

International Journal of Social Sciences and Arts (IJSSA)

ISSN: 2394-3823

- [Home](#)
- [About](#)
- [Current](#)
- [Archives](#)
- [Next Issue](#)
- [Editorial Team](#)
- [Publisher](#)
- [Processing Fee](#)
- [Announcements](#)
- [Submissions](#)
- [Contact](#)
-

Volume 2, Issue--1

January, 2015

Evaluation of Traditional Safranbolu Houses in Ecological Design Principles Context

Bahar Ulker Kaya

A Place where Three Roads Meet: Theory, Humanities and Research

Ramonu Sanusi

An Investigation on Tyler Rationale: The Potential Merits and Demerits

Sepeedeh Hanifehzadeh¹ & Sara Ebrahimi²

International Journal of Social Sciences and Arts (IJSSA)

ISSN: 2394-3823

- [Home](#)
- [About](#)
- [Current](#)
- [Archives](#)
- [Next Issue](#)
- [Editorial Team](#)
- [Publisher](#)
- [Processing Fee](#)
- [Announcements](#)
- [Submissions](#)
- [Contact](#)
-

Editorial Team

Salik Raihan Ahmad (PhD)
Maulana Azad National Urdu University, India

Mohammad Arshad Khan (PhD)
University of Delhi, India

Seyed Foad Ebrahimi (PhD)
English Department, Islamic Azad University, Shadegan, Iran

Intakhab Alam Khan (PhD)
King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah-KSA

Jephias Mapuva (PhD)
Department of Geography, Bindura University of Science Education, Zimbabwe

Lucell A. Larawan (PhD)
Central Philippine University, Philippines

Muhammad Asif Chaudhry (PhD)
Allam Iqbal Open university, Pakistan

Asmaa Sabry Abdel-Hamid Ahmed Helwa (PhD)

Faculty of Education Benha University, Egypt

Naila Mushtaq (PhD)

National University of Modern Languages, Pakistan

Huijian Dong (PhD)

College of Business, Pacific University, USA

Ravi Kant (PhD)

Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad, India

Isaac Agyemang (PhD)

University for Development Studies, Ghana

M. Karthikeyan (PhD)

Ambo University, Ethiopia

Call for Papers

Authors are encourage to submit their unpublished manuscript to ijssa@i-cse.com

Publication Frequency: January, March, May, July, September, and November

Coming Issue: November, 2014 (Volume 1, Issue--1)

H:

Call for Reviewers:

Academicians and scholars who wish to join our review board, may submit their CV to ijssa@i-cse.com

Important Link:

[Template](#)

[Format Sheet](#)

[Copyright Form](#)

[Home](#) | [About](#) | [Publisher](#) | [Archives](#) | [Current](#) | [Processing Fee](#) | [Editorial team](#) |

Copyright © International Journal of Social Sciences and Arts. All Rights Reserved.

IBADAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

A Place where Three Roads Meet: Theory, Humanities and Research

Ramonu Sanusi

Department of European Studies
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria
Email: rasanusi@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This article argues that theory has become a dominant sign of our time and has moved beyond its traditional engagement with literary text but addresses a wider range of socio-political and cultural concerns worldwide; embracing most disciplines of the humanities and the social sciences. Literary theory for instance, now includes the subject, minorities, identities, race, class, gender, empire, colony, nation, migrancy, centre, margin, postcoloniality, civil war, global refugee crises, globalization among others. Theory, as a result, is not a mere instrument that we use anyhow but rather it should be carefully chosen before we apply it to our research. Today, theory is very important that hardly can we engage in a humanistic study without applying theories. To be a critic now, especially in academic life, is also to be a theorist. The essay concludes by noting that Humanities and Research cannot operate in isolation for they walk and work together and that any serious researcher has to be mindful of this.

1. INTRODUCTION

I open my discourse on *Theoretical or Conceptual framework in Humanities Research* with the experience of a scholar-friend Obed Nkunzimana. Before venturing into Nkunzimana, I must first of all say here that I am borrowing the title of my paper from Dele Layiwola's Inaugural Lecture entitled "A PLACE WHERE THREE ROADS MEET: LITERATURE, CULTURE AND SOCIETY" and replacing "LITERATURE, CULTURE AND SOCIETY" with "THEORY, HUMANITIES AND RESEARCH." In his article entitled "Postcolonial Theory: The French (dis) connection," published in *PONAL Magazine*, which I guest-edited for Carleton University's Department of English, Ottawa, Canada (2007), Obed Nkunzimana reminds us of his first encounter with theory:

'Je me souviens.' I remember the first time I ventured into what was, for me, an uncertain territory – Postcolonial Theory. It was ten years ago [now, sixteen (16) years ago or more], while struggling with my PhD thesis at the Université de Sherbrooke. I submitted an article to *Présence Francophone* on Francophone literature and postcolonial theory. One of the anonymous reviewers' comments was thought-provoking: "Your article is well written," he said, "but I am not sure the theoretical approach is suitable to francophone literature." His rationale was that Postcolonialism is an Anglo-Saxon invention which cannot be applied to Francophone discourse. And, he added, "on s'en moque royalement." Although the editors of the particular volume of the journal were open to new approaches, following that evaluation, I had to justify my initiative and the rationale behind it before the article was finally published as "Les Stratégies postcoloniales et le roman Francophone: Débat Théorique et Prospective Critique" (1997). [...] I understood that

theories are more than simply handy critical instruments to be freely applied to the literary and cultural raw materials of our choice; they are rather ideological, contested and contesting battlegrounds. (1)

From the ongoing, it is clear that theories are not mere instruments that we use anyhow but rather they should be carefully chosen before we apply them to our research. Today, theories are very important that hardly can we engage in a humanistic study without applying theories. The Pakistani cultural theorist Aijaz Ahmad (1992) opens his book entitled *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* with a so long introduction "Literature among the Sign of Our Time". I am borrowing that phrase replacing 'Literature' with 'Theory', a term which today is used as a password in the politics of literary and cultural production and by extension humanistic studies in Europe, America, Latin America, Asia, Africa or elsewhere.

2. THEORY, HUMANITIES AND RESEARCH

What is theory, why the theory and what theory, all become the cornerstone of every work that we plan to do in humanities Research. Theory, as Pius Adesanmi (2002) avers, "is no longer content with a mere evaluation of its objects of inquiry, it now produces its own subjects of inquiry. For the contemporary subject, there is simply no escaping the grip of theory." (57) The critic continues by saying that if theory, a dominant sign of our time as Ahmad contends, spawns its own texts, another more compelling sign emerges the moment we open up those texts with a view to examining the relationships among the subjects who inhabit them. We can refer here therefore to sign of race, class, gender, identity among others. In a similar vein, Aduke Adebayo (2009) turning to literary theory or Poetics defines it as the principles of literature, the critical tools, the models with which the literary critic works. They are the principles upon which the literary critics base their judgment, a kind of meta-criticism on a literary work. The critic went further by saying that Wellek sees literary theory or poetics as an "organon of methods." Hence, there are Romantic, Realist, Naturalist, Symbolist, Structuralist, Stylistic, Feminist, Semiotic, Postcolonial, Reader-Response theories among others (11).

Theory has become a dominant sign of our time as I said elsewhere. It has moved beyond its traditional engagement with literary text and addresses a wider range of socio-political and cultural concerns worldwide; embracing most disciplines of the humanities and the social sciences. Literary theory for instance, now includes the subject, minorities, identities, race, class, gender, empire, colony, nation, migrancy, centre, margin, postcoloniality, civil war, global refugee crises, globalization among others. It is perhaps telling that it will be dangerous for any African critic or thinker operating in the context of Euro-American academy to be silent on names such as Foucault, Kristeva, Bakhtin, Derrida, Cixous, Baudrillard, Eribon, among others. Adding his voice to this debate, Gyan Prakash (a member of the Subaltern Studies Group), notes that the Third World scholar cannot be ignorant of Western theories as his Western colleagues can afford. In the same vein, Sim Stuart and Van Loon Borin (2001) in their book entitled *Introducing Critical Theory*; note that "theory has become one of the great growth areas in cultural analysis and academic life over the last few decades" (3). In the cover paper of their book, one reads the following, "the last few decades have seen an explosion in the production of critical theories, with deconstructionists, poststructuralists, postmodernists, second-wave feminists, new historicists, cultural materialists, postcolonists, black critics and queer theorists, among a host of others, all vying for attention. To be a critic now, especially in academic life, these

thinkers remind, is also to be a theorist – as any student in the humanities and social sciences will be only too painfully aware. Theory, Humanities and Research cannot operate in isolation; they walk and work together and any serious researcher has to be mindful of this. One no longer studies, humanities, but humanities and a full range of critical theories.

Dan Izevbaye (2008) in his Inaugural lecture entitled “The Humanities and the Rebirth of knowledge: A Nigerian Situation Report” avers that the ultimate split of knowledge into Science and Humanities in the wake of the transition from orality to literacy and numeracy is considered to be the source of the growing marginalization of the humanities in an increasingly scientific and technological age. Humanistic disciplines highlighted by Izevbaye include Classics, Religious Knowledge, Indigenous Nigerian languages (653). The critic, it is worth mentioning, was not defining Humanities but was rather deploring the state of Classics today. Humanistic disciplines have a wide scope and embrace languages, philosophy, music, fine arts, theatre arts, History among others. The Oxford American College Dictionary defines humanities as learning or literature concerned with human culture, especially literature, history, art, music and philosophy.

Research on the other hand, according to Olayinka et al (2006) in their article entitled “Definition, Spectrum and Types of Research,” is a curiosity-driven activity that has the purpose of discovery and advancement of knowledge. Considering all the above definitions, it is obvious that no one can separate this trio (theory, humanities and research). They work together and cannot function in isolation. Theory today has penetrated deep into any humanistic study and research so much that we cannot read say literature of different centuries in France or elsewhere without referring to the theory/theories applied to their texts. Aduke Adebayo (2009), notes that the approach of literary theory characterizes a work in universal term passing from the general to the particular or vice versa. The critic continues by saying that the French poets Victor Hugo, Alfred de Vigny and Lamartine are studied within the general framework of the literary theory called ROMANTICISM, while the theory of REALISM better explicates the works of their compatriots, Honoré de Balzac, Stendhal and Flaubert (10-11). Adding their voice to this debate, Stuart and Borin, assert that “critical theory is an innately pluralist exercise. It presents us with a range of possible methods and perspectives by which to analyze not only cultural artifacts but also their contexts—social, political, historical, gender, ethnic” (165).

Didier Eribon reminds us that Baudrillard, Lacan, Derrida, Foucault and Deleuze became world intellectual figures only after making the transatlantic pilgrimage. This presupposes that for any African scholar or student to make the pacific pilgrimage, he/she must combine theory to his/her research in humanities. It must be recalled at this juncture that most critics who elaborated a critical tradition for African literature in the sixties for instance, were from the West. These critics, as Pius Adesanmi (2002) reminds us, used Eurocentric critical tools in analyzing African texts. Despite the weaknesses, one observes in their reflections on African literature, the fact is that critics such as Gerald Moore, Bernth Lindfors, Paul Theroux, Charles Larson, Ulli Beier, Jacques Chevrier, Bernad Mouralis, Lylian Kesteloot, Jean-Paul Sartre among others can be seen as ‘founders’ of modern African literary criticism. Leaning on Adesanmi, it is worthy of note that when the first African thinkers arrived from their formative bases in Sorbonne, Oxford, Cambridge, Havard, Yale among others to join what they condemned as the Western monologue on African discourse, they could only maneuver within already existing Western paradigms of African Studies. This by extension applies to theories.

3. CONCLUSION

Hardly can we engage in humanities Research today without using theories. Western theories, it is necessary to note are applied to humanities or to read African works. Even though these theories are relevant, they do have their shortcomings. It should be reminded that critics and thinkers such as Udentia Udentia (*Revolutionary Aesthetics and the African Literary Process* (1993) and Niyi Osundare (*African Literature and the Crisis of Post-Structuralist Theorizing* [a monograph] (1993) rejected Western theoretical contributions to the understanding of African studies. It should also be reminded that in Africa, what unites rather than what divides us, has always been the heart of Third World politics and theory from inception. Obioma Nnaemeka, Buchi Emecheta, Christopher Miller among others also share this view. Katherine Frank (1984), a Western feminist drawing an example from feminism, reminds us in her article entitled "Feminist Criticism and the African Novel," that feminism, by definition, is a profoundly individualistic philosophy: it values personal growth and individual fulfillment over any larger communal needs or good. African community she avers, even, in its most westernized modern forms, places the values of the group over those of the individual with the result that the notion of an African feminist almost seems a contradiction in terms. Leaning still on Obed Nkunuzimana to close this discourse, the critic asserts that nowadays after his discovery of the 'POCO' [theory] World, things have changed. Some academic or researchers who are interested in Francophone Studies are raising their voices to prove or rather to promote the "Francographic" paternity of Postcolonial Theory. Theory in a nutshell is no longer an Anglo-Saxon affair but a World one.

REFERENCES

- Adebayo, Aduke. *The Nature and Function of Literature: The Comparatist's Perspectives*. [Inaugural Lecture] University of Ibadan, Ibadan, 2009.
- Adesanmi, Pius. "Constructions of Subalternity in African Women's Writing in French" [unpublished PhD Thesis], UBC, Vancouver, 2002.
- Ahmad, Aijaz. *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literature*. London & New York: Verso, 1992.
- Amuta, Chidi. *The Theory of African Literature: Implications for Practical Criticism*. London: Zed Books, 1989.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London & New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Frantz, Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Constance Farrington. New York: Grove Press, 1963.
- Emecheta, Buchi. "Feminism with a small 'f'" In *Criticism and Ideology* (Ed) Petersen Christen. Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1998, 173-185.
- Izevbaye, Dan. "The Humanities and Rebirth of Knowledge: A Nigerian Situation Report," *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies No 17 & 18* (2007-2008): 5-35.
- Laiyiwola, Dele. *A Place Where Three Roads Meet: Literature, Culture and Society*. [Inaugural Lecture] University of Ibadan, Ibadan, 2009/2010.

- Nkunzimana, Obed. "Postcolonial Theory: The French (dis) Connection. *The Ponal Magazine Vol. 1, Issue 2*, 2007. <http://projectponal.com>
- Nnaemeka, Obioma. *Sisterhood, Feminism and Power: From Africa to the Diaspora*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998.
- Olayinka, A.I. et al "Definition, Spectrum and Types of Research." In *Methodology of Basic and Applied Research*. (Ed) A.I. Olayinka et al. Ibadan: The Postgraduate School, University of Ibadan, 2006.
- Osundare, Niyi. *African Literature and the Crisis of Post-Structuralist Theorizing*. Ibadan: Dialogue in African Philosophy Monograph Series 2, 1993.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
- _____. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Knof, 1993.
- Sanusi, Ramonu. "African Feminism/Western Feminism: Contradictory or Complementary," *Papers in English and Linguistics Vol. 11* (2010): 184-195.
- Stuart, Sim and Van Loon Borin. *Introducing Critical Theory*. UK: Icon Books, 2001.
- Spivak, Gayatri. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*." (Ed) Carl Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana & Chicago: Illinois UP, 1988, 271-313.
- Udenta, Udenta. *Revolutionary Aesthetics and the African Literary Process*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1993.