

The need for a Philosophical reading of African Literature

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Abstract

Literature permeates all the labyrinth of human experience. This is because literature acts as both a reflection and a reflector of society. Through the depiction of the life of individual characters the fundamental symbols and values which unite social groups across countries and in different periods of time are conveyed through literature. Important as this consideration may be, its full impact and import cannot be harnessed if they are presented as works of fiction. The main aim of literature as work of fiction is to entertain. Yet in the African context, especially given its historical burden with colonialism and its after affects, most African creative writers employ their work as weapon of social protest. How can African literature retain its fictional character, maintain its role of entertainment and yet act as a force in the re-ordering of African society? This is where philosophy comes in. As the discipline best equipped to guide humanity towards self-understanding by examining all issues confronting humanity and proffering the best solution, philosophy is employed here as the method to be used to extract ideas contained in African literature and subject them to critical evaluation in order to determine their usefulness and justifiability. This study finds that there is need for a philosophical reading of Africa literature. This study concludes that promoting and sustaining dialogue between philosophy and African literature is essential for African self-understanding and opening up new theories for understanding diversities and divergent issues confronting Africa.

Keywords: *Philosophy, Reading, Literature, African Literature, African society*

Introduction

Without renouncing the value of African literature as fiction and means of entertainment, philosophy helps to add, extend and explore its potential as a veritable tool for reordering the society. This it does by providing the basis by which fictional accounts can be

subjected to rational examination and built into social norms and values which can be critiqued, accepted and sustained. That is, while the ideas extracted from literature can act as materials to understand society's values and practices, philosophy interrogates these ideas, questioning the values and practices to unveil the truth in any given situation. For instance, by interrogating Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow* philosophy makes it possible to understand the make-up of African society, the power structure between the rulers and the lead, the role of language in the arrangement of social relationships, the role of critical thinking in the review of life's experiences and how best to reconcile private and public issues among others. This way philosophy acts as a critical reflection on any item of knowledge raised in literature as well as suggest solutions. Philosophy, then, can be usefully applied to African literature. It is for this reason that this study makes a case for the need for a philosophical reading of African literature as an enterprise that will contribute immensely to African self-understanding and, even, her place in the world. To this end, this study is divided into five parts, the first is this introduction. The others are: Conceptualising Philosophy, Conceptualising African Literature, The importance of a philosophical reading of African Literature, and Conclusion. These parts, individually and collectively, bring to bear the cardinal importance of the application of philosophy to African literature.

Conceptualising Philosophy

A common notion often associated with philosophy is that it has no universally agreed definition. This is because philosophers disagree on what its nature, scope, tasks, overall goals, limitations, among others should be. Yet there is a point of convergence underlying the disagreements. The "need for critical reflection when handling any item of knowledge is a matter that all philosophers agree upon" (Okolo 2015:ix). This implies that philosophy can investigate any form of knowledge through the application of critical analysis in order to expose the real nature of whatever is under examination. Indeed, philosophy is derived from two Greek words: philo-, "love of" and Sophia, "wisdom or knowledge." Plato declared in the *Republic* (1941) that a philosopher is one whose love for wisdom is encompassing and devoted to the knowledge of the real. His philosopher-mentor, Socrates, held the view that an unexamined life is not worth living. For Socrates, the purpose of philosophy is to carry out a continuous examination into knowledge claims held both by others and oneself. In essence, philosophy promotes the attitude of consistent questioning, subjecting knowledge claims to thorough investigation, emphasising enquiry before doctrine and placing the search for truth as

the highest ideal for humanity. This way philosophy does the following: it provides us with the impetus for accepting, modifying or rejecting an idea; helps to sharpen concepts and in the process, at times, produce a new concept, new interpretations and new ways of rethinking an old concept; extends to all aspects of human experience and in so doing help to raise concerns in these areas such as politics, history, religion, and, of course, literature (Okolo 2015). The interest of this study is in the ability of philosophy to provide fresh insights and new ways of rethinking ideas contained in literature, thereby enriching our knowledge.

Conceptualising African Literature:

The study limits the understanding of literature to imaginative works consisting of drama, prose – short stories and novels, and poems. “The imaginative writer”, Mayhead (1965:14) submits “in one way or another, is interested in *people*, in their variety, in their speech and behaviour, in their thoughts, feelings, and sensations.” Three important kinds of values possessed by literature then are: it vitalises language; it makes for enjoyment; and it tells us things we would not otherwise have known about humanity of which we form a part (Mayhead 1965). For Ngugi (1981:6) literature shapes “our attitudes to life, to the daily struggle with nature, the daily struggles within a community, and the daily struggle within our individual souls and selves.” He insists that a “nation’s literature which is a sum total of the products of many individuals in that society is then not only a reflection of that people’s collective reality, collective experience, but also embodies that community’s way of looking at the world and its place in the making of that world” (p.7). Literature, then, “has its being, meaning and existence in the forces that operate and shape people’s lives – how society is organised, the quality of life, the physical and mental development” (Okolo 2020:150). That is literature is a fictional account that mirrors reality. African literature in this sense is fictional account that mirrors reality of African people. Ken Saro Wiwa, in fact, insists that for an African writer in his position faced with the environmental degradation of Ogoniland and the survival of his Ogoni people literature has to be combative. He submits that his art “must do something to transform the lives of a community, of a nation” (cited in Ben Anagwonye and Njideka Anagwonye 2012:199). This study will target both literary works by Africans such as *Wizard of the Crow* by Ngugi wa Thiong’o and literary works that focus on Africans such as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*.

The importance of a philosophical reading of African Literature

As already stated the concern of this study is to demonstrate philosophy’s ability

to extract ideas contained in African literature and turn them into viable instruments for the re-ordering of African society. Nine points will be put forward here to substantiate this claim.

First, Philosophy helps to underscore the role of African literature in a cosmopolitan and multilateral world. The need for people from several different countries or groups to forge a common identity founded on mutual respect in a world where power domination and manipulation continue to be real issues pose challenges to all participating parties. The most serious for Africa is how to make its voice to be heard and to count in intercultural dialogue. The multilateral nature of the world is gaining more emphasis due to the recognition that “these relationships take place within the framework of cosmopolitan – and often conflicting – interactions that try to adopt approaches towards humanity as a whole and to the world order” (Kasanda and Hrubec 2022:2). Cosmopolitan as a concept, in Kasanda and Hrubec’s (2022:2) view has “a variety of political, social, economic, moral, and cultural aspects and approaches” through which people come together, understand and transcend their differences so as to create a common space for everyone to become a citizen (Kant 2007, Appiah 2006). Okolo (2022:192) submits that presenting “the cosmopolitan community as a *safe* site where people can ‘migrate’ to while retaining what is important to their identity obscures global inequalities and the fact that the cosmopolitan ideals are not evenly distributed.” Indeed, Kasanda and Hrubec (2022:3) suggest that cosmopolitanism requires a more demanding meaning relating to social and political justice.

A philosophical reading of ‘Shanty Town’ (in Mandela 2006:32), for example, exposes the social and political injustice the blacks were subjected to under apartheid regime in South Africa. Shanty Town is a poem by an anonymous South African poet that depicts the miserable life of the inhabitants of Jabavu. The first stanza of the poem reads: “High on the veld upon that plain/And far from streets and lights and cars/And bare of trees, and bare of grass, /Jabavu sleeps beneath the stars.” Here the bleak existence of the people of Jabavu and how far removed they are from government presence and any development project are underscored. Pushed to a barren earth that is “Dry as the sand, rough as a rasp”, they are rendered powerless to even eke out a living for themselves. They have to endure “The frost-rimmed night” that “invades the shacks” with only “cotton blankets, rags and sacks” as protective cover. Reduced to such a poverty-stricken state, the people of Jabavu are politically marginalised. Okolo (2020:156) contends that poverty “makes it *extremely* difficult, *almost* impossible to effectively participate in government – whether in the capacity

of a leader or a follower.” This is because to “be a leader, a person should, at least, possess a certain educational qualification. Equally, to be a follower entails the ability to understand governments’ policies and programmes and to be in a position to accept, criticise and push for their reform” (Okolo 2020:156). Given the condition of the Jabavu people, it is difficult to see how they can participate, not to talk of, initiating intercultural dialogue. Kasanda and Hrubec (2022:3) observe that a “large proportion of Africa’s population evidently lives below or slightly above poverty line. As such, these people’s main worry is their own survival in everyday life, a circumstance that does not allow them to interact beyond Africa.” Shanty Town, however, reveals that in serious cases of poverty, the downtrodden are excluded from internal dialogue thereby creating a new challenge for cosmopolitan identity for those seeking acceptance and a voice in their local enclave before presenting themselves as members of “citizen of the world.” This way philosophy helps to clarify the interconnection and complexity surrounding the concept of cosmopolitanism and the efforts of African literary writers to promote the African profile by providing concrete materials for intercultural dialogue.

Second, philosophy helps to provide a comprehensive explanation to ideas contained in literature by interrogating the background of the idea. In his poem, ‘The Casualties’, which is an account of the Nigeria-Biafra war (1967-1970), John Pepper Clark (1975:113), submits that “We are all casualties.” The victims of the war are not only the dead, the wounded, those who lost persons or property, those in prison, but include even the propagandist and everyone who played a role in the war. From this perspective, the poem is an indictment of both the Federalists and the Secessionists and their agents and international accomplices. This, however, does not give a comprehensive understanding of the idea conveyed in the poem. To achieve this, there is need to begin by interrogating the background of the idea and then extend it to issues that will help to enlarge the scope. The relevant questions here are: what led to the Nigeria-Biafra war? Were there some measures that could have been taken to prevent the war? When the war started what was responsible for the duration it lasted? Does the end of a war signal a closure? What factors are responsible for the lingering effects of the Nigeria-Biafra war after it ended more than fifty years ago? What are the factors preventing Nigeria from becoming a great nation? Through such probing (which is outside the scope of the poem given that it would require paragraphs of explanation) philosophy not only provides a comprehensive background of the poem but extends its meaning and relevance to contemporary events in Nigeria. For instance, an attempt to examine the factors responsible for the lingering effects of

the war will lead back to some of the main causes of the war: the federal government inability to protect the lives of its citizens, especially the Igbos that were attacked as a fall out of the 1966 coup; the insecurity felt especially by the Igbos; the ethnic intolerance.

Third, a philosophical reading of African literature helps to understand better the African experience in a global context particularly as it relates to African political leadership. In Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow*, the Ruler, the president of the Free Republic of Aburiria, sets his mind to accomplish a feat that is unrivalled in the world. This is to build a modern Tower of Babel, to be called Marching to Heaven, to showcase Africa's technological might and vision unequalled by even the west. This will enable the Ruler to have a face-to-face conversation with God. To finance this ascension to heaven project, the Ruler looks to World Bank. When his bid to get funds fails, he resorts to make Aburiria the first corporony – the “Corporate colony”, leading the way to the world as “one corporate globe divided into the incorporating and the incorporated” (746). This will amount to selling his country and its people's labour to global capitalism. Marx (1964) warns of the dangers posed by capitalism, especially, the alienation of workers from their own productive activity which also leads to alienation from their fellow creatures. Labour under capitalism for Marx does not offer opportunity for self-realisation but rather drudgery which destroys both the body and the mind because the worker's labour is “coerced; it is forced labor. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it” (Marx 1964:70). Sandra Lee Bartky (1998:507) submits that the alienation of labour and psychic alienation is profoundly alike in that both “involve a splitting off a human function from the human person, a forbidding of activities thought to be essential to a fully human existence. Both subject the individual to fragmentation and impoverishment.” This helps to understand how independent African countries are mortgaging their independence and exchanging it for dependence. Both the Marching to Heaven project and the corporony vision are activities geared towards mortgaging the people of Aburiria and its future generations to Western donors thus perpetuating the peoples' subservience to the forces of globalisation.

Fourth, philosophy helps to upgrade ideas contained in literature into universal concepts such that they can be used to evaluate human conducts and guide human concerns. In Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* the principal character, Eugene, is portrayed as a confused Christian who uses his holiness as an instrument of oppression, especially on his family members. Application of philosophy to this makes it possible to place Eugene's action

in a universal context using well defined universal concepts. In this wise, the question becomes the role of oppression in family relations. Given the closeness associated with family life, what are the many faces oppression can assume in such setting? How are people psychologically oppressed expected to behave?

To be psychologically oppressed, according to Bartky (1998:496) “is to be weighed down in your mind: it is to have a harsh dominion exercised over your self-esteem. The psychologically oppressed become to themselves their own oppressors; they come to exercise harsh dominion over their *own* self-esteem.” Further she quotes Joyce Mitchell Cook as regarding it as the “internalization of intimations of inferiority”, (Barkty 1998:496). Here it is easy to see that both Eugene and his victims are psychologically oppressed. Eugene through his association with the white priest who soaked his hands in boiled water to stop him from sinning against his own body is a good example of someone who has internalised intimations of inferiority to the point that in all his actions he strives to exercise harsh dominion over *his* self-esteem. He extends this to his family members who in turn become victims of having harsh dominion exercised over their self-esteem. It does appear as if psychological oppression replicates itself and thrives most in an atmosphere of closeness. In this wise, the family as the primary place of socialisation instead of helping to liberate the individual acts as the site of confinement, a torture house of life imprisonment. Escape comes at the price of drastic measure. To escape Eugene’s house of horror, his wife murders him. The freedom she sought for herself and her children cannot just happen given the extreme route taken to achieve it. Her son, Jaja, lands in prison in his attempt to shield her from the murder. The oppression does not end for Jaja rather it mutates. And for as long as Jaja is imprisoned and is psychically alienated, for so long does the oppression of Beatrice and even his sister, Kambili, continues. Psychological oppression once instituted is difficult to erase. Its traces continue to linger in different guises that still have the power to keep the victim captive. The reason for this is not far-fetched. In spite of the changing functions of the family “the nuclear family’s responsibilities have in some ways become more important” (Nolan and Lenski 2004:278). Nolan and Lenski (2004:278-279) submit that the family bears “the primary responsibility for fulfilling the psychic and emotional needs of its members. With respect to children, the nuclear family is still expected to be the major factor in personality development, instilling basic values, providing affection, offering guidance and encouragement in school and career decisions, training in the use of money, and much more.” In this vein, Wasserstein’s assertion,

cited by James A. Gould (1998:509) “Does what it takes to become a person destroy one as a person”, deserves serious reflection. A person who is socialised in an oppressive environment may find it difficult to cut off all the shackles of oppression and emerge as an authentic being as the blighted lives of Kambili and Jaja demonstrate.

Fifth, philosophy helps to probe notions encountered in literature that are pervasive and if uncontested may be taken as natural or given. The idea that women have delineated roles in the African culture is one such notion. In *Things Fall Apart* Okonkwo’s major regret is the fact that Ezinma who showed so much promise is not a boy. Even though he perceives Nwoye as a failure, he invests all his energy in trying to make something of him. This bias is something greater than Okonkwo. It is rooted in his cultural cosmological arrangement. The lineage of a man without a male son to succeed him is considered closed; wiped out. And a man’s lineage stands a better chance if his successor is also successful. For this reason, no investment is considered too much to achieve this. Equally, in Uwem Akpan’s *An Ex-mas Feast*, all the proceeds twelve-year-old Maisha makes from prostitution is invested by the family for the school fees of her younger brother Jigana because he is the first son and should not become “useless as the gals” (81). Even though Maisha has ambition of going to school, that can only come after she has finished training her brother. In both Ezinma and Maisha’s cases their families’ only interest is in helping the sons to succeed. There is no attempt to measure the sons’ abilities, potential, skills, intelligence among others in relation to the daughters. Even though Ezinma from early childhood exhibited courage, determination, and intelligence, they are not nurtured. Instead, Okonkwo regrets that they are invested in the wrong person. In the end, both Nwoye and Jigana disappoint. Nwoye abandons his family and turns his back on his culture, thus thwarting the advancement of both his family and culture that have invested so much hope and resources on his success. Jigana leaves home to join the street urchins thus dashing the hope of his family to lift them from poverty as the first son. It appears the acceptance of a radical difference between the male and the female not just in gender but in power, aptitude, skills, talents, IQ, among others are the cardinal reason for gender inequality. Here there are issues begging for attention. Has gender anything to do with mental endowment? Is the fact of being male automatically endow the person with superior abilities over his female counterpart? Is it true that a lineage can be maintained only through male succession? If so, how is it that the prominent people we know in history, from Mahatma Gandhi to Mandela, from Socrates to Shakespeare, from Margaret Thatcher to

Mariama Ba, from Bessie Head to Buchi Emecheta, from Copernicus to Chinua Achebe are remembered through their personal achievements? What, then, is the justification for relegating a female child who demonstrates great potential to the background while investing on her male counterpart who does not possess what it takes? There is, therefore, no basis for the special investment made on Nwoye and Jigana simply because they are male children. The fact of their being male did not in any way make their success a foregone conclusion. It did not guarantee them special skills, potential, abilities, intelligence among others. They have to make their way in life based on how they are able to utilise their gifts.

It is, however, important to note that literature can also help to challenge these pervasive notions. In *Anthills of the Savannah* Achebe appropriates the traditional role of the male to perform the naming ceremony and gives it to Beatrice who in turn names the girl child “Amaechina. *May-the-path-never-close*” (222). This is traditional name reserved for boys as the perpetuators of the family lineage. Here the little girl is given the equivalent role to sustain her father’s lineage. Also, in Ngugi’s *Wizard of the Crow*, Nyawira is invested with the headship of the Movement for the Voice of the People, the only organisation bold enough to challenge the Ruler’s excesses and liberate the people. Having noted this, it is philosophy that can present coordinated argument to either counter or support notions contained in literature. The reason is simple. Literature even when it contains such ideas cannot marshal out the reasons needed to upturn or uphold such notion. Horkimer sums up: “the chief task of philosophy is to prevent mankind from losing itself in the ideas and activities which the existing organisations of society instill in its members” (cited in Gould 1998:41).

Sixth, philosophy helps to deepen our imaginative engagement with literature. Scholars (Achebe 1988, 2009; Ngugi 1981; MayHead 1965; Gordimer 1999; Okolo 2007, 2020; Davies 2007) are of the view that literary works can enrich the reader with moral lessons and even the right socio-political responses to every day issues. Many literary works bear testimony to this. Buchi Emecheta’s *Second Class Citizen*, Helon Habila’s *Prison Stories*, MSC Okolo’s *Gates of Dawn*, Soyinka’s *A Play of Giants*, Nadine Gordimer’s *Loot and Other Stories* among so many provide moral lessons and guides to everyday socio-political issues. The works in their various ways invite questions on issues of how oppressed people should fight back, how family issues should be managed, the right kind of people for political office, the fate that awaits irresponsible leaders and the role of citizens in the re-ordering of the society. However, while the reading of a literary work may help the reader to come to this awareness, literature can only

suggest it rather than state it. To state it literature will have to abandon its primary role of entertainment. It is left to philosophy to articulate the ideas, extend them and present them in a systematic way. For instance, what does it mean for a country to be democratic as encountered in the Free Republic of Aburiria in Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow*? Is the despotic character of the Ruler less than the ones encountered under military leadership in Soyinka's *A Play of Giants* and Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*? How is it possible for a democratic government to be as repressive, if not more, as a military rule? What are the factors preventing African societies from being truly democratic? How can African democracies be made to respond to the realities of the people? What should be put in place to make it developmental in its mode of practice, aspirations and service to the people? Through such probing philosophy invites us to reflect on the true meaning of democracy in African setting and factors making it impossible to live up to its mandate.

Seventh, philosophy helps to fill the gap between a writer's understanding of his/her work and the reader's understanding by providing a context for shared meaning. At times readers think that a particular action ought to have happened differently in a text, that a writer's presentation of an event(s) is (are) faulty. The suicide of Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* has been questioned as not a good representation of the Igbo society. Did Achebe misrepresent his society? To begin with, suicide has no cultural bounds and individual's responses to situations are unique based on their character, circumstance and their interpretation of what gives meaning to their lives. What one individual may overlook, another may take as an occasion for violence. Faced with a miserable painful death, after enduring a life time of poverty and derision from his people, Unoka, Okonkwo's father, chooses "to play music to the earth and the spirit of death, thereby translating the conflict between life and death into a joyful transition" (Okolo 2016:17-18). For Okonkwo, the desecration of his culture and his powerlessness to stop it brings to an end everything he stood for; he had worked for and robs life of its essence. To submit to such an existence will be to admit to and surrender to a cowardly life. For a man whose entire life has been devoted to distancing himself from being considered a weakling, even when such would have amounted to act of compassion, to submit to a life of cowardice is more than he can bear. Between the option of a life without meaning and an end to life, he chooses the latter or perhaps everything he represents imposes the latter on him. From this perspective, Okonkwo's suicide draws attention to the role of personality in negotiating life's circumstances. A real-life example will help to bring this home. In 2011 when

Muhammed Buhari lost presidential election in Nigeria to Goodluck Jonathan he declared that “*kare jini, biri jinni*”, (Hausa for “the dog and the baboon will be soaked in blood”). This was not an empty threat given the mayhem his supporters caused to destabilise the polity. Violent demonstrations erupted in 12 out of the 19 states in Northern Nigeria which resulted in enormous destruction, the murdering and maiming of several persons, including members of the National Youth Service Corps (O.G.F. Nwaorgu, C.C. Ojukwu and M.S.C. Okolo 2017: 178). In 2015, when Goodluck Jonathan, the incumbent president, lost the election to Buhari, he called and congratulated him even before the official announcement of the result by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). In accepting defeat, he urged his supporters to toe the line of peace because no election is worth the life of any Nigerian. In highlighting the importance of individuals as active agents in the propagation or subversion of culture, philosophy fills the gap between a writer’s work and the reader’s interpretation.

Eighth, philosophy makes it possible to assess a literary works ability to act as an agent of denigration or transformation by critically evaluating the import of language employed in a literary work. The words a writer uses are perhaps more important than the story because it is the words that infuse the story with meaning. To write about an African who has received the rudiments of western education as “an improved specimen” whose sight is “as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat walking on his hind legs” as Conrad (1972:38) did is to denigrate a people on the one hand. On the other hand, to write of Africa and her people as “Africa of proud warriors” as Diop (1976:68) recalls is to cast a people in a transformatory role. The function of philosophy is not to dismiss any of the assertion but rather to subject them to critical evaluation in order to render an impartial judgement. To begin with there is documented evidence that everybody on the planet ‘has inherited a small piece of genetic material (mitochondrial DNA) from one woman who lived over 190,000 years ago in Africa’ (*Readers Digest* 2008:174). Again, among the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, Egypt contributed two: the Great Pyramid at Giza and the Lighthouse of Alexandria. Also, Benin’s cravings were looted and plundered by British colonialists. In addition, Peter Vakunta (2006) informs that before the colonisers came to Africa, there were well-established educational institutions. He lists the universities to include the Al-Azhar University in Egypt, the University of Fez in Morocco, and the University of Timbuktu in Mali. Given these, is the description of an African as ‘an improved specimen’ due to his association with a European, correct? Could an association between two entities improve one and leave the other completely

unaffected? Is it possible that in a relationship involving two people that only one has the power of assessment? Can such an assessment pass the test of objectivity? What then will be the basis for its acceptance? In posing these questions philosophy makes it possible to show if the language is biased and what possible interpretations can be given.

Ninth, philosophy helps to sustain interest in a literary work by finding new and unexplored interpretations to a literary work. Here Okonkwo's suicide in *Things Fall Apart* is again an apt example. For instance, in Lene Bull-Christiansen's (2004) account Okonkwo's suicide is a mere breakdown as a result of the pressure of Christianity. Does this account sum the weight of the intrigue surrounding Okonkwo's exit from life. Upon his return to Umuofia after his exile Okonkwo was deeply grieved. And 'it was not just a personal grief. He mourned for the clan, which he saw breaking up and falling apart, and he mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like women' (129). He kills the white man's head messenger in a final attempt to restore Umuofia's past glory. He realises that there is nothing left to save when the men of Umuofia broke into tumult instead of backing his action. Okonkwo's suicide is the exit of a traditional hero who will not be a part of the desecration of his world. He knows that the west is irrevocably let in to borrow some of David Rubadiri's final words in *Stanley meets Mutesa*. Unlike Mutesa, Okonkwo is incapable of shaking the white man's hand and whispering, *Mtu Mweupe Karibu*, white man you are welcome. In the face of an irrevocable situation, the only option he can control is to remove himself from the equation. This way he not only leaves behind an unequivocal statement on his stance about colonial penetration into Africa but leaves an eternal warning of the kind of fate that awaits a people who cowardly abandons their culture for a way of life that is not theirs and will never be theirs. In Okonkwo's tragedy then is located the root of African identity crisis.

Conclusion

This paper set out to establish the need for a philosophical reading of African literature. To achieve this goal, it demonstrated the importance of philosophy in extracting ideas contained in literature and exposing them to critical reflection such that the ideas can be usefully applied to reordering of the African society. It further highlighted how philosophy provides the basis by which fictional accounts can be evaluated, accepted and sustained. Beyond this, philosophy's importance in interrogating the make-up of society, the power structure between the rulers and the lead, the role of language in the arrangement of social relationships as captured in most Africa literature is shown. Specifically, the paper profiled

works of some African writers such as John Pepper Clark, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Uwem Akpan, Chimamanda Adichie, Chinua Achebe who have contributed immensely to the understanding of social events in Africa. Given the many points discussed in this paper, it is clear that the reordering of African society depends critically on harnessing the ideas contained in African literature and subjecting them to philosophical reflection.

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Received on March 28, 2023

Accepted on July 12, 2023

Published on July 20, 2023