

CANONIZATION AND TEACHING OF AFRICAN LITERATURES
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The problematic of canon formation and teaching of African Literatures is surely included in actual debate upon the function of criticism and literary scholarship in our continent. In the early sixties has been sown the seeds with Fourah Bay and Dakar meetings. Today, looking back, the harvest presents a variety of publications as well as several events. Thus, the seventh issue of **Matatu** edited by Raoul Grandqvist is necessarily part of the vast catalogue.

The six articles represents an instance of a wide-spread and continuing reflections on the subject. Certainly the editor do not bear in mind any intention of exhausting it. However, we must pay equal attention to every pieces.

With the statistical approach, Bernth Lindfors comes to an obvious conclusion: "the decolonization of literature study in Africa is thus already well under way"(p.45). I listened for the first time part of this quantitative analysis in Dakar, during the fifteenth annual meeting of ALA, where he read the paper "The Famous Authors Reputation Test: an Update". Despite the well-known Lindfors purposes, the quantitative method lead on some illusions because it seems to be occupied with reputation or others items gauged according the criteria of "merit" and "masterpiece", alien to intrinsic universe in which are conceived the texts. Such is the Appiah's opinion, when he accepts, with some reservation, the polemic position of **Toward Decolonization of African Literature**. He recognizes "that such polemics can be a salutary corrective to a great deal of nonsense that has been written about African Literature, by critics for whom literary merit is gauged by whether can be inserted into a Great White Tradition of masterpieces"(p.65). It is clear, the Bernth Lindfors' quantitative approach has its foundations in the feature of audiences. Which audiences? Since the dawn of Modern African Literatures, the relationship between writer and public remain a very broad sociological quuestion closely related to educational systems, printing-press industry, the role of the media, the high cost and price of books.

In a substantial point of view, the positions argued by Anthony A. Appiah do not eschew from those presented by Chinweizu and others. I retain a good many points of convergence. Such a glance would not have any meaning if Appiah seemingly do not

convert that polemic book as a scapegoat of this charges. He says: "(...) what we see in *Toward the Decolonization of African Literatures* is, in effect, the establishment of a 'reverse discourse': the terms of resistance are already given us, and our contestation is entrapped within the Western cultural conjuncture we affect to dispute" (p.69). The epistemological relativism ("alternative epistemology of reading") supported by Appiah is not an impediment for a decolonization as regards to an environment inhabited by western cultures bearers. I think the pertinent effects of a revision encounter better justification in a world where ethnocentric misconceptions are still dominant.

I find this recurring idea crossing Priebe's and Hale's articles. I mean the idea of relativism. For critics teaching African Literatures outside the continent a worthy comment is made by Priebe: "We cannot deal with reading of texts if we do not actively deal with numerous misreadings of a continent that have been inscribed into the most serious, no less than the most banal, use of our discourse" (p.6). Hale's flagrant experience is also eloquent for he says: "(...) those of us who teach African Literatures must continue to teach to two audiences, to our students and our colleagues" (p.100).

Indeed, the current discussion on African criticism does not remain in its means or conceptual level. Most important is stressing the specificity of the text, providing another semantic and pragmatic framework. The Appiah's call for "a criticism grounded on the text" (p.81), sides itself with the reactions inserted in the above-mentioned book of Chinweizu and others. Nevertheless, the Appiah's essay is an exercise of eclectism.

Elizabeth Gunner also argues the principle of relativism when she observes that "canons are necessarily closely related to the cultural base of the country in which they are formed" (p.101). At the same time, she reveals some incapacibilities in seizing the real core around canon formation outside a steady dialogue with Africa, its cultural realities and the products of african scholarship.

To sum up, I must say that in teaching matters and canon formation, the specificity of methods and approaches are increasingly becoming a touchstone. Admittedly an epistemological rupture in critical reading is being outlined. Otherwise, taking into account the debates on pos-modernity emerging in the Euro-american arena, both poles of critical discourse - african critics and others - ought break up with the logic of universalism which so far has been guiding certain streams in the african cultural discourse. Within this scenario we need alternative responses rooted in the paradigm of heterogeneity. Hence, the critical relativism I am stressing points out the endogenous adequacy of all kind of theories and apologies. For this reason it should be a sorrow and the initiative will stand uncompleted if the theme is not retaken in another issue, now encompassing contributions from French and Portuguese speaking scholars, especially reporting pedagogical experiences in the framework of african educational systems.