falls prey to Karanja, a self-interested and calculating man who gets her pregnant. Gikonyo and Karanja's rivalry in love is paralleled by a competition between their different ethics and the ideologies they imply. Gikonyo, the would-be patriot, who recanted to get out of detention so that he could return to his mother and wife, must overcome Mumbi's betrayal, which he does manage in the end. Karanja, the opportunist, behaves as if he never really expected the white settlers to leave and finds himself in an ambiguous situation when they do. The only true patriot is Kihika who remains almost exclusively in the forest and is betrayed by Mugo in whom the community misplaces its hope for the future. Various points of view in the narrative are contraposed, which invites readers to contemplate multiple perspectives and to arrive at a more complex appreciation of the human forces that complicate historical processes. *A Grain of Wheat* leaves open questions about whether the community will be able to transcend the kind of betrayal Mugo commits. These unresolved issues are taken up later in *Petals of Blood* (1977), an ambitious novel in which Ngugi attempts a panoramic sweep of the forces that contributed to the establishment of a neocolonial order in Kenya.

The next turning point in Ngugi's trajectory was sparked by his participation in a people's theater experiment in 1977 at Kamiriithu village, which surpassed his expectations about what he and the peasants could gain from such a collaboration. Their successful performance of the play *Ngaahika Ndeendai (I Will Marry When I Want)* in Gikuyu constituted an epistemological break for Ngugi. Not only had the author's longing for a closer connection to a Kenyan audience been resolved, but he was also learning from his ideal interlocutors about how they viewed cultural production. Jomo Kenyatta's regime perceived the possibility of Ngugi being able to further refine a discourse of political dissidence this close to the people's interests as an untenable threat and issued a warrant for the writer's arrest. Ngugi was detained at Kamiti Maximum Security Prison at the end of 1977. *Detained* (1981) is a remarkable testimony to the life to which political detainees were subjected during the last years of Kenyatta's rule, but it also sheds light on the

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novel Ngugi wrote while in prison (*Devil on the Cross*) as well as his subsequent positions on language use and the cultural legacy of imperialism in Africa. In many ways, *Detained* is the objective result of the betrayal of the people's struggle for independence in Africa about which so many novels have been written including his own *A Grain of Wheat*. Nearly twenty years after his release from prison, Ngugi published his Clarendon lectures as *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams: Towards a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa* (1998), the most eloquent distillation of his reflections on a whole set of issues from repressive state authority to the role of artists in society, which his detention forced upon his mind with painful urgency.

Whereas the agonizing vicissitudes of imprisonment are openly discussed in the prison memoir, they get expressed indirectly in *Devil on the Cross* (1982), which is Ngugi's first novel in Gikuyu and written in prison. The novel is a hybrid work that seeks to appropriate the European novel as a genre into the Gikuyu tradition of orature, while retaining a biblical frame of reference. The manner in which this novel engages in a deliberate simplification of the opposing forces of good and evil in biblical terms – God versus the Devil – defines its ethical vision and strident tone. But the blunt moralization that subtends the confrontation between good and evil in this peculiar novel cannot be adequately understood without taking into account the author's harrowing struggle to survive the "stony dragon" with his mind and spirit intact. *Devil on the Cross* builds on the Kamiriithu experiment in defiance of the state's repressive measures and marks the beginning of Ngugi's ongoing effort to expand literatures written in African languages.

Ngugi went on to write a second novel in Gikuyu, *Matigari* (1987), while in exile in London. His essays *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) and *Moving the Centre* (1993), also from this period, were influential for their defense of African language literatures and their cultural critique of neocolonialism. *Matigari* is a striking novel for its combination of indeterminacy and idealism: while an aura of mystery surrounds Matigari, news of the fact that he goes around the country asking where one can find truth and justice spreads among the people. The author's actual displacement in exile gets projected in the narrative as homelessness accompanied by a persistent hope that justice will one day be realized for all Kenyans. The absence of a clearly defined social and historical context relative to previous works such as *Petals of Blood* or *A Grain of Wheat* signals a departure from his previous realism. The elusive identity that accompanies Matigari in his journey across the postcolonial landscape allows Ngugi to reflect on the circumstances that brought about the people's continued dispossession, which is the problematic at the heart of the novel. The nation – a vibrant independent Kenyan nation – is no longer

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an explicit object of patriotic longing in *Matigari*, but probing questions as to why independence ideals were not realized do continue to drive this narrative.[8]

Wizard of the Crow (2006), Ngugi's most recent novel, was also written in Gikuyu first and then translated, by the author, into English. The quality of the translation is remarkable for its achievement in so completely transferring the story from a Gikuyu sphere into an English language context that the original source remains ever so vaguely in the background; a choice that contrasts with such writers as Chinua Achebe, who appropriates English into his sphere of reference and adapts the language to convey his African sensibility and personal esthetic vision. *Wizard of the Crow* is a gargantuan novel that becomes as bloated as the corrupt dictator whose reign the narrative recounts over several hundred pages. The intricacy with which the author interweaves countless narrative threads as he develops an amusing array of sycophants and dissidents is monumental. A new, if somewhat belated, interest in magical realism helps Ngugi enliven the narrative's satirical humor and yet many such outmoded oppositions as shameless sycophants versus self-sacrificing dissidents persist. The cumbersome plot teaches a simple lesson: Only through organized and effective resistance can political dissidents bring about meaningful progress in Africa or anywhere else where entrenched dictatorship exists. To arrive at this conclusion, the reader is taken on a wild journey with Kamiti who becomes a healer of sorts and calls himself the Wizard of the Crow while he treats patients who suffer from such ailments as "white ache." We first encounter Kamiti when he is looking for work and is not successful in spite of his intellectual abilities and diplomas. His search for employment leads him to meet Nyawira, with whom he falls in love when she comes looking for him in the forest where he had retreated from the postcolonial city. Along the way, Kamiti discovers his ancestral roots in divination, the demands of political resistance, and then the debilitating hopelessness of alcoholism. Ultimately, he is reintegrated into society and reunited with Nyawira, with whom he had lost touch after she was forced underground as the leader of the political opposition. Kamiti is convinced by her movement's ability to intervene, even if in a limited way initially, and decides to join the group. This act of optimism, which amounts to a political conversion, is contrasted with the dismal state of affairs in the Ruler's palace, where the most craven and corrupt of a cast of ghoulish ministers takes the grotesque Ruler's place after his body, swollen with rage, emits a noxious gas that spreads across the land. Ngugi leaves the reader hoping, again, that the love and patriotism that this enlightened couple share will somehow revitalize the culture through stories told about them and serve as a basis for progressive political change.

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The Ghanaian novelist Ayi Kwei Armah explores the postcolonial African condition in terms of the toll the failure of nationalism takes on the intimate self and its longing for wholeness and authenticity. Rather than allegorizing national politics, Armah's fiction searches for an authentic self as witness to the tragedies of postcolonial Africa. In Armah's first novel *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), the sense of disillusionment is raw with emotion and conveyed in expressive terms of putrefaction and decomposition. The nameless protagonist referred to as "the Man" wrestles with his conscience as he struggles to fend off the temptation of joining his fellow countrymen who are enslaved by "the gleam." Armah portrays the culture of corruption and the destructive pursuit of riches in terms of the gleam, or the bright light of rapidly acquired wealth. The corrosive effects of this social disease that touches every aspect of newly independent Ghanaian society are developed through contrasting characters. Whereas "the Man" searches for a way of living in society without compromising his integrity, his friend the Teacher withdraws vowing never to hope again after such profound disillusionment. Both resist the culture of materialism set up by the new elite, although in different ways. By contrast, "the Man's" wife Oyo longs for the comfort wealth affords and brings considerable guilt to bear on her husband for not putting his family's material needs before his ethical integrity. As the narrative unfolds, "the Man's" progress is measured by his ability to resist the gleam's appeal and his family's demands. Oyo, like her mother, speaks the language of victims enslaved by the gleam until she witnesses Koomson's decline after Kwame Nkrumah is deposed by a *coup d'état*. The fat party man, Koomson, turns out to be the ultimate victim as he loses everything in the end and is forced to make a dramatic escape through a latrine fleeing those who orchestrated the coup. It is only after Koomson's sudden change in political fortune that Oyo wakes up and starts to feel genuine respect for her husband's integrity.

Armah's *The Beautyful Ones* offers a window onto Ghanaian society from the vantage point of a clerk who monitors the transportation of cargo freight trains. He is postcolonial Africa's Everyman and the dramatization of his moral dilemma translates the existential disorientation that average people felt by the betrayal of progressive ideals so soon after independence. "The Man" asks: "How could this have grown rotten with such obscene haste?"[9] Indeed, the speed with which the new class of leaders abandoned the spirit of anti-colonial nationalism preoccupies both "the Man" and his friend the Teacher whose life illustrates a "shrinking of the hoping self" (p. 79). "The Man's" sense of moral isolation grows more acute the longer he is able to avoid being entrapped by the pernicious web of social and familial relations that constrain individuals and subject them to intense pressures to conform.

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Yet, the narrator's strongest condemnation is reserved for new black leaders, who are described as picking at leftovers stuck in the white boss's teeth. This attitude, Armah suggests, is at the origin of postcolonial Africa's decline. An affirmative vision is projected into the future, but meaningful social change will require a more substantial reorganization than the opening created by Nkrumah's overthrow. *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* has become an archetype of the novel of disillusionment that defines the first postcolonial phase in Africa.

Armah's second novel *Fragments* (1970) is a strangely powerful novel about the shattering of the migrant intellectual's sense of self when faced with the insanity of postcolonial Ghana. It is narrated in the third person from the point of view of Baako, an American-educated artist who returns home in the years following independence. Baako's family is both a source of alienation and his most important anchor. Naana, his wise old grandmother, is a quiet presence who defends traditional values, whereas Baako's mother and sister belong to the new generation of people who have been corrupted by the postcolonial pursuit of wealth. Baako falls in love with Juana, a Puerto Rican psychotherapist who lives in Ghana, when he goes to see her as a patient. Her perspective as an outsider is valuable because it allows her to see the social dynamics that disable her patients with some distance, and yet she comprehends the difficult circumstances under which they suffer social injustice.

Two episodes illustrate the family discord that sent Baako to see Juana. When his sister has a baby she decides to have the baptism early, against Naana's advice, so that she can collect more money from guests by having the ceremony fall right after payday. Baako feels that he has ruined the baptism with his awkward behavior and by refusing to go around and collect money from guests despite his mother's goading. She, however, brazenly calls guests by name to come forward and put money in the pot. The baby dies soon thereafter. Finally, Baako's mother takes him to the site of a house she has under construction; it was her dream home, which she expected him to finish for her. Baako's mother brings her son to this place to cleanse her soul and to explain that she has forgiven him for not fulfilling her expectations. Armah renders the painful, contradictory emotions of anger and pity that tear at Baako's soul with genuine insight and sensitivity.

Although a more introspective novel than *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah extends his reflection in the second novel to include social pressures exerted on Baako beyond his family. When Juana and Baako take a journey to the beach, they witness a horrific scene in which a merchant sinks in the harbor with his truck full of perishable food, after falling off an overcrowded ferry that he desperately needed to take to the marketplace. Having to behold such an incompetent management of traffic, the indifference of

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bystanders and the plight of those stuck in poverty is a crushing experience for Baako. Discussions with Juana and Ocran, a former teacher, help Baako try to make sense of his estrangement from Ghanaian society after spending time abroad. In the end, the teacher is the one person who speaks the truth to Baako during a visit to the asylum where Baako is taken after a nervous breakdown. Ocran clearly articulates the moral dilemma that has ruined Baako's health; he explains that needy family members drag Baako down by wanting him to take care of them beyond his means and that their fantastic expectations prevent him from realizing his own potential. Although these relatives expect things of him that they do not expect of themselves, Baako is unable to choose his self-fulfillment at the expense of others.

The downward spiral begins when Baako's creative endeavors are thwarted at Ghanavision. He resigned from his job at the television station after a screenplay about slavery which he pitched to the managing director is shot down. He was told that coming to terms with the legacy of slavery has nothing to do with nation building and that artists should be supporting Africa's new leaders. In a rage, Baako burns all his treatments for other films he wanted to make. It is while contemplating what Baako calls the "cargo mentality," a disabling frame of mind that leads people to believe that bread will fall from heaven, that obsessive thoughts drag him into a pit of despair from which he never recovers. *Fragments* deepens the introspection of Armah's first novel and humanizes the author's cry for freedom and authentic self-determination. Whereas this novelist has been criticized for being stuck in a logic of lamentation while the nationalist cause waited, Armah's contemplation of the toll that the loss of promised freedom takes on the intimate self was actually ahead of its time.

Every postcolonial African novelist has had to work out his or her own position with respect to matters of form and esthetic inspiration, which language to write in and how to reach African audiences. The Senegalese novelist and film-maker, Ousmane Sembène, has been a pioneer in this regard. After Senegal's independence in 1960, Sembène no longer had a compelling reason to publish literature in France, so he turned to cinema. Fiction in French became a narrative realm where ideas for films were first articulated in the form of short stories and novellas. Many of these stories such as *Xala* (fiction 1973; film 1974) and *Le Mandat/Mandabi* (fiction 1966; film 1968) were reworked and adapted to the big screen. The style of Sembène's fiction has not changed dramatically over the years; it has become more economical and less descriptive, with a preference for the clean, efficient lines of the novella. In *Xala*, for example, it is remarkable how Sembène strips the novel as genre to its essential components and eschews the kind of stylistic experimentation we see in the works of Armah and Sony. Sembène's fiction appears utilitarian in comparison

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to his films, which are visually complex and innovative. Making films in Wolof and Diola (in addition to French) was an option that afforded him the possibility of communicating with audiences at home and abroad. Sembène sought to develop a widely intelligible film language that combined such elements as a slow pace, communication via physical gesture, pedagogical use of detail and a style of dramatic exposition that is more visual than verbal. This way, viewers beyond Sembène's linguistic sphere would not have to read subtitles in order to understand his films. Perhaps more than any other African writer, Sembène's esthetic choices have been consistently motivated by a desire to effectively communicate with his compatriots. He describes himself as a modern-day *griot* (traditional storyteller) who seeks to inform and enlighten his audience. The relative degree of freedom Sembène was accorded in Senegal is a luxury in comparison to the severe repression many of his fellow writers elsewhere have had to face.

While there are differences between the written and film versions of *Xala*, both use allegory to comment on the sterility of Senegal's comprador bourgeoisie. The protagonist, El Hadji, is struck by sexual impotence after his third marriage, and his curse of sterility (the *xala* referred to in the title) figures as an eloquent symbol for the syndrome in which corrupt opportunists destroy the promises that nationalist leaders made to the people during the fight for independence. Whereas El Hadji and his colleagues at the Chamber of Commerce claim to be compelled by respect for authentic African values, El Hadji epitomizes hypocrisy and alienation. This aspiring businessman prefers French to Wolof, drinks bottled Evian water and goes bankrupt in reckless pursuit of a European lifestyle. The novella leaves little ambiguity as to the origin of El Hadji's *xala*: a family member was dispossessed of his land when El Hadji falsified the deed for a parcel of land that belonged to the extended family by indicating his own father's name, thereby taking exclusive ownership. When the relative sought retribution, El Hadji had him jailed. The fate of this estranged family member, who became a beggar in the street, symbolizes the dispossession of common folks at the hands of the new elite. In this allegory, sexual potency, multiple wives, and an ostentatious lifestyle form a symbolic cluster representing postcolonial power for men in Senegal. Thus, when El Hadji is stricken with a curse of sterility, the patriarch and businessman loses everything – his virility, his social standing, and his material assets. Yet, the ending leaves open some probing questions about future social transformations. El Hadji accepts the beggars' demands and lets them spit on his naked torso in the hope of regaining his virility while his first wife and eldest daughter watch. It remains to be seen what the new El Hadji will become after enduring this humiliating ritual or what the beggars will gain from this limited insurrection

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since armed guards charged with maintaining law and order patrol the streets outside.

In the film, Sembène treats the display of anti-colonial nationalism with which the film opens with irreverent irony. Senegalese businessmen begin by making a show of how they dispense with symbols of French influence from their Chamber of Commerce, but this opening sequence then concludes with French economic advisors being ushered right back inside the building under military escort, as the people are held at bay. French power remains silent as the advisors never voice their political objectives; instead, they distribute briefcases full of cash to each member of the Chamber of Commerce. Sembène visually dramatizes how a new African elite remained under Western influence. Members of the chamber make hollow speeches about African independence and engage in nationalistic hand-waving, but these empty gestures are followed by actions that reveal their corruption and hypocrisy. Both the film and the novel indirectly communicate a Marxist call to action: if those dispossessed by the ruling elite rose up and demanded their rights, society would be transformed.

Nuruddin Farah's *Blood in the Sun* trilogy has made a valuable contribution to the contemporary African novel in terms of conceptual innovation. The novels in this series, *Maps* (1986), *Gifts* (1992), and *Secrets* (1998), are set in present-day Somalia. The trilogy explores questions of identity in complex terms, informed by philosophy, myth, and anthropology. At the same time, his recent fiction raised eyebrows for its iconoclastic representation of the writer's native Somalia, the role of Islam in contemporary culture and gender relations. These controversial elements bring attention to important and contentious issues facing Somalia and other African countries at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Farah and Assia Djebar are both openly critical of patriarchy and political manipulations of Islam and have been labeled by opponents as sell-outs to the West. Yet, Farah refuses to live in the West; he has lived in several African countries and currently resides in South Africa.

The story in the first novel is set against the backdrop of the Ogaden war between Ethiopia and Somalia in the late 1970s. *Maps* explores the role of discourse in constituting a Somali identity in terms that challenge the dictator Siyad Barre's nationalist discourse and its projection of an identity defined by a timeless essence. The protagonist is an orphan raised by a woman of Ethiopian origin who acquired the language and culture of Somalia. Askir's adopted mother, Misra, has thus crossed the border over which the two nations are fighting. As Askir matures, he finds himself forced by the dominant discourse to renounce his connection to his mother and her hybrid identity if he is to become a soldier for the nationalist cause. The drama of

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Askir's evolving sense of self does not progress from alienation to self-possession. Instead, questions about his identity linger and a sense of incompleteness thwarts his quest for self-definition. The narrative unfolds as a retrospective answer to the question – what is your name? – which the secret police ask Askir. Farah introduces discourse as an element in identity formation in addition to cultural and biological components that form the bedrock of nationalist identity. *Maps* establishes an opposition between the village, ruled by tradition, and the city where cosmopolitan Somalis enlightened by a modern education present a countervailing force. Villagers who migrate to the city become more tolerant of difference as a result of exchanging ideas with others and, in this urban context, reason triumphs over the primeval clannish passions and an unthinking adherence to tradition.

In the second novel, Farah continues to explore the stresses that postcolonial Somali culture brings to bear on individuals in terms of mixed bloodlines, confused origins, and the complex interaction between collective and personal identities. Kalaman, like Askir, faces questions about his origins. In *Secrets*, Kalaman discovers over the course of the novel that he is the issue of a gang rape. The brutality with which his mother was violated and the ambiguity of Kalaman's identity figure the multiple forces that gave birth to the modern Somali nation. Kalaman's identity crisis is dramatized through his attraction to two very different women. Talaado is patient and seems the ideal domestic partner, while Sholoongo is disorderly, unsettling, and sexually appealing. *Secrets* tells a story about the economy of desire in the postcolonial setting with a political allegory in which female protagonists figure as various kinds of territories to be occupied. Kalaman's journey is a quest for self-knowledge and self-acceptance, both prerequisites for a meaningful love relationship. And, as is often the case in Farah's trilogy, self-fulfillment in romantic love is an ideal with wide-ranging implications. The love that begins to grow between Talaado and Kalaman projects hope for a better future, where mutual respect and transcendence of divisions would triumph. *Secrets* gives us one of the most impious and anti-conformist patriarchs in modern African fiction. Nonno's irreverence can be interpreted as a search for new frames of reference beyond the dominant moral system in Somalia.

The third novel is the most uplifting. The quest for self-definition on which Duniya embarks in *Gifts* holds the potential to inspire social transformation. The way Farah links a defense of personal liberty with social progress in *Gifts* exemplifies the new spirit of the postcolonial African novel. Drawing on Marcel Mauss's essay on gift exchange, Farah presents a multiplicity of perspectives on the ethics of giving and receiving with a polyphonic discourse that includes excerpts from international news media, local journalism, folk tales and competing characters' perspectives.[10] However, the contrasting

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viewpoints do not remain static, rather they actively challenge hegemonic systems that create disabling mindsets for Somalis. First, the Eurocentric perception of international aid as genuine generosity is deconstructed and represented as self-serving calculation by wealthy "donor" nations and agencies. Second, the patriarchal view of women as chattels to be traded is questioned in the novel where the potential for a woman to become a self-sufficient, independent adult defies the notion of men as custodians of dependent women. The novel provides a complex critique of dependency in various forms and appeals for individual self-determination as well as national self-sufficiency.

Farah's invitation to rethink the ethics of gift giving questions the practice of charity – one of the five pillars of Islam – in Somalia. The novelist proposes that charity can be perverted by modern pressures exerted on individuals and communities. His challenge to reconsider this ethical terrain in view of the constraints that contemporary African societies face extends from domestic arrangements between spouses to an international web of relations. If reciprocal romantic love were to become the basis on which marital unions were formed, the status of women would be transformed and collective redefinition would follow. The novel succeeds in turning a man's courtship of an independent woman into a compelling and enriching adventure, which culminates in a loving exchange in which the self is given with unrestrained emotion as the most valuable gift of all. In addition to innovative concepts, readers find in Farah's fiction a life-affirming faith in the ability of the human spirit to triumph over adversity.

The humanity with which Armah and others are able to give voice to the suffering of ordinary people, with narratives that take the reader into the worlds the protagonists inhabit, exemplifies the dignified spirit of the best contemporary African fiction. Novels in the vein of Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* (1985) and *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* illustrate the unique power of literature to deepen emotional awareness while bearing witness to the disappointments of dispossession and betrayal. The keen insights masters such as Sembène offer into the complex dynamics at work in postcolonial societies cultivate awareness of the unfinished business of achieving meaningful freedom for the people. Variations on the theme of dispossession in the postcolonial novel involve enduring idealism that persists in the face of violence, corruption, and repression. The way Sony tenaciously held onto his Kongo traditions and beliefs was partially inspired by principled idealism, which became increasingly dysfunctional as his health and the political situation worsened. Ngugi's return to themes of collective resistance and patriotic love from *A Grain of Wheat* to *Wizard of the Crow* is another manifestation of the spirit of enduring idealism in the face of repression,

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detention, and exile. Farah's novels advocate for individual enlightenment in their exploration of cosmopolitan friendship, reciprocal love and personal freedom, even as Somalia continues to be plagued by violence and political chaos. In the years since *Orientalism*, some of the debate about postcolonial theory and criticism has become increasingly abstract and fueled by academic vanity, while others endeavor to sustain Said's original innovation: bringing a Third World perspective into focus so as to decenter First World authority. The most relevant interventions with respect to postcolonial African novels are those that continue to engage purposefully with Said's project and remain attuned to local sources of inspiration and the very real political forces that shape African novels today.

NOTES

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14

DOMINIC THOMAS

New voices, emerging themes

I was a little boy playing around in my father's hut. How old would I have been at the time? I cannot remember exactly. I must have been very young: five, maybe six years old. My mother was in the workshop with my father, and I could just hear their familiar voices above the noise of the anvil and conversation of the customers.

Camara Laye, *The Dark Child* (1954)

Here I was, in the home of Mr. Ibara – one of those high-and-mighty types who would drive past us in their luxury cars and sneer at us, ignoring the misery around them. One of those bigshots who embezzled state funds to build their villas and support their mistresses; who had no need to build hospitals or schools in this country, because as soon as they felt the first twinge of a headache they could hop on a plane to America or Europe and get medical care. Yeah, I was in the home of one of those bigshots. I'd parked my ass in the armchair of a bigshot. I'd drunk from the glass of a bigshot. In a minute, I was going to take a piss in the toilet of a bigshot. And then, as I gazed at Mr. Ibara's wife sprawled on the floor, I had the urge to fuck the wife of a bigshot.

Emmanuel Dongala, *Johnny Mad Dog* (2001)

In determining what might come under the rubric "new" in such an immense field as African literature, one has invariably to confront a plethora of structural issues pertaining to questions of history and thematics. In other words, should the defining criteria for inclusion be provided by such factors as the year of publication or the author's age, or rather should these classificatory modes be ignored in favor of broader concerns pertaining to the esthetic and historical subject matter of the works concerned? While this essay cannot possibly claim to be exhaustive in its investigation of a remarkably diverse corpus of works generated by African novelists, my inclination is to privilege the historical component and accordingly to explore how the transnationalism of these writers challenges a restricted politics of location while simultaneously expanding the framework of their works in order to incorporate an engagement with global issues. In turn, these measures have resulted in a rethinking of both the contextualization and reception of African literature and a reinscription of African voices as central interlocutors and contributors in a new global literature.

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I am deeply conscious of the important historical juncture at which this essay is located – namely the fiftieth anniversary of two foundational moments in the history of African literature. First, the publication of Mongo Beti's (Cameroon, 1932–2001) 1955 landmark essay, "Afrique Noire, littérature rose" ("Black Africa, Rosy Literature") in which he attacked Camara Laye for not sufficiently criticizing colonialism, and secondly the First Congress of Black Writers and Artists held in Paris at the Sorbonne from September 19 to September 22, 1956.[1] Whereas the politics of postcoloniality generated extensive critical discourse on national literary production from 1960 to the early 1990s, it is the pan-Africanism that informed Beti's essay and the gathering of black writers and artists at the Sorbonne that interest me here. The consciousness of a global blackness served as the distinguishing marker of these precursors to the contemporary discourse on globalization, and new African literature exhibits analogous tendencies today, broadening the nature and scope of Africa as a continent in order to incorporate the decentered realities of African writers themselves as they negotiate and engage with multifarious forms of diaspora, dislocation, displacement, and exile.

The epigraphs to this essay underscore these transformations, and the concerns of African writers have shifted considerably as indeed have the specificities associated with national literatures. Many commonalities have naturally survived beyond historical divides, and the fact nevertheless remains that writing itself remains a dangerous activity; dissenting African authors continue to be challenged, intimidated and silenced by the leaders of sovereign nations who have demonstrated little tolerance for oppositional discourse. Internationally though, the portrait gallery of contemporary African recipients of the most prestigious literary awards and prizes is extremely impressive, including the Nobel Prize in Literature, the Neustadt International Prize for Literature, the Prix Renaudot, the Booker Prize, the Irish Times International Fiction Prize, the Los Angeles Times Book Award, the Noma Award, and the Caine Prize. In fact, J. M. Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer, Naguib Mahfouz, and Wole Soyinka have all been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

The debate on the question of classifying African literary production has been a lively one, as different interlocutors have privileged esthetic, generational, linguistic, national, or thematic alignments. The less convincing of these is clearly the generational model, since such critically acclaimed writers as Beti and Ahmadou Kourouma (Ivory Coast, 1927–2003) and Ousmane Sembène (Senegal, 1923–2007) not only produced works across colonial and postcolonial historical divides but also texts whose content has been adjusted and modified dramatically over time from acerbic critiques of Western

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expansionist projects in Africa to carefully articulated observations of decolonizing imperatives, and finally to lucid commentaries on Africa's changing position in global realignments. These examples serve to confirm the resourcefulness of African writers and their capacity to adapt their esthetic projects to mutating sociopolitical circumstances.

Lilyan Kesteloot foregrounded the importance of political *engagement* in her book *Les écrivains noirs de la langue française: naissance d'une littérature*, and this model was later convincingly challenged by Guy Ossito Midiohouan in his revisionist book *L'Idéologie dans la littérature négro-africaine d'expression française*, in which he argued that a focus on genre and historical context provided a more accurate rendition of African literary production outside of this limited framework.[2] Midiohouan was also one of the most vocal critics of the national approach to African literature, and his position was representative of those for whom the experience of sovereign rule was too recent to have generated national particularities and who interpreted such nationalist positions as contributing factors to tensions between newly independent nation states.[3] Other critics, such as Adrien Huannou, advocated for the national approach: "Since all that belongs to a nation is national, and since a literature is made up of all the literary works of a country or region, then all the oral and written works produced by nationals of an African state constitute a national literature. There are therefore as many African literatures as there are states in Africa."[4] Whichever position one adopts, the insistence on the ideological component of literature is crucial, particularly in the postcolonial African context in which the politics of cultural nationalism have been so central, and in which cultural particularities have become evident as a result of autonomous sociopolitical experiences.

Dorothy S. Blair published *African Literature in French*, a comprehensive overview of francophone literature, Eustace Palmer *The Growth of the African Novel*, a comparative approach across linguistic and national lines; along with Jacques Chevrier's *Littérature nègre* and *Littérature africaine: histoire et grands thèmes*, these works constitute the main surveys of this corpus of works.[5] Séwanou Dabla's book *Nouvelles écritures africaines: romanciers de la seconde génération* incorporates works published between 1966 and 1983, selected for their focus on political events in the postcolony and an esthetic avant-gardism.[6] Abdourahman A. Waberi's (Djibouti) more recent essay, "Les enfants de la postcolonie: esquisse d'une nouvelle génération d'écrivains francophones d'Afrique noire" summarizes these generational categories, comprised of the pioneer writers of 1920–30, the Negritude movement from 1930 to 1960, decolonization and postcolonial disillusionment from the 1970s onwards, and finally a fourth generation that

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would include the "children of the postcolony or the transcontinental generation."[7] There are inherent shortcomings to the idea of a generation and the kind of homogeneity implied in these historiographies, and these must be resisted at all costs; nevertheless, the transcontinental dimension Waberi alludes to is useful in ascertaining the broad range of themes characteristic of new African writing. The bilateralism and transversalism of African literature today constitutes its originality, whereby its global status should not be interpreted exclusively as "homogenizing/hegemonic" or "heterogenetic/ interpenetrating" but rather, as Bill Ashcroft has argued, as a process in which individuals and groups are "transformed by diasporas and intercommunication."[8] This process of "intercommunication" has tremendous implications concerning the bilateralism of exchanges between writers and populations located in Africa and those residing elsewhere, yielding exchanges that contain the possibility of operating outside of normative, hegemonic influences.

In order to ascertain new writings and themes, one must take into consideration the historical context, but also acknowledge the significant decentralization that has occurred pertaining to the idea of Africa itself as a topographic territorial entity. New African writing is now generated in-/outside of Africa by writers who reside in various parts of Africa (often unrelated to their place of birth or nationality), beyond the continent (Australia, Europe, the United States), in "global cities" (Cape Town, Dakar, London, Los Angeles, New York, Paris), among African immigrants with whom they self-identify or disidentify, and more often than not in multiple geographic locations. In turn, thematic concerns reflect these mobilities. Themes such as colonialism and anticolonialism, the analysis and critique of missionary activity, the civilizing mission, and Negritude, the challenge to Islam, anti-apartheid activism, and the questioning of Occidental superiority have now been partially displaced by concern for the environment, immigration, democratization, civil conflict, genocide, the National Conferences, child soldiers, the disintegration of the nation state, AIDS, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and globalization – sociopolitical factors reconfigured in the imaginative landscapes of writers whose works exhibit a profound engagement with the most demanding ethical issues of our time.

One of the most innovative and significant literary developments of the late twentieth century, which also perfectly exemplifies the global reach of African writers, emerged from the *Rwanda: écrire par devoir de mémoire* project. A selected group of African writers traveled to Rwanda in order to write about the 1994 genocide. The atrocities had received much media coverage, but this experiment was designed to gauge the effectiveness of fiction in confronting unspeakable horrors. As one of the authors of the nine published

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texts that came out of this experiment, Abdourahman A. Waberi claimed in *Moisson de crânes* (2000), "This book has no pretension of explaining anything whatsoever, and fiction occupies the central role."[9] Arguably, the most convincing contributions were *Murambi, le livre des ossements* (2000) by Boris Boubacar Diop (Senegal), *L'Aîné des orphelins* (2000, *The Oldest Orphan*, 2004) by Tierno Monénembo (Guinea), and *L'Ombre d'Imana: Voyages jusqu'au bout du Rwanda* (1999, *In the Shadow of Imana*, 2002) by Véronique Tadjo (Ivory Coast). In all of these works, the tenuous relationship between memory and forgetting, healing and forgiveness is approached through multiple voices and testimonies not in an attempt to chart the coordinates of reconciliation, but rather to respond to the greater challenges posed by the limits of empathy and sympathy.

Political reform and transition have characterized the years either side of the new millennium and figure as the central marker of new African literature. In *En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages* (1998, *Waiting for the Wild Beasts to Vote*, 2004), Kourouma created a biting satire on the superficiality of transition to democratic rule. In turn, Emmanuel Dongala (Congo) examined the journey from Marxist-Leninist rule in the People's Republic of the Congo to a pluralist democracy in *Les petits garçons naissent aussi des étoiles* (1998, *Little Boys Come From the Stars*, 2001): "After slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism, and scientific socialism, democracy descended upon us one August morning, in the middle of the dry season."[10] Recourse to a central protagonist born in 1980 on the twentieth anniversary of official independence from French colonial rule and emphasis on humor had the dual effect of generating a social commentary that is less deterministic and prescriptive than the official discourse associated with the political leadership. In turn, we also discover the new alignments in a world no longer exclusively informed by the former colonial French influences, but rather by increasing proximity to the cultural dimension of globalization. Characters are now avid consumers of global signifiers such as Coca-Cola, Nike products and Arnold Schwarzenegger movies, and question the manipulative gestures and authoritarian impulses of leaders.

Indeed, new African writing has been actively inspired by the conditions that produced the phenomenon of child soldiers. In *Johnny chien méchant* (2002, *Johnny Mad Dog*, 2005) and *Allah n'est pas obligé* (2000, *Allah Doesn't Have To*, 2005) by Dongala and Kourouma respectively, ethnic cleansing and social unrest are told from the perspective of young, alienated, disenfranchised, vulnerable, and often orphaned children (such as Birahima in Kourouma's aforementioned novel) operating at the margins of devastated societies; Birahima is only ten years old when he is forced to join Liberian rebel forces. Often drugged, forced to enlist in private militias, conditioned

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into believing that the very precondition of their own advancement and survival is located in the systematic elimination of often illogically defined enemy ethnic factions, these young protagonists are positioned in the disfigured, dismembered, and fractured space of the postcolony. The paradoxical dimension of these actions resides in the process of reclaiming power and in redressing social imbalance; as the second epigraph to this essay powerfully demonstrates, the violence perpetrated is a component of a broader relationship to society, in which subjects engage in retributive acts against those who have traditionally occupied power. Earlier works had already featured analogous expressions of this arbitrariness, including Sony Labou Tansi's (Congo, 1947–95) *La parenthèse de sang* (1981, *Parentheses of Blood*, 1986) and Ken Saro-Wiwa's (Nigeria) *Sozaboy* (1985), but the radical shift that has taken place in these more recent texts concerns the prevalence of the phenomenon itself, documented in countries as varied as Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and in which the depths of social depravity have extended into the domain of each new generation.

Not surprisingly, and to varying degrees, these issues also preoccupy the work of Nurrudin Farah (Somalia), where they are both recorded and subjected to the scrutiny of the world community. In *Links* (2004) the central protagonist Jeebleh returns to Mogadiscio for the first time in over twenty years and is confronted by the disconnection between his memory of Somalia and the sociological reality: "Jeebleh's Mogadiscio was orderly, clean, peaceable, a city with integrity and a life of its own, a lovely metropolis .... It may have been poor but at least there was dignity to that poverty, and no one was in a hurry to plunder and destroy what they couldn't have";[11] and the devastation that has resulted from civil conflict and dictatorial rule is also shocking to him: "From the little he had seen so far, the place struck him as ugly in an unreal way – nightmarish, if he dignified what he had seen of it so far with an apt description ... In short, a city vandalized, taken over by rogues who were out to rob whatever they could lay their hands on, and who left destruction in their wake" (p. 35). In *Secrets* (1998), Farah had already evoked the build-up to the civil war and confusion that informs later works, and had tracked the gradual disintegration of the social and political fabric of a society.

In *Abyssinian Chronicles* (1998) by Moses Isegawa (Uganda), analogous circumstances are shared by the character Mugezi growing up under the brutal dictatorship of Idi Amin in Uganda: "The seventies were dominated by self-made men who, defying their limited backgrounds, rose to vertiginous heights of power before dashing their chariots into the abyss";[12] in *Snakepit* (1999), Isegawa's depiction of Uganda during the 1970s establishes striking parallels with such classic dictatorship novels as Sony Labou Tansi's *L'État honteux*

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(1981). Later, Yvonne Vera's (1964–2005, Zimbabwe) novel *The Stone Virgins* (2002) turned its attention to Robert Mugabe's legacy of destructive rule in Zimbabwe. Divided into two sections that run from 1950 to 1980 and 1981 to 1986, the novel tells us that "Independence, which took place only three years ago, has proved us a tenuous species, a continent that has succumbed to a violent wind, a country with land but no habitat. We are out of bounds in our own reality."[13] Tracking and juxtaposing the respective experiences of violence of two sisters Thenjiwe and Nonceba, Vera's text nevertheless succeeds in generating a beautiful poetic prose anchored in lengthy descriptions of the natural environment; inevitably though, these ultimately sound a dissonant chord with the kinds of brutal human interaction she stages: "Disembodied beings. Their legs branch from their bodies like roots. The women float, moving away from the stone. Their thighs are empty, too fragile, too thin to have already carried a child" (p. 103). Guerilla warfare and civil conflict have become the defining markers of the transcolonial experience in this social space, and the disfigurement and violations are perpetrated across generations by outsiders and insiders alike.

Violence against women is a recurring topos in new African literature. Aminata Sow Fall (Senegal) remains an active figure on the Senegalese cultural scene, and her novel *Festins de la détresse* (2005) is a strong critique of political life in Senegal structured around the plight of Biram and Gora, two young men endeavoring to orient themselves in a society that is accused of being politically directionless. Ken Bugul (Senegal), a radical voice whose novel *Le Baobab fou* (1984, *The Abandoned Baobab*, 1991) explored gender relations and sexuality, continues to foreground cultural and social violence, but in *Rue Félix-Faure* (2005), the focus turns to an aspect of African society that is usually ignored, namely the internal migration of African subjects (in this instance the Cape Verde immigrant neighborhood of Dakar). Much like their counterparts in Europe and elsewhere, these immigrants are also shown to be wretched and dehumanized. Werewere Liking (Cameroon), winner of the 2004 Noma Award for Publishing in Africa for her novel *La Mémoire amputée*, is an experimental author, whose work incorporates songs, poems, and performance as she reflects on the various ways in which memory operates in building a nation.

The South African context has certainly generated a significant number of works informed by the official end of apartheid rule, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the urgency of addressing the legacy of segregation and economic and social fissures. Perhaps most indicative of this transition is the brilliant evocation of endurance and struggle found in Njabulo Ndebele's (South Africa) *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (2004), in which the Greek myth of Penelope waiting for Odysseus is reapplied to the

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context of South Africa; in this instance, Winnie Mandela's wait for her famous husband's release from prison transports the reader across almost three decades of South African history. Strikingly original and challenging works have emerged from this context. In Zakes Mda's (South Africa) *The Heart of Redness* (2000), Camagu enters the world of post-apartheid South Africa upon his return to Johannesburg from the United States. The title compels us to think of Conrad's novel *The Heart of Darkness* as Camagu himself confronts his projected vision of a new South Africa with what he finds on the ground, where he "discovered that networking and lobbying were a crucial part of South African life ... He had not known that jobs were advertised only as a formality, to meet the requirements of the law."[14] Influenced by events relating to violations of the 1970s Immorality Act that outlawed "interracial" mixing, *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2004) explores the complex politics of race and miscegenation in apartheid South Africa: "They had uncovered twelve light-skinned children who they claimed had mixed blood. They were already in jail with their black-skinned mothers. There was a doctor too. All the way from Bloemfontein. His work was to take blood tests and to confirm that the blood was indeed mixed."[15] Popi, the child of a mixed-race union as a result of his mother's rape by white men extends the prevalence of this theme in post-apartheid literature and establishes an intertextuality with Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* (1999) in which a reversal of this history of corporal violation is visited on a white woman by black men.

Sexuality, gender, sexual violence, and sexual transgression have become distinguishing features of contemporary South African literature, metaphors for the broader sociopolitical circumstances related to a sovereign nation's attempt to negotiate a long history of intricate issues. Mark Behr's (South Africa) work has certainly played a major role in addressing the complexity of these ambiguous issues. *The Smell of Apples* (1995) counters the essentialism that informed apartheid policies, partly rejoining other anti-colonial efforts to rethink the assumed superiority of the Occidentalist project: "Even if you can get a black out of the bush, you can't ever get the bush out of the black."[16] Through the eyes of the young protagonist Marnus we become witnesses to the elaborate mechanisms deployed in order to condition and program new generations of unquestioning adherents to apartheid ideology. The originality of this approach comes precisely from the gesture of abandoning explicit denunciations of the apartheid project in order to replace them with a more concerted analysis of the internal dynamics employed at the service of a system of exclusion, reproduced here through carefully elaborated family values and a revisionist history of Afrikaner nationalism: "Dad says the history of the Afrikaner, also the Afrikaners from Tanganyika and Kenya, is a proud history. We must always remember that and make sure one day to

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teach it to our own children" (p. 38). In turn, *Embrace* (2000) is framed around a broader construction of morality in the consciousness of individuals and institutions as a prerequisite to grasping the underpinnings of the intellectual's own critical elaborations. Through the narrative of the fourteen-year-old Karl de Man (communicating with the deconstructive project of Paul de Man as well as the debate on confession following the discovery of his youthful pro-Nazi writing), Behr investigates individual consciousness within an authoritarian system founded on racial division. *Embrace* is also one of the seminal African texts of gay writing, and aligns itself with several other texts that have explored the more troubling issue of gender within South Africa.

Sexuality and incest also inform the nature of relations in Marlene van Niekerk's (South Africa) *Triomf* (1999), and violence defines the South African landscape of Etienne van Heerden's (South Africa) *The Long Silence of Mario Salviati* (2002), and Achmat Dangor's (South Africa) *Kafka's Curse* (2000). In *Bitter Fruit* (2001), Dangor moves into the domain of confession, memory, retribution, incest, and rape in order to engage with the history of apartheid South Africa and its attempt to address this past through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The character Silas is forced to confront the full extent of these moral dilemmas: "He was not capable of such an ordeal, he acknowledged. It would require an immersion in words he was not familiar with, words that did not seek to blur memory, to lessen pain, but to sharpen all of these things. He was trained to find consensus, even if it meant not acknowledging 'truth' in all its unflattering nakedness."[17] To varying degrees, these questions have also been explored in the works of established and critically acclaimed South African writers such as André Brink, Breyten Breytenbach, and Nadine Gordimer who also bring worldwide visibility to African literature alongside many new, exciting, and highly accomplished voices.

The Nigerian context and the bilateralism of relations with the Nigerian diaspora have yielded an arresting corpus of works. Ben Okri (Nigeria), the master of so-called African magic realism, takes us on an exhilarating voyage through African history in *The Famished Road* (1991) as the child-narrator Azaro recounts social and political developments in an imaginary African country, a journey that progresses on the path to political independence in *Songs of Enchantment* (1993): "they had forgotten that for the living life is a story and a song, but for the dead life is a dream. I had been living the story, the song, and the dream."[18] Much in the same way as Kourouma had concluded in his masterpiece *The Suns of Independence* (1968), these experiences generated much disillusionment. In Okri's compelling narratives, the term "famished" emerges as the indicator for the broken dreams and aspirations of a newly emancipated people. Azaro's father tells him that "Our road must be open. A road that is open is never hungry. Strange times are

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coming."[19] Indeed, the political trajectory Okri delineates in these novels provides the subject matter of subsequent works by fellow Nigerians such as Helon Habila and Chris Abani.

In *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Nigeria), a young girl named Kambili and her brother Jaja grow up in an oppressive domestic household that is carefully controlled and monitored by a devout Catholic father. Unexpectedly uprooted by a military coup, Kambili and her brother are sent away to stay with their aunt Ifeoma, a progressive woman whose own domestic space is more akin with the positive associations of the eponymous purple hibiscus flower and which therefore contrasts with both the biological father and the broader religious and political fundamentalism of postcolonial Nigerian society: "Finally, for twenty minutes, papa prayed for our protection from ungodly people and forces, for Nigeria and the Godless men ruling it, and for us to continue to grow in righteousness."[20] Habila's (Nigeria) *Waiting for an Angel* (2003) delves into the brutal dictatorship of Sani Abacha, as the central protagonist Lomba writes from prison: "Today I begin a diary, to say all the things I want to say, to myself, because here in prison there is no one to listen. I express myself ... Prison chains not so much your hands and feet as it does your voice."[21] As a journalist, Lomba's capacity to contest and record the history of a nation struggling in an increasingly oppressive environment is menaced by escalating repression, whereby fiction itself comes to present the only space in which to embark upon a sustained critique of exploitation, extra-judicial proceedings, and authoritarian power. Nigeria's capital city Lagos functions as the signifier for corruption under military rule, and Lomba's incarceration operates as a broader metaphor for a society that is itself held captive and prevented from flourishing.

Given the similarities between Nigeria and African countries such as Gabon whose dictators have secured their respective power bases thanks to their vast petroleum resources, analogous themes are to be found in Bessora's (Gabon) novel *Petroleum* (2004). This work is a powerful critique of the new forms of economic exploitation to be evidenced in Africa, which have been reformulated across colonial lines, as Western powers and now multinational corporations continue to sustain and facilitate a corrupt African leadership that ignores accountability to their populations. Naturally, these activities are being increasingly subjected to scrutiny by writers; Sony Labou Tansi's *Le commencement des douleurs* (1995) offered an apocalyptic vision of a disintegrating natural and social environment, and the tragic execution in 1995 of Nigerian writer and environmentalist Ken Saro-Wiwa was a powerful reminder of just what is at stake in exposing these important questions.

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All of these political developments have had a dramatic impact on African youth, whose lives and opportunities have often been curtailed. In *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* (2003) Fatou Diome (Senegal) examined the connection between the lack of economic opportunity and the migration impulse as a way of deconstructing existing perceptions and received notions concerning the nature of relations between Africa and the prosperous zones of the economic "north." Writers such as Chris Abani (Britain/Nigeria) have adopted ambitious frameworks in order to circumscribe the experience of cosmopolitanism and displacement and to relocate diasporic experiences in Britain, Nigeria, and the United States. Chris Abani's *Graceland* (2004), that features Elvis Oke, a young Elvis performer and impersonator in Lagos, is a brilliant meditation on the circulation of global signifiers and of the manner in which a mythic construct such as America surfaces as an escape mechanism to be contrasted with the realities of postcolonial Nigeria: "'Welcome to Lagos, Nigeria,' Elvis said. He put his bag down and took several steps away from it, the freshly watered sand crunching under his heels. He cleared his throat, counted off 'One, two, three,' then began to sing 'Hound Dog' off-key. At the same time, he launched into his dance routine."[22] In *Becoming Abigail* by the same author (2006), the narrative moves between London and Nigeria, two symbiotic spaces in Nigerian and Nigerian diasporic writings; Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* (2005) also provides a most convincing analysis of cultural and social in-betweenness and of multiple belonging.

These dimensions have been foundational to the work of Buchi Emecheta (Nigeria), who moved to Britain in 1960, and who has been a prolific contributor to the analysis of gender relations, exile, and immigration in contemporary British society. Her novel *New Tribe* (2000) is paradigmatic of Emecheta's concerns as a writer, as she turns her attention to a young child named Chester who is abandoned by his Nigerian mother and adopted by a white Reverend and his family residing in an imaginary rural village in England. The fact that the story provides an insight into age-old questions of race and integration is perhaps of less importance than the direction the abandoned child's identitarian quest takes on an existential journey to Nigeria. The circularity of this physical and psychological search can be anticipated, but nevertheless offers an important perspective on the conflicting nature of national and racial identities on the eve of the new millennium.

These works are constitutive of a growing body of literature produced by Africans living in Europe; the concentration of writers in the European Union is a result of both personal and professional reasons, or rather a consequence of political or migratory factors. Abdulrazak Gurnah's (Tanzania) *By the Sea* (2001) is a story narrated by Saleh Omar, an asylum seeker living in Britain, who has been placed on the south coast of England, from where he

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contemplates a long history of displacement and exile. In *Desertion* (2005), Gurnah tackles intellectual and physical encounters and movements between Africa and Britain, imperial legacies, political independence, and the birth of the nation. Gurnah's text offers a profound commentary on the nature of intimacy in imperial relations, but the relevance of these questions extends across generations and historical lines in order to reveal how the imbrication of nations and peoples informs contemporary manifestations of racial prejudice.

These questions are of course central to new immigrant literatures. Calixthe Beyala (Cameroon) occupies a somewhat unusual position among African writers. A prolific writer who has resided in France since the 1980s, she is also a well-known activist and media icon, the subject of much controversy following several (often quite convincing) accusations of plagiarism, and as the President of the organization *Collectif égalité* ("Collective for Equality") that advocates for minority and women's rights. Her work is best characterized by an unrelenting attack on the patriarchal oppression of women, an analysis of shifting gender relations in Africa and in the immigrant context in France, and an explicit examination of sexuality (and sexual relations) in Africa and the diaspora. In *Femme nue, femme noire* (2003), Beyala subverts the opening lines of Léopold Senghor's (Senegal, 1906–2001) famous colonial era ode to the beauty of blackness and the African woman in order to address the sociopolitical circumstances of African women in France today. The diasporic experience allows for a reformulation of relations outside of local pressure, though these are not necessarily intrinsic to sociocultural relations in France of which she remains highly critical.

Alain Mabanckou (Congo) has emerged as one of the most promising voices of recent years. His novel *Bleu-blanc-rouge* (1998) is an important contribution to thinking about migration, as the topography shifts between Africa and France through the adventures of various protagonists determined to achieve cultural and social capital through transnational experiences. The novel's focus on Africans in France provides a carefully formulated demystification of the Occidentalist myth of cultural superiority that continues to play a formative role in the minds of young Africans. The failed migration of the main character serves as a powerful indictment of the prevailing construct of France (and in particular its capital city Paris) as a refuge for unsatisfied African youth. Many of these questions are revisited in *Verre cassé* (2005) and *Mémoires de porc-épic* (2006, awarded the prestigious Renaudot Prize) – highly innovative novels which recount often humorous, exhilarating, and complex stories concerned with the joy and pathos of the individual and collective experience of postcolonial existence.

A substantial corpus of diasporic African works has been evidenced across the European Union. In France, Pius Ngandu Nkashama (Democratic Republic

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of the Congo, *Vie et mœurs d'un primitif en Essone quatre-vingt-onze*, 1987), Simon Njami (Cameroon, *African gigolo*, 1989), Léandre-Alain Baker (Congo, *Ici s'arrête le voyage*, 1989), and Gaston-Paul Effa (Cameroon, *Tout ce bleu*, 1996), are indicative of this development. In *Voici le dernier jour du monde* (2005), Effa features an adult man who left Africa as a teenager and prepares his return to the continent:

> If it is true that I have become a coconut, black on the outside and white on the inside, and that I have grown up like a palm tree forgetting my roots, then I must learn to renounce this natural shame. I was welcomed in France as a foreigner; now, it is as a stranger that I am returning home.[23]

Sayouba Traoré's (Burkina Faso) *Loin de mon village, c'est la brousse* (2005) anchors his text in areas of Paris in which there are concentrations of immigrants in order to recount a transcolonial history that stretches from Upper Volta to the sovereign Burkina Faso through to Europe. Likewise, Daniel Biyaoula's (Congo) *L'Impasse* (1996) and *Agonies* (1998) move seamlessly between the heterogeneous space of the African diaspora in France and Africa. With novels such as *Place des fêtes* (2001) by Sami Tchak (Togo) and *La fabrique des cérémonies* (2001) by Kossi Efoui (Togo), both the complexity and originality of African texts created at multiple global sites are further confirmed. Likewise in Great Britain, writers of African descent such as Diran Abedayo (*Some Kind of Black*, 1996), Biyi Bandele-Thomas (*The Street*, 1999), and Bernadine Evaristo (*Lara*, 1997 and *The Emperor's Babe*, 2001), have interrogated the status of minority cultures in Britain and focused on the demanding negotiations of private and public spaces in post-imperial contexts. More recently, works have been published in other European locations, such as Pap Khouma's *Io, venditore di elefanti: una vita per forza fra Dakar, Parigi e Milano* (*I Am an Elephant Salesman*, 1990) in Italy, Théo Ananissoh's *Lisahohé* (2005), in which a character returns to Africa after an extended exile in Germany, or for example two autobiographical narratives and memoirs by Lucia Engombe (*Kind Nr. 95*, 2004) and Senait Mehari (*Feuerherz*, 2004) published in Germany.

In many ways, Waberi's work perfectly encapsulates the complexity of new African literature and its refusal to be easily categorized. Displacement, exile, and nomadism serve as markers of new relations of power between the "north" and the "south" in the era of rapidly evolving global alignments. In both *Balbala* (1997), in which the subject is the 1991–3 civil war in Djibouti, and in *Transit* (2003) that considers the movement of populations around the planet as the direct consequence of political repression, growing inequities between regions, and of course the gradual collapse of civil society, Waberi adopts a polyvocal structure aimed at accommodating the multiple voices and

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interconnected stories linked to these political and social experiences. Later, in *Aux Etats-Unis d'Afrique* (2006), Waberi's readers are compelled to rethink the economic supremacy of the West as the shores of a prosperous and thriving Africa are invaded by asylum seekers and refugees from the collapsing societies of "Euramerica." All of these factors come together in Ngùgì wa Thiong'o's monumental novel, *The Wizard of the Crow* (2006). Initially written and published in Gikuyu, the latest work by one of the giants of African literature is a truly global African novel. Ignoring topographic limitations, the narrative leaps across boundaries and continents, questioning the history of contact between populations, the future of sovereign governance, and the interaction between populations in advanced capitalist societies.[24]

Writers do not of course produce texts in a social and political vacuum. Questions of location and reception, distribution and publication, language and translation, esthetics and politics are decisive. New African literature remains engaged with the most compelling global ethical questions of the twenty-first century. As readers and critics, we share in the responsibility of responding to these challenges and in the critical imperative of privileging a comprehensive and informed knowledge of culture, economics, politics, and sociology in our dialogue with these voices.

NOTES

1. See Mongo Beti, "Afrique Noire, littérature rose," *Présence africaine* (April–July 1955), 133–41.
2. See Lilyan Kesteloot, *Les écrivains noirs de langue française: naissance d'une littérature* (Brussels: Institut de Sociologie de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1963) and Guy Ossito Midiohouan, *L'Idéologie dans la littérature négro-africaine d'expression française* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986).
3. See Guy Ossito Midiohouan, "Le phénomène des littératures nationales," *Peuples noirs, Peuples africains*, 27 (1982), 57–70.
4. See Adrien Huannou, *La question des littératures nationales en Afrique noire* (Abidjan: CEDA, 1989), p. 34.
5. See Dorothy S. Blair, *African Literature in French* (Cambridge University Press, 1976); Eustace Palmer, *The Growth of the African Novel* (London: Heinemann, 1979); and Jacques Chevrier, *Littérature nègre* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1984) and *Littérature africaine: histoire et grands thèmes* (Paris: Hatier, 1990).
6. See Séwanou Dabla, *Nouvelles écritures africaines: romanciers de la seconde génération* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986).
7. Abdourahman A. Waberi, "Les enfants de la postcolonie: esquisse d'une nouvelle génération d'écrivains francophones d'Afrique noire," *Notre Librairie*, 135 (September–December 1998), 8–15 (11).
8. Bill Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 214.
9. Waberi, *Moisson de crânes* (Paris: Le Serpent à Plumes, 2000), p. 12. Translation mine.

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10. Emmanuel Dongala, *Little Boys Come From the Stars*, translated by Joël Réjouis and Val Vinokurov (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), p. 155.
11. Nurrudin Farah, *Links* (New York: Riverhead, 2003), p. 35.
12. Moses Isegawa, *Abyssinian Chronicles* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), p. 265.
13. Yvonne Vera, *The Stone Virgins* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), p. 82.
14. Zakes Mda, *The Heart of Redness* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), p. 32.
15. Mda, *The Madonna of Excelsior* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), p. 63.
16. Mark Behr, *The Smell of Apples* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), p. 39.
17. Achmat Dangor, *Bitter Fruit* (New York: Black Cat, 2001), p. 63.
18. Ben Okri, *Songs of Enchantment* (New York: Anchor, 1994), p. 293.
19. Okri, *The Famished Road* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991), p. 497.
20. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus* (New York: Anchor, 2003), p. 61.
21. Helon Habila, *Waiting for an Angel* (New York: Norton, 2003), pp. 13–14.
22. Chris Abani, *Graceland* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), p. 12.
23. Gaston-Paul Effa, *Voici le dernier jour du monde* (Paris: Le Rocher, 2005), p. 9. Translation mine.
24. See Angela Lamas Rodrigues, "Beyond Nativism: An Interview with Ngùgì wa Thiong'o," *Research in African Literatures*, 35.3 (Fall 2004), 161–7 (167 and 165, respectively).

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15

HARRY GARUBA

The critical reception of the African novel

From the mass of critical responses to the African novel, it is possible to identify a set of recurrent themes and ideas that have come to dominate the field of reception and to feature in one form or the other in the responses of critics and commentators. In this chapter, therefore, I intend to give systematic attention to these themes to emphasize the critical labor involved in the emergence of the African novel as an object of critical inquiry and to highlight the construction, through its reception, of a field of knowledge production organized around particular issue domains. I will attempt to do this by focusing on patterns of critical and conceptual engagement that recur again and again in various readings of the African novel. This approach, I believe, has the advantage of emphasizing the fact that the critical reception of the African novel has led to the construction of a field of knowledge in which the conventional terms of novelistic discourse are reconceptualized and reconfigured in relation to other (African) forms and traditions of verbal expression and other (African) social and historical contexts, which generate different questions and thus call for different grammars of discourse.

Changing terrains, conditioning reception

To begin with a gross generalization, the critical reception of the African novel has turned overwhelmingly on the question of "Africanness" and the novelistic form. Africanness as defined here spans the entire spectrum from the representation of African worlds, through the representation of African subjects or forms of subjectivity, to the representation of African epistemologies, narrative traditions, and modes of verbal expression. Sometimes these are explored on their own terms but more often they are explored in relation to the novel, figured as a generic inheritance from the West, with which these may not be fully compatible. From the short newspaper or journal review to the most sophisticated theoretically inflected critical analysis this overarching theme is variously enacted. The reason for this preoccupation is

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easy to discern: The origin of the literary genre we now know as the novel is usually associated with particular historical events that took place in Europe with the invention of the printing press and the rise of capitalism and the cluster of cultural values that developed alongside the changes brought about by these events.[1] Individualism and the cultivation of new forms of subjectivity, predicated on notions of autonomous agency, reason, and a new sense of temporality are the values usually identified as characteristic of this age and determinant of the form of the novel. Because these conditions were not replicated in Africa to the same degree *at the same time*, the emergence of the novel in Africa is thus closely tied to the advent of colonialism and the institutions that colonial rule introduced into Africa. As critics have often pointed out, this is not to say that there was no writing or tradition of prose narratives in Africa before the advent of colonial domination. However, the creation of standardized orthographies for the major languages of the continent, the introduction of colonial education, the institution of the mission schools and presses, the sponsorship of writing competitions, etc. considerably changed the terrain and produced the conditions in which the novel could emerge. This is why it is possible to argue, as Simon Gikandi does, "that the men and women who founded the tradition of what we now call modern African writing, both in European and indigenous languages, were, without exception, products of the institutions that colonialism had introduced and developed on the continent."[2]

In a similar vein, the reception of the African novel was contingent upon a series of historical developments that opened up avenues for critical engagement with literary texts and created the institutions of criticism that allowed this activity to flourish. The easiest way to exemplify this point is to compare the almost total lack of critical attention that followed the publication in 1891 of Joseph J. Walters' *Guanya Pau: A Story of an African Princess*, possibly the first full-length African novel, to the flurry of criticism that followed the publication in 1952 of Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. Between the reception of both texts, the first written by a Liberian during the period of the consolidation of colonial rule in Africa, and the second produced in the last decade of colonialism, major changes had occurred that were to set the stage for the critical reception of the African novel and the terms for this reception. These changes led to the creation of a new African elite, new reading publics, and new avenues and institutions of critical activity. It is important to caution here again that this does not imply that there was no "critical" attention (conducted orally within communities) to African narratives in the period prior to the colonial encounter or that "written" criticism did not appear in print sporadically over the years before the last decade of colonial rule. The point being made is that it was only within the decade of

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the 1950s and the period of the 1960s that followed that the conditions, necessary and sufficient, for the emergence of an appreciable degree of critical reception as we now know it arose.

The historical circumstances that conditioned the reception of the African novel can therefore be summed up in the consolidation of anti-colonial nationalism, the building of new institutions of higher education, and the task of cultural decolonization that the first nationalist governments of the late 1950s and 1960s set themselves. Not only was the novel deemed important to the forging of a new African or national identity, it was also considered central to the new task of decolonizing the school curriculum and the academic offerings inherited from the colonial educational system. As the new nationalist governments built schools and universities for their people, the need for some African content or material that handled subjects from an African perspective prompted major metropolitan publishers who had merely sold books in Africa to devote some of their resources to publishing books by Africans. The publication of a spate of new novels was accompanied by a real need for critical works that focused on these texts. Small magazines, journals, books, and other avenues for the publication of commentaries and analyses of literary works began to emerge. *Présence Africaine, Black Orpheus, Transition, African Literature Today, Research in African Literatures* and other journals more widely focused on the "new" literatures of previously colonized groups were founded to meet this need. In this manner, the trickle of attention that African novels had previously received quickly became a flood.

Given these circumstances, it is easy to see why the decolonizing, nationalist ethos of those years which laid the foundations for the emergence of serious critical attention to the African novel also, to a large degree, permeated the criticism that emerged with it. The conditions of possibility that governed the emergence of serious critical attention to the African novel also "dictated" a set of critical and analytical preoccupations which featured again and again in the reception of the novels. This is why – to return to the generalization with which we began – the critical reception of the African novel has turned overwhelmingly on the question of Africanness (or fidelity to an African authenticity) and the (European) genre of the novel. This question became the overarching problematic to which critical responses in one way or the other addressed themselves.

In considering this question, I will focus, first, on this period of sustained critical attention in the 1960s and 1970s, exploring the patterns of critical engagement that emerged and some of the critics who have been identified with each of these positions. Thereafter, I move on to more recent critical preoccupations that appear to arise directly from the new dominance of

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theory in literary and cultural studies. The focus on themes of reception in the first part is not meant to imply that after the 1970s these themes disappear. On the contrary, the themes remain, percolating into the new critical approaches in various ways. Sometimes these themes are simply renamed and refashioned in keeping with the new vocabularies of critical discourse. All the same, the thematic framework will not be wholly adequate in accounting for the rise of contemporary critical theory and the application of some of its methods and concepts to the African novel. This means that our reading of the patterns of reception will shift in the latter part of this chapter to focus on the new languages of critical theoretical discourse and the ways they have featured in recent critical responses to the African novel. On the whole, a reading such as I am proposing here is necessarily selective, focusing largely on the major issues that have dominated critical responses.

Strategic clusters of reception

In the first period of sustained critical attention that we have just identified, three major clusters of themes may be said to have defined the terrain of reception of the African novel. The first is the question of the place of the oral tradition or of orality in this literary form defined by its written medium and its dependence on the protocols of literacy. As F. Abiola Irele so aptly puts it in *The African Imagination*, the question that confronted African writers was "how to write an oral culture."[3] While writers grappled with that question, critics focused on ways of making formal esthetic sense out of the oral practices that the writers adopted in their novels. To reformulate Irele's proposition on a different plane, the question that confronted the critics was *how to read a written text grounded in an oral culture*. The second major cluster may be said to revolve around the question of what critical criteria are appropriate to the reading and evaluation of African novels. Underlying these debates about criteria was the question of the appropriateness or otherwise of an unproblematized adoption of conventional Western criteria of evaluation and judgment when dealing with African novels. If Western criteria were not wholly adequate then what other criteria should replace or supplement them? Flowing from these, a third set may yet be identified as clustering around issues of literature, language, nation, and nation formation. In this area, questions of language, culture, and ideology were placed beside issues of commitment and the novelist's responsibility in a new nation. The emphasis here was on the different context and history from which these novels emerge and what role these should play in the criticism.

It is necessary to caution at this point that I am referring to these as "clusters" to move away from a chronological reading of the timeline of

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reception or a binary reading of the spatial geography of reception as dichotomized between African and non-African critics. Temporal linearity is not helpful here because it obscures rather than highlights the ways in which responses coalesce over time around particular issues. Neither is a division between foreign and local reception beneficial because it may raise vexing issues about how to conceive locality in Africa, given ethnic, national, regional, and other geographies of affiliation. (Is an East African Gikuyu critic – who in all likelihood may never have seen and does not know what yams are – a local reader of a Nigerian novel?) These limitations make a focus on clusters eminently more appealing for the purposes of this chapter. It is also important to stress that the distinctions I will be drawing up below are merely for the purpose of identifying major tendencies rather than pigeonholing critics into either one or the other label. The works of many of the critics and commentators on orality and the African novel, for instance, do not neatly fall into one compartment to the exclusion of the other; more often than not they move between the two axes of the discourse we have identified.

There is a powerful critical consensus around the idea that the reliance upon or the deployment of narrative forms and tropes of the oral tradition is a major distinguishing characteristic of the African novel. Emmanuel Obiechina in his book *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel* (1975) says that "[t]he most noticeable difference between novels by native West Africans and those by non-natives using the West African setting, is the important position which the representation of oral tradition is given by the first, and its almost complete absence in the second."[4] And Irele in the title essay of *The African Imagination* goes somewhat further, claiming that orality is "the fundamental reference of discourse and of the imaginative mode in Africa" and that it "remains predominant and serves as a central paradigm" (p. 11). The place of oral traditions in the making of the African novel is an issue that has marked the responses of a large number of critics. The active presence of the oral as part of the expressive traditions of African societies is a sure indicator that it will feature in one way or the other in the narratives of African writers. However, recognizing the difference that orality makes is only the first step; the more important question is to understand what this difference signifies for the reading and analysis of African novels. How does orality mark the African novel and give it a distinctive identity? And how are the marks of orality to be read? Much effort was thus put into conceptualizing the significance of this *oral difference* for reading and interpretation.

As an example of such effort, the second part of Emmanuel Obiechina's book is subtitled "Domestication of the Novel in West Africa." The metaphor of "domestication" used here is significant because the idea is regularly implied

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in critical responses to the African novel as a way of highlighting the fact that African writers employing the "alien" form of the novel appropriate this genre to speak to the African experience they wish to convey. The constant invocation of orality is seen as one way of inscribing the form with an irreducible Africanness, thereby "domesticating" it. To continue with that awkward metaphor, the many ways in which African writers domesticated the novel in Africa through the incorporation of orality became a major preoccupation of literary critics. Obiechina's own practice sums up one of the ways in which this was done. In his own words: "The process of the novel's domestication in West Africa becomes more clear when examined against the inherited characteristics of the novel form – characterization, temporal and spatial setting, and language" (p. 82). And this is precisely what he does in his study, providing fulsome evidence of "[t]he blending of impulses from the oral and the literary traditions to give the West African novel its distinctive local colour" (p. 34).

Obiechina's approach may be characterized as that of a *positivist orality* in which, as Ato Quayson remarks, "details are read directly from cultural background to fictional world and back again."[5] This approach which provides a checklist of the oral, cultural elements in texts and explains their significance relies on an unproblematized mimeticism and was fairly widespread practice. It is the approach adopted by a host of critics, ranging from Bernth Lindfors to Christopher Miller, each adding his or her own individual inflections and nuances. The hallmark of this approach is the enumeration of details of the ethnographic material incorporated into the novels from proverbs and idioms and folk tales to the rituals and ceremonies of everyday life within the communities. The critical practice of itemizing local lore, religious beliefs, etc. fully glossed with explanations of their meaning was particularly appealing because it provided many readers with a point of entry into the cultural and social world of the novels. It is worth noting that this approach was adopted to facilitate understanding by foreign (European and American) audiences.

Within the orality cluster it is possible to identify another group of critics whose work we may characterize as being marked by a *discursive orality*. These are critics who adopt a more conceptual and theoretical approach, seeing the oral narrative and its forms as providing an overarching tradition in which each individual novelist participates. For these critics, the major point therefore is not just the ways in which orality is inscribed in the novels in terms of detailed ethnographies but the ways in which these writers appropriate the oral resources of the culture or society and then extend, refigure and transform them in their own works. The conceptual point they seek to make is one about mediation, continuity, or transformation rather than reflection and

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these are seen as characterizing the novelist's relationship with the oral tradition. Again, there are individual differences within the group reflecting either a bias toward an almost idealist notion of tradition and continuity (as in Irele's "Tradition and the Yoruba Writer"),[6] or a skepticism about the uses to which orality has been put in the criticism of the African novel (as in Eileen Julien's *African Novels and the Question of Orality*),[7] or a concern with the traffic of "interdiscursivity" between African literature and the oral tradition (as in Ato Quayson's *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing*). These differences notwithstanding, it is fair, I believe, to see their work as cohering around the notion of orality as a discursive resource which writers deploy in their own ways or which binds them to a common heritage of "tradition."

The focus on orality in the criticism was driven by the fear of appropriation and an anxiety over the charge of inauthenticity. There is no direct evidence that critics of the African novel were aware of the Nobel Prize award citation for Rabindranath Tagore which praised his "profoundly sensitive, fresh, and beautiful verse, by which, with consummate skill, he has made his poetic thought expressed in English words, *a part of the literature of the West*."[8] But, for those who wrote in European languages, this fear of being absorbed into an inappropriate tradition was brought home by Obiaguna Wali's 1963 essay "The Dead End of African Literature" in which he charged that African writing in these languages would end up being merely a minor appendage to metropolitan European literature.[9] With regard to the novel in particular which was already seen as a genre alien to Africa, a genuine anxiety that the African novel may in fact be an inauthentic cultural product fueled a need to claim a prior enabling tradition of orality as index of its Africanness. These anxieties fed into the major debates beginning with the Wali article through the Nairobi curriculum debate to the more recent polemical pronouncements of Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Ngugi's own novelistic practice exemplifies the enduring nature of these anxieties. Though more often identified with the advocacy of indigenous languages in African literature, Ngugi's struggle with novelistic form, shown in the shift from the protocols of the conventional novel as in *A Grain of Wheat* to the more performative forms of oral storytelling in *The Wizard of the Crow*, provides much better evidence of these anxieties and the resort to orality as the solution. Since the founding moments of critical response, virtually all critics of the African novel have had in one way or the other to deal with the question of orality. For the novel in particular the question of orality was seen as particularly important because the novel in its focus on everyday life was the major literary instrument needed to accomplish the ethnographic project of nationalist desire.

Another question that these critics had to confront was that of finding appropriate criteria for the reading and interpretation of this "new" cultural

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product. Initially focused on the novel, the debate was extended to include all of African literature. In an early survey of the positions adopted by African critics between the years 1947 and 1966, Rand Bishop identified a set of themes which critics argued should guide the setting of critical standards for the evaluation of African literature. As is to be expected for those times, these criteria give evidence of the reflectionist notion of literature that was the dominant frame of reference. Bishop's summary is instructive and therefore deserves quoting.

1. That, ideally, African writers should employ African languages as their media; failing this, for various practical reasons, it is both acceptable and desirable that they "do violence" to the standard forms of European languages as they are spoken in their mother-lands, in order to reflect the African world more accurately.
2. That African literature, while performing an important function in projecting an African presence heretofore lacking or distorted in the world, must nevertheless be primarily written for an African audience; and must not appear to be written primarily for a non-African audience.
3. That African writers should show discretion in their borrowings from Western literary traditions, while reflecting, where possible, the form and content of the – primarily oral – African traditions.
4. That African literature must not falsify African realia whether the writer chooses realism or surrealism or some other technique to portray these realia; but that the "information" provided by these realia must be transformed into art, and not be presented entirely for their own sake.
5. That African literature must be *engaged*, meaning that it must address itself to the various and serious problems currently facing Africa, and that it eschew the principle of "art for art's sake".
6. That African *literature* be, somehow, *African*, whether one labels this Africanness "Negritude" or in some other way, and without becoming *African* at the expense of being at the same time *literature*.[10]

Bishop's conclusions set out here give us an indication of the concerns that guided the reception of the African novel in the high nationalist period. These can be summed up as: a concern with language, audience, orality, authenticity, commitment; and pervading all of these is the basic requirement of Africanness which the sixth point highlights. Need we add that all of these concerns are united by the underlying assumption that literature is or should be a reflection of a reality as it exists out there in the world. As Olakunle George aptly puts it: "The presupposition underwriting the reflectionist view of literature is that adequate representation of an idea, an object, or a constellation of values is possible. Related to this is the assumption that literary

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texts encode, or can be made so to do, the realities of cultures and peoples."[11] If there was a degree of consensus here, translating these concerns into method proved to be a more contentious affair with critics adopting various positions. George characterizes the literary-critical approaches adopted as divided between "'intrinsic' criticism and its 'extrinsic' antithesis" (p. 85) meaning those critical works which focus on explicating the formal aspects of the text in the conventional lit. crit. manner as opposed to those which concentrate on its contexts – social, historical, cultural, political, etc. Though this generalized categorization captures in broad outline much of the critical practice and shows the self-characterization of the positions that energized those debates, actual critical practice sometimes straddled both poles, even when labeling itself as committed to one or the other position. For example, in "The Criticism of Modern African Literature," Irele's argued preference for the "sociological imagination" incorporates textual exegesis of the formalistic sort,[12] and Solomon Iyasere's stated preference for "cultural formalism" in "The Liberation of African Literature,"[13] which begins with a pitch for the formal but then acknowledges the importance of questions of social and cultural reference, also shows evidence of this mixing and merging.

In all, the critical responses relied on a host of methods borrowed from literary formalism, literary stylistics, empiricist sociology and functional anthropology, Marxist class theory, and so on. Eustace Palmer's two books *Introduction to the African Novel* and *The Growth of the African Novel*, for instance, exemplify the bare formalist approach while Emmanuel Ngara's *Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel*, makes a case for an old-fashioned stylistic approach.[14] Empiricist sociological approaches and an indebtedness to functionalist anthropology are evident in the works of a range of critics from Lindfors to Obiechina while the works of Omafume Onoge, Ngugi, Biodun Jeyifo, etc. are underpinned by Marxist conceptions of class and society.[15] The deployment of these approaches was underwritten by the quest to establish Africa-specific literary standards but – paradoxically – this quest was conducted by appealing to the disciplinary authority of specific methods and traditions of intellectual thought which have their origins in the West.

In recent times, several critics have tried to deal with the problem that this dependence on prior disciplinary or paradigmatic authority created. In "The British Legacy in Anglophone African Literary Criticism," David Atwell argues that the problem with appealing to intellectual or disciplinary tradition in African literary criticism is that:

> Bluntly put, these questions do not take us to the seemingly ideal realm of "African cultural milieu", but to the difficult situation of modern African literary scholarship as the unwitting beneficiary of a European heritage,

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> struggling to come to terms with indigenous circumstances. The prevailing constructs of this heritage ... do not settle in comfortably with the more overtly ideological imperatives – anti-colonial ones – of the time. The struggle going on in these standards is that of a criticism which, in attempting to be the spokesman of a particular ideological moment, is *unable to effect a conceptual break from certain categories which constrain it.*[16]

Atwell's critique is understandable at an abstract level. However, as George argues, it is in the contradictory motions of striving to create an African discourse by way of categories inherited from Europe and the conceptual blind spots that this occasions that we can locate the agency of African literary criticism. From his discussion of African literary criticism from the 1950s to the 1980s, he tries to show

> [t]hat major Africanist critics were methodologically tied to the reflectionist view of literature – namely, the idea that literary structure corresponds to social structure in a one-to-one relationship. Flawed as this understanding of literature happens to be, the agency of African letters as a discursive intervention resides precisely there. That is to say, it is in immersing itself in an inherited, conceptually flawed, understanding of literary representation that Africanist literary criticism offers a concrete instance of agency-in-motion.[17]

Whatever our opinion on the conceptual dilemmas or discursive usefulness of the theoretical foundations of the critical positions taken from the 1950s to the 1980s, it is clear that it is in the third cluster of issues of language, literature, nation, and nation formation that the reflectionist paradigm was most put to use in critical responses to the African novel. We should therefore briefly sketch the nature or the ideas that were espoused and their intellectual pedigree.

Perhaps the most enduring debate in African literature has centered upon the vexed question of language. From Wali's first polemical take on this question in 1963 to Ngugi's zealous crusade on the imperative to write in African languages, the question has continued to generate controversy.[18] Often tritely framed as a question of language choice, the terms of the debate include issues as large and momentous as the relationship between language, literature, and being, language, literature, and subjectivity, language and social reality, language and nation, language and ideology, and so on. This obsession with language is not predicated on the well-known relationship or homology often drawn between language and literature; rather it is anchored on a notion of cultural organicism that sees language as an expression of the natural harmony between self, culture, and society. This harmony which is believed to have been broken by colonialism led to a sense of disjuncture and alienation which it is the duty of the writer to surmount. A poetics of cultural

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retrieval and rediscovery was thus privileged and with it came the conceptual vocabulary of nation and origins, indigeneity, cultural cohesion and continuity and the sense of an ancient community of value. This vocabulary is fully deployed for instance in Wole Soyinka's *Myth, Literature and the African World*,[19] particularly in the two chapters on "Ideology and Social Vision" where he focuses on the works of African novelists, and it is never far from=the surface in Ngugi. The debates about the role of the writer in a new nation and the endless conferences about the African writer and commitment that were the common fare of this period were the direct result of this conception of the relationship between language, literature, and the society. Beside the novelists themselves describing their practice and reading the works of other writers on these terms, literary critics disseminated these ideas with remarkable consistency.

So much has been written about the essentialism betrayed in this conception of language that it will be superfluous to labor the point. What is important to note here is that this idea comes from an English critical tradition that runs from Matthew Arnold to T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis.[20] Arnold's promotion of literary education could be recontextualized within the world of the colonized and touted as the one way to overcome the Eliotian dissociation of sensibility which colonization had created; and the close reading of African novels would reveal Leavisian levels of meanings encoded in the texts. By closely scrutinizing their linguistic and semiotic texture, we arrive at the hidden gems of the literature and thus of the nation. In the first number of the journal *African Literature Today*, the founding editor, Eldred Jones, announced its mission in tones that echo these conceptions of the goals of the labor of criticism.

> *African Literature Today* is intended to be a forum for the examination of the literature of Africa. Its language is English but it will publish criticism of literature no matter what its original language. The editor wishes to encourage close analysis of individual works or the output of particular groups of writers. Publishers publish what they decide to publish for a variety of reasons ... Readers also read books with a variety of expectations ... It is the business of the critic to read discerningly and demonstrate the qualities of a work and thus (a) to make it accessible to a wider readership than the absence of criticism might have opened to it, and (b) by an accumulation of such examinations to help establish literary standards.[21]

The goals were to encourage close reading of texts to bring to light the hidden (literary?) qualities of the work and, by so doing, give a wider readership access to the pleasures of literature. Cumulative readings of this sort will help in creating and consolidating standards through educated judgement; and, in

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the end, this critical labor will make us all understand that literature is the true repository of the values and culture of the nation. These values are then posited as defining the nation in its ontological and historical being. The Great Tradition of African literature will thus have emerged.

It is necessary to say at this point that despite its wide acceptance, the nationalist imaginary was contested by critics who focused on the nationalist representation of female experience. Feminist critics often challenged the masculinist bias of the nationalist writing and criticism. Taking on the canonical authors of this great tradition such as Chinua Achebe, Ngugi, Soyinka and others, these critics dissected the patriarchal structure and frameworks of their novels and the culture and society which they had extolled. They found fault with their portrayals of female characters, the tropes employed in their characterization of women, and highlighted the silencing and subordination of women's voices in their texts. And examining the works of female novelists, they described their rebuttals of the unproblematized valorization of culture and tradition and their general contestation of the nationalist ethos of the time. Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, Chikwenye Ogunyemi, Carol Boyce-Davies, Rhonda Cobham, Florence Stratton, Elleke Boehmer, Susan Andrade are a few of the names whose gender-based interventions have had a major impact on the ways in which we think of the African novel.[22]

Theory, globalization and diasporization

Though I have tried to avoid a strict chronological or geographical ordering in this chapter, it will be unhelpful to pretend that the critical reception of the African novel in the period from the 1960s to the 1980s did not precede and set the stage for the critical responses that were to follow with the ascendancy of critical theory in the academy (alas, Western?) and in the wake of globalization. A new wave of theories has usurped the authority of the entire conceptual apparatus on which the criticism of the nationalist era had been founded. The old certainties of self, nation, and culture were disappearing under sustained attack from a series of "deconstructionist" positions that questioned the metaphysics of presence and the idea of an autonomous stable self in harmony with nation which had upheld the old organic conceptions of self and society. Under the influence of post-structuralism and postmodernism, postcolonial theory and criticism displaced the binaries of the critical practices associated with nationalism and in other cases reconfigured the vocabulary of discourse such that the highly political language of nationalist poetics mutated into a concern with the intricacies of the text, the nature of subject formation and subjectivity and of the shifting identities said to be characteristic of postcolonial liminality. The dispersal of the national elites

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who had promoted the organicist views of literature to other parts of the world meant that the intimate connections between physical location, self, and homeland could no longer be sustained on the same terms. Theory, globalization, and diasporization combined to create a profound shift in the practices that had framed the reception of the African novel.

In "Traveling Theory: Ngugi's Return to English," Simon Gikandi ruminates on the consequences of Ngugi's relocation from Kenya to the West on his practice as writer and intellectual. He says:

> Ngugi's response to the problem I have sketched above –what does it mean to be an African intellectual in the West? – has been to fall back on the language of globalization. The language of globalization begins in the revised edition of *Writers in Politics* and becomes full blown in *Penpoints*. In the latter book ... the language of globalization can be read as a mask for a universalist discourse that is without precedent in Ngugi's work.[23]

And earlier in the same review essay, Gikandi suggests that: "In exile, Ngugi had to retool his critical practice away from his native grounds, as it were; he needed to develop a new intellectual project outside the boundaries of the nation" (p. 199). I want to suggest that – under the pressures of the changes I have described – criticism of the African novel also had to "retool" and develop a new intellectual project to which the nation was no longer the vital center in the same ways as it had been. As African writers increasingly relocated and critics realigned themselves with the new global languages of critical discourse, the reception of the African novel entered into a new phase characterized by these changes.

It should be noted though that as early as the 1970s, the Nigerian critic Sunday Anozie, in a series of works, notably *Christopher Okigbo: Creative Rhetoric* and *Structural Models and African Poetics*,[24] had attempted to import continental European high theory into the criticism of African literature by way of French structuralism but this did not quite catch on. Besides, his focus in the earlier book (*Christopher Okigbo*) had been on poetry, and the latter one in which he extends the application of theory beyond poetry received a highly unflattering critique from Kwame Appiah that did not help matters.[25] However, by the 1980s, colonial discourse analysis and postcolonial theory and criticism arrived, riding on the back, so to speak, of the poststructuralist perspectives that had become dominant in Europe and America. Rediscovered ideas of dialogism and carnivalesque from Mikhail Bakhtin, deconstructive approaches from Jacques Derrida, and Foucauldian notions of discourse, knowledge, and power, came together in ways that challenged the foundational orthodoxies of intellectual practice across several disciplines.[26] These ideas found a ready home in literary studies which as part of its

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disciplinary orientation had always already been concerned with questions of language and representation; and, more specifically, previously marginalized literatures found ready tools with which to rethink their silencing in discourse and to subvert the tropes of hegemonic discourses and deconstruct the paradigms of Empire. The foundations of the knowledge–power complex and the structural hierarchies it authorizes suddenly became the object of sustained attack. Unlike the "apolitical" maneuvers of structuralism, the post-structuralist, postmodernist strategies on which postcolonial theory and criticism depended, promised a more emancipatory critique and seemed ready-made to deal with the clusters of themes that had been of interest to African literary criticism.

For example, orality which in the earlier grammar of nationalist discourse was seen as the distinguishing characteristic of the African novel was reconceptualized. It was now regarded primarily as one of the ways of "writing back" to the center or of subverting the hegemony of Western discourse and its privileging of the written over the oral. The language question previously read in terms of "authenticity," the fidelity of the writer's English rendering of the local language and life world to the original language and social world, were now reformulated to highlight the text's appropriation or abrogation of the imperial language and its texts. In these ways, the strategic clusters of critical interest were kept alive within the domain of postcolonial theory. But the concepts and methods of exploration were markedly different. Binary oppositions of colonizer and colonized, of empire and nation, and power and marginality, were displaced in favour of notions of hybridity and liminality, cultural translation and multiple subject positions and identities, mimicry and ambivalence, parody and pastiche, and so on. In short, not only was the authority of colonial discourse being questioned, the categories of nationalist discourse were also repudiated. The unified subjects of colonialist and nationalist discourse became fragmented and dispersed, written over by ambivalence, ambiguity, and hybridity.

Again, at the level of the orality cluster, a good example of the new emphasis on hybridity is the discernment of magical realism in the African novel. If the appearance of the oral in African literature had been seen as a way of reconnecting with the past and reinstituting a unified subjectivity rooted in tradition, the use of oral lore and supernatural elements in the African novel of magical realist orientation is seen as a way of inscribing and celebrating fragmentation and dispersal, instability and disjuncture; the goal is syncretization rather than purity. In her seminal study of magical realism in the West African novel, Brenda Cooper insists that:

> [m]agical realism at its best opposes fundamentalism and purity; it is at odds with racism, ethnicity and the quest for taproots, origins and homogeneity; it is

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> fiercely secular and revels in the body, the joker, laughter, liminality and the profane ... the novels themselves are heir to many traditions, pressures and conflicting strategies and as such, tend to be an amalgam of politics and purposes, working at different times in the interests of different segments of different populations.[27]

Instead of a focus on oneness, "truth" and an authenticity of being authorized by tradition, magical realism claims the space of multiplicity and mongrelization; its favored tropes are those of irony, parody, and pastiche. To underscore this difference, Brenda Cooper makes a distinction between the orality of an Amos Tutuola and the magical realism of writers like Ben Okri, Kojo Laing, and Syl Cheney-Coker, where the former depends upon a world view more or less authorized by tradition while the cultural formation of the latter is more cosmopolitan, traversing many traditions.

In this new theory-inflected criticism, even more significant is the shift from the mimeticism of the poetics of nationalism to the bracketing off or displacement of the real and the authentic in favour of representations; the emphasis is now placed on representational strategies, the semiotics of signs, cultural codes, and so on. Gikandi concludes from this:

> The immense popularity of *Things Fall Apart* has largely been due to Achebe's evocation of an "authentic Igbo world", and countless interpretations of the novel have been written to confirm and celebrate the author's reproduction of an "authentic" Igbo culture and its essences ... And yet, however appealing this mimetic claim might be, however tantalizing the notion of an empirical order reproduced in narrative might be to the reader of Achebe's texts, it must be resisted because it is not possible for the writer to appeal to an original notion of Igbo culture; like many other cultural products, the Igbo world is only accessible to us as it has been represented by others ... This is why it is important for us to remember Said's stricture that the object of reading is not a truth; rather, "the things to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original."[28]

Though many critics of the African novel shy away from being explicitly labeled postcolonial, it is clear as the above passage shows that the concepts and vocabulary of postcolonial discourse saturate the works of a large range of critics. This perhaps is unavoidable, given its cultural power and dominance within the academy. Even critics such as Robert Fraser, who are overtly hostile to postcolonial theory and criticism, are not averse to using its concepts and categories in their work and thus tapping into the cultural capital it provides. The last chapter of his book *Lifting the Sentence: A Poetics of Postcolonial Fiction*[29] is a savage parody of the practices of postcolonial

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theory and its major figures. Yet, as the title of the book indicates, Fraser sets out to outline a poetics of postcolonial fiction – a category about which he is highly skeptical. Setting aside his doubts for the benefits the term confers, he claims that the evolution of postcolonial literatures can be read in six stages. These stages, he identifies, are: (i) Precolonial Narratives; (ii) Colonial and Imperial Narratives; (iii) Narratives of Resistance; (iv) Nation-building Narratives; (v) Narratives of Internal Dissent; and (vi) Transcultural Narratives. He believes that each stage in the diachronic development he outlines has specific formal and stylistic features which define it and that these "can fruitfully be investigated at the minutest of levels: the level of word, phrase, sentence and paragraph, as well as the larger level of the structure of the text" (p. 9). Although the book reads very much like a survey, he insists that his purpose is not to present a survey of postcolonial fiction but to enunciate "a controlled exposition of method" (p. x). Fraser's method is a reading of some selected fictional texts said to be representative of each of these stages; a reading which seeks to identify stylistic features of "person," "voice," "tone," "mood," "tense," etc. which are said to be characteristic of postcolonial fiction in each of these stages. In short, it is a more or less traditional lit. crit. reading of a few texts seeking to transform itself into a methodological tool for the analysis of postcolonial fiction as a whole.

A more nuanced and sophisticated exposition of method can be found in Ato Quayson's *Calibrations: Reading for the Social.*[30] Calibrations, he says in this book, "is a practice of reading that oscillates rapidly between domains – the literary-esthetic, the social, the cultural, and the political – in order to explore the mutually illuminating heterogeneity of these domains when taken together" (p. xi). In an account of the way in which he arrived at this method in the essay "Incessant Particularities: *Calibrations* as Close Reading," Quayson narrates the circumstances of his formation as a literary critic and the major role that "close reading" played in his literary education. However, the insistence on the autonomy of the literary text by the proponents of close reading failed to convince in the highly politicized postcolonial world of his upbringing. This is how he describes it:

> The outside world of politics always intruded into our consciousness in the form of rumours of the disappearance of people, the brutality of the security services, and the general aggrandizement and enrichment of the few at the expense of the rest of us. And this external turmoil ensured that arguments about the autonomy of the literary field struck a false note whenever pressed without qualification by the critics we read.[31]

The wall erected between the literary text and the world by the formalists, New Critics, and their fellow travellers had also proved unproductive for

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an earlier generation of critics of the African novel, and their attempts to surmount this were registered in the reflectionist paradigm on which their critical labors and their continual struggle with method were founded. Their preoccupation with questions of representational authenticity, of relevance and social commitment, and so on can be read as a broad concern with the "worlding" of the text and the search for the means to translate this awareness into a method of reading. This concern conducted within the earlier grammar of decolonizing, nationalist discourse flows into Quayson's quest in this book. As he says in the explanatory essay "Incessant Particularities," "[t]he problem then was how to combine a respect for the text as an aesthetic object with a vigorous attention to the many dramatic things that were unfolding all around us."[32] This is the problem that calibrations as a method of reading literary texts seeks to provide.

Obviously, this is an attempt to grapple with the age-old problematic of the relationship between literary representation and reality, between the internal dynamics of the text and what lies outside or beyond the text, in the world. In connection with the African novel, this problematic had assumed a new inflection with the foregrounding of authenticity and representational accuracy in nationalist critical practice. In the emergent literature's confrontation with representations of Africa in the earlier novels of Empire as represented in such works as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*, this could not be avoided. In its earlier incarnation, the question of "Africanness" was seen to be central to finding a handle on this question. This has been staged at some point as a question of orality and the African novel; at other times, constructed as involving matters as momentous as language, nation, and subjectivity; or reconstructed into issues of relevance and commitment; and, then, reconstituted as a question of critical standards and appropriate method of analysis. These constructions are the basic themes that pervade the claims and counterclaims of the formalists, sociological, Marxist, and other critics of the African novel. In returning to this question of the text and what lies beyond it, Quayson's book shows the continuity and currency of the clusters of issues and questions that animated the space of the critical reception even in the time of theory.

Since the question of appropriate critical standards and methods has been predominant in the history of the critical reception of the African novel, I would like to conclude by drawing attention to recent work by George which examines the pitfalls of "applying" one critical theory or the other to African novels. In the essay "African Novels and the Question of Theory," he says:

> Against this background, merely "applying" theory to African literature short changes both the literature and the theory. By the same token, and quite

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> paradoxically, contemporary arguments that simply reject theory ... in an a priori fashion overestimate (or undercomplicate) what they are arguing against. The limits as well as the potential of theory can be apprehended and articulated, only when one enters into dialogue with it, not when one is either "applying" it, or refusing to apply it.[33]

He therefore argues, quite correctly in my opinion, that:

> As all literary texts generally tend to do, African novels often give us clues that we might use to understand and appreciate them. In this sense, *many novels theorize themselves, initiating, in the grammar of narrative, how we might go about reading them with profit.* (p. 21; emphasis added)

Perhaps the ultimate lesson that the critical reception of the African novel teaches is that, like the dancing mask of Igbo tradition that Chinua Achebe cites in his novel *Arrow of God*, it is continually in motion, demanding multiple perspectives and a plurality of subject positions.

NOTES

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INDEX

Abani, Chris, 11
  Becoming Abigail, 237
  Graceland, 237
Abrahams, Peter, 9, 54, 149
  Mine Boy, 54, 56, 148
  Song of the City, 148
  Wild Conquest, 148
Achebe, Chinua, 17, 20–8, 31–48, 146, 154, 182, 187, 218, 254
  and African experience, 9
  Anthills of the Savannah, 21–2, 23, 24, 27, 28, 35, 44, 46, 47, 48, 146, 154, 177, 182–3, 185
  Arrow of God, 33, 35, 36–8, 40, 45, 146, 187, 260
  Girls at War, 10
  Home and Exile, 39
  on Joseph Conrad, 31
  and language, 32
  Man of the People, A, 27, 38, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 146, 151
  and Miguel de Cervantes, 38–9
  No Longer at Ease, 21, 22, 23, 25, 35, 38, 40, 41–3, 44, 45, 146
  Things Fall Apart, 8, 20–1, 23, 26, 31, 33, 35, 36, 37, 39, 40, 43, 45, 146, 152, 183, 257
Adebayo, Diran
  Some Kind of Black, 239
Adesokan, Akin, 11
Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi, 11
  Half of a Yellow Sun, 10, 33
  Purple Hibiscus, 33, 236
Afolabi, Segun, 11
African National Congress (ANC), 54, 55, 59, 60, 62, 81
Africanness
  and authenticity, 259
  and the novel, 243, 245
Aidoo, Ama Ata, 10
Aiyejina, Funso
  Legend of The Rockhills, The, 10
Algeria, 86, 87, 109, 114, 117, 118
  in Feraoun, 106–7
  and history, 115, 119
  in Khadra, 119–20
  in Mustaghānimī, 96–101
  narrative of the nation, 98–100, 109–14
  in Pélégri, 104–5
  portrait of Algerian, 103–5, 107
  Revolution, 62, 86
  in Roblès, 103–4
  War of Independence, 103, 107, 109, 119
'Alī, Idrīs
  Dongola, A Novel of Nubia, 94
Aluko, T. M., 9
Amadi, Elechi, 165
  Concubine, The, 43
  Great Ponds, The, 9, 43
Amado, Jorge, 6
Anderson, Benedict, 15, 71, 89, 109
Angola, 6, 7, 55, 62, 79, 148, 166, 168, 169
  narrative of the nation, 168–70
animism
  animist materialism, 40, 160–2
  in Fagunwa, 17
apartheid, *see* South Africa
Apuleius,
  Golden Ass, The, 2, 3
Arab culture, 86, 108, 155
  as colonizers, 94
  and question of race, 94
  rise of Arabic novel, 87
Armah, Ayi Kwei, 17, 19–20, 27, 219, 220, 221, 225
  Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born, The, 38, 43, 151, 152, 219–20, 225
  Fragments, 43, 220–1

Healers, The, 19, 27, 141
Two Thousand Seasons, 144, 152, 154–6
Atta, Seffi, 11
Aucamp, Hennie, 76
autobiography, 105–9, 201–6
childhood, 203, 204
primal scenes, 205–6
Aventure ambiguë, L', *see* Kane, Cheikh Hamidou, *Ambiguous Adventure*

Bâ, Amadou Hampaté, 16
Bâ, Mariama, 125, 136
So Long A Letter, 5, 10, 47, 136
Bachi, Salim, 110, 112, 118, 120
Kahéna, La, 120
Bakhtin, Mikhail, 34, 163, 185, 193, 255
Balzac, Honoré de, 151
Barnard, Chris, 76
Barre, Siyad, 223
Barthes, Roland, 110, 125
Behn, Aphrah
Oroonoko or the Royal Slave, 8
Behr, Mark
Embrace, 235
Smell of Apples, The, 81, 234
Béji, Hélé, 121
Ben Jelloun, Tahar, 112, 117
Écrivain public, L', 117
Enfant de sable, L', 118
Harrouda, 117
Nuit sacrée, La, 118
Benchemsi, Rajae, 121
Benigna van Groenekloof of Mamre, 70, 72
Berlin Conference, 55
Bessora, 137
Petroleum, 236
Beti, Mongo, 7, 41, 125, 129, 130–1, 133, 136, 228
Branle-bas en noir et blanc, 131
Mission to Kala, 41
Trop de soleil tue l'amour, 131
Ville cruelle, 131
Beyala, Calixthe, 11, 137, 138, 165, 238
Femme nue, femme noire, 238
Bhabha, Homi, 209
Bible, 2, 4, 5, 70, 73, 74, 81, 163, 172, 217
in Achebe, 25
in Ngugi, 25
Biehl, Amy, 65–6
Bildungsroman, 108, 206, 207
in Africa, 200
and autobiography, 195–207
and Dangarembga, 196
in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, 199
and feminine condition, 189
and Gurnah, 152
and Oyono, 126
Bishop, Rand
list of critical standards, 250
Biyaoula, Daniel, 138
Agonie, L', 239
Impasse, 239
Biyidi, Alexandre, *see* Beti, Mongo
Blake, William, 26
body, 171, 181, 212, 213, 218, 222, 257
and memory, 99
and rape, 186
and sexuality, 138, 214
in Tansi, Sony Labou, 215
and writing, 121
Bolya, 138
Botha, P. W., 79
Boudjedra, Rachid, 98, 112, 114–15
Démantèlement, Le, 115
Funérailles, Les, 114
Leiliyat imraatin arik, 115
Rain, The, 115
Répudiation, La, 114, 115
Bourboune, Mourad, 114
Bouts de bois de Dieu, Les, *see* Sembène, Ousmane, *God's Bits of Wood*
Breytenbach, Breyten, 76, 78, 235
Brink, André, 9, 76, 78, 81, 235
Devil's Valley, 81
Looking on Darkness, 77
Bruggen, Jochem von, 73
Bugul, Ken, *see* M'baye, Marietou
Bunyan, John, 5
Pilgrim's Progress, The, 5, 16
Burger, Rosa, 59, 60, 61

Cabral, Amilcar, 26, 62, 178
Cachet, J. Lion, 72
Seven Devils and What They Did, 71
Camoens, Luis Vaz de
Lusiads, The, 69
Camus, Albert, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 111
Premier Homme, Le, 108
Cary, Joyce, 8, 31, 34
Mister Johnson, 259
Céline, Louis-Ferdinand, 138
Cervantes, Miguel de, 39
Césaire, Aimé, 129

Cheney-Coker, Syl, 257
Last Harmattan, The, 170–2
childhood, *see also* autobiography
abiku in Okri, 172
child soldiers, 231–2
Chinodya, Shimmer, 148
Chraïbi, Driss, 104, 112, 115–16
Civilisation, ma mère!, La, 116
enquête au pays, Une, 116
Lu, vu, entendu, 116
Monde à côté, Le, 116
Passé simple, Le, 115, 116
Christianity, 5, 19, 25, 86, 165, 187, 202
in Achebe, 21, 34
in Diescho, 56
and education, 2, 4–5, 70
in Fagunwa, 6
in South Africa, 78
city, 11, 44, 127, 137, 138, 199, 200, 224
in Abrahams, 54
in Achebe, 21–2, 23, 34, 40, 41, 42, 43
in Afrikaans literature, 72, 73, 74, 77, 78, 80
colonial, 187, 188
in Dutch South Africa, 70
in Farah, 232
in Habila, 236
movement to/from village, 41, 172, 191
in Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 26
in Paton, 76
postcolonial, 137, 138, 218
in Sembène, 179
in South Africa, 82
in Van den Heever, 74
in Vera, 192
Coetzee, Abraham, 73
Coetzee, J. M., 6, 76, 203, 228
Boyhood, 196, 198, 204
Disgrace, 150, 234
colonialism, 7, 24, 54, 92, 93, 104, 105, 113, 120, 128, 130, 143, 155, 186, 189, 196, 203, 206, 216, 223, 228, 252, 256
in Achebe, 31, 187
anti-colonial struggles, 7, 25, 51, 54–8, 61, 64, 66, 89, 93, 99, 104, 131–2, 145, 147, 148, 179, 197, 204, 210, 234
British, 8, 78, 145–6
colonial encounter, 2, 6, 40, 42, 48, 103, 106, 108, 117, 126, 127, 129, 131, 132, 133, 196, 200, 215, 244
colonial policies, 109, 128
colonization, 38, 103, 127, 130, 143
decolonization, 58, 63, 86, 97, 105–9, 121, 128, 135, 141, 144, 179, 209, 211, 215, 216, 229, 245
and emergence of novel, 244
French, 7–8, 98, 148, 152, 153, 155, 231
German, 152
historical context, 11
ideology, 7
in Kenya, 25, 181, 197
and language, 31, 86
metaphor of rape, 94
in Morocco, 116
in Nigeria, 197
Portuguese, 6–7
pre-colonial societies, 1, 11, 126, 127, 134, 144, 201
in Rhodesia, 196, 199, 200
in Ṣāliḥ, 93
in Sembène, 53
in Somalia, 185
use of literature, 15
and violence, 48, 104, 153, 154, 211
Conrad, Joseph, 31, 34, 149
Heart of Darkness, 8, 51, 149, 234, 259
Conton, William
African, The, 8
Couchoro, Félix, 7
Esclave, L', 126
Couto, Mia
Last Flight of the Flamingo, The, 64
Under the Frangipani, 7, 63

d'Almeida, Evaristo
O Escravo, 6
Dadié, Bernard, 9
Nègre à Paris, Un, 137
Damas, Léon, 129
Dangarembga, Tsitsi, 178
Nervous Conditions, 184, 188–90, 196, 199, 200, 206, 207
Dangor, Achmat
Bitter Fruit, 235
Kafka's Curse, 235
Darko, Amma, 10
Defoe, Daniel, 34
Moll Flanders, 34
Robinson Crusoe, 16
democracy, 212, 231
consequences of democratization, 231
in South Africa, 41, 58, 59, 65
Diagne, Ahmadou Mapaté
Trois Volontés de Malik, Les, 7, 126

Diallo, Aïda Madi, 138
Diallo, Bakary, 7
  Force-Bonté, 7, 126, 127
Diallo, Nafissatou, 199
  Dakar Childhood, A, 199, 202, 207
diaspora, 11, 15, 228, 235, 237–8, 239
Dib, Mohammed, 105, 109, 111
  Maître de chasse, Le, 111–12
  Qui se souvient de la mer, 111
Diescho, Joseph, 56
  Born of the Sun, 56–7, 58
  Troubled Waters, 57–8
Diome, Fatou
  Ventre de l'Atlantique, Le, 237
Diop, Birago, 9
Diop, Boubacar Boris, 127
  Murambi, le livre des ossements, 231
Diop, Cheikh Anta, 155
Djaout, Tahar, 110, 112, 118, 119, 120
  Invention du désert, L', 119
Djebar, Assia, 98, 105, 109, 112–14, 116, 121, 211, 223
  Amour, la fantasia, L', 98, 113
  Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua, La, 113
  Ombre sultane, 113
  Vaste est la prison, 113
Dongala, Emmanuel
  Johnny Chien Méchant, 231
  Petits Garçons naissent aussi des étoiles, Les, 231
Dutch Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), 69

education, 48, 63, 189, 198, 199, 253
  postcolonial reforms, 245
  in South Africa, 77
  and technology, 36
  use of African texts, 12
  Western, 92, 198, 200, 201, 206, 207, 224
Effa, Gaston-Paul
  Voici le dernier jour du monde, 239
Efoui, Kossi
  Fabrique des cérémonies, La, 239
Egypt, 85, 86, 87–92
Ekwensi, Cyprian, 34, 41
  People of the City, 35, 44
Emecheta, Buchi, 10, 178, 186, 187, 237
  Joys of Motherhood, The, 184, 187–8
  New Tribe, 237
engagement, 250

epic, 15, 19, 20, 127, 134, 163
  in Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 26, 27, 28
  Sundiata, 1
Equiano, 197, 202, 205
Essomba, Jean-Roger, 137
Etoke, Nathalie, 137
Evaristo, Bernadine, 239
Eybers, Elisabeth, 76

Fagunwa, Daniel, 5, 16, 17–18, 40, 44
  Forest of God, The, 17
Fanon, Frantz, 61, 104, 137, 143, 145, 148, 153, 154, 178, 210, 211
  and African bourgeoisie, 143
  Damnés de la terre, Les, 62, 86, 210
Farah, Nuruddin, 151, 154, 178, 184, 185, 186, 223, 224, 226
  Blood in the Sun Trilogy, 223–5
    Gifts, 224–5
    Maps, 44, 223–4
    Secrets, 224, 232
  Close Sesame, 151
  Links, 232
  Sardines, 151, 185–7
  Sweet and Sour Milk, 151
Farès, Nabile, 114
feminism, 98, 99, 136, 183
Feraoun, Mouloud, 105, 106–7, 109
Flaubert, Gustave
  Salammbô, 143, 153
Freud, Sigmund, 154

Gabon, 236
Garuba, Harry, 160–2
Genootskap vir Regte Afrikaners (GRA), 70–2, 73, 74
George, Olakunle, 250, 259
Ghana, 55, 151, 152
Gordimer, Nadine, 9, 10, 149, 228, 235
  Burger's Daughter, 59, 149
  July's People, 47
  None to Accompany Me, 150
  Sport of Nature, A, 149
Gramsci, Antonio, 207
Greene, Graham, 153
Grensliteratuur, 79
griot, 19, 152, 155, 222
Guinea Bissau, 55, 62
  PAIGC, 62
Gurnah, Abdulrazak
  By the Sea, 237
  Desertion, 238
  Paradise, 152

Habila, Helon, 11
Waiting for an Angel, 236
Haddad, Malek, 99
Quai aux fleurs ne répond plus, Le, 114
Haggard, Rider, 8, 155
King Solomon's Mines, 72
Hardy, Thomas, 34
Hassim, Aziz
Lotus People, The, 149
Hayford, Caseley
Ethiopia Unbound, 8
Hazoumé, Paul, 7
Doguicimi, 126, 127
Head, Bessie, 9
Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 53, 144
Heliodorus,
Aethiopica, 2, 3, 4
Hiyalwa, Kaleni
Meekulu's Children, 56, 59
Hoogenhout, C. P., 71, 73, 77
Catharina, the Daughter of the Advocate, 71
hybridity, 87, 110, 132, 149, 256
in Afrikaner identity, 81
in Farah, 223
in Kane, 134
in Ngugi, 217

Ibrāhīm, Ṣun' Allāh, 88
Smell of It, The, 88
Igbo, 9, 20, 23, 33, 36, 37, 39, 44, 146, 257, 260
Ike, Chukwuemeka, 147
immigration, 230, 237, *see also* diaspora *and* migration
Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, The, see Equiano
intertextuality, 94, 110, 125, 234
Irele, F. Abiola, 28, 159, 163, 246, 247, 249, 251
Isegawa, Moses, 11, 63
Abyssinian Chronicles, 232
Snakepit, 232
Islam, 2, 5, 85, 86, 98, 101, 152, 223, 225, 230, *see also* Qur'an
and African identity, 86
and Afrikaans, 70
in Chraïbi, 116
critiques of, 223
and Kane, 5
in Meddeb, 116
in Nigeria, 5
in Ṣāliḥ, 93
in Somalia, 223–5
Iweala, Uzodinma
Beasts of No Nation, 10
Iyayi, Festus, 147
Heroes, 10, 147

Jameson, Fredric, 10, 132, 133, 142, 160, 184, 197
Jonker, Abraham, 73
Jonker, Ingrid, 76
Jordan, A. C.
Wrath of the Ancestors, The, 33
Joubert, Elsa
Long Journey of Poppie Nongena, 78
Reise van Isobelle, Die, 81
To Die at Sunset, 79

Kahiga, Sam, 148
Kalu, Anthonia
Broken Lives, 10
Kane, Cheikh Hamidou, 7, 125, 127, 133
Ambiguous Adventure, 5, 133
Kateb, Yacine, 105, 109–11, 112, 117, 120
Nedjma, 109, 110, 112
Polygone étoilé, Le, 109, 110
Kenya, 9, 24, 25, 27, 62, 145–6, 148, 181, 216, 234, 255
Gikuyu, 145, 240
Mau Mau Rebellion, 41, 62, 145, 147–8, 216
in Ngugi, 62
Kenyatta, Jomo, 62, 216
Facing Mount Kenya, 26
Khadra, Yasmina, 104, 118, 119–20
Imposture des mots, L', 120
Morituri, 120
Khair-Eddine, Mohammed, 117
Khatibi, Abdelkebir, 112, 117, 120
Amour bilingue, 117
Livre du sang, Le, 117
Mémoire tatouée, La, 117
Pélerinage d'un artiste amoureux, 116
Khobbio, Bassek Ba, 127
Khoikhoi, 69
Kibera, Leonard, 148
Kipling, Rudyard, 155
Klerk, W. A. de
laer, Die, 76
Kombuis, Koos, *see* Letoit, André

Kourouma, Ahmadou, 127, 134, 135, 136, 228
Allah n'est pas obligé, 10, 231
En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages, 231
Soleils des indépendances, Les, 16, 134, 135, 235

La Guma, Alex, 9, 10, 149
Lacan, Jacques, 195
Laing, Kojo, 165, 257
Major Gentil and the Achimota Wars, 44
Woman of the Aeroplanes, 3, 165–6
Langenhoven, C. J., 72, 73
language,
literary use of indigenous language, 5–6, 86, 98–9
question of, 252
role of writer, 253
Laye, Camara, 7, 125
and Beti, 130–1, 228
and depiction of Africa, 201
Enfant noir, L', 129–30, 196, 197, 201, 207
question of authenticity, 130
Radiance of the King, The, 44
Leipoldt, C. Louis, 72, 73
Lejeune, Philippe, 195, 202, 203
Leroux, Étienne, 76, 77, 78
Seven Days at the Silbersteins, 77
Lessing, Doris, 9
Letoit, André
Somer II, 80
Liberia, 154
Libya, 86, 87
Liking, Werewere
Mémoire amputée, La, 233
literacy, 33, 35, 48, 159, 160, 203, 246
in Achebe, 42
in Arab culture, 2, 5
and writing, 2
littérature
de témoignage, 106, 111
migrante, 137
Loba, Ake
Kocoumbo l'étudiant noir, 137
Lopes, Baltazar
Chinquinho, 6
Lopès, Henri, 9
Nouvelle Romance, La, 137
Pleurer-rire, Le, 135
Loti, Pierre
Roman d'un Spahi, Le, 7
Lukács, Georg, 15, 149, 151, 152, 153, 154, 156, 187
and European bourgeoisie, 141–2, 153
on Flaubert, 143

M'baye, Marietou, 136, 137
Abandoned Baobab, The, 199, 206, 207, 233
Rue Félix-Faure, 233
Mabanckou, Alain, 11, 137
Bleu-Blanc-Rouge, 238
Machel, Samora, 63
Magona, Sindiwe
Mother to Mother, 64–6
Maḥfūẓ, Najīb, 5, 87, 92, 101, 228
Palace Walk, 88–92
Respected Sir, 88
Malan, D. F., 75, 198
Malan, Rian
My Traitor's Heart, 198, 202
Malherbe, D. F., 73, 75, 77
Meulenaar, Die, 74
Mammeri, Mouloud, 105, 107, 119
Colline oubliée, La, 107
Opium et le bâton, L', 107
Sommeil du juste, Le, 107
Mandela, Nelson, 55, 59, 62, 81
Mangua, Charles
Tail in the Mouth, A, 147
Marais, Eugène N., 72, 73
Maran, René, 130
Batouala, 7, 127, 128
Marita or the Folly of Love, 8
Mathabane, Mark, 198, 201
Kaffir Boy, 198, 202, 203
Maupassant, Guy de, 153
Mauritania, 86, 87
Mauss, Marcel, 224
Mazrui, Ali A., 86
Mbulelu, Mzamane, 10
Mda, Zakes, 11, 165
and Conrad, 149, 234
Heart of Redness, The, 149–50, 234
Madonna of Excelsior, The, 234
Ways of Dying, 150
Meddeb, Abdelwahab, 112, 116
Talismano, 116
Memmi, Albert, 105, 107–8, 109, 132, 210
Portrait du colonisé, 108, 210
Portrait du décolonisé, 108
Statue de sel, La, 108

Mengestu, Dinaw
Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears, The, 11
Mernissi, Fatima, 117, 121
Rêves de femmes, 121
métissage, 110
migration, 237, 238
within Africa, 233
experience of, 137
to Ghana, 152
narrative of, 41, 137
to South Africa, 69
Miles, John, 79
Kroniek uit die doofpot, 79
Miller, Christopher L., 130, 139, 153, 157, 196, 248
Mimouni, Rachid, 104, 112, 118
Honneur de la tribu, L', 119
Tombéza, 118
modernism, 41, 151
and *sestigers*, 76
modernity, 4, 17, 27, 41, 87, 90, 95, 101, 109, 116, 119, 121, 134, 150, 160, 161, 179, 187, 188, 199
and the city, 188
and Laye, 197
and literacy, 1
transition to, 6
Modisane, Bloke, 198, 201
Blame Me On History, 198, 203, 205–6
Mofolo, Thomas P., 16, 19
Chaka, 4, 16, 141
Mokeddem, Malika, 121
Monénembo, Tierno
Aîné des orpehlins, L', 231
Crapauds-brousse, Les, 135
monologue, interior, 45, 104, 111
Morocco, 86, 87, 115, 117
Mozambique, 7, 55, 62, 63
FRELIMO, 62
Mphahlele, Es'kia, 9, 10, 198, 201
Down Second Avenue, 198, 203
Mudimbe, V. Y., 86, 200
Bel Immonde, Le, 135
Mugabe, Robert, 233
Mungoshi, Charles, 10
Munonye, John, 9
Mustaghānimī, Aḥlām, 96–101
Bed Passerby, 98
Chaos of the Senses, 101
Memory in the Flesh, 96–100
Mwangi, Meja, 147, 148
myth, 43, 81, 159, 163, 188
in Achebe, 38, 43
of Afrikaner nationalism, 81
of colonialism, 144, 148
in Farah, 223
Idemili, 27, 48
in magical realism, 3
of Occident, 238
of Penelope (Ndebele), 233
Prometheus, 186

Namibia, 55–8, 59, 62, 79
narrative
dialogic, 34, 110, 113, 115, 177, 182
first person, 32, 45, 46, 47, 61, 131
of national liberation, 215
omniscient, 45, 47
theory of, 163
nationalism, 7, 15, 79, 90, 107, 204, 214, 223, 245, 249, 256, 257
Afrikaner, 71, 72, 75, 76, 77, 78, 81, 234
in Armah, 221
Egyptian, 89–92
in Farah, 223
identity formation, 224
in poetry, 7
Ndebele, Njambulo, 10, 11, 51
Cry of Winnie Mandela, The, 233
Ndione, Abasse, 138
Nedjma, 121
Negritude, 52, 86, 125, 129, 138, 250
Nganang, Patrice, 11
Ngoye, Achille, 138
Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 9, 17, 24–8, 41, 145–6, 147, 154, 155, 216–17, 225, 249, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255
and Achebe, 24–6
Decolonising the Mind, 24, 86, 217
Detained, 216, 217
Devil on the Cross, 24, 145, 154, 177, 181–2, 217
and Fanon, 215
and Gikuyu tradition, 9, 217, 218
Grain of Wheat, A, 24, 40, 145, 164, 216, 217, 249
Matigari, 16, 24, 145, 217, 218
Moving the Centre, 217
Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams, 86, 217
Petals of Blood, 24–5, 26–8, 62–3, 145, 151, 154, 216, 217

River Between, The, 24, 145
Weep Not, Child, 24, 145, 197, 200, 207
Wizard of the Crow, The, 218, 240, 249
Niane, Djibril Tamsir, 127
Niekerk, Dolf van, 76
Nienaber, C. J., 76
Nigeria, 11, 16, 44, 146, 235–6
and *abiku*, 172
in Achebe, 20, 21, 146
and city, 34
civil war, 147
and diaspora, 235
failure in leadership, 47
and history, 146, 151
in Iyayi, 147
and Saro-Wiwa, 232, 236
Njami, Simon, 137, 138, 239
Nkosi, Lewis, 9
Mating Birds, 47
Nkrumah, Kwame, 27, 61, 86, 151, 219, 220
novel,
colonial, 7–8, 126
debate on categorization, 228–9, 251–2
detective, 72, 104, 119, 120, 138
European, 15, 16, 34, 44, 85, 87, 136, 141–2, 149, 153, 156, 217
historical, 141–56
intercommunication, 229–30
Nujoma, Sam, 55
Nwapa, Flora, 9
Efuru, 43
Nzekwu, Onuora, 9

Obeng, R. E
Eighteenpence, 8
Obiechina, Emmanuel, 247
Odinga, Oginga
Not Yet Uhuru, 26
Ogot, Grace, 10
Okara, Gabriel
Voice, The, 16, 32
Okpewho, Isidore, 147
Okri, Ben, 40, 44, 151, 163, 164, 165, 257
Famished Road, The, 3, 151, 163, 172–5, 235
Songs of Enchantment, 163, 235
Omotoso, Kole, 160, 161
orality, 9, 12, 27, 44, 106, 159, 164, 246, 247, 256, 259
in Achebe, 20, 34
in Armah, 19, 155
and authenticity, 16, 249, 250
and Bible, 4–5
discursive, 248–9
in Fagunwa, 17–18
and literacy, 15–16, 17, 24, 28, 246
and oral tradition, 1–2, 43
positivist, 247–8
and 'writing back', 256
orature, *see* orality
Ouologuem, Yambo, 134, 135, 136, 144, 152–5, 157
Devoir de violence, Le, 127, 134, 135, 144, 152–3, 154, 156
Oyeyemi, Helen, 11
Icarus Girl, The, 237
Oyono, Ferdinand, 7, 126, 129, 131, 134
vie de boy, Une, 131
Vieux Nègre et la médaille, Le, 127, 132

p'Bitek, Okot
Song of Lawino, 26
Paton, Alan
Cry, the Beloved Country, 76
Pélégri, Jean, 103, 104, 105
Maboul, Le, 104
Oliviers de la justice, Les, 105
Pepetela, 148, 165, 170
Geração da Utopia, A, 148
Mayombe, 7, 148
Return of the Water Spirit, The, 3, 166–70
picaresque, 16, 17
in Farah, 185
plaasroman, 74, 76, 79, 80
Plaatje, Sol T., 16
Mhudi, 8
postcolonialism, 48, 52, 134, 135, 137, 142, 151, 177, 196, 199, 204, 209, 210, 216, 222, 226, 229, 257
in academia, 209–10
and Achebe, 31, 36, 182
and decadence, 143, 152
and ethics, 224–5
failure of nationalism, 219
fiction, 257–8
first phase, 210, 212, 220
in Ghana, 219, 220
identities, 94, 95, 138, 141, 144, 211, 224
ideology, 41

postcolonialism (cont.)
and nationalism, 229, 254–5
in Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 24
in Nigeria, 236, 237
and post-structuralism, 255–6
postcolonial condition, 10, 43, 94–6, 126, 138
postcolonial consciousness, 33
postcolonial situation, 146
power structures, 143
role of writing, 98–101
theme of dispossession, 225
theory, 256
and violence, 10, 154, 231–3
postmodernism, 79, 254
Preller, Gustav, 72, 73
Présence africaine, 128, 130, 211
print culture, 15, 19, 26, 33, 34, 35, 71, 244
Publications Act, 77

Quayson, Ato
Calibrations, 258
Qur'an, 2, 5, 98, 113, 134, 163

Rabie, Jan, 76, 78
realism, 34, 38, 43, 44, 76, 92, 117, 131, 132, 142, 159, 161, 181, 186, 187, 191, 250, *see also* novel
in Achebe, 40
in *Aethiopica*, 3
in Armah, 43
European, 156, 216
in *The Golden Ass*, 3
magical realism, 3, 44, 80, 119, 136, 151, 152, 159–75, 218, 235, 256–7
in Maḥfūẓ, 88
new realism, 10, 46
in Ngugi, 217
social realism, 107
socialist realism, 147, 216
ritual, 37, 159, 160, 222
in Achebe, 38
of initiation, 197
Rive, Richard, 10
Roblès, Emmanuel, 103, 104, 105, 106, 120
Hauteurs de la ville, Les, 103
Rushdie, Salman, 152, 164
Rwanda, 154
Écrire par devoir de mémoire project, 230–1

Sachs, Albie, 62
Sadji, Abdoulaye, 7
Said, Edward, 114, 209, 210, 226
Ṣāliḥ, Tayyib, 5, 93, 94, 96, 97
Mawsim al-Hijra ilā al-Shamā, 5, 92–6
Season of Migration to the North, 85
Sanou, Daniel Kollo, 127
Sansal, Boualem, 104, 107, 112, 118, 120
Serment des barbares, Le, 120
Saro-Wiwa, Ken, 236
Sozaboy, 10, 32, 225, 232
Sartre, Jean-Paul, 129
satire, 39, 46, 72, 187
in Achebe, 146
in *The Golden Ass*, 3
in Kourouma, 231
in Mangua, 147
scapegoat, 46, 214
in Achebe, 36
Schoeman, Karel, 78
By fakkelig, 78
Promised Land, 78
Stemme trilogy, 80
Scholtz, A. H. M.
Vatmaar, 80
Schreiner, Olive, 9
Schwartz-Bart, André, 153
Sefrioui, Ahmed, 117
Sembène, Ousmane, 7, 9, 41, 127, 132–3, 134, 178, 179, 190, 221, 225, 228
Derniers de l'Empire, Les, 133
Devoir de violence, Le, 154
Docker noir,Le, 133
God's Bits of Wood, 26, 41, 52–4, 56, 63, 132, 133, 148, 177, 178–9, 184, 185
Mandat, Le, 133, 221
Xala, 44, 133, 221, 222–3
Xala (film), 223
Senegal, 41, 52, 54, 199, 202, 207, 221, 222, 228, 231, 233, 238
Senghor, Léopold, 48, 52, 86, 125, 129, 138, 238
Sepamla, Sipho
Ride on the Whirlwind, 60
Serote, Mongane, 9
To Every Birth Its Blood, 60, 61
sestigers, 76, 77
Sierra Leone, 170–2
Siyad Barre, 151, 154
Small, Adam, 76
Smit, Bartho, 78
Soce, Ousmane, 7, 130
Mirages de Paris, 126, 127, 137
Society of Real Afrikaners, *see* Genootskap vir Regte Afrikaners (GRA)

Somalia, 151, 154, 186, 223, 225
Soromenho, Castro, 6
  Camaxilo, 6
South Africa, 8–9, 41, 54, 55, 56, 58–61, 62, 63, 64–6, 198, 201, 204, 205, 223, 233–5
  Afrikaans, 60, 69–82
  Afrikaners, 149
  anti-apartheid movement, 60
  apartheid, 8, 51, 55, 58, 59, 66, 75, 76, 77, 81, 82, 148–9, 198, 201, 203, 204, 205, 230, 233, 234–5
  Great Trek, 76, 81, 149
  history of settlement, 69
  language, 69–70, 73
  National Party (NP), 75
  post-apartheid, 148–50, 234
  Soweto Township Uprising, 59, 60, 77
South African Communist Party (SACP), 55
South West African Peoples Organisation (SWAPO), 55, 58
Sow Fall, Aminata, 137
  Festins de la détresse, 233
Soyinka, Wole, 147, 154, 155, 161, 165, 203–4, 228, 254
  Aké, 197
  Interpreters, The, 32, 38
  Myth, Literature and the African World, 253
  Season of Anomy, 44, 147, 154
  Strong Breed, The, 38
Spengler, Oswald, 74
  Decline of the West, 74
Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, 28, 93, 95–6
storytelling, *see* orality
Sudan, 53, 86, 87, 92, 93, 94, 154
supernatural, 80, 159, 197, 213, 256
  in Achebe, 40
surrealism, 147
Swahili, 6

Tadjo, Véronique, 11, 137
  Ombre d'Imana, L', 231
Tahir, Ibrahim
  Last Imam, The, 5
Tansi, Sony Labou, 10, 135–6, 211, 212, 214, 215, 221, 225
  and language, 136
  Anté-peuple, L', 136
  Commencement des douleurs, Le, 212, 214–15, 236
  État honteux, L', 214, 232
  Parenthèse de sang, La, 232
  Sept Solitudes de Lorsa Lopez, Les, 136, 214
  Vie et demie, La, 135, 212–14
Tanzania, 151, 152, 237
Tchak, Sami, 137
  Place des fêtes, 239
Toit, S. J. du, 73
  and history, 72
  koningin fan Skeba, Die, 72
  Queen of Sheba, The, 71
tragedy, 40, 117, 134, 170, 183
  in Achebe, 21, 36, 37, 39, 42
Traoré, Sayouba
  Loin de mon village, c'est la brousse, 239
Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), 59, 66, 80, 230, 233, 235
Tunisia, 86, 87
Tutuola, Amos, 16, 32, 40, 44, 162–3, 164, 171, 172, 174, 175, 257, 260
  Palm-Wine Drinkard, The, 3, 32, 244

Van den Heever, C. M., 73, 74–5, 77
  Afrikaanse gedagte, Die, 74
  Somer, 74, 80
Van Heerden, Étienne
  Ancestral Voices, 79–80
  Long Silence of Mario Salviati, The, 235
Van Niekerk, Marlene
  Agaat, 82
  Triomf, 82, 235
Van Wyk Louw, N. P., 76
Vassanji, M. G., 151
Venter, Eben
  Foxtrot of the Meat-Eaters, 80
  My Beautiful Death, 80
Vera, Yvonne 178
  Stone Virgins, The, 233
  Without a Name, 184, 190–2
Victor, Kapache
  On the Run, 56, 59
Vries, Abraham H. de, 76

Waal, J. H. H. de, 73
  and nationalism, 72
Waberi, Abdourahman
  Aux États-Unis d'Afrique, 240
  Balbala, 239
  Moisson de crânes, 231
  Transit, 239
Wachira, Godwin, 148
Waciuma, Charity, 148
Walcott, Derek, 26
Walters, Joseph Jeffrey
  Guanya Pau, 8, 244