

New African Women's Narratives and the Negotiation of Language: Between Decolonization and Globalization in Modern African Writing.

Achinko Estella Endah, PhD.

Department of African Literature and Civilization
University of Yaoundé 1, Cameroon
mrsachinko@yahoo.com

Professor Cécile-Dolisane Ebossé

Department of African Literature and Civilization
University of Yaoundé 1, Cameroon
dolisanececile@yahoo.fr

Abstract: In Africa's plurilingual and postcolonial context, language remains a contested site constantly negotiated through identity, power, and resistance. Contemporary African writers occupy a unique space, using language not only as a medium of expression but also to construct gender, linguistic indigenization, and hybrid discourse forms within colonial hierarchies in literary production. This study examines how contemporary African women writers negotiate language as both a colonial inheritance and a transformative tool for articulating indigenous epistemologies within global literary spaces. Situated within sub-postcolonial narratives and the politics of language in African literature, the study argues that modern African women's narratives do not merely reject colonial languages such as English and French, but consciously refashion them to transmit African worldviews into global discourse. And by exploring how linguistic hybridity operates as narrative strategies that disrupt Eurocentric literary norms while sustaining dialogue with global thought. Methodologically, a qualitative comparative analysis engages a close reading of the corpus to demonstrate language negotiation. This research brings into perspective Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's critique of colonial language politics, Homi Bhabha's hybridity, the notion of the 'Third Space', and Obioma Nnaemeka's Nego-feminism, blending transnational feminist perspectives. The selected narratives of Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* and *How Beautiful We Were*, Angeline-Solange Bonono's *Marie-France L'Orpailleuse*, and Chidiogo Akunyili-Parr's *I Am Because We Are: An African Mother's Fight for the Soul of a Nation*, show how linguistic hybridity is positioned as a site of resistance to global dominance, where indigenous knowledge systems intersect with transnational realities, producing narratives that are neither African nor Western. Ultimately, the study positions modern African women's narratives as an intersection and a convergence of local identities and global realities. Thus, foregrounding their vision and the relevance of language in shaping voice, power, gender, linguistic agency, and epistemic pluralism. **Keywords:** new African women's narratives; linguistic hybridity; decolonization; globalization; Nego-feminism; Indigenous knowledge; transnationalism.

Résumé : Dans le contexte plurilingue et postcolonial de l'Afrique, la langue demeure un terrain de contestation, constamment négocié à travers les enjeux d'identité, de pouvoir et de résistance. Les écrivaines africaines contemporaines occupent une place singulière : elles utilisent la langue non seulement comme un moyen d'expression, mais aussi pour façonner les questions de genre, l'indigénisation linguistique et des formes discursives hybrides au sein des hiérarchies coloniales régissant la production littéraire. Cette étude examine la manière dont ces écrivaines appréhendent la langue, à la fois comme un héritage colonial et comme un outil de transformation permettant d'articuler des épistémologies autochtones au sein des espaces littéraires mondiaux. S'inscrivant dans le champ des récits postcoloniaux et de la politique linguistique en littérature africaine, l'étude soutient que les récits des femmes africaines modernes ne se contentent pas de rejeter les langues coloniales telles que l'anglais et le français ; elles les remodèlent consciemment pour transmettre des visions du monde africaines au sein du discours mondial. L'analyse explore également comment l'hybridité linguistique opère comme une stratégie narrative bouleversant les normes littéraires eurocentrées tout en maintenant un dialogue avec la pensée mondiale. Sur le plan méthodologique, une analyse comparative qualitative repose sur une lecture approfondie du corpus afin de mettre en évidence les processus de négociation linguistique. Cette recherche met en perspective la critique de la politique linguistique coloniale

formulée par Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, la notion d'hybridité de Homi Bhabha, le concept de « Third Space » (« troisième espace ») et le Nego-feminism d'Obioma Nnaemeka, tout en intégrant des perspectives féministes transnationales. Cette étude propose d'œuvres choisies d'écrivaines africaines contemporaines — *Behold the Dreamers* et *How Beautiful We Were* d'Imbolo Mbue, *Marie-France L'Orpailleuse* d'Angeline-Solange Bonono, et *I Am Because We Are: An African Mother's Fight for the Soul of a Nation* de Chidiogo Akunyili-Parr — pour démontrer comment l'hybridité linguistique s'affirme comme un lieu de résistance à la domination mondiale, où les systèmes de savoirs autochtones croisent des réalités transnationales pour produire des récits qui ne sont ni purement africains ni purement occidentaux. En définitive, l'étude présente les récits des femmes africaines modernes comme un point de rencontre et de convergence entre identités locales et réalités mondiales, mettant ainsi en lumière leur vision ainsi que le rôle crucial de la langue dans la construction de la voix, du pouvoir, du genre, de l'agentivité linguistique et du pluralisme épistémique.

Mots-clés : Récits de femmes africaines contemporaines ; Hybridité linguistique ; Décolonisation ; Mondialisation ; Nego-féminisme ; Littérature africaine moderne ; Savoirs autochtones ; Transnationalisme.

Introduction

Language has been a major factor in the debate on the decolonization of African indigenous knowledge systems among African scholars. Modernity and globalization have further intensified this debate, highlighting its complexity, as language can be negotiable due to push factors such as mass migration to the West coupled with socio-political challenges relating to issues of weak governance and lack of opportunities in many African states, contributing to the growing aspirations among Africans to engage with global spaces. As a result, colonial languages remain dominant as tools to facilitate mobility, communication, and interactions in global spaces, and largely due to the fact that English and French continue to dominate everyday communication and intellectual production across the continent as an inherited colonial legacy. To further illustrate, for well-traveled Africans, rejecting a language like English completely would be out of the question since it is widely used and cannot be ignored. Hence, allowing them to adopt hybrid identities to position themselves as global citizens. However, the depth to which colonial languages have shaped the foundations of African educational systems and everyday knowledge makes decolonization a challenging process and a contradictory force for the African intellectual. Wiredu (1998) provides a succinct definition of decolonization: “divesting African philosophical thinking of all undue influences emanating from our colonial past” (pp. 17-47). Here, Wiredu offers a detailed and nuanced descriptive, prescriptive, and corrective oeuvre on wide-ranging issues, such as the impact of foreign languages on African thought and practices – as no language is conceptually neutral.

Decolonization is a reflective way of engaging with received ideas about Africa, and critiquing their validity from the standpoint of a native speaker of African language/s. Wiredu holds that, as a critical enterprise, decolonization demands that the African scholar be ‘doubly critical’ in engaging with the conceptual and discursive frameworks regarding both philosophical and religious ideas, bringing us to question: Can the use of colonial languages constitute a form of decolonial practice when those languages are appropriated, transformed, and made to articulate African epistemologies? Contemporary African female narratives such as Imbolo Mbue’s *Behold the Dreamers* (2016) and *How Beautiful We Were* (2021), Angeline-Solange Bonono *Marie-France L'Orpailleuse* (2017), and Chidiogo Akunyili-Parr’s *I Am Because We Are: An African Mother's Fight for the Soul of a Nation* (2022), are content with these realities rather than outrightly rejecting them.

In embracing this dimension, the selected African female writers and their narratives mentioned are referred to in this research as 'new', as they began to emerge during the global era, blending English and French with indigenous languages to not only create a stylistic hybridization but to enhance the narratives through 'Nego-feminism', equally viewed as a form of transnational negotiation transcending the global to reclaim the local beyond borders. By refuting both linguistic assimilation and pure nativization, new African women's narratives are still met with the difficulty of indulging solely in the decolonization process.

1. Methodology

This study is based on qualitative, interpretative, and comparative methodologies that offer a close reading of texts and facilitate analysis. The primary corpuses are: Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* and *How Beautiful We Were*; Angeline-Solange Bonono's *Marie-France L'Orpailleuse*; and Chidiogo Akunyili-Parr's *I Am Because We Are: An African Mother's Fight for the Soul of a Nation*. These texts are specifically chosen to show the diverse linguistic aspects aligning with the cross-cultural perspectives of this study. The writers are very distinct in how they craft their narratives, giving a unique blend of Cameroonian fictional literature from Anglophone and Francophone backgrounds, and a memoir narrative from Nigeria (Anglophone African) background, to bring divergent aspects of the linguistic blend of the African experience in modern times. The thematic development forms the ideological background of the study on pressing issues coded in the narrative pattern of the texts that contribute to the writers' distinct linguistic, comparative, and narrative approaches. The methodology doesn't claim to represent all contemporary African women's writing or all African linguistic contexts, given its delimitation. Its focus is primarily comparative and interpretative, showing how the corpus's multilingual and hybrid textual forms pose complexities to decolonization. Finally, it draws an analytical conclusion that avoids generalizing.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on discussions of multiple perspectives from influential writers, critics, and scholars to enrich the work. Perspectives on the politics of language and decolonization are drawn from Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Kwasi Wiredu. Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity and the 'Third Space' are integrated in this work. Nego-feminism is associated with Obioma Nnaemeka to demonstrate African women's linguistic positionality in that language, as a colonial legacy becomes a point of negotiation. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan's transnational feminist criticism bring attention to movement, location, and the interaction of local and global power structures.

3. 'Nego' Feminism, Gender and the Emergence of the 'New' African Woman Writer

The emergence of the 'new' African female writer marks a paradigm shift in African literary production, relating specifically to voice, agency, and representation. In the past, women were largely absent from, or overlooked in, African literary traditions dominated by male writers during the precolonial and colonial eras. They played insignificant roles in the writings of their male counterparts in African Literature, as seen in the literary movements of the pre-colonial and colonial periods. Colonialism's early focus on writing as a male-dominated activity created obstacles for the education of women and the early exploration of women-centered ways of knowing in the African knowledge base. This made it difficult to understand women's advancement in the changing society. As Kalisa (2009) asserts, this absence is linked to three interrelated dimensions: the lack of women's involvement in postcolonial discourse, their perceived linguistic limitations in handling colonial languages, and systemic gender discrimination rooted in patriarchy. These conditions created voicelessness, rendering women's literary invisibility across Anglophone and Francophone contexts.

Through the evolution of feminist insights, they found it necessary to project the experience of the African subject in the global world, where language is used as a narrative tool to negotiate the modern African experience, and to cross-examine the complexities of their lives in relation to global culture. It is important to note at this point that when engaging with African women's writing, the canonical Western feminist movement of the 18th century shaped various feminist perspectives universally, also giving room to Black and Third World feminists to counteract it and bring in perspectives that suit their own purposes and realities. This led to a recentering of African feminism, splitting into diverse frameworks such as: 'Motherism', by Catherine Acholonu, 'Womanism' by Chikwenye Ogunyemi in her re-reading of Alice Walker, 'STIWANISM' by Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie; and 'Nego-feminism' by Obioma Nnaemeka. Even though these frameworks are significant, this paper draws more on 'Nego-feminism' from Nnaemeka's 2004 essay titled "Nego-feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way" to theorize how African women negotiate and navigate around patriarchal structures, colonial legacies, and communal imperatives to secure agency and negotiation; Nnaemeka advances that "the way African women have always theorized and practiced feminism" (p. 378). Nego-feminism in the article allows us to interpret linguistic adaptation in ways that the production of language is rooted in negotiating power.

Transnational feminist perspectives complement Nego-feminism because it moves African women from a homogeneous category, as the selected writers occupy different linguistic and geographic positions. Grewal and Kaplan propose transnational feminism as a bridge for integrating and negotiating the local and the global from women's standpoint, as we see with the African women writers in this study. Contemporary female writers disrupt silence and invisibility by moving beyond the social to intersect with the linguistic aspects defined in this study. They are inserting themselves within both local and global literary spaces as I draw from the concept of the 'new' African female writer in this discourse informed by the earlier notion of the 'new woman' in 19th-century Britain, embodying characteristics of independence, intellectual agency, and resistance to patriarchal standards. I reimagine this figure in the African context as a woman redefining tradition and modernity by actively negotiating and shaping her own identity and destiny. As Stegeman (1984) puts it: "The new woman is used to show the rebellion of a person who wishes to assume responsibility for her life to reason about values of life and to determine the goals of her life. She thinks of herself, not the group. She uses reason rather than tradition; she assumes responsibilities for changing her situation rather than accepting the conditions in which fate places her" (p. 4).

Similarly, the 'new African woman' as described in contemporary feminist discourse is no longer powerless, but defined by education, her assertiveness, confidence, and global mobility. She now participates in public spaces, contributes to debates both nationally and internationally, thereby redefining African womanhood beyond traditional limitations and through her assertiveness. Beyond the new African woman's emergence being social, it is also literary, as she now enters global intellectual spaces at a time shaped by globalization, migration, and international exchange. Grewal and Kaplan (1994), place particular importance on "locations, both locations of origin and diaspora, and their attendant differences in culture, class, gender, sex, economic and racial politics for the varying diasporas that exist worldwide" (p. 16). Friedman (1998) insists that feminism be theorized with the understanding that "the global is always already present in the local; the local always already present in the global" (p. 111). Mbue, Bonono, and Akunyili-Parr, contemporary African female writers, demonstrate that even within these specific diasporic communities, gender politics produce divergent, and sometimes conflicting, male and female encounters with hegemony. Recognizing her circumscription in many

areas of contemporary experience, this perspective emphasizes the need for an extension of boundaries so as to facilitate validation of her participation as a woman.

Nego feminism, merged with a transnational feminist critical stance, allows us to see the new African woman writer as a product of globalization, explaining her emergence alongside modern narratives, contributing to the linguistic process from a point of negotiation. This negotiation equally brings into this study a cross-cultural African literary perspective of both Anglophone and Francophone narratives as seen in the selected texts: Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers and How Beautiful We Were*, Angeline-Solange Bonono *Marie-France L'Orpailleuse*, and Chidiogo Akunyili-Parr's *I Am Because We Are: An African Mother's Fight for the Soul of a Nation*.

4. New African Female Narratives and Centering Language Within Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Contemporary female narratives foreground language as a critical site of negotiation between indigenous knowledge systems and global realities. While the inherited colonial languages such as English and French remain dominant, African writers continually look for ways to appropriate and transform these languages to reflect African identities, using language expressed in mixed forms of their African heritage and colonial inheritance, defining their role at the center of international discourses that is neither wholly local nor global. In centering the use of language within indigenous knowledge systems, Mbue, Bonono, and Akunyili-Parr still attempt to valorize African languages in their work by writing from a transnational space, placing them parallel to the colonial languages (English and French), which they had adopted as Cameroonian and Nigerian authors. The narratives echo here with prominent writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1981), who tirelessly advocated for decolonizing African knowledge systems, differentiating it from Western epistemologies, as he argued that:

One may note that African literature in the European language lays claim to being differentiated from metropolitan literatures not only in its content but also to some extent in its form. Its originality comes from the recourse made by our writer, not only to African themes and subjects and to elements of folklore, but also to stylistic innovations derived from the formal features of traditional African literature (p. 16).

Ngugi establishes a historical problem with his critique. He doesn't project languages as neutral, especially when one language has been given utmost importance through colonial education and cultural institutions. Meanwhile, African languages have remained marginalized. There's a glaring fact that African writers still find ways to distinguish their writing and knowledge from the center despite using universal languages of English and French, while this originality is important to maintain not only in its themes but in stylistic innovations rooted in African oral traditions.

4.1. Language, Cultural Identity and the Use of Indigenous Names in Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*.

Culture is the easiest way to identify a people. As Epounda and Makogn (2025) add, culture is at the intersection of any given people. As such, it implies a totality of traits and characteristics that are uncommon to a people, for it differentiates them from other people. Such is the African culture taken as a whole complex which encompasses people's language, beliefs, names, work, laws, customs, habits, knowledge and any other values and capabilities likely to be acquired by a man as a member of a community. Accordingly, commenting on culture, Aziza (2001) holistically approaches the term when he pinpoints that:

Culture refers to the totality of the pattern of behavior of a particular group of people. It includes everything that makes them distinct from

any other group of people; for instance, their greeting habits, dressing, social norms and taboos, food, songs and dance patterns, rites of passage from birth, through marriage to death, traditional occupations, religions, as well as philosophical beliefs (p. 31)

This conception drives us to draw a parallel between culture and civilization since the latter denotes the way of life of a people. Therefore, it appears clearly that there can be no culture without people or society and no society without culture. Both terms stand as two facets of the same coin, and as such they remain complementary and depend on each other.

Mbue plays into this in her fictional novel as she uses names of African countries and cities to creatively name her characters, such as Malabo, Lusaka, Juba, Bissau, Nubia, Sahel, Bamako, and Cotonou. This naming of characters following African countries and cities indirectly gives a Pan-African feel of complementarity and dependence on each other, by being able to understand and see themselves in the story through language that is familiar and connects them.

Equally, it evokes a sentimental attachment for the modern African to create a liaison back to her home and cultural roots, even though he or she evolves with the global times. There is a need not to lose her authenticity in this fast-changing world, with literature being a form of cultural production; cultural names solidify connectivity and solidarity as they can be easily identifiable, also drawing in a broader audience and readership from different parts of Africa.

4.2. Language Mixture in Imbolo Mbue's Behold the Dreamers

A significant portion of this linguistic negotiation is language mixture, which incorporates vernacular expressions, pidgin English, and untranslated words. Mbue portrays the protagonist Neni in conversation with her friend, Fatou. Neni, who is originally from Cameroon and from an anglophone background, and Fatou, from Burkina Faso, having a francophone background, struggle with imperfections in expressing themselves in the English language by constantly using pidgin/English local parlance of West African origin, to comfortably share her worry with Neni about her husband and children's disinterest in visiting back home in Africa, as she says "Ousmane no want go back home," "If only me I go back. I go to my village, build house near my mother and my father. I live quiet life, die quiet die. If only me, I go home très bientôt..." (pp. 358-359). This depicts language bricolage for the African immigrant like Fatou, who takes on new language expressions, culture, and identity, like pidgin/English, even despite her inability to speak fluently. However, the pidgin/English language expression allows her to easily connect and flow with another African like Neni from a different cultural background, as they see and understand each other as African sisters. Their conversation unfolds to show that the immigrant experience and global attraction in Western and most developed countries have been the greatest means of escape for those from Third World or developing countries, given reasons of poverty, suffering, and bad governance, with some never wanting to look back at where they came from. Fatou's talks about her husband's lack of interest in going home even though he was born and raised in Africa, and how her children show no zeal to return to their parents' home country to discover their heritage. They would rather be seen to show so much pride in the nation of America, as they were born there and are second-generation immigrants, rejecting their own African values. The significance here is not that Fatou's English is imperfect, but that it proves the linguistic hierarchy in the global space as revealed in the novel. It equally demonstrates intimacy in the relationships among African immigrants who have different national and linguistic backgrounds bond so well through the simplicity of how language is being communicated.

Furthermore, the novel reveals the mixture of pidgin/English with French through Neni's conversation with her husband, as she often used words like 'papier' in French, translated as paper, to communicate with her husband about what they could do to get their papers in the United States. This mixture of French with pidgin-English in the Cameroonian context is typically referred to as '*Camfranglais*'¹ and illustrates the fluid linguistic realities of contemporary Cameroon where languages intersect and evolve, resisting the homogenizing tendencies of global language forms. The multilingual vocabulary shows the process in the transnational movement of the immigrant through documentation, aspirations and identities.

4.3. Folk Songs and Warrior Chants as Language of Oral Tradition, Resistance and Connectivity in Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* and *How Beautiful We Were*.

Agatucci's (1998) words are meaningful when he writes: "oral African storytelling is essentially a communal participatory experience. Everyone in the most traditional African societies participate in formal or informal storytelling as interactive oral performance" (p. 5). In the same vein, recognizing the influence of oral tradition in the works of female writers such as Bessie Head is described by MacKenzie (1989) in his observation that "... She is writing from within a culture with no written history, where storytelling and the oral tradition generally are the means whereby the community explains itself. Contemporary village life displaces the oral tradition but is itself characterized by a milieu of informal gossip and tales" (p. 17). Here, oral traditions or forms are taken as the primary means of preserving and transmitting knowledge across generations. In other words, Africans use them to transfer history, moral and social values, and culture from one generation to the next. They deserve to be not only recalled timelessly but also analyzed regarding the people's cultural experiences. Throughout their implementation, we understand the people's attitudes to inevitable phenomena and the depiction of Africans' way of life serving at the same time as a depository of their beliefs.

In line with this, Mbue constantly uses warrior chants in *How Beautiful We Were* such as "Sons of the leopard, daughters of the leopard, beware all who dare wrong us, never will our roar be silenced" (p. 282). This chant gives indirect insight into the determination and fierce spirit of the youth of Kosawa in winning the fight for injustice brought upon them and their community by Neoliberal powers. Foreign companies and multinationals like Pexton establishing in Kosawa have devastated the community through pollution, toxins, and generational deaths leaving the indigenes to come in solidarity and fight for the rights to their land their existence. The youths blaze the trail with warrior chants evoking the spirit of their ancestors/forefathers to lead them through it all. It is an insight to their warrior spirit stemming from their forefathers who blazed the trail for them referred to as 'leopards'.

Second, in the novel *Behold the Dreamers*, Mbue employs songs in Cameroonian pidgin to connect the character Neni back to her roots while abroad. The protagonist Neni joyfully sings in her local Bakweri dialect and pidgin English when her husband gets a job "E weni Lowa la manyaka..., E weni Lowa la manyaka, Lowa la nginya, Na weta miseli, E weni Lowa la manyaka", ... "God na belebe, God na waya oh, God na belebe, God na waya oh, nobody dey like am oh, nobody dey like am oh, ewoo nwanem, god na belebe."² (p. 31). These songs reflect the joy of being, and cultural

¹ *Camfranglais*: The mixture of French and Pidgin-English typically used in the Cameroonian context to show the evolution of language and communication within post-colonial societies. Imbolo Mbue uses this mixture of language as a contemporary Cameroonian writer in her narrative *Behold the Dreamers*.

² Translation of Quotation Number [5]-A Chant praising God; "God is so great, God is so great, God is such a wonder!"

continuity, where remembering allows her to reconnect to her roots within a diasporic setting as an immigrant.

Here, Mbue uses a collective oral form as opposed to the conventional narrative prose to depict an aspect of the indigenous African communal experience passed down from generation to generation. A form of art in African communities shows the continuity that African oral tradition is not obsolete, as in one way or another, everybody participates and connects to it. Bodunde (1992) observes that “the influence which the various elements of oral traditions exert on modern African writing, especially poetry, is indeed tremendous. In fact, ... traditions can be attributed to the writers’ recognition of the functions which verbal art forms perform in the society” (p. 20). More importantly, these elements of oral traditions, including folktales, myths, legends, riddles, proverbs, and many others, educate, socialize, divert, or entertain people while explaining the source of existence using language they understand.

4.4. Language as Integration and Social Positioning Angeline-Solange Bonono’s Marie-France L’Orpailleuse

Language functions as social positioning for the African immigrant as seen across Bonono’s characters. The protagonist, Marie-France, improves her mastery of the French language to reflect her attempt to integrate into Western society as she describes “Tous les jours, mon lexique s’enrichit de réalités jusque-là furtives. J’entends le mot papier, décliné joyeusement ou tristement : certificat de nationalité, carte de séjour, de résident, de visiteur, Anpe, Assedic, regroupement familial, intégration, racisme, diversité, discrimination, immigration...”³ (p. 30). While Marie-France makes efforts to improve her vocabulary by learning new words, this improvement in the French language contrasts with her development compared to a traditional practitioner who constantly expresses himself using unrefined speech when he tells Marie-France that her father is the cause of her misfortune and stagnation in France: “Problème très grave! Vie ou mort ! C’est ton père qui veut te tuer ! Malchance beaucoup beaucoup!” ... “Oui, c’est papa de toi qui accouche toi là, grand sorcier beaucoup ! Père c’est mal accousse toi. Mal! Mal!”⁴ (p. 90). This assertion reveals how the traditional practitioner’s expressions don’t follow the regular grammatical structure of the French language, including mispronunciations of words in French, hence posing a problem for his integration in an advanced society despite wanting to be himself and sticking to his original African accent.

Equally, Bonono employs colloquial expressions and local parlance such as ‘*Wolowose*’,⁵ which refers to a prostitute; ‘*ékié*’,⁶ a local way of exclaiming in the Cameroonian context; ‘*zigzaguer*’,⁷ which refers to one who is gay; bringing a mélange to language from the local to the global, and into global discourse. Here, language becomes a tool of empowerment as well as exclusion for the underdeveloped immigrant

³ Translation of quotation [6] from French to English: “Every day, I enrich my vocabulary by hearing words such as legal documents, National I.D., residence permit, integration, discrimination, racism, diversity, immigration...”

⁴ Translation of quotation [7] from French to English: “A very Serious Problem! Life or Death! Your father wants to kill you! So much badluck...!”

⁵ *Wolowose*: refers to a prostitute

⁶ *ékié*: used as an exclamation in the Cameroon Francophone context

⁷ *Zigzaguer*: used in referring to someone who is gay. The above 2, 3, and 4, words are local parlance in the Cameroonian francophone context which Angeline-Solange Bonono, also Cameroonian contemporary francophone writer uses in her novel *Marie-France L’Orpailleuse*. to represent a cultural evolution of language within context.

marginalized within a globalized context. It equally projects the hierarchies embedded within global linguistic systems.

4.5. Proverbs and Indigenous Epistemologies in Chidiogo Akunyili-Parr's *I Am Because We Are: An African Mother's Fight for the Soul of a Nation*.

Another key dimension of her language, as used in contemporary narratives, is through the use of proverbs and indigenous epistemologies. Akunyili-Parr in her novel draw from Igbo proverbs and global traditions to convey moral and African philosophical and ethical insights. Examples of such proverbs used are "When the roots of a tree begin to decay, it spreads death to the branches" (p. 68). This proverb is used to castigate the post-independent Nigerian society, where societal ills like corruption, bad governance, wars, and rising insecurities are eating into the fabric of the society and the environment. Additionally, she echoes the saying "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" (p. 295), from the renowned Black American and Civil Rights activist, Dr. Martin Luther King, now universal to advocate for the cause of justice for the oppressed and marginalized people in society. A particular case in point is the Igbo ethnic group, hugely depicted in the text to highlight their plight of ethnic discrimination and injustices meted out against them. This counters the cultural erasure that globalization can bring and aligns with the decolonization of the African mind as seen "in her Igbo tongue, she found proverbs that guided her through the darkness of politics" (Ngũgĩ, 1981 p. 115). This reflects the resilience of African epistemologies in the face of Western political chaos and modern corruption, portraying that language is a central issue in African literature, as writers must navigate between indigenous languages and the legacy of colonial languages from a dual space. Furthermore, writers like Achebe have added their voice to advocating for colonial languages as tools for expression, making them part of the African writer's dual identity, but they must be infused with African sensibilities. This results in a 'mosaic' or 'bricolage' form of writing as Patricia (2011) asserts where multiple linguistic and cultural influences coexist.

Also, a particular and significant linguistic and philosophical concept used broadly in Akunyili-Parr's text is '*Ubuntu*'⁸ which functions as a traditional value and pan-Africanist advocacy. Ubuntu which is constantly used across the text translates into 'I Am Because We Are', even as the title of her book to correct the nation through community, empathy, and collective responsibility, which are the values it embodies, and have been

⁸ In analyzing ubuntu's etymology, I draw from *Ubuntu and Human Rights*, asserting that Ubuntu's most common formulation is *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, an isiZulu expression from South Africa that translates approximately to the laconic phrase 'a human being is a human being through (the otherness of) other human beings. Nevertheless, ubuntu's essence remains an expression of African philosophy and has been described as a centuries old African philosophy and way of life that has sustained African communities and continues to be 'a set of institutionalized ideals which guide and direct the patterns of life of Africans'. It can be proved particularly useful in anticipating and counteracting the potential claim that ubuntu is insufficiently shared by and within African societies, but can be a more 'neutral' value such as dignity, would be more unifying in value-pluralist societies.

-Akunyili-Parr upholds Ubuntu as a language of Pan-Africanist advocacy throughout her novel as an ethic to address the wrongs of the nation of post-independent Nigeria expanding on malpractices and ills such as bad governance, fraud, corruption, theft, murder, tribal divide and bigotry that is disrupting the unity of the nation from moving forward. She continues to position the philosophy of Ubuntu as a standard that should impose reasonable obligations for the nation and its citizens to refrain from harmful practices and embrace virtues of reconciliation, forgiveness, humanity, compassion to enable Nigeria right its wrongs and heal its wounds. The writer's voice is a call to action not only for the nation of Nigeria but for the continent of Africa since we all are interconnected and must work collectively towards positive change and transformation.

applied continuously in post-apartheid South-Africa, where it originally emanates from. The author's use of Ubuntu is to imbibe that philosophy through her mother's story in this narrative, as she uses Igbo dialectic words such as '*Ugogbe*,⁹ translated as 'mirror' in English, to refer to and pay tribute to her mother for being an exemplary leader and a humanist that needs to be looked upon and emulated in the nation of Nigeria. By incorporating the philosophy of Ubuntu alongside the Igbo language is to build and promote interconnectedness within African indigenous knowledge systems. In other words, Ubuntu is known to be associated with the following expressions: humanity towards others; a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity; one's humanity only comes through the humanity of others; and everyone's humanity is tied to everyone's humanity. On this occasion, this depicts that a human being is the telos, or ought to be the telos, of human activities and all ethical or normative considerations. This rightly conjures up a good image of a human being that is at the end, center, and beginning of all ethical considerations (Etieyibo, 2017, pp. 140 – 143).

5. English and French as Colonial Inheritance: Between Decolonization and Globalization in the Age of Epistemic Pluralism

Although English and French retain significant institutional and transnational power as languages inherited through colonial education, contemporary African writers' continued use of them does not necessarily entail passive acceptance of their colonial authority. While seen as diasporic writers whose voices and identities are forming, predominantly, the novels focus on narrating African experiences through fictional and real-life characters, written in their adopted colonial Western languages of English and French, which follow some Eurocentric norms. They try to dismantle language and textuality, thereby altering the assumptions of narrative structure. Wauthier (1977) demonstrates that most African fictional texts are written in French and English. Accordingly, in his book titled *L'Afrique des Africains*, he considers African literature "a fictional production implying the existence of 'two Africas' inherited from colonization, the English and French one".

Language, as a bearer of culture and thought, plays a pivotal role in this negotiation. Even though colonial languages still maintain elements of their original epistemologies, African writers in their dual and hybrid identities have adapted them to express localized experiences. By infusing these languages with African worldviews, Imbolo Mbue, Angeline-Solange Bonono, and Chidiogo Akunyili-Parr create distinct forms of 'African English' or 'African French' to demonstrate how language evolves through usage and context, and is not static. By so doing, their narratives become a portal that reveals an Africa that is also fast-changing and transitioning, moving past colonialism, post-colonialism, and presently meeting the global, an evolution that no longer limits the African as backward and primitive is why the new African writer has emerged in the way she asserts herself and how she chooses to use the duality of

⁹ '*Ugogbe*' which translates to 'mirror', is a testament of her mother's great leadership in the nation of Nigeria as to why she writes this book. She doesn't only use this word but explore so much of Igbo dialectics in her novel to represent her language, cultural roots, and heritage as she constantly connects back while writing as a contemporary Nigerian from a global space.

language in communicating and in enriching her work through knowledge that empowers. The 'new' or contemporary African woman writer occupies a distinctive 'Third Space' that Homi Bhabha identifies as a locus of hybridity and in-betweenness, and through which she mediates the dualism of inherited legacies of colonial discourse and the fluid, global realities of transnational existence, weaving together a new African identity, belonging, and representation. The 'new' African woman writer has moved from an overlooked and temporal figure to an ideological shift in global African discourse. This dualism of the writer and her creative work is gained from the divergences, from cultural pluralism and multiplicities that currently define her and her vision in a transnational space. Thus, far, African literature is in an evolutionary phase and progressing in motion. As Epounda and Makogne reiterate, the age of globalization, with the use of colonial languages, prompted the conversion and proliferation of unprecedented written productions, as they were previously oral. It is obvious to admit that in this age, a new trend, known as modern African fiction, has been implemented, but an important part of African people remains in close contact with oral traditions and traditional cultures.

Mbue, Bonono, and Akunyili-Parr, of Cameroonian and Nigerian heritage and anglophone and francophone backgrounds, inserting themselves into global discourses allows African literatures to be read from a cross-cultural and foreign cultural perspective, to understand linguistic applications through the process of selection, codification, re-elaboration and implementation, which may be culture-specific, and/or may not be culture-specific. Here, readers from various backgrounds are expected to make inferences across world boundaries to capture the implicit meaning. This stance is crucial for understanding the new African female writer and modern African narratives in a globalized world: Ogundipe-Leslie's (1987) "re-creation" advances arguments for an identity that resists reduction to either tradition or globalization but instead consciously engages with both. New African women's narratives have emerged as dynamic intellectual spaces where the question of decolonizing language is renegotiated against the backdrop of globalization and cultural pluralism. Language is viewed as a tool where indigenous knowledge systems intersect with transnational realities, producing narratives that are dynamically African and modern, and of an evolving fusion of histories, geographies, and memories, within the globalized imagination. It is this critical engagement that defines the transformative power of African women's writings. This dualism of the writer and her creative work is gained from the divergences, from cultural pluralism and multiplicities that currently define her and her vision in a transnational space.

Conclusion

Thus far, we are witnessing a new African woman transforming in context, rising with the times, within diverse new cultures, transcending the conventional boundaries of African indigenous knowledge systems and postcolonial discourse to articulate new epistemologies that engage cross-cultural perspectives towards universal acceptance. In addition, their narratives also provide an indication of international receptivity by virtue of the critics who are addressing their works from divergent positions of feminist, deconstructive, and post-colonialist criticisms. Thus, the attempt to decolonize English and French colonial languages seems to be taking a different turn when it comes to contemporary African female narratives, given the writer's hybrid positionality, whereby their use of language is both a *mélange* of tradition and globalization, posing complexities to decolonization as far-fetched.

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