



Contemporary African Literature: New Approaches





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Tanure Ojaide

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Series Editor's Preface

The *Carolina Academic Press African World Series*, inaugurated in 2010, offers significant new works in the field of African and Black World studies. The series provides scholarly and educational texts that can serve both as reference works and as readers in college classes.

Studies in the series are anchored in the existing humanistic and the social scientific traditions. Their goal, however, is the identification and elaboration of the strategic place of Africa and its Diaspora in a shifting global world. More specifically, the studies will address gaps and larger needs in the developing scholarship on Africa and the Black World.

The series intends to fill gaps in areas such as African politics, history, law, religion, culture, sociology, literature, philosophy, visual arts, art history, geography, language, health, and social welfare. Given the complex nature of Africa and its Diaspora, and the constantly shifting perspectives prompted by globalization, the series also meets a vital need for scholarship connecting knowledge with events and practices. Reflecting the fact that life in Africa continues to change, especially in the political arena, the series explores issues emanating from racial and ethnic identities, particularly those connected with the ongoing mobilization of ethnic minorities for inclusion and representation.

Toyin Falola
University of Texas at Austin





Preface

Contemporary African Literature: New Approaches is the result of several years of reassessing African literature from multiple perspectives, including the interdisciplinary, ethical, and scholar-poet traditions. While literature generally has always been informed by other disciplines, more than ever before it now carries so many issues that were once thought to be far from it. African literature is unique in the sense of expressing the African condition. The African condition today involves globalization, conflict management, environmental and ecological concerns, and human rights, among many other issues. This book tackles many of these issues and does not consider them as “extra-literary” but valid materials for literary creations and so intrinsic to the literature. Other issues such as masculinity and the use of Pidgin English are also related to literature and have their separate chapters.

The book is conceived under the premise that literature is a cultural production, a point repeated in many chapters. With this premise comes the acceptance of a utilitarian function of literature as of the other artistic creations of African peoples. Thus, it is the belief of the author of this book that literary criticism has an ethical function and so relates that ethical function to how literature can affect the society and its readers for the better. The chapters on globalization, environment, human rights, quest for peace, masculinity, conflict resolution, and a few others are written from the viewpoint that literature should sharpen the consciousness of its people and readers for a better world. For instance, the writer and literary critic should defend their culture in an age of globalization and inscribe it into the cultures of the world. Similarly, in a world in peril environmentally and ecologically, it is the writer’s duty (as of the literary critic’s) to sensitize the public to be ecologically lit-





erate and work towards a balanced relationship between humans and non-human lives of the universe. Of course, for peace and harmony in our respective communities, societies, and the entire world, there should be the promotion of human rights. Majority populations should be sensitive to the feelings of minorities as the powerful should do towards the weak, the rich to the poor, and there should be fairness and justice and avoiding of exploitation and oppression of all kinds. Also, as in oral literature, masculinity should be redefined to express sensitivity to the female gender and the promotion of those virtues that make a man a sensitive and compassionate human being.

This book carries the scholar-poet perspective, which is discussed in one of the chapters. The author is not only a creative writer who has written many collections of poetry, novels, and short stories but also a literary scholar who has been studying and writing on traditional and modern African literatures. It is from the vantage points of both the creative writer and the literary scholar that I write this book. The reader should not therefore be surprised when I illustrate a point with my own poetry or fiction. More importantly, as a scholar-poet, I shift from the creative writer to the literary scholar and back and forth with the insights I have gained over several decades in the respective fields of creative writing and literary scholarship. I attempt to harness the skills of both careers that have coalesced into one mission in the book: a perspective that combines the craft and insights of the writer and the critic at the same time studying African creative works critically.

I conceived the different chapters of this book in such a way that I have done a practice run on them in various avenues. I deliberately proposed to speak on some of the topics as a keynote speaker or lead paper presenter in some conferences as with the chapters on globalization and the quest for peace, the environment and human rights, poetry in Northern Nigeria, and language, literature, and conflict resolution and management in Africa. On an occasion, I chose to make a presentation on my use of Pidgin English in my creative works. I already published the chapter on migration, globalization, and recent African literature in *World Literature Today*. Similarly, the essay on canonization in modern African

literature was published in the online issue of the *Asiatic: Journal of the Department of Language and Literature* at the International Islamic University of Malaysia after being presented as a lecture to students and faculty. I also presented a variant of the globalization and modern African literature chapter at an international conference on Asia-Pacific Cultures and Literatures in Kuala Lumpur, where it represented the African perspective. The chapter on masculinity has just appeared as an invited chapter in a book on masculinity, *Masculinities in African Literary and Cultural Texts*, edited by Helen Mugambi and Tuzyline J. Allan. The chapters might have been conceived for different literary outlets but are meant to complement each other.

I have placed in the book a chapter on an issue which has always been in modern/written African literature but not discussed in that light: the scholar-poet tradition. I intend it to be a call to look at modern African literature, especially the poetry, and see the impact that having one leg in creative writing and the other in the academy is having on the literature produced by such a writer. Do Africans in general and scholars and students of the literature in particular identify with what they read from their writers? If they do not, what is the cause and how can this problem be remedied? I do not posit any solutions in response to this issue in African literature but mean to provide food for thought for those involved in this literature: the writers and the readers.

The book begins with canonization in modern African literature and ends with African literary aesthetics: continuity and change. No matter the issues or topics discussed in modern African literature, one will at the end come to the crux of the matter, which these two chapters represent. To me they complement each other in the affirmation of literature being a cultural production and African literature possessing those qualities that define it as such. That is why I trace response to oral poetic performances as of the *udje* and *ijala* and the continuation into modern works in English, French, or Portuguese, among others. Modern African literature is the natural inheritor of traditional African literature and though there is hybridity, the literature seems to work best when it carries the old traditions in a new manner. I have always argued that if



there is no dispute about the existence of a Western literary canon, there should be none when one talks of the African literary canon, especially if one agrees that literature is a cultural production. This I have done again in this book. The complementing final chapter on literary aesthetics reinforces the first chapter as African literary works that do not address in some relevant way the African condition, as Chinua Achebe also sees it, will be deemed irrelevant.

It is my hope that these topics and approaches will generate a new form of criticism of African literature in general and also inspire writers to know the traditions from which they write as they affirm their own individuality while not forgetting the Africanity of their works. If the book generates interest among scholars and students as well as writers, then it has fulfilled its primary objective.

Tanure Ojaide
University of North Carolina at Charlotte
November 2011





Contemporary African Literature: New Approaches





Examining Canonization in Modern African Literature

With four literary Nobel laureates the past three decades (Wole Soyinka, Idris Mahfouz, Nadine Godimer, and J.M. Coetzee), modern African literature has reached such a world standard of respectability that deserves internal re-examination. Once a writer wins the Nobel Prize, his/her literature and the culture assume a significance that would normally not be accorded it. For this reason, it is pertinent to re-examine the modern tradition of African literature.

This chapter examines the idea of an African literary canon through the creative talents of African writers and their critics. The term “canon” will be used here in its simple meaning of being “privileged,” or given special status, by a culture (Murfin and Ray 38). Broadly speaking, works that attain the status of classics and are repeatedly discussed, anthologized, or reprinted are usually said to have entered the canon. Of course, different schools of critics, especially Marxist, feminist, postcolonial, cultural, and minority ones argue that many artistic works may not enter the canon if they do not conform to the mainstream ideology. The discussion of the African literary canon will have more to do with what makes African literature generally than isolating specific texts into a superior class of its own. This chapter will thus discuss the criteria for inclusion and what constitutes cultural acceptability in African literary works. Once there is a canon, it follows that there will be works outside its domain or what could be described as non-canonical works.

By inference, if literature is a cultural production, as there is a Western literary canon, so also will there be an African literary canon. This assertion is based on the idea that literature is a cultural production. Inevitably, since writers of Europe, North Amer-

ica (Canada and the United States), and European world peoples in Australia, New Zealand, and elsewhere have their literary canon as defined by critics such as Harold Bloom and others, one needs to define what is the African literary canon. This definition will be based on the African-ness or Africinity and what it constitutes in literary terms.

Africa is a geographical, political, and socio-cultural entity. For this reason the African in this discussion is not limited to the racial but also covers the totality of a diverse continent. African writers are those writers that express the African sensibility in their works. This is significant as critics have been shy to address the position in African literature of non-black writers of South Africa and also of Arab writers of North Africa. If Nadine Godimer has been a life-long member of the African National Congress and expresses the concerns of Africans, she is an African writer. There is also no doubt in my mind of the Africinity of Dennis Brutus, Breyten Breytenbach, and Athol Fugard. Brutus is popular in African literary circles, especially the African Literature Association, and for his anti-apartheid struggle. Breytenbach has suffered incarceration for his anti-apartheid views. Some dispute may arise on the African-ness of J. M. Coetzee, but he is a South African even though he currently lives in Australia. Similarly, being Africans politically and geographically, North African writers are African despite their Arab or Muslim affiliations. Simply put, any writer who is a citizen of any African country is an African writer. It is another matter to question whether any specific African writer projects an African sensibility.

Every literary canon exists in the context of the people's overall experience and aesthetic values. Thus, the African literary canon is related to the African experience, which has strong cultural and historical underpinnings. The question, rather the idea, of an African literary canon is one that has often been raised in controversies but not addressed head-on in its totality. Chinweizu's "debate" with Wole Soyinka in the 1980s, the issue of the language of African literature from Benedict Vilakazi through Obi Wali in "The Dead End of African Literature" in 1963 and Ngugi wa Thiongo's cultural crusade since the early 1980s to now, and the ongoing de-

bate as to whether contemporary African writers, especially those living in North America and Europe, are writing more to please their Western audiences and publishers rather than their own African people they write about, are examples of discussions that touch the issue of canon in modern African literature. In addition, what constitutes the African experience forms a significant part of the canonical definition. The issues of cultural identity are also involved in this exploration. All such controversial debates contest what should be or not be part of the African literary canon, what Abiola Irele describes as “the African imagination.”

To Chinweizu, Madubuike, and Jemie, modern African literature has to be “decolonized” to be taken seriously and seen as authentically African. Many critics would quarrel with that position as essentialist, but others still wonder why modern African literature should be written mainly in the foreign languages of former European colonizers of the continent and also exhibit core features of European modernist writing. To Soyinka, the reality of Africans has to be acknowledged and the modernist impulse of Europe has to be part of the historical experience of colonization, which, for better or worse, has given rise to modern African states. The traditional mode of Africa before colonization can no longer stand in isolation in the face of modernity and globalization. The world is more inter-connected now than ever before because of new means of communication, rapid movements of people, new technologies, and other “scapes” that Arjun Appadurai ascribes to globalization, that make the entire world a “global village.”

Benedict W. Vilakazi, as far back as 1939, lamented the fact that South African writers were writing in English and not in African indigenous languages. Very much in the manner of Chinweizu, some five decades earlier he saw African literature as literary works in African languages. He wrote:

By Bantu drama, I mean a drama written by a Bantu, for the Bantu, in a Bantu language. I do not class English or Afrikaans dramas on Bantu themes, whether these are written by Black people, I do not call them contributions



to Bantu Literature. It is the same with poetry ... I have an unshaken belief in the possibilities of Bantu languages and their literature, provided the Bantu writers themselves can learn to love their languages and use them as vehicles for thought, feeling and will. After all, the belief, resulting in literature, is a demonstration of people's "self" where they cry: "*Ego sum quod sum*" [I am what I am]. That is our pride in being black, and we cannot change creation (qtd. in Masilela 76).

Vilakazi also sees Bantu sensibility as different from what he describes as the Romantic sensibility of South Africans of European stock (qtd. in Masilela 75). This same idea of an African language defining African literature is to be pursued by Chinweizu et alia and Ngugi wa Thiongo later on.

Doubtless, literary works by Africans in indigenous African languages such as Ewe, Sotho, Yoruba, and Zulu are African works that have a place in the canon. So also are works of Afro-Arab literature in Ki-Swahili and Hausa. However, a people's experience is so diverse that it is not limited to "authentic" or pristine features. The African reality is diverse and ever-changing and it is expansive enough to accommodate what Africans do in their own different ways. Hybridization inevitably occurs in the course of a people's history, as that of Africans, and that is an integral aspect of the people's experience. The African identity, therefore, is an ongoing process, like the African culture, and is not fixed on marble but is dynamic—it absorbs new features, even as it discards some of its own old ways. Thus, literary works in non-African languages by Africans that express the African experience belong to the multifarious tradition of African literature(s).

Much as literatures in pre-colonial times are defined by the languages they are expressed or written in, European colonial adventures across the globe have made that definition of a people's literature limited and outmoded in a postcolonial context. Chinua Achebe accepts the use of English, but attempts to indigenize it to suit the society he writes about. In fact, in his particular case, as in *Things Fall Apart*, the language of the colonizer becomes a potent medium

of the colonized to interrogate the colonial enterprise in its political, moral, and ethical dimensions. Abiola Irele defends African writers' use of English, which he describes as an "extra-territorial" language, since there are now many Englishes worldwide. On the other hand, the language debate, as to whether a work in English, French, or Portuguese can be "African," appears to be playing itself out in suggestions of translations of works done by Africans in foreign languages into indigenous African languages. Furthermore, by using indigenous oral techniques to write, African writers are practicing what Abiola Irele describes as "written oral literature."

Literature in Africa has traditionally played a transformative role in society. Satiric or abuse songs, such as the *udje* of Nigeria's Urhobo people and the *halo* of the Ewe of Ghana and Togo, were composed to check the excesses of individuals in a communal society through insults of those breaking the communal ethos. One can say that the Yoruba *ijala* and the Zulu and Tswana *izibongo*, by praising individuals in society with the virtues of courage, generosity, sensitivity, and others, also stirred people to strive for such virtues. Oral narratives, especially epics such as of Sundiata, Ozidi, and Mwindo engage in stirring up a sense of heroism in individuals among their peoples. In simple folktales, the small animals outwit the big, with the animals behaving as humans in order to proffer lessons for humans in society. The mold that communality is supposed to ensure is often broken by the tricksters—tortoise, spider, hare, and hyena—that get away with unacceptable behavior in society. Thus, while there is a sense of community, there is room for the individual to be unique as long as that does not infringe negatively on others or communal harmony.

Modern African literature has imbibed many qualities of the oral tradition. Much of the writing is functional in the sense that the literary creations—poetry, fiction, and drama—aim at transforming society into a more humane one. It is for this reason of having an impact on society that Mazisi Kunene finds African literature "heavy," compared to European literature. He told Dike Okoro in an interview in Durban, 2003, the following: "When an African writer tries to change, they're trying to adapt to the idiom that is non-African. That is why the literature is light. They write



about flowers. Beautiful flowers. Who cares? (Laughs). Who cares about beautiful flowers?”

In fact, it is those works that aim at changing the world as it is (often imperfect) and installing new values that will advance the betterment of society and individuals that can be said to be natural inheritors of the oral tradition. In the oral tradition, as in *udje* and *halo*, literature matters as individuals pay attention to the way they live and so follow cherished values so as not to be laughed at in songs. Literary works that have this attribute should contend for inclusion in the African literary canon.

Many African literary works deal with subjects that in the Western canon will be described as “extra-literary,” suggesting that they should not be legitimate concerns of writers. However, what is “extra-literary” to the Western critic is intrinsic to the African writer, who, because of the historical predicament and tradition, draws materials from the socio-political happenings around him or her. For this reason, those literary works in all the genres criticizing political corruption, tyranny of leaders, excessive materialism of the elite, and others meant to ridicule and, by so doing, eliminate the negative habits of society are also natural heirs of the African oral traditions of literature.

Many African literary works fall into the satiric corpus of laughing at follies and foibles of individuals and society to change them for the better. Examples are plentiful, but it suffices to mention a few. Wole Soyinka’s *The Interpreters*, for instance, attacks the vulgar materialism of Nigerian politicians of that time, as Achebe’s *Man of the People*. Okot p’Bitek’s *Song of Lawino* ridicules Africans who copy Western lifestyles without discrimination as shown in the lampooning of both Ocol and his girlfriend Clementina, while portraying the culturally nationalistic Lawino in a positive manner. Much of modern African poetry is critical of political corruption as in Niyi Osundare’s *Songs of the Marketplace*, Frank Chipasula’s *Whispers in the Wings*, and the writer’s *Fate of Vultures*, among many others.

African writers condemn the exploitation of the common people (as in Syl Cheney-Coker’s “Peasants”) and other negative practices. There is the effort on the parts of writers to promote humanity and sensitivity to others. Works that condemn apartheid in South



Africa in the form of poetry such as Dennis Brutus's *Sirens, Knuckles, Boots*, fiction such as Peter Abraham's *Tell Freedom* and Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night*, memoir such as Bloke Modisane's *Blame Me on History*, and drama as Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* are functional works meant to eliminate the inhuman socio-political system of apartheid. It is thus very understandable that there is a lot of protest in modern African literature—against colonialism, racism, apartheid, political corruption, class distinction, injustice, and many other negative practices. Modern African literature is a literature that responds to the people's plight, feelings, and aspirations.

The cultural identity of modern African literature is a major consideration in establishing a canon for its texts. Culture involves a shared experience of belief systems, worldview, traditions, and aesthetic standards. One can observe certain aspects of cultural identity in modern African literature, especially the novel, even though written in English, French, or Portuguese, foreign European languages. As expressed in *Poetic Imagination in Black Africa*, these cultural qualities include the utilitarian function of the literature, social cohesion, the ethical/moral nature of African civilization, defense of African culture, African mystical life, ideas of law and order, peculiar attitude to time and space, and special use of folklore and language, especially of proverbs. Let me highlight some aspects of the cultural identity exhibited in modern African literature.

African literary works tend to be functional and not just art for art's sake. A few examples will illustrate the didactic tendency of African creative works. The "adequate revolution" that Chinua Achebe espouses is "to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement" (44). And he teaches fellow Africans "that their past—with all its imperfections—was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them" (45). To Mariama Ba, her mission as a female writer is to attack "the archaic practices, traditions and customs that are not a real part of our precious cultural heritage." Ngugi wa Thiongo and Ken Saro-Wiwa are also clearly didactic in both *Devil on the Cross* and



Lemona's Tale respectively. In Ngugi's novel, the Gicaandi Player tells Waringa's story so that other young women will learn from her story and avoid her mistakes. Saro-Wiwa's *Lemona's Tale* is meant for young, beautiful, but uneducated women to learn from her plight. While many literary works are openly didactic, others are more subtle in their methods.

The sense of community holds strongly in the African society. A cardinal point in understanding the African view of humankind is the belief that "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti 108–109). Mazisi Kunene is of the view in *The Ancestors and the Sacred Mountain* that "the earliest act of civilization was ... the establishment of a cooperative, interactive, human community." He adds:

The idea of integrating the artist's vision within a broad social experience becomes a normal and natural process that does not require rules of application. Both the philosophic and artistic worlds fuse to produce a discipline that aims at affirming the social purpose of all expressions of human life. In short, the ideal of social solidarity is projected (xvi).

Modern African literature, while dealing with individuals as characters, tends to focus on the entire society. In many works, the hero or protagonist is diffused in many characters. Examples of such works include Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* with five major characters, Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Petals of Blood* with three major characters, Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* with multiple major characters, and Tsitsi Dangerembga's *Nervous Conditions* with two major adolescent female characters. There are many characters of equal force and the focus appears to be more on society rather than a single protagonist, a characteristic that reinforces the communal nature of traditional African societies. In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, though Okonkwo is the protagonist yet he is not the hero of the narrative but rather the entire Umuofia community whose balanced values he fails to embody.

John Mbiti also says that "the whole psychic atmosphere of African village life is filled with belief in ... mystical power" (197).



This continues today through the embrace of traditional religion and practices and Pentecostal Christianity, which emphasizes defeating demons and principalities rather than preparing to go to heaven as the regular Western Christianity does. The belief in gods and mystical phenomena is strong in African literature. There are gods invoked in many African literary works. Also there is a sense of mystery expressed as in Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* and in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* in which a beautiful lady is dedicated to the gods and woe betide the man who marries her. Many African writers portray characters and actions that defy scientific reality and operate in extraterrestrial planes. Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and *Starbook* derive from this tradition. Of course, the much touted magical realism of Latin America most likely originated in Africa with actions which defy physical observable reality.

The African idea of law and order can best be seen at play in a literary work like Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, where Elesin has to will himself to die before the burial of the dead Oba so that he will not have to interfere with the rule of succession. On the African concept of land, it is sacred and dedicated to the ancestors. In *Weep Not, Child*, "Any man who had land was considered rich," and is poor if he has no land but has cars and jet planes (22). African literary works that express these mainstream beliefs can be considered belonging to the literary canon.

Modern African literature is highly infused with folklore. The oral traditions of Africa originated from the earliest history of the people and have continued to evolve according to the conditions of the times. African folktales, myths, legends, and other forms of folklore developed over thousands of years and have been influenced by mass migrations. The historical events, fashions and trends as well as the geography of the environment became absorbed into the folklore. Many African writers incorporate folktales into their works, whether it is in poetry as in Jack Mapanje, in fiction as in Chinua Achebe and Ngugi, and drama as in Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan. The folktale, as of the tortoise in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, becomes symbolic of the story's protagonist, Okonkwo, who achieves greatness by initially borrowing yams to plant and later

not waiting for a communal decision on what to do as a clan. Of course, like the tortoise, Okonkwo can be said to be self-centered rather than deferring to the communal interests of Umuofia.

The use of language in African literature appears unique because of the peculiar circumstances of African history and the nature of its indigenous languages. That Africans write in English, French, and Portuguese does not make their language European. Most African writers, especially of the first, second, and third generations, spoke their own mother tongues before learning the European official languages at school. In fact, there are many Africans who spoke two or more languages before acquiring any of the European languages of their countries. Once these African writers begin to use the adopted language, they tend to inform it with their native tongues. For instance, the writings of Wole Soyinka are informed by Yoruba, while those of Chinua Achebe are informed by Igbo, Kofi Awoonor's by Ewe, and Ngugi wa Thiongo's by Gikuyu. These tonal African languages have their own syntax and folklore, which become subtexts in, for instance, the English that the writers use. A reading of *Death and the King's Horseman*, *Things Fall Apart*, "Song of Sorrow," and *Petals of Blood*, without taking into consideration the African language settings of the respective texts, would lead to missing much of the meaning of the works. As Abiola Irele puts it in *The African Imagination*, "The effort to achieve a formal correspondence between the writer's African references and the European language he or she employs has, as one of its objectives, the achievement of a distinctiveness of idiom within the borrowed tongue by an infusion of the European language with the tonality of African speech patterns" (57). Irele sees "orality as a matrix of the African imagination" (58), incorporated into modern African literature through "transliteration, transfer, reinterpretation, and transposition" (58). Language, after all, carries the thought and experience of a people.

It is significant that many modern African writers, especially the poets, are highly learned in the folklores of their peoples. Kofi Anyidoho studied his Ghanaian Ewe folklore, as the writer has researched on Nigeria's Urhobo *udje* songs, and Jack Mapanje on Malawi's

Chewa folktales. The Ethiopian Nega Mezlekia, author of *The God Who Begat a Jackal*, has full grasp of his people's folklore. Similarly, South African Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* is replete with Xhosa folklore. Other writers such as the young Yoruba-speaking Akeem Lasisi, Ademola Dasylva, and Remi-Raji Oyelade have full grasp of their indigenous folklore.

Many African writers have gone to the extent of writing poetry, plays, and stories by anglicizing their local languages or indigenizing English. Kofi Anyindoho's "Tsitsa" does this in Ewe-izing "teacher," "college," "trousers," and "English," among so many words of the poem. Kojo Laing has also tried to use Akan words as if English. Gabriel Okara's novel, *The Voice*, is written in a language which is a transliteration of Ijo (also spelt Izon) into English.

The frequent use of proverbs by African writers, especially in fiction and drama, gives a unique flavor to African literature. The proverb, a traditional speech trope, validates what the writer aims at conveying. Chinua Achebe seems to have used proverbs the most of modern African writers. These proverbs give a distinctive cultural identity to modern African literature.

Though it could be seen as a postcolonial phenomenon, the use of Pidgin English has become an African language experience that some of the writers employ in their works. It started from coastal areas of Africa as a means of communication between the foreign sailors and the local communities as in Freetown, Sierra Leone, and Sapele, Nigeria. Pidgin English, like French patois in Francophone areas, grew over decades of urbanization in the twentieth century to become the major means of communication, in fact, the lingua franca, of common people.

Pidgin English has been used to write fiction as Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Soja Boy*, which is described as "rotten English." Many Pidgin poems have been written in Nigeria, as by Aig Imoukuede and Ezenwa-Ohaeto. In "I Wan Bi President," Ohaeto expresses the plight of the underclass that the President is spared from:

I wan bi President
 if food no dey market I no worry
 if dem say price don rise I no go worry



if salary no come on time I no go worry
if petrol dey cost too much I no go worry
if sanitation exercise dey I no go worry
if na religion trouble dey I no go worry
(Ojaide and Sallah 183).

Pidgin English, for the most cases, serves as a comic medium to undermine and ridicule accepted but unethical values of the society.

The use of Pidgin, Creole, and the indigenizing of European language words are forms of linguistic experimentation in the creative process of the postcolonial societies of Africa. Works done through these media are attempts to arrive at what language best suits the writer's mission and can best articulate artistically the message desired. The works in Pidgin English also express the African reality.

At the crux of traditional African literature is its orality. Abiola Irele observes in *The African Imagination* the prevalence of "a conscious reference to a matrix of expression whose ultimate foundation is the oral mode" (21). Africans, in their writings, have to switch from the traditional mode of the spoken word to the modern one of writing. It is interesting that there is a good amount of written works in some African languages, especially in Yoruba, Hausa, Ki-Swahili, and Somali. However, in terms of historical time, African languages have only recently started to be written, a postcolonial experience. The point is that while written, African literature still carries much of its traditional orality in many forms such as the use of repetition, songs, narrative modes, and chant-like rhythms, among other features. Often there is tension between the oral (often popular culture) and the modern written (often elitist) resulting in the synthesis of the two into a unique artistic mode. One can observe that modern African poetry tends to be more performative in mode than reflective, a distinction that comes out when one listens to an African poet and a Western (American or British) poet read at the same forum. This mediation of writing by orality has become a significant mark of modern African literature. No good African literature, therefore, can afford to ignore the reality of the known tradition of orality employed in a creative man-



ner in writing. This has led Abiola Irele to assert that “the problem of the African writer employing a European language is how to write an oral culture” (16). He adds that “what gives interest to the literary situation today in Africa is the way our written literature, in both the indigenous languages and the European languages, enacts a dialectic between orality and literacy” (38).

Since literature is a cultural production, it only follows that a people’s narratives, poetry, and drama should be an expression of their culture’s artistic disposition at its highest level. Failing to reflect this cultural identity will fall short of the aesthetic, which is culturally conditioned. In fact, the canon of a people’s literature grows from its cultural ideals. It is not surprising therefore that Obotunde Ijemere, a British, writes with that penname to be seen as a Nigerian Yoruba in order to validate his cultural immersion in the African people’s artistic production. The notion of a literary canon admits of some essentialism, since working out of a different, albeit foreign, cultural background will not fit into some specific cultural view of the literature. John Haynes, also a British writer in Nigeria, had to take a Hausa name while in Zaria to pass for a Nigerian in his poetic writing in his quest for African acceptance.

The African environment provides the setting, source of images, and symbolism for the African experience expressed in the literary works. The evocation of the landscape provides the literary work a concrete setting that defines it as African. African rivers, forests, and mountains, among others, appear in literary works. The river, for instance, is the home of Mami Wata, the water-maid or Olokun by a Yoruba name that pervades the poetry of many African writers such as J.P. Clark, Christopher Okigbo, and Onookome Okome. The weather is also evoked as in David Rubadiri’s “An African Thunderstorm.”

The fauna and flora of the continent become embodiments of the thoughts of the characters expressed in literature. Wole Soyinka’s *Brother Jero* plays are based on the motif of the trickster tortoise, the Yoruba *ajakpa*. Kofi Awoonor uses the weaverbird to represent the coming of colonialists to Africa in a very symbolic manner. The

culture has featured in Niger Delta literature, as well as the iroko in rainforest settings of African writers. The aim of such symbolism is to use known images of the environment to communicate to the African reader familiar with the reference.

Following the shared experience of culture and environment is the historical experience of the people, especially of the people's contact with Europeans and the consequence of that encounter. First, there was slave trade in which the coastal and interior parts of the continent were ravaged by despoliation and the youths captured and shipped away. Then there was colonization in which Europe, through military might, shared Africa for economic and political exploitation. With Europe "under-developing" Africa, the continent's people suffered and still suffer from the consequences of foreign domination and tutelage. One of the premises of colonialism was that Africans had no culture and history and so Europe had to bring it civilization. The Europeans, thus, held themselves as superior to Africans whose culture they considered inferior, uncivilized, and savage. The European notion of Africa as a tabula rasa informed the policy of assimilation pursued by France and Portugal in Africa. Colonialism and post-colonialism are inherent parts of the history of Western hegemony in empire-building and political and economic domination at the expense of other peoples as in Africa. African literature aims at countering the Western image of Africa in cultural and socio-political perspectives.

The Negritude writers countered the European notion of Africans as inferior by extolling pride in blackness. Works of Leopold Sedar Senghor, Birago Diop, David Diop, and others praise African values and humanity, what later generations will call *ubuntu*. Senghor does not only exhibit the state of innocence of pre-colonial Africa as in "Night of Sine" and "I Will Pronounce Your Name," but also expresses in both "New York" and "Prayer to Masks" how African humanism can complement European life. In the latter poem, he writes:

For who else would teach rhythm to the world that has
died of machines and cannons?

For who else should ejaculate the cry of joy, that arouses
the dead and the wise in a new dawn?
Say, who else could return the memory of life to men with
a torn hope?
They call us cotton heads, and coffee men, and oily men,
They call us men of death.
But we are the men of the dance whose feet only gain power
when they beat the hard soil.
(Moore and Beier 233)

Senghor is using this poem and similar ones to confront the challenges of colonial history, proffering to Europeans what they lack and Africans have in abundance. He thus uses his art not only to respond to the European colonization of Africa but also to defend Africa against European racism and what that entails.

While there are several strands of Negritude, including Senghor's romantic presentation of pre-colonial Africa as an idyllic place, there is agreement that the literary movement of the 1940s and 50s raised black consciousness in Africa and the African Diaspora, especially in the Caribbean where Leon Damas and Aime Cesaire were also pioneer exponents of Negritude.

While Francophone African intellectuals and writers used Negritude to react to European denigration of African culture, the Anglophone African writers affirmed their Africanity in their own way by showing the African personality as a human who has strengths and weaknesses. With works of Joseph Conrad (*Heart of Darkness*) and Joyce Cary (*Mister Johnson*) in particular portraying African characters in stereotypical ways, African writers felt it was their duty to correct the European distortions of the African.

Chinua Achebe's literary objective in his early works, especially in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, was to fight back the negative ideas of Africa propagated by the European colonizers and those sharing a similar imperial ideology. To the renowned Nigerian writer, "African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; ... their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty,..they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity." One can see Wole Soyinka's



Death and the King's Horseman in the context of showing African culture and life in relative terms to the European, indirectly saying that each culture has about the same things as others and differences are only relative. In that classic play, Soyinka looks at concepts of honor and sacrifice in particular in terms of cultural relativism. Thus, African writers see themselves as defending their race and culture in the face of European/Western marginalization and denigration. In the black-white dichotomy, many African writers, especially the older ones such as Senghor, Achebe, and Soyinka, extol the humanity of Africa as superior to Western exploitative nature and radical individualism. Mazisi Kunene talks of this when he differentiates between material development of the Europeans and the ethical development of Africans in *The Ancestors and the Sacred Mountain*. African writers bring their race and humanity to the center of discourse, unlike the margin Africa occupies in Western discourse.

Africa's political history has a significant impact on the people's experience and their literature. The experience of colonization placed the European metropolitan countries at the center and the African colonies at the periphery in a relationship that African writers fought against. In fact, Janheinz Jahn sees African history as paralleling modern African literature. The years of colonization, nationalist struggle, independence, post-independence, and neo-colonialism have their imprint on modern African literature. The colonization afforded African writers the opportunity to question European values in their exploitation of "others." Thus, African literature is critical of the colonial enterprise of Europeans. After World War II, many Africans, including those who fought for the liberation and freedom of Europe, demanded freedom for themselves. Leopold Sedar Senghor, who fought for the French and was a prisoner of war, was one of the African nationalists. Nationalism extolled African values, and political independence came with euphoria all over the continent. Africa was at last free of foreign domination and Africans were then in charge of their own affairs. As will be discussed later, the euphoria did not last for long.



The nation became very important in identity formations of Africans. In place of traditional ethnic groups or kingdoms, new states arose, bringing together multiethnic groups that the European powers put together for their political and economic benefit. African peoples were divided into countries irrespective of ethnicities, and countries such as Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and Uganda became multiethnic nations. A new political topography came into place with every African belonging to a specific country. With this development, the writers have a new “community” to address in their writings—their “people.” For instance, Achebe was no longer just an Igbo but a Nigerian. Similarly, Soyinka was not just Yoruba but also Nigerian, as Kofi Awoonor was not Ewe but Ghanaian, Lenrie Peters not Aku but Gambian, and Ngugi wa Thiongo not Kikuyu but Kenyan. Belonging to an ethnic group and to a nation will lead to tension in individual writers which they have to address in times of conflicts between the two “communities,” as Achebe and Ngugi had to do during the Nigerian Civil War and the Kenyan 2008 Presidential Election respectively.

In both Francophone and Anglophone Africa, writers attacked European exploitation of Africans. Works of Sembene Ousmane such as *Le Mandat (The Money Order)* and Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* are illustrative of the calamities brought by the West to Africa. Neocolonialism is perpetrated through contemporary Africa as in Ngugi wa Thiongo’s *Devil on the Cross*.

In addition to reacting to European exploitation, after independence, African writers started to react to their separate African rule. As will follow, the political corruption of the emergent states and the instability resulting in coups and civil wars gave the writers materials for their art. One can say that almost all over Africa, the writers interrogated their nations in what was a reactive stance of addressing the political ineptitude of the time. Works such as Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Wole Soyinka’s *Season of Anomie*, Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah*, and many other literary texts address the writer’s nation in its political direction. With many writers cynical about their country’s direction, the literary texts are not cheerful to read with the somber visions.



Literary works immediately preceding and following political independence in Africa, between 1957 and 1968, exhibit the euphoria that would fritter away with political corruption of the leaders. Satiric writing was common in poetry and fiction by Lenrie Peters, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, and others. Then from the late '60s through the '70s to the mid-'80s came the decades of coups and counter-coups that brought military dictators to power. Writers ranged on the side of the people against military rule. Soyinka's *The Man Died* and *A Shuttle in the Crypt* are examples of texts that addressed issues of military dictatorship and tyranny.

This period coincided with the Cold War between the Eastern Bloc and the West. Most of the writers were left of center. There was Marxism expressed in works, principal among them was Ngugi wa 'Thiongo in his *Petals of Blood*, *Devil on the Cross*, and *Matigari*. The workers and proletariat came to the center of fictional works. In poetry, many writers, including Jared Angira and Niyi Osundare, declared themselves Marxists. However, whether declared Marxists or not, the poets of the generation that include Syl Cheney-Coker, Odia Ofeimun, and Femi Osofisan ranged on the side of the underprivileged and tended to concern themselves more with socio-economic issues rather than culture which formed the major preoccupation of the earlier generation of Soyinka, J.P. Clark, Kofi Awoonor, and Lenrie Peters. These "new" poets also expressed more of class conflict as they relied more on African oral traditional techniques rather than the modernists in their expression of the current African reality. Thus, Africa's history and politics are connected.

Involved in the historical experience of Africa and concomitant with colonialism was the introduction of Christianity to Africa. While Christianity might have been brought to parts of Egypt and Ethiopia very early on in the history of that religion, and Portugal had made missionary incursions centuries earlier into Benin and Kongo kingdoms, it was colonialism that became the vanguard of Christian expansion in Africa. This new religion became one of the major faiths of Africans and brought with it new beliefs, icons, and socio-cultural ways, ranging from worship to marriage. Christianity, as pitched by the colonialists, was a more civilized religion



than anything Africans had had, since theirs were denigrated as worshiping heathen gods in fetish practices. Christianity was an inescapable part of Westernization, and African writers would react to it in diverse ways.

African writers, especially the poets, the Congolese Tchicaya U'Tamsi, the Nigerian Christopher Okigbo, and the Sierra Leonean Syl Cheney-Coker, copiously use Christian motifs of a suffering Christ and other rituals and symbolisms of Christianity, particularly of the Catholic Church. Christ becomes the sacrificial hero, who endures the “sins” of society and is immolated to give better life to his people. While Cheney-Coker may not be a church-going person, still he uses the image of Christ to express his Creole origin and his individual circumstances in his society in *Concerto for an Exile*. It is interesting to note that in Cheney-Coker’s poetry “his persona combines the contradictory attitude of condemning Christ and Christianity while at the same time seeing himself as Christ” (Ojaide and Obi 149). He feels betrayed, as Christ was, in love, his Creole ancestry, and the mistreatment of people in his country and throughout the world; hence he exhorts his betrayers:

Oh! Nail me to my cross, the two thieves also, I am they
my three deaths, one for myself, one for my people,
and one for Sierra Leone (10).

In Cheney-Coker’s poetic work, “The mask of Christ is used by the poet for secular motives—to save the lives of his people as in Christopher Okigbo, not to save their souls” (Ojaide and Obi 150).

Thus, Christianity may be alien in origin, but it has become a religion embraced by millions of Africans who fashion their lifestyles on its tenets. Many African writers, especially the poets, tend to be critical of Christianity because of its association with slave trade and colonialism.

Integral to Africa’s historical experience is the absorption of some European intellectual trends of the time. This has to do with the arrival of modernism in African literature. With writing, as we know it today, coming with colonialism to Africa, the pathway to literary modernism was created for the African writer even be-

fore starting to write. Modernism, or, for that matter, modernity, in Africa is a borrowed, and some would say acquired, outfit through the happenstance of European colonization and domination of Africa through politics, economic exploitation, socio-cultural assimilation, military might, and other hegemonic strategies for their benefit from the 19th century and is still ongoing in the 21st century in different guises. African modernity involves historical, political, and intellectual transformation, occasioned by the European encounter, from the traditional to “new” ways. As described by Octavio Paz, “The new is not exactly the modern, unless it carries a double explosive charge: the negation of the past and the affirmation of something different” (qtd. in Masilela 4). One can say that European modernity has, in many ways, fashioned African modernity.

Modernism (or modernity) goes with many assumptions—literacy, democracy, etc. that fit well with the state of the European world at the time of its origin between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century that coincided with the onset of colonialism in Africa. On the literary level, the works of T.S. Elliot, Ezra Pounds, W.B. Yeats, and Gerald Manley Hopkins, among others, illustrate the modernist spirit that resulted in difficult, obscure, allusive, and fragmented ideas manifested in poetry. Modernism demands some intellectual basis for creativity, as seen from the literary works of Europe from the late nineteenth century to the 1940s. Its focus on form, difficulty, obscurity, and fragmentation (of the psyche) are alien to mainstream traditional African poetry. However, absorbed into poetic writing as done by Christopher Okigbo and Wole Soyinka at different points of their poetic careers, modernist techniques become tools used to express the multifarious modern African experience as lived or perceived by the writers. As a result of its very nature, modernism has given rise in African literature to a high-brow, elitist, ivory-tower orientation to creative works in, for Soyinka, *The Interpreters* and the *Idanre* poems. The bulk of Okigbo’s early poetry, especially *Labyrinths*, belongs to the modernist impulse as borrowed by African writers. To deny that modernism is a European, albeit Western,

concept is to miss the point of its source, inspiration, and intellectual basis.

African writers have also been responding to the impact of migration and globalization on their people and continent. Ecological and environmental matters, sometimes arising from the actions of multinational companies, are at the core of Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* on the ecology of the coastal part of South Africa and the writer's *The Activist* and *The Tale of the Harmattan* on the environmental degradation of the oil-rich Niger Delta area of Nigeria. A major conflict in Mda's *The Heart of Redness* is conserving nature and maintaining culture versus development in the forms of electricity, tourism, and casinos. The argument of the Believers appears stronger as they can maintain their culture and still have cultural tourism and also electricity through solar energy. In Mda's viewpoint, one can sensibly conserve nature and culture and still be progressive.

In recent times, there has been discussion about the direction of contemporary African literature, especially the direction the literature is taking in light of the fact that many of Africa's leading writers now live in the West and the problem arising from the foreign publishers bringing out texts that conform to their notion of "African" literature, which is usually a distorted Western view of Africa. The relevant question is, Is any writing with an African setting African literature? Are African writers living in North America and Western Europe writing about the continent different from Joseph Conrad of *The Nigger of the Narcissus* and *Heart of Darkness*, Graham Greene of *The Heart of the Matter*, and Joyce Cary of *Mister Johnson*? If Conrad was in a ship that might have sailed by the African coast and Cary was a colonial officer in Northern Nigeria, are "Africans" who travel to Africa to gain experience to write books much different? Recent works such as Chris Abani's *GraceLand* and Uzodinma Iweala's *Beast of No Nation* come to mind. Abani's language and perception of the Nigerian society have been criticized as not reflective of the reality of the society portrayed. Similarly, Iweala's portrayal of the child-soldier, a Western obsession of the time, is seen as more to please a Western audience than to reflect Africa's

reality. The naïve language of the child-soldier, Agu, reflects neither the author's Igbo origin nor a general Nigerian identity.

Many African writers in North America and Europe appear to be less culturally inhibited and write about what writers in their new environments deal with. Calixthe Beyala, based in France, has addressed sex and sexuality in a very explicit manner in some of her writings. Many Nigerian writers based in the United States such as Tess Onwueme, Chris Abani, and Iweala have homosexual and lesbian characters in their works. In her recent novel set on the Nigerian Civil War, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has many episodes describing sex in that time of desperation and suffering. Nigerian writers based at home do not seem to be fascinated by sex and sexuality, which the foreign-based writers are not inhibited to write about because of the liberal environments in which they find themselves.

Writing specifically of South African literature, but reflective of this phenomenon in the continent's literature, Gugu Hlongwane writes: "The point being advanced here is that the Western gaze influences not only how some South Africans write, but also who is elevated as the modern interpreter who will be palatable for Westerners" (5). Also many of the African writers getting published in North America and Europe are barely read in their home countries where these books are very expensive because of Africa's current economic plight. The argument, whether African writers specially selected to be published in the West are African and represent African experience, since the content and style of their works are geared towards foreign markets and readers, is thus at the core of the ongoing contestation of the African literary canon. There is the implication that the unfettered works of African writers in the continent published there without Western editorial selection or others living in the West but often bypassed and so published by small presses represent true African literature. With cosmopolitanism and globalization, at a time when many people feel it no longer matters where you live, some may find the argument of an African literary canon as unnecessary or passé in the postmodern world in which we find ourselves. However, if literature remains a cultural pro-

duction, one expects it to reflect the experience, values, and aesthetic considerations of the people who are supposed to own it.

The position of contemporary African writers living (and writing) in the Continent in the literary canon debate has become less significant as the writers in the West tend to steal the spotlight with the advantage of big publishers, promotion in the media, and money involved. Most African writers winning international literary prizes tend to be living in the West, and one can count so many of them—Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Calixthe Beyala, Zakes Mda, Sefi Atta, Helen Oyeyemi, and others. These writers abroad have their works reviewed by the *New York Times Review of Books*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, and other prestigious papers, magazines, and journals in the West. At the same time, despite globalization, the poor communication network within Africa does not allow the widespread flow of new books within the continent. Rather, each country has a sense of its writers, who are barely known outside that country even within Africa.

Those living and writing outside Africa seem therefore to be defining the canon rather than those writing in Africa with access to only the less financially viable homegrown publishers. In fact, many of the writers in the continent are helpless and desperate for good-quality publishers and often send their works outside to be considered for publication in the West. With the exception of South African publishing, which is far more advanced than in other African countries, the poor editorial staff, poor quality of books, and the weak distribution network of the African publishers keep many of the published works from circulating outside their regions of publication. When many of these books go abroad through the African Books Collective based in Oxford, UK, and distributed by Michigan State University Press in Detroit, USA, they circulate outside the mainstream's major bookstores. In the face of globalization, the African literary canon is suffering the inability of the cultural home (Africa) to define itself and so surrenders its identity to others to define in the editorial rooms of Western publishers caring more for the capital to be gained by giving their own audience what they want to read about Africa.



The establishment of a tradition and the inter-textuality that goes with it are related to the establishment of a canon. While there is the inter-textuality of indigenous folklore and writing in the form of folktales used in poetry, drama, and fiction that easily conjure in one's mind certain modes of behavior as of the tortoise, spider, and hyena, among others, it is the connectedness of the writing tradition that gives the readers/audience a sense of continuity. Younger writers seem to be referring to their elders' works to validate their own standing in their individual country's or continent's legacy.

Zakes Mda of South Africa in *The Heart of Redness* echoes Achebe of both *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. Similarly, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in her *Purple Hibiscus* reminds readers of Achebe's constant reference to an Igbo proverb that where one thing stands, another can also stand in the characters of opposing types of Catholics, priests, and siblings. Of course, the folktale of the tortoise that Pa Nnukwu tells is a variant of Achebe's in *Things Fall Apart*. In drama, Femi Osofisan has consciously *rewritten* J.P. Clark's play, *The Raft*, in *Another Raft*. In poetry, Christopher Okigbo's influence runs in poets from his native Nigeria to Malawi and South Africa. In many countries, there appears to be heirs to older poets as Kofi Anyidoho to Kofi Awoonor in Ghana and Tijan M. Sallah to Lenrie Peters in The Gambia.

There appears to be an observable lack of connection between the older and younger writers in the case of South African literature. This is understandable in the sense that the children of free South Africa are different from the two earlier generations of the H.I.E. Dhlomo-Benedict Vilakazi and the anti-apartheid generation of Dennis Brutus-Peter Abraham. With the burden of apartheid lifted, younger writers are thrust into a postmodern and global world in which all of a sudden race issues and being South African do not matter a lot. In any case, on the whole there appears to be a tradition of African literature that is being nurtured by the creative spirit of older writers.

One cannot conclude the discussion of a literary or artistic canon without a thorough examination of the aesthetics involved. Traditional and modern Africans and their artists have their established



concept of the purpose of literature. They also have their notions of beauty and artistic merit when judging a specific literary text. Whether among oral or written texts, Africans have standards and principles for judging cultural productions, what Emory Elliott describes as “the systems of values” (5). African literary aesthetic also has to do with critical evaluation and making “selections and judgments from among an abundant array of texts” (Elliott 5). It is from the expectations of readers that a people’s literature can establish its canon. Audiences challenge the writers to certain standards. Works that advance their cherished values and are consonant with the highest aspirations of African peoples and done artistically are those that can enter the canon under discussion.

It goes without saying that since literature is a cultural production and is dynamic like the culture that carries it, the notion of an African literary canon is fluid and not cast in stone. The canon is not calcified, but evolving within the shared experiences of Africans, rooted in their known reality, and forever tapping into their changing consciousness. However, despite the diversity and the expanding content and style of modern African literature arising from the dynamic experience of the people and continent, African literature will remain that literature that responds to the concerns and expresses the sensibility and aspirations and ideals of African people in a form and manner that they see as part of their living reality.

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Migration, Globalization, and Recent African Literature

Richard K. Prieb writes that in 2005 African writers as a whole made up what was arguably “the most transcultural and transnational group of individuals anywhere in the world” (57). Martha Donkor has drawn attention to the “impetus for formerly colonized people to turn to migration as an option to living difficult lives” (27). Dependency, underdevelopment, underutilization, and poverty have led to the migration of professional and non-professional African men and women to the economically developed world. To Rainer Tetzlaff, globalization is “the expansionist takeover of the present-day developing countries by the Western economic system” (qtd. in Donkor 29). Hau Ling Cheng, writing on constructing a transnational, multilocal sense of belonging, says “Globalization has challenged the traditional conceptualization of the sense of belonging between people and places” (141–159). He employs social theorist Ulrich Beck’s notion of place polygamy to interpret immigrants and their sense of “multiple homelands.”

Many African writers in the West (European metropolitan centers, Canada, and the United States) are caught in the postcolonial bind of “multiple homelands,” their new immigrant homes in the West and their abandoned African homes. African writers have become part of the worldwide phenomena of migration and globalization with the attendant physical, socio-cultural, psychic, and other forms of dislocation, which permeate their individual writings. Migration, globalization, and the related phenomena of exile, transnationality, multilocality, and place polygamy have their bearing on the cultural identity, aesthetics, content, and form of the literary production of Africans abroad. While there are Africans

writing in Arabic, French, and Portuguese living abroad, I intend to focus on literary works in English by sub-Saharan Africans in the West. The emphasis on fiction reflects its popularity in the contemporary literary scene.

Sub-Saharan African writers in the West respond individually to their condition, according to their particular backgrounds and experiences with often general and sometimes peculiar results. Generally the Africans born in the 1940s and 1950s respond differently from those born after the 1960s and those Africans born abroad. Those born in the 1940s and 1950s grew up in Africa and went to school there. They tend to compare their native African environment to the new Western environment. These writers view the Africa they know with a sense of nostalgia and often maintain an African identity in a foreign land.

The Ethiopian Nega Mezlekia, now living in Toronto, Canada, in *The God Who Begat a Jackal*, writes about the social classification and ethnic and religious struggles in feudal Abyssinia of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in an enrapturing tragic love story. The South African Zakes Mda, who currently teaches in Ohio State in the United States, does the same thing in *The Heart of Redness* by presenting not only Xhosa folklore but also generations of opposing native and religious groups and the British colonization of the Xhosa area of South Africa. Chimalum Nwankwo, a Nigerian poet, who was very grounded in his Igbo culture before coming to study and later work in the United States, reinforces this trend in *The Womb in the Heart* with images of the *udala* tree that evokes traditional African spirituality.

The works are filled with nostalgia and set in concrete space and time. The examples of Mezlekia's *The God Who Begat a Jackal* and Mda's *The Heart of Redness* show specific and concrete geographical locations of Abyssinia (modern Ethiopia) and the Xhosa part of South Africa respectively. The vegetation, rivers, and other landscape features peculiar to those places are clearly delineated in the often sensuous and evocative language of the authors.

These works by older African writers living in the West are all steeped in folkloric allusions. *The God Who Begat a Jackal* bristles with folklore. The conflict between the followers of Mawu-Lisa and

Amma runs through the novel. Gudu, the protagonist of the novel, is a poet and an entertainer, who narrates not only tales but also riddles and other traditional tropes. *The Heart of Redness* is similarly filled with myths of the AmaXhosa such as that of Nongqawuse who parted the waves for AmaXhosa to pass and drowned their enemies. The recourse to mythologizing by these authors is an expression of their cultural identity.

These writers, with deep understanding of Africa they left behind, propose solutions to Africa's moral, ethical, and developmental problems as is done in Mda's *The Heart of Redness* on the debate about the need for development on the one hand versus the need to maintain a cultural identity in the people's "redness" and a pristine environment that contained traditionally known curative herbs on the other. The writers tend to eulogize ancient virtues that they think contemporary Africa can imbibe to be strong; hence the heroic and nostalgic manner older times are presented.

The post-1960-born Africans, sometimes children of immigrants, have at best vague memories of Africa, especially the traditional environment and society, and yet are not accepted as French, British, Portuguese, German, Dutch, or American even when citizens. What these Africans write is very different from their older counterparts who had much experience of Africa. Many in this group suffer from a psychic disconnection from the continent. These "children of postcolony" (qtd. in Adesanmi 967), educated in the West, imagine Africa because they have not experienced the continent physically and culturally.

The strong sense of history displayed by the older writers appears lacking. It is true that Chris Abani's *GraceLand* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* are set both in the 1980s and 1971—1990s respectively. However, the two works do not emphasize the detailed historiography that both *The God Who Begat a Jackal* and *The Heart of Redness* encompass in their respective societies. Also there are extremely few folkloric forays in the younger immigrant writers' works.

Most of the novels of the younger African immigrant writers often deal with the themes of coming of age. Abani's *GraceLand*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, and Uzodinma Iweala's

Beasts of No Nation all explore this theme. Abani gives a portrait of Elvis, the protagonist of the story, as he grows up in the Maroko slums of Lagos amidst violence and drugs. In Adichie's novel, Kambili, the narrator of the story and daughter of the strictly Catholic Eugene, is gradually changed by the exposure to her grandfather, Papa Nnukwu, and her aunt, Ifeoma, and her family in the trips to Abba and Nsukka respectively. Kambili's crush on Father Amadi is part of the sexual awakening in her growing-up experience. The child-soldier protagonist and narrator of Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* goes through senseless violence and at the end wants to go to school and live a normal child's life.

It is significant to note that while the older African immigrant writers such as Mezlekia and Mda tend to have a romantic reading of history and a nostalgic testimony of African culture, society, and environment, the younger writers like Abani and Iweala tend to be more critical of African history and often show an indifference to the culture. Adichie's portrayal of Papa Nnukwu and his positive traditional religion appears exceptional of the younger generation of African immigrant writers abroad.

A major trope of the younger African writers is violence. Two recent works by Africans living in the United States best illustrate this phenomenon—Chris Abani's *GraceLand* (2003) and Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005). In his novel, Abani presents rape, drug use, and the selling of human body parts. Iweala's novel is not set in a named African country but suggests southeastern Nigeria during the civil war period of 1967—1970. The protagonist, Agu, the other child soldiers, and their officers (Commandant and Luftenant) commit acts of senseless violence in very gory episodes.

The language of some African writers living and writing outside tends to be unique and different from the language of Africans in Africa. Abani uses English that is not West African for a story told about Nigerians by a Nigerian. The dragon flies, tomb flies, brownstone houses, and other forms of diction indicate the African writer's effort to use the language of his foreign readers.

Similarly, Iweala sets his novel in Africa and gives the young Agu who boasts of his reading but limited education very naïve English

not related to pidgin, Igbo, but creates his own peculiarly weird language for the boy. His use of “feets” and other ungrammatical expressions is expected to be excused because of his low education. However, words like “tin,” “shack,” “slug,” and most of the idiom-phones are more to make the story easy for Westerners to understand than a reflection of the child’s educational, cultural, and social background.

Two other African writers, the Nigerian Sefi Atta and the Ghanaian Mohammed Naseehu Ali write as if with a Western or American audience in mind. Atta explains simple cultural icons like types of dresses and food that are commonplace experiences of Nigerians in Lagos. For instance, she writes: “Wrapper is the cloth women tied around their waists’ (185). Also, she explains: “The general help we called house boys and house girls” (212). Mohammed Ali also does this in his short story collection, *The Prophet of Zongo Street*. In “Mallam Sile,” he writes: “Abeeba had tried to collect the money Samadu owed them, which was *eighty cedis—about four dollars*” (161, emphasis mine). In the same story, he writes: “The veins on her neck stood erect, like those juju (voodoo) fighters at the annual wrestling contest” (163). The Brooklyn-based writer explains Ghanaian terms such as “akpeteshie” as cheap but strong liquor to his readers. He also explains Islamic terminologies as he tells his stories.

This writing with a non-African Western audience in mind, a situation that migration and globalization have reinforced, is not limited to the younger African immigrant writers alone but also involves the older writers. Zakes Mda does a lot of explaining of Xhosa terms and customs in *The Heart of Redness*.

Many African writers, especially those a little older and who reconnect with their roots with frequent visits, practice place polygamy and have a multilocal sense of belonging. Chimalum Nwankwo belongs to this group in the sense that though working in the United States, he is as connected to his Nigerian home as ever. This can be seen in *The Womb in the Heart* where the poet explores traditional African life represented by the *udala* tree.

Globalization is seen by most non-Westerners as a form of Westernization of the globe and a phenomenon threatening to destroy

“cultural diversity” (Halm 155–173). At the moment there are Africans writing to be read by only or mainly Westerners and, as the examples of Abani and Iweala in their respective *GraceLand* and *Beasts of No Nation* show, there is lack of realistic reflection of the place, characters, worldview, and sensibility of Africa. In this regard, setting a novel in Africa becomes a convenient tool rather than a true reflection or relevant milieu towards an artistic function.

The exposure to the West and its literary heritage may be responsible for an expanded awareness in African writers living abroad. It is interesting that both Abani and Iweala, as Tess Onwueme in *Tell It to Women* and Ernest Emenyonu in *Tales of Our Motherland*, a short story collection, depict gay lifestyle in both traditional and modern Nigerian Igbo societies, a phenomenon that living in the West gives these writers the freedom and courage to express and expose. Similarly, the Cameroonian Calixthe Beyala, based in France where she is popular, writes novels depicting lesbianism, sexual abuse, female genital mutilation, and erotica, subjects that can be publicly discussed in the West but often suppressed in her native Africa. Writing in the generally liberal West thus gives one freedom to write about what could be seen as taboo in Africa.

Ecological and environmental matters, often talked about in the West, are at the core of Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness* on the ecology of the coastal part of South Africa and the writer’s novel, *The Activist*, on the environmental degradation of the oil-rich Niger Delta area of Nigeria. Coincidentally, in the fiction and the poetry collection on environmental and ecological issues, there is a returning character or persona whose awareness of the sensitivity to the environment probably gained from residence in the Western world may have inspired the activist ecological campaign. In Mda’s novel, Camagu is an environmental activist in his efforts to save the pristine environment of Qolorha as the Activist of the writer’s *The Activist* does in the oil-polluted Niger Delta of Nigeria.

Some of the African immigrant novels deal with emigration, even as others deal with a return home, thus creating a diversity of themes. In Adichie’s novel, the affable Ifeoma, the counterfoil to the fanatical Eugene, leaves with her children to the United States from where her daughter Amaka writes: “... we don’t laugh any-

more” (301). While migration to the developed West is a relief from the economic discomfort of Africa, it burdens the individual with psychological, spiritual, and other problems. Abani’s Felicia and also the protagonist of *GraceLand* also leave for the United States as a refuge from the dysfunctional Nigerian society.

As the characters that leave Africa for one reason or another express relief, so do those characters that go back to Africa have initial problems and eventual self-fulfillment. Generally there is a new type of alienation. In Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*, Camagu is not only disillusioned by the new democracy in South Africa but also discriminated against for having been away. He fails to get a job because he does not know the new “dance of freedom.” However, the cooperative he founded and his intellectual contributions benefit the community of Qolorha.

In *The Activist*, the protagonist leaves the United States for his Niger Delta homeland and faces initial setbacks, discomfort, and other problems. However, eventually, his efforts bear fruit as he sensitizes the populace of the Niger Delta to their exploitation and the degradation of their environment. When he becomes governor of Niger Delta State, he creates a ministry to deal with environmental and mineral matters with the responsibility of solving problems of pollution, health, and marginalization.

Experimentation in form is abundant in the writings of Africans living in the West. It is in the poetic genre that this is most noticeable. Ogaga Ifowodo in his *Madiba* poems uses the sonnet form for a series of poems in honor of Nelson Mandela. The strictness of form is such that the twenty seven sonnets represent the years Mandela spent in the maximum security jail of Robben Island for his anti-apartheid activities. Chimalum Nwankwo’s and the writer’s recent poetry works pay particular attention to form, thus blunting the often expressed criticism of the third generation of African poets as paying more attention to content at the expense of form. Nwankwo’s *The Womb in the Heart* has most of the poems in regular stanzas.

The phenomenon of Africans abroad writing about Africa and African experiences is ongoing. While in the past a few African writers living abroad have written about Africa, never before now

had such a large number of African writers, due to migration and globalization, been resident outside the continent and writing about it. Despite the ongoing status of the phenomenon, certain conclusions can already be drawn from the available body of work by Africans in the West writing about Africa in their fiction, drama, and poetry. By virtue of living outside their African homeland and in the West in an age of globalization, there are changes in subject matter, themes, style, and form in the various genres in which the writers engage themselves. One cannot predict to what extent new directions in writing will prove to question whether these writers are still African writers or writers of a different socio-cultural reality. With time the writers abroad may develop their own diasporic identity. The phenomena of migration and globalization have an overwhelming impact on African literature and generate diverse perspectives of the evolving nature of African literature and the depiction of the contemporary African condition.

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African Literature, Globalization, and the Quest for Peace

Introduction

Literature in Africa is an artistic production through which writers do not only express the aspirations, frustrations, and other experiences of their people/societies but also exhibit their culture. Creative writing, like other arts or trades, comes with responsibilities. That one has the talent and so chooses to exercise it in creative writing is not enough, but one also owes a measure of responsibility to the society and culture that have nurtured one's talent and to the potential readers/audience of one's literary contribution. The quest for peace in society has always been a major preoccupation of traditional and modern African literatures. Since African societies and the world continue to face multifarious problems, the responsible writer is challenged to formulate a vision to eliminate them so as to ensure peaceful coexistence. In recent times writers have been compelled to respond in their respective works to the phenomenon of globalization, which though not new but in many ways threatens their culture, identity, and survival. Addressing globalization in all its ramifications, therefore, is related to the quest for peace.

In the African tradition, literature tends to be utilitarian rather than art for art's sake. In their works, writers often interrogate the socio-political, economic, and other problems in their respective societies. It is in this tradition of commitment towards positive values and ideals of their societies that they address not only the quest for peace but also a defense of their culture, two core literary missions, which are oftentimes intertwined. This chapter will address the issues of globalization and quest for peace in African literature



with particular attention to Olu Obafemi, the Nigerian dramatist, whose works have been understudied.

Olu Obafemi's dramatic and other works are examples of literature in the quest for peace and also confronting a phenomenon that is assaulting African identity and posing problems that threaten the quest for peace. As David Cook aptly puts it in his introduction to Obafemi's collected plays, the dramatist's "aspiration is to remold a more humane society from amidst the twisted inheritance of misplaced and misused power: the ruthless power of the gun and even more, the callous power of cash" (iv). It needs to be stated from the start that each writer seeks individual ways to solve human problems in his or her society, which, if not tackled, could proliferate into global problems. This chapter also touches on the role of the African writer. To be relevant, the writer should use his or her artistic creations to promote justice, compassion, and tolerance and make people happy and fulfilled in their lives on personal and public levels. In the works of many African writers, they seek these virtues in their respective societies. Let us begin with the impact of globalization and then proceed to address the perennial quest for peace in contemporary African literature.

Globalization

Africa is, for better or worse, part of the global world which has now become inextricably inter-connected more than ever before because of new means of communication, rapid movements of people, new technologies, and other "scapes" that Arjun Appadurai ascribes to globalization, that make the entire world a "global village." David Held says that globalization is not new but an "increase in the processes of worldwide integration that began centuries ago and has culminated in the transformation of the global economy" (qtd. in Donkor 28). As also stated in the earlier chapter, to Rainer Tetzlaff, globalization is "the expansionist takeover of the present-day developing countries by the Western economic system" (qtd. in Donkor 29). In this process, the Western is often seen as the modern. There is thus a close relationship between modernity and

globalization, since “Electronic media give a new twist to the environment within which the modern and the global often appear as flip sides of the same coin” (Appadurai 3). Modernity has, for the most part, been equated with Westernization in Africa. Thus, globalization is another form of Westernization through new media and migration.

Globalization has led to migration from developing countries to developed countries and, for Africans both at their native and new homes, has resulted in physical, socio-cultural, psychic, and other forms of dislocation. As Appadurai also puts it, “electronic mediation and mass migration mark the world of the present not as technically new forces but as ones that seem to impel (and compel) the work of the imagination” (4).

Let us start with a letter the writer received in July 2009 from the Editor of Picador Africa, the African branch of Picador, to whom he had sent the manuscript of a novel titled *Stars of the Long Night*, a sort of mythical story about how traditional women broke the constraints imposed on them by patriarchy. This revolution came by one of them, rather than a man, stepping out to be the chief masquerade that the gods and ancestors had to choose for the role in an important festival. Part of the editor’s letter reads:

This is not the kind of fiction that we are currently looking to publish and have to be strict with this as a result of the economic climate. **It is well written but we do not see a wide enough market for this book at the current moment. . . . we believe that although it would work well in Nigeria, it lacks an international stamp** (emphasis mine).

Many other African writers attempting to publish their works with Western-owned publishing houses might have faced a similar experience. That a literary work would do well in its setting but lack an “international stamp,” a code word for a so-called global audience, which is really the West, has always been there but never as heightened as now in the age of globalization.

Here’s a recent call for poems by *Zugenruhe*, an online Western literary magazine:



Zugenruhe is now open for submissions of poetry. *Zugenruhe* is an online journal of international poetry, poetry of exile, and poetry of environmental memory. Please send 3–5 poems in an attachment to Zugenruhepoetry@yahoo.com for our inaugural issue. **We are looking for your best work on global themes, poetry that is rooted in the particulars of place, and poems that explore nature and environmental issues in a global context (emphasis mine).**

There are similar calls from many other magazines, journals, and publishers for creative works posted on the Internet for submissions to which writers of every continent and with access to the Internet, a major pillar of globalization, are invited to make submissions of poems, short stories, or extracts of other literary genres and forms.

The Western Unchanging Image of Africa

An unchanging image of Africa persists in the West through globalization, as Western publishers' choice of African works to publish and promote tends to be those dealing with negative experiences. Western publishers generally seek manuscripts of Africa bedeviled by conflicts and misery; hence the many works of child-soldiers, either as autobiographies, memoirs, or fiction, published recently in the West. Copious examples tell this bias of Western publishers for an Africa that is static and incapable of change to something the Mother Continent's own children can dream for her! African writers who paint a grim picture of their people thus write in the self-fulfilling manner and become darlings of the West. To Western publishers, African writers are themselves expected to validate the CNN and *The National Geographic* negative type of coverage of Africa.

Let me give some examples. The autobiography of the Sierra Leonean Ishmael Beah, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, was for long at the top of the literary charts in the United



States. Its author was interviewed by the media many times and appeared in the *New York Times* book review pages. Uzodinma Iweala's *Beast of No Nation*, a novel set in an unidentified but presumably Biafran (Eastern Nigerian) setting, and follows the growing up of a child-soldier, is promoted across the United States. Literary works that deal with war and violence appear to be promoted by Western publishers of African literary works. In fact, in an essay on recent African literature, Richard Prieb says that violence percolates much of African literature. I would say that Westerners (North Americans and Europeans) like to read African works that deal with violence. Many African writers abroad tell what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie describes as the "single story" of a negative Africa without the positive side of the African experience.

E.C. Osondu's short story, "Waiting," that won the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2009, also reflects the emphasis on war-related themes; in this case children in a refugee camp run by the Red Cross. While Osondu's people, the Igbo, had the experience of the Nigerian Civil War of the late 1960s, his story's historical setting is vague. However, the combination of war, African refugees with Western place names such as Orlando, Dakota, Paris, London, and the benevolent Red Cross and the Catholic Reverend Sister (Nora) appear to conform to the Western gaze on a "dark" Africa. Here is the opening paragraph of the story:

My name is Orlando Zaki. *Orlando* is taken from Orlando, Florida, which is what is written on the t-shirt given to me by the Red Cross. *Zaki* is the name of the town where I was found and from which I was brought to this refugee camp. My friends in the camp are known by the inscriptions written on their t-shirts. Acapulco wears a t-shirt with the inscription, *Acapulco*. Sexy's t-shirt has the inscription *Tell Me I'm Sexy*. Paris's t-shirt says *See Paris And Die*. When she is coming toward me, I close my eyes because I don't want to die. Even when one gets a new t-shirt, your old name stays with you. Paris just got a new t-shirt that says *Ask Me About Jesus*, but we still call her Paris and we are not asking her about anybody. There



was a girl in the camp once whose t-shirt said *Got Milk?* She threw the t-shirt away because some of the boys in the camp were always pressing her breasts forcefully to see if they had milk. You cannot know what will be written on your t-shirt. We struggle and fight for them and count ourselves lucky that we get anything at all. Take Lousy for instance; his t-shirt says *My Dad Went To Yellowstone And Got Me This Lousy T-shirt*. He cannot fight, so he's not been able to get another one and has been wearing the same t-shirt since he came to the camp. Though what is written on it is now faded, the name has stuck. Some people are lucky: London had a t-shirt that said *London* and is now in London. He's been adopted by a family over there. Maybe I will find a family in Orlando, Florida, that will adopt me.

All the young refugees are "waiting" to be adopted by mainly Americans! Just as in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Ifeoma and her family emigrate to the United States, and in Chris Abani's *GraceLand*, the protagonist with an American iconic name, Elvis, migrates to the United States too. Africa becomes the place to flee from and the West, especially the United States, the refuge to Africans in distress. It is significant that in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* and the writer's *The Activist* the protagonists leave the United States to live meaningful lives in Africa.

Oprah Winfrey's recent selection into her Book Club's readings of Uwem Akpan's *Say You're One of Them* is an indication of the popularity in the West of African self-fulfilling themes. The author's collection of short stories, published in the United States and Britain, has received rave reviews among Western critics and book-sellers. Each of the five stories is set in a different African country (Benin, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, and Rwanda) and deal with children as victims of poverty, violence, sexual abuse, and other negative phenomena. In the title story of the collection, set in Rwanda, a young daughter watches her Hutu father kill her mother who is Tutsi. The stories are very grim. Of course, with Oprah Winfrey's selection of this African work of fiction to promote, Westerners

will once more reinforce their negative image of Africa bedeviled by ethnic conflicts, poverty, misery, prostitution, and other ills.

Sex, Sexuality, and Related Themes

New themes in contemporary African literature tend to reflect Western interests and the impact of globalization. Sex and sexuality, as reflected in female excision/circumcision/female genital mutilation, lesbianism and homosexuality, obsession with sex in a rather lurid form, generally uncommon in African cultural norms, are exhibited in African fictional works that are seen as successful in the Western world. The Cameroonian Calyxthe Beyala, in many of her fictional works, writes unabashedly about sex. In Africa, sexual activities tend to be private and subtle rather than the exhibitionist manner common in Western writings and movies.

Many African writers in the West now write about lesbianism and homosexuality that are taken for granted in the West. Abani's *GraceLand*, Uzodinma Iweala's *Beast of No Nation*, as well as Tess Onwueme's play, *Tell It To Women*, and Ernest Emenyonu's short stories, *Tales of Our Motherland*, deal with lesbian and homosexual characters. Ironically, none of the Igbo writers in Nigeria such as Ifeoma Okoye and Akachi Ezeigbo deal with these sexual orientation themes. Are those at home suppressing truth or those outside in the West pandering to Western tastes? The truth may lie between the two positions, but globalization has made the writers abroad occupy the limelight and promote a lurid image of the homeland while the alternative view from home cannot be heard outside.

African Writers at Home and Abroad

The phenomena of migration, exile, and globalization have given rise to two African literatures; one outside, based in the West and palatable to Westerners, and the other at home for African con-

sumption. Africans writing outside the continent have the luxury of the liberal tendencies of the West to highlight or invent issues of their people at home. Are Africans outside competently equipped experientially and emotionally to write about Africa or they are imagining Africa, just as Joseph Conrad, Joyce Cary, and other Westerners “imagined” Africa? Is there a new African Diaspora literature being created in the Western environments in which these African writers find themselves—geographically, socially, politically, and of course economically? Are these new African communities really African in a foreign environment? Is globalization that has resulted in new waves of migration mainly for economic and human rights reasons not diluting the Africanity of African literature? Or is it expanding it and making it dynamic and adventurous? Will a time come when the new African economic migrant in North America or Europe become so out of touch with the reality far away that he or she will not be writing about Africa but an imagined Africa that coalesces with the Western hosts’ views? And is the new African literature, especially by writers abroad, being created for the global market? These questions are pertinent since “locality itself is a historical product and ... the histories through which localities emerge are eventually subject to the dynamics of the global” (Appadurai 18).

The Global Village Factor

The “global village” factor is important in any writer in Africa with access to publishing houses whose headquarters are in the West that dictates the literary tastes and trends. Most African writers have access to the Internet and post their own writings, poems, short stories, and extracts of longer writings, in the Internet for worldwide viewing. For instance, compiling an edited anthology of the “new” African poetry, Tijan M. Sallah and I got to know some young poets on the Internet. Many African writers at home or abroad have web sites and blogs and are on Face Book and are in constant touch with readers across the globe. Electronic copies of their works are accessible from anywhere in the world. Many publish in online literary

magazines. The new reality of globalization affects the African writer at home or abroad. The one abroad knows those at home will scrutinize his or her writings, as the one at home knows that the work has borderless possibilities in readership.

With the communicative role of literature and the global village factor in mind, the African writer consciously or subconsciously factors into the writing the global repercussions of the creative work. He or she is not just writing for himself or herself but also for “others,” who could be near or very far away. Now when I write, I attempt to transfer the local geography into scenic creations that can draw non-nationals into the experience being depicted. I try to portray the landscape to be imagined both outside and within the African context. Setting, which used to be more physical, has become a peculiar human metaphor for the experience being conveyed.

Many African writers discuss their local issues in a global context. In this aspect issues of the environment have been addressed. Since the local and the global are inter-related in locality, environmental, ecological, and nature issues have been the focus of some African writers. Niyi Osundare in *The Eye of the Earth* promotes sensitivity to the earth and proclaims that the earth will not die. The South African Zakes Mda also deals with the environment in *The Heart of Redness*. He writes about promoting eco tourism that will ensure development. In *The Activist* the writer writes about the environmental degradation of the Niger Delta and proposes through the protagonist a vision of a healthy environmental policy despite the oil and gas exploration. One advantage of globalization is that it has raised awareness of the atrocious policies and practices of multinational oil corporations in a developing country like Nigeria.

Web poetry has not yet caught up with African writers at home or abroad. Web poetry has its own contracted spellings, grammar, and form, just as text messages. It is the extension of the media that drive communication in the age of globalization. This emerging phenomenon is bound to affect African literature as it gains popularity in the West and the borderless frontiers of the Internet. It is only a matter of time.



The Pros and Cons of Globalization to African Writers

Let me thus not be misunderstood. Globalization is both negative and positive. For African writers, there is ample room to exploit the phenomenon for the regional writer's benefit. This is because paradoxically the global calls for the inscription of the local to be complete. Thus, as the global is localized, so also is the local globalized. This is an area that African writers should fully exploit to remain African.

Let me give the example of the Niger Delta, which has been the setting of many literary works, including J.P. Clark's *The Wives' Revolt* and *All for Oil*, Ogaga Ifowodo's *Oil Lamp*, Ahmed Yerima's *Hard Ground*, the writer's *Tale of the Harmattan* and *The Activist*, and numerous works by writers of or about the area. This oil and gas-rich region of Nigeria has faced environmental and ecological degradation following the exploration and exploitation of these natural resources for the past fifty years. The rampant pollution of the area is a matter of concern to the rest of the world because the pollution there adds to the world's green gas effect. The writers of this region expose the vulnerability of the ecosystem in the face of the multinational onslaught of Shell, Chevron, and others. What happens here is reflective of a global phenomenon of mineral-rich areas being damaged by multinationals, as in Bolivia, Brazil, India, and other places. In a way, globalization has given voice to the local to expose the perils to humanity of environmental and ecological degradation as happens in the Niger Delta. With attention drawn to the area by these writers and activists, the oil corporations and the Federal Government have become more sensitive to the concerns of the people in the area. From my observation, globalization shuts out and opens up opportunities simultaneously, and it is left with the African writer to fight against being shut out and to be a recognizable part of the world.



African Literature and the Language of Globalization

Language is the vehicle not only of a people's culture but also of the human experience manifested in thought and feeling. No matter how "extra-territorial" English may have become, it still carries the thought and worldview of a people. Postcolonial societies of Africa have in the past created their own English to shed as much of English thought as possible while absorbing their own. Thus, Africans have been using English, unlike the British or the Americans, to infuse English with an African episteme. The African use of English is so peculiar that the African identity remains despite the use of the foreign language.

Two major trends appear to be promoted by globalization among African writers: the Americanization of English by younger writers and the shift to a more universal language by the older writers. Younger African writers, no doubt influenced by the forces of globalization, embrace American pop culture and use American language to express their feelings and ideas. This practice affirms Appadurai's observation of the "drift from Anglophone diction to American style" (2). Chris Abani in *GraceLand* represents this trend as in the character of Elvis, the protagonist of the novel. The diction of the novel is American rather than Nigerian English. Of the other writers, mainly older, there is the effort to recast English in a less ethnic way than, for instance, Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe have done in using English informed by their respective Yoruba and Igbo languages in classic works such as *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Things Fall Apart*. Ben Okri and Syl Cheney-Coker are good examples of those writers using English in a more universal manner and stripped of ethnic nuances in their respective *Starbook* and *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*. For African writers in the age of globalization, there is a new language engagement procedure in creative writing tied to a broader human culture than an ethnic culture.

The result of these two trends among African writers is a gradual erosion of the Africanity of their works. If it is an effort to be published and be read by a larger English-literate audience, it is a betrayal of the ethics of writing not so much to convey the thought,



worldview, and identity of the people who form the characters and whose place forms the setting of a literary work.

A major trend in modern African literature before the preoccupation with globalization has been the promotion of literature in African languages. While Benedict Vilakazi, Obi Wali, and Ngugi wa 'Thiongo, among others, have called for the writing of African literature in African languages, and a conference with the theme of "Against all Odds" was held in Asmara, Eritrea, in 2001 to promote writing in African languages, globalization has appeared as a distraction from nationalist policies on literature and the curriculum. Globalization will have the negative effect of accelerating the demise of many African languages among the so many that UNESCO already says are disappearing. What is happening to the works of Akinwumi Isola, a highly talented Yoruba writer? Who is paying attention to Hausa writers in a global age? After the Asmara Conference, I started writing poems in Urhobo, but what is in the current global dispensation to encourage younger African writers to use their indigenous languages? Literature goes a long way to develop languages, and globalization will be at the expense of African literature in African languages. One can see globalization as threatening the cultural diversity and enthroning hegemonic English as the major language of literature.

Where is Olu Obafemi's stand on globalization? He is widely traveled and has spent time at British and American universities. Of his writings, it is *Nights of the Mystical Beast* that directly addresses some of the concerns about globalization. Kay explains to Debbie and Roberts:

So you've come to complete the chapter of your civilizing mission? Hm, you brought us clothes to cover our naked backs. Your history. Yes. Our children know by heart all the names of your ancestral celebrities. William the Conqueror, Alexander the Great, Charlemagne, but mention Jaja of Opobo, Mansa Kanka Musa, Chaka the Zulu, Kurumi and they gape. You brought us trade. Yes, we remain, cursedly the uninhibited market for your surplus rotten goods which nobody else wants except our



humble selves, your very obedient friends. We are your kites consuming accursed goods (17).

By advocating that Africans should know their history and other human experiences rather than other people's history and culture and also affirming self-reliance as a sine qua non of an independent people, Obafemi makes clear his position on globalization. The language of Obafemi's plays remains grounded in Yoruba folklore and his work is a good example of African writing that affirms Africanity by not bowing to the hegemonic waves of globalization.

African Literature and the Quest for Peace

In the African tradition, literature is often deployed to play a transformative role in society. The quest for peace has always been a literary objective of African cultures from the oral traditions of abuse and praise poetry, whether of the Urhobo *udje* and Ewe *halo* or the Yoruba *ijala* and *oriki* and Zulu and Tswana *izibongo*. The abuse traditions use satire to regulate the behavior of men and women in society to curb excesses in human behaviors and to serve as a deterrent of evil practices that could bring disharmony to the community. On the other hand, praise poetry promotes courage, hospitality, generosity, sensitivity, and other virtues that are held as models to which all humans should aspire for meaningful lives and peaceful coexistence. It is this attempt to promote harmony and peaceful coexistence that forms the main objective of many of our oral traditions of literature.

Literature affirms the positive values of justice, equality, fairness, freedom, and sensitivity as ideals to promote peace in society. African literary artists from traditional through modern to contemporary times understand that peace will not come if they fold their arms and only wish and pray for it. They believe it is part of their mission as literary artists and so make a conscious and persistent effort of speaking out and being activist in their vocation. Writers are aware of so many negative forces in society such as corruption, exploitation, torture, tyranny, and oppression that they must combat.



Peace in society is so important that we cannot shelve our responsibilities by saying that we are not touched by what happens in some other places. We, as humans, are interconnected because there is the infectious nature of positive and negative happenings. As Wole Soyinka writes in *The Man Died*, “The man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny.” The Rwanda genocide could take place anywhere else in Africa, if it is not condemned unequivocally. As will be discussed later, taking care of the environment affects everybody, since all humans could be victims of global warming and other negative effects of climate change.

Let me address some specific areas in which African writers have focused in the quest for peace. Many literary critics have written on contemporary African writers’ predisposition to writing about politics. This should not be surprising, bearing in mind the corruption that is rampant in most African states, the dictatorship, tyranny, oppression, inordinate greed, and other negative attributes that bedevil African political life. The political elites in most African societies treat the common people with total neglect of their plight. They embezzle the state funds as if personal and stash them in Swiss and other foreign banks and deprive their nations of much needed funds for development. As if that were not enough, they steal elections and behave as if they were above the laws of their lands.

Many African writers have proffered their vision in this area. From Soyinka through J.P. Clark-Bekederemo to Olu Obafemi, Odia Ofeimun, Niyi Osundare, and Jack Mapanje, African writers have criticized political corruption in their societies. There will be peace only if the resources of the country are shared equitably; there will be peace if political opponents, just because they express contrary views, are not thrown into jail or harassed; there will be peace only if elections are not rigged to put in power those who represent only their selfish interests. Many Nigerian writers condemn the excessive greed which has taken over the political life of the country. In *Nights of a Mystical Beast*, Obafemi’s Giro is symptomatic of the Nigerian state; hence Laja vows to “begin the real fight to end this long tale of exploitation of people by our people, a conspiracy organized by our big shots here and their allies abroad” (*Collected Plays of Olu Obafemi*(1), 25).

Closely related to the contribution of literature to promoting peace in the political sphere is the expression of the need to bridge the gap between the haves and have-nots, the rulers and the ruled, to shrink the class divide in society which often leads to social unrest and even war. African writers have done much to range on the side of the underclass against their exploiters by embarrassing the haves into forsaking greed and promoting a society without the sharp divide as exists today. Whether in Jared Angira, Syl Cheney-Coker, Festus Iyayi, Olu Obafemi, Femi Osofisan, Niyi Osundare, and others, the use of literature as a weapon against lording it over others is pervasive. Cheney-Coker's "Peasants" sums up the mission of writers, warning the exploiters: "Beware!" Literature aims at reducing human suffering and inequality caused by class differences to bring about peace. African writers have written about the need for food, hospitals, and schools, and other basic necessities for the masses and their children.

Olu Obafemi focuses on class divide particularly in both *Naira Has No Gender* and *Suicide Syndrome*. *Suicide Syndrome* has to do with hunger, overcoming austerity, finding jobs, paying rents and levies; the daily harrowing problems of the underprivileged. Literature draws attention to the poor state of things towards solving them by excoriating the conscience of the exploiters and sensitizing the hearts of humans towards the higher goals of selflessness, generosity, and compassion for the less privileged. The presence of blind men and cripples, among other characters, in Obafemi's plays indicates an appeal for human compassion, a pre-requisite of peace in society and the world.

One of the major causes of lack of peace in society is the relationship between the powerful and their victims. This manifests not only in politics and socio-economic areas but also in the relationship between the strong and the weak. On a macro level, post-colonial literature attempts to inscribe the former colonies at the center of discourse rather than at the periphery to which they are confined in the hegemonic literary discourse of the West. However, let me look at the micro level of power structure. This happens often in the realm of politics when elections are highjacked and the rulers owe no responsibility to the people they are supposed to represent.



The resistance to democracy often disturbs the peaceful coexistence of people of the society. In many literary works, the army boys behave recklessly because they carry the gun. They close stalls of market women, rape women, and seize things from their rightful owners. This abuse of power is also exercised by majority groups over minorities. Avoiding the exploitation, oppression, and marginalization of the weak, as of civilians, minorities, and have-nots, is very important in ensuring peace, because those taken advantage of tend to fight back. The Niger Delta problem has resulted in the lack of peace not only in the area but also in the entire nation.

In addition to condemning and embarrassing the corrupt leadership in Africa, the writers work towards conflict resolution and the maintenance of peace in the society. The writers promote sensitivity to others, the lack of which could result in unharnessed greed, ethnic nationalism and jingoism, and total disregard for the feelings and views of others. Literature therefore is a major advocate for peace in the African society.

The environment has become one of the indices of measuring peace in a society. As a result of the close connection between native peoples and their land for subsistence, they tend to suffer more when their environment is polluted. That is the case with the Niger Delta minority ethnic groups, especially with the Izon, Ogoni, Itsekiri, and Urhobo. Land is very important for the cultural and economic survival of the people. Polluting and desecrating that land therefore go against their cultural and economic survival. The concept of environmental justice embraces the environment and human rights. It involves the production, consumption of resources, and pollution caused by modernization, industrialization, and population growth. Often, one person's or group's peace hurts or causes problems for another.

African writers deal with the exploitation of the local communities as well as the degradation of the ecosystem of the area. Niyi Osundare in *The Eye of the Earth*, Zakes Mda in *The Heart of Redness*, and the writer's *Tale of the Harmattan* and *The Activist* address environmental issues. These writers advocate the "ecology of justice" for harmony in the relationship between humans and their environment for their respective wellbeing in the interconnected

cycles of life. There can be no peace in a place without clean land, water, air, and surroundings for farming, fishing, and a healthy life. In their respective poetry and fiction Osundare, Mda, and other writers advocate the “ethics of caution and reciprocity” between human and non-human nature.

Impact of Literature on Pursuit of National and World Peace

Drama and poetry are often performed for national reconciliation and development. Examples can be found in South Africa and Rwanda, where literary artists have used their works to facilitate the peace-building process in their respective countries. Nigerian writers need to do this to solve the endemic ethnic/religious crises in Bauchi, Kaduna, and Plateau States of Nigeria. Literature promotes tolerance by sensitizing readers/audience towards accommodation of all, be it on ethnic, ideological, political, religious, sexual, or other matters.

Literature seeks love and justice in fiction, drama, and poetry. The character of Ebi in *The Activist* is used to promote the interrelationship of different ethnic groups of the Niger Delta, especially in Warri, to register what unites rather than what divides the people. The characters are made to have different cultural backgrounds and are presented as role models in the multiethnic society. Even the Activist does not have a name that can be identified with any of the sparring groups in Warri and so becomes an Everyman in the society. African writers can also contribute towards peace by creating characters in fiction and drama that can triumph over failure.

Conclusion

Writing in a global age in Africa surely comes with challenges. Africa has to reassert itself culturally and artistically by setting aside some of its meager resources to publish its own talented writers with its own worldview, philosophy, ideology, and its hopes and



frustrations. In the end, it is African-owned publishing houses, and not overseas branches of Western conglomerates that thrive on globalization, that will reflect the true African condition. African writers should remain faithful to their roots and not be seduced by Western glamour and materialism to distort their own reality to feed an alien audience. Their primary audience should be the place and people that form the setting, characters, and experiences of their literary works. Once an African writer abandons expressing the African condition, that writer is no longer an African writer or writing African literature for that matter.

Since the African concept of literature is different from the Western and “global,” a euphemism for the Westernization of the globe, African writers should think of extending and challenging their own literary canon rather than abandoning it for an alien one that has no direct relevance to the lives and conditions of their people. They have to continue to resist the powerful forces of globalization to remain African with their own literary canon and artistic aesthetics. Since literature is a cultural production, writing global literature will mean ceding cultural identity. African literature should continue to contest the literary space and affirm its identity to remain unique. The increasing erosion of African lifestyles by Western pop culture in the name of globalization damages the authenticity of African literature. The powerful who promote globalization are attempting to change African literature, but this should not be allowed to happen. Rather, African writers, irrespective of where they now live, should make their local positions be inscribed into the global presence.

Henry Louis Gates, in “Canon-formation and the Afro-American Tradition,” exhorts:

we must not succumb to the tragic lure of white power, the mistake of accepting the empowering language of white critical theory as ‘universal’ or as our own language, the mistake of confusing the enabling masks of theory with our own black faces ... Now, we must, at last, don the empowering mask of blackness and talk *that* talk, the language of black difference.

Similarly, African writers should be themselves and not be imitating Western literature, masked as global literature. Globalization should not be a one-way traffic but must be an integrative phenomenon in which all “communities,” whether in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, or anywhere else in the world, have to contribute their special talent to advance universal literary creativity and world peace. The “global” that promotes American pop culture, which is already affecting Africa, does not allow for alternative voices and aesthetics. Since literature is a cultural production, as its aesthetics, African writers have to be conscious of their own culture and experiment on how to interrogate and expand it rather than embrace a “global” literature, which is a euphemism for Western-approved literature.

Is Africa or the world better off peace-wise for the work of its writers? Yes and no. No, in the sense of national or ethnic xenophobia of a few writers as in Eritrea/Ethiopia, Nigeria/Biafra, and tribalism of many African writers, who consciously or unconsciously promote the agenda of their specific groups. During the Nigerian Civil War of the late 1960s, while a writer like Wole Soyinka tried to reconcile the Federal and the secessionist sides of the conflict, other writers threw their weight behind their separate sides. During the ethnic and political crisis in Kenya recently between the majority Kikuyu people and others, there was no clear condemnation of the perpetrators of crimes as expected of prominent writers of the country, and often the silence of writers becomes a tacit approval of negative actions they do not want to speak against.

An ethical imperative governs African literature, an imperative which derives from the utilitarian tradition of orature and carried into new writings. If we remain mere aesthetes for an elite class without attempting to change the world we live in for the better, we lose sense of our mission as writers. We will not be ethically, morally, and artistically responsible in the African literary tradition if our literary art does not lift our societies to a higher humanity and sensitivity than we met it. If we write only to make money and to win literary prizes and fame, without heeding the ethical challenge to make positive contributions towards societal peace and harmony, we fail in our vocation as writers. If we embrace a “global” direction and forsake our culture, we will be lost

in the literary wilderness and only ape the Western as global and be ignorant ones unable to protect and assert their own identity. We will be absent in the assembly of world cultures to which we should insert ourselves as equals and not only contribute to the diversity of the world but also make our local issues global issues as we selectively embrace those issues of others that touch our lives.

In his plays, poetry, and fiction, Olu Obafemi surely does not believe that there is peace in his society or the world; if he does he will not be writing and indicting tyranny, dictatorship, oppression, exploitation, and injustice. It is only through the elimination of these negative human practices that peace will reign for individuals, societies, nations, and the entire world. To him, it is only through the coordinated action of the exploited, oppressed, and victimized that they can overcome the evil forces that work against them and peace. The commitment towards equality, justice, and a balanced society intensifies and reaches a climax in *Suicide Syndrome*. Obafemi has an “irrepressible conscience and a shrewd, sorrowful insight into the lives of his fellows... as a playwright, he becomes society’s conscience, a conscience that cannot be gainsaid except by those with a vested interest” (v). Every responsible writer should have a conscience to promote peace.

The writer may be a dreamer but, by persisting, the dreamer’s distant love will be fulfilled in a union and consummation. Through the writers’ unrelenting attention to the quest for peace, individual societies blessed with talented and committed literary artists draw closer by the day to living the dream of world peace. Olu Obafemi has played his part in this mission to bring peace to individuals, society, country, continent, and the world.

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Deploying Modern African Literature Towards the Environment and Human Rights

Introduction

This chapter acknowledges the interdisciplinary nature of literature in general and contemporary African literature in particular. Literature often presents itself in a context of setting and in relation to issues in an integrated manner. Literature, in the African tradition, has continued to address important issues of the society to draw attention to them so as to generate ideas and actions towards the solution of problems. This objective of literary writing underlies works against political corruption, tyranny, social and economic inequality, political marginalization, and other issues that have dominated the African literary tradition for decades. Environmental and human rights issues are necessary aspects of the African experience that inform the literature.

The study of literature of the environment is often called ecocriticism. The objective of ecologically sensitive creative writing and criticism is to promote what Michael Branch describes as “ecological literacy” (xiii). It is meant to make readers not only aware of the global environmental crisis but also for literature to “suggest[s] means by which we might read literary texts with a new appreciation for what they reveal about the complex of relationships that mediate interactions between humans and their environments” (xiii). It is a call for a change in culture towards a more “biocentric worldview, an extension of ethics, a broadening of human conception of global community to include nonhuman life forms and the physical environment” (Branch xiii). With awareness of ecocriticism, what Cheryll Burgess Glotfelty calls “the relationship between human

culture and the environment,” literature will lead towards “an ecologically sustainable human society” (qtd. in Branch 29).

The study of the environment inevitably leads to issues of land, culture, agriculture, politics, and economy, among others. These issues are related to ownership of land, oppression, and exploitation. These issues and the environment call for an “ecology of justice” or human rights that will bring harmony to the relationship between humans and their environment for their respective well-being in the interconnected cycles of life.

The two phenomena of exploration, environment and human rights, have assumed much significance in recent decades because of the ability of people who were once victims to communicate their messages to an international audience and create alliances for their causes. However, environmental and human rights issues have always been there as regular subjects, themes, and tropes of literary explorations from traditional oral literature to contemporary written literary works. African oral tradition is replete with the flora and fauna and landscapes that often assume symbolic meaning in poetry, narratives, and drama. Remove the tortoise, the spider, the hyena, the vulture, the eagle, and other animals and plants such as the iroko, baobab, and tamarind from African orature and it loses much of its essence. Mountains/hills, valleys, rivers, and forests or savannah environments appear as settings and symbols in poems and are often engaged as landscapes in narratives.

As the environment is represented on many levels, so also are the human rights of individuals and communities protected in literature. Much of the satiric mode in traditional African poetry, especially the Nigerian Urhobo *udje* and the Ghanaian/Togolese *halo*, abuses those who cross the line of moral and ethical behavior to deter others from doing the same to ensure communal harmony. The community’s human rights are embedded in the ethos that the songs attempt to promote for widespread awareness and also protect from being violated.

Language, literature, environment, and human rights are very inter-connected in many ways. Language and thought make literature the expression of human experience. Language and thought, of course, carry a people’s culture and worldview; hence literature

is a cultural production. Literature uses language to express ideas and feelings in an artistic way; in other words, literature uses language to express human experience, which involves the interaction with the environment and the exercising of human rights.

The Environment

The environment is often the context of human experience. After all, the interplay of human contact with nature in the form of nurture results in culture. Environment is broadly speaking a place. A people's environment involves culture, society, and geography, especially the fauna and flora that are often evoked in literary works. Daniel A. Omoweh, writing on the Niger Delta, defines its environment as "the entire environmental resources of the Niger Delta, including the culture of the people and other natural things attached to it" (130). He mentions the flora such as water lettuce, the *oghriki* plant, and the native mango. Of the fauna, he names the Niger Delta people's totem creatures such as antelope, snail, iguana, crocodile, monkey, and python. He also names many herbs and barks of trees of the environment that have therapeutic values. He links a people's environment with their health, culture, and literature, saying that the "most viable form of storing knowledge on traditional medical skills, therefore, is still through incantations, ritual, songs and cult procedures which are memorized by the practitioners" (180). There is thus a direct link between a people's environment and their human experience that involves their rights, language and literature, and overall wellbeing.

Language embodies features of the environment, which it names and not only gives meaning to but also signifies. Language and literature express the worldview of a people. Through literary practices such as incantations, rituals, songs, and poetic cult procedures, practitioners infuse efficacy through ritual or mystical pronouncements; the word is made to manifest into a meaningful result, especially in traditional medical practices. Language and literature thus transform an element of the environment into a healing formula. It is for this interplay of the environment, culture, health,

and literature that Omoweh laments Shell's violation of traditional belief systems through the destruction of traditional places of worship such as groves and shrines and the killing of their totem animals such as the python and iguana by the company's workers (177). These violations affect culture and the social fabric of the host communities and also adversely affect the traditional medicine of the people. A people have the right to practice their own culture.

Human Rights

Human rights can be broadly described as inalienable rights as human beings whether defined by a people's constitution or not and their basic rights as human beings that should have certain rights to live meaningful and healthy lives. While some human rights are thus written into and protected by the country's constitution and by the United Nations Human Rights Declaration, others are assumed on the basis of common humanity. These rights could relate to the environment such as minority rights, rights of indigenous people, resource control, and politico-economic rights. Environmental rights also include rights to good and clean air, water, land, and surroundings (ecology) for farming, fishing, hunting, and a healthy life.

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria provides a plethora of study materials on deploying literature towards environmental and human rights issues. In this bioregional issue, as framed by Ken Saro-Wiwa, the environment has bearing with a people's human rights.

Utilitarian Value of Traditional African Literature

Let it be noted that African traditional literature, like most of the arts, is barely art for art's sake. It is generally functional, didactic, and very utilitarian. While the oral artist suffers a form of moral alienation for telling the truth and is often bewitched as *udje* songs and Vinoko Akpalu's dirges testify, the modern writer can be arrested, jailed, or even hanged as Ngugi wa Thiongo, Jack Ma-



panje, Wole Soyinka, and Ken Saro-Wiwa, among others, have experienced in their respective ways. Exposing the adverse effects of what oil exploitation is doing appeals to the conscience of the oil companies. The owners of the land resist through activism by embarrassing the oil exploiters and bringing to public shame what the exploiters would like to hide. Literature thus excoriates the conscience of polluters of the environment. This is in the tradition of African literature, which is activist politically, socio-economically, and culturally.

This study broadens African literature to play a role in the resolution of the global ecological crisis in what can be described as the “ethics of caution and reciprocity” in the interactions of humans with nonhuman nature (Branch xix).

Modern African Literature and Nature As Environment

Literature in Africa continues to be deployed towards the environment whether as geography, nature, culture, or other aspects. Modern African literature has used nature as symbolic of human experience. Writing on culture, tradition, and society in the West African novel before 1975, Emmanuel Obiechina states:

The traditional world view has an important bearing on attitudes to nature and this in turn is reflected in the novels. It implies a mystical yet utilitarian outlook on nature instead of an externalized appreciation of it in forms like fine landscapes, beautiful flowers, cascading waters or the colours of the rainbow. In this tradition the beauty of the particular tree comes to be inseparable from its “vital” property, demonstrable in pharmaceutical or magical efficacy or the shade it provides from the heat of the sun. The uniqueness of a particular stream or wooded landscape resides in some supernatural manifestation, either as the abode of a communal deity or a local spirit identifiable with the destiny of the community. The rainbow is apprehended first and foremost as an externalization of



an internal force portending good or ill for an entire community. Nature is not “other” as in the industrialized and urbanized West, but is apprehended by the traditional West African as an integral part of his world order [emphasis mine] (1975:42).

Obiechina goes on to describe the connection between native/rural peoples and their land for subsistence and more. He states:

In rural West Africa, one is acutely aware how closely human life is integrated with physical nature. The people are farmers, constantly in contact with the earth. They till the soils and sow their crops in it. They have to clear the forests and the bush to make room for the crops. They depend on rain for success, and, since they sometimes go far to set up farms, they cross streams and brooks and forests and woodlands daily. Since many of the villagers do not have pipe-borne water, they have to go to the local stream daily. They see birds and animals of all sorts and recognize them as part of their environment, to be put to human use or in some cases treated with reverence and religious awe ... [emphasis mine] (43).

He mentions different types of terrain, hills and valleys, rocks, and others that humans interact with in their quest for livelihood. Thus, to traditional Africans, “physical nature is not dead. It is imbued with immanent vitality and spirit force” (Obiechina 43). Obiechina also discusses the presence of nature gods in many literary works as of Idemili in Chinua Achebe’s *Arrow of God*, the god of thunder in Elechi Amadi’s *The Concubine*, and Shango in T.M. Aluko’s *One Man One Wife*. He also refers to the mystical associations of the environment as of the udala and silk-cotton trees in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*.

The nature as environment that Obiechina discusses tallies with Al Gedicks’ observation of native cultures that “share a belief in the idea of a delicate balance in the universe that must be maintained by reverence toward the natural world. Human actions that desecrate sacred lands or destroy entire ecosystems upset this balance” [emphasis mine] (3). There is the recognition of the role of hu-

mans in this ecological chain that they maintained before modernity and multinational oil companies came from the industrialized world to extract oil and gas to sate their appetite for consumption and comfort.

Examples of Literary Engagement of Nature

Reading J.P. Clark-Bekederemo's *Poems, A Reed in the Tide, A Decade of Tongues, Casualties, and A Lot in Paradise*, one can see the environment and nature as central tropes in the poetic experience and language. Let's look at the memorable "Night Rain," part of which reads thus:

What time of night it is
 I do not know
 Except that like some fish
 Doped out of the deep
 I have bobbed up belly-wise
 From stream of sleep
 And no cocks crow.
 It is drumming hard here
 And I suppose everywhere
 Droning with insistent ardour upon
 Our roof thatch and shed
 And through sheaves slit open
 To lightning and rafters
 I cannot quite make out overhead
 Great water drops are dribbling
 Falling like orange or mango
 Fruits showered forth in the wind ...
 (*A Decade of Tongues* 6)

In the poem, nature, environment, culture, and human experience intermingle into a poetic sensibility that expresses motherly love and care, simple life, down-to-earth human existence, and life in a riverine rainforest environment. The poet deploys the wet environment to express his feelings.

Another Clark-Bekederemo's poem, "Streamside exchange," uses language and literature to philosophize about life from an environmental phenomenon. It reads:

Child: River bird, river bird,
 Sitting all day long
 On hook over grass,
 River bird, river bird,
 Sing to me a song
 Of all that pass
 And say,
 Will mother come back today?

Bird: You cannot know
 And should not bother;
 Tide and market come and go
 And so has your mother
 (*A Decade of Tongues* 20)

In this simple poem, set in a natural environment, the poet makes a philosophical statement on life. Life is not only transient but also unpredictable. The poet uses "Tide and market" to educate a child about life and death in a way it can understand. The flux of the tide and the regularity of the market day become metaphors to instill in this child the notion of the brevity of life and the harsh reality of the finality of the mother's death. In *Casualties*, poems informed by the Nigerian Civil War experience, Clark-Bekederemo uses different fauna—vulture, cockerel, crocodile, squirrel, locust, rat, beast, weaverbird, and others—as metaphors and symbols to express the tragic sensibility of the time. To the poet, it was a senseless war in which humans have become bestial, hence the copious animal images.

Nature and Romantic Writings

The environment in the form of nature has often featured in romantic poetry in Africa and the rest of the world. Works of Niyi Osundare as *Moon Songs* and Hyginus Ekwuazi's *Dawn Into Moonlight*:



all around me dawning and *Love Apart* use the elements of moon, stars, and others to express love and emotional conditions. African literature has always used tropes from the environment and nature to express love on many levels. This has been done by Wole Soyinka, Tchicaya U'Tamsi, Okot p'Bitek, and Christopher Okigbo, and many others. Literature records, bears witness, and expresses feelings and ideas by using language in an emotive manner to incite, serve as emotional response, affect the intellect, and widen the readership of writings.

The New Environmental Concern

There has been a noticeable shift from using nature and the environment as simple tropes and romantic expression into political environmental and ecological awareness by pushing art into the political realm for public health and greenhouse effects. For quite some time, ecocriticism was presented as a Western concern and not that of postcolonial places. Rob Nixon notes the antagonism between post-colonialism and ecocriticism, since there is a “postcolonial preoccupation with displacement and an ecocritical preoccupation with an ethics of place” (Olaniyan 717). Explaining the “ethics of place,” he refers to Jay Parini’s ecocritical concept of “bioregionalism,” which he defines as the “responsiveness to one’s local part of the earth whose boundaries are determined by a location’s natural characteristics rather than arbitrary administrative boundaries” (qtd. in Olaniyan 757). Eco awareness, as advocated in ecocriticism or “bioregionalism,” is very much at the center of contemporary African literature, bearing in mind Ken Saro-Wiwa’s advocacy of the Niger Delta environment and the writings of writers as Niyi Osundare, J.P. Clark-Bekederemo, Zakes Mda, and the writer.

General Global Concern

Niyi Osundare’s *The Eye of the Earth* was the first major modern African literary work to blaze this activist trail about the environ-

ment. His work and the writer's *Tale of the Harmattan* and *The Activist* appear to belong to a fresh deployment of literature towards the environment in a postmodern manner. To Osundare, "The earth is ours to plough and plant / the hoe is her barber / the dibble her dimple" (*Selected Poems* 49). Despite the elegiac tone of "The Earth will not die," the poet has hope for the earth. He laments what has been done to the earth:

Lynched
 the lakes
 Slaughtered
 the seas
 Mauled
 the mountains
 But our earth will not die (50).

Niyi Osundare straddles the environment as nature and as agency of health. Even though both his *Moon Songs* and *Waiting Laughter* copiously use nature images, it is with *The Eye of the Earth* that the poet awakens humanity to the importance of taking good care of the earth whose health is also human health. *The Eye of the Earth* focuses on the entire earth even though the poet's rock-strewn hometown area of Ikare-Ekiti in Western Nigeria appears to be the context of the poetic text.

Specific Niger Delta Setting

Both *The Tale of the Harmattan* and *The Activist* specifically focus on the Niger Delta and deal with the environmental degradation resulting from the oil exploration and exploitation in the oil- and gas-rich region. The Niger Delta, which produces most of Nigeria's oil, contains the "third largest contiguous mangrove forest in the world" (Gedicks 42). The gas flares, leakages, and blowouts pollute the air, soil, and water on which the local communities rely for their livelihood. The chemical wastes from drilling and servicing of equipment—bentonite, soda ash, EP-20—are harmful to the fauna, flora, and humans of the area since the chemicals are

not treated before being dumped on the environment. Sometimes pits are dug to store the chemicals and result in overflow and spill. Gas flaring, on the other hand, destroys vegetation. It is noted that 75% of Shell's gas is flared (Omoweh 193) and the heat of the flames has depleted herbs and farm yield in the area. Oil spillage, another environmental hazard phenomenon, is common in the forms of blowout, equipment failure, maintenance error, engineering error, third party sabotage, accident, and others. The spillage destroys such plants as oil bean and cherry plants and has led to the ecological damage that no longer allows the flourishing of anthills in the area. Humans die from the contaminated fish and fruits and the inhalation of dust from wastes. As Omoweh has found out, "most rivers in the communities have been confirmed to contain mercury and lead—two dangerous chemicals blacklisted worldwide as causes of human disorder and anemia" (206). At Erhoike, near Kokori, "gas flaring is felt 300 meters from the flare site and vegetation 500 meters away are biologically dead" (Omoweh 206).

Ecology of Justice

As a result of the close connection between native peoples and their land for subsistence, they tend to suffer more when their environment is polluted. That is the case with Nigeria's Niger Delta minority ethnic groups, especially with the Ogoni, Izon, Urhobo, and Itsekiri. Land is very important for the cultural and economic survival of the people. Polluting and desecrating that land therefore go against their cultural and economic survival.

In both *The Activist* and *The Tale of the Harmattan*, the writer uses language in the forms of narration and poetry respectively to deal with the environment and human rights. To the writer, a clean environment is a human right and its pollution becomes a violation of human rights. If oil chemicals used in servicing equipment seep into the soil or blowouts pollute the soil and gas flares make it impossible for crops to grow, are you not depriving the farmers of their human rights? Similarly, if blowouts pollute the water and gas flares lead to acid rain that destroys water life, are you not de-

priving the fishermen and women of their human rights? And the same with hunters, if flares and blowouts make the forest uninhabitable for the animals that live there. If chemicals percolate the wells from which communities draw their water for consumption and household chores, are those people not being deprived of their human rights? As the Women of the Niger Delta in *The Activist* tell about their early menopause, men losing their virility, malformed babies being born, and people suffering from unknown ailments because of the pollutants in the air, soil, and water, there is much to fight for human rights against the oil exploiters. Is it not a human rights issue that oil and gas industries are sited far away from the Niger Delta in states where the communities have not lost their farming and other occupations? Is it not a human rights issue for majority groups to gang up and dictate how oil money derived from the Niger Delta should be used in the entire federation at the expense of the Niger Delta people?

The African writer has become a “righter” of wrongs, a savior from ogres, and a defender of truth in a world in which falsehood threatens to overwhelm the truth. The writer now uses the environment and human rights as ideological standards that they foist with language in fiction, drama, and poetry for the causes they believe in. Contemporary African writers are generally to the left of center ideologically and appear aligned to The Greens and other groups that see the destruction of the environment as destruction of human life itself. An environment that provides food and good health is catering to the human rights of its people.

Environmental Justice

The concept of environmental justice embraces the environment and human rights. It involves the production, consumption of resources, and pollution caused by modernization, industrialization, and population growth. African writers deal with the exploitation of the local communities as well as the degradation of the ecosystem of the area. That the Niger Delta communities remain among the poorest not only in Nigeria but the entire world is a travesty of

justice, since their land that yields so much oil and gas can no longer sustain them and their environment has lost its biodiversity to the contamination brought about by the oil companies. Figures show that by 1993, Ogoniland alone had benefited Shell to the tune of \$30bn and yet it has remained very poor without light, water, and hospitals. The same narrative is told of the Izon and the Urhobo and Itsekiri people living by oil wells.

The edict by which the Federal Government of Nigeria seized the lands of peoples and colludes with multinational corporations to extract the oil and gas without regard for the environment or wellbeing of the local communities is unjust and has resulted in the “resource rebels” that sprang up across the Niger Delta. Shell insults the intelligence of the people and the world by saying that “local residents benefited from these flares because they could dry their foodstuffs for free by setting them near the burning gases” (qtd. in Gedicks 44–45).

Two environmental human rights documents that come to mind in the struggle of the local communities to rid their land of pollution and environmental degradation are: the Ogoni Bill of Rights and the Izon Kaiama Declaration. In 1990, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) under the leadership of Ken Saro-Wiwa, in response to Shell’s total neglect of the people and their environment, submitted the “Ogoni Bill of Rights” to the Federal Nigerian Government. They demanded, among others, “political control of Ogoni affairs by Ogoni people; the right to the control and use of a fair proportion of Ogoni economic resources for Ogoni development; adequate representation in all Nigerian national institutions and the right to protect the Ogoni environment and ecology from further degradation” (qtd. in Gedicks 46). These environmental rights are human rights.

The Kaiama Declaration, on the other hand, was spearheaded by Izon youths, the Egbesu Boys and other groups, in November 1998. They declare: “all land and natural resources (including mineral resources) within the Ijaw territory belong to Ijaw communities and are the basis of our survival.” They demand the immediate withdrawal from Ijawland of “all military forces of occupation and repression by the Nigerian state” (qtd. in Gedicks

50). This was after the destruction of Odi in Bayelsa State by Olusegun Obasanjo's troops and the punitive raids on Mbiama, Kaimama, and Patani. Chevron is also alleged to have colluded with the military to kill peaceful Ilaje protesters against the pollution of their land.

The appropriation and exploitation of the lands of Niger Delta people are blatant forms of oppression, a trend that Joni Adamson notices of governments and multinational corporations worldwide. Thus the fight "for the environment and fight for *all* forms of linked oppression" (qtd. in Branch 14) are the same. She links the oppression of people to the despoliation of their environment and lack of political power, which is reflected in the political marginalization of the Ogoni and Izon people. The alliance of majority groups in Nigeria and that between the Federal Government and the multinational oil corporations form a powerful force that dominates the minority people of the Niger Delta and despoil their environment.

Environment as Nostalgia

Oftentimes, nowadays, nature and the environment are used as tools to express nostalgia about how things have changed from the good old days to these bad days. Osundare, Clark-Bekederemo, and the writer express disappointment with the current state of the physical environment to draw attention to change. The idyllic life of the old days seems lost and the writers are trying to reclaim it in their imagination. But their efforts too are to recapture what used to be in order to restore the environment to a healthy and pristine state. If the old healthy and pristine environment cannot be fully restored, efforts should be made to slow down the rate of the degradation and concrete action should be taken to clean the already polluted environment in which we live. The writers thus wrestle with the issue of the environment as they pitch memory against the present in a nostalgic effort to reclaim the age of lost innocence.

Literary Vision of the Environment and Human Rights

In Zakes Mda's *Heart of Redness*, the protagonist, Camagu, is an environmental activist in his efforts to save the pristine environment of Qolorha. He establishes a cooperative to assist the local communities to fish and preserve their environment while at the same time fostering tourism. He is able to reconcile the two feuding Xhosa groups, those who accept the British colonization and those who do not. These two opposing native and religious groups clash over retaining a pristine culture and accepting modern/Western ways to get jobs. In the end, Camagu uses his intellectual expertise to found a cooperative that reconciles traditionalism with modernity, tourism without endangering the people's traditional occupations. This development that Camagu brings about would today be called eco tourism. Thus, Mda envisions a middle way in which the environment and the ecology of the South African coastal area are maintained in a cooperative that ensures that the local communities earn a living while retaining their traditional ways even as foreigners/tourists come to enjoy the natural biodiversity.

Both Osundare and the writer, in their respective works, envision transforming the environment from its current victim status at the hands of poachers, oil exploiters, and careless public into an agency of development and healthy living. In the two writers' works the environment is personified and subjected to inhuman degradation. Osundare talks of trees being beheaded. In *The Tale of the Harmattan* the environment is portrayed as human and being traumatized by poachers and the oil companies. The objective is to stop the hands of those destroying the environment and create public awareness towards sensitivity to the earth.

In the works discussed, having a healthy pristine environment that maintains eco balance that will afford the local communities food from the soil and water, good health in an unpolluted environment, and peaceful coexistence of all creatures becomes a human right of the community. It may look simple at first thought but the Niger Delta problem encompasses socio-cultural, political, economic, and other issues that make the environmental rights of the people their human rights. The mere fact that the oil is exploited

from a region inhabited by minority groups and whose profits are shared nationwide by majority groups tell the complexity of the environment being linked to the human rights of minority and indigenous groups, the greedy exploitative profligacy of the oil companies, and the relationship between the central Nigerian government and the oil-producing Niger Delta.

Literature embodies its people's values, which are fundamental human rights of the people. In these literary productions, issues of fairness, equity, and justice as well as countering oppression, exploitation and greed are discussed to promote humane values. Literature takes the side of healing the culture, society, economy, and politics of a people whose environment is critically challenged to benefit others rather than those living in it. It is the writers' vision that a good healthy environment leads to fulfilling lives of those blessed with it.

Conclusion

One can summarize the following from the interrelationship of literature, the environment, and human rights:

- Literature is interdisciplinary and bringing in the environment and human rights attests to this.
- Creativity and scholarship are not just for the ivory tower establishment but engage issues that matter to the society at large, and the environment and human rights matter a great deal to local communities and the entire human race.
- The environment has been presented as a victim of the oil companies and the careless public who are not sensitive to the earth. The environment has to be restored to its agency of positively being part of the harmonious cycle of life of humans and other organisms of the area. It is this idyllic state invoked nostalgically that the writers want the environment to be restored to for the benefit of all humans.
- It is not only just others such as the oil companies, the tourists, and the government workers who take bribes and turn a blind

eye on what happens, such as poachers, but also common people who are responsible for the degradation of the environment and the eco system. Superstitious beliefs that lead to the cutting down of trees and farming practices that lead to bush burning are doing a lot too to damage the environment and should be stopped. The smoke from bush burning has its own health hazards.

- Issues of the environment are also issues of civil rights, human rights, and issues of equity and justice as the Niger Delta problem in Nigeria demonstrates. The ecology of justice demands cultural, economic, political rights.
- Environmental and human rights issues are related to the relationship between power wielders and the weak, as the government and the governed, and the multinational companies and local communities. For instance, by issuing the Land Use Decree, the Nigerian Military Government in 1976 seized lands from their rightful owners and robbed the owners of lands of their minerals and other forms of produce. Similarly, the selling of oil blocs to the rich also robs the Niger Delta people from prospering from their land's wealth.
- Local communities where oil is produced that used to be victims are now "resource rebels" who fight for not only the resources of their land but also arrest the degradation of their environment by multinational oil corporations such as Shell and Chevron. Many groups and NGOs now put the multinationals on notice about their activities in the Niger Delta.
- Issues of the environment and human rights connect the local and the global in a glocal phenomenon. What happens in the Niger Delta environment is capable of affecting the rest of the world, be it the price of fuel or the green gas effect resulting from the massive pollution.
- What happens in the Niger Delta is a slice of the threat to the environment and the eco system of the world. The writers connect them to other cases as in Botswana, Brazil, India, and elsewhere in the world where the multinationals exploit minerals at the expense of the local communities. Specifically on oil extraction from native people's lands, the cases of

Colombia and Ecuador have similar scenarios with the Niger Delta people's plight.

- There must be "ecological literacy": enlightenment and education of the local and the global of the consequences of not doing anything to stop the environmental degradation and the benefits of a greener environment as in health and prosperity in agriculture and the economy.
- Human rights and the environment inform social, political, economic, and cultural aspects of people's lives because we share the earth together in a cycle that holds all in mutual interdependence. The balance has to be maintained.

Language, literature, the environment, and human rights are interwoven in the human experience. To live is to communicate human experience and that experience is highly influenced by the environment. The very struggle to live a healthy and fruitful life involves being accorded dignity, self-reliance, and good health, and to maintain these virtues, one has to be allowed human rights of existence.

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Language and Literature in Conflict Management in Africa

Introduction

This chapter deals with the deployment of language and literature towards conflict management in Africa. There is emphasis here on language because of its communicative role and since literature is created with language. In the concluding section of the chapter, the writer makes recommendations for conflict management in Africa. This chapter thus shows the extent to which language and literature can be used in a society towards the solution of problems.

Like many regions of the world, Africa had and still has a plethora of conflicts, which need to be not only managed from escalating into violence but also resolved to ensure peace and stability. Conflicts should not be seen as only negative; they could be the catalysts for changes that will ensure justice, fairness, and solutions to perennial problems in economic, environmental, political, religious, and other aspects of society. Oftentimes conflict is a necessary phenomenon in the dynamic march of society from one stage to another in its development. Much as politicians, diplomats, NGOs, wise men and women, and others try to prevent, manage, or resolve conflicts at their hands, some of the most important tools which the peace builders, the parties to the conflict, and other stakeholders need for success include language and literature. From the calls suing for peace, getting the parties to the table to talk to each other, through negotiations at meetings of peace brokers and the affected parties, to signing legal agreements, and ensuring that the agreements are implemented, language and literature play a significant role in the whole process. Paradoxically, language (with



its literature) is as capable of causing conflict as of defusing it; it could be used for good or bad. Of concern in this chapter is its positive role; hence how it can be used to “manage” conflicts and effect peace and stability will be highlighted.

Culture and society mold individuals to behave in certain ways and to recognize specific norms and virtues as acceptable and others as not. Conflict is generally perceived as a disruptive phenomenon in society that seeks stability, harmony, and peace as ideals of human existence and interaction. In order to maintain a healthy socio-cultural ethos, a people’s language and literature have in-built mechanisms not only to express but also to manage and resolve conflicts that arise. Since conflict is the antithesis of social and political harmony, one can venture to say that conflict and its resolution through negotiation have a great deal to do with language. To underscore the role of language in the entire process, it is important to know that “negotiation is an exercise in managing paradox” communicatively, since “the goal of negotiation is to reduce paradox to the point of achieving a level of openness capable of creating a collaborative agreement” (Eadie and Nelson 36). Let us take some time to define conflict and discuss the nature and functions of language and literature in the context of conflict management, before addressing specific conflict areas in Africa and how language and literature can be used to manage and resolve them.

Definition of Conflict

Conflict is an expression of differences. It involves competition and can be hidden/informal or open. It can also be internal or external, national or international, and there are various levels of conflict ranging from mild to very serious. Two fundamental features of conflict are: important *incompatibilities and disagreements* among contending parties and *interference* by one or more parties in the goal-seeking capability of the other (Eadie & Nelson 59–60). Conflict gives rise to “perceptions of threat that activate intense feelings of anxiety, fear, and anger along with concomitant contentious behavior” (idem 61). As will be presented later, there can

be group, community, religious, intra-state, or international conflicts. Social and political conflicts often arise when individuals or groups feel that their rights in society are being undermined. Also a conflict could arise out of ignorance of the “other.” Conflict is thus a state of antagonistic and adversarial relationship and certain tools, including language and literature, are needed to bring parties together towards a cooperative relationship. In fact, the “conflict management business is a communication enterprise” (Littlejohn and Dominici 5). Language is very important in conflict management as it involves conversation and negotiation. Once the meaning and ramifications of conflict are understood, then the choice of language and the strategic communication needed will be deployed towards its management and resolution.

Language and Literature

Language appears to be a defining instrument of human reality. Edward Sapir emphasizes the significance of language in life and reality. He posits:

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone; nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the “real world” is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group ... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation (Whorf 134).

Language is a vehicle of culture. How do you know a people without the language and folklore that carry their thought, world-

view, philosophy, and sensibility? Language plays a pivotal role in conflict management and resolution and peace building. It is imperative to understand a people's culture to resolve any conflict involving them. The values, ideas, and customs of a people or group are borne by their language. Many developed countries such as the United States, Britain, and France spend much money every year to study foreign languages to enhance their diplomatic activities, spying capabilities, and involvement in negotiations; they also do the same for their interventions to be done from a position of knowledge of the "other." The American Department of Education, for instance, provides hundreds of millions of dollars annually for its International Research and Studies Program that includes studying many African languages and preparing instructional materials on them. These languages, including Hausa, Ki-Swahili, and Yoruba, often provide the rich nations strategic and diplomatic advantages.

Understanding a people's language puts one closer to their thoughts and emotions, both of which condition behavior. There is no doubt therefore that language shapes thought and thought shapes action. Edward Sapir says, "The content of every culture is expressible in its language" (7). He goes on to say that "its forms predetermine for us certain modes of observation and interpretation" (10).

Language is primarily a means of communication among a people or between peoples. It consists of "an absolutely complete referential apparatus of phonetic symbols which have the property of locating every known social referent, including all the recognized data of perception which society that it serves carries in its tradition" (Sapir 105). Conflict management and resolution involve thinking, writing, and dialogue that language provides. No conflict can be meaningfully settled without dialogue. For effective conflict resolution, the peace brokers and affected parties must comprehend the language customs of all involved—how people talk in a group and one-to-one among representatives, including gestures, tone, pitch, eye contact, and facing each other. These paralinguistic features are as important in dialoguing as the language used. In fact, Littlejohn and Dominici find communication as constituting "the very environment in which all human action takes place" (5).

Nuances of a language are important to catch in dealing with conflicts to avoid slipping. Differences can be seen in register between two parties in conflict using the same language. However, respect, civility, honor, and dignity for the other party are carried by the language and its proper use will be a great asset in conflict management and resolution. There is the need to avoid insults and rudeness that would fuel a crisis. Language has to be used tactfully because there is a time to speak and a time not to speak—silences interspersed with speech—for a purpose. Opposing parties listen to and analyze the other's use of language. Thus since conflicts are sometimes couched in cultural responses in language, it is important for peace brokers and those involved in a conflict that seek its resolution to mind their language.

Literature is a product of language but accommodates the totality of a people's experience. There are two kinds of literature in Africa today because of its postcolonial condition: oral/traditional and modern/written. Whether oral or written, traditional or modern, literature in Africa functions in a manner that promotes virtues that are consonant with the society's vision of stability, law and order, harmony, and peace as well as general education about the environment, culture, and history of the people. Literature is thus a transformative subject that is geared towards turning society into a positive image of itself. It expands a people's consciousness, sensitizes them emotionally to issues of right and wrong, justice, and fairness. Oral literature in Africa has been in the form of folklore, while written African literature appears in the forms of autobiography, drama, fiction, and poetry. The folklore of African peoples is mostly embedded in the oral literature. Literature is intrinsically related to language and also carries the culture and values of the people. It is a means of expression and communication at the same time. African oral tradition is functional and geared towards a healthy social ethos.

African folklore, in the form of an oral tradition, carries many communication and peace building traditions. Among the Urhobo of Nigeria, for example, the *otota* tradition plays this role. The *otota* is an orator and rhetorician who has deep knowledge of the language, customs, and traditions, and uses wit and linguistic skills to navi-

gate complex issues towards resolving them to everybody's or the whole group's satisfaction or acceptance. The *otota* wants to bring parties to a common or middle ground through subtle use of language. The Urhobo do not only value but also honor communicators that have special oratorical skills. To fulfill these goals, the spokesperson must possess communicative skills and special charm. The society and culture have carried this value of communication into the ceremonies and activities of the people.

From traditional times, the office and institution of the *Otota* has been highly coveted and respected. Every traditional group discussion, family meeting, quarter's meeting, town's meeting, social associations and clubs, and others have an appointed *otota*. In other instances, the *otota* is either chosen or appointed for the group at the beginning of a meeting. Each party has its *otota* and the two become the principal negotiators in a two-party discussion or conflict. The African tradition of *palaver* is related to this. *Palaver* may have entered the English lexicon but derives from African customary practice of public discussion and settling of disputes. It involves the art of conversation, advocacy, and filibustering. Thus traditional African societies have built into their customs a mechanism for conflict resolution in the chosen official who exercises communicative skills.

Two other important African traditions also assist in preventing and resolving conflicts: the West African griot and the South African *imbongi*. The griot (female griotte) is a chronicler, constitution upholder, and memory of the non-literate people of the Senegambian and Mali areas of West Africa. Called by various names in the region, the griot settles disputes over kingship; he knows multiple generations of genealogies and lineages as in *Sundiata: Epic of Mali*, and also settles land disputes. Similarly in Southern Africa, among the Zulu and neighboring groups, the *imbongi* tradition involves the oral skill of knowing through memory and inheritance the happenings of the past. The *imbongi*, through *izibongo* (instantaneous praise chants), entertains visitors and dignitaries, and also performs the role of mediator in conflict situations.

These various African indigenous traditions—*otota*, *palaver*, griot, and *imbongi*—and others are tools for conflict management

in their separate societies. They arise from an African oral/non-literate culture, which places premium on word of mouth. The skills of these traditions will doubtless enhance dialogue that is so important to conflict management and peace-building in contemporary Africa. These are professional roles and transferred into contemporary life will ensure seasoned negotiators in conflict management and peace-building sessions.

Language and literature enhance sensibility, sensitivity, and humanity which are counterfoils to conflicts and crises. A good word or compliment in a meeting could change the atmosphere from a sour one to that of trust and give-and-take. Language can transform the relation between two parties from that of difference and antagonism to that of a healthy competition, collaboration, and complementation. Language and literature can engender love of others and patriotism that prevent internal conflicts in a multiethnic society. For example, the renowned Eritrean poet, Haile Reesom, in his poetry collection, *We Invented the Wheel*, uses poetry to stir patriotism among Eritreans and to see themselves as one people despite their different ethnicities.

Before addressing the possible positive contributions that language and literature have indeed made and will continue to make in the prevention, management, and resolution of conflicts in Africa, it is necessary to expatiate on a point mentioned earlier. Language itself can be a source of conflict in Africa. The problem between Anglophone and Francophone Cameroon comes easily to mind. In the 1962 Plebiscite in Western Cameroon, the northern part voted to be with Nigeria in today's Adamawa State; the southern part remained with Cameroon (including today's Bakassi Peninsula). The conflict between the minority English-speaking and the majority French-speaking Cameroonians continues today.

In some countries, language is playing a positive role, unlike in some other African states. Tanzania, a multi-ethnic nation, has been bound together by Ki-Swahili, also spoken in parts of Kenya, Eastern Congo DR, Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda. Language is also a unifier in both Eritrea and South Africa. Though officially with seven languages, most Eritreans speak Tigrinya and that communicative connection makes them have a sense of oneness. In post-

apartheid South Africa, the three-language policy seems to be working effectively. South Africans, irrespective of their racial backgrounds, are expected to speak one indigenous African language (such as Zulu, Xhosa, and Sotho), English, and Afrikaans. When you speak the other's language, you can identify better with that person, and the three-language policy seems to be working well in reducing ethnic suspicions and racial conflicts in South Africa.

The colonial languages bind many African ethnic groups together into a modern state. Lord Lugard's Bridge is not just physical but is metaphorically English for Nigeria. French seems to be the main common factor between the Northerners (so-called rebels) and the Southerners in Cote d'Ivoire. Despite this seemingly good impact of a nationally used language, the issue of a lingua franca has been sensitive in Nigeria and Kenya, both multi-ethnic nations that are prone to ethnic rivalries and bloody conflicts. In modern Africa, the issue of lingua franca or national language has raised tension and generated conflicts. In the 1960s and 1970s Nigeria engaged in a national debate about a lingua franca or national language but the matter was abandoned because of ethnic suspicions that it involved; the language policy was left to individual states to choose what languages should be used in state television and radio newscasts.

Conflict Factors and Areas in Africa

Africa is rife with crises, which Kofi Annan attributes not only to poor management, leadership, and greed but also to "a question of ethnic conflicts, which are sometimes based on one group's perception that {it is} not being treated fairly, it is being discriminated against by the state, or by the group that wields power . . ." (qtd. in Ohaegbulam 26). F. Ugboaja Ohaegbulam lists causes of conflicts in Africa and they include bad governance, legacies of imperial map-making and rule, authoritarian rule, and external causes. Of the many conflict factors in Africa, land appears to be one of the most fought over. Conflicts have been sparked within nations and among nations over land disputes, especially when the land contains mineral deposits or is good for agriculture. Border wars resulting

from disputed land are some of the most serious conflicts in Africa. The Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict (though not over minerals) is a classic example. Other conflicts arise from minerals—it has almost become proverbial that wherever there is a long-standing conflict in Africa, there are available mineral resources. Minerals have been or are involved in conflicts in Congo DR, Namibia, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. There are conflicts within nations as of oil in Nigeria where the Federal Government and the multinational oil companies are pitched against the Niger Delta people whose area has not only been impoverished by the oil exploitation but whose environment has been seriously damaged. Many analysts attribute the Nigeria-Biafra war to oil in the Niger Delta. Of course, oil also led to the Nigerian/Cameroon conflict which has been settled by Nigeria's withdrawal from the Bakassi Peninsula following the World Court's decision in favor of Cameroon. Nigeria has had conflicts too with Chad over oil exploration in the huge lake that separates the two nations.

Still related to land and also internal is the land conflict in Zimbabwe. When the colonialists came to what is today Zimbabwe, they seized from the indigenous Africans the most fertile lands and gave them to the minority white settlers. After the war of independence which was waged with the purpose of eventually getting the seized land back, President Robert Mugabe has in the later part of his administration focused on returning lands once seized from Africans and now owned by whites to their rightful owners. This has been controversial because of his manner of administration of Zimbabwe, but Britain, Australia, and the USA that now condemn Mugabe did not condemn the seizure of the lands of Africans when it took place in colonial times. It is interesting to note that British Intelligence bugged Mugabe's hotel room during the Lancaster Conference to resolve the Zimbabwean independence conflict!

Ethnicity is a major conflict factor in Africa. In Nigeria such conflicts include Itsekiri/Izon/Urhobo in Delta State, Tiv/Jukun in Benue and Taraba States, Hausa/Fulani migrant herdsmen and Yoruba farmers in Oyo, Igbo traders among Hausa people, and Birom indigenes and Hausa/Fulani migrant population. In Rwanda, the Hutu majority are pitched against the minority but powerful

Tutsi that resulted in perhaps Africa's deadliest conflict. In some countries the ethnic conflict has religious overtones as in the Sudan with the Arab Muslims pitched against the Southern animists and Christians (as in Darfur), in Cote d'Ivoire between the mainly Muslim Northerners and the mainly Christian Southerners, and in Nigeria's Plateau State.

Conflicts often arise over political and economic marginalization, exploitation, and struggle for equality. The Casamance region of Senegal has fought for many years for independence because of its perceived marginalization. The same situation obtains in the Western Sahara (Saharawi) region that Morocco has annexed with force. Conflicts, especially among ethnic groups to rule in many African countries, have become so common that political scientists generally see ethnic conflicts as the most negative thing in the African polity. The current situation in Nigeria as to where the next President should come from (North or South of the country) is a clear testimony of how ethnicity has become a canker-worm in African politics. The tense atmosphere needs every civility that language and literature can muster to avoid tragic consequences. In South Africa the former Vice President, Jacob Zuma, a Zulu overwhelmingly popular in his ethnic region, sees his political travails as the concerted effort of the Sotho and others to prevent a Zulu from becoming President. The same ethnic problem often casts a shadow over elections in Kenya, Ghana, and other countries.

Economic factors are also responsible for internal and external conflicts in Africa as had been mentioned earlier. However, let me add the case of the Niger Delta and Nigeria. In this case, the economic marginalization of the region that produces 95% of the national revenue has led to a prolonged conflict. The area is denied development by majority groups that gang up to enjoy the oil benefits while the Niger Delta people suffer the environmental damage in pollutions that adversely affect their occupations of farming and fishing and also the attendant poor health. The greed for the minerals of Congo DR appears to have attracted intervention from Uganda, Rwanda, and other countries for the spoils of war from an area where there is no government control.

Other sources of conflict in Africa have been: apartheid, struggle for kingship or presidency, refugee problems as between Chad and Sudan, environmental damage as of oil or drought, and religion. The Nile River has been a source of conflict among Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt; Egypt has threatened Sudan not to build dams on the river that would cut much-needed water from going downstream to the Egyptian Nile Delta. Somalia poses internal ethnic/clan conflicts as well as external conflict with Ethiopia that does not want a fundamentalist Islamic state next door.

Language, Civility, and Incivility

Cultural norms are steeped in language and literature through discourse. Discourse is the relationship between language and the people who use it. As Donald G. Ellis observes, incivility seems to be on the increase because we live in a polarized society (106). The situation is exacerbated by the media, especially the electronic one, that create more distance and individuality than proximity and community. According to Ellis, the “media situation creates conditions of exclusivity, rather than inclusivity” (110). Incivility manifests in hate, anger, offensive, and derogatory statements. Civility is associated with politeness, courtesy, order, and a genteel manner. It is the opposite of incivility that is crude, rude, and uncivil, or at least interpreted that way. Civility is a social pattern of behavior that helps to maintain order (Eadie and Nelson 7).

In Africa, the cultural approach to civility is generally affirmed and that necessitates that African conflicts be seen and settled from an African cultural perspective embedded in language and folklore. As explained by Ellis, civility focuses on implications for social relations; it is “placed squarely in the culture and points to ways in which various cultural concepts and themes can alter social relations” (107). Oyetade (1995) explains how forms of address maintain civil relationships in Yoruba (qtd. in Eadie and Nelson 108). Contemporary language is filled with hyperbole, and the world is dichotomized. Nuances seem to be disappearing.

In the communicative approach to conflict management, discourse is used to constitute and change patterns of what is considered to be civil communication. On the other hand, uncivil discourse leads to conflict and is often helped by technology in increasing types of media.

Communication Approaches to Conflict Resolution

There are many approaches to conflict management and resolution but this chapter is specifically concerned with the communication approaches that language and literature play a major part in. The communication model “focuses on uncovering the way that meaning and symbols function in a conflict negotiation process” (Eadie and Nelson 65). One premise is “the analysis of the *message system* that characterizes interaction. This analytic approach targets the language and discourse of the interactants to uncover the systems of shared and unshared meaning between the parties. These message systems are coherent frameworks through which meaning is created and behavior is grounded” (idem 65).

The second communication approach is premised on the belief that “analysis is founded on an *interactive assessment* of verbal and nonverbal messages as expressed through the discourse of the contending parties” (65). A third premise is that “negotiation dynamics are examined by analyzing the microelements of verbal utterances and nonverbal cues. Through these microelements, meaning and coherence emerge in discourse” (66). The fourth approach has to do with negotiation as a process; “the act of communicative discourse is a powerfully transformative process in which meanings and actions change as a result of escalating and deescalating conflict” (66). Putnam and Roloff call the communicative approach “the systems of meaning enacted through individual, situational, and cultural factors that shape the process” (qtd. in Eadie and Nelson 66). All the communicative approaches work in different ways through language and literature and can be used to deal with the sort of problems that are common in Africa as already discussed.

A Conflict Resolution Model and Language

The FIRE model of conflict negotiation whether of hostage-taking incidents or other conflicts “identifies four fundamental conflict concerns that communicatively focus the negotiation discourse between contending parties” (66). They are a) *Face* or identity concerns—an individual’s concern for own and other party’s reputation or projected image; b) *instrumental* conflict issues— incompatibility of the objective wants or demands of the hostage taker and the negotiator; c) *relational* conflict concerns—the nature of the relationship between the hostage taker and negotiator; and d) *emotional* conflict issues—degree of affective arousal being experienced by contending parties. As explained by Mitchell R. Hammer, the FIRE approach is “predicated on the view that conflict is transformed through communication as it emerges around face, instrumental, relational, and/or emotion issues” (67). Also, “the degree of communicative effectiveness achieved between the parties in addressing FIRE issues influences whether crisis situations are more or less likely to be resolved through a peaceful, negotiated settlement” (67). Language that is respectful, civil, clear, and apparently perceived as honest will help to de-escalate a conflict. Language that does not make the other party to lose face but to have credibility will also help to de-escalate a crisis. This model can be used to solve conflicts at local and international levels as of the Niger Delta and the Federal Government and also as between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Dialogue

Dialogue is one way to manage or resolve a conflict. Originating from literature and drama, dialogue takes place when characters speak to one another. In dialogue, characters respond to one another, unlike monologue when one character steps aside and talks to himself or herself (with the audience hearing but not responding). According to Littlejohn and Dominici, dialogue seeks to “clarify what is important to each person and why. It aims to

help each person understand the perspectives and experiences of others” (26). Peter M. Kellett and Diana G. Dalton say the purpose of dialogic exchange is “to create mutual understanding and action” (21). This collaborative sense-making of dialogue “involves reflective questioning leading to explicit reasoning, assumptions, and possibilities” (21). And the spirit of inquiry is “central to dialogue, and involves focusing on connections and embracing diverse perspectives” (21).

Once ground rules are established by the mediators and facilitators, dialogue helps to de-escalate conflict. The ground rules should include the time of the dialogue and that time should be right. In addition, the place or setting should be comfortable to both parties. The parties should treat people like people, take turns in listening, and ask questions. Dialogue (which develops to multilogue) not only makes it possible to explore differences but also to explore common ground. In crisis resolution, dialogue helps to build collaboration and lasting peace that ensures mutual respect by once conflicting parties.

Procedures for Conflict Resolution

A cardinal point in conflict resolution in Africa, as stated by the United States Institute for Peace’s Special Report is that “Africans should determine under what conditions it is helpful to have the international community engaged in conflict resolution efforts.” Thus, there is “broad consensus that conflict prevention, management, or resolution in Africa requires that Africans themselves act as a rudder, guiding peace processes forward and working with local disputants to bring about conciliation.” The failure of the militarily powerful United States mission in Somalia is evidence that local solutions might work best for Africa. An African layered response to a crisis that moves from local actors such as states, NGOs, to regional organizations and the continent-wide body (African Union) may be able to deal with small-scale crises with mediation and conciliation.

Once this notion of Africans solving their own problems is accepted, African traditional means of conflict resolution processes

embedded in African languages and folklores become necessary tools. At meetings to thrash out conflicts, Africans can resort to their traditions in using dialogue in a non-inflammatory way. In a measured manner, parties can build bridges of reconciliation. As elders do in palavers, the use of proverbs, axioms, and other words of wisdom will be very helpful in conflict resolution.

Since there are different levels of conflict, there may be bigger conflicts in which Africans may seek external assistance from the international community. Two simultaneous trends appear to be at work: Africans seeking UN assistance and the UN devolving more responsibility to regional and sub-regional groups. In this phenomenon, “a basis for partnership for peace arises, implying mutual commitment and obligations. African states may need capacity-building at the different layers of responses—training and professionalizing staff, developing an information or documentation center to provide analysis to staff and diplomats, and creating a cadre of capable diplomats trained in negotiation, mediation, and problem-solving skills who can be quickly deployed to attenuate incipient conflicts.” If the African Union is building its institutional capacity, there should be a register of ongoing and possible conflicts, a profile of major figures involved, and possible statesmen and women that can deal with such conflicts.

This scenario involves language training on many levels: foreign language acquisition experience, translation, and learning the language of diplomacy. Interpreters are also needed for diplomacy to be effective. Africa should confront the issue of a common language as Europe seems to have done. Europe seems to use English (or automatic English translation) at meetings and most European diplomats speak English and meet at short notice to discuss pressing issues. Africa has several languages to choose from and develop a tradition that will be embedded in that chosen language. The issue of Swahili or Hausa being an official African language should be revisited so that Africans speak indeed with one voice rather than using foreign/European languages to express their African minds.

Often working with others outside the continent involves the United States and the European Union with their own political,



economic, and strategic agendas. Since the West is culturally different from Africa, there tends to be problems in using their methods and language in solving African conflicts. Africans, in attempting to resolve their conflicts, should avoid copying the ideological terms of the West, especially of the United States and Britain. The foreign policy of a militarily powerful and rich country often shapes its vocabulary of the “other.” There are many examples of using Western terms fueling the already existing conflicts inside states or between states in Africa. In recent years, American naming of others as warlords, militiamen, terrorists, and insurgents has crept into the discourse of African conflicts.

Let me expatiate on terrorists and insurgents. In recent pronouncements by the Nigerian President and also copied by some in the media, there is talk of the insurgency in the oil-producing creeks of the Niger Delta. The youths (call them “Egbesu Boys” or “area boys”) are described as terrorists and insurgents or members of militias. President Olusegun Obasanjo has ordered his military Joint Task Force to crush the insurgency. If he feels that is a way to solve the conflict, he is committing a blunder. The injustice of economic exploitation of a region, the environmental damage for decades and its health consequences, the economic marginalization of the people, and other forms of humiliation cannot be solved without respect for the people and their needs. The language of respect helps in solving conflicts. Those fighting for their economic rights and defending themselves in the Niger Delta see themselves as freedom fighters and not as terrorists or insurgents that their exploiters in Abuja and elsewhere call them. Name-calling in this instance and in other cases escalates conflicts.

Another factor that should be taken into consideration in conflict management and resolution in Africa is the place of the language of law. National and international laws must be simple and unambiguous to be binding and not be interpreted in different ways. It is important that once a conflict is settled that measures be taken to ensure that the agreement is properly implemented. Language plays a key role in this aspect as in the World Court verdict on the Nigeria/Cameroon case over the Bakassi Peninsula—the language leaves no room for ambiguities.



Gender Contribution to Conflict Resolution

For effective conflict management in Africa, the inclusion of women is very important to deal with the totality of those involved. Women, in language, literature, and discussion, tend to be more civil and temperate than men and contribute a conciliatory aspect to discussions. Tess Onwueme's *The Reign of Wazobia* is a unifying play in the ethnically fractured Nigerian state. The dramatist uses the word "come" in Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo, the three major ethnic groups in the country, in a symbolical way to represent national unity. Apart from their roles as mothers of those involved in war, women and children seem to suffer most in African civil conflicts and wars as shown in Congo DR, Darfur, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Women tend to be raped by all sides of conflicts. The bulk of refugees are women and children; hence they should be involved in conflict resolution in Africa. Omitting women, therefore, is not using a factor that inhibits escalation of conflicts.

African Literature and Its Treatment of Conflicts

African literature has always reflected the African reality, which has its share of conflicts as defined earlier in the chapter. South African writers wrote copiously on apartheid during the white minority regime's rule. Dennis Brutus, for instance, used his poetry as a weapon to fight the injustice and tyranny of apartheid in his poems, especially in *A Simple Lust*, by exposing apartheid's atrocities and excoriating the conscience of the rulers. By exposing them and also mobilizing against South Africa in international sports, Brutus played a major role in galvanizing world opinion against apartheid, encouraging Blacks at home with his message of hope, and pricking the conscience of the white racists to bring down perhaps the most inhuman regime of modern times.

Nigerian writers have dealt with the Nigeria/Biafra civil war that had elements of ethnicity, religion, and struggle for power and economic advantage combined. Both Festus Iyayi and Isidore Okpewho in their respective *Heroes* and *The Last Duty* present aspects of the con-

flicts. To them, what one learns from the civil war is the tragic consequences on innocent people and the heroism of ordinary civilians. The poetry of Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, and Chinua Achebe address the civil war and all three writers express a tragic sense of war in which both the fighters and those at home are all casualties of the war. From these renowned writers and younger Nigerian writers in short stories, plays, home videos, and poetry, war has tragic consequences and they indirectly promote dialogue and conflict resolution through non-violent means to avoid war's grave consequences.

There is literature available on the Eritrean/Ethiopian war and conflict, which is still ongoing. Haile Reesom in *We Invented the Wheel* reflects much of his individual and national Eritrean attitude to the war. He is a partisan in his viewpoint and supports his side as he sees the war as a liberation war to free Eritrea from Ethiopian domination. He celebrates Eritrean nationalism in many of his poems and portrays Eritrea as the victim of Ethiopia. In this case, the conflict is a struggle between forces of domination and forces of those who want freedom and Reesom celebrates the victory of freedom.

There has been autobiographical work on the genocide in Rwanda showing the inhumanity of the violent conflict. Jean Hatzfeld's *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak* is an important resource "for those seeking to understand the Rwandan genocide." Such understanding will help to avoid such a horror in the future. Also there are poems appearing on Rwanda and Darfur, including the writer's and others that show the despicable inhumanity of those massacring innocent lives. Here's an example of a poem condemning the Janjaweed of Sudan:

TO THE JANJAWEED

May the fire you spread gleefully this way
scorch you and your family at the other end

may your patrons in government corridors
become dead vultures to the entire world

may the horses you ride to sack villages
throw you into vainglorious days

may the identity you hide now in scarves
be stripped by the Maker when you need cover

may those you chase out of life in these raids
turn round to pursue you out of the next life

may you have sway of night your haunt
and day reduce you to the lowest vermin

may you escape justice of Khartoum's courts
and be condemned forever in a higher trial

may those you kill to seize their property
deny you the ultimate refuge of peace

may djinns you invoke in your despoliation
testify against you in the final judgment

may you be victim of your blood thirst
and wander without relief from paradise

may the fire seeds you sow in Darfur
consume you and your damned bands. . .
(Tanure Ojaide's *The Tale of the Harmattan*, p. 58)

As of now, poems on the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone are getting published. The Sierra Leonean Syl Cheney-Coker has a new collection of poems focused on the recently ended civil war in his country, blaming the crisis on the availability of diamonds. Recent literature dealing with African conflicts tends to condemn inhumanity and also probe into the causes of the crises. With such knowledge and intellectual awakening, African literature is creating the atmosphere that will not only inhibit violent conflicts but sensitive human beings that will use language to solve their problems rather than weapons. By presenting the stark realities of war, African writers are advocating that it should be avoided by all means and parties should use the options of dialogue and negotiation.

Literature as a Unifier and Antidote to Conflicts

Contemporary African literature remains utilitarian and contributes indirectly to conflict management in the continent. All over Africa the writers espouse ideals and positive ideas in their attempts to refashion their separate societies. In fact, they provide ethical and moral direction to their individual societies. Towards this objective, they propagate a vision of society free of conflicts; hence they advocate justice, fairness, humanity; virtues that are antidotes to corruption, ethnicity, injustice, and other negative practices that create conflicts in the first place. In addition, many writers emphasize humanity over ethnic values that are often the roots of conflicts. In the Niger Delta, for example, J.P. Clark, Gabriel Okara, and my humble self express the sense of place and the regional bond that reduce ethnic differences. It is better to be a Niger Delta writer than be simply an Izon, Urhobo, or Itsekiri writer, bearing in mind the tension that often results in violence in the area from ethnic identity. Literature affects the consciousness of a people and has the capacity to expand intercultural knowledge/communication. As Obi puts it, "If conflict is, at least in part, a function of ignorance, and literature chips away at ignorance, therefore literature can mitigate conflict."

Literature is a unifier. Two Niger Delta writers—Tess Onwueme and the writer—have written drama and fiction respectively on the area to mediate in the ethnic violence that often plagues the oil-producing region. Onwueme's play, *What Mama Said*, and the writer's novel, *The Activist*, have characters of the conflicting groups of Itsekiri, Izon, and Urhobo relate in friendship and love; their friendly interaction eschews the lack of trust that causes physical confrontations. In *The Activist*, the Activist, the protagonist, is nameless and falls in love with Ebi Emasheyi, whose father is Izon, mother Itsekiri, and paternal grandmother Urhobo. She is an art lecturer at Niger Delta State University. The Activist's ally is Pere Ighogboja. Other major characters include Omagbemi Mukoro, Mrs. Taylor and Chief Tobi Ishaka. By mixing the characters that fall in love, respect one another, and are allies against their multinational and political exploiters, all of them bonded as Niger Delta people fighting for their environmental, economic,

and political good, the writer is creating a healthy social atmosphere that will reduce the tension among the different ethnic groups of the area.

A passage from *The Activist* depicting the aftermath of violent confrontations in Warri in which Itsekiri, Izon, and Urhobo are in refugee camps and fed by the Red Cross on genetically engineered corn meant for cows illustrates the reconciliatory objective of the writer:

The refugee problem was enormous. The Red Cross fed a stream of refugees from different quarters. In the Red Cross camps were now quartered Itsekiri, Izon, and Urhobo refugees under the same roof or tent; the refugees not only ate the same bread but drank the same water offered them by the outside charities.

In the refugee tents, everybody spoke either English or pidgin and nobody spoke Itsekiri, Izon, or Urhobo. In the unsanitary environment of the tent, Wilberforce and Yemi established an intimate relationship. Neither the Izon man nor the Itsekiri woman asked about the other's ethnic group.

"Thanks," Efe told Ebitan, after she offered him food.

"You need it more than me; I have already eaten," the Itsekiri woman told the Urhobo man.

"I hope your wound is healing," Omare, an Itsekiri, told Cecilia, an Izon woman who had looked at him with tenderness.

At night, the murmuring and moaning in the dark among men and women were neither in Itsekiri, Izon, or Urhobo. There was love in their distress. Some conceptions of more mixed children would come from the refugee camp experience. (236)

Other African writers have attempted to defuse conflicts with their writings. Chenjerai Hove of Zimbabwe in *Bones* does this with the contentious land problem in Zimbabwe for national unity. By making the land to have a spiritual character, Hove avoids racializing the problem and is as critical of his Shona people as of the whites, a literary mediation in an explosive context.

Concluding Recommendations

- Leaders and those who occupy positions of responsibility in society should desist from the language of threat and use the language of rapprochement. *We* should be civil and take a cue from cultural constructs that maintain communality, cohesiveness, and respect for others in order to establish order, peace, and stability. Avoiding hyperboles and negative metaphors will deescalate a crisis.
- Dialogue should be used as a means of resolving conflicts rather than violence or litigation. We should talk to those who don't agree with us or hold a different view of things from us toward better understanding and amicable relationship.
- Mediators, facilitators, and peace-builders should study the folklore of the parties in the conflict they are dealing with to fully understand their worldview, philosophy, and sensibility so as to know how to bring about reconciliation. Matters of honor and respect, when violated, can trigger or escalate conflicts. Once you treat others with respect and honor, they tend to reciprocate by being equally civil and receptive to your own suggestions.
- The language resources of the oral tradition—proverbs, axioms, and other wise sayings—should be explored to reinforce modern conflict management skills. Also skills for which the *otota*, the griot, and the imbongi traditions are famous should be deployed towards conflict resolution.
- Africa should find native forms of ethnic/folkloric/traditional resolutions of conflicts. Workshops should be organized for NGOs and others to be trained professionally for crisis management on African traditions of conflict resolution embedded in the folklore. It is not enough to know how Westerners resolve their conflicts; we must know our tradition of conflict resolution and reinforce it with what we learn from others in the modern context.
- Africans should resist foreign language usage even when using English, French, or Portuguese and indigenize the borrowed languages. In other words, the epistemology of conflict as

used in the West (especially by the United States) should be avoided for our own terms. People should be called what they call themselves rather than “terrorists,” “warlords,” “militiamen,” and “insurgents.” Failure to use language in our own way and using foreign terms could inflame the conflict and also draw in ideological interests from the international community and exacerbate an already bad situation. Africans should indigenize the imposed European languages.

- Africans should be cautious about the use of the electronic media that is so individualized that, unlike a face-to-face context of communication, one can in a closet say things without attention to civility and communal coexistence. The abundance of media and their use should be regulated, especially of inflammatory or tribal websites, to maintain peace. Because electronic publications are so instant that parties to a conflict should not rush to issue statements but think carefully and respond patiently. I do not call for the control of the Internet but it should be monitored so that it may not be used negatively to stir up crises and conflicts.
- Society should cultivate the habit of reading literature to absorb the virtues that African writers advocate: sense of justice, fairness, and compassion for the underprivileged and others. With such values inculcated into the general populace, there will be more humanity and sensitivity that will lead to avoiding conflicts and their negative consequences.
- Serious effort should be made for the adoption of an African language as a lingua franca. Using foreign languages such as English, French, and Portuguese opens Africans and African nations to spying by the West and others because of “the lack of privacy and the resultant vulnerability to surveillance by outsiders” (Ojaide and Obi 62). The issue of an African lingua franca should be revisited by the African Union so that we speak one tongue and have one truly African voice. Hausa and Swahili should be among languages considered for this necessary role. One language will not only bind us as Africans but will make us culturally institutionalize our conflict management experience as one people.

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I No Go Sidon Look: Writing in Pidgin English

Introduction

Pidgin is a hermaphroditic postcolonial hybrid tongue. It is both mother tongue and other tongue in its blending of English and West African indigenous tongues. I write a majority of my poems in English and a few in Urhobo and Pidgin and some in both Pidgin and English. I speak Pidgin English either at home in the Warri area, in Nigeria, or when talking with very familiar friends who speak or understand it. In secondary school, our Principal forbade us from speaking Pidgin and “Vernacular” because they were not educated languages and could corrupt our efforts at speaking Standard English. Before the Civil War, I had gone to spend school breaks with my aunt in Sapele, which then was the home of Pidgin English or had a variety of it that was said to be the most authentic. Warri’s variety of Pidgin English only assumed a preeminent position after the Civil War led to the economic decline of Sapele and Warri’s economic ascendancy with oil.

Pidgin English is the lingua franca of the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. Doubtless, the coastal nature of the area and the sea ports then brought together sailors and local people of mixed ethnicity who could not speak Standard English but evolved a medium of “broken” English to communicate; hence Pidgin has been defined as a “lingua franca which has no native speakers” (Trudgill 167). It thus cuts across ethnic boundaries wherever it is spoken in West Africa. It is the language of mainly illiterate and non-literate but also literate people along the West African coast from Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, to Nigeria. Over the years, accelerated by increased urbanization, transportation, and communication, Pidgin English has spread upwards to embrace the entirety of those West African

countries. Pidgin English has become a “blend of the indigenous Nigerian languages and English” (Uguru: 2008, 59). It is now the folk language and the language of the “low class” or the informal language of communication in most of Nigeria. Many FM Radio Stations and some television stations in Nigeria read news in Pidgin English for the masses.

Pidgin English removes the burden of elitism that goes with Standard English used for administration, business, and education. It flourishes among the lower class and is the commonly used means of communication in inter-ethnic and inter-class communication.

The Socio-Cultural Context and Setting of My Poetry and Pidgin English

Pidgin English is spoken across Nigeria’s South-South geopolitical zone, now almost synonymous with the Niger Delta. Port Harcourt, Yenagoa, Warri, and Sapele are the major towns, and I consider myself a “Wafi” man, a Warri resident. Warri is a contested city with Urhobo, Itsekiri, and Izon people, the majority groups, but also with many from other ethnic nationalities such as Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, Ishan, and Isoko. These people in a commercial city meet in the market and the streets speaking mangled English, Pidgin, to each other and eventually evolved the Warri brand of Pidgin.

Here is a poet who ranges on the side of the common and under-privileged people, expressing their plight, and giving voice to their fears and aspirations! What could be the most appropriate language to write about them, speak to them and for them, than the language with which they communicate on a daily basis with so much fluency and creativity? In *The Eagle’s Vision* I have the poem “I Be Somebody”:

I fit shine your shoe like new one from supermarket,
 so I know something you no know for your life.
 I fit carry load for head from Lagos go Abuja,
 so I get power you think na only you get.
 If you enter my room, my children reach Nigerian Army;
 so I rich pass you, whether your naira full bank or house.

You no know kindness, big man: na me dey help
 push your car from gutter for rain, not for money at all;
 and you dey splash poto-poto for my body when you dey pass.
 To tell the truth, I get nothing but
 you no fit get anything without poor man—
 na me be salt for the soup you dey chop every day.
 I be nobody and I be somebody
 (Ojaide, *The Eagle's Vision*, 49)

Much of my writing has the Niger Delta not only as its background but also as the source of its inspiration, images, folklore, and vision. What language is most appropriate to reach the people than Pidgin English, the lingua franca of the region? My choice of Pidgin English to write some of my poems, therefore, is predicated on the subject matter, themes, mood, and relevant communicative mode. To be socially and culturally relevant in the contexts of my Niger Delta background and Socialist vision, using Pidgin English becomes an imperative to affirm relevance and poetic authenticity.

Language and Thought

Language carries the thought process, culture, worldview, and philosophy of those who speak it and of the place it is located in. The development of a language also indicates how its speakers and writers respond to their changing reality. In the case of Pidgin, especially the Delta/Warri variety, young and old speakers acquire and create fresh idioms to express the continually changing state of life around them. It is an effortless communicative tool among these people and the means of self-expression in the flux in which they find themselves.

The Internet has given Pidgin English so many new vocabularies that creatively and metaphorically, and, in that sense, poetically, are a shot of needed freshness when the mainstream poetic idioms and conventions are languishing under the burden of so many traditions of poetry. While some examples will be given in the poems, it suffices to note that the Warri variety of Pidgin English is oral poetry performed by knowledgeable speakers with ever new

expressions that convey each person's response to his or her reality and the world around.

Thus, Pidgin English as a language carries the socio-cultural beliefs of its speakers. It becomes imperative to use it as a medium to present feelings and ideas borne by the underprivileged, poor and younger urbanites of society. I belong to the society in which Pidgin English is used by uneducated, illiterate, poor, and informal people especially in urban areas. It is the backcloth of my socio-cultural vision and leads me to speak as one of the people to the people.

The Pidgin English Poet as a Bluesman

Pidgin English carries the tone and mood of blues. The marginalized Niger Delta people live under harsh conditions and to lighten their burden become very funny. In fact, some of the best known Nigerian comedians are from the Niger Delta, especially from the Warri area. They include Gordons, I-go-die, Ali Baba, Basket Mouth, Maleki, I go-save, and Away-Away. They all perform in Pidgin English to large crowds to roaring laughter. There is a lot of hustling for survival in Warri and the Niger Delta and Pidgin English, in its informality, carries the comic tone with which to express the harsh realities of the people's experiences. Pidgin English in stand-in comedy, song, or poetry is a good device to make people laugh about what should make them cry!

I have endeavored, in the blues mode, to use Pidgin English in my poems to say funny but serious things as in "Immigrant Voice," "Warri, My Incontestable Love," and "When We Hear Name of President." [see in Appendices]

Performance

The performative nature of the "new" African poetry demands strategies to reach out to and retain the attention of readers and audiences increasingly losing patience with books because of tele-

vision and the Internet. Many people that will not buy a poetry book attend occasions in which poetry is read and they listen attentively. I have participated in functions in Nigeria's Delta State (at Abraka and Warri) in which I read poetry and the audiences responded far more enthusiastically to the Urhobo and Pidgin poems than to my perhaps more accomplished poems in English. These folks would have been totally excluded from my poetry if it remained only in "Standard" English and in book form and meant for classrooms or the interested reader.

Pidgin English does well in performance with its humor, nuances, tone, and associated gestures. As a linguistic medium that runs counter to the elite Standard English with its Victorian impulse, Pidgin English is very dramatic and it goes with gestures that are comic, ironic, and more hilarious than normal English. Expressions like "Shuo-o!" and others bring a fresh dimension to bewilderment in poetry when performed.

Audience Participation in Sharing Experience

The audience that listens to Pidgin is able to share in the experience of language on an equal basis rather than the underprivileged that will look to poets as inhabitants of the ivory tower that are prone to writing difficult incomprehensible stuff. In fact, by using Pidgin, the Nigerian poet democratizes the readership of poetry. Unlike writing in English in which the poet is the teacher of the language, writing in Pidgin reverses the superiority of the poet as the reader can even know the language better than the poet who remains a literary artist only because of his creativity in the witty use of the language.

Pidgin thus brings down my poetry from the ivory tower of university students, academics, and scholars to the common folks who listen attentively and fully grasp the language, tone, and the nuances involved in the poetic experience. The poetry is brought to the level of those who inspire it and can share in its artistry, feelings, and ideas. It is not elitist poetry but one that gets its inspiration and poetic force from the street and not from isolated reflection alone.

This is a means of decolonizing African literature and making the poetry accessible to the people rather than using modernist techniques of allusiveness, fragmentation, difficulty, and obscurity that will result in a poetry that is closed to most readers. This will help solve the general impression or problem of many African students, who had been exposed to the “euro-modernist” poetry of such poets as Christopher Okigbo and Wole Soyinka that poetry is too difficult to read, enjoy, or pursue as a career in the arts.

Diversifying the Language of Poetry

Pidgin English has a lot of vitality and infuses a new force into the poetic medium. Mainstream English poetic idiom is spent and one needs a sharp creative mind to introduce freshness into it. However, Pidgin, as a dynamic language, is able to absorb new foreign and indigenous words, idioms, and nuances that provide poetic strength to the expressed experience. It is a language that is always changing as rapidly as the experiences of those who use it. As will be seen in “Warri, My Incontestable Love,” Pidgin borrows new expressions from contemporary technology and gives them new meanings that are stunningly figurative and often humorous.

Pidgin in the past decade has appropriated so many words from the Internet. Gone are the days when “death” was “kpai.” Now one can “delete” somebody; that is, kill the person. Then the person can be “downloaded,” that is buried. Whenever I go back to Warri, new idioms have surfaced and I have to play catch-up all the time to be current with the language.

One major point is that Pidgin English does not bear the burden of clichés that English poetic language carries. Nor does it have the cultural inhibition when talking about sex and other bawdy or vulgar things. One might be hesitant in Standard English to talk about sex publicly, but Pidgin makes what the young and old say about sex not offensive. It exercises the poetic license of making the bawdy and crude acceptable in the context of the linguistic medium that is not Victorian, prudish, polished, or overburdened by finesse.

One of the strengths of Pidgin is its simplicity that makes it accessible to illiterate, semi-literate, and literate folks of all classes of society. It is first and foremost a spoken language even though it is beginning to be written without an established orthography. The simplicity confers relevance on the language that brings diverse people together in a communicative mode they can all share without anyone looking superior to others.

Pidgin English as Pop Culture

One way of looking at Pidgin is to draw attention to its roots and use in pop culture. While poetry slams tend to be the most expressed forms of poetry in Pidgin, there are other forms of pop poetry that it inspires. Many young people get attracted to poetry or rap in the pop nature of poetry. This trend has a way of increasing the size of readers or audiences of pop poetry expressed in Pidgin. As already stated, Pidgin captures the radical side of contemporary life among youths.

Aesthetic Considerations and the Poetic Choice of Language

Pidgin often defies the metric form of conventional poetry. It is free, exhibits vitality, and a rebelliousness that places the poetry in a poetic realm of its own. It elicits laughter. Pidgin accepts or permits in its flexible mode the lyrical and the narrative at the same time. It manifests literary and aesthetic qualities of wit, humor, dramatic declamation, freshness of diction, and can be highly figurative, and musical.

Pidgin English is a major linguistic tool to decolonize, indigenize, and nationalize poetry. In multi-ethnic nations, it becomes a cohesive factor in literary endeavors. No one is identified by his or her ethnic group and could be used to forge national identity and unity. Pidgin in Nigeria or Ghana is comparable to Yiddish in Israel and Creole in the Caribbean region.

Conclusion

I write in Pidgin when what I want to write compels me to do so. It may not be often that this happens since my poems in Pidgin are not many but it gives me the latitude to range on human experience and capture it with the most appropriate diction. The Pidgin poem comes through its own inspiration, as different from poems in English or Urhobo, but when it comes I surrender myself to the muse and do the divine bidding.

For me now in faraway Charlotte, N.C., there is the need to bridge the gap with my people at home, to reach out to my roots and to tap not only their creative resourcefulness but also maintain a continuing psychic relationship that distance and absence do not dissolve. With Pidgin I speak directly, without interpreters, to my people. In my use of Pidgin, there is also the spiritual satisfaction that keeps me buoyant in an often alienating society for those without anywhere else as their anchor. With Pidgin I go “home” not only in thought but also in speech.

In me there is the serious tension between being African—of which writing in Pidgin and other factors are a part—and being global, trying to reach others with a new humanity. It is a reality that I live as a 21st-century writer attempting to reconcile my Africanness with my being a global person. It matters not whether I write my best poetry in Pidgin, Urhobo, or English because the good poem gets translated as my “Immigrant Voice” [see Appendices] written in Pidgin got translated into Spanish. The tension can be resolved in good writing, which translation and openness in others to accept something different can achieve.

From its relevance to the society, its decolonizing function, and the literary and aesthetic imperatives it commands, writing poetry in Pidgin should be more explored to have a composite expression of human experience. For me, who feel strongly about the underprivileged of society and coming from a society where Pidgin is understood more than any other language, it becomes a necessity to nudge my muse to inspire me more to express myself in the lingua franca of the people with whom I identify.

Appendices (Some Pidgin Poems)

I No Go Sidon Look*

I no go sidon look
like African Union soja for Darfur

I no go sidon look
make Shell dey piss and shit for our water

I no go sidon look
make Pentecostal noise cover udje drums

I no go sidon look
make anybody curse Mama wen born me

I no go sidon look
make hawk come catch my neighbor fowl for my yard

I no go sidon look
make thief just dey chop like that

I no go sidon look
make cobra tanda for my door-mouth

I no go sidon look
I go clap for swordfish when kill crocodile

I no go sidon look
I go throw party for black ant wen fall elephant

I no go sidon look
I go dance when hyena die

I no fit sidon look lailai
I go do something-o.

* *Sidon look* is the Pidgin English for “sit down and look”; that is, remain passive.

Immigrant Voice

Back home to here na long long way.
 The picture of here from home is so different
 from the wilderness I dey see night and day.
 This na America with homeless for every corner
 that I think I dey a numberless world?
 Where all the fine fine things in that picture:
 everybody dress kamkpe that I think
 na angels, Hollywood Heaven they misspell?
 Now I work standing so te for minimum wage,
 get dollars for one hand and give them out for the other.
 I come back from work so dead I can't eat or sleep
 and before dawn I don get up to begin another slave day.
 When I reply their letters from home saying
 here no be what they think they see for their minds,
 they no gree with me and call me lie-lie man:
 "You dey already there and you no want us to come."
 I know my people hate me for telling the truth.
 Wetin they see, geographers dey call am mirage—
 America na big photo-trick to me.
 If say big thief no boku for home
 and they no give man chance to live softly,
 America no be place to live for whole day.
 The streets dey explode kpa-a kpa-a like Biafra,
 dead body no dey fear anybody;
 you no know whether the person saying "Hi!"
 want to shoot, rob, or rape you.
 Neighbor no dey, friend no dey except them dog;
 You dey for your own like craze-man dey pursue dollar
 which no dey stay for your hand—they say na capitalism,
 when dollar dey circulate, circulate without rest.
 When somebody don naked for you for daylight,
 nothing dey the big boast of beauty
 for the cloth e take cover crawcraw and eczema.
 No be so e be for the picture they don retouch—
 beggar, thief, poor poor, all dem dey boku.

Sometimes I cry my eyes red for night in bed.
 Wetin my eye don see for here pass pepper
 make me dey prepare to go sweet home.
 If God dey, make e punish them
 wen drive me from Africa come hell.
 [Ojaide, *When It No Longer Matters*, 105–06]

When We Hear Name of President

Wetin our eye never see?
 Dey don see Oba!

President na butcher e be
 for khaki or agbada—

cobra-o, viper-o, na snake dem be;
 murderer na killer no matter im dress.

From im big big house, one president
 send plenty plenty soja come kill us.

ABC, alias Death Squad, send e own
 come seize our pickin and hang am.

And Mr. Big Belle send lightning
 come sweep Odi with fire.

We don tire de cry,
 na inside hell we de—

gas de burn for our sky whaam whaam,
 our river rotten (Shell de shit inside)

because oil de boku for our land;
 because gas boku for our backyard;

all the green God take cover us de go,
 the water the Almighty give us dey poison.

nobody wicked pass our president
 wen de siddon kampe for Abuja



de wack wack with our oil,
de swell like pregnant woman.

E no know say we de self—
who give monkey banana?

Hutu massacre no reach Odi,
Kosovo na play-play for Ogoni.

Babi Yar, Wiriyamu, and Srebrenica
na im we de suffer for here.

River and creek full for dead body,
blood don drive water comot.

Na so we Govment be-o—
e go kill you for your property;

e take our land with decree
e seize our oil with gun

wetin armed robber be?
Dey no fit take our soul.

Instead of dis suffer suffer we de,
make God just take oil go dem farm

but make im twist neck of butcher
wen de call imself Presido!

Wen we hear name of president,
na run we de for our life

because e de come with soja
e de come with gun to kill

because e worse pass Hitler—
e de smile de kill us

baby, papa and mama
e de kill with smile

our animal and crop
e de kill with smile



na plague e be for our land
na death e de bring.

First na lagoon be graveyard,
den hillsides of our new capital.

Who know where they learn
say to be president na to kill?

Im wen think say e strong well well,
God go knack am for ground

we go dance say death don die
vulture don die, Hitler don die.

We no de cry again,
we don see blood boku

child-o, old papa-o, old mama-o
we don strong now

everybody for our land
enter bush—na Mau Mau

we de fight for our land;
na ANC guerilla we be now.

Dis fight better pass refugee
for our own land—

na only one life man de live,
we go defend am with our power;

we go fight get back wetin dey rob
from us—by God's power we go win

Make God punish president wen sabi
only to de rob and kill im people!
(Ojaide, *Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel*)

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Deploying Masculinity in African Oral Poetic Performance: The Man in Udje Dance Songs

The Urhobo people of Nigeria's Delta State are renowned for their *udje* dance song performance. While *udje* is mainly associated with Arhavwarien, Ewu, Okparabe, Olomu, Udu, and Ughievwen clans, it is the latter two that are popularly known in Urhobo as the "kingdoms of songs." In its heyday *udje* was also practiced in Agbon, Ogor, and Uvwie (Effurun) clans with master poets and performers hired from Ughievwen and Udu to teach *udje* poetry composition and its performance. The Urhobo people, a Pan-Edo subgroup, live mainly in Delta State, but there is a substantive number also living in Bayelsa, Edo, Rivers, Ondo, Osun, Lagos, Plateau, Borno, Kano, and other States of Nigeria. Many Urhobo currently live in Ghana, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Britain, and the United States. While the Urhobo share a common identity and ancestry, they have close neighbors in the Edo (Bini, Ishan, Ora, and Owan), Isoko, Ukwani (Igbo), Itsekiri, and Izon (Ijo). However, none of these neighboring groups practices *udje*. *Udje* is thus an exclusively Urhobo people's oral poetic performance tradition.

As a patriarchal society in which men are privileged over women and the customs and traditions have been established to favor men at the expense of women, the notions of manliness, manhood, or masculinity are not limited to being male by gender. Masculinity is a conglomerate of virtues and characteristics built around the traditional expectations of being a man and the glorification of virile values. These qualities, sometimes related to warrior virtues, are not only integral parts of the culture but are also often seen by the people as meeting established rules of behavior/conduct and action of men. This chapter discusses Urhobo notions of masculinity as deployed in the oral poetic performance of *udje*. Mas-

culinity in many African societies is a heightened form of human behavior and action that is the antithesis of femininity. In the udje poetic performance, masculinity assumes an even more heightened form not only in the poetry composition, music, and dance but also in its being geared toward extolling those virtues that the Urhobo hold to be admirable in men.

Udje is a unique type of Urhobo poetry/songs composed from often exaggerated and sometimes fictional materials about a rival side of the community and are performed with dance by rival quarters, towns, or villages on an appointed day during the festival time with large audiences in attendance. In a given year, it is the turn of one side to sing about the other and that side uses materials it gathered to compose songs that exaggerate the other side's foibles and frailties. The following year, the side that sang the previous year listens to and watches the response of the opposing side. Each song is either a response or a counter-attack; each side responds and springs new surprises. The tradition is seen foremost as a form of entertainment despite the fact that the poetic composition is, like in a battle, aimed at "wounding" and even destroying its target.

Udje is a male oral poetic performance tradition. The composers of the songs (*irori-ile*) and the performers/cantors (*ebo-ile*) are all men. Women stay at the periphery in udje dance song performance. Their role is limited to clapping to the percussive rhythms of the drumming, fanning the male dancers, and chanting praises at the drummers and dancers. Ironically, the men involved in the performance, especially the dancers, dress in women's wrappers. Also significant to the udje sense of masculinity is the fact that the performance is dedicated to Uhaghwa or other local deities that are neither male nor female. Despite some of these aspects of udje performance that incorporate female and androgynous qualities, udje in its conception and execution deploys masculinity in a variety of ways to achieve moral, ethical, and aesthetic goals.

The setting of Urhoboland where udje is performed is crucial to the understanding of the masculine ethic. The performers of udje live in the riverine area of the Niger Delta that comprises mangrove swamps and rainforest types of vegetation. Ughievwen and Udu clans that are best known for udje performance comprise rural

small towns and villages, where fishing and farming are the main occupations. In addition, the men tap rubber trees and also produce palm oil, two rigorous means of livelihood in the rainforest environment. Nobody takes to performing udje full-time; rather, it is combined with fishing, farming, or some other work. In keeping with the dominant values of the rural environs of Urhobo, udje aims to promote communal harmony and peace. The songs are meant to check individuals from crossing the line of decency and morality and breaking the communal cohesion. These rural values are seen as the opposite of those held in urban areas such as Warri and Sapele, where morality is perceived to be lax and there is aggressive individualism at the expense of the communal spirit.

Udje is conceived and practiced as *ofovwin* (war) in which one party uses all the poetic and theatrical resources at its disposal to “annihilate” the other side. Among the Urhobo people, war is often a masculine art in which physical prowess is displayed to assert the twin manly qualities of courage and power. Chief Jonathan Mrakpor of Edjophe explained this link between war and udje performance thus: “Wars and fights led to disputes, and the accompanying judgment led to *udje*. When there was a war or fight, one side won—the victorious group rejoiced with songs. In the process, the victorious sang songs about the defeated—they boasted about their prowess and mocked the weakness of their opponents. Stung, the defeated got angry and retaliated with biting songs of their own about the other group. *Udje* was the result of abusing the one who abused you.”¹ Chief Dozen Ogbariemu, a veteran of the art of udje, confirms that “udje songs are used to destroy or praise.”² In this context, the songs are used to praise one’s group and to vilify one’s rivals. War or war-like action is thus a mark of masculinity among the Urhobo people in both their real lives and their

1. Chief Jonathan Mrakpor of Edjophe, in an interview on August 6, 1999, at his Otughievwen home in Ughelli South Local Government, Delta State, Nigeria.

2. Chief Dozen Ogbariemu, a native of Iwhrekan in Ughelli South Local Government, Delta State, Nigeria, told me this in an interview on December 26, 2006, in his house.

poetic performance traditions. Men seek to assume leadership positions, whether in real war or in a performance competition, to defend their side and make it proud. In so doing, they are also boosting their egos in the society.

To all concerned in the tradition, *udje* is an artistic contest framed as a battle or war (*ofovwin*) between two parties, and in the fiercely competitive spirit each side avails itself all the big guns in the verbal arsenal and theatrical repository to sing the opponents to a fall. Images and motifs of battle or war fill *udje* songs and their performance activities. Often, the *obo-ile*, the chief performer, projects himself as the leader of an army and calls on his followers to put in their best in singing and dancing to ensure victory in the artistic battle. Here is an Otokutu song which, like an opening salvo in battle, is meant to exhort his group and to intimidate the other side:

The time has come at last.
 The chimpanzee boasts it will break the gorilla's back.
 If the civet cat cries all night, there must be cause for it.
 The *akpobrisi* tree says it is tough,
 but people bypass it to make offerings to the iroko tree.
 The boast of prowess between strong and weak
 will only be settled after a hand-to-hand encounter.
 The time has come at last.
 Now that our *udje* dance is out,
 will you still contest our superiority?
 It is sheer delusion, sheer delusion;
 if not, who will beat his chest
 that he is everything in the world?
 The river god says he will dance,
 says he will dance himself to madness.
 The ocean god says he will clap for him.
 When the waves rise in mad turbulence,
 who dares set in, in a canoe?
 The time has come at long last!
 (Ojaide 97)

Here, the Otokutu men project themselves variously as gorillas, the mythical fierce *akpobrisi* tree, and ocean waves, respectively, stances that the opposing side cannot contend with in the battle of songs ahead. While the Otokutu group is strong, the rival group is weak. It is a metaphorical display of physical and mystical power that is meant to intimidate the other group into submission even before the “battle” of songs begins. The *akpobrisi* tree is imbued with mystical power in Urhobo mythology. No two *akpobrisi* trees are found in the same vicinity, and only low brushes grow around it. It thus stands alone in defiance of other low shrubs around. In the udje songs, masculinity involves physical and mystical dominance as well as artistic superiority in poetry composition and performance.

The leader of a side often encourages his men to put in their best in the “battle of songs.” In a song, Akanabe, “respected for his strength,” exalts his men:

My people, stand close to me;
 help me gather more clubs.
 If you laze about
 when the battle is being fought,
 we shall all be enslaved.
 We can defend ourselves if we are together
 (Ojaide 101–102).

It is significant to put these songs in the historical context of the Urhobo people. Tired of intra-ethnic wars, they resolved at the middle of the nineteenth century to channel their violent energies into artistic competitions rather than real battles which often led to senseless bloodshed. Udje is, thus, a manly oral poetic performance that brings out the competitive spirit of war without its negative realities. To Urhobo men, physical war is destructive and should be avoided as much as possible. They opt instead for the artistic war that elicits the poetic and performance talents they have to entertain themselves.

Udje is a satiric genre and the entire performance is meant to generate laughter. Laughter is expected from the abuse of a rival or opponent in a poetic narrative that is meant to be humorous, sarcastic, and highly metaphorical. However, there must be the element of provocation involved to make laughter or the poetic assault of

udje justifiable to the audience and the tutelary gods, especially Uhaghwa, for whom the songs are composed and performed.

A man should not attack somebody else without being provoked. Masculinity entails holding back one's endowed strength until provoked to fight back; once provoked, one is bound to retaliate. Masculinity, as manifested in udje performance and Urhobo culture, has to do with character and attitude, the ability to defend oneself or one's side in a battle for honor, especially when provoked by a rival or opponent.

Many udje songs show the element of provocation before a satirical onslaught is unleashed against one's rival. One of the fiercest rivalries in udje contest tradition is between the neighboring villages of Iwhrekan whose *obo-ile* is Oloya and Edjophe whose *obo-ile* is Memerume. Oloya's famous song "Gbogidi" is based on provocation by the Edjophe people, and his justification on Iwhrekan's behalf to unleash the scathing attack of Gbogidi, a great performer from Edjophe:

Gbogidi it was who first smeared me with the image of
poverty.
Unless there are performers, there will be no spectators.
The idiot acted in ignorance.
You saw a lion asleep and tampered with its tail.
Gbogidi, we have brought the war to you
(Darah 172).

Calling Gbogidi "the monarch of paupers," Oloya goes on to paint a devastating image of a wretch. Often tinged with rivalry, the provocation involves earlier songs and the assertion of self-pride as shown in the epic duel between Iwhrekan's Oloya and Edjophe's Memerume, who sang against each other. Memerume begins one of his songs with "Oloya talks ill of me behind me" (Ojaide 30). In a similar vein, Oloya begins another song with:

Memerume, the time has come.
Never at any time
will a goat's challenge worry the leopard
(Ojaide 31).

The Ekrejegbe quarter of Orhuwhorun in its song says: “Ughere ward it is who brought about / this warfare; spectators take note” (Darah 113). Once one is attacked, one is honor-bound to retaliate. In “Eshamredje,” “Eshamredje boasted around / that he would destroy me with songs” (Ojaide 96); hence the attack on him. “Shame on Ekrabe” also cites provocation before attacking the rival or opponent:

A goat has asked a leopard for a duel;
and as the world waits for the great spectacle,
the goat prays that it leave the scene alive.
Boasting accompanies heavy drinking;
and bad jokes are fraught with danger
(Ojaide 105).

The poet-performer is the “leopard” challenged by a “goat” for a duel that the goat is bound to lose. Once there is provocation, then there are no boundaries in the response and counterattack. The rival party could base its song on so much falsehood that itself becomes a provocation to be responded to.

The disabled are exempted from being satirized for their handicaps, unless seen as assisting others in the “battle.” Wives of poets and performers are constant subjects of songs because in Urhobo society a man is expected to protect the honor of his wife when assaulted. It will be the height of unmanliness for one to ignore anybody saying negative things about his wife. Thus, picking on a person’s wife becomes an easy way of insulting the person and also provoking him.

Sometimes blood affinity to a great poet or performer makes one, irrespective of circumstances, to be the subject of acerbic songs. Okpoto, Okitiakpe’s brother, is sung as a violent sex maniac from whom women fled. Similarly, all of Kpaeban’s children, including Gbogidi, the performer, are verbally assaulted and described as the worst of the poor:

Gbariemu and his brothers formed a team
Poverty and Misfortune made up the other team
A draughts game
Come and watch, the appointed day is due

Oloya began advising:
Brother, play this, play this
 Maybe we can avoid Poverty.
 Diisi began advising:
Brother, play this, play this
 Perhaps we can escape from Poverty.
 Poverty set him one trap
 Gbariemu escaped it
 (Darah 87).

In the song, Gbogidi's brothers are all abused by virtue of being related to him. At the same time, the tradition establishes borderlines that should not be crossed in making fun of others. Crossing such borders results in poor taste and could generate not only disgust and revulsion from the audience who are judges of the songs and their performance but also provokes retribution from angry gods against the transgressors. Thus there are limits to laughter. While the Urhobo code of masculinity demands retaliation when provoked, it is unmanly to attack the innocent or the helpless.

Closely related to the concepts of provocation and retaliation is the principle of honor in Urhobo men. The concepts of honor (self pride) and shame (disrepute) among the Urhobo people are embedded in the udje tradition whether the genre of the song is satire, panegyric, dirge, or religious invocation. The songs are intended to be sufficiently devastating metaphorically to destroy the opponent/rival. An Orhuhworun song, for example, describes this objective: "Behold the fire the gods lit in the human mouth / It does not emit smoke / Yet it causes destruction" (Darah 21). As R.C. Elliott puts it, "the more a person dreads shame, the more he will avoid situations which might bring him the bad name conveyed by public mockery" (69). Udje involves public mockery of individuals, families, quarters, villages, or towns by rival groups as well as assertion of self-pride and honor by the singers.

Every Urhobo man wants to avoid shame. To be publicly shamed is to lose one's manliness. In an Orhuhworun song, "Whenever songs are to be composed," a family expresses the shame they suffer, a condition which inevitably reduces their standing in town:

Farmers, who once grew enviable yams,
 now grow petty cocoyams;
 we can see the change.
 When we, the renowned Ekrabes, sang,
 everybody moved;
 but we bewitched ourselves,
 and now make Ekrejegbe singers
 taunt their seniors and betters
 in spite of themselves
 (Ojaide 99–100).

Here, the Ekrabe family members bewail their plight in the song contest because “we bewitched ourselves.” Shame, as expressed in this song, erodes masculinity in an Urhobo community in which pride and honor are manifestations of one’s greatness.

Sometimes it is incumbent on the udje performer to mock himself rather than wait for the opposing side to do so. Thus, the principle of *iten*, masking, becomes a strategy to deflect attention from one’s weakness, wrong, or deficiency and avoid embarrassment. Once you have mocked yourself, others will not see the need to do so; or if they do, it will be overkill in a tradition in which one is meant to spring fresh surprises. In the use of masking in udje, masculinity employs wit and self-mockery to forestall insults from others. This means that no human being is perfect or flawless, but it is a mark of manliness to laugh at one’s self.

A good example of masking is Memerume’s “Amonomeyararia,” a song seemingly directed at a woman in the rival Iwhrekan village, but is generally interpreted as relating to the Edjophe poet-performer himself. A talented and renowned poet and performer, handsome and dignified, Memerume had many wives and concubines but no child. Since he knew rivals would use this deficiency in a song about him, he first sang about barrenness as a preemptive strike at himself. Amonomeyararia, the subject of the song, conjures in one’s mind Onomeyararia, a real person. While there was Onomeyararia in Iwhrekan at the time, there was no Amonomeyararia. The poet apparently used the fictional name that easily evokes an actual person as a cover to sing about his own sterility and the misfortune of

not having children. In Urhobo not having a child is seen as a serious masculine deficiency; hence Memerume chose self-ridicule rather than give rivals the opportunity to mock him. The courage to preempt the opponent's abuse or strike with self-deprecating humor is one of the ways of deploying masculinity in Urhobo society.

Chief Dozen Ogbariemu, a practitioner of udje in his young days and now 92 years old (2010), describes udje as songs used to bury heroes, a fact that explains the dirge tone of many of the songs. What is significant here is the deployment of masculinity in such an egotistical manner by the poet/composer or the cantor/chief performer as to create a hero of himself at the expense of his rivals. Many Urhobo men have Ivwri icons in their homes. Ivwri is the god of toughness and revenge and is fabled to put psychological and physical pressure on enemies to surrender. Chief Ogbariemu has an Ivwri statuette in his bedroom and he pours libation on it regularly. It is thus the practice of many Urhobo men, especially those who face competition, to invoke the Ivwri spirit. Ivwri is the divine personification of masculinity in Urhobo culture, and udje exponents/practitioners often invoke the spirit to defeat their rivals.

In udje the principals indulge in glorification of virility by self-projection at the expense of rivals. Okitiakpe of Ekakpamre, who died in 1979, was one of the best known udje poets and performers.³ He practiced udje for decades and was a pain to his rivals who saw no other way to insult him than to sing about his ugliness. In the famous song, "Me wven Odjelabo" (I am the Invincible Wrestler), Okitiakpe turns his so-called age and ugliness against his rivals:

Uto is all bush.
 Its people got wind of my gray hair
 and are gleeful.
 Since they are gloating around,
 have the old been driven from town?

3. Okitiakpe of Ekakpamre is one of the best known udje composers and performers. When I first met him in 1977, he was already very old and he asked his senior daughter to sing me his songs. He nodded his head as his daughter sang some of his songs to me.

The talk about my so-called age
 Is more publicized than the first head tax.
 The fuss is unbelievable:
 it is the head that grows gray hair;
 it is not a dress I choose to put on.
 This year we will see.
 Gin may be tasty,
 but palm wine makes it so....
 I am Odjelabo, the invincible wrestler.
 Like Uvwiam, I am ageless.
 Even when life is hard for a king,
 he still has coral beads on his neck.
 When it comes to performing udje,
 I am the peerless star;
 First, like Eni among the gods.
 Uto folks call me an old man;
 but do they see age in a flying bird?
 (Ojaide 95)

To counter his rivals' jibe at his age, Okitiakpe sings of his experience as a poet-performer in the light of the ageless Agbarho town of Uvwiam, for long settled before Udu and Ughievwen towns sprang up and yet still remains "ageless." He is the king of udje songs, who remains rich by virtue of the expensive coral beads that he wears at all times. And, above all, he remains athletic despite his so-called age. The poet-performer's rhetorical question, "do they see age in a flying bird?" underscores his superiority over his Uto rivals.⁴

Boasting is an expressive mode of masculinity in udje songs and performance. Each *ororile* (poet) or *obo-ile* (performer) deploys metaphors to extol his talent and skill, while insulting his rivals. In "Osokpro," the poet boasts: "I, a diamond, they mistake me for silver." In the same song, the poet says: "the words of my song are

4. Uto is a quarter of Ekakpamre, a town in Ughelli Local Government Area of Nigeria's Delta State. Okitiakpe belongs to the rival Ekruzierho quarter of the same town.

the iroko tree / An iroko tree can never be dwarfed by others” (Darah 214). Oloya in “Gbogidi” boasts: “I am governor of udje” to show his supremacy at both composition and performance of udje poetry. In “Mienka, the Prisoner,” the singer says “Ughere’s songs are a snake ever dreadful” and goes on to praise himself as “the fountain of songs” (Darah 102). In an Orhuwhorun song, the poet calls himself “the dictionary of Udunvwurhie ward,” while his rival, Arite, is “the monarch of ugliness.” In “Odaro,” the poet boasts: “I am the bitter head of *okpeyin yam*: / it’s neither good when roasted / nor good too when boiled” (Ojaide 103) to emphasize the masculine qualities of ruggedness and resilience in Urhobo society. In “Krekpe,” Memerume says “*erha* and the leopard look alike, / but the leopard still feeds on its meat!” (Ojaide 124). Here, the poet says that he is superior to his rival poet. In other words, among poets, some are far better than others.

From the songs, one can deconstruct the values and virtues that affirm masculinity and those that negate it. Praise elements are masculine, while insults render one un-masculine. Toughness and intimidating others are masculine qualities. Wealth is a masculine virtue. In song after song, poverty, deprivation, and debt are denounced. In “Gbejeriemu,” the thoughts of a poor man are compared to a river and “the boats that ply it / are boats of miserable tales” (Ojaide 139). Inono’s only dress is compared to the only child of a parent and the loss would be devastating. This song paints a damning picture of poverty. Inono has only one dress, which is both a work dress and an outing dress. As it is drying outside after being washed, a falcon snatches it away only for the poor naked man to chase the bird and pleading for his only cloth to be returned to him. In another song, a poor man is not allowed to talk; he only sits at meetings and listens to what the rich people say. Oloya says “Gbogidi is an interest on a loan / An interest makes a loan longer forever / It consumes one’s entire earnings” (Darah 173). In the same song, “The pauper’s thoughts are like a spider / Ever unsure whether to move forward or backwards.” Udje songs condemn all forms of excess, including rigidity, being over-sexed, miserliness, theft, and other traits that the Urhobo society abhors.

Often the content of the songs speaks to the influence of masculinity in the relationships between men and their wives or concubines. It is expected that a man marries from a good family so as to maintain his prestige, honor, and dignity. Okitiakpe of Ekakpamre, the renowned poet-performer, praises his wife's street, Ekennewhare, as "Oboye k'In gla" (Her street is England). To the Urhobo, England is a beautiful place. By saying that his wife comes from a place as beautiful as England, the poet is enhancing his prestige. It is manly for a performer to praise his wife's family home to affirm his faith in her. Similarly, a man's wife is expected to be clean and neat all the time and properly dressed to give pride to the husband. On the contrary, a dirty woman brings shame to her spouse and erodes his masculinity. For instance, Oloya's filthy wife, Revukperi, is described thus:

The lump of filth on Revukperi's back juts out like a
 hillock
 Like the charge office building
 Where people obtain summons in Warri.
 Witness her pulp-tissued belly like that of Ahwin
 With doughy muscles like a decayed *aligun* fish
 She trudges back and forth like a huge worm
 With an undulating back like Ilaje landscape ...
 With greasy hair like wrappings of chestnut
 Oloya's filthy wife stinks
 Like the beast called donkey common at Burutu port
 (Darah 147).

The woman is a specimen of ugliness. Her skin is not smooth; she is fat and does not make up. She also stinks. Oloya is a celebrated poet-performer, who brags about his artistic skill. He also represents his quarter of town in the "battle of songs." Such a distinguished man is expected to have a befitting wife, but, in this case, does not. His filthy wife thus diminishes his stature in the society, which places importance in marrying a "good" woman. Masculinity must possess social propriety that involves the good conduct and neatness of a man's wife. In some other songs, a man is perceived from the wife's conduct or action. Okpoto, who was brother to a great per-

former, and was himself a performer, had a wife who was known to be a bad cook. That Okpoto's wife could not prepare good food told on him, her husband.

Sex is meant for married or adult men in Urhobo. Since men are allowed traditionally to have many wives, sex is often a tool of domination. A man who cannot marry is ridiculed, and so the number of wives a man has enhances his masculinity. This is more important since marrying multiple wives is connected to wealth. Only the rich can afford to have many wives and concubines, and the poor remain unmarried or married to just one wife. In one of the songs, Ubiogba remains a bachelor for too long and becomes an embarrassment to himself and his family. In the Urhobo society, men are expected to marry about the age of twenty-five and men who remain unmarried after that age are looked down upon. It was after Ubiogba's marriage that he could sing "I am now free of insults" (Ojaide 146). In another case of being single for too long, Majotan, an *obo-ile* (poet/composer) remained a bachelor into his late forties, which was unusual for a healthy Urhobo man. He laments the misfortune of remaining single and doing what his wife, if he were married, should be doing for him:

It's time again
for singers and dancers to meet
and go to the lead-singer's.
Should they get there
and find the leader alone by the fire
preparing his own meal,
wouldn't you be shamed?
Uhaghwa, give thought to my plight
(Ojaide 165).

In many songs, the wife-less adults are ridiculed, and parents keep their young daughters from them to prevent assaults on them.

Impotence is a serious negation of masculinity in udje songs. Memerume's "Kpojiyovwi" is about a man who lost his potency and his wife revolted by leaving him. The greater tragedy in Urhobo culture is that "The particles that fall from the wind / get lost in the current / and the name is forgotten" (Ojaide 121). By being

impotent, Kpojiovwi will not have children to perpetuate his family name.

Self-restraint, especially as it affects married men, is also an expression of masculinity. For example, a night watchman who returns from work in the morning and makes love with his wife is ridiculed for being unmanly. In Urhobo culture, adults are supposed to make love only at night in the privacy of their bedrooms. However, this guard who works out the night has no other time to sleep with his wife. Still he is portrayed in the song as lacking self-control because he violates the ethics of mating in Urhobo.

There is another example in a song in which a woman comes from the cassava farm in the late afternoon and the man is so over-sexed that he wants her for sex. She protests that she is sweating and needs to bathe, but the man drags her to bed and makes love with her. The man is supposed to be disciplined enough to wait for when his wife is ready before making love. In addition to his indiscipline and impropriety, the man is guilty of coercion. The sex act between husband and wife should be mutual, not coerced by the male. In the udje tradition, masculinity demands discipline, restraint, and patience to ensure the continuity of social norms that promote harmony.

Udje performance is physically expressive of masculinity. Udje performers are expected to be handsome and perform with bare chests. Memerume, perhaps the greatest udje performer, was a tall man with athletic ability. A celebrated embodiment of masculinity, he exuded grace and dignity. There are extant reports of women rushing to embrace him before and after his performance. Not surprisingly, he had several wives and many concubines. Oloya, his main rival and perhaps the greatest udje poet, was also very graceful and dignified. The Urhobo people have at various times in their history chosen men with a magnetic personality to be their kings. Kingship in Urhobo embodies masculinity at its most heightened form; hence handsomeness, gracefulness, and a dignified personality are major factors in occupying the throne.

As a window into Urhobo socio-cultural life, udje performance reveals that not all men possess masculinity. Debtors, wretches, cowards, lazybones, and others that fall below the Urhobo measurement for success may be men but lack masculinity. Despite the

patriarchal nature of the society, every man is not masculine. Individual male attitudes, response to life, conduct, and deeds are used to judge masculinity. Women are not expected to possess some of these masculine qualities and be seen in a positive light. There are udje songs in which women who assert themselves or possess strong personalities are condemned. Women are supposed to be feminine, unlike men who are expected to be masculine. Men who lack masculinity are therefore seen as effeminate and falling short of their roles as men.

Udje masculinity dramatizes toughness, honor, propriety, the capacity for revenge or retaliation, and the projection of self-pride, all of which are the values the community has embraced for harmonious living. Masculinity demands imparting good such as cleanliness, restraint, patience, and discipline on a partner. A man should not be self-centered but should be generous to others, especially the less fortunate in society. Furthermore, a man should not misuse his freedom and rights. Above all, in the Urhobo communal society, the code for masculinity involves distinguishing oneself in established positive terms.

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Poetry in Northern Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects

Introduction

In this chapter, I intend to discuss the oral and written traditions of poetry in Northern Nigeria, examine factors that have not encouraged poetry writing in English, the challenges that need to be tackled, what things need to be done to ensure the flourishing of written poetry in English in the region, and prospects for the future. Poetry can be oral or written, and folk songs, “songs” by both freelance and “tied” singers will be considered as poetry as well as poems written in indigenous languages and derived from a foreign tradition. While one can see a difference between songs and written poetry, *wakar baka* (the “waka of the mouth”) and *rubu-tacciyar waka* (the “written waka”), what Graham Furniss calls them, they are both poetry.

Northern Nigeria is foremost a political creation that has socio-cultural, religious, geographical, and other connotations. However, is there a Northern Nigerian sensibility? In this chapter, Northern Nigeria will be taken in its broadest self-identifying image. It is poets who belong to or reside in any of the Northern states that will be considered as Northern Nigerian poets. However, they should also reflect in their poetry the life, temperament, world-view, and sensibility of Northern Nigeria as a distinct identifiable body with a poetic tradition and its own aesthetics.

There is the irony of an early Afro-Islam/Arab poetic tradition in Hausa and Fulfude before any form of written poetic tradition in other parts of Nigeria arose. When Shehu Usman dan Fodio and his daughter, Nana Asma’u, a renowned poet, were writing in the early 19th century, there was no comparable tradition of written



poetry in what has become Nigeria. A vibrant tradition of poetry in Hausa has also flourished from the 19th century through the 1970s to the present. It is ironical therefore that while the North can be said to have blazed the trail in the written poetic tradition in Nigeria, today there is paucity of renowned writers, especially poets, in English from the area. While Nana Asma'u's poetry is religious and in the Islamic tradition as the poems of Usman dan Fodio himself, there is another irony in the sense that their poetry attacks pagan practices and extols Islamic principles. Both the highly didactic *wa'azi* and the panegyric *madahu* form the two categories of poetry in Hausa: "one concerned with behavior in society in the context of reward and punishment in the hereafter, and the other with the expression of individual belief, emotion and religious commitment" (Furniss 197). The critical and devotional tenor of Islamic poetry is akin to the respective satiric and lyrical modes of much of modern/contemporary Nigerian/African poetry. Thus, there ought to be a smooth transition from the established Afro-Islam/Arab poetry in Fulfude and Hausa to writing poetry in English or Nigerian languages in the northern part of the country. This is a potential, like many others that will be presented, that has not been adequately tapped into by contemporary writers in Northern Nigeria.

Why is there a paucity of modern poets in English of Northern Nigerian origin compared to many from the Southern part of the country? While there are names such as Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, and J.P. Clark, there are no names of similar stature from Northern Nigeria. Also while at this time there are Niyi Osundare, Odia Ofeimun, Funso Aiyejina, Harry Garuba, and many others of the generation following Soyinka, there have not been active poets from the North of similar stature. One is not saying that there are no poets from the North but saying that they are not as renowned and many as those from the southern part of the country.

But one should not be limited to a superficial view of poetry. As mentioned earlier, there is a rich tradition of oral and written poetry in Northern Nigeria, the oral an intrinsic part of folk life and the written inspired by religious devotion. There appears to be a vibrant popular subaltern poetry both oral and written that is not



matched in popularity and strength by contemporary poetry in English in Northern Nigeria.

Oral Poets in Northern Nigeria

There are oral forms of poetry in every part of Northern Nigeria. Every ethnic group has its types, and most are either praise songs or songs of vilification. There is a rich heritage of singers in different parts of the area. These singers are not only the custodians of the genealogies and history of their people but also teachers of morality and ethics in the various societies. These oral poems, according to Furniss, have variable length verses with refrains and use rhythmic patterns not derived from Arabic meters (131). Often the oral poets perform the songs with accompaniments.

Furniss has divided them into two types: freelance and “tied” singers/musicians. Among the freelance Hausa musicians are the women Binta Zabiya, Uwaliya Mai Amada, and Maimuna Barmani Choge. Their themes are religious and social. The male masters of this group are Mamman Shata, Dan Mariya (Jos), Haruna Oji, and Hamza Cagi. The freelance singers sing praises of their clients but also sing about their individual experiences and criticize the evils in society. Barman Choge’s song about her feeling when her husband announced to her the coming of her co-wife is well known. The “tied” singers are those who sing the praises of their patrons and they praise warriors, boxers, farmers, and the aristocracy. Thus, there is a strong tradition of oral poetry and its performance in Northern Nigeria.

Written Hausa Poetry

The written tradition of poetry in Northern Nigeria was carried out by malams, scholars and their students. It was inspired by the jihad led by Usman dan Fodio, which opened the Hausa to a wealth of Arab/Islamic traditions of poetry. These poems have “regular stanzas, line-end rhyme schemes, and operate with Arab-derived

meters” (Furniss 131). The narrative-oriented *sira*, explanatory *far-illa* or *fikihu*, and others represent the wide variety of Hausa poetry. However, a “division in content and style of writing between strictly religious poetry and more secular poetry began to emerge at the beginning of this century,” that is the 20th century (Furniss 208). Since Islam involves not only theological but also socio-cultural and political issues, most of the poems tend to have a didactic tenor of moralizing. Modern Hausa poetry expresses a variety of themes, including corruption, marriage, problems of youths, and urbanization. Poets such as Aliyu na Manji, Akilu Aliyu, Gambo Hawaja, Tijani Tukur, Nalibi Wali, and a host of women poets from Kano (including Alhajiya Yar Shehu) have established a rich and vibrant tradition of written Hausa poetry that has evolved with the times in content and style. The challenge is: Can this tradition be modernized into English? And who takes over from this list of illustrious Hausa poets today?

Who are the Northern Nigerian poets writing in English? They are many: Mamman Vatsa, Adah Ugah, Abdul-Rasheed Na’Allah, Peter Atuu, Ben Abagyeh, S. Amali, Idris Amali, Abubakar Othman, Angela Miri, Aissatu Magaji, Denja Abdullahi, Idris Okpanachi, Ismail Bala Garba, Silas Obadiah, and a host of others. These poets mentioned have either published their individual collections or appeared in literary magazines, anthologies of Nigerian poetry or of Northern Nigerian poetry such as *Voices from the Fringe* edited by Harry Garuba and *Vultures in the Air*, and *Pyramids: An anthology of Poems from Northern Nigeria*. While Vatsa, Ugah, and Na’Allah have a body of work, none of the others can be said to have published in a sustained manner over many years.

The Afro-Arab/Muslim Poetic Tradition

Being Muslim does not inhibit writing poetry. If it does, there would have been no Shehu Usman dan Fodio, Nana Asma’u, and others in Fulfude and Hausa. If that were true, there would not have been first-class poets from the Muslim/Arab world such as Mahmoud Darwish and Adonis. But why has the predominantly

Muslim Northern Nigeria region not been able to produce renowned poets in English?

Political, socio-cultural, and religious temperaments have distanced the North from modernity, modernism, and Western traditions. For a long time during colonization, the British colonial administrators and the Northern regional administration agreed on not promoting Christianizing and Westernizing the “North” as part of the Indirect Rule policy. Thus, not many Western-style schools were built early in the North. Koranic schools flourished, until much later Western schools started to be promoted with the realization that only the educated would fill the civil service of the Federation. Thus, the South had a head start in Western education which translated to the emergence of many writers in English.

The view still persists in the Muslim World of the West being in opposition to it and its values. To many Hausa poets English or the Western has been synonymous with materialism, deviant behavior, and corruption; hence there was no promotion of writing or speaking English. In fact, many Hausa poets condemn youths who dress in the Western way and speak English as abandoning their Hausa roots and succumbing to corruption. These socio-cultural perceptions did not promote writing in English.

Of great significance is that the Islamic tradition, for the most part, rejects Western modernism that comes with assumptions of literacy, democracy, and individualism. In the South, most Nigerians seem to have accepted Western modernism in literature with the works of Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, and J.P. Clark who saw T.S. Elliot, Ezra Pound, W.B. Yeats, and Gerald Manley Hopkins as poetic models. In the North, this was not done by the intellectuals who seem not to have paid attention to writing poetry in English because doing so would run counter to Islamic religion and “national” pride.

Also in the North, there appears to be less of the individualistic inclination in the rather cohesive society that made the traditional and religious leaders very powerful. Also the social structure of aristocracy and commoners appears to be more regulated than in the South. In this wise, arose cultural and religious inhibitions to writers who fear breaking what is communally accepted. For in-

stance, whereas a Hausa female oral poet can sing in Hausa about her love life or her strong feelings towards a co-wife, modern women in the North have generally not expressed their private feelings. Thus, while Mabel Segun from the South could write personal poems forty and more years ago, the educated Northern woman would have found it difficult to express her individual feelings on paper in English for the public to read. Modern poets in Northern Nigeria, especially the female ones, appear to suffer from cultural and religious inhibitions in writing in English more personal types of poetry that many in the South have been writing for a long time.

The recent creation of Kano Censors' Board though mainly to curtail pornographic home videos has not helped matters and can only further erode the desire for individual and free expressions that poetry so much demands.

Appropriating Folklore/Orality into Modern Poetry

Northern Nigeria is multi-ethnic and heterogeneous even though most people speak Hausa plus at least one more language. Many people of Northern Nigerian origin are also Christian or traditional. This multi-ethnic background of Hausa, Fulfude, Kanuri, Tiv, Idoma, Igala, and others is a rich mine whose folklore could benefit poets writing from the region. In this area, a relative large amount of work has been done on Hausa and Fulfude. Of the smaller groups, a vibrant oral tradition still waits to be collected, transcribed, and translated into English for wider circulation. Literature in Northern Nigeria is not only written in Hausa, Fulfude, and English alone but persists in the daily lives and customs of the people in their indigenous languages. Whether it is the Kuteb, the Mumuye, the Gwari, Nupe, Birom, or others, there is a rich song tradition from the beginning of those groups. These oral traditions of literature need to be studied not only as an intellectual and academic exercise but also as a means of inspiring younger poets to model their writings in English or their own languages on their poetic traditions. Denja Abdullahi, for instance, has modeled a volume of poetry on the

jester tradition in Hausa. Abdul-Rasheed Na'Allah has also modeled poems on the Dadakuada poetic performance tradition of Ilorin in Kwara State. More experimental poetry of this type is needed to carry on poetic traditions of Northern Nigeria.

In addition, Shamsudeen Amali has modeled poems on the inquest of the Idoma and there are poems by Igala-speaking and non-Igala-speaking on the Inikpi legend. There is so much that could be exploited for a multi-layered poetry. The writer has personally tapped on Tiv Aondo and the myth of the snake that ferried the people across the Great River to their current abode. What has been done of the epic tradition of the Kanuri that Tijani El-Miskin wrote about as a scholar? What of the epic of the Yungur people? There is so much in the folklores of Northern Nigeria that could inspire poems or serve as references to poems. Fortunately, there are scholars of orality across the North, some of them poets themselves such as Idris Amali who works on Idoma proverbs and Angela Miri who works on the satiric songs of the Merynang people of Plateau State. Their respective *Generals Without Wars* and *Running Waters* reflect the influence of their indigenous oral traditions. Others are working on Tiv and Igede oral poetry.

Setting and Sense of Place

The landscape of Northern Nigeria that extends from the forests of Taraba and Kogi States through the savannah of Bauchi to the Sahelian parts of Borno, Yobe, Jigawa, and Sokoto States abound with symbolic fauna and flora that a poet can use to his or her advantage in writing. The uniqueness of the baobab and the tamarind, among other trees, is comparable to the iroko in the poetry of many from Southern Nigeria. Also, animals like the hyena and the lion carry symbolic connotations comparable to those of the tortoise and other rain forest animals.

A unique phenomenon as the harmattan has given rise to poems of poets of Northern Nigeria and elsewhere as the writer's *The Tale of the Harmattan*. The dust storms of the Sahelian belt could be exploited in poetic writings. In other words, Northern Nigeria, as



a place, is replete with metaphoric and symbolic figures that can enrich poetry in meaning and style.

Challenges and Recommendations

Poets from Northern Nigeria no doubt face many challenges that must be overcome for things to change.

1. Poetry comes from certain cultures and societies with certain skills and talents. Northern Nigeria can provide these features for poetry to flourish. There are socio-cultural and religious contexts that promote self-expression in a unique way that poetry demands. This means that the society has to be more accommodating of those that question authority, be it political, cultural, social, or religious. This tradition has been there and the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) poets such as Gambo Hawaja and others have expressed views contrary to the mainstream. Laws meant to regulate social behavior should be abrogated. Poets generally work towards establishing a more humane and sensitive society and, even when seen as rebellious, work towards the betterment of society. It is difficult in many strict patriarchal societies for women to fully express themselves without socio-cultural inhibitions. But how can modern educated women not do what the Kano women poets—Hauwa Gwaram, Alhajiya ‘Yar Shehu, and Rukayyatu Sabuwa Nasir—have done? These women wrote about issues that concern women—polygamy, marital responsibility on the side of men, and the plight of youths. Hopefully, the more educated women are in Northern Nigeria, the more they can poetically express themselves freely without any inhibitions. Thus, tendencies and forms of socio-cultural control will have to be replaced by more liberal but responsible practices for many men and women to express what the muse whispers to them.
2. Federal, State, and Private universities in Northern Nigeria should be at the vanguard in promoting literacy, a reading culture, and writing, especially poetry. Why has Ahmadu Bello



University not done what Ibadan and Nsukka universities have done to bring out a strong crop of writers? In the academy, one talks of the Ibadan and Nsukka schools of writers but one does not hear of the Zaria school of poets. The University of Maiduguri has done its little best in nourishing Idris Amali, Idris Okpanachi, Abubakar Othman, Angela Miri, Silas Obadiah, and the writer. All the universities in Northern Nigeria should take it as a responsibility to promote poetry the way many universities in the South have done.

3. Creative Writing Clubs should be established and where they already exist, as in Zaria and Maiduguri, should be invigorated to really have an impact in their respective communities. These Clubs should not be limited to English majors or members of the university community. Secondary schools and Colleges of Education should do the same. In the 1970s there was the Kikima Kulob, a poetry circle in Kano that included women. Such poetry circles should be revived and expanded.
4. The local branches of the Association of Nigerian Authors should be more active in promoting writing in the North. Creative writing workshops should be conducted on a regular basis to create awareness of creative writing. The branches could have some experienced writers or university lecturers to edit works of young inexperienced poets before rushing to publish their own works.
5. Literary magazines and journals should be established in Colleges of Education and Universities to promote poetry. When a young writer sees his or her work in print, it serves as a great motivation to continue writing. There was a time there was *Saiwa* in Zaria as *The Beacon* at Ibadan and *Omambe* and *Okike* at Nsukka. Institutions should invest in promoting poetry by funding literary magazines for their students and staff.
6. Poetry contests should be done at secondary and tertiary levels of education and also at the regional level. Entries to contests could serve as the source materials for anthologies. Such endowed prizes for poetry will also make young ones see it as something worth pursuing vigorously. Akilu Aliyu's fame soared after he won the national competition on civil war poetry and



his winning poem, “Jiki Magayi” (“Appearances Tell”), is very well known.

7. State Ministries of Education and Culture should have their roles to play in this regard of promoting writing. In addition to funding workshops, they could fund activities of writers in their respective States, including sponsoring some to artists’ colonies overseas.
8. Publishers as well as businessmen and women, philanthropists, and Governments providing funds in Northern Nigeria should publish poetry, which is not usually commercially viable. By chipping in some amounts of money to fund or subsidize poetry publications, business and government will be helping to promote poetry.
9. The media and press in Northern Nigeria should play the role that papers in Lagos and Ibadan have played for decades in promoting poetry by having weekend editions with poetry as *The Tribune*, *The Guardian*, and *Vanguard*. Reviews of literary works from the region and outside should be done to promote interest in literature in general and poetry in particular. The Hausa newspaper, *Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo*, published poetry from the 1950s to the 70s and generated much awareness of and interest in poetry from the locality. This should be revived and also done in the English language papers.
10. Home-grown critics should be groomed to guide the writers towards improving on their works. It is true that some critics in the North have written on the works produced there, but one tends to hear more of the Graham Furniss of SOAS in London, England, and Beverly Mack of Lawrence, Kansas, USA. The likes of Chinweizu et al should be encouraged to cut young egotistical poets to their proper sizes.
11. Courses on Northern Nigerian Literature should be designed for literature classes in the English Departments of Colleges of Education and Universities, as Literature of the Niger Delta is taught in Niger Delta University, Amassoma, and as Literature of the South in the American university curriculum. There is abundance of talented poetry deriving from the North to justify its inclusion in English Department curriculum.



12. Above all, the standard of English must be raised at all levels of education from elementary through secondary to university. English is a major problem for young Nigerians everywhere including the North. The States should invest in the teaching of grammatically correct English because without proficiency in written English, the writing will be hogwash.
13. Of course, writing in Northern Nigerian languages should be encouraged, and when talented works appear, should be translated into other Nigerian languages and English.

Examples of Poems

Look at the beauty of Barmani Choge's poetry in *Dare Allah Magani*:

Whoever causes a second wife to be brought to your house,
 Don't even greet them for a full nine months!
 May God deal with them in his own way, day and night.
 Allah is the light in the darkness.
 Wait and hear the names of a co-wife,
 Black scorpion with the terrible sting!
 Black snake with the terrible bite!
 The bitch, the leech with a hundred mouths,
 And what biting teeth, the bastard!
 With teeth embedded she shakes her head to and fro.
 Allah is the light in the darkness
 (qtd. in Furniss 143–44).

Hear Dankwairo's lines collected by U.A. Ahmed:

When it comes to wreaking havoc the monkey is as bad as
 the baboon,
 When it comes to wreaking havoc the monkey is as bad as
 the baboon,
 Tsula, the small monkey,
 Is also there, breaking the millet stalks,
 You, you are a Muslim,
 Yet you do as the pagans do (qtd. in Furniss 189).

And look at this criticism of the colonials:



In Jos the bush is full of lush grass,
 But we are not allowed to use our sickles,
 Only with a permit in our hands,
 The English even tax the grass
 (Furniss 233).

The writer has exploited the Northern Nigerian experience in the “Savannah Suite” section of *In the House of Words*. Listen to the second section of “The Third Moon”:

This is the fasting moon of the year
 and mouths must close before the sun.
 God is great! The power is not mine
 to go the entire length of the journey.
 The body is slave to the army of desires
 that impairs vision of faraway fountains.
 God is great! The power is not mine
 to keep the body alive without water.
 Now the flagellated body clear-eyed dialogues
 freedom with the soul shining immaculate.
 God is great! The power is not mine
 to cleanse the body of all its dirt.
 This is the fasting moon of the season
 to clear the overgrown way to paradise—
 the rough road bothers not the ascetic
 to whom the gloom is for a while.
 God is great! The power is not mine
 to shut the mouth to daylight delicacies.
 The mouth is itching to throw up vulgarities
 desires are on the loose in the name of love.
 God is great! The power is not mine
 to hold down the voracious beast after me.
 The chants of early night and dawn knock me
 down to smash my forehead against the ground.
 God is great! The power is not mine
 to hold on to purity of thought for the full month.
 The vigil takes through depths of night to dawn
 the power is not mine not to slip into sleep.



The subdued body bristles with health and peace
the fasting moon a school of health and comportment—
bring down conceit that runs us amok in the street
bring down greed that transforms the faithful into beast.
God is great! The power is not mine
to confront the high waves advancing towards me.
God is great! The power is not mine
to shut the mouth from dripping draughts.
This is the fasting season of the year.
God is great! God is great!
(Ojaide 67).

The Northern Nigerian experience is a rich poetic experience that has been tapped but still has an inexhaustible reserve in poetic creations.

Prospects

Change is definitely coming to poetry in Northern Nigeria. With the recent winning of the Association of Nigerian Authors' Cadbury Poetry Prize by Idris Okpanachi, an Igala from Kogi State and teaching at the University of Maiduguri, one can see this achievement will encourage other poets of the region. New meeting points of political parties, religious gatherings, schools, and others are coalescing poets in the North and across the entire country and providing them ideas and feelings to write about. Poets should not be shy to use materials from Northern Nigeria and be "Northern." It is only by being Northern, true to their contexts, that they can be Nigerian and African poets.

The prospects are very bright as poets should modernize the abundance of traditional and Afro-Islam/Arab poetic forms into a new poetry that is eclectic but individual, Northern, and Nigerian. Also poets in Northern Nigeria should seize the opportunity of globalization to place the local in the global stage. In other words, do not only modernize the traditional but also globalize the local and establish a new identity that will give your work a contemporary uniqueness.

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African Literature and the Scholar-Poet Tradition

The concept of the scholar-poet has been a part of Western literary creation and discourse since the time of the English poet, A.E. Housman. It is a tradition to which Ezra Pound, Tennessee Williams, Gerald Stein, and Charles Olson, among many others, belong. Earlier intellectual poets were not described as scholar-poets despite the fact that both John Donne and Samuel Johnson would have qualified for that appellation, except that though learned, they were not in academia. John Donne was a Doctor of Divinity and he was the best known of the Metaphysical poets whose works often contained learned references. On the other hand, Dr. Samuel Johnson, who is famed for editing the first English Dictionary, was a great satiric poet of the Neo-Classical or Augustan Age of English literature and very learned, but he worked outside the academy.

While most African poets writing today are mainly university-educated in varying degrees, and many have one foot in poetry and/or other forms of creative writing and the other in academia, there is barely any discussion of this feature of modern African literature. Benedict Vilakazi, the first Black South African to have a Ph.D. and lecture at the University of Witwaterstrand, has contended that African literature had to be written in an African language:

By Bantu drama, I mean a drama written by a Bantu, for the Bantu, in a Bantu language. I do not class English or Afrikaans dramas on Bantu themes, whether these are written by Black people, I do not call them contributions to Bantu Literature. It is the same with poetry ... (qtd. Masilela 76).

He must be thinking about the accessibility of the literature and its ability to transmit thought and feeling to the Bantu readers. A writer himself, he was very reflective intellectually on the literature of his Bantu people as opposed to that of the white immigrants who wrote in English and Afrikaans.

In *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*, Chinweizu, Madubuike, and Jemie discuss the scholar-poet tradition indirectly in their critique of the euro-modernist orientation of some African poets, especially of the allusive, fragmented, and obscure poetry of Wole Soyinka and Christopher Okigbo, without focusing on the tradition which made those African poets difficult and not accessible to many readers. The *bolekaja* criticism of *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature* and subsequent scholarly discussion of the poetry of modernist-influenced African poets are efforts at assessing the impact of African intellectual poetry on its readership. This chapter will focus on the scholar-poet tradition in modern African poetry, its nature, ramifications, insights, and the responsibilities involved. Since African literary artists writing in English, French, or Portuguese, have to master the foreign language of choice with its culture, can there be any of such poets outside the scholar-poet tradition? With African oral traditions of poetry different in conception, execution, and aesthetics, how relevant is modern African poetry to the writers' culture? Also, are there highly educated African poets, who are going against the grain of their training to stand astride poetry and academia and still write accessible poetry? Attempting to answer these questions should throw light on the scholar-poet in modern African literature.

A loose definition of the scholar-poet is a writer, poet, fiction writer, or dramatist, who is both a creative writer and an academic at the same time. The academic writer, especially a poet, theorizes his or her work, and informs the poetic writing with intellectual knowledge that makes the work "deep" and thus operates multiple layers of meaning. It is not that the poet without academic learning is not capable of works with many layers of meaning. However, with the scholar-poet, such a work has learned references, allusions, and forms or techniques that the writer must have learned from academic training or reading. It is common for the

scholar-poet's work to display wide-ranging and deep knowledge from books read. The modernists, especially Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, were very learned and their poetic works were replete with intellectual knowledge of different folklores as in Eliot's *Waste-land*. Many Western writers might have had first degrees or Master's but still read voraciously their own and foreign mythologies that informed their poetic writings. Charles Olson, often described as a typical American scholar-poet, came close to having a Ph.D. but did not have it.

The concept of the scholar-poet has shifted in the past half century from just being learned to straddling poetry and the academy in a more professional and physical sense. Most of the contemporary scholar-poets have their MA or MFA from writing programs in American universities such as Iowa and Syracuse and teach and write in the academy. They engage in what in the field is described as shifting boundaries between critical and creative work as they write critical essays often to earn tenure and promotion at the same time that they are immersed in creative writing. Their perspectives are often different from those of pure critics who lack the sensitivity of scholar-poets, who are doubly bound to the genre of poetry as creators and evaluators. Scholar-poets are also different from non-scholar-poets, since they combine intellectual and creative writing, unlike the poet who is married to only poetry writing. Even in the West, especially in the United States, poets who are not associated with academic or intellectual endeavors are rare. Once one has landed a lucrative contract or been reviewed favorably, that writer is likely to be signed as a faculty into a writing program to boost the college's image and to attract students.

On some occasions, there could be a problem between the poet and the critic/scholar as the creative writer feels that the critic/scholar uses his or her text to write books for promotion and tenure without offering financial remunerations to the writer. This comes with the belief that poetry does not sell and only poets who win prizes make some money. At the same time, some scholars feel that there is far more respect for poets/writers whom they make famous by the scholarly study or criticism of their works. However, there is a symbiotic relationship between the poet and the critic, and the scholar-



poet merges the two traditions into one of both creator and evaluator of poetry at the same time.

Benedict Vilakazi was highly educated and wrote in the Zulu language to get his poetry across to his fellow “Bantu” people; hence he shunned writing in English or Afrikaans. He influenced Mazisi Kunene, who having a Ph.D. from the School of African and Oriental Studies, University of London, wrote poems in Zulu expressing the Zulu cosmology and other themes. As will be discussed, it is the use to which education is put in poetry writing that is important in determining whether a poet is a scholar-poet or not. Is education, especially higher education, meant to show that Africans can write in a foreign language as well as the native speakers of the language or use their language to communicate poetically to their readers?

Many modern African poets are academics in one way or the other. Many have terminal degrees and are professors in universities. There are highly educated First Generation poets such as Kofi Awoonor, J.P. Clark, Michael Echeruo, Christopher Okigbo, Wole Soyinka, and Leopold Sedar Senghor, among others. In fact, most of them were or are still professors in universities. Christopher Okigbo worked as a librarian at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and later an editor of a publishing house at Ibadan in Western Nigeria. Michael Echeruo, who wrote *Mortalities*, is still a professor at Syracuse University in Upstate New York. These poets were in positions in which they had to teach or had access to reading academic books voraciously. Modern African poets of the Second Generation are generally highly educated academically, a point made in *Poetic Imagination in Black Africa*. Kofi Anyidoho, Frank Chipasula, Mphande Lupenga, Jack Mapanje, Chimalum Nwankwo, Niyi Osundare, and the writer are some of these, and all have doctorate degrees abroad, mainly in the United States and Britain. Also younger African poets at home and abroad such as Onookome Okome, Dike Okoro, Ogaga Ifowodo, and Maik Nwosu, either have doctorate degrees or are pursuing doctorate studies. These younger poets are also now having one foot in poetry and another in the academy. In Nigeria alone, these include Harry Garuba, Onookome Okome, Ademola Dasylyva, Aderemi Raji-Oyelade, Idris



Okpanachi, Dike Okoro, Tony Afejuku, Akachi Ezeigbo, and Ismail Garba. In most of the African countries, especially Botswana, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Malawi, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, and Zimbabwe, most of the best known poets teach in the universities.

Many African poets are now going through creative writing programs. While Taban Lo Liyong had an MFA from Iowa and the writer MA in Creative Writing from Syracuse, there are many young Africans now doing creative writing and going on to have Ph.D. in English or even Creative Writing. These include Ogaga Ifowodo, Maik Nwosu, Chris Abani, Dike Okoro, and Obi Nwakamma, among others, in the United States alone.

The exposure of so many African poets, old and young, to so much academic learning has consequences for the poetry they write. Some poets may have the first degree like Okigbo and be very learned, while others with Ph.D. or MFA/MA may not be scholar-poets but go for only poetry and abandon the academy. If there is an African poet whose work shows virtues absent in scholar poets, it has to be Gabriel Okara whose *Fisherman's Invocation* is spontaneous and lyrically pristine in content and style.

The poetry of the generation of Africans, who went to universities to study English in the 1950s and early 1960s and were taught by British lecturers, is steeped in modernist influence. In their allusive, difficult, and fragmented poetry, the poets alienated African readers both within and outside the ivory tower. Soyinka's *Idanre and Other Poems*, Echeruo's *Mortalities*, and Okigbo's *Heavensgate and Labyrinths* are good examples of the euro-modernist influence in modern African poetry. There are echoes of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot in Okigbo, of Eliot and Shakespeare in Soyinka, Gerald Manley Hopkins in the imitation "sprung rhythm" of J.P. Clark, and so on. One can say that the lack of enthusiasm towards poetry in the curriculum of African schools might have been caused by these earlier poets who wrote a type of poetry that neither the readers nor the culture could relate to in form and techniques.

For many in this generation, such as Awoonor, Clark-Bekederemo, Soyinka, and Achebe, the university was the arena from which they launched their writing careers. At the beginning



of their literary careers, before they found their individual voices, some of them were deliberately poetic as if they wanted to prove that they could write poetry as well as, if not better than, established Western poets such as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, W.B. Yeats, and Gerald Manley Hopkins. Okigbo's admitted stance that he did not write poetry for non-poets could only have come from that poetic tradition. Reading some of Okigbo's poems in *Heavensgate* and some of Soyinka's poems in *Idanre and Other Poems*, the reader finds a deliberateness that is not in their later poetry.

In addition to the imitation of Western, especially American, English, and French poets, the First Generation African poets wrote academic books, going beyond mere poetic or creative vocation into the realm of scholarship. A few examples will suffice. Soyinka wrote essays on ontological and philosophical comparisons of Greek and Yoruba cultures in *Myth, Drama and the African World*. Clark-Bekederemo wrote *The Example of Shakespeare* and in his poetic plays attempts to fashion Greek or Shakespearean tragedies in an African/Izon setting. Kofi Awoonor wrote a book of criticism on modern African literature. All three poets were professors in universities and thus were as entrenched in critical as well as creative writings. They thus related to poetry as creators and critics at the same time, a relationship that should have affected their own artistic direction as far as poetry is concerned.

As if to move modern African poetry into a different direction, the "new poets" of the Second Generation employed traditional poetic techniques to express their feelings and thought. Despite the irony of the high education of these poets, many of whom have Ph.D. degrees, they still brought the baggage of their academic learning to their writings. They may deliberately use African tropes and references but they have at the back of their minds the Western poets, whose poetic styles, forms, and content they want to avoid and by so doing affirm their Africanity. In other words, they suffer from a certain "anxiety" of deliberately attempting not to be influenced by foreign poets. It is interesting to note that many of these poets have researched into the indigenous poetic traditions of their people. Jack Mapanje, who edited the Malawian *Kallaloo* at Chancellor College, Blantyre, studied Chewa oral traditions. Sim-

ilarly, Kofi Anyidoho and the writer studied their respective Ewe and Urhobo poetic traditions, which influence their poetic styles.

Of the experimentation with indigenous poetic genres, there are copious examples. The *oriki* and *ijala* praise poetry traditions of the Yoruba people must have influenced Soyinka, as in “Mohammed Ali at the Ringside, 1985” in *Mandela’s Earth*. That Akpalu, the renowned Ewe poet, influenced Awoonor is certain because he collected and translated his songs with those of two other Ewe poets into *Guardians of the Sacred Word*. His “Songs of Sorrow” appears in parts to be a translation of Akpalu’s own song. J.P. Clark collected some Urhobo udje songs and wrote an article introducing the highly satiric genre to the Nigerian public in *The Nigerian Magazine* in the early 1960s. The process of listening to and translating these udje songs must have rubbed off on Clark and affected his writings, especially as in the satiric poems of *State of the Union*. One can say that the writer is highly indebted to the udje dance song tradition of the Urhobo people on which he has written two books, *Poetic Performance and Art: Udje Dance Songs of the Urhobo People* (2003) and *Theorizing African Oral Poetic Performance* (2008), in poems in the “Home Songs” section of *Delta Blues and Home Songs*.

As research and scholarship, endeavors of academics, have propelled some African poets to model poems on their oral traditions, so have others through their higher education learned so much of other traditions of poetry that they fashion their writings on. Of course, there is the use of rhyme by the earlier generation of African poets who employed rhyme to be poetically correct. Soyinka uses rhyme in some poems in *Idanre*. Alliteration is plentiful in Soyinka and Okigbo and assonance in Clark-Bekederemo. Niyi Osundare also uses alliteration copiously in *The Eye of the Earth* and many of his other collections. To these educated African poets, using rhyme or figures of sound serves as a mechanism of imposing order on their free verse poetry. While Okigbo uses repetition and alliteration, especially the liquid “l” sound, to make his poetry musical because he sees poetry as a musical composition, later poets use repetition more for emphasis.

Academic consideration is no doubt the case in certain types of experimentation by many African poets. Ogaga Ifowodo uses the

sonnet form that was in vogue in Elizabethan period and now mostly discarded in contemporary British/Western poetry, in *Madiba*, his collection of poems celebrating the legendary Nelson Mandela. The poet could be celebrating a disciplined man with a disciplined poetic form in his use of the sonnet form. The writer has, after two visits to Malaysia, experimented with the *pantun* poetic form of Malaysian poetry. The *pantun* attempts to use nature to explore a philosophical experience. One can argue that experimenting with foreign poetic forms in Africa is a way of expanding the poetic tradition to renew itself and grow. However, it is no doubt a practice of the scholar-poet to borrow from what he or she has read and indigenizing it as African.

The younger scholar-poets are writing books of essays on literature and poetry and appear to be publishing their poetic manifestos. There have been critical works on African literature and culture by Kofi Anyidoho, Chimalum Nwankwo, and Niyi Osundare, among others. Students studying their works have had to resort to these critical works. Students and scholars of the writer's poetry read, among others, *Poetic Imagination in Black Africa* (1996) and *Ordering the African Imagination* (2008) to comprehend the poetic perspective or ideology. These critical essays on poetry should reveal the poetic leanings and philosophy of the respective scholar-poets.

Most African poets have Forewords, prefaces, prologues, dedications, and epigraphs to their poetic works. These writings are para-textual devices, but they have become standard openings to poetry collections. Okigbo does this in *Heavensgate*, Soyinka in *Idanre*, and many other poets in their respective works. It appears only a few African poets want their poems to speak for themselves. Most of the younger poets seek prefaces and/or Introductions to place an imprimatur of validity on their works. Blurbs are also sought from as many critics and writers by some of the poets to comment favorably on the works. These methods—Forewords, prefaces, Introductions, and blurb endorsements—are used to guide readers of such poetic works to the theoretical framework of the texts. An example is on Olu Obafemi's plays. David Cook writes the Introduction to the collected plays. Tunde Fatunde writes the Preface to *Nights of a Mystical Beast*. Tola Mayomi does the Preface to *The*

New Dawn, while Niyi Osundare's review of its first production introduces *Suicide Syndrome*.

This practice of prefacing or introducing works was not present in the oral tradition, though the oral poets paid homage to superiors or veterans of the genre or tradition in which they practiced. The effort by scholar-poets to influence readers, even before they read the poems, is more of a public relations ploy than anything else. However, such para-textual pieces can distract from the work itself, since whoever agrees to write a blurb, Introduction, or Foreword often comes out with a favorable piece on the work.

Poets who are not scholar-poets in Africa are not many because the process of literacy in a foreign language such as English, French, or Portuguese inevitably brings about a wealth of knowledge about the language's culture and its poetic traditions that rub off on the African writer. Though it is mainly in African-language poetry can one talk confidently of no inhibitions that scholar-poets display in their restrained, rather conscious style, yet both Mazisi Kunene and Gabriel Okara have written poems that are free of the poetic excesses of learned poets. Kunene is, of course, influenced by the Zulu poetic tradition and wrote *Zulu Poems* and the Zulu epic, *Shaka*, but it is in his *The Ancestors and the Sacred Mountain* that he writes poems that are infused with his own African worldview bereft of the Western learning that he definitely had but chose to ignore or throw away in his poetic writing.

Gabriel Okara's pristine poetry is stripped of Western learning and academic dressing and flows spontaneously as the River Nun that he "calls" upon in *The Fisherman's Invocation*. These poems set in the riverine rainforest Niger Delta part of Nigeria bristle with nature and engender a feeling of calm and serenity. As Emmanuel Ngara puts it, "The recourse to images of referring to nature and tradition gives Okara's poetry an aura of simplicity, rather like Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*. This simplicity conceals a complexity of thought and poetic structure which at times makes Okara's poetry quite difficult to interpret, although it remains immensely readable" (57). These are poems one reads and goes back to read several times to attune to the elements of nature because of



their lyrical quality resulting from “a judicious use of poetic devices such as parallelism, repetition, and linking” (Ngara 58).

People in different professions could be poets. There are medical doctors, civil servants, military officers, business men and women who write poetry to various degrees of success. The Gambian Lenrie Peters was a medical doctor. Odia Ofeimun is a political scientist by training. Hyginus Ekwuazi is a theatre arts scholar by training. It is not surprising therefore to see many Africans, men and women, who have gone to the university to take one or more degrees, writing poetry and working in academic settings. Belonging to the intellectual academy and heeding the artistic call of poetry at the same time could pose challenges to such scholar-poets. It depends on what use scholar-poets make of their academic background. If they are too conscious of the rules of poetry, they will be inhibited and not allow passion and spontaneity to take over their poems. The result of such writing is likely to be superficial and dry and turn off non-elitist readers. If they are too learned, as if lecturing graduate students, their poetry will be inaccessible. There are many Africans, especially in university campuses, who still want poetry to be obscure and undecipherable. The writer heard such views recently at a reception that brought together faculty members of the English Department and members of the Association of Nigerian Authors in Benin. However, while there should be diversity in poetry writing, the scholar-poet should not turn away from his or her culture and society but use the knowledge to develop his or her people’s poetic tradition. It is possible for some poets that the more widely read they are the more inward they look at their own poetic traditions. Such poets could research into their orature and develop from it new forms and techniques to address contemporary issues.

There is an inherent disconnect in African postcolonial literature in English, French, and Portuguese. It is removed from the commonality of the people, a majority of whom are not literate or literate enough to understand the language of the literature. With the people speaking indigenous languages which the poets and other writers do not use as their creative medium, there is an inherent problem with the audience and readership of that literature.



The literary work not meant for the first speakers of the language used makes the literature only consumable by those who are either in the ivory tower or those who have passed through it.

What does the scholar-poet contribute to modern African literature? He or she brings a comparative perspective of poetry, which better informs the poet to strive towards cultural identity or any chosen direction of cultural development. At the beginning of the modern African poetry period, there might have been the attempt by writers to use Western methods but the practice, as by Okigbo, Soyinka, and Clark-Bekederemo at the time, was more to prove a point—that educated Africans could write as well as, if not better than, Western poets. However, the “new” poets and subsequent generations have displayed a large measure of African cultural traits to continue the poetry’s cultural and socio-political identity.

The African scholar-poet brings diversity to the modern poetic tradition, which expands it to incorporate and integrate multifarious influences and features for vitality and continued renewal. Since culture is dynamic, the African scholar-poet’s experience of modernity and globalization reflects not only the changing experiences of the people but also the reality of the world he or she now lives in.

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African Literary Aesthetics: Continuity and Change

In literary discourse, one reads about poetic aesthetics very often but not much about literary aesthetics, especially when it concerns African literature. The aesthetics of the different genres tend to be isolated and discussed separately; hence poetic aesthetics, narrative aesthetics, and dramatic aesthetics tend to be treated in isolation of each other. While such a study of individual genres is simpler to undertake because of the uniformity of the generic features, a study of the aesthetics of literature also makes sense in a disciplinary manner as one would also look at art, music, and dance, among other artistic productions. This chapter therefore deals with the aesthetics of African literature in general, including traditional, modern, and contemporary literatures, as well as in all the literary genres as known today with emphasis on drama, fiction, and poetry.

Only a few literary scholars have attempted discussing the aesthetics of African literature directly. Among the functions of the critic that Chinweizu and others enumerate in *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* is “educating the taste of the public” (286–287). The strident condemnation of the euro-modernist tendencies of poets such as Christopher Okigbo, Wole Soyinka, and J.P. Clark for their indebtedness to Western poetic traditions is meant to make the point of how difficult it will be for African readers to understand and relate to poetry written by African poets with borrowed techniques and poetic forms. *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* may not have addressed the question of literary aesthetics directly but covers it in the general concern of a people’s literature without regard to their environment and culture, especially their orature. To a large extent, the study of modern African poetry since the early 1980s, especially of its content and form, is

incomplete without addressing the alarm that Chinweizu and his group raised in their controversial book.

Another literary scholar that has contributed to the issue of literary aesthetics is Emmanuel Ngara whose three significant books, *Stylistic Criticism & the African Novel* (1982), *Art & Ideology in the African Novel* (1985), and *Ideology & Form in African Poetry* (1990), deal with African literary “modes” and form, aspects of the aesthetics of African literature. Despite the rigid ideological stand of inflicting Marxism on what has always obtained in Africa from time immemorial, the utilitarian function of art, as Marxist, his studies of African poetry and the novel are relevant works that attempt to deal with major aspects of African literary aesthetics. In *Ideology & Form in African Poetry*, he defines “aesthetic ideology” as referring to “the literary convention and stylistic stances adopted by the writer” (12). He admits that there are “several layers” of aesthetic ideology and identifies repetition and parallelism as well as the para-linguistic affective devices of myth, allusion, and irony as enabling poetic aesthetics. He makes the strongest case for African literary aesthetics as follows:

In the process of reading, the reader and the text also enter into a dialectical relationship. There is no one-sided cause and effect relationship. The text bares itself to the reader, exposes its multiple layers of meaning and aesthetic effects and the reader responds by not only receiving what the text offers but also by injecting into it something of his or her perceptiveness, ideological insights and sensitivity. The reader and the text enter into a relationship similar to that of a man and woman making love (16–17).

It is in subsequent chapters of the book that he deals with the poetic devices used to generate the aesthetic effects by the authors he selected to discuss. Ngara is an unapologetic Marxist in his approach and ignores the fact that literature is a cultural production. Still, his works on African poetry and fiction are few of a kind in the criticism of African literature.

The writer’s *Poetic Imagination in Black Africa* (1996) and Abiola Irele’s *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora* (2001) also, without coming out front, deal with African

literary aesthetics. While *Poetic Imagination* identifies cultural traits in African literature, the focus is poetry. Irele's book identifies history, environment, and orality as some of the main factors conditioning African literatures. While not stating it, the veteran literary scholar infers that modern African literature carries those elements that make it African and to appeal to the African and other readers. Most of the studies of modern African literature are interpretative discussions or applications of current theories to it, and for almost two decades there have been no penetrating approaches to this literature.

This discussion begins with the premise that literature is a cultural production, and so responses to the literary creations are more often than not culturally informed in the contexts of the socio-cultural and political backgrounds of the texts which condition both their writing in the first place and the consequent relationship between the artistic creation and its reception. Put differently, the writer has his or her people/audience/readers in mind in the process of writing. "Am I telling a story that my readers will enjoy reading?" "Am I interrogating the established traditions of drama, narratives, or poetry?" "Have I done enough to sustain the interest of my audience as I express the experience that is central to my creative work?" "How do I make the feelings and ideas I express pleasurable to my readers/audience?" These questions, in one way or another, lurk at the back of the writer's mind during the period of artistic creation.

Agreed that the readers/audience of a writer do not necessarily come from the cultural group, and globalization has extended readership across the globe, but the focus of any writing appears to be the geographical, socio-cultural, and political contexts of the creative work itself. "Others" or outsiders may take interest in a work for its perceived universality or humanity, but the work's setting informs the primary readership anticipated. Doubtless African writers come from different ethnic groups with sometimes unique practices. However, in this chapter, irrespective of the ethnic affinities of an African writer, he or she is culturally African.

With this premise, the response to African literature that governs its authors and as affects its readers will be different, for instance, from Western writers and their literature. Literature is highly informed

by the culture and society in which it is produced. Literature may thus be capable of eliciting universal and/or human validation but the cultural response, based on the worldview, ontological disposition, sensibility, and canonical expectations of a people, seems to be its strongest driving force.

With postcoloniality and globalization influencing literatures outside the West, defining and discussing the nature and effects of African literary aesthetics would make literary critics assess the quality, form, content, and other aspects of African literary creations by the artistic rules or expectations of their creation. By being postcolonial there is the acknowledgement that modern African literature is a product of the European incursion into Africa for economic, political, and other selfish reasons. The new African literature, as different from the oral traditional literature, is thus viewed in relation to Western, especially British, French, and Portuguese, that informed its beginning. Though still written in European languages of English, French, and Portuguese, modern African literature has matured into a recognizable literature of its own with a specific literary canon that makes it unique.

This study of African literary aesthetics is timely in a global world in which there is an erosion of the cultures of peoples without much power in the media and other organs of globalization. While globalization is expected to inscribe the local into the global, the overwhelming domination of global institutions by the powerful West continues to leave African culture in a perilous position. This chapter attempts to define the local and affirm diversity in the global literary context.

What motivates the African literary artist, traditional or modern, to compose his or her works? Who are meant to be the primary audience, and perhaps the secondary audience of the works? How do the audience/listeners/readers respond to these works? What are the criteria that “specialists” of different kinds of African literature use in evaluating it? What would it look like if rules of American football are used to judge world soccer, also called football and vice versa? Furthermore, what is the organizing principle of African poetry or narrative in traditional and modern times? What impact are songs/poems meant to have on the audience/lis-

teners/readers? What gives pleasure in the African traditions of poetry and storytelling, which were for centuries oral before the written tradition now flourishing along with many oral traditions today? These are necessary questions to ask so as to find new and relevant criteria to assess African literature rather than using trendy Western theoretical approaches to apply to the literature. This approach leads from the texts to theory rather than the other way around, as has often been the case in which scholarly approaches in the Western academy such as structuralism, semiotics, deconstruction, Marxism, feminism, and a host of other theories, become boxes into which African literature is squeezed. The approach of using Western literary theories to evaluate African literary works results in a fishing expedition in which those aspects of theories are sought in African literature. The approach of squeezing African literature to fit into Western theoretical frameworks disregards the artistic mission and the readers' or audience's relationship to their cultural productions. It appears the aesthetic considerations, often informed by cultural and individual artistic considerations, of the different literary genres turn out to be a major determinant of the texts. And, besides, African writers look into their traditions and specific individual creative techniques in their consideration of form, content, and viewpoint in their separate works.

While not subscribing to essentialism, one can see unique qualities in African literature. It appears socio-cultural, not universal, aesthetic traditions inform all creative arts, including literature. Sensibility and sensitivity are culturally conditioned, as attitudes to other human beings, animals such as cats and dogs, and plants vary. While aware of some studies that question whether there is an "African" of anything especially in a global world, as done by Anthony Appiah and others, it is puzzling that authors of such works do not question the Western, a euphemism for the European world, with Greco-Roman origins. This study affirms an Africanity in the literature produced by Africans (and primarily for Africans), a literature which is informed by aesthetic demands that address the needs and expectations of the socio-cultural and political contexts in an artistic manner and following specific aesthetic principles. There appears to be a marked layer and substratum of Africanity



in African literature, which distinguishes it culturally from literature from elsewhere in the world. The cultural mark manifests in diverse ways in the continent and in the individuality of literary artists; however, there are cultural affinities shared in poetry, narratives, and drama in the shared experiences across the continent and especially in sub-Saharan Africa. The worldview, ontology, and sensibility of a people go a long way to create a peculiar episteme that subsequently distinguishes their literature.

In discussing African literary aesthetics, it is significant to note that much work has been done on the aesthetics of African arts, and there is much to learn from those studies in the current discussion. In many of the discussions of African arts, there is almost unanimous agreement that they involve the creators and those who use the works. Let us use three examples from studies of African arts which deal with their aesthetics.

D.M. Warren and J. Kweku Andrews write that “the aesthetic value of a given Akan art piece is frequently based on the functional or symbolic aspects of the work. Every decoration must have meaningful properties which suit the purpose of the piece, even if the purpose is strictly aesthetic” (10). They go on to list the specialists in the field who make aesthetic evaluations of art works. They add that “the sellers and the heads of the sellers’ associations or unions, act as communication liaisons between the general buying public and the artists who produce for the public. These leaders have the power to accept or reject items to be sold by their sellers ...” (11). The African literary scholar can apply the principles of aesthetic judgment for the visual arts, as discussed by Warren and Kweku, to the study of African literature. The functionality of African literature, whether oral or written, has been maintained. African traditional and folk stories are told to educate the young, and many songs, as will be discussed, are meant to encourage the virtues of courage, patriotism, and selflessness. Other stories and songs, by condemning negative values, are meant to promote harmony and peace in the community.

The same could be said of modern African literature, which, for the most part, has been used as a tool, even a weapon, to assert Africanity or bring sanity to the political malfunctioning of the state.



At the same time, the narrative, song/poem, or drama has to be interesting, and the “strictly aesthetic” purpose involves the use of tropes such as proverbs, metaphoric images, symbols, humor, and other literary techniques to spice up the experience being described. Warren and Andrews may as well be writing about the role of African literary critics as the “communication liaisons” between the writers and the reading public in their reviews, expositions, and other scholarly works on the literary creations of African writers. African literary critics are trained to use critical tools to direct readers into a better appreciation of literary works. A literary work is a cultural product that is regulated through quality control mechanisms that critics, scholars, teachers, and readers apply to judge its worth. Warren and Andrews also discuss the criteria and vocabulary of establishing aesthetics, critical elements that are also very relevant for a meaningful discussion of African literary aesthetics.

To Susan Mullin Vogel in *African Aesthetics: The Carlo Monzino Collection*, “Good/beautiful expresses two sources of African aesthetic pleasures: the aesthetic form of a work (its external appearance) and its aesthetic content (the significance of something good). Form and content must intimately correspond with one another to elicit aesthetic pleasure” (xiii–iv). She cites from Warren and Andrews whose collaborative research finds out that in the Akan artistic tradition, the designs for joyful occasions have bright colors and straight lines and those associated with war or mourning have dark or intense colors and curved, crossed, or broken lines (quoting Warren and Andrews 1977, p.10). She concludes that “aesthetic pleasure is thus spiritual and visual, intellectual and sensuous” (Vogel xiv).

Again, Susan Vogel’s conclusion holds true for African literature as it does for African art. African drama, fiction, and poetry are expected to give “aesthetic pleasure” that is spiritual, intellectual and sensuous. The artistic means and effects of literature are involved in this conclusion. The literary artist uses individual or special techniques of form and style to awaken in the readers or audience a sensuous intellectual and spiritual fulfillment. For instance, after reading Leopold Senghor’s poetry, Wole Soyinka’s plays, and Chinua Achebe’s novels, there should be a feeling of spiritual and intellec-



tual satisfaction. The writers deploy various tropes to achieve their aesthetic objectives.

Jean Laude in *The Arts of Black Africa* also touches on aesthetics in African arts. Discussing Benin art specifically, she says the ivory workers learn craft “according to specific rules of an aesthetic as well as a social order” because though the sculptor enjoys his craft but he also has to bear in mind that he is commissioned for social and religious reasons. The same myths from oral literature are evoked visually in sculpture. And Laude may as well be writing of African literature when she says that “African art is a self-conscious art” with a repertory of themes and formulas.

One can borrow many aspects of the concept of artistic aesthetics into literary criticism, especially on the relationship between the writers (creators) and the audience/readers (those who use the work). Looking at narratives in traditional and modern African literatures, one can see how the form and content are also very important as sources of pleasure. The “spiritual and visual, intellectual and sensuous” pleasures in art are similar to those derived from literature whether narrative, poetry, or drama. To summarize aspects of art that are not only applicable but also intrinsic to the study of African literary aesthetics, one can mention the following points:

- Functional and symbolic value;
- Purpose of the piece even if a decoration;
- “communication liaisons” mediating between artists and the public;
- Correspondence of form and content;
- Aesthetic pleasure: spiritual and visual, intellectual and sensuous;
- Specific rules of an aesthetic and as a social order; and
- A self-conscious art with a repertory of themes and formulas.

From the example of African arts whose aesthetics have received extensive study (and one might argue it is because of the very nature of art), one can apply many of their criteria and vocabulary of aesthetic evaluation to the study of African literature. In fact, Warren and Andrews, writing on oral literature evaluation among the Ashanti, cite two comments often made: “N’ano ate” (He can speak

well) and “N’ano ye me maa” (He can’t speak well) [19]. Similarly in Urhobo aesthetics, Atiboroko Uyovbukherhi writes of the “avwerhe” (sweetness) of a story or poetry/song. The point being made here is that there is a corpus of aesthetic epistemic terminologies and criteria available to judge African literary works as in African arts.

Literary aesthetic is defined loosely to involve beauty, taste, pleasure, and what could be described as artistic merit. To quote from an earlier work, *Theorizing African Oral Poetic Performance*, “It involves standards and principles for judging cultural productions, what Emory Elliot describes as ‘the system of values’... Aesthetic also has to do with critical evaluation and making ‘selections and judgments from among an abundant array of texts’ ...” (Ojaide 4). This chapter uses some specific oral and written genres and texts to examine African literary aesthetics, starting from traditional literature and moving to modern literature with different factors, including national politics, individual ideology, globalization, and socio-cultural conditions, affecting the texts and the readers’ responses to the works.

In the oral tradition, let us examine the poetic satiric *udje* of Nigeria’s Urhobo people and the *halo* of the Togolese and Ghanaian Ewe and then the Yoruba *ijala* and the Tswana and Zulu *izibongo*. On the narrative side, one could cite from the Malian *Sunjata* and the Nigerian Izon *Ozidi* as well as the Ananse (Spider) and Ajakpa (Tortoise) stories of the Ashanti and Yoruba respectively. A discussion of African poetic and narrative modes inevitably involves the dramatic because poetic songs such as *udje* and *ijala* are performed. This is equally true of the two examples of epic narratives, which are performed, a practice which has led to different versions of *Sunjata*.

Udje is an oral poetic performance genre of the Urhobo people of Nigeria. It consists of paired groups that sing against each other in alternating years at a public performance before large audiences. Each group’s songs praise themselves, ridicule their rivals, or reflect on life. Most of the songs tend to be satirical portraits of people in rival communities and are meant to “wound” or “destroy” them artistically. The *udje* poetic and performance genre has aesthetic principles to provoke laughter and intellectual delight. As put by G.G. Darah, “It was considered a mark of poetic accom-



plishment for a composer to fabricate much of the material he needed to make a song. What listeners enjoyed was not exactness of detail or truth but the craftsmanship in the construction, the technical dexterity with which even obviously incredible points were woven together to appear as facts” (emphasis mine, 46). As a noted udje performer, Basikoro Esha, says, “The accomplished song-maker did not have to wait for incidents to occur before creating a song.... If I wanted to accuse you in a song as a drunkard, I could do so without minding whether the allegation was true or not.... but because you are the one I wanted to humiliate I would mention your name in place of the drunkard’s. That was why many people tended to think that a particular song referred to them. A gifted song-maker creates by deft use of allusions and analogy. As the song progresses, metaphors are introduced. Once a metaphorical remark or proverbial allusion is made and explained logically later in the song then that piece is acclaimed a poetic success” (qtd. in Darah 46).

To the practitioners of the udje tradition, “Echadia y’udje” meaning “The spectacle makes udje great.” This involves the costume, the carrying of the effigy of the person being sung, the various dance formations and steps, and other features meant to make the poetic performance a spectacular event. Other aesthetic aspects of the udje tradition have been written on by J.P. Clark, G.G. Darah, Isidore Okpewho, and the writer. Some of such features include the following points.

- As Shekiri Sikogo, an experienced udje performer, puts it, “The quality of an udje song is not determined by melodic elegance.... The aesthetic consideration of udje songs is based on the poetic value of the expressions in it, the kind which are apt and memorable for all time. It is the expressions that retain classical merit for a long time that define the poetic essence of udje” (emphasis mine, qtd. in Darah 63).
- The formal features and structure of an udje song are expected to be clear: *akparo* (introduction), *ekere* (middle), and *ifue* (conclusion) with a telling image or proverb to summarize the experience. The song is shared between the lead singer



and the chorus in a call-and-response manner. Despite each group's uniqueness, "the informed listener was always able to recognize certain formulas of structure and technique of presentation to apply in locating the given song within a verifiable traditional type" (emphasis mine, Darah 64).

- It is also expected that there should be a balancing of musical properties, including melody, tone, and pitch of the singing and the drumming;
- A satire against one's kin should be in disguise to reduce tension in the unit; hence *iten*, masking is commonly used.

The Yoruba *ijala* chants, according to Abiola Irele, are generally inspired by recollections of immediate experiences from the hunting expedition. This aspect of *ijala* reflects an intimate acquaintance with the denizens of the forest, who are sometimes described in terms that ascribe human attributes to them in such a way as to stress their common insertion within the realm of nature. *Ijala* thus involves acute observations of the fauna and flora that form the natural environment of the hunter's profession. Indeed, there is a sense in which the corpus may be said to constitute a catalogue of the natural world—a taxonomy, as it were, expressed in a poetic register. Abiola Irele further observes that *ijala* poetry "recited in a chanting mode consists of series of epithets, often very condensed in structure and evocative in style. The poetry is recited along with the procession of masquerades (*Egungun*), which wear brightly colored costumes, and are accompanied by drummers and dancers in their progress through the streets, alleys, and by-ways of Yoruba towns. This procession provides its context of performance and determines its public character which enables its social function to emerge clearly into view: as a medium by which the values of the community are affirmed and the sense of collective belonging strengthened" (7).

The same aesthetic process and results described in *udje* and *ijala* respectively are similar to other poetic and narrative cultural productions in Africa, especially the Ewe *halo*, the Tswana and Zulu *izibongo*, and epics such as *Sunjata* and *Ozidi*. The epic traditions told heroic tales of those who saved their peoples from op-



pression as Sunjata or personages of immense valor that should be cultural models as Ozidi. In the folktale traditions of the spider and the tortoise, young ones are taught values of the community such as selflessness, generosity, and sensitivity to others as the selfish and cheats are disgraced or punished for their self-centered actions and greed. The traditional narratives in the forms of epics, legends, and folktales are aimed at establishing communal cohesion and harmony by promoting cherished values and virtues. They are told with devices that bring together dramatic and narrative elements. It should be noted that these performance, poetic and narrative modes mentioned are representative of such creations across the African continent.

The traditional African literary creations discussed promote high imagination in the fabrication of stories, spectacular drama, and intense poetic language. The composers and the audience are very much aware of these literary devices and their effects and are able to tell when a work has classical merit in the culture. The tradition of African orature thus has established aesthetic standards to look up to and judge works by.

Many African writers borrow elements of their oral traditions into their written modern works. As Chinua Achebe says in *Things Fall Apart*, among the Igbo people, the art of conversation is highly regarded and proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten (4). The same thing could be said about other African groups from which modern African writers have imbibed their cultural sensibilities. Oratory is highly valued in the African verbal tradition. In the literature, be it storytelling, poetry/chanting, or drama, the spoken word is fully exploited for all its poetic possibilities in meaning and sound, two major areas that provide the spiritual and intellectual satisfaction while experiencing literature. The devices that enhance performance of orature include physical gestures, voice modulation at different stages of performance, eye contact with the audience, and body movements to accentuate certain aspects of narration, song, or music. Literature in the African tradition is highly performative and theatrical in nature to ensure the liveliness of the literary occasion, which is presented live.



Wole Soyinka borrows from the various Yoruba poetic traditions, especially of *oriki* and *ijala*, in his poetry and plays. In *Mandela's Earth and Other Poems*, the poet praises Muhammad Ali, the champion boxer in oriki fashion in "Muhammad Ali at the Ringside, 1985":

Black tarantula whose antics hypnotise the foe!
 Butterfly sideslipping death from rocket probes.
 Bee whose sting, unsheathed, picks the teeth
 Of the raging hippopotamus, then fans
 The jaw's convergence with its flighty wings.
 Needle that threads the snapping fangs
 Of crocodiles, knots the tusks of elephants
 On rampage. Cricket that claps and chirrups
 Round the flailing horn of the rhinoceros,
 Then shuffles, does a bugaloo, tap-dances on its tip.
 Space that yields, then drowns the intruder
 In showers of sparks—oh Ali! Ali!
Esu with faces turned to all four compass points
 Astride a weather vane; they sought to trap him,
 Slapped the wind each time. He brings a message—
 All know the messenger, the neighborhood is roused—
 Yet no one sees his face, he waits for no reply,
 Only that combination three-four call card,
 The wasp-tail legend: I've been here and gone.
 Mortar that goads the pestle: Do you call that
 Pounding? The yam is not yet smooth—
 Pound, dope, pound! When I have eaten the yam,
 I'll chew the fiber that once called itself
 A pestle! Warrior who said, "I will not fight,"
 And proved a prophet's call to arms against a war (49).

The rhythm of the poem is incantatory and reminiscent of the Yoruba praise poetic genre. The use of various forms of repetition, structural and verbal, to achieve musicality and emphasis, as well as the use of the piling up of descriptive epithets, exclamation, and other techniques all generate aesthetic results in the poetry.

Many of Soyinka's plays, especially *Death and the King's Horseman*, borrow much from the Yoruba poetic, dramatic, and folk-

loric heritage. After all, early in his writing career, he used a Ford Foundation fellowship to research into Yoruba folk drama. The songs, dirges, and tropes in the play are meant to create the tragic atmosphere under which the happenings take place.

Similarly, Ngugi wa 'Thiongo absorbs much of the Gikuyu oral tradition in his later works, especially in *Devil on the Cross*, where the Gicaandi Player, a minstrel persona, tells the story of Wariinga so that other young women will not fall into the errors and tribulations that bedevil the female protagonist. Ngugi uses many resources of Gikuyu folklore in most of his novels to introduce aesthetic features that the Western novel may not be able to provide to the African reader. In an underexposed book titled *Ngugi and African Postcolonial Narrative: The Novel as Oral Narrative in Multi-genre Performance*, Odun Balogun writes on Ngugi's use of the multi-genre performance form in his novels to create a modern African narrative in English. What Balogun describes as "multi-genre" involves dramatic, narrative, and poetic devices as used in oral performance deployed into the novel as never used before in modern African literature. Ngugi's insistence that Africans should write in African languages, as he does in *Devil on the Cross*, *Mati-gari*, and *Wizard of the Crow*, is an attempt not only to develop African languages but also to deploy an African aesthetic to his literary works.

African oral narratives have been adequately studied especially by Isidore Okpewho and other scholars of African orature. Aesthetic features have been highlighted in the performance of the epic works of *Sunjata*, *Ozidi*, and the *Epic of Mwindo*, narrative works which blend poetry, narration, and drama in one performance. In his seminal book on the African epic, *The Epic in Africa*, Okpewho names humor, horror, rhetorical questions and statements, the alert at climactic points, climactic chants, exclamation, the reliance on sounds, realism, and the bard's weaving of his personality into the narrative as the main elements that bring pleasure to the listener/watcher of the performance. The audience of an epic performance looks toward the action, spectacle, and the narrative dexterity of the bard for a communal event which is meant to be entertaining and educative at the same time.

Modern African literature has attempted to transfer the aesthetic qualities of the oral tradition to complement some known Western notions of literary aesthetics, but it is the African aesthetic purpose of literature that gives cultural identity to modern African works of literature. From the beginning of the literary tradition to the present, the aesthetic criteria that give relevance and validity to African literature seem to be the same as in oral literature but in a different manner. What is responsible, for instance, for the success of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* with African readers? What makes Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* and Tsitsi Dangeremba's *Nervous Condition* resonate with African readers? Literature, from these African authors and others, seems to be a way of questioning socio-cultural and political happenings in the community towards an awakening of consciousness in problematic areas that need to be addressed for the good of the very community. It is interesting to note that what these books are doing can be compared to what the *udje*, *ijala*, folktales, and epics of traditional literature have also done. Literature in Africa aims at establishing or restoring harmony and good values for the people to live by for a meaningful and fulfilling existence.

The functional dimension of the aesthetic praxis in African literature thus runs through oral and written literatures, also known as traditional and modern literatures respectively. This can be seen in the poetry, fiction, and drama from the late 1950s to the present. If it is not expressing *negritude* to affirm the humanity of the African, it is fighting colonialism with its racism and economic exploitation, and then the corruption and the mismanagement that has become endemic in the new African state for the most part. A few examples show the highly functional and didactic aspects of the African literary aesthetics.

Chinua Achebe, in his essay, "The Novelist as Teacher" in *Hopes and Impediments*, has admitted that he writes "applied art as distinct from pure" (45). In an interview with Bill Moyers at Amherst, Massachusetts, Achebe says the African writer who practices art for art's sake will find himself or herself irrelevant to the society. In his role as a teacher, in *Hopes and Impediments*, the Nigerian novelist commits himself to a "revolution" in order "to help my soci-



ety regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement” (44). He teaches his African readers that “their past—with all its imperfections—was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them” (45). Also Achebe says he wrote his early novels, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, to show that “African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans . . . Their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty. . . . they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity” (qtd. in Killam 8). The African literary artist thus avoids art for art’s sake for a rather activist mission in his or her work, and functionality is integral to the aesthetics of the writing.

There is much didacticism in modern African literature as in traditional literature. Ngugi’s *Devil on the Cross* and Ken Saro-Wiwa’s *Lemona’s Tale* are good examples of didactic works written to teach readers lessons. Others may not be direct moral or ethical expositions but still teach lessons of socio-political responsibility. The satirizing of political corruption in many African novels, such as *The Interpreters*, *A Man of the People*, and *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, is an effort to condemn political corruption and promote positive values of accountability, responsibility, and sensitivity to the people. In poetry, the writer’s *Fate of Vultures*, Odia Ofeimun’s *The Poet Lied*, Jack Mapanje’s *Of Chameleon and Gods*, and many other poetic works condemn negative practices in the public sector to arrest corruption and usher in a more humane and balanced society. Others, including Osundare and Zakes Mda, in their respective literary works sensitize the readership towards a reciprocal relationship between the human and the natural environments. It is not that Africans do not write literature on individual issues as of love and pain and so forth, but the public aim of the writing seems to correspond with what traditional literature started long before writing as we know it now emerged.

It also needs to be noted that the early writers of the African literary tradition, especially the first generation of dramatists, novelists, and poets, by their stature and recognition, set up aesthetic standards that future generations of writers have to follow, extend,

and be judged by. In other words, new writings have to be placed beside the earlier writers. Clark-Bekederemo, Christopher Okigbo, Dennis Brutus, Lenrie Peters, Wole Soyinka, and Kofi Awoonor have their poetry as the touchstone with which other poetic writings are judged. Similarly, Achebe and Ngugi have their standards of fiction, as of Soyinka in drama.

This chapter will go on to discuss aspects of poetry, drama, and fiction that relate to the literary aesthetics of African literature.

Poetry

- Africans have a long experience of poetry. While unarguably there are differences between traditional poetry and the written poetry, one perhaps folksier and simpler and the other seen as mainly elitist and Westernized in origin, the generality of African poetry readers today expect poetry that is comprehensible in content, witty, and musical in rhythm. Some of the most memorable African poems such as David Rubadiri's "An African Thunderstorm," J.P. Clark's "Night Rain," and Dennis Brutus's "The sounds begin again" seem to have some qualities that elicit aesthetic satisfaction on the part of readers.
- The language of poetry has to be powerful and metaphoric with the use of images and figures, which have to be stunning, unexpected, and sometimes symbolic in significance.
- Various forms of repetition and parallelism make poetry memorable. These could be figures of sound in the forms of rhyme, word, phrase, or line repetitions, and structural repetitions in the forms of parallelism. Christopher Okigbo's poetry as well as Brutus's poetry, in various ways, exhibits various sound effects that enamor readers to their works. The poems have a flow enhanced by various forms of repetition, alliterations and assonances and are not encumbered rhythmically by disruptions. Often the rhythmic flow of the lines is reinforced by alliterations and assonances that carry the content of the poem like a current the fish swimming seawards. Their respective *Heavensgate* and *A Simple Lust* make interesting reading. Later poets are also very much aware of the flow and sound pat-

terms of their poetry and Niyi Osundare is one of the poets who use alliteration and assonance copiously.

- Wit in African poetry could be in the form of irony, humor, and unexpected use of words and new coinages. While almost every African poet wants to use words in a new way, Kojo Laing is worth mentioning for his use of Akan words and the combination of words in his poetry collection, *Godhorse*. Atukwei Okai, another Ghanaian poet, also does the same.
- Traditional and modern African poetries tend to be performative and attract readers/audience as the poets declaim their works. The atmosphere in an African poetry reading scene is more of a performance in which the audience is often involved in repeating refrains, singing, and the poet using motivational devices to engage the audience in the poetic event. With sounds and gestures, a dramatic enactment of the work unfolds as reader and audience are engaged in a symbiotic process, much as in oral literature with poetic songs.
- The more African poetry carries traditional oratorical aspects, the more effective the poem appears. The use of proverbs and memorable lines empowers the poem.
- The poem falls into a recognizable traditional form: satire, praise, dirge, reflection/musing, etc. Most African poems can be placed in one of these forms.
- Themes also could be traditional but must have a twist at the end: love, death/sorrow, socio-political observations, and others.

Drama

- The more directly or indirectly the audience/readers identify with the characters, views, and setting of the literary works, the more they seem to enjoy the play. Without empathy the audience may be aloof to the experience being dramatized before them. One's personal experience of a play's production is an example of how literary or theatrical aesthetics work. Watching Olu Obafemi's play at Ilorin on April 2, 2010 satirizing societal breakdown in Nigeria, the raconteur rails

against corrupt police, judges, and other negative aspects of society, the audience went wild. Of course, watching Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman's* production at the National Theatre, Iganmu, Lagos, in 1986 after the author's winning of the Nobel Prize for Literature, the large audience identified with Olunde as he questioned Mrs. Pilkings over aspects of Western culture that parallel African cultural practices such as sacrifice, deference to royalty, and others that Westerners often condemn, ignoring the fact that they have such cultural practices in a different form..

- The setting, costume, and speech patterns must reflect the society that forms the basis of the theatrical production. Many dramatic works by Yoruba playwrights exploit the use of music and dance, which engage the audience in a pleasurable journey during the duration of the action. In Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, Elesin Oba dances beautifully to music which assumes a symbolic function in the play. In the play, drumming assumes not only a symbolic role but also an aesthetic one. Similarly, Olu Obafemi's plays have so much traditional music and dance that excite the audience.
- The spectacle, like in udje performance, is a major aspect of any play's aesthetic content.
- The dialogue must have its roots in the language in the context of the setting as far as the characters and the social contexts are concerned.
- The supernatural and the mystical are integral aspects of human life in Africa. In other words, deities and ancestors participate, even when invisible, in human actions and help to shape the nature of the experience being reenacted.
- Part of the drama may involve rituals or rites that are reenacted on the stage. In J.P. Clark's *Song of a Goat*, the sacrifice of the goat is done off-stage. Violence on the stage is not relished.
- In the end, there is communal renewal. An individual could be sacrificed to ensure the health, peace, and prosperity of the whole. A situation in which the majority or community will perish to save an individual however high the status revolts the communalistic mind of the African even in modern times.

Fiction

- African novels are not just realistic in the Western sense of the novel but are life-like. One tends to forget while reading Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Lemona's Tale*, Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*, and so many other African novels that one is reading fiction. Rather, one feels as if reading almost a true story that has been stretched imaginatively. The response to the killing of Ikemefuna in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* by both Africans and outsiders is because the situation is taken as if real.
- The narrative elements of suspense, humor, surprise, and foreshadowing tend to be the main devices. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, like many other African novels, carries the reader along with these techniques.
- The narrative force impels the storytelling; the descriptive aspects in the story itself are minimized.
- The supernatural and mystical can take place without damaging the trend of the story because the African reader is familiar with a mystical world driven by ancestors, gods, and other invisible forces. Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and *Star-Book* as well as his short stories and Syl Cheney-Coker's *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* are examples of African modern narratives that are not hampered by the supernatural or magical.
- Some didactic dimension makes the experience of the characters more appealing to the reader. At the end of the work, there is likely to be a sigh of relief that some lesson has been learned or some ending, explainable and justifiable by the worldview of the people, has occurred.
- The resolution at the end leaves society or the community wiser or experienced or purged of inhibitions or taboos. It is a renewal or reawakening that affects the protagonist as well as the community.

African writers use their literary works to establish a connection with their African contexts. The writers attempt to have setting, theme, socio-cultural and political issues, and characters engage

the reader by making them to reflect their respective African condition and reality. The relationship between the text and the reader is important in gauging the aesthetic effects of a literary work. The reader enjoys the work the more he or she can relate to the experience and other aspects of the novel, fiction, or poetry. Being able to raise the reader's or audience's empathy is a writer's mission. If William Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* were produced before an African or Nigerian audience, for instance, they would most likely derive more pleasure from the African play than the English. How much the reader can identify with the experience, characters, dialogue, and other aspects of a literary work strongly conditions the literary response.

The very content of a literary work, in its reflection of the African experience, brings out what the African reader can identify with and relate to in the daily struggle of existence. Issues of socio-cultural, economic, and political significance and a reflection of the worldview and sensibility of the people are points that attract the reader to the work because they are mirrors of human existence as experienced in Africa.

At the same time the very techniques used are often such that combine borrowed and indigenous techniques to affect the reader's taste. In the different genres, as already explained, there are devices that bring out aesthetic effects.

African literature has its own aesthetics conditioned by the cultural contexts of worldview, ontology, sensibility, specific sense of humor, and other socio-cultural and political factors that are products of history and geography specific to Africa and Africans. At the same time there are generic specificities that propel pleasure and sense of fulfillment in the literary works. Above all, the peculiar background and mission of each African literary artist condition the writer to deploy techniques, mood, atmosphere, characters, and themes towards some utilitarian value that will bring to the reader and audience spiritual, intellectual, and other forms of literary fulfillment towards making life better for the people at large.

From this study it appears that while modern African literature is a product of both traditional African and modern European forms, it is the forces of orature that seem to drive the aesthetic

considerations on both the parts of the literary artist and the audience. The deep-rooted literary features inscribed into literary writings do not only give cultural identity to which the readers and audience can identify with but also provide a *mélange* of literary effects that keep the reader/audience engrossed in the work.

One can say that the aesthetics of a people's literature inform the features that make that literature unique. The literary artist and readers/audience have a symbiotic relationship as producer and consumer, each with expectations that make the literary work contribute to the spiritual and intellectual delight and a manifestation in creative terms of the society's socio-cultural and political condition as it affects the individuals. In the end, the literary work pleases the more it performs a function that brings and affirms the values and virtues that the people hold dear.

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