

# READING POSTMODERN INFLECTIONS IN AFRICAN LITERATURE

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One problem with contemporary African literary works is that they have become markedly self-reflexive in the way they rewrite one another, drawing attention to their own functionality and fictionality, thus inviting a new reading that departs from postcolonial philosophy to reach out for postmodern aesthetics. The objective of this article is to explore how contemporary critical positions in African literary studies mark off perceptible shifts from issues of primal postcolonialism to a more self-reflexive treatment of postmodernism in contemporary aesthetics. The approach proposed here is a textual analysis sustained by postmodern theory suggested by Sara Mills (2004). The results show how creative works depart from the tradition of “writing back” to the European colonial center by focusing their gaze on local forms of oppression that are seen to parallel classical colonialism. Yet, while critics have separately studied postmodernism and self-reflexivity in African texts, the intersection of the two has not been given sufficient attention. The hint of interest of this analytical paper then is to decipher postmodernist aesthetics noted in African literary works, novels and plays as developed to a higher level of self-consciousness. The specific question addressed is, to what extent postmodernism expresses itself as an outgrowth of modernism and postcolonialism?

**Key words:** Modernity, postmodernism, postcolonialism, theoretical, recalibration, African literary theories and criticisms.

**RESUME**

L'un des problèmes des œuvres littéraires africaines contemporaines réside dans leur forte autoréflexivité. Elles se réécrivent mutuellement, mettant en lumière leur propre fonctionnalité et fictionnalité, et invitent ainsi à une nouvelle lecture qui s'éloigne de la philosophie postcoloniale pour embrasser l'esthétique postmoderne. Cet article vise à explorer comment les positions critiques contemporaines en études littéraires africaines marquent un glissement perceptible des problématiques du postcolonialisme originel vers une approche plus autoréflexive du postmodernisme dans l'esthétique contemporaine. L'approche proposée est une analyse textuelle étayée par la théorie postmoderne de Sara Mills (2004). Les résultats montrent comment les œuvres créatives s'éloignent de la tradition de la « réponse » au centre colonial européen en portant leur attention sur des formes locales d'oppression perçues comme parallèles au colonialisme classique. Or, si le postmodernisme et l'autoréflexivité dans les textes africains ont été étudiés séparément par la critique, leur intersection reste insuffisamment explorée.

L'intérêt de cette analyse réside dans le décryptage de l'esthétique postmoderne présente dans la littérature africaine (romans et pièces de théâtre), et son développement jusqu'à une conscience de soi accrue. La question spécifique abordée est la suivante : dans quelle mesure le postmodernisme s'inscrit-il dans le prolongement du modernisme et du postcolonialisme ?

**Mots clés :** modernité, postmodernisme, postcolonialisme, théories littéraires africaines et critiques.

## INTRODUCTION

Many critical positions in African literature have tried to locate the postmodern and showcase its functions but have arrived at diverging views that further complexifies the critical apprehension of postmodernist aesthetics. New approaches have emerged that attempts to reconfigure theoretical claims of postmodernist literature. Connor, for instance, suggests that "Postmodernist theory responded to the sense that important changes had taken place in politics, economics, and social life, changes that could broadly be characterized by the two words delegitimation and dedifferentiation" (Connor, 2004, p. 3). He argues in favour of the authority and legitimacy decentralization of the grand narratives, and adds "Authority and legitimacy were no longer so powerfully concentrated in the centers they had previously occupied" (Ibidem). Emmanuel Obiechina points out the fact that postmodern esthetics in African literature stems from the African writers' expression of "differences that derive from culture, experience, language, outlook, and so on. Thus, because the social and cultural background of the West African novel and the major impulses that bring it about differ from those of the English novel, we notice obvious differences between them" (Obiechina, 1990, p. 53). Charles E. Nnolim, theorizing the postmodern adopts a different position by saying that "The African writer in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should forget the complexes of the past and be more imaginatively aggressive, invading other continents and even the skies as new settings striving to have a global outlook in his creative output, mounting a new international phase and not limiting his canvas to the African soil" (Nnolim, 2006, 4). Evan Maina Mwangi on his side postulates that postmodern African literature is when "The [African] literatures mix local values with global desires and anxieties to signal what Bhabha has called "interstitial spaces," locations in which precolonial practices are not separated from colonial modernity but are mediated through mutual exchange" (Mwangi, 2009, p. 138). These critics in their positions raised above do not reach a consensus as to what aesthetics or ethics guide the postmodern African literature and the debate is still open to postulate new directions of African literature criticism in the postmodern aesthetics. This paper adds a contribution to the understanding of postmodern aesthetics in African literature. The specific question to which it tries to answer is to what extent does modern African literary critical reception admit postmodernism as an orienting compass for opening new vistas for new critical approaches in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

### 1. Circumscribing the Postmodern in African Literary Theory and Criticism

The decade of 1950s which was formative of the writers of Achebe's and Ngugi's generation became the period of literary campaigns for regaining African personality, dignity and cultural rehabilitation. Onwuchekwa Jemie Chinweizu's and Ihechukwu Madubuike's book *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* in the words of Charles Nnolim "made waves in the critical annals of African literature" (Nnolim, op cit, 5); a position that beckons the fact that the language question, and the

establishment of what should constitute the accepted aesthetics of African literature divide African writers and critics to the extent that pluralities of views invite pluralities of interpretations of the African literary canon. In this context, Catherine Fishburn has pleaded for a model of reading that will permit critics to engage African texts on postmodern footing. (Fishburn, 1995, p. 1) Another critical response comes from Emenyonu (ed.)'s *New Directions in African Literature*, a volume that provides an in-depth view of the positions of African literature at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and an examination of the directions that African literature is now taking with new and emerging writers and the growth of writing by African women (Emenyonu, 2006, p. 56). Contributions examine the influence of new concerns - globalization and the views from Diaspora, as well as established themes such as childhood and war. After the debate over African cultural identity has been sufficiently advanced, new critical standards have emerged to question the uniformity of African ideology and to assert the necessity to have pluralistic views of African society that rhyme or dissent with Western standards. Stuart Mill in his introductory notes to postmodernism asserts that

In a general sense, postmodernism is to be regarded as a rejection of many, if not most, of the cultural certainties on which life in the West has been structured over the last couple of centuries. It has called into question our commitment to cultural 'progress' (that economies must continue to grow, the quality of life to keep improving indefinitely, etc.), as well as the political systems that have underpinned this belief. Postmodernists often refer to the 'Enlightenment project', meaning the liberal humanist ideology that has come to dominate Western culture since the eighteenth century; an ideology that has striven to bring about the emancipation of mankind from economic want and political oppression (Mill, 2001, p. vii).

This critical ground is predicted on the idea that at the heart of the postmodern thought in African literature stands the asthetization of critical standards that reformulate African values in the context of globalization. The postmodern African literary text takes into account the ethical values that are dear to Africa, gauge them in the general context of global changing scene and redefines critical standards that put writers, critics and society in equilibrium. A question may be put whether one can talk of authentically African values in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. African aesthetic values were defined by the Achebe generation and encompass: African morality, communal values of solidarity, intercommunal help, political wisdom and intellectual approach to change. They were summarized by the author of *Arrow of God* through Ezeulu's voice thus:

"The world is like a mask dancing. If you want to see it well, you do not stand in one place" (Achebe, 1964, p. 46). Here the postmodern perception of society is encrusted in the statement that the world is constantly changing. It is engaged in an irreversible race of change, modernity, postmodernity, construction and deconstructions of values, facts and experiences and man has to adapt to these changes. In the African context as foregrounds Abdul R. JanMohamed, the colonial praxis has produced "the dilemma of denigration and historical catalepsy." (JanMohamed, 1983, pp. 151-152). "Because the moral validity and the social momentum of the indigenous culture have been negated by European denigration and by the autocratic rule of the colonial and

postcolonial government, the African finds that if he adheres to the values of his own culture he chooses to belong to a petrified culture" (Ibidem). However, if he accepts only the Western cultural ideology, he finds himself engulfed in a form of cultural catalepsy, because, by rejecting his own past, he belongs to a society that has no direction and no control over its own historical evolution (Ibidem). Achebe's critical response to these aspects of colonial pathology foregrounds the imperatives underlying his fiction. From a postmodern approach, one can postulate that, as an intellectual and a writer he is more sensitive to cultural denigration and the necessity to preserve African values that were falling apart from the European imperialist sword. For him, the lack of self-confidence in the face of Western wind becomes a disease difficult to cure.

This critical position is corroborated by Stuart Mill (2001) who asserts that

In the view of postmodernists this project, laudable thought may have been at one time, has in its turn come to oppress human kind, and to force it into certain set ways of thought and action. It is therefore to be resisted, and postmodernists are invariably critical of universalizing theories ('grand narratives' or 'metanarratives' as they have been dubbed by the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard), as well as being anti-authoritarian in their outlook. To move from the modern to the postmodern is to embrace skepticism about what our culture stands for and strives for (Mill, op cit, VII).

Theorizing a poetics of postmodernism in African literary and cultural practices engages a critical reformulation of the African artist's function because, Postmodernism as a literary theory is a border crossing theory that assembles cosmopolitan writers and different disciplines. This is the perspective defended by Edward Said (1978) (quoted by Linda Hutcheon) who has argued in favour of such a border crossing theory, which he refers to as "supervening actuality of 'mixing', of crossing over, of stepping beyond boundaries (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 55). For Hutcheon, the postmodern theory "gives way to an intertextual play and the admission of intellectual contingency, a manifestation of the overlapping of literary, philosophical, and critical discourses as a postmodern phenomenon. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* he offers a perspective of postmodernism by asserting:

What postmodern aesthetic practice shares with much contemporary theory (psychoanalytic, linguistic, analytic philosophical, hermeneutic, poststructuralist, historiographical, discourse analytic, semiotic) is an interest in interpretative strategies and in the situating of verbal utterances in social action. Although the names of Lacan, Lyotard, Barthes, Baudrillard, and Derrida tend to be the most cited in discussions of postmodernism, the other perspectives listed are just as important to any consideration of contemporary theoretical discourse and its intersection with art. We cannot ignore Marxist, neo-pragmatist, and feminist theory, to add only three more important ones to the list (Ibidem).

Implicit in Linda's critical view here is the sense of an intellectual pragmatism which lies at the level of critical reformulations of African literary theory. That theory should not arise from what the Westerners have chosen to believe about Africa but from a more cognitive apprehension of African socio-political and cultural positions in the present world's geopolitics. It is an intellectual momentum that will gear the synergy

of developmental praxis of African thinkers toward a rhetorical assertion of self to cohere with other in a redefinition of new values for a better world. Implicitly, it is to see Africa not only as part of what ChidiAmuta calls “the changing world” but also as “a highly heterogeneous and multivalent geopolitical entity whose problems need to be confronted at the level of theories with practical implementations for both the present and the future” (Amuta, 1989, p. 35).

Sara Mills in his book *Discourse* has advocated the kind of postmodern discursive agendas that mark out African postmodern aesthetics. He submits that

An extensive body of theoretical work has been developed, mainly building upon the work of Edward Said (1978, 1993), who attempted to fuse Foucauldian discourse theory with insights from Antonio Gramsci's political writings. Some of the work by theorists such as Peter Hulme (1986) and Mary Louise Pratt (1985, 1992) is detailed... to exemplify the use of the term discourse and to show the ways in which discourse has been modified. In general, this work is described as colonial discourse theory. That work which tries to question some of the assumptions of Said's work on discourse and representation, which is largely informed by psychoanalytical theory rather than discourse theory, and which is more concerned with the effects the colonial enterprise has had on current social structures and discursive formations, is known as post-colonial discourse theory (Mills, 1997, p. 105).

In this excerpt, Sara advocates that Said (1978) has given the quick off of the postcolonial criticism basing on the tenets that European imperialist literature has gravely distorted facts about Third World nations including Africa, to which these nations had to react. Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* discusses the idea of the worldliness of imperial texts. Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwhalia attempting to decipher Said posit that:

What is crucial about the cultural productions of the West is the subtle way in which the political realities of imperialism are present in them. In the British novel, for instance, the issue of empire and imperial dominance is continually, subtly and almost ubiquitously inflected. The significance of the worldliness of these texts is that, in their writing by authors who may have had no conscious idea of the way in which the empire was represented in them, they demonstrate that there is no empire without its culture (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia, 2001, p. 8).

*Culture and Imperialism* also rehearses a favorite topic of Said's: how should the post-colonial world react to the dominance of imperialism? Said's concentration in this book on Western classics seems to have led many critics into the belief that he does not have a theory of resistance. But his position is more subtle. Recognizing that a 'rhetoric of blame' is ultimately stultifying, he advocates a process he calls 'the voyage in', where post-colonial writers take hold of the dominant modes of literary writing to expose their culture to a world audience (Mills, op cit, 106). Edward Said has shown that there are a number of features which occur again and again in texts about colonized countries and that these cannot be attributed simply to the individual author's beliefs, but are rather due to larger-scale belief systems structured by discursive frameworks, and are given credibility and force by the power relations found in imperialism. This aesthetic reformulation describes colonial discourse as: an ensemble of linguistically-based practices unified in their common deployment in the management of colonial

relationships. Underlying the idea of colonial discourse is the presumption that during the colonial period large parts of the non-European world were produced for Europe through a discourse that imbricated sets of questions and assumptions, methods of procedure and analysis, and kinds of writing and imagery. Colonial discourse does not therefore simply refer to a body of texts with similar subject-matter, but rather refers to a set of practices and rules which produced those texts and the methodological organization of the thinking underlying those texts. In *Orientalism* (1978), Said described the discursive features of that body of knowledge which was produced in the nineteenth century by learned scholars, travel writers, poets and novelists, which effectively produced the Orient as a repository of Western knowledge, rather than as a society and culture functioning on its own terms. The Orient was produced in relation to the West and was described in terms of the way it differed from the West. Said argues that these colonized countries were described in ways which denigrated them, which produced them as a negative image, an Other, in order to produce a positive, civilized image of British society. These representations were structured largely according to certain discursive formats which developed over time, but which accrued truth-value to themselves through usage and familiarity. Each new text which was written about the Orient reinforced particular stereotypical images and ways of thinking. As Said argues:

Everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself [sic] vis-à-vis the Orient, translated into his text; this location includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kind of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text – all of which adds up to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient and finally representing it or speaking in its behalf (Said, 1978, p. 20).

This struggle over representation had far-reaching effects, in that it informed racist knowledge and practices, constructing the grounds within which debates about race were largely conducted and the typologies within which indigenous people and their descendants were forced to be categorized and to categorize themselves as for example in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* or Nadine Gordimer's *The Burger's Daughter*. These seemingly linguistic and textual decisions about racial grouping Gordimer's novel had far-reaching material consequences which affected the rights and lives of indigenous peoples, resulting in certain groups of people being denied human status, others being used as slave labor, and still others being hunted and killed like animals. These representations also determined in large measure which countries were seen to be 'open' to colonial expansion, and in need of the 'civilising' influence of the European powers. I now describe the discursive structures which Said has identified as constituting imperial knowledge, in order to delineate the ways in which his definition of discourse has modified Foucault's discursive model.

For instance, Chinua Achebe in his *Hopes and Impediments* (1989), a collection of essays which x-rays the literary and cultural dimensions of colonial and postcolonial literatures, does not simply focus on the jingoistic, openly propagandist texts which circulated within the colonial period; he also analyses the texts which were produced

in the name of scholarship: linguistic and philological analyses, history and ethnography, together with travel writings (Achebe, 1989, p. 30). Achebe argues that those countries which had been colonized were reduced to being seen as objects of knowledge (Ibidem, 65). Their reality was not represented as being of the same order as a Western European reality; instead, the task of colonizers, when they wrote accounts of colonized countries, was to: produce what they themselves referred to as information.

Achebe argues that discursive structures circulating within the nineteenth century in particular informed the way that knowledge was produced, so that seemingly 'objective' statements were, in fact, produced within a context of evaluation and denigration. Valueladen statements about the inhabitants of colonized countries were presented as 'facts' against which there was little possibility of argument. Once this process begins, even anecdotal or fictitious information begins to accrue to itself factual status because of its production within the colonial nexus of power relations. For Said, the colonized people are dehumanized by the series of stereotypes made about them within colonial texts. The fact that sweeping generalizations were made about particular cultures made them less communities of individuals than an indistinguishable mass, about whom one could amass 'knowledge' or which could be stereotyped: To garner the essentials from the above statements, one can say that Postmodernism includes the following phenomena as enlisted by S. Marsen, quoted by V. Bhat:

- a. A conception of personal identity as fragmented or dispersed owing to our participation in many contexts – geographic dislocation, drastic career changes. An instance of this can be read in Ade Solanke's *Pandora Box* where the heroine Toyin and her teenage boy Timi experience cultural fragmentation and dispersal in London.
- b. An abandonment of the search for origins, the original, universal or transcendental cause. This includes the dislocation of the modernist-romantic notion of genius, the inspired creator of the new. The original work displaced by intertextuality (cross reference), parody, self-parody, and acceptance of contradiction as having no resolution, and a strong use of irony. An illustration can be found again in *Pandora's Box* through the experience of the heroine as she finds it difficult to reconnect with her cultural roots. She relocates her dreams in London, and yet seeks remedial of her cultural nostalgia in imported Nigerian movies.
- c. A questioning of notions of linear reality and linear causally-based narratives, opting for parallel universes or multiple realities. Here, Sefi Atta gives an example through her narrative verve in *Everything Good Will Come*. The protagonist Enitan Taiwo's story is told not in a linear ethos, but is interrupted from time to time with flashbacks that reinforce the progression of the plot.
- d. Socio-cultural developments associated with the mass media, such as internationalization of information (through global channels) and a dramatization of

information that tends to blur the distinctions between truth and fiction. This aspect is highlighted in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* where the characters are created in a mass media dominated and information and communication techniques sprawling world. Thus through a highly advanced assimilation of mobile phones applications, the manipulations of complex electronic devices, characters like Dike, Efemelu, Aisha and Mariama tend to blur the distinction between truth and fiction (Sky, 2006, 30).

These points highlight postmodernism in African literature as all innovating and changing sphere in a dynamic of progress. It equates what Karin Barber says:

The literature is permeated with the vocabulary of novelty: almost every study speaks of innovation, freshness, inventiveness, modernity, topicality, change or fashion. This is not to say that popular arts are seen as being necessarily recent, only that at any given period in the past they were perceived as something new, the latest fashion. What gave them their claim to novelty, it seems to be agreed, is principally their incorporation of elements not previously present in the indigenous traditions — that is, elements imported from other cultures, usually the metropolitan ones. We have already seen that when popular arts are defined against the traditional arts, what makes people see them as popular is their syncretism. This identification is so strong that anything syncretic almost automatically qualifies as popular. What are identified as popular arts are in effect the new unofficial arts of colonialism and post-colonialism, produced by the profound and accelerating social change that has characterized these periods (Barber, 1987, p. 3).

The meaning of this assertion is that many of the first and second generations African writers namely Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka, Nadine Gordimer, Femi Osofisan, Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo on the Anglophone side have sufficiently reacted against the West (Europe) as the center. They have written back to the West giving the right account of African identity, personality and cultural lores. Staying in the logic of Edward Said, Ngugi wa Thiong'o advocates the imperious necessity to move the center by struggling for more cultural freedom. He has advocated the importance of African artistic creativity that has nothing to envy to the Western Eurocentric literature. Chinua Achebe claims that he has the duty to teach his audiences that Africa did not hear of culture for the first time from Europe.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century recent trends in African literature and theory have advocated the necessity to write back not to the West (Europe) but to self. Africa writing back to self presupposes a reconsideration of critical objects to react against. Writing back to self is a new theoretical trend in African literature that goes beyond the post-independent disillusionment discourses. It is already established by most postcolonial writers that the general malaise that befriends African intellectual analysts of the post-independent period is the problematic mismanagement of African politics imprinted by the general leadership incompetence, the neglect of women's rights, the inhuman child treatment and labor, the armed conflicts on the continent, the unemployment challenges and the general poverty conditions that put the underprivileged masses of the society in confrontation with infectious epidemics and diseases.

These problems previously perceived as the direct consequences of the mismanagement of the postcolonial state by African leaders, themselves ruling as the remote control sets of European ex-colonialists should now be shouldered solely by the African political intelligencia. In other words, there is no point indicting the West for problems whose solutions can possibly be designed by African leaders and intellectuals.

Postmodernism in African context should be a reconfiguring of critical positions that take into account the self-indexation of Africans in the resolution of our own problems. Mwangi suggests that

It is therefore crucial to define the term metafiction in relation to postmodernism and African literature, not only because postmodernism has a vexed relationship to indigenous African literature but also because of the various shades of meanings the term metafiction takes in different contexts. Following Dilip Gaonkar's (2001) and Sanjay Subrahmanyam's (1998) questioning of Wallerstein's view of modernity as a Western virus spreading to the rest of the world, I view metafiction not as an exclusively Western phenomenon but as an aesthetic practice that has grown simultaneously in different parts of the world (Mwangi, 2009, p. 8).

And adding to this, he says:

Metafiction in African literature is situated, interlinked with similar practices across the globe but entailing unique disruptions of Western postmodernisms. There are, of course, links between the different practices of metafiction, but metafiction in African literature, as in other literatures, is conjectural. It gestures to its own indigenous specific location, even when it is linked to global metafictional productions (*Ibidem*).

Postmodernism reads in African cultural theory in that for some time now, many African art works grapple with how to keep the essence of originality, commonality, and sameness. Postmodern temperament in African literature is self-conscious. It subjects itself to the most glaring scrutiny and to endless commentary on language question, feminist pluralism, cultural identity and ethnicity. Writers, be they novelists, playwrights or poets and free thinkers have their part in this process as do academics and other intellectuals. So far the cast-list of these scrutinizers and commentators is a familiar one. What has changed is the role of the seagents in the age of globalization and mass media. The postmodern age is one in which cultural activity is dominated by media industries capable of appealing directly to

A public (itself the beneficiary of 'mass education') over the heads of any cultural elite. Fishburn in her approach to Buchi Emecheta's fiction has underlined how Catherine Belsey rebukes Stanley Fish for failing to recognize that a plurality of readers must necessarily produce a plurality of readings (Fishburn, 1995, p. 22).

African postmodernism is a pluralist confrontation of dissenting voices, diverging opinions and cosmopolitan interpretations of postcolonial issues in literature. To begin with, the language question has been much debated among African writers and dissenting voices have raised to suggest the type of language to adopt in writing African literature. While Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Fagunwa opted for writing in African

language, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ayi Kwei Armah, Ama Ata Aidoo, Alex Laguma, Nadine Gordimer, Buchi Emecheta, to mention but a few on the Anglophone side, wrote in English the colonial language. Some of Ngugi's works were originally written in English before being translated. Examples include *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (*I Will Marry When I Want*), *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini* (*Devil on the Cross*), *Maitu Njugira* (*Mother Sing for Me*). Wole Soyinka translated Fagunwa's novel *Forest of Thousand Daemons* originally written in Yoruba in English. As neither colonial language can effectively describe genuinely the African experience, name African local names and tell accurately African stories, these writers opted for a transgression of linguistic norms: translation techniques, pidginization, and transliteration. Achebe and Soyinka are famous for their Pidgin languages and the translation of Igbo and Yoruba proverbs and folktales, while Gabriel Okara is to be reckoned with his hybrid Yoruba-English grammar. From a postmodern standpoint, the African writer is still grappling with the question of originality in transmitting African experience in foreign languages. Textually speaking, there exist more hybrid works of African literature, judging from the languages used, the characters' names, choices of settings, and thematic concerns.

## 2. From Modern to Postmodern: A Landmark for Literary Aesthetics

The postmodern creative aesthetics definitely read in the images offered by the settings of African creative works. Most of the urban novels by African writers like Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City*, *Lokotown* and *Jagua Nana* or Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, or Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* are set in cities like Lagos and Nairobi and try to capture the physical and social atmosphere of the city and to show how the characters are influenced by it. Emmanuel Obiechina infers that the reader is made aware of the constant noise of the traffic, the honking of cars, the loudspeakers blaring out high life or hip-pop tune from record shops or advertising articles from commercial vans (Obiechina, 1975, p. 149). The hawkers are crying their wares along the streets; and there are unstable crowds massing wherever there is a pedantic magic maker, or an accident or any other short lived street spectacle, holding up traffic, and adding to the hubbub. There are crowded slums side by side with ultra-modern office blocks. At night, there are radiant street lamps, the desperate gaiety of nightclub life and the sordid activities in the dingy, ill-lit areas inhabited by the underworld, the pimps and the prostitutes (Ibidem). All these provide a setting background against which the postmodern African writers portray some of their characters playing out the hectic game of survival. Ekwensi is very successful in relating his Lagos characters to their physical and social environment. Obiechina further maintains that he knows the Lagos of the underworld and the slums better than any other Nigerian writer (Obiechina, 1975, p. 149). His success in relating social situation to physical environment and at revealing character through setting seems intermittent, which gives rise to a panoramically developed narrative.

The postmodern African writing highlights the difficulty of the survival of the original and the genuine, values and characters in art works. The postmodern African character in novels like Sefi Ata's *The Man of Two Worlds* or Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* is hybrid, trapped in-between home and foreign values, in search for identity. Pressed between ideological stands and the emergency of survival, he/she tends to opt for the current needs of life. By crossing borders through immigration, the characters embrace new values, borrow beliefs, and tend to derelict their original ones. But in the process, the old self reload and leap into the surface, so that the individual subject live through a cultural simulacrum. As V. Bhat says, "Postmodernists question notions of objective reality." (Bhat, op cit: 4) Jean Baudrillard, a well - known postmodernist theorist, believes that "reality" cannot be known or accessed in an immediate fashion through the senses or through the intellect. Instead, we know it through its representations, especially through its media representation. Baudrillard uses the term "simulacrum" to describe the various artificial environments that mediate our perception of the world. The critical debate in process in African literary circles is whether the African characters in works of fiction should be termed postcolonial or postmodern. Since the publication of three important books: Mpaliwe-Hangson Msiska, *Postcolonial Identity in Wole Soyinka*, Evan Maina Mwangi, *Africa Writes Back to Self: Metafiction, Gender, Sexuality*, there has been a landmark turn taking in the postmodern aesthetics in African literature.

Sefi Ata's *A Bit of Difference* can be rated a postmodern novel inasmuch as it depicts the condition of a Nigerian expatriate in London in quest of identity: material, spiritual and cultural. The information on the back cover page unveils the notes that, at thirty-nine, Deola Bello, a Nigerian expatriate in London, is dissatisfied with being single and working overseas. Deola works as a financial reviewer for an international charity, and when her job takes her back to Nigeria in time for her father's five-year memorial service, she finds herself turning her scrutiny inward. In Nigeria, Deola encounters changes in her family and in the urban landscape of her home, and new acquaintances who offer unexpected possibilities. Deola's journey is as much about evading others' expectations to get to the heart of her frustration as it is about exposing the differences between foreign images of Africa and the realities of contemporary Nigerian life. Deola's urgent, incisive voice captivates and guides us through the intricate layers and vivid scenes of a life lived across continents. With Sefi Atta's characteristic boldness and vision, *A Bit of Difference* limns the complexities of our contemporary world. A novel not to be missed by one of our continent's most accomplished contemporary writers.

Osofisan advocates the overlapping decline of drama/theatre tradition to the detriment of film industry as an important landmark of postmodernism in African literature, culture and theory. Leaning on Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacrum, he explains that as far as painting or sculpture is concerned there is an original work by an artist and there might be thousands of copies. But the original is the one with

the highest value (particularly monetary). He contrasts this with CDs or Music records where there is no "original" as in painting; there are only copies, all of the same. When for instance, the Nigerian born English playwright Solanke has her character Bev exclaim: "There are over 40 million mobile[phone]subscribers in Nigeria, ... That's millions of people with phones but no bank accounts. Why not serve them with mobile wallet?" (Solanke, 2012, p. 53), the writer insinuates the postmodern effects of technology that not only impoverish Nigerian citizens, but also turn out to be fake copies with no original designs. The concept of virtual reality is another version of Baudrillard's "simulacrum," - a reality created by emulation, for which there is no original; for example computer games (Baudrillard, 2004, p. 369). What we know about reality is influenced by the way we know it – the media through which our objects of knowledge are represented and communicated. In this conception, signs function as commodities and operate in a universal code that generates, as All aspects in modern societies, argues Lyotard, depend on these grand narratives. But postmodernism is the critique of grand narratives, the awareness that such narratives serve to mask the contradiction and instabilities that are inherent in any social organization or practice (Lyotard, 2004, p. 355). Modernity in African literature has often been associated with the refined ways and styles in human life and activities. In works like Ade Solanke's *Pandora's Box*, Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, and *Anthills of the Savannah*, new technologies, the replacement of manual labour by machinery, the shift from traditional mud house with raffia thatches into modern cement, copper and zinc buildings, the use of mobile phones, the aeroplane in Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* mark a new landscape of the footing of postmodernism in African literature. These technological shifts contrast with the traditional lifestyle and values of values portrayed in works with precolonial settings like Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Healers*, Elechi Amadi's *The Great Ponds*, and Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* where the traditional mode of life is imprinted with cultural practices that parttern to genuine and authentic African traditional life. In precolonial Africa, instruments like the drum, the *ogene*, dressing style like the goatskins, and the loincloth. Mpaliwe-Hangson Msiska postulates that "While affirming the value and integrity of African culture, Wole Soyinka has endeavoured to foreground the contradictions inherent in it using his critique as a basis for constructing a new critical consciousness not only for the colonial cultural heritage but also of the indigenous culture" (Msiska, 2007, p. 45). For instance, in *The Lion and the Jewel*, Soyinka examines the relationship between tradition and modernity and finds that a modernity that fetishises surface things rather than its essential spirit ends up being inimical not only to the progressive elements within the discourse of modernity itself but also to those of tradition, creating conditions for more exploitative interpretations of tradition to assume a validity that a more critical view of modernity would easily have undermined. Lakunle's desire to cut down all trees so that he can create parks in which modern lovers can have their romantic strolls is self-evidently not only superficial but also environmentally destructive. As for Baroka, he is not a simple antithesis of the shallow village school

teacher but part of a mercenary breed of politicians, traditional and modern, who have found a way of seeing cultural hybridity as a means of pursuing individualist project in a manner inimical to the postmodern public good. In this respect, Soyinka goes beyond the conventional tradition-versus-modernity opposition, exposing both negritudist return to the past and the ruthless mindless modernism of the tree cutting variety as representing infertile soil for the necessary reconfiguration of postmodern society (*Ibidem*).

In other words, there is no longer any faith in the great belief systems of the past, in history, progress, or truth. Our capacity to hold such beliefs has been eroded by the constant bombardment of images and information available to us through the new technology and the mass media . . . We can no longer make sense of the world because there is no cohesive world to make sense of. Instead we occupy a state of what Baudrillard calls "hyper-reality," an unreal world of dreams and fantasy , of "simulacra" – the world of TV , of the shopping mall, of video games, of Disneyland. People have been reduced to mindless consumers, and the dominant language is the language of packaging and advertising. According to Baudrillard, there is no point in trying to resist the hyper-real, we should simply enjoy it.

Such a view has of course been criticized as being absurdly negative – apocalyptic even. But Joe Staines feels that as a cultural critique, though of an exaggerated kind, postmodernism functions best when it analyses the extremes of mass-consumerism and the media (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 55).

The evolution of popular forms of entertainment in Africa nowadays has taken new turns with the development of new information and communication technologies. The film industry, the home video industry, and the internet have modernized and facilitated the recording, performing, marketing and distribution of CDs, DVDs, and Diskettes so that the live theatre consumerism has lost its audiences to the detriment of modernized dramatic performance, the TV moovies and serials. In addition, these new technologies have introduced a form of counterfeiting of works of arts namely CDs, DVDs, sculptures, mobile phones and other electronic appliances so that it is very difficult to distinguish the fake copy from the original or the genuine one. This has given rise to new drama elites, actors and spectators who no more need to go to theatre halls to watch performances. Femi Osofisan in an influential article "African Theatre and the Menace of Transition: Radical Transformations in Popular Entertainment" stresses the point:

With particular reference to the discipline of theatre, however, and to the phenomenon that has come to be called the 'home video industry- - the industry which now goes by various names such as 'Nollywood', 'Gollywood', 'Riverwood', and so on, depending on which country one is focusing on – Nigeria becomes even more glaringly significant [...] For theatrical activity – defined, that is, as live performances before live audiences – is in a state of crisis on our continent. It has lost its popular appeal, and is rapidly on the wane. In its place, bubbling and noisy like a newly sprung waterfall, is this new shock stock of video films, which has completely overwhelmed the culture market (Osofisan, 2012, pp. 362-363).

The premise of Femi Osofisan here is that the modern African theatre develops in a lively and ebullient setting in terms of theatrical activity especially in places like South Western part of Nigeria. Certain factors make me advance the proviso that African theatre has attained the age of post-modernism. The factors of its blossoming are rapid progress of modern technologies of information and communication as favoured by the wide spreading of home videos, so that film makers use accessible digital video technology, especially as the old video cameras have given way to their digital descendants and the new High Definition cameras. The editing, music and other post-production work is all done with common computer-based systems, thus reducing the total cost of production by almost 80 per cent. Afterwards, the films go straight to DVD and VCD disks, which are also cheap to reproduce and distribute.

According to J. A. Cuddon,

Postmodernism beckons changes, developments and tendencies which have taken place (and are taking place) in literature, art, music, architecture, philosophy since the 1940s or 1950s, postmodernism. Indrama one might cite experiment with form, content and presentation in such developments as the Theatre of the Absurd, Total Theatre, the 'happening' and, latterly, the Théâtre de Complicité. Other discernible features of postmodernism are an eclectic approach, aleatory writing, parody and pastiche. Nor should we forget the importance of what is called magic realism in fiction, new modes in science fiction, the popularity of neo-Gothic and the horror story (Cuddon, 2013, p. 552).

The burgeoning of Marxist, feminist and psychoanalytic criticism since the 1970s is yet another aspect of postmodernism. It also shifts to a critical position in criticism, in which a complete relativism exists – hence its proximity to post-structuralism. Perhaps most important of all are the revolutionary theories in philosophy and literary criticism expressed in structuralism and deconstruction.

Alex Inkeles and David H. Smith seem right when they approach postmodernism from the perspective of the ability of modern man to cope with technological changes and especially the nation building challenges:

A [post]modern nation needs participating citizens, men and women who take an active interest in public affairs and who exercise their rights and perform their duties as members of a community larger than that of the kinship network and the immediate geographical locality. Modern institutions need individuals who can keep to fixed schedules, observe abstract rules, make judgments on the basis of objective evidence, and follow authorities legitimated not by traditional or religious sanctions but by technical competence (Inkeles and Smith, 1976, p. 4).

This position concurs to opine that postmodern criticism in African literature projects the image of modern institutions and characters who win more and more freedom of choice in residence, occupation, political affiliation, religious denomination, marriage partner, friends and enemy. They have sought to replace a closed world, in which their lives tread the narrowest circles, with a more open system offering more alternatives and less predestination. From a desperate clinging to fixed ways of doing things, some characters have moved to postmodern ideological stand. In place of fear of strangers

and hostility to those very different from themselves, they have acquired more trust and more tolerance of human diversity.

J. Ndakaku Amankulor in his article "English Language Theatre" has offered a critical survey of the development of African dramatic performances, an approach that lays much emphasis on western cultural domination of African theatrical scene. This gives me the opportunity to take critical stands to affirm that African drama has developed new directions in postmodern times. These directions operate in three basic modes in which various scenes of performance characterize postmodernity: the dramatization of life by the indigenous traditional performances before the intrusion of European culture, the theatrical playfulness of African art remarked in masquerades, ritual dances and festivals and a focus on cultural practices. In the words of Amankulor,

The strength of indigenous African theater before the coming of the Europeans and Arabs resided in cultural associations and community institutions. These associations, which were community-based, were often distinguished in their varying functions by the age, sex, and sometimes occupation of the members. In addition to the political, social, and artistic obligations they fulfilled for their people, which included the initiation of new members, the associations formed performance groups for drama, music, and dance, as well as sculpting, decorative, and other artistic groups. Drama, dance, poetry, storytelling, music, and the creation of sculpture lent themselves readily to performances, which naturally exploited contemporary religious and social realities. (Amankulor, 1993, p. 138).

The postmodern critical theory of 'drama' as an act of performance as developed by Jean François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979). According to Iain Hamilton, *The Postmodern Condition*,

Announces in drama the type of performance that has had perhaps the greatest impact concerning the status of the plays he calls 'meta-' or 'grand narratives'. While grand narratives such as the Enlightenment narrative of infinite progress in knowledge and liberty, or the Marxist narrative of progressive emancipation of laboring humanity from the shackles imposed upon it by industrial capitalism, have played a crucial role in anchoring knowledge and politics in modernity, postmodernity has entailed a crisis of confidence in them (Grant, 2001, p. 28).

In other words, as Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis say, "he suggested that Western thought has grounded its truths in 'grand narratives' such as Marxism, Christianity and Freudianism. These conditions of knowledge were now generally apparent and that defines the "postmodern condition". To live postmodernity is to live the performative nature of 'truths'" (Shepherd and Wallis, 2004, p. 134). In *Postmodern and Performance* (1994) Nick Kaye takes a closer focus, and specifies the esthetic genre performance as a postmodern phenomenon. So performance is twofold. It is first the generic term that defines the field of performance, and especially here art performance. And secondly, it is an operational term since the argument concerns live art's postmodern art's performativity, its rhetorical strategies.

## CONCLUSION

The findings in this article are twofold. First, the postmodern African literary politics is becoming reconstructed and redefined. Beyond these two elements, identity becomes a modern innovation. In the postmodern this aesthetics, the issue is how to construct and maintain our identity in an effort to secure our place in the globalized world and avoid uncertainty. This is because in the modern world the avoidance of uncertainty was seen as an individual problem. Second, given the predominant notion that African literature is about "writing back" to the European canon, the proposal that African arts are primarily writing back to themselves, this paper is extending the ideas in that authoritative and seminal analysis in a direction they have indicated, especially in their discussion of how we can rethink postcolonial studies. Noting the shortcomings of postcolonial studies and charting the way forward toward postmodernism, the postmodern aesthetics underscore that as the field has developed over the last decade or so, it becomes clearer that perhaps postcolonial theory needs to be further grounded in specific analyses of the effects of large movements and ideologies on particular localities.

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