

The Conceptualisation of Time and its Relation to the Scriptural Representation of the Child in the African Culture

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The reflection on the general concept of time in African literature is never sketched in isolation for literary works focus on character description enunciation and spacing. The issue of timing is particularly valorised. Linked directly to the linguistic theory, the essential argument of this priority consists in showing that literature, as compared to other forms of arts, painting for instance, needs language as a means of expression. This language is essentially a set of words that combine together to produce a continuous chain covering a particular span of time- therefore, any literary work should get its specificity within a continuous linear narrative in order to guarantee harmony with its means of expression-

Time is given a considerable place in fictitious world- if one admits that time is an essential component of the narrative, just as characters and space are, it would be pertinent to devote a great deal of effort to tackle this alleged link in a given literary work. Thereafter, one sees the applicability of these components, especially, *time characters*. These forms of representation being time-sensitive may symbolise its duration. In this sense, one would say that time tends to be that circle of evidence which includes both the human being and his space ,i.e., it is the extension of one's consciousness.

It is worth mentioning that every individual has a personalised view of time. The personal experience, periods of pleasure and pain determine the relative appreciation of time. Undoubtedly men have not the same conception of time and thus not the same consciousness. In fact time has quite similar significance for members of a given society. Every member

experiences it his way. While someone, for instance, aspires to commit suicide because of some changes in the *conventional time*ⁱ, other develops a certain appreciation to, and acquaints with every elapsed second. Time cannot have the same value for the two. This leads to the overt conflict of generations.

The two generations share the space of evidence (society), yet their vision of this one space differs. The same opinion could be developed over these generations as far as their conception of time is concerned. The time of the oldest generation, which prefers preserving the ancient tradition, is not identified to that of the young one. The two generations foresee promotion as an ineluctable step in their lives. However, the required time for such an act is seen differently, i.e., for the former generation time is very long while for the latter generation, it seems short. Concretely, it is the same lapse of time and the same lifetime period.

The existential time is, in fact, the reflection of human consciousness, for it manifests what both generations are and what they aspire to. Yet, particular digression, as far as the human consciousness is concerned, is due to the direction granted to time by the dominant political classes. The opposition to a political regime is therefore crystallised by this disagreement between the members of a given society. This means that contradictions between values are granted by different generations. Thus one would say that it is, in fact, the dominant class that confers to time its sense.

The sense attributed to time underlines both the values and the action that this particular social class, respectively, develops and manifests. Consequently, it is the nature of these values that infers either the promotion or the decline of a given group.

The nature of the human values is conceived with the notion of time that depends on classical distinction between the present and the future. The past and the future are the very essence of life, for the historian Si Hadi Tazi shows that the

past is a 'dead time' which should, definitely, be taken into consideration while living the present.ⁱⁱ

Literature, by allowing a specific place to time and to human consciousness, acquaints one with the changes of concept of time and thus the change of the content of the individual consciousness. The absurd character of the world may change the individual consciousness, i.e., the absence of a rational coherence produces a certain incompatibility of the individual's experience with a very organized system. The African writer, in this sense, through portraying the difference between man's intent and the resulting chaos he encounters, stresses the diverging conceptions of time.

The African writer is likely to refer to the absence of logic and common sense in his writing. This hypothesis could be discussed differently, i.e., that the African is unable to control and order experience, that he feels himself a victim of modern technology and bourgeois values, and his traditions have included the assumption that human beings are fairly rational creatures who live in an intelligible universe, that they are part of an ordered social structure.

The African writer's task is then nothing, but the exposition of the absurd aspect of the world. In fact it is not the world which is absurd but the confrontation of its irrational character. A. Camus adds that the absurd is neither with man nor in the world, but in their coexistence (Henry Sosnowski)ⁱⁱⁱ. For Camus absurdity is given a premise of all modern experience, an uneasy feeling, above all, a sense of contradiction, and is only the beginning of a perception of life, its meaning and consequences.

Camus seems to presume the absence of any kind of universal logic or direction generally associated with the idea of divinity as D.Z. Maiowitz stresses^{iv}. The absurd is, in fact, the confrontation between the sense of the irrational and the overwhelming desire for clarity that resounds in the depths of man^v. An author's juxtaposition of given social events and members of group is, in reality, a means whereby he

endeavours to mirror the awkwardness of life in the spirit of the individual.

What is not accepted and welcomed among members of a society, what does not act in their favour, and what seems strange to them qualify the very aspect of their social milieu. The absence of implacability between the reality of the traditional social *vécu* and the individual's perception of it, produces an absurd vision of the world. The aborigines in their traditional costumes do not feel really at ease with the - so-called - strange life style; the modern education, the new acquired foreign habits, behaviours, new religion and new languages are all considered strange and irrational according to the traditional ethnic conception of life.

The ethnic groups have undoubtedly their way of seeing, scrutinizing and evaluating things in life. It is natural that either the suggested or the imposed regime has a place amidst this social group. This regime is certainly seen to destroy their traditional order, way of practices and mythical world. In this vein M. Eliade says:

Initiation qui montre que l'homme des sociétés primitives ne se considère pas comme achevé tel qu'il se trouve donné au niveau naturel de l'existence: pour devenir homme proprement dit, il doit mourir à cette vie première et naître à une vie supérieure, qui est à la fois religieuse et culturelle (1965 : 156)

The African writer deals with the absurd aspect of the traditional African society through suggesting literary characters, in order not to say heroes^{vi}. One supposes that the character that might go concomitantly with rational coherence is *the child*.

Portraying the child in the African novel constitutes a study of conception of childhood in the traditional African society as well as the changes to which this same society is subjected, in a time the process of change appears strange in

the eyes of the elders. This is another way of underlining the importance of the child in the African novel.

In so far as the novel puts in parallel the division of time (past, present, future) and the division of society in category, for time and society, as Zérafra stresses, are essential and pre-requisite in the Romanesque world (1971). One is compelled to grasp the changes of the concept of time and thus with the content of individual consciousness, through the character of the child.

The question that might- be raised is whether the reader's acquaintance with the individual consciousness changes the more he is confronted to the very reality he experiences. The suggested answer could be no more than a mere reference to some characters (*children*) in African fiction. A child is shown to grow up within interpersonal relationships along which he develops attitudes of sociability, attachment and rejects at any time the surrounding subjects.

Complex activities, emotions, imitations, aggressions, identifications, and afterwards comparison between persons play multiple roles. Yet, these relations follow one another within a system of institutions-family, techniques, exchanges, culture, and ideology... which are at once interdependent and ineluctably convergent. Socialisation, through developing inherent attitudes of the subject to sociability and by means of fitting individual, is defined within a conflicting net that constitutes the global society.

By definition, children are different, but share that particular feature which distinguishes them from adult. Innocence and the eager desire for change must be overt in some African novels, especially those corresponding to the fourth stage of cultural upheaval in Africa^{vii}.

The child, with whom the idea of studies is seen germinating, intends to introduce the idea of universal equality and brotherhood, i.e., he believes that the only way towards social promotion and satisfaction is via education. C. Achebe's

character *Nowye*, or M. Feraoun's *Fouroulou*, are likely to be the same. Unsatisfied with the traditional way of living, behaving and above all, beliefs which sanction even the innocent. *Nwoye* rebels against the set norms and ways of conduct. He tries by means of converting to Christianity to express his dissatisfaction with his father's society; *Fouroulou*, haunted by the idea of studies, intends to introduce the idea of universal equality and brotherhood, believing that education is the only way towards social promotion and satisfaction.

The African child symbolises in fact the new conception of the world, change and progress as well as the rejection of the arbitrary rules. This change requires essentially a considerable time to be given birth. This is probably why time is given a great deal of importance. This leads, as well, to the discussion of the authors' consideration to the character of the child in the traditional values and the substitutability of time by another in the traditional African society.

The Child between temporal, scriptural and traditional values

To be continued

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ⁱ *The conventional time* is a manner to uniform time. It is as well a means of reducing the plurality of manners of living time by individual consciousness. The conventional time is the attempt of getting uniformity to the existential time. *The existential time* is, on the contrary, a fantasist, a poetic and creative time. It has no form other than the one given by an individual. It is relative and even subjective.
Danial Tchapda Piameu; *Le Temps*, taken from *Mots Pluriels*, Vol.1. no 1. 1996

ⁱⁱ Si Hadi Tazi ; *la Conception du Temps dans l'Islam*,
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ⁱⁱⁱ *La philosophie de Camus*, [http:// nebula.nonors.unr.edu/-Feminore/wt202/sosnowski](http://nebula.nonors.unr.edu/-Feminore/wt202/sosnowski)

^{iv} *The Meaning of Absurd*; David Zane Mairowitz, [http:// www.geocities.com/Athens/Aegean/1300/absurd.html](http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Aegean/1300/absurd.html)

^v Ibid

^{vi} M. Zeraffa shows that: ' le héros n'avait aucune représentativité. Il était le substitut, le double, le délégué d'un ordre magico religieux. Le héros n'avait pas d'histoire (1971: 04)

^{vii} The concerns of the African fiction are reflected in the following:

- Novels portraying the initial exposure to the west; Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Ngugi's The River Between.
- Novels concerned with the problems of adaptation to the western education: L'Aventure Ambiguë, Cheikh Hamidou Kane.
- Novels of urbanization best typified by Cyprian Ekwensi's Lagos novels
- Novels concerned with the problems of politics or national building, either prior to independence or in a post-independent situation; Peter Abraham's A Wreath for Udomo and Achebe's A Man of the People.
- Novels concerned with a more individualized life style, with a growing emphasis on the individual and his relationship towards a group from which he has become estranged; Armah's Fragments and Ezekiel Mphahlele The Wanderers. (' The Emergence of the African Fiction ', Larson, 1978, p.114)