African Sexualities II

Dark-Toned Homoerotica

In recent times there has been considerable focus on the study of sexualities in Africa. However, even in the face of stratagems to the contrary, institutions of patriarchy prevent a complete freeing up of the politics of the private, which the feminist movement and feminist discourses have been quite successful in addressing. The nation-state, dogmas of nationalism, and the work of liberationist theorists have not only hindered African female agency and voice but have also hampered the emergence of an authentic space for discourses of the private in Africa. One is aware this shortcoming is not limited to the African continent alone. Patriarchy has always been global and imperialist in nature. Also, its penetration of virtually all human institutions and practices is noted. Nonetheless, this chapter interrogates the specificity of the silence of female agency in nationalist constructions of spaces for public sexuality and finally, the sources of agency and counter-articulation created by forms of African feminisms that produce new and interesting ways to deliberate upon the nature of African sexualities. Accordingly, the major aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the ways in which traditional ideologies of modern African identity, primordial forms of patriarchy, and statist nationalism mask the real nature of African sexualities by constructing artificial categories and images while at the same time discourses associated with feminism seek to identify traces of transgression, imagination, and agency by which we can isolate and appreciate what mainstream discourses and institutions do so much to exclude. Again, most of references are drawn from South Africa and Nigeria though many of them speak to the majority of the African continent. The choice of South Africa and Nigeria should be particularly instructive. Nigeria is largest African nation in terms of population with approximately one Nigerian for every three Africans. South Africa has one of the most powerful

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economies in the continent and it is also intimately linked with strong circuits of global cultural flows. This makes it an unassailable site to explore issues of self-stylization, autonomy, and sexual identity.

**What Is in a Text?**

V. Y. Mudimbe goes against the grain in contemporary African philosophy in a number of ways. Apart from his fervent rereadings of colonialist anthropology, Mudimbe questions the assumptions of lin- eal patriarchal text by espousing an almost incestuous kind of hybridity. In the preface to his text, *Parables & Fables: Exegesis, Textuality, and Politics in Central Africa*, he writes:

I presented at Louvain my dissertation on the concept of *air* and my complementary thesis on Ber Borochov’s language in 1970. Five years, I was, after a sojourn in Africa, in Geneva, Switzerland, dying of bone cancer. In Africa, as well as in Switzerland, doctors had given me a maximum of six months to live. A misdiagnosis. In a surge of defiance, I wrote three books in five months. The first, collection of poems, *Entretailles*, was published in 1973 by Editions Saint Germain-des-Pres in Paris. [...] The collection of poems speaks about impossible conjunctions between day and night, men and women, nature and culture north and south, etc. In them, I wanted to express the tension of a communion which in the very project of its expression would supersede its warring elements. The second book, a novel, *Le Bel immonde*, published by Presence Africaine in 1976 (translated into English as *Before the Birth of the Moon*, and published by Simon and Schuster) patiently conjugated the “French Nouveau Roman” techniques with a critical yet impatient reading of 1960 Central African politics. Finally, I wrote *L’Autre Face du royanne*, published in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974, by L’Age d’Homme.  

The extract above reveals much about Mudimbe’s general theoretical deportment in relation to more conventional discourses of African philosophy. In the passage, it is disclosed that he is a poet, novelist, and theorist. His preoccupations as a poet are wholly conceptual owing much to Levi Strauss’s structuralism in the persistent attempt to reconcile seemingly eternally opposed polarities. As a novelist, he explores “the novel of ideas” as the genre through which to derive meaning from the perplexities of postcolonial Central African politics. *L’Autre Face du royanne* seeks “to interrogate the paradoxes of social and human sciences and specifically, to address the aims of anthropology.” These diverse intellectual interests are brought to