

Postcolonial African Writers

A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook

Edited by

**Pushpa Naidu Parekh
and Siga Fatima Jagne**



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Foreword by **Carole Boyce Davies**
Emmanuel S. Nelson, Advisory Editor

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Publisher's Note

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original may be apparent.

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FOREWORD

The post-colonial theoretical project has been to identify a contextual paradigm for cultural and intellectual production, and to identify economic, social, and political realities in the wake of European colonialism and in light of the continuing condition of what has now been defined as post-coloniality. Those located within this theoretical sphere, who are then defined variously as colonial or post-colonial subjects occupy a range of geographical and historical locations united by their relation to European (largely British commonwealth) colonialism. In this particular, here literary, context, African writers constitute the subject of a specific (post) coloniality and are therefore brought within a singular analytic frame based on the internal logics of this discourse.

Postcolonial theory has made tremendous strides into becoming a respectable academic discourse. The assertions and critiques of the conceptualization of post-coloniality have been variously articulated. A recent collection of essays, *Contemporary Post-Colonial Theory, A Reader* edited by Padmini Mongia presents a fair range of positions.¹ My own particular critique has supported those of Shohat, McLintock, Mukerjee, and Suleri and includes the fact that along with its totalizing approach, post-colonial theory continues to turn on the same masculinist assumptions of coloniality even as it claims to speak for the entire population.² Additionally, while one may recognize the post-colonial condition as a descriptor of the conditions of both the colonized and the colonizers in the wake of colonialism, the formulation of post-colonialism so far has taken more account of the experience of the (formerly) colonized and their perpetuated condition of coloniality and has been short on analyses which bring into play questions of global/late capitalism and American imperialism which more accurately describes the colonial condition today.

Further clarifying their position on postcoloniality, editors Chris Tiffin and

Alan Lawson, in their concluding comments to their collection *De-Scribing Empire: Post-Colonialism and Textuality* titled “Reading Difference,” argue that the “(post-) colonial subjects—races as well as individuals—continue to be interpellated by a range of imperial mechanisms just as effectively as they were previously coerced by the overt and formal institutions of Empire (230).”³ They assert further that imperialism and its practices continue although not necessarily in the same form. Thus, for them, the practice of postcoloniality moves in two interrelated directions: (1) it interrogates imperial texts to expose the founding ideologies of imperialism and (2) it accounts for the texts of those postcolonial subjects in order to recognize the numerous voices of those affected by Empire and thereby to resituate the former. Thus, a kind of relationality between the two discourses is put into play.

We come then to this particular text and its contributions. *Postcolonial African Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* works with the second level of this postcolonial project by putting forward the works of a wide range of “postcolonial” writers. This collection becomes a particular intervention in the field of postcolonial studies. Its primary and most important contribution is that it accounts concretely for a range of writers of a specific geographic specificity within the larger field of postcolonial studies. One of the concerns of those critical of postcolonial studies is that it often erases the specificity of a number of groups of writers and instead accounts for writers as they relate to colonialism. Thus African literary production, with its various valences, can easily get subordinated under this larger formulation. This text intervenes in an important way here by providing, within the rubric of postcolonial studies, a body of writers emanating from the African cultural experience.

Another significant contribution of this collection is that it consciously produces a gender balance in terms of its selection of writers and critics. Few texts have even bothered to sustain this balance. The fact that it is edited by two conscious women scholars from the “postcolonial” world is not to be dismissed. And while texts like *Into the Nineties, Post-Colonial Women’s Writing* now exist, their existence often means that work dealing with the literature of specific geographic areas can avoid the task of full representation.⁴ In the Preface to this book, Pushpa Naidu Parekh states, “the central organizing principle of the volume is postcoloniality as it is reflected in the novels, poetry, prose, and drama of major, minor, and emerging writers from diverse countries of Africa, including representative North and South African writers and writers of the Indian diaspora born in Africa, both male and female.” The reach of *Postcolonial African Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* is towards broad representation at a variety of levels.

Each anthology struggles with its own question of inclusiveness. It is to this collection’s credit that in its very structuring, representation of a variety of identities within the larger metanarrative of “postcoloniality” has been addressed. But even further, while the editors are definite about making sure that women’s voices are heard, they are as clear that women’s subject positions be

recognized, “not as simply women’s concerns, but as contentious, often destabilizing interventions that are located at all nodes of spatiality and temporality of postcolonial African writing” (preface). And this sense of inclusivity in terms of gender is not achieved at the expense of male writers and is mirrored as well in terms of geography, language, region, generation.

As postcolonial theory enters the academy more firmly as a recognized discourse, texts previously studied under a range of rubrics are relocated within the larger definition of postcoloniality. A variety of texts studied as specific national literatures—African literature or Caribbean literature, or Australian literature—now have another identity as postcolonial literatures just as they may have identity as women’s literature or occupy some other category. *Postcolonial African Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* makes sure that African writers are not left behind as this discourse expands and clarifies itself. Instead it provides a wide range of authors and their texts, biographical and bibliographical information written by well-respected scholars in the field. Its existence makes the study of this literature much more accessible. For me, as a teacher of some of these literatures, it means an important addition, a necessary research tool, and a text which fills a variety of spaces in the existing body of critical materials.

NOTES

1. Padmini Mongia, ed., *Contemporary Post-Colonial Theory, A Reader* (London: New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996).

2. Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London: Routledge, 1994), 80–112.

3. Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson, eds., *De-Scribing Empire: Post-Colonialism and Textuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 230–231.

4. Anna Rutherford, Lars Jensen, and Shirley Chew, eds., *Into the Nineties, Post-Colonial Women’s Writing* (Australia, U.K. and Denmark: Dangaroo Press, 1994).

—Carole Boyce Davies
Florida International University

PREFACE

Postcolonial African writers have been, and currently are, engaging a major intervention in counterdiscursive and revisionist projects impacting the academic world since the fifties. Grasping the multiple coordinates of their intense investigations, deliberations, and debates underlying their literary productions involves an equally challenging, often overwhelming, but increasingly gratifying task. As editors of this reference sourcebook, Siga Jagne and I are passionately involved in making a commitment to effecting this task while recognizing that any grasping is also a letting go and any understanding is also a concession to the irreducibilities of mind and spirit. In a world where claims of global transnationalism are muted within the folds of neoimperialism and neocolonialism, a number of us who have traversed time and space and contentious borderlines are still imbricated in the ambivalences and contradictions of our realities.

In response to these realities, we bring together in this systematic reference volume over fifty bio-bibliographical and critical entries on selected known and emerging writers from diverse African countries, writing mainly in English and French. The selection of Anglophone and Francophone and a couple of Lusophone writers is not intended to reinscribe the notion that indigenous African languages are lost and forgotten or that important and significant literature is not produced in them. On the contrary, we acknowledge that in many instances, more artistically powerful and sociopolitically relevant material is being produced in the indigenous languages. Karin Barber discusses these issues very effectively in “African-Language Literature and Postcolonial Criticism.”¹ We believe, however, that work in these diverse language areas should be undertaken and is being undertaken by scholars specialized in these languages. Albert S. Gérard in *African Language Literatures* undertook, as he stated, “to embark upon the task of gathering as many relevant historical facts within [his] scope

of knowledge in languages that are known to [him] and ordering them into some sort of coherent pattern covering the fifteen-odd centuries that have elapsed since written composition began in Ethiopia.”² Other scholars, such as Mugyabuse M. Mulokozi, Randall L. Pauwels, Flora Veit-Wild, and C. F. Swanepoel, have undertaken useful and much-needed study of indigenous African-language literatures.³ We have therefore limited our selections and wish to clarify that we do not claim to represent all postcolonial African writers, only a selective sample of writings mainly in English and French, with a glimpse into two Lusophone writers. I believe that ideally these writers should be read in conjunction with indigenous African and Arabic writers writing in Africa in order for us to understand the various trajectories of postcoloniality in African writing. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak put it, we must learn to become “inter-literary.”⁴ Moreover, in light of Gérard’s cautionary warning that European-language writing in Africa may not last forever, even as Latin did not in Europe, since its producers are themselves dissatisfied with addressing only “a tiny privileged minority,” one can make no naïve assertions of future trends.⁵

Many of the writers we have included in this sourcebook are being studied in some undergraduate and several graduate programs in institutions across the world. Increasing interest in postcolonial studies, we know, does not reflect a readiness in academia to include hitherto-neglected area studies, or if they are included, to study them in ways that would destabilize the privileged grounding of a Western critical discourse of all literary productions. But it does begin to pose questions regarding what our students as well as faculty need to know and research before introducing courses on aspects of African literature. In fact, a sourcebook like ours hopefully will challenge academicians to think in terms of particular regional, cultural, social, political, and economic contexts and to research bio-bibliographical details. A major component of each entry, “Major Works and Themes,” provides a concise, interpretive summary of the writer’s works in chronological sequence and a clear sense of the writer’s primary themes and strategies. The central organizing principle of the volume is postcoloniality as it is reflected in the novels, poetry, prose, and drama of major, minor, and emerging writers from diverse countries of Africa, including representative North and South African writers and writers of the Indian diaspora born in Africa, both male and female. The contributors to this volume directly address the impact of the writer’s experience and consciousness of postcoloniality, such as concerns with the issues of emerging identities in the postcolonial climate, neocolonialism and new forms of oppression, cultural and political hegemonies, neoeitism, language appropriation, economic instability, or the politics of publication and distribution, on his or her artistic imagination. The analysis of the works in most entries is also focused within the framework of postcolonial cultural and critical ideologies and theories. The “Critical Reception” section in each entry provides a summary of the critical reactions to the writer’s work. A crucial objective of this section is to locate the significance of the writer in the postcolonial African literary context as well as the larger context of post-

colonial literatures. The “Bibliography” consists of two sections—works by the writer and studies (or selected studies) of the writer. The selective secondary sources include significant critical studies that address in some way the postcolonialist aspects of the writer’s life and works.

In this volume, we as editors have included several entries that discuss African women’s subject positions in the context of colonizing and neocolonizing processes, not simply as women’s concerns, but as contentious, often destabilizing interventions that are located at all nodes of spatiality and temporality of postcolonial African writing. While volumes specifically on African women serve their purpose, we hope, by placing several known and emerging women and men writers alongside each other, to expose, question, and often dispel the center-versus-margin construction of identities and ideologies as they are reflected in literary discourses. Many of the entries in this volume will locate African women in their own contexts, identifying both possibilities and problematics in their own realities, their concerns, and their issues. However, the critics’ and theorists’ insights, whether in this volume or outside, should not go unchallenged. It is the “subaltern” women’s voices that need to be heard. Whether directly challenging Western feminists’ colonization of the female experience or questioning their own authority in articulating all the problems of the subaltern women, these voices give shape and meaning to their own theoretical preoccupations.

Having said this, I would like to emphasize that I see our contributors as polyphonic voices. Their entries provide not only information regarding the life and works of the selected African writers but also divergent intellectual frameworks that define or emerge from the differences in colonial and postcolonial experiences within the various African states across the continent. Many entries illuminate thematic, structural, and narrative patterns as they embody multiple configurations of literature as intersections of specific aesthetic, political, sociohistorical, cultural, and economic forces created and sustained within colonial and postcolonial realities. Samuel A. Dseagu, Emmanuel S. Nelson, Emevwo Biakolo, Hema Chari, Vanessa Everson, Harold Barratt, and Brinda Bose, among others, provide insight into specific expressions of these intersections.

Samuel A. Dseagu elucidates the central concerns in Ayi Kwei Armah’s novels by a careful examination of the symbolic representation of their characters within the context of postcolonial Ghana. The encroachment of Western materialism, the vacuum in leadership as a result of political instability and economic malaise, and the irony of who gains social status in postcolonial Ghana are imposing reflections of “larger national and international forces at work.” Dseagu notes that Armah in his works, ranging from *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* to *Two Thousand Seasons*, deals with Africa’s “identity and predicament” in the context of “Africa’s progression from independence, ‘so woe-fully assimilated’ to the West.” Dseagu also raises the question of publication as crucial in Armah’s critique of colonial and neocolonial politics. After having his first three novels published by American companies, Armah went to East

African Publishing House in order to support “the dissemination of local texts for the populations.” With the publication of *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah is committed, as Dseagu notes, to Africa as “the center of his reading public.”

Emmanuel Nelson evaluates Chinua Achebe as a postcolonial writer who, through his engagement and “constant dialogue” with the history of the Igbo people of Nigeria, reconstructs an “oppositional,” sometimes “subversive,” version of “official,” “authorized” history, even as he records the “private dilemmas of an individual post-colonial.” Nelson illustrates, through a close analysis of the novels, that Achebe provides a “benevolent counterpoint” to the violence and madness of postcolonial realities, whether it be through women’s “tasks of national renewal and the return to political sanity” (as in *Anthills of the Savannah*) or the emergence of “self-knowledge” and an “understanding of the daunting complexities of his nation’s politics” (as in *A Man of the People*). Nelson combines a finely balanced interplay of close analysis and application of postcolonial theoretical framework in his criticism.

Emewwo Biakolo analyzes J. P. Clark-Bekederemo’s poetry and plays in terms of two related concerns: “the celebration of African cultural experience and achievements, as exemplified among the Ijaw and Urhobo people of the Niger Delta, as well as lamentation and criticism of European colonialist exploitation, along with the psychological crisis produced in modern Africans by the European encounter.” He also discusses Clark-Bekederemo’s criticism of “American social and political life” in his prose travelogue.

Hema Chari’s engagement in her entry on Nuruddin Farah is with “the post-colonial nature of his writings” and the concerns that “underlie his unyielding criticism of neocolonial practices in contemporary Somali politics.” She focuses on two thematic concerns in his novels, “the ethics of human freedom and the oppression of women in postcolonial Somaliland.” In order to clarify these themes, Chari explores, with compelling force, Farah’s investigation of “other related sociopolitical issues that regulate the nature of freedom in Somali culture,” such as patriarchy, kinship practices, “public and private sites of negotiation available for women,” family structures, “the metaphorical relationship between political and domestic power,” “Somalia’s political independence,” and the “vacuity of the country’s nationalist agenda,” as well as “Somalia’s complex relationships with foreign powers.”

Vanessa Everson evaluates Ferdinand Oyono’s limited but significant literary production of three novels in the light of Cameroonian colonial politics and its baggage of “religious hypocrisy, physical brutality, and moral turpitude.” Everson characterizes Oyono’s writing, marked by “acid wit” and incisive satire, as “a melody in counterpoint.” She further observes, “His fellow countrymen do not escape his critical gaze, for they allow themselves to be duped.”

Harold Barratt delineates the “sociopolitical and ideologically charged nature of Alex La Guma’s fiction” through an analysis of the recurring theme of “the dehumanizing process that South Africa’s apartheid system inflicts upon both

oppressor and oppressed.” He examines La Guma’s language and symbols as powerful strategies to unveil the violence and horror of the apartheid regime.

Another South African writer, Lewis Nkosi, and his sociopolitical commitment are studied by Brinda Bose. Examining his literary criticism, his play *The Rhythm of Violence*, his novel *Mating Birds*, and short stories, Bose articulates Nkosi’s concern with the impact of colonialism and its “repercussions on the country’s social and literary life.”

Several contributors discuss themes and issues related to the location and construction of the postcolonial female subject. Marie Umeh, Eleni Coundouriotis, Hildegard Hoeller, Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi, Mary Vogl, Siga Fatima Jagne, Elaine Savory, Christine Loflin, Lisa McNee, Maxine Beahan, and Lindsay Pentolfe Aegerter consider various explorations of the female self and space and of the contours of her social, political, and cultural realities.

Marie Umeh’s detailed study of Buchi Emecheta identifies her literary achievement as marking “a turning point in Nigerian literary history.” Umeh analyzes the major theme in Emecheta’s works as “the extirpation of retrogressive Igbo cultural norms that prevent women from participation in a wide range of activities said to be the preserve of men.” Umeh appraises Emecheta’s engagement with compelling issues, such as raising “the political consciousness of all women,” challenging “the marginalization of women in all social systems,” depicting “the woes of Igbo women due to repressive patriarchal norms that condemn them to prescribed fates of subsistence and subjugation,” and exposing the conflicts between the values and precepts of Igbo traditional culture and the Western colonial culture. Emecheta also deals with the heroic and leadership roles of women in the Biafran war, the neocolonial evils of Nigerian society, and even the “potential evil of polygamous relationships,” as well as sexual abuse of children. Umeh further evaluates Emecheta’s “revolutionary imperative” as resting on the “need for ‘balance,’ ‘equalization,’ and ‘alliance’ in male-female relationships within the Igbo sociocultural framework.” She critiques this imperative as sometimes leading to overstatement and depiction of males as one-dimensional. Umeh also notes Emecheta’s artistic development in terms of moving from “episodic” plot narration to “technically mature creations.” Umeh’s entry also provides insight into the various scholarly studies that involve a reevaluation of feminist studies in the context of African women and the complexity of postcolonial Igbo life and culture.

Eleni Coundouriotis examines Tsitsi Dangarembga’s two published works in the context of Zimbabwe’s colonial history and traditional practices. She suggests that the novel *Nervous Conditions* can be seen as a “rewriting of the male education novel” in which a woman’s “possibilities of selfhood” are “enabled only by the active negotiation of conflicting cultural codes.” Coundouriotis further unravels the class-gender-colonization nexus within which the “politicization” of the native self, especially the female native self, is constructed.

Hildegard Hoeller identifies Ama Ata Aidoo’s major focus to be the “psy-

chological impact of the colonial and post-colonial experience on her male and particularly her female characters.” She notes Aidoo’s representation of the diverse African women’s struggle through challenging “the concept of marriage, the role of other women in the oppression and liberation of her heroines, the concept of sanity, and finally language and literary forms themselves, as they in their traditional forms seem unable to represent a woman’s truth accurately.”

Juliana Nfah-Abbenyi discusses Calixthe Beyala’s vision of the postcolonial female subject’s self-liberatory act within the constraints of poverty, violence, exploitation, and degradation. “What we see consistently is Beyala’s ability to portray tragic conditions that Africans in the post-colonial era have created or have to live with, but she also leaves the post-colonial subject with a potential for change.”

Mary Vogl’s entry on Assia Djebar explores how “Algerian women have faced a double colonization, colonial and patriarchal, and have had to fight to redefine their role in postcolonial Algerian society.” Vogl discusses, with penetrating insight, Djebar’s understanding of “the politics of language” and post-colonial Algerian women’s experiences as they become manifest significantly in “related themes of voice, body language, aphasia, sound, and silence.” Vogl also assesses the value of the coexistence of French and Arabic in Djebar.

Siga Fatima Jagne situates her detailed and textured analysis of Mariama Bâ’s two major novels in “the oral tradition of the Senegalese griot women,” writing a “speakerly text.” She unravels the multiple “positionings” of Bâ—“a post-colonial position she has been assigned to by a conflicting tradition and Islam” besides the impact of French colonization, shaped by “the Wolof view of fatalism,” informed by Islam, as well as one located within the traditional practices of the caste system: “Her positionings as female, Muslim, *guer*, Western educated, orphaned, mother, and a divorcée inform her experiences and the different tensions in these multiple positionings.” Jagne’s final argument rests on the observation that the oppositions and tensions in the lives of Bâ’s women characters are “not always negative,” as “Bâ seems to leave space for transformation. . . . At the same time, this does not absolve her from reinscribing caste in ways that can be read as acquiescence.”

Elaine Savory’s essay on Bessie Head examines the multiple and conflicted identity layers of the biracial, colored African woman within the context of South Africa and later as an exile in Botswana. She analyzes the several “hybrid” and “exiled” cultural spaces from which Head’s women protagonists articulate their critique of ideological and political containment. Savory considers the specific ways in which Bessie Head questions the systems of domination, as they define her reality, in order to resist them. She envisions Head as a writer whose concerns include the whole of humankind: “She decided to opt for ‘mankind as a whole.’”

Christine Loflin examines the women’s “dialogue” motif in Flora Nwapa’s novels and short stories as an affirmation of indigenous African feminism evolving from the “community of women.” Nwapa dismantles not only imposed

Western values but also outmoded traditional beliefs such as the glorification of motherhood in both *Efuru* and *Idu*. Loflin also assesses the recent critical attention and reevaluation devoted to Nwapa's works. These readings resist placing Nwapa's works "within preexisting frameworks of Western feminism or cultural studies." Loflin then accounts for the relevance of recent postcolonial feminist studies to African women writer's works.

The entry on Nafissatou Diallo by Lisa McNee focuses on the intersection of private and public spheres in Diallo's works. Her autobiography, historical romances, and the juvenile novel all reflect and critique aspects of contemporary social practices. McNee examines Diallo's works as addressing "issues of women's representation and roles in public life." Diallo critiques, in the process, as McNee notes, the "depredations of the ruling classes" as well as "the caste system that continues to influence Senegalese society in light of Muslim values."

Maxine Beahan points out Muthoni Likimani's role as one of the first Kenyan women to become "a program producer at the Kenyan Broadcasting Commission, now the Voice of Kenya," and a writer who promotes women's issues. Beahan analyzes Likimani's works for their expression of political activism. She also discusses the wide-ranging social themes in Likimani's novel *They Shall Be Chastised*, a verse collection, *What Does a Man Want?*, and a document titled *Women of Kenya: In the Decade of Development*, published for the United Nations Women's Conference held in Nairobi in 1985. These themes encompass the problems of increasing Westernization, particularly through the impact of Christianity, on "traditional Kikuyu social structures"; images and roles of women; pressures of traditional practices in a changing society; and "divisions between women who work in the country while their husbands work in the city."

Lindsay Pentolfe Aegerter analyzes Ellen Kuzwayo's contribution to rewriting "autobiography" as "autoethnography" in order to "educate her audience about the politics of African women's identities." Grounding Kuzwayo's work in the oral tradition, Aegerter explores the connections among the structure, style, function, message, and method of storytelling in both works, *Call Me Woman* and *Sit Down and Listen*. Aegerter points out, "For Kuzwayo, the combination of fiction and nonfiction, of symbolic and 'realistic' suggestibility, works to create a womanist vision of wholeness." In Aegerter's view, within the South African apartheid context, Kuzwayo creates the "miracle" of retaining and continuing "traditional values" and engaging dialogically the contentious politics of colonial exploitation and collective efforts at "personal and cultural wholeness."

Femi Euba, Iyunolu Osagie, Elaine Savory, Jo Nel, and Adaku Ankumah examine the place of African playwrights whose plays can be viewed as a forum for the exploration of postcolonial concerns and issues. Femi Euba, a founding member of the 1960s Masks, a "theatre laboratory" founded by Wole Soyinka, analyzes Soyinka's life experiences and works with scholarly insight and per-

sonal knowledge. Clarifying the centrality of the Yoruba Ifa-oracle corpus in Soyinka's works, Euba also addresses its links to postcolonial realities—the ruptures and antinomies in the postcolonial corrupt Nigerian state are played out against the restorative creative-destructive potential embodied in the Ogunian tragic hero figure.

Iyunolu Osagie identifies Femi Euba's concern with the "theoretical and performative ritual role . . . of the black dramatist as bearer of tradition and conscience of society." His plays of satire, as Osagie points out, reflect his political commitment as well as a "social vision for the postmodern realities of our times." In "Euba's search for a definition of black diasporic theater," Osagie captures "a unifying concept of identity through a physical and metaphysical journey of fate as controlled and directed by Esu-Elegbara, the god of fate, the messenger god who distributes both good and evil to the human race."

Elaine Savory focuses on how Femi Osofisan "utilizes Yoruba tradition but in the service of opening up political dialogue." She also traces Osofisan's connections with and departures from Soyinka. Most significantly, Osofisan rejected the "mythopoetic style of Soyinka" in order to express his "radical socialism." Savory also illuminates Osofisan's unique blend of theatrical styles.

Jo Nel reflects upon the postcolonial themes and techniques in Athol Fugard's plays and novel, such as the relationship of past and present and the exposure of the apartheid victim's conditions of "confinement, poverty, and deprivation." Nel also discusses Fugard's use of drama as "an autobiographical vehicle."

Jo Nel in his examination of Fugard's novel, *Tsotsi*, analyzes the impact of racial separation of the white man's city from the township of the black community, resulting in violence and suffering. Nel also discusses the theme of time and its associations with "mutability, with change, and with decay."

Focusing on Efua Sutherland's various contributions as playwright and theatre director in Ghana, Adaku T. Ankumah highlights her role in founding the Experimental Theatre Players, the Ghana Society of Writers, a community theatre, and a touring theatre group at the School of Drama, University of Ghana, Legon. Ankumah notes that Sutherland combines "relevant European dramatic forms and the traditional Akan storytelling art called *Anansesem* and its dramatic techniques, including audience participation." Her plays also examine "the role of women in contemporary society." Ankumah, in her close analysis of plays such as *Foriwa* and *Edufu*, discusses these roles as those of nation and community building.

A preoccupation with identity underlies a number of postcolonial African writers and is reflected in issues of racial, sexual, class, caste, language, ethnic, and national identity in the literary texts. Through direct and indirect confrontation of these issues, thematically, stylistically, or rhetorically, the writers either question, subvert, or dismantle certain inscribed codes regarding identity designations as they inform the "political unconscious" of the colonial texts. John C. Hawley, Chinyere Grace Okafor, Christine Loflin, Soraya Mékerta, J. Roger

Kurtz, and Pushpa Naidu Parekh address these preoccupations in writers with varying agendas and methods.

John C. Hawley and Chinyere Grace Okafor note the impact of class structure on the neocolonial African state. Hawley assesses Ngugi wa Thiong'o's commitment to "the struggle of the common people of Kenya to come to terms with the effects on their culture of colonialism and the neocolonialism that followed." Hawley observes that Ngugi's shift to writing in Gikuyu and "translating the work—often into Kiswahili first, and then into English," as well as his chronicling of the Mau Mau revolution in his fiction, is clear evidence of his commitment to nationalist literature through linguistic indigenization and class alignment. His works, often progressively, show an increasing "understanding of the postcolonial situation and the politics and economics of exploitation." In Hawley's analysis, these complexities are reflected in Ngugi's "interior search for the various motives of those who participated in the [Mau Mau] war. . . . His is an organic view of group interchange." Hawley demonstrates in his analysis and critique that Ngugi brought "the newer politics of responsibility" to writing. Ngugi's responses to the "challenges of national independence" are investigated within the ideology of Marxism embodied in decolonization theorists like Frantz Fanon.

Writing in response to and against the ideological constructions of identity within colonial and neocolonial frames of reference, postcolonial writing often constitutes an uneasy engagement. It implies revolutionary change but also participates in the dubious project of displacement. Scholars note the multiple ways in which postcolonial African writers envision the configurations of this revolution and displacement in rewriting the new social order.

Chinyere Grace Okafor identifies Vincent Chukwuemeka Ike's concern with the complex nature of postindependence social order. Okafor identifies this new drive as a conflicting one of breaking the boundaries of ethnicity while affirming ones "attachment to [one's] roots," as illustrated in the issue of interethnic marriage in Ike's novels *Toads for Supper* and *Sunset at Dawn*. Okafor also discusses Ike's allegorical envisioning of neocolonial political intrigues in *The Naked Gods* by focusing on the choice of leadership, in this case of a vice-chancellor for Songhai University. Other issues central to Ike's works are a critique of the colonial education system, widespread corruption as exemplified in the leakage of examination papers, the class structure of the Nigerian-Biafran "war experience," and the "pretensions of the intellectual community," as well as the conflict between the old and the new generation in the modern African society. Okafor observes that Ike places his faith in the young to draw all "segments of the society" to revamp the "precarious situation of neocolonial Africa."

Chinyere Grace Okafor also examines Festus Iyayi's representation of neocolonialism in Africa through a focus on Benin City, where "juxtaposition of traditional African and modern, Westernized cultures" provides an exposition

of “the injustices and suffering of the masses.” The system of neocolonialism fosters violence, poverty, depravity, alienation, and corruption. Okafor notes Iyayi’s portrayal of these realities as a critique of “the class structure of the post-colonial system” so clearly exemplified in the life of the modern city (as in the novels *Violence* and *The Contract*). Okafor discusses Iyayi’s examination of this issue in *Heroes* in relation to the “exploitation of the ordinary soldier and civilian in the Nigeria-Biafra war” and his emphasis on “the class structure of the war” as he delineates how the “Biafran and Nigerian upper classes contrived the war as a result of their conflict and implicated the lower class to fight the war for them while their own children are protected from the war.”

Christine Loflin examines Zaynab Alkali’s *The Stillborn* to note how, in the postcolonial experience of migration, not only the city but also the village has been influenced by Western modernization and the missionary work: “Thus Alkali disturbs and undoes the dichotomy of the village and traditional life versus the city and modernity.” Loflin addresses Li’s “fluidity of identity” as she moves from “daughter to wife to educated single parent to ‘the man of the house’ to, prospectively, matriarch of her family” in the context of Homi Bhabha’s salutary warning in *The Location of Culture* that migration creates a need “to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities.”⁶ Alkali does not therefore promote the modern woman as simply one kind; she could combine economic independence with a solidarity with men “to build a new society.” Loflin further illuminates the implications of stylistic innovation in postcolonial writers; she argues that the use of dreams in Alkali’s novels reflects a “move away from the standards of Western realism.”

Soraya Mékerta’s entry on Tahar Ben Jelloun explores what she calls the “very real and concrete situations” that he writes about. She also points out that he ventures into the depth of memory of the Maghrebian people and the Maghreb. Mékerta’s observations rest on Tahar Ben Jelloun as a writer, critic, and activist who understands, questions, and critiques “all forms of abuse, specifically those inherent in colonialism and neocolonialism; cultural and linguistic impositions; racial and ethnic intolerance; [and] class, gender, and sexual oppression.” Jelloun’s writing, Mékerta tells us, is wide and varied in scope, forcing an interdisciplinary reading of his works. Mékerta characterizes his work: “Deeply rooted in the Maghreb, in France, and in between, Tahar Ben Jelloun’s voice is forceful and passionate; it demands to be listened to.”

J. Roger Kurtz reads Francis Imbuga’s plays and novels as providing an indirect criticism of postcolonial East African politics and society. He evaluates Imbuga’s *Shrine of Tears*, for example, as an examination of “the contradictory roles of politicians, of the police forces, of the universities, of expatriate ‘experts,’ and of traditional cultural forms.” Kurtz identifies in Imbuga’s indirect criticism not only survivalist motives but an effectual deterrent to volatile silencing of artists by corrupt government machinery. He points out, “Imbuga’s texts allow the targets of his criticism to save face and provide them room to reform themselves by avoiding direct confrontation.”

Pushpa Naidu Parekh's entry on Gabriel Okara examines his radical aesthetics of revolutionary change in colonial and postcolonial phases of Nigerian history. Parekh observes that the discursive and ideological reconstruction of the historical, political, and spiritual self is effected through linguistic and structural innovations. The speaking voices in Okara's poetry and particularly Okolo in *The Voice* search for and find an inner, self-generated aesthetics in which the seeds of a transformative vision and revolutionary activism are engendered. By the end of *The Voice*, the individual leader moves the communal masses to defy the anxiety, fear, materialism, and hatred of the colonized mentality through stages that correspond to those that Fanon delineates in *The Wretched of the Earth*.

Samba Diop, Ode S. Ogede, Alma Jean Billingslea-Brown, Dominic Thomas, Judith Imali Abala, and Norman Weinstein propose shifts in approaching the writers and their works, keeping in mind the various sociopolitical influences that determined their artistic choices. Samba Diop provides a clear understanding of Léopold Sédar Senghor's stature, his contributions to the philosophy of Negritude, and the shifts in Senghor's poetic development, as well as his political engagements and commitments and his prominence with regard to pan-Africanism and diaspora issues. Diop's entry critically reevaluates, beyond the advocacy/censure divide, the significance of the Negritude movement as a much-needed and timely response to colonial constructions of African culture and people. He further notes how the movement was critiqued and provides both sides of the debate, while acknowledging the relevance of moving beyond the dialectics of Africa and Europe.

Ode S. Ogede locates David Mandessi Diop's poetry within the Negritude school, his main decolonization project being the advocacy of using African languages in literature. Ogede observes that Diop's style, his "assertive, defiant tone," and "his angry response to the evils of colonialism" influenced the work of exiled writers like Mazisi Kunene and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, as well as the Black Consciousness poets of South Africa such as Mafika Gwala and Don Mattera and the West African poet Kofi Awoonor. Ogede notes how, as a conscious expression of his political commitment, Diop adopted African oral forms, such as praise-names, in his celebration of the African woman.

Ogede assesses Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie's poetry as setting "a new standard for Nigerian women's poetry." He notes Ogundipe-Leslie's use of African rhetorical devices, such as the "adynation symbol," to convey feminist messages. He clarifies how Ogundipe-Leslie formulates her sense of "commitment" as one that goes beyond literary resistance to "tell about being a woman."

Alma Jean Billingslea-Brown identifies the themes of "death, grief, and loss" in Kofi Awoonor's works as closely connected to Anlo-Ewe oral tradition—"the Ewe dirge, a traditional verse form of loss and lament." Billingslea-Brown notes that the grieving in Awoonor's poetry is for the loss of traditional culture through the imposition of Christianity. By abandoning his own Christian name,

George Awoonor Williams, he reclaims his own identity through a “ritualistic process.”

Dominic Thomas observes the complex use of French in Sony Labou Tansi’s works and connects it to his “historical relationship to it,” that is, one of colonization and linguistic “rape.” This connection impacts Tansi’s “radical syntactic and lexical reform,” “a modification of traditional narrative linearity,” and “extensive use of neologisms.” Violence in language reflects, as Thomas notes, the “extravagance of the political regimes and the horrors perpetrated by a number of post-colonial dictatorships.” Thomas also explores Aminata Sow Fall’s works, revealing their concern with the question of “political power” in a postcolonial society, as well as with the “aesthetic aspects of literary production.”

Judith Imali Abala examines Micere M. Githae Mugo’s role in the “battle against the hegemony of Eurocentrism” through her questioning of “the ‘authenticity’ and ‘accuracy’ of Kenyan historical accounts written from a European point of view” (in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, coauthored with Ngugi wa Thiong’o). Abala cites Mugo’s use of songs and affirmation of dance and recitation as a celebration of her “own culture and modes of expression.”

Norman Weinstein explores Amos Tutuola’s works in the mode of the quest romance but also connects his repeated use of the motif of “trial by fire” to revealing the “present political, social, and economic realities of postcolonial Africa.” Discussing the critical reception of Tutuola, Weinstein assesses two currents: critics who see stylistic innovations, especially his use of “Yoruba English,” and critics like Chinua Achebe who focus on Tutuola’s moral dimension.

Several postcolonial African writers express themselves out of a specific ethnic culture and draw their perceptions from that particular worldview. As noted earlier, Mariama Bâ as much as Wole Soyinka and Kofi Awoonor, among other writers, shape their literary world out of these perceptions. In analyzing Okot p’Bitek’s writings as they emerge out of Acoli culture and its traditions, Awuor Ayodo notes that with colonialism and later independence, p’Bitek was “faced with the urgent question of whether to define the emergent post-colonial societies, the African, and the African worldview in terms of an ethnic group . . . ; in terms of Western culture; or as a symbiosis of both.” P’Bitek’s belief in “the primacy and value of ethnic culture” is reflected in his works, both in Acoli (or Luo) and those translated by himself into English.

Brian Evenson and David Beus’s collaborative essay on Camara Laye focuses on his celebration of traditional African cultures, particularly the Malinké culture in *L’enfant noir*. The contributors note that while other writers delineate the impact of clashing cultures, Laye celebrates “a single culture.” Although the book was critiqued as “idyllic and insufficiently engaged,” Evenson and Beus point out Laye’s perceptions of Africa as other than a Western-defined, appropriated, and constructed realm.

Nalini Iyer and Anne E. Lessick-Xiao delineate the multilayered African iden-

tity by focusing on the multicultural influences on particular writers. Iyer, in her analysis of Christopher Okigbo, attests to his envisioning of the African poet as “a product of a complex culture who gives voice to its values.” His poetry draws from “Ibo myth and beliefs, Christianity, Virgil, Nigerian music and rhythms, and English and American modernist poets.” Iyer also comments on the poet’s political themes in his last sequence of poems, *Path of Thunder*. Anne E. Lessick-Xiao unravels the multiple interests in Emmanuel Dongala’s life—music, mathematics, science, drama, and the novel. Attesting to his “multiculturalism,” Lessick-Xiao notes that his troupe has performed works of varied playwrights, including Yukio Mishima and Jean-Paul Sartre. She also notes the influence of Asian literature and philosophy, Latin American writers, and, most significantly, African-American music, particularly jazz, on Dongala’s writings.

Craig McLuckie’s entry on Dennis Brutus highlights the “balance of the poetic with the political” in his writings. McLuckie notes the movement and progression in Brutus’s poetic output, in particular the specific validation of occasional poems as well as committed ones, within the context of South Africa’s politics of apartheid, Brutus’s phases of activism, and his present concerns regarding a growing transnational “society dominated by mass media.”

Carol Marsh-Lockett, Christine Sizemore, Jo Nel, and Nicholas Birns examine the complexities of identity construction from the standpoint of white settler writing in South Africa. Marsh-Lockett traces the development of Nadine Gordimer’s works in the context of South Africa’s apartheid and colonialist politics and ideology. The moral failure of colonialism and the consequent spiritual and psychological destruction is confronted in various areas: “sexual adventurism,” “miscegenation,” and “narcissistic liberalism.” Marsh-Lockett observes that Gordimer raises an important issue regarding the place of whites in a changing Africa; she underscores the moral issues at stake and her conviction that the whites who wish to stay in postapartheid Africa must do so on the terms of the African peoples (*None to Accompany Me*).

Christine Sizemore begins her analysis of Doris Lessing by pointing out her “ambiguous relationship” to the colonial “English literary tradition” as well as to “the landscape of Africa.” Observing that all of Lessing’s writings “focus on the issue of difference,” Sizemore examines racial, national, class, gender, and age as well as species differences in relation to the “issues of power, control, and exploitation that she [Lessing] saw as a child in colonial Rhodesia.”

Jo Nel anchors his discussion of Alan Paton’s works on certain prevailing themes, “the disintegration of traditional influences on African youth, especially as they migrate from the rural areas toward the cities,” “obsession with racial purity,” “the effect of apartheid laws on the citizens of the country” and “the inexorable erosion of the human soul in the enactment of racist ideology,” and “the challenge posed to Christian principles by the political aberration called ‘apartheid.’ ”

Nicholas Birns elucidates Olive Schreiner’s “awareness of the political and moral tragedies afflicting her native South Africa” through an examination of

what he calls her “visionary style.” He examines Schreiner’s novels and short stories for their depiction of the condition where personal events have political parallels and implications.

Several scholars discuss the politics of identity as a concern of the writers they examine. Moving away from essentialist notions of identity to an engagement with historical moments and geopolitical locations in subject formation, several post-colonial African writers reexamine the colonialist and imperialist paradigms of “otherness,” “difference,” and “authority” in terms of cross-cultural mobility. Postcolonial and culture studies theorists like Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Carole Boyce Davies, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Trinh T. Minh-ha have articulated their critique of essentialism in the context of their specific theoretical terrains. Notions of “hybridity,” “diaspora,” “memory,” and “mestiza consciousness” therefore shape the works of many writers. Ama Ata Aidoo in *Our Sister Killjoy* poses these contested articulations as constant displacements of cultural codes within the combative space of transglobal movement. So do other writers, as examined by Robert Bennett, J. Roger Kurtz, Jogamaya Bayer, and Moredewun Adejunmobi.

Robert Bennett notes Ben Okri’s “remarkable sense of formal experimentation” evidenced in his reinterpretation of the European novelistic conventions from a “postcolonial perspective.” Noting the necessity of “aesthetic responses to colonialism,” Bennett focuses on Okri’s experimentation with African narrative techniques, extending the scope of the novel to include “mythical journeys, intense dreams, and other African rituals or rites of passage.” Commenting on Okri’s later fiction, Bennett identifies Bhabha’s concept of the postcolonial aesthetic of hybridity as central to Okri’s exploration of “the liminal border between diverse cultural traditions.” Bennett notes the need for critics to explore further Okri’s development of a “uniquely African sense of postmodernism that derives from a creative extension of African folklore.”

J. Roger Kurtz explores Peter Nazareth’s interest in the complexities of genealogy as arising from his own personal history of Goan identity in an East African setting, culturally distinct from both African and Asian groups. This preoccupation “constitutes a classic example of the rootlessness, border crossing, fragmented identity, and cultural hybridity that typify what has come to be described as the ‘postcolonial condition.’” In this process, Nazareth incorporates, in Kurtz’s view, “an examination of how traditions are modified for new contexts” through the figure of “the trickster, a stock character in various African literary traditions.” Kurtz examines Nazareth’s interest “in how entire texts function as tricksters, making subversive readings available. . . . The Trickster Tradition, by Nazareth’s account, offers an alternative to the Great Tradition.”

Jogamaya Bayer examines the impact of the colonial construct of racial hierarchy on Essop Patel, whose grandfather came from India to South Africa when he was thirteen. Several of Essop Patel’s poems express an idealized

“solidarity among people all over the world,” while exposing the racist laws of South Africa’s apartheid government, such as the Immorality Act, which prohibited racial intermixing. He examines the limitations of racial categorization and compartmentalization.

Moradewun Adejunmobi provides an insight into Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo, whose competency in French and Malagasy confirmed his “role of mediator between cultures.” Adejunmobi places Rabearivelo in the context of Madagascar’s literary climate, where a “thriving written literary culture flourished” long before the British introduced “roman script in the nineteenth century.” With the French colonization, the status of the Malagasy language became uncertain, while French was adopted as the only recognized language for any kind of literature. Rabearivelo, as noted by Adejunmobi, “sought to give expression to the henceforth inevitably hybrid and multicultural character of colonized culture.”

Maghrebian Francophone literature is explored through entries by Lynne Dumont Rogers, S. D. Ménager, Mary Vogl, and Soraya Mékerta. While I have discussed Vogl’s and Mékerta’s pieces in an earlier section of this Preface, I will specifically look at the other two scholars here. Lynne Rogers examines Moroccan writers Driss Chraïbi and Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine. Considering Driss Chraïbi’s novels, both realistic and symbolic, Rogers focuses on his range of themes from an indictment of Islamic society imbued in certain hypocritical traditions (as in *Le passé simple* and *La civilisation, ma mère!*) and the imperialist French constantly displacing and devastating the Arab immigrants in France (*Les Boucs*) to the “role of the individual caught in a historical whirlwind of modernization” (as in *L’âne* and *Un ami viendrez vous voir*), “the illusion of leadership and the role of political discourse in the creation of both a communal reality and the future,” the epic Berber trilogy covering the Arab conquest of North Africa to the present, and the Inspector Ali adventure novel. Rogers emphasizes the appeal Chraïbi has for the “second generation of modern Moroccan writers” and Arab feminists because while never presuming to speak for women, Chraïbi depicts them with “warmth and understanding.”

Similarly, Rogers finds in Khaïr-Eddine a rejection of “the assimilation offered by Europe” and a refusal “to find refuge in the comfort of ethnic nativism.” His writing, she notes, is informed by his political commitments expressed as “complex allegories that draw on the oral traditions of southern Morocco and on Sufi mysticism, as well as the Western literary canons.”

S. D. Ménager’s study of the Algerian writer Leïla Sebbar explores her early interest in Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir and her “interpretation of aspects of the African colonial myth” as well as her later preoccupation with “the condition of the immigrant North African family.” Ménager clarifies that Sebbar has been cited as a Beur writer, although she was born in Algeria and not in France (Ménager explains that the name “Beur” refers to “the slang talked by the new generation descending from immigrant parents, born in France, educated there, ignorant of their parent’s culture,” “Beur” itself being

an “approximate reversal” of the word “Arab”), because she deals with the “Beur” culture in her works, particularly the *Shérazade* trilogy. Cultural crossing and racial mixing as themes dominate the novel *Le Chinois vert d’Afrique*. Ménager reads Sebbar’s latest novel *Le silence des rives* as “a parable on exile and memory” in which women continue to play a central role.

Brian Evenson studies the contentious spaces that some African writers occupy in the historical and cultural map of postcolonial Africa. Viewing Dambudzo Marechera as a “controversial and irreverent” writer of Zimbabwe, Evenson focuses on biographical elements in his writing, such as rootlessness, nihilism, violence, poverty, and turmoil, even as he draws on political themes, as in *The House of Hunger*, *Black Sunlight*, and *Mindblast*. Evenson notes the influence of American beat writers on Marechera’s work as well as his need to transform language expressed in his unique style, combining sharpness and eccentricity, for example, the “‘drugged’ narrative style” in *Black Sunlight*. Referring to Marechera as “an odd sort of postcolonialist,” Evenson identifies his “inverted postcolonialism, the negative equivalent of other writers’ affirmation.”

Jared Banks’s entries on Mia Couto and Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa, both writers from Mozambique, depart from others in that they exemplify certain currents in Lusophone writing, an area that is not the main focus of this volume. His entries on a privileged white, Mia Couto, and the black writer Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa within the parameters of Portuguese colonization are therefore merely a slim reflection of the peculiarities and preoccupations of Lusophone writers of Africa. However, they invite further in-depth study of individual Lusophone writers.

Musa Dube addresses an important concern with regard to postcolonial studies in the West. Through her analysis of the emerging writer Mositi Torontle, she illustrates the politics of publication and distribution as a major obstacle in the dissemination of postcolonial writers’ expressions. These politics are major deterrents to the decolonizing agenda and seem to suggest the implacable ways in which postcolonial critical discourse co-opts or reifies the silencing of some African writers by naming only those readily available in the Western market, as well as those who seem to fit into the Western-defined theoretical models of resistance to colonialism.

Each of the scholars in this volume contributes to the ongoing discussion regarding the theory and practice of postcolonial literatures in Africa. The groupings I have conceived are only some of the ways in which the connections among them could reveal certain preoccupations within the postcolonial critical discourse. This volume, we hope, will provide the groundwork on which more critically focused work can begin. However, even this process of preparing the groundwork has required each one of us to investigate, research, and discover both the quality and quantity of available resources. The fact that technology, like the Internet and multimedia, will make it possible to reach across continents to locate an article or an ongoing work and to communicate with the actual authors and researchers in ways inconceivable even today is exhilarating. Yet it

should also make us wary of possible ethical transgressions through the re-trenchment of the mentality that the world, especially the so-called Third World, is a marketable consumption for the armchair, electronic-gearred intellectual tourist in the so-called First World. However, I also see the other side of the picture. It is in fact the so-called Third World, with its extremely well trained high-tech computer specialists, software programmers, electronic engineers, and the large masses of educated people (besides Western-educated), that is increasingly becoming the consumer for this technology. For them, it displaces the hierarchies of writing over oral forms and European languages over non-European ones, even as it becomes the best medium for interdisciplinary studies. Whatever the new technology does, I envision that sourcebooks, whether in print or electronic form, will always be an asset for the further research and serious study that African literatures, like other literatures of the world, invite.

NOTES

1. Karin Barber, "African-Language Literature and Postcolonial Criticism," *Research in African Literatures* 26.4 (Winter 1995): 3–30.

2. Albert S. Gérard, "Foreword," *African Language Literatures: An Introduction to the Literary History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1981), x.

3. Mugyabuse M. Mulokozi, "A Survey of Swahili Literature: 1970–1988," *Africa Focus* 8.1 (1992): 49–61; Randall L. Pauwels, "Swahili Literature and History in the Post-structuralist Era," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 25.2 (1992): 261–283; Flora Veit-Wild, *Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers: A Social History of Zimbabwean Literature* (London: Zell, 1992); C. F. Swanepoel, ed., *Comparative Literature and African Literatures* (Pretoria: Via Afrika, 1993).

4. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Burden of English," *Orientalism and the Post-colonial Predicament*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 153.

5. Gérard, "Foreword," xiv–xv.

6. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 1.

—Pushpa Naidu Parekh

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INTRODUCTION

This Introduction aims at raising various compelling and significant issues related to the expression, production, publication, and distribution of African literary writing and to critical discourses that have constructed models for interpretive approaches to and/or theoretical frameworks for these writings. In the first section, Pushpa Naidu Parekh considers the viability of applying emerging critical concepts and theoretical models being discussed and debated within the field of postcolonial theory to postcolonial African writers. Reconsidering the tendencies to reinscribe the separation of theory and practice and to privilege critical discourse, Parekh provides a detailed look at the ways in which theory informs practice and practice directs or even determines theory. In order to do this, she identifies certain conceptual paradigms constructed at specific moments of colonial and postcolonial sociohistorical and political climates in specific postindependence African states, as discussed in the various scholarly entries of the sourcebook. She also raises crucial issues related to the theory and practice of postcolonial African writing as evidenced in the collected entries. In the second section, Siga Fatima Jagne provides critical reflections on certain definitions regarding the category “woman” in feminist theory and its relation to African women. By calling into question the simplified conflation of various issues such as class, race, and sexual orientation, as well as nationality, Jagne begins her arguments regarding the category “woman” in the African context by identifying the specific and often contradictory locations occupied by specific women in and outside the literary field.

POSTCOLONIAL CRITICISM AND AFRICAN WRITING

Pushpa Naidu Parekh

The colonial world is a Manichean world. It is not enough for the settler to delimit physically, that is to say with the help of the army and the police force, the place of the native. As if to show the totalitarian character of colonial exploitation the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil.

—Frantz Fanon

The Wretched of the Earth

Babamukuru was God, therefore I had arrived in Heaven. I was in danger of becoming an angel, or at the very least a saint, and forgetting how ordinary humans existed—from minute to minute and from hand to mouth.

—Tsitsi Dangarembga

Nervous Conditions

Struggle. Struggle makes history. Struggle makes us. In struggle is our history, our language and our being. That struggle begins wherever we are; in whatever we do: then we become part of those millions whom Martin Carter once saw sleeping not to dream but dreaming to change the world.

—Ngugi wa Thiong'o

Decolonising the Mind

I think that many writers, in reaction against the humiliation of the colonial era, would like to build up an image of Africa, other than the humble humility of the sparsely furnished hut.

Some of one's work is like reclaiming that humility that has been trampled on and abused.

—Bessie Head

*A Woman Alone*¹

Several historical events and shifts of political and socioeconomic significance have propelled the institutionalizing project of African, Asian, and postcolonial studies in the wake of African-American studies in the United States. While a steady growth of African studies programs at the graduate level indicates one direction of this project, the paucity of undergraduate courses on African or African diaspora studies, especially in U.S. colleges and universities, as well as the politics of “ghettoizing” certain area studies and the equally problematic labeling of these studies as “minority” or “multicultural,” has constantly undermined the potential for effective transformation of hegemonic agendas both within and outside the academia. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in “Marginality and the Teaching Machine” identified the contentious nature of “the difference and the relationship between academic and ‘revolutionary’ practices in the interest of social change”:

If there is a buzzword in cultural critique now, it is “marginality.” Every academic knows that one cannot do without labels. To this particular label, however, Foucault’s caution must be applied and we must attend to its *Herkunft* or descent. When a cultural identity is thrust upon one because the center wants an identifiable margin, claims for marginality assure validation from the center. It should then be pointed out that what is being negotiated here is not even a “race or a social type” . . . but an economic principle of identification through separation.²

At this juncture, it would be useful to consider the term “post-colonial” as indicative of chronological historicity and “postcolonial” as an ideological conceptualization. In most countries that gained independence from European colonizers and could be considered “post-colonial,” the persistence of imperialist and neocolonialist agendas and infrastructures, as well as ineffectual attempts to dismantle the Eurocentric and Western paradigms, makes the term take on ironic inflections. Often the term “decolonization” seems to imply the serious questioning and dismantling of these paradigms. At the same time, “postcolonial” evokes the very spatial split (West and non-West are no longer self-exclusive entities) and temporal deferral (separation of past, present, and future are constantly ruptured by liminality and memory transference) at the heart of the emergence and identification of the human subject within the context of what Homi Bhabha calls “the colonial space of consciousness and society.”³ Stephen Slesmon, in “The Scramble for Post-Colonialism,” points out the heterogeneity of the concept as an “apparatus of institutional power”:

“Post-colonialism,” as it is now used in its various fields, describes a remarkably heterogeneous set of subject positions, professional fields, and critical enterprises. It has been used as a way of ordering a critique of totalizing forms of Western historicism; as a portmanteau term for a retooled notion of “class,” as a subset of both postmodernism and post-structuralism . . . ; as the name for a condition of nativist longing in post-independence national groupings; as a cultural marker of non-residency for a Third World intellectual cadre; as the inevitable underside of a fractured and ambivalent discourse of colonialist power; as an oppositional form of “reading practice”; and . . . as the name for a category of “literary” activity which sprang from a new and welcome political energy going on within what used to be called “Commonwealth” literary studies.⁴

Karin Barber in “African-Language Literature and Postcolonial Criticism” provides an incisive second look at the so-called oppositional form of postcolonial criticism, granting that while “postcolonial criticism is a field of enquiry rather than a unified theory—and a field, moreover, within which people have taken up heterogenous and contradictory positions—it does nevertheless produce a predominant theoretical effect.”⁵ Barber’s critique not only exposes the limitations of postcolonial criticism as it is being formulated and reformulated by a largely Western-educated elite intelligentsia, but also elucidates its complicity with the colonial project: “Nonetheless, postcolonial criticism shares with Commonwealth criticism its effacement of modern indigenous-language expression

in colonized countries.”⁶ Barber critiques postcolonial criticism for “consign[ing] indigenous-language expression to the background, paradoxically by an inflation of its role as source and resource to the anglophone written tradition.”⁷ The politics of postcolonial criticism thus traverses a precarious terrain in both exaggerating and simplifying “the effects of the colonial imposition of European languages” and turning “the colonizing countries into unchanging monoliths, and the colonized subject into a homogenized token.”⁸ Barber proceeds to unveil the elisions and contradictions emanating from this model: “Modern expression in indigenous languages is not considered to exist: as in Commonwealth criticism, African languages in this model are strongly yoked to orality and to the pre-colonial order.”⁹ Barber claims that theorists like Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (*The Empire Writes Back*) and Chantal Zabus (*The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone Novel*) reinscribe these elisions and contradictions through adopting the paradigm of binary opposition in which “the columns get glued into permanent sets, resulting in a picture of two separate worlds of experience, one of which is in the process of superseding the other.”¹⁰

Barber’s arguments are helpful in assessing the viability of postcolonial criticism as it exists as well as its reformulations to evaluate postcolonial African writers. A close look at groups of essays in the latter part of this section will also illuminate ways in which Barber’s analysis tends to homogenize postcolonial criticism as one unified methodology while denying it to be so. In the process of utilizing the postcolonial concepts and ideas, the scholars in this sourcebook redefine the various implications of these theories in relation to actual practice. Perhaps theory aligned more closely to practice would dismantle the privileging of European models even within postcolonial criticism.

Barber’s position that postcolonial criticism tends to reify the perceptions of the monolithic colonizer and colonized can, to some extent, be supported and contested by the increasing articulation of varying positions by “Third World” feminists. Chandra Talpade Mohanty in “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse,” Carole Boyce Davies in *Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*, Trinh Minh-ha in *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*, and Sara Suleri in “Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition” provide serious examinations of the concept “postcolonialism” in the context of feminism and “the Third World woman.”¹¹ Mohanty critiques the Western feminist reinscription of the “colonialist move” in assumptions of “Third World women” as an oppressed group: “Western feminists alone become the true ‘subjects’ of this counter-history. Third-World women, on the other hand, never rise above the debilitating generality of their ‘object’ status.”¹² Boyce Davies resists the “totalizing” posture and “re-male-ing” discourse of “post-coloniality.”¹³ She challenges the “macro-discourse of postcoloniality” by offering black/Third World women’s “migration narratives” and “horror stories” that constantly resist being obscured, managed, elided, or “post-poned.”¹⁴ Through “multiple ways of voicing

that reside in Black women's textualities," located outside the master discursive field of "post-coloniality," these stories create " 'elsewhere' worlds and places and consciousness."¹⁵ While Minh-ha queries the representation of the categories of gender, race, and nativism within feminist discourse, Suleri examines the "iconicity" that is granted to the "imbrications of race and gender" in the voice of the "postcolonial Woman" and seeks to "dismantle the iconic status of postcolonial feminism."¹⁶

Moreover, criticism of attempts to formulate a homogenizing, "comprehensive postcolonial theory," as in *The Empire Writes Back*,¹⁷ attests to the multiple forms of postcolonialisms, "viewed as ideological orientations rather than as a historical stage," as discussed by Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge in "What Is Post(-) Colonialism?": "We are really talking about not one 'post-colonialism' but many postcolonialisms."¹⁸ Distinguishing between "oppositional postcolonialism" ("found in its most overt form in post-independent colonies at the historical phase of 'post-colonialism' ") and "complicit postcolonialism" ("as always present 'underside' within colonization itself"), Mishra and Hodge identify "postcolonial women's writing" as requiring "a different order of theorizing" that would take into account the "twice disabling discourse" that burdens the postcolonial women.¹⁹ They also discuss the need "to recognize the different histories of White settler colonies which, as fragments of the metropolitan centre, were treated very differently by Britain" and of "non-White colonies."²⁰ Contending with the elisions of racism and the politics of second language and of violent forms of colonial oppression in nonsettler colonies, Mishra and Hodge expose the "pan-textualist bias" and "seamless theorizing" in works like *The Empire Writes Back* that reduce all forms of postcolonialism to "the liberal Australian version of multiculturalism," validating pluralist notions of "syncretism/hybridization" over "any claims of indigeneity."²¹ Mishra and Hodge's essay is particularly relevant to identify the specific "material conditions which give rise to post-colonial difference," especially since the colonial policy and treatment of the white settler colonies were similar whereas they varied in the nonsettler colonies.²² These different experiences of colonialism define the different forms of postcolonialism that exist:

In the Indian subcontinent the colonial experience seems to have affected the cities only, in Africa it worked hand in hand with Evangelical Christianity, in Southeast Asia the use of migrant labour—notably Chinese and Indian—mediated between the British and the Malays. In the West Indies slave labour, and later indentured Indian labour, again made the relationship less combative and more accommodating.²³

Mishra and Hodge's essay also warns that the "complicit postcolonialism" of white settler colonies and now of global capitalism "is on the way of becoming the literary dominant of 'postcolonialism' "; it is therefore important to "acknowledge difference and insist on a strongly theorized oppositional postcolonialism as crucial to the debate" without conflating it to one type.²⁴

THEORIZING AFRICAN WOMEN

Siga Fatima Jagne

African women, specifically, have been in the Western classroom for centuries, but always as objects of speculation and subjects of inquiry with little or no agency afforded to them. Their existence as historical subjects, inhabiting multiple locations and positionings, is hardly, if ever, mentioned. That is, in these representations they have existed in a vacuum, suspended in time. This construction and image of the African woman, exoticized and misrepresented, became the standard way in which images of the African woman were sifted and scrutinized through the centuries.²⁵

Ifi Amadiume and Christine Obbo observe the fact that generally African women are portrayed as victims and powerless human beings. This stance, they argue, shows a total misunderstanding of the complexities of African women and their lives. Amadiume goes on to explain why Third World women should take their research seriously, especially in the context of the generalizing tone that the studies on these women take on in the West. She writes, "It was, of course, from my knowledge of my own people that I recognized that a great deal of what anthropologists and Western feminists were saying about African women's lack of power was incorrect."²⁶

This questioning of the category of woman and women becomes particularly relevant when one talks about African feminist writing and criticism. African women's discourse continually challenges notions of womanhood and femaleness that have been inscribed and prescribed in the discursive practices in which they have been "represented." The whole notion of the inscription of the subject as being ahistorical and apolitical is, therefore, challenged in their works. Spivak, in "The Politics of Interpretations," posits the fact that it is not only problematic, but "difficult to speak of a politics of interpretation without a working notion of ideology as larger than the concepts of individual consciousness and will."²⁷ African women occupy unique spots that complicate a definition of homogeneity. Filomina Chioma Steady, Carole Boyce Davies, Molaria Ogun-dipe-Leslie, and others have questioned these definitions in their discussions of African women.²⁸

This rejection of essentialist categories and definitions leads to the question of the African woman writer. What are her concerns and issues? Molaria Ogun-dipe-Leslie offers her view of what Third World writers should be concerned about:

That the female writer should be committed to her third-world reality and status may lead to disagreements. Being aware of oneself as a third-world person implies being politically conscious, offering readers perspectives on and perceptions of colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism as they affect and shape our lives and historical destinies.²⁹

Here Ogundipe-Leslie is arguing that a political commitment to the realities of the African women writers, as colonized and decolonizing subjects, should be evident in their work. That is to say, these women, even when writing what moves them personally, should have an awareness of the society in which they live and that has shaped their experiences.

But it may well be important to juxtapose Gayatri Spivak's other view of this critique, not specifically of the writer, but of the subaltern woman all the same. Spivak explains how the Third World woman cannot be accommodated in the First World discourse because she has been doubly displaced and it would be difficult to place her in a "psychoanalytic allegory."³⁰ I think that the Third World "woman" experiences a triple displacement: as a woman in patriarchal discourse, as the feminine that undoes the whole in deconstructional discourse, and as a colonized woman.

DISCOURSE ON FEMINISM: VOICE AND AGENCY

Therefore, the question to be raised is the discourse on language and voice. How do Western women's theories include infibulation without condescension—"we know better"?³¹ When H  l  ne Cixous, an African by geographical location (a fact that is never factored into her identity in Euro-American academe), talks about women's sexuality, using the metaphor of the dark continent, does she remember her sisters who have to deal with the problem of "double displacement"?³² Is she also celebrating them too?

This is not to say that African women are not feminists, because if anything the term "feminist" fits these women well. The reason for disavowal by many African women is the connotations associated with the word. To most of these women, the colonial ties between feminism and multinational capitalism make them suspicious of this kind of political movement. Mariama B  , even though an avowed feminist, is quick to point out that she is not a feminist in the Western sense of the word, because she understands the contradictions between Western feminism and traditional African customs. As she says: "Politically organized women may be able to influence the progress of a country. The plain women's organizations do not aspire to that. . . . We have no illusions that we, by ourselves, can change the fate of S  n  gal's women."³³ This African feminism B   is talking about can only be understood within the confines of the culture B   is writing about.

What then is involved in the subaltern woman speaking for herself and telling her own story? Is this another way to shut up voices and intellectuals from the rest of the world? Claims about original native voices can also be used to question the authority of intellectuals and writers in the Third World. Writing is as much an act of exclusion as it is an act of inclusion. As an act of creating knowledge, one writes from a position of power and privilege.³⁴

When the writer sits to write, there are factors that come into play, such as her own history, location, gender, class, and the different spots she inhabits.

Taking these factors into consideration, what makes the writer representative of her or his group or people?

However, questions about “authentic” voices in the West come up too. Are all Western feminists defined in the same terms Luce Irigaray sets?³⁵ In recent years there has been a substantial amount of literature written by the subaltern woman. Rather than having Westerners and the subaltern male tell their story, subaltern women have decided to break their silence and let their voices be heard. Perhaps this is a misleading way, because subaltern women until recently have been voices in the wilderness, screaming but not heard—but now Westerners are willing to listen. What does this listening entail? Are these listeners actually hearing, or are they doing their own interpretation of what they think they hear?

This newly found voice of subaltern women poses direct challenges to Western feminism, as it questions the Western feminists’ colonization of the female experience and exclusionary practices and challenges its exclusivity. These new voices also create problems for the subaltern female writer. Is she an authority? Can she articulate all the problems of the subaltern woman? Does writing not privilege presence as truth?

Critics and theorists in their quest to provide insight into authors’ works do not leave space for the authors’ own theoretical preoccupations. Critics and theorists are quick to judge authors without totally exploring the author’s right to do what she or he wants with her or his creativity and experience. Sometimes the relationship between critic and author becomes one of envy and disdain. Even more problematic are the new theorists (poststructuralists and deconstructionists), who feign the death of the author and do a coup d’état on the text.³⁶

THE “COMMITMENT” DEBATE

Ogundipe-Leslie’s questioning of the African woman writer’s commitment regarding the status of her womanhood, though valid, takes us back to that whole question of whether the writer can really address everything of concern to his or her society. There is a need to put Ogundipe-Leslie’s concerns in perspective and historicize them. Her perspective on the African woman writer and her commitment was part of a set of ongoing discourses in Nigeria on commitment and the writer that is in a way tied to some form of activism. This discourse emerges from social and anticolonial critics (some Marxists, others not). Chinua Achebe’s article “The Role of the Writer in a New Nation” places the role of the writer within the framework of a commitment to representing society.³⁷ Biodun Jeyifo, Onoge, Fatunde, and Darah, writing in Georg Gugelberger’s collection of essays on Marxism in African literature, explore these concerns.³⁸ Onoge’s premise is that there is a crisis of consciousness in modern African literature. This crisis, he argues, is a problem of definition: “African writers have phrased the problem under the conceptual rubric of ‘role’, ‘responsibility’ or ‘commitment’ of the writer to his [sic] society. While critics, African and

foreign, have generally posed it in terms of the validity of the sociological character of the contents of the bulk of the literature.”³⁹ Onoge sees the foreign prescriptives as perpetuating the master/slave dichotomy and continuing with the exoticism of the Other. He cites critics such as Kesteloot and Blair as upholding “cultural liberalism” and “authentic exoticism.” Biodun Jeyifo’s sustained work on Marxism and African literature sees the relationship of the writer to the critic as one based on what the writer is concerned about and what the critics think he or she should be doing, but he sees some problems in this relationship:

Some of these parallel or competing discourses are either incorporated into the “dominant” discourse or neutralized, marginalized. At this level where one discourse achieves relative dominance over other discourses, we are beyond the power of individual scholars, critics or theorists to serve as arbiters of opinion, knowledge or value, no matter how gifted or influential they might be.⁴⁰

This is further complicated by the division into the camps of the local versus foreign critics. “The real danger,” Jeyifo contends, of “a dichotomization of the two camps is located elsewhere: in recent times, ‘Africanists’ have come to hold sway over the discipline in an especially problematic manner, and their narrowly formulated agenda increasingly dominates perceptions of ‘what is to be done’ at the present time in the field.”⁴¹ This concern over the control of African literature, especially at this juncture in academe, when it is being appropriated for Western theories, is justified. In another essay, Onoge concludes on the note that “the very sociality of the literature requires that criticism go beyond the literary text to include the many structures of its manufacture.”⁴² Most of these writers are coming out of the Fanonian base that enacts a coming together of praxis and theory. This is an act that Fanon thought that the new African intellectual was capable of in the decolonizing project. Sekou Touré, in his address to the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists, had noted:

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 with the people in the great battle of Africa and suffering humanity.⁴³

The intellectual then becomes the creative balancer in this decolonization and neocolonial sequence. For Touré, one cannot be a writer and not show some political awareness of the human condition that surrounds one.

Fanon, on the other hand, sees the role of the intellectual as retrogressive in the colonial structure because of his or her displacement from his or her culture

to that of Western culture. The geographical equation here becomes important but problematic. The term "West" automatically assumes a dominant position, and any geographical area that is situated in opposition to the West is automatically subordinated in Western discourse and Western discursive practices. This subordination is inherent in colonialism, and Fanon states that as long as the West posits itself as the center and the rest of the world as a marginalized periphery, there will always be reason for production of counterdiscourses—even if it means using the theories of the West and stretching or subverting them.⁴⁴

Amilcar Cabral, another Marxist revolutionary, makes the same point as he points out that in a subordinated subject position, such as that of a colonial subject, which is fixed, subversion has to take place because the subordination of the subject is oppressive.⁴⁵ So the revolutionary movements of the colonized countries as they move toward decolonization (a term Fanon prefers over post-colonialism) "express antagonisms that emerged" (in the case of Africa) in response to the hegemonic formation installed since the 1500s.⁴⁶ Therefore, in this new discourse of decolonization, in which the base and superstructure of the West do not work, new alternatives are to be found, and at the forefront will be the new intellectual who will lead with the masses of the different colonized countries.

The "counterhegemonic" project of the new intellectual will necessarily include a conscious African bourgeoisie who can articulate the nature of "multileveled oppression" in which the African peoples find themselves and resist its impulses. This is the major point with which some African critics are concerned. This counterhegemonic project becomes even more urgent when one looks at the homogenizing and dismissal of Africans. Africans have been lumped into one category—that of race, regardless of class and culture. The new African intellectual, I argue, should be able to recognize that the cultural, political, and social formations of each group in the different countries take on different dimensions (some horizontal, some vertical formations) and should be sensitive to these differences. The formation of superstructures by the colonial elite from the West, being perpetuated by a few trained African elite, should be destroyed by these new intellectual and indigenous structures put in their place. These elites (traditional intellectuals, Antonio Gramsci calls them) were put in place to serve the interest of the colonizing group; they need to reorient themselves to the interest of their people.

Moving from the critics back to the writer, one finds a view that is more sympathetic to a bourgeois analysis. The women writers, specifically, discuss and situate their writings in both a personal and a universal context that has been attacked by male critics as being Western and that is a total misunderstanding of African traditions.⁴⁷

Ogundipe-Leslie situates herself within this Marxism debate on this issue of commitment, but adds feminist commitment to it.⁴⁸ However, what is problem-

atic in her presentation is the lack of transformation of the male ideas to the specific politics of location of the female writer.

The whole question of truth in regard to African women writers raises the question of how a truth claims to operate on writers of fiction that is not truth to begin with. It is understood that Ogun-dipe-Leslie is working in a specific theoretical framework—a framework that is very male and mainstream, rendering it problematic when applied to African women writers. This in no way detracts from the excellent points she makes. Perhaps a different way of reading the Marxist “commitment,” by putting the women’s work in context, would have helped. As it is, it is easy to take Ogun-dipe-Leslie out of her context and see her as assuming the stance that the African woman writer should be the authority and articulate all the problems of African women.

Both Tsitsi Dangarembga and Aminata Sow Fall contest Ogun-dipe-Leslie’s point that only Ama Ata Aidoo and Micere Mugo show political consciousness in their writing. Just being aware of oneself as a female writer is a political act in itself, and, as Aimé Césaire said in an interview, the act of writing is a political act.⁴⁹ Whenever a writer puts pen to paper, it is political.

Ogun-dipe-Leslie’s reference to the female writers resisting the title of feminists is equally true for the purveyors of *écriture féminine*: Cixous, Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva, who see the rejection of maternity by some feminists as an incapacity to transcend a phallocratic attitude toward women.⁵⁰ For these subaltern women writers, I argue against Ogun-dipe-Leslie: the reason they refuse to accept the label feminist is because, as Dangarembga argues, “white Western feminism” does not name African women’s experience. African women’s writing reflects concerns they have as women, as Ogun-dipe-Leslie rightly points out.

The problem with the term “feminist,” I argue, rests on its location within an imperialistic, racial language and other discourses. In recent years, feminists from the West have taken on the imperial project of teaching African women about the horrible things associated with clitoridectomy, which they have renamed “genital mutilation.” This, of course, is a presupposition that African women have no concern over their welfare and need to be guided, somehow, into an understanding of what is good or bad for them. The fact that there has been, on the continent, a grass-roots women’s organization for years to fight this practice is voided by the “discovery” of the West of this “mutilation.” (This attitude brings to mind the “discovery” of America by Columbus and what I term the Kipling complex.)

Filomina Steady discusses the position of the black woman as a view of history being the enemy of the black woman. Steady explains that the black woman, especially the African woman, is the “original feminist,” because she always had to take on roles that Western women never thought of taking up. The African woman has to be self-reliant, resourceful, and intensely involved in production and is not afraid to lose her femininity in the process. Steady argues the fact that the nature of oppression for the black woman is complex

because her experiences “represent multiple forms of oppression rather than simple sexual oppression.”⁵¹

The major point of contention, then, between Western feminists and some African women rests on the concept of individualism versus communalism, that is, individualism, as the desired goal in Western culture, versus communalism in most African cultures—a concept that takes precedence over the needs of the individual. Toni Morrison, writing about this point in black literatures, notes:

These community values (I call them village values) are uppermost in the minds of the Black writers, and it may be this feeling of village values as opposed to Gopher Prairie despair that causes so much misadventure in white criticism of Black writers: such critics tend not to trust or respect a hero who prefers the village and its tribal values to heroic loneliness and alienation. When a character defies a village law or shows contempt for its values, it may be seen as a triumph to white readers, while Blacks may see it as an outrage.⁵²

“SANI BAAT”—THROWING VOICE

When one looks at the works of some African women writers, this conflict of the individual versus the community, especially in the creation of a voice, becomes problematic. So far, we have seen the different prescriptions of commitment and some writers’ responses to them. The question now is how the writer gets to a voice and one with agency. How does one create a fictional world and remain true to one’s experiences?

Ama Ata Aidoo, in an interview with Adeola James, explains the fact that the question with the muted writer’s voice is a reflection of the position of women in society. “Women writers,” she asserts, “are just receiving the writers’ version of the general neglect and disregard that women in the larger society receive.”⁵³ The intellectual production mirrors the notion that women, like children, can be seen, but not heard. This silencing of the female writers goes on even as critics include them in their analysis, an act Aidoo defines as appropriation. She alludes to the state of the criticism of African literature today as “meat out there in the market place, with everybody dragging it, including people who do not care for Africans or what they are writing. But they see that it is a way of making a name for themselves as critics of African Literature.”⁵⁴

Consequently, Spivak suggests that “in seeking to learn to speak to (rather than listen to or speak for) the historically muted subject of the ‘subaltern’ woman, the postcolonial intellectual [writer] systematically unlearns female privilege.” This unlearning process, Spivak further explains, necessarily involves “learning to critique postcolonial discourse with the best tools it can provide” and not “simply substituting the lost figure of the colonized.”⁵⁵

What does this “looking to the past” in recovering one’s voice and agency mean to the African woman? Adrienne Rich, in the following passage, offers a

reading of the re-visioning that she believes women writers are doing when they write:

Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for woman, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us; and how we can begin to see—and therefore live—afresh.⁵⁶

The African women writers, I point out, indicate the commonalities between internal patriarchy and external colonialism in their texts. They seem to have an understanding of their femaleness, since their female characters inhabit the center of their work. Gayatri Spivak maintains that “between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears . . . displaced . . . caught between tradition and modernization.”⁵⁷ When the subaltern woman is placed in this position, she is rendered mute. Spivak places this lack of agency within what she defines as “the other side of the international division of labour”: “the subject of exploitation cannot know and speak the text of female exploitation, even if the absurdity of the nonrepresenting intellectual making space for her to speak is achieved.”⁵⁸

I would like to offer an alternate reading and locate myself within the concept of “voice throwing.” I believe that by “throwing” in one’s voice, a disruption of discourse can take place. The act of “throwing” one’s voice can create an epistemic violence to discourse that will create a space for hitherto-unheard voices. The problem that will arise from such an action will be the appropriation of this voice within the particular discourse it interrupts, an act that may or may not render it mute.

Margaret Walker explains these “truths” further by mentioning that it is hard for the black female writer to deal with racism, with its denial of a creative black mind, because to white people blacks lack intelligence and emotion and creativity. Facing these kinds of repressions, both economic and political, it is a marvel that these subaltern women learn to speak. Gayatri Spivak concludes at the end of her article “Can the subaltern speak?” that the subaltern cannot speak, within the prescribed Western parameters of discourse, because “there is no space from which the sexed ‘subaltern’ can speak.”⁵⁹ But the subaltern can speak through human agency, despite discursive determinants. The subaltern sees then through different eyes and critiques the practices around her. She can speak in her own language and has started to speak. She needs to be listened to and not attacked ferociously to be rendered mute again. As Margaret Walker puts it:

Everyday, I have lived, however, I have discovered that the value system with which I was raised is of no value in the society in which I must live. This clash of my ideal with the real, of my dream world with the practical, and the mystical inner life with the sordid and ugly world outside—this clash keeps me on the battlefield, at war, and struggling, even tilting windmills. Always I am determined to overcome adversity, determined to win, determined to be me, myself at my best, always female, always black, and everlastingly free.⁶⁰

Revising Spivak, however, or as a pretext of Spivak, I would like to again evoke the Wolof concept of “throwing voice” in my subsection on agency. I believe, as the Wolof people do, that the best way to interrupt discourse, albeit a negative way, is by throwing one’s voice into it. No apologies are needed for this type of disruptive speech that brings the speaker into the center of the discourse. Because of the plurality of positions and spots that African women inhabit, mostly in the margins, it is important for them to “throw” their voices into the established discourse. Only then will they be heard.

NOTES

1. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 41; Tsitsi Dangaremba, *Nervous Conditions* (London: Women’s Press, 1988; Seattle: Seal Press, 1989), 70; Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1986), 108; Bessie Head, *A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Craig MacKenzie (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1990), 79.

2. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Marginality and the Teaching Machine,” *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 53, 55.

3. Homi Bhabha, “Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche, and the Colonial Condition,” *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 116. The article originally appeared as the Foreword to Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), vii–xxi.

4. Stephen Slemon, “The Scramble for Post-Colonialism,” *De-Scribing Empire: Postcolonialism and Textuality*, ed. Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 16–17.

5. Karin Barber, “African-Language Literature and Postcolonial Criticism,” *Research in African Literatures* 26 (Winter 1995): 4.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., 7.

8. Ibid., 3.

9. Ibid., 9.

10. Ibid., 11.

11. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse,” *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) (first published in *Boundary 2* 12.3–13.1 [Spring/Fall 1984]: 333–358); Carole

Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London: Routledge, 1994); Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); Sara Suleri, "Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition," *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 244–256.

12. Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes," 71.

13. Davies, *Black Women, Writing, and Identity*, 80.

14. *Ibid.*, 82–83.

15. *Ibid.*, 82, 89.

16. Suleri, "Woman Skin Deep," 244.

17. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989).

18. Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge, "What Is Postcolonialism?" *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 284.

19. *Ibid.*, 284.

20. *Ibid.*, 285.

21. *Ibid.*, 287.

22. *Ibid.*, 287, 289.

23. *Ibid.*, 289.

24. *Ibid.*

25. For a more detailed treatment of this theme, see Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Christopher Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); and V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

26. Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1987), 9. See also Christine Obbo, *African Women: Their Struggle for Independence* (London: Zed Books, 1980).

27. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Politics of Interpretations," *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 1988), 118.

28. Carole Boyce Davies, "Introduction: Feminist Consciousness and African Literary Criticism," *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*, ed. Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1986); Molará Ogundipe-Leslie, "African Women, Culture, and Another Development," *Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women*, ed. Stanlie M. James and Abena P. A. Busia (London: Routledge, 1993); Filomina Chioma Steady, Introduction to *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally* (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman, 1981).

29. Molará Ogundipe-Leslie, "The Female Writer and Her Commitment," *Women in African Literature Today*, ed. Eldred Durosimi Jones, Eustace Palmer, and Marjorie Jones (London: James Currey, 1987), 11.

30. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Carey Nelson and Lawrence Crossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

31. There is an ongoing debate in gender and human-rights studies on the issue of clitoridectomy. The arguments are complex and cannot be summarized here. See Nawal

El Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World* (London: Zed Press, 1980); Awa Thiam, *Speak Out, Black Sisters: Feminism and Oppression in Black Africa* (London: Pluto, 1986); Alice Walker and Pratibha Parmar, *Warrior Marks: A Documentary* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1993), and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992).

32. Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *New French Feminisms*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivran (Amherst: University of Mass. Press, 1980).

33. Mariama Bâ, interview in Barbara Arnhold's "The Long Road to Emancipation," *Afrika* (1980): 24.

34. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other*.

35. Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, translated from French by Alison Martin (London: Routledge, 1992).

36. This is only of interest for a canonized writer. For a critique of this in regard to women, see Nancy Miller, "Changing the Subject . . .," *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 104.

37. Chinua Achebe, "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation" in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (London: Heinemann, 1975).

38. Georg Gugelberger, ed. *Marxism and African Literature* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1985), 21.

39. Onoge, "The Crisis of Consciousness in Modern African Literature."

40. Biodun Jeyifo, "The Nature of Things: Arrested Decolonization and Critical Theory," *Research in African Literatures* 21 (1990): 34.

41. *Ibid.*, 44.

42. Onoge, "Towards a Marxist Sociology of African Literature," 62.

43. Sekou Touré, from the speech "The Political Leader as the Representative of a Culture," Rome, Italy, 1959.

44. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 40.

45. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe discuss this issue in their work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985).

46. Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*.

47. In particular, Femi Ojo-Ade's problematic "Female Writers, Male Critics," *African Literature Today* 13 (London: Heinemann, 1982), 158-179.

48. Ogundipe-Leslie, "African Women, Culture, and Another Development." At this point I would like to assert that my counterpoints to Ogundipe-Leslie's articulations are by no means an attack on her ideas. She is one of our pioneers in writing about African women. I respect her work, and the arguments that follow in no way detract from her contributions, but are my attempts to try and understand what she is attempting to do for my own clarification.

49. Siga Fatima Jagne, unpublished interview with Aimé Césaire, October 1985.

50. Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa"; Irigaray, "This Sex Which Is Not One"; and Kristeva, "Woman Can Never Be Defined."

51. Steady, *Black Woman Cross-Culturally*, 33.

52. Toni Morrison, "City Limit, Village Values: Concepts of the Neighborhood in Black Fiction," 1981, 38.

53. Ama Ata Aidoo, interview in *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk*, ed. Adeola James (London: James Currey, 1990), 11.

54. *Ibid.*, 13.

55. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 295.

56. Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, 1976), 48.
57. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 306.
58. *Ibid.*, 287.
59. *Ibid.*, 295.
60. Margaret Walker, "Being Female, Black, and Free," *The Writer on Her Work*, ed. Janet Sternburg (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1980), 101.

CHINUA ACHEBE (1930–)

BIOGRAPHY

Chinua Achebe was born in Ogidi in eastern Nigeria on November 16, 1930, to Isaiah Okafor Achebe and Janet Achebe. His parents, though they instilled in him many of the values of their traditional Igbo culture, were devout evangelical Protestants; his childhood, therefore, was marked by the rich ambivalence of a complex inheritance. He attended mission schools, for example, but remained emotionally close to many of his relatives who were not Christians. These early negotiations of cultural duality would later enable him to develop a necessary distance from the competing and conflicting forces that had shaped his sense of self and formed his worldview—a distance that he now affirms as a prerequisite to see the totality of life “steadily and fully” (*Morning Yet on Creation Day*, 68).

In 1944 Achebe enrolled at the prestigious Government College in Umuahia. Four years later he entered the London-affiliated University College at Ibadan to study medicine, but soon abandoned medicine in favor of literature, philosophy, and history. He became involved in a variety of political and cultural activities on campus. He edited, for example, Ibadan’s *University Herald*, to which he also contributed essays and short fiction, and wrote occasional commentaries for student publications such as the *Bug* and *Eagle*.

After his graduation in 1953 Achebe joined the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. He first served as talks producer (1954–57), then became controller (1958–61), and finally assumed the directorship of the corporation’s External Broadcasting (1961–66).

In 1958 Achebe published his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*. Heinemann Educational Books published it rather reluctantly—the editors were unsure if West-

ern readers would buy a novel by an African—and printed only 2,000 copies. But the novel became a stunning success: since its first publication, it has been translated into nearly fifty languages and has sold millions of copies internationally. Though it was not the first novel published in English by an African author, its spectacular worldwide success inaugurated a new era in African literary history and helped secure a firm foundation for an emerging tradition. Achebe has published four other novels, two collections of essays, a book of short fiction, a volume of poetry, and numerous miscellaneous pieces, but *Things Fall Apart* remains his most widely read work.

One of Africa's most outspoken intellectuals, Achebe has been and continues to be a public figure deeply involved in the political life of his nation. During the Nigerian Civil War (1967–70), precipitated in part by Biafra's attempt to secede from the Nigerian federation, Achebe—a staunch supporter of Biafran independence—became the province's most committed and eloquent spokesperson. In 1983, upon the death of Mallan Aminu Kano, Achebe was elected the deputy national president of the People's Redemption Party. He remains a keen observer of Nigeria's turbulent politics and continues to be a fearless critic of the military dictators whose coups and countercoups have profoundly destabilized his nation's democratic foundations.

Achebe has also played a pivotal personal role in the emergence of postcolonial Anglophone literature in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa. As the director of Heinemann Educational Books in Nigeria, he has encouraged and published the work of dozens of African writers. *Okike: An African Journal of New Writing*, which he founded in 1971, has provided a forum for a generation of young African artists. *Uwa ndi Igbo: A Journal of Igbo Life and Culture*, a bilingual periodical that he established in 1984, is an invaluable source for students of Igbo civilization.

Achebe is a superb storyteller, a gifted poet, an insightful literary critic, and a brilliant cultural commentator; his phenomenal career as a professional writer spans five decades. Among the numerous honors he has received are the Jock Campbell Award for Literature (1964), the Commonwealth Poetry Prize (1972), the Nigerian National Merit Award (1979), and over a dozen honorary doctorates. He has held professorships at numerous African as well as North American universities. Achebe and his wife, Dr. Christie Okoli Achebe, until recently lived in Nsukka, where he was associated with the Institute for Africa Studies at the University of Nigeria. Currently he is at Bard College in upstate New York. They have four children: Chinelo, Ikechukwu, Chidi, and Nwando.

To appreciate fully the achievement of Chinua Achebe, one must understand his artistic credo, which he has eloquently articulated in "The Novelist as Teacher"—an essay that first appeared in London's *New Statesman* (1965) and was subsequently reprinted in his *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (1975). Achebe views himself, first and foremost, as a teacher who reflects as well as shapes the communal visions and values of his people. He summarily rejects the modern Western notion of the artist as an alienated individual who projects a private

vision forged in isolation. To Achebe, the artist is an integral part of his or her community; what he or she creates, therefore, must have functional value and relevance to those individuals who make up the community. He also rejects the pseudo-universalist precepts and apolitical pretensions of the Western aesthetic orthodoxy. To Achebe, art and political concerns, be they local or global, are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, he insists that the artist has an obligation to remain committed to the well-being of his or her people: the most compelling duty of the current generation of African intellectuals, according to Achebe, is to help their fellow Africans regain the dignity and self-esteem lost during the colonial years. He defines himself as a cultural nationalist with a revolutionary mission: “to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement” (*Morning Yet on Creation Day*, 44). His artistic objective, then, is explicitly political: the achievement of psychosocial rehabilitation through cultural literacy. This educational intent is manifest in much of Achebe’s work.

MAJOR WORKS AND THEMES

History—and the struggle to come to terms with it—is an obsessive theme in virtually all post-colonial literatures. Our coming to terms with our problematic historical inheritance, after all, is essential for racial self-retrieval, for forging an authentic and liberating sense of personal and cultural wholeness. Indeed, our meaningful reconnection with our history is indispensable for healing the cultural fracture caused by the catastrophic impact of colonial intrusion; it is a prerequisite for cultural reclamation, for continued resistance. It is precisely this vital and fundamental nexus between establishing a valid connection with the past and achieving a wholesome sense of self that prompts the post-colonial writer to engage in constant dialogue with history.

Inevitably, then, the post-colonial writer runs into intellectual conflict with European-generated imperialist historical discourses. She is faced with the need to reappropriate her past from colonialist historical narratives; she has to salvage her past from distortions and denigrations; and she must revise her history to redefine her past. Her dialogue with the authorized versions of history, therefore, assumes a subversive character. Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* is one of the most celebrated imaginative attempts to subvert official history by constructing an oppositional version of it.

A landmark piece of post-colonial fiction, *Things Fall Apart* is set in the Igbo village of Umuofia in eastern Nigeria; the action takes place during the closing decades of the nineteenth century. The narrative, divided into three parts, focuses on the rise and fall of its strong-willed protagonist, Okonkwo. While mapping the course of Okonkwo’s life, Achebe manages to provide a memorable recreation of Igbo life before, during, and immediately after the British colonial intrusion.

Part I tracks the social ascendancy of Okonkwo in the tribal setting. Haunted

by the memory of his father, whom he regards as a failure, Okonkwo—through sheer hard work and determination—emerges as a key figure in the village's power structure, but his ruthlessness renders his hard-won status rather precarious. When he accidentally murders a son of Ezeudu, a priest, Okonkwo is banished to the nearby Igbo village of Mbita for seven years. In this section of the narrative Achebe also reconstructs precolonial Igbo society: it is a stable, functional, cohesive community that promotes the work ethic and rewards personal achievement; it has an elaborate judicial system and a flexible mode of government; its elaborate rituals and ceremonies help reinforce the people's shared ontological sense. Achebe, however, resolutely avoids romanticizing the Igbo past: he refers to many culturally sanctioned cruelties—ritualized sexism, abandonment of twins, routine sacrificial murders. But he also makes it obvious through reform-minded characters such as Obierika that the precolonial Igbo culture was a dynamic one with the capacity for internally generated progressive change.

Part 2 of the novel documents Okonkwo's difficult exile, his incremental awareness of the perils of excessive individualism, and his growing appreciation of kinship and community. This section also reveals ominous signs of the encroaching colonialism and indications of Okonkwo's resistance to it.

Part 3 chronicles Okonkwo's return to Umuofia, where he hopes to reintegrate himself into the village life. But Umuofia, during his absence, has changed drastically. Things have begun to fall apart: colonial administrative structures, now securely in place, have radically altered traditional life; aggressive proselytization by British missionaries has injected new values that have undermined tribal cohesion. Okonkwo's own son, Nwoye, adopts the Christian faith and rejects his father. Okonkwo's violent resistance to change lands him in jail; his kinsmen, afraid of the colonial administrators, offer him little support. Unwilling to come to terms with the new realities, Okonkwo commits suicide.

The novel ends with a marvelously ironic paragraph. The narrative point of view, which until now has sympathetically presented the complex world of Okonkwo, now abruptly shifts to the arrogant and shallow imperialist perspective of the District Commissioner. His limited vision reduces Africa to stale colonialist stereotypes—the very stereotypes the novel had earlier successfully disrupted. David Carroll, in his *Chinua Achebe: Novelist, Poet, Critic*, correctly identifies the function of this narrative tactic: “The author is recovering an area of experience from stereotype, and the final ironic shift is to challenge the reader to apply the stereotype if he [*sic*] dare” (61).

A modern classic, *Things Fall Apart* is Achebe's calculated response to the imperialist versions of the colonial encounter. Here he offers a contestatory rearticulation of history that is explicitly designed to destabilize European discursive constructions of Africa's past. Such a reinscription of African history, of course, fits neatly into his larger project of educating his audience: “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" (*Morning Yet on Creation Day*, 45).

No Longer at Ease, Achebe's second novel, was published in 1960. At the center of the action is Obi, the son of Nwoye and grandson of Okonkwo; here, as in *Things Fall Apart*, the narrative records the rise and fall of its protagonist. But the fictional milieu, however, is radically different: the work is set in the Nigeria of the 1950s, on the eve of the nation's political independence. As its title suggests, the novel explores the malaise of modern Nigeria: the uneasy coexistence of traditional ethos and European values and the absence of a coherent cultural framework that can give a firm direction to the country in general and to its educated elite in particular.

The novel begins with the trial of Obi, a promising young official in the Nigerian Civil Service, who has been arrested on charges of bribery. A brilliant student in his village, Obi is sponsored by the Umuofia Progressive Union to study at an English university; upon his return he enters the prestigious Civil Service. Unable to integrate his anglicized attitudes and indigenous values, he increasingly finds himself rootless and alienated. He rejects certain Igbo cultural practices, such as the caste system that ostracizes the *osu*; yet he does not have the moral courage to marry his girlfriend Clara, because his parents violently object to having an *osu* daughter-in-law. His failure to formulate a coherent set of moral values to live by ultimately destroys him. He begins to accept bribes—a pervasive practice among government officials—but does so ineptly and gets caught. The novel ends with Obi's conviction.

Here, as in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe is concerned with the debilitating impact of colonialism on the individual as well as on the national psyche. But in *No Longer at Ease* the theme of cultural dislocation—a recurrent theme in post-colonial writing in general—is particularized even more poignantly: the focus is not on a community in disarray but on the private dilemmas of an individual post-colonial. The gently ironic tone of the authorial voice, however, suggests that Achebe is not entirely sympathetic to his alienated, culturally schizophrenic protagonist. Indeed, the novel could be read as a cautionary tale: the post-colonial failure to achieve the necessary synthesis of indigenous traditions and the imposed Western values into a coherent and functional system could be a formula not only for individual tragedies but national disasters as well.

Published in 1964, *Arrow of God* is Achebe's third novel. Here he returns to Nigeria's past and, as in *Things Fall Apart*, explores the impact of change—profound and traumatic change—on individuals and communities. *Arrow of God* is set in the Igbo territory of Umuaro in eastern Nigeria; it narrates the story of Ezeulu, a tribal priest, who is faced with the gradual loss of his authority because of the advent of Christianity, the encroachment of colonialism, and the emergence of intratribal rivalries. When Captain Winterbottom, the District Commissioner, appoints him as a chief warrant officer—as part of the new British effort to decentralize political power and impose indirect rule—Ezeulu rejects the patronizing offer. He is jailed for disobeying imperial authority, but he is