



Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

Second Cycle Degree programme

in European, American and
Postcolonial Language and
Literature
(D.M. 270/2004)

Final Thesis

The Educational Role of Narrative Fiction

A Particular Focus on African Postcolonial Literature

Supervisor

Ch. Prof. Shaul Bassi

Assistant supervisor

Ch. Prof. Graziano Serragiotto

Graduand

Giorgia Caser

Matriculation Number 834768

Academic Year

2015 / 2016

Acknowledgements

First of all I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors professor Shaul Bassi and professor Graziano Serragiotto for giving me advice to develop this topic and for their availability. Then I would like to thank professor Mark Bray who introduced me to the interesting field of comparative education enthusiastically.

I also wish to thank all my family, in particular my father who surely encouraged me from up above and who transmitted to me the importance of studying, giving me the possibility to continue my academic career. I owe more than a thank to my mother, who is always here for me and who helped me to pursue this achievement. I am very grateful to my brother for helping me to focus when I needed the most and to my grandmother for her incredible strength and for her constant presence in my life. Moreover, I would like to thank my aunts, uncles and cousins for saying the right words at the right moments.

In addition, I wish to express my gratitude to all my friends who constantly encouraged me and made me smile, in particular little Kenza for her contagious happiness. Finally, I would like to thank the person I love for believing in me, for reassuring me and for showing to love me every day.

“Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity.”¹

¹ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story”, *Ted Talks*, transcript of the conference for Ted Talks, July 2009. Accessed December 31, 2016.
<http://ssw.unc.edu/files/TheDangerofaSingleStoryTranscript.pdf>

Contents

Introduction	vi
Chapter 1	
An overview on the roles and features of literature	1
1.1 The educational role of literature.....	2
1.1.1 Literature as a way to discover the self and reality	2
1.1.2 Literature to report social issues.....	4
1.1.3 Literature in education.....	5
1.1.4 Electronic literature and digital material	7
1.2 Narrative fiction.....	9
1.2.1 Narrative fiction and reality.....	9
1.2.2 Narrative fiction, a technical definition.....	10
1.2.3 Author and narrator's reliability, the role of the writer	11
1.2.4 The role of the reader.....	14
1.2.5 Freedom in narration and interpretation	16
1.3 Literature about Africa	
1.3.1 Western representations of Africa	18
1.3.2 Conrad's Heart of Darkness	20
1.3.3 The danger of a single story	21
Chapter 2	
African postcolonial literature and its diffusion	
2.1 The worldwide power of narrative fiction.....	25
2.1.1 Afropolitans, a new generation of Africans.....	27
2.1.2 Afropolitanism as a global movement.....	28
2.1.3 Afropolitanism: elitism and cultural commodification	30
2.2 The cultural industry.....	32
2.2.1 The postcolonial cultural industry	32
2.2.2 The postcolonial and globalisation	34
2.2.3 The postcolonial exotic.....	35
2.2.4 How to write about Africa.....	36
2.2.5 Literary prizes and the award industry	37
2.2.6 Literary prizes in Africa	38
2.3 African literature and its origins	

2.3.1 African literature and the existence of this categorisation	40
2.3.2 Languages' disappearance in Africa.....	41
2.3.3 The role of English	42
2.3.4 African writers in English	43
2.3.5 Origins and narrative strategies of African postcolonial novel	44
2.3.6 Oral literature in Africa	45
Chapter 3	
African Literature in Education	
3.1 Education in Africa.....	48
3.1.1 Literacy in Africa.....	49
3.1.2 The situation of Kenya	50
3.1.3 The situation of Nigeria.....	51
3.1.4 Slums	51
3.1.5 The case of Tanzania	52
3.2 Literary education	
3.2.1 A definition of literary education.....	54
3.2.2 Traditional educational approaches in Africa.....	55
3.2.3 Omolowabi's educational approach	55
3.2.4 Comparative education and implications	56
3.3 Literature in African schools	
3.3.1 Publishing in Africa	58
3.3.2 Publication of schoolbooks.....	58
3.3.3 Literature availability to African students	60
3.3.4 Oral literature in education	61
3.3.5 African postcolonial literature in language education.....	61
3.3.6 The artist as a teacher	62
3.3.7 The roles of the teacher	63
3.3.8 The teacher in African schools	64
Chapter 4	
Examples of African postcolonial literature	
4.1 Achebe's Things Fall Apart	66
4.1.1 Orality and fiction.....	66
4.1.2 Okonkwo, a controversial character	68
4.2 Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's Weep not, Child.....	69

4.2.1 The importance of education	69
4.2.2 The role of the land.....	72
4.2.3 Racism and identity	73
4.3 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Americanah	75
4.3.1 The importance of reading.....	75
4.3.2 Identity and diversity	77
Conclusions	80
References	82
Webliography	84

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to emphasize the worldwide power of narrative fiction in the way it can speak to the entire world and overcome geographical and cultural borders. Its educational role in terms of what readers can learn through narrative fiction will also be analysed. In particular, African postcolonial literature will be the main focus because of its recent widespread diffusion through the emergence of new African authors. The risk is that their works would almost become commodified and part of a cultural industry. On the contrary, the role of African authors should be reckoned to promote their creativity and to give Africa a voice. This thesis is divided as follows: chapter one will present some considerations on the functions of literature and its importance in life and education. Then it will also deal with technical aspects of narrative fiction, and with Western representations of Africa in terms of effectiveness of literature and its reliability. Chapter two will focus on the postcolonial literary industry and the recent phenomenon of Afropolitanism will be presented. The chapter will also deal with African postcolonial literature, in particular in English language delineating its history, controversies and limits of expression. Chapter three will tackle the employment of African postcolonial literature in educational practices, with a particular focus on the role of the teacher. Lastly, chapter four will present some examples of narrative fiction in English language whose educational role and its relationship with the Western societies, can be taken as starting point to encourage children in becoming adults in a globalized world. In the conclusion, final considerations on the topic will be delineated.

The reason why Africa, and in particular African postcolonial literature was chosen as an area of analysis of this thesis, is an interest of mine for the continent, especially for its culture and education. The images about Africa as a problematic continent, have a primary role in describing it, but maybe some writings from African writers can help the Western societies to develop a deeper and complete knowledge of this continent that seems to be so far from us. In a recent interview Wainaina declared that today there is a bad reporting on Africa which is portrayed by the media as a world of embedded aid and pity, of dying orphans and corruption.² Media reinforce the stereotypes on the continent and contribute in creating a mythical place in our imagination. This other opinion can reinforce better Wainaina's statements:

² "Talk to Al Jazeera - Binyavanga Wainaina: Rewriting Africa", *Al Jazeera English*, April 13, 2013. Accessed January 16, 2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qMODRFS2Pbc&t=13s>

Africa is the ONLY continent I have ever heard discussed as “less than a place and more as a concept” which often serves as a basis for moving the discussion away from the continent entirely. Coming from an intellectual history in which philosophers like Hegel declared that Africa was no part of history, contemporary discourses grudgingly concede Africa’s historicity but argue about its concrete geographical existence. Africans have almost absolute immobility in a contemporary global world that works very hard to keep Africans in their place on the African continent.³

For these reasons it is important for African authors to give their voice on the situation of their continent.

In this thesis a particular attention will be given to postcolonial African literature in order to confer it the prestige it deserves. Although Africa can be viewed as a very distant continent not only geographically speaking, but also in terms of history, culture and civilisation it is, on the contrary, more close to us as than we can imagine, not only for the increasing presence of multiculturalism in Europe, but also for the importance that the African writers give to literature as a way to improve life in general.

³ Okwunodu Ogbecchie, “Afropolitanism: Africa without Africans”. *AACHRONIM Magazine*, April 4, 2008. Accessed January 11, 2017. <http://aachronym.blogspot.it/2008/04/afropolitanism-more-africa-without.html>

Chapter 1

An overview on the roles and features of literature

Umberto Eco talks about literary tradition defining it as a collection of texts that were written by human beings to express their love for themselves.⁴ According to him, narrative fiction exists *gratia sui*, therefore it bears no functions. However, this consideration underestimates the act of reading itself and consequently the texts we read. It is through the simple passion of reading that a spiritual elevation is made possible for the reader, without any kind of obligation. For this reason Eco decides to underline the most important roles of narrative fiction. Reading gives the chance to keep the language in practice awarding it the status of common and individual heritage and creating national identity. Languages undergo temporal and political changes, as happened in Italy with fascism that substituted some ordinary terms at the time, such as cocktail that became *coda di gallo* or bar was changed in *mescita*. Fortunately, literary texts can help us to fix language that was subdued to political changes. Literature helps to create a global community and identity. As we will analyse in depth in the introduction to chapter two, there are authors who through their literary contribution can help us to build our identity of global readers, enriching our cultural heritage. During the reading process, a reader can also imagine different narrative sequences and other possible endings of a story. In this case, due to the fact that literature allows imagination, it can also play an educational role. It makes us understand that a text presents events that have to happen, that there is a divine providence where the author is the director, as seems to occur for some events of life. The reader may also cover the role of a simple witness of what happens, since she or he only has to accept what is presented by the writer. Literature not only has the function to convey good or bad moral principles or to contribute to the development of our sense of beauty, it even tells us that there is a destiny we cannot change and that we only have to face. These are the principal functions of literature for Umberto Eco and its role in education will be studied in depth throughout this thesis.

⁴ Umberto Eco, *Sulla letteratura*, Milano: Tascabili Bompiani, 2008, p.7

1.1 *The educational role of literature*

First of all, I would like to clarify the use of the term *educational* in this paper. It will not be solely used in its primary sense, which is linked to teaching and learning at schools, but in a broader sense, that is to say a complete personal experience that goes beyond the school context even if related to it. To do so, the importance of the following relationships will be underlined: literature and the self, literature and reality and finally literature and education, in order to point out the fact that literature should not be viewed as an isolated subject that bears no connections with the world we live in, instead it should be included as an integral part of our everyday lives.

1.1.1 *Literature as a way to discover the self and reality*

A reader can perceive possible connections between a text and some aspects of their personality, while reading a text or at the very end of the reading process. It may be inferred that, since the word *text* is the primary form and part of the derivative word *texture*, the reader should follow the texture of the text in order to grasp its structure. A simple phrase or description can represent the keystone to understand even the most inexplicable features and attitudes of a person.

As Marcel Proust asserts:

Every reader, as he reads, is actually the reader of himself. The writer's work is only a kind of optical instrument he provides the reader so he can discern what he might never have seen in himself without this book. The reader's recognition in himself of what the book says is the proof of the book's truth.⁵

This quotation emphasizes how through literature, a reader can discover through the concreteness of the written words, some aspects of her or his personality that would not have been noticed even by themselves. In this case literature serves as a warning to consider also the inner feelings and traits of personality to make the reader conscious of her or his true potential. Also Tzvetan Todorov states that the not-professional reader wants to come into contact with literature for a particular reason, that is “to find a meaning that enables him to better understand the human being and the world; to find in literature

⁵ “Chaque lecteur est, quand il lit, le propre lecteur de soi-même. L’ouvrage de l’écrivain n’est qu’une espèce d’instrument optique qu’il offre au lecteur afin de lui permettre de discerner ce que, sans ce livre, il n’eût peut-être pas vu en soi-même.” Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Paris: Éd. Gallimard, 1919

beauty to enrich his life and in doing this, to understand himself better. Knowing literature doesn't have a unique aim, but it's one magnificent way to build the self".⁶

Another important writer who recognises the power of literature in revealing the self, is C.S. Lewis, who saw in literature an instrument to strengthen his perception of himself. He wanted to use literature as a way to see the world better through other people's eyes. According to him, literature holds the magic power of making the reader identify with different characters, while at the same time she or he remains the same unique person. Even if the reader seems to go beyond herself or himself and to lose her or his identity, becoming part of what other people wrote, C.S. Lewis thinks that reading is a very useful way to remain themselves. Dahl's *Matilda* can be an example of how literature can make someone aware of their best qualities. Here the main character, a six-year-old girl grows up fed by the books she reads. Thanks to all the book-characters she comes into contact with, she develops her personality becoming stronger than anyone of her schoolmates. The heroes she reads about, give her the courage to face the superficial society she lives in and to fulfil her dream, that is to be loved by a real family. In this case books can represent a source for self-consciousness and courage to face everyday obstacles, a concrete way of improvement of someone's problems within particular situations. Hence, literature helps to cope with reality. The main characters of a book can give to the reader the answers she or he is looking for and their ways of reacting to the most complicated situations can be taken into account to be made into practice. Characters can serve as inspirational figures for the readers who can identify or detach themselves from the fictive people they are reading about. Since reading literature is a conscious act, it is the reader who decides the degree of involvement in a literary text. What the reader can infer is that some books can be taken as a guide to face life with a sense of more comfort.

A scientific study proved that reading literary fiction makes the readers able to decode various emotions and be empathic with other people.⁷ What emerged from a series of five experiments on a thousand of participants employing a combination of Theory of Mind techniques, was that emotions were better perceived by the literary-fiction readers than the non-fiction or popular fiction ones. One of the psychologists, David Commer Kidd stated

⁶ Tzvetan Todorov, *La littérature en péril*, France: Flammarion, 2007, p. 24-25; translation of mine. Original version: "pour y trouver un sens qui lui permette de mieux comprendre l'homme et le monde, pour y découvrir une beauté qui enrichisse son existence; ce faisant, il se comprends lui-même. La connaissance de la littérature n'est pas une fin en soi, mais une des voies royales conduisant à l'accomplissement de chacun"

⁷ Liz Bury, "Reading literary fiction improves empathy, study finds". *The Guardian*, October 8, 2013. Accessed February 16, 2016. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2013/oct/08/literary-fiction-improves-empathy-study>

that the participants were naturally able to transferring the experience of reading fiction into real-world situations, because "the same psychological processes are used to navigate fiction and real relationships. Fiction is not just a simulator of a social experience, it is a social experience." Literature can help personal growth improving the readers' ability to play somebody else's role in their lives and discovering the reality that surrounds them.

1.1.2 Literature to report social issues

Literature can be used as way of reporting a social problem. As Sartre points out, when a writer decides to use her or his own words to express her or his opinions, she or he acts, and the main purpose of her or his action is to take on responsibility of the situation she or he is living in.⁸ For this reason Sartre supports the writer's complete involvement in literature, since she or he should arouse human's consciousness in a way that the world we live in cannot be ignored. According to the philosopher and critic, literature should make people act in order to let them claim their freedom of expression and participation in the life of the community.

Roberto Saviano reported organized crime in the Italian region of Campania, in *Gomorra*. Here the author stands opposed to the dominant values system, the one who awards money and power. During an interview he answered a question about the power of literature, saying that it can transform a particular story in an universal one since " literature frightens when it becomes an instrument to change a marginal story into a very close, known and famous one".⁹ In this case literature can enable the author to express herself or himself freely even on the most controversial issues. Unfortunately, the consequent limitation of freedom in every-day life, as it happens to Saviano who lives constantly under protection, can be seen as an action turned against himself in his intention to testify. It can be considered almost as a punishment for having described reality without limitations. The decision to sacrifice himself to build a better society is undoubtedly an admirable action, but a tough decision for an author to make. The lesson taught by Saviano's example arouses a deep reflection on the risks taken by an author while doing her or his job of presenting reality. A parallel can be made with modern African literature,

⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Che cos'è la letteratura?*, Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2009, p. 23

⁹ "La letteratura mette paura nella misura in cui diventa uno strumento che permette ad una storia marginale di diventare vicinissima, nota, conosciuta." Translation of mine. Roberto Saviano, "Qual è la potenza della letteratura?". July 6, 2013. Accessed November 17, 2015. <http://www.letteratura.rai.it/articoli/saviano-qual-%C3%A8-la-potenza-della-letteratura/22580/default.aspx>

which is said to have started as a report on colonialism, then it moved to testify the experiences in western society.

Aimé Césaire with the movement of *négritude*, used the French language to denounce the French colonisers. Sartre gives a definition of the term saying that it can be regarded as a particular form of affection towards the world.¹⁰ It can even be seen as an active imitation of passivity, it is not a static movement but a form of becoming conscious of the self. The black man becomes aware of his reporting power through the use of literature, poetry in particular. The collective memory is shared with society becoming part of it. Ngugi identified two categories of writers, the first are *idealist writers* who see society as static and no chance of transformation, the second are *materialist writers* who use their works to mirror the changes in society.¹¹ In modern society, literature acquires the role of a proper social institution together with religion and science, since the writer does not have to work on commission for a prince. However, the author depends on the literary market which is made up of publishers, the audience and even social life. A writer undergoes a process that makes herself or himself an intellectual whose life is totally linked to society.

1.1.3 Literature in education

A possible way to make the most of literature is to employ it in education. As a matter of fact, literature can be a useful tool for the learning process. To demonstrate this consideration, a parallel can be drawn between Paolo Balboni's tripartite model that establishes the causes of human action, that are: duty, need and pleasure, and the aims of literary education.¹² In this model, the effective method of acquisition in the learning progress is based on the third motivational cause, that is pleasure, through which notions can be fixed in a durable way. What literary education tries to make the reader discover, are pleasure and need for literature. If the reader is guided by these two motivational causes, she or he will find the answers to the most complicated issues of her or his life. Hence, since human action and literary education, have in common the motivations of need and pleasure, literature can represent the solution to enable the reader to act and find the answers. However, literature can present some limitations. For instance, as far as literature in a foreign language is concerned, the first limitation is represented by language. A student who learns literature in a second language can face various problems. First of all,

¹⁰, Sartre, *Che cos'è la letteratura?*, p.397

¹¹ Chidi Amuta, *The Theory of African Literature*, London:Zed Books Ltd., 1989, p.99

¹² E. Paolo Balboni, *Le sfide di Babele, insegnare le lingue nelle società complesse*, Torino: Utet università, 2012, p. 87; p.14

owing to the presence of unknown vocabulary, she or he can become consequently demotivated. Then, the society described can be slightly different from the environment the student lives in, therefore the explicative and helping role of the teacher in these kinds of situations is required. The second limitation can be represented by the choice of the authors to be studied that cannot cover a sufficient range of authors. Moreover, as the poststructuralist and postmodern theories of literature sustain, a text cannot be considered unproblematic since its meaning is never entirely fixed. Twentieth century Post-modernism, dissociates itself from the past centuries in a way that a variety of languages and media were accepted. It represented a radical break with the past since its perception of reality, knowledge and interpretation of cultural heritage completely changed. New literary theories started to spread, from which a pedagogy that became known as social critical literacy, raising the following issues on text and readers. The concept of text can be considered the key-issue: it can have the role of both shaping the reader and being shaped by the reader or by teachers authorising it for their students, it can present particular ideologies and views of literacy and literature. They can also place some individuals at the borders or at the centre of the story, making the decision of empowering or silencing them and underlying their social role. The context should be considered as a crucial aspect to enable the reader in the construction of the text.

Giovanni Freddi talks about literary education which can be named as the process of teaching literature, highlighting its principal purposes:¹³

- 1) *Historic and cultural aim*: literary works are a way to express moral, cultural, art and civil experiences of a civilisation. Hence, literature can be employed to discover history and society.
- 2) *Aesthetic and expression aim*: since literature is part of the art heritage of a people, it can improve the education of taste and critical judgment, enabling the student to understand the possible connections between the different forms of art.
- 3) *Linguistic and expression aim*: the process of studying literature means to be in contact with the finest and most complete use of a language which can be employed diversely according to the situations.
- 4) *Educational aim*: it should be considered the most important aspect to develop in schools, however in Italy it is reduced to a few official ministerial expressions such as

¹³ Giovanni Freddi, *La letteratura natura e insegnamento*, Milano: Ghisetti & Corvi Editori, 2003, p. 41

the moral education of the student, his way of developing taste and his psychological refinement.

These are the purposes that should be considered in teaching literature to give to literary education its appropriate role of educational method that becomes effective when literary production is used. Enzo Palmisciano underlines the captivating and gripping power of literature that should be considered fundamental in schools, since it can assume a pedagogical role.¹⁴ He presents the pleasure of the text as a way to improve one's taste and critical judgment. As a matter of fact, the text can help the reader develop her or his personality and the concept of the other.

As it has been suggested through this section of the chapter, the power of literature in teaching different and various lessons to the reader should be taken into account. Nevertheless, in contemporary society, we tend to underestimate literature using written texts as a simple leisure activity, while it should be considered as a constant presence in everyday lives. To conclude, having seen the multiple functions of literature, it can be admitted that it deserves more prestige because it can represent a tool to help us live in wisdom and self-consciousness.

1.1.4 Electronic literature and digital material

It can be useful to mention also literature in electronic form, since it has become an alternative to printed literature. Purchasing books on the Internet in order to be read on devices like smartphones, e-books readers, tablets and personal computers is a common process in the society of today. This form of literature can have positive effects such as the fact of allowing the readers to carry with them a consistent amount of titles while travelling without worrying about their weight, to purchase some books that are no more available in the print form, to get the titles immediately from the Internet without waiting them to be brought at home, and even to save money since books in electronic form are sold at a lower price and some of them can be downloaded freely. However, there are some critics who do not encourage this form of literature. Eco and Carrière for instance, talking about the possible disappearance of books, underline their importance as concrete objects.¹⁵ Eco is convinced that, since everyone needs to write and read, this object cannot disappear

¹⁴ Dorotea Medici, *Che cosa fare della letteratura? La trasmissione del sapere letterario nella scuola*, Milano: Franco Angeli, 2001, p.61

¹⁵ Jean-Claude Carrière, Umberto Eco, *Non sperate di liberarvi dei libri*, Milano: Bompiani, 2009, p.22

because it is the most flexible medium of expression. E-book readers are functional for the fact that their pages cannot disintegrate with time and that they can include more titles in a single device, but books can be seen as the extension of our hands, something biologic and not artificial like technology. Books are reliable collections of information that, if there would be a global electric black-out cannot be lost.

Negative effects of e-books can be seen in the changed relationship between writers and readers and even in the way in which authors write. Students for example, if they read a book on an electronic device, tend to skim-read and to give less attention to what they are reading. The electronic devices they use, if not e-book readers, are usually employed for other activities like personal computers and smartphones, therefore literature they purchase there is underestimated and a total immersion in what they read is not possible. Furthermore, authors tend to write less and to cut sentences length in order to keep the reader's attention, so what they write is subdued to electronic canons. On the contrary, the publication of what they write is less difficult in a continent like Africa for example, where mostly of the literary works are published in the West. However, difficulties in purchasing electronic literature can be noticed especially in Africa. In Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa electronic literature is widespread but for other countries that have less digital infrastructures online and electronic literature is not available and seen like a luxury. At the Indaba Zimbabwean International Book Fair, the topic of "The Book in the Digital Era," was faced but even if it was said that books distribution is declining due to many bookshops closing, there is the need of the print books to support writers and spread their work to the country's readers. Online publication and e-books are very common among individual writers, but only a million Zimbabweans can access the Internet. They mostly use social networks which are becoming important sources of literature diffusion as well as literary blogs. Wainaina states that electronic literature leads to a spectral world in which concrete objects like books are not needed since they are available on the Internet and have the possibility to spread faster.¹⁶ If seen from this last consideration, the printed books would less and less be considered in the future.

The next section of the chapter will focus on narrative fiction and literature's reliability, since literature's power can be undermined by the fact that literature can be considered only as fiction, in the sense of something that bears no connection with reality.

¹⁶ Stephanie Santana, "Exorcizing Afropolitanism: Binyavanga Wainaina explains why "I am a Pan-Africanist, not an Afropolitan at ASAUk 2012" *Africanwords.com*. February 8, 2013. Accessed January 11, 2017. <https://africanwords.com/2013/02/08/exorcizing-afropolitanism-binyavanga-wainaina-explains-why-i-am-a-pan-africanist-not-an-afropolitan-at-asauk-2012/#2>

1.2 Narrative fiction

1.2.1 Narrative fiction and reality

Wolfgang Iser states that if literary texts bore no connections with reality, they would be incomprehensible.¹⁷ He affirms that they are a mixture of reality and fiction, therefore they make an interaction between the given and the imagined. Since the relationship between the two engenders a clear contrast, the duality of reality and fiction should be replaced with a triad that is made up of the real, the fictive and the imaginary. From this triad we can infer the nature of a fictionalizing act that converts reality into a sign to express something else. This act allows a process to cross the boundaries between external reality and the imaginary, mixing the two elements through the importation of social and extra-reality items in a literary text. This importation does not necessarily make the items fictive, instead their representation in the text can be seen under a different light. Since the fictionalizing act cannot be inferred from the reality in the text, it involves an imaginary quality that does not belong to the reality of the text but cannot be separated from it.

At the same time, Iser also talks about the reality of fiction, noticing that fiction and reality are classified as pure opposites.¹⁸ Therefore, if we deal with the reality of literature, this concept can engender confusion in the reader. Some writers, on the contrary, put this issue under another light. Umberto Eco for example, made a declaration that summarizes the question in a few words, asserting that the narrative way of telling the truth, presents a criterion of truth. If we consider the events that happened in Hiroshima during the Second World War, they may seem unreal but they happened as well.¹⁹ As a consequence, in this sense, reality is not so far from fiction. Literary truth can be seen as a special type of truth and according to Walton what makes a fictive assertion true, is the imaginary claim to speak in a truthful way.²⁰

On the other hand, Todorov states that literature is a fiction and the literary text is not subdued to the evidence of truth since it is *fictionnel*.²¹ Todorov also uses the words of

¹⁷ Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary, Charting Literary Anthropology*, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, p.1

¹⁸ Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading, a Theory of Aesthetic Response*, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978

¹⁹ “Che fuori tempo che fa, Omaggio ad Umberto Eco”. Video, February 20, 2016. Accessed March 20, 2016. <http://www.rai.tv/dl/RaiTV/programmi/media/ContentItem-e84d6a6c-6601-4fa3-9ead-72bc52b50ca0.html>

²⁰ Walton Kendall L., *Mimesis as Make-Believe. On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*, Cambridge (Ma) – London: Harvard University Press, 1990, p.399

²¹ Tzvetan Todorov, *La notion de littérature*, Lonrai, France: Éditions du Seuil, 1987, p. 13, 18-19

René Wellek who talks about the use of language in literature comparing it to the language of science and to every-day language. The language of literature uses a consistent number of associations, ambiguities and has multiple functions such as an expressive function and a practical one. On the contrary, the scientific language has only a direct meaning that does not create possible allusions, whose reference is to a concrete element, whereas literature can also refer to an imaginary world. As far as the comparison with every-day language is concerned, the literary use of language is systematic since it organizes the qualities of every-day language and it is an end in itself because outside the literary context, it is not possible for it to exist. A literary text does not claim to reveal the truth, but since it is fictional, the issues of reality and truth are dependent on the literary aim itself that is, according to Todorov, to make an independent use of the language.

Fiction does not necessarily describe events that have historically taken place, it can serve as a form of subconscious writing of history and it can use reality as a starting point to develop a story. The readers should not bother on the question on whether the literary text is reporting the truth or not: they should rely on the narrative authority and try to accept the author's way of using the language to narrate.

1.2.2 Narrative fiction, a technical definition

Narrative fiction shows in words fictitious events that are sequentially linked with one another. The expedient of fiction can be used to relate a story through non-existent characters, in order to present a situation that may have been not easy to narrate if clear references to names, places and issues were made. The author's attempt is to use narrative fiction as a metaphor to interpret the world that surrounds the readers, in order to make them aware of the possible changes and nuances of a situation. Moreover, the fact of describing fictional situations, may have a double function, that is to say it can get the reader closer to reality since she or he is experiencing a fictional world, or it can be used to escape from a bitter reality in order to come back stronger than before. As Lothe states: “*fiction* comes from the Latin *fingere* to invent, to think up, to make up”.²² The author decides to employ the narrative text using narrative devices as a way of story-telling. The narrative text, or better called *discourse*, quoting Genette, is the authors' way of expressing themselves concretely.²³ Genette, starting from the term *récit* , proposed a classification of

²² Jakob Lothe, *Narrative in Fiction and Film, an Introduction*, United States: Oxford University Press, 2000, p.4

²³ Gérard Genette, *Discours du récit*, 1972

narrative fiction. The meanings of the term in French are three at least: the statement, the content of a statement and the action performed while the statement is produced and Genette gave to the different meanings a representative term. The first already-mentioned term, is *discourse* which can be considered as the text, that is the spoken or written, not necessarily chronological presentation of the events. Here a writer can transmit a content and a characterization of the people presented, which is filtered through narrative voices and perspectives. The second meaning is carried by the term *story* which represents the combination between the events chronologically arranged not following the narrative sequence, and the fictional characters. It can be defined as the summary of the action, a paraphrase of what happens in the text. The term *narration* holds the third meaning and it hints at the way in which the text is written and conveyed using narrative devices and different patterns to give shape to the discourse, whose creative task belongs to the narrator. Genette's narrative classification strongly influenced recent narrative theory even if he based his theory on the Russian formalists of the early twentieth century who started to make a distinction between story and discourse applying the pair *fabula/syuzhet* that are the summary of the action and the design of the story respectively. *Discourse* and *syuzhet* are connected as two elements of the text form, since they present the content of the text through different narrative procedures and they both are related to the *plot*, a concept explained by Aristotle in the *Poetics* as the 'construction of the events'. The sequence of events, which can be probable or necessary, is linked by a relationship of cause and effect. Admittedly, causality in narrative fiction is not the same of the real world, since it can also depend on the role of the reader who may add casual elements to the plot, as we can see in the next sections of the chapter. Before, we should consider the author and narrator's role in presenting the fictional work.

1.2.3 Author and narrator's reliability, the role of the writer

As happens for *Wuthering Heights*, many narrators can exist in only one text. As a matter of fact, Emily Brontë decides to tell the love story of the main characters Catherine and Heathcliff, through three different narrators. The employment of different narrators can increase the reader's confusion while trying to understand the essential sequence of facts. One of the narrators is Nelly, Catherine and her family's housekeeper, a woman who helps Catherine becoming an adult. Nelly relates Catherine and Heathcliff's love story to Mr Lockwood, a tenant of the house, but her tale can be considered not faithful to the real events, since Nelly is emotionally influenced by the relationship she bears with Catherine,

who is like a daughter to her. Therefore, when a character has a particular relationship with another character about whom they are relating, their story can be told in an incorrect way, that is to say that there can be misconceptions, inaccuracies and omissions in the story told. Usually the narrator, if the text does not hint to a possible unreliability, has *narrative authority*. This powerful feature of the narrator enables the reader to accept the story that is presented, in order to become part of a sort of agreement between herself or himself and the author. As readers, we are required to believe in what the author communicates to us through his text. In the case of Nelly, it can be assumed that she does not represent the model of reliable narrator since she is influenced by her feelings for Catherine, anyway, she has a strong narrative authority as well, because she lived in the house where the events took place, so the reader gives her a partial credibility. Lothe presents the three following features to recognize an unreliable narrator:

- 1) The narrator does not entirely know what she or he is relating ;
- 2) The narrator is personally involved in the story even in a strong way;
- 3) The narrator himself seems to be a symbol of conflict in the ideological orientation presented in the text.

As happens in the example of Nelly, the above-mentioned features seem to confirm her condition of unreliable narrator.

When a narrator sees and tells the events in a particular way, she or he communicates using elements of language that have a demonstrative function such as *the, this, that, there, now, I you, tomorrow* and *yesterday*. We can understand what they refer to if we take into account the *narrative perspective*. Lothe underlines that other than the afore-mentioned linguistic elements, narrative perspective is also linked to the narrator and characters' viewpoints, judgements or experiences and other factors such as the narrator's position with the perceived object, the distance, previous knowledge, psychological attitude towards the object. In narrative fiction it is mostly based on the type of narrator, if she or he is a first-person narrator or a third-person. Due to the fact that a first-person narrator is internal in the narration and the third-person is external, their narration can be considered more reliable or not. As a result, it can be assumed that a narrator may give a particular vision or interpretation of the events, that in many cases cannot be considered neutral and objective.

Despite the fact that a narrator can appear unreliable, what should be taken into consideration is the role of the author. According to Achebe, a writer should report the experience of her or his nation, since there is the problem of forgetting what happened in the past.²⁴ The writer is seen by Achebe as a way to express art that is created in service of human beings. He presents *mbari*, a traditional event of his country, Nigeria, where men and women from the community of Owerri Igbo, participated in a colourful festival of images in honour of the earth goddess, Ala, building a house of images where the entire community life was portrayed. The artists in the ceremony were ordinary members of society and when the festival was over they returned to their normal lives. The message bore by this ceremony is that art and society are indivisible and there are not severe obstacles between makers of culture and its consumers, since making art is not an exclusive privilege or duty of a particular group of society. Even if Achebe describes the artist as an outcast, who “lives at the fringe of society, wearing a beard and a peculiar dress and general behaving in a strange, unpredictable way”, he can be considered as a teacher.²⁵ As a matter of fact, the role of the writer, in Africa specifically, can be regarded as an eye-opener and a prophet. In Africa the *griot*, that is the term used to define the author in the past decades, had social duties since she or he had to take part in every official function as a necessary accessory to the sovereign as a transmitter of oral tales and proverbs. The role of the writer has been modified in modern times, despite the fact that some African writers maintain the same role of the writer of the past. For example, in countries like Nigeria and Kenya, the author is aware of her or his responsibility towards less educated people. Achebe himself can be considered a pedagogue, since he wants to explain the past so that the present may be better understood. Also Sartre explains his idea of writer who should have the function of guiding the reader, in order to enable her or his audience to see things through her or his eyes. Her or his role is similar to the African *griot*'s one who mainly is a speaker who through her or his symbolism tries to use words to express his feelings. As a speaker, the griot can report a story told by somebody else where changes and elaborations of the story in first-person, or through characters may be added. In reporting the truth, that sometimes can be considered *her or his truth*, a writer can be accused of excess of emotions and reactions such as anger, overjoy or over sadness. Anyway, a writer should communicate what she or he feels, and the reader should decide to take the narrator for a

²⁴ Chinua Achebe, *Morning yet on creation day : essays*, London ; Ibadan : Heinemann Educational Books, 1977, p.21

²⁵ Achebe, *Morning Yet*, p.42

reliable story-teller or not. Sartre underlines the relationship between the reader and her or his audience telling that when a writer develops her or his work, she or he makes the decision of writing to give existence to his words through his readers. Having said that, it should be advisable to dedicate a whole paragraph to the role of the reader in the process of shaping and taking on trust what the writer presents throughout her or his texts.

1.2.4 *The role of the reader*

Wolfgang Iser states that a text that is read has a potential response that can be analysed investigating on the reading process, therefore the reader acquires a fundamental role. A text can only have a meaning and a consequent interpretation, when it is read. Giving the reader a central role in the interaction between the author and the text, Iser also differentiates two categories of readers that depend on the literary critic's statements on the effects of literature or responses to it.²⁶ In the first category, if the critic deals with the history of responses, she or he is called *real reader* because she or he focuses her or his attention on how a literary work has been received by a particular reading public. Her or his role can be considered as related to the society she or he comes into contact with, since she or he analyses their judgments on a text. This kind of reader is associated with the *hypothetical reader* who can actualize the text in her or his response. The second category is related to the potential effects of the literary text and is made up of the *ideal reader*, who has something in common with the author and sometimes can coincide with the author herself or himself and is considered by Iser as a pure fictional being who must look for a potential meaning of the text. Finally, the *contemporary reader*, which is associated with the second category, is represented by the cultured reader who has come into contact with different kinds of texts. Iser's categorization of readers, can be seen as opposed to Sartre's conception of the figure of the reader, since he associates the existence of a text to the reader's freedom. As a matter of fact, the reader has the role to continue what the author started, since through her or his reading, she or he gives concreteness to the author's words. On the other hand, the reader can also have the power to employ her or his freedom to choose whether to read a book or not. This is the reason why the author makes an appeal to the reader in order to be read. A work of art, according to Sartre, does not exist if is not observed, therefore the reader when she or he reads, takes on the responsibility of employing her or his freedom to make a work of art exist and she or he is also free to

²⁶ Iser, *The Act of Reading*, p.27

believe in what she or he reads. The author wants the reader's complete attention and her or his trust. What results from the reader's devotion, is a sort of generosity agreement between the author and the reader in which they trust each other and also hold expectations in the other. A writer proposes her or his description of the world to the reader's generosity, in order to be heard. Both Satre and Iser insist on the important role of the reader and her or his subjectivity, through which she or he creates meanings that sometimes go beyond the actual text giving her or his interpretations to the author's piece of work.

It can be interesting to know what happens in the mind of a reader when she or he comes into contact with a text. Benton and Fox state reporting Henry James' words, that if the author is capable to raise the reader's interest, telling the story in a good way, she or he engenders the *literary belief*, which makes the creation of a secondary world possible.²⁷ This secondary world can be considered as a secondary-limbo, "an in-between state of mind which draws upon both the unique psychic make-up of an individual and the actual world that is everyone's possession"²⁸. The reader starts to become lost in an imaginative game, building an alternative world that can be found in an area that is between the reader's inner reality and the outer reality of the worlds on the page. Some authors and critics use to describe the reading process with the metaphor of the journey. Coleridge for example says that "the reader should be carried forward by the pleasurable activity of mind excited by the attractions of the journey"²⁹.

The phases of the reading process in the mind of the reader are classified by Benton and Fox as follows:

- 1) *Feeling like reading*: when a possible reader decides to approach to a new book to read and starts to become acquaintance with it through the cover, the possible memories it can evoke and the future expectations.
- 2) *Getting into the story*: it describes the reading experience in which the reader makes continuous adjustments that enable herself or himself to go on reading and playing the author's game.

²⁷ Peter Hunt, "Children's literature critical concepts and cultural studies". In *Education and Theory* vol 2, edited by Peter Hunt, New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 127

²⁸ Hunt, "Children's Literature", p.128

²⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, London: J. M. Dent, 1997

- 3) *Lost in the book*: when a reader creates a mental picture using the author's temporal and spatial images. She or he is not completely lost because this sense of being part of another world will end.
- 4) *Increasing sense of ending*: while reading the reader feels like the 'happily ever after' moment will come and she or he looks for an appropriate conclusion that will assure that the fiction is properly organized.

More detailed mental acts are also presented by Benton and Fox, that are: *picturing, anticipating and retrospecting, interacting and finally evaluating*. All these acts seem to happen naturally in the mind of the readers, therefore their role as protagonists of the reading process, should not be taken for granted.

1.2.5 Freedom in narration and interpretation

Going back to Sartre, he insists on the concept of freedom in narration, since the writer should be free to narrate, and he also supports freedom in interpretation. In his opinion, a writer relies on the readers' freedom asking them to make her or his work exist. As a matter of fact a reader is free to approach a literary work and to interpret it according to her or his personal experience, background and memories. The reader's interpretations contribute in the existence and in the development of the work of art.

Umberto Eco underlines the fact that is the author who brings the words and the readers bring the sense.³⁰ Moreover, what should be considered in interpreting a text, are the intentions of the author, the intentions of the reader but also the intentions of the text, a third element that emerges as the object of communication. Iser also dedicates a whole section on interactions between a text and its reader. Since reading is not a one-way process, both authors and readers play an active role in the reading process. The author sets a game made up by words that the reader have to understand in order to join into it. The reader at the same time perceives some elements in the text that will guide herself and himself in shaping the story. Following the author's sequence of sentences she or he is able to go forward and even backwards if she or he finds some elements that remind herself or himself of a previous scene. Familiar and life memories can also intervene in the process and they can merge with the particular moment in the text when memories are evoked. The narrative text, as Lothe states, creates meanings indirectly, and the theorist Roland Barthes

³⁰ Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 24

adds that a literary text bears multiple meanings.³¹ Narrative theory explains that the text's meaning is constructed by narrative structures that can increase but also limit the different meanings at the same time. The narrative text is therefore dependent on limited structures that in a sense guide the reader's free interpretation and that can moderate her or his imagination. On the other hand, according to Eco, freedom of interpretation is another role of literature: the multiple meanings of language that are proposed in different reading plans, set the reader in front of possible ambiguities of language and even of life.³² Reading a literary text gives us the possibility of free interpretation because of ambiguities of language and of the situations presented. Therefore it is possible to open our minds and to interrogate ourselves about possible multiple meanings, changing ideas too. However, texts present themselves as authorities and we have to accept their truths. Literary texts make us aware of what should not be taken for free interpretation. The world of literature can inspire trust in the reader, since some concepts that are expressed by an author can be regarded as truthful, therefore, a literary model gives us an imaginative or not, model of truth.

³¹ Lothe, *Narrative in Fiction and Film*, p. 16

³² Umberto Eco, *Sulla letteratura*, p. 11

1.3 Literature about Africa

1.3.1 Western representations of Africa

Ryszard Kapuscinski states that “Africa is too large to describe. It is a veritable ocean, a separate planet, a varied immensely rich cosmos. Only with the greatest simplification, for the sake of convenience, can we say *Africa*. In reality, except as a geographical appellation Africa does not exist”³³. Also V.Y. Mudimbe argues that before the eighteenth - century increase in the slave trade, the black continent was on the maps as a *terra incognita*, but its peoples and their material productions were familiar to travellers, students of human species, merchants and European states.³⁴ The content of British writings about Africa increased with the slave trade of the eighteenth century. That content

shifted from almost indifferent and matter-of-fact reports of what the voyagers had seen to judgmental evaluation of the Africans. [...] The shift to such pejorative comment was due in large measure to the effects of the slave trade. A vested interest in the slave trade produced a literature of devaluation...³⁵

Explorers brought evidence of “African inferiority”, for instance the technique of Yoruba statuary must have come from Egyptians or Benin art must be a Portuguese creation, the architectural achievement of Zimbabwe was due to Arab technicians. Therefore, the explorers’ texts reported evidence on new discoveries, no matter how they were reliable or colonialism-influenced in their descriptions. The picture of Africa and Africans explorers bore in mind was the result of increasing social, mental and educational preconceptions. Philip Curtin states that the Europe’s image of Africa that began to emerge in the 1870s

was found in children’s books, in Sunday school tracts, in the popular press. Its major affirmations were the common knowledge of the educated classes. Thereafter, when new generations of explorers and administrators went to Africa, they went with a prior impression of what they would find. Most often, they found it.³⁶

It is important to mention the role of educational notebooks promoted by colonial schools to achieve moral conquest and cultural exploitation. An example is *Mamadou et*

³³ Ryszard Kapuscinski, *The Shadow of the Sun. My African Life*, London: Penguin, preface

³⁴ V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge*, Bloomington [etc.] : Indiana university press, 1988, p.9

³⁵ Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow, *The Africa That Never Was: Four Centuries of British Writing about Africa*, Prospect Heights, Ill: Waveland Pr Inc, 1992, pp. 22-23

³⁶ Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Actions*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964, p.iv

Bineta, that are educational notebooks to promote Western education in colonised African countries. From the seventeenth century Western colonisers started to transcribe and edit African oral literature according to an occidental perspective. African students of that time could be linked to their tradition even under colonial exploitation, but they were reminded also that they came from a savage country. Editing these schoolbooks, the colonisers showed Africans that the values and traditions of their civilisation existed, but at the same time the texts they studied were carefully adapted and contents systematically selected to detach Africans from their traditional culture.

Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow made an analysis on British representations of Africa that demonstrates how these representations have arisen from Western fantasies rather than from concrete facts about African reality.³⁷ According to these authors, British writings about Africa are influenced by a pattern of primitivistic myths where Africa and the Africans emerge as the opposite of Britain and the British, being two distant poles of a single system of values. For instance, while the British are brave, gracious in granting favours, the Africans are cowards and accept them without gratitude. What is presented in terms of anthropological views of Africa, can be linked to Conrad's definitions of the Africans that dehumanize them and almost annihilate their presence. The Africans are the passive objects of British intentions to bring civilization to an ignorant people. Africa is viewed as a world apart, a mysterious continent that is too alien to be included within civilization. The British' perceptions of Africa and Africans and their political and economic interests on the continent, have revealed more about themselves and British society than on Africa. The images that are made up of stereotypes from the sixteenth century continue to have a strong influence on current perceptions of Africa. A century after, Hegel thought that Africa was "comparable to a land of childhood still enveloped in the dark mantle of the night in terms of self-conscious development of history, and that there was nothing harmonious with humanity in the African character".³⁸

Professor Mĩcere Mũgo supports the idea that some of the best Europeans and Americans minds were those who damaged mostly the African image.³⁹ They contributed in increasing the myth of the African as a black beast. Some examples can be found in Shakespeare with characters like Othello and Caliban, in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* where Friday is presented. Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa* illustrates 'the white man's burden' to

³⁷ Hammond and Jablow, *The Africa That Never Was*

³⁸ Hammond and Jablow, *The Africa That Never Was*, introduction

³⁹ Mĩcere Mũgo, *Written Literature and Black Images*, in *Teaching of African Literature in Schools*, Nairobi: Kenyan Literature Bureau, 1982

educate the savage who depends on the coloniser. Elspeth Huxley's books describe the primitive uncivilized African savage comparing him to the Western hero. The most common stereotype about the African is that she or he is a dealer of witchcraft user. Mĩcere Mũgo narrates that the description of Gagool in Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, provoked a feeling of terror whenever she saw an old African woman. Sydney Poitier tells that, due to the literature about Africa he read, he linked Africa with snakes. All these examples have the consequence of undermine the African's self-confidence in herself or himself as African, causing almost shame in their origins. Ngugi wa Thiong'o expressed the need for anti-imperialist struggle also on an educational level through the diffusion of Afrocentric values to create a conscious culture and a value system that goes against imperialist culture. For this purpose, he recognises the creative and cognitive role of literature and the arts that make our knowledge possible through multiple images, whose role is to see the world in a certain way. Another more famous example of Western influence in the perception of the African people is presented in the following paragraph.

1.3.2 Conrad's Heart of Darkness

Fancy, sometimes called Imagination, is not inimical to Fiction. On the contrary, they are bosom friends. But they also observe careful protocol around each other's property and around the homestead of their droll and difficult neighbour, Fact. Conrad was a writer who kept much of his fiction fairly close to the facts of his life as a sailor.⁴⁰

Conrad decided to write about places and people who actually exist, describing them in a distort way. He confessed that *Heart of Darkness* can be considered experience, but it was "a little beyond the actual facts of the case for the perfectly legitimate purpose of bringing it home to the minds and bosoms of the readers".⁴¹

As Achebe asserts, Conrad embodies the Western intention of placing Africa in a remote and negative position to underline Europe's best qualities.⁴² Achebe underlines how Conrad presents through his fictional narrator Marlow, the peaceful image of the noble River Thames, as if to make a comparison with the actual setting of the story that is the unimportant River Congo. His definition of Africa is "unknown planet", there "the earth

⁴⁰ Chinua Achebe, *Africa's Tarnished Name in The Education of a British-Protected Child*, London: Penguin Classics, 2009

⁴¹ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, New York: Norton, 1972, p.4

⁴² Chinua Achebe, *An Image of Africa*, Indiana University Press, Research in African Literatures, Vol. 9, No. 1, Special Issue on Literary Criticism, (Spring, 1978), pp. 1-15. Accessed April 29, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3818468>

seemed unearthly”, and he describes the African as “prehistoric man”, a “savage” asking himself whether they were really human. The same is for the African woman who is completely different from the mature, faithful and patient Western woman. Conrad also uses language to discredit the natives, for example he reports their way of speaking in onomatopoeias, as to imitate their grunts. In Achebe’s opinion literature is always badly served when an author’s artistic insight yields place to stereotype and malice. Moreover, according to his biographer Bernard C. Meyer, Conrad is claimed to be inaccurate in reporting his experience in Congo in 1890 because he did not notice important features of Africa during that time. As happens with the *Heart of Darkness*, in some cases novels can engender and also strengthen stereotypes and prejudices on other cultures and habits. Conrad’s mythology is still present nowadays. In 2008 Fred Robarts observed that the US embassy in Kinshasa sold T-shirts emblazoned with the words “I survived the Heart of Darkness”.⁴³ This can be an example of a current opinion of the world where Africa and Africans are under-estimated and the West is heroic and victorious. On another level, Conrad’s novel can only be seen as a form of literary fiction that is neither true nor false and that can help the reader to be empathic with the characters, that means that they can share or condemn their behaviour.

1.3.3 *The danger of a single story*

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie illustrates through some episodes that have happened during her life, how believing to a single voice on a topic can be dangerous. She starts with her experience of early reader of British and American children’s books whose role was pivotal in her first writings because she used to write the same stories she was reading.

All my characters were white and blue-eyed. They played in the snow. They ate apples. And they talked a lot about the weather, how lovely it was that the sun had come out. Now, this despite the fact that I lived in Nigeria. I had never been outside Nigeria. We didn’t have snow. We ate mangoes. And we never talked about the weather, because there was no need to. My characters also drank a lot of ginger beer because the characters in the British books I read drank ginger beer. Never mind that I had no idea what ginger beer was. And for many years afterwards, I would have a desperate desire to taste ginger beer. But that is another story.⁴⁴

This is to demonstrate that narrative fiction can deeply influence readers, especially in the case of children. The stories they read are completely detached from their every-day lives,

⁴³ Susan Williams “Ways of Seeing Africa”. *Africa Bibliography*, pp vii-xiv, 2009, Accessed December 16, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40961465>

⁴⁴ Adichie, *The Danger*

consequently literature is seen as another world that bears no relations with reality and the readers themselves. For example, before reading African authors, Adichie believed that all the characters in books had to be foreigners, therefore she could not identify. When she comes into contact with authors like Achebe or Camara Laye she starts to feel part of the world of literature. Believing in a single story can be dangerous and deceitful because it can generate misconceptions about how is reality. Adichie presents the example of her American roommate who could not believe she was able to speak English and that she did not listen to *tribal music*. This proves that relying solely on popular images, she grew up believing that Africa was a completely different continent, where people speak only local unknown languages and listen to a particular kind of music. According to the American roommate, Africa was a single story of catastrophe, “a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, and incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves, and waiting to be saved, by a kind, white foreigner”. According to Adichie Western literature can possibly be the cause of these increasing beliefs on Africa. She reports the example of John Locke, a London merchant, who went to West Africa in 1561 and wrote about black Africans of being “beasts who have no houses, people without heads, having their mouth and eyes in their breasts.” His writing is part of a tradition of Western writings on Africa. A tradition that depicts Africans, mostly in a negative way and has a deep influence in creating wrong opinions. After narrating some useful examples supporting this idea, Adichie concludes telling:

All of these stories make me who I am. But to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience, and to overlook the many other stories that formed me. The single story creates stereotypes. And the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.⁴⁵

The reader and the person who listen to a story has to develop her or his critical sense to distinguish what can be believed or not, what should be considered is a balance of stories, not a single story.

⁴⁵ Adichie, *The danger*

Chapter 2

African postcolonial literature and its diffusion

2.1 *The worldwide power of narrative fiction*

“One of the greatest things literature does is allow us to imagine; to identify with situations and people who live in completely different circumstances, in countries all over the world.”¹ This powerful message embodies the main role of narrative fiction that can be applied to literature in general, in this particular case to African literature. Its worldwide power can be envisaged in the fact that the author writes her or his story in a particular context and at the same time this story can be suitable for other possible situations. As far as African postcolonial literature is concerned, many African novels describe situations happening in the continent but they can also have some links with Western societies. For example Selasi’s *Ghana Must Go* is a novel about a family where normal events and situations between any family in the world are presented. With her novel she aims to underline the characters’ feelings to make the reader empathic, rather than the characters’ African roots. She is frustrated by the fact that the African experience cannot be considered *universal*.

If we took African characters – or immigrant characters- to be as universally relatable as, say middle class suburban white characters, we wouldn’t speak of African novels. [...] Every time we pick up a book, we erase our personal borders. We trespass the boundaries of the self and enter the wilds of the Other. After those initial moments of disorientation, we find that we are home. As Fitzgerald has said, “That is part of the beauty of all literature. You discover that your longings are universal longings, that you’re not lonely and isolated from anyone. You belong.”²

This idea can be linked to the concept of world literature. Greenblatt analyses it going back to its first definitions.³ The term world-literature was introduced by Goethe in 1827 who took inspiration from Christoph Martin Wieland’s definition of *Weltliteratur* moving it to a global and more extended dimension. Goethe’s idea of world literature can be understood through what he stated about it:

Perhaps one will soon attain to the conviction that there is no such thing as patriotic art and patriotic science. Like everything of real value, they both belong to the entire world and can only be promoted through

¹ Message from Chinua Achebe in Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Weep Not, Child*, New York: Penguin Group, 2012

² Taiye Selasi, “African literature doesn’t exist” transcription of the opening speech of the Literature Festival in Berlin, 2013, Accessed May 25, 2016. http://www.literaturfestival.com/archiv/eroeffnungsreden/die-festivalprogramme-der-letzten-jahre/Openingsspeach2013_English.pdf

³ Stephen Greenblatt, *Cultural Mobility: a Manifesto*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.96

the free and general interaction of all living beings, with an abiding regard for that which remains and is known to us from the past.⁴

Goethe did not believe in patriotic literature, his conviction was that being literature a precious human heritage, it should be shared and considered as a global belonging. In this way he denies the existence of cultural borders. He was convinced of human interaction among the nations to enrich global literature through a mixture of different cultural aspects and peculiarities, considering also human history and the consequent temporal changes. His idea of developing cultural education comes from the fact that “the best poets and aesthetic writers of all nations have aimed at bringing a certain universality into their work. In every particular, whether it be historical, mythological, fables, more or less randomly concocted, one can increasingly perceive the universal shining through the national and personal guise”.⁵ His thoughts promote human interaction to understand better the others but also ourselves arriving to an “altered self-understanding”. Cosmopolitan education, in whose progress he strongly believed, can have a larger as well as a smaller scale effects. Also Marx reflected upon the concept of world-literature focusing on its utopian implications. He predicted that there would be a time in which literature would overcome national borders to replace the old national needs. There would exist a global literature that would be almost commodified and becoming a single product. On the contrary Goethe believed that nations would distinguish themselves through language, culture and heritage and emerge thanks to these aspects. He imagined a global literature as a merge of cultural and peculiar manifestations coming from all the nations throughout the world.

It can be interesting to connect these ideas of universalising literature and of cosmopolitan education, to the phenomenon of Afropolitanism that connects all the Africans in the world.

⁴ *Goethe: Sämtliche Werke*, vol. XVIII: *Ästhetische Schriften 1771-1805*, Frankfurt: Friedmar Apel, 1998, p.809 in Greenblatt, 2010, p.100

⁵ Goethe, p.1246, in Greenblatt, *Cultural Mobility*, p. 107

2.1.1 Afropolitans, a new generation of Africans

A recent movement that embodies this concept of crossing borders and spreading African culture throughout the world is Afropolitanism. The term Afropolitan was coined by Taiye Selasi in 2005. In her article, she describes this new generation of emigrants who feel at home in many places in the world.⁶ They are ethnic mixes, speaking two or more languages and their identity is hybrid. These young and gifted Africans left their countries to find a better future abroad since the 1960s. Their number has been increasing through the years and it has changed the perception of them by the West, due to the fact that the children of this generation of emigrants, started to build their lives in other countries and to emerge as new Africans. The previous generation looked for traditional professions like doctors, lawyers, bankers, engineers, on the contrary the new generations are becoming part of media, politics, venture, capital and design. The desire of Afropolitans is to give honour to their roots wherever they live and to understand the cultural complexity. Their condition of being African means coming from a continent that is usually portrayed as problematic, a country of lack and diseases, where poverty and suffering are the most well-known commonplaces. They are “Brown-skinned without a bedrock sense of ‘blackness,’ on the one hand; and often teased by African family members for ‘acting white’ on the other – the baby-Afropolitan can get what I call ‘lost in transnation’.”⁷ Afropolitans have the need to build their identity in terms of national, racial and cultural dimensions. From the national point of view they should establish their relationship with the places they live in since it is natural to internalize some features of one nation such as pronunciation. They see their race in terms of politics rather than of pigment; their idea of race depends on how they were raised, if they lived close to brown people or not and where they see themselves in the history of *blackness*. As far as culture is concerned, they have to accept the complexity of African culture that is a mixture of various habits.

⁶ Taiye Selasi, “Bye-Bye Babar”. *The LIP Magazine*, March 3, 2005. Accessed July 26, 2016.

<http://thelip.robertsharp.co.uk/?p=76>

⁷ Selasi, “Bye-Bye Babar”

2.1.2 Afropolitanism as a global movement

The link of Afropolitanism with cosmopolitanism seems to be evident. As Salami argues, cosmopolitanism takes its origins in Greece with Diogenes who stated to feel a global citizen.⁸ This idea can also be employed outside the West, as happens with Africa. Salami underlines the fact that in Africa, being a continent of migrations, there are cities like Djenne, Timbuktu and Addis Abeba where westerners, migrants from Asia and Middle East and Africans live together.⁹ Therefore Afropolitanism is linked to the West in terms of cosmopolitanism, but this latter concept is not solely present in western cities. For this reason she underlines the fact that some critics see the western domination in the movement. On the contrary, a similar theory of Afropolitanism had already been formulated by the African-American sociologist W.E.B Du Bois who stated the importance of multicultural societies to enhance culture and the fundamental role of black people in promoting these types of societies. His struggle for black freedom can be seen as a synecdoche to indicate the entire humanity's battle for liberation. Also Achille Mbembe gave his definition of the movement:

“Afropolitanism is not the same as Pan-Africanism or *négritude*. Afropolitanism is an aesthetic and a particular poetic of the world. It is a way of being in the world, refusing on principle any form of victim identity – which does not mean it is not aware of the injustice and violence inflicted on the continent and its people by the law of the world. It is also a political and cultural stance in relation to the nation, to race and to the issue of difference in general.”¹⁰

Minna Salami, wrote some articles about the movement of Afropolitanism. She argues that it allows Africans to feel like global citizens while keeping their traditions alive.¹¹ Her blog *MsAfropolitan* mainly focuses on the movement, highlighting the fact that through Afropolitanism, Africans can contribute to enhance their continent on a global scale and to help Africa's growth. It can also be useful to restore Africa's misrepresentations through the ages. Since it is a movement that involves multiple fields such as culture, art,

⁸ “The question was put to him what country he was from, and he replied, ‘I am a citizen of the world’.” Diogenes (404-423 BC) as reported in Diogenes Laertius *The Lives and Opinions of the Ancient Philosophers*, 3rd Century AD

⁹ Minna Salami, “Afropolitanism and Identity Politics”, *MsAfropolitan*, April 14, 2015. Accessed January 11, 2017. <http://www.msafropolitan.com/2015/04/afropolitanism-identity-politics.html>

¹⁰ Achille Mbembe, “Afropolitanism”. In *Africa Remix, Contemporary Art of a Continent*, edited by Simon Njami, Jacana Media, 2007. Accessed January 15, 2017, p.28-29, https://books.google.be/books?id=rQbiP0M5tCUC&pg=PA26&lpg=PA26&dq=mbembe+afropolitanism&source=bl&ots=OpfYVKNFfj&sig=keRFQLmeATL3fB3ng9at_R7izQ&hl=en&sa=X&ei=zYPeUuKnILPdygPr4DICQ&ved=0CDIQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=mbembe%20afropolitanism&f=true

¹¹ Salami, Afropolitanism

commerce, music, literature and technology, it can use these means of communication to give a voice to Africa. The role of social media is pivotal to Afropolitanism because they promote the diffusion of common ideas. Computers and mobile phones are fundamental devices to spread knowledge. As Tolu Ongulesi underlines, thanks to the Internet and satellite television, young Nigerians can have a more complete global view and they can come into contact with young Africans all over the world.¹² Also Mbembe asserts that Internet has improved African conditions in terms of erasing boundaries and developing new means of communication and a rapid circulation of ideas.¹³ It contributed to shorten the distance between the rural areas and the cities, to enhance a major electrification in marginal areas and also to cross physical country borders. Moreover, Mbembe states that the philosophy of Internet can be found in the same ancient African philosophies for the fact that “permanent transformation, conversion and circulation is an essential dimension of what we can call African culture”. African pre-colonial world symbolizes the digital because these historic aspects are linked to the digital world. The world of ancient Africans was characterised by a constant reuse of physical and mental entities, by an interrogation on themes like life, body and the self. Objects were seen as detaining magical powers to go beyond predetermined borders and to have access to the universe’s infinite extension.¹⁴ Cultural success of the Internet in Africa can be linked to the way in which African societies established, that is through circulation and mobility and the *extraordinary plasticity*. The first aspect resides in migration because Africans moved from a country to another from pre-colonial period, increasing ethnic variety and merging. The second is defined by Mbembe as “the capacity to embrace what is new”. Africans’ flexibility can be compared to the Internet spirit of innovation and transformation. Internet can help the growth of Afropolitanism in its diffusion throughout the continent. “Afropolitanism is the cultural movement that accompanies these historical processes, some of which are totally new. It’s more than pan-Africanism, it’s something that makes Africa the point of

¹² Mark Tutton, “Young, urban and culturally savvy, meet the Afropolitans”, *CNN*, February 17, 2012. Accessed January 11, 2017. <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/02/17/world/africa/who-are-afropolitans/>

¹³ “The Internet is Afropolitan” Interview between Bregtje van der Haak and Achille Mbembe, *Chimurega Chronic*, March 17, 2015. Accessed January 13, 2017. <http://chimurengachronic.co.za/the-internet-is-afropolitan/>

¹⁴ Achille Mbembe, “The digital age erases the divide between humans and objects”, *Mail & Guardian*, January 6, 2017. Accessed January 13, 2017. <http://mg.co.za/article/2017-01-06-00-the-digital-age-erases-the-divide-between-humans-and-objects>

encounter of different migratory movements”.¹⁵ It can be considered as a form of *wordliness* in which the local is influenced by the global.

2.1.3 Afropolitanism: elitism and cultural commodification

One of the main negative opinions on Afropolitanism is that it unites only Africans who live outside the continent. Many critics of the movement have argued that it belongs to an elite of Africans, mainly living in Europe, who do not consider Africans who are settled in the continent. Even in the art world, Ogbeci argues that Afropolitanism considers only the artists that live in the West, ignoring the creativity of Africans who live in Africa. Artists living there, are almost not allowed to visit Western museums or to present their works abroad.¹⁶ One of the critics of Afropolitanism is Wainaina who thinks that Afropolitans are represented by a black elite who are able to invent new things, meeting in cities like London and Paris and having no residence. This last feature contributes in creating a social class who bears no responsibility towards Africa as a continent and its people.¹⁷ On the contrary, Salami argues that Afropolitanism can also be related to the people living in the continent because it is not a diaspora movement. In Africa there are many cosmopolitan cities where art, music and creativity are affected by cosmopolitanism.¹⁸ Also Brendah Nyakudya states that "An Afropolitan is someone who has roots in Africa, raised by the world, but still has an interest in the continent and is making an impact, is feeding back into the continent and trying to better it". She thinks that also non-Africans can feel to be Afropolitans: "We like to think that it doesn't matter where you were born, if you find yourself on the continent and you love the continent, that makes you an Afropolitan".¹⁹ Tutton makes a list of some Afropolitans among whom there are musicians, vocalists, economists, architects, and editors who all live in Europe or America but have African roots. From this description it seems that Wainaina's and other critics views of Afropolitanism being an elitist movement that considers only Africans in the West and not those living in the continent, are supported. On the contrary, Afropolitanism if based in Western countries, can improve a widespread diffusion on how the conditions in Africa are and remind that Africa is a cosmopolitan continent. Moreover, as Mbembe states:

¹⁵ Mbembe, "The Internet is Afropolitan"

¹⁶ Okwunodu Ogbeci, "Afropolitanism: Africa without Africans"

¹⁷ "Entrevista Binyavanga Wainaina", *TVWiriko*, March 28, 2014. Accessed January 16, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RF2ZGXUWKlw>

¹⁸ Tutton, "Young, urban"

¹⁹ Brendah Nyakudya, in Tutton, "Young, urban"

“Today many Africans live outside Africa. Others have decided of their own accord to live on the continent but not necessarily in their countries of birth. More so, many of them have had the opportunity to experience several worlds and, in fact, have not stopped coming and going, developing an invaluable wealth of perception and sensitivity in the course of these movements. These are usually people who can express themselves in more than one language. They are developing, sometimes without their knowing it, a transnational culture, which I call ‘Afropolitan’ culture.”²⁰

Wainaina highlights another aspect of Afropolitanism that is commodification. He declared that Afropolitanism is “product driven,” design focused, and “potentially funded by the West.” It seems that with Afropolitanism “travel is easy” and “people are fluid.”²¹ He considers Afropolitanism as a kind of fashion, that will pass in a short period of time. He feels to be pan-Africanist rather than Afropolitan because he believes Afropolitanism to be a superficial movement that does not take into account the reality of the continent. His desire is to create free imagination across Africa.

As far as literature is concerned, Wainaina also express his opinion on the topic.²² He mentions African novels, who according to him are written only for Afropolitans, not considering the African population. Moreover, Afropolitanism contributed in paying attention on the novel as a final product and not on the process of writing it. He defines electronic literature as *digital pulp* because it is more likely to reshape literary conventions. For example electronic literature encourages a participatory audience who can comment and express their opinions on the text. However, Wainaina recommends to take into account the extended availability of this kind of literature that can be useful for the reader to rediscover the pleasure of reading.

²⁰ Mbembe, “Afropolitanism”, p.30

²¹ Santana, “Exorcizing Afropolitanism”

²² Santana, “Exorcizing Afropolitanism”

2.2 The cultural industry

Said states that the background in which we study literature has changed and also society structure.²³ There are various reasons to explain this transformed background. Said identifies them in migration, electronic literature, diasporic communities who take the place of the previously settled ones, new mythologies and fantasies, as well as consumption. The literary market has been altered and at the same time also scholars' interests, who are more acquainted with terms like "non-European" and "decolonised". Myoshi wrote massively about globalization and its effects, in particular he highlights the loss of importance of humanities in American universities. The current American civilisation contributed in increasing the separation between science and humanities, not giving prestige to the latter ones and creating two separate fields of debate. Also a new geography is believed to exist, favouring the central areas to the marginal ones which are left in wars, deprivation and disease. This situation of prevailing influence of one force to another, can be extended to the example of English that has become a global language, while marginal languages are losing their status. The result of these dominating politics is the birth of a cultural industry that does not consider uniqueness and the single product.

2.2.1 *The postcolonial cultural industry*

Sandra Ponzanesi discusses the fact that the postcolonial field has been subdued to an increasing commodification and popularization during the last decades.²⁴ In terms of commodification, it can be said that cultural products seem to have become the protagonists of a cultural market. This means that the single product is seen as a source of profit that should have specific features to be sold and part of this market. In particular, the postcolonial field seems to have become a veritable *culture industry*. This term goes back to Adorno and Horkheimer's theorizations, according to which popular culture, in its diffusion throughout the world and becoming globally available, produces standardized goods as it happens in a factory. Artworks are becoming controlled by the capitalist system that uses them in order to make money and to entertain the audience. In this case arts do not follow the principle "l'art pour l'art", being subjected to the economic market. Moreover, culture is being redistributed through commercial structures, for example film

²³ Edward W. Said, "Globalizing Literary Study". *Modern Language Association* (2001) Vol. 116, No. 1, pp. 64-68. Accessed November 17, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/463641>

²⁴ Sandra Ponzanesi, *The Postcolonial Cultural Industry: Icons, Markets, Mythologies*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014

and music, art and museums. This process of large distribution of culture is very useful for the fact that culture seems to have become more available even to the most disadvantaged people, but the fact of homogenizing different forms of culture can have the effect of devaluating some peculiar cultural manifestations leaving the place to more influent ones.

According to Ponzanesi,

there is a shift in the notion of culture and consumption from being a top-down structure and given meaning, and moving towards a more complex understanding of culture as participatory and constructed through networks of different agents, agencies and power relations and of products not as something fixed but as acquiring and giving meanings within a system of circulation, consumption and reception.²⁵

Adorno stated the same, supporting the idea that media colonized the cultural and the ideological sphere. “Cultural products, once fabricated will circulate as commodities and identical objects, and will contribute to capital accumulation”.

As far as black culture is concerned, he points out that it has been influenced by the cultural industry. Also Cashmore investigates on the commodification of black culture highlighting the fact that with the introduction of black culture into the cultural industry, cultural integration is not automatically promoted. On the contrary the risk is to create a *cordon sanitaire* that keep the black person at distance, while her or his works are fruited by the cultural market:

This is the culture of the antidote to racism, a way of removing the complexities of history and society from the mind by introducing a painless cure: legitimize black culture, its literature, its religion, its athleticism and perhaps above all its music. If this is so, it is time for black culture to be examined with the same kind of cynicism that Theodor Adorno brought to American culture in general. Adorno’s most potent argument was that the culture ushered in during modernity was and is – manufactured by elites to serve their own interests, often commercially as politically motivated ones.²⁶

The postcolonial industry invests on the process of commodification of cultural difference. Cultural difference seems to be subjected to market canons that are the symbols of power relations.

²⁵ Ponzanesi, *The postcolonial*, p.24

²⁶ Cashmore, in Ponzanesi, *The postcolonial*, p.28

2.2.2 *The postcolonial and globalisation*

Postcolonial studies are expanding, but they are influenced by globalization. This phenomenon can lead to positive effects such as the diffusion of culture on a worldly scale, but it can also make local manifestations of culture commodified. It can also provoke an overrating of what can be considered exotic. The local becomes part of the global and during this process it risks to be absorbed by a major force. Huggan describes the postcolonial field as being a site of struggle between contending value regimes, that are postcolonialism and postcoloniality.²⁷ The first focusses on material and symbolic production and refers to a series of oppositional practices that reduce colonial hegemonies and cultural homogenization, while the second is tied to the global market. Postcolonialism aims to enquire market strategies and positions on the field of postcolonial studies. Two of these positions are *worldliness* and *cosmopolitanism*.²⁸ Worldliness is connected to Said, according to whom it is on service of global community, since cultural products come from the peripheries to spread throughout the metropolis of large mass-scale movements. The consequent hybridisation of culture would promote “transnational solidarities in an age of cultural fragmentation and the mass-dispersal of people, goods and ideas”. Ahmad disagrees with this statement supporting the idea that when commodity acquires universality, cultural differences are also manufactured and consumed, therefore a process of *fetishisation* of cultural otherness which turns the literatures/cultures into saleable exotic objects.

Also the position of cosmopolitanism presents some ambiguities because it is at the same time an indicator of cultural tolerance, but it can also hide new forms of ethnocentrism. Brennan for example, thinks that emphasising on the world, cosmopolitanism also focuses on identity, about “rethinking of the indigenous in the context of an intellectual generalism”. Postcoloniality is connected with cosmopolitanism through multiple attentively constructed products such as multicultural anthologies, publicised first novels by younger authors writing about their local situations and book reviews. The industry of otherness invested on the commodification of cultural difference and the globalisation of commodity culture leads to a struggle of unequal relations of power.

²⁷ Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic, Marketing the Margins*, London: Routledge, 2001, p.5

²⁸ Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, p.9

2.2.3 *The postcolonial exotic*

Postcolonialism and postcoloniality are the intersection of what is called the *postcolonial exotic*. The term exotic is linked to exoticism, described by Huggan as “a particular mode of aesthetic perception, one that renders people and objects strange even as it domesticates them and manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery”.²⁹ It is a combination of strangeness and familiarity, whose status can be requalified to be used in different political needs and aims. According to Foster, the exotic is a symbolic system that domesticates the foreign and the culturally different in order to be predictable and to be employed in the postcolonial market. However, even if the exotic assimilates cultural difference, in a way it limits its inclusion because it keeps distances between with familiar contexts and promotes colonialism.

The exotic can also be exploited for commercial, political and economic interests. Greenblatt states that the wonder found in exotic peoples may anticipate their exploitation and the exotic beauty could cover the way in which they were obtained. Said adds that exoticism can be viewed as a “mechanism of aesthetic substitution which replaces the impress of power with the blandishment of curiosity”.³⁰ He focusses mostly on nineteenth-century exoticisms, while the twentieth-century exoticisms are the result of a worldwide market rather than of the expansion of the nation. The exotic from the peripheries has come to the centre as happens for the exotic products that are available for their proximity at shops or street-markets. They become exotic objects because they are decontextualized from their original context and they are sold mostly for being authentic and original. They seem to be familiar objects but at the same time they remain foreign because “knowledge is incompatible with exoticism, but lack of knowledge is in turn irreconcilable with praise of others; yet praise without knowledge is precisely what exoticism aspires to be”.³¹

Another form of the exotic, mainly connected to African literature is the *anthropological exotic*. Huggan presents it as trend through which African literature spread and gained a particular market value.³² This form of exoticism represents a mode of reception and consumption of African literature, allowing the reader to be informed about the African world. It uses the exotic tendencies of strangeness and familiarity within

²⁹ Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, p.13

³⁰ Edward W. Said, in Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, p.14

³¹ Tzvetan Todorov, in Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, p.17

³² Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, p.37

anthropology. Some scholars expressed their opinions about whether it was right to read African literature under an anthropological perspective or not.³³

Amuta believes that African critics are obsessed with cultural anthropology in their analysis of African literature. They are influenced by the ethnicity of the authors and driven by romantic-idealist notions of traditional African cultures. Miller thinks that African literature is read by Western critics depending on anthropology, since their knowledge about the topic is scarce. However, he supports an anthropological reading because it permits the understanding between local ethnicity and global ethics and it also allows an intercultural critique. On the contrary, Gikandi, who does not reject anthropology, underlines the possible misunderstandings caused by anthropological models that can view literary texts as being a reproduction of reality. The anthropological exotic can be seen as a distorting filter that contribute in creating an exotic myth whose appearance seems the only source of interest in the cultural industry.

2.2.4 *How to write about Africa*

Wainaina gives some ironical instructions to authors who want to write about Africa. The article he wrote can be interesting because being postcolonial industry mainly based on commodification and on particular commercial rules, it can be connected also to the field of literature and to the demands of postcolonial literary industry. Through the use of hyperbolic words, he outlines multiple advice on specific themes, for example images of Africa, food, taboo subjects, contents and style of writing. About the vocabulary that a writer should use in her or his literary text, Wainaina suggests:

Always use the word 'Africa' or 'Darkness' or 'Safari' in your title. Subtitles may include the words 'Zanzibar', 'Masai', 'Zulu', 'Zambezi', 'Congo', 'Nile', 'Big', 'Sky', 'Shadow', 'Drum', 'Sun' or 'Bygone'. Also useful are words such as 'Guerrillas', 'Timeless', 'Primordial' and 'Tribal'. Note that 'People' means Africans who are not black, while 'The People' means black Africans.³⁴

As far as geography is concerned, he ironically encourages talking about Africa as a single country, regardless of the particularities of every African state. A writer should present all the stereotypes that we are accustomed to see such as people starving and living in the forests like savages. The characters she or he introduces in her or his work should be

³³ Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, p.37

³⁴ Binyavanga Wainaina, "How to Write about Africa", *Granta Magazine*, January 19, 2006. Accessed November 26, 2016. <https://granta.com/how-to-write-about-africa/>

“warriors, servants, corrupted politicians, ancient wise men, bad western characters, colourful characters”. Animals should speak and have names other than family values. Light in Africa should be described as well as sunsets and wide empty spaces.

Another important suggestion given by Wainaina is the following: “any work you submit in which people look filthy and miserable will be referred to as the real Africa [...] you are trying to help them to get aid from the West”.

All these ironical instructions would lead to the success and the appreciation of the writer. Paradoxically, if an author decides to present a situation of an African country in different terms from those used by Wainaina, she or he seems not to have written about the continent. This happens because of the extended heritage of stereotypes and images presented by the media that contribute in shaping our *single story* about Africa.

2.2.5 *Literary prizes and the award industry*

Another field of the postcolonial literary industry is represented by prizes and awards that immediately confer literary merit to selected authors. Ponzanesi states that nowadays literary praise has implemented and she also investigates on the possible reasons for these sudden recognition.³⁵ The Nobel Prize for example has been awarded, recognizing literary worth of postcolonial non-European authors, only in the last three decades. Literary awards assumed a major role in literary criticism and in the process of canonization. Between the author and the consumer there exist a system of mediation, promotion and sponsoring that confers economic and also symbolic value to the product. The added value contributes in creating an abstract quality in the product that becomes superior and the most desirable among others. This system of mediation can be linked to Bourdieu’s circuits of legitimization that are represented by systems of sponsorship, assessment and consecration which embody a manifestation of power since there are dominant groups that control this cultural capital circulation.

Ponzanesi focused mostly on the status of non-mainstream literatures that, due to this increasing presence of literary awards, have tended to be marginalized.³⁶ Also Huggan confirms this consideration highlighting the fact that prizes and awards have contributed in favouring few postcolonial authors who tend to represent many others. This can be caused by the publishing policy that supports metropolitan authors to the detriment of marginal

³⁵ Ponzanesi, *The postcolonial*, p. 74

³⁶ Ponzanesi, *The postcolonial*, p.92

locations. Ponzanesi also underlines the consequences of literary awarding saying that promoting authors and their publishing houses, they can lead to canonization losing a critical eye. Moreover they turn the postcolonial field into a cultural commodity that idealises cosmopolitan authors who appear to be “under the spell of exoticism and colonial nostalgia”. Finally, the award industry contributes in the disappearance of a number of literatures written in minority languages, not allowing authors writing in vernacular languages to have commercial opportunities.

2.2.6 Literary prizes in Africa

According to Ponzanesi, in Africa the Nobel Prize can be won by a writer who “carefully applies just enough Africanesque patina and satisfy the Western tourist taste for exotica”³⁷ In the case of Soyinka, the first African who won the Nobel Prize for Literature, Ponzanesi states that it was given to him because he showed to be a cosmopolitan writer “whose African roots happened to provide one of the many ingredients for his complex and highly personal vision. He synthesized a very rich heritage from his own country with literary legacies and traditions of European culture”.

Literary prizes in Africa depend mostly on the Western influence because of the lack of funding and commercial structures of the publishing houses. The access to literature in English language is dependent on foreign markets and African writers tend to gain international visibility through anthologies that are organised in Western metropolitan centres, where the essential aspects of African literature seem to be lost because of European and American readership’s interests. On the contrary, literary prizes contributed to bring attention to new writers and to make their literary works well-known. African literary prizes are:

- *The New Macmillan Writer’s Prize for Africa*: it is awarded by an independent panel of judges and is open to African citizens and people who are born in Africa;
- *Caine Prize for African short stories*, that preceded the New Macmillan Writer’s Prize, first awarded in 2000 at the Zimbabwe International Book Fair and the following year at the Nairobi Book Fair, only to an African author who writes in English;

³⁷ Ponzanesi, *The postcolonial*, p. 53

- *African Books Collective Prize*, that is awarded to authors writing in all African languages;
- *Noma Award* (ended in 2009), given to authors presenting their work in either local or European languages.

Other prizes that were gained also by African authors are the Booker Prize, the Man International Prize, which was awarded to Achebe in 2007, the Neustadt International Prize, the Commonwealth Writer's Prize and the Orange Prize that was conferred to Adichie in 2007.

2.3 African literature and its origins

2.3.1 African literature and the existence of this categorization

According to Taiye Selasi, African literature does not exist.³⁸ This statement can be deceitful for a reader who thinks that this literary classification exists, but according to Selasi the categorizing of literature is not the most suitable way to understand it. If she or he reads a literary work that has been previously associated with a label, the reader can be disorientated by the background of the author. Selasi asserts that the designation *African literature* is useless as well as the labels of Asian, European, Latin American, South American Literature. As far as African literature is concerned, this categorization can imply a lack of respect for the complicated nature of African cultures and for the creativity of African authors. If literature is considered to be universal, it is not important whether the author is from Africa or from Europe, what matters is what the author wants to express through her or his literary work. A writer should be considered first as an artist rather than African or European. Her or his ability to write from the point of view of any type of character that could be completely different from the author in terms of age, social status and sex, should be noticed before her or his nationality. As Selasi asserts, during the writing process, she as a writer, never experiences her nationality. Authors like Goethe, Said and the poet Charles Simic, sustained the existence of a literature without nationality which will defend the individual against all kind of generalizations and cross the geographical borders. On the contrary, even nowadays literature is tried to be nationalized, a practice that dated back to the nineteenth century when there was a growing tendency of nationalism within Europe. National boundaries were taken as physical limits to determine literary spaces. The consequences of this politics could be either positive for the protection the country's uniqueness, or negative because some authors for example Senghor, are called Francophone to defend the French authenticity, becoming categorized under another categorization. The same happens with America, where some of the authors are described as African-American, Haitian American, Dominican-American. In order to use the term *African* as a label for a category of literature, the nuances of the different African cultures should be taken seriously as it happens for European writers who usually are presented by

³⁸ Taiye Selasi, "African Literature Doesn't Exist"

the country of origins and not as simply *European*. “With the multitude of languages and cultures the African continent is the least eligible for generalizations”.³⁹

In 1962 there was an historic meeting of African writers at Makerere University College, Kampala, Uganda, where a definition of African literature was tried to be given after an animated debate. African writers who were at the conference, were not able to explain what African literature was, instead they focussed only on evasive abstractions. After this conference a unique literature written by Africans in European languages was born. It was the literature of the petty-bourgeoisie that supported this class in assuming the leadership of the countries that were trying to have a role in presenting Africa to the world. Initially this literature was influenced by a positive spirit of political awakening, later it became more disillusioned and criticised the situation. It was addressed to the peasantry and the working class and tried to give an evaluation of neo-colonial societies. This kind of literature, which was written in European languages, was defined *African literature* as though a literature in African languages never existed.

2.3.2 Languages' disappearance in Africa

Ponzanesi considered the role of marginal languages of Asia and Africa reporting that many of them are endangered.⁴⁰ Their condition does not depend on their few speakers but on the general attitude of the speakers towards their traditional language. When two groups come into contact, there is an exchange of both cultural elements and cultural prestige which can be linked to technological progress. If a group feels to be less technologically advanced, it may choose to abandon its culture and consequently its language to adopt a more modern one. A language tends to die because a speaker moves to a different language. Language disappearance in Africa is caused by the establishment of other African languages and not only of colonial languages as happened with Nigerian Pidgin English. The death of a language provokes also the extinction of a cultural heritage. According to Ngugi wa Thiong'o, language represents the means of spiritual subjugation. Colonisers tried to impose their language to take control of colonised' cultural means of development. Through the appropriation of African languages, their colonialism process became more effective. However, the limitations that were imposed to the colonised in terms of language utilization, led to important troubles for the locals, especially for

³⁹ Selasi, *African Literature Doesn't Exist*

⁴⁰ Ponzanesi, *The postcolonial*, p.99

children who were allowed to go to colonial schools. A direct evidence is presented by Ngugi himself who relates that after declaration of the state of emergency in Kenya in 1952, the colonial regime took control of the schools, therefore English became the language of his formal education. As a consequence, a child was educated in a foreign language that was different from the language spoken at home. It caused a phenomenon called colonial alienation that was intensified by the fact that Europe was considered the centre of the universe. The culture to which the child was exposed was the product of an external world to himself. She or he started to see the world through the culture of the imposed language. Moreover, anyone who was discovered speaking the mother tongue Gikũyũ, was corporally or financially punished. On the contrary, any progress in English was highly rewarded and the knowledge of the colonial language assured the direct access to secondary school. Oral literature in Kenyan languages stopped and the constant use of a new language contributed in distancing Kenyans from themselves. Kenyan languages were linked to negative qualities such as underdevelopment, punishment and humiliation. Ngugi supports the idea that the African writer is bound to create a literature using his or her languages, the same that Spencer, Milton and Shakespeare did for English. This challenge should be reinforced by relating the people's anti-imperialist struggles to free themselves from colonialism. These are the only possible ways to reconnect African peoples and to create unity in their multi-lingual diversity. However, if a writer uses African languages to express her or his ideas, she or he risks to be considered a subversive person who clearly represents an enemy for the state, as it happened to Ngugi who was incarcerated.

2.3.3 The role of English

In a continent that distinguishes itself for its multitude of languages, a unifying language can be the only possible solution to communicate and spread ideas coming from there in the world. English can represent the solution for many African countries. Nevertheless, some debates between African writers took place since the use of the colonizers' language was not completely approved. It represented a way of submitting to the colonizer and not investing to recover African ethnicity.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o who is very concerned about the question of language in Africa, asserts that the discussion about language started in 1884 when the capitalist powers of Europe divided the continent in terms of languages of Europe, that were English-speaking,

French-speaking or Portuguese-speaking African countries.⁴¹ The population of every country was identified by the language that was spoken by their colonisers. Nevertheless, European languages were useful to unite African people in their multiplicity of African languages. In the literary field European languages were viewed as saviours of African languages against themselves. Senghor for example used French to rescue the old spirit and style of African fables and tales. Achebe asserted that:

Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces guilty feeling. But for me there is no other choice. I have been given the language and I intend to use it.⁴²

He supports the importance of the use of English language by the African writer in order to spread African literature worldwide. English language will be able to carry the weight of the African writer's experience. A new English will be used since it should integrate with new African surroundings.⁴³

2.3.4 African writers in English

The African writers in English come from different countries and multiple ethnic groups which are diverse in languages, traditions and cultures. In this context, English plays the role of a unifying element, being used not only between the countries but often in a single nation. Another common feature is *diglossia*, where English is combined with some terms coming from traditional African languages. Since the terms are mostly kept as they are, this can cause difficulties in the readers but it also can represent a stimulating method to learn new words. Standard English is commonly used in writers' literary works or it can also change vocabulary and structures according to African usages. Other features of African literatures in English include the presence of the oral tradition which is part of African culture and traditions, that manifests itself through the use of a narrating voice, dialogues, proverbs, the non-linear concept of time with the coexistence of present and past, the constant presence of natural elements, the magic together with the reality. Another aspect to be taken into account is the role of the African writer. As it has been illustrated with Achebe, the writer's role can be of a guide who knows everything, a critical and visionary, who warns, denounce and diffuses African traditions and usages that are not

⁴¹, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature*, Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya, 1986, p.4

⁴² Achebe, *Morning Yet*, p.62

⁴³ Achebe, *Morning Yet*, p. 63

common. African writers have a strong political commitment to their nation, sometimes they dedicate their whole life in writing, seeing their roles of writers as part of their personality. Their attachment for the country is often expressed throughout their literary works.

2.3.5 *Origins and narrative strategies of African postcolonial novel*

The development of African novel was affected by two main factors. The first was the control of the printing press by the missionaries and the colonial administration who also controlled the selection that was introduced in school libraries. The kind of novel that resulted was also the product of a policy of control by the government and mission-controlled presses. The second factor was the increase of universities and colleges in Africa at the beginning of the fifties where students who came into contact with the English, the American, the French and Russian novel. These students however, started to know Africa through African writers who write in English, who create the Afro-European novel. This novel was also published by multinational publishers who found a new area of investment. Novel in the West assured liberal ideology especially up to the nineteenth century. A certain familiarity with the Western novel was decisive to the rise of the African novel. Colonialist education was a factor in Africa's literary development, especially in the case of the novel, to the extent that it was fundamental in the creation of a colonized bourgeoisie. Amos Tutola was the first novelist coming from tropical Africa who became known by Western literary audiences, being published from an European house.

Postcolonial literatures and in particular the African one, tend to have an approach that is focused on those literatures detaching from an Euro-centric perspective. In African postcolonial fiction themes like migration, identity, self-reliance and culture are the most commonly presented. Narrative strategies of postcolonial writing have been presented by Monica Fludernik as the following that can be found in African postcolonial literature as well ⁴⁴:

- a *plot structure* and *characters constellation* that invert the perspective highlighting the characters of the colonized rather than of the colonizers;
- *framing narratives* and *narrative roles* which are inserted into the main narrative to create doubts on the truthfulness on what is read;

⁴⁴ Monica Fludernik, "The narrative forms of postcolonial features", in *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p.906

- *collective narrative* that with the use of the pronoun *we* reflects common values and the memory of a society to include it entirely in a story;
- *dialogue* and *representation of consciousness* in order to show that the colonised is capable of talking and thinking using both the native language and the coloniser's one;
- *temporality* and *spatiality* that show an extended narrative time and a mythic representation of the period before colonisers arrived;
- *clichés, stereotypes, Orientalism vs Occidentalism* in which the colonized country is describes as a woman to be subjected to the power of the colonisers. Some stereotypes are employed by authors to criticise the characters who use them;
- *intertextuality* that makes both postcolonial and Western readings possible, *myth* and *supernatural* whose role can be symbols of Western rationality and reasonable values while the colonised is portrayed as wild and superstitious.

Some scholars view in the global recession one possible cause for the development of the genre of fiction. They state that in periods like the Great Depression the audience used fiction as a reliable and strong instrument to overcome these periods of uncertainty. In Africa the genre of fiction started in the 1950s and 1960s after the decolonization in order to give African people a voice. Its aim was to assert social and cultural difference, however the adoption of the novel as a literary form derives from colonialism. The European colonial literature contributed in creating a starting point to develop African literatures, the genre of the novel for example, which is commonly used by African writers, was born in Europe. The use of a Western model can be viewed as a way to be equal to the colonial masters but it also has been considered as a form of “betrayal” to the detriment of traditional culture which promoted for example oral literature.

2.3.6 Oral literature in Africa

Oral literature is the most widespread form among the majority of Africans who live in rural areas. In a village the relationship between the story-teller and the audience is more direct and spontaneous, it allows communication and an immediate exchange of views and experiences. In this way literature plays a pedagogical role as it happens in a classroom for example. Ngugi talks about two different visions on oral literature. The first is based on anthropological analysis that sees oral literature deeply linked to the savage and the primitive. According to the second vision oral literature is the starting point for the form of

written literature, that was promoted by the invention of the press. There are multiple views on oral literature, some scholars state that orality has an ornamental role to the literal aesthetic and is not essential, others state that literary forms must aim to orality. For example Senghor idolatrisises the oral because it is linked to African identity and traditions. Throughout Europe with the rise of the bourgeoisie who used to read for pleasure, orality was associated with the rural and so to illiteracy. However, oral literature had its supporters who stated that it remained a form of response to the colonial supremacy and the oral was simply transcribed into written form in order to be fixed. Ngugi defines it as a different formal narrative, dramatic, poetic system.⁴⁵ Oral literature is characterized by performance, preferably outside, in a complete circle, on a definite moment of the day and with the presence of an active audience. The moment of the performance is pivotal for this kind of literature because it involves the audience directly. In Africa the oral tradition is important also for the impact it has on written texts. Schipper calls oral literature *written orality*, tracing it back to its origins.⁴⁶ African written orality continues the tradition of African story-telling. It can be noticed when an author uses dialogues, proverbs, songs, tales, riddles, open endings to discuss and anecdotes.

As Irele states: “Orality demonstrates the contextual dimension of communication and restores the full scope of imaginative expression which writing in its reductive tendency cannot fully capture or represent. Orality presupposes a dynamic conception of literature, one that envisages literature as *text in situation*”.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams: towards a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, p.109

⁴⁶ Mineke Schipper, *African Literature and Literary Theory*, London: Allison & Busby, 1989, P.67

⁴⁷ Irele, in Uzoma Esonwanne, “Orality and the genres of African postcolonial writing”, in *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, p.141

Chapter 3

African Literature in Education

3.1 Education in Africa

Before talking about the role of literature in African schools, it can be useful to take into consideration the current state of education in sub-Saharan Africa. Today there are 30 million out-of-school children as UNESCO Institute for Statistics and UNICEF report confirms.¹ In order to provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults, the Education for All Movement (EFA) started to develop a concrete programme at the World Education Forum of Dakar in 2000. The following goals to be achieved by 2015 were established:

- 1) *Early childhood care and education*: increasing and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education with a particular consideration for the weakest and most disadvantaged children;
- 2) *Universal primary education*: ensuring that by 2015 all children, in particular girls, children from difficult backgrounds and ethnic minorities, have access to and conclude free and compulsory primary education of good quality;
- 3) *Youth and adult skills*: realizing the achievement of the youth and adult's learning needs through equitable access to appropriate educational and life skills programmes;
- 4) *Adult literacy*: attaining an improvement of the 50 percent in adult literacy levels, particularly for women and equitable access to fundamental and continuing education for all adults;
- 5) *Gender equality*: eradicating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and obtaining gender equality by 2015, with a particular attention on girls, in assuring them a complete, equal access and achievement to good-quality basic education;

¹,"Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All, Findings from the Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children", Montreal: *UNESCO Institute for Statistics* (2015), accessed April 27, 2016 , p. 13
<http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/oosci-global-report-en.pdf>

- 6) *Quality of education*: enhancing quality education aspects and ensuring excellence of all in order that acknowledged and measurable results are gained by all, particularly in literacy, numeracy and basic life skills.²

These goals are assessed by the EFA Global Monitoring Report on almost annual basis firstly to check if the world achieved the EFA goals and the stakeholders fulfil their commitments, secondly to clarify the elements determining the pace of progress and if a possible link between the strategies' implementation and the achievement of goals can be established, finally to shape a post-2015 agenda on data basis.

3.1.1 Literacy in Africa

Going back to EFA goals, as far as goal 4 is concerned, sub-Saharan Africa still remains the continent with the lowest literacy rate among adults, which was expected to reach the overall 63 percent by 2015 (respectively 71 percent for male and 55 for female) but in the period from 2005 to 2012 it amounts to 59 percent (68 percent for male and 50 percent for female).³ The youth literacy rate in the same period is 69 percent (75 percent for male and 63 percent for female). Pre-primary education is very limited in the rural areas of sub-Saharan Africa and in the urban ones it is available to wealthier households. As for primary education, sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest enrolment ratio (47 percent of the school-age population) and only ten countries have achieved universal primary education. Secondary schooling is not reached in most sub-Saharan countries and regarding higher education, universities exist in very difficult circumstances. Adult literacy education is the main form of education available in sub-Saharan Africa. Other forms of education include agricultural extension, community development programs and industrial or vocational training. Even if progress on illiteracy reduction, it has been increasing since the independence period, being higher among women than men. The language choice is also complex because for adult learners, the material must be developed in local languages and this cause an increase in the costs.

² "Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges" Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2015, Accessed April 27, 2016. pp. xii-xiv,: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002322/232205e.pdf>

³ "Education for All", p. 330

3.1.2 The situation of Kenya

The government of Kenya instituted free primary education in 2003, since the costs of children education started to become an obstacle to students' attendance. After this measure, the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) increased from 87.6 percent of 2002 to 104 percent. Other measures involved cutting the number of the subjects that changed the student-teacher ratio from 32:1 to 40:1, allowing districts to choose teachers, the beginning of multi-grade and shift teaching in some schools. However, despite progress, millions of children are not allowed to go to school and even if it is almost half the number of 1999 it is still the ninth highest of any country in the world.⁴ Also the quality of primary schooling is not enough to assure a basic education to students. 6 percent of young men were illiterate and 26 percent semi-literate after being six years at school. Among young women, 9 percent are illiterate and 30 percent semi-literate after having attended six years of school.⁵ The marginalized areas are lacking more in progress, since their children have less chance to go to school. For example 55 percent of girls and 43 percent of boys living in the North-East of Nairobi had never been to school. Nonetheless, this represents an improvement since 2003, when 71 percent of girls and 56 percent of boys in the North-East had never attended school. Significant progress has been made in the percentage of out-of-school children at primary level in the period going from 2000 to 2015, with an estimated 77 percent decrease. Even at secondary level there was a drop of 98 percent in the same period.⁶ An important issue that remains is the lack in the number of trained teachers, instructional materials, building funds and furniture. External economic aids are required to assure at least teaching and learning material.

⁴“Education in Kenya”, *Unesco Report*, 2012, Accessed 24th April 2016, http://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/gem-report/files/EDUCATION_IN_KENYA_A_FACT_SHEET.pdf

⁵“Education in Kenya”

⁶Trey Menefee, Mark Bray, *Education in the Commonwealth - Quality Education for Equitable Development*, Commonwealth Secretariat, 2015, Accessed February 16, 2016. p.198, <http://cerc.edu.hku.hk/publications/other-cerc-publications/education-in-the-commonwealth-towards-and-beyond-the-internationally-agreed-goals/>

3.1.3 The situation of Nigeria

Like Kenya, in 1999 Nigeria approached universal primary education. In 2011 an agreement between UNESCO and the Nigerian Government was signed in order to enhance adult and youth literacy.⁷ Even if the situation in Nigeria has improved thanks to the EFA project, there are still 50 million illiterate adults. The current number of out-of-school children of primary age is growing by 124590 children per year.⁸ According to the agreement, national abilities for projecting, providing, assessing and controlling literacy quality will be bolstered. This programme will be realized by UNESCO's office in the Nigerian federal capital, in close collaboration with Nigerian authorities.

From 2000 to 2015 the percentage of out-of-school children at primary level, increased to 27 percent while for the lower secondary level data are not available but it may be presumed they augmented. Enrolment rates did not increase in number probably because of the large population of the country, therefore the proportion of primary-aged out-of-school children is very high. As far as gender equality is concerned, Nigeria primary schooling give preference to boys' enrolment, while girls are still inferior in percentage. Nigeria's major challenges are low attendance, low ending-school rates and disparities in gender, as well as regional and geographical disparities.

3.1.4 Slums

The problem of slums, the densely populated areas surrounding a city, is a difficult issue to tackle, mainly in terms of health, life conditions and even in education. In Africa they are situated mostly in Kenya, in particular in the areas surrounding the capital Nairobi and also in Nigeria and South-Africa. Their existence is caused by the fact that the resources that are available for the most part of the population, in reality are used by a restrict group of people, precisely 20 percent of people in the world use 80 percent of public resources. In 2000, at the time of Dakar World Education Forum, many governments were doubtful about providing education in the slums area. Due to the absence of governmental policies on this question, probably because many settlements are illegal, therefore not typically recognized in government plans for education provision,

⁷“Nigeria and UNESCO launch \$6 million national literacy programme”, *UNESCO Press*, May 5, 2011. Accessed April 27, 2016.

<https://www.google.it/search?q=Nigeria+and+UNESCO+launch+%246+million+national+literacy+program+me&oq=Nigeria+and+UNESCO+launch+%246+million+national+literacy+programme&aqs=chrome..69i57j516500j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

⁸ Menefee, Bray, *Education in the Commonwealth*, p. 222

NGOs and the private sector have played a significant role. NGOs' educational projects cover the entire schooling period of a children becoming adult in the slums. They are involved in children formation, in counselling and providing help to the most desperate situations. A children in the slums probably goes to school without a meal since her or his mother comes home late in the night after having worked all day for a miserable salary and she is too tired to cook. The only place where children can find peace is school.⁹ Low-fee private schools were instituted in the slum areas, raising awareness and increasing lobbying efforts around the difficulties of slum dwellers in access to education. Private schools in urban slums are usually underfinanced, face difficulties collecting funds from parents and lack resources. In spite of this, after fee abolition in Kenya, they were attended by over 40 percent of the students. This happens because the nearest public schools are on the areas' fringes. Parents are almost obliged to decide for private schools. Other reasons for this choice can be the convenient location, the classrooms are smaller, teachers are more aware to the needs of slum students and they probably achieve better results.¹⁰

3.1.5 The case of Tanzania

It can be interesting to consider the situation of another African country, Tanzania. After achieving independence in 1961, a programme of modernization from an agrarian economy to an industrialized one started to take place and it also involved education. In 1961 in a population of 10.5 million people, Tanzania counted only 100 university graduates, fewer than 200 upper-secondary school graduates and the 75 percent of the adult population was illiterate. In 1967 the government started a social project after the president Julius Nyerere's Arusha Declaration and his policy statement *Education for Self-Reliance*. According to him the problem with Tanzania was that its existing educational system was projected for a colonialist and capitalist society, therefore it was elitist. The system considered the children who were not going to school (87 percent) as failures and elevated only those who succeeded. As a consequence, the system increased the distance between students and the society that should have prepared them and supported a wrong model of the weak domination by the strong. Nyerere proposed a reorganization of education in which community was privileged rather than individualism. Schools started to be reorganized as social, economic and educational

⁹ These details have been shared by Anthony Mouagli, a man who was born and lived in the slums of Deep Sea in Nairobi, who also through his love for knowledge was the first graduated coming from those desperate conditions. He spoke at a conference promoted by the Italian NGO AfricaSì in Venice, on 22nd March 2016.

¹⁰ "Education for All", p.100

communities where the students were in charge of cooking, cleaning and helping make educational decisions. The calendar was more flexible so that pupils could participate actively in productive village activities at home as part of their final assessment. They were considered for their contribution to the village rather than for their marks. Economic investments were made by the government to enhance primary education and private primary schools were nationalized. By 1981 the primary enrolment ratio 97 percent. Moreover, adult literacy campaigns were instituted to reduce illiteracy. As far as secondary school is more complex since its slower growth imposed selective criteria. Even if secondary schools doubled in number, but the number of primary graduated children was doubling every five years, therefore a decreasing percentage found place in secondary schools. Private schools were allowed to admit those left-out children but it was not enough to guarantee even secondary education. Unfortunately in the 1980s the country faced economic pressure, droughts, low foreign exchange earnings and government inefficiency, all elements that threatened educational improvements so that Education for Self-Reliance programme was abandoned. Nevertheless, Tanzania's improvements in education were important and this country represents a model for other African realities. This curiosity on president Nyerere who was in charge from 1977 to 1985, can be a symbol of his motivation to enhance education in Tanzania: he translated *Julius Caesar* and *The Merchant of Venice* into Swahili to make them available also to people living in the villages.

3.2 Literary education

3.2.1 A definition of literary education

In such a complex and various continent, it can be slightly difficult to assure literary education to all students. Even because literature starts to be studied in depth from secondary school and as we have seen before, not all the students have the possibility to reach a level beyond primary school. Moreover, in many schools literature is a choice of the student who decides to follow the literary curriculum rather than the scientific one. The definition of literary education can be summarized by Balboni who describes it as the initiation to literature, a way to discover its existence.¹¹ The student can find out literature's true values, its function of testifying history and culture, its ways of expression through the aesthetic use of language. Literary education enables the human being to develop her or his imagination. An adolescent who lives in the slums of Nairobi for example, can find in reading a literary text a way to escape the bitter reality she or he is living in. This possible use of literature as a source of pleasure should be taken into account even in adolescents studying in Western schools. Sometimes they are not sufficiently stimulated and they are not given valid reasons to study literature with pleasure. Literary education should be seen by the students as a *need*, they should understand that:

- 1) they need literature because in books they can read the words of a person who faced their same problems on questions like war, friendship, love, religion and maybe find the answers they are looking for;
- 2) they need to learn how to read literary texts to better understand and give their interpretation on them;
- 3) they can develop critical sense which is useful to discern authors, literary trends and texts;
- 4) they can improve their literary corpus throughout ages to choose better the authors to read.¹²

¹¹ Paolo. E. Balboni, *Educazione letteraria e nuove tecnologie*, Torino: Utet Libreria, 2004, p.6

¹² Balboni, *Educazione letteraria*, p. 17

3.2.2 Traditional educational approaches in Africa

Nsamenang and Tchombe state that the education Africans are provided with, is not suitable for them because it seems to imitate Western educational model.¹³ Consequently, a mismatch between African schools and the livelihoods of Africa's young citizens is developing. African traditional educational system should be taken into account. It can be seen as a product of three educational approaches:

1) *Indigenous education*: it is the traditional education that existed for centuries before the introduction of formal schooling. Its aim was to introduce youth in society, develop abilities and behaviours to enable them to become effective members of society. It firstly took place in the home with parents who were the child's first educators. It is a kind of education that is connected with daily life and depended on society needs;

2) *Religious education*: it was brought by Christian and Islamic missionaries. Their educational method was different since the first aimed at formal schooling to develop literary skills to read the Bible, whereas the second started from the knowledge of the Quran to learning the alphabet;

3) *Colonial education*: its impact is still evident in the current educational systems. It was given to promote colonial interests. Under the British colonial rule there was a segregated educational system in some colonies with separate schools for Africans, Asians and Europeans.

3.2.3 Omoluwabi's educational approach

An example of the inclusion of traditional elements in African education is provided by *omoluwabi* approach that involves Yoruba traditions for the child's development also at school.¹⁴ Yoruba children are usually educated by the family who live in the same household and by neighbours. The seniors usually teach the juniors lessons of good moral values and behaviour. Children are constantly exposed to oral traditions and philosophy, to poems, songs, riddles and wise proverbs in order to learn also practical truth. Through these oral forms children can become *omoluwabi* that means a complete person having a

¹³ A. Bame Nsamenang and Therese M.S. Tchombe, *Handbook of African Educational Theories and Practices: A Generative Teacher Education Curriculum*, (Bamenda Cameroon): Presses universitaires d'Afrique, 2011, accessed May 7, 2015.

<http://www.thehdc.org/Handbook%20of%20African%20Educational%20Theories%20and%20Practices.pdf>

¹⁴ Nsamenang and Tchombe, *Handbook of African Educational Theories*, p.221

good character, who respects the older and those who are in a higher class position, who is loyal to parents and local traditions, honest, devoted to duty, ready to help the needy and the infirm, sociable, courageous, hard-worker. All these values start to be transmitted from the womb with mothers who are taught how to behave and to sing songs of praise to the unborn to build nurture and good character in the children after she or he is born. After birth the child is constantly reminded of the meaning of her or his name, the mother continues in singing praise names and songs to form the child's character. Language and counting training are provided by the adults in the community. Yoruba people largely invest on skills' development to fight poverty and be able to face difficult periods. These positive values of traditional education can be inserted in the school curriculum to promote the total development of the child training all his physical and moral faculties, to use oral literature to improve the acquisition of knowledge, to teach the importance in being part of a family and of community for social cooperation.

3.2.4 Comparative education and implications

Bray states that comparative education has been defined as a discipline by a few people whereas most people see it as a field that allows scholars to deal with educational issues comparing one another.¹⁵ Lê Thành described comparative education as “a field of study covering all the disciplines which serve to understand and explain education”. It can be useful to investigate on various social topics in order to understand better differences and similarities of particular contexts of the world. A comparative study should notice the common elements among the disciplines analysing the reasons why they can be considered similar and their relationships. Multiple themes are compared, for example to quote some topics of Bray's study, he and other scholars give guidelines to compare race, class and gender, places, times, system, cultures, values, policies, pedagogical innovations, ways of learning and educational achievements among different countries also belonging to different continents. Comparative education is becoming influenced by globalisation whose consequences are overcome national views, offer new topics for analysis and the cultural displacement that undermines the peripheries such as African countries.

¹⁵ *Comparative Education Research: Approaches and Methods*, edited by Mark Bray, Bob Adamson and Mark Mason, Hong Kong: CERC and Springer, 2014; this study was gently submitted by Professor Mark Bray, UNESCO Chair Professor of Comparative Education at the University of Hong Kong, on 27th April 2016.

Comparative literatures are also an important field of comparison on a more specific topic. Some courses of comparative literatures are held by universities and they aim to provide students with a more complete literary experience whose internationality can establish a connection among different cultures. Through comparative literature students can enrich their literary experience and learn about other cultures and habits. It could be interesting to have courses on comparative literature that deal with both European and African literature in order to highlight the possible similarities and connections between them. African children who came into contact with literature in colonial schools and universities were European-oriented in the sense that they read a literature with an Eurocentric perspective. This cultural control was simply following the intention of creating a total control on the colonised which includes also economic and political control. Through the literature that was studied in schools and higher institutions, African minds were influenced in their perceptions of their own continent.

Comparative education can also be employed in comparing school curricula. This comparison can be complex because of the contexts of curricula but it can be applied through different perspectives that are the evaluative, the critical and the interpretive. It can be interesting to present seven different conceptions of the curricula established by Marsh and Willis.¹⁶ The first two categories focus on the content of what is taught and are called *classical heritage* and *established knowledge*. Both focus on subjects, the first on essential knowledge given by grammar, reading, logic, rhetoric and mathematics, the second on arts, sciences, humanities and language. Then there are two curricula which are centred on the future of the students, that are named *social utility* and *planned learning*. They both are based on subjects and activities that can be useful after leaving school and enhance modernity rather than traditional approaches. The last three categories focus on the learning processes and they are called *experienced learning* which considers the planned or not learning experiences within an educational institution, *personal transformation* which includes the changes in both teachers and learners during the learning period and finally *life experiences* that evaluates planned learning in institutions and in real life.

¹⁶ *Comparative Education Research*, p.311

3.3 Literature in African schools

3.3.1 *Publishing in Africa*

Book availability is fundamental in schools. Commercial publishing in Africa started with Oxford University Press that established a branch in Ibadan, Nigeria in 1949. Before this event, publishing in tropical Africa did not exist. Success for African writers seems to be relied on the West that makes possible for African authors to relate their stories. This situation also happens because in Africa is difficult for a marginal author to publish since traditional publishers prefer to buy rights of books that have already been published in the West because they do not want to risk to invest on unknown talents. In Nigeria for example most of the writers are self-published and their success only depends on the audience of their books' presentations and on the employment of their texts as schoolbooks. Western critics usually celebrate African writers and welcome their works in a sympathetic way, also giving them awards. However, local writers who were not awarded are seen as unimportant and they can also risk to be never discovered. Local readership is very limited, there are only a few bookstores. Therefore, African writers tend to write for a Western audience who demand specific contents that most of the times reflect African stereotypes and do not talk about positive elements.

Selasi expresses her frustration with Africa's publishing industry.¹⁷ In Nigeria for example there is not a stable publishing house, it also is difficult to publish in countries like Ghana. She also states that African writers are not writing for the West but they are almost forced to publish in the West because there is no other way to join a larger readership. She also reports the fact that an African reader can write about particular topics and she or he is also instructed on how to write about them. This writing guidelines can lead to silence voices.

3.3.2 *Publication of schoolbooks*

States' publishing houses intervention in the field of schoolbooks publication should lead to various benefits that can be summarised as follows:

- the state establishes a curriculum based on educational aims and classified according to different subjects;

¹⁷ Taiye Selasi, "Stop pigeonholing African writers". *The Guardian*. July 4, 2015, accessed August 25, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jul/04/taiye-selasi-stop-pigeonholing-african-writers>

- the state makes a selection of suitable writers for textbooks;
- it organises printing and the distribution of the texts;
- textbooks become more available to the students with state subsidies to buy them;
- a more spread production of schoolbooks is guaranteed even if there is the lack of raw materials to assemble the books.

African universities are another source of publication development, even if the majority of the manuscripts are mostly published in Europe and America, since the bureaucracy of publication in African universities is too complex and restrictive and the costs of publication are too high if compared to other developing continents like Asia. There are also independent publishers who are authors, printers and publishers and booksellers at the same time. This kind of entrepreneurship is represented by a few cases, since a basic capital is required and also the procedures are complex as well as expensive. Moreover, also a basic knowledge in marketing, promotion and distribution of the books is needed.

After independence education was seen as the unique vehicle to regain African consciousness and to ensure social and economic progress, therefore African tried to enhance education through educational programs and textbooks. Even if many meetings on book and education development were held, Africa remains in a disadvantaged position among the other continents. Problems of transport and distribution, texts often arrive late to students.

In the late 1970s in Nigeria and Ghana were instituted the Children's Literature Association (CLAN) and the Children's Literature Foundation (CLEF). The latter was created to distribute books at low cost in schools and public libraries. Their aims are to select manuscripts and promote the production of good-quality books to be distributed at adequate prices, to analyse the condition of writing, design and production for the authors writers, illustrators and publishers. Furthermore, they would encourage the review of books for both children and young adults to cooperate with national and international organization that deal with children's literature, and promote the publication of a children's magazine, arranging workshops and seminars. They also would establish an annual book award for sponsorship.

3.3.3 Literature availability to African students

Ngugi reflects on the fact that if you are a student of literature in Kenya, you will probably study English language.¹⁸ He asserts that students are taught the history of English language and literature from Beowulf to T.S. Eliot and they learn by heart English poems whose themes are slightly different from the African situation. He states that through the learning of European literatures, students are “confronted with a distorted image of themselves and their history as reflected and interpreted in European imperialist literature”. For these reasons he proposes that student should learn first African literature. He asks himself about the order and the methods to present African literature to children. He asserts that the teaching of this subject depends on two processes that are the choice of the material and the interpretation of it.¹⁹ The *great Nairobi literature debate* held in September 1968, presented some proposals for the improvement of the English Department of the Arts Faculty Board. This department was bound to become less British and more willing to study other writing in English. African writings were presented and it was agreed to include them together with European and other literatures. The literature that is available to African children is placed into three categories by Ngugi²⁰. The first category is the humanist and democratic European tradition that is Aeschylus, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Balzac, Dickens, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Gorky and Brecht. This type of literature describes the European experience of history and it is thought that, even if they bear no connections with the African context, their themes of love, fear, birth and death are universal and deserve to be taught. The second category is represented by the literature of liberal Europeans who present Africa in their imaginative explorations for example Alan Paton and Karen Blixen. The last category is racist literature where Africans are stereotyped as good and bad people. In particular, the good African co-operated with the European coloniser and he or she carries the qualities of beauty, intelligence and strength. On the contrary, the bad African resisted to the colonisers’ occupation and for this reason is described in negative terms as a weak, coward and dishonest person.

The great Nairobi literature debate continued and in September 1974 a conference on Teaching of African literature in Kenyan Schools was held at Nairobi School. From this event it emerged that the syllabuses used in those years were inadequate for teaching

¹⁸ Ngugi wa Thiong’o, “Literature in Schools”, in *Literature and Language Teaching*, edited by Christopher Brumfit and Ronald Carter, Oxford: Oxford University press, 1986, p.224

¹⁹ Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Decolonizing the Mind*, p. 88

²⁰ Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Decolonizing*, p.91

purposes and for the needs of the continent. Students continued to analyse texts that were based on colonial needs of cultural dominance, these books were not suitable for the period of independence. For this reason, African literature must be at the centre of school programs, through the use of it the African struggle for a cultural identity can be overcome and people can be integrated in terms of race, class or nation.

According to Nsamenang and Tchombe education in African countries does not fulfil positive results because it detaches Africans from their everyday lives. Its inadequacy is one of the reasons why African students leave the continent to study abroad, imagining their future out of Africa.²¹

3.3.4 Oral literature in education

Oral literature is an important source to deliver knowledge and values in African societies. It is useful to know about history and culture of a people and represent a medium for cultural continuity. However, oral literature in the village is detached to what is learnt at school but because of its importance, it can be employed to develop curricula for cultural and language studies. Since African children are bilingual, their exposition to two languages in the village allows them to understand the languages employed to give tasks at school.²²

3.3.5 African postcolonial literature in language education

As it has been illustrated in chapter one, the purposes of literary education are respectively the historic, the aesthetic, the expression, the linguistic and the educational aim. This paragraph focusses on the linguistic aim of literary education.

Charles R. Larson affirmed that African writers frequently use literature with a didactic ending. This educational role can be noticed in Brumfit and Carter who state that literature can be employed to improve the process of the language acquisition.²³ Literary texts can be used as examples to discuss linguistic items and also to introduce the culture to foreign students, even if this aspect cannot be taken into account seriously since in literary texts some cultural elements may be distorted and not coincident with reality. A minimum language and reading competence should be developed in the reader in order to be able to

²¹ Nsamenang and Tchombe, *Handbook of African Educational Theories and Practices*

²² Oral literature has been presented in chapter 2, paragraph 2.3.6

²³ Christopher Brumfit and Ronald Carter, *Literature and Language Teaching*, Oxford: Oxford University press, 1986, p.22

understand the literary text. However, the reading habit may not be a costume in all the students' houses, so three possible situations in language acquisition can happen when students turn to written expression at school:

- 1) there may be some students who have developed the ability of an aesthetically structured speech and children writing in their mother tongue, so they are more familiar with written expression;
- 2) other students may read literature in a foreign or second language and their culture may have been influenced by a rich literary tradition;
- 3) finally there can be students who read literary texts in a second language but their contact with the language is through orality and the aesthetic form of the written language can be different from the texts they read at school.

These possible situations should be taken into account by the teacher whose role is to facilitate the students' comprehension.

3.3.6 *The artist as a teacher*

Achebe wrote that many of his readers consider him to be their teacher.²⁴ Some of them encouraged him to write like he was doing and others suggested him how to end his novels in order to create some educational opportunities. After these responses by his readers Achebe thought that a writer should not take directions from her or his audience and that she or he should be free to write according to her or his decisions and in some cases also going against the society she or he is writing for. These considerations mean that not always a writer decides to use her or his voice to give a message to the audience, she or he can simply write for no apparent reason. On the contrary Achebe expresses his will to

help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement. And it is essentially a question of education, in the best sense of the word. [...] The writer cannot expect to be excused from the task or re-education and regeneration that must be done. In fact he should march right in front. For he is after all the sensitive point of his community.²⁵

A parallel can be made between the social role of the writer and the educational role of the teacher.

²⁴ Achebe, *Morning Yet*, p.42

²⁵ Achebe, *Morning Yet*, p.44

3.3.7 *The roles of the teacher*

Balboni talks about the role of the teacher defining her or him as a director who acts within the teaching process.²⁶ The figure of the teacher has been associated with different roles that are respectively:

- a *facilitator*, a person who helps the students dealing with the material they approach during their life school;
- an *advisor*, a figure who understands their students' needs;
- a *maieuta* a person who uses the dialectic method to inspire students in asking questions and giving their own answers;
- a *tutor* who supports and protects the students throughout their school career;
- a *director* who gives the parts to the casting, teaching them how to interpret their roles.

These functions are symbols of the ways in which the teacher is viewed. She or he is a guide who inspire confidence in the students.

According to Brumfit, the teacher should employ multiple methods to help the students to give a positive and motivated response to the literary text.²⁷ For example providing them with the basic guidelines to discern deeper meanings in the text or she or he should choose some texts that allow a sudden response by the students without her or his mediation which can be linked to the students' personal needs. The selected text can be a starting point to introduce other traditional literary texts but it can also persuade students to propose any book they feel to be related to the teacher's choices, giving them the chance to be direct protagonists during the lessons.

What appears to be sure is that the teacher should take into account various factors about the students in order to get any kind of response. These aspects are the linguistic, the intellectual and the cultural level of the students, her or his expectations.

²⁶ Balboni, *Le sfide di Babele*, p.109

²⁷ Brumfit and Carter, *Literature and Language Teaching*, p. 25

3.3.8 *The teacher in African schools*

According to Akinsola, there is the need to incorporate African traditional education into the teachers' school programmes in Africa.²⁸ If the teacher takes into account also this aspect of the African student there will be some advantages:

- she or he can be familiar with traditional education and evaluate the more suitable kind of training that is required for each age;
- she or he can know the ideal instruments and procedures to use;
- the teacher can interpret the child's attitude;
- the teacher can notice the personal differences in the children's behaviour and determine how to valorise them in the school context.

As it has been said at the beginning of the chapter, teachers in the majority of African schools work in complex conditions, however education is a fundamental social aspect to improve African situation. Investments on this field should be promoted in order to guarantee a complete school career to children and teachers and a better life to all African people.

²⁸ Ester F. Akinsola, in *Handbook of African Educational Theories and Practices*, p.230

Chapter 4

Examples of African postcolonial literature

4.1 Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

It can be regarded as curious how a simple manuscript that at the beginning risked to remain unpublished, now has become a novel that is translated in 49 languages and is the best-selling African novel. These circumstances can give a lesson of courage and hope to a student who like Achebe, wants to express herself or himself about the country they live in. Moreover, the story of Achebe who came from a poor background, and in the end became a professor emeritus and a prominent figure who is worldly known can be seen as an encouragement for young African students who have to leave their continent or who do not believe in a possible future staying in Africa.

When this novel was discovered in Nigeria, it was too expensive to be bought. It was written not only for Nigerians but for readers outside Africa, for a larger audience. It became the first novel written by an African author to be included in a syllabus for African secondary school students throughout English-speaking areas of the continent. Achebe was recognized as the most original African novelist writing in English and became the first to create his audience among his fellow African writers. *Things Fall Apart* was recognised as the first English classic coming from tropical Africa and it is considered the archetypal African novel.

4.1.1 *Orality and fiction*

What can be noticed in the novel is the important role of orality in the way it is used to relate stories about the main character Okonkwo, the traditions of the Igbo people and the events that happen throughout the novel.

Achebe uses dialogues, proverbs and tales on the events to give the idea of a speaking person, a the third-person narrator who narrates a mythical past creating memory. From the first pages of the novel where Okonkwo's father is described also the traditions of the Igbo people are presented, such as the fact of gathering around the fireplace and playing music. These two activities are linked to orality and storytelling. Okonkwo used to tell stories to his sons in order to educate them:

Okonkwo encouraged the boys to sit with him in his *obi*, and he told them stories of the land – masculine stories of violence and bloodshed. Nwoye knew that it was right to be masculine and to be violent, but somehow he still preferred the stories that his mother used to tell, and which she no doubt still told to her younger children – stories of the tortoise and his wily ways, and of the bird *eneke-nti-oba* who challenged the whole world to a wrestling contest and was finally thrown by the cat.¹

He told cruel stories to his son on order to reinforce their spirit and to make them grow like real and strong men as himself. Here the contrast with the stories told by Nwoye's mother is evident and it mirrors a different attitude both towards children education and to childhood as a more pleasant and cheerful period. The most evident example is represented by the oral tale of the tortoise in chapter eleven that is told by Ekwefi to her daughter Ezinma. Achebe inserts this story within the story, which can also exist by itself. The meaning of this story can represent Ezinma's struggle for life and for being accepted by her father Okonkwo who wanted her to be born male.

Orality is also used in the novel to report news and it is through a story told by Obierika, one of the characters, that the reader is introduced to the presence of the white man:

'During the last planting season a white man had appeared in their clan.' 'An albino', suggested Okonkwo. 'He was not an albino. He was quite different.' [...] 'And he was riding an iron horse. The first people who saw him ran away, but he stood beckoning to them. In the end the fearless ones were near and even touched him. The elders consulted their Oracle and it told them that the strange man would break their clan and spread destruction among them.'²

Here the reader can hear the voice of a member of Okonkwo's clan who reports what he knows about the white man's arrival. The coloniser is seen as a strange presence in the village, he is described as somebody different, an alien that strikes terror and disrupts the quiet life of the village. Through this description Achebe gives voice to the colonised and tries to show that even they have prejudices against the new presence

The narrator's voice is also reported in the novel, relating how the situation transformed after the arrival of the missionaries:

The arrival of the missionaries had caused a considerable stir in the village of Mbanta. There were six of them and one was a white man. Every man and woman came out to see the white man. Stories about these strange men had grown since one of them had been killed in Abame and his iron horse tied to the sacred silk-

¹ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, London: Penguin Classics, 2001, p.39

² Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, p.101

cotton tree. And so everybody came to see the white man. [...] He spoke through an interpreter who was an Ibo man, though his dialect was different and harsh to the ears of Mbanta.³

Another figure that is presented is the interpreter who allowed the communication between the missionaries and the natives. Here the problems in communication are evidenced. The colonisers also brought education teaching the villagers to read and write. At the end of the novel the District Commissioner expresses his intention to write a book about the process of 'bringing civilization' to the various villages he visited. In this book he would write his view on the colonised being careful to omit the details about the natives that could menace his image. Through this ending Achebe seems to tell to the reader that narratives sometimes are deceitful and stories about Africa depicted the villagers in a highly detached way from how reality was.

4.1.2 Okonkwo, a controversial character

From the first description of him, Okonkwo is presented as a popular wrestler, a brave man and with a fierce spirit. His relationship with his father is one of the main reasons of the development of his personality since he had to gain all his fortunes and his renowned reputation without having his aid. However, despite being viewed as strong and sometimes also violent man, he is also fragile:

His whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest, and the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw. Okonkwo's fear was greater than these. It was not external but lay deep within himself. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father.⁴

This part continues recalling the suffering of Okonkwo as a child for his father's laziness, and pointing out that for all his life he would have hated the things his father loved that were gentleness and idleness. He is obsessed with the presence of his father's spirit but it seems to give him an example of how he should not be, therefore he starts to build his household and his family. Throughout the novel he behaves like a man of action being a hard-worker who overcomes difficult experiences and trying not to show any affection to his family in order to not be viewed as a weak man. On the contrary the narrator shows through some episodes that he is very fond of his sons and daughters even if the manifestations of his affection are rare. His controversial attitude towards his family

³ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, p. 105-106

⁴ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, p.11

and traditions can be noticed especially when he kills his adopted child Ikemefuna to respect the Oracle forecasts but he rebels against the tradition of the “Week of Peace” beating one of his wives. Moreover, his rage against his son who converted to Christianity lead him to disclaim paternity of him. His violent attitude brings him to kill people and also to take revenge against the white man. After being caught and beaten by the white man he is completely destroyed. He feels to have lost all the authority and respect he hardly gained throughout his life. He decides to kill a white messenger and in the end he also kills himself. This act shows both his defeat but also his strength demonstrating that he had no intention to be subdued by the white man. Achebe presented a strong character that in various situations can be criticised for his ways of reacting but he also gives to the reader many hints for reflection.

4.2 Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Weep not, Child*

Weep not, Child is the second novel written in English by Ngugi wa Thiong’o and the first to be published. This novel has been chosen because it conveys particular themes and meanings that can be useful for a deeper analysis on the situation in a small village of Kenya in 1960. It can represent a useful way of seeing that context through the eyes of a boy whose only desire is to improve the conditions of his country. The themes that are presented in the following paragraphs can be seen as universal because they involve some social aspects that are considered even in Western societies.

4.2.1 The importance of education

It should be noted how the theme of education is linked to other major issues in the novel and how it can represent a source of inspiration for those who have lost the confidence in the power of learning at school. First of all education, which seems to be inexistent in the familiar context, is acquired in a specific place in the novel that is school. The main character Njoroge, succeeds in learning at the point that he is admitted to high school which is an important fulfilment for a boy coming from a poor family and a difficult context. According to Njoroge, school represents a way to escape the bitter reality he is living in. In the text there are several passages where the reassuring and positive features of the schools Njoroge attends, emerge. For example, the first impression is of a strange place but fascinating, but the most significant description that reflects Njoroge’s feelings about Siriana Secondary School is the following:

The school itself was an abode of peace in a turbulent country. Here it was possible to meet with God, not only in the cool shelter of the chapel, where he spent many hours, but also in the quietness of the library. For the first time he felt he would escape the watchful eyes of misery and hardship that had for a long time stared at him in his home. Here he would organise his thoughts and make definite plans for the future.⁵

From this portrait school seems to be an ideal place to stay, an area that is permeated by serenity and it reminds of a paradise island where hope is never dead. It becomes a real refuge for Njoroge where his troubles end. School is a source of happiness not only for the main character but also for the other children. When Njoroge, after leaving school reluctantly, sees children coming from school he immediately notices their hopeful faces and regrets the time in which he was like them, bursting with happiness. However, the learning context should be taken into account:

Njoroge was tired, for his new school was five miles away from home. And he had to do all that journey on foot. This was what education meant to thousands of boys and girls in all the land. Schools were scarce and very widely spaced. Independent and Kikuyu Karing'a schools, which had been built by the people after a break with the missions, had been closed by the government, and this made the situation worse.⁶

Moreover, during that time the children attending school were few and their school career was depended on money basically. As we can see from the first page of the novel, when Njoroge shows his desire to go to school, his mother answers that they are poor and he should also consider the fact that he would not be given a midday meal like the other children. When he was a student he risks to leave school several times and in the end he has to quit to sustain his family. Despite this, he still believes in the power of education as a possible way to improve Kenyan society. This feeling of hope can be noticed mainly in Njoroge's parents who are very proud of their son because he is learning how to write letters, to read, to do arithmetic and to speak English.⁷ In addition, his education would also lead to the recovery of the lost lands according to Ngotho, Njoroge's father, who felt that an educated child could be a credit to the family. At the same time Njoroge wanted everyone to go to school. While he thinks he will change the situation of Kenya seeing himself destined for something big, he also realizes that an effective change of the situation can happen only if education is given to all. For this reason he tries to share what he learns at school with his brother Kamau, even if he seems reluctant. In this effort he proves his deep interest in the future of the community and his desire to rescue the country from ruin.

⁵ Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child*, p. 119

⁶ *Weep Not, Child*, p. 75

⁷ *Weep Not, Child*, p. 16

Also his community wants to help him as a touching episode demonstrates. When he risks to leave school definitely, after attending the primary level, many people of the community gave him a contribution to let him continue. This is the demonstration that Njoroge has become the son of an entire community who sees in him, an educated child, the only hope to improve their condition. This was an evidence of the fact that despite the troubled time, people had a genuine interest in education as a unifying factor.

In Njoroge's village mixed peoples lived together: Indians, Africans and white men. The contrasts among these different ethnic groups frequently happen during every-day life. Nevertheless, school can be viewed as a place where this clash of cultures can live together and enrich one another. At school Njoroge even if his aim is to learn to fight the coloniser white man, he shows a real passion for England which he defines "the home of learning". He also loves English literature and he is happy when there is an English class. When he arrives at secondary school, it is the first time he meets white teachers and he completely changes opinion of them because of their behaviour:

He would for the first time be taught by white men. And this was what confused him. Though he had never come into real contact with white men, if one had met him and had abused or tried to put him in his place, Njoroge would have understood. He would have ever known how to react. But not when he met some who could smile and laugh. Not when he met some who made friends with him and tried to help him in his Christian progress.⁸

At school he met boys of different nationalities and they treated him like a friend. He also comes across with the son of Mr Howlands, the British farmer who owns his family land. Instead of having fear of him, they found themselves in the same situation and they start to talk like real friends even if at the village they never spoke before. They felt united by a common experience of uncertainty and fear in their country that they could not escape. Besides, it seems that all the discrepancies are levelled there.

A parallel can be drawn between the situation presented in the novel and the current conditions in Kenya particularly, but also with the Western societies, since the school world is one of the vehicles in the novel through which Africans and the white people come into contact. The status of education in Kenya has been explored in chapter 4 and even if progress has been made, the current situation is still to be slightly improved. The novel highlights that education in the village near Kipanga is mainly based on the family

⁸ *Weep Not, Child*, p.119

wealth. To allow their children to attend school, parents have to make sacrifices and not every son or daughter can receive an education. Njoroge in the novel is one of the selected children and he is very grateful to his mother for giving him this important chance. She wants him to acquire all the possible things to learn and she also wishes she had enough money to send her married daughters at school. What emerges from the novel is that going to school is considered as a luxury that not everyone can afford. This happens even at primary school level. It may be the reason why education is desperately desired by Njoroge who also praises God to let him learn. Njoroge reveals to be a very concrete and not superficial boy who asks for a personal and community growth. He sees education as a gift, for this reason he should be an example for Western students who take the fact of getting education for granted, and sometimes they do not apply themselves on their studies.

4.2.2 *The role of the land*

Ali Mazrui reported an ancient proverb which says that African soil is so fertile that if you dig your nail into it, your finger nail will begin to grow.⁹ He also states that nature's bounty helped to make Africa a garden of Eden. These could be the reasons why Njoroge's father Ngotho and Mr Howlands are so attached to their land. In *Weep Not, Child* the concept of land can be related mainly to the theme of power and in a minor degree, to education and race. The first one is based on the fact that owning land means detaining power and being rich. Mr Howlands is a landowner therefore he is an authority figure. Here is what Njoroge's brother Kori thinks about him and other important people of the village, including his elder brother Boro:

[...] a mere salary without a piece of land to cultivate is nothing. Look at Howlands. He is not employed by anybody. Yet he is very rich and happy. It's because he has land. Or look at Jacobo. He is like that because he has land...Boro has no land. He could not get employment.¹⁰

A simple job is not enough to be taken into consideration. Even a worker is not believed to be a respectable person because he does not have land. Njoroge for example when he starts to work at an Indian's shop is badly treated. Owning a portion of land other than being rich, means happiness. Njoroge's father Ngotho is not happy because he has lost the lands that previously were of his family. For this reason he is not satisfied with his job, he feels responsible for Mr Howland's land and wants the situation to be improved. The

⁹ Ali Mazrui, "The Africans: A Triple Heritage". Video, August 6, 2012, accessed August 3, 2016.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tnr42v3xBN4>

¹⁰ *Weep Not, Child*, p.44

condition of Ngotho who grows crops for Mr Howlands is similar to what Marzrui describes.¹¹ In some African countries such as Mozambique, Ghana and the same Kenya, crops are cultivated to be exported for European needs. The land is at the service of Western societies to the detriment of African peoples whose fundamental needs are a global issue.

What seems to be sure in this context is that:

Any man who had land was considered rich. If a man had plenty of money, many motor cars, but no land, he could never be counted as rich. A man who went with tattered clothes but had at least an acre of red earth was better off than the man with money.¹²

Moreover, in a religious country where the presence of God is constantly evoked even at Njoroge's school where there is a chapel, Mr Howland's god is land and the farm he had built.

Land is also connected to education. Njoroge wants to get education at school to gain back the lost lands. He is conscious of the fact that a possible recovery of the lands that were of his family, could lead to the wellness of his family but also in a broader sense, of his country. For this reason he tries to make a constant effort to exceed at school. When he needs to be helped to pursue his school career, he becomes the son of the people living in the village, the son of the land.¹³ In this context land means peoples and some considerations are made about it. For instance, it is believed that England belongs only to white people and that God has given to every race their country: to Indians was given India, to Europeans Europe and to Africans Africa, the land of black people.¹⁴

This concept is linked with the theme of race that will be analysed in the next paragraph.

4.2.3 Racism and identity

Right from the first pages, a multicultural scenario and consequent stereotypes about it are presented. The first ones are about Indians. They own many shops in the village and are claimed to fear the white men. They are also envied by black people because they sell at

¹¹ Mzrui, *The Africans*

¹² *Weep Not, Child*, p.19

¹³ *Weep Not Child*, p.116

¹⁴ *Weep Not Child*, p.46, p.61

more convenient prices. When they are together with the rest of the people of the village their identity is questioned:

In the Indian bazaar, black people mingled with white people and Indians. You did not know what to call the Indian. Was he also a white man? Did he too come from England? Some people who had been to Burma said that Indians were poor in their country and were also ruled by white men.¹⁵

Africans feel to be undermined by the presence of other people other than the white man whom they are accustomed to live with in the village. Their condition of colonised people seems to be unbearable anymore, the colonial past contrasts emerge again and they lead to the Mau Mau violent movement against the British colonisers. A curious episode of racism includes also Njoroge, who feels puzzled because of his mother's reaction to an act of kindness by an Indian boy, who gave a sweet to Njoroge:

He (Njoroge) took the sweet. He was going to put it in his mouth when his mother turned on him and shouted, 'Is it that you have not eaten anything for a whole year? Are you to be greedily taking anything you're given by anyone, even by a dirty little Indian?'¹⁶

From this episode Njoroge starts to fear even his mother, understanding that her behaviour was undeserved. All the Africans feel threatened by the presence of the other, was she/he Indian or European. This can be connected to Europe's current situation where people from African countries are migrating to the West to escape death. Multiculturalism is permeating also Europe and the coexistence among people of different cultures is complicated. In the case of the novel the context is slightly different because white people went to Africa to colonize the continent, but here in Europe Africans are coming to save their lives. On the concept of *race*, Kamau thinks about Blackness saying that "is not all that makes a man" and he also believes that some Europeans are better than Africans.¹⁷ Even Njoroge changes his opinion on the white man when he is taught by missionaries at school. Their devotion to their work, the fact of treating all the students coming from different tribes, in the same way, increases Njoroge's belief that education can save Kenya and reverses the negative stereotypes about white people.

The phenomenon of racism in the novel can be translated to another form of it, that is sexism. Women in the village are not considered as equal as men. This happens even in Western societies where the limitations for women are far to be levelled.

¹⁵ *Weep Not Child*, p. 8

¹⁶ *Weep Not, Child*, p. 38

¹⁷ *Weep Not Child*, p.21

Njoroge's father has two wives and when they express their opinion even on important issues, they are not taken into consideration. Even if it is Njoroge's mother who decides for his education, only Ngotho represents the real authority in the family. Another feminine figure who is important to Njoroge is his friend Mwihaki, whose elder sister is a teacher. In a society where most of the girls are the first to be denied education, this character, even if with a minor role, can be a symbol to comfort African girls. The same can be said of Mwihaki, who is allowed to attend school. Even if she was 'only a woman, a girl'¹⁸ she encourages Njoroge in his studies and becomes like a sister to him. At the end of the novel, when Mwihaki rejects him after his declaration of love and his suggestion to leave the village, the role of Njoroge's mothers becomes crucial, since they save him from his tentative of suicide. This can be seen as a possible reevaluation of the women's role, which was almost marginal in the novel.

4.3 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

Adichie is an emergent writer whose work has been translated in thirty languages and was published in the *New Yorker*, *Granta* magazine, the *Financial Times* and also won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize and the Orange Prize. Her novel *Americanah* won the National Book Critics Circle Award. It can be considered an expression of the freedom of writing because in this novel Adichie faces controversial themes such as sexual experiences, physical appearance, common Western stereotypes and illegal actions such as corruption, stolen identities and convenient marriages.

4.3.1 The importance of reading

In a letter to a friend who became mother Adichie gives her some guidelines to raise her daughter and in particular she wrote about books:

Fifth Suggestion: Teach Chizalum to read. Teach her to love books. The best way is by casual example. If she sees you reading, she will understand that reading is valuable. [...] Books will help her understand and question the world, help her express herself, and help her in whatever she wants to become – a chef, a scientist, a singer all benefit from the skills that reading brings. I do not mean school books. I mean books that have nothing to do with school, autobiographies and novels and histories. If all else fails, pay her to read. Reward her. I know of this incredible Nigerian woman who was raising her child in the US; her child did not

¹⁸ *Weep, Not Child*, p.102

take to reading so she decided to pay her 5 cents per page. An expensive endeavour, she later joked, but a worthy investment.¹⁹

This advice of reading in order to live better is a precious recommendation that underlines the important role of books of enriching our personalities and of seeing the world in a more complete way.

Ifemelu who is the main protagonist of *Americanah* is a character who recognises the pivotal role of reading. She usually reads and talk about books throughout the all novel. Other characters notice that she reads because her vocabulary is enriched and particular. When she moves to America, her boyfriend Obinze suggests that she should read American books, novels, histories and biographies, so she starts to spend some time in the library:

She was used, after all, to reading books with pages missing, falling off while passing through too many hands. And now to be in a cavalcade of books with healthy spines. She wrote to Obinze about the books she read, careful, sumptuous letters that opened, between them, a new intimacy; she had begun, finally to grasp the power books had over him. [...] And as she read, America's mythologies began to take on meaning, America's tribalisms – race, ideology, and region – became clear. And she was consoled by her new knowledge.²⁰

Ifemelu feels secure, protected and reassured by reading. This extract shows the power of books and of knowledge which give strength to her. Through reading she understands the reasons why Obinze liked American books and the reality she lives in becomes more clear. As Ifemelu reads American books to understand better American culture, Americans read African books to get prepared to African culture. An American with whom Ifemelu was having a conversation with at the hairdresser, talked about *Things Fall Apart* defining it “as the most honest book I’ve read about Africa”.²¹ This can be an example of how a single story can be deceitful. Throughout the novel Ifemelu asks herself whether books are so reliable as she believes or not. She comes across other forms of expression such as films but she has more confidence in what she reads. Even if she comes to the conclusion that real life is slightly different from the stories presented in novels, she relies on books as life

¹⁹ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions”, October 12, 2016, accessed October 13, 2016. <https://www.facebook.com/chimamandaadichie/posts/10154412708460944>

²⁰ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah*, Usa: Large Print Press, a part of Gale, Cengage Learning, 2013, p.229

²¹ Adichie, *Americanah*, P.319

guides as well. During the presidential elections of 2008 Ifemelu reads the book *Dreams from My Father* by Barak Obama and it makes her change idea about which of the candidates should win being “absorbed by the man she met in those pages, an inquiring and intelligent man, a kind man, a man do utterly, helplessly, winningly humane.”²²

Obinze is also a passionate reader and usually talks about books preferences with the other characters of the novel, he believes that when somebody reads there is hope and feels himself when he reads. He develops his passion for America reading books about it but he loses fascination in America when he comes there and realised how things were. He also gives advice to Ifemelu about the books she should read suggesting that she should read *Huckleberry Finn* but Ifemelu’s strong personality refused it considering the book “nonsense”. Obinze develops his imagination reading books and he also links episodes happening during his life to films and books, for example when he met a man to make a deal Obinze behaves “like a character in a spy novel who had to speak in silly code”.²³

Studying and education are important in the novel. Ifemelu leaves Nigeria to go studying in America since in Nigeria there were multiple strikes at university. Her aunt with whom she lives in America is studying for her exams and Ifemelu’s father uses to read as a pleasure but he always had the desire to continue his education going to university.

4.3.2 Identity and diversity

At the beginning of the novel the reader perceives Ifemelu’s nostalgia for her country:

She scoured Nigerian websites, Nigerian profiles on Facebook, Nigerian blogs, and each click brought yet another story of a young person who had recently moved back home, clothed in American or British degrees, to start an investment company, a music production business, a fashion label, a magazine, a fast-food franchise. She looked at photographs of these men and women and felt the dull ache of loss, as though they had prised open her hand and taken something of hers. They were living her life. Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil.²⁴

After coming back to Nigeria Ifemelu feels she can be herself. Even when she was in America she needed to keep her Nigerian identity alive and for this reason she started to express herself through a blog where she presented her opinions and stories about Africa,

²² Adichie, *Americanah*, p. 589

²³ Adichie, *Americanah*, P.388

²⁴ Adichie, *Americanah*, p.15

America and being Nigerian in America are told. However, in some moments home seemed to her a distant place, not geographically speaking but in terms of life conditions and opportunities. When Obama wins the elections she feels “there was nothing that was more beautiful to her than America”²⁵ She also feels grateful to have an American passport. On the contrary, life in America was complex to her. In order to be accepted when she arrived, she became to be influenced by her aunt and her friend Ginika who completely changed after their arrival in America and even by the Africans she met at university. Therefore she starts to change her hair which were the symbol of her African identity, she began to practice the American accent. She became a member of African Students Association (ASA) and during one of their meetings where African students exchanged ideas on their condition of being African in America, a member of the group summarises what should be done to be accepted in America:

“very soon you will start to adopt an American accent, because you don’t want costumer service people on the phone to keep asking you ‘What? What?’ You will start to admire Africans who have perfect American accents, like our brother here, Kofi. Kofi’s parents came from Ghana when he was two years old, but do not be fooled by the way he sounds. If you go to their house, they eat ken-key every day”.²⁶

This idea of acting pretending to be American while keeping African identity and traditions can be the solution to survive in America and Ifemelu seems to adopt it. However, Ifemelu has a strong personality and after a period of faking the American accent she stopped and started again to speak English with her African pronunciation.

What is important to notice is the perception of Africans on the fact of being black. In the novel, during a party, a friend of Ifemelu stated that she became black only when she came to America.²⁷ It can be considered true even for what experienced both Obinze, who moved to England and America, and Ifemelu. White people in America tended to make them notice the fact of being ‘different’ in subtle ways. For example Obinze’s friends during a dinner talked about African objects they bought considering them *exotic* and when Ifemelu goes baby-sitting for a white family, the lady living there told her that she did charity in Malawi. Therefore, this fact of talking about ‘difference’ through admiration for the *exotic*, seems to express sympathy but it can be more viewed as an attitude to show superiority. Even if these are only two examples, Ifemelu and Obinze perceived the fact of

²⁵ Adichie, *Americanah*, p.601

²⁶ Adichie, *Americanah*, p. 236

²⁷ Adichie, *Americanah*, p.454

being black many times and in other situations. However in America they “pretend that being black and being white are the same thing”.²⁸

²⁸ Adichie, *Americanah*, p.487

Conclusions

It is not easy to talk about the functions of literature avoiding generalisations on the topic. Nevertheless, this thesis has attempted to summarise the important roles of narrative fiction in terms of personal and moral growth and in its employment in the educational field.

Literature can help human beings to keep language alive and overcome the flow of time, it allows imagination to dream and to escape a bitter reality. Moreover, it arises our sense of beauty and it helps to discover the self, making us aware of our true potential. Reality is deeply connected to literature that can be considered a mixture of both reality and fiction, which engenders a contrast because they seem to belong to two different worlds. However, according to scholars such as Eco they are not so far from each other. On the contrary, Todorov states that literature is a fiction whose literary language bears no connections with reality and it can be seen as a metaphor to interpret the world.

Narrative fiction can foster the idea of a global community and identity as Goethe underlined with his idea of *Weltliteratur*, since stories can be linked to multiple contexts. This concept can be connected to the movement of Afropolitanism whose idea of “being Africans of the world”, engenders both positive values of solidarity and cohesion but even negative consequences such as elitism and cultural commodification. The diffusion of postcolonial literature through globalization can lead in the creation of a cultural industry where the single product is viewed only as a source of profit that should fulfil specific features. As a consequence, culture is redistributed in the most influential areas to the detriment of marginal areas. The interest for the *exotic* in the postcolonial literary industry contributed in creating also an award industry that leads to canonization and idealisation of cosmopolitan authors.

The use of literature in education aims to make the students discover the pleasure and the need for literature. However, the main limit of foreign literature is language that can cause some difficulties in the students. In this case the figure of the teacher is pivotal for students to help them in their learning process. Other possible demotivating factors are the vocabulary employed in the text, the completely different contexts described in literary texts and their meaning.

As far as the African context is concerned, these limitations are particularly perceived in the fact that primary education is not available to all children and in the availability of books. In this thesis some data on the issue have been reported to create a more detailed

panorama of the situation. The countries of Nigeria, Kenya and Tanzania have been presented to consider their improvements in education. It has been suggested that traditional educational approaches should be taken into account while teaching to African students who come from the rural areas in order to make them at ease and simplify their learning path. Possible approaches can be *omoluwabi* which aims to build a complete person, and comparative education that connecting multiple educational fields can find new techniques to render the learning curricula more suitable and effective. Oral literature can give an important contribution in enhancing literature as a school subject, being the milestone in the development of written literature and performance centred.

Literature can represent a way to report social issues: authors take the responsibility of the world we are living in making other people aware of it. They give voice to art expressing their social duties through a narrator who embodies narrative authority and narrative perspective. Authors rely on the reader who has a fundamental role in bringing the sense to a literary text and in evaluating the texts' reliability.

Some works of literature claim to present reality in a distorted way, being based on stereotypes and imperialist views. For this reason, African writers decided to give their voice to redeem themselves from Western perceptions expressed in written texts. African literature faces different issues such as the problem of the language in which it should be written, its categorization that leads to danger its possible universality and even to cultural commodification and the issue of publishing. Authors like Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Adichie, can be viewed as examples to encourage African students to invest in literature to improve their living conditions. The themes presented in *Things Fall Apart*, *Weep Not, Child* and *Americanah* can be connected to both African and Western culture, showing the worldwide power of literature.

References

- Achebe, Chinua. *Africa's Tarnished Name in The Education of a British-Protected Child*. London: Penguin Classics, 2009
- Achebe, Chinua. *Morning Yet on Creation Day : Essays*. London ; Ibadan : Heinemann Educational Books, 1977
- Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. London: Penguin Classics, 2001
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Americanah*. Usa: Large Print Press, a part of Gale, Cengage Learning, 2013
- Amuta, Chidi. *The Theory of African Literature*. London:Zed Books Ltd., 1989
- Balboni, E.Paolo. *Educazione letteraria e nuove tecnologie*. Torino: Utet Libreria, 2004
- Balboni, E. Paolo. *Le sfide di Babele, insegnare le lingue nelle società complesse*, Torino: Utet università, 2012
- Bray, Mark, Adamson, Bob and Mark Mason, edit. *Comparative Education Research: Approaches and Methods*. Hong Kong: CERC and Springer, 2014
- Brumfit, Christopher, and Carter, Ronald, edit. *Literature and Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University press, 1986
- Carrière, Jean-Claude, Eco, Umberto. *Non sperate di liberarvi dei libri*. Milano: Bompiani, 2009
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria*. London: J. M. Dent, 1997
- Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. New York: Norton, 1972
- Eco, Umberto. *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*. Cambridge University Press, 1992
- Eco, Umberto. *Sulla letteratura*. Milano: Tascabili Bompiani, 2008
- Esonwanne, Uzoma. "Orality and the genres of African postcolonial writing". In *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, edited by Ato Quayson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012
- Freddi,Giovanni. *La letteratura: natura e insegnamento*. Milano: Ghisetti & Corvi Editori, 2003
- Fludernik, Monica. "The narrative forms of postcolonial features". In *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, 906, edited by Ato Quayson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012
- Greenblatt, Stephen. *Cultural Mobility: a Manifesto*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010

- Huggan, Graham. *The Postcolonial Exotic, Marketing the Margins*. London: Routledge, 2001
- Hunt, Peter. "Children's literature critical concepts and cultural studies". In *Education and Theory*, vol 2, 127, New York: Routledge, edited by Peter Hunt, 2006
- Iser, Wolfgang. *The Act of Reading, a Theory of Aesthetic Response*. London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978
- Iser, Wolfgang. *The Fictive and the Imaginary, Charting Literary Anthropology*. London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993
- Walton, Kendall L. *Mimesis as Make-Believe, On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*. Cambridge (Ma) – London: Harvard University Press, 1990
- Lothe, Jakob. *Narrative in Fiction and Film, an Introduction*. United States: Oxford University Press, 2000
- Medici, Dorotea. *Che cosa fare della letteratura? La trasmissione del sapere letterario nella scuola*. Milano: Franco Angeli, 2001
- Mudimbe, V.Y. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge*. Bloomington [etc.] : Indiana university press, 1988
- Mũgo, Mĩcere. "Written Literature and Black Images". In *Teaching of African Literature in Schools*, edited by Eddah Gachukia and S. Kichamu Akivaga, Nairobi: Kenyan Literature Bureau, 1982
- Ponzanesi, Sandra. *The Postcolonial Cultural Industry: Icons, Markets, Mythologies*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014
- Proust, Marcel. *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Paris: Éd. Gallimard, 1919
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Che cos'è la letteratura?*. Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2009
- Schipper, Mineke. *African Literature and Literary Theory*. London: Allison & Busby, 1989
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *La littérature en péril*. France: Flammarion, 2007
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *La notion de littérature*. Lonrai, France: Éditions du Seuil, 1987
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Decolonizing the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature*. Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya, 1986
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o. "Literature in Schools". In *Literature and Language Teaching*, edited by Christopher Brumfit and Ronald Carter, Oxford: Oxford University press, 1986
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams: Towards a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Weep Not, Child*. New York: Penguin Group, 2012

Webliography

- “Che fuori tempo che fa, Omaggio ad Umberto Eco”. Video, February 20, 2016. Accessed March 20, 2016. <http://www.rai.tv/dl/RaiTV/programmi/media/ContentItem-e84d6a6c-6601-4fa3-9ead-72bc52b50ca0.html>
- “Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges” Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2015, Accessed April 27, 2016. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002322/232205e.pdf>
- “Education in Kenya”, *Unesco Report*, 2012, Accessed 24th April 2016. http://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/gem-report/files/EDUCATION_IN_KENYA_A_FACT_SHEET.pdf
- “Entrevista Binyavanga Wainaina”, *TVWiriko*, March 28, 2014. Accessed January 16, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RF2ZGXUWKlw>
- “Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All, Findings from the Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children”, Montreal: *UNESCO Institute for Statistics* (2015) Accessed April 27, 2016. <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/oosci-global-report-en.pdf>
- “Nigeria and UNESCO launch \$6 million national literacy programme”, *UNESCO Press*, May 5, 2011. Accessed April 27, 2016. <https://www.google.it/search?q=Nigeria+and+UNESCO+launch+%246+million+national+literacy+programme&oq=Nigeria+and+UNESCO+launch+%246+million+national+literacy+programme&aqs=chrome..69i57.516500j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>
- “Talk to Al Jazeera - Binyavanga Wainaina: Rewriting Africa”, *Al Jazeera English*, April 13, 2013. Accessed January 16, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qMODRFS2Pbc&t=13s>
- “The Internet is Afropolitan” Interview between Bregtje van der Haak and Achille Mbembe, *Chimurega Chronic*, March 17, 2015. Accessed January 13, 2017. <http://chimurengachronic.co.za/the-internet-is-afropolitan/>
- Achebe, Chinua. *An Image of Africa*, Indiana University Press, Research in African Literatures, Vol. 9, No. 1, Special Issue on Literary Criticism, (Spring, 1978), pp. 1-15 Accessed April 29, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3818468>
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. “Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions”, October 12, 2016. Accessed October 13, 2016 <https://www.facebook.com/chimamandaadichie/posts/10154412708460944>
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. “The Danger of a Single Story”, transcript of the conference for Ted Talks, July 2009. Accessed December 31, 2016. <http://ssw.unc.edu/files/TheDangerofaSingleStoryTranscript.pdf>
- Bury, Liz. “Reading literary fiction improves empathy, study finds”, *The Guardian*, October 8, 2013. Accessed February 16, 2016. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2013/oct/08/literary-fiction-improves-empathy-study>
- Mazrui, Ali. “The Africans: A Triple Heritage”. Video, August 6, 2012. Accessed August 3, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tnr42v3xBN4>

- Mbembe, Achille. "Afropolitanism". In *Africa Remix, Contemporary Art of a Continent*, edited by Simon Njami, Jacana Media, 2007. Accessed January 15, 2017. https://books.google.be/books?id=rQbiP0M5tCUC&pg=PA26&lpg=PA26&dq=mbembe+afropolitanism&source=bl&ots=QpfYVKNFfj&sig=keRFQLmeATL3fB3ng9at_R7izQ&hl=en&sa=X&ei=zYPeUuKnILPdygPrr4DICQ&ved=0CDIQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=mbembe%20afropolitanism&f=true
- Mbembe, Achille. "The digital age erases the divide between humans and objects", *Mail & Guardian*, January 6, 2017. Accessed January 13, 2017. <http://mg.co.za/article/2017-01-06-00-the-digital-age-erases-the-divide-between-humans-and-objects>
- Menefee, Trey, and Mark Bray, *Education in the Commonwealth - Quality Education for Equitable Development*, Commonwealth Secretariat, 2015. Accessed February 16, 2016. <http://cerc.edu.hku.hk/publications/other-cerc-publications/education-in-the-commonwealth-towards-and-beyond-the-internationally-agreed-goals/>
- Nsamenang, A. Bame and Therese M.S. Tchombe, *Handbook of African Educational Theories and Practices: A Generative Teacher Education Curriculum*, Bamenda (Cameroon): Presses universitaires d'Afrique, 2011. Accessed May 7, 2015. <http://www.thehdc.org/Handbook%20of%20African%20Educational%20Theories%20and%20Practices.pdf>
- Ogbechie, Okwunodu. "Afropolitanism: Africa without Africans". *AACHRONIM Magazine*, April 4, 2008. Accessed January 11, 2017. <http://aachronym.blogspot.it/2008/04/afropolitanism-more-africa-without.html>
- Said, Edward W. "Globalizing Literary Study". *Modern Language Association* (2001) Vol. 116, No. 1, pp. 64-68. Accessed November 17, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/463641>,
- Salami, Minna. "Afropolitanism and Identity Politics". *MsAfropolitan*, April 14, 2015. Accessed January 11, 2017. <http://www.msafropolitan.com/2015/04/afropolitanism-identity-politics.html>
- Santana, Stephanie. "Exorcizing Afropolitanism: Binyavanga Wainaina explains why "I am a Pan-Africanist, not an Afropolitan at ASAUK 2012". *Africainwords.com*. February 8, 2013. Accessed January 11, 2017. <https://africainwords.com/2013/02/08/exorcizing-afropolitanism-binyavanga-wainaina-explains-why-i-am-a-pan-africanist-not-an-afropolitan-at-asauk-2012/#2>
- Saviano, Roberto. "Qual è lapotenza della letteratura?". July 6, 2013. Accessed November 17, 2015. <http://www.letteratura.rai.it/articoli/saviano-qual-%C3%A8-la-potenza-della-letteratura/22580/default.aspx>
- Selasi, Taiye. "African literature doesn't exist" transcription of the opening speech of the Literature Festival in Berlin (2013). Accessed May 25, 2016. http://www.literaturfestival.com/archiv/eroeffnungsreden/die-festivalprogramme-der-letzten-jahre/Openingspeech2013_English.pdf
- Selasi, Taiye. "Bye-Bye Babar". *The LIP Magazine*, March 3, 2005. Accessed July 26, 2016. <http://thelip.robertsharp.co.uk/?p=76>
- Selasi, Taiye. "Stop pidgeholing African writers". *The Guardian*. July 4, 2015. Accessed August 25, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jul/04/taiye-selasi-stop-pigeonholing-african-writers>

- Tutton, Mark. "Young, urban and culturally savvy, meet the Afropolitans", *CNN*, February 17, 2012. Accessed January 11, 2017. <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/02/17/world/africa/who-are-afropolitans/>
- Wainaina, Binyavanga. "How to Write about Africa", *Granta Magazine*, January 19, 2006. Accessed November 26, 2016. <https://granta.com/how-to-write-about-africa/>
- Williams Susan, "Ways of Seeing Africa". *Africa Bibliography* (2009) pp vii-xiv. Accessed December 16, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40961465>