

**DERRIDEAN DECONSTRUCTION AND MODERNIST INFLUENCE IN AFRICAN  
LITERATURE**

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**Abstract**

*Defining African identity gave rise to varied fields of studies such as African Literature and African Philosophy. From its inception, men and women with bias in modernist presuppositions shaped it. A new way of literary interpretation – post-structuralism – has been presented, attracting much negative reactions that literary studies centres in Africa are not insulated. The passion for the real/truth of a literary work, a major heritage of modernist thought has thus coloured literary discourse in Africa. This paper examines how this search for the real (or truth) has manifested in literary works via Jacques Derrida's deconstructive strategy.*

**Keywords:** Derridean Deconstruction, Female, Power, Modernist, African

**Introduction**

The African, from the pre-rationalist, pre-literate and/or traditional times of nature worship to the contemporary, seems to have imagined that some forces were behind the movements of the forces of nature (Forsyth, 1982), a connotation of the universality of Newton's First Law of Motion, i.e. the Law of Inertia, which states that a body in the state of rest will continue in this state unless acted upon by an external force (Nelkon, 1981). In line with this principle, it may be averred that the 'flagging off of independence' in the 1960s triggered amongst Africans a search for a unique identity; for the things, values, and modes of operation that were identical with them. But for independence, the African may not have gone all out to define himself. Thus, the search for a proper African consciousness gave birth to the exploration of African Literature. But what a distinction lies between African Literature and literature (as understood before the invention of African Literature) – that which makes African Literature distinct from the corpus of work called literature all over the world. The same question may apply to every attempt or field of study aimed at working out some realistic and relevant African identity and its underpinning principles. This question is not within the purview of this paper.

Defending the African world in African Literature was done by men and women whose trainings were within modernist backgrounds – their researches tending generally to be based on structuralism, which may be viewed as a manifestation of modernism. African Literature and other studies associated with the search for African identity have, in different institutes of research in Africa, been informed by modernist presupposition such as the necessary presence of a basic or underpinning principle, in different formats of knowledge-explication (Luntley, 1995). Thus, African Literature was examined from the 'prison-house' (Jameson, 1975) of some unchangeable, pure, and self-existent principles. The introduction of post-structuralism as a mode of literary criticism into the centres of African Studies has provoked several opposing reactions.

In this paper, the writer will pay attention to the question of objective reality and truth in view of its entrenchment in African literary studies in varied ways. With deconstruction, an attempt will be made to prepare an equitable ground for a fair discourse on the African world. In other words, it means to invite theorists in African literature to realize that while they seek for uniquely African modes of life in literary studies as against the suppression of the African world during the colonial era, they should become conscious of avoiding the reactionary lure and pitfall of postulating any African identity as metaphorically superior to another. Derridean deconstruction is soothing oil in this invitatory move.

### **Objective Reality as the Inviolable**

The search for reality, for truth can be traced to the earliest period of Greek scholarship when Plato located true knowledge in the realm of the invisible, which is divided into the two worlds of lower reason (understanding) and higher reason (pure abstraction). For Plato, there is no knowledge outside the world of the invisible (or 'mind'). At the level of the visible, only opinion (*doxa*) can be arrived at. This realm of the visible or sense-perception is made up of two levels, namely the worlds of belief, and of imagination (the lowest on the rung). This level of sense-perception is where flux rules supreme (Popkin & Stroll, 1993). Real knowledge is pure and unchangeable, i.e. knowledge beyond flux as found at the level of the senses. This is a knowledge that man cannot affect and can only approximate, but never attain. So, it serves as a standard. While Plato failed to attempt a unification of the two realms of the visible and invisible, he was the first to theorize on knowledge of the real and its location outside the physical. For Plato, literature, like all art-forms, occurs at the lowest level of sense-perception – imagination and so, epistemologically speaking, it was not of any value. The most valuable thing, truth or pure abstraction, occurs at the level of the divine (world of forms/shapes).

In Aristotle, there is a presupposition of the possibility of knowledge. His interest is on accounting for the way knowledge occurs and the way it is linked up to other states of cognition of the knower. For Aristotle, in his *Posterior Analytics*, the knower is in contact with the real world through experience and action. This contact of the knower with the external world is a given. The real (objective) world, which is experienced by the knowing agent, exists and is different from the cognizing agent. Put differently, there is an object and a subject. Both of them are distinct. Although this agent is distinct from the world of experience, the distinction does not debar knowledge (Taylor, 1990). He avoided the platonic dichotomy between sense perception and knowledge as such.

Philosophy, the science of first causes, for Aristotle, is also the science of truth: 'Now we do not know a truth without its cause' (Aristotle, 1984, p. 24). He ties the conception of truth with causes and principles. Thus, reason and truth are inherently bound together. By this route, the definition of reason in terms of truth took off in Western Philosophy. To enable him define the nature of truth, Aristotle applied (formal) logic, which is, for him, the study of truth and its manifestations. The instruments for the warrant of truth are the Three Laws of thought, namely Non-Contradiction, Excluded Middle and Identity. Aristotelian articulation of truth gives prominent presentation of this logic in terms of: a) 'what is true, is not self contradictory' (this means that logic exists for logical consistency), b) 'what rational is, true is' and c) 'but we know a truth only by knowing its cause' (van Doan, 2001, pp. 47, 52, 90n). His last statement to the effect that only a cause and what it caused can be true is noteworthy. Anything whose cause cannot be ascertained cannot be real (true). In other words, the real must have a known cause. Thus, several modes of interpreting literary works came in vogue by way of this desire for the source of a work. Such modes include the author's mind, the community/geography of the author, the political play around the author, the findings of science, archaeology, sex, identity, et cetera. In other words, theorists conceived of the idea that every literary work must have a cause and such a cause must be totally distinct from the work of art which it caused. The author-matrix became the great ideal of literary discourse.

Plato had conceived of true knowledge as a thing given by the gods and so, it was located outside man and everything visible. And this view informed Aristotle's formulation of true knowledge as something given, something not defined by man. The reason for assuming that the vision of knowledge as a given and as located outside man and the world of senses was to enable them have a knowledge that was stable, untouchable and inviolable – beyond the influence of the senses and any form of vagaries, and challenge. Its location at the plain of the divine (divinity here refers to the traditional Greek world of myriads of gods that were viewed as determining occurrences in the world of men) was intended to give it the air of authority and by this, command responsive acceptance. This conception of knowledge in terms of the given was so strong that, in Rene Descartes, it was given a grand formulation as "clear and distinct perception" (Descartes, 1960, p. 34). But Immanuel Kant came within the Enlightenment period and undid every formulation of knowledge as a given, i.e. as something unaffected by the senses (objects of

knowledge). Kant enunciated what is known as the Copernican Revolution when he said that man can never really know because the ‘thing-in-itself’ (*noumenon*) is outside and beyond man’s ability to know or sphere of knowledge. The *noumenon* exists only at the level of divine intellect (*Intellectus Archetypus* or *Intuitus Originarius*). Man can only know things as they appear, i.e. from the perspective of the spectator (*phenomena*), which is nothing but discursive knowledge. This sort of knowledge or understanding – derivative understanding – is found only within the human intellect (*Intellectus Ectypus*). Human understanding is derivative, for him, because it stands in need of images and brings forth only possible knowledge (Cassirer, 1944; O’Neil, 1990; Coletti, 1973).

From the above Kantian thesis, one can understand what is generally known as the 18th Century epistemological break. Every appeal to the authority of the subject, author/writer, logic (traditional and formal), algorithm, and any form of knowledge-explication by way of establishing a fundamental principle was dismissed by Kant. With him, confusion seems to have been thrown in the path of knowledge. In the Kantian account, real knowledge can only be arrived by way of constructed reason, not an externalist, imposed reason. The community (specific) is the determinant of what is knowledge. This is done without recourse to any externalist principle or formula (O’Neil, 1990). While various attempts were made to save the epistemic subject and re-establish foundationalist-styled systems after Kant’s Copernican Revolution, the problems that caused the epistemological break were never really arrested. In contemporary times, it has been seriously re-visited by the Post-structuralist thinkers. And it is rather curious that the Plato-influenced Kantian tradition of the impossibility of objective knowledge had to be brought to prominence again in our time.

A thorough examination of Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* reveals that there seems to be a singular plan written in all human beings – inbuilt thought categories. Thus, the race for objective foundations desired by men must be constructed by them because nothing is given; there exists no other universe but the one created by man – a view that certainly disconnects from the worldview of traditional Greek ideological framework indicated above. The only thing man has is reason, which principles he does not have as a given but must be accounted by man. This account is not to be taken for a given; it is man determining that which he takes as the basis of reason. This is Kant’s autonomy of reason (O’Neil, 1990), which is the supreme principle of practical reasoning – the Categorical Imperative. To follow this principle is to act exclusively on universal principles, and from these laws everybody can choose, i.e. acting on universal laws.

One of the reasons for the appearance of postmodernism is the fact of various unresolved issues symbolized by the 18th century epistemological break. At the centre of this debate still stands the idea of *grund* norm without any successful account of how man justifies such standard. The posture of Kant that man can never truly arrive at the true knowledge of any thing (‘thing-in-themselves’ – *noumenon*) – i.e. knowledge of a thing from the standpoint of omniscience, which is otherwise called *Intuitus Originarius/Intellectus Archetypus*, has remained largely unaddressed. The rationalists, before and after Kant, have always presupposed some *almighty formula* that explains all things. Such thinkers would include Saussure, Edmund Husserl, Edith Stein, Alfred North Whitehead and Sartre, Lacan, Albert Einstein, Freud, Gadamer, Karl Marx, et cetera.

Philosophical post-structuralism is the critical resistance of a model of truth and rationality that came from the 18th Century and saw reason as some ‘neutral ahistorical tool’ (Luntley, 1995, p. 7), a modernist model of knowledge that conceived knowledge in terms of pure reason – the abstract handling of symbols as found in mathematics, logic and the natural sciences. According to Habermas, the ambition was to set up objective science, universal morality and Law, and autonomous art (Robinson, n.d.). Derrida stands up against the modernist tradition via the theory of deconstruction.

Derrida, in his own words, said that ‘I often describe deconstruction as something which happens. It is not purely linguistic, involving text or books. You can deconstruct gestures, choreography. That is why I enlarged on the concept of text’ (Kalu, 2004, p. 68). Deconstruction is a strategy forged within the writings of Derrida to enable him critique what he felt constituted the western metaphysical tradition. Western philosophy had, for a very long time, been crafted in ways that enabled it to threaten its founding values (*ratio/reason/nous*). All metaphysical systems from Plato to Rousseau, Descartes to Husserl had proceeded by way of setting up a hierarchy of values, ethical and ontological distinctions that did two things (Ryan, 1982; Derrida, 1973). First, it arranged value-oppositions clustered around an ideal, hidden limit. Second, it subjugated these values to the value it considers fundamental to the other values. This metaphysical system was always biased by taking up an element and establishing it as epistemologically superior to the other(s). The other elements are usually viewed, strategically, as derived or dependent upon the imposed origin/standard/self-identity/ substance/presence/ideality, et cetera. Usually, it was biased

about the other, i.e. difference. For Jacques Derrida, western metaphysics (logocentric thinking or logocentrism) was the metaphysics of presence; it conceived being in terms of presence to the exclusion of absence or difference. In his *Totality and Infinity*, Emmanuel Levinas described metaphysicians from Plato – Rousseau, Descartes – Husserl as comfortable with the other, i.e. alterity (Laruelle, 2010). Other is here used in terms of difference (*différance*) from the perspective of Derrida as expounded in his *Speech and Phenomena*. In Heidegger, we can find a similar note in his deconstructive term – ontological difference (Gadamer, 2007).

Deconstruction proceeds by examining founding principles and unearthing all the other elements that were regarded as standing in direct opposition to the base or ‘substructural element’ or origin. When the elements that were designed on some origins and, many times, forgotten on account of the imposing nature of the supposed foundation, were raised, there was no attempt to cause a reconciliation aimed at setting another general origin. Rather, it juxtaposed the elements and declared them as standing on a level ground, e.g. man – woman, boy – girl, good – evil, langue – parole, body – spirit, etc. This is called binary opposition (Hill, 2007). Binary opposition systematically challenged critical discourse to the extent where all forms of intellectual discourse could no longer be viewed in terms of an architectural design having a substructure and superstructure. The search was no longer for meaning but meanings; instead of objective science, it became a search for objective sciences; African philosophies instead of African philosophy; African literatures instead of African literature, et cetera. This has a Nietzschean strain – no one truth, but truths; no one interpretation, but interpretations. Meaning has become the issue of ‘whatever you like...’, which arguably may be termed relativism. But could this not be described as subjectivism? All modes of expression are now irreparably poisoned by the erasure of ‘original meaning’. So, Derrida’s idea of erasure is crossing (‘X’). One cannot think of writing in terms of a uniquely distinct message from the author to the reader anymore because meaning has become an exercise in self-multiplication to the point of being indefinite. I cannot find any identifiable origin or end to the network of communications (Kearney, 1987). Interestingly for Paul Ricoeur, the author is no longer the basis for understanding/interpreting the text (literary work). Rather, the literary work speaks to its audience (i.e. opens itself to its audience). The author no longer has the final word in that he is not the final arbiter in regard to literary hermeneutics.

### **The Real and African Literature**

Contemporary studies in African Literature have been forced to recognize the challenge of an alternative interpretive model by way of post-structuralism, even of postmodernism. Literary studies in Africa are greatly steeped in the modernist forms of a ‘given’ that guides the reading of the text, a position which is understandable within the context of the spiritist-magical worldview still dominant in 21st century African society.

Simon Gikandi’s “Chinua Achebe and the Invention of African Literature” (Esonwanne, 2007) describes Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* as a novel that examines the cultural instability caused by the collapse of colonial rule. The events found in that novel, particularly the very survival of Igbo culture (exemplified by Umuofia) had to do with the colonial intrusion into the people’s lives. It is an account of the psychological hold of colonialism over the lives of African peoples. The entry of the colonial rule did put the people’s lives at risk. Gikandi describes this traumatic experience as “the crisis of the soul”; notwithstanding his deep treatment of this psychological world (Esonwanne, 2007). Gikandi is, therefore, a good representative of the school of thought that views the African novel as having a specific key for unravelling the ‘inner meaning’ or substructure of a text.

The search for the ‘inner meaning’ or substructure of a literary text is a search for the real, which is a modernist streak. In the article, “Oedipus, Ogbanje, and the Sons of Independence,” Neil Ten Kortenaar examines Chinua Achebe and Mongo Beti, two of Africa’s “Sons of Independence,” with a view to seeing whatever knowledge their works might yield about “the African nation-state and modernity” (Esonwanne, 2007, p. 141; Kortenaar, 2007, pp. 181-202). For Kortenaar, therefore, novels may be viewed as paths for the representation of historical events – these events should serve as the ‘magic wand’ for understanding the novel. For Isidore Diala, the 1998 Winner of *The Pyre and ANA Cadbury Poetry Prize*, who belongs to this school of thought, African Literature is necessarily bound up with real historical issues that must be found outside the borders of the text (Akubuiro, 2005). It is along this line that Olusegun Oladipo views Achebe’s novels as clear stories of Africa, generally and Nigeria, specifically; in this light, the *Anthills of the Savannah* is a description of African socio-political and economic situations (Oladipo, 1988/89). Unlike the case above where reality is tied to a substructure of the literary text, here it lies in historical facts, outside the text – something akin to Archimedes’ desire for a place to stand and move the world. Is objectivity not a knowledge-format supposed to be uninvolved, unbiased, abstract, pure, and non

value-based? But if these works (*Things Fall Apart* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, for instance) are literary texts as they are thought to be, how are they different from historical texts? If they concern themselves with historical materials, then we must have them as facts of history with their locations, years and dates. In other words, why call them literary texts whereas they are historical texts? Why the duplication of names if the contents are identically structured? In Gikandi's case then, *Things Fall Apart* offers us psychological data. If so, why is it classified as a literary genre whereas it should be a text of reading on psychology? It appears that Gikandi, like a lot of African scholars, does not appreciate the need for each discipline to stand clearly defined. Literature must be different from psychology and history. The latter has been addressed in "Reading, Text, and the Metaphors of Perceptions" (Akwanya, 2013, pp. 76 – 84).

Brenda Cooper examines Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* and Assia Djebar's *Fantasia* in "Banished from Oedipus? Buchi Emecheta's and Assia's Djebar's Gendered Language of Resistance" and reveals how metaphor is tyrannically deployed with a view to asserting the superiority of the male over the female. The Law of Symbolic Order is activated to protect patriarchal discourse and empower male dominance (Esonwanne, 2007, pp. 143 - 158). The theme of male superiority is again queried by Clare Counihan in "Reading the Figure of Woman in African Literature: Psychoanalysis, Difference, and Desire." She argues that Frantz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha changed the discourse of sexual difference into the discourse of racial difference. She notes that Fanon's and Bhabha's translation of psychoanalysis from the thought of sexual difference to that of racial difference defaces, and negates the figure of the woman as *Other*. This translation process reduces the figure of the woman to that of "a phantom, shimmering in and out of presence and absence" (Counihan, 2007, pp. 161 – 162). But in "Gender and Sexuality: An Analysis of Female Crisis in Buchi Emecheta's Novels," Samuel Onuigbo and Chika K. Ojukwu picks up the foregoing thread by demonstrating how the female, in the form of the girl-child suffers the double tragedy of i) being unwanted, and ii) being cultured to be stupid. Ona, in the *Joys of Motherhood*, is not permitted to marry but to live as the mistress of Obi Umunna. She was to bear him a male-child. If she bore a female-child, Obi Umunna would not accept her; and thus, Agbadi would have her (Emecheta, 1979). While the male-child is indispensable, the female-child is being rejected. The exhibition of stupidity in thinking is hereby portrayed as the hallmark of a woman in that she is encouraged to exhibit mediocrity or outright stupidity. But if a woman demonstrated possession of grey matter, wit and wisdom, she was swimming against the current created by the men for women to swim in, and was rebuked. For this reason, Nkwocha Agbadi rebuked Ona at the instance of perceiving that Ona was unduly intelligent. He cautioned her, in the first week of motherhood, for refusing to be a woman and choosing to think like a man (Onuigbo & Ojukwu, 2013). This temper quickly calls to mind the view of Carrie Chapman that the world discouraged women from self-development and self-expression yet claimed her to be valueless; it gave her no education, denied her every appearance of responsibility while positing that she had no genius nor orator; to enjoy pleasure, she had to gain it as a favour through engaging in vanity (as cited in Jagger & Rothenberg, 1984, p. 4). Notwithstanding the strides in Western societies (and other parts of the globe) to correct this anomaly, Chapman's viewpoint still finds corroboration in present-day Western society, an example being the disparity in the number of female philosophers employed in universities (Ratcliffe & Show, 2015). The situation is even worse in Nigeria where the ratio of female philosophers may be as low as 1% of the total number of male philosophers; at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (Nigeria's first indigenous university), in over 40 years of the existence of its department of philosophy the first female came into her teaching ranks in 2015. This imbalance needs to be seriously addressed but even without sacrificing meritocracy. In these studies on the elevation of the male as a superior entity over and above the female lies an important modernist presupposition: that the real and significant is the male-man. In the text, the man is viewed as real whereas the woman or female is either inferior or an illusion. But is it sound to argue that because the female is different from the male, she is outside reality or inferior to man, or even an insignificant semblance? No. Contemporary studies in biology, psychology and neuroscience are yet to provide supporting proofs to the idea of the female-child or woman as a 'second sex'. This idea of the insignificance of the female seems to be more of a socially constructed, albeit distorted, justification for the perpetuation of oppression and violence against the female such as sex-specific salary structure, sex-selective abortion and 'genderisation'.

### **Reviewing the Modernist Influence**

From the above discourse, we may infer that various attempts to read African Literature from some modernist patterns of the grand entity such as the author's intention, economics, politics, and history can be deduced. It has been movements in search of something akin to the Archimedean point where one may stand and rule the world of literary criticism. When novels are read, people are quick to expect the

work of art to reveal “the truth” or “the real” of the novel, i.e. the “thing-in-itself” that Kant calls the *noumenon*. At other moments, the literary works can be read by way of assuming knowledge of the intention of the author. The ‘real’ in the literary text is usually viewed as some inner signification hidden within the text that can be brought out in terms of discovering the author’s intention, geographical standpoint, political upheaval, et cetera at the moment of writing the text. This reality, constituting the object of presupposition and search, is generally expected to have a definite and unalterable character. The situation is so prevalent in the studies of African Novels that teachers and lecturers are in the fashion of expecting students to approach their studies of literary texts in terms of definite meanings, answers and expected formats (Akwanya, 2007). One of the fallouts of this strategy is the stifling of creativity and may be one of the reasons a lot of university graduates in Nigeria for instance appear to be deficient in critical skills and a sense of ingenuity (Agbakoba, 2008); they are moribund in the sense that they are generally incapable of addressing novel problems arising either in their specific fields of expertise, or the society at large, even problems thrown at them by their employers. Thus, the fact that most African societies still operate at the level of subsistence (economics and basic extractive industry) could be appreciated from this standpoint.

The concern about discovering the intention of the author is an exercise in futility in that it resurrects the philosophical problem of other minds. How do you have access to the thoughts of the other? To what extent can you read the mind of a person whether alive or dead, present or absent? Although Dilthey would think otherwise, it is my opinion that you can never really know the mind of any person, including the author’s. Paul Ricoeur asserts that the human understanding is submissive to the productive marks of human imagination via interpretations, that all the concerns of man are mediated via language and discourse. He calls this the ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ since discourse both closes and discloses something about the nature of being (White, 1991, pp. 311 – 321; Robinson, 1995). Man has no means of gaining direct and independent confirmation of the author’s mind. Only the individual (and his Creator-God) can be said to have direct access into a person’s mind. This is what some thinkers mean by the individual being the sole epistemic authority (Agbakoba, 2001). So, the search for the intention of the author in a novel is purely an exercise in the dark. Even if the author declared that so-and-so was his intention in the writing of a literary text, man would still not have any direct and independent access to his mental load so as to verify his declaration.

Every reader and interpreter of any literary text is an assemblage of biographies (Coulthard, 1995). Each of the visits paid to the house of a literary text is always with the backing of unique individual mental bias, which is a compendium of interpretive indices. Thus, from the very beginning, readers have preset views, which become the condition for reading any literary text. From this perspective, it can be seen that arguments from people’s local settings, colonial experiences, political upheavals, and economic uncertainties are tiny frames of reference. Just as these perspectives are posited, other interpretive modes may be presented. It might be difficult to validly argue that from these individual and particular units, direct access to a person’s mind or possession of a universal interpretive frame of reference that encapsulates and explains all other frames of reference may be attained. To argue is to be will make one guilty of the fallacy of over-generalization. Thus, it becomes easier to appreciate the perceptions of Jacques Derrida that there is nothing outside the text –

*‘Il n’y a pas de hors-texte’* (Derrida, 1976, p. 158) and that “everything is a text,” (Kalu, 2004, p. 68) a statement he made while waving his hand at people picking at their lunches oblivious they were undergoing deconstruction. It is impossible to fix the meaning of a text without due regard to the fact that each of us has a mental biography defined by the past and present and that this mental biography remains open to further expansion. Recognizing this fact should serve to open us to being creative, and that too much romance with modernism could cause man to close himself up to “the further reaches of human nature” (Abraham Maslow).

In recent times, the figure of the feminine in African literary studies has, steadily, been on the rise. This development may be accounted for by many factors. One of such factors is the United Nations’ Third MDG (UNN MDG), which aims to promote gender equality and empower women. The very ideas of gender equality bespeaks of some inequality between the male and the female gender. It clearly connotes that the female that needs to be empowered. Thus, this MDG recognizes the presence of an age-old, abusive, patriarchal ideology within the African thought-life. This ideology was greatly encouraged and strengthened by modernism. And modernism upheld the view that identified reason with masculinity and emotion as femininity (Lloyd, 1998).

Simone de Beauvoir defends the place of the other, particularly the female. In her *Ethics of Ambiguity* and *Second Sex*, she criticized Jean Paul Sartre’s defence of the freedom of the individual alone;

an individuality, which she interprets as defending and valuing only the male image in *Being and Nothingness* (Beauvoir, 1948; Satre, 1992). For her, true freedom is not to be found in Sartre's individualism, but intersubjectivity, which implies partnership with the other. More than ever, there has been a clarion call for the opening up of the African space to the figure of the woman as significant player in negotiating the African socio-cultural arena like the female artists of Nri and Agulu (Ikwuemesi, 2011, 7-8, 10, 13). Such recognition must bequeath equity, justice and fairness to the woman rather than cripple the manifestation of her full potentiality as argued for in Butake's *Betrothal without Libation* and his *Family Saga* (Nkealah, 2011).

Behind the idea of the imposing and intimidating character of the male stands a theory of rationality, which upholds that reason is a characteristic of the male whereas the woman is represented as emotional and incapable of thought (Lloyd, 1998). This line of definition of woman is biased with a view to setting up an axiological hierarchy where the woman is considered as slavishly dependent upon the man and may never be able to do anything rational. Contemporary findings in psychology as in Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) have proven that every human person has a brain that is made up of two hemispheres, namely the right and the left. The left hemisphere of the brain deals with logical patterns whereas the right hemisphere of the brain is in-charge of human emotions (Blakeslee, 1983; Gonzalez, 1993). Men and women are mentally and emotionally equal in the structure of their brain-lives. As we set out to achieve the MDGs, it ought to be stated that the truth of the structure of human brain (and inferentially, thought-processes) as one that gives equal room for both sexes to develop by choice. The modernist-chauvinistic posture needs to be curtailed in the interpretation of literary texts. It is fitting those vestiges of feminine oppression as represented by Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* be summarily terminated. Counihan agrees to this by stating that the narrative places the spotlight so much on Okonkwo's dilemma and by so doing, it obscures Ezinma his daughter, the figure of woman. Counihan and Kortenaar agree that Okonkwo despises the feminine gender represented by Ezinma.

## Conclusion

The call of the United Nations for gender equality and women empowerment accords with the invitation of Derridean Deconstruction announcing the erosion of biased, oppressive, and unjustified hierarchical structures such that equality may reign over all other structures. Derridean deconstruction calls for the placing of men and women on a par, especially in terms of dignity and opportunities (Okuyade, 2009). But Dame Stephanie Shirley recently suggested a clarification of the latter by arguing for the erasure of sexism, even 'reverse sexism' (whether in favour of the males or the females) as a criterion for job placements. In her view, employment and reward at the workplace ought to be performance-based—she underscores this point in the light of attempts by the European Union for Boards to introduce quotas for female employment (Shirley, 2014). This position is in alignment with Derridean deconstruction's disposition for equality, especially in regard to her call for a complete resistance to and abolition of every form of unfair exaltation of any sex. But if, as she argues, contemporary feminism champions female rights on the bases of chivalry and/or tokenism, then a critical purpose of feminism – to bring more women into top level of organizational hierarchies – would have been undermined; because, as she notes, Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) are not functions of 'special treatment' but of discipline, smart and hard work. Gleaning through Shirley's blunt points in "The Myth of the Glass Ceiling," feminism seems to imply, at least up to this point, a subtle exaltation of the female above the male (a form of 'reverse sexism'), on any bases exclusive of merit and performance. If true, would this not be a systematic nurturing of a section of society to develop a claim-consciousness (even if spurious) against rights' abuse? Again, if this is true and if this was to serve as a social justice or redressing principle for discontented persons/groups of persons such as former colonies of some western nations, descendants of former slaves, terrorists such as Boko Haram, ISIS, and Al Qaeda, or a child claiming abuse by the mother demanding some chores be done, how should different societies of the world or the United Nations address such demands equitably and fairly? Or, how affirmative is the affirmative action policy? While these questions are beyond the purview of this paper, Derrida's deconstructive strategy may yet serve as a theoretical mechanism for understanding power-balance and advocating for a paradigm shift aimed at entrenching a civility of equality across board.

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