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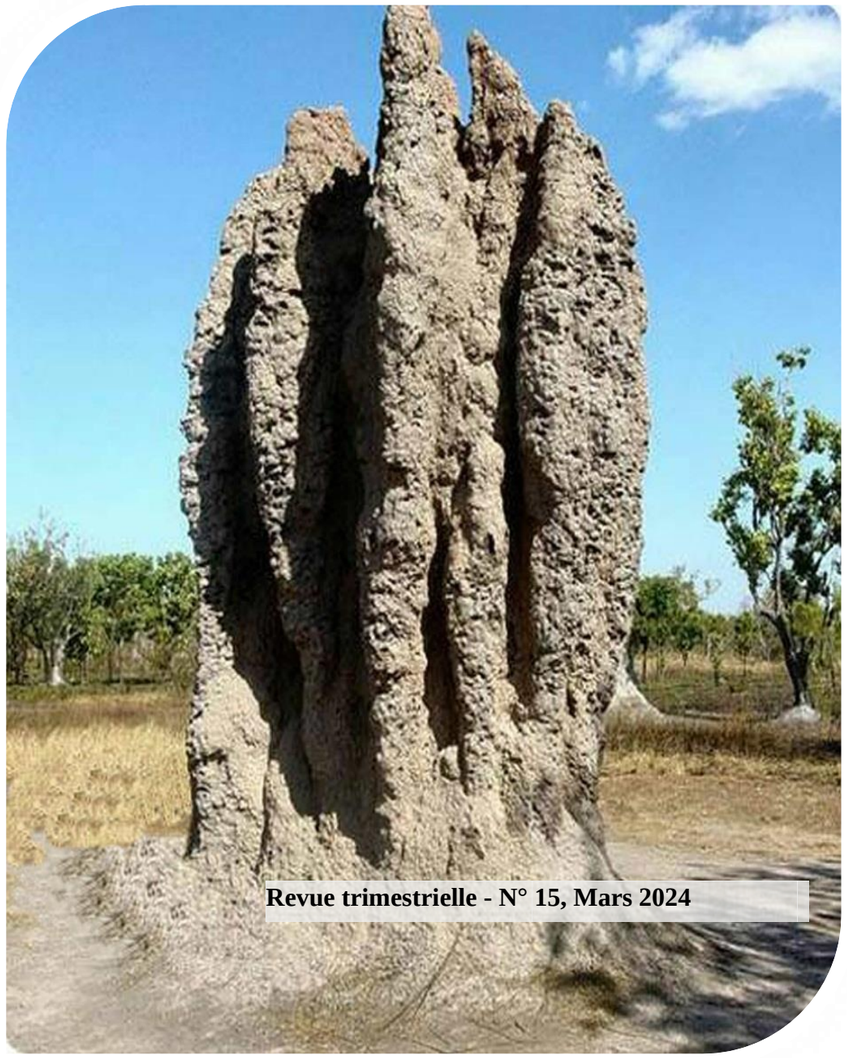

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BP: 61536 / Tel Bureau: (228) 22 22 10 45 / Mobile : (228) 90 12 37 30

E-mail: imprimerie.stlouis@yahoo.fr

REVUE TRIMESTRIELLE - N° 15 Đamá Nínaʋ | REVUE INTERDISCIPLINAIRE LETTRES, ARTS ET SCIENCES HUMAINES

"Dama Ninao" est une revue scientifique interdisciplinaire qui accepte et publie tous les articles relevant des Lettres, Arts et Sciences Humaines. A cet effet, elle s'intéresse aux études et théories littéraires, linguistiques, sociologiques, philosophiques, anthropologiques et historico-géographiques. La Revue "Dama Ninao", entendu "L'Entente" en langue kabyè du Nord Togo, est créée dans l'intention de matérialiser la mondialisation ou la globalisation qui s'opère avec l'esprit d'équipe et d'échanges et la désuétude du monde autarcique. Le monde scientifique universitaire ne peut échapper à cet esprit d'équipe qui fonde un creuset où « le fer aiguise le fer », les échanges se croisent, puis s'entremêlent pour aboutir à une reconstruction des connaissances scientifiques individuelles dans la collectivité.

La Revue Dama Ninao nous renvoie à la Civilisation de l'Universel du poète sénégalais Léopold Sédar Senghor, qui prône la porosité des âmes avec l'acceptation de l'autre, de ce qu'il dispose d'utile pour mon avancement : sa civilisation, sa culture, sa langue … Elle se fonde notamment sur la philosophie de Paul Ricœur qui préconise la perception de Soi-même comme un autre. Considérer soi-même comme un autre aux yeux de l'autre, nous amènerait à faire taire nos distensions et ressentiments afin de redimensionner notre espace, reconstruire notre histoire et notre société.

La Revue Dama Ninao s'est inspirée de la nature. Des insectes en miniature nous produisent de bels chefs-d'œuvre architecturaux, conjuguent leur génie créateur et leur force dans la patience et dans la tolérance. Ils créent des œuvres monumentales qui dépassent l'entendement humain, les termitières. A cet effet, la nature semble nous parler, nous guider, nous instruire dans le silence. Seules ces créations nous interpellent sans autant faire de nous des disciples. Comme la termitière qui, pour la plupart du temps, est une composante de maillons surgissant de la même matière, la Revue Dama Ninao se veut une termitière scientifique dont les enseignants-chercheurs en sont les maillons.

Au confluent de diverses sciences, la Revue Dama Ninao se propose de promouvoir la recherche scientifique et universitaire en impulsant le dialogue interdisciplinaire, le dialogue entre divers champs disciplinaires et divers contributeurs du monde universitaire.

Professeur Koutchoukalo TCHASSIM

Université de Lomé

Contact : revuedamaninao@gmail.com

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E-mail : revuedamaninao@gmail.com; infos@revuedamaninao.net
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LIGNE EDITORIALE DE LA REVUE DAMA NINAO

Dama Ninao est une revue scientifique internationale. Dans cette perspective, les textes que nous acceptons en français ou anglais sont sélectionnés par le comité scientifique et de lecture en raison de leur originalité, des intérêts qu'ils présentent aux plans africain et international et de leur rigueur scientifique. Les articles que notre revue publie doivent respecter les normes éditoriales suivantes :

La taille des articles

Volume : 10 à 15 pages ; interligne 1.5, police 12 pour le corps du texte et les courtes citations ; police 11 pour les longues citations, Times New Roman, les références des citations doivent être incorporées dans le texte. Exemple : Guy Rocher (1968, p. 29), pas de référence en foot-notes à l'exception de quelques commentaires.

Ordre logique du texte

- Un **TITRE** en caractère d'imprimerie et en gras. Le titre ne doit pas être trop long ;

- **Nom et prénom(s)** du contributeur ou des contributeurs, **nom de l'institution** d'appartenance, **adresse mail**

- Un **Résumé (Abstract)** de 8 lignes en français et anglais, en interligne simple, suivi de 6 **Mots clés** (**Key words**)

- Une **Introduction** : elle doit avoir une problématique, une méthode et une structure.

- Un **Développement** : les articulations du développement du texte doivent-être titrées comme suit :

1-Pour le **Titre** de la première section

1-1-Pour le **Titre** de la première sous-section

1-2- Pour le **Titre** de la deuxième sous-section

2- Pour le **Titre** de la deuxième section

2-1-Pour le **Titre** de la première sous-section

2-2- Pour le **Titre** de la deuxième sous-section

3- Pour le **Titre** de la troisième section (si l'auteur de l'article le souhaite)

-Une **Conclusion :** elle doit être courte, précise et concise en mettant en relief l'authenticité des résultats de la recherche.

-**Bibliographie** (Mentionner uniquement les auteurs cités)

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- AMIN Samir (1996), *Les défis de la mondialisation*, Paris, L'Harmattan.

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En cas d'utilisation des tableaux, ceux-ci doivent être numérotés en chiffre romains selon l'ordre de leur apparition dans le texte. Ils doivent comporter un titre précis et une source. Les schémas et illustrations doivent être numérotés en chiffres arabes selon l'ordre de leur apparition dans le texte.

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Les instructeurs à qui la revue affecte les articles de leur spécialité, doivent les lire avec rigueur, rejeter tout article dont le contenu est en inadéquation avec le titre et/ou dont le raisonnement n'offre pas une qualité scientifique, faire des propositions pour l'amélioration dudit article, renvoyer l'auteur de l'article à la ligne éditoriale de la revue au cas où elle n'est pas respectée. Ils se doivent notamment de vérifier, par le biais d'internet, si le même article n'est pas déjà publié dans une revue en ligne.

Objectifs et portée

La revue Dama Ninao, de par son nom qui signifie « entente », a pour objectifs :

- de matérialiser le monde universitaire qui est un creuset où « le fer aiguise le fer », les échanges se croisent, puis s'entremêlent pour aboutir à une reconstruction des connaissances scientifiques individuelles dans la collectivité ;
- de promouvoir la recherche scientifique et universitaire en impulsant le dialogue interdisciplinaire, le dialogue entre divers champs disciplinaires et divers contributeurs du monde universitaire.

La revue Dama Ninao a une portée scientifique et sociale. A cet effet, elle publie tous les articles relevant des Lettres, Arts et Sciences Humaines et s'intéresse aux études et théories littéraires, linguistiques, sociologiques, philosophiques, anthropologiques et historico-géographiques sur appel à contribution thématique (colloque) ou varia. Elle est un espace de rencontre, de construction et de reconstruction des réseaux relationnels et scientifiques.

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AFRICAN FICTION-AFRICAN INTRICACIES NEXUS: A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

Ayélé Fafavi d'ALMEIDA
dacredo@yahoo.fr
Université de Lomé, Togo

Abstract: Literature, spanning across continents and ages, has consistently served as a unique medium for expressing the human condition: African literature is no exception to this rule. It has been delving into the African experience since pre-colonial times, casting African writers' responses to a myriad of challenges, including colonial and postcolonial debates, questions of identity, social justice, globalisation, environmental and ecological concerns, human rights and gender issues, among others. Through a cogent review of the works and perspectives of prominent African writers, this study explores the intricate relationship between African literature and the multifaceted challenges confronting the continent. Drawing from the voices and perspectives of African writers themselves to unravel the dynamic interplay between literature and the pressing issues that engulf both these writers and their communities, this essay disentangles, from postcolonial and reception lenses, the complex tapestry of themes, narratives, and socio-political contexts that shape the African literary landscape.

Keywords: Africa, literature, writer, challenge, identity, postcolonialism.

Résumé : De par le monde et à travers les âges, la littérature a toujours été un moyen privilégié pour exprimer la condition humaine: une règle à laquelle la littérature africaine ne déroge pas. Depuis les temps précoloniaux, elle a exploré, entre autres, l'expérience africaine, offrant les réponses des écrivains africains à une multitude de défis, incluant les débats coloniaux et postcoloniaux, les questions d'identité, de genre, de justice sociale, de mondialisation, d'environnement, d'écologie, et de droits de l'homme. A travers l'examen des œuvres et des perspectives des écrivains africains les plus éminents, cette étude analyse la relation complexe entre la fiction africaine et les défis multiples auxquels est confronté le continent. En se référant aux voix et aux perspectives des écrivains africains eux-mêmes pour illuminer l'interaction dynamique entre la littérature et les problèmes pressants qui minent ces auteurs et leurs sociétés, cet essai revisite, par le biais des théories de la réception et postcoloniale, la gamme de thèmes, de récits et de contextes sociopolitiques qui façonnent le paysage littéraire africain.

Mots-clés : Afrique, littérature, écrivain, défi, identité, postcolonialisme.

Introduction

African literature, a mosaic woven from myriad threads of cultures, languages and experiences across the continent, encapsulates the essence of diverse narratives. From Chinua Achebe's incisive portrayal of the enduring impacts of colonialism on Africans in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's exploration of gender and identity in *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), African writers have been crafting narratives that illuminate societal complexities and challenge established norms.

Defining African literature is a daunting task. As noted by Cosmo Pieterse and Donald Munro in their *Protest and Conflict in African Literature* (1969, p. ix), any work addressing African experiences of a given place and time, whether from a traditional or a modern perspective, is deemed African literature. This holistic definition reflects the evolving nature and diversity of African fiction. Given the multitude of linguistic, historical, cultural, ethnic/tribal, gender and national differences across the continent, it may be more appropriate to speak of "literatures" rather than a singular "African literature". As Achebe contends in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (1975, p. 56), African literature comprises "a group of associated units," encompassing all national and ethnic literatures found on the continent: "You cannot cram African literature into a small, neat definition…. I do not see African literature as one unit but as a group of associated units—in fact the sum total of all the national and ethnic literatures of Africa." In the wake of Achebe's observation, Tanure Ojaide (2012, p. 17) highlights the thematic diversity of the said literature, stating the following: "while Francophone African intellectuals and writers used negritude to react to European denigration of African culture, the Anglophone African writers affirmed their Africanity in their own way by showing the African personality as a human who has strengths and weaknesses". In sum, African literature is a heterogeneous entity.

Besides standing as a testament to the resilience and creativity of its writers, African literature equally mirrors the continent's multifaceted identity, independence struggles, and ongoing quest for justice.

This essay journeys into the captivating world of African literature, with a specific focus on the dynamic relationship between literary works native to Africa and the challenges faced by the continent. Using postcolonial and reception theories as grids, it unravels the dynamic interplay between literature and the pressing issues at stake for both African writers and their societies.

Materialised through the "rejection of 'the master narrative' of Western imperialism – in which the colonial 'other' is not only subordinated and marginalized, but in effect deleted as a cultural agency – and its replacement by a counter-narrative in which the colonial cultures fight their way back into a world history written by Europeans" (Abrams, 2005, p. 245), postcolonialism is connected to writing, while its theory attempts to intervene in the construction of culture and knowledge, mandating intellectuals who hail from postcolonial societies to write their way back into a history others have written for them (Culler, 1997, pp. 130-131), to clear space for multiple voices, so to speak.

Primarily attuned to the reader's reception of a text, reader-response theory discards the response of a single reader at a given time but privileges, instead, altering, interpretive and evaluative responses of the audience over time (Abrams, 2005, p. 271). Holding the reception theory as "an operational model par excellence, and simultaneously a theory of the literary text," Wolfgang Iser (2006, p. 68) endows it with the capacity "to elucidate why and how the same literary text can mean different things to different people at different times." Locating readers as vital to interpreting literature, reader-response criticism views a text in isolation as devoid of meaning until readers experience it (Culler, 1997, p. 63).

Structured around two main sections, this essay tracks the historical evolution of African fiction, from its roots in oral storytelling and indigenous languages to its response to the challenges posed by colonialism and its after-effects. In the process, the intricate themes crisscrossing it are unravelled, while the influence of language and cultural diversity resulting in the emergence of unique voices within this rich literary landscape are established. This exercise is helpful in comprehending how the

African fiction mirrors the continent's experience, showcasing its resilience, creativity, and capacity to instigate change.

1. New Wine into Old Wineskins: From Oral to Written Traditions

Debunking the popular myth of Africa as a continent devoid of literature until contact with the West led to written works in European languages, Ruth Finnegan's *Oral Literature in Africa* (2012, p. 414) abundantly demonstrates that oral literature reigned supreme in Africa alongside the written form, prior to African-European encounter, making the continent the possessor of both unwritten and written traditions. Though an unfamiliar concept to most people hailing from written cultures, oral literature is alive and well in Africa. With certain definite characteristics of its own, this literature is dependent on "a performer who formulates it in words on a specific occasion—there is no other way in which it can be realized as a literary product," Finnegan (2012, p. 5) asserts. If a written literary work has an independent and tangible existence in the shape of a document which attests to its literary form and its further transmission, oral literature significantly differs as the connection between transmission and its very existence "is a much more intimate one, and questions about the means of actual communication are of the first importance—without its oral realization and direct rendition by singer or speaker, an unwritten literary piece cannot easily be said to have any continued or independent existence at all," Finnegan (2012, p. 5) holds. Deeply rooted in the foundational concepts and ideas of the universe and humanity of African traditional societies, these oral traditions are performed to insure continued existence as they contribute to the impact of the particular literary form being exhibited. In sum, oral tradition serves as a conduit for cultural transmission, relying on direct interpersonal communication, memory, and ingrained patterns of thought, speech, and action to maintain cultural continuity.

Emphasising the importance of cultural transmission, African oral tradition, the earliest form of African literature, disseminates the continent's rich history of storytelling. Like the genres of literatures, Africa has variegated types of oral

tradition, the major ones being myths, legends, fables, folk-tales, riddles and proverbs.

Myths, for instance, explain life and death and the great forces of nature. While legends are non-historical or unverifiable stories handed down by tradition from earlier times and popularly accepted as historical, fables are short tales used to teach moral lessons, often with animals or inanimate objects as characters. Stories passed down verbally from generation to generation with each storyteller adulterating their original contents and making them more interesting and fascinating with the passing of time, folk-tales are considered to be false or based on superstition, though they are likely to teach lessons to the younger generation. A type of art form in Africa, albeit often of minor and childish interest, riddles often involve metaphorical or poetic expressions and are very closely related to proverbs. Expressed briefly and concisely like proverbs, riddles "involve analogy, whether of meaning, sound, rhythm, or tone; and the two forms are sometimes even combined in the 'proverb-riddle'" (Finnegan, 2012, pp. 413-4), except that riddles are more for entertainment rather than for serious consideration. As the African novel's foundational rock, proverbs will be addressed shortly.

Oral tradition, the bedrock of any communal culture in Africa, preserves the crucial aspects of heritage from one generation to the next, a legacy that persists in the written form, regardless of sweeping external influences. Emmanuel Obiechina astutely holds the following regarding its tenacity and survival in his *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel* (1975, p. 26): "Oral tradition has survived in West Africa in spite of the introduction of Western writing and the foreign tradition which it bears". This survival of oral tradition within African literature testifies to its enduring legacy. Oladele Taiwo (1967, p. 11) aptly notes: "In Africa as elsewhere oral traditions reflect the people's way of life. What oral literature is current in any area depends on the character, temperament and occupations of the people". Oral tradition implies, through Obiechina's lenses (1975, p. 32), a situation in which "cultural transmission is carried on by word of mouth through direct contact between individuals depending largely on memory and habits of thought, action and

speech for cultural continuity." Griots and storytellers play important roles in this tradition, salted with profuse use of proverbs.

Dating from the fifteenth century, contact between European literate culture and West African oral culture has caused tremendous changes on the continent. These changes occurring in the wake of European settlements herein brought along transformations not only in people's lives but in their oral tradition as well; they ultimately increased novelistic literature in the 1950s. Notable West African forerunner fiction that emerged in those years include Amos Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard* (1952), Camara Laye's *L'Enfant Noir* (1953) and *Le Regard du roi* (1954), Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City* (1954), Ferdinand Oyono's *Une Vie de boy* (1956) and *Le Vieux nègre et la médaille* (1956), Mongo Beti's *Mission terminée* (1957) and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), among others.

African fiction unveils a realm where storytelling is not merely a hobby but a potent force that shapes identities, challenges norms, and reveals the essence of African life. Authors, with their pens as compasses, navigate the rich, complex and diverse landscapes of this vast continent to collect their materials.

It is within the expansive universe of African fiction that narratives journey through time, space and culture, reflecting African history, struggles, dreams, and resilience. This body of fiction underlines the power of words as tools for understanding, empathy and transformation. The distinctive feature of African fiction lies in its faithful mirroring of the diverse realities of the continent. African authors do not merely tell stories: they are custodians of their shared history. With a cogent depth only known to insiders, they painstakingly capture the intricacies of African cultures and their threats.

The interplay between African fiction and the continent's complexities transcends mere narration: this fiction uncovers echoes of the past, addresses pressing issues of the day and entertains hopes for the future. It delves into the core of social, political, and cultural challenges. It dismantles stereotypes, interrogates biases, and amplifies voices that have long been marginalised or suppressed altogether. This

vibrant literature initiates discussions on identity, gender, migration, and the legacy of colonialism, acting as a reflective mirror of Africans' shared consciousness.

Deploying language as a pivotal tool, African fiction casts an insight into characters' appearance, digs into their moral stands and emotions; it mirrors their actions, uncovers their habits, feelings and thoughts, among others. As is the case with oral tradition where language is reinforced by physical gestures, facial expressions, vocal inflexions and other arts of the performer (Obiechina, 1975, p. 155), African fiction is influenced by the local language with its attendant flurry of proverbs.

Obviously, their wealth of common sense, wisdom, experience and truth has made proverbs ready-made traditional strategies in oral speech acts and writings from high literature to the mass media (Mieder, 2004, p. 4). Thus, emulating the oral tradition's featuring of proverbs to encapsulate vast wisdom and communicate morals, the written tradition abundantly distils proverbs in its creative writing.

Since proverbs have a lion's share in the novelistic undertaking as well, revisiting their definitions and importance seems mandatory at this stage, before proceeding further.

Proverbs crisscross African fiction. Given their uniqueness and captivating nature, a staggering number of proverb scholars have despaired of the task of defining this puzzling concept.

Paremiographer Archer Taylor underscores its hurdle in his 1931 eponymous book, *The Proverb* (in Mieder, 2004, p. 3):

> The definition of a proverb is too difficult to repay the undertaking; and should we fortunately combine in a single definition all the essential elements and give each the proper emphasis, we should not even then have a touchstone. An incommunicable quality tells us this sentence is proverbial and that one is not. Hence no definition will enable us to identify positively a sentence as proverbial.

While Richard P. Honeck (1997, p. vii) refers to proverbs as "complex, intriguing, and important verbal" entities, Wolfgang Mieder (2004, p. 4), in the wake of his mentor Stuart A. Gallacher, views them as "a short, generally known sentence

of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form and which is handed down from generation to generation." Whether it is defined in the 15th century by Michael Apostolius of Byzantium (in Anglistika, 2009, p. 215) as "a statement which conceals the clear in the unclear, or which through concrete images indicates intellectual concepts, or which makes clear in furtive fashion," or as "a succinct and pithy saying that is in general use and expresses commonly held ideas and beliefs," according to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, defining a proverb still remains a trying intellectual exercise. Thus, *The Columbia Encyclopedia* casts it as "a short statement of wisdom or advice that passes into general use," while Gregory Titelman's *The Dictionary of America's Popular Proverbs and Sayings* (2000, p. vii) paints it as a "collective wisdom of all nations, of all ages, of all times" that "typically expresses a commonplace thought in a succinct, often metaphorical way". Likewise, Bob Duckett's *The Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture* (2006, p. 1075) carves a proverb as "a short well-known, supposedly wise, saying usually in a simple language." If a proverb is a well-known phrase that generally gives true pieces of advice in the estimate of Albert Sydney Hornby's *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2006, p. 1169), Donatus Nwoga (in Abalogu, 1981, p. 16) represents it as "a terse statement which figuratively gives expression to the point of traditional wisdom relevant to a given situation," while Achebe (in Asika, 2012, p. 15) conceives of it as "the palm oil with which words are eaten". Meanwhile, Obiechina (1975, p. 156), perceives it as "the kernels which contain the wisdom of the traditional people". Other scholars, including Finnegan and Isidore Okpewho, have given it a try as well. Thus, while Finnegan (2012, p. 383) sees a proverb as "a saying in more or less fixed form marked by 'shortness, sense, and salt' and distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth expressed in it," Okpewho (1992, p. 226) visualises it as "a piece of folk wisdom expressed with terseness and charm."

Recognising the contested character of all expert definitions of this elusive concept, Mieder (2004, p. 44) has formulated the following aggregate definition of a proverb, after surveying fifty-five Vermont educated non-experts: "a phrase, saying,

sentence, statement, or expression of the folk which contains above all wisdom, truth, morals, experience, lessons, and advice concerning life and which has been handed down from generation to generation".

The debate, however, is far from dying down, as this series of definitions reveal what a proverb *is not* than what it *is*. Thus, Peter Grzybek (1994, p. 227) still concludes the following in a well-researched essay: "there is no generally accepted definition which covers all specifics of the proverbial genre". Buying into Grzybek's caveat, Paul Hernadi and Francis Steen (1999, p. 1) issue their reservation serving as a commanding compass:

> [N]o definition can both map all of Proverbia and protect the neighboring lands of clichés, maxims, slogans, and the like from unwanted annexation. Rather than legislate necessary or sufficient conditions for Proverbian citizenship, we propose to issue residence permits to all brief, memorable, and intuitively convincing formulations of socially sanctioned advice.

Speaking to a simple truth and often considered common sense, proverbs are laconic and epigrammatic sayings used to express commonly held ideas and beliefs, mummified as carriers of wisdom passed down from one generation to the next.

Reduced to a few words, these philosophical and moral expositions form "a mnemonic device in societies in which everything worth knowing and relevant to day-to-day life has to be committed to memory" (Obiechina, 1975, p. 156). Singled out by their "terseness" and "charm," proverbs are recognised as embodying timeless truths. Legacies of a given people, proverbs are traditional sayings that disseminate moral or cultural messages. While their terseness implies a certain economy in the choice of words and sharpness of focus, their charm conveys the touch of literary or poetic beauty in the expression. In enclosing "terseness" and "charm" in his definition, Okpewho entails that people use proverbs to make communication more communal and traditional, rather than focusing on individual expression or uniqueness. Clearly, instead of expressing one's thoughts in a uniquely flashy way, using proverbs aligns one more with shared communal values for cohesion's sake.

Because they contain wisdom that have inspired and motivated many over time, proverbs are used to address all aspects of life. Witty and amusing in nature, they are

deployed to emphasise, in Taiwo's (1967, p. 26) formulation, the "words of the wise and are the stock-in-trade of old people, who use them to convey precise moral lessons, warnings and advice, since they make a greater impact on the mind than ordinary words". As Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika (2012, p. 14) has noted, like some other elements of folklore, proverbs play significant roles in the literary works of African authors who chose not only "to blend their works with the touch of African oral tradition" but also "to give their creative works a stamp of uniqueness, authenticity, and identity as they reflect and project their culture, tradition, outlook, views and perceptions of a community that conditioned them even though they communicate in a language alien to them". So, irrespective of the level of modernity and technological advancement witnessed in Africa, proverbs still hold herein a preeminent place in both sacred and secular events; they play prominent roles in creative writing, forming a big chunk of the African novel. Used instantly as effective rhetoric in oral and written communication alike, proverbs contain everyday experiences and common observations in succinct and formulaic language, making them easy to remember (Mieder, 2004, p. xi).

Devolving from the precedent paragraphs, African novelists have utilised this form of folk literature in their creation to reinforce traditional ideology and philosophy of their society. Achebe, above all other African novelists, has creatively injected proverbs into his narrative to domesticate the English language in African form. Proverbs are not only instrumental in projecting the African culture and bringing to focus the thematic concerns of Achebe's fiction, but this novelist uses them to unveil the wealth and vastness of African universe as well. Characters in his *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* constantly and profusely speak in proverbs. To illustrate the disappointments of his early life and to be thankful for opportunities granted him after years of hard struggles, Okonkwo, the hero of *Things Fall Apart*, resorts to a proverb, declaring: "If a child washed his hands he could eat with kings" (1958, p. 6). Aiming at praising Okonkwo's success story, this proverb exhorts the younger generation to follow in his footsteps: Okonkwo's sense of humility (materialised through his working for Nwakibie, a wealthy man of his village, to earn

his first seed of yams) has paved the way for his own fame. Nwakibie said of him, using another apt proverb: "a man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his own greatness" (1958, p. 14).

Female novelists partake in this game of dotting fiction with proverbs as well. Mary Modupe Kolawole (1997, p. 78-79) submits that proverbs "are recreating new myths and archetypes that strengthen positive images of women too," a statement which is fully fleshed out in Diana B. Mcbagonluri's *Tears of a Rain Goddess* (2003). Focusing on women's empowerment, feminine leadership, and the impact of war-related rape, this contemporary Ghanaian female writer tactically deploys proverbs to encapsulate femininity and celebrate womanhood in her fiction. Tamara, the heroine of the said piece, is a war-torn woman deprived of her womanhood. However, her awareness about her physical beauty drives her using her body as armour to quench her thirst for revenge. Once she is fully dressed up, Tamara utters the following words to self-congratulate: "the peacock never tells people how gorgeous it looks but don't you think anytime it opens its wings it is indirectly telling the whole world that it is beautiful?" (2003, p. 26). Also, Zenator, another female character in the novel under consideration, exhibits sensitivity toward her father Samad through a proverb. After brushing aside a piece of advice from Samad, the chief advisor of the Kumbungu kingdom who has sensed an impending danger lurking on Kumbungu, Yiri Naa (the king) severely rebuked the latter. Driven by a strong father-daughter bond, Zenator shows compassion to her genitor whose refusal to eat prompts her uttering these proverbial words: "Baba when an insect falls into your eyes it is mine that floods with tears" (2003, p. 39). As Asika (2012, p. 16) has rightly theorised, "proverbs have become a tool which African writers use to justify the actions of characters, criticize bad ethical and immoral behaviors." There is no arguing the point: African writers express the wealth of philosophy, wisdom and perception of life as they affect and control their communities by means of proverbs.

From rural to urban settings, language is metamorphosed via a novelist's shower, a transformation which familiarises native African readers with the material, easing author-readership communication. As an instance, pidgin, the language of

semi-literate people, is widely used in most West African novels. Fiction writers of the continent recognise pidgin as a channel of communication to meet the demand of the people Obiechina (1975, p. 188) has labelled "pidgin personalities".

2. In the "Writing Back" Posture: African Fiction and Colonialism

European contact with African oral culture spurred significant changes in local traditions. Colonialism introduced literacy and significantly altered African societies, for such an introduction resulted in popularising the novel as a literary genre, an amalgamation of indigenous and written cultures. A form borrowed and "assimilated to a new cultural reality, in which the old indigenous culture and the new technological culture have been and still are being painfully married" (Obiechina, 1975, p. 35), the novel is now the novelist's tool to convey the African vision to the whole world.

The inability of colonial school to teach in local languages drove the imposition of European languages on Africans as *lingua franca*. Although African writers have penned their pieces in the colonisers' languages, they mirror a domestic touch, content-wise, leading to their categorisation as an African novel, with reference to Obiechina's (1975, p. 35) five systematic defining criteria in the matter: (1) it is set in Africa and is about African life; (2) it draws heavily from the local environment for authenticity; (3) it emphasises sociology; (4) it often carries didactic and propagandist elements; and (5) it reflects the peculiar cultural situation of Africa – blending oral traditions and modern technological influences.

Adopting a combat-like posture, the initial wave of African writers primarily grappled with the clash of cultures and the repercussions of colonialism. For instance, Achebe's forerunner and seminal works – *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964) and *A Man of the People* (1966) – counter the negative impacts of European depiction of Africa. This author vividly portrays the intricacies of African politics, the struggle for ethics in governance, and societal fairness in postcolonial Africa.

While fighting back lingering colonial legacies, Achebe masterfully delves into the shaping and transforming of individual identities amid societal changes and external influences in *Things Fall Apart*, with the clash between traditional Igbo identity and the forces of colonialism forming the pivotal conflict that ultimately leads to Okonkwo's tragic downfall and the disintegration of Igbo society altogether. Similarly, his *No Longer at Ease* explores the challenges faced by a young Nigerian man returning from England to work in the civil service, grappling with the cultural and moral dilemmas brought about by colonisation. Overwhelmingly, writing back to the centre is the major thematic focus of the first generation of African writers (Beier, 1967); an agenda centre-staging Africa's control of its own narration.

As Achebe has repeatedly claimed, narrating Africa in a positive light remains the driving force behind his art, his art's leitmotiv. He once declared in this connection (in Sallah & Okonjo-Iweala, 2003, p. 59): "Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter." Restating this leitmotiv in an interview reported by Ashley Fetters ("Achebe's Legacy", n. d.), Achebe notably concluded:

> The last four or five hundred years of European contact with Africa produced a body of literature that presented Africa in a very negative light and depicted Africans in vividly negative terms. This portrayal stemmed from the need to justify the slave trade and slavery. However, by the mid-twentieth century, Africans took control of narrating their own stories.

To a large extent, African writers have taken command of their stories, as African novelists of the independence era have sought to correct the distorted portrayals of Africans by artfully manipulating the colonial stereotypes projected on them in European literature. They have reversed the terms with which Blacks are previously tagged, dumping them on white community in Africa. Thus, the white man's claim to superiority is debunked in Laye's *Le Regard du roi* (1954, p. 14), while the real savages, in Cecilia I. Arungwa's (in Emenyonu, 1989, pp. 121-134) estimate, are the Whites of Oyono's *House Boy* and Beti's *Poor Christ of Bomba*.

As it were, then, postcolonial Africa witnesses a significant paradigm shift in African writing, an enduring theme in African literature, excavating the lasting

impact of colonial rule on the continent. African fiction unpacks the injustices and sufferings inflicted on Africans during the heyday of colonialism, while celebrating the resilience of African cultures. Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian prolific writer and one of the pioneers of African literature, skilfully navigates the clash between tradition and modernity in his dramatic production. Elucidating societal changes impacting relationships, values, and community dynamics, he symbolically represents tradition in his *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963) as the lion and modernity as the jewel. His actors grapple with questions of identity, language, and power, embodying hybrid identities straddling tradition and modernity. Initially expressed through satire in his *The Lion and the Jewel* and *The Trial of Brother Jero* (1963), Soyinka's bulk of works reflects social concerns, emphasising the collective experience and immediate pressing societal issues. Although he writes of modern West Africa in a satirical style, his serious intent and belief in the evils inherent in the exercise of power are often evident in his work as well. His cognizance of Western responsibility does not spare his sweeping criticism of Africa's ills, revealing both his disregard for African authoritarian leadership and his disillusionment with the continent's overall governance.

African fiction, in challenging Western narratives and stereotypes about Africa, offers diverse perspectives and stories that illuminate the multifaceted nature of the continent. Serving as a historical record and a vehicle for envisioning a more equitable and culturally rich future for African nations, this literature counters colonial legacies. Different African countries were uniquely impacted by colonialism, evident in the differing concerns of Francophone and Anglophone African writers. This diversity of approaches enriches the literary landscape of the continent.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's fiction is characterised by a deep commitment to decolonisation, a critique of colonialism, exploration of African identity, and a strong political and social consciousness. Set in fictional Kenya, his *Petals of Blood* (1977) keenly explores the influence of British colonialism and capitalism on Gikuyu society, reveals cultural clashes and criticises postcolonial governance in Kenya.

Above all, this novel unveils disillusionment and corruption in post-independence Africa. Moreover, Ngũgĩ advocates for the decolonisation of African literature, highlighting the erosion of traditional values due to colonisation. His insistence on using African languages in literature – argued in his *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) – hallmarks his literary philosophy. A conclusion he reached after verifying the African elite's steadfast attachment to colonial languages, a truly negative impact inherited from colonial upbringing. A carrier par excellence of the history, culture and values of the people who speak it, the colonial language was not only pivotal in spreading colonialism as an ideological project: it equally plays a decisive role in the stereotypical images the colonised have of themselves individually and collectively.

Set in fictional Ghana, Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) reflects on postcolonial disillusionment and moral decay in society, addressing the challenges faced as the country's leaders are grappling with corruption and self-interest in post-independence era. Armah's piece is an effort to condemn political corruption and promote positive values of accountability, responsibility, and sensitivity to the people (Ojaide, 2012, p. 182).

While most male authors are unashamedly committed to fighting colonialism and its lingering legacies, African female writers have the battle of their own to fight. Feminists have traditionally charged men with making women the insignificant "other"; that men have suppressed the female. Men, most feminists believe, have devalued, devoiced, and trivialised what it means to be a woman. These serious charges apply to African male authors as well, faulted to have marginalised the role and importance of women in their works that primarily focus on restoring the dignity to postcolonial African men. With that self-assigned mission in mind, African male writers have refrained from creating dynamic portrayals of women in their novels, depicting them in subservient roles, instead. Historically, then, several African male writers have featured powerless female characters in their creative works to reinforce images of female submission to patriarchal norms and outdated rules. Despite modernity, these women are portrayed as ill-equipped to critically analyse the world surrounding them.

Worse, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi and Tuzyline Jita Allan (2009, p. 266) submit that literary works by African women were generally neglected and "seen as isolated phenomena" since the 1960s. So, not only are African women stereotypically represented in male fiction, but their works are marginalised within the emergent body of postcolonial African literature as well, as their "writing seemed almost like an enterprise whose cause was in question". In pursuing their version of the nation-building imperatives supposedly incumbent upon men alone as well as in their fight to humanise Africans after colonial smearing, African male authors have underrated females in their novels rife with objectifications and discriminatory representations of women.

Taking their cue from those glaring shortcomings in the fiction crafted by their male counterparts, female writers present their heroines as subjects equally committed to the nation-building task, a common enterprise for both sexes, so to speak (Ogunyemi & Allan, 2009, p. 4).

As the above paragraph attests to it, in addressing this male bias from a gynocritical perspective, female authors have positively portrayed women in their fiction. Breaking free and loose from male-centric models of novels, they have penned their own versions to counter misogyny and promote women's participation in all areas of public life. African female authors, including Flora Nwapa, Efua Sutherland, Nawal El Sadawi, Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo and Tsitsi Dangarembga, to name but a few, have significantly enriched African literature through focusing on diverse themes that encapsulate the experiences, struggles, and triumphs of African women. Prevalent themes in African female fiction encompass a wide array of subjects, including gender roles, feminism, identity, cultural conflict, female oppression, family dynamics, motherhood, women's socio-economic struggles, female agency, resilience and empowerment.

A trailblazing West African female writer, Nwapa's novels are prominently focused on the place of women in traditional society. Her works – such as *Efuru* (1966), *Idu* (1970) and *One is Enough* (1981) – highlight the lives, struggles, and triumphs of African women. They equally address gender inequality, female

autonomy, and women's resilience in patriarchal settings. In addition, Nwapa's narratives examine the postcolonial era in Nigeria, exploring the effects of colonialism on African communities. Her body of works positions her as a significant voice in African literature, particularly in portraying the lives and experiences of African women amidst cultural, social, and economic transformations.

Taking up the challenge of promoting African literature in written form and departing from the tradition of maintaining cultural products in the form of oral works characteristic of the continent, Sutherland used the traditional storytelling format by which African folklore has been transmitted in her three major plays – *Edufa* (1962), *Foriwa* (1962) and *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1975) – to create appropriate dramatic forms for her country, the newly independent Ghana. While some critics claim that Sutherland's dramatic works demonstrate her strong interest in exploring and criticising the role of women in African society, others see her scholarship as primarily didactic, aiming at teaching her readership lessons in both traditional morality and the skills to cope with a changing environment. Her literary production, in sum, shows women's prominent role in transmitting African traditions from time immemorial.

In conflict with patriarchy from an early age, the Egyptian feminist and writer Nawal El Saadawi's fiction addresses female oppression. The most influential of the more than fifty (50) books she penned, *The Hidden Face of Eve* (1977), asserts that patriarchy and poverty oppress Arab women. Partly written as a corrective to western feminism's ignorance of the Arabic world, this novel underscores some of the positive aspects of Islam. Her fiction concerns itself with social issues. Thus, while *Woman at Point Zero* (1975), her best known novel, gives a horrifying account of childhood and marital abuse leading to prostitution, *Love in the Kingdom of Oil* (1993) uses a "dreamscape narrative to examine a world in which, for a woman, husband and boss are interchangeable, and for a man, female self-determination is incomprehensible" (*The Guardian*, "Obituary," n. d.).

Equally critical of women's role and place in African society, Emecheta, a celebrated Nigerian author, delves into a spectrum of female-related themes: the

impact of colonialism on women, motherhood, family dynamics, gender roles and women's socio-economic struggles; themes which are central to her *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *Second-Class Citizen* (1980*)* and *Double Yoke* (1982), among others. In sum, Emecheta's novels shed light on the challenges of African women in patriarchal societies, the clash between traditional and modern cultures, and the socio-economic constraints on women in postcolonial Africa.

Likewise, feminist consciousness and modernity permeate Aidoo's production. The foremost Ghanaian female novelist to use novel (*Changes: A Love Story)* as a powerful weapon in her fight for rights, privileges and ennobling roles for women in Africa, Aidoo has earned world recognition with a problem play, *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965), which portrays the clash between native culture and western values – in which a Ghanaian student returning home brings his African American wife into the traditional culture and the extended family that he now finds restrictive. *Our Sister Killjoy* (1966), her semi-autobiographical first novel, voices similar preoccupations, reflecting Aidoo's perennial concern with the African educated abroad. If *The Dilemma* explores the conflicted environment of intercultural marriages, *Anowa*, another play by Aidoo, features the strong willed Anowa who refuted tradition, but soon got entangled in a childless marriage to a rich man "she chose" herself, a man who was alleged to "trade" his manhood for wealth and slaves. In sum, Aidoo's fiction centre-stages tradition and modernity, marinated with feminist consciousness.

In the footsteps of her predecessors, Dangarembga takes up, among other themes, gender inequality in patriarchal society, in her *Nervous Conditions* (1988). In claiming that being a woman in patriarchal African society is synonymous to social incompetency, loss of identity, moral degradation, lack of possibilities and individual progress, among other disadvantages, *Nervous Conditions* stands as one of the foremost African feminist novels focused on sexual discrimination. As reflected in the novel, these words are uttered in support of gender inequality in patriarchal society: "But what I didn't like was the way all conflicts came back to this question of femaleness. Femaleness as opposed and inferior to maleness…" (1988, p. 118).

Commenting on three female novelists' positive carving of their heroines, Anthonia Kalu ("Women," n. d.) opines the following:

> Writers like Aidoo, Sutherland and Nwapa have made distinctive contributions to the genres in which they work – Aidoo in the short story, Sutherland in the play, and Nwapa in the novel. They have managed to develop their themes in such a way that their chosen forms are inseparable from the manner in which they perceive women and society in general.

Though current African novelists' embracing an array of themes might wrongly suggest a disjunction between them and the first generation of writers who snatched the continent from European stereotypical representations, this move rather indicates continuity in a tradition set up by their predecessors, tying African past and present writers in an unbroken bond. An intertextual approach establishes a seamless connection between them, as most young African writers, who are addressing contemporary issues in African literature, have confessed to it: they have been influenced by – or drawn inspiration from – the pioneers. Actually, issues of interest currently discussed in the African fiction by the new generation of novelists are migration and displacement – including Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* (1995), Adichie's *The Thing around Your Neck* (2009) and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013). African diasporan themes are being centre-staged herein. Examples comprise Dinaw Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* (2007), Teju Cole's *Every Day is for the Thief* (2007), Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* (2013) and Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc*. (2014). Family and relationships are centrally addressed in these productions as well. Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016) are cases in point. Above all, polygamy and its challenges, especially seen from women's vanguard, are quintessential: Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1980), Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010) and Peace Adzo Medie's *His Only Wife* (2019) are some select pieces. Currently, the African novelistic landscape is equally flooded with conflict and post-war stories: Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005), Alain Mabanckou's *Broken Glass* (2005), Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and Aminatta Forna's *The Memory of Love* (2010) are references. Technology

and connectivity narratives are carving space in the field, with Adichie's *Americanah* (2019) serving as a sample. The African fiction thrives on gender-based and feminist-oriented stories as well. Instances comprise Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and *The Book of Not* (2006), Aidoo's *Changes* (1991), Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010) and Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay with Me* (2017). Equally, urbanisation and identity topics crisscross the field. Among others are Darko's *Faceless* (2003), Chris Abani's *Graceland* (2004) and Chigozie Obioma's *The Fishermen* (2015). Least but not the last, climate change stories are claiming the spot: *Yellow Yellow* (2006) by Kane Agary, *Oil on Water* (2010) by Helon Habila, *The Seed Thief* (2015) by Jacqui L'Ange, and *After the Flare* (2017) by Deji Bryce Olukotun can be cited, among others.

It is undeniable that literature holds an extraordinary power to reflect and critique societal norms, serving as a catalyst for transformative change. By skilfully weaving stories, creative literature acts as a reflective mirror to society, illuminating injustices, biases, and the intricacies of human experiences. Its capacity to challenge established ideologies, evoke empathy and provoke critical thinking among readers is unmatched. Through the portrayal of social issues, amplification of marginalised voices, and exploration of alternative futures, literature remains instrumental in sparking conversations, motivating actions, and planting the seeds of social transformations. Its impact is invaluable, acting as a force for societal evolution and progress.

Conclusion

African literature and oral tradition are entangled, constituting both sides of the same coin. Enmeshed with oral tradition, African fiction is not just a genre: it is an odyssey which explores the nuances of human experiences of a vast continent with mindboggling diversity. Stories have the power to transform, connect and enlighten. In today's world, where globalisation and technology reshape our societies, African fiction serves as a bridge connecting our heritage to the global community. Besides

fostering dialogue and shaping our understanding of the African continent, it showcases creativity and resilience of its people. Even if criticised for romanticizing the continent, African fiction does confront uncomfortable truths, highlighting persisting inequalities, conflicts, and injustices. It ultimately urges Africans to address these issues with compassion and determination.

The resilience and creativity of African writers shine brightly, as these artists overcome barriers by articulating a wide range of voices and presenting different perspectives. This breathtaking journey into the hinterland of African literature and its entanglement with Afro-centric issues has highlighted its cultural depth and the untold challenges faced by African writers. Incontestably, understanding these challenges and embracing diverse voices has been an enlightening and a rewarding intellectual exercise. The debt to future generations of African literature scholars is to continue amplifying underrepresented narratives, fostering a more inclusive literary discourse.

Offering a diverse tapestry of literary expression with a promising future, the African literary landscape is continuously evolving in its embracing multifaceted issues for the continent's empowerment. Emerging voices diversify narratives, spanning a wide spectrum of genres, themes and storytelling techniques. Advancing technology provides opportunities for digital platforms and social media to expand access to African literature, fostering a more extensive readership and a global audience. The growing diversity in voices from different African regions, languages, and cultures is enriching the literary scene, paving the way for an expanded African literary landscape that captivates audiences worldwide.

There is a pressing need for deeper research into underrepresented themes, marginalised voices, and intersectional issues in African literature to foster a more inclusive representation that celebrates the diverse stories of the continent.

Overall, the future of African literature promises an exciting era marked by a vibrant tapestry of new themes, voices, and a profound exploration of underrepresented narratives, solidifying its place as an essential and dynamic contributor to the global literary stage.

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