

Zaria Journal of Liberal Arts (ZAJOLA)

Faculty of Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

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Faculty of Arts,
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EDITORIAL POLICY

Zaria Journal of Liberal Arts (ZAJOLA) is a peer-reviewed journal, published bi-annually by the Faculty of Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria. The journal welcomes manuscript of original articles, from scholars around the globe, in the various areas of Liberal Arts. The articles may be product of descriptive or analytical research, field research notes, reviews of publications and printed materials, drawn from, but not limited to Languages and Linguistics; Law; Environmental Sciences, Education; Management Studies; Cultural and Literally Studies; Theatre Arts; Philosophy; Religion; History and Strategic Studies; Archaeology and Heritage Studies; Developmental Studies and Social Sciences.

All manuscripts submitted for publication should adopt APA 8th Edition Style of referencing. The manuscripts should be typed double-spaced with sufficient margins and should count between 4,000 and 6,000 words, including the abstract, references, and appendices. The Manuscripts should not be under consideration for publication in any other research outlet.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT

This Edition of *Zaria Journal of Liberal Arts* marks the end of the year 2023. In this Edition, there are twelve well written articles by distinguished scholars.

The Edition opens with Ibrahim Muhammad Abdullahi's article on the implications of the New Normal on 21st century African novel and the impact of ICT. In a related study, Saleh Ahmad Abdullahi explores a semiotic approach of Emoji characters as used in WhatsApp chat messages. Through Ahmed Yerima's *Pari* and Fosudo's *Another Episode of Trauma*, Oladolapo Ojediran and Olayinka Magbagbeola interrogate enraged voices and social realities in Nigeria.

In linguistics, Hassan Usman Gadaka carries out a morphological analysis of Polar tone in Gudi and Yaya dialects of Ngamo language while Abdulrahman Umar works on the semantic aspects of repudiation in Basa language.

Ezekwesiri Okebugwu Nwosu, Nwaoha Chimaroke Chizoba and Tobeckukwu Odunze are concerned about the attack on Igbo indigenous religion. To them, this act can be defined as imperialism while Azuka Felix God's presence and Emily Oghale God's presence are concerned with the issues and perspectives in teaching and learning in urban society with the integration of multimedia, developmental and career guidance.

In his article on archaeology, Ogunlade Simeon Oluwole assesses some potential heritage sites in Nigeria. Following this is the article of Eraye Chistopher Michael and Jimoh Buhari Edun. The two scholars examine the implications of forest crime on socio economic development in Boki local government area of Cross River State. Alawode Musa Ajibola, on his own, examines the ideological nexus between Zaria and Ife Art schools.

In French studies, Tajudeen Abodunrin Osunniran and Hannah Kojusola Kuponiyi bring out the linguistic characteristics and discursive functions of filler words in French and Yoruba films. In a related field, Aliyy Abolaji Abdulrazaq carries out a reflection of lexical gaps in some translation works by Yoruba translators.

It is important to note that the view and opinions presented in these articles are solely those of the authors. Happy reading.

Prof. Abubakar Sule Sani

Editor-in-chief

30th November, 2023

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Literature and ICT: Implications of the New Normal on 21st century African fiction

Ibrahim Muhammad Abdullahi

Abstract

The sudden spurt of Covid-19 as pandemic came at a time when a greater proportion of global communities and activities were uneven in their degree of technological awareness and readiness: this includes the 21st century literature and literary expression in the genre of African Novel. This paper therefore, investigates the implications of Covid-19 pandemic on the 21st century African literary expression in the novel, as dictated by the new normal: social distancing, lockdown, digitalisation, e-fiction and globalisation. The paper deploys E. D. Hirsch's New Historicism as its theoretical framework and the qualitative text-based method as its tool of analysis. It is discovered that the pandemic forced every human activity to make digitalisation and digital transformation a rapid strategic focus: sequel to social distancing and lockdowns. This has created a new norm in Global contact relations and communication. One of the most important aspects of this transformation has been providing remote infrastructure that can support digital relationship and communication. Besides this urgent need of digital technology, it is also discovered that the situation has resulted in the need for new authors with new mind set who might require very novel competencies and behaviours than were needed a couple of years ago. It is recommended that as the cumulative impact of the pandemic leads to global digital adjustment of not only economic activities but cultural studies, there is the need for proactive assistance and cooperation in global relationships.

Keywords: Covid-19 Pandemic, New Normal, Digitalisation, Technological Age, and E-fiction.

Introduction

The World has been engrossed by a pandemic identified as a new coronavirus Disease-19, over the first half of 2020 which is later code named as COVID-19 (Qiu et al., 2020). Whereas COVID-19 originated in the city of Wuhan in the Hubei province of China, it has spread rapidly across the world, causing human tragedy and remarkable economic and socio-cultural destruction. With the brisk spread of this pandemic, continents across the World, including Africa have adopted extensive public health processes strategic to curb its spread, including

social distancing (Fong et al., 2020). As part of social distancing, institutions: businesses, schools, community centres, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and mass gatherings have been advised to close down in most countries, allowing activities only for essential necessities. This is meant to “flatten the curve” of new infections, curb exponential spread and lessen pressure on public health services (John Hopkins University, 2020).

The spread of COVID-19 has substantially reduced economic activities across the globe (IMF 2020a). This contraction also surpassed that of 2008-2009 Global Financial Crisis. In June 2020, the IMF forecast of a 4.9 percent shrinkage in global economy was informed by: i) perseverance in social distancing activities; ii) reduced activity during lockdowns; iii) steeper decrease in productivity amongst various firms; and iv) cumulative uncertainty (IMF, 2020b). The economic and cultural implications would obviously be extensive and undefined, with diverse effects on societies, productions, chains of supplies, credit markets and, the entire global culture and economy. Relative to the severity of the social distancing methods: lockdowns, span of implementation, and the extent of compliance would adversely affect cultural production. However, social distancing is a deliberate increase in the physical space between individuals aimed at controlling the spread of the disease (Red Cross, 2020).

Many aspects of our everyday life have been devastated by the pandemic. It prompted global adoption of a series of emergency response systems to suppress infection rates and control the incidence curve in an endeavour to decongest the public healthcare systems (Zhang et al, 2020).

In many parts of the world, including Africa, this meant a temporary but prolonged disruption or shutdown of several societal engagements which negatively impacted on millions of social groups and families, particularly those from underprivileged nations (UNESCO, 2020). Consequently, creating a new norm in interpersonal and community relationship and communication code named the new normal. While the disruption in societal activities caused by COVID-19 pandemic is extraordinary, important insights can be gained about its far-reaching impacts through cautious analysis of relevant developments and transformative innovations.

Literature has always been a vital partner of universal history. It is a creative skill which replicates the norms of society, ethos of culture, values, beliefs and

traditions (Albrecht, 1954). It is not just prejudged as an ornament in the use of language, but also seen to be the “fundamental sine qua non” of complete living (Bennett, 1961, p. 90) that has passed through numerous transformations throughout history to contemporary times. Literature is flourishing, educating and enticing its readers through appealing to their minds. Synchronously, literature has provided its vast readers the opportunity to learn about historical events and of the modern day, while motivating them to delve into personal cognition and imagination through various novels (Bennett, 1961, p. 101). Reality is reflected upon through literature as a piece of art, an opening through which new ideas and perspectives can blossom. It is a system of the transmission of messages from the source to the receiver throughout the world, through the utility of common language in the society. Literature allows the documentations, recordings and learning’s for future generations to call upon. These artefacts could be informative journals, studies, biographic, fictional/nonfictional texts and or novels, poems, plays or, diaries etc. Therefore, it is an embodiment of an index of fascinating ideologies and truths, sentiments that could stimulate present and future generations. This paper highlights the crisis-response migration method to technology-based cultural production and communication in terms of the impact of covid-19 pandemic and the consequential new normal on literature and literary expression in the 21st century African novel.

Theoretical Framework

This discourse is conceived on the premise of New Historicism - a literary critical movement which began in the 1980s, and seeks the themes and meanings of literature in close reference to the prevailing socio-political, economic and historical conditions of the time. It adopts E. D. Hirsch’s New Historicism; his “objectivist” construct which removed the historical and context-bound nature of knowledge, proposing a distinction between “meaning,” which embraces the author’s meaning or intention in his unique use of language, and “significance,” which relates to the appraised meaning of the text according to the values and beliefs of the critic. And Gadama’s notion of ‘horizon fusion’ which posits that the knowledge in the “text” results from the tradition of interpretation than the “original” authorial meaning and, that our perspective is informed by the very past we are seeking to analyse. This allows for an empathetic fusing of our own

cultural horizon into any text (as cited in Habib, 2005, p. 761). These views are relevant to this study because they combine to allow for a universal cultural fusion in the text by its global readers and critics. Hence proving the possibility of a universal literary perspective.

Defining the New Normal

According to Dictionary.com, the new normal is “a current situation, social custom, etc. that is different from what has been experienced or done before but is expected to become usual or typical.” That is to say, the new normal is the result of a turmoil to which a society settles following a crisis that drastically alters the earlier condition of life and one that is likely to be the permanent replacement of the old state of things. This transformative transition tends to affect and influence, in one way or the other, the entire social fabrics of society. The term new normal has earlier been used in reference to World War 1, September 11 attack, previous pandemics, the financial dilemma of 2007-2008, the consequences of the 2008-2012 global economic recession and most recently used to denote the consequences of Covid-19 pandemic.

In the context of literature, the novelist, Robert A. Heinlein was said to have used the phrase in his 1966 novel, *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* (1966) with a character telling lunar colonists:

Citizens, request may reach you through your comrade neighbors. I hope you will comply willingly; it will speed the day when I can bow out and life can get back to normal – a new normal, free of the Authority, free of guards, free of troops stationed on us, free of passports and searches and arbitrary arrests (p. 23).

In this context, new normal suggests a transition from the old way to a new which supersedes the previous state of things. With the advent of covid-19 pandemic, especially in view of its persisting mutations, the term “new normal” gained increase usage to refer to resulting changes in human behaviour and relationship, during and after the pandemic. The intensity of the situation compelled the alteration of the everyday life of every people globally. This includes among others, limiting person-to-person contact; handshakes and hug, maintaining social distance etc. These situations will possibly stay on (Zhang et al, 2020). These social imperatives that transform the usual has created a new sociology and psychology in global relationship and communication. The entire world is forced into abandoning the old ways for the new. Therefore, literature and literary expression in the 21st century are not exempted the world over. To accommodate

the situation, the 21st Africanfiction, as of necessity, must assimilate the new in all aspects of cultural production: representation, regeneration and criticism. As the society changes, so its literature. The socio-cultural realities of people and cultures are changing, so must their literatures.

By implications, the new normal implies the emergence of a new global culture in line with the tenants of globalisation. It is a sociocultural and economic transition which allows or creates global culture that cuts across all social boundaries: cultures, ethnicity, religion and nations. It is a transition to the digitalisation of societal relations and cultural communication via new digital relationships which determine cultural production and communication.

Digitalisation and the 21st Century African Fiction

Today, the new digital media are ubiquitous. They have become “the new normal” (Hinssen, 2011, p. 11). They have created “new types of public sphere” (Celikates 2015, p. 71). Recently the use of social media such as Twitter and Facebook have strongly influenced dramatic political changes like #endsars in Nigeria and the election of President Trump in the US. They have enabled the creation of a “post-truth” culture (Peters, 2013, p. 137). The new media “...give us new powers. They create consequences for us as human beings. They bend minds. They transform institutions. They liberate. They oppress” (Silverstone, 1999, p. 10). Or, in the prophetic words of Marshall McLuhan (1964), they are “the extensions of man” (p. 131). Knowledge and information are accessible almost at any time and any place. They create opportunities but also risks for cultural and information practices. Social media is now part of diverse human activities. Much has been written and discussed about these developments in education and cultural studies in general (Brookfield 1986; Wildemeersch 1991; Losh 2014; Peters 2013; Walsh 2014; Peters 2017). These radical changes are usually fashioned as challenges for globalisation.

Digital literature broadly includes literary works which exploit the processing power of the computer to enhance the text’s poetics beyond using the computer as a networked distribution medium. It is designed to promote creative and scholarly work around new digital textual genres (Rettberg, 2012). As an emerging field,

digital literature has shifting and permeable borders. Hayles (2008) argues for a distinction between digital literature and digitised print literature under the rubric of born-digital works, “a first-generation digital object created on a computer and (usually) meant to be read on a computer” (p. 3). This definition places digital literature in opposition to print rather than noting the affordances of the platform itself. The rise of self-published e-book exclusives challenge this definition, as formats such as EPUB are optimised for reading on the screen yet would not be considered sufficiently to be classified as digital literature.

The implication of the new normal: social distancing etc. made digital literacy and digitalisation a major aspect of public importance for literary writers and critics in Africa, often in connection with the discourse on cultural competences. Vlieghe (2016) claims that “there is a fundamental difference between traditional and digital literacy, or more precisely between what it means to be a literate person in digital and pre-digital times” (p. 558). The digital times we live in create a new space between the digital literates and the digital illiterates. Vlieghe (2016) writes: Digital literacy is the set of competencies required for full participation in a knowledge society. It includes knowledge, skills, and behaviors involving the effective use of digital devices such as smartphones, tablets, laptops and desktop PCs for purposes of communication, expression, collaboration and advocacy (p. 558).

It further informs us about the ‘digital divide’, or the gap between the people familiar with the use of new information and communication technologies (ICT) and those who are out of the successive digital revolutions (Mok and Leung,2012). This universal development must have significant impacts on the future conditions of every society and its literature: literary representation in all genres and, Africa cannot afford exclusion. The writing of the 21st century African fiction, reading and criticism will need to be complemented by knowledge of the processes of digitalisation and the new digital media. This is more obvious because literacy is not simply about “reading the word”, it is also about “reading the world” in a critical way (Casanova, 2004, p.67). Therefore, in this transitional process to technology-based communication, one must ask, are literary digital writers mainly to be engaged in encouraging individuals to accept the new technology or, to take up the responsibility of stimulating critical digital literacy? Obviously, I should recommend that, within the context of the prevailing surge in literary digital expression, writers should inspire knowledge on how to

handle the new media and to simultaneously raise awareness on the risks of the use of these technologies. Schmidt-Hertha and Strobel- Dumer (2013) write: Not only is it necessary to offer adequate educational programs for ... people but also informal learning processes within the social environment have to be initiated and supported. These self-controlled learning processes can, for instance, take place in self-organised computer groups or on Internet forums which, in turn, can be initiated and accompanied by educational institutions (p. 39).

African Fiction and ICT

A leading theorist of postcolonial studies observes that anyone who wants to create a space for literature in new media should understand that: “public spheres,” are “increasingly dominated by electronic media (and thus delinked from the capacity to read and write)” (Appadurai, 2000, p. 22). Obviously, Appadurai is not speculating of the Internet, which is still and likely always to be overwhelmingly textual, despite an insistently instrumental visual presence. The premise that reading and writing are of course “delinked” (Appadurai, 2000, p. 79) from electronic media shows the extent separation of spheres could become for scholars like Appadurai (2000) who continue to assess globalisation essentially in terms of reading and writing of printed materials. Appadurai (2000) attempts to locate a universal literature commensurate with the processes of globalisation but by delinking reading, writing, and electronic media, he fails to appreciate the idea that writing produced in new media might in fact be an emerging world literature.

In Otlet’s “conceptual prefiguration of the Internet” every existent work in print would be but chapters and paragraphs in a “universal book”. To Otlet, electronic media is all inclusive and therefore, include works of all countries, cultures, and languages. Yet, inclusiveness alone did not make their vision universal. Rather, the promise of reshaping boundaries, away from national and cultural divisions toward more conceptual discriminations: the kind of dissimilarity capable of linking people in discourse, not separating people categorically (Otlet, as cited in Prendergast, 2004, p. 23). These Concepts and connections that had remained potential could now be activated in the mind of a reader and actualised in a distributed workspace. To this end, knowledge transfer would occur, not through

interpretive activity or through description or summary alone but because every user would be similarly free, in Nelson's (2003) words, to "list, sketch, link, and annotate the complexities we seek to understand, then present "views" of the complexities in many different forms" (p. 332).

The universality of literature reviewed in the context of digital and communications media, would be not about achieving a single common language or the expression of an essential human spirit, but rather about occupying a common workspace. Nelson (2003) called this process "transclusion" (p. 304): an inclusion through site transfers of distinct texts that could be full or partial, depending on one's requirements: in every case, the "original" document or set of documents remain at their home address while being reproduced at the destination address. The recognition of this capacity, which can make reading and researching a sort of worldwide consortium building, could possibly bring to the universal public, a literary work that had been deemed private and secluded. Italo Calvino, in his *If On A Winter's Night A Traveler* (1981) anticipated the possibility of occasional threat by new media to literary privacy when he has his narrator advise the reader to shut the door and "let the world around you fade..." Tell the others right away, 'No, I don't want to watch TV!' Raise your voice - they won't hear you otherwise - 'I'm reading; I don't want to be disturbed!' ...Speak louder, yell: 'I'm beginning to read Italo Calvino's new novel!' Or if you prefer, don't say anything; just hope they'll leave you alone. (p. 1)

The situation is different in the collaborative, receptive media that, like the Internet and unlike television, include text as a primary component. Though here, too, demands are made on a reader's time and attention. In reception media such as Otlet's universal book and the Internet, documents and imaginative utterances are not given as ends in themselves but as materials to be reworked, relocated, and remixed: the prospect of freedom, as we shall see, has always been a feature of the aspiration toward a world literature - indeed, it is one of the "world thoughts" characterising the genre, according to George Brandes and Eric Auerbach (as cited in Prendergast, 2004, pp. xiii-ix).

Implications of ITC on the 21st Century African Fiction

Any societal change that directly or otherwise affects human activities: relationships, thought processes, communication and interaction in time and space must have an influence on culture, cultural communication and cultural production in that society. The implication of the new normal on literature,

literary expression and criticism in Africa relates to how communication technology impacts on the mode of cultural encoding of content, form, medium as aesthetics and the basis of representation of the society. The new normal has necessitates the imperative of new conception and redefinition of the old, in line with the prevailing condition. The new normal has hasten the transition to global culture and behaviour. Similarly, literature, literary expression and criticism must comply with the dominant and compelling super situation as dictated by the tenants and imperatives of globalisation. Digitalisation, understood as “the way in which many domains of the social life are restructured around digital communication and media infrastructure” (Brennan & Kreis, 2022, p. 57) is necessary in the transformative creation of African e-fiction. In fact, this situation relates to globalisation and would strengthen the emergence of “world literature”, which requires hybridity in digital texts to be subjected to digital criticism using universal standards (Siemens, 2005, p. 17). This will be the new direction in the representation of African novel, fiction or literature in the context of global cultural experiences that is free from any demarcation or border by language, culture, religion or geography. In respect of hybridity in literary expression in African fiction or novel, Ben Okri has already set the necessary literary global precedence in his numerous novels. Digitalising the 21st century African fiction/novel is necessary to literary accommodate the new normal.

Speaking at the launching of *Debating World Literature* (2004), Christopher Prendergast alludes to a controversy that could easily take in the entire world, by returning to a notable early formulation of the term, “world literature.” To this, Goethe adds that, “I seek only to point out to my friends my conviction that a universal world literature is in process of formation” (as cited in Prendergast, 2004, p. 3). Hoesel-Uhlig notes that Goethe’s sense of “a common world literature transcending national limits” was not, and by its defining terms could not be, offered as a personal vision so much as a recognition of new modes of cultural “traffic” (as cited in Prendergast, 2004, p. 2). Regardless of the language of a work, its cultural and linguistic differences resonate in ways not always felt or appreciated in its country of origin where language was never a constraint in the first instance. (Damrosh, 2003).

Karl Marx addresses this multinational infrastructural condition in his equally well-known characterisation of a “world literature” that would “arise” out of the “impossibility” of one-sided, nationalist and local literatures (as cited by Morretti in Prendergast, 2004, p. 148). The field itself, therefore, was defined in a condition of perpetual emergence, even as the world-system of global capital, complete in all essentials by the Victorian era, has continued to be under construction and constant revision to the present day.

These infrastructural and social developments, though they proceed largely independently of literary developments, nonetheless work on the thoughts of African authors must influence the forms an emergent literature can take. The awareness of a potential global reception for example, which develops together with the development of a modern literature, can infiltrate into the consciousness of an author during composition. Certainly, there are African authors of world stature who remained self-consciously local in their settings and idiom: Ngugi, Soyinka, Okri are instances. Currently, when authors from all nations claim “otherness” and “identity,” the claim is understandable not as a refusal of the world-system so much as a demand for inclusion in an imagined “world republic of letters” (Casanove, 2004, p. 5). Of course, the contributors to the evolution of world literature are aware of the highly uneven development of a world literary tradition: “...let me put it very simply,” says Franco Moretti:

We have not lived up to these beginnings: the study of comparative or international literature has been a much more modest intellectual enterprise, fundamentally limited to Western Europe, and mostly revolving around the river Rhine (German philologists working on French literature). Not much more” (as cited in Prendergast, 2004, p. 148).

Conclusion

The impacts of Covid-19 pandemic on the entire world is numerous and devastating. Its mutational resistance has created a permanent shift in the overall processes of contact relationship in the world. This marked a turning point in global human history. As a necessary product of culture, literature and literary experience, expressed in the form of the African fiction/novel ought to be influenced by these global events and so succumb to and accordingly respond to the prevailing situations of its place of origin. The prevailing necessities of the impact of the pandemic – new normal: social distancing, lockdown has resulted in the formation of novel global attitude to life and health in line with the tenants of

globalisation. It adversely transforms all forms of contact relationship, communication and pedagogy. The need for new communication strategy arose which paved the way for the emergence of new skills, new behaviours and modes of cultural relationship and communication. This new way, as of necessity, led to the digitalisation of virtually every aspect of the social, economic and cultural life. Literature and literary expression in the form of the novel the world over must reflect this phenomenal change and, Africa in the obvious, cannot afford global exclusion in the 21st century.

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