



Thinking Local and Globalising Cultural Ideology towards Decolonising Literary Theories

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Abstract

This paper examines what constitutes indigenous ideas, thoughts, values and ethics that drive a peoples' consciousness, propel dynamic actions and developments, and worldview thus culminating in a globalized cultural ideology. Sequel to this, it forms the bases for evaluation of their perspectives, in music, literature and the humanities. Attempts at early forms of decolonization by experts are reviewed in philosophy, sociology and literature towards decolonization and having an African identity. Among the African literary writers whose works are established on indigenous thoughts include; Chinua Achebe, Ayi Kwei Armah, Sefi Attah (novelists); Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, Kobina Sekyi (playwrights); and poets such as Christopher Okigbo and Niyi Osundare among others. African indigenous ideologies such as Obafemi Awolowo's Mental Magnitude, Leopard Cedar Senghor's communism, ajogbe and ajobi and Omoluabi among the Yoruba, Julius Nyerere's Ujamaa among others were examined. The paper concludes that more of our cultural values, ethics and beliefs should be the bases of our postulations in the humanities in order to take Africa from all vestiges of colonization.

Keywords: Local, Globalising, Ideology, Decolonisation and Literary Theory.

Introduction

One pertinent issue that bothers scholars who have to engage in writing critical essays in literature, either African Literature or Literature in English is, "What is the theoretical framework to be used?" This question is what students and lecturers at any given presentations also ask in order to



evaluate if the presenter is “on course” or “off course.” In other words, there is always a deliberate thinking far away to western ideologies in order to apply literary theories, sometimes referred to as “modern” such as Communism, Marxism, Feminism, and Historicism among others. There is usually no attempt to look inward into cultural ethos, indigenous philosophies and proverbs in many indigenous African countries that propel actions and influence conducts, hence, plot in the narratives and the essence of the publications of literary texts that are theorized ideologically in the western modes. Since most modern literary theories evolved from the exegesis of their epochs, and influence writings, there is the need for African writers to shift from aligning and evaluating their works with foreign ideologies. An example of the paradigm shift is Womanism, while others follow with natural philosophies and ideologies. A good example of African writers who utilize the African ideological concepts are Chinua Achebe, Ayi Kwei Armah, and Sefi Attah. The aforementioned are novelists, while playwrights include: Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, Kobina Sekyi. Poets include: Christopher Okigbo and Niyi Osundare. For instance, Sefi Attah in her *Everything Good will Come* as a title which emanates from a Yoruba context of “*a da fun mi*” which in the action of the character is a “return to sender” or talking back mode. Ilesanmi (2004), laments the neglect of indigenous Yoruba criticism in foreign yardsticks. According to him,

If Yoruba orature and literature are born in a culture, they cannot but grow and develop more conductively in the cultural environment. [...] But students of literature and orature have often looked outside the culture that gave birth to their disciplines to find criteria for literary criticism (23)

This paper equally considers earlier attempts by various scholars towards decolonizing literary theories and evolving theories from indigenous African socio-cultural, religious, economic, and political contexts. These scholars therefore make us as Africans to pride ourselves in what belongs to us as knowledge that guides our valour academically and writing prowess. This is what this paper tries to examine and posit.

By the word local, it is meant that the thoughts and ideas about human relations, and/ or socializing evolve from the community in which a group of people live. In this wise, these thoughts and ideas are engrained into the socio- cultural, religious, economic and political systems overtime. The projections of such thoughts through externalisations and diplomatic relations with the external world



(another community), thus becomes an ideology, a worldview. In elucidating further, and to avoid ambiguity, this paper has in mind the African settings as its contexts for myriad analyses towards decolonisation. Once an idea or thought has crystalized overtime, one can say that it forms the basis of ideological perspective through whose lence the other ideas or similar ideas that come in contact with it, are measured or evaluated for value judgements. As an illustration, Communism as practiced in former Soviet Union during the mid-1970s and 1980s is not the same as community life style in Africa. According to Peet and Hartwick (2009),

The Soviet Union did not allow democratic decision making. Party congresses became formalistic exercises; the (relatively small) communist party served as an elite, distant and privileged minority government; and the people were often suppressed, at times ruthlessly. The Soviet Union was an elite society that used "communism" to control the masses (188).

Contrastively, the African theory of community living adopts and sustains inclusiveness. According to Makinde (2002), many African writers, especially in the field of social and political philosophy, have tried to fashion a system of social and political organization based on African traditional values. Notable among them are Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Leopold Senghor of Senegal, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Obafemi Awolowo of Nigeria. Behind the theory of African Social Organization, there is a system of values that calls for social justice, community life, familyhood and the spirit of brotherhood – all of which are said to be antithetical to the spirit of capitalism and its social values, some of which are greed, acquisitive tendency, economic and social inequality, dehumanization and many others. However, it is not at all clear what African leaders advocate as the supreme value of human existence, nor is it well stated how a return to traditional institutions and social behaviours would change social and political situations on the continent of Africa, especially in the 20th century technological age.

Makinde (2002, p. 119), while reiterating Awolowo's views opines as follows, in an obvious disagreement with Nyerere and Leopold Senghor, Awolowo suggests that an African social and political organization cannot be developed by a return to traditional values. Since the kind of social and political values being advocated for Africans depend on an African traditional way of life which is essentially communal living based on a traditional spirit of sharing, the



social and political system implied is obviously communism or socialism, otherwise known as African Socialism. In his book, *The People's Republic*, Awolowo takes a radical departure from his colleagues by suggesting that the theory of social and political organization called socialism cannot be based on the African traditional value system. Like Nkrumah, Awolowo does not believe that an African Socialism, or indeed any socialism whatever, could be based on past traditions. But unlike Nkrumah, Nyerere, and Senghor, he goes further to maintain that socialism cannot be said to have its roots in any region of the world. For Awolowo, Socialism is simply a normative science. He wrote:

Socialism...as it is generally agreed by all socialists, is a *normative science*. Before any theory at all can answer to the name of science, it must be of universal application. If any principle is purely and strictly peculiar to a given institution, region, or state, it may be of a custom, practice, or even a theory, but it certainly cannot lay claim to the status of science. Just as there can be no African Ethics qua Ethics as a science, or African Logic, so there can be no African Socialism. (Awolowo, 1968, p. 208)

Moreover, in his search for a supreme value of human existence in social and political organization, Awolowo developed a theory known as 'Mental Magnitude.' The doctrine of mental magnitude is essentially Platonic with Stoic and Cartesian flavours. It states a tripartite division of man with physical, psychical and divine attributes. It makes a case for a conscious effort to reach that "state" and "stage" wherein all the three "levels" of attributes may be jointly employed by homosapiens to master fate and destiny, and thereby live a happy, healthy, prosperous and full life – a triumphant life (Omaboriowo, 1982, p. 46). Mental Magnitude is a philosophical doctrine which derives from a theory of mind and body, with the assertion that the mental is superior to the physical element of a person, and should take control over the emotions, desires, and actions of man.

Awolowo believes that socialism, like democracy, is an attitude of the mind, irrespective of whether we talk of the European mind or an African mind. This is to say that it is a social attitude, imposed, as it were, by the rational mind in general, at all times and everywhere. In *The Problems of Africa* (1977), he sees human beings as the instrument of social, political, economic and scientific changes. "Man is the sole



creative and purposive dynamic in nature: everything else by comparisons is in a state of inertia" (Awolowo, 1977, p. 53).

The theme of Decolonising the Humanities in the African Academy is laudable. Focusing on our identity as Africans, brings out in us rejuvenation of who we are and who we should be in the face of the barrage of external or global influences on all fronts. The task of decolonization cannot be carried out in a vacuum according to Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike (1985, p. 5). Also, they submit that, it requires an atmosphere of *active nationalist consciousness*. In addition, it must be conducted within the guiding parameters set by those intellectuals who have upheld black consciousness through the centuries (5).

What then is black consciousness? Angmor (1987), opines that consciousness is an attribute of the mind, since mind is the source of awareness. Therefore, black consciousness in this context refers to the mind of the black man (14). In 1981, there was an International Conference titled "International Conference on African Philosophy" which held at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria 15-19 February, 1985, (with assistance from UNESCO). In his introductory remark to the publication that came out of the conference, P.O. Bodurin opines that,

African intellectuals and politicians have spent a great part of their energies for most of the twentieth century on the struggle against colonialism in all its ramifications. Most of Africa is now free from the nomination of foreign colonial powers. As one country after another gained political independence "issues related to the ideological options of African leader and the effects of their policies on African populations began to exert an immediated pressure upon African minds." We find works like Nkrumah's *Consciencism*, Senghor's *African Socialism* and Nyerere's *Ujamaa* (vii).

It is worthy of note that the words in quote are Abiola Irele's (1982) as he P.O. Bodurin finds them relevant.

In Africa, a call for relevance is a call for Africanness (vii), Bodurin emphasizes. Before going further in this paper, perhaps one should ask, is the paper on philosophy or literary theories? Just as the philosophers tried at their conference to reflect on human issues, other scholars and intellectuals also brood on their existence not only for



themselves, but with others. They tried to wonder or brainstorm on what ought to be not only for the present, but for the future. And according to Omoregbe (1985), both Plato and Aristotle tell us that this “wonder” is the beginning of philosophy. We therefore as scholars are philosophers who make attempts at solving issues not just in our various fields of study, but in their relations to humanity. Furthermore, what is literature, which is the field this paper’s discourse if it is not writings in the socio-cultural, religious, economic and political contexts of the people. The narrative events in all the genres of literature have not occurred in vacuum. They largely constitute more of the experience of the writers, rather than being fictional. Kolawole (2005, p. 6), affirms that the word, Aesthetics was a branch of philosophy before it became adopted in literary criticism.

Attempts towards Decolonising Theories

Before considering attempts towards decolonizing theories, what is the nature of decolonizing? Omoregbe (1985), submits that

The fact that the philosophical reflections of African thinkers in the past were not preserved or transmitted by writing accounts for the fact that these philosophers remain unknown to us. But this does not mean that they do not exist, for we have fragments of their philosophical reflections and their views preserved and transmitted to us through channels other than writing such as mythologies, formulas of wise – sayings, traditional proverbs, stories and especially religion. [...] The fragments of philosophical reflections, ideas and world-views transmitted to us through the formulas of wise says, through proverbs, stories, socio-political organizations, mythology, through religious doctrines and practices did not originate from a vacuum. They are evidence of deep philosophical reflections by *some gifted individual thinkers* who were African philosophers of the past, the African counterparts of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, etc (6-7).

Thus, the community or communal thoughts evolve from the society and it is applied into all fields of human endeavour as guiding principles, and laws and they become ideologies. Dasyva (2016), describes the evolution of communal thoughts becoming ideologies as “Glocalization” in his article “Glocalization of Yoruba Omoluwabi Ideology.”



Quoting Dasyuva,

... the *Omoluwabi* concept is guided by revisionist/historicist assumptions since one is dealing with an all-encompassing philosophical hermeneutic that both defines and engages the sociology of life and living, the prevalent patterned attitude, and values in the indigenous Yoruba society. "Glocalization," in this context of the local relevance of *Omoluwabi* and the possibility of its attaining a higher pedestal of global idealogical competitiveness (65).

Omoluwabi is thus explained as the humane qualities possessed by humans. S/he is devoid of bestial instincts that could cause him/her harm, cause others (family) harm and would not lead to his or her death. This then presupposes that right from childhood to adulthood, qualities such as morals, ethics, would have been imbued into the life of an individual that would make him or her live respectfully amidst others globally. This is akin to Obefemi Awolowo's mental magnitude Philosophy.

In addition, Chinweizuet al. (1985) aver they set for themselves the limited task of probing the ways and means whereby Western imperialism has maintained its hegemony over African literature, and the effect of that hegemony upon the literary arts of contemporary Africa (x). And in doing this, they have adopted the *Bolekaja* criticism mode.

What is *Bolekaja*? It is a term which describes two individuals engaged in fisticuff: - a term in Western Nigeria (among the Yoruba) applied to passenger lorries ("mammy wagon") from the outrageous behaviour of their touts. Beyond the image of physical fight created through the *Bolekaja*, is the ideology of fighting back. Either fighting back or talking back through literary writings as protest literatures distinctively distinguishes African literature from European literature bearing in mind, the historical antecedents of the Western world in Africa, most importantly slavery and colonialism, and by this, establishing African literature as a cannon.

Furthermore, Anthony Appiah (1985), submits that

The relation of the African writer to his past is a web of delicate ambiguities. If he has learnt not to despise it or try to ignore it – and there are many witnesses to



the difficulty of this decolonization of the mind – he has still to learn how to assimilate and transcend it. He has grown up in a family for which the past, if not the present, is at least not far below the surface. *His past, and his people's myths of the past – are not things he can ignore* (252). (Emphasis mine)

The fact that the past, or the background of any writer influences his or her thoughts is a veritable tool and muse for writing. It can then be inferred that Wole Soyinka in his play, *Death and the King's Horseman* did not play down on myth and the world view of the Yoruba people in the face of stiff opposition as presented by The Pilkings. In order to eschew misinterpretation and misrepresentation of his play, *Death and the King's Horsemen* (1975), Wole Soyinka cautions in the "Author's Note," (Eyeh, 2010, p. 359),

The bane of themes of this genre (that is, death/myth- emphasis mine) is that they are no sooner employed creatively than they acquire the facile tag of 'clash of cultures,' a prejudicial label which, quite apart from its frequent equality in every given situation of the alien culture and its indigenous, on the soil of the latter ... The Colonial in incident, a catalytic incident merely. The confrontation in the play is largely metaphysical, contained in the human vehicle which is Elesin and the universe of the Yoruba mind- the world of the living, the dead and the unborn, and the numinous passage which links all (Soyinka, 1975, p. 6-7).

Kobina Sekiyi in his play, *The Blinkards* while lampooning the western ways of life at the detriment of the African, speaks through the character of Mr Onyimidzi, a lawyer that, to be educated to civilization is unfortunate; to be educated to the natural way of living is a blessing (59). Ayo Langley in his introduction to *The Blinkards* writes thus:

Sekyi and a few like minded contemporaries in West Africa constantly returned to this theme of alienated African in their attempts to warn against the dangers of excessive Europeanization (Sekyi, 1974, p. 13)

At this juncture, mention must also be made of Ola Rotimi who adapted Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, a Greek play into the Yoruba context and titled it as *The gods are not to blame*. Contextualising the play brings out the essence of the Yoruba belief in Ifa divination and

the role of the gods, thereby illuminating the Yoruba pantheon of gods that shape actions of the characters and plot of the play.

Besides, a peep into indigenous background mores and ethos brings to mind the concept, a social concept of human relations by blood and neighbourliness *Ajobi* and *Ajogbe* respectively by Akinsola Akinwowo. Professor Akinsola Akinwowo, a sociologist in his Inaugural Lecture titled, "*Ajobi* and *Ajogbe*: variations on the theme of sociation" makes a distinction initially between *Ajobi*, a social concept of humans being blood related, that is consanguinity, and *Ajogbe*, that is, relationship based on co-residenship. In Akiwowo's words,

The derivative concept *alajobi* may be defined as that which sustains all kinds of lineal and collateral relationships; while the derivative concept *alajogbe*, as that which sustains persons or individualized groups who are living together, under one roof or a contiguous shelter in a locale (18).

However, Akiwowo stresses that the primordial forms of *asuwada eniyan*, that is human society, *Ajobi* and *Ajogbe*. *Ajobi* refers to members of the same family or a group of extended family members, the *alajogbe* when in close contact and relations, sometimes surpass blood relations. In other words, an *alajogbe* can transform into an *alajobi*. In the Bible, Jesus stresses the good neighbourliness when he illustrates with someone who knocks on the neighbour's door at midnight asking for bread and will he not oblige him? (Luke 11:5-13). It behooves neighbours to come to the rescue of their fellow neighbours irrespective of ethnicity, gender, race and religion in the period of need. The act evokes the exhibition of human kindness, love which is a universal concept.

Similarly, these thoughts are emphasized by Julius Nyerere in his African brotherhood concept, although political. Individuals, according to Julius Nyerere (1971, p. 9), in a traditional African society are rich or poor according to whether the society is rich or poor. Although one may want to call this African traditional political value communism or communalism, Nyerere calls, it socialism. The tendency, of course, is to avoid any association, with the Marxist communist doctrine. But the word "socialism" is also a foreign word, and may therefore have different meanings to different linguistic groups in Africa. Thus, while socialism could mean, in the African context, communal life such as living together in the spirit of love and brotherhood, it could also mean (Makinde, 2002, p. 14), *Ujamaa*, "Family hood" or "community spirit," as Nyerere puts it (Nyerere, 1971,



p. 12). Leopold Senghor calls it "community society" founded "on the general activity of the group." (Senghor, 1964, p. 94).

While revisiting the concept of African Brotherhood by Nyerere, Erumevba avers as follows:

The thing to note is that individuals may yet be knit together by a feeling of fraternity, deriving from their common concern for issues affecting their collective, even when blood relationship does not exist among them (198).

The perspectives of both Akiwowo, Nyerere, Senghor and Jesus Christ to human relations along social, and political lines respectively evolve as a result of endogenous factors (African) on one hand, and perspective of the Jews through Jesus Christ on another (religious) and not exogenous, that is, from the Western perspectives.

In the contributions of Mary Ebun Modupe Kolawole to African research in the Humanities, she says, it will need to transcend correcting the imbalance but needs to embrace diversities of theories and approaches (2014, p. 20). Being an advocate of Womanism, she equally postulates the Yoruba proverb that says "*Igi kan o da igbo se* – "A tree cannot make a forest." (2014, p. 191). This view is expressed as an alter-Native to Western idea of Feminism, thereby emphasizing the inclusion of women in societal development. She further opines that rather than both men and women engaging in conflicts, there is an open space wide enough for each to fly. This thought emanates from the Yoruba belief that the sky is wide enough for birds to fly without colliding. This is her open space theory of feminist inclusion. In Kolawole's own words, "I maintain that **the open space theory** is more functional in capturing the pluralism of African reality and the diversity of African cultures" (2005, p. 11).

Kolawole is not alone in postulating an African and cultural theory in her academic and gender studies. Olabisi Aina, a sociologist, also postulates a gender theory in her Inaugural Lecture, which also is the title of the lecture as '**two halves make a whole.**' The aim of this postulation and/or derivation as theory is for espousing the complementarities (rather than competitiveness) in gender relations; a world where gender interests intermesh, and indisputably integrate.

As a matter of consciousness towards decolonization of African literature, Dasyuva (1999), observes, the term "alter-Native was coined



by Funso Aiyejina who established the alternative verity of some new breed African poets (1). According to Dasyilva,

He (Funso Aiyejina) described the mode and form of their new poetry as an interface foregrounded by the traditional African philosophy, hermeneutics and poetic modes. It is this idea of "nativity" by new breed poets, and the conscious determination which endear us to the term "alter-Nativity (1).

Christopher Okigbo (1971) in his poem, "Passage" under the classification of *Heavensgate* a subsection of the book of poetry, *Labyrinths-Poems* demonstrates a return to the indigenous religious ideology from the labyrinth of the western religion of Christianity.

BEFORE YOU, mother Idoto
naked I stand;
before your watery presence,
a prodigal
leaning on an oilbean,
lost in your legend,
Under your power wait I
on barefoot,
watchman for the watchword
at Heavensgate;
out of the depths my cry:
give ear and hearken... (3)

Idoto is a village stream. The oilbean, the tortoise and the python are totems for her worship (Okigbo, 1971, p. 3). Christopher Okigbo's adoption of Idoto, the family deity, as a poetic symbolism tests on this notion of a cyclic return and renewal. (Nwakanma, 2010, p. 8). Another poet who utilizes African values in his poetry, is Niyi Osundare. As *Companion to African Literatures* puts it, "Village Voices" (one of Osundare's collection of poems) enriches bucolic tradition with local songs, myth, and panegyric verses. His intention, is not to idealise or romanticise tradition but to contrast it with the so-called modern social formation that now suppresses it (189). This he has done successfully thereby combining the craft of creativity with the search for regenerative values (Eke & Obika, 2021, p. 7).

Even when the etymology of the alter-Native has evolved from the context of poetry, its application to other narratives in literature is well suited because it buttresses newness and something away from eurocentricism.



The alter-*Native* theory in the novel by Chinua Achebe in his early two novels, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* emphasise the communal life. As observed by David Ker (2003), the protagonist of *Things Fall Apart* is not Okonkwo, but Umuofia. The same can be said of *Arrow of God* (125). According to Ker,

Both communities, to use Achebe's tense proverbs, are like the lizard; if it loses its tail it soon grows another (125) [...]

The communities of Umuofia and Umuaro tower above all other names character in the novels (126).

In *Things Fall Apart*, Umuofia emerges with its own space and time, its own ideological system and its own standards of community and to become familiar with it through its voices and to perceive it as if from within and consequently to assume a point of view internal to it (127)

David Ker has been able to foreground the community as organic and it coerces the individuals into the moral, religious, and political ethos through which they are adjudged at any point in time. In a similar vein, Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, should account for the experimentation which transfers wholeness from the individual 'person' to the communal 'personality.' (150). Going further, Ker tells us, that the novel is centred around a community is evident in the first sentence: 'We are not a people of yesterday,' and in the way the communal voice pervades the narrative (150). The novel could thus be said to be an answer to the question 'Who are we?' It pursues this answer meticulously by delineating the nature of the collective group through whose eyes the story. The method allows the collective voice to portray the psychological and moral nature of the community in passages as this (151).

'Our way, the way, is not a random path. Our way begins from coherent understanding. It is a way that aims at preserving knowledge of who we are, knowledge of the best way we have found to relate each to each, each to all, ourselves to other peoples, all to our surroundings...Our way knows no way is wholeness. Our way knows no oppression. The way destroys oppression. Our way is hospitable to guests...Our way produces before it consumes. The way produces before it consumes ... our way creates...' (Armah, 1974, p. 39).



Since its publication in 2006, by Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* have critiqued the novel in research papers culminating in journal and book publications and most notably too are research projects by undergraduates and postgraduate dissertations and theses. Furthermore, it can also be unequivocally stated that the approaches to examining and studying the novel has been from the perspective of Feminism. This can be buttressed through the heroine's (Enitan's) consciousness throughout the novel. That notwithstanding, the oversight by majority of the researchers has been the less emphasis on the socio-cultural context that produced the title of the novel.

"Everything Good Will Come" is as Chinweizu et al stated as their purpose for their book, the *Bolekaja* stuff. It is a form of talking back. But is the talking back necessary? Yes! In the Yoruba socio-cultural context, it is often believed that, "*tí ewúrẹ̀ ba boju wẹ̀ hìn, a fi èpè fún elépè.*" That is, when a goat looks back, she returns any malediction or curse spoken against her." Failure to do so is the beginning of lack of progress, "*ìbẹ̀rẹ̀ orí burúkú.*"

Enitan's reaction to the curse by the van driver indicates in the Yoruba belief that she is not a bastard. When the van driver says, "Nothing good will come to you!" she responds thus, "Tell him, *a da*. It will be good. Everything good will come to me" (326). It is agreed that there is evidence of female consciousness as Enitan talks back, although verbal, but written in a novel form, the thought evolves from the Yoruba belief. Sefi Atta did not just ape Bell Hook's *Talking Back* and its American context, she formulates hers based on the Yoruba cultural belief.

Conclusion

In conclusion, major intellectual discourses were carried out in the 80s to 20th century on Decolonisation from some of the works cited, and we are still engaged in the same discourse in the 21st century which brings to the fore the need to sustain our culture and values. Moreover, attempts at decolonisation goes from literature and socio-cultural and political terrains to philosophical thoughts. This paper is concluded using two Yoruba proverbs. (i) *tẹ̀ni ni tẹ̀ni, ta kisa ni ti a tan,* that is, what belongs to us is ours, while the rag belongs to the dung hill. (ii) "*Nani nani nani, oun a ni la un nani,*" that is, we pride ourselves in whatever we possess.

In other words, more of our cultural values, ethics and beliefs should be the bases of our postulations in the humanities.



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