

**THE CONCEPT OF NATIVISM  
IN INDIAN AND AFRICAN LITERARY  
CRITICISM**

Final Project Report submitted to  
University Grants Commission (WRO)  
Pune

By

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# Preface

## Preface

The concept of *Desivad* was not much in discussion till 1980s. It was Bhalchandra Nemade who started a nationwide movement after realising the perils of submitting the literary products of one culture to other culture's theories. During my post graduation classes I had heard about the concept of *Desivad*. But a serious thought of doing research on this did not occur to me until I met Dr. Ashok Babar, my Research Guide. Dr. Babar had published a book entitled *Desivad*, which proved a source of inspiration for me.

While working on the concept of *Desivad*, I had not only a challenge to state exactly what *Desivad* is? but also to defend it from the objections raised against its origin. Some hard-headed native colonialists always objected that Nemade's *Desivad* has been borrowed from the West, from the concept of Nativism advocated by Ralf Linton, an American Anthropologist. It was my moral concern to answer these objections as a researcher. The discussions with my guide gave me a new insight to think on this issue with a different perspective. I decided to search whether there is any similar movement anywhere in the world. No doubt, Irish Literary Renaissance and other similar activities were in existence, but *Desivad* is totally different from it. I came across a book *Proverbs, Textuality and Nativism in African Literature* by Adeleke Adeeko. This book gave me a fresh outlook. In Africa also a movement similar to *Desivad* existed, but with a different attitude. In India this concept is advocated by a single person i.e. by Nemade, and in Africa it is a group activity. It emerged out of the discussions that were held in the "Conference of African Writers of English Expression" at Makerere University, Uganda. This gave a boost to my research and the result is the present thesis.

In the concluding chapter of this thesis I stated how the concept of *Desivad* is of Indian origin and dates back to Bhagavan Mahaveer, Gautama Buddha etc. and how it is different from the concept of Nativism in Anthropology and what similarities and differences it has from African Nativism.

I feel it was a great opportunity to work on this topic. I take this opportunity to thank very sincerely Dr. Ashok Babar who guided me intemperably and Mrs. Surekha Babar who always looked after me as her son. Dr. Babar's encouragement and inspiration is the base of this outcome. I also express my gratitude to Prof. Bhalchandra Nemade, who read the whole script of my work and gave some important suggestions in this regard. I also thank Prof. G. M. Pawar who always helped and guided me to look at the

problem in a proper way. I sincerely thank Dr. P. A. Attar, Head, Department of English, Shivaji University, Kolhapur for helping and encouraging me to complete my work. Discussions with Dr. Sudhakar Marathe, Dr. Maya Pandit-Narkar, Dr. Rohini Tukdev were also important for carrying out this task. I am especially indebted to Netra Agarkar-Hiremath who made me available all the required books from U.S.A. and Professor Sangameshwar Neela who helped me to collect the source material for my research. I thank the staff of the various libraries, particularly, Dr. N. Satish, IC Librarian, Ramesh Mohan Library, English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, Shivaji University, Kolhapur, Dhvanyaloka, Mysore, Pune University, Mumbai University and so on. The present work has gained authenticity because of the services rendered by this group.

It will be ungrateful if I forget the mention of my family friends Dr. Randhir Shinde and Mrs. Madhuri Shinde who always inspired me to complete the work for Doctoral Degree since we were together. I sincerely thank my friend Dr. Mahaveer Shastri from Department of Prakrit, Walchand College and Dr. Madhuri Shastri for their constant help till the completion of this work. I had to do this work in addition to my normal duties. This is not a product of a man of leisure. I worked when people usually rested or relaxed. But I have enjoyed every moment of it only because of my friends: Pramod Mane, Milind Salgar, Vishwanath Madgundi, Amar Ghattaragi, Archana and Pradeep Pandit, Dhanajay Honmane, Balkrishna Waghmare, Ramesh Tibile, Anil Farakate, Rajkumar Kasturkar and many more. I am especially indebted to Shri. Dhanyakumar Jaini, a scholar of Sanskrit and Prakrit languages, for going through the whole script and doing the meticulous task of reading the proofs.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Ranjit Gandhi, Secretary, Shri. A. P. D. J. Pathashala and Dr. A. H. Manikshete, the Principal of my college. Never failing in encouragement they have helped me throughout the preparation of this work.

Now when the work is done I look back to the hectic days of the last four years and think that it has been possible mainly because of the labours of my brothers Anand and Avinash, blessings of my father Mr. Vijaykumar and mother Mrs. Asha and all members of my family. I have no word to express my gratitude for them.

I gratefully mention the constant encouragement I received from my wife Padmini and unspoken support from my sons Aneesh and Satvik.

**Santosh Koti**

Chapter 1  
**Indian and African Literature**

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## Chapter – 1

### Indian and African Literature

#### 1.0 Introduction

Nativism seems to have been gradually emerging in recent years through the collective efforts of intellectuals like M.N. Srinivas (in Sociology), Romila Thapar and Ranjeet Guha (History), Anil Seal and Partha Chatterjee (Political Science), Sudhir Kakkar (Psychology) and Meenakshi Mukherjee and Bhalchandra Nemade (Literary Criticism). *Nativism* goes farther than Internationalism and appeals not only Internationalism but also Universalism because it has an important role to play not only in literary criticism but also in the other areas of our intellectual endeavour. The present work is a beginning in the direction of formulating a well-considered and multi-dexterous response to the serious cultural challenges of our times. For example, globalization is an important issue in all aspects of cultural studies; hence the present researcher would explore the Socio-Economic ideologies which connect with the power structure and power relations in India and Africa, since the cultural war between global and the regional proves literature as an institution with its power structure and power politics of center and periphery.

However, M.H. Abram's *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (1993) fails to exhibit any reference to *nativism*. Even the fourth edition of J. A. Cuddon's *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, published in 1999, does not include it. This volume has included all the –isms: from the period of Aristotle to the present one, but it fails to pay any attention to nativism.

*Nativism* is completely unknown and untaught in our institutes of learning which most students and teachers of literature in India have not even heard of is now being given a voice and shape, however feeble and blurred. The present researcher would attempt to explore the area of study in Indian and African context with reference to the Indian critics: Bhalachandra Nemade, Ganesh Devy, Makarand Paranjape, Ashok Babar and the African critics: Ngugi Wa Thiong'O, Adeleke Adeeko, Chinua Achebe, and Gabriel Okara. Indian *deshivad* and African *nativism* have some common values: ecological, social, and linguistic, to care about language

death. According to Adeleke Adeeko African nativism is a highly productive and intensely generative category in the formation of African literature and criticism. It offers a self reflexive reading of representative oral and written, national and ethnic African literatures.

In Africa the language of education was no longer of the African Culture. The literature produced in European languages was given the identity of African literature as if there had never been literature in African languages.

In 1962 a historic meeting of African writers was organized at Makerere University College, Kampala, Uganda. The title, *A conference of African Writers of English Expression*, automatically excluded those who wrote in African languages. Yet, despite this exclusion of writers and literature in African languages, no sooner were the introductory preliminaries over than the conference of *African Writers of English Expression* sat down to the first item on the agenda: 'What is African Literature?' In 1964, Chinua Achebe, in a Speech entitled *The African Writer and the English Language*, said:

Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling. But for me there is no other choice. I have been given a language and I intend to use it

(Ngugi, *Decolonising the Mind*: 1986).

Thus African *Nativism* came forward through the problem of the language of African Literature. It is a kind of group activity started with discussion of the issue of the language of African Literature. Ngugi Wa Thiong'O, who has one of the participants in the conference, later abandoned writing in English and started writing in his native language i.e. Gikuyu.

Since 1962, the year of the now-famous Makerere African Writers' conference, Anglophone African literary criticism has been preoccupied with devising strategies for indigenizing the substance and language of its governing principles. All leading African Writers and critics have participated in formulating the parameters for devising a metalanguage and hermeneutic predisposition that will reflect the

importance of indigenous forms to the definition, classification, and appreciation of African culture.

Another important issue in the discussion of African criticism is the question of audience. Much has been written on the African writer's problem of audience. The fact that African critics took up the question, however consciously or unconsciously, means that the eventual impact on the literature itself will be even more profound than one might otherwise have expected, for criticism has the double function of expressing the past – in this case, a concern with cultural identity – and of affecting – and effecting – the future directions in which African literature is likely to move in response to it.

African literary criticism, like everything else, did not develop in a vacuum. In fact, the world milieu in which it did develop was so politically and emotionally charged – not to say economically and culturally controlled by the standards by which they evaluated African literature.

Modern African literary criticism as a conscious movement toward the articulation of critical standards applying to African literature probably began in the 1930s with Aime Cesaire, Leon Damas, Leopold Sedar Senghor, and others formulating the theoretical basis of negritude. The criticism takes on more concrete form with the founding of the journal and publishing house, *Presence africaine*, in 1947, and in the publication the following year of Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie negre et malgache de langue francaise*, with its introduction, "Orphee noir," by Jean-Paul Sartre.

What must be kept in mind is the extent and depth of the complex position in which African critics found themselves, particularly in the years just prior to and after independence. Confronted with a burgeoning literature and with a desire to foster an accurate image of Africa abroad while encouraging a concern for Africa's immediate internal problems, Africans have produced a body of criticism that reflects precisely this complex and fluid situation.

## **1.1 Africa**

In the late nineteenth century, the European imperial powers engaged in a major territorial scramble and occupied most of the African continent, creating many colonial territories, and leaving only two fully independent states: Ethiopia (known to Europeans as "Abyssinia"), and Liberia. Egypt and Sudan were never formally incorporated into any European colonial empire; however, after the British occupation of 1882, Egypt was effectively under British administration until 1922. Imperial rule by Europeans would continue until after the conclusion of World War II, when almost all remaining colonial territories gradually obtained formal independence.

Independence movements in Africa gained momentum following World War II, which left the major European powers weakened. In 1951, Libya, a former Italian colony, gained independence. In 1956, Tunisia and Morocco won their independence from France. Ghana followed suit the next year, becoming the first of the sub-Saharan colonies to be freed. Most of the rest of the continent became independent over the next decade, most often through relatively peaceful means, though in some countries, notably Algeria; it came only after a violent struggle.

Portugal's overseas presence in Sub-Saharan Africa (most notably in Angola, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and São Tomé and Príncipe) lasted from the 16th century to 1975, after the Estado Novo regime was overthrown in a military coup in Lisbon. Zimbabwe won its independence from the United Kingdom in 1980 after a bitter guerrilla war between black nationalists and the white minority Rhodesian government of Ian Smith. Although South Africa was one of the first African countries to gain independence, the state remained under the control of the country's white minority through a system of racial segregation known as apartheid until 1994.

Today, Africa contains 54 sovereign countries, most of which still have the borders drawn during the era of European colonialism. Since colonialism, African states have frequently been hampered by instability, corruption, violence, and authoritarianism. The vast majority of African states are republics that operate under some form of the presidential system of rule. However, few of them have been able to sustain democratic governments on a permanent basis, and many have instead cycled through a series of coups, producing military dictatorships.

### 1.3 African Languages

There are well over a thousand languages (UNESCO has estimated around two thousand) spoken in Africa. Most are of African origin, though some are of European or Asian origin. Africa is the most multilingual continent in the world, and it is not rare for individuals to fluently speak not only multiple African languages, but one or more European ones as well. There are four major language families indigenous to Africa.

- The *Afro-Asiatic* languages are a language family of about 240 languages and 285 million people widespread throughout the Horn of Africa, North Africa, the Sahel, and Southwest Asia.
- The *Nilo-Saharan* language family consists of more than a hundred languages spoken by 30 million people. Nilo-Saharan languages are spoken by Nilotic tribes in Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Uganda, and northern Tanzania.
- The *Niger-Congo* language family covers much of Sub-Saharan Africa and is probably the largest language family in the world in terms of different languages.
- The *Khoisan* languages number about fifty and are spoken in Southern Africa by approximately 120,000 people. Many of the Khoisan languages are endangered. The Khoi and San peoples are considered the original inhabitants of this part of Africa.

### 1.4 The Problem of African Literature

One of the first African critics to offer a definition of African literature was the Nigerian writer Cyprian Ekwensi. In 1956 he wrote, “What then is African

writing? To my own mind African writing is that piece of self-expression in which the psychology behind African thought is manifest; in which the philosophy and the pattern of culture from which it springs can be discerned” (1956: 703). However, it was not until 1962, when Christopher Okigbo put the question before the Conference of African Writers of English Expression, held that year June 8-18 at Makerere University that the matter was taken up in earnest.

By that year, virtually all of the British holdings in Africa were either independent or on the verge of “self-government.” The writers felt that colonialism was in its death throes, that newer societies were emerging, and that a matching cultural agenda must be formulated. J. T. Ngugi observed, in words that suggest a sense of relief, that unlike similar meetings held in 1956 and 1959, “the whole conference was almost quiet on such things as colonialism, imperialism, and other isms” (Language and Destiny of Man, 1986: 33).

There was no attempt to keep or publish an exact transcript of what was to become a seminal conference for African literature, but there exist at least three attempts to summarize the conference’s attempt to come to terms with the question of defining African literature. Bolke Modisane of South Africa reported that

Christopher Okigbo, the eccentric Nigerian poet (“I don’t read my poetry to non-poets”), provoked discussion by posing three points. Is African literature that body of literature produced in Africa by African and non-African Writers? Is it the literature produced by Africans of African descent? Or is it the literature produced by writers from all over the world writing on and about Africa? This stormy session struggled with definitions which threw up more questions and more definitions. Arthur Maimane, South African short-story writer, submitted that it was literature recording the experience as seen through the eyes of an African. Questions shifted to the qualification of African literature. What were the essential elements of the literature? Opinion emphasized “that feeling of being black” and this divided the conference on the concept of “Negritude”- which was defended passionately by the observers from French-speaking territories. Ronald Segal, a white South African, challenged the validity of “that feeling”, submitting that feelings were

universal, and that there was nothing like an exclusive African feeling. Subsequent discussion was inconclusive, but with the compromise acceptance of the unstated principle that the essential elements of African literature were the African viewpoint, a little of “that feeling”, the moral values, the philosophy, and the customs of African society (1962: 716).

Bernard Fonlon of Cameroun reported more precisely that Christopher Okigbo had said that to be African,

a work must have its roots deep in African soil, must take its birth from African experience, must pulsate with African feeling; in brief, what made a work African was Negritude as first felt and expressed by Senghor and Césaire. It was not race, neither was it theme that made a work African: a foreigner could treat African material and an African writer would be devoid of authentic African feeling (1963: 42).

Okigbo himself was asked at the conclusion to the conference, “Are you convinced after the deliberation and doubts of the Conference that there is such a thing that might be termed African literature?” He replied, “If and when the literature emerges, it will have to devise its own laws for its unity; its own form. Until this happens it appears rather premature to talk of African literature in terms other than geographical” (“Transition Conference Questionnaire,” 12). Fonlon then offered his own thoughts:

The experiences and emotions of the African are essentially universal: colonial humiliation, frustration, sorrow, bitterness, hate, revolt, revenge, exaltation, joy, love- these are human experiences. To my mind what conferred upon these an African character was their expression, their manner (1963: 42).

Here Fonlon’s emphasis on expression as the defining element is very significant.

Less than a year after the Makerere conference, two others were held successively, in March and April 1963, at the Faculte des letters of the University of Dakar and at Fourah Bay College in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The theme of these conferences was “African Literature and the University Curriculum” and it led, quite naturally, perhaps out of the Makerere failure, to another attempt to define African literature.

It was a Canadian critic, T. R. M. Creighton, who proposed what eventually became the definition, accepted by the Freetown conference: that African literature is composed of “any work in which an African setting is authentically handled, or to which experiences which originate in Africa are integral” (1965: 84). This definition has the merit, argued Creighton, of including Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Wole Soyinka’s “Telephone Conversation,” set in London, while excluding Graham Greene’s novel *The Heart of the Matter* because it might as well have taken place in Singapore or in Tooting as in Freetown.

A not unconnected question- is this literature African, or is it an addendum to European literatures? - was raised by Ezekiel Mphahlele in a discussion paper at the conference. He said:

When someone talks to me about African writers, I react emotionally, and so think of the epithet “African” as referring only to black people in Africa. The epithet makes me impulsively think in general cultural terms, and so excludes Arabs and whites. If I said white Africans should be included in a conference specifically labeled “African writers,” I should be reacting intellectually. But when we speak of African *writing* or literature, then I suggest that we need not be bullied by terminology of our own making. For what we call African writing, outside the unequivocally African literature that takes in all indigenous languages capable of being written, is really *primarily* English or French or Portuguese or Italian or Spanish literature and only secondarily African. The element of Africa in the concept is both geographical and cultural. (“The Language of African Literature,” discussion paper 1)

In 1966 Mphahlele offered an addendum to his earlier definition, and accepted “black” or “Negro” as a defining element in much the same way Ekwensi seemed to: “A study of African literature (having made the point that it is still rightly *African* because it is written out of an *African* experience) is not complete if it does not include writing by whites who are native to Africa and write out of a situation of involvement in the life of the continent”. But he added that “we have to begin somewhere; again, the mood, idiom and imagery of negro African writing is not shared by the literature that comes from any of these whites” (1966: 25).



In contradistinction to whatever *African* means, the terms *Western* and *European* are often used interchangeably. *European* is used more often, perhaps, in referring to languages and to the colonial powers in Africa; *Western* is used to denote a broader frame of reference to include, specifically, the term *American*. If the two terms are not used consistently, it may help to think of their more significant connotation as being *non-African*.

## 1.5 African Literature

### A Brief Survey

What is African literature and what makes an African writer? The search for a definition has brought much debate: is it the literature written *in* Africa, or *about* Africa? Is it solely the literature produced by people living in or originating from Africa; or can the writings of a non-African who utilizes an African setting be accepted as African literature? Does Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* qualify? What about Joyce Cary, Graham Greene, Robert Ruark, Ernest Hemingway? Does African literature embrace only the indigenous languages, or should it include English, French, Portuguese, Afrikaans? Then there is the question of boundaries: North African writing belongs to such a radically different tradition from that of the literature south of the Sahara. Yet the recent Pan-African Cultural Festival was held in Algeria and perhaps points towards more unity of thought among writers of the entire continent. Lastly, what is the position of native white South African Writers?

At a seminar on 'African Literature and the Universities' held at Fourah Bay College in Freetown, Sierra Leone, in 1963, a motion was put forward which defined African literature a 'any work in which an African setting is authentically handled, or to which experiences which originate in Africa are integral'.

Hans M. Zell in his *A Reader's Guide to African Literature* quoted Chinua Achebe. Chinua Achebe, however, feels that one cannot cram African literature into a small, neat definition, and goes on to say, '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.' He believes that 'any attempt to define African literature in terms that overlook the complexities of the African scene at present is doomed to

failure' (1972: vii). The German scholar Janheinz Jahn, too, has his own concept of 'neo-African literature'. In the introduction to his monumental bibliography he argues that it is the style that characterizes Neo-African literature and not the author's language, or birthplace, or colour of skin (1972: vii).

**African literature**, literary works of the African continent, refers to literature of and from Africa. It consists of a body of work in different languages and various genres, ranging from oral literature to literature written in colonial languages (French, Portuguese, and English). **African literature** As George Joseph notes on the first page of his chapter on African literature in *Understanding Contemporary Africa*, while the European perception of literature generally refers to written letters, the African concept includes oral literature (1992: 303).

As George Joseph continues, while European views of literature often stressed a separation of art and content, African awareness is inclusive:

"Literature" can also imply an artistic use of words for the sake of art alone. Without denying the important role of aesthetics in Africa, we should keep in mind that, traditionally, Africans do not radically separate art from teaching. Rather than write or sing for beauty in itself, African writers, taking their cue from oral literature, use beauty to help communicate important truths and information to society. Indeed, an object is considered beautiful because of the truths it reveals and the communities it helps to build (1992: 304).

African literature is best understood within the context of Ali Mazrui's categorization of African historical experience as a "triple heritage": Africa as a space produced by endogenous historical traditions, Arab/Islamic influences, and Western Judeo-Christian influences. This triple heritage has produced a literature characterized by a tripodal identity, based on its relationship to each element. Africa's indigenous heritage is of its rich oral traditions. The Arab/Islamic heritage is associated with the written literatures of North Africa and parts of East and West Africa. The Arabic and Western aspects of Africa's triple heritage reflect the continent's experience with the historical trauma of conquest, evidenced by such events as the Arab invasion of North Africa and West Africa, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and colonialism. The

Western/Judeo-Christian heritage has shaped the literature written in English, French, and Portuguese.

In the introduction to *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* the authors of the book Chinweizu , Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwa Madubuike said that

African literature *is* an autonomous entity separate and apart from all other literatures. It has its own traditions, models and norms. Its constituency is separate and radically different from that of the European or other literatures. And its historical and cultural imperatives impose upon it concerns and constraints quite different, sometimes altogether antithetical to the European. These facts hold true even for those portions of African literature which continue to be written in European languages (1980: 04).

While defining African literature the authors added further that now, in order to bring a more judicious attitude to the business of defining African literature, it is necessary to examine the classificatory criteria and how to apply them. We must take cognizance of the following situation in world literature: There are *regional literatures*, for instance the European regional literature, which includes many *national literatures* in different languages, or the American regional literature which includes the literatures of the United States (in English), Canada (in English and French), the Caribbean and South America (in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese). There are also *language literatures*, some of which include many national literatures. English language literature, for instance, includes (a) British national literature; (b) the national literatures of those countries where an exported English population is in control, e.g., Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand; (c) the national literatures of those countries where English, though neither indigenous nor the mother-tongue of the politically dominant population or group, has become, as a legacy of colonialism, the official language or one of the official languages, e.g., Nigeria, Kenya, south Africa, India, Jamaica, Trinidad and Malaysia. A similar classification can be made for literatures in the languages of other imperialist nations (1980: 11). They further added that the hegemonic attempt to annex African literature for European literatures has usually been made for such

African works as are written in non-African languages. The main instrument of such annexations has been the fact that the language used in writing them is non-African. Those concerned with shaking off these encroachments and annexations would need to (1) examine how much such language-based claims are worth; (2) come to an understanding of what works indubitably constitute African literature; and (3) find a procedure for deciding the doubtful cases (1980: 11).

Usually our conception of literature is perhaps a little broader than is conventionally allowed. In our view, literature must include all the genres of publicly communicated written matter of society. Thus, in addition to prose fiction, poetry and drama, we consider essays, biographies, addresses and orations a vital part of literature. Now, it should be borne in mind that poems, plays, stories, essays, speeches, etc. do exist in two modes- the written and the oral. So it is useful to follow Pio Zirimu and Ngugi Wa Thiong'O's seminal example in using the term *Orature* to denote poems, plays stories, etc. in oral form, and in reserving the term *literature* for the same things in their written forms.

### **1.5.1 Orature**

The term 'Orature' coined by Pio Zirimu, a Ugandan linguist and literary critic, traces the oral antecedents of African literature. There has been a serious debate about the origins and the thematic concerns of African literature which is mostly concerned with the traumatic experiences of the native consequent on the Colonization of the continent and later with neo-colonial scenario.

Africa's traditional literature is oral. But since Africans began coming into contact with Arabic and Western cultures, they have produced written literacy works; at first only a few did so, but afterwards a great many. Former slaves who somehow ended up in Europe or America were writing in European languages as early as the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. With the establishment of mission schools in Africa, written literary works have been produced there too, in both European and African languages, since the beginning of this century.

African critics have been able to demonstrate the native origins of the African fiction tracing it to its "Oral Narrative Forms" while debunking the theory of its being

derived from the “European Model.” Chinweizu’s *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*, is a trend-setter in this direction whereas Chidi Amuta’s *The Theory of African Literature*, a monumental study in African criticism, locates the African novel in post-modernist dialectics (K. Indrasen Reddy: Preface: 1994).

Oral tradition comprises the specialized verbal art forms—proverbs, riddles, chants, lyric poetry, tales, dramas myths, legends, epics and other expressions,—through which African societies have ensured cultural continuity. It is the repository of a community's core values, philosophies, mysteries, rituals, and, most importantly, memory. It survives by virtue of transmission from one generation to another by word of mouth. Performance is its most important distinguishing feature. It exists only in its moment of actuation, when performer and audience come together in a quasi-spiritual engagement. The performer draws his or her materials from the collective ancestral lore familiar to the audience; distinctiveness comes with innovation and inventiveness, delivery, and command of language. Oral histories, myths, and proverbs additionally serve to remind whole communities of their ancestors' heroic deeds, their past, and the precedents for their customs and traditions. Essential to oral literature is a concern for presentation and oratory. Folktale tellers use call-response techniques. A griot (praise singer) will accompany a narrative with music.

(\* A griot is both a guardian of tradition, a man who is often well-born and always respected, and a story-teller who entertains. Niane notes this double character, which today can lead to confusion between ‘a caste of professional musicians living off others’ and the venerable bards who guardians of the tribal history of ancient Africa and now are becoming extinct. Today, he notes, the griot is reduced to living from his musical art; formerly he was attached to some princely family. )

Ruth Finnegan sparked the most significant controversy on the status of oral tradition when she concluded, in her influential *Oral Literature in Africa* (1970), that Africa had no epic. Isidore Okepwho's *The Epic in Africa* (1979) and *Myth in Africa* (1983) became crucial to the institutional and conceptual legitimization of those genres against the backdrop of the Finnegan controversy. Allied to the development of a robust critical apparatus on African oral tradition was the process of recording the various oral genres—folktales, proverbs, riddles, myths, praise poetry, epics, and sagas—for posterity. Birago Diop's (1906–1989) *Les contes d'Amadou Koumba* (1947; *Tales of Amadou Koumba*) and *Les nouveaux contes d'Amadou Koumba*

(1958; New tales of Amadou Koumba) and Bernard Dadié's (b. 1916) *Le pagne noir* (1955; the black cloth) have become classics of the folktale genre. The Sundiata, Mwindo, Ibonia epics and the Ozzidi saga are also extant in significant textual versions.

### 1.5.2 Literature

Africa's written literature could easily span close to five thousand years, depending on the persuasion of various commentators. Thinkers in the Afrocentric tradition trace the antecedents of African written literature to such touchstones as the scribal tradition of ancient Egypt, the Arabic poetic tradition, which began roughly with the Arab conquest of Egypt in the seventh century C.E., the spread of that tradition to the Maghreb and West Africa from the ninth century C.E., which culminated in the development of Hausa Islamic/Arabic verse from the seventeenth century on.

The term 'African Literature' covers a vast and complex body of creative literary works. It is essential therefore to clarify the specific parameters of the study undertaken in this study. For this purpose, literatures produced in the African continent may be divided into three distinct and widely accepted categories:

- (a) Traditional African oral literatures which include indigenous modes of narration that are being increasingly marginalized as a consequence of the invasion of literacy
- (b) New literatures written in African languages which primarily include recently developed indigenous vernacular writing
- (c) Modern African literatures written by indigenous African writers in languages not indigenous to Africa, especially English, French and Portuguese. Ngugi Wa Thiong'O in *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986) prefers to call them "Afro-European" literatures

(Post-colonial African Fiction: Mala Pandurang, 1997:01).

Some of the first African writings to gain attention in the West were the poignant slave narratives, such as *The Interesting Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789), which

described vividly the horrors of slavery and the slave trade. As Africans became literate in their own languages, they often reacted against colonial repression in their writings. Others looked to their own past for subjects. Thomas Mofolo, for example, wrote *Chaka* (tr. 1931), about the famous Zulu military leader, in Susuto.

Since the early 19th century writers from western Africa have used newspapers to air their views. Several founded newspapers that served as vehicles for expressing nascent nationalist feelings. French-speaking Africans in France, led by Senghor, Léopold Sédar, were active in the négritude movement from the 1930s, along with Damas, Léon), 1912–78, French poet, b. French Guiana and Aimé Césaire, Aimé, 1913–, West Indian poet and essayist who writes in French. Their poetry not only denounced colonialism, it proudly asserted the validity of the cultures that the colonials had tried to crush. After World War II, as Africans began demanding their independence, more African writers were published. Such writers as, in western Africa, Soyinka, Wole, Achebe, Chinua, 1930–, Nigerian writer, b. Albert Chinualumogu Achebe, Sembene, Ousmane , Kofi Awoonor, Neto, Agostinho, Camera Laye, Mongo Beti, Ben Okri, and Oyono, Ferdinand Léopold and, in eastern Africa, Ngugi Wa Thiong’O , p'Bitek, Okot, 1931–82, Ugandan writer and anthropologist. Educated at the Univ. of Bristol, University College of Wales, and Oxford, p'Bitek is best known for three verse novels, *Song of Lawino* (1966), *Song of Ocol* (1970), and *Two Songs*, and Jacques Rabémananjara produced poetry, short stories, novels, essays, and plays. All were writing in European languages, and often they shared the same themes: the clash between indigenous and colonial cultures, condemnation of European subjugation, pride in the African past, and hope for the continent's independent future. In South Africa, the horrors of apartheid have, until the present, dominated the literature. Mphahlele, Es'kia, 1919–, South African writer. Gordimer, Nadine, 1923–, South African writer, b. Springs. Head, Bessie, 1937–86, South African writer. Born in South Africa to a white mother and black father, she was placed in foster homes and orphanages as a child. After 1964, she lived in exile in Botswana. Brutus, Dennis Vincent, 1924–, South African poet, b. Salisbury, Rhodesia (now Harare, Zimbabwe). Brutus grew up in South Africa and received (1947) his B.A. from its Univ. of Fort Hare at Alice. Tlali, Miriam, 1933–, South African

novelist, (b. Johannesburg) all reflect in varying degrees in their writings the experience of living in a racially segregated society.

Much of contemporary African literature reveals disillusionment and dissent with current events. For example, V. Y. Mudimbe in *Before the Birth of the Moon* (1989) explores a doomed love affair played out within a society riddled by deceit and corruption. In Kenya Ngugi wa Thiong'o was jailed shortly after he produced a play, in Kikuyu, which was perceived as highly critical of the country's government. Apparently, what seemed most offensive about the drama was the use of songs to emphasize its messages.

The weaving of music into the Kenyan's plays points out another characteristic of African literature. Many writers incorporate other arts into their work and often weave oral conventions into their writing. p'Bitek structured *Song of Iowino* (1966) as an Acholi poem; Achebe's characters pepper their speech with proverbs in *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Others, such as Senegalese novelist Ousmane Sembene, have moved into films to take their message to people who cannot read.

The twentieth century witnessed the blossoming of a generation of North African writers whose craft combined centuries of Arab narratological conventions and Western influences. These writers both write in Arabic and have influential translations of their works in English and French, or they write directly in the two European languages. Of those whose works attained international recognition in English are the Egyptians Naguib Mahfouz and Nawal El Saadawi. Mahfouz's deft handling of historical realism, his inimitable depiction of quotidian life in Cairo turned his fiction into an important opus of Arab imagination and earned him the Nobel Prize for literature in 1988, while Saadawi's transgressive novels have become some of the most important feminist works in the twentieth century.

The modern novel in French came much later in the Maghreb. The Algerian, Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma* (1956), is usually considered the first significant work of the fiction from the Francophone Maghreb, even though the Moroccan, Driss Chraïbi had published a novel, *Le passé simple* (The simple past), two years earlier. North Africa fiction in French soon blossomed with internationally acclaimed writers such as Tahar Ben Jelloun, Abdelhak Serhane, Abdelkébir Khatibi, and Assia Djebar. Djebar's



expansive fictional opus, which explores wide-ranging themes such as the trauma of French colonization of Algeria, the brutal war of liberation, and the condition of women in the context of religion and tradition, has become the quintessence of North African literature in French.

With regard to sub-Saharan Africa, discussions of written literatures tend to take the late nineteenth century as a rough starting point. Indigenous language literatures evolved as a consequence of missionary activity during this period. Missionaries established churches and schools and introduced forms of orthography into local languages to facilitate translations of religious literature. As a result, indigenous language literatures blossomed in western, central, eastern, and southern Africa in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. The Yoruba fiction of Nigeria's D. O. Fagunwa (1903–1963) and the Sotho fiction of Lesotho's Thomas Mofolo (1876–1948) are notable examples.

European language literature, usually referred to as modern African literature, is the dominant African literature. Although the violence of colonialism and the attendant sociopolitical ruptures it occasioned in Africa constitute the background of modern African literature, texts have evolved over several decades and across numerous genres in a manner that allows for the identification of divergent thematic and ideological clusters, all of which underscore modern African literature's investment in the representation of the African experience.

Négritude poetry was the medium through which modern African literature came to international attention in the twentieth century. The Négritude movement grew out of the encounter of young African intellectuals and their black Caribbean counterparts in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s. The Senegalese Leopold Sedar Senghor (1906–2001), the Martinican Aimé Césaire (b. 1913), and the Guyanese Léon-Gontran Damas (1912–1978) were the avant garde of the movement. Négritude philosophy involved a coming into consciousness of the condition of one's blackness in the racist European context of the time and the validation of Africa as the matrix of a proud black race after centuries of European misrepresentation. Damas's *Pigments* (1937) was the first volume of poetry to properly signal the birth of the Négritude movement, but Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939; Notebook of a

return to the native land) became its bible. Senghor's *Chants d'ombre* (1945; Shadow songs) and *Hosties noires* (1948; Black hosts) transformed the movement into a full-blown aesthetic phenomenon. However, the full dimensions of Negritude angst were not recorded until the publication of David Diop's (1927–1960) *Coups de pilon* (1956; Pounding).

Poetry comparable in stature with Negritude poetry did not come out of Anglophone and Lusophone (Portuguese-speaking) Africa until the period of the 1960s–1980s. Wole Soyinka (b. 1934), Christopher Okigbo (1932–1967), Gabriel Okara (b. 1921), John Pepper Clark (b. 1935), Kofi Awoonor (b. 1935), Lenrie Peters (b. 1932), Taban Lo Liyong (b. 1938), Okot P'Bitek (1931–1982), Kwesi Brew (b. 1928), Dennis Brutus (b. 1924), Agostino Neto (d.1979), and Antonio Jacinto (1925–1991) were the leading lights of Anglophone and Lusophone African poetry. Okigbo's collection, *Limits* (1964), is representative of this phase of African poetry.

The African novel also developed within the ambit of historical reevaluation, cultural nationalism, political contestation, and anticolonial protest. Although modern African fiction started with the publication of the Ghanaian Joseph Casely-Hayford's (1866–1930) *Ethiopia Unbound* (1911), it was not until Amos Tutuola's (1920–1997) *The Palm Wine Drunkard* appeared in 1952 that Anglophone West African fiction attained international recognition. Francophone Africa's first novel, René Maran's (d. 1960) *Batouala*, was published to considerable acclaim in 1921 and went on to win the prestigious prix Goncourt. *Batouala* owed its fame to Maran's vivid portrayal of the effects of French colonial rule in Africa as well as his evocative and humanizing descriptions of African life and its environment.

The novel came of age in Francophone Africa from the 1950s onward when writers such as Camara Laye (1928–1980), Seydou Badian (b. 1928), Mongo Beti (1932–2001), Ferdinand Oyono (b. 1929), Sembene Ousmane (b. 1923), Cheikh Hamidou Kane (b. 1928), Ahmadou Kourouma (1927–2003), Williams Sassine (b. 1944), Sony Labou Tansi (1947–1995), Henri Lopès (b. 1937), Alioum Fantouré (b. 1938), and Tierno Monenembo (b. 1947) arrived on the scene. The thematic spectrum of these writers is broad and their range reveals the shifts that occurred in the sociopolitical dynamics of their informing contexts, particularly the tragedy of one-

party states and military dictatorships that became the rule in postcolonial Francophone Africa. For instance, Laye's *L'enfant noir* (1953; *The African child*) is a powerful bildungsroman that explores the growing up of an African child who loses the values of his traditional society in a world permeated by European values. In *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba* (*The poor Christ of Bomba*) and *Une vie de boy* (*Houseboy*), both published in 1956, Beti and Oyono, respectively, deploy critical satire to expose the hypocrisies of the colonial situation. Ousmane brings class analysis to the crisis of colonialism in *Les bouts de bois de dieu* (1960; *God's bits of wood*).

However, it was Chinua Achebe's (b. 1930) *Things Fall Apart* (1958) that placed African fiction in the ranks of twentieth-century greats. In *Things Fall Apart*, the epic dimension of Africa's contact with the West, a preoccupation of much of modern African literature, reaches its philosophical and aesthetic peak. Much of Anglophone West African fiction explores versions of Achebe's themes either as collective sociopolitical fissures in a changing world or as individual dramas of alienation. Cyprian Ekwensi (b. 1921), T. M. Aluko (b. 1918), Elechi Amadi (b. 1934), Onuora Nzekwu (b. 1928), John Munonye (b. 1929), Wole Soyinka, Kofi Awoonor, Ayi Kwei Armah (b. 1939), Ngugi Wa Thiong'O (b. 1938), Kole Omotoso (b. 1943), and Festus Iyayi (b. 1947) all became major Anglophone West African novelists in the period from the 1960s through the 1980s. While Armah adds a humanist/universal dimension to the drama of man's alienation from his environment in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), Ngugi offers a Marxist exploration of the African experience of colonialism and neo-colonialism in *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) and *Petals of Blood* (1977).

Apartheid and race relations are the background of Southern African fiction. Peter Abrahams (b. 1919), Richard Rive (1931–1989), Es'kia Mphahlele (b. 1919), Lewis Nkosi (b. 1936), Alex La Guma (1925–1985), and the Afrikaner novelists, J. M. Coetzee (b. 1940) and André Brink (b. 1935), all produced novels emblematic of the South African situation. Abraham's *Mine Boy* (1946), Rive's *Emergency* (1964), Alex la Guma's *A Walk in the Night* (1962), and J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) document the scale of the human tragedy created by apartheid in South Africa.

African drama is perhaps the genre that has explored the resources of oral tradition most effectively as a result of the ontological linkages between the two: African religious ceremonies—rituals, sacrifices, festivals, funerals, christenings—are forms of drama and the roots of that modern African genre. Wole Soyinka, Wale Ogunyemi (1939–2001), Ola Rotimi (1938–2000), Femi Osofisan (b. 1946), Bode Sowande (b. 1948), and Olu Obafemi (b. 1950) have all written plays exploring the full range of human experience within the cosmic order and within the material contexts of colonialism, neocolonialism, and the self-imposed tragedies of the African post-colonial order. Soyinka's plays, the most notable of which are *A Dance of the Forest* (1963) and *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), explore the entire range of these thematic preoccupations. In South Africa, drama proved to be one of the most versatile cultural instruments in the antiapartheid struggle because of its immediate accessibility to a large audience. The South African dramaturgy of Athol Fugard (b. 1932) comes closest to Soyinka's in terms of artistic accomplishment and thematic range.

African literature is very much seized with the traumatic experiences the scars of which are left behind by colonialism. Like all other art-forms in Africa, African fiction has a functional value. Unlike his European counterpart who suffers from an alienated image, the African novelist is in a position to debunk many schools of criticism, the school of criticism, the school of “art for art’s sake” in particular. The functional role of African fiction is committed to drawing and involving its people in a nation building activity (K. Indrasena Reddy: 1994: 10).

In his introduction to *The African experience in Literature and Ideology* (1981) Abiola Irele says that

“the value of modern African writing is essentially in the comprehensive testimony it offers to the turns and patterns of an unfolding drama of existence in which *we have been and continue to be involved*. That drama has its source in our relation to the Western world which has crossed our historical path and modified the realities of our entire perspective upon the world. The imaginative writing in particular stands both as a direct representative of the concrete facts of our collective experience and as a reconstruction *in the form of images of the*

*states of consciousness induced by that experience; the very process of symbolic projection revealing itself as a means of drawing this experience more fully and ultimately within the collective self so as to enable us to comprehend its meaning for ourselves in the immediate future.”*

Irele thus perceives modern African writing in terms of literary production that emerged out of the contact between Africa and the West, a contact which was both ‘historical’ and ‘experimental’ in dimension. It is important to recognize that Irele’s application of the term African as a cultural referent goes beyond a simple geopolitical association. The phrase “decolonizing the mind” was initially used in a paper by Elred Jones at the 1967 African- Scandinavian writers conference at Stockholm. It is also used by Mphahlele in *The African Image* (1962), but gained wider currency as an ideological operative concept through Chinweizu’s adaptation of the phrase in the *Decolonization of African Literature* (1980), and Ngugi’s use of the phrase as the title of a collection of critical essays published in 1986 entitled *Decolonizing the Mind*.

A written literature also develops alongside people’s oral literature. This was integral to their cultural assertion. In the case of the African, the very act of putting words on paper was itself a testimony to his creative capacity. It was also the first tottering step by the ‘educated’ towards self-definition and acceptance of the environment from which they had been alienated by years of Eurocentric education. The written tradition was in both African and European languages.

**Chapter 2**  
**Nativism:**  
**African Critical Discourse**

## Chapter 2

### Nativism: African Critical Discourse

#### 2.0 Introduction

As the question what is African literature? is important, the question, How- by what standards- was it to be judged? is also very significant. It was common before 1960s that the literary products were submitted to the critical standards of the West, without considering the relevance of the native standards. The issue was not much in discussion until the organization of the famous “Conference of African Writers of English Literature” at Uganda’s Makerere University. The writers met to assess the achievements of *anglographic* African literature and plot newer courses away from the then-dominant anti-colonial subjects that were believed to have been overtaken by events. In this chapter the present researcher has tried to answer the problem of criticism and an attempt has been made to search the concept of nativism in African literary and critical tradition.

#### 2.1 The Concept of Criticism by Africans

When modern African literature began to mushroom in the years between World War II and the First World Festival of Negro Arts in 1966, it led critics the world over-African and non-African alike- to raise questions seldom asked, for the growth of African literature brought an entirely new and unique entity into the already existing world family of literatures. How and where did this new phenomenon fit into the literary scheme of things?

The view is gaining ground in African literary circles that African literature should not be judged by the criteria which have so far been used in the evaluation of Western literature. The reasons for the objection to the use of Western criteria are not always literary or cultural; to a very large extent they are complicated by nationalistic and ideological considerations. Having shaken off the imperialistic yoke there is a tendency in some quarters to reject everything associated with the imperialists. In the colonial days African culture was adversely affected by the imperialist experience since everything was judged by Western cultural standards and there was a tendency,

in fact, to suppress those aspects of African culture which could not be reconciled with Western culture. It therefore seems unthinkable to a number of African intellectuals that even after liberation African culture should continue to be dominated by Western standards. This would seem, to them, to be a form of cultural neo-imperialism. For most African countries the experience of actually having writers on print is new and exciting and therefore a source of national pride. They can at last take their places alongside other nations who boast a written literature. Their writers therefore become national heroes almost overnight. That the works of some of these writers should be denigrated by foreign critics using foreign criteria must be a source of great annoyance. Inevitably, therefore, there is the call for indigenous criteria, and behind it is the barely concealed assumption that these indigenous criteria will be slightly more relaxed and flexible.

Robert P Armstrong was one of the first Western critics to address the question “How- by what standards- was *African literature* to be judged?” In a paper entitled “African Literature and European Critics” presented at the seventh annual meeting of the African Studies Association in Chicago in 1964, Armstrong noted that one’s critical approach to this literature as an entity in itself or as an extension of European literature. He quoted Jean-Paul Sartre’s essay, “Black Orpheus,” in defense of his belief in an African literature and also disagreed with the position that African literature was European by virtue of its being written in European languages. He said:

It makes considerable sense to assert, as Sartre suggests, that a literature exists when the unique perceptions and experiences of a people begin to take literary shape, to demand their own metaphor, regardless of what language they may or may not share in common. Metaphor, symbol, situation- these, not words, are the items in the lexicon of literature (1964: 03).

Armstrong further said that the definition of a literature would depend upon ‘domicile, perception and experience- but subject matter not at all’. He concluded his paper by saying,

What is required is a frank admission on the part of the critics that we are here working with a new literature that will shape its own forms, dictate its own diction, express its own values. What is needed, both from here [the west] and



from Africa is a determined exploration, by the most highly trained people, of the nature of this new literature (1964: 11).

This call by R. P. Armstrong later helped the growth of criticism by Africans.

At the conference on African Literature and the University Curriculum held in Dakar in March 1963, Dorothy Blair of South Africa was also concerned with the proper approach to African literature. She took the position that

Obviously I can apply only the canons of aesthetics to which I am accustomed by reason of my philological studies, or indeed of my European cultural roots. May that not be held against me! Personally, I can't see any harm in this provided that one accepts... a certain universality of aesthetics, based on truth, or rather on certain truths that are applicable to any culture, those truths that certain writers have defined here in the recent few days (1965: 77).

One of these "truths", according to Blair, was "the love of suffering humanity." It was this love that she said she appreciated in the work of Aime Cesaire, "this love that lends the depth of emotion to his work. For the understanding of suffering is universal (1965: 77)".

In the introduction to his *New Approaches to African Literature*, J. A. Ramsaran, a Caribbean critic, was aware of his shortcomings as a critic of African literature but took the position that his dual grounding in European and oriental literature rendered him somehow neutral in his judgment of African literature. Speaking of himself in the third person, he said:

He is therefore aware that although he can satisfy neither the African nor the European critic, in this very fact lies his hope that he will be saved from the pitfall of trying to impose rigid criteria from any one particular culture upon African literature, which is compounded of many simples and must evolve its own standards of judgment in fields where they are undefined, uncertain or non-existent (1965: 3-4).

Edgar Wright, a Canadian critic, agreed with Ramsaran that Africa must evolve its own standards of judgment but then retreated from his position, saying,

“Yet it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that a literature in English must also take its place in the total body of such literature,” and further added that “the only point at issue is whether the wave of African writing is in some way a literature of an essentially different order, not to be subject to the same standards as, say, American or Jamaican or Indian- English literature, as part of a world literature” (1966: 108).

However Wright failed to establish the cohesiveness of a “world literature in English,” while implying at the same time that African literature in English would be somehow closer to the tradition of English literature than it would be to African literature in French- a hypothesis African writers and critics would probably be quick to reject, their disagreements over Negritude and other issues notwithstanding. Yet in all fairness Wright planted in the same article one of the seeds of Criticism by Africans:

It is likely that some standards of comparison [evaluation] will emerge from within [Africa] as sufficient books appear to make comparison inevitable. This development will be hastened as the amount of objective non-racial and non-political criticism by Africans (at the moment very small) increases (1966:107).

Wright suggested that some criticism by Africans would be more valid than others. He further said, “The two levels [of critical standards] ‘local’ and ‘universal’, need not necessarily conflict with each other. What is necessary is that the local standard, while encouraging its own ideas, is at the same time responsive to the basic principles and standards” (1966: 108). It is clear exactly what these “basic principles and standards” were, but one assumes they were those of the traditions of English and Western literature. It is interesting here to note the African response to this Western insistence of Wright that the African aesthetic adjust itself to the “universal”.

As might be expected, the Africans argued that it was the “universal” that must adjust itself to Africa. The retort of Malagasy poet Jacques Rabemananjara was that

in so far as the African is authentically African, he automatically attains the universal. When you [the West] speak of universal one gets the impression of

opposition between universal and African because for centuries the notion “universal” was monopolized by the West. But we say to you, a universal form from which we were absent was truncated and we do not accept it (The Negro Theatre: 351).

Rabemananjara’s opinion clearly indicates here that the Africans no more want the critical standards of the West. The absence of them from the critical scene is given much consideration by themselves. They are not ready to accept such critical standards. On the other hand they feel the need to create the critical standards which will suit their tradition and culture and best evaluate their native literature.

As for Leopold Senghor, poet and past president of Senegal, the concept of a “civilization of the Universal” was a cherished ideal, though it was not perhaps the same concept that Western critics had in mind when they spoke of a “basic” or “universal” value, Senghor said:

For if European civilization were to be imposed, unmodified, on all Peoples and Continents, it could only be by force. That is its first disadvantage. A more serious one is that it would not be *humanistic*, for it would cut itself off from the contemporary values of the greater part of humanity. As I have said elsewhere, it would be a universal civilization; it would not be the Civilization of the Universal.

(“What is Negritude?” 1961 b: 1211).

John F. Povey was one of the few Western Critics who stated openly his belief that African literature is subject to the canons of western literary criticism. He gave at least two reasons for his argument. First, the African writer writes primarily for an international, not an African audience; Povey said, “The question of intended audience seems to me fundamental as a basis for our decision as to the proper quality of our critical judgment” (1966: 81). Second, African poets such as J. P. Clark are influenced as much by European as by African tradition: we are forced to consider the demonstrable fact that Clark is drawing upon the whole tradition of twentieth century poetry in English” (1966: 86). Povey added, “It soon becomes clear, I think, as one reads the poems of Clark that the African information is not, at the obvious level, a

very significant part of the problem in making a sensitive and just evaluation” (1966: 87).

In this regard the authors of *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* Chinweizu et al say, “It seems to us quite clear that works done so for African audiences, by Africans, and in African languages, whether these works are oral or written, constitute the historically indisputable core of African literature. Works done by Africans in non-African languages, would be among those for which some legitimate doubt might be raised about their inclusion or exclusion from the canon of works of African literature, and it is for them that some decision procedure would have to be established” (1980: 11-12).

Austin J. Shelton, an American anthropologist, took issue with another opinion. He opposed Anthony Astrachan’s view that a novel given a society and individuals with manners, good or bad and that is enough. A reader or critic is able to provide more profound insights in to particular work because s/he her/himself knows more about the world out of which they were written. He also feels that one can make a valid criticism of the work without knowing too much about the place in which it is produced. What s/he has to do is just to read the book. Shelton responded that the casual reader might pick up a work of African literature and read it for its effect upon him/her as s/he reacts to it according to his/her own system of values. Any “valid criticism” which s/he might make certainly cannot be put to an objective test, but rather will depend upon what s/he construes as the “world within the novel”- that is, his/her “valid criticism” will depend upon his/her subjective and uninformed response to the work as s/he experiences it without reference to any other information. Shelton further says,

When he (The casual reader) reads the European work, he depends for his understanding not solely upon the so-called “world within the novel”, but understands that “world” in terms of all the knowledge and values of the actual world in which it occurs. Thus, such an attitude (of Astrachan) about the reading of African literature can give only short shrift to that literature (1968: 07).

Shelton has provided three “Values and Other General Critical Norms” by which the western critic might approach African literature.

1. “much African art and literature tends to be didactic”;
2. “some African literature tends to reflect the analogical flow of activity rather than the movement according to a western-type logic or cause-effect system”; and
3. “African literature, indeed, reflects African values” (1968: 11-13).

It seems that the first two norms could easily be subsumed under the third and that Shelton’s main point was to ask for more knowledge of Africa in order to relate African literature properly to its context. The title of his article, after all, was “Critical Criteria for the Study of African Literature,” which still leaves us with the search for the criteria by which to evaluate African literature.

The debate on ‘By what standards is African literature to be judged?’ for a long time, was academic and acrimonious. Rand Bishop in the preface of his book *African Literature, African Critics* says, ‘Then one day, in one of those lucid moments that come all too seldom, it occurred to me that there was no need to approach the question academically, for Africans had in fact been evaluating their literature for years. And if they had been doing so, it would perhaps be more productive- and surely less contentious- to analyze the nature of the criticism already written rather than theorize about what the criticism should be. In other words, Africans had for several years been answering the question of how their literature should be evaluated- by virtue of evaluating it. And therefore the means of answering the question was not theoretical; it was empirical.’ (1988: xi).

Joseph Okpaku was one of the first critics to consider, if not the identification of the critical standards by which Africans judged African literature, at least the methods by which one could go about it. He asked:

What then are these African critical standards? The logical place to go in search of them is the African aesthetic. In particular, we should examine our traditional artistic forms as well as genuine (not “studied”) contemporary African tastes and attitudes towards the various art forms.... The next place to

search for these standards would be an examination of those common aspects of life most frequently dramatized in the arts. This would include love, life, hate, honor, duty, death, destruction, pride, prejudice, friendship, fear, violence, birth and reality amongst others. Different cultures not only have different conceptions of these but have different attitudes to them. Not only that, they give them different emphases, tastes and preferences constitute the basis on which to build criticism. This is where the search for African critical standards must begin (1967: 04).

Okpaku's terms *studied* and *genuine* give the impression that African critical standards exist inherently in the African critic and that they remain only to be discovered or that they are easily identifiable and recognizable by all "genuine" African critics. And he seemed to suggest that the "genuineness" of any critic, or the lack thereof, was readily apparent. Further it can be assumed that an examination of African taste- will reveal critical standards. The element of African life will reveal much about African culture, but the attitudes toward how these elements are handled literally will reveal much more about the standards of African literary criticism. Okpaku rejects the whole apparatus of western criticism and western standards.

The present practice of judging African literature by Western standards is not only invalid; it is also potentially dangerous to a development of African arts. It presupposes that there is one absolute artistic standard and that, of course, is the Western standard. Consequently, good African literature is taken to be that which most approximates to Western literature (1969: 139).

The native African critics were considering the need of native standards to evaluate their literature. They feel that evaluating the indigenous literature with foreign critical standards creates danger to the development of literature and arts.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in the introduction to *Decolonising the Mind* states the need of native standards. He says, "Even literature is sometimes evaluated in terms of the 'tribal' origins of the authors or the 'tribal' origins and composition of the characters in a given novel or play. This misleading stock interpretation of the African realities has been popularized by the western media which likes to deflect people from seeing that imperialism is still the root cause of many problems in Africa.

Unfortunately some African intellectuals have fallen victims- a few incurably so- to that scheme and they are unable to see the divide-and-rule colonial origins of explaining any differences of intellectual outlook or any political clashes in terms of the ethnic origins of the actor” (1986: 01).

He further adds, “I shall look at the African realities as they are affected by the great struggle between the two mutually opposed forces in Africa today: an imperialist tradition on one hand, and a resistance tradition on the other. The imperialist tradition in Africa is today maintained by the international bourgeoisie using the multinational and of course the flag-waving native ruling classes.... The resistance tradition is being carried out by the working people (the peasantry and the proletariat) aided by patriotic students, intellectuals (academic and non-academic), soldiers and other progressive elements of the petty middle class. The resistance is reflected in their patriotic defence of the peasant/worker roots of national cultures, their defence of the democratic struggle in all the nationalities inhabiting the same territory” (1986: 02).

This patriotism and the love for literature in indigenous languages will be a cure to the cultural bomb used by the imperialistic ideals.

## **2.2 Concept of Nativism in African Literature**

Nativism in African literature starts with the *Decolonization of African literature*. During the post-independence period English acquired the status of official language and medium of instruction in educational institutions. All the indigenous languages were accorded secondary position. Even the production of literature in indigenous languages is banned. This socio-political condition gave birth to Nativism in Africa.

In the preface to his book *Decolonising the Mind* Ngugi Wa Thiong’o compares the writer with a surgeon. He says, “a writer and a surgeon have something in common- a passion for truth. Prescription of the correct cure is dependent on a rigorous analysis of the reality. Writers are surgeons of the heart and souls of a community” (1986: ix). Ngugi’s comparison is appropriate here. By comparing a writer with a surgeon he tries to show the relationship between the writer and the

society. Any work cannot be created in a vacuum and any writer never exists in a void. The relation between the two is very significant.

In 1962 Ngugi was invited to the historic meeting of African writers at Makerere University College, Kampala, Uganda. The list of participants contained most of the names which had then become the subject of scholarly dissertations in universities all over the world. The title? ‘A Conference of *African Writers of English Expression*’. This conference automatically excluded those who wrote in African languages. It was surprising that Ngugi, a student, could qualify for the meeting on the basis of only two published short stories, ‘The Fig Tree’ in a student journal, *Penpoint*, and ‘The Return’ in a new journal, *Transition*. But neither Shabaan Robert, then the greatest living East African poet with several works of poetry and prose to his credit in Kiswahili, nor Chief Fagunwa, the great Nigerian writer with several published titles in Yoruba, could possibly qualify.

The discussions in this conference were mainly based on the novel, the short story, poetry, and drama in English and hence they excluded the main body of work in Swahili, Zulu, Yoruba, Arabic, Amharic and other African languages. Yet, despite this exclusion of writers and literature in African languages, no sooner were the introductory preliminaries over than this Conference of ‘African Writers of English Expression’ sat down to the first item on the agenda: ‘What is African literature?’

Obiajunwa Wali, the critic and politician, was the first to respond to the report that the writers who met at Makerere resolved to keep writing in “national” languages and conceptualizing themes in “ethnic” languages. Wali disagreed with the resolution that urged the writers to reconcile the oxymoron of “African writing in English,” which he indicted as a capitulation to the ills of colonialism. He described the resolution as a cultural accommodation of the political conquests produced the peculiar condition in which a writer’s language of “being” conflicts with that of his or her “existence.” Wali believed that “the whole uncritical acceptance of English and French as the *inevitable* medium for educated African writing, is misdirected, and has no chance of advancing African literature and culture... and until these writers and their western midwives accept the fact that any true African literature must be written



in African languages, they would be merely pursuing a dead end, which can only lead to sterility, uncreativity, and frustration” (1963: 14).

Kwame Anthony Appiah in his paper “Topologies of Nativism” summarizes as *Nativism* the visceral rhetoric often used in the “nationalist” theses of the side that favors founding an African cultural and intellectual identity on the advancement of oral and precolonial traditions. Appiah says,

Both the complaints against defilement by alien traditions in alien tongue and the defenses of them as a practical necessity ... seem often to reduce to a dispute between a sentimental Herderian conception of Africa’s languages and traditions as expressive of the collective essence of a pristine traditional community, on the one hand, and, on the other, a positivistic conception of European languages and disciplines as mere tools; tools that can be cleansed of the accompanying imperialist- and more specifically, racist- modes of thought.

The former view is often at the heart of what we can call “Nativism”: the claim that true African independence requires a literature of one’s own. Echoing the debate in nineteenth-century Russia between “Westerners” and “Slavophiles,” the debate in Africa presents itself as an opposition between “universalism” and “particularism,” the latter defining itself, above all else, by its opposition of the former. But there are only two players in this game: us, inside; them, outside. That is all there is to it. (“Topologies of Nativism,” 56)

This summary, of course, caricatures the sincere altercations involved in the ciphering of an effective scheme for cultural and intellectual discourse in Africa after colonization. It excludes the “moderate” middle represented, for example, writers like Ezekiel Mphahlele, Gabriel Okara, and, to some degree, the very influential African Marxist community. As Appiah’s statement suggests, the “nationalist” or “traditionalist” voices, the promoters of the folk, the oral, and the rural, did not dictate the governing assumptions of how best to privilege the native perspective.

In an essay published about a decade before Appiah’s, Emmanuel Obiechina argued that the adversarial (anticolonial) context in which the humanities developed

in Africa is largely responsible for both the activist orientation of the dominant thinking and the nativist orientation of the language. According to Obiechina,

Cultural Nativism, or that aspect of it called literary nationalism, is so fundamentally universal a phenomenon in unequal social situations such as that engendered by colonialism that its inevitability hardly deserves an argument... Whether this nativism or cultural affirmation finds expression in psycho-political terms such as the African Personality or in the literary ideology of Negritude its cultural implications are obvious. There is a fundamental assumption that the African has had a civilization which is distinct from all other civilizations and which distinguishes him from all other human beings (1968: 26).

Generally, the articulation of Nativism-including the nationalists'- involves predominantly secular registers that include but are not limited to sociolinguistics, historical and cultural materialism, classificatory biology, development economics, and sociology. The nativization polarities are also present in the social sciences, in which the character and the relevance of the informal to the formal, the unorganized to the organized, and the rural to the urban sectors remain important questions. Even the "natural" sciences- ethnobotany and ethnopharmacology are two good examples- sometimes get involved in the kinds of questions Wali's essay provoked. Gender studies have also not been able to avoid the fray. For example, if Amadiume's approach to African feminism in *Male Daughters* (1987) seems to be driven by the nativist impulse. She says that while she was planning the research for her book "she decided it was best to fo home and, with the help of Nnobi people themselves, write *our own* social history, especially from the women's point of view." In Nnobi, her "right to ask questions, act as a spokeswoman and make recommendations for change and improvement' is assured (1987: 9-10).

In literary criticism alone, the methods of charting the native ways of knowing has been conceptualized in so many ways that grouping them under some headings only begins to reflect their intricacies. In his epoch making book *Proverbs, Textuality, and Nativism in African Literature* Adeleke Adeeko has classified Nativism into three groups.

The first group, he calls thematic or classical nativism. This group asks for the foregrounding of *local* and *public* subject matter, the rejection of tendentious universalism in critical standards, and development of an aesthetic that privileges translucent communication. Classical nativism claims inspiration from an Africanized aesthetic theory of “use” and “relevance.”

The second group is of structuralist or speculative Nativism. It proposes idealistic interpretations of the formal dimensions of “traditional” theater, fiction, and poetry upon which contemporary practices ought to be based. Unlike the thematists, the structuralists do not use “tradition” to disavow dense and solipsistic arts.

The third group is of linguistic or artifact nativism. It demands a radical translation of all arts that aspire to be called African indigenous languages and cultural conventions. Decolonized African culture, according to the linguistic nativists, must free itself from European languages and cultivate the native tongues in order for liberating educational and pedagogic theories to flower fully.

(1998: 6-7)

It seems that none of the three groups deviates significantly from a functionalist aesthetics. Even the linguists and the structuralists, who both settle definition parameters around language and form, affirm that an African aesthetic must bear direct relevance to the everyday.

### **2.2.1 Classical Nativism**

Classical nativists teach that “usefulness” is the fundamental African aesthetic principle. They argue that precolonial African poets, storytellers, and ritual actors who constitute the African “classical” tradition did not sing solely for sheer excitement but also for conducting practical affairs like counseling, nighttime entertainment, and official record keeping. Adeeko says that “Liturgies, divination chants, and ritual conventions are all expressed in poetically intense forms. (1998: 07)”. The precolonial traditions show amply, as the Yoruba proverb *civil conduct is the ultimate beauty* implies, that effective stylization anticipates usefulness. As Ngugi puts it, “Song, dance and music were an integral part of a community’s wrestling with its environment, part and parcel of the needs and aspirations of the ordinary man.” No

African society, he continues, allowed “the cult of the artist with its bohemian priests along the banks of Seine and Thames” (1972: 06).

Another African critic Odun Balogun invokes this view of African arts in his nativization of the signs of latent modernism in the experimental styles of Tutuola, Osofisan, and Omotoso. He says, “Our oral literature sees the artist not as an alienated individual but as an integrated, balanced, communal being who creates purposeful art in clear, understandable terms” (1982: 59). Even Georg Gugelberger’s anthology *Marxism and African Literature* uses the central theme of classical nativism as a focus of organization. Gugelberger declares in the introduction to the collection that “in Africa prior to colonization, art functioned and communicated.

The post-Makerere criticism of Chinua Achebe reveal important clues about the historical specificity of the evolution of classical nativism’s governing tenets in African postcolonial criticism. Achebe’s three influential essays, “The Novelist as Teacher” (1962), “Colonialist Criticism” (1975), and “The Truth of Fiction” (1978) together suggest that classical nativism developed in Anglophone African literary criticism as a defense of *realism* against critical judgments derived from the modernist tenet *l’art pour l’art*. The essays suggest that the privileging of function over form in classical nativism developed as a resistance to severe critical judgments that considered the realist aesthetic and political engagements of early Anglophone African fiction to be shockingly unmodern and unsophisticated. Achebe’s writing shows that the functionalist aesthetics promoted in classical nativism is designed to oppose European modernist evaluation that speaks as if its criteria apply universally.

In “The Novelist as Teacher” Achebe did not justify his cultural self-restitution theme with any *indigenist* philosophy. Instead, he offered his fiction—which poetized local fauna and flora, the harmattan and the palm tree— as an example of a little effort toward national rehabilitation. Achebe says that “Nationalist” writing was not an essentially *African* form but an appropriate cultural response to history. Like “African personality,” “African Democracy,” “African Socialism,” and Negritude, “earnest prose fiction is a form of historical restorative: “They are all props we have fashioned *at different times* to help us get on our feet again. Once we are up, we shan’t need any of them any more” (1989: 44) .

In “Africa and Her Writers,” a lecture Achebe gave at Harvard two years before “Colonialist Criticism,” he said that “our ancestors created their myths and legends and told their stories for a human purpose ; they made their sculptures in wood and terra cotta, stone and bronze to serve the needs of their times. Their artists lived and moved and had their being in society, and created their works for the good of that society” (1989: 19).

In December 1978 Achebe gave a convocation lecture at University of Ife. He spoke on “The Truth of Fiction.” Here Achebe rendered in more philosophical language his views on the general problems of cultural recuperation, the appropriation of nonliterate traditions, and the creation of regional identity within global languages. He translated the specific problems of definition in African literary criticism into the less regionalized idioms of knowledge and existence. In that essay, Achebe presented useful arts not as a specifically *African* practice but as an ingredient of cognition. He described fiction in very broad and faintly poststructuralist terms as a method of plumbing the divide between essence and existence. In an almost deconstructive manner, Achebe portrayed the usefulness of a narrative as the methodical imposition of meaningful patterns on chaos. Fiction, Achebe said, is “something we know does not exist but which helps us to make sense of, and move in, the world.” Here Achebe argued that because the conventions of refashioning existing knowledge and of allotting significance to ordinarily random acts underlie human communication and the production of truth, all communicable knowledge, historical and cultural, uses basic fictive processes. Useful art is a basic human characteristic, not a mere “ethnic” response to history nor a tendency that Africa implants in its creative citizens.

In the same lecture Achebe divides fiction into three categories. 1. Beneficent, truthful fiction, 2. Malignant fiction and 3. Self-conscious and self-critical good fiction. Achebe says that Beneficent fiction like tropical medicine is guarded in its pronouncements and methods. It acknowledges the “fictionality” of truth. Malignant fiction like racism pretends to a complete ignorance of its methods and the “baselessness” of its foundation. It pretends not to know that it is merely an “effort to create... a different order of reality.” It tells itself that it has removed the gap between knowledge and being. Instead of whispering “Let us pretend,” malignant fiction yells “This is real.” But the self-conscious and self-critical good “fiction” has an in-built

evaluating system with which it gauges how well it is able to rehabilitate the condition that initialized it.

Achebe's critical writing shows that classical nativism's privileging of local concerns in less elaborately contrived forms, when beneficent, is founded on philosophical and historical reasons. Achebe never offered a compendium of appropriately *African* subject matter, or an accompanying *African* rhetoric, because his intention in all the essays appears to be a restatement of the values of locally useful arts and not the rediscovery of a positive African outlook. His nativism asks for the perpetuation of a *historical* precolonial ethos that discriminated between the arts of "a person with whose words something can be done or one else who, if he tells you to stand, you know you must immediately flee" ("Language and the Destiny of Man" 33).

It is clear from Achebe's writing that a self-aware defense of local concerns in unadorned realism should not harm ironists, artistic innovators, and political dissenters. Nativism, for him, is a critical element in the cultural promotion of communal "good purpose".

Classical nativism finds its most vocal expression in *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*. By naming their critiques of modernist evaluations of African writing "colonialist" interpretation, Chhnweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike apparently want to appropriate the underlying principles of Achebe's usage of that term. The authors of this book regard the unsympathetic evaluation of "un-modernity" in modern African writing as blatant Eurocentrism. They also assert that the oral traditions constitute a common cultural and intellectual pool that is vast and deep enough to sustain contemporary African writing. The book's authors specify what they deem to be a practical rhetoric for the welding of precolonial (oral) and modern (literate).

In "Issues and Tasks in the Decolonization of African Literature" the authors of this book say, "our basic assumption in this essay is that contemporary African culture is under foreign domination. Therefore, on the one hand, our culture has to destroy all encrustations of colonial mentality, and on the other hand, has to map out new foundations for an African modernity. This cultural task demands a deliberate

and calculated process of syncretism: one which, above all, emphasizes valuable continuities with our pre-colonial culture, welcomes vitalizing contributions from other cultures, and exercises inventive genius in making a healthy and distinguished synthesis from them all.

If decolonization is the aim, such synthesis must be within the parameters of the African tradition rather than outside it. It should expand and renew the tradition through new syntheses and breakthroughs rather than leave it in changed and in moribund stasis. In order to achieve such synthesis, experimentation is crucial. The kind of experimentation called for may be described as *traditionalist*, that is to say, experimentation for the purpose of modernizing and revitalizing the tradition” (1980: 239).

The authors also opine that an African literature whose addiction to European techniques of presentation compels it to attenuate or eschew entirely the flavour of African life, cannot sustain its claim to being an African literature regardless of who produces it. They consider that the flavour of African life is a matter of contemporary realities and life tones as well as of the cultural inheritance from the past. For instance, novels about contemporary Africa need to capture the flavour of contemporary African life; similarly, African historical novels need to convey the flavour of African life in the place and period in which their action is set. It is this need which makes imperative a gratin of African literary sensibility and techniques onto their ancient roots. They give an advise to those who approach the task from a training in the Western narrative tradition, whether of the “well-made” or the modernist tendencies, need an apprenticeship in the African oral tradition before they can succeed in making their art a simulacrum of African life.

In defense of the nativist impulse, *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* rejects innovative but unpopular forms, “privatist” sentiments, clichéd expressions, and incongruence of thought and feeling. The book recommends lyrical speech, musical rhythm, mellifluousness, and other voice-dependent styles. It also advises the cultivation of intense emotions, sweeping vision, and concrete imagery. The authors ignore orature coded in dense, esoteric, and elusive idioms. They exclude in advance the use of what they call “muddy” language and de-Africanize writers who

prefer such language regardless of the thematic relevance of their work to contemporary questions. In the peculiar reading of precolonial (oral) traditions proposed by Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike, the truly African writer cannot “preoccupy himself with his puny ego” (1980: 252).

While discussing the issue of language and literature and the values to evaluate a work of art the authors say that Achebe’s works may be written in the English language and may therefore be considered part of *English-language literature*, does not mean that they can be criticized with British national values. Indeed, the basic differences between British and Igbo experience and values are what make it necessary for Achebe to have to bend the English language in order to express Igbo experience and values in it (1980: 12-13).

In the same book Chinweizu, Ihechukwu Madubuike, and Onwuchekwa Jemie suggest some canon to evaluate African literature. They say

As stated before, works done for African audiences, by Africans and in African languages, whether these works are oral or written, constitute the historically indisputable core of the canon of African literature. In a pragmatic application of family resemblances in order to decide what other works should be included in this evolving canon, the following are some of the most important considerations: (1) the primary audience for whom the work is done; (2) the cultural and national consciousness expressed in the work, whether through the author’s voice or through the characters and their consciousness, habits, comportment and diction; (3) the nationality of the writer, whether by birth or naturalization- a matter that a passport can decide; and (4) the language in which the work is done. (1980: 13-14).

Thus, Chinweizu, Ihechukwu Madubuike, and Onwuchekwa Jemie consider that audience, cultural and national consciousness, nationality of the writer and the language are the most important canons to evaluate a literary work and suggest that these are applicable both to the oral and written literature.

Classical nativism gives importance to the precolonial oral traditions. The literature that existed before the advent of the colonies is considered indigenous and



true literature. The advent of colonies in Africa introduced them with British, Portuguese, and French literature and culture. It also introduced them the system of writing. This took them away from their indigenous literature and oral tradition. Naturally, as influenced by Western literature and criticism, they started evaluating their own indigenous literature with Western critical standards.

The incontrovertible truths of classical nativism, that African cultures did not begin with European contacts and that modern writers should locate their inspiration in their traditional predecessors, sound less anxious wherever the theorist states explicitly that the arts of the diviners, the hunter' guilds, and the priesthood are forms that are being appropriated for a localist foundation of the emergent postindependence culture.

### **2.2.2 Structuralist Nativism**

Where classical nativism focuses on the clear expression of public themes, structuralist nativists Africanize the expression of public themes in forms that need not be clear. Classical nativism doubts the African-ness of any work that exhibits self-conscious artistry. An overt sympathy for modernist aesthetics is considered a heavy literary offense, in the rhetoric of militant and not so militant classical nativism. That is the reason why, in *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*, the dense poetry of Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, and Michael Echeruo is dismissed as modernist and irrelevant. The structuralists search for the identity markers of modern African writing in the structural and hermeneutic principles that are derivable from traditional high arts such as rituals, divination chants, esoteric lyric, and secular narratives of the Sahelian griot.

Soyinka in his *Myth, Literature, and the African World*, has explained a theory of tragedy. He has used Yoruba rituals to illustrate patterns of structuralist nativism. Soyinka's this work has been the most insistent voice on the Africanist defense of self-conscious artistry. His explanation of the philosophical implications of Yoruba rituals represent one of the most advanced examples of structuralist nativist thinking.

Soyinka's nativist ideas on art, cognition, and existence are founded on the widespread African belief that dying and living are different stations on the track that

connects humans to their ancestors. As everyday practice reveals, the living reaches ancestry through propitiation and plies the stretch to the unborn with the physical labour of procreation. In addition to the three “ethnographic” states- living, unborn, and ancestral- there is an in-between “fourth” space “where occurs the utter transmutation of essence-ideal and materiality” (1976: 26). In that space, the will to (pro)create is tested and proved. Without that space, none of the living, the unborn, or the ancestors will ever come fulfillment. According to Soyinka’s reading of tradition, the transactions in the “fourth” space are the subjects of ritual performances of myths of creation and of creativity.

Adeleke Adeeko has given an example of story in Yoruba language. Adeeko says that “in the Yoruba beginning an *Orisa Nla* (grand Divinity) was smashed into countless pieces when his servant, Atunda (Reinvention), pushed down a huge boulder on him. The fragmented pieces of the hitherto grand being rolled into the terrestrial distances and became multiple gods and goddesses. At some point in time, the deities developed nostalgia for the earthly wholeness within which they used to live before the *Orisa Nla* bang. Humans too suffered in the aftermath of that split: as it is usually expressed in divination formulas, famine scorched the earth, semen atrophied in the genital sac, women’s menstruation ceased, and total chaos threatened the cosmos. The divinities and humanity together experienced a grief about the separation of “essence” from “self” brought about by Atunda’s acts. Both communities also started efforts to recreate the original unity. Although he is not quite explicit on the matter, Soyinka implies that the productive *Orisa Nla* split and the reopening of the paths to oneness happened in a time unit not measurable mechanically” (1998: 15).

Here the wish for wholeness must not be fulfilled because the energy generated during the quest for the construction of linkages sustains existential patterns. The endless imaginative striving of humans and the divinities to construct the path to (meta)physical oneness energizes life and fends off stasis. If the labour devoted to the bridging stopped- especially because it succeeded- for a noticeable period of time, all of the known existential states would fuse: the ancestral pool would dry up for a lack of supply from the deaths of the living, the ranks of the deities that draw therefrom would be depleted, and the physical act of bringing forth the unborn

would cease. Adeleke Adeeko says “to avoid such a disaster, humans keep replaying the quest for material oneness- one that will never materialize physically- with repeated sacrifices, rituals, and appeasement feasts” (1998: 15).

Adeeko further adds that the myths say that when the gods set out to realize their yearnings, they too faced daunting problems. Dense forests and massive rocks obstructed their earthward ventures. Thoughts of unforeseeable consequences of reuniting with humans aggravated the torment of physical barriers. (1998: 15-16). It suggests that the gods also make earthward journey and suffer like human beings. Soyinka uses a Yoruba story to illustrate this in his article “Fourth Stage”. Ogun, one of the godlings, successfully conquered the physical barrier with his fabricated iron cutlass. As Ogun’s tool was very sharp and hard-edged, he was able to clear the forests more efficiently than the other divinities. The other deities conceded leadership to him after they discovered the strength of his path-making manufacture. Soyinka attributes an artistic and political significance to Ogun’s act. He says Ogun’s feat makes him “the first *actor*... first suffering deity, first *creative* energy, the first challenger, and the *conqueror* of transition” (“Fourth Stage” 1988: 145).

From this Yoruba story of tragedy, Soyinka deduces two senses of acting. In the first faculty, *inventive genius*, humans exercise the power to create combative tools that defy disintegration: these tools include verbal arts, mechanical contraptions, and other elements of material culture. These physical and scientific acts of creation are complemented by the *exertion of will*, which is the second sense of acting. Both acts continue endlessly and are fundamental to existence. In Soyinka’s deduction, the unending quest to bridge the abysmal gulf accidentally caused by Atunda simultaneously motivates self-reflective will for restoration and provokes purposeful physical movements and actions. Adeeko says “If that gulf does not exist, all will be one, and if the energy to bridge it is not renewed constantly, all will be separate” (1998:16). However, neither state, in Yoruba Metaphysics, is permissible.

Rituals, for Soyinka, are conspicuous means by which Yoruba culture articulates, classifies, and inscribes philosophical and time-tested meaning. In his article “Who’s Afraid of Elesin Oba?” Soyinka says, “Ritual is the irreducible *formal*

agent for event disparate and time separated actions of human beings in society” (1988:120).

In Soyinka’s speculative reading of rituals, the duty of a “serious” African literature is to inflect the cosmic overview that organizes traditional performances. A proper appreciation of Ogun’s ritual enables the formation of a theory of knowledge: all “engineering,” like Ogun’s steel cutlass, must serve communal good. Such understanding also enables a theory of acting; choral performance, like Ogun’s wail, must aid the strengthening of a will to invent. Also the knowledge of the essence of the rituals leads to a theory of tragedy that requires that the hero’s will, like Ogun’s, must not succumb to destructive forces.

Thus structuralist nativism gives importance to the expression of public themes. The structuralist nativists search for the identity markers of modern African literature those are derivable from traditional high arts such as rituals, chants, lyrics and the secular narratives of the griot.

### **2.2.3 Linguistic Nativism**

In one episode in Casely Hayford’s *Ethiopia Unbound* (1911), one of the oldest imaginative extended English prose narratives in West Africa, the protagonist Kwamankra insists on the use of the local language as the medium of instruction and official business in the National University.

*He was foremost in bringing forward schemes to prevent the work of the University from becoming a mere foreign imitation. He kept constantly before the Committee from the first that no people could despise its own language, customs, and institutions and hope to avoid national death. For that reason the distinctive garb of students, male and female, was national with an adaptability suggestive of the advanced state of society. It was recognized that the best part of the teaching must be done in the people’s own language, and soon several textbooks of known authority had, with the kind permission of authors and publishers, been translated into Fanti, thereby making the progress of the student rapid and sound (1911: 16-17 emphases added) .*

The emphasized parts of Kwamankra's plan state the central philosophical and political contentions of linguistic nativism. Since 1911, one might say, the major quest of linguistic nativists has been to produce an effective pedagogy for national development of written artifacts in the indigenous languages. In 1911, Casely Hayford's Kwamankra wanted to prevent cultural death; in 1962, Obi Wali urged African culture producers to avoid a dead end. The cultural questions and problems raised by linguistic nativism can best be illustrated with the writing of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, whose voice is the most insistent at the present time.

The most controversial variety of nativisms returned to the critical center stage in 1977 when Ngugi condemned as un-African all writing, including his own, done in European languages. Ngugi declared publicly that material languages *in themselves* carry significant ideological connotations. In his manifesto statement, "Return to the Roots" which he expanded later into the book-length essay *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngugi ruffled African Marxist activism with the claim that the language selected by a writer from the menu available in a stratified, multilingual, and formerly colonial society is inevitably of ideological significance. For Ngugi, material languages are depositories of both ethnic and national histories. Narrative forms' vocabulary range, rhetorical apparatuses, socio-linguistic patterns, and even syntax are shaped by the history of their specific community. Like Wali, Ngugi calls upon fellow writers in English to cultivate some competence in the native languages. He believes that such a reeducation will enable them to change their neocolonialist attitudes about local languages. Since history has not fashioned monolingual nations for Africa, the national literatures, Ngugi said, must not be forced into an artificial monolingualism. Speaking about his own country, he says, "Kenyan national literature should mostly be produced in the languages of the various nationalities that make up modern Kenya. Kenyan national literature can only get its stamina and blood by utilizing the rich national traditions of culture and history carried by the languages of all the Kenyan nationalities' (1981: 57).

That is the reason that in a statement given in *Decolonising the Mind* Ngugi takes a new stand. He says,

In 1977 I published *Petals of Blood* and said farewell to the English language as a vehicle of my writing of plays, novels and short stories. All my subsequent creative writing has been written directly in *Gikuyu* language: my novels *Caitani Mutharabaini* and *Matigari Ma Njiruiingi*, my plays *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (written with Ngugi wa Mirii) and *Maitu Njugira*, and my childrens' books, *Njamba Nene na Mbaathi i Mathagu*, *Bathitoora ya Njamba Nene* and *Njamba Nene na Cibu King'ang'i*.

However, I continued writing explanatory prose in English. Thus *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, *Writers in Politics* and *Barrel of a Pen* were all written in English.

This book, *Decolonising the Mind*, is my farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings. From now on it is *Gikuyu* and *Kiswahili* all the way.

However, I hope that through the age old medium of translation I shall be able to continue dialogue with all (1986: xiv).

After this Ngugi produced all his creative writing in his native language *Gikuyu* but by translating it himself into English he made it accessible to all.

Critics of Ngugi's linguistic nativism see no particular characteristic that can distinguish his program from an extreme nationalism. Simon Gikandi asks one common question about Ngugi's views on the historical significance of material language in postcolonial communities:

But if language was a product of separate generations and social classes, how could it transcend historically-engendered social divisions to become the unified signifier of a nation and its many voices? Indeed, how could the materiality of language be reconciled with Ngugi's romantic conception of literary language as the agent of a *sprachgeist*?" (1992: 132).

A study of Ngugi's Marxian earlier writing shows, however, that his late championing of linguistic nativism merely pushes one aspect of all material cultural activism to its limit. Ngugi's address to the 1970 national convention of the Kenyan Presbyterian Church illustrates the nature of latent linguisticism in all nativisms. In

that speech, Ngugi asked the delegates a question which in its cultural assumption covers all nativisms: if “the symbols with which we choose to identify ourselves are important in expressing the values held by a community, why is wine at Holy Communion more clean than Njohi?” (Church, Culture and Politics” 35). It suggests that Christian patriarchs prefer imported wine over native spirits not because one is less potent or inherently more Christian than the other.

The ordinary demand of linguistic nativism that African cultural practices should be expressed in African forms raises several problems that criticism has hitherto underplayed. By renaming all that is now called “African” literature as elitist Afro-English and Afro-European writing, linguistic nativism calls for the reconstitution of African literary criticism so that writers who work in the indigenous languages will become significant factors in the discipline. These works would matter to criticism beyond their study in folklore, anthropology, and other “curious” culture departments. In other words, if linguistic criticism were to succeed, the referent of the term African literature would have to be expanded to include the clearly modern works of the so called ethnic writers.

Ngugi in an essay “Literature and Society: The Politics of the Canon!” define a nation’s literature. He says, “A nation’s literature which is a sum total of the products of many individuals in that society is then both a reflection of that people’s collective reality and also an embodiment of that people’s way of looking at the world and their place in its making. It is partisan on the collective level because it tries to make the reader see how that nation has defined itself historically in the internal relationship of all the parts that contribute to its wholeness and the mutual relationship between that wholeness and the worlds around it” (1981: 05). Ngugi is fully aware of the fact that the literature does not exist in a vacuum and the writer cannot write in a void. Literature is the reflection of the collective consciousness of the people who live in it. That is why Ngugi advocates all the writers to write in their own indigenous languages. He himself switches over to his native language Kikuyu for his further writing.

Ngugi’s particularly visible switch from the thematic side of nativism to the linguistic side also upset traditional divisions in African criticism. His progressive and

nativist activism brings together two hitherto opposing theoretical camps in African cultural debates. Prior to Ngugi's interventions, African Marxists have been too reticent in joining the controversies about the forms most appropriate for making African literature native. For one important reason, the fine attention to the details of historical imprints that Marxism requires for the study of culture was difficult to practice on precolonial African forms. For another reason, the anticolonial movement out of which the "traditional" and "African" categories emerged had already implicated Marxism as "European". So the African Marxist committed to a dialectical methodology cannot function without a specter of Eurocentrism. A Marxist who wants to be African without compromising either of the two disciplinary identities has to devise a method that accepts the "traditional" status of the ordinarily compromised precolonial texts and then convince other Africanists that Marxism is not Eurocentric. When Ngugi added linguistic nativism to his well-known Marxist identity, he cleared new forests for both fellow leftists who avoided "romanticized" artifacts and the classical nativists who distrusted dialectical analysis.

### **2.3 Nativism as the Vehicle of Idealism and Pragmatism in African literary criticism**

The pragmatic classical and structuralist nativist want to create in local accents an African literature that can use any of its historical languages and forms. They believe that languages and cultural conventions are instruments that do not on their own define cultures, literatures, or nations. When different geographical and political entities share a common language in the articulation of their literatures, the expressed cultural, ethnic, and national differences establish their individual identities. For the pragmatists, code switching, character individuated by native speech patterns, elaborate worldviews, fictionalized local response to history, and other markers of culturally specific narrative, poetic, and dramatic protocols are more important for the creation of a distinctly nationalist culture than the raw verbal materials. Literatures, for them, are not languages but linguistic embodiments of cultural patterns.

Achebe once pondered aloud in a rebuttal of linguistic nativism that,

Some of my colleagues... have tried to rewrite their history into a straightforward case of oppression by presenting a happy monolingual African



childhood brusquely disrupted by the imposition of a domineering foreign language. This historical fantasy demands that we throw out the English language in order to restore linguistic justice and self respect to ourselves.

My position is that anyone who feels unable to write in English should follow their desires. But they must not take liberties with our history, it is not simply true that the English forced us to learn their language .... We chose English not because the English desired it, but because having tacitly accepted the new nationalities into which colonialism had grouped us, we needed its language to transact our business of over-throwing colonialism itself.... For me, it is not *either* English or Igbo, it is both (“Song” 1989:32).

The linguistic nativists respond that history is not tamperproof: it is intended to be rewritten and reconstituted constantly. They agree with the pragmatists that languages, for understandable reasons, shed off their national(istic) and cultural origins when they cross boundaries and are sometimes used in creating forms unrecognizable to the initial users. They add, however, that those tongues do not migrate on their own. The languages find and make homes in strange lands, usually after bloody conquests. Decolonized people cannot, after having freed themselves again, be less anxious about the languages and conventions of their cultures. History teaches that linguistic and other cultural variables usually correlate with a hierarchy propped by educational, sociological, economic, and cultural privileges. In postindependence Africa, the languages and cultural forms introduced during the colonial era remain dominant because the hegemonic structures that were devised for maintaining conquests have not been dismantled. If the postindependence culture is to fulfill its promise adequately, it has to pay greater attention to the native conventions of signification.

## **2.4 Nativism and Contemporary Literary Theory**

It is hardly possible that a reader who encounters the globalist explanations of the place of African literature in world cultures without a knowledge of the fratricidal divisions among Africanists might reckon with the unacknowledged indebtedness of those theories to nativist in-fighting. In particular, the rhetoric of difference and

liberal multiculturalism used in contemporary criticism in Africa to comment on what is broadly called the post-colony are inspired by nativist discourses of self-assertion.

This can be explained with the help of Frederic Jameson's well-known "Third World" essay. This essay echoes the nativists' call for a culturally differentiated criticism. Jameson's characterization of third-world writing as necessarily allegories of nationalism sounds imperial in its first-world "postmodernist" context. But when placed within the nativist discourses it becomes clearer that Jameson is trying to mark the differences between first- and third-world allegories. Jameson's world-system grid reflects the relative status of each region in contemporary world orders. Adeeko says "in Jameson's grid, first-world writers produce allegories that use traditional images but without relating them, as tradition demands, to antecedent cultural references. Their third-world counterparts, who work from the late capitalist outposts, write classical allegories that reflect national experience" (1998: 23) .

Jameson's allotment of regional tropes resembles very closely the functionalist poetics of African classical nativism. When Jameson hypothesizes that "third world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic- necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society." (1986: 69), he states what classical nativists call an irreducible quality of all African arts. Although Jameson denies a cultural specificity to the third world outside of a predestined response to late capitalism-"none of these cultures can be conceived as anthropologically independent or autonomous, rather, they are all in various ways locked in a life-and-death struggle with first world cultural imperialism" (1986: 68)- the nativists would say that Jameson's admission of tropological differences only rhetoricizes the difference. Jameson's assessment of the American reception of "third world" art also parallels rather closely some of the nativist attacks on Eurocentrism. Jameson says that the engagement with "national" issues causes the cold reception of third-world texts in the American first world, where privatist and modernist aesthetic expectations rule. It seems that this is what Chinweizu and others had in mind when they advised that "those approaching the task [of discussing African literature] from a training in the Western narrative tradition, whether of the 'well made' or the modernist tendencies,

need an apprenticeship in the African oral tradition” (1980: 240) of making political and personal statements.

Christopher Miller’s methodologically innovative essay “Theories of African” is also important in this connection. Miller later expanded the essay into the lead chapter in his book of the same title. This essay balances two contradictory tasks of heeding the nativist demand for an analytical differentiation that respects local initiatives and also fulfilling the homogenizing conditions of contemporary theory. Miller proposes an interdisciplinary criticism that will study indigenous ideas on representation for the purpose of understanding how chosen cultures order and *rhetorize* facts. Adeeko says that, “the method, which Miller calls a literary anthropology, explores the discourses of “man” in a way that adapts localist (native) theoretical perspectives for practical literary and cultural criticism. Such a study will make use of both “ethnic” insights and cosmopolitan theory; it will correct both the blind spots of globalism (especially its purported mastery of regional differences) and the unjustifiable “theoretical” shyness of Nativism” (1998: 24). Such metafigural studies will expose the differences between “European” ideas of representation and the African “native perception of the same. Miller thinks that a literary anthological criticism of African literature will be ethical in that it will overcome the implicit arrogance of the question “what’s the difference?” and then aid the setting out of what’s different. Miller’s literary anthropology theorizes the native’s signifier and also signifies the native’s theory. Miller tells the nonnative investigator that in regard to literary theory, “the most fruitful path for the western critic of African literature is not to play it safe and ‘stay’ home,’ not to ‘leave home without it,’ and pretend to approach African literature with a virgin mind, but to balance one against the other, by reconsidering the applicability of all our critical terms and by looking to traditional African cultures for terms they might offer” (1986: 39).

Henry Louis Gates, a most noteworthy critic of African literature, considers himself a native and it is also clear from his choice of personal pronoun, once advised virtually the same direction for the African Literature Association: “we must, first, demand that the major theorists of Western literature be accountable for African literary theory; and we must, second, turn into our vernacular traditions to define

indigenous systems of interpretation that arise from within African cultures themselves” (1989: 16).

The first generation of African postindependence intellectuals not only successfully opposed the domineering “universalism” that granted their cultures no generative subjective status, they were also able to dictate the terms of future debates. Achebe refused literary high modernism with “indigenist” aesthetics, Soyinka reinterpreted Yoruba myths with Nietzschean model in order to give a native philosophical depth to his drama. Chinweizu, Madubuike, and Jemie experienced the Black Arts phenomenon in the United States and were provoked enough to return home and smash a few critical and cultural icons they viewed as betrayals of an African outlook. Ngugi constantly moves his global materialist concept of cultural activism toward the indigenous languages. However, partly because of the sociology of contemporary intellectual traffic, the devastation of post-independence economies, and the ideological compromises that result from migration, some critics of African literature want to believe that those earlier defenses, as Appiah says, of “local knowledge” are wrongheaded and claustrophobic: it is a matter of “us” against “them”.

The views expressed by the above critics of African literature show, African nativists responded to global encroachments, and they in turn influenced cosmopolitan views of the world. The important lesson of nativist formulations for the history of literary criticism is not whether they offer profoundly original theories of art or propose a thoroughly new poetics of culture, or whether the exclusivist and specificist language of some of the nativists is self-defeating. The philosophical challenge of nativism for criticism lies in devising the means with which to evaluate the African literature.

## **2.5 The Role of African Critics in the Decolonization of African Literature**

Chinweizu and others in their *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* pose a question how can the African critic’s support and aid African writers in their efforts to decolonize and Africanize their techniques? Chinweizu says that the role of the critics is secondary. “Their proper role is that of a helper, not legislator, to writers

and audience. Their authority exists only insofar as they remain representative of the society for which the writers produce. They certainly have no independent authority to lord over either writers or audience. In the ideal state of things, where everybody in the society is sufficiently educated to serve as his or her own critic, the role of the professional critic ought to disappear” (1980: 286). If Chinweizu’s views come true that would be a very healthy thing. A recognition of this fact should teach professional critics some genuine humility. That is why it is necessary that the critics must work in such a way that they should not be the obstacles to Africa’s cultural decolonization.

What the African critics could supply to both the writers and their audience would be a well researched and well analyzed knowledge of things valued in traditional African orature, and why these are valued. Their top priority should be to investigate Africa’s artistic values and to transmit their findings to writers and audience alike.

Chinweizu and others have also advocated that, by correctly reflecting the community’s sense of these values, the critics can help that interplay between writers and audience who work from common assumptions, values and expectations in order to make and enjoy a healthy, confident culture. They say that it is a critics’ responsibility to hold up to the writers’ work the mirror of their own community and not a mirror from any alien land. They strongly warn that this is a principle which African critics must always near in mind and consciously apply.

Depending on this rule Chinweizu and others have suggested the following functions of the African critic:

1. Writing advertising jingles for publishers.
2. Exploring themes and ideas, thereby illuminating the layers of meaning beneath the surface of a given work; evaluating the work and situating it within the African literary tradition.
3. Exploring the relationships between African art, the African artist, and African society.
4. Criticism of craft for the purpose of:

- (a) Nurturing talent by encouraging and discouraging tendencies among African artist;
- (b) Educating the taste of the African public.

(1980: 286)

Chinweizu and others say that the economics of literature always makes function 1 necessary. Among African critics of poetry, function 2 has largely been neglected. Mislead by euromodernist example and percept, the African critics have been preoccupied with what should be the unnecessary preliminary of prospecting for the surface meaning of texts. They say that such a diversion and waste of critical effort would be uncalled for of the African poets took the trouble to be clear. When well done, function 2 aids the reader in his efforts to get the most out of a given work. They consider that function 3 is always important to the sociologists and historians of literature, but secondary to the concerns of craftsman and audience, the producers and consumers of art.

Chinweizu and others give utmost importance to function 4. They say that it should be at the core of the critic's concern. If good works are to be produced and enjoyed, skill and virtuosity have to be encouraged in the maker, and a sensibility for appreciating what is well made has to be developed in his audience. For this purpose, the ability to judge, and common values upon which to base judgment, must be developed. Chinweizu and others advocate that to do this effectively, African critics must develop an African esthetic, encourage an awareness of African tradition, and play the role of critical intelligence guiding the transmission of African cultural values. Whereas the artist creates cultural artifacts, the critic evaluates them. Where the artist is a maker of well-made things, the critic is a maker of judgments.

Chinweizu and others pose a question that how well do the African critics carry out these functions? And they answer it negatively by saying "Not vey well." They say that the active ones among them appear determined to forget the fundamental ground rule and to hold Europe's mirror to Africa's writers. If they have their way, they will convert African literature into a tributary of European literature. This brand of criticism insists on applying Western paradigms or models to African works, predictably concluding that the African work fits the Western model and, by

implication, is thereby worthy of recognition by “the world.” Chinweizu and others say that this is the mentality of cultural inferiority which responds to foreign cultural challenge with “proof”: “We’ve modeled ourselves after you; we’ve met your standards. Please accept us!” (1980: 288).

The authors of *The Decolonization of African Literature* suggest, “Now, rather than a disorientive Eurocentrism or a disorientive irrelevance, the task of our African critics is to formulate an African esthetic- which in the field of literature would include a poetics, a narrative rhetoric, and a dramaturgy- adapted to the needs of contemporary Africa. This may well be the center piece of their function as nurturers of artistic sensibility.” (1980:290). According to Chinweizu and others artistic sensibility usually determines a writer’s characteristic emotional and intellectual responses to literature. It determines what experiences the writer converts into literature, and how he treats them. It also sets up standards of valuation which determine what is valued, what is held in low esteem, and what is ignored. An African esthetic must be grounded in an African sensibility, and the incontestability uncontaminated reservoir of African sensibility is the African oral tradition. It is from there, therefore, that the African critics must extract the foundation elements of a modern African esthetic.

Usually an esthetic is an after-the-fact codification of exemplary devices and characteristics extracted from an already established and acclaimed body of masterpieces- the classics of a given culture. Some might say that there is at present not a sufficient body of contemporary African writing, and that much of the oral tradition has not been recorded and made available; and therefore that the African critics do not have as large a body of masterpieces as is desirable for that analysis that must precede the formulation of an esthetic. However, because contemporary African culture is embattled and, in addition, is patently being led astray by apers of alien traditions, African writers and critics can no longer postpone the investigation necessary for the formulation of an esthetic.

Therefore, it is necessary that African critics should begin now to record, assemble and analyze the vast store of traditional material in African languages, materials both written and oral; must begin to study and analyze them in order to

extract guidance towards the formulation of a contemporary African poetics, narrative rhetoric, and dramaturgy. The paucity of available material surely should not be turned into an excuse for not doing the job. Chinweizu and others advocate that, “Since there is a vast uncollected treasure of materials, the smallness of the material already collected should indeed goad the critics to intense research activity. Given, our circumstances, this task cannot be postponed” (1980: 291).

## **2.6 The Role of African Educational System in the Decolonization of African Literature**

The language of education in Africa is no longer the language of their culture. Ngugi Wa Thiong’O in his *Decolonising the Mind* states that “I first went to Kamaandura, missionary run, and then to another called Maanguuu run by nationalists grouped around the Gikuyu Independent and Karinga Schools Association. Our language of education was still Gikuyu. The very first time I was ever given an ovation for my writing was over a composition in Gikuyu. So for my first four years there, was still harmony between the language of my formal education and that of the Limuru peasant community. It was after the declaration of a state of emergency over Kenya in 1952 that all the schools run by patriotic nationalists were taken over by the colonial regime and were placed under District Education Boards chaired by Englishmen. English became the language of my formal education: In Kenya, English became more than a language: it was *the* language, and all the others had to bow before it in deference.” (1986: 11)

Here it clearly indicates that the language of African culture was less important of the schooling system. Students did not have the freedom to learn in their native languages. It is surprising that this policy was not forced by the colonizers but implemented by the neo-colonizers, i.e. the native post-independent rulers of Africa. As the critics like Chinweizu, Ihechukwu Madubuike, and Onwuchekwa Jemie suggest that the grounds for the germination of liberated African literature should be prepared. They state the need of a central project of creating a unified community of writers, critics, disseminators and consumers of African literature, a community unified in their experience of the African tradition of orature and literature, unified in their fundamental expectations of African literature, and unified in the values by which they produce, judge and consume that literature. For the creation of such a



unified community, Africa's educational institutions and educational processes need to be modified.

Chinweizu and others state that the European language and literature departments need to be abolished and advocates that these should be replaced by the following departments:

1. A Department of African Languages, Oratures and Literatures,
2. A Department of Comparative Literatures; and
3. A Department of Colonial Languages

Chinweizu and others give some justifications for this project in the following way.

### **2.6.1 The Department of African Languages, Oratures and Literatures**

There is a need for each African to be exposed in through depth to at least one African culture and its orature and literature. With such an in-depth exposure, an African would be in a better position than now to understand other African cultures. S/he would then have a solid experiential and intellectual base for comparing notes with Africans who speak other languages. S/he would also be in a better position to avoid or stop wild speculations and outright lies regarding the relationship between African orature and African literature in non-African languages. S/he would have firm experiential roots upon which he could resist Western blandishments and disorienting dicta about esthetic matters. And, perhaps most important, his /her consciousness would have a firm grounding in one branch of that African orature whose values must be at the centre of the process of synthesizing a modern African literature with that of the traditional, one branch of that traditional element which must control contributions from outside Africa. The natives need to absorb the influences coming from outside Africa and mould it according to the requirements of the indigenous traditional standards.

“In order to meet this goal”, says Chinweizu, “it would be necessary for each university to require each of its students to demonstrate proficiency in the language, literature and orature of one African culture before s/he may be allowed to graduate. Such a demonstration should involve an ability to think, talk, read and write in the

student's chosen language into the national language of his country, and vice versa. Thus, a student must be able to pass an oral as well as a written exam in the African language of his choice. A mandatory part of his training for this exam should include the collecting, writing down and translating of pieces of African orature. A student before graduation would be required to have collected, written down and translated material of whatever genre- oratory, drama, poetry, narrative, etc.- not excluding medicinal and culinary recipes and technical instructions for doing or making things in traditional way." ( 1980: 297)

In order to meet these requirements, Chinweizu and others suggest that it would be the responsibility of the departments of African languages, literatures and oratures to –

1. collect and compile such transcripts of orature and supervise their translation from the original African language into the national-official language so others could share it;
2. translate African works written in European languages into African languages;
3. translate works from one African language into other African languages.

(1980: 298)

As the products of this kind of preliminary work are disseminated, they pave the way so that, some day, a continental African language could emerge- one which would have absorbed inputs from various national experiences, one whose speakers would then share a common body of references, experiences, values, etc.

Chinweizu and others emphasize on the point that a given department of African languages, literatures and oratures does not have to be comprehensive or polyglot. All that is necessary is that each such department should study and teach the languages, literatures and oratures of the area in which it is located. A cardinal principle to be upheld is the *equality* of all African languages, with each developing and flourishing in its locality.

They also advocate that though the researching and developing of this particular project is a matter for the universities, such requirements would have to be extended throughout the educational system. At each level- elementary school,

secondary school or university- an appropriate and demonstrated degree of proficiency in an African language, literature and orature would be mandatory.

Chinweizu and others say about this project that, “This project is, in our view, the cornerstone of any effort to root out the Eurocentric preoccupations of our literature. the more we know about ourselves, the more we can challenge their aspersions and put-down out of our own lived experiences and our studies. Wild and glib disorienting dicta will not take root in African minds which are properly prepared.” (1980: 298)

### **2.6.2 The Department of Comparative Literatures**

Chinweizu and others, in the same book, state that a Department of Comparative Literatures would have the responsibility of exposing students to a wider breadth of literatures than those of France, England, Portugal or other West European countries. It would beits responsibility to expose them to the literatures of other parts of the world – South American, Chinese, Indian, North American, Russian, South Asian, etc. – as well as the literatures of Europe and, of course, of Africa. The authors of this book also say that, “such exposure would give African students of literature the proper breadth of perspective from which to see through the parochialisms and ethnocentrism of the pseudo-universalist literatures and criticism that reach them from the West. By being enabled to compare African literatures with the literatures of the world, they would be put in a position to acquire a proper respect for the African achievement in literature and orature” (1980: 299).

### **2.6.3 The Department of Colonial Languages**

It would be necessary for Africans to learn to read and write and speak colonial languages as long as they remain the official languages of African countries. Chinweizu and others advocate that a Department of Colonial Languages would be necessary so that, for instance, Nigerians could conduct their official business in English and also conduct their inter-African business in French, Portuguese, etc. when the departments of African languages, literatures and oratures have done their work and Africa has evolved a continental official language to replace the colonial ones, then the department of colonial languages would have to be abolished (1980: 299).

They also state that it is important to emphasize that the department of colonial languages should not be permitted to teach the national literatures of England, France, Portugal, etc. The African students need not study England's literature in order to learn English. Ditto for French, Portuguese, etc. Whatever exposure to English language literature one needs in order to learn the English language should be acquired by studying African literature in English, Afro-Caribbean literature in English, and Afro-American literature. If this is judged insufficient, it could be supplemented with good English-language literary texts, both those originally written in English and excellent translations into English from the literatures of the various peoples of the world. What one wishes to learn about the English language must be done without having to imbibe *England's* national prejudices, values and outlook.

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**Chapter 3**  
**African**  
**Nativistic Literary Values**

## Chapter 3

### African Nativistic Literary Values

#### 3.0 Introduction

Before the now famous 1962 Makerere conference African literature was evaluated with reference to the critical standards of the West. Even the literature written in European languages were considered African literature. But for the first time during this conference a question was posed “what is African literature and by what standards is it to be evaluated?” The writers participated in this conference Ngugi, Achebe and all others tried to define African literature and also became aware of the fact that they were evaluating their literature by the critical standards of the West, which in fact is not altogether applicable to the African situation.

After dealing with such problems the authors and critics decided to answer this question in their own way. Ngugi Wa Thiong’O gave up writing in English and started writing in his native language i.e. Gikuyu which is the language of his people. They asked themselves a question ‘whom are we writing for?’ and posed the question of audience. They thought that if they were writing for the African people why they shouldn’t use the language of their people. So Ngugi gave up creating literary works in English. He even abandoned his English name ‘James’ because it was a name given by the colonizers. It was then for the first time the critics started dealing with the question ‘what should be the critical standards to evaluate African literature?’

African literature has a tradition of approximately 5000 years. Basically it is orature. This orature got form of literature after the advent of the Europeans. The natives studied the literary genres of the West and imitated the genres in their language only.

Joseph Okpaku was one of the first critics to consider, if not the identification of the critical standards by which Africans judged African literature, at least the methods by which one could go about it. He asked:

What then are these African critical standards? The logical place to go in search of them is the African aesthetic. In particular, we should examine our

traditional artistic forms as well as genuine (not “studied”) contemporary African tastes and attitudes towards the various art forms.... The next place to search for these standards would be an examination of those common aspects of life most frequently dramatized in the arts. This would include love, life, hate, honor, duty, death, destruction, pride, prejudice, friendship, fear, violence, birth and reality amongst others. Different cultures not only have different conceptions of these but have different attitudes to them. Not only that, they give them different emphases, tastes and preferences constitute the basis on which to build criticism. This is where the search for African critical standards must begin (1967: 04).

Okpaku’s terms *studied* and *genuine* give the impression that African critical standards exist inherently in the African critic and that they remain only to be discovered or that they are easily identifiable and recognizable by all “genuine” African critics. And he seemed to suggest that the “genuineness” of any critic, or the lack thereof, was readily apparent. Joseph Okpaku also said, ‘an African critic trying to relate African literature or any other literature to Africans must do so against the background of African culture. He must draw upon the patterns of the African aesthetic. In other words, he must use African critical standards’ (1967: 3). The difficulty comes when it is seen that the African critic’s background is clearly different from that of Westerns, yet the standard used is the same.

In the two decades following World War II, it was tacitly assumed by Africans and non-Africans alike that African critical standards for modern African literature did not exist, or, if they did exist, that they were unknown. Yet Africans have been writing literary criticism of modern African literature in increasing volume since the inception of the journal *Presence africaine* late in 1947. It seemed, therefore, that an analysis of this body of criticism would very likely suggest African critical standards that have actually been in existence, and in use, for some time, and, as Paul Bohannon pointed out, might provide a new dimension to the Western understanding of the African literary aesthetic. This aesthetic should not be adopted wholesale by western critics a better – because it is more complete – frame of reference for the evaluation of an African text, as well as a better understanding of the culture in which the African

writer has written. Critics and their criticism, after all, are as much a part of the cultural context as are artists and their art.

It is important here to note the views expressed by the three important African critics. In *The Mind of Africa* (1962), W. E. Abraham spoke of African philosophy in a way that would seem to hold as well for African literature:

The question of the existence of an African philosophy is not a “uniqueness” question. There is no reason why, in order that there should be an African philosophy, it has to be different from every other philosophy. It is sufficient that philosophy should occur in Africa such that it is not derived from outside Africa (1962: 104).

A. Bodunrin, while reviewing Abraham’s book in 1966, said,

When one speaks of the unity of African cultures one does not thereby imply uniqueness, one does not necessarily wish to say that there is a minimal complex of significant elements which are common to African cultures and which are such that they have never been seen elsewhere before in the history of mankind. Such a claim would clearly be preposterous (1966: 46).

And Gaetan Sebudani said the same year that while African works showed a “world vision reflective of the African soul” it was also apparent that “the criteria which make up the originality of Negro culture end up simultaneously revealing its connection to the stream of a universal civilization” (1966: 80-81).

A particular critical standard, then, regardless of its resemblance, imagined or real, to any standard chosen by any other critical tradition, becomes African by definition, by virtue of its having been used by Africans.

After several years of planning among African and European intellectuals, the initial issue of the journal *Presence africaine* appeared in Paris and Dakar. Alioune Diop its editor, said its purpose was to “define the African’s creativity and to hasten his integration in the modern world” (1947: 185) and that it had been conceived during World War II by “a certain number of overseas students, witnessing a stricken Europe questioning herself as to the efficacy and genuineness of her values, gathered



themselves together to study that same situation and to weigh the distinctive qualities of their own being” (1947: 186). At the First International Congress of Africanists, held in Accra in 1962, Diop explained the inspiration behind the journal’s name: “In France, the expression ‘Presence Francaise’ is a well-known euphemism, denoting as it does ... ‘the authority of the French in the colonies’ ” and added

The ordinary pre-war French bourgeois could of the term “Presence Francaise” as meaning simply the presence in the colonies of French communities living in peace and harmony with the native community, their sole purpose being to bring the disinherited peoples medicine, education, technical and financial assistance. We know, in actual fact, that things were far from being quite as simple and straightforward. The plain truth is that European civilization and culture are to be met with throughout the world. We use the languages of Europe at our conferences. We employ the techniques of Europe to give our lives a modern touch. The economic laws of Europe dominate our lives. The price of ground nuts or coffee is determined in the Western capitals, whose currency we use.... If we are to live in the modern world, we need to assert our presence in it, and that is the meaning of ‘Presence Africaine’ (1964: 46).

By stating this Diop wants to indicate that the foreign influence is spread not only in the field of literature but in the fields of economics, politics and so on. Not a single field is spared from this. So he states the importance of native standards in the evaluation of literature. Therefore, in this chapter an attempt has been made to identify African Nativistic literary values to evaluate African literature. These are indigenous values, rooted in African life and African culture. This will help the evaluation and study of African literature.

### **3.1 Native Tradition-**

When modern African literature began blossoming in the late 1940s and early 1950s, it was mainly for European consumption. The most unfortunate aspect of the early Western criticism was that very few of the Westerners knew much about Africa. The criticism of the literature was being based on the assumption that, because it employed European languages, African literature in French and English were

therefore, respectively, branches of French and English literature, and that one need only apply the underlying principles of Western literary criticism in assessing the new literature.

African critics seemed to agree that African writers should pursue the African tradition and avoid the European tradition as much as possible. However, this proved more difficult than it seemed. What was, after all, the African tradition? Did it exist? Thomas Melone, a critic and scholar from Cameroun, suggested that it did not exist:

The writer's craft assumes a long literary tradition, a heritage of formulae, thoughts and sensibility, of types and views of the world accumulated by the ancients and which, for the present generation, constitute an essential source. Neither Senghor, nor Cesaire, nor Birago Diop, nor Elolongue Epanya have a Cervantes in front of them, as Corneille had, nor a Hugo (1963:167).

However, Melone's was a lonely voice among a chorus that proclaimed the existence of a healthy and vigorous African tradition. In 1947 Senghor was probably the first to make such a claim: "Although our research in Senegalese poetry is not yet finished, we believe we can now affirm the existence in Senegal of a rich oral poetry, possessing its own techniques, however subtle" (1947:219).

The very next year Cheikh Anta Diop has written about Africa's tradition of written as well as oral literature. He said, 'there exist written - not only oral - African literatures that follow a well defined poetic art: the epic Wolof literature concedes nothing to European epic literature, it even has a certain superiority of form' (1948: 61). In 1949 J. H. Nketia translated some Akan poetry and offered this advice to future African writers: 'it's important that our traditional poems, reflecting our life, and embodying our ideas and sentiments, are collected before they are forgotten' (Osadebay et. Al., 158) and added that for those who are aspiring to write literature, they should provide the structure on which to base their literary activity.

In the early 1950s Samba Birame defended the oral tradition in the pages of *Presence africaine*: 'we know that the music, the songs and dances, the poems, the stage sets of this older theatre were not written. But this in no way diminishes their original value' (1952: 305). Birame was a student then. He further added that African

students needed 'to absorb without hesitation the essential virtues that the African traditions teach' (305).

Ngugi Wa Thiong'O in his book *Moving the Centre* explains three traditions in the literature from Africa. First is that the oral tradition or orature. It is the literature passed on from mouth to ear, generation to generation. It consists of songs, poems, drama, proverbs, riddles, sayings and it is the richest and oldest of heritages. Furthermore, it is still very much alive and readily incorporates new elements. It can be extremely simple or very complex depending on the time, place, and the occasion.... The importance of the oral tradition is that through its agency African languages in their most magical form have been kept alive. One of the highest developments of this was the *griot* tradition in West Africa.

The second tradition is that of Africans writing in European languages particularly in those of the former colonizers. This is clearly a product of the fatal encounter between Africa and Europe in two ways. First is the question of language choice and this links it inevitably to the literatures carried by European languages. This literature is branded with the Europeanness of the word. A case of black skins in white linguistic masks? Secondly, it arose out of and was generally inspired by the great anti-colonial resistance of the African masses.

The third tradition is that of Africans writing in African languages. In the pre-colonial era, this was a minority tradition among the nations in that not many of the African languages had been reduced to writing. But it has always been there and as Professor Abiola Irele has pointed out it is these languages which contain the classical era of African literature, a pre-colonial tradition. It is the one that owns the label, the title, the name, 'African literature'. It has been overshadowed by the more recent Europhone tradition (1993: 18-20).

Joseph Ki-Zerbo noted with concern the dangers attending African culture in the face of an aggressive West bringing its technology into the African continent. He posed the question that should the African critics therefore expect a phenomenon of pure and simple cultural destruction? And then assured the readers that 'to forecast the extinction of these cultures would also be to underestimate the conscience of an ever-increasing number of young Africans who deeply feel an historical mission to

liberate their country by preserving its traditional culture' (1957: 13). In the same year Amadou Moustapha Wade saw a different danger and that of unawareness of what means African tradition? He asked, 'who among us has sufficiently penetrated our poetic universe, our languages, to be able to choose which elements to marry to another prosody' (1957: 84).

In the Second Congress of Negro Writers and Artists held in 1959 at Rome a resolution was passed 'to defend these oral literatures that constitute the real base of Negro-African culture' (Resolution- 387). Michael Dei-Anang echoed the sentiments of fellow Ghanian J. H. Nketia in reiterating the value of an African tradition for the writer. He said, 'these Africans who want to write romantic, imaginative stories could not have a richer treasure than the *Ananse* stories.... As for music and poetry, the true and sincere cadence of powerful words and melody, we have a reserve that is probably richer than any other in the whole world' (1959: 6). Dei-Anang's this view clearly indicates the love for native tradition and irrelevance of western types followed by the fellow writers.

Camara Laye, who had been detained in 1963 because of the then President Sekou Toure of Guinea, made clear the role of African tradition and gave the credit to the President itself.

Under the guidance of our President, His Excellency Sekou Toure, the first thing we did, after independence, was to take hold of ourselves again. Very quickly, we picked up again our own music, our own literature, our own sculpture; all, that is to say, that was most deeply implanted in us and that had been slumbering during the sixty years of our colonization. That is our new soul (1965: 73).

David Rubadiri a well known writer and critic spoke of his feelings for an African tradition: 'Now when I sit down to write, I don't consciously make an effort to try to adapt some so-called African forms. The echoes of the African tradition come to me subconsciously. I hear them, and perhaps this is the only African influence that I can confess to' (1964: 15).

On the other hand, Abiola Irele, while reviewing the first four volumes of the Oxford Library of African literature, called for a more deliberate effort: It is impossible for the modern African writer to take his “African-ness” for granted; on the contrary, it is imperative for him to rethink and refashion his art with reference to his own heritage and in conformity with a native cultural authority. The present volumes indicate that such a tradition exists, affording a solid frame of reference to the modern individual artist in search of a new, living idiom. I must therefore recommend them as indispensable reading not only for students and scholars, but indeed primarily for African writers themselves’ (1964: 468).

This awareness become more profuse up to 1965, Donatus Nwoga said that ‘West African writers, particularly the poets, are more confidently allowing elements of traditional and folk imagination into their work’(1965:15). He concluded that a proper appreciation and criticism of their poems depends more and more on an understanding of the folk poetry and the folk imagination behind the poets.

But Lewis Nkosi, while implying the value of the African tradition, was concerned because black South African writers did not avail themselves of it enough. He said, ‘Behind most of their writing there appears to be nothing in the way of background or tradition other than the monstrous workings of the apartheid system, (1965:164). It is possible that this was a mental reaction in the black South African writer against what Ezekiel Mphahlele saw as the use of Bantu culture as a ‘means of oppression’ by South African government to further its policy of apartheid.

Mphahlele’s thoughts on the African tradition were also developed in a booklet written expressly for the aspiring African writer, *A Guide to Creative Writing*. In his introduction, he said of the new African short story that “it can no longer be the fable or legend that we have told among ourselves from generation to generation without changing the subject.... It can no longer be the story in which the music of the words plays an important part” (1966 a: 2). Nevertheless, Mphahlele by no means advocated abandoning the oral tradition. He saw its value for written literature clearly: “we should however record our fables, legends and myths and oral poetry before they are completely forgotten. Recording these stories in print and on tape will help us

know better where we come from. This in turn must show us which way we are going with the new forms” (1966 a: 2-3).

In literature Negritude represents an aesthetic which seeks to maintain and uphold traditional African culture and sensibilities. It could be argued that one of the objects of the whole Negritude movement was to encourage the expression of the African tradition in the arts – that, in fact, Negritude *was* the African tradition. However, this notion was largely rejected by English-speaking Africans. Ben Obumselu stated this position perhaps more succinctly than anyone else:

If we wish to insist that the literary works which our contemporaries are now writing should be described as “African” with the object of characterizing some quality in the literary works themselves and not merely the racial origin of the authors, we ought, I think, to imply among other things that these works appeal to an imagination created in a large measure by the tradition of African literature (1966: 47).

Further Obumselu reiterated more pointedly that if there is continuity of African literary imagination, it will be found that this continuity is maintained by learning and not by the activity of some occult racial principle. In its place, he offered some suggestions as to what might and might not be used negatively, and opposed to Rubadiri, Irele, and others, he said, “I don’t believe that modern African literature can learn very much from folklore. Its imaginative range – I distinguish folktales from legends and myths – is too narrow” (1966: 55). More positively, he said he believed that myths and legends are more promising but they have not been discovered by the African writers.

J. P. Clark suggested a corresponding source for Nigerian drama:

As the roots of European drama go back to the Egyptian Osiris and the Greek Dionysius so are the origins of Nigerian drama likely to be found in the early religious and magical ceremonies and festivals of this country. The *egungun* and *oro* of the Yoruba, the *egwugwu* and *mmo* masques of the Ibo, and the *owu* and *oru* water masquerades of the Ijaw are dramas typical of the national repertory still generally unacknowledged today (1966 b: 118).

M. J. C. Echeruo pointed to what he saw as a significant gap between the African tradition and modern Nigerian poetry. Echeruo chided the African poets for their neglect of their tradition: “Our poets, we should say, have so far refused to commit themselves to any kind of form that would answer to the tradition of the popular epic in traditional literature” (1966:150).

Mohamadou Kane saw the use of the African tradition as essential while attributing the lack of its influence to a gap between the African writer and an African audience. The African writer went astray, he said, in writing for a European audience; “The solution offered, if not original, is one calling for common sense and strengthening of relations between traditional African writing and the new. In other words, for the new trends to be thoroughly embedded in a cultural reality which is African culture” (1966:13). But he warned that this process could not be superficial:

He [the African writer] sings of the wealth and soul of our culture and praises the hundred qualities in it but is careful not to delve into tradition and illustrate such treasures. He leaves us with the disagreeable impression of being a preacher unconvinced himself, a skilful handler of myths. Experience shows us, however, that those writers known to Africans and esteemed by them are the ones who realize their work will be worth something only if it is rooted in a traditional literature in which the writer, even though he may know it perfectly well, at times feels ill at ease (1966: 28).

Kane also saw the problem of invoking the African tradition prematurely. He says ‘the trouble is that we have been summoned to a meeting with the universal too early and it is characteristic of our times to be impatient and to insist that every man must be ready to cope with this meeting. We must of course see in this invitation the implicit recognition of the value of our cultures but must not lose sight of the need at this first stage not only to consolidate the authenticity of our culture and literature, but to act in such a way that our spokesmen absorb this fully from the outset’ (1966: 31).

To undertake a description of the African tradition – primarily oral – is well beyond the scope of this study. The astute scholarship that has gone into the several volumes of the Oxford Library of African Literature will alone attest to this fact. Other studies by African critics are numerous and equally detailed. What was

pertinent to the developing canons of African literary criticism was the critics' awareness of the African tradition, not only of its existence but of its aesthetic details. More to the point was their willingness to apply their knowledge of this tradition to their evaluations of modern African literature.

### **3.1.1 Orature**

Oral traditions form an integral part of the culture of any group of people. Before printing was invented communities sought to preserve their identity as groups by handing down orally from one generation to another the most important elements of their culture. Even since the invention of printing, oral literature in Africa has not died out. In the first place, much of the material could not be printed. Secondly, even if some of the material was printed, there was still widespread illiteracy and poverty. It was only orally that the elders in the community could continue to transmit to the young ones the customs, beliefs and expectations of the race.

Studies of African literatures implicitly or explicitly argue a continuity with traditional verbal artistry, which, in the absence of a popular writing tradition, was exclusively oral. One can read that intent, for example, in Jonathan Peter's assertion that "the production of fiction in West Africa is virtually as old as communication through the spoken word." Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie, and Ihechukwu Madubuike similarly see the traditional narrative forms of African societies as "Africa's oral antecedents to the novel" and argue at some length against critics who suggest differences between the two" (1980: 25-32). But while there can be little doubt that some connection does exist between the traditional forms and the modern, it would be an error to imagine that modern African literatures wholly evolved from, or had an unbroken relationship with, traditional verbal artistry. The modern literatures are quite evidently a legacy of the European irruption on the African scene, and they differ markedly from the traditional forms. It is also futile to suggest that the differences between traditional forms and modern literatures are immaterial, as the proponents of "orature" suggest, or that the distinction that one is oral and the other written is of little significance, as Wellek and Warren argue (1956: 21-22), and as Andrejewski, Pilaszewicz, and Tyloch also do in their book *Literatures in African Languages* (1985: 18). Oral performances are by their nature intimately personal and



immediate, involving a performer in close physical contact with an audience – performer and audience sharing not only the same spatial and temporal space but also a cultural identity. Literature’s audience is characteristically remote, oftentimes separated by vast spatial, temporal, and cultural distances.

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. A seafaring people will base much of their folklore on the sea and rivers, and since they are likely to be fishermen, on fishing, fishes and other sea creatures. A race of hunters will dwell much on hunting and animals in their oral literature. The experiences of a mountainous people will be different from those of people who live in the lowlands. People who live in the tropics are likely to have been exposed to influences different from those of people who live in temperate climates. These conditions account for the different types of oral traditions current in various parts of the world.

Different versions of the same basic story, which arose spontaneously in various places, can be found in different parts of the world. What happens in most cases is that at every stage and with each group the content of the story changes to suit the needs and beliefs of the group. A good example is the story of the great flood. There are many versions of this story all over the world. The Cishinaua of Western Brazil, the Makusi of Guyana, the Caribs of Central America and many other peoples have their own versions of this story. In the Greek version Zeus brought about such mighty destruction by flood that only Deukalion and his wife Pyrrha survived. In the Hebrew version Noah and those who were to be saved with him took refuge in an ark from where they sent out a dove to discover if the deluge had subsided.

The Yoruba too have their own version of the same story, and Oladele Taiwo has retold it in his book *An Introduction to West African literature*. It runs like this. ‘Long ago, the people of Ife offended God because in the midst of material comfort they forgot to make the necessary sacrifices to Him. God therefore decided to punish them with famine. They had nothing to eat for a long time. Later they decided to consult the priest of the Ifa oracle, Orunmila, to ask what they could do to restore peace and plenty to their land. Orunmila consulted the oracles and told the people to

sacrifice 200 bush rats, 200 fishes, 200 hens, 200 pigeons, 200 he-goats and 200 she-goats to appease God so that they might see an end to their distress. Otherwise a greater calamity would befall them. The people said they could not afford to make this sacrifice, for they had not the means of getting the things required for it. In an attempt to save himself, Orunmila consulted the oracles in order to know what he could do so that the doom which was soon to befall the domain of Ife would not affect him. He was asked to make sacrifices to the gods, which he did. Later he went up to heaven on a rope sent down to earth for this purpose. Hardly had Orunmila left the earth when rain started to fall in heavy torrents, day and night. The waters rose and covered all the ground, mountains and trees. The domain of Ife and the whole world were swept away. Only one coconut tree remained on to which Orunmila descended when he returned to reorganize the earth' (1967; 12).

This version of the story of the flood is different from all other versions. It has a distinct Yoruba colouring and there is a connection with Ife which is regarded as the cradle of the Yoruba. One of the most important deities of the Yoruba, Orunmila, has an honourable part to play in it.

The Eurocentric critics of African literature believe that African literature is born out of European literature. These critics take a position that '(1) that there were no African novels prior to the European cultural invasion; (2) that there was nothing in Africa comparable to the novel out of which the African novel might evolve; (3) that whatever there was in the 'African oral narrative tradition has had a negative influence on the African novel because of the limitations of the oral medium; and (4) they therefore insist that the only "legitimate" model for the African novel is and ought to be European' (Chinweizu et. al. 1980: 26).

There are both oral and written African antecedents to the African literature, and they are comparable and in no way inferior to the European literature. Chinweizu and et. al. in *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* provide the information that Africa has a strong history and tradition than any other country. 'It should be borne in mind (a) that written literature has a long tradition in parts of Africa; (b) that Africa was not totally unilliterate when Europeans arrived there; and (c) that some parts of Africa had written literatures long before many parts of Western Europe. Long

before Caesar led his roman legions to bring civilization to barbarian Gaul, to Celtic Britain, and to the Druidic German tribes of Vercin-getorix in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., the African Nile Valley civilizations of Pharaohnic Egypt, Nubia, Kush, Meroe and Ethiopia had literate cultures – in territories where Sudan, Ethiopia and Egypt are today located. And long before these Johnny-Come-Latelys to civilization – England, France, Germany and all of non-Mediterranean Europe – were taught the literary arts, these same literate African cultures of the Nile Valley had taught writing to the Mediterranean cultures of Crete, Greece, and Judaea, had given them their religions and gods, and schooled them in mathematics, astronomy, architecture, and philosophy, and in the other arts and sciences. Besides extended narratives in Egyptian hieroglyphs, there are pre-colonial African extended narratives written in Amharic, Hausa and Swahili, among others’ (1980: 26).

Chinweizu and others in the same book state that ‘in addition to extended written narratives in African languages, there was in pre-colonial Africa an abundance of oral narratives which are in no way inferior to European novels. It might be noted that some of these, especially the epics and epic cycles, when written down, are comparable in length to quite a few European novels. These narratives have made thematic, technical and formal contributions to the African literature. Among the formal are contributions in the area of length, structural complexity, and textural complexity. In their themes and techniques, African novelists have utilized material from African tales, fables, epigrams, proverbs, etc. The structural and textural complexities of their narration have counterparts in short as well as extended oral narratives’ (1980: 26).

Adrian Roscoe attributes the shortness of African novels to the influence of African oral tales, all of which he regards as short. He says:

The oral story, then, has been Africa’s dominant form. As Borges points out, a piece of the length and complexity of a novel could never be related by a word of mouth. In Africa’s oral past, and present, texts as long as *Things Fall Apart* or *The Interpreters* are not normally found. Africa has been brought up on much shorter narratives; epics like *Sundiata* being special, occasional, exceptions ... and in any case of fairly short length ... Important results stem

from this. The African child ... may acquire a taste for the novel; but his home life, his society's history – in a word, his culture – predisposes him to the story. It also means that, for the moment, the African reader is a short distance performer. And curiously enough, so, too, are many of their texts, whether they are traditionalists like Tutuola or moderns like Soyinka and Clark' (1971: 75-76).

Roscoe is comparing the novel, not with the epic which would be its comparable oral form, but rather with the shorter oral narrative.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'O in his *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams* has given three traditions in the imaginative verbal production of Africa. According to Ngugi 'there is that of the linguistic agent: the one who, no matter what the standpoint of his interpretation of its people, history, and culture, used European languages. This tradition has a long history and it goes all the way back to Leo Africanus in the sixteenth century and Equiano in the nineteenth century; although, if we narrow it down strictly to a matter of imaginative reconstruction of reality, it is a twentieth-century phenomenon. In its rise and development, it is closely linked both to the rise of anti-colonial nationalism and to that of higher education in Africa, particularly to the increase in English and French departments.... The other tradition, a much older one, is that of Africans writing in their own languages. In East Africa, for example, there has been continuous literary output in Kiswahili since the seventeenth century and even possibly from earlier times. And Amharic in Ethiopia, as a written language, goes back to biblical times. But in term of imaginative literature, especially fictional and dramatic narratives, the tradition also became stronger with the struggles against colonialism. The reduction of many African languages to the Roman alphabet through the mediation of Christian missions who wanted the Bible to be accessible to the new converts also helped in the growth of this tradition.... The third tradition, the oldest and the most vital, was that of all those works of imagination produced through word of mouth. Here there is no mediation by the written sign. The production line runs from orality straight to aurality: the mouth produces, the ear consumes directly. Historically this goes back to time immemorial and it is still an integral part of the contemporary African reality....it is the only tradition against which the colonial state often took firm measures, banning many of the songs and performances, and gaoling

the artists involved. This verbal artistic production carries the name orature (1998: 103-105).

In the same work Ngugi states that oral literature is in no way inferior to the written one. On the other hand he considers it a separate entity. According to Ngugi 'oral literature had commonalities with the written. Both were rooted in words. Oral literature was to orality what literature was to literacy. All the genres, the narrative, the poem, drama, which were part of literature, were already there in fully developed form in the oral'. He further adds that the oral 'was a system, a different formal narrative, dramatic, and poetic system' (1998: 109).

Ngugi, Owuor Anyumba and Taban Lo Liyong make a boldest call to place, within the national perspective, oral literature (orature) at the centre of the syllabus. They said,

The oral tradition is rich and many-sided ... the art did not end yesterday; it is a living tradition ... familiarity with oral literature could suggest new structures and techniques; and could foster attitudes of mind characterized by the willingness to experiment with new forms ... The study of the Oral tradition would therefore supplement (not replace) courses in Modern African Literature. By discovering and proclaiming loyalty to indigenous values, the new literature would on the one hand be set in the stream of history to which it belongs and so be better appreciated; and on the other be better able to embrace and assimilate other thoughts without losing its roots (1969: 148).

In his *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams* Ngugi narrates how his works are greatly influenced by the oral tradition of Africa. He says, 'My first four novels – from *The River Between* to *Petals of Blood* – were all composed in English. And in keeping with their europhone tradition I borrowed flavor from African orature – proverbs, riddles, and legends, for instance. Even the break with the linear narrative structure that many critics have noted in my work after *Weep Not Child* is clearly influenced by the digressional patterns that one finds in a lot of oral narratives. So the literary grace in my europhone phase was also derived from the oral power of my cultural inheritance. But after *Petals of Blood*, in the case of novel, and *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, in the case of drama, I changed to writing in Gikuyu under

circumstances that I have described in my book *Decolonizing the Mind*. This change in the linguistic means of my literary production has affected my work and life profoundly again because of my relationship to Gikuyu orature' (1998: 122-23).

Mohammed ben Abdalla has said that for him 'the rituals, dances, music and folklore of our people have a major role to play in the development of African literature' (1987: IX). He even sees the possibility of developing critical theory from the traditions of orature. He calls upon African playwrights to set their own standards, richly drawing from their own cultural heritage, 'our history and the totality of the African experience to create the criteria for judging our own work' (1987: X).

### **3.2 Native Modernity**

During the colonial and even post-colonial period African critics used to follow western concepts of criticism. The critics tried to search the themes of Modernism, Postmodernism, Realism, Surrealism, Naturalism, Structuralism, and so on in African literature, which, in fact, is not altogether applicable to it.

In *The Black Atlantic* (1993), Paul Gilroy argues that, from the late eighteenth century to the present, the cultures of Blacks in the West have been hybrid and antithetical to "ethnic absolutism" (1993: 4-5). According to Gilroy, the modern history of the Black Atlantic is a discontinuous trajectory in which countries, borders, languages, and political ideologies are crossed in order to oppose "narrow nationalism" (1993: 12). Gilroy's term "Black Atlantic" describes the "rhizomorphic, fractal structure of the transcultural, international formation" of modern Black cultures that oppose the nationalist focus "common to English and African American versions of cultural studies" (1993: 4). Gilroy defines "modernity" as the period from the end of the eighteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth centuries when the ideas of "nationality, ethnicity, authenticity, and cultural integrity" that sustain contemporary cultural studies in the West were first developed (1993: 2). Gilroy writes:

The conspicuous power of these modern subjectivities and the movements they articulated has been left behind. Their power has, if anything, grown, and their ubiquity as a means to make political sense of the world is currently

paralleled by the languages of class and socialism by which they once appeared to have been surpassed. My concern here is less with explaining their longevity and enduring appeal than with exploring some of the special political problems that arise from the fatal junction of the concept of nationality with the concept of culture and the affinities and affiliations which link the Blacks of the West to one of their adoptive, parental cultures: the intellectual heritage of the West. (1993:2)

There are problematic aspects of Gilroy's concept of Black modernity. The first element is Gilroy's representation of the essentialising or romanticizing of Black culture as being antithetical to modernity. The second is Gilroy's definition of Black modernity as simply a Western phenomenon, as if Africans and other Blacks from the non-western hemisphere had not produced valuable cultures and identity formations that fit popular notions of the modern. The third aspect is Gilroy's exclusion of the role that African intellectuals played in the international forms of nationalism and resistance movements that Gilroy found to be central in the history of the Black Atlantic and Black modernity. Conceiving Black modernity and the Black Atlantic as referring only to intellectual, cultural, historical, or technological developments in the African American and the Caribbean West is reductive and simplistic. The danger in such a rationale is the failure to validate the intricate relationships between Blacks of Africa in the West and those who have been in the Diaspora since slavery times, and those between tradition and modernity. In *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora* (2001), Abiola Irele writes:

African literature may be said to derive an immediate interest from the testimony it offers of the preoccupation of our writers with the conflicts and dilemmas involved in the tradition/modernity dialectic. This observation is based on the simple premise that, as with many other societies and cultures in the so-called Third World, the impact of Western civilization on Africa has occasioned a discontinuity in forms of life throughout the continent. It points to the observation that the African experience of modernity associated with a Western paradigm is fraught with tensions at every level of the communal existence and individual apprehension. (2001: ix)

Irele's statement suggests the big problem in how African culture and literature are often interpreted from Western notions of modernity that do not appreciate the African-centred idea of stable traditions. Alternatively, Abiola proposes a concept of modernity that acknowledges the continuous experimentation with new forms of expressions that negotiate in harmonious ways with old ones. Irele writes, "Significantly, the idea of tradition has featured prominently in the process, both as theme and as determining factor of the very form of our modern expression. Above all, the idea of tradition has served us essentially as a focus of consciousness and imagination and thus enabled us to formulate a vision of our place in the world" (2001: 67).

Two aspects of *Ambiguous Adventure* emerge by using similar conceptions of the relation between tradition and modernity in African literature. First is the book's representation of the experiences of the protagonist Samba Diallo in both Africa and France. The second is the book's depiction of Black cultural nationalism as a consistent element of African-centred notions of modernity and modernization. As Kane's novel shows, modern Blacks can embrace both their hybrid and authentic experiences and identities while demanding that (1) Europeans acknowledge the humanity of Black people and that (2) they repair the consequences of their colonization of African lands and people.

### ***3.3 Negritude***

The term was coined by a French poet and dramatist from Martinique Aime Cesaire and the Senegalese poet and politician L-S. Senghor in 1930s. It refers to and connotes the attitude displayed in some recent writing by African authors and more particularly, by French-speaking Africans. It is a literary movement which produced its works between 1934 and 1948 and became known under the name of 'Negritude.' It began in Paris in 1934, when a few students founded the journal *L'Etudiant Noir*. They were Leopold Sedar Senghor from Senegal, Leon Damas from French Guiana, and Aime Cesaire from the West Indian island of Martinique. The philosophy of negritude insists that all works of art, genuinely African, and the writers should draw their inspiration from this philosophy. The followers of this philosophy believe that any writing that is worthy of the attention of Africans should be irrevocably



committed to the cause of African liberation, both political and cultural. They consider that in the present African contest any work of art should be judged not on its intrinsic value but by the contribution it makes towards the restoration of the dignity of the African culture. To understand the concept of negritude it is necessary to understand African culture first.

Africa is a geographical, not a cultural term. There are two different cultural areas, with different histories and traditions: on the one hand North Africa, and on the other what is variously called 'Negro Africa', 'Black Africa', 'non-Islamic Africa' and 'Africa south of the Sahara'. The peoples in these two areas have had all sorts of relations with each other over thousands of years, yet differences between them have remained. North Africa today is part of the Islamic cultural area, which has spread into the Sudan, an area of a different culture – where the two together have produced a variety of hybrid forms.

The other area has no satisfactory name. 'Black' or 'Negro' Africa is an expression of racial geography, which one can only use with reluctance, since it implies the idea of identity between culture and race. Besides, 'Negro African' culture and 'Negro Africa' have for some centuries ceased to be identical. On the northern borders of 'Negro Africa' there are many Negro Africans who are now part of Islamic culture; and for another thing, it is 'Negro African' culture, not 'Negro Africa', which has spread to the new world. 'Non-Islamic Africa' is equally inexact, for north of Islam's southern borders there are many peoples only partly Islamic or not Islamic at all. 'Africa south of Sahara', a clumsy periphrasis at the best of times, avoids racial connotations, but is not exact either: the frontier between the two dove-tailed cultures does not coincide with the Sahara. One is also in difficulties for an adjective – 'sub-Saharan African culture' sounds still more ungainly.

Everyone knows, however, what is meant by these unsatisfactory phrases: the area or culture of the peoples living partly in the Sahara but mostly south of it. They form one of the main races of mankind, they have had a separate history since ancient times, they have developed specific cultures in their comparative isolation, their values largely coincide, they speak languages which according to the latest research all belong to the Congo-Kordofanian family, and they inhabit the land-mass extending

in ancient times south of Libya into the unknown. On his map of the world Ptolemy, the Egyptian astronomer and geographer, gave this land-mass the name 'Agisymba'.

No one has yet been able to discover the origin or meaning of this name: it is presumed to have meant either the Highlands of Tibesti or the Lake Chad region or the countries south of the Equator. In Ptolemy's time Africa meant only the coastal strip on the Syrtis Minor (Gulf of Khabs), i.e. the modern Tunisia. To the west that were Nubia and Mauritania, to the east Cyrenaica, Libya and Egypt. South of these countries, already in the desert, were Gaetulia, Phazania (Fezzan), Ethiopia and Numidia. All the unknown area are farther south was Agisymba - and no doubt Ptolemy had good reasons for calling it that. The noun 'Agisymba' and its adjective 'Agesymic' are not used in the English-language edition of Ptolemy's book.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'O considers language as a carrier of culture. Literature is not produced in a vacuum. It is the product of social environment and the culture in which the writer lives. The cultural patterns recur in the writings of indigenous writers. These patterns show the tradition, history and culture of the nation. Africa is not a single nation. It is a group. Naturally, it consists various cultures. And there is a natural communication between these cultures. Ngugi has stated three important aspects of culture. He says that culture is -

- **Product of History:** - Culture is a product and a reflection of human beings communicating with one another in the very struggle to create wealth and to control it. But culture does not merely reflect that history; or rather it does so by actually forming images or pictures of the world of nature and nurture.
- **Image forming agent:** - Culture is an image-forming agent in the mind of a child. One's whole conception of oneself as a people, individually and collectively, is based on those pictures and images which may or may not correctly correspond to the actual reality of the struggles with nature and nurture which produced them in the first place. Language as culture is thus mediating between individual and self, between oneself and other selves; between individual and nature.

- **Transmitter or imparter of those images:** - Culture transmits or imparts those images of the world and reality through the spoken and the written language, that is through a specific language. In other words, the capacity to speak, the capacity to order sounds in a manner that makes for mutual comprehension a quality specific to human beings. It corresponds to the universality of the struggle against nature and that between human beings. But the particularity of the sounds, the words, the word order into phrases and sentences, and the specific manner, or laws, of their ordering is what distinguishes one language from another. Thus a specific culture is not transmitted through language in its universality but in its particularity as the language of a specific community with a specific history. Written literature and orature are the main means by which a particular language transmits the images to the world contained in the culture it carries (1986: 15).

Language as communication and as culture are then products of each other. Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which individuals come to perceive themselves and their place in the world.

Ngugi explains how the process of colonialism came into effect. He says, ‘the real aim of colonialism was to control the people’s wealth: what they produced, how they produced it, and how it was distributed; to control, in other words, the entire realm of the language of real life. Colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic or political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people’s culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others’ (1986: 16).

Ngugi further clarifies that colonialism specifically did the work of destructing a people’s culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and consciously elevated the language of the colonizer. ‘The

domination of a people's language by the language of the colonizing nations was crucial to the domination to the mental universe of the colonized' (1986: 16).

In his epoch making book *Moving the Centre* Ngugi explained how the native tradition and art in Africa was suppressed by the colonialist due to the fear of losing control over the states. He says, 'during the colonial period the practitioners of this culture were often jailed, maimed or even killed. Their songs, dances and even their sculptures were often banned. Colonial Kenya for instance saw such popular, but politically-conscious, dances and songs like Kanyegenyuri and Muthirigu actually banned by the colonial authorities. Mau Mau writers and poets were jailed without trial or else killed. Unfortunately, even after independence the new regime maintained this hostility to national patriotic cultures that reflected people's total opposition to the continued plunder of their labour and wealth by imperialism and its local black allies. Artists and writers belonging to this tradition have been jailed, maimed and killed. Peasant and worker-based theatre movements have been banned. Cultural centers built by the efforts of peasants and workers have been destroyed.

In Africa the language of education was no longer the language of the environment. Children who started getting education had to study through the language of the colonizers. Naturally, they faced great difficulty in understanding the environment which they studied and environment in which they lived. It took the African child away from its own culture. Ngugi explained it thus, 'the language of an African child's formal education was foreign. The language of the books he read was foreign. The language of his conceptualization was foreign. Thought, in him, took the visible form of a foreign language. So the written language of a child's upbringing in the school (even his spoken language within the school compound) became divorced from his spoken language at home. There was often not the slightest relationship between the child's written world, which was also the language of his schooling, and the world of his immediate environment in the family and community. For a colonial child, the harmony existing between the three aspects of language as communication was irrevocably broken. This resulted in the disassociation of the sensibility of that child from his natural and social environment, what we might call colonial alienation. The alienation became reinforced in the teaching of history, geography, music, where bourgeois Europe was always the centre of the universe' (1986: 17).

Since culture is a product of the history of a people which in turn reflects, the African child was now being exposed exclusively to a culture that was a product of a world external to himself. He was being made to stand outside himself to look at himself. The child was made to see the world and where he stands in it as seen and defined by or reflected in the culture of the language of imposition.

As the location of the great mirror of imagination for an African child was necessarily Europe and its history and culture and the rest of the universe was seen from that centre, there was a call to return to the roots, to the native culture of Africa.

Literature is a cultural production; modern African literature expresses the socio-cultural, historical, and other experiences as well as the sensibility of its people. Literary works that focus on certain criteria of cultural acceptability, African-ness, or Africanity constitute modern African literature.

Since literature is a cultural production, it only follows that a people's narratives, poetry, and drama should be an expression of their culture's artistic disposition at its highest level. African literature is produced in the African environment. It provides the setting, source of images, and symbolism for the African experience expressed in the literary works. The evocation of the landscape provides the literary work a concrete setting that defines it as African. African rivers, forests, and mountains, among others, appear in literary works. The river, for instance, is the home of Mami Wata, the water-maid or Olokun by Yoruba name that pervades the poetry of many African writers such as J. P. Clark, Christopher Okigbo, and Onookome Okome, among many poets. The weather is also evoked as in David Rubadiri's "An African Thunderstorm," featured in *A Selection of African Poetry* edited by Kojo Senanu and Theo Vincent.

The fauna and flora of the continent become embodiments of the thoughts of the characters expressed in literature. Wole Soyinka's *Brother Jero* plays are based on the motif of the trickster tortoise, the Yoruba *ajakpa*. Kofi Awoonor uses the weaverbird to represent the coming of colonialists to Africa in very symbolic manner. The vulture has featured in Niger Delta literature, as well as the iroko in rainforest settings of African writers. The aim of such symbolism is to use known images of the environment to communicate to the African reader familiar with the reference.

Ngugi, Oluoch Anyumba and Taban Lo Liyong were emphatic in their rejection and affirmation of English literature and culture. They wanted to place Africa in the centre. They said,

We reject the primacy of English literature and cultures. The aim, in short, should be to orient ourselves towards placing Kenya, East Africa and then Africa in the centre. All other things are to be considered in their relevance to our situation and their contribution towards understanding ourselves ... In suggesting this we are not rejecting other streams, especially the western stream. We are only clearly mapping out the directions and perspectives the study of culture and literature will inevitably take in an African university (1969: 146).

They proposed a new organizing principle which would mean a study of Kenyan and East African literature, African literature, third world literature and literature from the rest of the world. They concluded:

We want to establish the centrality of Africa in the department. This, we have argued, is justifiable on various grounds, the most important one being that education is a means of knowledge about ourselves. Therefore, after we have examined ourselves, we radiate outwards and discover peoples and worlds around us. With Africa at the centre of things, not existing as an appendix or a satellite of other countries and literatures, things must be seen from the African perspective (1969: 150).

Abiola Irele was very likely the only one to apply negritude as a standard positively. He was crucial of Ulli Beier and Gerald Moore's anthology, *Modern Poetry from Africa*, because, he said,

The point of course is that where the African poet is not simply making verse out of a borrowed rhetorical tradition, where his whole being is attuned to the particular atmosphere of his native origin, he must necessarily produce a poem that translates a definite African sensibility. It is in this sense that Negritude is a *vital* poetic message, the expression of a total African vision (1964: 277).

The greatest achievement of *negritude* is that it has made people of African descent all over the world accept the fact that they have a right to be different from other races. One of the main problems posed by the philosophy has been how the African can be himself again after suffering so many humiliation in history. How can the African benefit fully from modern civilization without rejecting his cultural background? How can he, for instance, utilize Western ideas, techniques and institutions without becoming part of them? Will cultural liberation follow political independence?

These are some of the basic problems posed by the philosophy and to which some of its adherents have been trying to find a solution. Followers of *negritude* think that Africans do not have to look or behave like people of other races. Oladele Taiwo is of the opinion that 'Africa does not have to produce a Shakespeare to be regarded as great. The African genius is essentially different from that of his Western counterpart and has produced different results. African culture is what it is because Africans are what they are and there is no need for the African to envy or imitate the cultural heritage of any other racial group. *Negritude* is a philosophy devised to raise the stature of people of African descent in international affairs and to remove all the disadvantages which previously went with a black skin' (1967: 46).

The movement has been fairly successful in the literary field. It has aroused the consciousness of negroes and alerted them to their present needs and opportunities, and to the fact that they have responsibilities to their own race. *Negritude* has taken different forms in order to achieve its varying objectives. Many cultural organizations have been founded in order to promote cultural revival, such as the Mbari in Nigeria. There have also been many changes in the field of religion. There has arisen the concept of African personality. Even the establishment of the Organisation of African Unity is claimed to be an achievement for *negritude*.

There is dilemma posed by *negritude*. The African is invited to glorify his past and preserve his cultural inheritance. Is he also to protect himself against European civilization? Should the African, because of his loyalty to his traditional background, reject the ideas and practices he has acquired form the Europeans? Should he deliberately choose to remain backward in order to promote the cause of *negritude*?

How can he use the Western languages, French and English, in his daily life, for business and international transactions, and yet avoid the Western way of life? Oladele Taiwo says that 'A more realistic approach to the problem is that the African is at present at a crossroads, culturally. He wants to move away from the foreign culture imposed on him during the colonial period but it is not yet clear what form of indigenous culture will take its place. He cannot return to his own culture as it was a century ago. He should realize that nothing prevents him from taking advantage of modern ideas and inventions and making them serve his particular needs. He should draw selectively from both inherited ideas and acquired European values. This would not awaken the basis of *negritude*. The philosophy is meant to be dynamic. The founders were aware of the realities of the twentieth century and the interdependence of peoples and continents. *Negritude* was not meant to be a racist philosophy, but an antiracist racism. Any intolerance shown by its adherents had no place in the minds of the founders. Unless *negritude* is presented as a progressive force, which can appeal to all negroes, it cannot command international respect. If present negro writers give the impression that they intend to make the philosophy an instrument of revenge for past wrongs and a means for counter-revolution, they have only themselves to blame if others show scant respect for it' (1967: 48).

In September 1974 a crucial conference on 'The teaching of African Literature in Kenyan Schools' was held at Nairobi School. The conference was jointly organized by the Department of Literature, University of Nairobi and the Inspectorate of English in the Ministry of Education. The conference was therefore conscious of the fact that an actual literature syllabus, no matter how far reaching in its scope and composition of texts and authors, is limited unless literature is seen and taught as an ideological component of the continuing national liberation process. In one of the conclusions of the conference it is written:

Three major principles that emerged from the conference have guided the discussions of the working committee and the preparation of this report.

- (i) *A people's culture is an essential component in defining and revealing their world outlook. Through it, mental processes can be conditioned,*



*as was the case with the formal education provided by the colonial governments in Africa.*

- (ii) A sound educational policy is one which enables students to *study the culture and environment of their own society first, then* in relation to the culture and environment of other societies.
- (iii) *For the education offered today to be positive and to have created potential for Kenya's future it must be seen as an essential part of the continuing national liberation process.*

(Recommendations of the working committee;1974: 19-20).

The result of this is seen in 1982, some elements like the oral literature components, have been introduced in the school literature curriculum.

Ngugi in *Moving the Centre* hopes for the better future. According to him destroying African culture is not possible. He says, 'Imperialism in its colonial form was not able to destroy a people's fighting culture. I can firmly say this: that Imperialism in its neo-colonial clothes will not be able to destroy the fighting culture of the African peasantry and working class for the simple reason that this culture is a product and a reflection of real life struggles going on in Africa today. You can destroy a people's culture completely only by destroying the people themselves and I suppose that we can safely leave that task to those who think that they can win a limited nuclear war so that they can continue to eat up, unmolested, uncontested, the resources of the people of Asia, Africa and South America' (1993: 45).

The same optimism is witnessed in David Diop's poem 'Africa'. After evoking an Africa of freedom lost as well as the Africa of the current colonialism, he looks to the future with unqualified, total confidence:

Africa tell me Africa  
Is this you this back that is bent  
This back that breaks under the weight of humiliation  
This back trembling with red scars  
And saying yes to the whip under the midday sun

But a grave voice answers me  
Impetuous son that tree young and strong  
That tree there  
In splendid loneliness amidst white and faded flowers  
That is Africa your Africa  
That grows again patiently obstinately  
And its fruit gradually acquires  
The bitter taste of liberty.

(Ngugi, *Moving the Centre*: 62)

### **3.4 Language of People**

Ngugi Wa Thiong'O in his article "Return to the Roots" denied that the literature produced by the African writers is African literature at all. He said, 'What in fact has been produced by we Kenyan writers in English is not African literature at all. It is Afro-Saxon literature, or better still, Anglophone Kenyan literature, part of that body of literature produced by Africans in European languages like French and Portuguese that we should correctly term Afro-European literature, or better still, Europhone African literature. We can then talk of its three major divisions: Anglophone African literature; Francophone African literature; and Lusophone African literature. Kenyan African literature would be that literature produced mostly in the languages of all the African nationalities that make up modern Kenya. And Kenyan National literature would be the totality of all the literatures written in all the Kenyan nationality languages. Kenyan national literature can only get its stamina and blood by utilizing the rich tradition of culture and history carried by the languages of all the Kenyan nationalities. In other words Kenyan national literature can thrive only if it reaches for its roots in the languages, culture and history of the Kenyan peasant masses, the majority class in each of Kenya's national communities' (1981: 57).

An important argument relating to the definition of African literature has been the controversy surrounding the languages in which it is, and ought to be written. What is the relationship between a literature and its language? In pursuing this question, African critics began to establish a critical standard.

Not many Africans approached the question as directly as did Nigerian critic Obiajunwa Wali. His 1963 article, “The Dead End of African Literature?” set off a lively debate. Wali’s basic premise was that

The whole uncritical acceptance of English and French as the inevitable medium for educated African writing, is misdirected, and has no chance of advancing African literature and culture. In other words, until these [African] writers and their western midwives accept the fact that any true African literature must be written in African languages, they would be merely pursuing a dead end, which can only lead to sterility, uncreativity, and frustration (1963: 14).

One of the bases for Wali’s position was that literatures are defined by language and, therefore, “African literature as now understood and practiced, is merely a minor appendage in the main steam of European literature.” He explained further,

The basic distinction between French and German literature for instance, is that one is written in French, and the other in German. All the other distinctions, whatever they be, are based on this fundamental fact. What therefore is now described as African literature in English and French, is a clear contradiction, and a false proposition, just as “Italian literature in Hausa” would be (1963: 14).

Fifteen years earlier Cheikh Anta Diop had expressed the same idea:

Without underestimating at all the value of these Africans writing in foreign languages, does one have the right to consider their writings as the base of an African culture? Upon examination – even a superficial one – we must respond in the negative. In effect, we believe that all literary work belongs necessarily to the language in which it is written: the works thus written by Africans arise, above all, from these foreign literatures, and one would not know how to consider them as monuments of an African literature (1948: 58).

Wali's other main argument for African languages was that the African writing in a European language would produce only a pale version of what he or she would be capable of creating in an African language. He said:

An African writer who thinks and feels in his own language must write in that language. The question of transliteration, whatever that means, is unwise as it is unacceptable, for the "original" which is spoken of here, is the real stuff of literature and the imagination, and must not be discarded in favor of a *copy* (1963: 14).

Here Wali touched on an argument that received much greater support among his fellow critics. In fact, the argument goes back to 1948, when O. K. Poku felt that the technical difficulties of writing in a second language were nearly insurmountable. He said,

Africans can do little to furnish the palace of English literature. For the African's knowledge of English can never equal the knowledge that the Englishman has of his own language. Africans can never be Englishmen; can never speak English perfectly and can never fully understand its idioms. Better to start developing the African tongue to become masters of a true literature and the best interpreters of the African nature (1948: 900).

In 1949, K. A. B. Jones-Quartey said, in the same vein,

The majority of Africans can never employ the English language as the majority of Englishmen and Americans employ it; they can or should never build a national literature upon it, because the original language of a people carries with it that people's peculiar genius. And the African genius dwells as much in African language as the Anglo-Saxon and Hindu spirit dwell in English and Hindustani (1949: 24).

But Chinua Achebe challenged the argument that the African could not write effectively in a second language. Examining Christopher Okigbo's "Limits" and J. P. Clark's "Night Rain," he said:

I do not see any signs of sterility anywhere here. What I do see is a new voice coming out of Africa, speaking of African experience in a world-wide language. So my answer to the question, Can an African learn English well enough to be able to use it effectively in creative writing? is certainly yes (1965: 29).

Ngugi Wa Thiong'O considers that the issue of language is at the heart of African literature. He says 'The choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe. Hence language has always been at the heart of the two contending social forces in the Africa of the twentieth century' (1986: 4).

Gabriel Okara in an article reprinted in *Transition* exemplified how the African writers were enriching foreign languages by injecting Senghorian 'black blood' into their rusty joints. Okara said:

As a writer who believes in the utilization of African ideas, African philosophy and African folklore and imagery to the fullest extent possible, I am of the opinion. The only way to use them effectively is to translate them almost- literally from the African language native to the writer into whatever European language he is using as medium of expression. I have endeavoured in my words to keep as close as possible to the vernacular expressions. For, from a word, a group of words, a sentence and even a name in any African language, one can glean the social norms, attitudes and values of a people.

In order to capture the vivid imaged of African speech, I had, to eschew the habit of expressing my thoughts first in English. It was difficult at first, but I had -to learn I had to study each Ijaw expression I used and to discover the probable situation in which it was used in order to bring out the nearest, meaning in English. I found it a fascinating exercise (1963: 15).

Ngugi poses the questions related to Okaras views that why an African writer, or any writer should, become so obsessed by taking his mother-tongue to enrich other tongues? Why should he see it as his particular mission? In fact as a critics or readers

of literature we never ask ourselves: how can we enrich our languages? 'Why not have Balzac, Tolstoy, Sholokov, Brecht, Lu Hsun, Pablo Neruda, H. C. Anderson, Kim Chi. Ha, Marx, Lenin, Albert Einstein, Galileo, Aeschylus, Aristotle and Plato in - African languages?' And why not create literary monuments in our own languages? Why-in other words should Okara not sweat it out to create in Ijaw, which he acknowledges to have depths of philosophy and a wide range of ideas and experiences? What was our responsibility to the struggles of African peoples? No, these questions were not asked. What seemed to worry us more was this: after all the literary gymnastics of preying on our languages to add life and vigour to English and other foreign languages, would the result be accepted as good English or good French? Will the owner of the language criticize our usage?' (1986: 8).

Chinua Achebe's views clearly throw light on this.

I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit new African surroundings (1965: 30).

A Nigerian writer, John Munonye, described how the process of mental translation helps the production of literature and the process he went through when he had difficulty expressing himself;

One thing I do in such circumstances (apart from walking out of the house) is to resort to the vernacular, in my mind, and then translate into English on paper. I must say that I have found this very rewarding. It leads to some personal style.

This is particularly so in the dialogues. In a story where the characters are Nigerian the dialogues should, I think, be as close as possible to the emotions, style and idiosyncrasies of the people. (1966:78).

Ngugi Wa Thiong'O considers that language plays an important role in the development of African literatures. The continuous tradition of indigenous languages and the production of oral literature is also significant. Similarly the environment in which an African child grows shapes the mind and literary taste of the child. Language is not a mere string of words. It had a suggestive power well beyond the

immediate and lexical meaning. The appreciation of the suggestive magical power of language is reinforced by the indigenous games played by the children with words through riddles, proverbs, transpositions of syllables, or through nonsensical but musically arranged words. The language, through images and symbols give a view of the world and it has a beauty of its own. In African the home and the field were then the pre-primary schools. The language of the evening teach-ins, community and work in the fields was one. Ngugi state how this situation changes when a child goes to school with reference to his own schooling. He says:

And then I went to school, a colonial school, and this harmony was broken. The language of my education was no longer the language of my culture. I first went to Kamaandura, missionary run, and then to another called Maanguuu run by nationalists grouped around the Gikuyu Independent and Karinga Schools Association. Our language of education was still Gikuyu. The very first time I was ever given an ovation for my writing was over a composition in Gikuyu. So for my first four years there, was still harmony between the language of my formal education and that of the Limuru peasant community.

It was after the declaration of a state of emergency over Kenya in 1952 that all the schools run by patriotic nationalists were taken over by the colonial regime and were placed under District Education Boards chaired by Englishmen. English became the language of my formal education: In Kenya, English became more than a language: it was *the* language, and all the others had to bow before it in deference.

Thus one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gikuyu in the vicinity of the school. The culprit was given corporal punishment - three to five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks - or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as *I AM STUPID* or *I AM A DONKEY*. Sometimes the culprits were fined money they could hardly afford. And how did the teachers catch the culprits? A button was initially given to one pupil who was supposed to hand it over to whoever was caught speaking his mother tongue. Whoever had the button at the end of the

day would sing who had given it to him and the ensuing process would bring out all the culprits of the day. Thus children were turned into witch hunters and in the process were being taught the lucrative- value of being a traitor to one's immediate community (1986: 11).

This process of culprit finding is hazardous in the development of indigenous languages. If the indigenous languages are flourished then only the literature will flourish. Because any language has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture. For example English. It is spoken in Britain and in Sweden and Denmark. But for Swedish and Danish people English is only a means of communication with non-Scandinavians. It is not a carrier of their culture. For the British, and particularly the English, it is- additionally, and inseparably from its use as a tool of communication, a carrier of their culture and history. Or take Swahili in East and Central Africa. It is widely used as a means of communication across many nationalities. But it is not the carrier of a culture and history of many of those nationalities. However in parts of Kenya and Tanzania, and particularly in Zanzibar, Swahili is inseparably both a means of communication .and a carrier of the culture of those people to whom it is a mother-tongue.

This happened because by 1950 the need consciously to create and foster a native middle class with British values to cater for British interests in a future Kenya had outweighed the fear of the easy accessibility of radical anti-imperialist literature. To achieve this, it was decided that English should be actively promoted as the main language at the expense of Kiswahili and other African languages. Ngugi quotes Mutahi:

Reasons for this sudden change can be found in a speech given by the Governor, Sir Phillip Mitchell, in Nairobi in 1954. He said... what se have set our hands to here is the establishment of a civilized state in which the values and the standards are to be the values and standards of Britain, in which everyone, whatever his origins, has an interest and a part. The wildest naked man in Turkana has an investment in it, although apart from the security he now enjoys, it may be a remotely maturing one... (1981: 59).



What Macaulay had articulated for India in the nineteenth century – to use English to create a class of Indians who were Indians in colour but British in everything else – was being articulated for Kenya Africans in the twentieth century by Governor Mitchell.

Ngugi in his *Decolonising the Mind* has stated three aspects of language: first what Karl Marx once called the language of real life, the second speech and the third is the written signs.

- **The language of real life**

It is the element basic to the whole notion of language, its origins and development: that is, the relations people enter into with one another in the labour process, the links they necessarily establish among themselves in the act of a people, a community of human beings, producing wealth or means of life like food, clothing, and houses. A human community really starts its historical being as a community of co-operation in production through the division of labour. Production is co-operation, is communication, is language, is expression of a relation between human beings and it is specifically human:

- **Speech**

It imitates the language of real life, that is communication in production. The verbal signposts both reflect and aid communication or the relations established between human beings in the production of their means of life. Language as a system of verbal signposts makes that production possible. The spoken word is to relations between human beings what the hand is to the relations between human beings and nature. The hand through tools mediates between human beings and nature and forms the language of real life: spoken words mediate between human beings and form the language of speech.

- **Written Signs**

The written word imitates the spoken. Where the first two aspects of language as communication through the hand and the spoken word historically evolved more or less simultaneously, the written aspect is - a much later historical

development. Writing is representation of sounds with visual symbols, from the simplest knot among shepherds to tell the number in a herd or the hieroglyphics among the Agikuyu gicaandi singers and poets of Kenya, to the most complicated and different letter and picture writing systems of the world today.

These three aspects of language shape the harmony in communication. Speakers' interaction with nature and with other men is expressed in written and spoken symbols or signs which are both a result of that double interaction and a reflection of it. During the pre-independence period the literature produced in Africa, or in any other colonized country, was basically produced in the language of the colonizers. The peasants, working class people speak European languages. The same continued even after independence. It is interesting to note that though people had great pride in their history, though they sang of unity among the African peoples as an immediate and desirable ideal, 'today, thirty years after independence, there is not a single newspaper in African languages apart from Kiswahili' (Ngugi; *Writers in Politics*:1981: 128). Post colonial dictatorships in Africa have seen writers imprisoned, exiled or murdered. At the very least they have created a climate of passivity. In the sixties and seventies, the neo-colonial cultures of fear and silence seemed to thrive. Black run neo-colonial states were not really seen with the same clarity as white supervised colonialism. Blacks were, after all, the ones now in power and anti-colonialism was often couched in images of blackness versus whiteness. If it was continued in the same way African languages might have ceased to exist. But it didn't happen. Ngugi said,

These languages, these national heritages of Africa, were -kept alive by the peasantry. The peasantry saw no contradiction between speaking their own mother-tongues and belonging to a larger national or continental geography. They saw no necessary antagonistic contradiction between belonging to their immediate nationality, to their multinational state along the Berlin-drawn boundaries, and to Africa as a whole. These people happily spoke Wolof, Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo, Arabic, Amharic, Kiswahili, Gikuyu Luo, Luhya, Shona, Ndebele, Kimbundu, Zulu or Lingala without this fact tearing the multinational states apart. During the anti-colonial struggle they showed an

unlimited capacity to unite around whatever leader or party best and most consistently articulated an anti-imperialist position. If anything it was the petty-bourgeoisie, particularly the compradors, with their French and English and Portuguese, with their petty rivalries, their ethnic chauvinism, which encouraged these vertical divisions to the point of war at times.

No, the peasantry had no complexes about their languages and the cultures they carried! In fact when the peasantry and the working class were compelled by necessity or history to adopt the language of the master, they Africanized it without any of the respect for its ancestry shown by Senghor and Achebe, so totally as to have created new African languages, like Krio in-Sierra Leone or Pidgin in Nigeria, that owed their identities to the syntax and rhythms of African languages. All these languages were kept alive in the daily speech, in the ceremonies, in political struggles, above all in the rich store of orature - proverbs, stories, poems, and riddles (1986: 23).

The peasantry, working class and the common people have kept the languages of Africa alive with their love for land and the language. But the so called educated African still strive to get position at the international scene by writing in a language which culture is totally different from that of African culture. It is impossible for them to ward off the imperial influence. In this connection Ngugi Wa Thiong'O poses a question. He asks

The question is this: we as African writers have always complained about the neo-colonial economic and political relationship to Euro America. Right. But by our continuing to write in foreign languages, paying homage to them, are we not on the cultural level continuing that neo-colonial slavish and cringing spirit? What is the difference between a politician who says Africa cannot do without imperialism and the writer who says Africa cannot do without European languages? (1986: 26)

In this connection it is important to note Ngugi's own example. In a statement given in the beginning of *Decolonising the Mind* he said

In 1977 I published *Petals of Blood* and said farewell to the English language as a vehicle of my writing of plays, novels and short stories. All my subsequent creative writing has been written directly in *Gikuyu* language: my novels *Caitani Mutharabaini* and *Matigari Ma Njiruiingi*, my plays *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (written with Ngugi wa Mirii) and *Maitu Njugira*, and my childrens' books, *Njamba Nene na Mbaathi i Mathagu*, *Bathitoora ya Njamba Nene* and *Njamba Nene na Cibu King'ang'i*.

However, I continued writing explanatory prose in English. Thus *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, *Writers in Politics* and *Barrel of a Pen* were all written in English.

This book, *Decolonising the Mind*, is my farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings. From now on it is *Gikuyu* and *Kiswahili* all the way.

However, I hope that through the age old medium of translation I shall be able to continue dialogue with all (1986: xiv).

After this Ngugi produced all his creative writing in his native language *Gikuyu* but by translating it himself into English he made it accessible to all. He further adds that wherever he went, particularly in Europe, he had been confronted with the question: 'Why are you now writing in *Gikuyu*? Why do you now write in an African language? Even in some academic quarters I have been confronted with the rebuke, 'Why have you abandoned us? It was almost as if, in choosing to write in *Gikuyu*, I was doing something abnormal' (1986: 27). Answering these questions Ngugi says, '*Gikuyu* is my mother tongue! ... I believe that my writing in *Gikuyu* language, a Kenyan language, an African language, is part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African peoples. In schools and universities our Kenyan languages – that is the languages of the many nationalities which make up Kenya – were associated with negative qualities of backwardness, underdevelopment, humiliation and punishment: We who even through that school system were meant to graduate with a hatred of the people and the culture and the values of the language of our daily humiliation and punishment. I do not want to see Kenyan children growing up in that imperialist-imposed tradition of contempt for the tools of communication

developed by their communities and their history. I want them to transcend colonial alienation' (1986: 27-28).

It is now the need of the nation that the African writers are by this calling to do for African languages what Spencer, Milton and Shakespeare did for English; what Pushkin and Tolstoy did for Russian; indeed what all writers in world history have done for their languages by meeting the challenge of creating a literature in them, which process later opens the languages for philosophy, science, technology and all the other areas of human creative endeavours.

Ngugi advises that the 'writers in African languages should reconnect themselves to the revolutionary traditions of an organized peasantry and working class in Africa in their struggle to defeat imperialism and create a higher system of democracy and socialism in alliance with all the other peoples of the world. Unity in that struggle would ensure unity in our multi-lingual diversity. It would also reveal the real links that bind the people of Africa to the peoples of Asia, South America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, Canada and the U.S.A.' (1986:29-30).

In his famous essay entitled "Return to the Roots" from *Writers in politics* Ngugi advocates that the use of indigenous African languages only flourish African national literature and theatre. 'I do not want to ascribe any mystical qualities to the mere fact of writing in African languages without regard to content and form. But the question which Obi Wali posed about the peasant and worker audience as the strongest source of stamina and blood for African literature is primary and we, Kenyan African writers in particular, must meet the challenges of language choice and a national theatre, two of the most important roots of a modern national culture' (1981: 56). Ngugi further adds that 'the growth of writing in African languages will need a community of scholars and readers in those very languages, who will bring into the languages the wealth of literature on modern technology, arts and science. For this they need platforms. It is a vicious circle. So while the two pieces mirror my current involvements in the struggle to move the centre of our (African) literary engagements from European languages to a multiplicity of location in our (African) languages' (1993: xiv).

It's better to sum up with a poem by the Somali poet of the oral tradition, Mohamed Ismail of Garce, who has gone so far as to accuse the educated Africans of committing treason against their own languages:

Oh my friends, the Somali language is very perplexed;

It is all anxiety in its present condition;

The value of its words and expressions are being gagged by its own people;

Its very back and hips are broken, and it accuses its own speakers of neglect;

It is weeping with deep sorrow;

It is being orphaned and its value is vanishing.

(Ngugi, *Moving the Centre*: 21)

As Ngugi says writing in African languages has many difficulties and problems. Problems of literacy. Problems of publishing. Problems of the lack of a critical tradition. Problems of orthography. Problems of having very many languages in the same country. Problems of hostile governments with a colonized mentality. In short, literature in African languages suffers from a lack of a strong tradition, creative and critical. Writers in African languages are having to create several traditions simultaneously; publishing, critical vocabulary, orthography, and even words. But it has the advantage of being able to establish a natural give and take relationship to the rich heritage of orature. African writers in African languages are giving something back, however tiny, to the development of African languages.

### ***3.5 Literature engagee***

A writer who produces a work has certain responsibility. It is the morality of the writer. Literature acquires serious meaning only when it reflects social reality in all aspects and areas of life. The issues of writers morality usually argued out in the vocabulary of privatism and commitment are those concerning the responsibility of writers to their society. There is a privatism of *matter* as well as of *manner* which issue forth in obscurantism. Obscurity due to a privatism of matter is that in which allegedly incommunicable experiences, experiences said to be beyond verbal

expression, are presented. But, the writers should ask, why bother writing about such experiences if they are intrinsically incommunicable *in words*?

Chinweizu and others state that ‘obscurity due to privatism of manner is that in which matters that are quite capable of communication in words are so presented as to be incomprehensible to readers. This is a question exclusively of treatment – of *privatist versus public treatment* of any theme whatsoever, *not* a question of whether the themes treated are from public or private life, and not, as is commonly supposed, a question of whether the themes are public or private in nature. Public themes can be treated in a privatist manner, resulting in privatist, obscure work; and private themes can be treated in a public manner, thus avoiding privatist obscurity’ (1980: 249).

The point is that no matter his topic, the writer’s language should not be tuned to some idiosyncratic perceptual matrix which obscures it for the public. Surely, a writer can write about his emotions and perceptions, his self-explorations, his love affairs, the death of his dear ones, his thoughts about suicide, his prospects for promotion in his job, etc., and about all the complex emotions that might accompany these events, but his treatment should not be obscurantist. It can not be denied that works on such subjects are “a valid exercise in growth” and that they can “have the effect of changing men’s consciousness and making them aware of what previously they had not even guessed”(Nwoga: 39-40). Rather, it would be pointed out that such an exercise would be ineffectual if it failed to communicate its experience. It should be re-emphasized that *private* themes do not necessarily result in *privatist* writing, as the poetry of Lenrie Peters, amply demonstrates.

Discussions of privatism, insofar as the term involves an attitude towards the public, usually lead to questions about the writer’s responsibilities to the public and therefore to talk about his social commitment. Misunderstandings about the term “commitment” quickly arise. This is usually because of a confounding of two questions, namely: (1) the social responsibility of the writer *as citizen*, i.e., a citizen who happens to be a writer by trade; and (2) the commitment or *engagement* of the *products* of his trade, i.e., his writings.

Though the public may have become conditioned to the notion that commitment in art demands that the artist carry guns or join protest marches, such

acts of political or social commitment – which a writer engages in as a citizen – should properly be kept distinct from the commitment of the literature which he produces. An artist who chooses to engage in acts of social or political activism does so only in his capacity as an ordinary citizen. For example, when military service is not required of him, a writer who volunteers does so in his capacity as a citizen. He has no professional obligation to volunteer, nor does he have a professional obligation to not volunteer. It is entirely up to him and his citizen sense of what the occasion calls for. If his sense of citizen responsibility should move him to volunteer, and if he should get killed in battle or be forced to endure imprisonment, he should not be accused of having deserted an alleged responsibility to art. A responsibility to art, whatever that is, can not take precedence over his responsibility to his society to play his role in it as a citizen. And even his art has social value only insofar as it is a means for serving his society. In that sense, it is on a par with any other means of social service for which a writer has competence, be it soldiering or administering or doctoring.

On the other hand, when military service *is* required of a writer, he cannot claim exemption on the simple basis of being a writer. The kind of argument which says that writers or any other artists, as an artistic elect, are intrinsically exempt from “carrying guns” is simply disingenuous. That being an artist does not exempt anyone from one’s citizen responsibilities. The notion of an artistic elect intrinsically exempt from the social responsibilities common to all members of the society is simply fatuous. Chinweizu and others state that ‘the arts are merely one group of professions among others. Why an exemption for artists but not for farmers, carpenters, or cooks? There may indeed be other grounds for individual exemptions, e.g., for cripples, cowards, pacifists, or the insane; but such exemptions, surely, must apply to all professions alike’ (1980:251).

Ngugi Wa Thiong’O in his play *I Will Marry When I Want* has clearly shown how a particular community is being exploited by others. Especially the natives who converted into Christianity exploit the others on religious grounds. Here it is the writer’s responsibility to bring truth in front of the society. Here Ngugi fulfills his citizen responsibilities by fulfilling the social responsibilities.



It needs to be pointed out that when a writer fulfills his citizen responsibilities, even at the price of imprisonment or death, this fact may change the society's estimate of him as a person. He is then admired for his courage and heroism as a citizen, but even such heroism is no reason for his literary work to be esteemed more highly than it deserves. These considerations would of course hold true for a cook, carpenter, farmer, gossip columnist, doctor, lawyer, teacher, burglar, hangman, bartender, or any member of any trade.

Chinweizu et. al. comment that writing and politics must be kept separate and apart. 'Literature and politics influence each other, and those writers are deluded who, drawing support from the absurd pretensions of art for art's sake, put on the airs of an artistic elect who must keep their works unsullied but the political concerns of their fellow citizens. Their notion is that art should concern itself with "eternal verities" and "universal" themes and must fastidiously shun matters of contemporary concern to their community as topical, journalistic, sociological ephemera' (1980:251).

A writer does have a minimum professional responsibility to make his work relevant and intelligible to his society and its concerns. He may do so by treating the burning issues of the day; or he may do so by treating themes germane to his community's fundamental and long-range interests. There are no intrinsically artistic grounds for avoiding either. Art is not sullied by either. The only plausible grounds for avoiding either are personal lack of interest and personal incompetence in handling that kind of material. Chinweizu and others say, 'if an African writer wishes to avoid both these kinds of issues, either by writing for alien interests and audiences, or by writing in a privatist code, then why should he publish and circulate his works in Africa?

Another question emerges that for whom an African writer writes? And the answer is that the African writer must write first and foremost for Africans: African literature for the Africans. This is not a surprise of revolutionary concept; it is very likely an unspoken criterion of the literary criticism of any literature and a writer's responsibility.

In the 1950s and 1960s all the publishing machinery was located in the West and controlled by Westerners whose decisions were based on a knowledge of and

dependence upon, Western customers. It was the fact for the African writer and critic. The East Africa Publishing House began publishing creative work in the mid 1960s, and Andre Deutsch, Longmans, and Oxford set up operations in Africa with varying success. But it is clear that the control of the publication of African literature, certainly before 1960s, was almost entirely in non-African hands. Non-Africans have continued to control much of the publication of African literature from 1960 to the present, though less exclusively. A Western publisher who took on an African manuscript had to keep in mind that almost all its prospective buyers would be Western, not African. And this, of course, was the very market the publisher knew best. Hence a particular form of African literature was encouraged.

The African writer and critic had yet another difficulty. There was a great desire to project into the non-African world an accurate image of Africa. Africans then had to reach the very people for whom the western publisher was prepared to tailor an African literature. African writers wanted to reach a Western audience but on their own terms; yet they were not in a position to dictate those terms. They had to write for a Western publisher; they wanted to write for a western audience; but they had also to write for an African critic who told them they should write for an African audience. Paulin Joachim said of Camara Laye's *Le Regard du roi*, 'The world awaits Africa's distinct contribution to a common heritage. And it is no at this time that an African creator will choose to be a Kafka or a Picasso. Let us do as President Senghor and write for our people and not for the approval of a foreign public, (1961: 7).

It won't do for a writer to claim that he has no mandate from anyone to write; therefore no one should advise him what to write about or how to write. One may ask such a writer why he bothers to make his writings public, why he uses public resources, lays claim to public attention, yet disdains all responsibility to society. Chinweizu says, 'if he insists on the prerogative claimed by some decadent and alienated bourgeois artists of the West, he should move to the West where he can join them in indulging in the social irrelevance of art for art's sake. If he chooses to remain in Africa, he should keep his scribbling to himself. For the function of the artist in Africa, in keeping with our traditions and needs, demands that the writer, as a public voice, assume a responsibility to reflect public concerns in his writings, and not preoccupy himself with his puny ego. Because in Africa we recognize that art is in the

public domain, a sense of social commitment is mandatory upon the artist' (1980: 252). That commitment demands that the writer pay attention to his craft, that he not burden his public with unfinished or indecipherable works. It also demands that his theme be germane to the concerns of his community.

Chinweizu and others also advocate that 'in focusing on these concerns, the matter for his poetry, novels or other writing may be historical, philosophical, sociological, scientific, or topical. He may choose to explore some of the values of his society, or some of the dangers in its path; or he may choose to lampoon its foibles or castigate its wrongdoings, the quarry for themes is as big as all of the society and its history, its imagination and its future. And by the way, it should be pointed out that the distinction between *topical* and *non-topical* matters is not a distinction among literary themes but rather a distinction about the state of social interest in literary themes. For any particular theme, be it love or politics or war, could drop back into being a matter of fundamental, long-range and unfocussed concern at some other time. It is misleading to talk as if love, private grief, personal ambition, etc. are somehow "eternal" and "universal" themes, and as if such public matters as war, peace, corruption, territorial aggrandizement, and politics somehow are not. The former can be just as topical or non-topical as the latter. A society concerned with its future would be concerned at some point or another, and at one level or another, with every aspect of its affairs, private and public, transient and enduring, past, present and future. Thus, any one of these could supply the writer with issues germane to his community' (1980: 253).

But a question emerges. Must a writer write about every one of these in order to be considered committed? It would be foolish to answer it positively. 'Who would have enough time do so even in ten life times?' (Chinweizu; 1980: 253). It is reasonable for a writer to write only about that of which he knows well and is skilled enough to handle well. Once he chooses a particular subject to write and from his particular orientation, it is his responsibility to write in such a way that the readers can understand and learn from his writing.

Artistic commitment is therefore a matter of orientation, a matter of perceiving social realities and of making those perceptions available in works of art in order to

help promote understanding and preservation or, or change in, the society's values and norms. Thus, the commitment of a work is a matter of its quality, its orientation, and the perceptions it fosters. Commitment, so understood, requires, in particular, that even moments of private reflection, when treated in works of literature, be so presented as to be accessible to the audience. Not coded in cipher meaningful to the author alone. Chinweizu and others pose the question that 'if the reflection is so private that it cannot or should not be made accessible to the public, why present it for public consumption?' (1980: 254).

There emerges another question regarding *engagement* of literature in politics. Though non – mandatory, the times may well demand that writers, like other citizens, be politically *engage* through their work. Chinweizu and others advocate that, 'a writer who chooses to use his writing to serve a given social cause or interest should show his commitment through what matters he treats in his tracts, his propaganda, his satires, his affirming or muckraking works, and his *prima facie* apolitical creations, and by the manner in which he treats them. He can defend or attack the state, if that is where his impulse leads him. He can satirize such individuals or such manners as he disapproves of. He can mourn public losses, or celebrate them' (1980: 254).

Litterature engagee is a critical movement started in 1960s with a view that literature should be *engagee*, or committed to the solving problems of the contemporary world, developed by Sartre in his essay *Qu'est-ce que la litterature* but explicated two years earlier in the initial issue of his *Les Temps modernes*. Abiola Irele was one to consider broader nature of Sartre's influence. Irele says,

The nature of literary activity in Europe has not been without consequences for the literature of *negritude*. The years preceding World War II saw the development of a literature of "causes," culminating in the outpouring provoked by the Spanish Civil War. This literature committed to political causes was to receive a tremendous impetus during the French Resistance; and after the war Jean-Paul Sartre developed the idea of *litterature of engagee* in a series of essays on the nature of literature and on the relationship of the writer to society (1965: 341).

Perhaps it was Sartre's interest in Negritude, in "Orphee noir," that paved the way for the influence of his concept of *engagement*; perhaps the influence was due to the fact that Negritude itself was at that time more *engagee*, more revolutionary, than it was to be in later years; or perhaps the concept of *engagement* is inherent in African culture in a way that it is not in the West, thus assuring an affinity with the Western form of it.

Leopold Senghor said of traditional African art, 'it is created by everyone and for everyone,' and 'because they are functional and collective, African-Negro literature and art are committed', to which he added, 'a work of [African] art is perishable. If one preserves the spirit and style one can readily duplicate an early work by modernizing it as soon as it becomes dated or destroyed. In other words, in Negro Africa, 'art for art's sake' does not exist. All art is social' (1956: 28-29).

In the same vein, Lewis Nkosi, commenting on the artist's relationship to society, noted some fundamental differences between modern and traditional African society:

The idea of an artist as someone who stands apart and questions his society is admittedly a foreign one in Africa. Before we can meaningfully talk about the role of the poet in the present-day African society we must draw a contrast between what is accepted as the role of the artist in Western society and that achieved for the artist in the traditional African society. There was no recognized or readily ascertainable conflict between the poet and his community in traditional Africa. The poet's ideals and his social goals were not seen to be necessarily separable from and in conflict with those of the rest of the community. The function of the poet as an obsessed, even mad individual, a vertiginous rebel threatening the status quo, is essentially alien to the traditional African concept of the poet's role.

In this community the poet or the artist in general is there to *celebrate* his own or his society's sense of being and not there to subvert its social values or moral order (1965: 102).

But Nkosi did not advocate a return to traditional values in Toto, nor did he deny the relevance of Sartre's *engagement*. He said,

In the traditional African society, for instance, the Sartre thesis would not only seem irrelevant, as I have indicated, but foolish and not worthy of a rebuttal. Yet we must admit that in many areas of Africa the destruction of traditional African values by European imperialism and the concomitant Christianization of Africans has drastically reversed the role of the poet or artist in the community (1965: 104).

The issue of *engagement* was not only got reflected in the books and articles but it became the subject of discussion in the conferences held during that period. At the conclusion of these conferences the practice was to issue resolutions that reflected the sentiments of the group. Several of these resolutions made reference in some way to the concept of *engagement*. The first of those, written at the First International Congress of Negro Writers and Artists held in 1956, included among its “Final Resolutions” the following:

This conference invites all Negro intellectuals to unite their efforts in securing effective respect for the rights of Man, whatever his color may be, and for all peoples and nations whatsoever.

This conference urges Negro intellectuals and all justice-loving men to struggle to create the practical conditions for the revival and the growth of Negro cultures.

Paying tribute to the cultures of all lands and with due appreciation of their several contributions to the progress of civilization, the Conference urges all Negro intellectuals to defend, illustrate and publicize throughout the world the national values of their own peoples (Final Resolution 1956: 364).

The Conference of Tashkent, held in the Uzbek capital in October 1958 and uniting Asian and African writers at a time when most of Africa was still under colonial rule, issued this appeal: ‘our convictions that the purpose of literature is indefectibly tied to the destinies of our people, that the true flowering of literature can occur only in liberty, independence and the people’s sovereignty; that the destruction of colonialism and racism is the condition for the entire development of literature’ (Conference de Tachkent, 1958: 135). Six months later, the Second Congress of Negro Writers and

Artists, held in Rome in March 1959, also passed a resolution. This one mentioned *engagement* specifically, under “the responsibilities of the black writer to his people”:

(b) the true expression of the reality of his people, long obscured, deformed or denied during the period of colonization.

This expression is so necessary in today’s condition that it implies for the black artist or writer the specific notion of engagement. The black writer can only participate in a spontaneous and total manner in the movement outlined above. Having been given the sense of his struggle at the outset, how could he refuse it? (“Resolution,” 1959: 39-89).

Senghor was certainly the leading advocate of *engagement* among the francophone critics, but he was by no means the only one. His fellow countryman and poet, David Diop, perhaps one of the most virulent exponents of literary militancy, put forth his position, during a “debate on national poetry” in *Presence africaine* in 1956. He said,

We know that some people want to see us abandon militant poetry (a term that makes “purist” sneer) in favor of stylistic exercises and discussions of form. Their hopes will be disappointed because for us poetry does not amount to taming the beast of language but to reflecting on the world and maintaining the memory of Africa (1956:115).

Several Senegalese followed Senghor’s lead in championing literary *engagement*, the earliest of them being Alioune Diop, the editor of *Presence africaine*. Addressing the U. S. National Commission for UNESCO, he made a distinction between Africa and the West:

The West distinguishes clearly between the responsibilities of its culture and those of its politics. To such an extent that in some upper spheres of society politics are treated with a sort of disdain or repugnance. There, it is fashionable to ignore politics, and there, culture is a kind of haven or salvation where the best of man is cultivated and invented, sheltered from an political aggression or intervention.

On the contrary, in the Emergent World, cultural concern is the germ from which profound political initiative evolves (1962: 65).

Mahanta Fall indicated his preference for a committed literature at the Dakar conference of 1963, although he concluded with a recognition of artistic considerations as well:

The African poet is not a poet enclosed in his ivory tower. But he wants to be an actor who assumes an important role in the great drama Africa is playing in at the moment. Even if the African poet belongs to an independent state his poetry will always remain a poetry of combat, because it is bound up not only with his other African brothers who are still fighting for their independence, but with other Blacks scattered throughout the world who are victims of injustice. Isn't the African poet, in effect, their interpreter, their spokesman, their voice, their trumpet who proclaims their political liberation? This means that poetry and politics mix intimately.

It must be added that *engagement*, this intrusion of politics in the domain of literature, steals nothing from the literary value of African poetry in French, because in marking his work with the stamp of Negritude, of Africanness, that distinctive mark which identifies it as an authentic African work, the great African poet never loses sight of the requirements of poetry, of art (1965: 218).

Chinua Achebe expressed his support of *engagement* throughout the 1960s. In speaking of the denigration of black people, he said in 1964, 'this presents the African writer with a treat challenge. It is inconceivable to me that a serious writer could stand aside from this debate, or be indifferent to this argument which calls his full humanity in question' (1964:157). Achebe also saw the use of the African past as a means of "committing" literature:

I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past – with all its imperfections – was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them. Perhaps what I write is applied art as distinct



from pure. But who cares? Art is important but so is education of the kind that I have in mind. And I don't see that the two need be mutually exclusive (1965:162).

In 1966 Achebe asked that the African writer's commitment change according to the situation:

Most of Africa is today politically free; there are thirty-six independent African States managing their own affairs – sometimes very badly. A new situation has thus arisen. One of the writer's main functions has always been to expose and attack injustice. Should we keep at the old theme of racial injustice (sore as it still is) when new injustices have sprouted all around us? I think not (1966 b: 138).

Like the commitment of the writer Ngugi advocates the commitment of the critic also. The ideological struggle which is there in literature is also there in criticism. A critic should be free from all restrictions. Ngugi said, 'A critic who in real life is suspicious of people fighting for liberation will suspect characters who, though only in a novel, are fighting for liberation. A critic who in real life is impatient with all the talk about classes, class struggle, resistance to imperialism, racism and struggles against racism, of reactionary versus revolutionary violence, will be equally impatient when he or she finds the same themes dominant in a work of art. In criticism, as in creative writing, there is an ideological struggle. A critic's world outlook, his/her class sympathies and values will affect evaluations of Chinua Achebe, Sembene Ousmane, Brecht, Balzac, Shakespeare, Lu Hsun, Garcia Marquez or Alex La Guma' (1986: 104).

### **3.6 Verbal Action**

Nativism gives importance to verbal action. In African literature the standard verbal action is practiced along with Realism. African writers and critics believe in portraying African reality. For them literature must reflect the real life of Africa. If a writer fails to do so, his writing does not acquire much significance.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'O has clearly stated the situation in Africa in his critical writings, such as *Decolonising the Mind*, *Moving the Centre*, *Writers in Politics* and

through various other articles. But he did not stop by evaluating the situation critically and presenting it to the world. He created a work through which he focused African people in the post-colonial regime. He stated how African imperialist and resistance tradition affected African life. Ngugi said,

My approach is different. I shall look at the African realities as they are affected by the great struggle between the two mutually opposed forces in Africa today: an imperialist tradition on one hand, and a resistance tradition on the other. The imperialist tradition in Africa is today maintained by the international bourgeoisie using multinational and of course the flag-waving native ruling classes. The economic and political dependence of this African neo-colonial bourgeoisie is reflected in its culture of apemanship and parrotry enforced on a restive population through police boots, barbed wire, a gowned clergy and judiciary; their ideas are spread by a corpus of state intellectuals, the academic and journalistic laureates of the neo-colonial establishment. The resistance tradition is being carried out by the working people (the peasantry and the proletariat) aided by patriotic students, intellectuals (academic and non-academic), soldiers and other progressive elements of the petty middle class. This resistance is reflected in their patriotic defense of the peasant/worker roots of national cultures, their defense of the democratic struggle in all the nationalities inhabiting the same territory (1986: 02)

Ngugi not only stated this truth but created a verbal action also. He wrote a play *I Will Marry When I Want* in collaboration with Ngugi Wa Mirii. The performance of this play brought imprisonment to the playwright. In this play Ngugi showed how the common people in Africa were exploited in the post-colonial period. How religion itself became the cause of exploitation and how the natives in power oppress other natives. Kiguunda and Wangeci, in order to marry their daughter with Ahab Kioi's son, have to get converted into Christianity and in that they lose everything which they did possess. Kiguunda and Kioi both are the natives, but the Kiois have converted into Christianity. The Kiois and Ndugires compel Kiguunda and Wangeci to get converted into Christianity along with their children. Refusal of this would break the marriage. The following situation in this play clearly reveals the attitude of Christians towards the natives.

KIGUUNDA: What do you want?

KIOI: We want you to enter the Church!

JEZEBEL: You and your wi-wi-wi- and Wangeci.

HELEN: Come out of the muddy trough of sins!

NDUGIRE: Praise the Lord.

KIOI: to enter the Church is easy. But you must first stop living in sin.

JEZEBEL: You must be baptized. NDUGIRE: You do a church wedding.

HELEN: Give Wangeci a wedding ring.

KIGUUNDA: Sin, did you say?

JEZEBEL: Yes, you and Wangeci have been living in sin.

WANGECI: But God has blessed us and given us children.

HELEN: Children of sin.

KIGUUNDA: Sins...Sins!

KIOI: We have brought you the tidings

So that when our Lord comes back

To separate goats from cows

You'll not claim

That you had not been warned.

Repent. Come out of the darkness.

KIOI, JEZEBEL, HELEN and NDUGIRE: [singing]

*When Jesus comes back*

*To take home his amazing ones,*

*The amazing ones being the people*

*Saved by the Lord.*

*They will shine bright as the star*

*The great northern star*

*And the beauty of his amazing ones*

*Will shine likely the stars and you children, and you children...*

KIGUUNDA: And you the children!

The amazing ones!

Sins! Sins!

*Wapi!*

This is mine own wife,

Gathoni's mother,

I have properly married her

Having paid all the bridewealth

According to our national ways.

And you dare call her a whore!

That we should now be blessed by a human like me!

Has he shaken hands with God?

Let me tell you one thing Mr Kioi.

Every home has its own head

And no outsider should interfere in other people's homes!

Go away, you devils!

On this Wangici is very upset and worried about the future. She says to her husband Kiguunda,

WANGECI: See what you have now done,

Chasing away our guests.

You did not let them say what had really brought them here.

Tomorrow you'll be without a job! (1982: 48-50).

The play clearly depicts how under the disguise of rituals the small piece of land of Kiguunda is grabbed by the so called messengers of salvation. The performance of

this play brought Ngugi imprisonment. In his book *Writers in Politics* Ngugi said about this as follows:

My own struggles for the freedom of African languages and the consequences of that struggle are a case in point. I was a professor of literature at Nairobi University in Kenya when in 1977 I was placed in a maximum security prison. For most of 1978 I lived in a cell of stone and only through the combination of the death of the old president, the coming into power of a new one, and the national and international pressure, was I released and then only to find myself barred from any employment in the country of my birth.

The real reason for my political imprisonment was, of course, my having been involved with ordinary working people in a community theatre that reflected their history of anti-colonial struggles and those against contemporary social conditions in the post-colonial era. The real crime was not simply the fact that our village theatre raised issues, but more importantly, in a language the people could understand (1981: 80).

In the same book Ngugi has stated the issue about his novel *Matigari*. In Kenya certain words have been legally protected and assigned for the sole purpose of the use of the leader. In Kenya one cannot use the word 'president' for any leader of any group outside its reference to state president. One can be called chairman, director, or anything else but not president. In 1986 a warrant was issued for the arrest of the main character in his novel, *Matigari*, simply because word had reached the president that ordinary people were talking about a man called *Matigari* who was asking questions of truth and justice. Ngugi said, 'the police were themselves astounded when they found out that the man 'Matigari' was only a fictional character. The president's reaction? Arrest the book. And in February 1987 in a very well-coordinated police action, the novel was taken from all the bookshops in the country' (1981: 80).

Ngugi has reacted in his full-length play *The Black Hermit* written in 1968. In this play the hero had found himself inside the tribal design and wants to escape form the traditional system.

Remi was not the husband of Thoni, alone

Remi was also the new husband of the tribe (1968: 8).

The protagonist, Remi is brought back from his college world to become the husband, according to tradition, of his brother's wife after the brother has died in an accident: 'They had obeyed me. Now they were asking me to show similar obedience. Finally I agreed to live with her' (1968: 35). And he was on the verge of giving up his political ambitions 'Because I was trapped by the tribe' (1968:31). But Remi revolts and goes off to the city: 'I wanted to be myself.... How then could I take another man's wife? I wanted a woman of my own' (1968: 34). But it is Remi who describes himself as a 'hermit' because he knows he has turned his back on an essential part of himself:

Seclusion from what was formerly around you is solitude. To be a hermit means escaping from what's around you. My tribe was around me (1968: 46).

Yet already in this play Ngugi is insisting that the roots of the modern young African reach out in a number of directions: that it is false to make a simple opposition between tribal tradition and sophisticated detachment. Remi puts this to the apparently rather characterless white girl whom he has taken up with in the city when he decides to leave her, and return to his village in a new spirit:

You are different from me, from, us, from the tribe. You cannot know what I know... you have not experienced what I have experienced. Your background is a world from mine. How can we be the same? How can the call of the trine your call? To you tribalism and colonialism, the tyranny of the tribe and the settler are an abstraction. To me they are real. I have felt the shaft here. Yes, they have made a wound here, a wound that made me run to the city. To you, African nationalism and what it means to us who suffered under colonial rule for sixty years can only be an intellectual abstraction. But to me, my whole being – I am involved in it (1968: 47).

Remi fails to judge all the forces within himself accurately. He rears back to the village obsessed with his personal mission:

I must now rise and go to the country.

For I must serve our people,  
Save them from traditions and bad customs,  
Free them from tribal manacles (1968: 45).

Remi finally reiterates that 'I came back to break Tribe and Custom, / Instead, I've broken you and me' (1968: 76).

Ngugi's *River Between* clearly opposes the traditional practices in Africa. The practice of circumcision of boys and girls was common. A boy cannot become a boy unless he is circumcised, similarly a girl cannot attain womanhood without the circumcision. Ngugi showed in this novel how this practice is dangerous and fatal.

In his *A Man of the People* Chinua Achebe comments on the educational system in Africa. *A Man of People* is an ironic novel. It is aware that modern trends are disintegrating trends which can be combated: Mrs. Nanga is resolved that her children shall go back to the village regularly:

Don't you see they hardly speak our language? Ask them something in it and they reply in English. The little one, Micah, cleft my mother "a dirty bush woman" (1966 a: 42). Through such works Achebe has clearly shown the faults of colonial education system in Africa.

In conclusion it can be said that African writers wanted to portray real Africa. They did it by creating their works in their own language and brought the essence of African life into the literature. Instead of presenting the historical account they preferred to create verbal action. This verbal action boosted the growth of African literature. The same standard is seen in the poem *Fingers* by a Senegalese poet Sembene Ousmane who is committed to social realism. The poem illustrates the kind of vision informing his work.

Fingers, skilful at sculpture  
At modeling figures on marble  
At translation of thoughts  
Fingers that would impress,

Fingers of artists.  
Fingers, thick and heavy  
That dig and plough the soil  
And open it up for sowing,  
And move us,  
Fingers of land tillers.  
A finger holding a trigger  
An eye intent on a target finger  
Men at the very brink  
Of their lives, at the mercy of their finger  
The finger that destroy life.  
The finger of soldier.  
Across the rivers and languages  
Of Europe and Asia  
Of China and Africa,  
Of India and the Oceans,  
Let us join our fingers to take away  
All the power of their finger  
Which keeps humanity in mourning (1971).

### **3.7 Reality**

Whether it is called Realism – with a capital R – or African Reality, African critics found themselves from the late 1940s into the 1960s in relative agreement on the need for the depiction of African life – and on the need for accuracy in that depiction. Perhaps the term *African Realism* reflects both needs as well as any. It is particularly interesting to note that these needs were not confined to theoretical



statements; they were applied to a host of individual literary works, and they cut across all genres.

Numerous critics sought to express concrete reality reflecting specific elements of Africa. One of the first post-world War II critics to do so was O. K. Poku, who asked in 1948 that African writers ‘become masters of a true literature and the best interpreters of the African nature’ (1948: 900). A year later T. M. Aluko said:

We shall want stories and novels written by African writers with an essentially African background and atmosphere, and for an essentially African reading public; stories in which the characters will have familiar African names – Ajayi, Codjoe and Momo Kano; and in which the places are familiar West African towns and villages, with the names of well known streets in say Ibadan or Kumasi coming in (1949: 1239).

Peter Abrahams expressed a similar sentiment in 1952. He said that the writer must be true to his land so that he can portray the people in real sense. He said:

First, he must know his land and its people so truly that when he writes of them they become real living, even for those who do not know his land and people. He must have looked at them so closely that, almost, he can pick the unexpressed dreams and hopes from their hearts and put them down on paper (1952: 387).

The reverend John S. Mbiti wrote of his reaction to a statement in an English children’s book, which perhaps still another explanation of the African penchant for realism. Reverend Mbiti’s childhood book said, ‘This book is specially written for English boys and girls. They will enjoy reading it more than any foreigner would; and will appreciate it more readily’. This statement caused him to say, ‘I have always, since then, wanted to see books written by Africans, about our country and life, and with local colour’ (1959: 244-45).

Chinua Achebe demonstrated a concern for African reality in a 1962 essay, “Where Angels Fear to Tread.” He castigated a European critic for saying Cyprian Ekwensi’s novel *Burning Grass* (1962), ‘this is truly Nigeria and these are *real*

Nigerian people'. Then, rather than questioning the limits of African reality, he went on to accept it implicitly by saying:

She did not say what her test was for sorting out *real* Nigerians from unreal ones and what makes say, Jagua less real than Sunsaye. And as if that was not enough this critic went on to say that Ekwensi was much more at home in a rural setting than in big cities! (1962: 62).

The African critics feel that African reality must spring from African soil. African manner, African expression should be imprinted in African literature regardless of themes. In the works of Chinua Achebe and J. P. Clark there is rich use of African soil. In his article "A Word of Introduction" written in 1963 Bernard Fonlon described what he considered to be an important connection between a realistic literature and *la litterature engagee*. He said:

Once you have aroused in a people a thirst for reading by fashioning for them a literature like Eve was fashioned from Adam, a literature from their own flesh and blood, a literature from a substance that touches them most intimately, a literature which they can see themselves as in a mirror, a literature which speaks a language they can understand- then, subsequently, the other literature which strives to rouse political consciousness, which seeks to be a weapon against injustice, an instrument for social change or moral reform, will meet minds already prepared, minds athirst for more and more literature (1963: 11).

African Nativism is based on Frantz Fanon's philosophy and realism is one of its dimensions. Fanon wants the African writers to fashion the revolution with the people. He feels that the writers should be the living part of Africa and her thought. Fanon quotes from Sekou Toure's address to the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists, Rome, held in 1959 as, 'to take part in the African revolution it is not enough to write a revolutionary song; you must fashion the revolution with the people. And if you fashion it with the people, the songs will come by themselves. In order to achieve real action, you must yourself be a living part of Africa and of her thought; you must be an element of that popular energy which is entirely called forth for the freeing, the progress and the happiness of Africa. There is no place outside that

fight for the artist or for the intellectual who is not himself concerned with and completely at one with the people in the great battle of African and of suffering humanity, (1965: 166).

Frantz Fanon's classic text *The Wretched of the Earth* has provided inspiration for anti-colonial movements. With power and anger, Fanon makes clear the economic and psychological degradation inflicted by imperialism. Fanon showed how the fight for freedom must be combined with building a national culture, and showed the way ahead, through revolutionary violence, to socialism.

Sonar Senghor was concerned that African theatre be realistic and must permit the African writers to create an African repertoire in French based on certain Senegalese themes – themes of the national *prise de conscience*, themes borrowed from African day today problems. J. P. Clark seemed to agree with Senghor when he chided Nigerian teachers for their impatience with modern poetry dealing with Nigeria. He said:

The average teacher of poetry in Nigeria, trained only in the appreciation of traditional English poetry, exhibits very strongly built-in reactions against modern Nigerian poetry, indeed against all modern poetry, and therefore cannot easily accommodate novelty. Possessed of reflexes, conditioned as those of Pavlov's dog, he reacts readily to any item out of the double vistas of the Classics and the Bible that, according to [Sir Herbert] Grierson, inform English poetry. But the slightest reference to the religion, history and oral traditions of his own peoples leaves his sniffing at one for explanations (1966 a: 64).

The application of realism as critical standard is much provoked in novel as in any other genre. From 1955 on, other critics began applying the standard of reality in earnest. A. A. Kwapong reviewed Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City* that year and liked it in part because 'Ekwensi has a feeling for the climate of the Lagos of the night-clubs, ambitious politicians, grasping trader and ordinary folk which I find promising' (1955: 24). Another review of Ekwensi's *People* followed in the next year. Davidson Nicol admired the novel partly because 'it is set chiefly in Lagos and it

gives a vivid description and atmosphere of the demi-mondaine of a modern African city' (1956: 113).

In 1958 Chinua Achebe's first novel *Things Fall Apart* was published and African fiction – at least in English – seemed to move into a new stage, and the criticism with it. Ben Obumsele was one of the first Africans to review the novel. He noted that '*Things Fall Apart* will be seen as a first novel, not simply in the personal sense, but in the more important sense that it is the first English novel in which the life and institutions of a West African people is presented from the inside' (1959: 37). Here the question of language is not considered. What is important here is the portrayal of African reality from within, by an African. But Obumsele applied the same standard when criticized Achebe for a lack of fidelity on another account. He said 'the form of novel ought to have shown some awareness of the art of this culture. We do not have the novel form, of course, but there are implications in our music, sculpture and folklore which the West African novelist cannot neglect if he wishes to do more than merely imitate a European fashion.' he added, 'I am in particular disappointed that there is in *Things Fall Apart* so little of the lyricism which marks our village life' (1959: 38).

Ezekiel Mphahlele was another critic who applied African reality consistently as a critical standard. His realist bent began to show in 1957 when he discussed several white South African writers and found them lacking. He said, 'the story of Africa is not been told yet,' and went on to criticize the unrealistic qualities of several white South Africans:

Oliver Schreiner, in spite of her strong sense of justice, regarded the non-white as part of the setting, passive and waiting for some individual philanthropy. William Plomer was so cynical about white civilization that he romanticized and idealized African character from a superficial knowledge of it. Sarah Gertrude Millin (of *God's Stepchildren* fame) regarded her Hottentot and half-caste characters as groveling helpless victims of a fate: accidental or self-imposed mixed marriages. Alan Paton sentimentalized his black characters in order to prove the effectiveness of a liberal theory that he posed, (1957 b: 175).

In another essay he commented on the lack of realism in Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* and Sol T. Plaatje's *Mhudi*, saying, 'these two novels were characteristic of the writing of their time: a romantic backward glance in response to the breakdown of traditional moral standards as a result of urbanization, the use of immigrant labor, and political and social repression.' He continued in a more optimistic vein, 'the two decades beginning with the last war have seen an increase in antiblack legislation in South Africa. Romance has given place to realism in prose writing' (1963: 127).

Paulin Joachim for many years contributed book reviews to the Dakar based magazine *Bingo*. In these can be seen his consistent concern with African reality. The earliest to exhibit the use of this standard is his 1961 review of *Un Piège sans fin* by fellow countryman Olympe Bhely-Quenum. Joachim said, '*Un Piège sans fin* is a book of great interest. It is above all a book authentically African. The first to our knowledge. It renders for us all the sensibility, all the emotional power of the Negro-African people' (1961: 41).

Wole Soyinka made his critical debut in print in 1963. In that year, his essay, "From a Common Back Cloth" did much to further the standard of African reality, for in it Soyinka reviewed the work of several African writers in terms of their ability to use the "back cloth" of that reality. Of Mongo Beti's *Mission to Kala* (1958), Soyinka said:

Mongo Beti takes the back cloth as he finds it, asserting simply that tradition is upheld not by one-dimensional innocents, but by cunning old codgers on chieftaincy stools, polygamous elders, watching hawk-like the approach of young blood around their harem, by the eternal troublemaking females who plunge innocents, unaware, into memorable odysseys. Hospitality is not, as we are constantly romantically informed that it is, nearly so spontaneous. There is a mercenary edge, and this, alas, is not always traceable to that alien corrupt civilization (1963: 394-95).

Soyinka concluded his essay with a strong call for realism, saying, 'idealization is a travesty of literary truth; worse still, it betrays only immature hankerings of the creative impulse' (1963: 396).

Ngugi's novel was approved by critics for its fidelity to African reality. Taban Lo Liyang said, 'he (Ngugi) has admirable figures of speech such as calling a chief 'big' because he 'used to eat with the Governor.' There are other inappropriately used, however, such as use of the proverb 'a lamb takes after her mother' to describe tigerish qualities. For comic relief, he gives us realistic classroom scenes' (1965: 43). Alex Chudi Okeke liked the novel in part because 'though Ngugi has not used local proverbs such as you find in Chinua Achebe's writings, he has nevertheless used certain proper names of existing places like Mhua, Kikuyu and Kipanga which indeed give you an aura of reality to the fiction' (1966: 4).

Ngugi, while stating the fact in African nations, clearly mentions that African languages would have ceased to exist - with independence. It existed only because of the peasantry and working class. He said in his epoch making book *Decolonising the Mind*, 'in the process this literature created, falsely and even absurdly, an English-speaking (or French or Portuguese) African peasantry and working class, a clear negation or falsification of the historical process and reality. This European-language-speaking peasantry and working class, existing only novels and dramas, was at times invested with the vacillating mentality, the evasive self-contemplation, the existential anguished human condition, or the man-torn-between-two-worlds-facedness of the petty-bourgeoisie' (1986: 22).

Perhaps as much as the novel, poetry also led critics to express their concern for fidelity to African reality. Leopold Senghor was the leader of a movement away from conventional realism in African literature, but his quarrel was more with method than content. His concern for realia was apparent in his statement, 'it is not true that realism is the best means of expressing the real' (1957: 11). It is not surprising, then, to find Senghor, as early as 1954, evaluating a writer using as his measure the adherence to an African reality. In his essay, "Language et poesie negro-africaine," Senghor said of one poem, 'it is thus speckled with images like the skin of a panther. Simple images, whose force nevertheless is that they are borrowed from the soil: from the animals, plants, natural phenomena, in the life of our country people' (1961: 154).

In 1963, at the Dakar conference, Ezekiel Mphahlele commented on Negritude and dwelt for a moment on the realism in Senghor's poetry:

Sheer romanticism that fails to see the large landscape of the personality of the African makes bad poetry. The omission of these elements of a continent in turmoil reflects a defective poetic vision. The greatest poetry of Leopold Sedar Senghor is that which portrays in himself the meeting point of Europe and Africa. This is the most realistic and honest and meaningful symbol of Africa, an ambivalent continent searching for equilibrium (1965: 24).

Mphahlele finds realism an important element in Senghor's poetry in a continent which is searching equilibrium in the post-colonial period.

The use of the standard of reality was applied even to the short story, although this genre's neglect by African critics seems to have been as widespread as in other literatures. Alioune Diop was perhaps the first to apply the standard to the short story when, in his preface to Bernard Dadie's *Legendes africaines* (1954), he spoke directly to Dadie, saying, 'you not only have unquestionable talent, you are rooted in the heart of your soil, sharing with your people their fight and their labors, their laughter and their innocence, (1954: 7).

In 1963 the Cameroon journal *Abbia* published a short story by Jacques Muriel Nzouankeu, "Le Dame d'eau." In publishing it, however, the journal implied the standard of reality in this statement at the head of the story: 'The somber pessimism of this work is contrary to the humanism and the optimism of the African vision of the world' (*Abbia*, "Note," 1963: 101).

Drama received less criticism than any genre in African literature. But it can be noted that Peter Nazareth implied as an African reality as a standard. Gerald Moore, the British critic of African literature, had suggested that James Ngugi's play *The Black Hermit* should not have been written in verse (1963: 34). Nazareth disagreed:

The ritualistic quality of the verse makes the audience feel the ritualistic slow-moving quality of life in the village; it makes the audience feel that life in the village has roots. This is contrasted with the jazzy but "rootless" rhythms of life in the city. The contrast between the movement of the verse and the prose makes the audience feel that Jane, for all her sincerity, could never

comprehend life in the village and what it means to Kiarii. When Elders come to the city to take Kiarii back to the village, the play shifts back to verse for a moment. The tautness of the verse makes the audience feel that the hold of the tribe over Kiarii is no intellectual abstraction – it is real (1963:5).

The readiness and willingness of African critics to apply the precepts of realism to African literature is an interesting phenomenon that invites certain hypotheses about the literature and criticism. No other single factor seemed to have been applied as often as consistently as a critical standard. One explanation might be that the literary critic, like the writer, like most people, prefers to operate from a position of strength, from a base of what is known; and, given the fact that modern African criticism was even younger than modern African literature, what more logical base to build from than the “African reality” with which one was already familiar? Whatever they were in the 1950s and 1960s in relation to Western literature and criticism, the Africans felt a strong need to be true to themselves.

### **3.8 Nativization**

The question of language is the essence of African Nativism. African Nativism moves round the issue of language. The literature produced in African languages is given the status of African literature. But in Africa the language of education and the language of administration is English, French or Portuguese depending on by whom the state was ruled by. The question of language was directly approached by Obiajunwa Wali in 1963. As a result of this an interesting and related line of thought began to develop. If the African writer, for whatever reason, chose to write in a European language, could that language somehow be made “African”? Could French and English be “Africanized”? For many critics, the answer was yes.

Davidson Nicol of Sierra Leone was perhaps the first African critic to take this position. In 1956 he asked:

Is it possible for a West African to write poetry in English? Or in French for that matter? I think it is. It may not be acceptable always to some Europeans who may feel that it is unlikely an African or Asian can handle these languages sufficiently well for this purpose. However, other Africans when



they read poetry in English or French by an African can understand and feel the poetic impulse and anguish coming through (1956: 116).

In the same year Cyprian Ekwensi mentioned two extremes available to the African writer while at the same time advocating an intermediate solution:

In Africa, communication on a mass scale must still be in the English language, and that leaves the African two and only two choices; depending on the character from whose lips the words are proceeding. The first medium, as I have said, is Queen's English - as it would be used in conversation by a normal Englishman. The second medium is Pidgin English. But the injection of African idioms into spoken English so as to identify the dialogue as African, can still be achieved without recourse to dropped h's and g's or inclusions of "ain'ts" and "reckons" (1956: 704).

W. E. Abraham expressed a similar opinion in *The Mind of Africa*: 'It is proper for our new African novelists to do for Africa what Hardy and Lawrence did for Britain. They can do this by putting their vernacular behind their English and their French, by writing of the mass of traditional Africa as though they were translating into English or French' (1962: 99). Ezekeil Mphahlele, again responding to Wali, asked of the African writer: 'Why can he not be authentic simply because he is using a foreign medium? He is bringing to the particular European language and African experience which in turn affects his style' (1963: 8).

The use of standard forms of European languages was also discussed at the Dakar conference of March 1963. Gilbert Ilboudo said that

The writers attending the symposium all felt this need to grasp African reality when they spoke of "doing violence" to the French language. French, they say, cannot express all the shades of our feelings. Even at the risk of adulterating the language, it should be made to accord more closely to our way of feeling. However the direction in which this transmutation is to occur was not made clear (1964: 31).

Another francophone critic, Gaetan Sebudani, spoke not in prescriptive terms but of an apparent fact: 'Negro-African literature has given French a new dimension... the French language, accustomed to translating rational thought, finds itself suddenly the vehicle for emotional expression. And this convergence of currents betrays neither the internal structure of French, nor the rhythm that marks the abundant richness of the African soul' (1966 b: 79-80).

Mphahlele advised the aspiring African writer that 'a writer should listen closely to his people's speech. Then he should put it across in English, without necessarily sounding very English in idiom'. He further added that 'in reporting dialogue in particular a writer should not strain at writing strictly grammatical and idiomatic English. What he should strive to do is *capture the mood, atmosphere and word picture* or images of what a character is saying *or doing in his (the character's) own language*. Otherwise African character will be heard to talk like English-speaking ones, which is false' (1966: 30-31).

Achebe spoke similarly of the African writer's position, describing the dilemma of trying to express African thoughts and feelings in language that cannot seem to do so:

Caught in that situation he can do one of two things. He can try and contain what he wants to say within the limits of conventional English or he can try to push back those limits to accommodate his idea. The first method produces competent, uninspired and rather flat work. The second method can produce something new and valuable to the English language as well as to the material he is trying to put over. *But* it can also get out of hand. It can lead to simply *bad* English being accepted and defended as African or Nigerian (1964: 160).

Another Nigerian, Edward Okwu, used similar terms:

There are then those swift and subtle turns of the mind, and those little catch-phrases that are peculiarly African, or Nigerian as the case may be, which, attributed to the wrong circumstances, at best look grotesque and misapplied. Our writers should then make the English language serve them the purpose of squeezing out of it the colour of African thought (1966: 313).

It is Soyinka who has liberated the English language from the more mechanistic preoccupations with style. He still uses the devices of cushioning. For him it is the leap from Yoruba, to English, to pidgin or to any number of shades of allusion and meaning between, the reflection of experience, whole as it is all these, or the best means at the best moment. His use of pidgin illustrates this freedom of multilingual balance in the joyous exploitation of the West African extension of diglossia. It is a technique he uses time and again: in the third scene of *Brother Jero*, when Chume's increasing excitement at conducting the service for the fleeing prophet is reflected in the translation from 'Church English' to deeper and deeper pidgin. In his creative work Soyinka always use a beautifully handled mixture of English, pidgin and Yoruba. The following speech is one of several of the kind by Samson in *The Road*.

A driver must have sensitive soles on his feet. Unlike his buttocks. His buttocks would be hard. Heavy-duty tyres. But not the feet you see. Because he does not walk so much, and he has to be able to judge the pressure on the pedals exactly right. I have such thick soles you see so I always revved the engine too much or too little. Then it was Fai! Fai! Fai! You think say I get petrol for waste? Take your foot commot for ancelerator! Small small! I say small small – you tink say dis one na football game. Fai fai fai! You dey press brake – Gi-am! – as if na stud you wan' give centre back. I say do am soft soft! Fai fai fai! All a waste of time. Every time I started the lorry it would like a railway – gbagba gbagba – like clinic for hiccup. Other times it would shoot off like sputnik – fiiiioom! That was when I got it worst of all – Fai fai fai fai! You wey no fit walka no fly you wan' fly? Ah, sometimes I wonder why I didn't go deaf [*He stands for a while, trying to remember.*] (1960: 64).

In the speech of Samson the fine blending of English, pidgin and Yoruba is found. It clearly illustrates how the African writers have nativized English language. We find the same African spirit in Okigbo's poem "Elegy for Alto". It clearly indicates the local colour of African languages.

AND THE HORN may now paw the air howling goodbye...

For the eagles are now in sight:

Shadows in the horizon –  
 THE ROBBERS are here in black sudden steps of showers, of caterpillars –  
 THE EAGLES have come again,  
 The eagles rain down on us –  
 POLITICIANS are back in giant hidden steps of howitzers, of detonators –  
 THE EAGLES descend on us,  
 Baynets and cannons –  
 THE ROBBERS descend on us to strip us of our laughter, of our thunder –  
 THE EAGLES have chosen their game,  
 Taken our concubines –  
 POLITICIANS are here in this iron dance of mortars, of generators-  
 THE EAGLES are suddenly there,  
 New stars of iron dawn;  
 So let the horn paw the air hawling goodbye...  
 O mother mother Earth, unbind me; let this be my last testament; let this be  
 The ram's hidden wish to the sword the sword's secret  
 prayer to the scabbard –

(Okigbo, "Elegy for Alto": 1971).

Okigbo makes fine use of poetic oratory of proverbs, fables, praise chants, parabolic and gnomic sayings in his poems.

These quotations have shown the various sides of the debate concerning the use of European languages for African literature. Obiajunwa Wali thought that languages ought to define literatures; Mphahlele raised several instances to challenge this view. Others thought that African languages were important in nation building. Achebe argued that English *is* the national language of Nigeria.

It was argued that, even granting a technical command of a second language there were psychological hazards that might occur in using the language of the colonizer. To this argument there was little direct rebuttal; however, a strong rebuttal by implication lay in the thinking of many that the writer, in using the colonizer's language, used it in such a way as to bring out the Africanness of the contest in which it was used, thus gaining the advantages of a world language and audience, something important to many, without endangering the integrity of the African experience.

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# **Chapter 4**

## Conclusions

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### Conclusions

#### 4.0 African Literature

1. In Africa African literature written in European languages was misunderstood as African literature only as if there had never been literature in African languages. African literature refers to literature of and from Africa. It consists of a body of work in different languages and various genres ranging from oral literature to literature written in colonial languages (French, Portuguese, and English).

2. Africa is continent comprising 54 small countries. Each country has its own constitution. Each country has its own language and tradition. Though the constitutions and languages are different, the customs, traditions and cultures are same. In this way African continent is similar to that of India.

3. After the publication of the journal *Presence africaine* in 1956 the concept of African literature became prominent in Africa. In short African literature is the literature produced in indigenous African languages. It is a body of that work which has thrown away the influence of foreign languages.

7. We have to consider the situation in Asia also. Considering the similarities between Asia and Africa, the concept of Nativism relates itself to the continents: Asia and Africa. Both the continents strive to preserve their identity with reference to their tradition, cultures, morality, native modernity, realism and languages of peoples.

#### 4.1 Nativism: African Critical Discourse

1. English is not an indigenous language; naturally the basic urges cannot be presented through it. It is an alien language which provides pieces of entertainment to foreign readers. This craze hampered the development of native literature.

2. Nativism in African literature starts with the *Decolonization of African literature*. During the post-independence period English acquired the status of official language and medium of instruction in educational institutions. All the indigenous languages

were accorded secondary position. Even the production of literature in indigenous languages is banned. This socio-political condition gave birth to Nativism in Africa.

3. In Africa the concept of Nativism emerged from the then famous Makerere conference. It is a group activity. The writers participated in the conference sat to discuss the issue of African literature and concluded that African literature must be produced in African languages and should be evaluated with the indigenous African standards. In India the concept of Nativism is advocated by Bhalchandra Nemade, whereas in Africa it emerged out of a group activity. In Africa Chinua Achebe, Gabriel Okara, Wole Soyinka, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Ngugi Wa Thiong'O are the critics who advocated the movement of nativism.

4. African literature was evaluated by the standards developed by the West, which were not altogether applicable to the African situation. Even after liberation from the colonial clutches African culture was continued to be dominated by Western standards.

5. African Nativism is basically divided into three categories, i.e. Classical Nativism- teaches that "usefulness" is the fundamental African aesthetic principle; Structuralist Nativism- focuses on the clear expression of public themes; and Linguistic Nativism- advocates to produce an effective pedagogy for national development of written artifacts in the indigenous languages.

6. In Africa Nativism is the vehicle of idealism and pragmatism in literary criticism. For them literatures are not languages but linguistic embodiments of cultural patterns.

7. Hence, the term Nativism needs to be exhibited in the Glossary of Literary Terms as well as in all the Standard English Dictionaries.

8. Nativism is not atavism; those who have a hankering to go back into the ancestral past are called atavistic. *Shivsena* and *Maharashtra Navnirman Sena* are atavistic because of their chauvinistic and outdated views.

## **4.2 Nativistic Literary Values**

### **6.2.1 Native Tradition**



1. African literature has a tradition of approximately 5000 years. Basically it is Orature. This Orature got form of literature after the advent of the Europeans. The natives studied the literary genres of the West and imitated those genres in their languages only.

2. African Nativism has three literary traditions. First is that the oral tradition or Orature. It is the literature passed on from mouth to ear, generation to generation. It consists of songs, poems, drama, proverbs, riddles, sayings and it is the richest and oldest of heritages. The second tradition is that of Africans writing in European languages particularly in those of the former colonizers. This is clearly a product of the fatal encounter between Africa and Europe. The third tradition is that of Africans writing in African languages. In the pre-colonial era, this was a minority tradition among the nations in that not many of the African languages had been reduced to writing.

3. African Nativism illustrates that the rituals, dance, music and folklore of African people have a major role to play in the development of African literature. There is also the possibility of developing critical theory from the traditions of orature. African Nativism expects drawing their own cultural heritage in their literature.

#### **4.2.2 Native Modernity**

1. During the colonial and even post-colonial period African critics used to follow western concepts of criticism. The critics tried to search the themes of Modernism, Postmodernism, Realism, Surrealism, Naturalism, Structuralism, and so on in African literature, which, in fact, is not altogether applicable to it.

2. African Modernity covers the period from the end of the eighteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth centuries when the ideas of nationality, ethnicity, authenticity, and cultural integrity that sustain contemporary cultural studies in the West were first developed. African modernity is considered “black modernity” by the African critics.

#### **4.2.3 *Negritude***

1. In Africa 'Negritude' is a movement which gives importance to the portrayal of African culture. It began in Paris in 1934, when a few students founded the journal *L'Etudiant Noir*. The followers of *negritude* think that Africans do not have to look or behave like people of other races.

2. *Negritude* is a philosophy devised to raise the stature of people of African descent in international affairs and to remove all the disadvantages which previously went with a black skin.

3. Africa is not a single nation. It is a group. Naturally, it consists of various cultures. And there is a natural communication between these cultures. Languages as communication and as culture are then products of each other. Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which individuals come to perceive themselves and their place in the world.

7. Literature is a cultural production; modern African literature expresses the socio-cultural, historical, and other experiences as well as the sensibility of its people. Literary works that focus on certain criteria of cultural acceptability, African-ness, or Africanity constitute modern African literature.

#### **4.2.4 Language of People**

1. Ngugi Wa Thiong'O in his article "Return to the Roots" denied that the literature produced by the African writers is African literature at all, especially the literature produced in Colonial languages.

2. Language plays an important role in the development of African literatures. The continuous tradition of indigenous languages and the production of oral literature is also significant. Similarly the environment in which an African child grows shapes the mind and literary taste of the child.

3. In Africa the medium of instruction in schools is compulsorily English. This creates problem in the development of indigenous literature. This happened because what Macaulay had articulated for India in the nineteenth century – to use English to create

a class of Indians who were Indians in colour but British in everything else – was being articulated for the Africans in the twentieth century by Governor Mitchell.

4. Ngugi advises that the writers in African languages should reconnect themselves to the revolutionary traditions of an organized peasantry and working class in Africa in their struggle to defeat imperialism and create a higher system of democracy and socialism in alliance with all the other peoples of the world.

#### **4.2.5 *Litterature engagee***

1. *Litterature engagee* is a critical movement started in Africa in 1960s with a view that literature should be *engagee*, or committed to the solving problems of the contemporary world.

2. The issue of *engagement* got reflected in the books and articles and it became the subject of discussion in the conferences held during that period. At the conclusion of these conferences the practice was to issue resolutions that reflected the sentiments of the group. Several of these resolutions made reference in some way to the concept of *engagement*.

3. In Africa the ideological struggle which is there in literature is also there in criticism. Like the commitment of the writer there is the commitment of the critic also. A critic should be free from all restrictions.

4. Africans also consider the commitment for whom should an African writer writes. And the answer is that the African writer must write first and foremost for Africans: African literature for the Africans. This is not a surprise of revolutionary concept; it is very likely an unspoken criterion of the literary criticism of any literature and a writer's responsibility.

#### **4.2.6 Verbal Action**

1. In African literature the standard verbal action is practiced along with Realism. African writers and critics believe in portraying African reality. For them literature must reflect the real life of Africa. If a writer fails to do so, his writing does not acquire much significance.

2. It can be said that African writers wanted to portray real Africa. They did it by creating their works in their own language and brought the essence of African life into the literature. Instead of presenting the historical account they preferred to create verbal action. This verbal action boosted the growth of African literature.

#### **4.2.7 Reality**

1. The African critics feel that African reality must spring from African soil. African manner, African expression should be imprinted in African literature regardless of themes. African Nativism is based on Frantz Fanon's philosophy and realism is one of its dimensions. Fanon wants the African writers to fashion the revolution with the people. He feels that the writers should be the living part of Africa and her thought.

2. The readiness and willingness of African critics to apply the precepts of realism to African literature is an interesting phenomenon that invites certain hypotheses about the literature and criticism. No other single factor seemed to have been applied as often as consistently as a critical standard. Whatever they were in the 1950s and 1960s in relation to Western literature and criticism, the Africans felt a strong need to be true to themselves.

#### **4.2.8 Nativization**

1. The question of language is the essence of African Nativism. African Nativism moves round the issue of language. The literature produced in African languages is given the status of African literature. But in Africa the language of education and the language of administration is English, French or Portuguese depending on by whom the state was ruled over. The question of language was directly approached by Obiajunwa Wali in 1963. As a result of this an interesting and related line of thought began to develop. The African writers, for whatever reason, chose to write in a European language, started nativizing the European languages.

2. African literature is a fine combination of French, Portuguese, English, Pidgin, Yoruba, Gikuya and various other native African languages. African writers have nativized the colonial languages according to the texture of the native African languages. This trend of nativizing foreign languages is the chief feature of African literature.

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