

# Finding a Cause Worthy Fighting For - A Modern African Writers Dilemma

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The modern African writer must at times cope with thoughts of inadequacy, thinking that the issues we are tackling nowadays are not as worthy as such issues as colonialism that our pioneers were writing about. But through the eyes of the past generation writers we must find our voice and write stories that reflect the modern times while reaching to the past for what was and the future for what should be or might be. In this discussion I would like to focus on four key issues about the dilemma faced by African writers both by taking writing as a career and by securing their place in African writing.

First, there is the question of genre. We have been greatly exposed to historical fiction from the West and have to be validated by Western critics in order to succeed in our writing. Sometimes we are forced to write like pioneer African writers such as Chinua Achebe or Ngugi wa Thiong'o. This comparison both in historical and values-based criteria driven by the West diminishes Africa's innovative writing.

Second, there is the issue of making a living through writing. African writing does not pay. There is limited market for writers in Africa because of poor reading culture, inadequate copyright regulations, and lack of technology. But why do we write? We write because it's the best way for moving our communities forward. It opens people's eyes.

Third, there is concentration on competitions, awards and paid writing at the expense of innovation. The agenda for writing in Africa is set by those who want tailor-made written materials. Sometimes we specifically write to win certain competitions or awards. This scenario makes it challenging to sustain quality African writing, especially if the awards are refused or ceased.

Fourth, the definition of African literature is a little problematic. Our literature is put for academic purposes, whereas other literatures are meant to serve several purposes such as fun and entertainment. Usually African literature is defined by the West. Even if we commit to futuristic writing, which should be our commitment, because there is too much information already, we should know how to advance our goals amid such lack of clarity on what constitutes African literature. The Diaspora African writers have succeeded in advancing the space for African writing by organizing workshops, fairs, or literary weeks. However, there is still a lot of work to do.

Finally, writing in the local languages is interesting, but the audience does not have the purchasing power to procure them. I tried writing in Chichewa and found out that "voice literature" work for the local languages; however, use of audios and videos is appropriate for short genres like poetry, short stories, or essays. It becomes challenging with long pieces such as novels.