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African writing, aesthetics and discursive violence

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Abstract

As a signifier "African writing" is suitably pluralistic in its potential for denotation and connotation and delimitation of thematic concern. Wearing an ambiguous qualifier such as "African" the contestable positions taken for granted for this cultural tag – which had camouflaged as incontrovertible – are mediated by the pluralism of the nominal which it qualifies. The erstwhile monolith and subject/object of literary/critical discourse fissures viscerally agreeably into fluid ethnic, linguistic and cultural heterogeneity with the result that both the literature and the study based on this literature transform into semantically elastic nondescript items in a state of unremitting variability. Which condition seems compatible with postmodernist insistence of organic connections and disconnections between the system of sound and that of reality according to Saussurean linguistics and Barthesian associative distinction between signifier, signified and sign. Calibrated synchrony deepens the complexity of a subject/concept already detached from signifier, a changing and changeable signified that is stratified and is multilingual multiracial multicultural. The chronological sequence of past, present and future presents as an evasive continuum of experience that self-inflates into an aesthetic balloon and a basket of illusions. This essay attempts to examine the systemic contradictory connections and discordances in the chronology of African writing and the study based on it: the thrust of the discussion is speculative and in tune with postmodernist strategies of discursive engagement with metalanguage the type that derives from a second order of discourse which is in turn based on a first order of speech.

Keywords: African writing, aesthetics, postmodern, futuristic, discordances, discursive violence

Preamble

African writing and the study based on it have their genesis in a denial or distortion of an African past as postcolonial studies or postcoloniality has argued. Some of the dominant voices that pre-empted black Africans in the expression of cultural experience in the written medium – albeit predominantly for a colonial metropolitan audience, as is much studied – included the likes of Aphra Behn in *Oroonoko, or the Royal Slave,* a tale in prose which features a protagonist that is fairly stereotypical and built on the variable concept of the noble savage, and Sir H. Rider Haggard who is well-known for his widely read *King Solomon's Mines*, *Alan Quatermain,* and others (in the former novel, Gagool is a hag and a type although, as scholars have observed, the author sometimes rises a bit above blatant paternalism to treat black characters with a measure of detached sympathy and dignity in a few of his works, for example, the expendable Foulata in the same novel) (The pathetic fatality of Imoinda in Behn's *Oroonoko* is comparable) and is credited for starting the genre of prose fiction whose concern is the quest for a lost world or lost civilisation; also illustrative is Joseph Conrad's controversial short-story *Heart of Darkness* which is well discussed: one of its prominent interlocutors being the novelist Chinua Achebe.

In *Orientalism (1978)* Edward W. Said discusses the sociological conditioning and "textual attitude" that characterised the kind of discourse that emanated from the imperial metropolis. The ideological and spiritual quest for an African past yielded Negritude and African history and romantic idealisms that quite ironically found real-life counterparts, personalities, in the many political despots in newly independent African countries, the concern of Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka in some of his more recent poetic, dramatic and prose works. In an ironic twist of chronology the ontology of the African present would appear to have raced up to and caught up rather supersonically with segments of the African past and with important desultory implications for a hazy future in atavistic joy-rides reminiscent of the illusory chronometric motions on a technological contraption named the time machine in the science prose fiction of that title by H. G. Wells: the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade having given way to new forms of modern-day slavery in which children and women are sometimes the willing and sometimes the unwilling commodities; conventional forms of colonialism have lapsed and been replaced by globalisation in which the main colonisers are commodities and consumables whether of the material or intellectual and nontangible varieties; a new wave of displacements and diasporic placements has arisen which is called cynically the brain-drain from Africa, wherein highly trained and skilled human resource emigrates en masse from African shores to the more developed economic centres of the world

within the context of an arrogant and extravagant display of political nonchalance to the development by various home governmental policy makers. The African continent it would seem is captive to the allure of the historic past and a seductive pull of distant and perhaps not-so-distant economic capitals of the modern-day emporium and product of the European industrial revolution which it fed directly and indirectly with human and material commodities for at least two centuries.

In a summation of a concomitant scenario Biodun Jeyifo avers:

> From all of these reversals, I come to what, surely, must be considered their final, ultimate consequence: From all available evidence, African literature is today much better taught outside Africa than within. Indeed, if we are to stare this particularly discomfiting crisis squarely and unblinkingly in the face, we have to admit that, again all the significant exceptions duly noted, African literature is today generally poorly taught in most of the African universities. For these are universities which are themselves endlessly bombarded by unprecedented crises of under-funding, demoralization of faculty, staff and students, the rise of a pervasive culture of obscurantism and fetishistic pseudo-intellectualism as many senior teaching and research staff of academic departments come under the sway of Pentecostal, chiliastic religious movements (Jeyifo, 2011, p. 61).

While “Pentecostal, chiliastic religious movements” would only appear to have been demonised in the observation – not quite proven, the connection is unsubstantiated despite the caveat of “significant exceptions” – the other factors seem more readily verifiable as is the much vilified brain-drain syndrome which describes the efflux of “senior teaching and research staff of academic departments” from Africa to mainly European and North and South American destinations in the proverbial pull of “greener pastures”. The consequences on the continent are not limited to the teaching of African literature but cut across virtually all the high-skill domains and professions of medicine, nursing, pharmacy, engineering, agriculture, accounting, management, etc., as the continent is “circumstantially” baulked of harvest on investment in the well-trained and highly skilled human resource that it had developed for its own use and growth. Ironically, those European and American skilled human resource destinations that are beneficiaries of this pattern of migration are the least economically and intellectually disadvantaged on the face of the earth; and the providentially induced high-skilled population movement is a historic demonstration of the proverbial pointlessness of “carrying coals to Newcastle” which superfluity is gleefully celebrated. It should seem logical and not surprising that the affected disciplines in those European and American capitals should

do so much the better than their counterparts in Africa even without the primordial advantage of a historic Renaissance head-start in science and technology.

The resultant dearth of intellectual mentors and role models in many parts of Africa has led to a strange culture of routine (and official) disdain for knowledge; a general disrespect for knowledge has grown in direct proportions to a related malaise that presents as overvaluation of paper qualifications. The rupture of academic tradition on which academic culture thrives – whereby continuity allows younger academics patiently and with infectious curiosity and rigour to cut their teeth and mature respectably at the feet/desk of older and certainly more experienced academics and veterans in the ivory tower – owing to the mass off-shore departures, only stultifies the said tradition to a point that many an academic campus is only so in name and not a university in reality despite the sometimes grandiose architectural design and concrete and metallic structure on ground. The saving grace in the current bewildering tide and mushrooming of state and private universities all over the continent for political and commercial reasons remains mostly the Church mission university – for example, Redeemer's University (RUN) Ede, and Covenant University, Ota, in Nigeria – which is quick to install on its campus the infrastructure and modern facilities that conduce to dignified and effective dissemination, hence acquisition, of knowledge and skills in an Internet Age in a manner similar to the pattern set down by older private universities in the United States of America the likes of Harvard University that are associated with an academic culture of excellence.

The scenario involving mission-owned private universities should be unsurprising because historically the Church has been favourable and instrumental to the preservation, development and spread of knowledge – it is probably the reason some ninety per cent of world literature (if there be such a commodity) alludes in one way or another to the contents of the Holy Bible (an all-time best-seller and most discussed/criticised book/document in the history of the human race). (Also, the Church's respect for knowledge is scriptural: Hosea 4:6 reads: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" and Proverbs 4:4 says: "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom, and in all your getting get understanding"). The surprise should be that the theory and criticism of African literature gloats and appears to overlook this development as anomalous and contradictory: that the study of African literature seems in the main more viable outside rather than within the continent of its

naming. But as William Shakespeare puts it, what's in a name?

Discursive Violence

In his experimental novel of ideas (and mainly Barthesian scriptible text) *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo*, Ali A. Mazrui experiments aesthetically with fictional form involving a synchronicity of sequences in time that allows past, present and future to play out simultaneously while exploring the ethical implications of an internecine war. At the end of narrative discourse the ethical question hangs unresolved in the lisible text and morphs in the scriptible in parallax relations to the reading consciousness. War literature continues to dialogue with visceral violence and to enlarge in output: to the growing list of prose literature examining the 1967-1970 Nigerian civil war is *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie a dramatic novel that has been filmed in a lengthening line of films concerned with the said civil war experience such as *The Dogs of War,* a film based on a fictional book largely inspired by Biafra written by Fredrick Forsyth. The idea of war shapes up in literature donning different forms of violence depending on the preferred narrative intention and strategy of the author. Alex la Guma's *The Stone Country* an artful exploration of the potential of ideology to confront and precipitate a dissolution of apartheid rule in South Africa is handled engagingly in a manner that recalls George Orwell's narrative strategy in the animal fable classic with the title *Animal Farm* and puts the novel beyond the charge of propagandist writing the kind that writer and critic Lewis Nkosi lamented as generally characterising the protest literature emanating from pre-1994 South Africa.

A more self-conscious fusion of art with socialist ideology is present in some African writing, in the works by writers the likes of Festus Iyayi in the novels *Violence* and *Heroes,* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o in such titles as *A Grain of Wheat*, *Petals of Blood*, and *Wizard of the Crow,* and playwright Ebrahim N. Hussein in *Kinjeketile,* in East and Central African writing; and in West Africa Sembene Ousmane in the novel *God's Bits of Wood.* While the historical experiences of anti-colonial struggles named the Mau Mau and the Maji Maji uprisings and paradigmatic railway workers' strike action engendered some of these fictional accounts, and others such as the famous 1929 women action referred to in history books as the Aba Riots, the face of violence keeps changing from seemingly noble to ignoble and downright contemptible and objectionable causes. As Soyinka observes in "A voice that would not be silenced" a Foreword to *The Last Summer of Reason* by Tahar Djaout concerning totally irrational unprovoked terror against unarmed defenceless humanity:

The voice from the grave urges itself on our hearing. For let no one be

in any doubt – the life-and-death discourse of the twenty-first century is unambiguously the discourse of fanaticism and intolerance. We can subsume this however we will under other concerns – economy, globalization, hegemonism, the arms race, AIDS, even environmental challenges; some of these rightly dominate the attention of the world. Ultimately, however, we come face to face with one overweening actuality: the proliferation of a mind-set that feeds on a compulsion to destroy other beings who do not share, not even the same beliefs but specific subcategories of such beliefs. It is a mind-set that destroys the creative or adventurous of any community. It continues to prove efficient at fuelling devastating conflicts all over the world, often in places that are remote from the accustomed circuits of global attention (Olaniyan & Quayson, 2007, p. 141).

Apart from the ubiquitous mindless terrorism of contemporary times stemming from bigotry of one kind or another, state violence in a pervasive reign of impunity in postcolonial Africa sometimes takes the form of a hounding of creative writers and social critics who publicly advocate good governance that is marked by probity and accountability in public places, and justice and fair-play by governments, to the generality of the people as espoused in Soyinka's prison memoirs with the title *The Man Died* and the poetry in *A Shuttle in the Crypt.* The conflictual relationship between state and writer is symptomatic and comparable to that between predator and prey illustrated in the power game between the cat and the mouse in La Guma's *The Stone Country,* the brutal inhumanity and harshness of which setting is the subject of solitary contemplation by the lyric speaker in the poem "The sun on this rubble" by South African poet Dennis Brutus:

Under jackboots our bones and spirits crunch

forced into sweat-tear-sodden slush

now glow-lipped by this sudden touch:

sun-stripped perhaps, our bones may later sin

or spell out some malignant nemesis

Sharpevilled to spearpoints for revenging (Senanu & Vincent, 1988, p. 118)

As a person, Brutus the poet and freedom writer was hounded in and out of prison, goaded into politically motivated banishment, was shot – but not fatally – by apartheid state police at a point before he went on exile from apartheid South Africa.

Hounded by a post-colonial civilian regime and recounting an aspect of prison experience, Jack Mapanje in *Gathering Seaweed: African Prison Writing* is described as "a Malawian poet, linguist and human rights activist; formerly head of the Department of English, University of Malawi at Chancellor College, he was imprisoned for about three and a half years by dictator Hastings Banda of Malawi, essentially for his radical poetry" (blurb) weaves wavy sporting gear for mind (and body) in ropy enjambement, defiant run-on lyrical lines, while confined, in the poem "Skipping without rope":

Your silly rules, skip your filthy walls

Your weevil pigeon peas, skip your

Scorpions, skip your Excellency Life

Glory; I do, you don't, I can, you can't,

I will, you won't, I see, you don't, I

Sweat, you don't, I will, will wipe my

Gluey brow then wipe you at a stroke

I will, will wipe your horrid, stinking (Mapanje, 2002, pp. 185-186)

Power wielders and tyrants have come in both genders in different parts of the world, starting out as mostly absolute monarchs and influential shamans; but, as is common knowledge, a headcount of aristocratic and political despots tips the historical scales of numbers in favour of men and patriarchy. The centuries' old façade of patriarchy and gender-based male orchestrated cultural violence comes under feministic pressure that seeks to reverse masculinist/androcentric ideology in literature and the study based on it; hence, the advent of the resisting reader who sets out on a deliberate revisionary rereading of literature, and the attraction of gynocriticism to add nuanced logic to discourse which presents as metalanguage that had been dominated by masculine accent and authority. At the level of creativity, gender-based domestic, sometimes aggravated, physical, emotional and psychological violence is turned on its head to give the (Barthesian) lisible text a resolution that attempts to rehabilitate in realist prose fiction Philip Sidney's much battered idea of poetic justice in an ethical fictional justification of parricide, as illustrated by Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, but is also in furtherance of a creative exploration and unravelling of the workings of the Oedipal in literature.

Language has no doubt been central to the processes of assignation of power and this point is amply illustrated in literature and the study based on literature: the theory and criticism of literature. Obviously no thanks to Michel Foucault and his ilk, the discursive power play has turned up with a despot known variously as “obfuscation”, “obscurantism”, “obscurity”, or difficulty of diction, an enemy considered benign in certain genres of literary production and by certain phases of literary theory and criticism and in certain other quarters regarded as malignant and ferocious. Frank Kermode writing under the title “The Uses of Error” remarks:

It would doubtless be convenient if words could only be used to mean one thing at a time; there would be fewer misunderstandings. But there would be much less poetry; and the whole field of human experience that exists only because language exists, with all its treacheries and ambiguities and those magical powers we honour when we use euphemisms, would dwindle to almost nothing (Kermode, 1991, p. 428).

The Ijala chants of Yoruba praise poetry like the mantic poetry known as Ifa in the same community thrives on nothing if not on mysticism and obscurantism and its lyricism is retained in some measure in its passage through the aggravating conduit pipe and semantic bottle-neck of conversion from one language to another and, frequently, from one medium to another, as scholars of African folklore have observed. Obscurantism in literature is not necessarily lost in translation and readerly obtuseness is predictably a relative condition, as literary history has shown in depositions going back at least twenty-five centuries since the theorists and thinkers of antiquity Plato and Aristotle. As Roman Jakobson’s oft-quoted remark puts it, poetic language is “organised violence committed on ordinary speech”; the advanced violence on ordinary speech that yields cryptic poetry appears to be more a factor of the exigency of esoteric usage and ritual practice in the African cultural space(s).

The elitist genesis of the formal study of literature has conferred on literary theory and criticism some kind of esotericism which feminism has stridently interrogated in recent times in line with the general assumption that discourse is crucial in the construction of power. This is all in keeping with the self-reflexive self-subversive character of the multi-fangled poststructuralist ferment in the study of literature. Feminist outing in African writing and the study of it is predictably multi-angled in position and thrust. Writing under the title “Stiwanism: feminism in an African context” Molara Ogundipe-Leslie offers an interesting

summation:

> "Stiwa" is my acronym for *Social Transformation Including Women in Africa*. This new term describes my agenda for women in Africa without having to answer charges of imitativeness or having to constantly define our agenda on the African continent in relation to other feminisms, in particular, white Euro-American feminisms which are unfortunately under siege by everyone. This new term "STIWA" allows me to discuss the needs of African women today in the tradition of the spaces and strategies provided in our indigenous cultures for the social being of women. My thesis has always been that indigenous feminisms also existed in Africa and we are busy researching them and bringing them to the fore now (Olaniyan & Quayson, 2007, p. 550).

Feminist discourse is a tributary to the metalanguage that has slipped out of the ivory tower and entered into the public space where it has encountered some opposition to its discursive modus operandi which in recent times has been largely influenced by French philosophers and thinkers the likes of Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, and their North American poststructuralist admirers and practitioners of theory of the variety named deconstruction the likes of Paul de Man, Barbara Johnson, J. Hillis Miller. The culprit is theory which is deemed a cognomen (and synonym) for obfuscation or obscurity in discourse of the study of literature, where "theory" is, according to scholars, not about general principles and laws of literature commonly referred to as literary theory, and accumulating from Aristotelian times up to now and which traditionally found application in practical criticism, but is more of "thinking about thinking" as Jonathan Culler puts it in *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. On this conceptual turn-about, Barbara Christian in "A race for theory" says:

> The New Philosophers, eager to understand a world that is today fast escaping their political control, have redefined literature so that the distinctions implied by that term, that is, the distinctions between everything written and those things written to evoke feeling as well as to express thought, have been blurred. They have changed literary critical language to suit their own purposes as philosophers, and they have re-invented the meaning of theory (Kemp & Squires, 1997, p. 70).

The poststructuralist discursive (and philosophical) "debacle" in question has its roots in early twentieth century Saussurean linguistics which allows a separation of a primordial plane of sound from that of reality operating in systemic differential and oppositional relations and binaries of signifier/signified, synchronic/diachronic, etc. Since that time and no

less in the twenty-first century, the development has held out important implications for studies in many disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences, in particular the study of language and literature. As metalanguage, it offers up discursive semiological possibilities that are bewildering and at the same time exciting because of the subjectivities precipitated by its seductive potential for opacity and variability. Elaine Showalter asks “Where do we go from here?” (Kemp & Squires, 1997, p. 68).

In a review of the situation involving “bad writing”, “obscurity” and “difficulty” in their introduction to the book *Just Being Difficult? Academic Writing in the Public Arena,* Jonathan Culler and Kevin Lamb reflect on the relativity of these signifiers and the overt and covert/subtle connections to the exercise of power. As appears widely acknowledged in academia and the public arena into which it has slipped, poststructuralist discourse is fraught; but as the authors note of the above observation, the malaise of obscurity in language use is not peculiar to literary study (and literature on which the study is based) but is present in other disciplines as well such as philosophy (from which the present literary style of self-conscious opacity is an import) and science and social science where obscurity of discourse is traditionally celebrated, even rewarded.

But to what extent is a given part of literary/cultural discourse immune to the contagion of obfuscation?

Signifying Floaters

The signifier “Africa” is a floater that is elastic in signification and bears no fixed connection to any one specific signified in the theory and criticism of cultural production that the theory and criticism purports to have as subject/object. As a symbol, it swings widely on a capricious and variable axis of denotation and connotation in futile attempts at continua alignment. Like fashion in popular culture, “Africa” in discourse shifts in relation to an amorphous signified that is all-inclusive in cover and extent starting out with a continental geographical locus and unfurling intercontinentally; historically, this global stretch is the farthest it has gone and can go and is probably the justification for the expansive constituency of its most notable clientele: the body of literati named African Literature Association (ALA) with headquarters located in North America.

Like a weathervane, its canvas of perspective and coverage shrinks in (futile) attempts at matching the edges of a quivering signifier and an

unstable culturo-geographic landmass so named as the source of the literary/cultural production of its interest and concern. Cyclically, further shrinkage is forced that shears off part of the northern hemisphere of the geography; and signifier becomes indicative of sub-Saharan Africa in which part of a part of the southern hemisphere named South Africa was routinely excised for ideological reasons of apartheid. For prolonged spells of time, and conceptually, the landmass had variably presented culturally and racially as a monolith and as a polyglot.

The signified/concept fissures before the dancing signifier in a surreal play of presence and absence in which the language is missing that specifically informs the writing that wears the signifier as a label out of a huge basket of tongues. The most culturally ethnically linguistically diverse continent cannot find the language that names “African” literature. But historically, changeably, and interchangeably, the signifier adorns with qualifiers such as “Anglophone”, “Francophone”, “Lusophone”, in a play and replay of modifications of the conceptually splintered continental monolith in which indigenous tongues continue circumstantially in creative slumber. In a bizarre ontological twist, the comparatively silent indigenous languages seem rapidly to be losing younger patrons faster than the languages of colonialism are doing: and not much creativity is taking place in those domains in part because of a disappearing reading culture – a general malaise that is rather more severe in geographic Africa than elsewhere and is, within the conceptually riven signified, severer at the indigenous language level than at the level of global English especially.

The malleable signifier strains at inclusion on the basis of orality and literacy: but folklore has been a veritable treasure trove of inventive facility and performance for oral audiences and creative writers who have adopted materials from preliterate lore for incorporation into poetry, drama and prose literature as in the example of the adoption of the Abiku trope from the Yoruba metaphysic in the dramatic monologue of that title by Soyinka and dramatic lyric of the title by J. P. Clark-Bekeredemo and its magic realist expansion in the award-winning novel *The Famished Road* by Ben Okri. At the indigenous language level the writers have adopted copiously from the oral lore in a thinning line of indigenous language writers, as already noted, from D.O. Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola (who peculiarly bestrides the linguistic dome separating Yoruba and English) and Adebayo Faleti and Akinwunmi Ishola.

The aesthetics of performance in dramatic literature is significantly underwritten by linguistic and lyrical materials especially from folklore worked into the invention in a long line of indigenous language dramatists that includes Hubert Ogunde who in his lifetime was, as is well studied, easily the most commercially successful dramatist and

film-maker in the south west of Nigeria, experimentalist Duro Ladipo; and Anglophone playwrights: laureate Wole Soyinka whose play *Death and the King's Horseman* is a lyrical classic; irrepressible Ola Rotimi; the prolific Femi Osofisan whose impressive oeuvre includes aesthetically engaging *The Chattering and the Song, Morountodun.* The foregoing examples are only a very few from the complex wide and variable dynamics of denotation and connotation in the chronology, geography and imaginary of the aesthetics of inclusion and exclusion suggested by the signifier "Africa/African" in the cultural experience of the peoples to whom the cultural production is ascribed that is so named.

The chimeric aesthetic ambivalence over identities and definitions contemplates an ambiguous past in a cyclical embroilment that involves an unclear present and an uncertain future. For example, creative dialogue with a version of the past held out by writers the likes of Joseph Conrad in the controversial novelette *Heart of Darkness* and Joyce Cary in the novel *Mister Johnson* triggered variant historicity in the contents of Achebe's classic *Things Fall Apart*. Through divergent optics the subject and signified that the signifier "Africa" stands shakily to is discernible in Aphra Behn's illustration of the variable trope (and Barthesian signified turned signifier) of a black protagonist in Oroonoko that bears a resemblance to Shakespeare's Othello in the tragic drama of the title; is perceived in the aforementioned prose works by Haggard; in Alan Paton's *Too Late the Phalarope* ; in *Disgrace* by J.M. Coetzee; in *Burger's Daughter* by Nadine Gordimer; in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* by Soyinka, and so on and so forth; and what these titles have in common are both the signifier/subject/object and the language of creative expression. The link between them is "Africa" and discourse is English though it is in one form or another out of a linguistic basket that language scholars have labelled Englishes. This creative scenario replicates Francophonically and Lusophonically.

The aesthetics of "African" writing turns about in the face of a post-1994 political and ideological development whose ontology makes the deduction inescapable that the subject/object/signified configures anew as not monolithic as was previously supposed out of convenience, nonchalance or wilful ignorance, but that rather it is multiracial multicultural multilingual. V. Y. Mudimbe observes as follows in "African Literature: Myth or Reality?" on the amorphous character of the study of African literature:

> We have learned how to live with these contradictory assumptions. In fact, they are norms and systems since they are simultaneously the paradoxical references of our professional activities and the events which make thinkable our literary praxes. Moreover, depending on our state of mind, these norms allow us all the

> liberties we wish. From them we can today decide that Chinua Achebe's and E. Mphahlele's works are internal parts of English literature; Senghor's, Rabemananjara's or Camara Laye's of the French. And tomorrow with the same conviction we could demonstrate exactly the contrary and celebrate our authors as mirrors of African authenticity. (Olaniyan & Quayson, 2007, p. 63)

Still, the unstable ways of the theory and criticism of African writing is consistent with the postmodernist ferment that argues an essential Saussurean systemic disconnect between signifier/signified with a potential for collateral convergences and divergences, synchronies and dichotomies, pluralities and instabilities, which validate simplicities and obscurantisms and all varieties of discourse regardless of time and space of origin. As is widely recognised, the age of theory unleashed itself on the cultural/literary terrain in the twentieth century with immense potential for anarchy, and the currents and crosscurrents of continuities, discontinuities, discursive violence, guarantee immunity to no particular kind of discourse.

Conclusion

The foregoing is a speculation on pluralisms and instabilities as they present in the study based on the writing labelled "African" in attempt to illustrate convergences and divergences of (shifting) positions adopted by a few varieties of discourse that are characterised by a fairly elastic concept of violence which starts out on a formalist note that literary language is a product of violence brought on ordinary speech while also acknowledging the ontological presence of less hapless forms such as extremist irrational violence the fatal type that erupts from an enthronement of dogma which violates the fundamental notion that humanity is in the image of God and having an inalienable facility to choose what to believe and what not to believe and is designed to be swayed one way or another through unforced reasoned persuasion.

In literature, the possibilities of a poetics are enriched, ironically, by the not-so-perverse disconnection canvassed by modern linguistics such as that between signifier and signified and notable among other binaries in systemic differential opposition. The motley lot of simplicities and obscurities in academic discourse in the humanities, especially in literature and the study based on it and the subject of observation and commentary whether in academe or in the public domain all receive validation by the praxes of their production and the commonality of their interlinked histories and languages at creative and critical levels of discourse, a component of violence notwithstanding.

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