

RELIGION, GENDER AND RACE RELATIONS UNDER SCRUTINY

This issue of *Imbizo* brings together seven articles and one interview, forming a corpus of critical enquiry that puts religion, gender and race relations under scrutiny. The authors have employed varying theoretical models to analyse different texts – plays, novels, films and semi-autobiographies. Located all over Africa and its diaspora, these authors provide different and yet intersecting perspectives on these issues, and their arguments are persuasive to the extent that they nullify our skepticism.

The article on ‘Linguistic representation of religious identity and ideology in selected postcolonial Nigerian literature’ by Ikenna Kamalu and Isaac Tamunobelema applies the principles of critical stylistics and critical discourse analysis to argue against the proliferation of religious fundamentalism in contemporary Nigeria, a phenomenon which has not only increased tremendously over the years but has been the cause of deep social fissures as well as innumerable deaths in Nigeria. The authors of this article draw linguistic examples from three Nigerian texts to argue that ‘the socio-political climate in postcolonial Nigeria breeds a culture of hatred, intolerance, violence, exclusion, and curtailment of individual and group rights in the name of religion’. They challenge the use of language to legitimise and justify acts of violence against the Other – constructed on the basis of religion and ethnicity. Their stylistic analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*, Chidubem Iweka’s *The Ancient Curse* and Uwem Akpan’s ‘Luxurious Hearses’ is a call for Africans to practise religious tolerance as a bulwark against continental disintegration.

Religion is also the subject under criticism in Femi Abodunrin’s article titled ‘African literature and indigenous knowledge: A study of Wole Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* and D.O. Fagunwa’s *Adiitu Olodumare*’. However, unlike Kamalu and Tamunobelema who focus on the conflicts between Christianity, Islam

and Traditional Religion, Abodunrin explores the ways in which Traditional Religion, termed indigenous religion in the article, has been undermined by a pseudo-capitalist ideology which not only adopts a Christian outlook to read African indigenous belief systems but effectively distorts the philosophies of these belief systems in the process. Focusing on Yoruba religion, Abodunrin argues that the ecocritical and the carnivalesque, both erroneously attributed to Western thought, are intricately present in Yoruba mythology and cosmology. His analysis of two texts situated within the Yoruba indigenous knowledge system complements Kamalu and Tamunobelema's article in positing the view that the world would be a better place if there was less of religious fanaticism and more of respect for people's individual and collective beliefs.

Busuyi Mekusi's article titled 'When indemnity becomes disdainful: Revenge as metaphor for "unfinished business" in post-apartheid South African drama' looks at race relations in South Africa as it interrogates a dominant concept in the post-apartheid era – the concept of reconciliation, or the prospect of it. In a nuanced analysis of *Zulu love letter* as both script and film, Mekusi argues that there can hardly be reconciliation in the face of undissipated desires for revenge as a means of dealing with the trauma of racial oppression under apartheid. Essentially, the article questions what Mekusi describes as 'the one-sided, manufactured view of forgiveness and reconciliation advocated by the TRC, which is less than being genuine when viewed against the attitudes of former offenders'.

Moving beyond the trauma of apartheid oppression, Zanele Nyamakai and Barbra Manyarara's article on 'Women who have killed: the psycho-social effects of prison life' explores self-inflicted trauma as experienced by Zimbabwean women who have killed their own family members, deliberately or inadvertently. The authors use as the basis of their discussion the semi-autobiographical collection *A tragedy of lives: women in prison in Zimbabwe* edited by Musengezi and Staunton (2003). The personal narratives of the various women ex-convicts captured in this text are moving, and, as the authors point out, the women's trauma is exacerbated by the fact that imprisonment truncated their mourning and thus their ability to find closure. The authors conclude their analysis by stating that 'when women cross boundaries and kill they serve a treble sentence: physical imprisonment, mental self-torture and the likelihood of being a pariah once they have paid their debt to society'. Effectively, this article calls for a more sensitive system of rehabilitating Zimbabwean women who have killed and served time.

Keeping the focus on women, Washington Mushore applies feminist theories, particularly Amazon feminism, in analysing a film in the article 'Breaking gender stereotypes: women and work in the film *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*'. The author conducts an extensive literature review of feminist counter-arguments against gender differentiation which results in unequal power relations where women are excluded from certain types of work deemed fit only for men. Using the agency

of the film heroine in the chosen film, the author argues that work should not be gendered as women are just as capable of performing the kind of work men engage in. The author's passionate articulations against gender discrimination where work and education are concerned bespeak a latent commitment to the project of gender equality.

Discussions on gender are invariably engaging, irrespective of whether one is looking at film or texts. In Yvette Ngum's article on 'Gender and cultural negotiation in *Ninah's Dowry*: Exploring a Cameroonian view', the focus is on the ways in which gendered bodies enact power over presumed weak or inferior bodies. The analysis moves from male enactments of power over other male bodies to male exercise of power over female bodies objectified by patriarchy. It is particularly interesting how the author deconstructs the cultural constructs of power in relation to dowry using the dilemma of the protagonist Ninah who is trapped in an abusive marriage because her obtaining a divorce depends entirely on her ability to refund the dowry paid on her head. Ngum's robust argument on gendered power relations in this film concludes with the statement: 'The film participates in an interventionist project, exposing gendered violence and projecting women's multi-layered resistance to it'. This is a statement that readers of this article would hardly disagree with.

The genre of film gets further analytical attention in the article '*Django unchained*: Rediscoursing racial relations during the slave trade' by Peace Mukwara and Tatenda Mangosho. Isolating a film that transforms race relations in the African diaspora, the authors apply anthropophagic theory in illustrating how the slave Django exploits his indispensability to a white master to achieve his own goal, namely, recovering his wife from a slave farm. The authors argue that the heroic exploits of Django in this film dismantle stereotypes of the slave as a hopeless victim of white cruelty, thereby offering viewers a more transformative vision of race relations during the time of slavery in America.

As in *Imbizo* 7.1, an interview has been included in this issue. It is an interview with Zimbabwean writer Pettina Gappah whose writing satirises contemporary Zimbabwe by exposing the fallacies of the people and the state. Faith Mkwesha's interest in Gappah's work enables the two women to discuss questions about language, gender, and the politics of location as they impact on a writer's artistic production.

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