

PROGNOSTIC IMAGINATION AND AFRICAN LITERARY WRITERS IN THE CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN POSTCOLONY: A STUDY OF CHIGOZIE OBIOMA'S *THE FISHERMEN*

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Abstract

This study examines the role of African writers in projecting future possibilities within the African postcolony through the framework of prognostic imagination, especially in recent times when excessive power is wielded in the postcolony, leaving it fragile and precarious. African literature has traditionally focused on revisiting colonial histories and interrogating the socio-political crises of post-independence societies. While such retrospective engagement remains important, it often limits the imaginative capacity of literature to envision alternative futures for the continent. The problem that motivates this research is the continued dominance of backward-looking and retrospective narratives in African literary discourse, which creates a gap in exploring the prophetic or anticipatory role that literature can perform in shaping future consciousness. The purpose of this research is to investigate how writers can move beyond retrospective representations to assume a visionary role that anticipates possible trajectories for African societies through the imaginative power of prognosis, thereby guiding readers toward the future. The study analyzes *The Fishermen* by Chigozie Obioma. Using qualitative textual analysis, the research is theoretically grounded in the postcolonial framework of Achille Mbembe, particularly his concepts of commandment, entanglement, intimacy of power, and necropolitics. The study is limited to selected contemporary African novels that demonstrate elements of prophetic imagination. Findings reveal that the writer employs symbolism, prophecy, narrative foreshadowing, and speculative imagination to critique present socio-political realities while projecting possible futures within the African postcolony. The study concludes that African writers possess the creative capacity to function not only as chroniclers of past and present experiences but also as visionary agents of future consciousness. It recommends increased scholarly engagement with prognostic imagination.

Keywords: African Writers, African literature, Prognosis, Literary techniques, Postcolony/ theory on the postcolony

Introduction

Across centuries, the role of the African writer has oscillated between that of a historian, social critic, and cultural reformer. From the pre-colonial griot that preserved communal memory through oral performance to the postcolonial novelist who interrogated imperial domination, African literature has consistently mirrored the continent's moral and political evolution, but anticipatory narratives in African literature remained underexplored in the African postcolonial state. This is not the fact, that significant percentage of research findings and writings in African literature identify that African literature has long served as a powerful medium for reflecting on pre-colonial, colonial, post-colonial legacies, social change, identity, and the complex realities of post-colonial life. As a result of this, much critical attention has been devoted to retrospective and diagnosed narratives, which are stories steeped in lived pre-colonial experiences, colonial disruption, historical trauma, and memory, thereby down playing the role of African literary artists, who delved in such thematic preoccupation or project such motif. On this note Mba (2023) avers, "instead of straight line, we have something resembling a circle, African writers repeatedly return to and in a sense rewrite the past, both literary and historically". Less explored are those works that engage in imaginative projection: narratives that foresee, anticipate, or speculate on future social, moral, and political trajectories of postcolonial African societies.

Foundational voices in African literature, such as Elechi Amadi, Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ WaThiong'o, Wole Soyinka, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Ayikwei Armah, Christopher Okigbo, Nadine Gordimer, Mongo Beti, Dennis Brutus, Thoms Mofolo, Sembene Ousmane, Ferdinand Oyono and Peter Abrahams wrote powerfully against pre-colonial experience, colonial domination, cultural alienation, and political betrayal. Later theorists such as Edward Said, Frantz Fanon and Homi Bhabha framed the postcolonial subject as trapped within hybridity, mimicry, and resistance. Within the present postcolonial condition or what Achille Mbembe (2001) coined 'the postcolony' a deeper creative responsibility emerges; the need for a writer to become a prophet of possibility, one who speaks into an uncertain and unstable future. In line with this thought, Achebe alleges,

is a self-imposed responsibility hoisted on the writer by the realities of his existence, any African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of the contemporary Africa will end

up being completely irrelevant like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his house burning to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames (Dasylva 2003).

Coincidentally, early novels of the African literary epoch lamented the failure of post-independence Africa. Portraying a condition marked by uniform corruption, callousness, political incapacity and hypocrisy. At this cradle, African writers were committed to unveiling the mendacity of the state understood as a continuation of colonial power structures rather than a rupture from them and their future consequences. Some of these literary works have left an indelible mark on literature, transcending borders and captivating readers worldwide. Although contemporary African literature continues to captivate readers, some works by African authors remain timeless. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, a landmark novel, stands as a foundational text examining the disruptive effect of colonialism on African societies. Through the tragic journey of Okonkwo the protagonist of the novel, Achebe compellingly depicts the tension between deeply rooted traditions and the forces of change. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's powerful novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* is set against the turbulent backdrop of Nigerian civil war. The story intricately interlaces the experiences of three central characters, presenting a moving exploration of love, loss, and the intricate realities of the wartime. Consequently, Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* recounts the story of Mustafa Sa'eed's return to his home village after years of study in England. The narrative probes deeply into questions of identity, the legacy of colonialism, and the fraught encounter between differing cultures. In *Nervous Conditions*, Tsitsi Dangaremba's striking debut novel portrays the challenges faced by a young girl, in post-colonial Zimbabwe. It offers a penetrating reflection on gender dynamics, access to education and the enduring effect of colonial legacies.

In African Republic of the Congo, Alain Mabanckou, Congo- Brazzaville, unfolds *Black Moses* as a darkly comic coming-of-age tale. Through its vivid storytelling, it examines questions of identity, youth defiance, and the longing for a sense of belonging. Mariama Ba's ground breaking novel, *So Long a Letter*, offers a moving meditation on the experiences of a woman in Senegal. Through the voice of the main character, Ramatoulaye, Ba thoughtfully engages with the themes of polygamy, cultural tradition, and the weight of social expectations. Ngugiwa Thiong'o is not left out; he presents a satirical examination of postcolonial politics within a fictional African nation, using *Wizard of the Crow*. Blending elements of magical realism with incisive social critique, he delivers a richly layered and intellectually stimulating narrative, while in *Petals of Blood* chronicles a compelling exploration of postcolonial disillusionment in Kenya. The novel deftly intertwines the lives of four central characters, engaging deeply with themes of exploration, identity formation and collective resistance. Coetzee J.M.'s Nobel Prize, winning novel probes the intricate realities of post-apartheid South Africa. Through the experiences of David Lurie, the narrative examines issues of power, the possibility of redemption, and the unsettling terrain of moral ambiguity. The post-independence of Ghana is captured in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, showcasing the ethical and political deterioration within society. Ayi Kwei Armah relentlessly reflects on the corruption and the pressures on societal expectations.

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Mbembe's notion of 'the postcolony' turns attention inward, highlighting the lived realities of power, banality, survival, and repetition that shape African life after colonialism. In his view, postcolony is marked by paradoxes: the persistence of authoritarian structures in the guise of independence, the cyclical crises of governance, and the entanglement of modernity in ways that often reproduce, rather than transcend, colonial dynamics (Ogbazi:39). Igwe (2010) concurred with Mbembe by stating, "Africa Postcolony defaults the hopes and legacies of the founding fathers of Africanism bringing to naught the belief and pride in African cultural heritage espoused by Pan-Africanism". Globally, the twenty-first century is marked by moral and existential

crisis. The wars in Ukraine and Gaza, the eminent immigration policies taking place in United State of America by Donald Trump, more against the blacks, economic inequality and late capitalism, forced migration and refugee crisis, the collapse of economies, the corrosion of democratic ethics, terrorism, banditry, incessant kidnapping, random maiming of human lives, killing, and the erosion of collective human values have produced a climate of fear and despair. Within Africa, these global fractures are compounded by endemic corruption, insecurity, unemployment, and the failure of political leadership, Nigeria not an exception. Against this backdrop, rather than resigning to cynicism, the African writer must guide their readers towards the future. Out of the disorder of the postcolony must emerge a new literary consciousness one that transforms disillusionment into the grammar of hope, if any, because presently hopelessness looms in African futures as Obioma prognoses in *The Fishermen*.

The Fishermen (2015) powerfully exemplifies this prognostic function of African narrative. Set in 1990s Nigeria during a period of military dictatorship, the novel allegorizes the collapse of moral order through the story of four brothers whose destinies are ruptured by a madman's prophecy. Through allegory, symbolism, and psychological realism, Obioma narrates the destructive legacies of failed leadership, superstition, and fraternal division, reflecting Nigeria's fractured nationhood. Yet, beneath the tragedy lies a deeper moral call: the need for reconciliation and rebirth. In this way, the novel transforms prophecy from fatalism into foresight, suggesting that healing is possible when societies confront the ghosts of their past. "Prognosis, in this sense, becomes both an ethical and imaginative act of resistance, a reclaiming of futurity from the distortions of colonial narratives that once denied Africa any history or destiny", Fanon, (1963).

In the light of this, African literary novel tied to the liberation struggle and nation-building, cannot now retreat into aesthetic detachment when socio-political fabric remains fragile and unfinished. The moment is one of crisis and continuity, where residues of colonial domination coexist with emergent forms of internal oppression and global marginality. Within this paradoxical terrain, the writer's responsibility becomes prognostic to diagnose the present disorder and anticipate its moral and historical consequences. To engage in prognosis, African writers transform literature into a laboratory of vision, where the writers reconstruct the fragments of the past intertwined with the present and projects them into possibilities of becoming, as Ogbazi (2025) penned;

African artists' propensity for political, social and cultural commitment reflects prognosis impulse to diagnose; critique and recommend a cure, often involve revolution or tumultuous revolt against an oppressive post-colonial regime run by who Achille Mbembe has termed the "autocrat". Much of the writing following post independence literary oeuvre were prognostic in nature as they decried the crippling politics of African leaders who reinvented the servitude and ethnic bigotry that existed in colonial Africa. African postcolony is a stream of overflowing sensibilities, temporalities, and subjectivities where in African, obscured by the clamour for freedom, are compelled to advance to embellished subjecthood. The postcolony, as Mbembe argues is pluralistic and characterized by chaos and violence that reveals its "tendency for excess and lack of proportion (38-39).

While earlier African writers such as Elechi Amadi, Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ WaThiong'o and Wole Soyinka, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Ayikwei Armah, Christopher Okigbo, Nadine Gordimer, Mongo Beti, Dennis Brutus, Thoms Mofolo, Sembene Ousmane, Ferdinand Oyono, Peter Abrahams, etc emphasized literature as an instrument of reclamation, education and decolonization, this seminar paper argues for an additional function; literature as foresight, mutating african literary artists as foretellers, keeping them at foresight instead at the hindsight of postcolonial state. So the problem of this research lies at the boarder of African literary scholarship largely concentrating on interpreting pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial histories without developing structured anticipatory or prolepsis frameworks for imagining Africa's future, even within the persistent fluidity and unpredictability realities of postcolony state. This backward- looking focus leaves a critical gap in understanding how literature can function as a tool for prognosis which transforms writers as seers. This research therefore interrogates how contemporary African literary text; Obioma Chigozie's *The Fishermen* diagnose present postcolonial conditions and project possible futures shaped by power, autocracy, fear, and repetition. It involves also, analysing how narrative strategies such as prophecy, allegory, and institutional breakdown reflect Mbembe's notions of the postcolony, while revealing Afro- pessimist prognostic visions of Africa's future, especially Nigeria.

Conceptual Review

This seminar paper is guided by five interrelated concepts that form the backbone of its analytical orientation: Prognosis, Literary Techniques, African literature and Writers, Postcolony and Theory of *On the Postcolony*. Each of these provides a lens for interrogating the selected text; *The Fishermen*.

Prognosis

Etymologically, prognosis is derived from “medical science refers to the prediction of the likely development of a disease based on current symptoms”, According to Risor and Nissen (2018),

Diagnosing and prognosis are closely related practices mobilised in biomedicine to name disease and anticipate its course. Upon diagnosis with long term disease, people often rely upon information given to them by health care professionals regarding the stage and timing of their illness course, what to expect, and when it might occur; these temporal aspect of illness are collectively referred to as prognosis, while the future is uncertain for all people, whether they live with a disease or not, prognosis serves to allay some of that uncertainty by foregrounding some possibilities regarding disease course as more probable, even certain, than others. Prognosis thrusts people into the future, giving a sense of reassurance to the person that the future, no matter how undesirable it might be, is determined, and at the same time, relieves the uncertainty that accompanies diagnostic practices and processes.

Subsumed to literary discourse, prognosis metaphorically denotes the ability of the text to anticipate, foreshadow, and imagine future trajectories of the societies. “Anticipating the future requires imagination which is an important methodological tool allowing access to the uncertainties of life”, Stevenson (2014). As Eagleton (2008) reminds us, “literature is not merely reflective but constitutive of social realities” it narrates contradictions while suggesting possible outcomes”. In the African context, where colonial and postcolonial histories continue to entangle present realities, prognosis thrusts readers into the future, giving a sense of reassurance to them, that the future, no matter how undesirable it might be, is determined, and at the same time, relieves the uncertainty that accompanies diagnostic practices and processes.

Hence, it becomes an interpretive tool for understanding how literature functions as foresight. Prognosis emphasizes the persistence of social, political, and economic challenges; tends to see African futures as constrained or stagnant (Mbembe 2001). Ogbazi (2025) opines; “prognosis from the perspective of African literary writing refers to the anticipated outcome of a situation which the writer foretells. It refers to how the future is envisioned through the ‘stethoscopes’ of present realities”. She further argues that;

Admst the present realities of postmodern world where the power of democracy continues to be questioned, African literature and cultural expressions have had to wrestle with an Afropessimist prognosis one in which Africa is denied hope for the future. As a concept used mostly in the medical field, it is fundamental to understanding a disease, it’s fundamental to understand the disease, its potential for complications, foreseeable outcomes which could be recovery, recurrence, or death. In literature, it covers a broad spectrum from inferences in and about the novel, its characters and plots, to how the novel as a work of art within a society reflects, predicts, and prophesies about the future (40).

There are significant works on prognosis imagination in African literature, though they are often discussed using terms like, futurism, social regeneration, vision, and postcolonial futures, reimagination rather than the specific medical term prognosis. Megbowon (2020) states;

The contemporary societies across the world are faced with the burden of prevalent and diverse societal wrongdoings which have possible future implications that are alarming and worrisome if not controlled”. Therefore, the need for societal regeneration for a better future becomes imperative and this change can be achieved by various means.

The above extract, argues that African literature can be considered a tool through which the desired change can be achieved, she demonstrates how African literature fulfill the criteria of being prognostic imaginative, time and sculpting the future. For Megbowon, prognosis is regeneration.

A keynote address by Owuor (2025) views prognostic as Reworlding. She foregrounds, African writers’ function can neither be revolution or reformation, rather;

African writers should tell a new powerful tale, one so persuasive, that sweeps away the old myths and becomes the preferred story, one so inclusive that gathers all the bits of our past and present into a coherent whole, one that even shines some light into our future, so that we can take the next step. A step to rewind Africa is to intentionally choose to re-mystify the human and the earth, to awaken the deep desire to swallow, to transmute the horrible deluge of fear. Reworlding Africa is transmission: the recalling into being of all that is gorgeously possible in existence, once more.

When the efforts of a literary writer are measured against tangible positive social change, the desperate remain evident. This observation leads the researcher to propose a new thematic orientation one that moves beyond merely depicting societal dysfunction to consciously constructing an ideal society in which embody the values and possibilities African society ought to pursue. With Africa as the central concern, such an orientation seeks to

better and equip society to confront the challenges of globalization. This approach does not negate the inherent fictionality of the novel (literature); rather, it strengthens it by advancing narratives that are not solely anchored in the past. Such a shift may open a new avenue of relevance and appeal for future African literary production. The future directed stance is a core feature of prognosis. According to Abdoulaye (2018) “prognosis does not merely identify problems, it projects potential outcomes or alternatives in the future. By advocating narratives that are not solely anchored in the past, it signals a shift towards constructive foresight rather than retrospective critique”. It explicitly anticipates future consequences, which is a defining marker of prognostic discourse. It strategically engages with globalization, framing literature as a tool to make up the challenge of globalization, positions the novel as an instrument for future social preparedness further reinforcing its prognostic character, (Dike 2021). Although it begins with diagnosis, later advances into prognosis, which is the proposal of an ideal, future oriented literary model and imaging constructive possibilities for African society, but Nigeria in particular.

There is a growing body of work specifically in Afrofuturism/ Africanfuturism, which uses speculative writing to imagine black futures and civilizations, engaging with global juristic discourses and reclaiming historical narratives. Authors such as Nnedi Okorafor are central to this movement. Afro futurism reveals the ongoing impact of colonialism and slavery on the lives of black individuals’ globally.” Udisi E.S. (2024). He further opines that,

It is evident how Afrofuturism offers a space for defiance, enabling people to envision different possibilities for the future and question prevailing stories. The convergence of Afrofuturism and technology brings to light the possibilities for groundbreaking advancements and forward-thinking, while also recognizing the dangers of upholding current systems of authority.

To align the above expression to prognosis, it is evident; futurity reminds us of numerous possibilities literature holds for grappling with the challenges of both today and tomorrow, bring to light how reflections on the past create tools for the future, (Eshel, 2012). Afrofuturism functions as a prognostic framework through which alternative futures are imagined, enabling resistance to dominant narratives while projecting transformative possibilities. Its intersection with technology foregrounds forward-looking innovations that anticipate social renewal, even as it critically warns against the reproduction of existing structures of power in future challenges. Similarly, Ogbazi (2025) notes “prognosis in African literature serves to reveal current trends, their historical antecedents and their possible impact on the future of the continent, she includes texts which explore theme of illness, war, violence, assaults, corruption, fraud and so on” (40).

Prognosis can be classified into three modes Afro-pessimist, Afro-optimist and Afro-realist prognosis. When novels are read as prognosis of Africa’s future, they sometimes disclose an Afropessimist prognosis, which refers a literary outlook that anticipates Africa’s future as a continuation or worsening of its historical crisis. Afropessimist writings have one virtue; they do not whitewash Africa’s problems. Further, they aptly refuse to excuse the outrages of some African dictators on the basis of political ideology or racial identity. In particular they refuse to use colonial exploitation to mask postcolonial Kleptocracy; the personalization of state power, and the politics of prebendalism, (<https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/dic...Afropessimist>). In this mode of prognosis, novels project futures marked by political decay, failed leadership, corruption, and social and economic stagnation. Afrofuturism warns and critiques by interrogating the dangers of maintain existing hierarchies and systems of oppression (Womack 2013).

The future appears cyclical rather than progressive, suggesting that Africa remains trapped in structures inherited from colonialism and internal misrule. Such texts functions as warnings, they foresee bleak outcomes of prevailing systems and attitudes remain unchanged.

Afro optimism prognosis is a literary perspective that foregrounds hope, resilience, and potential in African societies despite historical and contemporary challenges. It interprets African narratives as visions of possible positive futures, emphasizing the agency of individuals, communities, and institutions in shaping these futures. It promotes narrative of innovation, agency and social reform. Its core features are constructive, inspirational, and forward-looking for instance, Appiah (1992) emphasizes possibilities for moral and cultural renewal in African contexts. Onwudiwe and Ibelembe (2002), assert Africans had to overcome colonial obstacles or had to build on meager colonial foundations. Although, they acknowledge Africa’s disappointing performance in various respects, they stress throughout that exclusive concentration on African failures create new and reinforces existing negative perceptions of contemporary Africa. They contend development is about human beings, so they do not rely exclusively on statistical estimates and projections.

Afro-Realist Prognosis strikes a balance between pessimism and optimism, by recognizing the difficulties, African societies face while also acknowledging possibilities for progress. It often portrays nuanced,

multifaceted futures rather than purely bleak or idealized outcomes. The core characteristics of Afro-Realist are balanced, pragmatic, grounded in observable social dynamics. Example Adichie (2000) reflects both the trauma of history and the resilience of its characters. Rautekus and Daniels (n.d) calls this hybrid literary practices Afro-realism, showcasing how black and white authors used to represent black life and race with both emotional depth and social depth. Although they focused on African-American fiction encyclopedia Britannica's article on African-American literature reviewing the rise of urban realism in the 20th century, with writers like Richard Wright (Native son, Black boy) whose work depicts Black life and racial oppression in concrete, realistic terms.

In a nutshell, literary prognosis is not, strictly speaking of a technique rather it functions as a critical model or interpretative framework (a vision or logic). It describes writers' orientation toward the future; that is how a text imagines, anticipates, warns or speculates about what lies ahead, especially in relation to historical and political conditions. In the contemporary African literature (Nigeria to be precise), prognoses often emerges as a response to colonialism, postcolonial failure or ongoing imperial entanglement, but in the postcolonial state, this imagination often emerges from disillusionment, cycles of failed leadership and external intervention, the search for futures not determined by colonial residues.

Literary Techniques and Devices

Literary techniques and literary devices are tools writers use to shape meaning, guide readers' interpretations and subtly control how a story unfolds, including how readers anticipate the future of characters and events. Matvejeva, (2024) writes "Literary devices are ways if taking writing beyond its straightforward, literal meaning. They help to guide the reader on how to appreciate a piece. Examples are; metaphor, simile, and analogy, which form comparison literary device" net. Ford and Morgan (n.d) viewed the concepts along side with literary element, while they comment;

Literary elements, techniques and devices are tools that writers use to enthrall their stories and make them more interesting. Literary elements could be plot, setting, character, theme and conflict. These are the basic components of a story that the author uses to build their narratives. Literary techniques on the other hand, are methods of writing that authors use to express their ideas. These include foreshadowing, flashbacks, irony, and symbolism. Literary devices are specific tools that writers use to create a certain effect. These include metaphor, simile, personification, and alliteration. All these elements, techniques, and devices are used to make the story more engaging and help readers connect characters and the plot.

Alshamiri and Murshed (2025) refer the concepts as "stylistic devices. They view both concepts as linguistic tools used and employed by writers to bring about beauty and attraction in their literary works. They are elated to sound others to structure and meaning". These techniques enable the articulation of complex experiences, political, cultural, and spiritual in forms that resonate with local sensibilities while engaging global literary disclosure. The study of the stylistic feature is within the thrust of Chinweizu et al (1980) landscape, *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*; which outlined model of what should be an ideal style of writing that adds credence, aura, colour, vitality, authenticity, uniqueness and peculiarity to the works of African writers. They opine:

A necessity of linguistic experimentation lies in the fact that Africans do not use English the way the English do, and in the fact that the rhetoric devices of each African language community are peculiar to it and are a legacy of its cultural inheritance. If a flavour of African life is therefore to be captured in novels written in English, English language has to be flexed and bent to allow these idiomatic and rhetorical usages to be presented. Several African writers have experimented to this end; some have been more successful than others.

Style deduces from the above assertion, entails a writer choice of word, diction, narrative techniques, linguistic foregrounding, gestures, sentence patterning, and structuring, direct transliteration, descriptive quality, tonal level and speech pattern among other distinctive qualities that mark one out of a crowd of the likes of him. Verdonk (2003) defines style in language as "a distinctive manner of expression or a distinctive linguistic expression". Style is the man. Abram and Harper (2005) define style:

As a manner of linguistic expression in prose or verse – as how speakers or writers say whatever it is that they say. It is specific to a particular work or writer, or else distinctive of a type of writing, has been analysed in such diverse terms as the rhetorical situation and aim; the characteristic direction or choice of words; the type of sentence structure and syntax; and the density and kinds of figurative language.

Stylistic features in African literature are equally diverse and innovative. The oral heritage of repetition, code mixing, code switching and proverbial wisdom permeates the works of African writers like, Okot' p' Bitek,

Achebe and Soyinka, which help them to achieve success in an afrocentric literary landscape. In line with this, Chinweizu (1980) reflects that so much in the African oral narrative style, where the true picture of a typical African social discourse situation comes alive in the creative works of the writers, African Orature is maximized. That is “African Vernacular Style” as coined out by Bernth Lindfors.

However, within the context of this discourse, such techniques offer the aesthetic means to express uncertainty, fear, hope, and speculative futures in ways that conventional, strictly realist narrative might not capture, as Ogbazi (2025) views “in predicting the future of the character, the author could hint at outcome through literary devices such as foreshadowing, symbolism, and prophecy which for instance, is evident in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, where the prophecies of the three witches were a prognosis of the future of Denmark, as well as the end of *Macbeth*” (40).

From literary perspective, this research is not only interested with how literary artists/writers employ techniques to foretell the consequences of their characters’ choices; rather, it is interested in how this, is a reflection of the author’s positionality and narrative intervention to occurrences in his/her society. So, literary devices/techniques refers to the narrative strategies, stylistic devices, and formal methods employed by African writers often combining oral tradition, motif, myth, symbolism, communal memory and modern literary form. It acknowledges the hybridity of African literature; rooted in both indigenous, oral-mythic heritage and global literary forms.

Narrowing this down to the text ‘*The Fishermen*’ chose for this research process, the researcher will like to elaborate solely on the ones Obioma deployed, such as prophecy (Foreshadowing), symbolic imagery, (river as site of doom, water/fishing as metaphor) and a narrative structure that blends past, present, and future reflect Mbembe’s notions of the postcolony, while revealing Afro-pessimist prognostic visions of Africa’s future.

African Literature

According to Nwachukwu-Agbada, et al (2019), “literature has two senses one is everything ‘written’ which would refer to texts produced in disciplines such as law, the sciences, sports, religion, economics, chemistry etc, but for the literature as a subject of study, we mean a creative or imaginative work of art produced by a poet, dramatist or novelist”. Tracing the history of literature, research shows that, it has commonly be used since 18th century, equivalently with the French belles’ letters (fine letters), to designate fictional and imaginative writings; poetry, prose fiction, and drama. Abrams and Harpham (2012) opine that,

In an expanded use, it designates also any other writings including philosophy, history and even scientific works addressed to a general audience that are especially distinguished in form, expression, and emotional power. It is in this large sense of the term that we call ‘literary’ the philosophical writings of Plato and William James, the historical writings of Edward Gibbon, the scientific essays of Thomas Henry Huxely, and the psychoanalytic lectures of Sigmund Freud, and include them in the reading lists of some courses in literature...in its application to imaginative writing, ‘literature’ has an evaluative as well as descriptive fiction, so that its proper use has become a matter of contention (199).

Literature, whether handed down by the word of mouth, or in print, gives us a second handle on reality, enabling us to encounter in a safe, manageable dimension of make-believe the very same threat to integrity that may assail the psyche in real life, and at the same providing through the self discovery which imparts a ventable weapon for coping with these threats whether they are found within problematic and incoherent selves or in the world around us, (Achebe 1988). The intention of this research is not to discuss literature as a concept, but to narrow it down to African literature of which in its oral and written forms, has long served as a vital medium for preserving history, expressing cultural identity and addressing social and political realities within African states. “One cannot cram African literature in a small, neat definition, because African literature cannot be seen as one unit but as associated units in fact, the sum total of all the national and ethnic literatures of Africa” (Ezenwa-Ohaeto (102) quoting Chinua Achebe). Rooted in diverse traditions, African literary works often draw from indigenous languages, oral narrative and symbolic expressions, creating texts that are both artistically rich and culturally authentic. Contemporary African Literature (drama, poetry and prose) holds significant cultural, social and political importance. It offers a diverse range of perspectives on African identity, history and cultural issues, challenging stereotypes and misconceptions. It also provides a platform for African writers to share their stories with a global audience, contributing to a more inclusive literary landscape.

African Writers/Artists

An African writer can either be an African writer or a writer from Africa. One may conflate these terms but the two are distinct, while the former refers to a writer who affirms their Africa-ness as the source of their art, the latter refers to origin, a writer from Africa, (Anifowoshe 2020). They are acclaimed authors from Africa and diaspora noted for their compelling storytelling, wide- ranging perspectives, and enduring thematic depth. From foundational writers such as Chinua Achebe, NgugiwaThiong o, and Wole Soyinka to modern voices like

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Nuruddin Farah, Tsitsi Dangerembga, and Abdulrazak Gurnah, Obioma Chigozie, etc. These writers' works transverse different languages and genres, engaging experiences that stretch from the colonial past to contemporary formation of identity. Olugbemi-Gabriel, (2025) quotes Niyi Osundare, who defines writers as "righters, someone who must go beyond the ordinary to capture the living realities of his society, the view to bring about the more needed change". According to Adesanmi (2007) he states;

It is instructive to add that the writer in doing his job of writing cannot afford, like the proverbial ostrich, to bury his head in the sand of indifference while everything around his being is in a state of anomie, and far from the expectations of the people and the society at large. It is against this background that for the people living in postcolonial Africa, it can be safely concluded that it is not yet *uhuru* despite gaining independence from colonial rule because the joy and hope that pervaded the land after the involuntary exit of the colonizers have since given way to the fog of postcolonial disillusionment.

Those artists whose works emerge from, respond to, and interrogate African historical, social, political, and cultural realities. They are not mere storytellers, but agents of meaning. Commentators, witnesses, critics, and vision-markers are known as African Writers. In this research, they take a central place because they articulate experiences of postcolonial life in imaginative, symbolic, and narrative forms. By analysing Obioma as an African writer, the study situates him not simply as a novelist but as participant in a broader discourse, one where literature becomes a place of critique and foresight about African postcolony. Agbasiere (2000) describes African writers "as a teachers, a chroniclers, men of vision, a messiah and agents of change", as he uses some of the characters in Habila's novel to fulfill these important roles.

Most African writers have tended to draw their materials from past and continuing history of their people and have been showing their concern for or commitment to the aspirations of their people (Ugwuanyi 2014). In this discourse, highlighting African writers underscores that the text under study are rooted in indigenous contexts, and their voices emerge from internal dynamics of African societies; not from external, western-imposed narrative vantage point.

The Postcolony and Achille Mbembe's Theory on the Postcolony

The theoretical premise for this seminar is hinged in theory, *On the Postcolony*, detailed in Mbembe's influential book, titled *On the Postcolony*. Postcolony is not just a period, but a complex historical formation denoting specified attributes after colonial rule. It does not have a specific date, rather refers to a period following decolonization extending into contemporary moment. Postcolony is era after formal decolonization of Africa, but still grappling with the legacies of colonial power, ethnic division, economic instability, and political crisis, (Ogbazi 2005). Mbembe (2001) emphasis is "on a condition of governance and social life rooted in shaped by, and extending beyond colonial rule rather than a neat from-year-to-year era". "This stage of postcolonial studies marks a shift in which African writers increasingly turn inwards, focusing on self-examination and deeper exploration of their societies" (Barry 196). Achille Mbembe's *On the Postcolony* interrogates the complex, contradictory nature of African post-independence societies. For Mbembe, the postcolony is not a linear aftermath of colonial rule but a "chaotic plurality of times" (Mbembe 14), a temporal condition where the colonial past, the postcolonial present, and the imagined future coexist in entanglement. Power in the postcolony, he argues, is characterized by intimacy between ruler and ruled; a grotesque mimicry of colonial relations that produces both complicity and resistance. Mbembe's vision dismantles the myth of postcolonial liberation as a clean break. Instead, he reveals a repetition of power and violence, where the colonized subject remains trapped in cycles of domination and desire, like he states, "the postcolony is a particularly revealing, and rather dramatic, stage on which are played out the wider problems of subjection and subjectivity" (Mbembe 102). The modalities of this theory express ways power, subjectivity, and everyday life operates within African postcolonial states. According to Mbembe (2001), the postcolony is a space of "simultaneous entanglement," where domination and freedom coexist, producing moral and political ambiguity.

Mbembe, in *On the Postcolony*, develops his key idea of "entanglement" – the distinctive experience of time in the postcolony – as an "interlocking of presents, pasts, and futures that retain their depths of other presents, pasts, and futures" (Datta: 2025). Mbembe's analysis of postcolonial time as internally pluralistic and layered unchains methodologies of linear causality that view history as a transition from one stage to another. According to Mbembe, the postcolony, as a present experience of time, or as a time of the "now", is precisely that moment when different forms of absence become mixed together: absences of those presences that are no longer so and that one remembers (the past), and absences of those others that are yet to come and are anticipated (the future), (16). Unlike colonialism, which imposed external control, the postcolony is characterized by internalized systems of power and mimicry. In this ambiguous landscape, African societies oscillate between progress and paralysis, freedom and fear. As a result of the foregoing, these modes describe how the postcolonial condition is

lived, felt, practiced, and reproduced. These modes are highlighted; the commandment which refers to the authoritarian, bureaucratic, and often arbitrary exercise of state power. Power is performed in excessive, theatrical ways, mixing violence, ritual, humour, and intimidation. It shapes, how citizens relate to authority: with fear, compliance, and sometimes playful subversion. The second mode is the Banality of power: power in the postcolony is not only violent; it is also mundane, repetitive, and normalized. It appears in everyday interactions: police checkpoints, administrative delays, bribery, and casual authoritarianism. The Aesthetics of vulgarity is the third mode: Mbembeargues that social life in the postcolony is marked by an intimacy between rulers and ruled where both participate in exaggerated, vulgar, and ironic performances of power, such as political rallies, public rituals, and corruption. The intimacy of power: There is a mutual complicity between citizens and the state. People mock authority, relies on it, fear it, and sometimes help reproduce it. Power is not distant, it is personal, familiar. The postcolonial subject: Subjects in the postcolony live in a condition of dual consciousness, navigating contradictions, uncertainties, and fluid identities shaped by colonial residue and contemporary realities, (Mbembe 102)

In analytical use, the concept of post-colony provides the socio-historical and political backdrop against which the novel's events and symbolic structures are interpreted. It helps explain why prophetic imagination, moral collapse, and violence emerge, not as aberrations, but as symptomatic of structural conditions and inherited power dynamics (Olugbemi-Gabriel, O. 2025). Unlike Post-colonialism, especially as it concerns Africa, a springboard for what Barry refers to as "cultural resistance" which ultimately is "the first step for colonized people in finding a voice and an identity to reclaim their own past", Adesanmi (2007) projects postcolony as a spatial literary shift;

A phase critically important that marks understanding the writings of new writers from Africa, as it marks a clear departure from the much popular past time of rewriting and retelling the past. Although this critical 'new' phase in African literature is to a large extent being grown, germinating and concretizing abroad, this is realistically so because the postcolonial (African) writer tends to emigrate to the centre as a result of the push and pull factor.

Ogbazi (2025) on the discourse of *On the Postcolony* opines that;

First "post" in "post colony" as in "after the colony" is contentious owing to Africa's umbilical attachment to the west, especially with many African writers being forced into exile or moving away from the continent. However, the term is used here in a broader sense, drawing from Achille Mbembe to discuss an age marked by discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another, and envelop one another. The postcolony, as Mbembe argues is pluralistic and characterized by chaos and violence that reveals its "tendency for excess and lack of proportion. The emphasis on the postcolony, as an era, a concept, and movement centers' on unraveling how it is bestowed the burden of assertion, diagnosis, and cure on the African literary artist. It is because far from pre-colonial literature which focused on what is perceived as the reclamation project which the works of Chinua Achebe, Ngugi WA Thiong'o, Ferdinand Oyono, Peter Abrahams, and Sembene Ousmane to mention but these, reflected, the African writer in the postcolony had to challenge the surrogates of the colony, who are the new African leaders. The reclamation project was shortly outlived as the artist had to quickly, almost impulsively turn the land and the people for the next bout of criticism and creative outrage, Ayi Kwei Armah in *The Beautiful Ones Are not yet Born, Fragments: Chinua Achebe in No Longer at Ease, A Man of the people, and Anthills of the Savannah*; and Wole Soyinka in *The Interpreters* are all searing accounts of corruption and disillusionment with the political climate of Africa (38).

This insight above by Ogbazi, establishes a critical context for understanding African modernity not as a settled state but as a space of flux, a zone of becoming that demands new forms of thought and creativity. It is within this contradiction that prognosis becomes essential by weighing possible alternatives for African future. The postcolony provides the raw material for diagnosis of corruption, social decay, and political instability in constant guise presently, but it also demands creative foresight. African writers must imagine futures that transcend the colonial residue. In *The Fishermen*, for instance, the chaotic world of the Agwu brothers mirrors the fragmentation of the Nigerian state.

However, the modalities of the postcolony describe the styles, logics, and performances of power and life that define the African postcolonial condition, marked by authoritarian command, everyday banality, vulgar aesthetics, intimate complicity, and complex subjectivities.

Methodology

This seminar employs qualitative textual analysis, specifically close reading and thematic interpretation, to examine how prognosis operates within *The Fishermen*. Analysis focuses on; narrative structures of prophecy and prediction, particularly the role of Abulu's prophecy as a catalyst for future-oriented anxiety, Character psychology showcasing how belief in prophecy shapes actions and precipitates tragic outcomes, temporal imagination, exploring how the novel collapses past, present, and future in ways that mirror Mbembe's postcolonial temporality, and Socio-political allegory, interpreting the family's disintegration as a metaphor for the Nigerian postcolonial state. Through these analytical categories, the study investigates how prognosis functions both as a narrative ideology and as a commentary on postcolonial uncertainty. Prognosis is deployed as a critical tool to examine how literary text, imagines, anticipates, or forecloses the future. Prognosis is understood not as predictive certainty but as a speculative and imaginative engagement with possible futures, shaped by fear, hope, violence, and belief systems within the postcolony. By applying prognosis to *The Fishermen*, the research demonstrates how Obioma's narrative reflects Mbembe's assertion that the postcolony is a site where the future is continually negotiated but rarely secured. Prognosis thus becomes a means of revealing both the limitations and possibilities embedded in contemporary African literature.

Synthesizing the Fishermen with the Theory on the Postcolony

The timeline of this text is appropriate, that is from decolonization of Nigeria, 1960 to the 1990 and beyond. The Fishermen aligns almost seamlessly with Achille Mbembe's ideas of commandment, intimacy of power, entanglements and necropolitics. What Obioma does narrative, Mbembe theorizes conceptually. According to Mbembe, "the postcolony, as a present experience of time, or as a time of the "now", is precisely that moment when different forms of absence become mixed together: absences of those presences that are no longer so and that one remembers (the past), and absences of those others that are yet to come and are anticipated the future". (16). This idea of the postcolony as a specific experience of time, not just a historical period after colonialism but a condition of lived time, a way people experience the present in Africa.

Postcolonial Entanglement

Mbembe insists that the postcolony is not a clean break from colonialism but an entangled temporal space where past, present, and future coexist. Obioma's novel resonates forward because Abulu's prophecy collapses time: the future (death) invades the present and governs action. The Fishermen performs Mbembe's entanglement – history, myth, fear, and futurity fold into one another.

The Fishermen is a story of the four Agwu brothers – Ikenna, Boja, Obembe, and Benjamin – narrated as a recollection of their childhood by the youngest, Benjamin, who is now an adult. Set in Akure, the story spans the decade 1993–2003. It charts events in the brothers' lives against significant moments in national history. When Mr Agwu, their strict father, is transferred to a different city, the brothers break loose and decide to become "fishermen" by spending time after school at the Omi-Ala River, an arterial water body running through the town which was once a sacred pre-colonial place of worship but which is now a despoiled place of danger and waste. On one of their trips, they come across the prophet-madman Abulu, who delivers the shattering prophecy that Ikenna, the eldest, will be murdered by a fisherman, presumably implying he will be killed by one of his brothers. Ikenna is stabbed to death by Boja as the brothers' relationship worsens, and Boja subsequently commits suicide by drowning himself. Obembe and Benjamin, the surviving brothers, seek revenge on Abulu for destroying their brotherhood by murdering him. Fearing arrest, Obembe escapes while Benjamin remains and is imprisoned for his crime. The novel ends with a courtroom scene where the adult Benjamin recollects how his ten-year-old self had stood before the judge to defend his crime. Child Benjamin's defense begins with the words "we were fishermen", identical to the novel's opening line. In light of this revelation, the space of the novel is reconfigured as a defense of the "fishermen" rather than as a simple remembrance of past events (Datta quoting Obioma, 411).

Commandment (authoritarian command)

Military rule in 1990s Nigeria aligns directly with Mbembe's claim that commandment operates through violence, spectacle, and unpredictability. Mbembe's commandment is not just harsh authority; it is authority without accountability, where law is replaced by whim. In *The Fishermen*, the police are not protectors of justice but extensions of brute force, arrest and punishments; these are disconnected from moral guilt. Fear becomes the logic of obedience. Socially, the novel reflects a society fractured by mistrust, rumor, and the erosion of communal ethics. Politically, it mirrors a postcolonial state marked by weak institutions, arbitrary authority, and the absence of protective governance, conditions Mbembe describes as commandment. The failure in leadership is metaphorically portrayed in *The Fishermen* through the character of Mr. Eme James Agwu whose departure from his home shatters his family apart. At the exposition of the plot, the reader grasps that he has been transferred to a branch of Central Bank of Nigeria situated in Yola - "a town in the north that was a camel distance of more than one thousand kilometers away" (9). Ben the narrator reveals:

That home which father rules with great strength and unity becomes vulnerable due to his absence. His sons who he has wished to become great men; pilot, lawyer, doctor and professor - decide to take up fishing without their parents' knowledge. Fishing in a dreadful Omi-Ala River shows the boys' level of vulnerability as their encounter with Abulu the madman and his prophesy that Ikenna will be killed by one of his brothers set the plot of the novel in full motion (Emelano 2020 quoting *The Fishermen* 25-40).

The narrator, Ben keeps emphasizing the effect of their father's absence on the family, reveals that commandment cannot produce durable political order. Instead, it ensures its own crisis by alienating subjects and hallowing out institutions. These present conditions form the raw material from which Obioma projects a societal future marked by internal collapse rather than external domination, as Achebe (1983) captures, on the *Morning Yet On Creation Day*, when Murtala Muhammed seized power in July 1975 public servants in Lagos were found on seat at seventy-thirty in the morning. Even the "glow-slow" traffic that had defeated solution and defied every regime vanished overnight from the streets! Why? The new ruler's reputation for ruthlessness was sufficient to transform in the course of only one night the style of Nigeria's unruly capital. Commandment thrives where citizens cannot predict consequences. This uncertainty mirrors;

Abulu was a madman. His brain, Obembe said, dissolved into blood after the near-fatal accident that left him insane... Abulu and his brother grew up without their father. When they were kids, their father went for a Christian pilgrimage to Israel and never returned. Most people believed he was killed by a bomb in Jerusalem, while one of his friends who'd gone on the same pilgrimage said he had made his way to Austria with an Austrian woman and settled there. So Abulu and Abana lived their mother and their elder sister who, by the she was fifteen, took up whoring and moved to Lagos to practice her trade (95-96).

The deployment of Abulu, the madman-prophet, further connects present circumstances to future outcomes. In a society where institutional authority has lost credibility, truth emerges from marginal, grotesque figures. This stylistic choice mirrors Mbembe's observation that power and meaning in the postcolony often operate through excess, rumor, and spectacle. Obioma thus prognoses a future in which irrational voices continue to shape political and social destinies, not because the dominant epistemology. It aligns with Mbembe's notion of the intimacy of power, where domination is reproduced through everyday life rather than imposed solely through coercion. The future postcolony Obioma imagines is therefore one that reproduces its crises intergenerationally.

Intimacy of Power

Achille Mbembe's concept of the intimacy of power describes a mode of domination in life postcolony in which authority operates through proximity, familiarity, and everyday life, rather than through distant or purely coercive state mechanisms. Power, in this sense, becomes internalized, woven into social relations, belief systems, language, and the domestic sphere. The ruled do not merely submit to power; they participate in it, reproduce it, and often turn it inward upon themselves.

This theoretical formulation finds a striking literary realization in Chigozie Obioma's *The Fishermen*, where power is spectacular nor overtly political, yet profoundly destructive. In the absence of effective state presence and stable paternal authority, power migrates into the most intimate spaces of life, the family, brotherhood, memory, and fear. Mbembe's abstract intimacy of power thus becomes narrative concrete: domination unfolds not through soldiers or laws, but through prophecy, rumor, and psychological anticipation. The central tragedy is set in motion through the technique called foreshadowing through Abulu's prophecy, delivered by a figure deemed mad by society.

When Obembe reports that Abulu had said a "fisherman" would kill him, Ikenna interprets it as follows: "He saw a vision that one of you will kill me (127).

In this conflation, Abulu's prophecy functions as a micro-sovereign act, echoing Mbembe's claim that power in the postcolony often resides in informal and symbolic figures. Though socially marginal, Abulu acquires authority over life and death through language alone. His words infiltrate the brothers' consciousness, recognizing their relationships and transforming affection into suspicion. Here, Mbembe's intimacy of power is no longer metaphorical; it is embodied in the boys' daily interactions, where surveillance, fear, and control are enacted within the brotherhood itself. At the same time, the brothers' gradual descent into paranoia and violence demonstrates how intimate power is internalized and reproduced by its subjects. The boys become both victims and agents of domination, enacting the logic of power against one another. Fratricide emerges not as a sudden rupture but as the inevitable outcome of power that has become fully intimate, psychological, emotional, and familial. In Mbembe's terms, this reflects the post colony's tragic paradox: domination persists not because of

its distance, but because of its closeness. Chigozie prognoses a breakdown of Fraternal Bonds as national allegory, the brothers' collapse into suspicion prefigures Nigeria's broader fractures- ethnic, religious, and regional. Obioma anticipates how communal trust erodes when collective narratives are poisoned.

Necropolitics and the precariousness of life

Achille Mbembe's notion of necropolitics (denotes politics of death, a framework for understanding how modern and postcolonial power governs through killing, letting die, or making life unlikeable) which explains how sovereign power determines whose lives are valued and whose deaths are permitted, provides a critical lens for interpreting the morbid trajectory of the brother's fate. In *The Fishermen*, Ikenna gradual descent into madness and fratricide illustrates the fragility and uncertainty of life in the postcolonial condition. The historical weight of colonial boundaries and unresolved internal tensions is inscribed onto the family, manifesting as both psychological disintegration and physical violence. The narrator in the novel, *The Fishermen*, disclosed Ikenna's disposition after Abulu's Prophecy:

Ikenna was undergoing a metamorphosis: A life- changing experience that continued with each passing day. He closed himself from the rest of us. Though he was no longer accessible, he began to leave shattering traces of himself around the house in actions that left lasting impacts on our lives (68).

Conclusion

The discussion so far proposes that African writers, emerging from the historical continuum of pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial experiences, bear a critical responsibility to guide their readers toward the future through the imaginative power of prognosis. While African literature has been widely studied as a tool of resistance and memory, very little scholarship emphasizes its prognostic capacity that is, its power to envision futures rather than merely interpret the past.

Drawing upon Achille Mbembe's concept of the postcolony, this study advances the idea that prognosis functions as both a literary tool and a creative laboratory through which African writers engage with the crises of their time and project possible futures. In line with Mbembe's position, Chigozie Obioma (2016), in an interview with Premium Times, argues that Nigeria as a nation "is a Western idea that needs to be rethought and turned into an African construct to be viable." Elsewhere, he asserts that neocolonialism persists in postcolonial Nigeria in the form of "a culture of incompetence, endemic corruption, dignified ineptitude, and, chief among all, destructive selfishness and greed."

The Fishermen explores the crisis of general disillusionment with the postcolonial Nigerian state through the story of four brothers Ikenna, Boja, Obembe, and Benjamin who serve as central characters whose experiences reflect broader tensions surrounding community and identity in postcolonial Nigeria.

This prescient novel under study portrays catastrophe not as an accident but as a process inherent in the contemporary African state. Obioma interprets the signs embedded in postcolonial life, fear, belief, fractured kinship, and internalized violence and projects their logical conclusions. He warns that unless African societies confront how narratives shape reality, the future may become a repetition of preventable tragedy.

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