

Reviews

The Rise of the African Novel: Politics of Language, Identity, and Ownership

by MUKOMA WA NGUGI

Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2018. Pp. 228. \$24.95 (pbk).

doi:10.1017/S0022278X1800068X

In the introduction to his monograph, Mukoma Wa Ngugi states that the book is not the African equivalent of Ian Watt's study on *The Rise of the Novel*. I see this disclaimer as an author's attempt at modesty, for what Ngugi offers in his *The Rise of the African Novel* is an ambitious study that traces the African novel beyond the conventional starting date in the 1950s and 1960s. Ngugi, a crime fiction writer himself, retraces the steps of African literary criticism, taking issues with the canonisation of the Makerere writers who gathered in 1962 in Kampala. Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Mukoma Wa Ngugi's father) and Obi Wali were among the writers who congregated for the conference of the 'African Writers of English Expression'. As the story goes and as recounted by the younger Ngugi, these writers struggled with the compatibility of the oppressor's language to the project of decolonisation. Whereas Achebe and others conceded English's adaptability to the task of African literary productions, Obi Wali and Thiong'o insisted on African languages as the appropriate vehicle of the continent's literary expressions. While acknowledging the importance of developing literatures in African languages, Ngugi recognises the pain of writers like Achebe who opted for English not only out of pragmatic consideration but also because English has become part of Africa's cultural heritage. Ngugi analyses the cost of English ascendancy which is that while African literature in English has thrived, those in African languages have been suppressed.

One implication of this suppression is the elision of earlier African writings such as the South African examples that Ngugi foregrounds. In fact, Ngugi's proposal is for a reconstructed history of the novel in Africa, one that accounts for the writings pre-dating the Makerere generation. As he puts it, 'there is much to be gained by reading the early South African literature in relation to the literature of decolonisation and to the transnational literature being produced by younger African writers like NoViolet Bulawayo and Chimamanda Adichie' (9). Ngugi models this interpretive frame in Chapter 3 of his book where he reads A.C. Jordan's *The Wrath of the Ancestors* alongside Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. Against earlier categorisations of African literature, Ngugi proposes that the accommodationist impulse of the earlier South African writings qualify them as 'synthesis' while the anticolonial and global bent of Achebe's and Bulawayo's works make them fall under the rubrics of 'decolonisation' and 'transnationalism', respectively. In other words, pre-Makerere represents synthesis, the Makerere

generation stands for decolonisation, while the younger generation of African writers, the post-Makerere generation, belong to the transnational subset.

Even while establishing his own category, one achievement of Ngugi's study is his refusal of rigid boundaries in generic and disciplinary formations: 'the more borderless we allow African literature to be in terms of its literary history, languages, and genres, the richer the African literary literature' (161). Expanding on the implications of a borderless African literature for pedagogy, Ngugi claims that 'there is no reason why, for instance, an African literature survey course cannot start with early African writing, the Makerere, and post-Makerere writing, while including popular fiction' (161). Heterogeneity is fundamental to Ngugi's argument, and we see this reflected in his discussion of the language of African literature. Although he decries the lack of attention to literature in African languages, which motivated his cofounding the Mabati–Cornell Kiswahili Prize for African Literature, he does not seek the abdication of English. Rather he wants to see greater support and visibility for writings in African languages as complementary and not in opposition to their English counterparts.

Ngugi's book compares to such works as Evan Mwangi's *Africa Writes Back to Self: Metafiction, Gender, Sexuality* (SUNY 2009), which also advocates for taking seriously literature in African languages and works published and circulated on the continent. Scholars and students of African literature will thank Ngugi for bringing the history of their field together in a comprehensive manner. While repositioning marginalised texts and reordering the cartography of the field, he brings fresh perspectives to older debates such as the role of language in African aesthetics. The lasting significance of *The Rise of the African Novel* is further guaranteed by its account of recent innovations in the African literary sphere including the vibrant work of digital platforms, including *Jalada*. It is remarkable that platforms such as *Jalada*, doing excellent work to support translation and original works in African languages, are based on the continent. Ngugi concludes that the *Jalada* collective is 'proving the feasibility of a democratisation of linguistic and literary spaces' (68). One can make the same claim for his book, a significant addition to the scholarship in African literary criticism and history of the novel.

CAJETAN IHEKA
University of Alabama

Africa and Global Health Governance: Domestic Politics and International Structures by AMY S. PATTERSON

Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018. Pp. 240. \$25 (pbk).

doi:10.1017/S0022278X18000691

Amy S. Patterson examines African patterns of involvement in global health governance and questions why states that lack capacity and receive sizeable donor resources do or do not participate in the design and implementation of health campaigns (2). Patterson's main argument and takeaway is that African actors in health governance are far from powerless – African actors are agents in global health governance and the interplay of international, state and societal