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# Creating New Forms of Identity and Recognition Through Community Building in Contemporary West African Fiction

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## Abstract

Exploiting experimental and liberating language, symbolism, and progressive patterns of thought to address issues dealing with the much-needed transformation of West African societies, several recent authors seem ready to revisit, revise, and re-define the implications of identity formation, community building and sustenance, new struggles for recognition, alterity, a better understanding of the "other, and especially the roles of class, racism, misogyny, colorism, etc. in the reconstruction, re-formation and strengthening of communities not only in West Africa but wherever Africans live. These authors seem intent on manipulating language to create and locate spaces, landscapes, and characters in ways that point not only to how political and other conflicts (domestic and foreign) have in large part been responsible for West Africa's endless "season of anomy" (Soyinka) and destruction but also to some potential paths for genuine freedom. With linguistic styles that evoke painting and spatial geography, the artistry and poignancy of these writers, who, incidentally, are often of a progressive, at least left leaning bent, have helped to create visual and poetic canvasses in which important questions are raised and, in some ways, answered. Chief among the questions are the following: how can progressive artists use tools at their disposal—oral, aural, cinematic, sound, and writing techniques—to help create new and improved communities that will benefit substantially more members of their societies than what currently exists? How can an examination of the 'other', indeed the very notion of alterity—often presented as a central motif in West African life—be challenged and dismantled through community building and sustenance?

Taking my cue from an African proverb "if you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together," my presentation will show how some new works, in the treatment of new themes and techniques, in the display of new ways to modify and, at times, break from conventions of narrative, in the representations of lives (both human and non-human), in the frank and well-focused ways of discussing gender certainties (or lack thereof), and in the shifts in literary forms, provide some of the best examples of the qualitative growth that is now taking place in West African literatures

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