



Routledge Handbook of Minority Discourses in African Literature

Edited by Tanure Ojaide and Joyce Ashuntantang

ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF MINORITY DISCOURSES IN AFRICAN LITERATURE

This handbook provides a critical overview of literature dealing with groups of people or regions that suffer marginalization within Africa.

The contributors examine a multiplicity of minority discourses expressed in African literature, including those who are culturally, socially, politically, religiously, economically, and sexually marginalized in literary and artistic creations. Chapters and sections of the book are structured to identify major areas of minority articulation of their condition and strategies deployed against the repression, persecution, oppression, suppression, domination, and tyranny of the majority or dominant group.

Bringing together diverse perspectives to give a holistic representation of the African reality, this handbook is an important read for scholars and students of comparative and postcolonial literature and African studies.

Tanure Ojaide is the Frank Porter Graham Professor of Africana Studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, USA.

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Edited by Tanure Ojaide and Joyce Ashuntantang

First published 2020
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
and by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-0-367-36834-0 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-429-35422-9 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

We dedicate this book to the memory of Pius Adesanmi who had agreed to submit a contribution to this Handbook before the tragic crash. Pius always affirmed the African humanity in all he did. And that is an everlasting truth.



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Tanure Ojaide

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PART I

Background



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1

INTRODUCTION

Tanure Ojaide and Joyce Ashuntantang

The project that resulted in *The Routledge Handbook of Minority Discourses in African Literature* started several years back as two of us discussed peculiar situations in our respective countries. Joyce is from Anglophone Cameroon and Tanure from Nigeria's Niger Delta region. Anglophone Cameroon constitutes two regions, South Southwest and Northwest, out of the republic's ten. It suffers marginalization in political representation and economic development from the Cameroonian government, which is dominated by Francophones. The Anglophone area has been so subjected to neglect by the pro-Francophone government that many on that side have called for either an autonomous region within Cameroon as existed from 1961-1972, or a separate independent nation. This situation is compounded by the fact that Anglophone Cameroon is rich in natural resources including oil and is regarded as the breadbasket of Cameroon. The Niger Delta region, geopolitically the South-South in Nigeria, produces the oil and gas whose joint revenues fund the 744 local governments, 36 states, and the Federal Capital Territory, as well as the federal government. In addition to suffering environmental degradation which imperils their health, the Niger Delta people are also helpless as the powerful federal government and multinational oil companies take away their resources to develop other parts of the country and make staggering profits, respectively. This happens as the people of the region remain among the poorest in Nigeria, if not the entire world. The current minority status of Anglophone Cameroon and the Niger Delta dates back to French and British colonial policies which have condemned them to the domination of political units (Cameroon and Nigeria) created for the profit and interest of the colonialists.

We at first thought of a project to compare and contrast the literatures of the two relatively small but multiethnic regions. However, we decided to start from the comparative areas of exploitation, marginalization, and resistance in Anglophone Cameroon and the Niger Delta. We, the editors, are scholars and writers: Joyce writes poetry, plays, fiction and non-fiction; Tanure writes poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. As writers, we found that initial option very tempting. However, also as academics, with more discussions, we felt there were many other "minorities" whose plight needs to be part of the project that has to do with marginalization, political activism and resistance, expressing solidarity of the oppressed by a dominant power, and suffering as a result of the minority status. It was then that we started to have a growing conviction that many forms of "minorities" reflected in literature could gain entry into our project. We realized that we needed

more scholars to do a more comprehensive and profound job. What could be more appropriate for a project that advocates diversity and inclusion than drawing scholars knowledgeable about African literature to look at the manifold levels of “minority” status expressed in it? We then researched for weeks on whom to invite into the team of scholars to tackle each “minority” situation. That is, the genesis of this project grew out of two regions of neighboring countries to embrace other situations and conditions that we will describe as “minority discourses.”

As Africans but also products of the American/Western academy, we had to fashion our project in the light of earlier studies which we want our work to expand upon and also to show that African literature does not always follow Western theoretical constructs. Working from the premise that literature, like the other artistic creations of art and music, is a cultural production, we settled on interrogating African literature as reflecting the African experience through Africa’s particular culture and society. We acknowledge African culture as dynamic and changing with forces from within and without. These changes have become more rapid with the forces of globalization that have made local happenings in other places influence Africa and perhaps caused Africa’s local happenings to have global significance. Tanure knows that any disturbance in Warri or Port Harcourt in Nigeria affects the world oil prices and the Stock Exchange in New York and elsewhere. At the same time, a government crackdown in any part of Anglo-phone Cameroon catches the attention of social justice protesters abroad. The world has become intertwined, and while accepting what is needed from outside, the African should not surrender to foreign forces so as to lose his identity.

We thus had our notions of “minority” and diversity before we did more research, after which we assigned topics to contributors from across different regions of Africa, the United States and Canada, and Europe. We would discover works on “minorities” that in general terms tallied with or differed a little from what we had in our minds. While some scholars, including Homi Bhabha in “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” have written on minority discourse, the focus here is on two texts inspired by different historical circumstances that have received great academic attention and which some of the contributors to this Handbook have read and referred to. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in their *Kafka: Toward a Minority Literature*, use Franz Kafka’s work to define what they term “minority literature.” They see Kafka, then a member of the Jewish minority in Prague writing about the Jewish experience in the majority German language, as writing minority literature. That leads them to make the categorical statement that “a minor literature doesn’t come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs in a major language” (16). Maybe because of the historical context of Kafka’s works, we do not accept this statement as true of all minor literatures in the case of African literature. In this book, works of minority ethnic groups in their own languages that are marginalized by overarching colonial languages or dominant majority groups are taken as minor literatures.

Three quick examples of such minor literatures language-wise represented in this book are the Jola of the Casamance region of Senegal and The Gambia, the Berbers/Amazigh of North Africa, and Pidgin English from Nigeria. It is true there are “minorities” in the majority languages of English, French, and Portuguese, but literary works do not need to be written in them to qualify as minority literature or discourse in African literature. The emphatic words of Deleuze and Guattari – “a minor literature doesn’t come from a minor language” – do not adequately describe the minority literatures in Africa, where the term “minority” is more amplified in the multifarious way of looking at things.

Deleuze and Guattari name two other features of “minority literature”: being political and taking on a collective value (17). These are also some of the features of the “minority” groups that constitute the marginalized groups in Africa whose reflections in literature are our concern

in this Handbook. What could be more political than the cases of the Anglophone Cameroon and Niger Delta already mentioned? And, of course, the rhetoric of the collective aspirations of marginalized or exploited people to express their position in the face of a dominant group or power stands out in its passion and emotive language.

It is interesting to note that Franz Kafka wrote in German in the early part of the 20th century. It is also noteworthy that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *Kafka: Toward a Minority Literature* was originally published in French in 1975 in Paris before being re-published in English in 1986 by the University of Minnesota Press. It is in the period of the American academy's fascination with multiculturalism and diversity that Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd's *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse* came out in 1990. The authors see in "minority" "the political and cultural structures that connect different minority cultures in their subjugation and opposition to the dominant culture" (ix). While English is the majority language in the United States of America, there are literatures in English that the American academic establishment calls "ethnic literatures" in advertisements for faculty positions. The mainstream/majority Anglo-American literature, with its canon closely guarded by its literary scholars, is not described as "ethnic literature." The "ethnic literatures" probably include African-American literature, Native American literature, Chicana literature, and literatures written in English by Americans outside the Anglo-American literary tradition. It is in this context that JanMohamed and Lloyd's book has chapters on race, culture, ethnic, white, Asian-American, African, and Hebrew topics. It is a deliberate effort to use these different/diverse groups' discourses to subvert the hegemonic monolith of Anglo-American literature.

Africa is not a superpower country but a continent of fifty-four countries. Thus, the issues that informed "minority discourse" in a work meant for the American/Western academy are different from what inform African literature and other cultural productions. Race may be a problem in South Africa and North Africa, but generally, other issues loom large in the African experience. For instance, in this Handbook, we are taking issues of disability, the environment, gender, sexuality, and others as equally important rather than a black-and-white notion in which "white" is the dominant power, institution, and attitude and "black" the subjugated minority. Africa is not homogenous culturally, but for the most part, sub-Saharan Africa tends to have a fairly comparable culture; hence, Africa is culturally a subregion among such other cultural areas as the Western/European and Oriental. In any case, on the theoretical side, JanMohamed and Lloyd strike a common chord on minorities:

By "minority discourse", we mean a theoretical articulation of the political and cultural structures that connect different minority cultures in their subjugation and opposition to the dominant culture. This definition is based on the principle that minority groups, despite all the diversity and specificity of their cultures, share the common experience of domination and exclusion by the majority.

(ix)

Minority discourse in African literature is not aimed at multicultural objectives in administrative and pedagogical remediation as in the West as such. It is not meant to show diversity where one has to fill in one's race as black, white, or otherwise. Like us, many Africans did not have to identify themselves as black until they landed in the United States, where race is a mark of identity. In the African experience of literature, diversity is a reaffirmation of the multifarious nature of the people and their ontology. As explained in the first chapter, most African cultures, such as those of the Yoruba, Ashanti, Dogon, and Igbo, place a premium on diversity or the multiplicity of representations.

We want to be mindful that interest in minority discourses is not only in Africa but universal. Our work in literature has an intellectual convergence with a work like Al Gedicks's *Resource Rebels: Native Challenges to Mining and Oil Corporations* on pollution and exploitation of the weaker peoples and regions by multinational companies in which the likes of Nigeria's Niger Delta exist all over the world, especially in Latin America and Asia. "Resource rebels" who seek to have control over their resources are many in the world. There are other forms of minoritization, including languages spoken and lifestyles. The contexts of diversity are, however, different, and what contemporary society expects from the exhibition of the minority beside the majority may also be different. In the West, it could be aimed at excoriating the conscience of the exploiting, dominant, hegemonic structure towards acceptance and ceding of space to the constricted minority status group. Each struggle for minority rights is a contribution to humankind for a world in which all are accepted and treated equally, ensuring social justice.

To better understand the content of this Handbook, it is thus important to see diversity in cultural perspectives and also the role of literature in sociocultural perspectives. From traditional to contemporary times, literature in Africa has been utilitarian and transformative. Folktales are told to imbibe young ones with morals and ethics, as epics are used to express through the hero or heroine the virtues that humans look up to in their respective communities or societies. In modern and contemporary times, literature has been a medium of expressing the vision of writers towards sociopolitical and economic development and equality of their respective countries. There is no doubt that African literature is on the whole geared towards activism, unlike contemporary literature in the West, where writers do not seem to be bothered by the happenings in their societies. In Africa, writers could be questioned, arrested, jailed, and even executed by the government or the ruling class for pointing out the truth, but something like that will likely never happen in the Western world. Thus, literature is used by many African writers as a sociopolitical weapon, quite unlike in North America and Europe, where it is merely for intellectual reflection. With that role of literature in society, the study of African minority literature could combine traditional and modern roles as a form of transformative and advocative agent in society.

* * *

We have sought balance in the chapters which make up the book. Some of the chapters deal with general or wide topics, and others are very specific. Tanure Ojaide's opening chapter on theory and aesthetics is general and encompasses some of the issues that other contributors write on more specifically later in the book. At the same time, both Gĩchingiri Ndiĩgĩrĩ and Honoré Missioun write on Wangari Maathai's memoir, *Unbowed*, and Tanella Boni's *Matins de couverture*, both of which respectively deal with the environment. Both Maximilian Feldner and Stephen Kekeghe write on several short stories of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Tanure Ojaide, respectively, though on specific works, Feldner and Kekeghe start with general concepts relevant to their chapter. There are also specific examples in the general topics. Feldner, in his chapter, begins with the concept of "African culture," as interpreted in North America and Europe, which influences the African literary works they publish, promote, and market, before focusing on Adichie's short stories, which in her fictional work form a "minority discourse." Similarly, Kekeghe compares the relationship between the psychiatrist and patient with the creative writer and his fictional characters with mental disorders before discussing specific Ojaide short stories dealing with mental illnesses and concluding that the short stories form a "minority discourse" in Ojaide's writings.

Each chapter justifies the minority status of that literature. For a long time, African literary scholars have talked of “literatures,” and, in fact, one of the leading literature research journals

is called *Research in African Literatures*. Many “literatures” exist in Africa, and they make up African literature. There are discourses of minority regions such as the Niger Delta, Anglophone Cameroon, Jola/Casamance, and Amazigh/Berber. While these are parts of nations, there are other minority literatures passionately articulated in the book. Two examples stand out. Sule Egeya writes on Northern Nigerian literature as a minority literature within Nigerian literature. Even though the population of Northern Nigeria is said to exceed that of the South, the modern literature in English has been produced almost entirely by Southern writers. Egeya gives the historical indirect rule of the British colonial system which allowed the North to implement its own laws, the Islamic religion, and the low rate of Western education as major reasons for the scarce literary productions in English in the North. This is evidently a case in which the majority people have a minority status in Western education and literary production. This does not take into consideration the fact that there are other literary works in the North written in Fulfulde and Hausa but which are not given the same exposure as literary publications in English.

Also within a nation, there are minority discourses when the national government alongside a specific majority ethnic group could minoritize other groups in the sense of using the government’s power and resources to create a dominant discourse at the expense of groups that are victims of government reprisals. Maurice Vambe’s chapter deals with the separate responses to nationhood within Zimbabwe after Robert Mugabe’s government violently suppressed the Ndebele people of Mashonaland. According to Vambe, the majority Shona writers see things differently from the minority Ndebele writers. He uses many fictional texts to debunk the government and Shona’s attitude to the military action as creating a false sense of one nation, when in fact is not so. The majority Shona dominated the Zimbabwean government under Mugabe. The Ndebele responses in imaginative works in English become a minor literature within Zimbabwean literature.

There are minority literatures as far as language is concerned, such as the chapters by Daniela Merolla on Amazigh/Berber literature, Ernest Cole on Krio drama in Sierra Leone, Chike Okoye on Pidgin English poetry in Nigeria, Mwenda Mbatia on Swahili literature, and Hein Willemse on Afrikaans literature. As explained in the opening chapter, each language creates a linguistic community which binds its speakers emotionally and politically. There are chapters on gender and sexuality as well as on disabilities and religion. The issues that constitute minority status interrelate, as on region and language in the case of Anglophone Cameroon, religion and gender as seen in Saeedat Aliyu’s discussion of female Muslim writers in Nigeria, Enajite Esegghene Ojaruega on gender and a traditional poetic genre, and Hein Willemse on race and language in Afrikaans literature. The minority status becomes the *raison d’être* of each chapter when directly or indirectly expressed. This brings cohesion to the work as the respective minority statuses of the literatures bring out the subjectivities that in totality form African literature.

We have also paid attention to disability as a minority discourse, as well as migration and others. Pamela Olubunmi Smith deals with the presentation of madness and psychiatric disorders in female characters in African literature. Dike Okoro deals with a disabled boy who, despite being shunned by the community, gains redemption by saving the people from a disastrous flood in Meshack Asare’s Sosu’s *Call*. Okoro introduces Afro-futurism as a discourse in African literature.

Clearly, the Handbook takes a panoramic view of African literature. There are instances of minority literatures in the precolonial or traditional period through postcolonial to contemporary/global times. Razinat Talatu Mohammed writes on Afropolitan writers who are not bound by national boundaries but see their identity in transnational and global terms. Such writers include Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Taiye Selasi, and NoViolet Bulawayo. Enajite Esegghene Ojaruega writes on *udje*, a Nigerian Urhobo oral poetic performance genre that sings about women but excludes women in composition and performance and leaves them to marginal activities such

as handclapping and fanning the *ebo-ile*, the lead performers. Mwenda Mbatiah takes a sweep of Swahili literature from about the 13th century to the present. The postcolonial period seems to have exacerbated issues of feminism and sexuality and current global concerns about the environment and climate change.

Let us expatiate on some of these issues. African patriarchy seems to have been exacerbated by the colonialists. The Western culture which traces its values to Judeo-Christian tenets is a patriarchy. In the British colonial period in Africa (and we believe the same of the French and Portuguese), there was not a single female administrator in all the colonies. This attitude reinforced the patriarchy in Africa that was mitigated with some matriarchal and matrilineal societies as among the Akan in West Africa and many small groups in Central Africa. There were set roles for men and women in the agrarian society in Africa which modernity appears to have disrupted. There are African subtleties which the West, by its own expressive openness, tends to see in their light and label as denial or suppression. Frieda Ekotto's chapter touches on this. There might have been women loving women in Africa before the coming of Europeans but not necessarily in the manner of European women, so that throwing Western terms of sexuality at Africans may not be right. Cultures are different, and none are more so than African and European cultures.

Literature, through this study of minority discourses, has excavated or salvaged African practices lost through four to five generations of European colonization of Africa. In addition to differences that seem to appear on the nature of sexuality are African and Western/European attitudes to the environment. This Introduction does not have room to do a detailed comparison, but it suffices to know that Africans have always paid attention to their environment, with a lot of regard for the non-human beings with whom they shared their lands. It is only in the late 1980s and early 1990s that ecocriticism started as a focus of scholarly interrogation of literature. The current interest in the environment and climate change has been integrated into the traditional life of the African. Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed* and the work of the Green Belt Movement reflect traditional Africa's concerns for the environment which other cultural groups are just waking up to.

We have divided the book into sections as an organizational strategy and to give a sense of order to the structure. In some cases, the chapters within sections could be switched because of the fluidity of some issues that intertwine with others. It is an arrangement that gives meaning to the project of "minority" discourses. The broad areas covered thus are in these sections: 1: political and racial forms of marginalization; 2: culture and language; 3: patriarchal domination, gender, sexuality, and other sociocultural minorities; 4: intranational, national, and international marginalization; 5: literature and disability; and 6: recent trends of marginalities: timely and timeless. We have attempted to frame each chapter within these broad outlines of minority literatures. However, the case of Eritrea in Charles Cantalupo's writing is a unique case where the entire national literature becomes a part of the national experience "against all odds" in light of the Horn of Africa and especially Eritrea's secession from Ethiopia.

The editors want to emphasize that despite a minority discourse leaving the impression of a binary situation of majority-minority with the "minority" always vulnerable, it is not always so in African literature. Maurice Vambe argues that "Minority discourses are in perpetual flux," and there could be minority within minority discourses. As Vambe further explains and as also already mentioned in the case of majority Northern Nigeria producing a minor literature in English compared to the minority Southern Nigeria producing a majority discourse in literature, "minority discourse" is not in numbers. Vambe gives the example of there being a very few colonialists compared to natives and yet the colonialists being dominant. In that case, "a numerical minority might be a numerical majority in the control of the publishing industry." And "By

the same logic,” according to Vambe, “a numerical majority might be a numerical minority in the field of knowledge production, management, and its dissemination.”

We have attempted to engage all literary genres of literature. Fiction in the form of novels seems to have engaged minority discourse the most among the contributors. Essays on gender, sexuality, disability, and many more areas of minority statuses are based on fictional works. It is interesting that Okoro focuses on Meshack Asare’s children’s storybook, *Sosu’s Call*. Ernest Cole writes on Yulisa Maddy’s use of Krio in his plays, and Mwenda Mbatiah has plays in Swahili among his literary texts for discussion. Feldner and Kekeghe work on short stories. Ojaruega writes on traditional poetry, Chike Okoye on Ezenwa-Ohaeto’s Pidgin English poetry, and Cantalupo on Eritrean poetry. The chapter on Swahili literature has memoirs and autobiographies as some of the texts. Ndigirigi focuses on Wangari Maathai’s memoir, *Unbowed*, as Misioun quotes copiously from Boni’s non-fictional works. The Handbook is a reflection of the critical/scholarly attention to different African literary works.

Some chapters give a detailed historiography before focusing on specific texts to give background to the minority situation being discussed. Tijan M. Sallah does this on the Jola, who are split into Senegal, The Gambia, and Guinea Bissau. Merolla does the same for the Amazigh, the Berbers, of North Africa, who appear erased from Moroccan, Algerian, and North African literatures mostly in Arabic and French. Willemse details the history of Afrikaans and its change from minority to majority and back to minority language in the new dispensation of South Africa. It is also worth mentioning Fiona Moola’s discussion of “Coloured” and Rajendra Chetty’s history of Indians, both in South Africa. Reading African literature through the lenses of these contributors takes one through a multidisciplinary path to a sudden awareness of why things are what they are: the source of every minority status and its resort to literature as a form of resistance against domination.

The editors have not interfered with each contributor’s opinion or ideology, to reflect the multifaceted nature of knowledge inherited from Ananse’s pot of wisdom which broke and spread out to be gathered by as many people as possible! It is a process meant to encourage a vibrant and healthy scholarly expression to show the diversity of opinions in critical discourse. In fact, each contributor’s view is itself a “minority discourse,” and the totality of the views approximates the reality of diverse views, emotions, and aesthetic appreciation. The editors are only facilitators of the discussion, and each chapter is a contribution to the palaver of minorities in the congress of African literature.

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2

THE THEORY AND AESTHETICS OF MINORITY DISCOURSES IN AFRICAN LITERATURE

Tanure Ojaide

Introduction

In literature, theory and aesthetics have become protean terms whose definitions or meanings seem to shift from what were previously thought to be their limited spaces into new scholarly vistas. Theory and aesthetics often function in a partnership that brings out the unity of a text or a collection of works that form a discourse. Jeffrey R. Di Leo, in his review of Vincent B. Leitch's *Literary Theory in the 21st Century: Theory Renaissance*, taunts us with "Word on the street is that theory is dead – superseded by a multitude of studies" (412). He goes on to quote Leitch as writing that "theory in recent times has become a crossover interdisciplinary fusing literary criticism, linguistics, philosophy, history, anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis, and politics" (29). The profusion of "studies" in the 21st century has given rise to the "renaissance" of what can also be called theories.

Though the study of "minorities" or minority studies has been popular in the Western academy, especially since the 1990s, when there was general encouragement of multiculturalism, "minority literature" predated that decade. Franz Kafka, writing about Jewish experience in German, a mainstream language, was producing "minor literature" at the beginning of the twentieth century. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986), start by emphasizing that "A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language" (16). They then go on to say: "The three characteristics of minor literature are the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation" (18). Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd, in their edited *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse* (1990) write that:

By "minority discourse", we mean a theoretical articulation of the political and cultural structures that connect different minority cultures in their subjugation and opposition to the dominant culture. This definition is based on the principle that minority groups, despite all the diversity and specificity of their cultures, share the common experience of domination and exclusion by the majority.

(ix)

The definitions from these two books will constitute a major part of the understanding of “minority” discourse or literature in this chapter.

Minority studies, minor literature, and minority discourse are used to mean the same thing in this chapter to discuss theory and aesthetics in African literature. Minority discourse has to do with the conception of minority groups, as opposed to majority, with different identities or traits in specific spatiotemporal settings, and often relating to power in political and social issues. It is thus minor in not being dominant but different from the mainstream. Minority studies is therefore unique in its discourse, which is eclectic as it relates to political, social, economic, ethnic, racial, and other ideological and identity issues that may be set in contexts of place or time. It is panoramic in its “crossover” and interdisciplinary attributes and focuses on the specificity of its minority status.

African literature has undergone scrutiny through various theoretical approaches, including structuralism, deconstruction, Marxism, historicism, postcolonialism, and feminism. The substrata of African literature comprise minority literatures whose discourses exhibit comparative features in countering majority or dominant institutions or attitudes, especially in social, cultural, political, and economic spheres of the African experience. It is significant to note from the beginning that most minority discourses are themselves counter-discourses, but they are not always or necessarily so. For example, as argued by B. Weiss in “Utter(ing) Silences,” though “women have crossed the borderline of restricted spheres and have thrown their voices for everyone to hear” (Smith and Ce 8), sometimes “women deliberately choose to refuse to throw their voice. They, in the true sense of the word, decide to be voiceless, yet as a means of subversion” (Smith and Ce 9). Thus, while feminism could be a minority discourse attempting to subvert patriarchal orthodoxies, there is another discourse within feminism in which it is not only “voice-throwing” but also silence that could be a more potent weapon against male or patriarchal domination. It appears therefore that even within a minority discourse, there can be a counter-discourse or discourses, while in a majority discourse, the counter-discourse could be a minority discourse. I work under the premise that “minority discourse” avails itself of a set of ideas that can lead to a meaningful discussion of African literature. Furthermore, these minor literatures have in their particular ways aesthetic features that make them of interest and value to their writers and readers.

The study of the minority discourses in African literature is bound to elicit some conclusions on the theory and aesthetics, however tentative they may be. It offers the critical inquirer ample opportunity to have this array of discourses from whose panoply one can proffer remarks that constitute not only a form of reiterating its theoretical attributes but also aesthetic conclusions on African literary minority discourses. Certain ideational patterns emerge in an exploration of literatures that are not in the mainstream but have their respective bodies of work which are intrinsic parts of African literature. Interestingly, these different discourses are parts of a larger unit in literary traditions that contextually distinguishes itself as African literature and is distinct as a literary tradition or canon from, for instance, European, Asian, or Latin American literatures. I am aware of Anthony Giddens’s argument about the effects of the forces of globalization in the remapping and reconfiguration of the cultures that produce the “continental” literatures. However, African literature remains very much an African cultural production from traditional to modern times because it is itself a part and vehicle of African mores, history, sensibility, worldview, and realities, which it reflects and records in the literary genres of poetry, drama, and fiction. Thus, as a cultural production, literature, through its content and deployment of figurative language, has characteristic features and functions, which Stein Haugom Olsen says “must display those features which define and justify that interest which members of the culture

take in its literature” (521). To him, the properties of literature “constitute their aesthetic nature and thus their aesthetic worth” (Olsen 521). The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to establish a pattern of the theory of minority discourses and simultaneously examine the aesthetics that drives these discourses as vibrant parts of African literature and without which the literature itself is not complete as the comprehensive reflection in writing of the experiences and living realities of the people.

Theory and African literature

Theory and aesthetics have long been bandied about in African literary scholarship without definitions, and sometimes they become buzzwords in literary essays and presentations that leave one wondering what these terms really mean. I use “literary theory” in this chapter as defined by Gregory Castle “in terms of principles and concepts, strategies and tactics needed to guide critical practice” (2). Castle defines theory as “*the capacity to generalize about phenomena and to develop concepts that form the basis for interpretation and analysis*” (2). To him, the:

mode of thought suggested by this working definition involves first the ability to think generally about a given set of phenomena (language, social relations, women’s experience, the novel as a form); second to develop theoretical concepts (or models) based on assumptions and principles governing the inclusion of elements within the set and the relations between those elements; and, finally, to use these concepts as the starting point from which to interpret and analyze specific instances within a set.

(3)

By “set,” he means “the function of metaphor, capitalism, female gender roles, the *Bildungsroman*” (3). These “sets” in African literature form minority literary traditions whose discourses present their respective “elements.” Castle also points out that theory grows out of ideology (3). It is a mode of thought related to society, politics, language, history, psychology, and gender, among others. Theory is thus the idea through which the literary scholar can look at the binding contents and forms of texts and also interrelate and exclude them from other bodies of work that do not open themselves to particular modes of interpretation or types of scrutiny.

While complaining of “a near absence of clear theoretical moorings” (2) and “theoretical anaemia” (5) in African literature in the later part of the 20th century, Chidi Amuta makes a significant point that “the interpretations of the literary products of a given society can only command validity if they are rooted in theoretical paradigms that either organically derive from or are most directly relevant to the objective conditions of life in the society in question” (6). To the Nigerian Marxist critic, “it is the socio-economic, political and ideological contradictions which define the life and historical experiences of the African people that must form the basis of a new and more functionally relevant theoretical approach to African literature” (vii-viii). Amuta’s alignment of the African reality to only class conflicts is ideologically suitable for his materialist discourse but does not allow theory to involve power, gender, social, and other paradigms of the African experience. Minorities in politics, culture, gender, language, economic and psychological states, and more seek to express their disaffection with the perceived majorities and affirm their own identity. In this sense, each minority discourse becomes a “theoretical articulation of the political and cultural structures that connect different minority cultures in their subjugation and opposition to the dominant culture” (JanMohamed and David Lloyd ix). With the long history of postcolonialism and now globalization, this chapter affirms the accommodation of the plurality and diversity of African experiences that form minority discourses.

Aesthetics and African literature

Aesthetics has been a contentious term to use to describe literature outside of poetry for a long time. Peter Lamarque says, “If aesthetics is to be at all relevant to literature it must deploy recognizable features of aesthetic appraisal as applied more widely but it must also capture something distinctive about literature as an art form” (5). The point is that aesthetics is not only about beauty but has come to include interest, value, meaning, and literary devices such as form and realism that help the reader to grasp the content of a literary work. It is in light of this definition of “aesthetics” that the term is not only relevant but also helps to mark out any literary discourse by both the pleasure and the meaning of the experience expressed.

In his *Ideology & Form in African Poetry* (1990), Emmanuel Ngara defines “aesthetic ideology” as “the literary convention and stylistic stances adopted by the writer” (12). To the Kenyan Marxist literary scholar, “The reader and the text enter into a relationship similar to that of a man and a woman making love” (16–17). Many African scholars have examined African literary texts or genres with particular attention to their respective aesthetics. For example, in my book, *Contemporary African Literature: New Approaches* (2012), there is this observation:

One can say that the aesthetics of a people’s literature inform the features that make that literature unique. The literary artist and readers/audience have a symbiotic relationship as producer and consumer, each with expectations that make the literary work contribute to the spiritual and intellectual delight and a manifestation in creative terms of the socio-cultural and political condition as it affects the individual. In the end, the literary work pleases the more it performs a function that brings and affirms the values and virtues that the people hold dear.

(Ojaide 188)

Going by this statement, each minority discourse in African literature has its “expectations” for “the spiritual and intellectual delight” of the minority group ranging against the dominant group. In this discussion of minority discourses in African literature, the focus is more on experience expressed as a discourse in the multiplicity of discourses that are subsumed in African literature than in literary techniques per se in the texts. In any case, however much has been done earlier on the aesthetics of African literature as a literary tradition, one still needs a broader definition of aesthetics to separate minority discourses from majority literature.

Josette Attard posits several points in connecting literature and aesthetics. She sees aesthetic characteristics as “a special kind of values, which can lead to experiences of interest and desire” (81). After identifying form as relevant to aesthetics in literature with particular attention to poetry, she says that “an aesthetic experience can result from the detection of the expressive qualities of a literary work” (81). Attard sees a core aesthetic experience in literature which “consists of the contemplation of the conceptions the work presents to the imagination and this is done for the sake of pleasure arising from such an experience” (83). So each minority discourse presents an “experience” to which many writers respond. For instance, Niger Delta, Anglophone Cameroon, North African Amazigh/Berber, and the Senegambian/Casamance Jola (Diola) literatures all interrogate experiences of particular peoples or groups with specific conditions which cast them as minorities or marginalized peoples among the respective dominant groups they struggle against. Their unique experiences are borne by a literature whose form lends its discursive power to tropes or expressions that carry certain values and at the same time bring about some measure of emotional and intellectual pleasure.

In addition, there are experiences in African societies based on languages such as Nigerian Pidgin English, Sierra Leonean Krio (Creole), Congolese or Ivorian patois, Central Africa's Lingala, South African Afrikaans, and East and Central African Swahili. The speakers of each of these languages see themselves as minorities, since these languages are not the generally or majority-spoken languages in their respective nation-states. Each language speaker is connected imaginatively to the speakers of the same language, and all the speakers create a linguistic community in which they share common interests that bind them socioculturally, politically, psychologically, and sometimes economically. I believe there is a certain political affinity among Anglophone Cameroonians who speak English and see themselves as marginalized by the majority Francophone Cameroonians who control the central government in Yaounde. Though the official language of Tanzania and despite millions of speakers in East and Central Africa, Swahili is still a minority language compared to the inherited colonial languages of English, French, and Portuguese which are widely spoken and adopted as official languages. Afrikaans is a minority language largely spoken by "whites" of Dutch origin in South Africa and was identified with the constitutional change to apartheid in South Africa from 1948 until it ended on May 10, 1994, when Nelson Mandela became the first black president and officially ended the noxious separation of races in the country. It is instructive to note that Coloureds and many blacks speak and write in Afrikaans and the language has fluctuated from majority/official status to minority depending upon the political swing of the country.

Each of these languages has its aesthetic structures that make it peculiar for writers to deploy the diction, figures, and other phonological ploys in the language to express their thoughts and feelings. A body of literature has coalesced around each of these "minor" languages and, put together, they too all form many of the "minority discourses" in African literature. Nigeria's Pidgin English, for instance, is mainly used by the less educated in society, especially traders and the common folks in urban areas. To a large extent, Pidgin is the lingua franca of the Niger Delta in Nigeria, despite the language's spread to other parts of the country. It is a "language" that is very humorous and used by comedians and writers to say serious things in a lighthearted manner. Pidgin English has been dexterously deployed in Nigerian literature. In the poetry of Aig Imokhuede, Chinua Ezenwa-Ohaeto, Akachi Ezeigbo, and Eriata Oribhabor, among many poets, its aesthetic features powerfully manifest themselves in the frivolous banter for which the language is known. The same could be said of a long history of Nigerian fiction with Pidgin English dialogue, from Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* through Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English* (1985) to more recent works like Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. In fact, Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* is written entirely in Pidgin English that the author calls "rotten English."

Similarly, there is a huge body of work in Swahili literature which bears Arab and African cultural traits. Abdilatif Abdalla's collection of prison poems, *Sauti Ya Dhiki*, has been praised for the manner in which form and language fuse to convey meaning. In any case, the elocution of Pidgin English, like the other African languages, in poetry, drama, and fiction gives them a distinctive mark in the plethora of languages in Africa outside the officially adopted foreign English, French, and Portuguese whose speakers, writers, and readers ironically form the majority discourse as far as languages are concerned in Africa.

African folkloric affirmation of multiple/minority discourses

African folklore, through many examples, seems to affirm fragmentation rather than homogeneity and so privileges diversity over conformity or oneness. The examples of Yoruba orishas – a thousand and one godheads – and Ashanti Ananse's pot of wisdom breaking and dispersing wisdom seem to demonstrate this affirmation. The Dogon also have myths woven out of multiple

godheads emanating from Amma. Furthermore, among the Igbo people, as Achebe emphasized, one is not enough, and there is tolerance of “another” or “others” in the saying that “Where one thing stands, there can also stand another.” There are likely many other examples of folkloric myths of fragmentation and multiplicity of one, but these mentioned examples are some of the most powerful mythical representations of the psychic acceptance of pluralities of the African essence, or rather the diversity of oneness. Deploying these myths to understand the familiarity with diversity, one can say that there is one African literature made up of many parts, subdivisions, or discourses.

African literature, especially in its traditional and oral form, has long been broadly described as being mainly for entertainment and education. However, today, one is aware of the multiplicity of characteristics, forms, or sets of the literature. As the literature grew and with more texts availing themselves of different sociocultural, political, economic, and psychological spectra, African literature was bound to display its many parts in the countless “discourses” which stand alongside each other in their differences and against their respective majorities in the African imaginary. One can infer that there is a proclivity to the diverse and multiple, as nothing solidly uniform can be as vibrant, strong, and lasting as something made of different parts that continue to reproduce and by doing so engage in self-rejuvenation.

African literature may have established itself as a literary tradition with its canons as different from literatures of other cultural regions of the world. However, what is evident is that even within a canon or tradition, there are disruptions and the “fragments” can be assembled into a whole. African literature is thus made up of multiple discourses that carry the totality of the African experience, identity, reality, and worldview and a sense of African-ness or Africanness. After all, a human being is made up of many limbs or parts and each part contributes to a healthy body. Culture is the heart and language the blood that give life to the body. It is in the same light that the minority discourses play out in African literature.

Interestingly, each “minority discourse” unit has a body of work to it so that the “minor literature” has its own identity in the wider field of African literature. For instance, there is a body of work that constitutes each of the minority languages I earlier discussed. Similarly, marginalized groups in African countries have their literatures, such as Anglophone Cameroonian literature, Niger Delta literature, Amazigh/Berber literature, and Senegambian Jola literature. Niger Delta literature includes numerous collections of poetry, dozens of plays, and many fictional works. It also has many scholarly works on this literature of a Nigerian marginalized people whose region has valuable resources of petroleum and gas whose sale forms the main earnings sustaining the Nigerian federal government. Many of these literatures are subnational literatures, too. Anglophone Cameroon has a very vibrant literature of its own that equally has an identity of its own through the works of such writers as Mbella Sonne Dipoko, Bate Besong, Bole Butake, Anne Tanyi-Tang, and Joyce Ashuntantang. Connected to this set or subset are literatures related to intranational conflicts such as the South Sudan and Zimbabwean Shona-Ndebele problems. Civil war conflicts such as the Nigeria-Biafra war have a large body of work in fictional representations of war activities, as shown in the works of Flora Nwapa, Isidore Okpewho, Festus Iyayi, and Elechi Amadi. The genocide in Rwanda, the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria and adjoining countries, and the Eritrean-Ethiopian war have also generated their own literatures that form minor literatures.

Historical forces and minority discourses

African minority discourses embrace historicist backgrounds. We are at this time at the confluence of postcolonialism and globalization, and African literature is evolving into manifold

directions and forms. Postcolonialism and globalization have their impact in bearing testimony to the multifarious discourses that make up African literature. For a long time, the discourse of African literature concerned both the oral/traditional and the written/modern. The oral/traditional literature itself is made up of a variety of forms. The modern/written form of African literature assumed the nomenclature of “postcolonial,” which by its implication is a never-ending discourse. The “postcolonial” seems unipolar in the sense that it sees all the literary productions resulting from the European imperial interventions of the 19th century in Africa and elsewhere in the world through that historical lens. However, things are changing, since all those who had been once colonized could not be tied forever to their far-past history. Inevitably, this change has affected the realities of Africans and their cultural productions. African literature has asserted its uniqueness and has a tradition and a canon of its own. Globalization has exacerbated the disruptions in Africa from the postcolonial unipolarity into minority subdivisions of liberalized African cultural productions. Kwame Anthony Appiah’s “Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?” (McKeon, ed. 882–897) touches on the changing realities of Africa which have given rise to expression of multiple states of being.

Let me use two discourses that have changed drastically because of the intellectual climate of the liberalization and exposure brought about by democracy and increased movements of peoples across borders. It is not that some of the experiences did not exist even when not talked about. Issues of sexuality and migration show how globalization has highlighted and brought into the open African internal contradictions in expressions of experiences that at some time in the past would have been taboos. This is in addition to the internal forces driving people to migrate out of the continent. I hope to discuss these subjects later as aspects of contemporary African experiences. Being African as well as the African experience are no longer uniform or have a specific essence as such but are now quite multidimensional. One is not even sure Africans are one people! They are peoples whose unique experiences divulge the elasticity of current and future discourses that cannot be classified in one small space but many small spaces. To put it in a popular way, the genie has come out of the bottle!

Modern African literature might have started as reactive, which is what postcolonial literature is in its response to being under the rule of a foreign power whose motive is the economic wellbeing of the imperial government and not the interests of the subjected people. In most of the literary works, African writers depicted how Africans suffered in colonial times, whether in the forms of racial discrimination, economic exploitation, and political marginalization, among other woes. Then the literature evolved to what we really are and on to an affirmative literature. In other words, it developed from a conscious response to those who disrupted African life with their imperial ambitions to a period of subconscious expression of being African. Literature has become increasingly responsive to our environment, our biology, our inner being, and our living realities. I am a human being who has choices and is living the consequences of my being in a particular environment. People(s) are not the same and so do not behave the same way and do not have the same needs. Identities have become more fluid and complicated in Africa now than in past decades. The expression of disparate experiences is at the core of multiple discourses. Most in society will follow conventional ways, but others will have their own individual ways. So there are majorities and there are minorities. The dominant group wants order, peace, and harmony which favor it, but some may feel constrained by the needs of the majority and so seek to disrupt their constraints.

Even African folklore also affirms this. The tortoise, spider, and other trickster characters undermine the majority ethos of society, whether for self-centered individual needs or not, and so express alternative views. The communal needs and the individual or personal needs do not always converge in the same ethical directions; hence the majority and the minorities. There is

alterity that contends with any form of accepted ways. Even when ways of life are forbidden, people will still practice them!

Countering domination

The societal apprehension of dissent or dissident ways may not be unique to only African society but appears to be a universal human trait. In a way, these multiple discourses can be related to Michel Foucault's concepts of "power," "madness," and "resistance." The unconventional, rebel, deviant, or abnormal folks of society are shamed so as to conform, but many will resist the strong tactics of power. The minorities are perceived as "mad" by the majority groups. For instance, most Nigerians far from "the drilling fields" with the apocryphal devastation of the Niger Delta because of the exploitation of its oil and gas will wonder why there is such a loud cry for resource control. Of course, the impoverished people of the oil-rich region "resist" the powerful multinational companies and the complicit federal Nigerian government with gun and pen; hence the struggle of the Egbesu Boys, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, Niger Delta Defense Force, and other militant groups to seize control of their land's resources. The same case of dissent could be seen in minority Anglophone Cameroon, which the dominant Francophone side could say is "mad" in its attempt to shed minority status by becoming a self-governing region or a sovereign country of its own. One can posit that in the more liberal climate of today, there are bound to be many "madmen" fighting a war of "resistance" against the "power" of the establishment, which could be an authoritarian government, patriarchal system, or homophobic society.

Patriarchy is the dominant sociocultural structure in Africa. Men's control of power leads to gender biases. In a literary work like Tsitsi Dangerembga's *Nervous Conditions*, the men enjoy privileges that women are excluded from. For instance, young Nhamo is sent to live with Baba Mukuru, the educated and wealthy family patriarch. He does not sit near women in the bus because he says they smell of reproductive odors. He leaves his luggage at the bus stop and expects his sister to come and get it for him. One is not surprised that when he dies, his sister does not grieve. Baba Mukuru and his wife go abroad and have virtually the same level of educational qualification, but it is only the man who is celebrated upon their return. Similarly, Nyasha and her brother Chido are treated differently. The father allows the boy to go out as he likes and to even sleep at his friend's place, but he is very harsh on Nyasha, complaining about her style of dressing and lateness in coming from parties. The domination of the male gender thus leads to rebellion by the female gender as a result of being kept down. Since the males see themselves as superior to women, there are grumblings and protests by the female characters to counter male domination. *Nervous Conditions* is emblematic of feminist voices that include Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, and Sindiwe Magona's *Beauty's Gift* that speak against male domination.

As a minority discourse, feminism empowers female characters to free themselves from men-ordained sociocultural traditions and exercise all their agencies to be full human beings who can live towards self-fulfillment. Feminist literary texts have value in inspiring female readers to summon their agency rather than living as victims in a patriarchal society. They provide female models to female readers. At the same time, feminist texts, by exposing the exploitation and oppression of women by men, sensitize male readers towards treating women as equals and helping to bring equity to representation on gender, economic, and political levels. The aesthetics of feminist discourse embraces the use of irony and other tropes to undermine the assumed superiority of men over women because of gender. In Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, Nhamo is not as brilliant as Tambu, but when things are hard financially, the family only pays his school

fees because he is male. The girls are seen as only needing to be trained to cook and be good wives. And that is why a boy like Nhamo is able to eat his chicken and still have it!

Closely related to the silence or paucity of women's voices is sexuality. African writers, male and female, heterosexual or not, now express themselves more openly. In this context of sexuality, heterosexuality becomes the dominant set that other kinds of sexual orientation contend with. Conventional society does not encourage deviation from the norm and sees LGBTQ folks as abnormal. There are now African works that problematize heteronormativity. Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* presents Adrian Njoko, a gay protagonist, who, after living a hidden life by marrying and having children, has to choose between the false life and what he really is, a gay man, in a society that will shun him if he exposes his true being. The conflict he experiences appears treated with authorial empathy. Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*, a civil war novel, has gay practice among the soldiers. Similarly, Chris Abani's *GraceLand* describes homosexual practice in the Afikpo section of the novel. Tess Onwueme, in *Tell It To Women: An Epic Drama* (1995), describes two female characters, Ruth and Daisie, in a lesbian relationship.

The increasing body of literary work on gay lifestyle tells the experience of a minority group that wants its voice to be heard and its experiences to be acknowledged. Times have passed when many gay men and women or writers hid their experiences, and they now openly show off their lifestyles in literary works as well as in parades in major African cities. Theirs is the literary representation of their living reality as gay, and they also express their criticism of homophobic behaviors in most African societies. Thus, there are many dimensions of whatever subject is talked about. The plurality of involvement, however far from the majority's, shows the diversity of the African experience which can only be fully comprehended through attention to many other discourses.

Trending periods in African literature

The indigenous oral and modern written traditions have managed over decades to fuse into the subconscious stream. African writers in poetry, fiction, and drama no longer want to prove themselves to be as good writers as their Western counterparts. This was, however, not the case in the initial stage of modern African literature, when many of the writers modeled their works on Western writers. For instance, that generation of African poets that includes Leopold Sedar Senghor, Tchicaya U Tam'si, Christopher Okigbo, Kofi Awoonor, Wole Soyinka, and J.P. Clark, among others, is in fact African "modernist" since the writers exhibit many of the features of Western modernist poetry such as allusiveness, fragmentation, and the focus on individualism. How could one read Okigbo without strong echoes of Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, or Stephane Mallarme? The same could be said of Clark with Gerald Manley Hopkins, whose "sprung rhythm" he adopts in some of his poems. Senghor writes about the African experience of his time, but he deploys the poetic techniques of French Symbolists to express himself in many of his poems. So there was a time when African poets wrote as if they were part of the European/Western modernist poetry tradition.

There are parallels in fiction and drama of what was happening on the poetry scene. There have been studies of Chinua Achebe's indebtedness to Thomas Hardy's form of the tragic novel. The Nigerian writer might have also learned from the craft of Joseph Conrad, whose *Heart of Darkness* he denounced on many occasions as a racist novel. Greek tragedies like Orpheus and Eurydice informed Ofeyi and Iriyise in Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*. Soyinka may have learned from not only Bertolt Brecht but also other European practitioners of the theatre of the absurd, resulting in a play like *The Road*.

The reactive streak of modern African literature includes Negritude that aimed at affirming African-ness as opposed to the European. Of course, there were writers and scholars of Anglophone Africa who did not accept the philosophy that Negritude tried to preach. Soyinka's famous or rather infamous retort that a tiger does not proclaim its "tigritude" shows the lack of uniformity on African ways of regaining an African identity after colonization has attempted to destroy it or make Africans look down on their own culture and "assimilate" Western ways. Negritude is different from the expression of the African Personality which takes pride in the African as a being of his own. Like in the mode of models, many writers seemed to have fallen in line with the literary tradition of the country that colonized them. In this manner, the Negritude writers were from Francophone countries, and many of them studied in France. The African Personality novelists were from Anglophone Africa. One can say that there has never been a uniform tradition as far as African literature is concerned, as there are always writers pitching their writing tents on some turf that is not universally followed in the continent. So the issues of what are majority and what are minority literatures have always been there but have become exacerbated by more open expressions of "minority" experiences.

Following the generation of writers already mentioned are the "Alter/Native" poets who rose to prominence in the 1980s following Chinweizu's strong and persistent criticism of the African "euromodernists" as not writing from the African tradition. *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature* played a role in separating the African "modernist" writers from the writers that followed and looked to their oral traditions to model their techniques. The Alter/Native poets do not have to prove themselves as their predecessors did but express themselves as they see fit from the perspective of their African-ness. These writers do not look backwards for reaction to the past of European expansionist imperialism. They are more concerned with the living realities in Africa that involve class conflict. The writers attempt to transform the inadequacies of the present into a society that cares for its underprivileged. They conceive of poetry as comprehensible with use of such devices as irony, personification, metaphors, and other figures that expose the class differences so as to bridge the gap between the haves and the have-nots. The early resort to oral literature features might have been responsible for the label of "Alter/Natives."

There are thus major movements in African literature, but there are many still outside such movements and giving space to diversity. There seems to be in every period of African literature a form of majority trend which has reacting against it multiple counter-trends that may not be as strong. What is significant is that at one time or the other, there is a mainstream or popular discourse or assumption of the major trend which many other discourses attempt to counter or subvert. It must be stated that these counter-discourses to majority subjects, positions, situations, and traditions may not be deliberate but individual responses reflecting the views of others or efforts to go along with the zeitgeist or otherwise. For instance, if we were to take Frantz Fanon's concept of the development of the literature of a colonized people with its three stages in *The Wretched of the Earth*, there are many varieties and diverse or counter-movements within broad development periods. Fanon conceives three developmental periods in the history of colonized nations. In the first phase, the writers write like their counterparts in the metropolis to show that they are as creative and good as nationals of the colonizing country. The African "euromodernists" seem to fit into that category of writing almost within the Western tradition of the time. The second phase has to do with a resort to nationalism and the stubborn application of literature to nation-building. The "Alter/Natives" appear to represent that phase by borrowing much from the indigenous oral traditions. By Funso Aiyejina's nomenclature of this group of writers, they are not only "alternatives" to the "euromodernists" but also fostering a new form of "native" literary tradition.

The blind spots of Frantz Fanon's third stage of literature development

Fanon posits the third phase of literature of the colonized people as affirming themselves without recourse to lamenting, whining, or criticizing "others," the Western imperialists, forever. The people at this stage have to assume responsibility for their respective destinies and express their subconscious or emotive state of being. We live in history but also outside of it; not the broad history of Western imperialism and its consequences (colonialism) but within a history of subnationalism and transnationalism, even though it could be argued that these current developments were earlier created by imperialist forces. However, Africans now express themselves in thoughts and feelings in areas of migration, sexuality, disability, and the environment. These are issues consonant to their humanity. Thus, while Fanon projects what the third phase of the literature of a colonized people would be, he projected it in "postcolonial" and "post-postcolonial" perspectives which did not take into account the many "studies" that would occupy the attention of Africans in the later 20th and current 21st centuries. Yes, African literature is "postcolonial" but cannot remain forever in the continuum of that post-imperialist conundrum and so has to reflect the living realities of the people whose experiences are the subjects of literary works.

Fanon could not anticipate many of the concerns that would preoccupy writers in former colonies of European powers in so many decades to come. Many of the discourses that prevail in African literary scholarship today can be said to be the blind spots of Fanon's theoretical assumption of the final phase of the literature of the people who were once colonized. These are minor areas in the major postcolonial history and all are subsumed into modern African literature. Migration, sexuality, and the environment in particular have become important issues not only in the lives of the people but also in literary representations. Many of these issues have tangential connections to postcolonialism in the sense that the migration of people from the once-colonized nations seeking better lives in Europe, the liberal lifestyle that gives rise to free expression of sexuality, and sensitivity to environmental issues can still be traced to the former European powers and the West. In any case, these areas have become areas of concern among many others in Africa.

Migration literature

Migration has always been part of modern African literature because Africans have always been traveling or migrating to other countries. The traffic has always been to former European imperial powers and new Western economic powers; hence the popularity of Western Europe and North America as destinations of choice. In Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure*, set in Senegal, a colony of France then, the young and impressionable Samba Diallo, who has been trained in an Islamic school, is sent to Paris, the French capital, to study philosophy. He develops psychological problems which take him back home, and that conflict drives him to become a psychological wreck. The experiences of the 21st-century new-wave migrants have provided materials for the content of works of writers. Nigerian diaspora writers have established a subcategory of literature called Afropolitan literature about experiences of migrants to and from the North (Europe and North America). These texts reflect historical, sociocultural, economic, and philosophical contexts. The wave of African migrants dying in the Mediterranean in efforts to get to Lampedusa or other parts of Europe has become a regular television event. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, and Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*, among many others, carry the experiences of migration in contemporary Africa. In recent times, there is a generation of Africans who are global citizens who see themselves as Africans and more. Their identities go beyond borders of specific countries, especially where

they migrated or decided to settle. These experiences form a minority discourse in contemporary African literature.

It is significant that the migration from the continent tells of the lack of jobs and other socio-economic opportunities in Africa. In some places, civil conflicts are responsible for the exodus of mainly youths to take risky journeys to other lands for a peaceful life. The texts draw attention to the need for African leaders to pursue policies that will create jobs, have non-dictatorial policies, and give hope to their citizens, especially youths, who only leave for the North because they have no hope in their futures in their respective African homelands.

African eco-critical literature

Literature about the environment, or eco-critical literature, has gained attention in recent decades. Nigeria's Ken Saro-Wiwa exposed the environmental degradation of the Niger Delta where oil and gas-exploring and exploiting multinational companies such as Shell BP and Chevron did not care about preventing oil spills or managing them with the same standards as in the companies' home countries in Europe and the United States of America. Gas flares continue in the Niger Delta over two decades after its banning by the United Nations. Within the Niger Delta, there have been literary responses to the pollution which affects human and non-human lives. Wangari Maathai's Green Belt Movement in Kenya; her works, especially *Unbowed*; and her winning the Nobel Prize for Peace have promoted the environmental struggle in Africa. Eco-critical literature has a body of work that also includes the works of Niyi Osundare such as *The Eye of the Earth*, Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* and *The Tale of the Harmattan*, and Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*. What is significant is that while the literature could be postcolonial or post-postcolonial, there are many issues that converge into it. After all, Africa's living realities comprise not only one situation but multifarious situations.

The rhetoric of minority discourses

Rhetoric is used here as the device in establishing the emotive and intellectual space of a minority discourse. It is the "expressive qualities" of a text that Attard talks about (81). In a way, it marries theory and aesthetics into a set that not only brings delight but also intellectual delimitation of the discourse. There are expectations of a discourse, majority or minority, and in those expectations are the delight, interest, and value of the literary texts that fall within that corpus of discourse. The literature of blacks, for instance, in North Africa where Arabs form the majority brings to the center black characters that are often represented as victimized or marginalized by the majority group and so resist oppression by self-assertion. The minority in almost every discourse casts itself as the wronged and virtuous side against a villainous majority. In a gay fictional work, one will expect the gay characters to be portrayed in a sympathetic manner by the gay writer as asserting independence of sexuality in the midst of homophobic assault. The mere fact that a gay writer or reader can identify with gay characters in the narrative is a matter of interest, delight, and value. How can there be a feminist discourse without issues of women's marginalization, oppression, or solidarity? How can there be a Marxist discourse without issues of socioeconomic stratification?

Aesthetics involves the delight or pleasure derived from the text or group of texts that constitute a discourse. In these minority discourses, there is a certain sincerity of the writer in pursuing a cause or advocacy that generates a rhetoric that becomes consonant with that minority's resistance, collective solidarity, and the politics of its wellbeing. The situation of a minority discourse is often a response against a dominant or majority position it counters for its individual

affirmation. Each minority discourse goes against the grain of a dominant culture. It directly or indirectly condemns the tyranny of the dominant group that is often described as unethical, unfair, and even immoral. It is an effort to shake off the majority's perception of the minority as deviant, rebellious, and abnormal. The rhetoric that gets associated with minority discourse involves tropes that represent the situation being expressed so as to be acceptable to the reader. The different metaphors that define minority from majority are carefully selected to assert its *raison d'être*.

The form deployed for the expression becomes a paradigm that unites all the voices of the minority into a single discourse. The aptness of the tropes comes in the beauty of the metaphors and other types of figurative language used. Often repetition, irony, and hyperbole are other figures deployed. The minority discourse counters the majority or dominant tradition, whether it is in sociocultural, political, economic, racial, or other terms, as already mentioned in this discussion. It turns things upside down and often expresses a revolutionary ethos to affirm its identity and relevance.

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, theory appears inseparable from aesthetics in the sense that it is the organizing principle based on incorporating ideas to approach a text, group of texts, or "studies" towards making meaning of the human experiences that the writers present in their respective works. It is a way of thinking differently from the majority or dominant group; a counter-discourse that wants to be seen or heard outside the majority voice. Theory of anything or, in this case, minority situations, has semi-autonomy of its own existence. Theory and aesthetics say something that delight intellectually through the artistic rendition of human experiences in literature.

Minority studies of African literature does not show a contestation of different discourses but a growing polyvocality and emergence of differences in a postmodern and global world of which Africa is a part. The African experience has begun to manifest the subdivision that allows Derrida's wish for a thousand flowers to bloom. Small or minor discourses are now seen as important in an inclusive and multicultural world; hence this study to show how there is strength in differences and many voices.

In conclusion, theory and aesthetics in African minority discourses are intertwined. The form and language of each minority discourse mark it in a unique way that makes readers enjoy the craft and meaning of the particular body of texts that constitute that discourse. There is no doubt that these minority discourses are the subjectivities of super-constructs such as politics, nation, gender, race/ethnic group, and other assumed or accepted norms that minorities resist to create their own spaces where they want to be left alone to enjoy their humanity. Humanity becomes a complex entity whose body and emotions differ within groups. The suspicion of the monolith could not have been stronger than what it is today that has expanded every field to many reflections and interpretations. Meaning and value become the main aesthetic features that promote minority status into a self-propelling agency that stands out as different to affirm a new identity within a bigger identity that solemnizes oneness for strength but which oppresses. From this discussion, African literature's strength arises from a multiplicity of thoughts and feelings that coalesce into groups, one major and many minorities resisting the dominant force. As Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have written, "There is nothing that is major or revolutionary except the minor. To hate all languages of masters" (26). The different African minority literatures are in every sense "revolutionary" and deploy the languages of their dominant groups to achieve their aesthetic fulfillment.

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PART II

Political and racial forms of marginalization



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3

AMAZIGH/BERBER LITERATURE AND “LITERARY SPACE”

A contested minority situation in (North) African literatures

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Are the Imazighen/Berbers in a “situation of minority” in the Maghreb and in (North) African literatures? Although raising such a question may seem paradoxical in the case of language groups that suffered censure and gross violence in colonial and postcolonial times, the notion of Amazigh/Berber minority can be tricky to discuss and is largely rejected by the Imazighen themselves. Such an interrogation leads to questioning the relationships among historical actors and to avoiding essentialist interpretations of minority and majority groups in North Africa. The assigned “situation of minority” or majority needs to be reconstructed in the light of reciprocal historical dynamics by looking at cultural interaction and change and retracing inequality in power relationships which are not simply dichotomic (dominant/dominated) but very much articulated (Bertheleu 2008: 29). Reflecting on “minor,” “minority,” and “minorization” in literature offers an entrance to such dynamic constructions. This article investigates Amazigh/Berber literature and “literary space” by looking at the articulation of identity construction and at discourses on minority and majority in North Africa.

Both the terms Amazigh and Berber are used because, since the end of the 20th century, the Amazigh (sg.) and Imazighen (pl.) tend to stand out in society and in current studies, while the term Berber remains inscribed historically in the discourse of the research domain.¹ The geographical space of the communities using Amazigh/Berber vernaculars extends from Morocco to the oasis of Siwa in Egypt and passes through Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. It also includes the Tuareg Berber-speaking populations in Mali, Niger, and the north of Burkina Faso.

Contested population figures

The estimated population figures for Imazighen were and are *loci* of political and scientific debate in both colonial and postcolonial sociopolitical contexts. The range of estimates indicates that censuses and any existing sources are either old or unreliable: Amazigh people are presently estimated to number between 12 and 25 million. The latter figure depends upon recalculation based on colonial sources, while the former derives from recent censuses that are unreliable concerning language use.² Moreover, the large migrant communities in Europe are not always taken