

Continuity and Renewal in the Endless Tales of a Continent: New Voices in the African Novel Ogaga Okuyade, Guest Editor

The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale. The novelist has isolated himself. The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others. To write a novel means to carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life. In the midst of life's fullness, and through the representation of this fullness, the novel gives evidence of the profound perplexity of the living.

Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller" 364–65

Every generation of writers confronts the burning issues in its society and wrestles with them.

Charles Nnolim, "A New Writer" 158

It is my contention that the direction of any literature has more to do with the prevailing conditions of the writer's time and his or her individual response to them, brought about by the personal life of the writer.

Tanure Ojaide, *Ordering the African Imagination* 73

The contemporary African novel has to respond with ever-increasing flexibility to new and challenging circumstances in its effort to record and reflect on the African experience. From the late 1980s, most African countries began to experience dramatic transformations in their socio-political arrangements. These transformations were most visible at the level of the system of government employed by the rulers.

Military dictators began launching endless transition programmes that brought most of them back to power. Others became autocratic in their bid to ensure their **political metamorphoses from military dictators to democratic autocrats** would not be contested. The Sani Abacha junta of Nigeria and Yoweri Museveni of Uganda easily come to mind here. Despite the revolutions in Egypt and Libya that removed Hosni Mubarak and Muammar Gaddafi, respectively, both nations are still in an anarchic state, particularly Egypt, a nation barely out of a state of emergency. Within the last three decades, ethnicity has become the major currency with which most African countries negotiate leadership via elections; the Kenyan, after the Moi administration, and the Nigerian examples are the most resonant. Although military interventions are no longer popular, there are still traces of coups in the continent, such as coup by ballot in Nigeria and Zimbabwe. In order to contain these incessant crises in the continent and forge an African continent with a common socio-political and economic destiny, the leaders and heads of government in Africa changed the label of the umbrella association which offered them a platform to constructively interrogate and negotiate the fate of the continent. This change from the Organization of African Unity to the African Union was geared towards facilitating and consolidating the gains of independence, which would in turn help readjust and redefine the functions of the union to meet contemporary demands of African countries and address global challenges as they affect the continent.

In a more positive vein, Nelson Mandela, South Africa's foremost anti-apartheid nationalist, was released from prison, the apartheid regime crumbled, and Mandela assumed office as the first democratically elected president of the Republic of South Africa. Countries like Ghana, Liberia, and recently Mali have had success at the polls and in their economies. Apart from the ongoing political transformations, the continent continues to be shaped by violence, crisis, and attempted genocide. The aim of this special issue is to explore and evaluate through cultural analysis the new novel in Africa at this crucial juncture in African literary and political history, and more importantly, how the new African novelists respond to these political transformations and challenges.

The novel in Africa is without doubt the most popular and inclusive of the genres. The reason for its popularity is understandable. The African novel has remained vigorous and articulate in its examination of the contemporary African situation. Its popularity is also due “to the essential features of the form itself as primarily embodying a story and interesting stories make good reading. But the writer in Africa does more than tell a story; he arouses in the reader a true sense of himself, evoking his past and linking it to the present” (Chukwuma vi). Since the novel describes changing realities, the novel necessarily changes too; its structural and narrative designs change with the evolving social climate. This special issue addresses changes in the novel from different interpretive dimensions, with a focus on the third generation African novel.

The African novel as a cultural product emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. While the novel originated as a Western “invention” revealing the worldview and self-conception of Europeans (Saariluoma 5), the African writer has given it a new kind of existence within the African geo-cultural space. In recreating the socio-cultural realities of African peoples, the African novel at its inception bore narrative signatures and linguistic codes that are indigenously African. Considering the fusion of the formal Western mode of the novel and the local flavour derived from African narrative traditions, Joanna Sullivan argues that the “African novel evolved from a combination of both its own traditional literary forms of folklore, poetry, epics, and myth and the colonially imposed form of the novel” (186). This in turn has made Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie, Ihechukwu Madubuike, and Emmanuel Obiechina insist that the African novel is distinct from the Western variant, and for this reason it is supposed to be read and interpreted from an African epistemology. Abiola Irele aptly captures the hybridized province of African literature when he remarks that “orality as a matrix of the African imagination,” incorporated into modern African literature through “transliteration, transfer, reinterpretation, and transposition” (58), gives the African form of the genre a distinctly indigenous stamp. Regardless of this discernible difference between the Western tradition of the genre and the African variant, the novel as a

cultural product deals specifically with the relationship between the individual and his ever-changing environment.

When this special issue was originally conceived, the plan was to examine a range of narratives commonly identified as third generation African novels. However, as we received contributions, it became clear that the business of generational stratification is both fussy and challenging in the context of African literature. Like many efforts at classification, definitions and sorting criteria lose coherence and precision. Harry Garuba has remarked that the concept of the generation in African literature is “a slippery descriptive terrain in which nothing is conceptually or analytically certain” (52). J.M. Coetzee, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, André Brink, and Ahmadou Kourouma, for example, belong to an earlier generation of African novelists, but they are still active and producing narratives two generations after the one to which they are said to belong. Given the difficulties of precision, I shall use various terms to describe recent African fiction, including emergent generation, third generation, Brenda Cooper’s “new generation,” the new or recent African novel, and the new wave in the African novel.

Despite the difficulties of classification, it is nevertheless imperative to periodically reevaluate the African novel in order to come to terms with the process, developments, and trends of its evolution. Dan Izevbaye’s insistence on the importance of a periodic reassessment of the African novel is fundamental to this special issue of *ARIEL*:

A periodic reevaluation of the African novel is necessary in order to develop a lively critical heritage as support for its growth. One function of such a reevaluation would be to sift the recent past for significant contributions to fiction in order to affirm our continuity with it, and encourage a redefinition of existing literature in the light of new knowledge about literature and society. Since our attitudes to existing novels are constantly being affected by the publication of new ones, it is important for us constantly to re-examine our critical attitudes and perhaps find a new critical language to reflect our modified consciousness of what the literature means to us. (7)

The African novel has evolved through several literary and socio-cultural and political stages: from cultural affirmation cum nationalism (the first generation) to postcolonial criticism of the newly independent states (the second generation) to disillusionment and resignation (the third generation). The novel continues to oscillate between an interest in neo-colonial capitalistic exploitation, with all its adverse effects, and the failure of independence to usher in the desired socio-economic emancipation for African peoples. These pervasive dual concerns have provoked Charles Nnolim's contention that African literature of the twentieth century was "lachrymal"—a kind of "weeping literature" (1). Nnolim challenges the African writer to be forward looking, because if "African literature in the 20th century suffered from imaginary timidity, it has no reason to be so confined in the 21st century" (4). The problems that plague Africans in the twenty-first century, however, are the problems that haunted Africans in the twentieth century, including poor leadership, passive populations, lack of shared vision on the destiny of Africa, weak constitutional and bureaucratic infrastructures, poverty, disease, and war. A close reading of the new novel in Africa reveals that Africa appears to exist in a permanent state of transition.

The last decade of the twentieth century exhibits a subtle shift in the direction of the African novel. This shift is not total but marks both the beginning of new trends and an extension of the dominant ideological standpoints of the African novel of the 1970s-80s. Most of the new generation African novelists write and publish outside their nations. Besides massive exodus or brain drain, which has become the means by which Africans express their disenchantment with governance in the continent, the bureaucratic failures of government have created a permanent mood of depression in the people. As I will argue in the course of this introduction, recent African novelists use their works to insist on a second independence. Although this agitation is similar to that of the first generation, who used their imaginative composition to promote nationalism and negotiate cultural rehabilitation, and similar to that of the second generation, who pragmatically engaged African leaders on the need for self-criticism, third generation novelists also deal with the need for socio-economic emancipation. Interestingly, the socio-political

and economic history of Africa has been linear from the colonial era to the present—a history of exploitation and the near absence of bureaucratic infrastructures for the socio-economic emancipation of the people. However, the most visible change one notices in Africa's political arrangements is the face or identity and garb of government—from Western colonialists to emergent African nationalist leaders, military dictators to democratic autocrats. This special issue of *ARIEL* portrays recent writers as post-independence nationalists, thereby foregrounding the relationship between disenchantment and nationalism. The issue concentrates on the salient qualities that distinguish these writers' works and their specific relevance to the African situation and the human condition at large.

Although the politics of exploitation associated with colonialism and its consequences on the African continent have diminished as dominant subjects in the African novel of the post-independence era, transnational capitalism has become an important factor which will continue to condition the artistic and social vision of the African writer. However, the colonial legacy has not been completely ignored. African novelists have continued to interrogate dialectically the socio-economic consequences of the colonialists' hasty withdrawal from Africa. Their novels examine how this departure has exposed most African nations as fragile agglomerations of distinct groups, and exposed the ethnic divisions in Africa's political landscape. The seeds of ethnic conflict were sown during the colonial era, and these seeds have borne fruit in the form of ethnic divisions and power struggles since the late twentieth century. Indeed, ethnic division remains one of the most significant barriers to political stability in many nations, including Rwanda, the Sudan, Kenya, and Nigeria. Gorette Kyomuhendo's *Secrets No More* and John Nkemngong Nkengasong's *Across the Mongolo* address this issue.

Considering Nnolim's insistence on the need for the African writer to be forward looking ("African Literature") and Ayo Kehinde's admonition to the African writer to at least imagine a near-perfect world that is not wholly engulfed in crises, the African and his or her immediate environment have a conflictual relationship. The recommendations of these critics stem from an awareness that the older generation novelists

were too close to the colonial tensions in Africa, which made cultural conflict the dominant thematic concern of the creative engagements of the first generation African novelists. The succeeding generation, disillusioned by the monumental failure of Africa's emergent leaders, used their art to interrogate problems existing within the continent—the colonial attitude with which African leaders governed. Considering the politics of globalism and the facilities which globalization offer, one can remark that the third-generation novelists seem more versatile in their thematic preoccupations and more global in their vision and style, especially in their exploration of issues like transnationality, migration, exile, war, and cultural revitalization. For example, these new writers address pressing postcolonial concerns of the twenty-first century like ethnic conflict, rape, gender violence, the recruitment of child soldiers, and genocide.

There are two other easily recognizable traits in the new novel. One is the gradual disappearance of indigenous African narrative techniques as in Chinua Achebe's, Ayi Kwei Armah's, Ngũgĩ's, Buchi Emecheta's, and Wole Soyinka's novels. These narrative techniques distinguish the African novel from other traditions and familiarize readers "with the oral epistemology from which modern African literature evolved" (Adesanmi 245). Is the near absence of indigenous formulaic narrative patterns in the recent African novel a result of globalism or transculturation? The second common trait in the new novel is a preponderance of the child figure. Is the preponderance of the child figure in recent African novels a strategic rhetorical design to interrogate the human rights condition in Africa? Or does the child-figure suggest the stunted growth and development of the African continent?

While I was working on this special issue, Achebe, the father of postcolonial African literature, passed on. Although this issue is not a tribute to his passing, the event of his death offers us a vantage post from which to remember how his debut novel, *Things Fall Apart*, is a milestone in the emergence of a new narrative form in Africa.¹ The emergence of the novel in Africa is arguably associated with the projects of national identity reconstruction and national cultural rehabilitation. Simon Gikandi contends that the "period of nationalism" in the new postcolonial

African nations “created a space for the genre” as “the search for a novelistic tradition in Africa paralleled the search for a political tradition” (392). Envisioning the novel as a cultural sphere where the writer accounts for the African national experience creates room for the novelist to consciously and artistically perform the role of a teacher, torchbearer, and seer, bringing to bear Achebe’s legendary remark on the function of the novelist as a teacher:

I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past—with all its imperfections—was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them. Perhaps what I write is applied art as distinct from pure. But who cares? Art is important but so is education of the kind I have in mind. And I don’t see that the two need be mutually exclusive. (44)

Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* not only captures the dominant theme of the literature of the late 1950s and early 1960s, which revolved around the colonial experience and the impact of that experience on African people and cultures, but it reminds Africans that they had well defined socio-political arrangements before the arrival of Europeans. Ernest Emenyonu defends the theory of the novel that was common in Achebe’s generation:

Clearly, . . . Achebe and his contemporaries, saw their artistic roles as those of “re-education and regeneration” and believed the novel was an arena in which to wage “wars” against imperialism, colonialism, corruption, dehumanisation and ignorance first abroad and later home. Without a proper understanding of the African writer’s theory of the function of the novel in Africa, the reader may be tempted to see the African writer at the time as engaging in matters outside the realm of the novel as a work of art. (xi)

Many important novels of the 1960s conform to this political and cultural function of art, including Achebe’s *A Man of the People*, Soyinka’s

The Interpreters, Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Ngũgĩ's *A Grain of Wheat*, and Alex La Guma's *The Stone Country*. In all of these works, the African writer is positioned as an entertainer as well as a teacher and torchbearer. The African novel in particular served as a barometer of socio-political and cultural conditions.

By the late 1960s, disillusionment had become an established feature of the African novel. Africa's emergent leaders were failures, bureaucratic inefficiency was widespread, and many new regimes governed in an imperialistic and exploitative manner. As economies collapsed, national leaders did little to solve the problems, and this led to civil wars and military interventions of varied dimensions across the continent. With the rise of violent conflicts, political corruption, and military coups, writers turned away from cultural nationalism since the enemy of the people now resided within the nation rather than outside it. Gikandi captures this transformation of the African novel when he remarks that "in the mid-1960s the form and function of the novel changed almost overnight," moving "the reader away from the sometimes celebratory and utopian tone of earlier novels to a grim critique of the narrative of cultural nationalism" (393). This second generation of writers definitely knew "where the new rain started beating Africans," as the expression goes, and they consequently "distanced themselves from the project of cultural nationalism" (393).

Several trends are easily identifiable in the evolution of the African novel since the mid-1980s. This special issue does not pretend to address these trends wholly, but it will briefly introduce developments that we now associate with a new generation of writers in the continent. The first characteristic of the African novel in recent years is the emergence of a very powerful feminist streak. If the prominent African novelists from 1950 to 1990 were male, those from the last decade of the twentieth century appear to be female. This is not to argue that African male novelists have gone underground but to indicate that the number of female novelists in Africa has continued to soar since the 1990s. Eustace Palmer suggests that this exceptional rise of African female novelists as the dominant voices of the genre could be attributed to factors such as "the emergence of 'womanism' or feminism, and

the effectiveness of the International Women's Decade, women's greater access to higher education or to positions of responsibility and power within the state, or the changing relations between men and women in African society" (8).

Whatever the factors, one thing stands out: these new female novelists have productively enlarged and broadened the scope of the African novel. They also offer an alternative to the traditional man/woman relationship in African society and emphasize the need for the relationship to assume a symbiotic structure and not the dominant commensalism or parasitic formation. What is most fascinating about this development is not just the number of female novelists writing presently but their accomplishments over the years. The most resonant of these voices is the Nigerian Chimamanda Adichie. Others include Sefi Atta, Helen Oyeyemi, Unoma Azuah, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, Chika Onigwe, Promise Okeke, Ama Darko, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Yvonne Vera, Kyomuhendo, Calixthe Beyela, Zoë Wicomb, Diane Awerbuck, and Patricia Schonstein Pinnock. Most of these novelists explore mother-daughter relationships in their narratives just as earlier generations of African female novelists did. These new female writers also interrogate how the daughters rebel against the moral-ethical codes of their various societies in order to come to terms with the challenges of womaning² and constructing identity for themselves. The strategic rebellion of the daughters is what I call daughter-tongue interference³—the refusal to allow the mothers' stories to be rehearsed or re-enacted in their own lives. These strategies take different shapes and shades. However, the end result of the rebellion is of most importance. The rebellions emphasize the need to attain a voice, exercise agency, and experience female bonding. Characters like Tambu and Nyasha in *Nervous Conditions*, the anonymous protagonist in *Skyline*, Sheri and Enitan in *Everything Good Will Come*, Kambili and Amaka in *Purple Hibiscus*, and Ofunne in *Sky-High Flames* easily come to mind here. These female writers have also expanded the significance of the gender drama from the familial base. Although the gender drama is still set within the locus of the family, the writers explore national issues from this popular primordial base. These writers use the growth process of their female protagonists to interro-

gate that of their nations. Thus, socio-political problems are explored as analogous to themes of patriarchal dominance.

In a highly perceptive essay examining the relationship between product, producer, market, and the politics of consumption, Akin Adesokan enumerates some of the features of the new African novel

These novels share five features: they are mostly written by women; they are focalized from the perspectives of culturally innocent or marginal protagonists; they thematize the emotional consequences of familial or public upheavals; they are not too long, but if they are, they compensate for their length by being formally or linguistically nonexperimental; and they end happily, or at any rate, not too grimly. The features may come together in a novel (Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* or Doreen Baigana's *Tropical Fish*); some of them may be conflated in others (*Allah Is Not Obligated*, Oonya Kempadoo's *Buxton Spice*, or Uwem Akpan's *Say You're One of Them*). (4)

J. Roger Kurtz adds that the third generation Nigerian novel is backward-looking, and "four salient conclusions emerge. The first is that the recent past looms large for this group. Many of their works look to recent national traumas: military dictatorship, corruption, human rights abuses" (25). Kurtz's conclusions are applicable to the new African novel.

These new African narratives—especially the debut novels—often exhibit traits associated with the *Bildungsroman*, a form which evolved from Germany and became popular in most Western countries in the nineteenth century. Considering the narrative structure of some of these novels, Tanure Ojaide notes, "Most of the novels of the younger African immigrant writers often deal with the themes of coming of age" (*Contemporary* 33). Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*, Azuah's *Sky-High Flames*, Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, Moses Isegawa's *Abyssinian Chronicles*, Awerbuck's *Gardening at Night*, Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Oyeyemi's *Icarus Girl*, Chris Abani's *GraceLand* and *Becoming Abigail*, Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*, Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* and *Measuring Time*, Yaba Badoe's *True Murder*, Darko's *Beyond*

the Horizon, Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns*, Calixthe Beyala's *Your Name Shall Be Tanga*, Pinnock's *Skyline*, K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents*, Wicomb's *David's Story*, and Shatto Gakwandi's *Kosiya Kifefe* fall under the category of narratives of growth.

The literary prototype of the *Bildungsroman* protagonist is the German author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's nineteenth-century hero Wilhelm Meister, who embarks on a spiritual journey "to seek self-realization in the service of art" (Buckley 9). Although recent African novelists have continued to deploy the structural pattern of the *Bildungsroman* to account for the African experience, the African variant of the coming-of-age narrative differs from the traditional Western variants. The African coming-of-age narrative does not emphasize self-realization and the harmonious reconciliation between the protagonist and his society as the prototypical Western *Bildungsroman* does. Instead, it expresses a variety of forces that inhibit or prevent the protagonist from achieving self-realization. These forces include exile or dislocation, problems of trans-cultural interaction, poverty, and the difficulties of preserving personal, familial, and cultural memories.

Another significant development in the African novel is the emergence of a new sub-genre, the child-soldier narrative. Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns*, Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas obligé*, Emmanuel Dongala's *Johnny chien méchant*, Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*, and Abani's *Song for Night* are paradigmatic examples of this sub-genre. The child-soldier is not actually a recent development in the politics of global conflict nor is it an African phenomenon exclusively, but Maureen Moynagh argues that:

War machines operate around the globe, and child soldiers have been found serving in Colombia, in Sri Lanka, in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as in several countries in Africa. The figure that features most commonly in documentaries, films, on talk shows, and in published memoirs and works of fiction, however, is the African child soldier. There is, it seems, a place already prepared in the Western imagination for the African child soldier as a subject of violence in need of human rights intervention and rehabilitation—intervention that threatens to mimic

colonial infantilizing of Africans as needing the “protection” of European powers. (41)

The child soldier is both victim and perpetrator, innocent and cruel; the figure mirrors the internal divisions that are characteristic of contemporary African wars. The child-soldier became popular in Africa with the end of the Cold War. Most of the prior crises involved struggles to sustain or expand territories or control natural resources. The new wars involve internal rifts centered on ethnicity. The proliferation of firearms, especially the Kalashnikov or AK-47 assault rifle, has reshaped the crises in Africa. The image of a child in combat bearing a Kalashnikov bigger than him/her reflects a new brand of violence within the African continent. While the child soldier is neither a nascent phenomenon nor unique to Africa, it amplifies the failure of the human world to protect its future, which is signified in the identity of the child.

The image of the child soldier can be viewed from both a human rights and a postcolonial perspective. The image remaps the African continent as “a place of violence” where horrible things happen (Priebe 46) and a site “of perennial political and humanitarian emergencies” (Adesokan 11). One of the easily identifiable tropes of third generation African novels is violence. Most of these new narratives (un)consciously reconfigure and reproduce the dominant stereotypical image of the African continent as a black demonic jungle or a terrain where human existence is not only precarious but almost impossible. Images of “hungry, snot-nosed children covered with dust, amputated limbs, the killing of dogs for food, piles of dead human bodies, death as a result of miscarriage or AIDS” pervade these novels (Pucherová 8). Ironically, it is such stereotypes that first generation African novelists artistically contested with their narratives, thereby restoring faith among Africans that the continent was a living geopolitical entity before the advent of the West.

Due to space constraints, I will not elaborate on some of the factors responsible for the reproduction of cultural prejudices in recent African narratives. Briefly, three reasons account for the return or reconfiguration of denigrating images of Africans and the continent in some recent African narratives. The first is the impact of transcultural migration and

what Bill Ashcroft calls “transnation” (98). Second is the near absence of publishing houses in the continent. Third is the impact of Western literary prizes. Together, these factors suggest that contemporary writers have a Western audience and market in mind. Ojaide aptly captures the relationship among representation, production, market forces, and audience for recent African narratives:

In fact, many of the writers in the continent are helpless and desperate for good-quality publishers and often send their works outside to be considered for publication in the West. With the exception of South African publishing, which is far more advanced than in other African countries, the poor editorial staff, poor quality of books, and the weak distribution network of the African publishers keep many of the published works from circulating outside their regions of publication. When many of these books go abroad through the African Books Collective based in Oxford, UK, and distributed by Michigan State University Press in Detroit, USA, they circulate outside the mainstream’s major bookstores. In the face of globalisation, the African literary canon is suffering the inability of the cultural home (Africa) to define itself and so surrenders its identity to others to define in the editorial rooms of Western publishers caring more for the capital to be gained by giving their own audience what they want to read about Africa. (“Examining Canonisation” 17)

Considering the debasing and hopeless portrait of Africans and Africa in some of these recent narratives, one wonders about authorial objectivity in the exploration and imaging of the African experience. However, Cooper cautions that:

The recognition of social and economic disparities . . . is not in contradiction with the acknowledgement of porousness, perplexity and collusion. What we need to be aware of throughout this book, is that the everyday worlds that the writers under discussion examine are indeed particular to their circumstances;

we should know that they are not spokespeople of the worlds and circumstances of the majority of people from the countries from which they come; but we should examine their lives and struggles, within the particular angle from which they write, with respect and interest, for they deliver powerful insights into struggles and dilemmas, politics and transformations that are part of the structures of globalization and the mobility that comes with it. (22)

With the burden of apartheid lifted and participatory democracy established, the South African novel now addresses new subjects that are both enthralling and compelling. Post-apartheid South African novels continue to call attention to racial tensions, of course. Unlike most African countries where the connection between previous generations of writers and those of the third generation is easily identifiable, however, there appears to be a disconnection between apartheid and post-apartheid novels. This disconnection is associated with the reinvented national identity: the rainbow nation. Meg Samuelson associates this thematic shift in the new South African novel with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC): “These narratives are part of a larger process, in which the TRC participated and which it, in turn, shaped; the paradigms of memory, mourning, reconciliation and recovery that formed the basis of the TRC’S operations loom large in the literature produced during the first decade of democracy” (2).

Post-TRC novels speak to the collective memory and reinforce the work of the commission in recreating a national narrative, thereby engendering a new past. David Attwell states that literature after apartheid focuses on the “political ambiguities of transition: the tension between memory and amnesia. It emphasizes the imperative of breaking silences necessitated by long years of struggle, the refashioning of identities caught between stasis and change, and the role of culture—or representation—in limiting or enabling new forms of understanding” (*Rewriting Modernity* 3). The TRC constitutes a point of transition in South African society, especially in its attempt to reconstruct a new national narrative that underpins the dialectics of reconciling the brutalities of

the apartheid past in order to move the nation into a future emblematic of a kind of difference which will not be hinged on the politics of racial binary—superiority and inferiority. More importantly, the TRC altered the course of South African literature at the level of subject matter. Before the inauguration of the TRC and the eventual fall of apartheid, an entire generation of South African writers predominantly concerned with the injustices and destructiveness associated with apartheid. The temper was anger; the dominant mood was that of saturated indignation at the prevalence of different forms of oppressions and injustices in the country. This made apartheid literature almost exclusively one of “protest, resistance . . . to expose the evils of (apartheid) and to help—in whatever way literature can—to bring about its downfall” (Foley 126). However, with the demise of apartheid, some artists both in South Africa and other African countries found themselves without subject matter or reason to write or create. A good example is the Nigerian singer, Sonny Okosun.⁴ Foley argues that, following the inauguration of the TRC, the new South African literature began to concentrate on the subjects of truth and reconciliation, and the writers have continued to explore “how much has been achieved in the process of national healing and conciliation, but also, more importantly, just how much more remains to be done” (139, 140). Shane Graham suggests that literature following the TRC exhibits a kind of “collective sense of loss, mourning, and elegy, as well as a sense of disorientation amid rapid changes in the physical and social landscape. These changes necessitate new forms of literal and figurative ‘mapping’ of space, place, and memory” (1–2). Just like the TRC inquiries, the new South African literature equally exhibits features that reconnect South Africans in a form of an imagined community. A close reading of Sindiwe Magona’s *Mother to Mother* and Zakes Mda’s *Heart of Redness* accentuates the argument above. Other South African writers continue to explore the imperfections of the TRC in their narratives, thereby offering a polemical appraisal of South Africa’s transition articulated in the TRC agenda. Achmat Dangor’s *Bitter Fruit* and Coetzee’s *Disgrace* fall into this category.

My intention here is to illustrate how TRC has become a source of artistic creation of the new novelists in South Africa and how it will

continue to condition South African literature in a period of transition. Whatever the trajectory of the new generation of South African novels, it is clear that it will be conditioned by postmodernity and a world in which race will no longer remain a dominant factor in the experiences of South Africans. This is so because new socio-economic challenges continue to emerge, and the lessons of the apartheid struggles may gradually become inconsequential for addressing immediate political and economic issues in a society in transition.

Most of the essays in this special issue address two developments I have noted above. They are the new feminist streak and the shift in the post-apartheid novel associated with the new sociopolitical arrangement in South Africa.

Ronit Frenkel's essay addresses the literature of South Africa since the period of transition to a democratic state. Her essay considers a fundamental question in post-apartheid South African culture: what defines the cultural landscape of post-transitional South Africa? By examining three South African narratives, Frenkel maps the movement between transitional cultural production and post-transitional literature of the present. Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* assumes the position of a representative text of the South African transitional period, while Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207* and Ceridwen Dovey's *Blood Kin* are described as post-transitional texts. These novels focus specifically on issues like place and space and simultaneously reveal the shifts in South African cultural history, as they comprise a set of related perspectives that inscribe meaning across times and spaces. The essay argues that the post-transitional is obviously not simply a temporal marker but rather extends the parameters of what characterizes current cultural formations in South Africa. The post-transitional, therefore, is a broadening of concerns and styles that reaches both backwards and forwards with a wider scope.

Annie Gagiano's essay, "Women Writing Nationhood Differently: Affiliative Critique in Novels by Forna, Atta, and Farah," explores how African female novelists like Bessie Head, Assia Djebar, Nawal el Saadawi, Lauretta Ngcobo, and Vera opened the way for contemporary writers including Adichie, Unity Dow, Delia Jarrett-Macauley, Valerie

Tagwira, Forna, Atta, and Farah to demonstrate not only that female authors throughout the continent have a strong sense of nationhood but that they articulate their national sensibility powerfully, critically, and in complex, individual ways. Gagliano argues that the surge in African women's writing that lucidly and skillfully evinces their authors' interest in artistically capturing politically and morally evaluative accounts of their nations constitutes not only a definitive marker of recent African female narrative but also one of the most interesting features of the new(er) corpus of fiction by African authors. She contends that the most fascinating aspect of the novels by Forna, Atta, and Farah is how these diasporic authors do not assume "cosmopolitan" perspectives in their writing even as they eschew the anti-colonial gestures of earlier generations. Neither romanticising nor sentimentalising the nation, these authors nevertheless evince an ongoing emotional, cultural, and political attachment to the nation. Forna, Atta, and Farah delineate their nations' ills and interrogate the causes of the problems. They insist that nationhood is a relationship carrying responsibilities for the government toward its people.

Madhu Krishnan assesses the representations of national commitment in Binyavanga Wainaina's literary memoir, *One Day I Will Write About This Place*, Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*, and Vera's *The Stone Virgins*. Her essay explores the variety of modes of engagement with the imagined community of the nation. The three novels Krishnan examines illustrate diverse models of the individual/nation relationship, signifying the range of affiliations, disavowals, and commitments marking the dynamic and multi-vocal space of the nation as a community articulated not in spite but because of its differences. Krishnan demonstrates that these three narratives do not mark a break with the narratives of previous generations but reflect the ongoing evolution of national commitment in African literatures.

Anna-Leena Toivanen's essay focuses on Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Véronique Tadjo's *Loin de mon père*. The essay acknowledges the current transnational paradigm and the efforts that have been made to bring the local back into discussions of globalization and transnational border crossings. Her reading of the novels emphasizes national issues and ex-

plores the ways the texts employ father-daughter relations as a vehicle for dealing with the failures of the postcolonial nation-state. Since the father-daughter narratives are closely intertwined with the postcolonial nation, Toivanen uses the novels to examine daughterly disillusionment and the possibility of daughterly intervention in the nationalist family drama. By studying the family as an allegory of the nation, the essay raises a pertinent question: in what sense, if any, can the daughters be defined as “daddy’s girls”—that is, how does the complex paternal legacy affect them and persist through them?

Ana Luisa Oliveira Goncalves Pires treats Mda’s *Heart of Redness* as a text written from the perspective of a diasporic author who is well acquainted with the socio-history of the homeland. This ability to deploy myth and history to imaginatively and artistically connect to the homeland helps Mda stand out as one of the most renowned contemporary South African black novelists at home in South Africa or in the diaspora. Pires argues that Mda’s narratives are quite enthralling especially in their ability to articulate an aesthetic sensibility in which subtlety, humour, and sharp critical commentaries are central. In her reading of *The Heart of Redness*, Pires foregrounds how Mda deftly portrays the challenges facing past and present South African society through a complex alignment between two distinct narrative strands—one which is set in contemporary post-apartheid South Africa and the other, a historical narrative that recovers the 1856–57 “Cattle Killing Movement”—and artistically unveils the early encounters between the Xhosa people and the British colonisers. The essay further demonstrates how Mda weaves myth and history into the real in order to portray contemporary issues and the challenges faced by post-apartheid South Africa. Pires’ analysis suggests the current generation of South African novelists is moving away from accusations and guilt and focusing instead on the need for development and understanding.

Paulina Grzeda’s essay examines the emergence of magical realism as a narrative form in South African literature in the period of transition. The essay suggests magical realism became increasingly attuned to the South African writing sensibility of the period. Furthermore, the narrative form relies heavily on African oral traditions. Grzeda argues

that magical realism constitutes a point of confluence between black and white writing of the apartheid period and signifies a reconciliation of Eurocentric Western rationalism and African tradition. Although Grzeda uses Brink's and Mda's narratives for analysis, she suggests that magical realism began proliferating in South African novels directly following the end of apartheid. She also considers the possible reasons behind the gradual abandonment of magical realist strategy in post-millennial South African fiction. Interestingly, the essay conceptually positions South African magical realist texts at the intersection between literature of celebration and disillusionment and suggests magical realism emerged out of the brief coexistence of the two literary trends in South African literary history.

Each essay in this special issue explores the directions in which the new African novel is evolving. The essays address two of the developments I have already mentioned: the feminist streak and the post-apartheid narrative shift within the broad spectrum of South African literature. Although there are books and essays on this topic scattered here and there, this special issue of *ARIEL* on new African narratives presents for the first time sustained scholarly debates and engagements with the new wave of the African novel. These essays present new voices emerging from different parts of the continent and explore how these voices articulate new realities and visions in the African experience. Examining novels from the 1990s to the beginning of the twenty-first century, the essays provide a critical perspective on developments in the last two decades and gesture toward the shape of things to come.

Notes

- 1 This is not to suggest that Achebe was the only important African novelist of the period. Other Africans had already written narratives associated with the transitional phase of the novel in the continent.
- 2 Womaning, in this context, gives expression to the complex and cumulative process of growing up for the girl-child. The term articulates the numerous stages the girl-child undergoes to become a woman in a patriarchal society, and underpins the variety of ways the girl-child struggles to find her voice and claim space for herself as a woman. Interestingly, then, the concept can be used to measure how successfully the female protagonists in these texts negotiate their growth process from girlhood to womanhood.

- 3 The strategic rebellion of the daughters is what I call daughter-tongue interference—the refusal to allow the mothers’ stories to be re-enacted in their lives. These strategies take different shapes and shades. However, what results from the girls’ rebellious strategies is of utmost importance for our analysis.
- 4 Sonny Okosun, the Nigerian Ozziddi exponent, who passed on in 24 May 2008 in Washington DC, is a paradigmatic example of an artist who found himself without subject matter to deal with as apartheid crumbled. The finest moment of his career was in the late 1970s and 1980s when he used his music to contest the harrowing conditions in which Black South Africans negotiated existence in apartheid South Africa. His 1977 song, “Fire in Soweto,” became a major international hit.

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