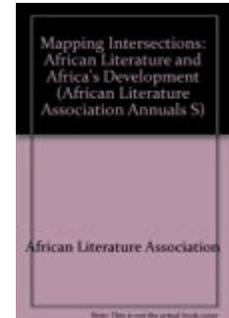




Anne V. Adams, Janis A. Mayes, eds.. *Mapping Intersections: African Literature and Africa's Development*. Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1998. 316 pp. \$69.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-86543-633-6.



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Mapping Intersections: African Literature and Africa's Development is the second of a series of conference proceedings from the African Literature Association to be published. It is comprised largely of papers presented at the twelfth annual meeting of the ALA at Cornell University in 1987, although it does include essays solicited specifically by the editors. The challenge of producing a text of this nature is to maintain the diversity of opinion and methodology which characterizes the ALA itself, while at the same time providing a clear and coherent interrogation of the topic at hand--in this case, the relationship between literature and development on the African continent and in the African Diaspora. Anne V. Adams and Janis A. Mayes have succeeded admirably in both cases, and they have produced a scholarly work of focus and clarity, which presents multiple insights on a compelling subject.

In their introduction to the text, Adams and Mayes address the problem of investigating the role of literature in Africa's development, especially since, as they note, "African development, as a concept, is not generally construed to incorpo-

rate 'the literary'" (p. 2). Given this oversight in academic and political studies of Africa, the first task of this book has to be to assert the ties which bind literature and development.[1] Adams and Mayes insist on the primacy of such ties, pointing out that Africa's writers "function--in an evolved African tradition--as Public Intellectuals; insightful, incisive, visible, activist commentators" (p. 2); as skillful editors, Adams and Mayes then let the essays which follow their introduction elaborate and illustrate their point.

One of the many strengths of this work is its organization. The essays presented in the book are divided into five sections, each of which is organized around a particular aspect of African literature and African development. The first section, entitled Literature and Development: Conceptualizing Frameworks, explores development through questions of literacy and access to literature. Underlying all of the essays in this section is the axiom that literacy is fundamental to the development of a society. In her essay, "Literature and Development: Writing and Audience in Africa," Molarra Ogundipe-Leslie draws attention

to the fact that much of what is written about Africa is not written by Africans, or if it is, it is written by a very small minority of Africans. For Ogundipe-Leslie, this fact is disturbing, since, as she suggests, "culture is the repository of values, in which crucible literature is also burnished to reflect, change, and be changed by society" (p. 28). The ability of a people to write itself, she maintains, is fundamental to the potential of that people to develop in a way that is "locogenetic; developed by its users" (p. 27).

The essays which follow Ogundipe-Leslie's explore the very real barriers to the development of indigenous literature on the African continent. Micero Githae Mugo discusses the obstacles faced by many African women who wish to become literate, and John Chileshe, using Zambia as a case in point, examines the ways in which the educational systems in African countries often function to render the production of literature in African languages all but impossible.

The difficulties faced by African writers and readers are enormous, but there are successes to be noted, and these successes are also examined in this first section. Bernth Lindfors, in his article "African Little Magazines," investigates the role played by the many small, independent, African magazines in promoting and analyzing African literature; Matthew Umukoro, in his article, "Radio and Development," points to the yet unrealized potential of radio for disseminating native literature to the African public. Niyi Osundare's article entitled "Bard of the Tabloid Platform: A Personal Experience of Newspaper Poetry in Nigeria" recounts Osundare's own efforts to bring poetry to the person in the street. This article demonstrates that, despite the problems of poverty and illiteracy, the determined writer can create an interested audience for his work. As Osundare himself puts it, the newspaper is a forum where he, as poet, can "stress the inevitability of change and the possible triumph of justice" (p. 81). Also in this section is an article by Eustace Palmer, in which she

affirms that despite the many barriers to its creation and reception, African literature has an enormous potential for inspiring change in Africa.

The second section of the book, *Literature in Development: Critical Models*, is comprised of essays which examine concepts of individual and collective identity in the literature of African writers. In "Discourses of the Self: Gender and Identity in Francophone African Women's Writing," Renee Larrier explores the role of race and gender in self conceptualization through the autobiographical works of writers such as Nafissatou Diallo and Ken Bugul.

Addressing one of the fundamental questions of African literature and African development—agency—Larrier concludes that the existence of such narratives demonstrates that the very act of "[w]riting oneself, or rather, a women's experience, into history is empowering" (p. 133). Taking the question of agency from a different angle, Cecil Abrahams explores the relationship between the works of Alex La Guma and Ongane Waly Serote and the political reality in South Africa. Abrahams examines the representation of racially motivated social injustice in the works of both writers, and shows how the call for action these writers issued in their works coincided with changing attitudes and action in racially divided South Africa.

Other articles in the section explore ideas of development in the works of writers such as Haiti's J.S. Alexis, Morocco's Tahar Ben Jelloun and Guadeloupe's Maryse Conde. Although heavily Francophone in its orientation, this section does provide analyses of questions of development in both English and African language texts. Robert Philipson, for example, points out the evolution of the individual in the Swahili novel; Thelma Ravell-Pinto undertakes the question of whether the white perspective of black South Africans has shifted with the change in social structure in that country through a reading of Nadine Gordimer's *My Son's Story*.

The third section of the book, *Literature for Development: A Principle*, contains only George Lamming's keynote address at the 1987 conference. This address, entitled "On Cultural Sovereignty" is placed so that it constitutes a thematic center of the book, and rightly so. In his address, Lamming deals directly with the potential of literature to effect social and political change; he also brings in, for the first time, the role of the critic, who functions as "a mediator of the text" (p. 257). Lamming suggests that the critic, the writer, the reader and the text interact to create what he calls "sovereignty...the capacity and therefore the intention of a people as total society to exercise control over the material base of their survival and a commitment to define and redefine their own reality" (p. 258). Literature, he asserts, is fundamental to a people's ability to control their own destiny, which is to say, to evolve in the "logogenetic" manner about which Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie wrote in her essay.

Lamming also emphasizes that the connection between literature and change is well known to those who would stifle development in Africa, which is, as he reminds us, why writers in Africa (and elsewhere in the world) are so often imprisoned, and even killed.

The fourth section of the book, *Literature as Development: Activist Pedagogy*, follows from Lamming's recognition of the critic as teacher and teacher as critic, and examines the ways in which the teaching of African literature, both on the continent and elsewhere, can contribute to positive change in and for Africa. The two articles in this section, Mildred Hill-Lubin's "Putting Africa into the Curriculum through African Literature" and Stephen Arnold's "Creating African Literature in an Oral Environment: The Guelph/Yaounde Project and the Association For Creative Teaching in Cameroon," present practical steps which can be taken to promote the creation and reception of African literature. Hill-Lubin provides very concrete advice on bringing African literature into

U.S. classrooms at all levels and in various subjects, while Arnold relates the successes realized by one project attempting to bring African literature to African classrooms. Very practical in their subject matter, both articles have at their core the premise explored in the more theoretical essays--that literature is essential to Africa's growth.

In lieu of a formal conclusion, the editors have included, as the last section of the book, transcripts from a roundtable entitled "Writers and Critics on African Literature and Development." Here, writers such as Assia Djebar, Amadou Kone, and Barbara Gloudon, along with critics such as Eustace Palmer and Biodun Jeyifo, speak about their own experiences as writers of African literature and their views on the direction development of Africa.

These writers echo the sentiments presented earlier in the book, and often go even further, to suggest political and social action which should be taken to promote growth in Africa. Abiola Irele, for example, opens the roundtable by calling for a "capturing of Western technology...to improve [Africa's] material state," along with the simultaneous participation of literature as a means for "bringing [Africans] to a certain understanding of ourselves" (pp. 290-91); Femi Osufan closes the session by asserting that "the writer who wants to produce better literature has to try to...make sure literature is a part of the struggle of [African] people to survive" (p. 305).

The words of these writers reinforce the ideas and sentiments presented elsewhere in the book and provide confirmation that African literature is closely tied to African development, and consciously so.

As a whole, *Mapping Intersections: African Literature and Africa's Development* provides a thorough interrogation of the relationship between literature and development in Africa. The structure of the book and the content of the essays included function together to provide a multi-faceted exploration of the problems and potential

for literature on the African continent to encourage social and political change. The inclusion of essays on education, literacy, government involvement, and reception of texts, as well as direct analysis of African literary texts, ensures that there is something in this book to appeal to every Africanist.

Notes

[1]. The relationship between literature and development has been examined, of course, by Ngugi wa Thiang'o in several of his works.

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