Reimagining African communities: Achebe, Ngugi, Gordimer, Farah and the Anglophone African novel

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the novels of Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Nadine Gordimer, and Nuruddin Farah, paying special attention to the relationship between language and nation, nation and race, as well as culture and language. The study explores how each of these contemporary Anglophone African writers uses modified versions of English to help build cross-cultural bridges in an increasingly trans-national world. It examines how the various manifestations of the English language in the traditionally non-English speaking nations of these writers constitute an anglophone African literary-linguistic continuum. This anglophone African literary-linguistic continuum provides the point of reference for examining how diverse linguistic, literary, cultural, as well as religious expressions converge into a discourse that facilitates intra-, pan- and trans-national communication within and outside the continent. The dissertation establishes that the works of these four authors—from four different parts of the African continent—affirm the plurality of Anglophone African writings, a plurality which continues to defy a unified theory, mainly due to the literary-linguistic and cultural circumstances of the authors and their respective nations. It also affirms that any language—foreign or indigenous—can help subjects reimagine their nation, regardless of their ethnic background, race or religious affiliation, so long as they make that language relevant to their literary expression. The dissertation emphasizes how the many manifestations of English help rather than harm cross-cultural national and transnational discourse. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the English language embodies the various discourses of sub-Saharan anglophone Africa in an attempt to enable cross-cultural, intra-national and transnational literary discourse.