

## **African Fiction-African Intricacies Nexus: A Bird's Eye View**

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I consider it a profound privilege and honor to be part of the remarkable ECKLL XI (11th Enrichment of Career by Knowledge of Language and Literature) event. I am delighted to share insights on “Contemporary Perspectives in Language, Literature, Education, and Culture”.

In our fast-evolving world, our understanding of these interconnected fields undergoes continuous evolution. Language, serving as the vessel of our thoughts and emotions, adapts to the complexities of our modern global society. Literature, reflecting our collective experiences, evolves alongside our cultural tapestry. Education, as the bridge to enlightenment, seeks innovative approaches to engage new generations of learners. And culture, the rich tapestry of traditions and

values, engages in a perpetual dialogue with the forces of change.

This conference testifies to our collective commitment to exploring the current paradigms, challenges, and innovations in these vital domains. It provides an opportunity for us to exchange ideas, challenge existing perspectives, and embrace fresh insights.

As we gather here, let us harness the collective wisdom and innovation of our academic community to delve into “Contemporary Perspectives in Language, Literature, Education, and Culture”. Together, we will strive to unravel mysteries, discuss challenges, and celebrate the discoveries arising from this intellectual journey. Thank you for being part of this vibrant and insightful event. I eagerly anticipate the stimulating discussions, enriching exchanges, and groundbreaking ideas that will undoubtedly shape our

understanding of these vital fields in our contemporary world.

Today, I stand before you with an immense sense of privilege as I embark on a journey into the captivating world of African fiction and the intricate tapestry it weaves.

Africa, dubbed the cradle of humanity, not only embodies our shared origins but also boasts an enchanting reservoir of stories. African fiction serves as a gateway to the continent's diverse cultures, intricate histories, and layered identities. Today, we embark on a journey that extends beyond the mere pages of novels and stories. Our venture delves into the African Fiction-African Intricacies Nexus, offering a bird's eye view of a captivating world.

African literature, a mosaic woven from myriad threads of cultures, languages, and experiences across the continent, encapsulates the essence of diverse narratives. From Chinua Achebe's incisive portrayal of colonialism's impact in *Things Fall Apart* to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's exploration of gender and identity in *Half of a Yellow Sun*,

African writers craft narratives that illuminate societal complexities and challenge established norms.

Defining African literature is a daunting task. As noted by Cosmo Pieterse and Donald Munro in their edited work, *Protest and Conflict in African Literature* (1969: ix), any work addressing African experiences in a given place and time, whether from a traditional or modern background, can be deemed African literature. This definition reflects the evolving nature and diversity of African literary expressions. Given the multitude of linguistic, historical, cultural, racial, ethnic, gender, and national differences across the continent, it may be more apt to speak of "literatures" rather than a singular "African literature". As Achebe contends, "African literature" comprises a group of associated units, encompassing all national and ethnic literatures in Africa.

The diverse approaches within African literature, as highlighted by Tanure Ojaide (2012: 17), further enrich the continent's literary landscape. Francophone African writers utilised Negritude to counter

European denigration of African culture, while Anglophone African writers affirmed their African identity by presenting multifaceted African personalities. This diversity of approaches truly enriches the continent's literary fabric.

African literature stands as a testament to the resilience and creativity of its writers. It mirrors the continent's multifaceted identity, independence struggles, and ongoing quest for justice. At its essence, African literature is devoted to transcending boundaries and amplifying the voices of the silenced, showcasing Africa's rich cultures and histories on the global stage. African writers not only contribute to the global literary tapestry but also stand as crucial chroniclers and interpreters of their societies. Their works provide invaluable insights into the nuances of identity, cultural heritage, social justice, and the effects of globalization on the African continent. Serving as cultural ambassadors, these writers invite readers into the heart of Africa's complexities and contradictions.

In this exploration, we will navigate the historical evolution of African literature, from its roots in oral storytelling and indigenous languages to its response to the challenges posed by colonialism and the subsequent era of post-colonialism. Exploring the intricate themes interwoven within African literature, we will examine the influence of language and cultural diversity, and the emergence of unique voices within this rich literary landscape. Through these lenses, we aim to comprehend how literature both mirrors and shapes the African experience, showcasing its resilience, creativity, and capacity to instigate change.

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

It is within the expansive universe of African fiction that

narratives traverse time, culture, and geography, reflecting our history, struggles, dreams, and resilience. This body of work underlines the power of words and stories as tools for understanding, empathy, and transformation.

The distinctive essence of African fiction lies in its deep connection to the diverse realities of the continent. African authors do not merely tell stories: they are custodians of our shared history. They aptly and religiously capture the intricacies of our cultures, societies, and the obstacles we face with a depth that only insiders can genuinely portray.

African fiction uncovers echoes of our past, the challenges of our present, and the aspirations for our future. However, the interplay between African fiction and the continent's complexities transcends mere narration. It delves into the core of social, political, and cultural challenges. It challenges stereotypes, dismantles biases, and amplifies voices that have long been marginalised. This vibrant literature actively initiates discussions on identity, gender, migration, and the

legacy of colonialism, acting as a reflective mirror of our shared consciousness.

Emmanuel Obiechina (1975: 26) astutely holds the following in his *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*: “Oral tradition has survived in West African literature despite the introduction of Western writing and its foreign traditions”. This survival of oral traditions within African literature remains a testament to its enduring legacy. Oral traditions are the bedrock of any community's culture, preserving the crucial aspects of heritage from one generation to the next, a legacy that persists within the written form even amidst external influences.

Africa boasts a diverse array of oral traditions, comprising myths, legends, folktales, riddles, and proverbs. Oladele Taiwo (1967: 11) rightfully notes: “In Africa, oral traditions reflect the people's way of life. The prevailing oral literature in any region is shaped by the character, temperament, and occupations of its inhabitants”. These oral traditions are deeply rooted in the foundational

concepts and ideas of the universe and humanity within African traditional societies. Central to this tradition is the use of proverbs by the elderly, encapsulating vast wisdom and communicating moral lessons.

African languages share distinctive features as a result of historical contact between different communities during migrations and subsequent interactions. These shared characteristics signify the enduring impact of such encounters on African linguistic diversity (Awoonor, 1975: 49/66). Oral tradition serves as a conduit for cultural transmission, relying on direct interpersonal communication, memory, and ingrained patterns of thought, speech, and action to maintain cultural continuity.

In African societies, oral traditions encompass myths, legends, folktales, riddles, and proverbs, each offering unique insights into African storytelling. Myths elucidate life, death, and the powerful forces of nature, while legends serve as historical fragments imparting moral lessons. Folktales resonate with familiar situations and often carry

moral messages, targeting the younger generation. Griots and storytellers play vital roles in perpetuating this oral heritage.

Proverbs, integral to oral literature, continue to echo in written forms, delivering precise moral teachings and advice. As Taiwo (1967: 26) aptly states, "Proverbs deal with various facets of life and serve as a potent medium for the wise to convey moral lessons, warnings, and advice".

European contact with West African oral culture since the fifteenth century spurred significant changes in local traditions. Colonialism introduced literacy and significantly altered African societies. This transition facilitated the emergence of the novel as a literary genre, an instrument used by African writers to convey messages not only to the local populace but also to a global audience. Emmanuel Obiechina (1975: 35) notes the amalgamation of old indigenous culture and new technological influences, shaping West African literary culture.

The initial wave of writers primarily grappled with the clash of

cultures and the repercussions of colonialism. Achebe's seminal works, including *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *A Man of the People*, aimed to counter the negative European depiction of Africa. He vividly portrayed the intricacies of African politics, the struggle for ethics in governance, and societal fairness in a post-colonial era.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe masterfully delves into the shaping, challenging, and transforming of individual and cultural identities amid societal change and external influences. The clash between traditional Igbo identity and the forces of colonialism forms the pivotal conflict, ultimately leading to the tragic downfall of Okonkwo and the disintegration of Igbo society. Similarly, Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* explores the challenges faced by a young Nigerian man returning from England to work in the civil service, grappling with the cultural and moral dilemmas brought about by colonisation.

In an interview reported by Ashley Fetters, Achebe notably

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

The imposition of European languages, both English and French, occurred due to the inability of colonizers' schools to teach in local languages. Although novels were penned in the colonizers' language, their content retained a domestic touch, leading to their categorisation as West African Novels.

Obiechina (35) systematically outlines five criteria defining a "West African Novel": (1) it is set in West Africa and is about West African life; (2) it draws heavily from the local environment for authenticity; (3) it emphasises sociology; (4) it often carries didactic and propagandist elements; and (5) it reflects the peculiar cultural situation of West

Africa – blending oral traditions and modern technological influences.

The novel's pivotal tool, according to Obiechina (155), is language. It employs language to describe characters' appearance, moral and emotional characteristics, clothing, actions, habits, feelings, thoughts, and other noteworthy aspects. Notable West African novels emerged after 1950, including Amos Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard* in 1952, Camara Laye's *L'Enfant Noir* in 1953, and Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City* in 1954. The advent of literacy allowed African novelists to employ proverbs to reinforce traditional values and societal wisdom. The use of proverbs in the novel is a nod to traditional ideology and societal philosophy.

Using proverbs in speech fosters communal and traditional communication, aligning with collective wisdom and shared cultural values, as observed by Achebe, who effectively communicates the significance of proverbs in understanding reality.

Moreover, West African fiction often features the use of pidgin, primarily utilised by semi-literate individuals, identified as 'pidgin' personalities (Obiechina, 188). Writers recognise pidgin as a means of communication and incorporate it in their works which take various literary forms.

Post-colonial Africa witnesses a significant paradigm shift in African writing, an enduring theme in African literature, digging into the lasting impact of colonial rule on the continent. African authors use their literary works to scrutinize the injustices and suffering endured during the colonial era while celebrating the resilience of African cultures. Wole Soyinka, one of the African literature's pioneers, skillfully navigates the clash between tradition and modernity in his play *The Lion and the Jewel*. Elucidating societal changes impacting relationships, values, and community dynamics, he symbolically represents tradition as the lion and modernity as the jewel in the play. Characters grapple with questions of identity, language, and power, embodying

hybrid identities straddling tradition and modernity. Soyinka's work reflects social concerns, emphasising the collective experience and immediate societal issues, initially expressed through satire in his plays like *The Lion and the Jewel* and *The Trial of Brother Jero*.

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

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*, set in Kenya, deeply explores the influence of British colonialism and capitalism on Gikuyu society, revealing cultural clashes and critiquing post-colonial Kenya, exposing disillusionment and corruption in post-independence

Africa. Ngũgĩ advocates for the decolonisation of African literature, highlighting the erosion of traditional values due to colonisation.

Ayi Kwei Armah's novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, set in Ghana, reflects on post-colonial disillusionment and moral decay in society, addressing the challenges faced as the country's leaders in grappling with corruption and self-interest in post-independence era.

African literature has historically marginalised the role and importance of women in works that primarily focus on restoring the dignity of post-colonial African men. Female authors, addressing this bias, have sought to portray women positively in their novels, which has given rise to a critical approach known as gynocriticism. This approach aims to break free from male-centric critical models, scrutinising male-authored texts and objectification of women. African female authors like Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Mariama Bâ, Bessie Head, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Ama Ata Aidoo, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Nawal el Sadawi and Efua Sutherland, among others, have



significantly enriched African literature with their contributions, focusing on diverse themes that encapsulate the experiences, struggles, and triumphs of African women. Prevalent themes in African female fiction encompass a wide array of subjects, including gender roles and feminism, identity and cultural conflict, colonial and post-colonial experiences, family dynamics, motherhood, socio-economic struggles, agency, resilience, and empowerment.

Nwapa, a trailblazing West African female writer, is prominently focused on the place of women in traditional society in her novels. Her works, such as *Efuru*, *Idu*, and *One is Enough*, highlight the lives, struggles, and triumphs of African women, addressing gender inequality, female autonomy, and women's resilience in patriarchal settings. Nwapa's narratives also examine the post-colonial era in Nigeria, exploring the effects of colonialism on African communities, positioning her as a significant voice in African literature, particularly in portraying the lives and experiences of African women amidst

cultural, social, and economic transformations.

Emecheta, a celebrated Nigerian author, delves into a spectrum of themes such as feminism, the impact of colonialism on women, identity conflicts, motherhood, family dynamics, gender roles and socio-economic struggles in works like *The Joys of Motherhood*, *Second-Class Citizen* and *Double Yoke*, among others. Through her novels, Emecheta sheds light on the challenges African women face in patriarchal societies, the clash between traditional and modern cultures, and the socio-economic constraints in post-colonial Africa.

Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, set in colonial Rhodesia, follows a young girl, Tambudzai, torn between her traditional Shona culture and Western education. The novel scrutinises the impact of colonialism on African education, family dynamics, and the aspirations of young women. Dangarembga's work, alongside other pieces in African literature, delves into post-colonial themes, offering insights into the complexities of post-

independent African societies, revealing the struggles, aspirations, and resilience of African people as they navigate change and opportunities following colonial rule.

Although Nawal El Saadawi is of Egyptian descent rather than from sub-Saharan Africa, her work *Woman at Point Zero* delves into post-colonial issues, specifically the oppression of women within a patriarchal society shaped by both colonial and traditional norms. In contrast, the young Nigerian female writer Adichie, in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, explores the complex historical and personal ramifications of colonialism and the struggle for independence during the Biafran War in Nigeria.

The continuity and preservation of tradition tying past and present writers in African fiction form an unbroken link, symbolising a seamless connection between them. Recently, a wave of young African writers has emerged through addressing contemporary issues in African literature such as migration and displacement (including NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*,

Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck* and Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*), the diaspora (Adichie's *Americanah*, Dinaw Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*, Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*, Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Teju Cole's *Every Day Is for the Thief*, Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.*), climate change (*After the Flare* by Deji Bryce Olukotun, *The Seed Thief* by Jacqui L'Ange, *Oil on Water* by Helon Habila, *Yellow Yellow* by Kane Agary), family and relationships (examples include Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*), polygamy and its challenges especially seen from women standpoint (Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter*, Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Peace Adzo Medie's *His Only Wife*), technology and connectivity (Adichie's *Americanah*), conflict and post-war narratives (Aminatta Forna's *The Memory of Love*, Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* and Alain Mabanckou's *Broken Glass*), gender and feminism

(Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*, Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay with Me*, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*), urbanisation and identity (Amma Darko's *Faceless*, Chris Abani's *Graceland*, and Chigozie Obioma's *The Fishermen*).

It is undeniable that literature holds an extraordinary power to reflect and critique societal norms, serving as a catalyst for transformative change. By skillfully weaving stories, creative literature acts as a reflective mirror to society, illuminating injustices, biases, and the intricacies of the human experience. Its profound capacity to challenge established ideologies, evoke empathy, and provoke critical thinking among readers is unmatched. Through the portrayal of social issues, amplification of marginalised voices, and exploration of alternative futures, literature becomes a cornerstone in sparking conversations, motivating action, and planting the seeds of social transformation. Its impact is

invaluable, acting as a force for societal evolution and progress.

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

Future trends in African literature are set to be dynamic and diverse, allowing for the exploration of new themes, genres, and narrative styles. With the aid of digital media, these contributions will democratise access to African literature, reaching a broader audience locally and globally. Global literary interactions will facilitate the exchange of ideas,

fostering cultural understanding. There is a pressing need for deeper research into underrepresented themes, marginalized voices, and intersectional issues in African literature to foster a more inclusive representation that celebrates the diverse stories of the continent. Overall, the future of African literature promises an exciting era marked by a vibrant tapestry of new themes, voices, and a profound exploration of underrepresented narratives, solidifying its place as an essential and dynamic contributor to the global literary stage.

The resilience and creativity of African writers shine brightly, overcoming barriers to present a range of diverse voices and perspectives. Our exploration into African literature has highlighted its cultural depth and the challenges faced by African writers. Understanding these challenges and embracing diverse voices has been an enlightening journey. The debt to future generations of African literature scholars is to continue amplifying underrepresented

narratives, fostering a more inclusive literary discourse.

I encourage readers to engage with African literature, explore the works of African writers, and participate in ongoing conversations about Africa's diverse and vibrant literary landscape. Through such engagement, we can better appreciate and celebrate the enduring legacy of African literature in the global literary sphere.

While acknowledging the challenges faced by African authors in terms of limited publishing platforms and visibility, our collective effort should focus on breaking down these barriers to ensure that African literature continues to flourish.

African fiction is not just a genre; it is an odyssey. It is an invitation to explore the nuances of human experiences through the lens of a vast and diverse continent. Stories have the power to transform, connect, and enlighten. I encourage you to embark on your own journey through African fiction, exploring its intricacies and appreciating the nexus where fiction meets reality. Let us be inspired by the tales of Africa as they

have the potential to reshape our understanding of the world and our place within it.

In today's world, where globalization and technology reshape our societies, African fiction serves as a bridge connecting our heritage to the global community. It fosters dialogue, paves one's way to understand our continent and its people, showcasing creativity, and resilience. However, African fiction does not just romanticize; it confronts uncomfortable truths, highlighting persisting inequalities, conflicts, and injustices, urging us to address these issues with compassion and determination.

The nexus between African fiction and African intricacies demonstrates storytelling's power to inspire change and provoke thought. Let us embrace the richness of African fiction, celebrate its intricacies and use it as a catalyst for understanding, unity, and progress. Together, let us embark on a journey through African novels to discover

the beauty, complexity, and resilience of this continent.

Thank you for your attention, and I am eager to hear your thoughts and questions as we continue to explore the beauty and complexity of African literature.

Finally, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all the organisers of this conference, as well as guests and partners who have made this event possible.

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