

Iulian Boldea, Dumitru-Mircea Buda (Editors)

**CONVERGENT DISCOURSES. Exploring the Contexts of Communication**

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## THE AFRICAN LITERATURE OF WAR. WRITINGS IN THE SHADOW OF DISILLUSIONMENT

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*Abstract: Against a background marked by continuous political conflicts, corruption, the absence of a structured management of the resources, and social and political anomy, as Wole Soyinka would so aptly describe it, in his novel, Season of Anomy, the literary figures imprinting the African space wrote about violence and social disintegration. Not only these will be the main centers of interest for any African writer but also the African War, as a social phenomenon, remains an atypical one. Its consequences are as visible now as they were decades ago, and the social disillusion it brought remains a landmark for the development of a modern African conscience. The individual, negotiating between his/her own tragedy and the desperate cry of his/her social group, travels endlessly among places, which retain the memory of senselessness. This lack of meaning is highlighted in the main works of the second wave of African literary creations, especially by writers such as Wole Soyinka, with his novel The Interpreters, which marks the advent of the second wave, and Season of Anomy, his second novel, centered on the theme of war, with its heroes and cowards. The second wave of African writers includes also Kwei Armah, with The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born (1968), which continues the theme of Soyinka's The Interpreters, Christina Ama Ata Aidoo with Our Sister Killjoy (1966), considered the first West African novel in English language written by a woman, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Half of a Yellow Sun, included in the writings of Literature of War, even if the author didn't testify the direct horrors. The African writers approaching the war and its consequences, on the background of a disrupted African space, share a profound experience, and their perception of it remains one of the most exploited sources in the history of African literature.*

*Keywords: social disillusionment, social cohesion, Nigerian war, myth, anomy*

In 1993, Oyekan Owomoyela edited the volume *A History in Twentieth Century African Literature*. Far from being the only historical account of the artistic effort in the pre-colonial and post-colonial Africa, it advanced a systematic and well-structured perspective on the literary dimension of African thought.

As one of the contributors mentions:

Since it is scarcely a generation old, it is probably too early to talk of generations of West African writing in English. I have elected instead

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to speak of “waves” of West African writing, dictated by the developments more in Nigeria than in the other countries<sup>1</sup>.

As far as we know, his classification in waves rather than generations is the only attempt in this direction. We will briefly present the first wave of African writers, inasmuch they have had an influence upon the works of the second wave’s authors.

Although he is not mentioned in Peters’ classification, Fagunwa is mentioned by critics like Abiola Irele, Simon Gikandi, Judith Tabron, even if, at least in the last case, he appears to serve as a pretext for an eulogy for Wole Soyinka’s translation of Fagunwa’s Yorùbá stories. Without deepening the artistic value of Fagunwa’s work, the author seems content to make a plea for the rather reserved interest that Fagunwa’s work was received in the Western literary world. As Fagunwa mentions: “white people did not like it very much, because the taste was already lost; in Yorùbá the story will move you, this is not so with the translation.”<sup>2</sup> After this short and inconclusive argument centered more on Soyinka’s exquisite use of English language than on the qualities of Fagunwa’s works, the discussion moves, not suprisingly, to Tutuola.

Acknowledging that a discussion on, let’s say, Fagunwa’s *A Forest of a Thousand Demons* would necessarily imply a discussion about its translation, the Nigerian writer must gain his recognition as a forerunner of Tutuola, Soyinka and many other Nigerian writers.

Deeply rooted in Yorùbá thinking, Fagunwa’s humanist works have influenced, acknowledged or not, entire generations of Nigerian writers. Though his relevance as a writer is hardly mentioned in the histories of African literature, Fagunwa is considered by critics like Abiola Irele the origin of a thread which unites writers like Amos Tutuola and Wole Soyinka<sup>3</sup>. All three authors outline in their works “the integrative role of Yorùbá culture in the situation of contact created by the advent of Western culture.”<sup>4</sup> The great merit of Fagunwa’s writing is that he made known to the Western world a unique philosophy, proving that the colonization was not imprinted in savage and irrational tribalism, but it informed with new contents a perspective on life and its meaning strikingly original. Fagunwa’s influence on Tutuola is recognized, albeit in a vague way, by Janheinz Jahn, who, in his *History of Neo-African Literature*, wrote: “Tutuola’s source... is the oral Yorùbá tradition and he is closer to it than the author Fagunwa, who wrote in the Yorùbá language and influenced him”<sup>5</sup>. Based on the analysis of a number of descriptive fragments in Fagunwa and Tutuola Ulli Beier infers the same obvious influence of the former on the later, but, as Irele underlines, important was

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<sup>1</sup>Jonathan Peters, „English-Language Fiction from West Africa.” *A History of Twentieth Century African Literatures*. Ed. Oyekan Owomoyela. University of Nebraska Press, 1993. 9-48, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Ilesanni, Obafemi, „The Folklore Fantasist.” *West Africa* 3716 (1988): 2041-2042, qtd. in Judith Tabron: *Literature from Three Continents. Tutuola, H.D. Ellison, and White*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Abiola Irele, „Tradition and the Yoruba Writer: Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola and Wole Soyinka.” *Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka*. Ed. James Gibbs. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996. 45-68, p. 46.

<sup>4</sup>*Idem*.

<sup>5</sup>Jahn, Janheinz, *A History of Neo-African Literature*. London: Faber and Faber, 1968, qtd. in Abiola irele, op. cit., p. 47.

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“safeguard the foreign reputation of Amos Tutuola”<sup>6</sup>, not to construct a niche in African literature for the first Nigerian writer. Abiola Irele nominates Fagunwa as the creator of the “mythic novel”<sup>7</sup>, a narrative form in which the folk tale gets substance, and acquires an “allegorical and symbolic quality”, promoted by “an enduring relevance”<sup>8</sup>.

The forest as a universal habitat, dense in supernatural forces that challenge man and his destiny, constitutes a theme, which Soyinka will assume in his plays, and advances a representation of the African’s existence in connection with - and shaped by – the natural and supernatural co-existing with him. His characters, predominantly hunters, negotiate their “human essence”, as Irele puts it, with the daemons of the forest, revealing and reinforcing the prerogatives of the human being in using supernatural and natural alike in shaping his destiny. In any encounter between humans and the “Lord of Forests,” there is a certain mixture of respect and assertion of this prerogatives. The dialogical style goes beyond the simple prayer to gods, conferring substantiality to those supernatural forces governing the forest.

Lord of Forests! Lord of Forests! you are the merchant prince of ghommids; I say you are the merchant prince of ghommids; there is no trader to equal you. The arm of the human kind accompanies the pounded yam when you dine, their fleshy breast provides the meat for your eba; when you drink corn pap, their skull serves you for a cup—what, I ask, can a son of man do to you? Forest Lord! Have you lately taken to walking on your head? I say have you now taken to walking on your head? For your eyes are now where your buttocks should be, spitting embers. Forest Leader, are you feeling tired? For why else have you not yet emerged? We are all assembled and still await you<sup>9</sup>.

As Abiola Irele underlines, Fasgunwa’s humanism does not proceed from outer sources, in other words, it cannot be translated in Western concepts, but “proceeds directly from the very structure of the imaginative tradition from which his work derives”.<sup>10</sup> According to Peters, the first wave made its debut in the 1952, with Amos Tutuola’s first novel *The Palm-Wine Drinkard and His Dead Palm-Wine Tapster in the Dead’s Town*. Although the work is considered a novel, there are controversies regarding the accuracy of this labeling, due to its strong dependency on oral tradition<sup>11</sup>. Nevertheless, if we accept its designation as a novel, it is considered by some critics the first novel of a black African written in English, and the first one published by a Nigerian<sup>12</sup>. On the contrary, Simon Gikandi mentioned Sol Plaatje’s *Mhudi* as being “the first novel in English by a black person in Africa.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Abiola Irele, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>7</sup>Abiola Irele, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>8</sup>*Idem.*

<sup>9</sup>D.O. Fagunwa, *Forest of a Thousand Daemons*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1982, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup>Abiola Irele, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>11</sup>Moss, Joyce; Valestuk, Lorraine. *World Literature and Its Times. Profiles of Notable Literary Works and the Historical Events That Influenced Them*. Detroit: Gale Group, 2000, p. 327.

<sup>12</sup>*Idem.*

<sup>13</sup>Simon Gikandi (ed.), *Encyclopedia of African Literature*. London-New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 628.

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If the aspect of pre-eminence remains an issue of debate, undeniable is the fact that Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is a "landmark work."<sup>14</sup> The novel provides insight into Yoruba folklore, resorting to folktales within a mythical time frame, it portrays a „nameless hero journeying to the world of the dead and backs,”<sup>15</sup> in search for his palm-wine tapster, because without him, he has become a socially pariah. As his protagonist says, “[...] they were leaving me one by one until all of them went away...”<sup>16</sup> The palm wine is used as a strong symbol of „a cultural reality he is living in as well as a preservative impulse towards his cultural past.”<sup>17</sup> His novel was criticized by his African readers as being a merely „rehash” of the stories told by their grandmothers.<sup>18</sup> This is the very dimension of Tutuola's novel which attracted his European readers – the exotics and the magical quality of his hero's journey. The major themes of this „brief, thronged, grisly and bewitching story... written in young [i.e. immature] English”<sup>19</sup>, are the powerful link of the African with his traditions and the mythology of his people, in the context of the community's estrangement due to the deliberate Western politics. Even if Tutuola did not establish a literary tradition, he continues to be considered the first African writer received with interest by the Western reader, for making accessible through reading his „mysterious Africa,”<sup>20</sup> in which the death land can be penetrated by the living in order to gain wisdom and a sense of social identity.

Shortly after the publication of Tutuola's novel, in 1954, Cyprian Ekwensi published *People of the City*, describing the sordidness of the city life, as Tutuola described the myth-rooted life in the village. He described himself as „a writer for the much canvassed 'man in the street'... primarily interested in the story of an individual.”<sup>21</sup> This urban novel was followed by *When Love Whispers* (1947), considered as belonging to the “realm of popular fiction,”<sup>22</sup>. His third novel, *Jagua Nana* (1961), represents „the remarkable story of an African Moll Flanders trying to make in the city of Lagos.”<sup>23</sup> Accused of pornography, it was firmly rejected, largely because the theme of sexuality was forbidden in African writing of his age (1950s). This controversial novel is of interest for our brief encounter with the first wave of African writers because it introduced a central theme for the second wave: the violence of Nigerian politics.

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<sup>14</sup>Moss, Joyce; Valestuk, Lorraine, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

<sup>15</sup>*Idem.*

<sup>16</sup>Amos Tutuola, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard and His Dead Palm-Wine Tapster in the Deads' Town*. New York: Grove Press, 1953, p. 98.

<sup>17</sup>Judith Tabron, *Literature from Three Continents. Tutuola, H.D. Ellison, and White*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2003, p. 50.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Dathorne, O.R. *African Literature in the Twentieth Century*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975, p. 94.

<sup>19</sup>Thomas, Dylan. „Blithe Spirits.” *The Observer* 1901-2003 (1952). <http://www.theguardian.com/books/interactive/2013/oct/05/dylanthomas-wales>, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup>Owomoyela, Oyekan. *Guide to West African Literature Since 1945*. New York-Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2008, p. 15.

<sup>21</sup>Hugh Dinwiddy, „Cyprian Ekwensi. Survive the Peace. Review.” *African Affairs* 76.304 (1977): 409-410. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/721305>, 409.

<sup>22</sup>Owomoyela, Oyekan., *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>23</sup>Simon Gikandi, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

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The image of a Lagos tormented by political rivalries, leveled through the sheer truculence, is harshly depicted in images of corpses lying on „muddy and pitted” roads, with „full gutters,” creating the sense of a chaotic Lagos, „as if the ghost of that corpse had gone abroad among them.”<sup>24</sup> Lagos is plagued by corruption, bribery and lack of any social norms, a core motif in Wole Soyinka’s writings.

In 1958, Chinua Achebe published *Things Fall Apart*, widely considered „an African classic” (Owomoyela), „the best selling novel of Africa” (Moss et al.). Achebe’s achievement resides in his evaluation of the impact the colonial period had on the Igbo society and, by similitude of effects, on the entire African space. The severance of the roots, the falling in desuetude of traditional mores, the sense of outcasting perceived by the returning hero are themes of great resonance not only in Achebe’s work, but also in the works of the future waves. What is unexpected and impressive in Achebe’s endeavor in a context in which the African writing strived to hail the originality of African traditions is “Achebe’s honesty as a novelist and historian... shown in the fact that he does present the missionaries as gaining foothold because their values offer an improvement over some real moral lapses in the traditional Igbo culture.”<sup>25</sup> It is also true that Achebe’s novels give insight in the resonance and the effect the “period of ideological crises and multiple competing orders of social reality”<sup>26</sup> The same clash between opposite social systems and their means of coping and converging in a new social reality is to be found in Achebe’s successors, Soyinka being one of them. Together with Soyinka, Achebe, as opposed to Tutuola, is considered a representative of the formal writing in the Western tradition.<sup>27</sup> *Things Fall Apart* was conceived by Achebe as part of a series of four novels, testifying on Nigeria’s history. The sequel of the first novel, *No Longer at Ease* (1960), presents the country on the eve of Independence, *Arrow of God* (1964) follows „the period when the dual mandate was introduced as British colonial policy,”<sup>28</sup> and *A Man of the People* (1966) analyses the aftermath of Nigeria’s Independence, predicting the political instability which was to plague Nigeria in the next decades<sup>29</sup>.

As David Whittaker and Mpalive-Hangson Msiska pointed out:

One of the unique achievements of *Things Fall Apart* is that it was the first Anglophone (English language) African novel to elucidate graphically how colonized subjects perceived the arrival of the colonizing Other. What Achebe achieves so successfully in the novel is to portray vividly how

<sup>24</sup>Cyprian Ekwensi, *Jagua Nana*. London: Hutchinson, 1961, p. 139.

<sup>25</sup>Reed Way Dasenbrock, „Creating a Past: Achebe, Naipaul, Soyinka, Farah.” *Salmagundi. The Literary Imagination and the Sense of the Past* (1986): 312-332. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40547835>, p. 315.

<sup>26</sup>Taiwo Adetunji Osinubi, „Chinua Achebe and the Uptakes of African Slavery.” *Research in African Literatures* (2009): 25-46, p. 25.

<sup>27</sup>Charles Larson; A.O. Ude; Chinua Achebe; Wole Soyinka; Obinkaram Echewa. „New Writers, New Readers.” *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) 4.1 (1980): 81-92. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40255753>, p. 84.

<sup>28</sup>Owomoyela, Oyekan., *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Larson et al., *op. cit.*, p. 84.

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the mechanics of the colonial encounter led to the undermining, and ultimately the overthrow, of a highly developed autonomous African culture.<sup>30</sup>

The four novels are linked by a number of shared themes: “the clash of cultures, the destruction of the old value system and authority, and... sociocultural themes dealing with religion, custom, taboo, and the supernatural.”<sup>31</sup> In this first wave of African writers we should mention Onuora Nzekwu, with *Wand of Noble Wood* (1961), credited with “the first sociological or anthropological novel in Africa”<sup>32</sup>, in which the author tries to bridge the gap between African traditions and the significant “colonial” Other, making them cognoscible and less alien.

On the same social theme wrote Timothy Aluko his first novel *One Man One Wife*, followed by *One Man One Matchet* (1965), and *Kinsman and Foreman* (1966). In *One Man One Wife*, Aluko outlines the negative effects of the Christian missions on the country people of Nigeria. The author presents in a satirical discourse the conflict between the polygamist tradition of the Western Nigeria and the Christian view on marriage or celibate, and “uncover the hypocrisy of characters like Pastor David and Royasin and their negative influence on the rural traditions.”<sup>33</sup> The second theme approached by Aluko is the influence of tradition on the urban social relations and the conflict between individuals who preserve the traditional values and those who want to range them to the modern times. Through the themes approached in his writings, at least in the first three novels, Aluko belongs to what Simon Gikandi called “the conflict of cultures genre.”<sup>34</sup>

In his later novels, Aluko preserves the satire as stylistic device and turns to a critique of corrupt political practices of the post-Independence ruling class, in *Chief the Honourable Minister* (1970), *His Worshipful Majesty* (1973), and *Conduct Unbecoming* (1993)<sup>35</sup>. Due to his lack of in-depth analysis of the characters, his rather simple style and his “failure to take a moral stand,”<sup>36</sup> Aluko was considered an entertainment writer and as such his works are not included in „the elite literature.” Nevertheless, despite the fact that his novels are addressed to the popular market, he is credited with „inaugurating the famous Onitsha market literature.”<sup>37</sup>

The first wave of African writers ends with Gabriel Okara, and his only novel *The Voice* (1964), a quest of the meaning of „it,” in a country in which the African psyche is perceived as

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<sup>30</sup>David Whittaker; Mpalive-Hangson Msiska, *Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart*. London-New York: Routledge. Taylor & Francis Group, 2007, p. 11.

<sup>31</sup>Oyekan Owomoyela, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 21.

<sup>33</sup>Douglas Killam; Alicia Kerfoot, *Student Encyclopedia of African Literature*. Westport-London: Greenwood Press, 2008, p. 235.

<sup>34</sup>Gikandi, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>35</sup>*Idem*.

<sup>36</sup>Hans Zell,, Carol Bundy and Virginia Coulon, *A New Reader's Guide to African Literature*. London: Heinemann, 1983, p. 22.

<sup>37</sup>Oyekan Owomoyela, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

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the intersection of its individual psyches, and people are interpreted for what they are, not for their mask on the social scene.

First wave of African writers were preoccupied by colonialism and its clash with the African culture, its traditions and its spirituality. Urban life, a second theme, is analyzed against the whole universe of the African village, a self-sustaining enclave in a world struggling with the attack of modernity.

As Owomoyela pointed:

Conflicts ranged from the colonial and generational through the ethnic, political, and religious to the battle of the sexes, the alienation of the child of two worlds, and the debate on tradition versus modernism.<sup>38</sup>

The characteristics of this wave reside in the contrast between popular and “elite” literature, the use of “pidgin” and high-class English, the recourse to myths and the insistence on the traditional familial and social values.

The second wave of African writers assumed these themes, elaborating and developing them in a literary epoch which was to mark the recognition of a canonical African literature. A sense of disillusionment begun to mark the African writings, with a marked accent on political corruption, alienation, loss of social values, and the interminable military coups that haunted the Nigerian space in the last decades.

As Oyekan Owomoyela underlines: “The advent of the second wave of fiction writing in English by West Africans may be marked by the Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka’s ‘The Interpreters’ (1965),”<sup>39</sup> a social network of interrogations and journeys into the corrupt core of the social scene in post-Independence Nigeria. The second volume listed after *The Interpreters* is Chinua Achebe’s *A Man of the People*, which “etches out an unflattering portrait of Nigerian independence through the eyes of an ‘interpreter’.”<sup>40</sup> The second wave’s theme of preserving the autochthonous customs and beliefs of the first wave are reiterated in works such *The Truly Married Woman and Other Stories*, written by Davidson Nicol (Abioseh Nicol), from Sierra Leone. Both stories included in the collection, *The Leopard Hunt* and *The Devil at Yolahun Bridge*, are set in the past, under the ruling of British colonists. Both short stories present conflicts between the colonial and the local administrators. The main difficulty, in Nicol’s opinion, in arriving to a shared experience and an understanding of each other’s otherness as an enriching channel, resides in the deficient communication. As Bernth Lindfors pointed out: “It is a credit to Nicol’s sensitivity and literary skill that these stories paint both sides of the racial fence accurately and compassionately.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Oyekan Owomoyela, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 22.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 23.

<sup>41</sup>Lindfors, Bernth. „Review.” *Books Abroad* 40.4 (1966): 488-489. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40121243>, p. 489.

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Other two Sierra Leonean writers included in Owomoyela's history are Yulisa Maddy, with *No Past, No Present, No Future* (1973), a "carefully constructed novel"<sup>42</sup> which outlines an ethnic adversity built on the alleged supremacy of the Creoles, and Sarif Easmon, *The Burnt-Out Marriage* (1967). Sarif Easmon's novel approaches the effects of cultural conflict and contrasts the values of pre-colonial society and the modern African experience.<sup>43</sup> One interesting feature of his writings, including his plays, is that, in appealing to an African reader – or audience – he uses Pidgin, an unusual choice for that period of African literature<sup>44</sup>.

We return to Nigeria, with the "best-known novelist of the supernatural in English," as Owomoyela introduces him, Elechi Amadi and his novels, *The Concubine* (1966), *The Great Ponds* (1969), and *The Slave* (1978). More frequently analyzed, *The Concubine* presents the village life before the arrival of the Europeans, with its customs, mythical beliefs, and their powerfully evoking culture. The link between the life of the villagers and the observance of gods' needs becomes the primary axis on which the plot develops. The same concept of gods' retribution for their neglect was outlined in Soyinka's *The Interpreters* and will find an echo in *Season of Anomy*. The original angle of Elechi Amadi's novel resides in his appeal to an outer plot, in which the causes of the effects, the three deaths in the novel, are attributed to natural causes, and a secondary plot, revealed only at the end of the book, in which the reader is forced to re-read the novel through the theme of gods' revenge. Writing about this intricate structure, Barry Ivker pointed that:

Episodes thought to be understood in Western terms must be reexamined in the light of traditional African "reason." And the very brevity of the tragic denouement when compared with the pages of psychological "realism" ironically focuses on the two conflicting modes of "knowledge."<sup>45</sup>

The same theme of gods' revenge for disobeying their rituals and their sacrificial routine underlines the plot of *The Great Ponds*. The community equally suffers the wrath of gods, innocents and perpetrators alike, suggesting the strong bond that ensured the survival of a village in the postcolonial confusing context. Beginning with Amadi's novel, the Western becomes visible as a second modality of interpreting the present, functioning together with the ancient wisdom to propose a system of social values. Informing the negotiation between these two approaches, the Western is subordinated to African knowledge; nevertheless, it helps in constructing the modern reality, and its role is acknowledged. Other themes approached in the second wave are male-female relations with a racial substrate, as in *A Few Nights and Days* (1966), and the conflict between individualism and communal values, as in *Because of Women* (1969), by the Cameroonian Mbella Sonne Dipoko.

Reviewing *Because of Women*, Robert Morsberger wrote:

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<sup>42</sup> Larson et al., *op. cit.*, p. 520.

<sup>43</sup><sup>43</sup> Gikandi, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Douglas Killam; Alicia Kerfoot, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>45</sup> Barry Ivker, „Elechi Amadi: An African Writer Between Two Worlds.” *Phylon* (1960-) 33.3 (1972): 290-293. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/273529>, p. 292.

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*Because of Women* develops into an effective study of sex and society... Dipoko does not indulge in the excessive anthropology that burdens many African novels, but he enriches his narrative with evocative images of the vital and vigorous life of the Cameroons - the banter and gossip of the people, the traffic of markets and waterfronts, and everywhere the abundance of nature, exotic birds heralding the change of seasons, village paths, decaying forests, and storm-swollen rivers.<sup>46</sup>

If in the first wave of African writers, the number of works was reduced, and each of them benefited from an amplified relevance for the emerging post-colonial literature, and the accumulating knowledge on this new world, in the second wave, the plethora of writers becomes impressive. As Peters underlines, not only the number gains proportions but also “their talents [writers’ talents] were more diversified, and their styles reflected that variety.”<sup>47</sup>

The euphoria and the sense of self-determination of post-Independence period were fading away, and the African economy was not modernizing at the same pace with the demolition of the old social and administrative structures; the newly freed nations found themselves struggling to acquire the knowledge of freedom abased on which to construct their identity as self-determined countries. The period was marred by continuous political conflicts, corruption, the absence of a structured management of the resources, and this social and political anomy, as Soyinka would so aptly describe it, was a sure recipe for violence and social disintegration. Following a study centered on the rationalities of the numerous coups and countercoups in the frail African space, Augustine Kposowa and Craig Jenkins explain:

[...] comparison of the immediate independence period with the 1970s show the major sources of coups to be ethnic antagonisms stemming from cultural plurality and political competition, and the presence of strong militaries with factionalized officer corps. There is no evidence for a political “overload” due to rising mass participation, but politically factionalized regimes were more vulnerable to coups. During the 1970s, export dependence created political turmoil, which led to plotting, but foreign capital penetration, by strengthening states, deterred coups. Military coups are largely driven by elite rivalries inside the military and the civilian government. Stable civilian rule would require an elite pact to regulate political competition within multiethnic states.<sup>48</sup>(126)

To indicate the scale of the turmoil defining the period, the aforementioned authors outline that between Independence and 1985, “the 45 African states had had 60 successful military seizures, 71 attempts, and 126 reported plots.”<sup>49</sup> In 1980, 25 African states were under

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<sup>46</sup>Robert Morsberger, „Review.” *Books Abroad* 44.2 (1970). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40124518>, p. 353.

<sup>47</sup> Peters, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>48</sup>Augustine Kposowa; Craig Jenkins, „The Structural Sources of Military Coups in Postcolonial Africa, 1957-1984.” *American Journal of Sociology* 99.1 (1993): 126-163. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2781957>, p. 126.

<sup>49</sup>*Idem.*

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military ruling, and over 90% had experienced at least one coup event.<sup>50,51</sup> The coups were not peacefully leveraged, in fact each of them took a great toll in human lives and financial losses. From this perspective, it is not surprising the trauma they determined in the collective psyche of the Africans. Coupled with this trauma, the distrust in governments, military or not, the decay of the social mores, the alienation from the familial norms, considered as incapable to preserve the social coherence until then a strong feature of any African community, are only few of the social dimensions on which the writing of the 70s developed. As Peters so aptly describes the new literary avenue, the West African literature developed against “the dismal landscapes” of a profound and large-scaled disillusionment (28). In fact, the awakening that followed the initial overjoy determined an entire wave of writing, under the denomination of “The disillusionment literature,” aka the second wave of African writers.

The first author mentioned in Owomoyela’s history of literature is Kwei Armah, continuing the theme of Soyinka’s *The Interpreters*, with its rampant social-political decay, and ill-placed Western mimicry. Unlike Soyinka’s characters, Kwei Armah suggests “ways of relieving the society of apathy cynicism, moral degeneracy and inertia.”<sup>52</sup>

His first novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), examines corruption, greed and social order, being considered “a work of uncompromising pessimism,” “an expression of a profound philosophical pessimism,” except the ending, which comes like “an articulation of guarded optimism for the future.”<sup>53</sup> Another characteristic of the novel brings *The Interpreters* and *The Beautiful Ones* together in their belief in the potential of the ritual to transform the society. On the other side of the analysis, Wright maintains that ritual is impersonal and saturated with formalism, so it is impossible to give birth to a social system as the one mandatory for re-constructing a living reality; instead, it is able to yield only “an apparently fatalistic acceptance of corruption as the total condition of reality.”<sup>54</sup> This pessimism will underline many of the works produced in this period, a clear sign that African writing did not suffer of a “cosmic pessimism,” but it was in a point in its becoming in which negation and pessimist social representations of the African condition were leaving no space for another perspective. The disintegration of a social nucleus, like in Soyinka’s novel, is not followed by a recovery or a return to the social matrix of the village. This “disintegration of the community”<sup>55</sup> is like “the human hair scraped from which decayed white woman’s corpse,” or a silence as an estrangement in which the loneliness

<sup>50</sup>Ali Mazrui; Michael Tidy, *Nationalism and New States in Africa*. London: Heinemann, 1984, pp. xviii-xxviii.

<sup>51</sup>Pat McGowan; Thomas Johnson, „Sixty Coups in Thirty Years.” *Journa of Modern African Studies* 24 (1986): 539-546, qtd. in Augustine Kposowa; Craig Jenkins, „The Structural Sources of Military Coups in Postcolonial Africa, 1957-1984.” *American Journal of Sociology* 99.1 (1993): 126-163. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2781957>.

<sup>52</sup>Peters, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>53</sup>John Lutz, „Pessimism, Autonomy, and Commodity Fetishism in Ayi Kwei Armah's "The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born".” *Research in African Literatures* 34.2 (2003): 94-111. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4618295>, p. 94.

<sup>54</sup>Derek Wright, „Motivation and Motif: The Carrier Rite in Ayi Kwei Armah's "The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born".” *English Studies in Africa* 28.2 (1985): 119-33, p. 129.

<sup>55</sup>Lutz, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

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[...] was made more bitter by the distant beat of bands on the hill creating happiness for those able to pay money at all times of the month, to pay money and to get change for it-the men of the Atlantic-Caprice. Sometimes also the sudden blast of car horns coming briefly and getting swallowed again forever, each particular sound going somewhere very far away. And underneath these single cries the night itself, a long, unending sound within the ear, just too high or just too low to disturb the captive hearer. Then the mocking rattle of the Morse machine mercifully breaking now and then into the frightening sameness of the lonely time.<sup>56</sup>

The alienated individual, surrounded by his own fears and a technology, which is meaningless to him, distances himself from a world with no meaning for him. The cars' lights passing on the streets evoke what Robert Fraser called "the sulphur brilliance of artificial light in tropical darkness"<sup>57</sup>. The same sense of non-belonging becomes a characteristic of the African Disillusionment Novel, as it was in *The Interpreters*.

*Season of Anomy*, Wole Soyinka's second novel, ends with the stirring of life in the forest<sup>58</sup>. In Armah's interpretation, "the image of the flower... disappeared".<sup>59</sup> The disillusionment already felt in *The Interpreters* gave way to pessimism, to a lack of trust in human capacity to define itself as "a singularity in the midst of the uniformity and mediocrity."<sup>60</sup> Another element shared with Soyinka's *Interpreters* is the symbol of the journey, in which the road is walked by the uncorrupted hero, and each stop brings him face to face with the unrelenting power seekers of the modern Africa. This lack of trust in Africa's future, this search for "the seeds of the disease from which his society suffers"<sup>61</sup> are determinants of "an iconoclasm" which in some instances becomes extremist, cautions Owomoyela, quoting Wole Soyinka, Gerald Moore, and Robert Fraser.

Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, a novel preoccupied with the strength of collective psyche in creating the social destiny, could be condensed in the words of the novel's narrator: "the reign of the destroyers cannot reach beyond these two thousand seasons".<sup>62</sup> The novel's division into three "realms", of the godhead, of the ancestors, and of the living<sup>63</sup>, substantiates the close dependence of the African community on the balance between these worlds, seen as equally plausible, as in Soyinka's mythical plays (*A Dance of the Forests*, *The Road*, *The Bacchae of Euripides*), or as in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*. The entire African ontological system of beliefs is based on such interrelations. The road as a symbol for social injustice, blind technology crushing any type of community residing in its way, a non-reciprocating deity

<sup>56</sup>Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. London: Heinemann, 1969, p. 15-16.

<sup>57</sup>Robert Fraser, *The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah: A Study in Polemical Fiction*. London: Heinemann, 1980, p. 21, qtd. in Peters, p. 28.

<sup>58</sup>Wole Soyinka, *Season of Anomy*. London: Arow Books Limited, 1988, p. 320.

<sup>59</sup> Armah, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>60</sup> Lutz, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

<sup>61</sup>Owomoyela, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>62</sup> Armah, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

<sup>63</sup>Khondlo Mtshali, „Gods, Ancestors, and Hermeneutics of Liberation in Ayi Armah's "Two Thousand Seasons".” *Journal of Black Studies* 40.2 (2009): 171-188. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40282628>, p. 171.

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benefiting from the sacrifices brought to it, is a visible element in both Soyinka's works and Ben Okri's.

Following Oyekan Owomoyela's *A History in Twentieth Century African Literature*, our review highlights only a finite number of landmarks from the multitude of possibilities for tracing a sum of coherent concepts and philosophical experiences in the African literary world.

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