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**TEXT, TEXTUALITY AND
CONTEXTUALITY**

**-Paradigms Lost and Paradigms Regained
in Literary Theory.**

By

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Professor of English and Women's Studies



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1. Introduction

Several factors are responsible for my location as a literary theorist. My interest derives from my recognition of a dearth of literary theorising in African literature in the early 1980s. There were debates about the definition, language and the audience of African literature. There was a lot of focus on practical/textual criticism and the sociology of literature. I found literary theorising more inclusive and more challenging. I saw absences and gaps which justify the claim in the humanities that the North gives the theory, the South gives the data. I felt challenged by this dichotomy and decided not to be a provider of data for the theory of European-American researchers on African literature. Literary theory also enhances perspectivism, inclusiveness and contextualisation. It has remained the sustained nexus and backbone of literary studies over the centuries. My research reveals that literary theory is the earliest and has remained the most fundamental aspect of literary studies. Some scholars consider theory abstract. According to Mary Rogers, "theory connotes dispassionate scholarship and abstract ideas."¹ My objectives, therefore, include making literary theory concrete by injecting dynamic originality into it and not re-inventing the wheel.

2. Literary Theories in Historical Perspective

A historical hindsight reveals that literary theory has been enriched by inter-disciplinary influences. The mimetic genesis of

¹ Mary Rogers, 'Introduction', *Contemporary Feminist Theory*, Boston: Macgraw Hills, 1999, p.1.

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literature explains the interactions with other disciplines that provide extra-literary paraphernalia. There has been a polarity between advocates of purism or art for art's sake and those who uphold the versatility of literary theorising. Literary creativity and literary criticism started simultaneously with classical writers like Aeschylus and Aristophanes. The latter's work, *The Frog*, was one of the earliest examples of social satire as criticism. Composite scholars like Plato and Aristotle who were not literary experts per se but philosophers, scientific theorists, political scientists, and ideologues, provided the earliest definitions of literature and generic conceptualisation. From the beginning, literature was not intended to be a 'neutral designation' and was often a recreation of cultural histories with political and ideological undertones. The word, Aesthetics was a branch of philosophy before it became adopted in literary criticism. Specific periods adopted dominant literary traditions that defined literature. Instances are the Classical, Neo-classical, Elizabethan, Metaphysical and Romantic literary periods. The twentieth century was the melting pot of theories as past traditions merged into new ones to capture the restless spirit of the age. Dominant theories of the last millennium include Formalism, Marxism, Structuralism and Post-structuralism, Modernism and Post-modernism, Existentialism, Semiotics, Deconstruction, Intertextuality and Feminism. The period also witnessed counter-discursive theories such as Post-colonialism, Womanism and Multi-culturalism. Some of these highlights inform my research directly or tangentially.

3. Directions of Contemporary Literary Theory

The context of the last millennium is significant as a period of pluralism of values, ideas, ideals, and ideologies. The contemporary period is also the age of computer and high technology and the literary trend is a **mirror image** of the larger society. Globalisation has also intercepted the inter-activity of literature and other disciplines. All these mediate the trends of modern literary theorising which is characterised by binaries and ambivalences. Liselotte Glade affirmed

that literary criticism has "set in motion the dialectics of belonging and estrangement, of love and exile, of inside and outside." She further identified an "in-betweenness", an expansive locale and shifting borders as the hallmarks of 20th century literary studies. (Bock & Wertheim, 1986.). James Clifford also observed that in "the 20th century, cultures and identities reckon with both local and transnational powers to an unprecedented degree."³ Others described these binaries as - **Manichean allegory, or Manichean opposition**. Parker underscored the trend as "binomial oppositions" while Edward Said denoted the west - east oppositions and binaries. *Colonial thinking of us/them*. East/West, North/South, has enhanced this outlook. This is the basis for post-colonial theory, a theory of counter discourse or speaking back to redress the imbalance, especially in Third World literary studies. It also explains an observable paradigm shift from dominant literary modes to a synchronic approach to literary studies. Local signifiers and reverberations in other 3rd World postcolonial literatures and theories encourage a search for less conflictual approaches by critics like Lindsay Pentolfe Aegerter. He warns against re-inscribing "the Manichean oppositions imposed by colonization itself."

According to Hedwig Bock and Albert Wertheim, one factor for the persistence of post colonialism is "the confluences and collisions between the aboriginal and external culture. The other is the civil problem and struggles that necessarily arise as a once dependent area becomes independent."⁴ Edward Said's theory of Orientalism sums

³ Hedwig Bock & Albert Wertheim eds. *Essays on Contemporary Postcolonial Fiction*. Munchen, Max Hueberg Verlag, 1986, 5.

⁴ *Ibid*

⁴ Hedwig Bock & Albert Wertheim eds. *Essays on Contemporary Postcolonial Fiction*. Munchen, Max Hueberg Verlag, 1986.

up post-colonial contradictions, "Reality is divided into various collectives: languages, races, types, colours, mentalities, each category being not so much neutral designation as an evaluative interpretation"⁵. Such binomial oppositions include issues of place versus placement and displacement. Said poses the question, "...how can one study other cultures and peoples from a libertarian, or a non-repressive and non-manipulative perspective...?"⁶ Others like Hommi Bhaba and Chinua Achebe debate the question of cultural colonialism and hybridisation. Bhaba maintains that cultural purity is not visible. His location of culture places the emphasis on cultural difference as opposed to cultural diversity.

The radical Indian theorist, Chandra Talpade Mohanty classified native women or women in colonised nations, lower-class women, the peasants, the doubly oppressed, as the silenced category or the '**subaltern**' and raises the crucial question, "Can the subaltern speak?" I answered this question in my research. This subaltern irony is more related to women's literature but is central to any critique of colonised literature '**under western eyes**.' She affirms that third world women 's realities are not homogeneous'⁷. Benita Parry responded by challenging the post-colonial woman intellectual, to give a voice to the subaltern through their narratives. Another post-colonial critic, Abdul Janmohammed sees colonial literature as "an exploration of the boundaries of a world of boundaries of 'civilisation', a world that has not (yet) been domesticated by European signification or codified in detail by its ideology." (Ashcroft, 1989). He also emphasises the Manichean allegory, a permanent opposition between the Self and the Other. Ngugi wa Thiong'o proffers the solution by advocating shifting the cultural centre or decentring European values of judgement through

Edward Said, *Orientalism, Western Concepts of the Orient*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1991, p.227.

⁵ *Ibid*.

⁷ Mohanty, Chandra. *Third World Women and and the Politics of Feminism*. Bloomington, Indiana, 1991.

multiculturalism. Others justify hybridity as Helen Tiffins considers it inevitable. Trihn Minh -ha is one of the most famous presenters of the architectonics of otherness, a dominant discourse in Postcolonial literary studies.

4. African literary theory.

African literature was born in the womb of several paradoxes as critics began to articulate the status of written and oral literature. Some scholars claim that orality is expressed in a mode different from writing and reading; they therefore consider the term, 'oral literature' contradictory. This explained the coinage of the word, 'orature'. There was a visible struggle with the contradictions which manifested in apprentice literature. Another focal point was the beginning and boundaries of African literature. Some scholars traced the origin of written African literature to slave narratives written in Europe and America in the 18th century by African slaves. Works by freed slaves such as Olaudah Equiano and Phillis Wheatley became the prototypes of earliest African literature. But this rationale will qualify all the literature of Black Americans, Caribbean and Black European writers as African literature. Another school identified Thomas Mofolo's (*Chaka*) and Casely Hayford as the earliest writers of African literature.

African literature as we know it today emerged as a response to literary texts by Europeans (Joyce Carry, Joseph Conrad and others) that presented Africa '**through western eyes**.' As the debate on African literature subsisted, writings by Africans - Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe among others, were classified as English literature. This necessitated a new nomenclature, 'literature in English' as a distinction from English literature. The task of the African theorist at the beginning, therefore, included addressing such issues, decoding absences, silences and thematic clusters. African literary theory is often dialectical but there is an imperative on the theorist, to resolve tensions while situating new African cultural paradigms.

The African theorist has often adopted meta-criticism or the criticism of criticism. The efforts of important pioneer critics such as Oyin Ogunba, James Ogude, Sam Asein, Abiola Irele, Ali Mazrui, yielded dividends in raising awareness about African literature and culture. There has been an increase in the interest in African literature globally. Diverse theories emerged, ranging from cultural purity by Chinweizu's group and Cheik Anta Diop, to Ngugi's multiculturalism. A contested boundary has existed and still exists between thesis and antithesis, between self-definition and self-denial, between assimilation and dissimilation, between interiority and exteriority, between change and alterity, and most significant to my research, between male and female writers. Many critics have enunciated the inevitable polarities and ambivalence produced from these diverse contested sites.

Several western critics of African literature have made landmark contributions and Bernth Lindfors is a giant in this process. Agostino Lombardo, borrowing the terminology from F.O. Matthiessen, has recently described the quantitative productions of African literature as the "African Renaissance". Lombardo and other critics have also revisited the qualitative texture and structure of African literature by acknowledging the importance of the 'complex social machinery' that constitutes the crucible for African writing. The multicultural exposure has inevitably created what Lombardo describes as "an autochthonous culture, having *orality, visuality, gestuality*, as its main forms of expression."⁸ I agree with this critic that African literature transcends the re-writing of history and the recreation of cultural agency. It is a complex of values, both specific and transcendental, both national and trans-national. The dominance of counter-discursive African theories is an aspect of post-colonial literary studies. This manifests the hybrid identity, the dialectic of double voices and the double-consciousness of African writers and the doyens of

African literature. African women writers have had to contend with an additional stratum of ambiguous identity. Their challenge transcends double consciousness and this necessitates multi-vocality.

5. My Research and Emerging Theoretical Patterns

My research has been predicated on identifying patterns, recreating new configurations, new myths/archetypes and new dominant paradigms. My areas of my focus include, African, Diasporic, Commonwealth, American, Postcolonial literatures, cultural and gender theorising. My approach is multi-disciplinary and cross-generic. I maintain the instrumentality of the text not as all-sufficient, but as the peephole to the authors' ideology, philosophy, experience, and belief systems that combine to shape and nurture the artistic skill and aesthetic sensibility. Theoretical borders are fluid as some theories overlap while others are flexible. Literary studies, like other disciplines in the humanities, is at a defining moment. It is located at the interface between history and epistemology, fiction and realism, tradition and modernity, change and alterity. The scholar who must make an impact has to **take** all these on board. It is even more daunting for African scholars who need to transgress existing academic spaces that already presuppose that Africa has little to offer the world and must be consumers of other people's ideas and technology. My research is also at the interface between textuality and contextuality. No literary theory can minimise the text as the baseline of criticism. But I reject the theory of the death of the author, which presumes that the author and auterist data are insignificant. I saw the literary theorist's challenge as that of revisiting the polarities where necessary, by searching for a more conciliatory approach.

In my research, I underscore four major nuggets: literature as intertextuality, literature as dialogism, literature as counter-discourse and literature as a collective cultural repository or cultural history. Many cotemporary theories have a link to these, centrifugally or centripetally. This is also an attempt to demystify literary theory especially for students. I know that many students consider literary

⁸ Agostino Lombardo, "Wole Soyinka: the Artist and His Tradition," in Bindella, M.T and G.V. Davis, *Imagination and the Creative Impulse in the New Literatures in English*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, p.94.

theory inaccessible, esoteric and difficult, when it is not adequately presented.

Intertextuality is a theory that some scholars and students underrate. A few years ago, a colleague told students that intertextuality is not a literary theory. Although Plato and Aristotle did not use the word intertextuality, by defining literature as mimetic, as an imitation of other pre-existent texts, they located the earliest definitions of literature on inter-textual terrains and connections. I establish this theory as a salient issue that has occupied the front-burner of literary studies. The term, intertextuality was coined by the French critic, Julia Kristeva in 1977 in her seminal work, 'Word, dialogue and novel' (sic) and 'Prolemes de la structuration du texte'. (Kristeva, 1997). This French critic of Bulgarian origin is a well-known linguist, a semiotics theorist and a feminist. Her theories are complex and diverse. I disagree with her articulation of feminism and her theory of "the father, the son and the woman...." I am not preoccupied with her complex linguistic configurations either. However, her theory on intertextuality is sound and versatile. Judith Still and Micheal Worton elaborated on the term intertextuality and their work has brought it into the limelight in contemporary literary studies in an explicit way, "The theory of intertextuality insists that a text (for the moment to be understood in the narrower sense) cannot exist as a hermetic or self-sufficient whole, and so does not function as a closed system."⁹ The basic premise is that the writer is first a reader of texts before he becomes a writer of one. So the work of art is influenced, deliberately or not, overtly or implicitly, by other texts, ideologies, literary traditions or linguistic patterns and belief systems of a particular social milieu. I agree with these critics in their observation that there subsists a "cross-fertilisation of the packaged textual material (say book) by all the texts which the reader brings to it."¹⁰ Not only do texts fertilise each

other, readers' experience of a literary tradition or theory enriches interpretation beyond the authorial intention.

The intertextual influence and motivation may not be fully apprehended or discerned as the reader/critic brings other criteria of judgement into the perception of the work. Ola Rotimi's play, *The Gods Are Not to Blame* is a contrived intertextuality as the playwright deliberately based his play, with an overt title, on Oedipus' classical Greek play as its intertext. Similarly, Wole Soyinka's play, *The Baccae of Uripaedes* is a contrived intertextual creation. But in each case, the writer's genius, personal ideological orientation and collective cultural values reshape and recreate the issues and or form of the original Greek intertext.

My theoretical position is that literature as an imitation of life derives from certain sustainable principles. The imitative text is not necessarily inferior to the intertext or pre-text. Most literary works are located between two **idiolects** and or several **sociolects**. Literary discourse is open and incomplete as new readers will always bring new interpretations from personal experience or 'cultural assumptions.' Although the concept of intertextuality only came into the forefront in the 1960s, any text discourse implies intertextuality at various levels. It is a primal and composite theory as it equally recognises the importance of the author and the social environ. Many of my published works and work in progress deal with fundamental intertextual relations especially in African literature. Akachi Ezeigbo's novel, *The Last of the Strong Ones* is an overt re-writing of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in a brilliant imaginative way. She has no apology for making *Things Fall Apart* the intertext as her objective is to recast the same moment in Nigeria's colonial history. By redressing the invisibility and marginalisation of women in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Ezeigbo refocuses attention on women in traditional Igbo societies who were not in the social periphery and history confirms her position. The dynamic impact of the Uwabiala movement and Aba women's mobilisation confounded the colonial rulers and forced them to change

⁹ Micheal Still and Judith Worton, ed. *Intertextuality: theories and practices*. Manchester : manchester University Press, 1991, p. 1.

¹⁰ Ibid.

tax and other laws. *Things Fall Apart* is silent on such spectacular historical roles as women occupy liminal positions in his writings for twenty one years until *Anthills of the Savannah*. Ezeigbo represents and re-presents women in a closer to reality fashion in her creation of four women giants who worked hand in hand with men to resist colonial incursion. They also influenced the inevitable social change at the eve of colonial take-over. More recently Chimamanda Adichie recreated *Things Fall Apart* in her award-winning novel, *Purple Hibiscus*

Literature is an extended metaphor and a symbol whose intertextual interactions transcend literary transactions. It derives from the impact of a wider range of pretexts - linguistic, cultural, philosophical, ideological, historical or political. According to Heidegger, "every work of art says something other than the mere thing itself, positing the work first as an allegory, and then a symbol." (Worton, 1990). As an example, Armah's axes of intertextuality are mostly historical in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*, but political in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and several other novels. Information that shape Armah's socialist beliefs gleaned from socialist literature then become intertexts and pretexts to his creative works. So, intertextuality transcends naïve assumptions of imitation of other fictional works. Roland Barthes acknowledges Kristeva's work as one of his own intertexts and observes, "The intertext is not necessarily a field of influences: rather it is a music of figures, metaphors, thought-words; it is the signifier as *siren*." (Rowland Barthes, 1976). In *Writing Degree Zero*, Barthes refers to intertextuality in specific terms: "...it is impossible to develop (my selected mode of writing) within duration without gradually becoming a prisoner of someone else's words and even of my own. A stubborn after-image, which comes from all the previous modes of writing and even from the past of my own, drowns the sound of my present words." (Barthes, 1984). At the extreme end, one could perceive literary intertextuality in the light of literature as metaphor, as extended metaphor, as allegory and as symbol, looking at literature beyond the literal.

I observe a new way of **hystorifying** reality in African fiction. Akachi Ezeigbo's trilogy, *The Last of the Strong Ones*, (1996), *House of Symbols*, (2001), *Children of the Eagle*, (2002) and Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*. (2004). Others are Andre Brink's *The Other Side of Silence*, (2002) which has a context that is much more transparent than in *Before I Forget* (2004), Yvonne Vera's depiction of the war and freedom ambivalence in Zimbabwe is equally revealing as a process of historifying reality because it derives largely from historical documents as we see in *Nehanda, Without a Name* and *The Stone Virgin*. South African writers have adopted this device in an increasingly explicit way. The historical pretexts to such works include the life stories of women giants such as Nehanda of Angola, Bakwa Turunku and her daughter, Queen Amina of Zaria, Nehanda of Zimbabwe and Nana Asantewa of the Asanti in Ghana. Others include Kabansa of Bonny, Nana of Itsekiri and Madam Yoko of Sierra Leone. Groups who have refuted women's invisibility includes Abeokuta and Aba women, Ondo parallel high chiefs the Magira (queens) of Bornu. I researched into women mythic and legendary heroines and the formidable roles of women regents to establish that marginalisation is not indigenous to Africa. This is the crux of my book, *Gender Perceptions and Development in Africa*. (Kolawole, 1997). I respond to the need for the centrality of "cultural imperatives and shifts" advocated by Obioma Nnaemeka. Lauretta Ngcobo's *And They Didn't Die*, Helen Kuzwayo's *Call me Woman*, Zakes Mda's three novels, *Ways of Dying*, (1995), *The Heart of Rednes* (2000) and *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002). David Bell describes this device as 'storyfying' and affirms that it is "complex and innovative".¹¹ This dialogue with the past is a common trend in African and postcolonial writing and is a pointer to the centrality of the **dialogic imagination** which is another theory emphasised in my research work.

¹¹ David Bell, "Simply a Tale? Zakes Mda and the art of 'storyfying' contemporary South Africa", paper presented at the Triennial Conference of the European Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, Malta, 21-23 March, 2005

Dialogism is one of the most progressive and versatile theories in contemporary literary studies. Plato's Socratic Dialogues is the precursor for dialogism in literature in classical times. He preferred and proffered a dialogic approach and opposed monologism. Plato asserted that philosophers seek the truth through plurality of voices (in a narrative milieu) and this is what dialogism is all about. This explains the absence of unity and the loose structure of the Socratic dialogues. The literary work is not autonomous but is a dialogue with the reader, the society and political ideologues. I find this conceptualisation of literature very functional especially in my research in African literature and on gender in literature, (Kolawole, 1997). At the beginning of the 20th century, the Russian theorist, Mikhael Baktin propounded the theory of dialogism. It was not prominent outside Eastern Europe until the 1980s after the work got translated. I support Baktin's assertion that dialogism is closely related to intertextuality. Literature as a form of social dialogue inevitably borrows from other texts, ideas and ideologies. Dialogism therefore advocates multiplicity of voices and the tolerance of plurality of viewpoints. Plato's dialogic literature is related to his more liberal theory of art as imitation, which is remarkably different from Aristotle's monologic position. Aristotle's emphasis was on unified structure, the unities especially in the dramatic genre. Colleagues in dramatic arts will agree with me that contemporary drama has shifted largely from the monologic paradigms and the regimentary unities, as contemporary drama is relatively flexible in structure. Julia Kristeva also supports dialogism since it is closely related to her theory of intertextuality.

The binary opposition between Plato and Aristotle set the pattern for contemporary literary theory as counter discourse, which is the third of my focal theories. The African situation calls for dialogism to encapsulate the epistemological, ideological and cultural pluralism. I locate my research on the dialogic plane because this approach is versatile in embracing African worldview. Yoruba worldview supports dialogism and plurality of viewpoints and approaches, 'ona kan o

woja', 'there are many routes leading to the market place,' 'oju orun l'eye fo' - 'there is adequate sky space for the birds.' My location of literary theory on a flexible but dynamic terrain derives from such notions. The trope of the market place has been central to my conceptualisations. Obioma Nnaemeka calls it 'a live and let live' philosophy. African discursive tropes uphold pluralism of voices and attitudes. I maintain that **the open space theory** is more functional in capturing the pluralism of African reality and the diversity of African cultures. This is why I affirmed in my research that African literature needs to be redirected from the twilight zone to a more dynamic space. Many writers present protagonists whose dilemma is that of being caught between cultural closure and self-negation.

Dialogism confronts the tension between many contradictions and binaries and many writers try to resolve the dialectic tensions. This is achieved through composite heroism/heroism or multiple voices. Male writers have also adopted heteroglossia or multivocality as we see in Ngugi's *Matigari*, a novel which bridges many gaps and shifts many borders. In a radical repositioning from the structures of previous works, Achebe also deploys heteroglossia in *Anthills of the Savannah* as a response to critics who accused him of gender partisanship in his earlier works. The protagonists in *Matigari* and Achebe's female protagonists in *Anthills of the Savannah* achieve a counter-discourse through multivocality. My research confirms that, intertextuality, dialogism and counter-discourse are interconnected in contemporary literary studies (Kolawole, 2002).

Counter-discourse

My interest in counter discursive theories emerge from the recognition that the world has been built on exclusivist paradigms and this is especially revealed in post-colonial literature. My research focused on ways in which literature, especially African literature can engage in counter-discourse by transcending it. A recent conference in Malta brought together major names in Commonwealth literature

and literatures written in English. Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin, Elleke Boehmer, Stanley Borg, Margaret Daymond, Lynn Innes and a host of others were participants. The theme of that conference confirmed this concern with exclusionist dispensation in literary studies. 'Sharing Places: Searching for Common Ground in a World of Continuing Exclusion.' There is a new search for transcending the binaries. This has necessitated many migrant writers' use of literature to advocate the sharing of spaces and cultural border-crossing through transnational and trans-cultural themes. This has implications in my theorising as we see in my article, 'Repossessing African Space: Self-healing and Self-retrieval in the Diaspora.' (Kolawole, 1997.).

Migrant writing centres fluidity of space and hybrid identity which abiku trope symbolises in Yoruba world view. Soyinka, J.P. Clark and Ben Okri have centred this trope. It negates the presumption of a fixity or permanence of identity. W.E.B. Dubois coined the word 'double consciousness' to describe the divided awareness and reality of Africans in the Diaspora. Adrienne Rich calls it split awareness. Others look at post-colonial conditions and African identity in terms of singing in Babylon. Anthony Kwame Appiah stressed the dilemma of Africans singing cultural songs from the belly of the whale, alluding to the scriptural lament of the Israelites, "... for there they that carried us away in captivity requires from us a song....How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" (Psalm 137, 1).¹² Literally or metaphorically, the colonial encounter has had a profound influence on the psyche of African writers and critics globally.

Post-colonial writers are largely preoccupied with de-centering culture, deconstructing and decoding of universalising canons, resisting cultural imperialism, orientalism, and ghettoisation, which characterise colonial literature and literary criticism. Since Salmon Rushdie's

famous metaphor, 'the empire writes back', post-colonial theorising has become more dynamic on the front burner of modern literary studies. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their masterpieces have gathered together the major strings of post-colonial discourse to show the common grounds and points of departure. The polar positions of writers and characters as well as the contradictions of the colonial subjects as the mimic men by V.S. Naipaul, and Jenny Sharpe, are reinforced by the emphasis on marginalisation of subaltern groups by Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and others. Hommi Bhabba's theories of hybridisation and essentialism continue to give way to diverse thesis and antithesis. The transparency of the binaries of the Self and the Other has been critiqued by many theorists especially Trin Minh-ha, Chinua Achebe, and Fredrick Jameson.

In my search for "new modes of conceptuality", Kristeva's conceptualisation of the 'vertical axis', which emphasises the importance of text and context, is also crucial to my work. The literary text as a mediator always points to the significance of context. In African literature, this context is both historical and cultural. Kristeva highlights an ambivalence, that of the "insertion of history into a text and the text into history." Everything is related to the way of knowing, of self-knowledge, of epistemology. Mundibe emphasises **gnosis** in African philosophy. Much of the images representing Africa by non-African writers were and are still located in the realm of tarzanism and neotarzanism. Soyinka and others have advocated the rejection of self-negation of this kind. This implies that self-criticism is also important and this is the reason for the dominance of the **gleam/gloom** metaphor in many African works.

Recreating new critical tools has been a challenge. I recognise the validity of the thesis of the radical black American critic, Audre Lorde, "*For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house,*" (p.112). That one needs special tools to unpack colonial heritage and neocolonialism has been the thread running through much postcolonial literature. But I suggest that the master's tool can be

¹² Anthony Kwame Appiah, Keynote Address at the African Literature Association Conference, Columbus, Ohio, March 1994.

adapted. Some scholars see migrant writers as subjects of displacement and V.S. Naipaul portrayed this in his works. They maintain that migrant critics in the Diaspora cannot continue to use the literary yardsticks imposed by the masters. The exile writers are not fully reintegrated into the new 'home'. The question of home then becomes a contested one as many African and other post-colonial writers are located in the 'third space,' the twilight zone (Kolawole, 2002).

Rejecting the master's tool, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o proposes shifting the cultural centre through multiculturalism. It is a counter-discursive reaction to the continuity of the tradition that judges other literatures against European canons. His call was followed by many other African critics. (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1994). I was privileged to have met him at a one-day workshop in Union, New Jersey, USA in March 1995. In my interview with this giant of African literary production, he confirmed that there is a paradox in singing cultural songs in a strange land. His writings in Gikuyu cannot be read by his immediate proximate readers in the United States. This dilemma explains why he and others have become cultural apostles more than ever and touches on literature as a cultural repository. Several other third world critics are theorising issues central to post-colonialists. Anand Komar and Frank Welz recently depicted the need to situate cultural change in a historical crucible. Simon Gikandi, a migrant critic, has been advocating a re-assessment of the impact of modernity on African and third world societies, maintaining that tradition and modernity have co-existed longer and one is not superior to the other.

I interrogated the persistence of colonial referentiality in Third World literature so many years after independence in my research. I identified some of the reasons why recent literary scholarship has become so heavily **post-marked** - post-structuralism, post-modernism, post-colonialism, post-feminism, post-development, and even post-humanity. One of the reasons is the omnipresence of the past. Human experience is not delineated in chronological patterns and checkered chronology is another way in which epistemology is perceived. One

cannot overlook our colonial history, which now manifests as neocolonialism and shape the artistic imagination. But dwelling in the space of **the twilight zone**, the space of 'in-betweeness', the space between the night and day, accounts for much of the pessimism in African literature. 'the beautiful ones are not yet born,' 'why are we so blessed?' Transcending the postmark is crucial and many writers are doing so. Tess Onwueme's play, *Tell it to Women* is ostentatiously a post-feminist play. However, post-ness and past-ness are still ubiquitous as William Faulkner aptly affirms, this omnipresence,t¹³ "The past is not dead; it is not even past." Many African writers and critics maintain that in African world-view, life is a continuum as the past, the present and even the future criss-cross. Thought patterns are not always spatially constructed, the past shapes the present and epistemology is not always chronological. This has been a dominant theme for Ayi kwei Armah, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Senbene Ousmane, Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe.

I support Michel Foucault who advocates diversity of methods to encapsulate the complexity of discourse. Sushela Nasta also calls for a "multiplicity of perspectives". (Nasta, 1991) She recognises the thrust of postcolonial critique to include correcting the imbalance and the binaries for self-reclamation as she asserts,

It is not only a question of redressing the balance; the reclamation is more simply shifting the ground of a series of opposition and areas of struggle: whether male/female, coloniser/native, black/white, feminist/womanist, postcolonial/poststructuralist, Third world/first world, traditional literary canons/ counter discourses and forms.¹³

¹³ Sushela Nasta, ed, *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and Southeast Asia*. London: The Woman's Press, 1991. p.xvi.

My works on metafiction and my life-story approach include interviews with writers and critics including Zulu Sofola, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Ama Ata Aidoo, Ifeoma Okoye and Oyin Ogunba. I interviewed Efua Sutherland's daughters, Esi Sutherland-Addie and Amowi Sutherland-Phillips at a meeting of the Women Writing Africa in Bamako Mali. (Kolawole, 1998). This elicited important information about her life, her work and her ideological position on African literature and women writers. Similarly, I interviewed Zulu Sofola and the interview constitutes a chapter in my book, *Zulu Sofola, Her Life and Her Works*. (1999) Such interviews bring out profound issues that informed the writer's aesthetics. Autobiography and biography unfold the importance of memory to the writer's self-inscription both at personal and collective levels:

Some African women writers have used metafiction to declare overtly a direct correlation between the fictional process and the reality of their experience. Literature becomes useful as its own metalanguage....This self-referential process is therapeutic, as it allows direct self-commentary by unveiling temporarily the veil of fiction. (Kolawole, 1997, 167.)

Literature as a Cultural Repository

The interplay between culture and post-colonialism is very significant to my work. Rejecting imposed modalities involves eliciting positive worth in one's own culture...Some writers look for stability in African culture as a womb of retreat, to deal with the problem of migration and dispossession. I see a way out of the cultural quagmire as an attempt not only to shift the cultural center but also for African writers and theorists to consciously make a cultural detour to Africa, refocus on African values and literary practice. So those who opt for migration as well as those of us who are in Africa as cultural hybrids

need to sing new cultural *songs*. 'Owo ara emi l'afi ntun iwa ara emi se.' This explains the increase in cultural nationalism in literary theorising and this has been the bane of my research.

The root of the word culture is crucial to an understanding of the status of literature as a repository, an arsenal, a storehouse of cultural values and codes. Culture is a derivative of the Latin word, *cultura*, which means to nurture, tend or cultivate. Literature is one of the best transmitters of cultural values and a tool for nurturing it as it tends and carries it from one generation to another. Literature as a form of cultural production, derives its definition, essence and functionality from this conceptualisation of culture. My work on cultural theories provides a multi-disciplinary **macro-theoretical framework** for the **micro-theoretical constructs** that are specific to literature. A new emphasis on culture as a determinant of many aspects of human development emerged from the World Conference on Cultural Policies (MONDIACULT) held in Mexico City in 1982 and the United Nations Decade of Culture that followed (1988-1997). Culture is not static but dynamic, adaptive and evolutionary. As a follow-up to that conference, Ato Wolde Michael Chemu affirmed, "all nations, nationalities and peoples have the right to build their culture in any way they believe beneficial." Burama Sagnia also raises a very salient question, "If we accept the postulate that culture is an adaptive mechanism that constantly adjusts to satisfy human, biological and social needs, shouldn't we then ask ourselves whether the best way forward for Africa is to marginalize the role of culture in development frameworks and process or to use it as a platform or springboard for development."¹⁴ My current research involve works by writers who use literature to sensitise the society on burning social and development issues more than ever before. Writers like Wale Ogediran, Ifeoma Chiwuba, Lawrence Damani, May Nwoye and many

¹⁴ Burama, S Burama K. Sagnia, Coordinator, African Itinerary' College for Culture and Development, in a Keynote Address delivered at the Sensitisation Workshop on 'Culture, Gender and Development in Eastern and Southern African English-Speaking Countries, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 8-11, April 1997, p.7.

others centre HIV/AIDS preoccupations and child trafficking. The veil of fiction is becoming thin but literature's functionalist role is paramount.

Like other third world critics, Homi Bhabha has centred the metaphor of the 'location of culture' as an important approach in modern scholarship. Some critics interrogate development when it does not take on board cultural imperatives. A self-conscious attempt to re-locate culture becomes a necessity. It is the rationale for the call by black theorists for an Afrocentric approach not only as an aspect of the empire writing back to the centre but a tool for self-realisation. The African American theorist, Molefi Asanti has led this movement. Bhabha rejects the theories of cultural purity and cultural universalism, but he adopts cultural difference as a valid macro-cultural theory, "Cultural diversity is an epistemological object – culture as an object of empirical knowledge – whereas cultural difference is the process of the enunciation of culture as 'knowledgeable', authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification..."¹⁵ (Ashcroft, 1989). Burama Sagnia's suggestion that, "culture is an adaptive mechanism that constantly adjusts to satisfy human, biological and social needs" touches on the heart of the matter in this on-going search for a robust culture specific criteria in literary studies.

Many recent African migrant writers have overtly adopted the celebration of culture as a womb of retreat. Many writers have moved from presenting multicultural dilemmas to resolving the tensions. Emecheta's *The Family* and *Kehinde* present a conciliatory dimension to the problems of transcultural location and these works also reveal overt ideological contents. More recent works by writers have continued to recreate these hydra-headed cultural predicaments as we see in Ben Okri's recent work, *In Acadia* (2003) and Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2003). (The latter won the Commonwealth Writers prize for Africa in 2003 and the writer is a 22 year-old

¹⁵ Ashcroft, Bill et. al. Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin. (1989) *The Empire Writes Back. Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*. London: NY: Routledge.. p.199.

undergraduate in law at the University of Jos.) This category also embraces populist aesthetics of disillusion in post-independence works in a dynamic interlock of historicism and radical ideology such as Marxism and gender. We witness silences and the other side of silence as we see in Emecheta's reversals and the South African writer, Andre Brink's works.

Transcultural texts reveal a common trend that is not only true of African literature but many Commonwealth literature but other literatures written in English fit into this pattern. My research has concentrated on this international trends. Salmon Rushdie's thesis underscores what he called 'hybridity, impurity, intermingling, and the transformation of the new and unexpected combinations of human beings'. This implies that the post-colonial experience is a contaminating one. However, I agree with Bill Ashcroft that it injects a different kind of newness into the colonial space. This, in the words of Ashcroft, is "a newness that is a sameness, the construction of colonial place by erasure, inscription and narration." (Ashcroft, 2005). Emecheta's new work, *The New Tribe* (2000), plays out the dilemma of maintaining cultural identity in a strange land. Set in St. Simon, England, the space presented is a contemporary multi-cultural one. Hester Arlington is the son of a Nigerian single mother, Catherine Mba an exile since her childhood days. Chester's adoption by an English family, Vicar Arthur and Ginny Arlington initiates Chester's quest for identity. His adopted white family has the reputation of having adopted a white child, Julia, in the past without much cultural dilemma. Emecheta's work is a type of a very common trend in transcultural literature. The recent winner of the Best book in the Commonwealth Writers' Prize award for 2005, Andrea Levy, centred issues that are similar in her work, *Small Island* although in a more intricate and profound way. Diran Adebayo's novel, *Same Kind of Blackness* (1996) which has become a classic of Black British writing, is another brilliant exemplar of transcultural literature. These writers are re-negotiating cultural realities and have shifted from the celebration of difference

and monoculture. They have crossed “the shadow lines” of division to come to terms with the inevitability of transcultural and transnational interconnections. They are re-visioning and re-envisioning space.

6. Is literature relevant in the Age of High Technology?

Many of our students ask the challenging question, “What is the relevance, what are the opportunities for graduates of the arts in this age of computer and high technology?” As early as 1991, when many African scholars still considered computer skill as a tool for research in the science related disciplines, I became computer literate and availed myself of the immeasurable technological and Internet research resources and networking available to scholars in the humanities before it became the norm here in Nigeria. This was enhanced by my nomination as one of ten West African women scholars sponsored for an intensive program in Internet Connectivity, Networking and web site designing at the Michigan State university, East Lansing, USA in the year 2000. My research has subsequently proved that high technology cannot minimise the arts but does highlight artistic potentials, skills and effectiveness of research methodology. The multi-media enriched my accessibility to data in my chosen research focus as the Internet has encouraged an unprecedented accessibility to knowledge and my international relevance. Again, the way out is to refocus on the relevance of African culture and using technology to sustain this relevance. Technology cannot displace culture; it can enhance it in diverse ways. This has been one of my challenges as a scholar. I am happy that Power Point presentation has enriched this lecture.

There is an interesting theory that emerged in the last years of the last millenium which brings out an intersection between literature and technology. It is relevant to my research as a myth theorist. Scientific myths such as the Superman are not new. But **the cyborg** myth adds new dimensions to literary and gender theories as a hybrid, an amalgam of machine and organism or machine and man through

wearable computer or similar devices. The myth of the cyborg emerges from the concept of using scientific and technological devices to re-energise the human in a supernatural way. It is used in medical science as well in coupling organism and machine. In literature, this myth is expressive of the persistence of dualities, ambivalences and contradictions. Literary theorists see the cyborg as a hybrid of fiction and social reality, fiction and fact, in a world of dissolving boundaries of identity. Cyborg then becomes an ontology, an amalgamated image of imaginativeness and material reality according to Donna Halaway in ‘The Cyborg Manifesto.’ She uses the cyborg metaphor to provide new modes of conceptualising women’s experience. Beyond the conceptual framework of the cyborg, structurally, science fiction is a hybrid and the antecedent of **many scientific and technological discoveries**. The space fiction **series are precursors** of scientific discoveries in certain cases and this suggests recreating scientific discoveries first imaginatively, **before becoming real**. American critics also theorise Cyborg feminism. **In the African context**, the cyborg is a valid image, not only for the multiple hybrid identity of the African woman, but also a type of the profound resilience, almost supernatural image needed for the African woman to deal with her multiple roles as wife, mother, professional, cultural agency and others.

The arts will survive in this age of high technology because the world will always need the artist to **humanise** the society; but the art including literature must adapt to the exigencies of the time. The humanities scholar cannot afford **cyberphobia**.

7. New Paradigms

My work explores the dynamics of social change and its effect on African literary production. The colonial experience and attendant social change remain traumatic to African experience. This leads to the crucial issue of **alterity**. Alterity is the state of remaining yourself against impending forces of self-fragmentation and self-negation. The dialectic tension between change and changeability is at the core of

my theory. The attempt to remain oneself at a collective level is often misrepresented by non-Africans as resistance to change and primitivism. But I reject this notion and aver that the African's alterity, the ability to remain yourself and retain your identity a positive mark. I find a Yoruba proverb very relevant to this postulation, "Aghara ojo o l'oun o nile wo, onile ni o nigha fun." -the rain flood will try to demolish the house but the owner will not allow this to happen." (Kolawole, 2004). Self-naming has become a crucial call by Africans and Blacks in the Diaspora. My work has identified certain categories based on African epistemology and modalities of self-naming. I have grouped works into three categories, based on African perceptions and paradigms.

Kikusuku is the Swahili word for parroting or rote imitation. This is identical to early apprentice literature. Early literary works by many African literary pioneers fit into this apologetic parroting category. Many writers have shifted from parroting as they interpose culture specific paraphernalia. This is an approach that characterises many early African works including the first phase of women's writing, with heroines that were stock tragic heroines, the *femme fatale*.

Saani Baat is a Senegambian concept that means voice-throwing and the transgression of existing space. It is the core of the thesis by the Gambian scholar, Siga Jajne (1994). I relate this to devices that transgress western canons such as Achebe's trans-literation, which has become a major literary attribute in African literature. This is also evident in the shift from tragic heroinism to strong women that force their voices on existing discourses 'by breaking the veil of silence.' We see this in Zulu Sofola's - *Queen Omu*, Aidoo's *Anowa* as well as Nwapa's *Women Are Different* and *One Is Enough*. Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, Aidoo's *Changes*, Onwueme's *The Reign of Wazobia* and *Tell it to Women* are other examples.

Guguletu means 'our pride' in Xhosa language and it is also the name of a Black township on the outskirts of Cape Town. I find

this concept useful in defining a third approach. Guguletu brings out the irony of the modern African's predicament in confronting neocolonial paradox of dispossession literally or metaphorically. Guguletu reveals the squalor, poverty and disorientation of Blacks as it is located in the suburb of one of the most developed, most sophisticated most beautiful African cosmopolis. But guguletu is expressive of the fact that Africans can still take pride in their culture, even from the social periphery of existence. The neo-negritudist works fit into this category. These concepts, *kikusuku*, *saani baat* and *guguletu* are my original contributions to the search for indigenous modalities of description and classification of African literature.

8. Gender and African literature - Women as a critical mass.

My gender research is one of the most important aspects of my work as a literary theorist. My early research had no special gender focus until my fellowship at Cornell as a Rockefeller Visiting Scholar. (1991/92) I observed that gender was an emergent major criterion of scholarship in the humanities, sciences, and health sciences. At that point most books focused on western criteria of assessing gender in Africa including African literature. I set out to string together the views of Africans about women's reality from my research into history, legends, myths, oral genres, folktales, proverbs and others. African literature occupies a site that I describe as the **twilight zone**, a site of in-betweenness. The issue of difference or otherness has therefore continued to engender many epistemological negotiations. My works also explore women's alterity, not as a negative resistance to change but a manifestation of changeability even as they resist cultural and gender self-negation. African women writers' agency is remarkable through their resilience. There was an overwhelming gap in African women's perception of gender and a yearning for naming their own struggle, rejecting tags like African/Black feminism. African women have to constitute themselves as a **critical mass**.

I identify with Alice Walker and Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi. Clenora Hudson-Weems and others in their yearning for more inclusive

ways of naming black women's struggle. My theoretical book, *Womanism and African Consciousness*, raised valid questions and defines womanism,, "What then is womanism? To Africans, womanism is the totality of feminine self-expression, self-retrieval and self-assertion in positive cultural ways." (Kolawole, 1997, p.24). Womanism is not a man-hating ideology. It underscores racial and cultural relevance, the centrality of the family, and the need for men and women to work together to achieve gender justice, gender equity and women's empowerment. (Kolawole 1997, 2004, 2050). Just as feminist literary criticism has become a major tool of critical research. I see that womanism is an adapted version of this, an attempt to infuse cultural and racial nationalism into gender literary theory.

When I started seminars and teaching on womanism, some colleagues here believe that 'he who pays the piper dictates the tune' and were skeptical about piloting an alternative to feminism might which might offend donor agencies as they asked, "Who will sponsor this?" Others prefer to retain the term feminism maintain the status quo My challenge was to inject an African perspective, thus increasing the options in gender conceptualisation. Feminism itself is not monolithic. The diversities include liberal, socialist, Existentialist, postmodern feminisms. Others include eco-feminism and the latest variant, cyborg feminism. My South African experience is significant. As a foundation Associate and a scholar -in-residence for 3 months at the African Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town in 1997, my works on womanism turned scholarship around in South Africa. It became a focal point in diverse ways. I challenged universal sisterhood and advocated focusing on racial and cultural mediations. My books are now on the reading list of universities in Europe, The USA, Asia and many African countries. There have been requests from German publishers for rights to translate my works into German. At a recent conference in Cape Town in January 2005, comments by renowned professors of literature in universities such as Stellenbosch, Cape Town, Natal, Sweden, USA and others humbled me. "Professor,

you are a celebrity. A legend. I just can't imagine leaving this conference without shaking hands with you." "You have been making waves in South Africa in the last five years." " Mary Kolawole's paper has given us a clue to the problems of gender studies in the last ten years. She has given us the way forward." These commentators include the famous literary Professor, Kristen Petersen. The world was waiting for a scholar with courage to sing African song in strange lands but rooted in Africa.

I also researched into women's genres in oral literature as tools of self-expression in dynamic ways. These genres as avenues for women's self-assertion refute the claims of voicelessness and invisibility. I agree with Micere Mugo and Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie that we only need to search for sites of African women's audibility, visibility and power. Such sites are revealed in the female oral literary genres which were avenues of dynamic involvement in the social process as I remarked in my works, "A plethora of female genres exists among the Yorubas. These include Obitun songs, Olori songs, Aremo songs, Ao-oka, gelede, Olele and Alamo songs. The Fulani Bori songs in Northern Nigeria consist of overt modes of self-expression and self-assertion for the women in this esoteric religious group. Other genres specifically dominated by women include Hausa women's court poetry, Igbo birth songs, Ogori Ewere, many panygeric poems and folktales, among others." (Kolawole, 1997). Elsewhere in Africa women had a voice in many oral genres that are exclusively female: *nzema* satirical maiden genre of Ghana, *swati* bridal songs, Impongo among the Ila and Tonga of Zambia, Akan Dirges, Galla lampoons, Kamba grinding songs and numerous gender myths, and proverbs. (Kolawole, 1997, 19998). Much work has been done in the area of images of women in African proverbs by Minekke Schipper, Susan Arndt, Helen Mugambe, Kehinde Yusuf, Ifeanyi Arua and Juliana Abbenyi.

Colleagues and students involved in gender research across disciplines inundated my inbox with requests for assistance, for

information, literature reviews and references on gender in Africa. Recently my work sounded a caution in this process of representing African women's views according to donor agenda. They may not be foregrounding issues that will transform African women from their liminal spaces, from the margin to the centre. At a recent international conference on 'Writing African women', I warned about self-centred research and so called representation of African women. I propose a re-presentation of African women using the trope of 'writing-in'.. the Yoruba tradition that ensures a cautious approach to getting to know the bride as African women have become the proverbial beautiful bride for researchers. I saw my task in the light of Leela Dube's contention, probing the "ethnocentric bias of western feminist scholars who tend to interpret data from other cultures in the perspective of the experiences acquired in their own cultures and their understanding of female-male relations from them."¹⁶

Fagunwa's Mount Lamgbodo symbol dramatises a gender tension - men as custodians of the master key to societies' multiple problems. The quest for Lamgbodo involved only men, seven brave hunters. Women are revealing their resourcefulness through literature. Moving Nigerian literature from Mount Lamgbodo has been a major objective for these women. I also use the metaphor of the arere tree in my theorising of the ambiguity of women's space and voice. A Yoruba proverb sums up this contradiction, "*ile ti obim'in ti nse toto arere, igi arere ni hu nibe.*" - a house that allow women's vocality will have the arere tree growing in it. Arere tree is not allowed to grow near human habitation due to its offensive odour but arere is a strong tree that is valuable in building construction. Younger generation of women writers are deconstructing the arere metaphor. These include Toyin Adewale, Omowunmi Segun, Maria Ajima and a host of others. Canonisation of texts is another challenge for me. I deliberately worked on new writings by young Nigerian writers to establish and publicise

their works. I worked on Toyin Adewale's anthology, *Breaking the Silence* for this reason.

Some of the best known feminist theorists today include Mary Eagleton, Mary Evans, Maggie Humms, and Mary Rogers. They have proffered some of the most earth-shaking theories. Let me state here that feminism is a theory that cuts across many disciplines. It is a valid theory to philosophers, sociologists, historians, anthropologists, political scientists, cultural scholars, scientists, technologists and medical researchers. It is easily the most crosscutting theory in modern scholarship. It is therefore unfortunate that here in Nigeria among some scholars, feminism is denigrated as being unscholarly. And because womanism is relatively new; many scholars are still ignorant about its status as a research tool.

My research re-iterates the conceptualisation and practice of womanist theories. Womanism was coined by two Black scholars, Alice Walker and Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi in 1982 as a means of self-naming and to inject black consciousness into gender scholarship. Womanism is now being celebrated as black women's contribution to the debates on gender and my work is one of the most applauded all over the world because of the originality of ideas. I have been honoured and I am still being applauded for increasing the options of gender conceptualisation and methodology. Just as mainstream scholars like Sandra Harding, Rose-Marie Tong, Angela Miles, Jane Parpart, Mary Rogers and Mary Evans have underscored feminism as a sound theory and tool of modern scholarship, numerous Black writers such as, Chandra Mohanty, Irene D' Almeida, Abena Busia, Amina Mama, Trion Min ha, Madhu Kishwa, Leela Dube, Shushela Nasta and Audre Lorde are elucidating Black feminism. Alice Walker, Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi, Juliana Abbenyi, Clenora Hudson-Weems and I have brought womanist literary aesthetics to the centre of global gender scholarship. I wish to rest the case on this note, womanism, which was not coined by me, like feminism, is a literary theory and methodology recognised internationally. I will like

¹⁶ LEELA Dube *et. al.* *Visibility and Power*, Delhi: OUP, 1986, p.8.

to appeal to colleagues who still lack knowledge about feminism and womanism to surf the Internet, read around on these concepts and it will surprise them that the world has gone beyond the level of asking questions about the authenticity of these gender canons. A scholar can be defined as a citizen of a world of ideas; the more you have access to ideas, the more you become a dynamic participant in this world of ever-changing and ever-widening epistemological horizons. Ignorance can no longer be celebrated or validated in these days of high technology and information explosion.

9. Conclusion - a Postscript.

Since I became a professor, I have felt a fresh impetus to continue to shape and influence contemporary scholarship in my discipline. As a professor of English, my focus on cutting-edge theories have earned me above average international recognition and outreaches. As a foundation member of the Centre for Gender and Social studies of this great university and the first editor-in chief of the centre's journal, I have worked with colleagues from various other disciplines because of my multi-disciplinary approach. My research has national and international implications that make it a reference point in international academia in literary theory in general and in gender theories in particular.

I have relocated the interplay between textuality and contextualization as vital literary paradigms. I uphold alterity, not as a resistance to change, but as an act of sustained purposive resilience by Blacks in refusing to allow their culture to be swept away by the flood of social change. In a pun on the usual pejorative use of the word native to describe non-European aborigines, I uphold the African literary writer and critic as **alter - natives** in search of **alternatives**. I brought such alternatives into my research by increasing the options of theoretical formulations in a cultural vortex, using African concepts and terminologies that have not been used before. My work departs from re-inventing the wheel or parroting other existing theories but it

transgresses unwholesome boundaries. I recognise agency, both cultural and gender, as a positive attribute in the verbomotor context of Africa. I have tried to re-centre lost sustainable valuable paradigms with new cultural epistemology.

I adopt new configurations by rejecting self-negation and cultural closure. My work postulates theories that discourage treating African literature as ahistorical, acultural or a *tabula rasa* through cultural contextualisation. Literature is not a neutral designation as it takes root firmly in culture and is intercepted by class, race, ideology, philosophy, sociology, history and other extra-literary paraphernalia. It shows an interface between the personal and the collective, the oral and the written, the traditional and the modern, the indigenous and the exotic. My theories emphasise epistemology - different levels of knowing and perception of reality from a diversity of locations. Dogmatic theorising that views literature from a single theoretical framework cannot accommodate the plurality of African people's complex experience and fragmented history and culture. My principle has been, **adapt, adopt and recreate new paradigms**. I researched into uncharted aspects of oral literature, myths and women's traditional locations that help shape written literature because Africa, as a verbomotor society, still depends on orality in social transaction. I recommend a deliberate link between literature and technology as a reflection of the modern age.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, the last twenty five years of my research in this university have brought wonderful opportunities, national, regional and international because of the versatility of my scholarship. I have enjoyed university research funds. I received the United States National Endowment for the Humanities/USIA award in 1990. I was the only Black and African at the summer program at UCLA, Berkeley and the coordinator said, a summer program on the problem of race in American literature would have been meaningless if I was not there. As a Rockefeller Visiting Scholar at Cornell University in 1991-92. I did not realise that being given such an award

by this American Ivy League university carries with it, respect and honour that would reverberate for a long time. The recognition of my work has earned me other international awards that cannot be listed exhaustively. They include being a Visiting Scholar at The School of oriental and African Studies, (SOAS), University of London, a Commonwealth Universities Scholar at the University of Canterbury, Kent, U.K, (1988), a Guest Researcher at the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, Sweden, (1997) a foundation Associate and Scholar-in-Residence at the African Gender Institute, University of Cape Town (1997), and DAAD scholar at Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany, (2002).

Some of these have given me opportunities to mentor younger colleagues and I have brought them on board international scholarship and networking. I was able to get the NAI in Sweden to supply unlimited number of books for an unlimited period of time and they send their catalogue regularly and pay the postage at no cost to my university. I have been a consultant to Ford Foundation, the Feminist Press, the United Nations University in Tokyo and the International Institute for Higher Education, New York. My on-going role as the Chairperson for Africa in the Commonwealth Writers' Prize has made available to me, the best and most recent books in the Commonwealth and opened incredible doors of honour. I was the only one of the four chairpersons in the Commonwealth Writers Prize who was privileged to meet and discuss with the Head of the Commonwealth, Queen Elisabeth II of Great Britain, at Windsor just three weeks ago en route the meeting and conference in Malta. Moreover, one of the two books that won the final Commonwealth Writers' Prize is the African winning book, which I presented at Malta, *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2004). Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, literary studies, psycho-analysis or life history approach is very important. It is essential for me to state here that my personal story is an important crucible that molded the tenacity of my professional accomplishment. At age 12, as the oldest of 12 children, I witnessed a serious downturn

in my father's prosperous import business. I gained admission at that point in time, into the first Anglican Girls Secondary School in the then Northern Region. My father's friend advised him against training a girl at a time of financial hardship. My father replied, "She is brilliant, diligent and disciplined. If I fail to train her, how am I sure the boys will be equally diligent?" That prophetic position motivated me to success.

As an end-note, I wish to suggest that African scholars need to cross many borders and jump hurdles such as lack of fund, obsolete equipments, outdated resources, inaccessibility to the state-of-the art devices and a lack of enabling research environment. As a scholar, I feel 'a sense of an ending' in the pursuit of knowledge and excellence if we allow these mountains on the researcher's path to limit and hinder us. Against many odds, the Nigerian scholar's achievement becomes very spectacular, almost a miracle. It takes tenacity, sacrifice, resourcefulness, diligence and fortitude to remain relevant to national and international commitments and exigencies in a globalised world. This should be the goal of every scholar - to excel even as he/she struggles against the grain. Waiting for a perfect academic environment is like 'waiting for Godot.' We need to be creative and resourceful in seeking alternatives as 'alter-natives' in a world of competition and superlatives and cyborgs. The government should re-think its position and make extra efforts to encourage research and academic excellence so that Nigeria can compete and utilise her infinite human resources fully. The intellectuals who are singing songs in strange lands should be encouraged to return and build the nation. This can only happen if they are restored from the 'belly of the whale.'

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, colleagues, invited guests, ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for listening.

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