African Literature Comes of Age

AFRICAN LITERATURE TODAY 40

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Editor: Ernest N. Emenyonu

JAMES CURREY

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Editorial Article

African Literature Comes of Age

ERNEST N. EMENYONU

African Literature has indeed 'come of age' since the publication, in the English language, of Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) in the middle of the 20th century. Prior to 1958, there were remarkable novels by Africans written and read inside and outside the African continent. They include Peter Abrahams' *Mine Boy* (1946), *The Path of Thunder* (1948), *Tell Freedom* (1954), *A Wreath for Udomo* (1956); Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy* (1956); Amos Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard* (1952); Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City* (1954); Nadine Gordimer's *Lying Days* (1953); Camara Laye's *The African Child* (1956), *The Radiance of the King* (1954); and others. One would have thought that a collective name for this body of writing should have been 'African Literature/African Writing' in the context of world literatures, but it was not. Moreover, before these African writings were published in European languages, there existed creative works by Africans written in indigenous African languages, some of which were published, notably by British publishers in the United Kingdom. Three distinct examples are Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* (1931), Pita Nwana's *Omenuko* (1933), and D.O. Fagunwa's *Ògbójú Ọdẹ nínú Igbó Irúnmọlẹ* (*The Forest of a Thousand Daemons*) (1938).

One can point out that before these writings in African languages, a most popular form of imaginative creativity, 'storytelling', had existed in all African societies from time immemorial. It was a verbal performance. It consisted of oral narratives expressively performed in the process of narration. It was a very popular form of entertainment. It served raconteurs in telling folktales, seers and diviners in their invocations and incantations (forensic and otherwise), and griots in telling or updating the history, heritage, lineage, and exploits of ruling monarchs in ancient African empires and kingdoms. It served warriors, hunters, wrestlers, carvers, farmers, and other professionals relaying accounts of their expeditions, adventures, heroic experiences, victories

or otherwise, to family or community members. Mothers found it effective in inculcating cherished community and societal values in the formative years of their children. The forms of communication were relative to times and circumstances.

The 'song' was a universal medium. There were solo performances featuring minstrels and group performances consisting of vocalist/s accompanied by drummers and dancers acting as chorus. Essentially, embedded in these African oral performances, were customs and traditions transmitted by word of mouth from generation to generation. Again, in essence, these performances could have been identified in literary circles as 'African Oral Performances' and designated (because of the vast literary contents and artistic techniques embedded in them) as 'Oral Literature', and given due recognition and credit as such, but they were not. This was in pre-colonial and colonial eras, and because Africa was colonized or occupied by Europe, the European *literati* applied to Africa the 'famous' (notorious?) intellectual theory of their time that proclaimed: '*If it is not written, it is not Literature!*'

African Oral Performances, collectively known as Oral Literature, are verbal, not written. However, their cultural contents and techniques of presentation make them literature. They constitute the sources of raw African values. Contemporary African prose fiction, poetry, and drama draw from them in function, narrative techniques, and purpose. Contemporary African writers have used or applied them to embellish their narrative techniques as well as to reinforce their themes of social relevance. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe became the first African writer who consciously reached into the past to draw themes and narrative techniques from the African art of storytelling. His uniqueness as a modern African storyteller lay in his innovative approach in establishing the art of the African novel, namely, the articulation of the traditional and the modern in storytelling. His characters had names (Nwoye, Obierika, Ikemefuna, Ezinma, Nneka etc.) with meanings that reflected their cultural history and the circumstances of their birth. He brought into the novel realities of African and Igbo environments, human conditions, and sensibilities in ramifications never before thought possible in a novel. They included such realities as African cosmologies, religious and philosophical beliefs in the supernatural, the concept of death as a point of transition, not a finality; reincarnation, sacrifice, ancestors – and yes, 'there was coming and going between the living and the dead'. He boldly asserted that 'there is nothing disgraceful about the African weather – that the palm tree is a fit subject for poetry.' (Killam 1973, 3). Perhaps, one can see how these ideas could seem audacious and

inflammatory in the face of European popular ideas about literature, its scope and function, and E.M. Forster's definition of the novel documented in his celebrated book, *Aspects of* the *Novel* (1927). Achebe made no apologies. He purposefully brought into his novel *Things Fall Apart* more 'aspects' than Forster did, some inconceivable in European minds. 'Fantasy, prophecy, human nature' articulated by Forster were incompatible with Achebe's relative depictions in *Things Fall Apart*. These include ancestors from the spirit world changing into physical humans to attend social events in the world of the living, the existential roles of diviners, and the institution of the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves. Additionally included is the half-human/half-spiritual identity of priestess Chielo shopping with fellow women in the open market in the day and communing with supernatural agencies at night. Instead of ideologies known in European literatures, Achebe called on African writers to tell the African story, the African way. He declared, 'I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my 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.' (Killam 1973, 4). Furthermore, he maintained:

> As far as I am concerned, the fundamental theme must first be disposed of. This theme – put quite simply – is that African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African people all but lost during the colonial period and it is this dignity they must now regain. The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect. The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost. There is a saying in Ibo that a man who cannot tell where the rain began to beat him cannot know where he dried his body. The writer can tell the people where the rain began to beat them. (Killam 1973, 8)

In *Things Fall Apart*, without mincing words, Achebe told African readers where the rain began to beat them. Close to the end of the novel, after European colonizers stripped Africans of their dignity, humanity, cultural pride and identity, choice of language of communication, and self-esteem, Achebe then stated his purpose in the novel:

> 'Does the white man understand our custom about land?'
> 'How can he when he does not speak our tongue? But he says that our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion

> also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act as one. *He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.'* (Achebe, *Things Fall Apart,* 160, my emphasis)

A number of British publishers rejected the manuscript of *Things Fall Apart* before Heinemann publishers, London (after considerable intervention and persuasion) agreed to publish it. Obviously, they did not see any lucrative profit coming from the risky venture, so they printed only 2,000 copies in hardback for libraries. Who else would want or care to buy or read a so-called novel written by an African? In England at the time, not many thought Achebe's novel had even a fighting chance. The rest, as the saying goes, is history. Chinua Achebe died on 21 March 2013, but he was alive to see his debut novel read in all corners of the globe with millions of copies in sales, and translations into over sixty (and counting) world languages. In response to someone who was said to have so bitterly resented *Things Fall Apart* that he ridiculed and mocked it, 'that'd be the day when Achebe would be read along with Chaucer on a classic literary canon', Achebe quipped, 'and when that day comes, they would be reading more Achebe than Chaucer!' Achebe had his unique sense of humour. He recognized that *Things Fall Apart* would grow to influence not only African Literature in particular, but also change the course of world literature in general. Literary critics who attributed 'the invention of African Literature' to Chinua Achebe seemed to have had just cause! African Literature has indeed 'come of age' in the 21st century when it has been called by its rightful name. There might be places in the world today with notions of African Literature as 'one of the new world literatures in English or French'. Such nomenclatures betray ignorance or wilful misinformation that only facts and re-education can correct. In the 21st century, that re-education is being done by African and non-African scholars in classrooms, lecture halls, and other forums and platforms all over the world. The demands for African writings grow by the day and African writers, male and female, are responding with amazing innovative creativities.

This volume of *African Literature Today* is not only an affirmation but also a celebration of African Literature coming of age in all its ramifications. The Articles as well as the Literary Supplement reflect its maturity, diversity, scope, spread, and above all, relevance. The articles deal with diverse subject matters, set in all geographic regions (urban

as well as rural environments) of the continent, and discuss works of authors from all parts of Africa: west, east, north, and south. The themes of the works have no boundaries and touch topics as far apart from each other as the approaches to them – from sickle cell disease to the animalization of humans. Feminism has a new twist that states that pioneer feminist writers were guilty of the stereotypes of womanhood that they criticized and lambasted in male chauvinistic writings. A discourse on black masculinity as epitome of racism goes a step further to redefine masculinity as having different shades far worse than they appear on the surface. Two articles (one by a woman, the other by a man), on religion as a weapon of dehumanization of womanhood and political exploitation in creative works set in different parts of Africa, come to the same conclusion after extensive analysis that religion was used by its propagators to exploit the populace, dehumanize women, and create class distinctions. A novel set in post-apartheid South Africa existentially portrays apartheid as far from over; dead but alive! Conventional literary genres are in one article said to manifest shortcomings in definitions and representations; that indeed, genres are either disappearing or crossing boundaries; that the theatre is regenerating new forms that in theory and practice change the known trajectories of dramatic theatre, and more. Some specifics will help to substantiate the increasing thematic depths and upsurges that have not only reinforced the autonomous status of African Literature, but also endowed its criticism with vibrant, formidable theoretical approaches. In general, these kinds of substance, freshness, and vitality characterize the articles in this volume of *African Literature Today*.

In the lead chapter, 'Of Literature & Medicine: Narrating Sickle Cell Disease in a Nigerian Novel', Kazeem Adebiyi-Adelabu presents an engagement with the subject of illness in the Nigerian literary context. He argues that sickle cell disease (SCD) has become so rampant in Nigeria over the years that it deserves the type of wide attention given to HIV/AIDS in both the medical humanities and in African literary studies. He advocates among other things that, 'Medical personnel can draw illumination and pedagogic values from reading illness narratives (…) Perhaps the multiplicity of benefits or responses to a single narrative embedded with multiple meanings is what makes fictions of illness or pathography a thing of interest in both literary and non-literary landscapes in recent times.' This article will be of interest to literary scholars as well as the general reader.

Chikwurah Destiny Isiguzo, in his 'Post-humanism & Speciesism in African Literature: Animals & the Animalized in Zakes Mda's

The Heart of Redness', brings a rare perspective in the analysis of the portrayal of animal characters in this novel. He interrogates Mda's novel from a post-humanist theory focusing on human and animal species. Beginning with exploitation, Isiguzo ends with an analysis of the portrayal of horse intelligence and suffering: 'Comparing human suffering to the suffering of nonhuman animals or other living things to some people is unthinkable (…). However, a critical examination of human exploitation reveals that it shares the same pattern as animal exploitation and degradation.' There are personifications of animal behaviours and actions that remind one about George Orwell's *Animal Farm* in an African setting and environment.

In 'Manifestations of Masculinities in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Novels: Initiating a Talk on Black Masculinity Studies', Paramita Routh Roy uses two of Adichie's novels to open an important discourse on black masculinity: 'The whole notion of blackness has been constructed by the white people in their own interests. It is by creating the idea of "other" that the white colonizers tried to legitimize their superiority and their hegemony over the colonized. In this connection, "black male gender identities have been culturally constructed through complex dialectics of power" and thus unveiling this complex system can expose the hypocrisy of the white hegemonic structure (Pochmara, 12). Adichie initiates a conversation on "Black Masculinity" by investing her fictional narratives with characters that represent different shades of masculinity (…) It is clear that through her novels she emphasizes the transforming definitions of black masculinity.' This is a new area of attention in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*. It makes an interesting read. Paramita Routh Roy persuasively argues the points she raises logically. Equally significant are her definitions of the terms, 'black masculinity' and 'subordinate masculinities'.

Readers may find Nonye Chinyere Ahumibe's chapter, 'Transformative Female Narratives & New Visions in African Women's Writing: A Re-reading of NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* & Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*', engaging and rattling at the same time. She states that pioneer African feminist writers were as guilty of derogatory stereotypes of womanhood as the male chauvinistic writers they set out to criticize and lambast in their works. Included are Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Mariama Ba, Ifeoma Okoye, Amma Darko, and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo. She advocates alternative African women's writing that purposefully recreates or re-imagines African womanhood. The two selected novels she studies in the chapter, demonstrate that Adichie and Bulawayo present in

them 'alternative stories' about African women which 'exhibit their complexity and multi-dimensionality (…) chang[e] society's poor perception of women, and enhance[e] women's sense of self and value (…) and ensur[e] that economic exploitation of female characters is non-existent'. This article is bound to compel a re-reading of a lot of current African women's writings and their criticism to date.

In 'Religion, Capitalism & Politics: The Revolutionary Imagination in the Plays of Nawal El-Saadawi', H. Oby Okolocha explores how Nawal El-Saadawi's plays represent her most irrepressible qualities of dissent and fearlessness. She argues that there is a close similarity between the operations of religion, capitalism, and politics and that Saadawi demonstrates in the plays how the three social institutions exploit the populace, discriminate against women, and create class distinctions. Okolocha concludes that events in the plays illustrate that the operations of religion are synonymous with the operations of power politics, and Saadawi's presentations suggest that religion is inherently an oppressive construct and shares similarities with capitalism.

Alexandra Negri, in 'Approaching Gang Violence on the Cape Flats in Rehana Rossouw's *What Will People Say*?', gives the reader peeps into post-apartheid mixed feelings of love and hate, dreams and realities symbolized by the Cape Flats, 'a suburb located between the Cape Peninsula and the mountains south-east of Cape Town in South Africa. (…) The crime-ridden townships of the Cape Flats are a blatant reminder of the spatial legacy of segregation as a feature of apartheid.' Negri analyses and interprets the novel as a kind of metaphor of 'hopes and impediments':

> how to best cope with past and present sins committed by one's community while clinging, nonetheless, to the hope that, somehow, 'everything will come right' in the new South Africa – how to accept that South Africa *was,* as Mandela famously asserted as he took his presidential oath in 1994, 'the skunk of the world' and simultaneously embrace the hope that it *will* meet up to the promises of the so-called Rainbow Nation – and, maybe most importantly, how to grapple with being South African in the meantime.

Negri analyses and interprets the novel as a kind of metaphor of 'hopes and impediments'. The complexities of events and the human conditions in the novel truly fit the existential description of apartheid in post-apartheid South Africa as 'far from over; dead but alive!'

In 'The Denunciation of Religious Collusion with Colonization in *Devil on the Cross* & *Matigari*', Christophe Sékène Diouf, using

Marxist theory and postcolonial approaches, shows how Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o draws upon full images excerpted from the Bible to depict the prevailing situations in Kenya during the colonial and postcolonial periods. 'Marxist literary theory,' Diouf suggests, 'is an essential guideline to examine Ngũgĩ's opposition to the different forces that hamper the liberation and prosperity of Kenyan people. It represents a central instrument of struggle in both novels.' His study 'demonstrates that Ngũgĩ's artistic genius enables him to mix Gikuyu and the Marxist philosophical doctrine with biblical elements to convey his messages.'

Benedicta Adeola Ehanire's 'The Weapons of Subjugation in Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*' provides a unique analysis of 'a story spanning forty years of the subjugation of the people of Kosawa, a fictional African village created by Mbue to expose a global phenomenon of the brute force of the powerful over the weak. The powerful American oil company, Pexton, egged on by the federal government, engages with reckless abandon in the drilling of oil in the village. The operations lead to the despoliation and degradation of the land as well as the pollution of the waters.' Ehanire credits the author with painting 'a picture of the hopelessness of the people who are victims of the insensitivity of imperialists and their own (villagers') federal government.' The reader can hardly miss the satire of sadism and hypocrisy in contemporary African political leadership.

In 'Abrogating Aesthetic Boundaries in Contemporary Nigerian Poetry: A Reading of Femi Abodunrin's Poetry as Drama', Sani Gambo essentially analyses Femi Abodunrin's poetry as drama. This is based on his observation that, 'In recent times, poetry has generally experienced a gradual and systematic shift in favour of a new performance paradigm which points to the fluid nature of the genre. (…) The implication of this is that the traditional notion of poetry and those of prose, drama, and even orature as distinct artistic categories have come under serious contemporary scrutiny.' With reference to Femi Abodunrin's poetry collection, *It Would Take Time: Conversation with Living Ancestors*, his study 'demonstrates the fluid nature of contemporary Nigerian literature accentuated by the coalescence of literary categories to the extent that the distinctions between genres are gradually disappearing'. The chapter is well written and there is interesting commentary on Abodunrin's work.

'The End of Robert Mugabe: On Knowledge Production & Political Power' by Tinashe Mushakavanhu is a powerfully written, intense story of a nation (Zimbabwe) under and after Robert Mugabe. It encompasses diverse perspectives from vast sources and multiple genres, well

researched and documented. The reader will find in this chapter more than reminiscences of achievements and lost opportunities.

The last chapter in the volume, 'The Text & Textual Fields of African Popular Literature: The Agency of Nigerian Stand-Up Comedy' by John Uwa, is best described as an exceptional work in a class of its own. Uwa examines 'selected live performances (…) remediated on DVD and social media, to articulate the changing trajectories of African literature in the wake of the postmodernist conception of "the literary".' He defines Nigerian stand–up comedy as 'a solo performance in which actors take turns with the microphone to entertain the audience with jokes and humour, punctuating their renditions with intermittent punchlines that should evoke laughter and applause.' He adds, however, that it is 'a non-elitist response to "literary theatre" that speaks of the determination of a subaltern group to be heard in the theory and practice of dramatic theatre in Nigeria.' This chapter is a must read and a rare treat for the reader. The author is clearly a brilliant critical thinker with a large amount of material to offer on Nigerian stand-up with a pool of critical positions to call on from Aristotle to postmodernism.

The authors of the chapters in this volume have shown, in theory and practice, manifestations that affirm and celebrate that African Literature, has indeed, come of age. The items in the Literary Supplement richly complement the articles. The memorial tributes recognize a legendary, ultra-feminist, versatile writer, Nawal El-Saadawi, and a multitalented, incomparable literary critic, Charles R. Larson.

Enjoy!

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Articles

Of Literature & Medicine

Narrating Sickle Cell Disease in a Nigerian Novel

KAZEEM ADEBIYI-ADELABU

INTRODUCTION

The representation of disease or illness in literature can be sobering, distressing, illuminating, pedagogic, relieving, or even controversial depending on what the writer makes of it or what the reader gleans from it. For writers seeking escape from loneliness, social isolation, or depression resulting from some pathology, writing about such an experience may be soothing and relieving. Medical personnel can draw illumination and pedagogic values from reading illness narratives, while a patient that is reading a story may be agitated by the contents of the story to the point of despair. Perhaps the multiplicity of benefits or responses to a single narrative embedded with multiple meanings is what makes fictions of illness or pathography a thing of interest in both literary and non-literary landscapes in recent times. In recent years, HIV/AIDS has been one of the main preoccupations of many fictional and pathographical works. Similarly, the on-going Covid-19 pandemic has received and continues to attract interrogations across the different genres of literature. Yet some critics believe that disease and illness have been under-represented in literature. One of the contemporary critics who subscribes to this line of thought is O'Rourke (2017), who laments about literature having so little to say about illness, and passionately argues for literature's need to address 'features of illness that still need explaining, that might help us recognize illness for what it is (a painful monotonous truth), that might materially affect our bloodless debates over healthcare' (par.14).To emphasize her point, she recalls Virginia Woolf's (1926) surprise about why illness has not taken its place in literature alongside such great themes as love, battle, and jealousy.

Indeed, while there is still a lot for literature to mine from conditions of illness, disease, as well as health and medicine in general, it has not done badly either. For instance, in the last two decades or so,

the representations of HIV/AIDS in imaginative writings, including African's, have been remarkable. In addition to joining in such representations, Nigerian literature has equally been exploring other diseases and illnesses. A few examples include Ogochukwu Promise's *Sorrow's Joy* (2015), which explores cancer; Remi Raji's *Wanderer Canto* (2021), which is partly about Covid-19; and Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay with Me* (2017), which deploys sickle cell anaemia as subject as does this novel under study, Olayinka Egbokhare's *Dazzling Mirage* (2017).

Interestingly, the intersection of literature and medicine in general, long taken up by literary scholars in other parts of the world, has recently begun to gain the attention of scholars of African literature. No less than three doctoral studies have been carried out in this area at the Department of English, University of Ibadan.[1] Scholarly essays in this evolving area of African literary scholarship are increasing. This chapter seeks to advance and deepen this scholarship. It engages with sickle cell anaemia, a disease that has probably been around since creation but discovered and given scientific formulation only in the early twentieth century. The objective is to examine the representation of the disease, particularly the shades of pain that come with it, in *Dazzling Mirage,* a recent Nigerian novel. This is with a view to demonstrating that despite the many grave challenges which usually attend the condition, it is still possible for those living with it to have a meaningful life.

The narrative is about Funmiwo, a sickle cell disease (SCD) patient who battles against massive odds in the form of physical, social, emotional, and psychological pain that almost render her lifeless. Born of an unmarried nursing student who dies during childbirth, Funmiwo is abandoned in the hospital for three weeks until Mrs Adebayo, a nurse in the hospital, is saddled with the responsibility of caring for her. She and her husband later adopt baby Funmiwo only to discover that she has sickle cell anaemia. They keep her nevertheless, seeing her as an answer to their own childlessness. As early as the first three weeks of her life, before moving to the custody and care of the Adebayos, Funmiwo starts her battle to survive the deadly disease.

However, instead of surrendering to defeat in instalments by the forces of pain and death, she embraces the warmth of family and friends, as well as other positive forces, to live a fulfilled and meaningful life. It is important to analyse the factors that make life meaningful and positively liveable for the novel's protagonist in order to show the potential of literature to enact the possibility of a meaningful and joyful life for SCD patients. The analysis will also help to deepen our understanding of the plight of SCD patients. The

chapter starts by seeking to unpick the phenomenon of SCD and its incidence and moves on to a narration of its fundamental symptom (pain), as depicted in the novel, and to the strategies of coping with it.

SCD & ITS INCIDENCE

SCD is a genetic blood disorder that is usually inherited from birth parents. It is characterized by an abnormal tendency for red blood cells to distort and take on the shape of a sickle under certain conditions (Midence and Elander 1994). Though more prevalent among people of African ancestry, it is also found among people of other parts of the world, such as Latin America and parts of Asia. Recent research findings have established its global spread, tracing the same to intercontinental migration (WHO 2006; Ola et al. 2013; Angastiniotis et al. 2013; Piel et al. 2013a). In terms of spread and density, sub-Saharan Africa has the highest incidence of the disease, with Nigeria in the lead due largely to the size of its population. Nigeria has about 200 million people, and has been listed as one of the three countries that account for nearly 90 per cent of the world's SCD population (Piel et al. 2013b). According to these researchers, Nigeria alone, as of 2010, had at least 91,000 newborns identified with SCD, with the potential to increase to 140,800 by 2050. This high prevalence of the disease, unfortunately, has not been met by corresponding remedial efforts by the state or health authorities in Nigeria.

In his study of SCD in sub-Saharan Africa, Williams (2016) states the obvious when he observes that the disease is a common and growing health problem in the region. He adds that at least 240,000 children born with the condition die every year. Worse still, the disease is 'widely neglected on the continent, where an estimated 50% to 90% of those born with the condition die undiagnosed before their fifth birthday' (343). Of the burden of SCD in the subregion, Nigeria accounts for not just the greatest, but for up to 15 per cent of mortality in children on the continent (WHO 2010). Also, the official document of the Nigerian government on SCD, *Nigerian Guideline for the Control and Management of Sickle Cell Disease*, affirms that the country is 'the most sickle cell endemic country in Africa with an annual infant death of 100,000 representing 80% of infant mortality in the country' (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2014,1). The document also estimates about 24 per cent of Nigerian adults as having sickle cell trait. All of these point to how frightening the situation is in the country.

In spite of this scenario, there is little evidence to show that the Nigerian government is committed to reducing the incidence and prevalence of the disease in the country through modern state-of-the-art facilities and therapies. Apart from establishing prenatal SCD screening at some tertiary health institutions, not much has been done to radically improve the situation. Because there are no specialized centres for lifelong medical care for chronic diseases such as SCD, the management of the disease is often left to ill-equipped primary health centres or the efforts of patients' families. However, public health education, partly sponsored by government and partly by NGOs and medical professionals in private capacities, has greatly improved awareness of the disease, as well as attitudes towards those living with it. Comparing the results of surveys carried out in 1970 and 2001, Ohaeri and Shokunbi (2001) trace this improvement to increased literacy level and greater societal sophistication. Nevertheless, they draw attention to the challenge of attitudinal change in the public by noting that about 5 per cent of parents of SCD patients who participated in their 2001 study had known about the possibility of SCD before marriage, while a third of the participants in the study had not yet determined the genotype of their children.

While there have been sustained, even if inadequate, efforts at engaging with the disease in terms of public health concern, control, treatment, education, and enlightenment from clinical and diverse health perspectives in the subregion, it is very interesting to see that creative writing on the continent is slowly but steadily contributing to engagement with the disease.

A CONSTANT WAR WITH PAIN

Physical pain is a major symptom of SCD, as people with SCD experience a life of morbidity that is continually and mainly characterized by pain. In common biomedical parlance, 'crisis' is the word used to define the regular struggle with pain to which the SCD patient is sentenced from as early as age two. The pain is said to be caused by vaso-occlusion or 'avascular necrosis of active bone marrow' (Serjeant 1997, 727) which, in non-specialist language, means the narrowing or blockage of the bone marrow in such a way that blood-bearing cells are trapped in the blood vessels, causing a reduction in oxygen supply. While it is relatively common knowledge that the pain SCD patients experience is caused by genetic factors, the novel *Dazzling Mirage* insightfully provides

information about the multiplicity of causes, such as cold, dehydration and stress, all of which are highlighted as trigger factors. These factors are implicated in the novel in the incidents of pain crises experienced by Funmiwo, the protagonist, and Deolu, a young schoolboy.

Funwimo's first crisis in the novel is triggered by stress associated with her work; the second by emotional turmoil due to being jilted by Sanya, her first love; and the third by stress associated with pregnancy and childbirth. Perhaps because it has been argued that pain defies expression through language (Woolf 1926; Scarry 1985), the narrator of Funmiwo's story, consciously or unconsciously in agreement with this position, exploits paralinguistic resources to articulate not just the pain the protagonist goes through, but to also depict the severity of the pain in images that are simultaneously and variedly auditory, kinaesthetic, and tactile. Speaking of the agony experienced by the young woman during one of her pain crises, the narrator observes: 'She gritted her teeth. Her knuckle cringed. Pain shot through her marrows, rendering her bones sore and soft' (12). He goes further: 'Her features contorted as tortured gasps escaped her lips. She bit her lower lip and gripped the bedside harder' (12). As she struggles with the pain racking her being and crying uncontrollably, Funmiwo screams 'Hun-un-un! Yeh-eh-eh! Oh-h-h! Somebody help me! P-l-e-a-s-e h-e-l-p-m-e-e!' (12). These are extremely grave, if fictive, renderings of the plight of people living with SCD.

Indeed, while the above rendering may appear a bit too frightening for those who have never seen an SCD patient in pain, it is a realistic one. If Funmiwo takes her experience of a pain crisis triggered by work-related stress, as above, in her stride, she wishes for death in a more serious episode that occurs while she is pregnant. In this case, the pain experienced is both psychological and physical. Unlike the auditory, tactile, and kinaesthetic imagery deployed to inscribe the physical pain resulting from the work-induced stress, the physical pain experienced by Funmiwo on this occasion is powerfully conveyed through visual imagery incited by the way she pines for death to end the excruciating pain ravaging her body. Because she does not wish to cause unnecessary worry for her family, she struggles so much silently that '[s]ometimes she felt as if her whole system was falling apart and that her stomach would rupture as pain laid siege to it' (132). While Funmiwo's experience here may not be too surprising because the pain is connected to a state of pregnancy, it is not exactly labour pain. However, the distressing corollary here is the complication wrought by the addition of a bone pain crisis which activates soreness in her bone marrow.

As noted earlier, the pain that attends Funmiwo's pregnancy-induced crisis is not only physical, she also suffers grave emotional and psychological pain. As she struggles with the physical pain, wishing for death, she also ponderously wonders over the emotional pain her death might cause her loving parents. Yet much as she wishes for death, she finds it emotionally painful to contemplate having a child she would not be available to care for as a mother. These dilemmas and struggle clearly underscore the degree of agony that people living with SCD have to grapple with, but they could also provoke a spirit of compassion and fellow feeling in caregivers and others. Given the anxiety Funmiwo exhibits here, she becomes vulnerable to another round of distress, as much as it also prefigures the possibility of anxiety neurosis. With all of these, the novel underscores the cyclical and endemic nature of the pains that often dog an SCD patient's life.

People living with sickle cell disorder also struggle with emotional or psychological pains that result from a number of other factors, the deadliest of which are stigmatization and social alienation. Funmiwo, the protagonist, and the young schoolboy, are victims of these sad realities in *Dazzling Mirage*. As noted earlier, one of the major psychological pains suffered by Funmiwo in the novel results from being jilted because of her sickle cell condition. That people with SS genotype, the biological condition responsible for SCD, are often stigmatized in social intercourse in Nigeria has been noted by Ola et al. (2013). In the case of Funmiwo, the attitude is summed up in Mrs Fadipe's ireful remonstration with her son over his interest in marrying the girl. She chides her son:

> Now, listen, my boy, if you choose to be irrational about this, I'll not let you off easily. I don't want a sickler for a daughter-in-law, understand? If you think I'll spend my old age taking care of a sickly daughter-in-law who may not even be strong enough to give me children, then you must be joking. I want your wife to be an asset, not a liability! (Egbokhare 48)

I have quoted at length the above in order to call attention to the language and, possibly, the mindset of those who, in this case a provisional mother-in-law, oppose marriage to people with sickle cell. Whereas Mrs Fadipe may not be faulted in seeing some illogicality in her son's obstinate resolve to marry a person living with SCD, her language clearly reveals a mindset that is extremely prejudiced, insensitive, and self-interested. While it is also pertinent to note that her position raises an ethical question about the role of African parents

in their children's choice of marriage partner – albeit a culture that is dying out – the woman's reaction must be understood as one driven by the instinct of self-preservation. Contrary to the impression that she wants to protect her son, she is actually trying to protect herself against the vulnerability of an old age which a weak and sickly daughter-in-law portends for her. In Africa, there is still a heavy reliance by the geriatric on physical, psychological, and economic supports from their children and grandchildren. To underline the gravity of this ethical conundrum and a possible case of selfish interest, the son, Sanya, also queries: 'Are you saying because of medical incompatibility, two people in love should not get married?' (Egbokhare 48). He is mentally agonized. However, his own pain pales into paltriness when compared to Funmiwo's in terms of its intensity and her capacity to endure the pain. In fact, as soon as the altercation between him and his mother is over, nothing in the rest of the narrative suggests that he feels further pain. That he thereafter breaks his relationship with Funmiwo with indifference further validates this.

Paradoxically, while the other emotional and psychological pains experienced by the protagonist are induced by physical pain, the emotional pain in this instance catalyses the physical one. After receiving the psychological and emotional blow of being jilted, Funmiwo is distressed and depressed. Anger, frustration, and even hatred have promptly supplanted the emotions of love that hitherto resided in her person. The result is organic disequilibrium in her physiology, with physical pain dominating. According to her, she became not only sick in spirit following this, her body was starved and she 'ached all over' (108).

To further illustrate the intensity of the psychic pain and disequilibrium this kind of development can cause, the novelist tells an anecdote of a lovely girl who attempts to commit suicide following a break up with her partner due to genotype incompatibility. After being jilted for the fourth time on the same grounds, the pain incited by the rejection and stigmatization has become unbearable; it is comparable to the kind of psychological pain described as traumatic by Adebiyi-Adelabu and Aguele (2017). Indeed, sickle cell disease has generally been noted to attach a taint to people living with it. Jenerrette and Brewer (2010), Dyson et al. (2010) and Dyson et al. (2011) have all observed that health-related stigma is a challenge for young adults with SCD. They further note that the experience of stigmatization may even hinder care seeking for acute pain by the patient, thereby worsening their condition. Although these studies draw data and insights from

Canadian and American SCD patients' experiences, the findings are no less true of Nigerian SCD patients' realities. In fact, in a study of attitudes toward peers with SCD among secondary school students in Nigeria, Ola and colleagues (2013) observe a significant level of negative attitude by students toward SCD.

If stigmatization imperils a happy life for people living with sickle cell anaemia in their quest for marriage, then social isolation or alienation also brings them psychological pain, especially at younger ages when they are more mentally and emotionally vulnerable. For instance, during moments of loneliness after one of her episodes of crisis, Funmiwo recalls how she was always socially isolated as a child. As a child, she was never allowed to play the way other children did, never allowed to attend parties, and never allowed to host any party, even at the landmark ages of eighteen and twenty-one. Obviously, these are borne of the parental sense of responsibility to protect their child from harm, especially the frequent crises; the experience is nevertheless psychologically tortuous for her. Although this parental protection might minimize the incidence of a physical pain crisis in children with sickle cell anaemia, it also inflicts psychological pain on them. Funmiwo laments, 'no rough play, no bathing in the rain, no ice creams or fan ice. Nothing' (Egbokhare 21). Indeed, these are some of the things that make life exciting and fun-filled for children. As adults, memories of such experiences are also heartwarming. To deny children such a life is, therefore, akin to robbing them of a real childhood.

Unfortunately, this parental tendency to overprotect is extended to public spaces, where people who lack knowledge of the capacity of sickle cell patients not only deny them agency in matters that directly concern them, they also even feel obliged to treat them with a mixture of pity and sympathy. This tendency innocently but easily undermines their confidence, and makes them feel handicapped and hurt. Adeolu, the young schoolboy living with SCD, and a friend to Funmiwo, provides a perfect example. He is excluded from a school play by his teacher on the grounds that he lives with sickle cell anaemia. Pejoratively, he is told that he is 'different from normal children' (72) and that he may fall sick anytime. The boy is stung, and the stinging remarks eventually trigger psychological and emotional imbalance in him, ultimately contributing to the bone-pain crisis he suffers later the same day.

It is also worth noting that the agony that comes with sickle cell condition is not limited to vaso-occlusive crisis in the patient. The primary caregivers partake of the pain psychologically and emotionally. Parents of children with the condition are usually distressed to see

their wards in pain. One of the participants in the pain management study carried out by Booker et al. (2006) says this about his plight:

> *When I am in crisis sometimes, it makes my parents very depressed. And sometimes I try to hide if* (sic) *from them, because if my father knows I am in crisis he feels he is the one who should be feeling it*. (original italics, 46)

A similar thing is observed in the case of Funmiwo's parents, especially her mother. Even when she does not know that her daughter is undergoing a pain crisis while away from home, she imagines it, becomes agitated, restless, and distressed. During Funmiwo's pregnancy-induced crisis, both father and mother also vicariously share her agony. The submission by the participant in the above cited study not only serves to authenticate the vicarious pain suffered by primary caregivers, especially parents, it also underlines the sense of guilt that may be experienced by both parents and their children who live with SCD. Guilt, in mental health studies, has been linked to some internalizing disorders, with depression being number one (Bybee and Quiles 1998). This suggests that caregiving parents and child-patient are at risk of psychological turmoil.

In spite of this, whether by accident or design, Funmiwo's story inscribes a vision of hope and possibility. Though due to her medical condition she suffers the pain of rejection at the hands of her lover of around six years, she ends up marrying a more deserving man: the chief executive of a high profile company, Adverts Merchant, who is highly understanding, loving, lovable, rich, and responsible. With this plot, the story not only offers a symbolic positive vision to people living with SCD in terms of conjugal possibilities and achievements, the success of the marriage, despite many challenges, also makes concrete the hope of a meaningful and fulfilling life for those with SCD who desire marital union.

MANAGING & COPING WITH SICKLE CELL DISEASE

In consonance with the earlier two-dimensional exploration of the challenge of SCD, this section examines how SCD patients cope with both the physical and emotional or psychological ordeals they live with in *Dazzling Mirage*. Like most health challenges, SCD is managed with the use of drugs. Although non-curative, many prescription and non-prescription drugs are available to manage the pain that comes with the episodes of crisis which characterize the life of the patient, and to build the blood in their body. However, much as pain-

relieving drugs are available, they may not be within the reach of the rural or poor victims of the disease in Nigeria. Indeed, the kind of medical attention received by Funmiwo in the novel is hardly the type available to the typical SCD patient in the country. Her parents are medical professionals: the father a physician and the mother, a nurse. Besides their professional expertise, they are also financially well off. This characterization raises some questions. Is Funmiwo's successful management of her condition due to the status of her parents? Could the situation have been different if their status had also been otherwise? To be sure, their professional experience and relatively high economic status assist in providing Funmiwo with many of the things that help her to cope with the bone-pain crisis that dogs her life. However, it is the warmth, love, and care from her parents, professional caregivers, friends, and others, that play the most crucial role in the management of the condition: love and care from her parents; care, compassion, and empathy from colleagues at work; and, love, understanding, and encouragement from friends. All these, together with her determination and positive outlook on life, make life meaningful and fulfilling for her.

The novel also hints at the potential of traditional or non-orthodox medicine to mitigate the effect of bone-pain crisis in SCD patients. We learn of a certain sixty-year old grandmother who, in addition to receiving orthodox medical treatment, 'uses herbs and a particular type of chewing stick known as *Orin Ata*' (Egbokhare 138) to manage her SCD condition. The grandmother not only lives a full life, she also 'enjoys everything life has to offer' (138). While this information is provided to encourage Funmiwo to see beyond the pain and other discomforts associated with her condition, and to embrace life with optimism, the fact is that many poor or rural people living with SCD in Nigeria either rely wholly on herbs or use them as complements to orthodox medicine. This patronage of herbs may well inform the bold but spurious claim by some herbalists or traditional medicine personnel that they can cure SCD, as also seen at the Sicklers' conference in the novel.

However, while drugs may relieve the patient of the physical pain, the psychological and emotional pains can only be soothed by love, care, counselling and the like. As observed during banter between Funmiwo and another character in the novel, 'tender loving care' is emphasized as one of the things a sickler needs in order to wade through bone-pain crisis whenever it occurs. This phrase, used jokingly by Lanre, one of Funmiwo's colleagues at work, articulates the best non-drug means which the protagonist takes advantage of to

overcome the episodes of crisis she experiences. From her parents, her physician, fiancé, friends, and family members, no energy is spared to show love to Funmiwo during crises, and even when she does not have crisis. Living her conviction that what a person with SCD needs are love and adequate medical attention, her mother not only provides the 'software' of love to Funmiwo while under her wing, she tries to continue along this track even after the girl has grown up enough to work and live independently of her parents.

This is further evident when her mother insists that though she could not make the physical pain of Funmiwo go away, holding her daughter's hand, stroking her aching brow and sharing words of comfort with her always help. Indeed, as a sickly abandoned three-week-old baby, what brought Funmiwo back to full life was the love and care of Mrs Adebayo, not drugs,. As further evidence of the potency of love and care in mitigating the effects of pain in SCD patients, we witness an instance where Funmiwo shows little concern for the pain ravaging her body simply because Sanya, her lover, is around to support and dote on her. She also composes a poem where she passionately notes that the love she gets from those around is the strength that keeps her going.

In addition to love and care, encouragement and counselling also play some role in attenuating the challenges that come with SCD. The most significant in this connection, as far as *Dazzling Mirage* is concerned, are words of cheer, inspiration, and reassurance from husband, a caregiver, to wife, the patient. This is particularly so during the crisis triggered by pregnancy and childbirth complications in the latter. Dotun repeatedly assures his wife of his love and the love of the people around. He assures her that no harm is coming her way, and that she should be optimistic and never be scared. He makes no pretense of being a sharer of the agony his wife is going through. All of these inevitably buoy up Funmiwo's spirit and enable her to cope with her medical challenge.

Beyond the familial and spousal words of encouragement, the novel also makes use of stories of people who are living positively with SCD to encourage Funmiwo and, by implication, others on the imperative of optimism to not only survive the sickle cell condition, but to also enjoy their lives. Besides the nameless grandmother referred to earlier, Chief Sodiwin, an elderly man living with SCD, is held up as a model of not just positive living, but also of active life in spite of his health status. Both are profiled as agile elders who can easily pass for 'the so-called "normal people"' (120). In fact, the reference to their elderly status significantly undercuts the assumption that a person with SCD is fated

to die young, an assumption so widespread that it has almost become a truism about the condition. It is even particularly disturbing because it is responsible for engendering unnecessary anxiety in both patients and caregivers. Such ordinary anxiety, as we are informed by Secer et al. (2019) can lead to adverse health challenges such as anxiety disorder and depression. Although the mortality rate of SCD patients is generally below that of those who do not suffer from SCD, the fact is that there are other diseased, social, economic, and cultural conditions that also increase the mortality rate of people in any given society.

In the novel, prayer is also, but uncertainly, offered as a means of coping with the challenge of SCD; uncertainly because the victims of the disease themselves are not seen to cultivate prayer as a means of mitigating their pains. Nevertheless, we see instances of others praying for them with a view to achieving the same. The nameless grandmother prays for Funmiwo while hospitalized at Dr Ayodele's clinic. The physician himself encourages Funmiwo's husband to pray during the treatment of his wife's pregnancy-induced crisis. He admits that he is also 'consultating with God in prayers, asking Him what to do every step of the way' (131). While it may be difficult to establish the efficacy of prayer scientifically, as Funmiwo's husband also seems to acknowledge, its placebo or soothing psychological effect cannot be dismissed. Adebiyi-Adelabu (2021) has, for instance, noted the balmy effect of prayers on a mind that is psychologically troubled. Similarly, other studies (Ohaeri et al. 1995; Uwakwe et al., 2001; Anie et al., 2010) have shown that religion and spirituality are part of the psychosocial strategies used by Nigerian SCD patients and their familial caregivers to manage the illness.

Unfortunately, one of the sources of the peculiarly Nigerian conduit for stigmatization of SCD is ironically the religious institution which promotes the use of prayer as a coping strategy in the management of SCD. Apparently motivated by the intention to reduce or eradicate the SCD phenomenon, many churches and mosques in Nigeria either discourage or forbid outright marriage between carriers of sickle cell trait. The clergy in such religious houses often stay away from the wedding of couples with this condition. This practice does not only put undue pressure on SCD patients, it also tends to cut them out as social outcasts. Although no character's attempt at marriage in the novel is threatened by a religious institution, Funmiwo, Deolu and the character said to have attempted suicide are seriously traumatized on account of their status as persons living with SCD.

CONCLUSION

In *Dazzling Mirage*, the phenomenon of SCD is explored with attention to the challenge of physical pains and psychological or emotional pains that derive from stigmatization and social alienation, which are often associated with the condition. In spite of the challenge, the novel projects a vision of hope for those living with SCD. The protagonist of the novel embraces life with a positive vision. Contrary to her mother's wish for her to stay close to the family in Ilorin, she relocates to Ibadan to take up working in an advertising company, a job in which she takes great delight and finds joy and satisfaction. Despite her continual experience of bone-pain crisis and disappointment from being jilted, she gets happily married to a man with whom she enjoys mutual love and companionship, and by whom she has a beautiful and lovely daughter. All of these are read as consequent upon having or enjoying the psychosocial benefits of love, care, compassion, empathy, and the like from significant others. The foregrounding of these psychosocial benefits in the novel is, therefore, understood as imaginative writing's prognostic strategies for coping and living a meaningful life with SCD.

NOTE

[1] The theses are: Omobowale, E.B. 2002. 'Literature and Medicine: A Study of the Creative Works of Nigerian-Physician Writers'; Owonibi, S. 2010. 'Patient-Writers' Portrayal of Disease and Psychological Trauma'; and Kekeghe, S.E. 2018. 'Psychiatric Conditions in Selected Nigerian Literary Texts'.

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Post-humanism & Speciesism in African Literature

Animals & the Animalized in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*

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INTRODUCTION

Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* carries the post-humanist vision of inclusion, and dismantles the notion of human hegemony. Mda exposes hegemonic powers that often disavow the nonhuman species. He also articulates the animalization of humans through which he draws attention to the exclusion and exploitation of animals. Thus, Mda in *The Heart of Redness* engages the animals directly. By re-imagining animals as subjects and the protagonists of his oeuvres, by emphasizing their peculiarity as nonhuman humans and their interconnection with humans, and by also portraying the conflict of exclusion of nonhuman animals, Mda revises the place of the animals, challenging the speciesist notions that foreground their exclusion. Speciesist notions, according to Thomas Lamarre, comprise violence to nonhuman animals and animalized humans; it is 'blatant discrimination against animals, which comes of attributing 'bestial,' that is, negative characteristics to nonhuman animals and extending these negative attributes to humans' (76).

This chapter explores how Mda speaks against human and animal discrimination from a post-humanist point of view, locates and recognizes the animal, and argues for openness from the closures and 'enframings' that exclude nonhuman animals. Thus, Mda interrogates human status: 'the concept of "the human" that the human falsely "gives to itself" to then enable its recognition from a safe ontological distance, of the nonhuman other in a gesture of self-flattering "benevolence" wholly characteristic' of human(ity) (Wolfe 2010, 118).

This chapter examines Mda's rethinking of 'the hierarchy of human/animal' (Wolfe 2010, 118). He carefully chooses both human and nonhuman animal characters, what Wolfe describes as a 'distribution of subjectivity across species lines' (Wolfe 2010, 125), that is, a rethinking

of subjectivity from a non-hierarchical and non-anthropocentric way that neither favours nor elevates humans. The tenacity and commitment with which Mda explores the nonhuman undermines the assertion of Philip Armstrong (2002) that African creative writers do not pursue the subject of animals with vigour because it, 'risks trivializing the suffering of human beings under colonialism' (413). This makes *The Heart of Redness* an important work and a post-humanist manifesto in postcolonial African literature.

While Cajetan Iheka (2018) acknowledges the need for the recognition of nonhuman forms like plants and the affinity and interconnection between humans and nonhuman animals, he reads 'nonhuman (animals) as symbols for oppressed humans in African literary criticism' (3). In his essay that focused on racism and environmental justice in the face of neoliberal environmental exploitation/interventions, Byron Caminero-Santangelo (2014) sees the subject of animals as core in *The Heart of Redness*. To borrow the words of Evan Mwangi (2019), *The Heart of Redness* 'views animals as representing their own need for recognition and rights as sentient beings' (1). In lieu of this, Wolfe argues that literature and literary studies have an important role to play in confronting certain speciesist modes of thinking towards the animal and how language and analysis rely on cognitive science in denying the animals cognition (the occlusion cognitive science seeks to overcome) (Wolfe 2010, 116). On Mda's cognition of the non-human, Astrid Feldbrügge (2010) notes that he confronts the dichotomy between the indigenous people and the nonhuman world and challenges hierarchical structures and notions that privilege the human world above the non-human (151).

Wolfe describes the structure used in establishing human/animal dichotomy, such as language, morality, contractedness, reciprocity, technology, and cognition, as 'framing and enframing', which is neither epistemological nor logical but rather sociological and material; a systematic discrimination against another based solely on a generic characteristic (Wolfe 2003, 1). In defining framing, Wolfe maintains that it 'decides what we recognise and what we don't, what counts and what doesn't; and it determines the consequences of falling outside the frame (in the case at hand, outside the frame as "animal" as "zoe," as "barelife")' (Wolfe 2013, 6). This frame constitutes a category of those who enjoy rights, as Roberto Esposito (2011) observes, 'defined only by contrast with those who, not falling within it, are excluded from it' (209). Those outside this frame are confronted with the violence

of exclusion because they are seen as a different race, gender, species, religion or nationality (Wolfe 2013, 9).

Wolfe de-frames this framing by challenging the subjective ontology that entitles humans to an exclusive classification in a world populated by different species. Wolfe conceptualizes Post-humanism with the aim to reconfigure the human/nonhuman dichotomy by challenging traditional conceptions and by re-imagining the place of nonhuman others exposing how much they have been 'misunderstood and exploited' (2010, 99). This is therefore why Post-humanism for Wolfe entails 'that we ought to be nondiscriminatory with regard to species in recognizing the characteristics and potentialities that are widely agreed to constitute what animal rights philosopher Tom Regan calls "the subject of a life"' (Wolfe 2003, 190).

While Wolfe acknowledges that 'the discourse of species has been used historically as a chief strategy for marking and exploiting other human subjects as well', it is also made clear 'that theoretical and ethical problems raised by the discourse of species are ever simply reducible to the problematics of race or nation' (2003, 188). The discourses of speciesism or animals often interact with racism, colonialism, capitalism and other-isms that establish dichotomy between species. Speciesism is the sacrifice of animals and the animalized. Thus, animalization is an issue of exclusion and imposed identity. Thus, following Wolfe, the study looks at animals and the animalized humans, and how human and nonhuman exploitation intersect.

COLONIALISM: THE ANIMALIZED

Frantz Fanon (1963) observes that: 'The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of value, but also the negation of values' (141). The natives are also described in zoological terms and references made 'to the slithery movements of the yellow race, the odours from the "native" quarters, to the hordes, the stink, the swarming, the seething, and the gesticulations. In his endeavours in description and finding the right word, the colonist refers constantly to the bestiary' (Fanon 7). Africans were seen as uncultured savages and this is demonstrated in the declaration of Sir George Grey, a colonial governor in *Heart of Redness* that: 'They *the natives* will give up their barbaric culture and heathen habits, and when they take over their chiefdoms they will be good chiefs' (Mda 127; my emphasis).

This motif of animalization is seen throughout the novel and serves as the conflict both in the colonial (between the colonists and natives) and postcolonial (between the believers and unbelievers of amaXhosa) South Africa where colonialists ripped Africans of their humanity and left a legacy that African culture is debased and thus its adherents barbaric and subhuman. Colonial civilization/culture contends with the culture of amaXhosa and tries to animalize the people. This conflict is portrayed in a parallel story of the amaXhosa people during colonialism and contemporary times. Mda's style in fusing the historical and contemporary South African experience is to make visible the extent of the colonial experience and its impact even after the end of apartheid. By recreating the conflict during the cattle killing of colonial times in the contemporary amaXhosa using the descendants of the major characters of the colonial period, Mda shows that the negative colonial impact and legacy cuts across generations and can be seen in the light of Nixon's notion of slow violence. By this he means a 'violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all' (Nixon 22).

In the novel, the colonial aggressiveness and their notion that Africans are subhuman or children that need to be tamed is first revealed through the disposition of a colonialist, the self-acclaimed Great White Chief of the Xhosas, Sir Harry Smith, who sees the Xhosas as his children and himself as their father. Sir Harry Smith infantilizes the Xhosas people and calls them animals while calling for their extermination during a war with them: 'I loved these people and considered them my children. But now I say exterminate the savage beasts!' (Mda 20). He forces all the kings and chiefs of the amaXhosa people to kiss his boot in a ceremony-like ritual in recognition of his superiority as higher human species from a more human race (Mda 19). In view of such an attitude, Val Plumwood (2001) argues, that 'the colonial conception of humanity depended on the not-human' (52). This sensibility is what Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin (2007) describe as enframing the other as 'the uncivilised, the animal and animalistic' (5).

The very notion of Sir Harry Smith/European colonialists' abrogation of superiority and hegemony is speciesist, and predicated on the enframed perception that sees 'indigenous cultures as "primitive", less rational, and closer to children, animals and nature' (Plumwood 53). Such a speciesist orientation is inculcated in the natives, the contemporary unbelievers of the amaXhosa as they have imbibed the animalization of anything African.

Mda is critical of the colonialists' animalization of Africans, what Grant Farred (2007) describes as 'the mis-representation of the "native" as uncivilised, or "red", in the iconography of Mda's novel, and therefore less than human – the very incarnation of the Conradian Other' (111). Camagu laments in the novel: 'They were taught by the missionaries that it is a sign of civilization, of ubugqobhoka, to despise isikhakha as the clothing of the amaqaba – those who have not seen the light and who still smear themselves with red ochre' (Mda 61). By identifying themselves with African culture, they are automatically denigrated as barbarians who are yet to encounter the 'superiority' of Western culture and the so-called civilization. Thus, Bhonco, the head of the contemporary unbelievers cult, describes his amaXhosa culture as darkness: 'They want us to remain in our wildness! (…) To remain red, all our lives! To stay in the darkness of redness!' (Mda 279). Therefore, to prove his embrace of western civilization Bhonco decides that: 'he will only be seen in suits' (Mda 79). Farred observes that: 'by reiterating so vehemently their support for "civilization", by trying to escape the "heart of redness," the Unbelievers inadvertently give credence to the colonialists' representation of them' (111).

In an ironic twist, Mda reveals the white colonialist engaging in barbaric acts to the nausea of their African onlookers: 'Then, to the horror of the men watching, the soldiers cut off the dead man's head and put it in a pot of boiling water' (21). The Africans are confounded when they witness the anticlimax of the so-called civility of the British soldiers led by John Dalton. Mda reveals the irony beyond the European appropriation of superiority over Africans when John Dalton declares to Twin, who accused them of cannibalism when they saw the British soldiers cooking the severed head in a pot, that: 'We are civilised men, we don't eat people' (Mda 21). For John Dalton, Africans lack the basic quality of humans and can only qualify as souvenirs and specimens. John Dalton confidently informs the Twin: 'These Heads are either going to be souvenirs, or will be used for scientific enquiry' (Mda 21). For the colonists, colonial subjects are dispensable specimens. Mda through this scene reminds the reader that most times, science relies on the exploitation and sacrifice of the animalized 'other'.

Sir George Cathcart, another colonial governor sent to replace Sir Harry Smith after he was defeated in the war with the African natives, continues the extermination policy of his predecessor. The war is caused by the usurpation of the African traditional institutions and the forceful appropriation of natives' lands by the British, who are also bent on forcefully subjecting Africans to their colonial rule, which leads to an

almost extermination of the natives. Sir George Cathcart adopts a policy of starvation to force the African into submission as the war continues: 'If he could not defeat the amaXhosa people in the field of battle, he was going to starve them into submission' (Mda 25). Another vivid example of the colonialists' animalization or dehumanization of the colonized is seen in the brutality of a colonial governor, Sir Benjamin D'Urban, who according to the novel, murdered King Hintsa, a beloved king of the amaXhosa people. Mda writes that: 'They have not forgotten how D'Urban had invited the King to a meeting, promising him that he would be safe, only to cut off his ears as souvenirs and ship his head to Britain' (86). By this story of King Hintsa, which is similar to the fate the headless ancestor Xikixa encounters, Mda through a repetition of the dismembering of Africans reinforces the claim that the colonists view Africans as specimens or subhuman that invite scientific inquiry. In lieu of this, Ana-Maria Ştefan (2013) notes 'the whole burden of Western anxiety and prejudice against the African *alter*, most often perceived as an inferior alienus' (17).

The last colonial governor of what post-Apartheid became the amaXhosa community pursued a policy of starvation and the appropriation of natives' land through subtle but excruciating means. As Mda narrates: 'He had arrived with great enthusiasm with a mission to civilize the natives (…) Of course he had to take their land in return for civilization. Civilization is not cheap' (95). Mda through euphemism ridicules and criticizes colonialism and exposes the exploitation, mercantilism and consumerism that sit at the core of all colonial projects. By stripping Africans of their land, calling them subhuman and their culture debased, the governor is portrayed as a speciesist who is carrying out 'colonialism's project of Othering – denigrating, exploiting, enslaving – indigenous communities' (Farred 111). Like his predecessors, Sir George Grey does not believe the native is equal to the white colonialist; there is equality of all humankind for George Grey only when they abandon their cultural identity and perspective, embrace British culture, and pay for such civilization with their lands. Mda tells us that: 'Grey believed that all men were equal – well, almost equal – as long as they adopted a civilized mode of dress and decent *British* habits (96; my emphasis).

THE ANIMAL OTHER

A critical reading of *Heart of Redness* may raise the suspicion of the reader over the role of the colonialists in inventing the cattle killing crisis in the novel. Mda portrays the cattle killing of 1856–7 as a

colonial invention and strategy which aimed to 'destroy the political independence of the Xhosa […] to make their land and labor available to the white settlers, and to reshape their religious and cultural institutions on European and Christian models' (Peires 1989, 312; 313). An inquiry into the rise of the Nongqawuse and Nombanda prophesies and the evaluation of the prophecies reveals the influence of colonial Christian mythologies as contained in the bible. The girls' prophecies seem to also imitate the previous prophesy of Mlanjeni, a native prophet, who previously 'ordered that all dun and yellow cattle be slaughtered, for they were an abomination' (Mda 19). The fact that Mhlakaza, who was formerly a devout Christian and a follower of the colonialist, is related to the girls and is the one that discovered the girls' prophecies, may raise suspicion of the colonialists' complicity in the invention of the girls' prophecy; the amaXhosa people, being a religious community and a community of prophets made them very vulnerable. In an informed evaluation of religion and how it institutes hierarchy and shapes human experiences, Farred writes: 'Because of its declared adherence to the multitudinous, observant One (say God, g-d, or Allah) as the apex of the hierarchy, the theocratic cannot function as anything but the space of inequality. It is here where transcendentally-derived or socially-authored hierarchies order existence, where those hierarchies are most strictly enforced' (102).

Any interpretation that Sir George Grey, an experienced colonial governor, uses this valuable experience to penetrate the religious amaXhosa people has a lot of credibility as this is further proved by his attitude during the great famine that accompanied the cattle killings (Mda 236–8). Mda writes how the famine is used to turn the natives into labourers and slaves; and in very clear terms reveals the colonialists' complicity in the cattle killing crisis '"We are achieving what we set out to do," he benevolently told his magistrates. "(…) these people are not irreclaimable savages"' (296).

The Cattle Killing Movement, which results in famine, creates an opportunity that the colonists leveraged in weakening the natives' resistance to colonial encroachment and the appropriation of their native land. Twin-Twin sees the colonists' complicity in the whole crisis.

> Twin-twin heard how thousand of his people had died as a result of the cattle-killing movement… He saw with his own eyes white settlements spreading over the lands of his people. He was filled with bitterness and his scars went wild (…) 'We have been cheated,' he told Nxito. 'These people through whose ears the sun shines are spreading like a plague in kwaXhosa' '(…) It must be true that The Man Who Named

> Ten Rivers planned all this cattle-killing business,' said Twin-Twin. 'He is the one who planted these ideas in the mind of Nongqawuse. He wanted the amaXhosa people to defeat themselves. Now he is enjoying the spoils of victory without having lifted a finger'. (298)

Land has always been at the centre of colonial exploitation. In order to exploit the natives, the colonists frame a difference by terming the natives subhuman and savages in need of civilization. The word 'enframing' in this context means an artificial creation and invention that provides the justification for colonial mercantilism, consumerism, and the exploitation of the natives and the appropriation of their lands. For this purpose, the colonialist violently destroys the natives and their culture.

The colonial speciesist project in the dehumanization of the native and subsequently their exploitation is what Mda seeks to dramatize and relive. As Maria Renata Dolce (2016) avers: 'Mda's literary writing thus manifests its transformative potential and establishes itself as a site for the reinvention and reintegration of a wounded community dis-membered by colonization, which did not limit itself to acts of destruction and appropriation, but deprived the oppressed of their past, their memories, their histories, their voice' (62).

Beyond the natives, Mda's *Heart of Redness* also focuses on the issue of animals and their place as the sacrificial 'other' for humans. In the middle of the conflict between the believers and unbelievers is the issue of animal sacrifice for human existence (for the preservation of the amaXhosa people). While the believers insist on the sacrifice of all their animals to save them from colonial peril and the lung sickness that has attacked their animals in exchange for new animals and the resurrection of their ancestors, the unbelievers distrust and do not believe this prophecy. The unbelievers are more practical, insisting that the sacrifice of all their animals is counter-productive. Farred notes very importantly that: 'The notion of sacrifice is, in this way, constitutive of both "faiths": the "Believers" and the "Unbelievers" recognize the importance of the transactional nature of faith, the need to sacrifice something in order to receive in return or to achieve something greater, more transcendent than their current condition' (104). Thus, for the natives, animals are the usable 'other', the way the colonists perceive the natives; the 'other' here in the transactional sense constitutes subjects (objects) that can be used for exchange.

Mda (2000) challenges anthropocentrism, the notion that puts humans at the centre of the universe and places them above every other existence. Like Jacques Derrida, Mda recognizes that: 'The

animal is a word; it's an appellation that men have instituted, a name they have given themselves right and the authority to give to another living creature' (392). He imagines animals as the subject of the novel and not as objects which is contrary to the perception of subjectivity as the only reserve of humans. Wolfe's view on humanness is that 'it is true that what we think of as personhood, knowledge, and so on is inseparable from who "we" are, from our culture, discourses, and disciplines; but at the same time, we are not we; we are not that "auto-" of autobiography that humanism "gives to itself"' (Wolfe 2010, 119). Mda's re-ordering of the place of animals in the novel from object to subject resonates with Wolfe's praxis of animals as subjects of injustice: 'to rethink the hierarchy of human/animal, as animals remain excluded (as anything but, presumably, derivative or "indirect" subjects of justice) from the liberal "conversation" about political ends to which philosophy clearly subordinated' (Wolfe 2010, 124).

In the novel, the Cattle Killing Movement is a transactional act that ought to bring succour to the amaXhosa people from colonists' exploitation and extermination. The first time there is cattle killing, it is ordered by Mlanjeni 'that all dun and yellow cattle be slaughtered, for they were an abomination' (Mda 19). This will help the amaXhosa win the Great War of Mlanjeni. The amaXhosa people lose their way even with the animal sacrifice. This consumerist approach towards the animals denies animals subjectivity and places them as the sacrificed alternative for human existence. This is even more evident in Nongqawuse and Nombanda prophesies (and all the prophets of that time) where the sacrifice of animals is seen as the solution to lung sickness imported by British colonists' cross-border animal husbandry (Mda 55).

This revelation also confirms the complicity of the colonialists in the Cattle Killing Movement. However, from the quest for human survival rose the quest for the colonization of animals. Wolfe contends that: 'In this way we can readily imagine a semiotic square in which "human" means "colonizing mimetic primate" and "animal" means "colonized mimetic primate"' (2003, 187). Jacques Derrida describes it as the 'sacrificial structure' (see Derrida 2002). With the development of the lung-sickness rises the promise of new quality life that is incorruptible and uninfluenced by colonial desecration.

Mda's imagination of the animal is complex. While he portrays them as the sacrificial 'other'; he also sees them as subjects sharing qualities with humans in terms of intelligence, intuition, and emotions. He establishes a human/animal relationship that is symmetric rather than

asymmetric and presents this as the ideal. Let us examine these two sides of animal representation in the novel.

Nongqawuse and Nombanda's prophecy is that the amaXhosa people must kill all their animals for a new set of animals that will rise with the dead. The existing animals are contaminated through witchcraft. In clarifying the Nongqawuse and Nombanda's prophecy, Mhlakazi adds that: 'The existing cattle are rotten and unclean. They have been bewitched. They must all be destroyed (…) The new people who will arise from the dead will come with new cattle, horses, goats, sheep, dogs, fowl and any other animals that the people may want. But the new animals of the new people cannot mix with your polluted ones. So destroy them' (Mda 60).

In addition to the promise of new animals, the destruction of the colonialists is also promised. Notice that to justify the killing of the animals, they were declared 'rotten' and 'unclean' in line with the popular saying 'to call a dog a bad name just to hang it'. Noting the anthropocentric nature of the prophecy by Nongqawuse, Nombanda, and Nonkosi, Farred writes that the amaXhosa people 'were not required to sacrifice their lives, only that which they owned (…) the amaXhosa are not required to do violence to their children – or other loved ones; (…) the amaXhosa would have been without bloodshed. Nonqawuse's "cattle-killing" required nothing but obedience (…) and sacrifice' (107). The sacrifice did not require 'self-renunciation' (Foucault 247) but the renunciation of the animal 'other'. Had the believers and unbelievers obeyed, they, according to the prophecy, could have attained the unattainable through animal sacrifice. The question Mda asks through his novel is why animals must be sacrificed for human existence considering the roles animals are forced to play in religion, laboratory research, and human security.

On the other hand, Mda portrays and projects a post-humanist attention to animals in the relationship of Twin and his descendants with their animals and emphasizes recent ethological discoveries of animal intelligence in his re-imagination of animals as subjects. Humans' abrogation of intuition, intelligence, and spirit is challenged by Twin's Gxagxa, the horse who has insight beyond the reach of humans. Gxagxa leads Twin, Twin-Twin and their families to a new settlement where they escape from disease and death, with the spiritual connection of Qukezwa to the horse; they reach a land of great pastures: 'Qukezwa led the way, for she knew the language of the stars. She rode reinless on Gxagxa, Twin's brown and white horse, which seemed to know exactly where to go without being

guided by her' (56). He reinforces this argument by also portraying Zim's horse in contemporary South Africa as having the same intelligence, stressing that animals from precolonial to postcolonial times are not in any way lesser species when compared to humans. Mda imbues Zim's horse, Gxagxa, with the kind of intelligence speciesists attribute only to humans (316–17). Mda's conception of Gxagxa dismantles the notion of human hegemony. By re-imagining animals and emphasizing their peculiarity as nonhumans, Mda reverses the place of the animals, challenging the speciesist notions that foreground their exclusion, and contributes to the debate on the question of the animal.

Twin's attitude towards animal suffering is also very instructive. The narrator explains that: 'now the beautiful brown and white horse was becoming a bag of bones in front of his eyes. Twin did not sleep. He kept vigil at Gxagxa's stable (…) As long as Gxagxa could not eat he found it impossible to eat (…) The poor horse spent days gasping for air, its tongue hanging out. Then it died. Yet Twin continued his vigil. He was waning away' (84). In portraying sympathy for animal suffering, Mda calls attention to animal exploitation, agitating for a collapse of the human/animal dichotomy and also a recognition of the subjectivity of animals and their rights. Mda acknowledges the ontology of animals and their creative intelligence; and thus preaches human tolerance of animals (41). He writes that preserving animals' lives teaches us about our lives though this must not be understood as using animal rights to project the preservation of humans as this will only reinforce the humanist notion that this thesis seeks to decentre (250).

CONCLUSION

Comparing human suffering to the suffering of nonhuman animals or other living things to some people is unthinkable particularly in African literature where writers feel that articulating issues like the impact of colonialism and postcolonial disillusionment is more urgent. In fact comparing humans and nonhumans is seen as a slur or condescension in many societies (Spiegel 1988, 14). However, a critical examination of human exploitation reveals that it shares the same pattern as animal exploitation and degradation. At the core of the violence in these human and nonhuman exploitations is the notion of 'othering' and capitalist consumerism. Huggan and Tiffin (2010), as pointed earlier, insist that the exploitation and violence done against

human and nonhuman nature defies '"either/or" matters' and that the study of these experiences 'must proceed together' (137; 8).

Comparison is not in the sense of finding differences for such will negate the singularity, interconnectedness and wholeness of every living existence that this study roots for. The comparison is necessary in establishing similar patterns in the institution of exploitation and oppression of humans and nonhumans. Spiegel is of the view that: 'The more we learn about the earth's environment, its ecosystem and the creatures who live here, the more we see the absurdity in the concept of ranking species against one another' (19). She therefore implores us to look out for those qualities that are relevant to the moral consideration of every living existence. Peter Singer (2002) supports Spiegel, alluding that equality is a moral idea and that 'we should make it quite clear that the claim to equality does not depend on intelligence, moral capacity, physical strength, or similar matters of fact' (4).

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Manifestations of Masculinities in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Novels

Initiating a Talk on Black Masculinity Studies

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African literature's indulgence of modern conceptions has been instrumental in breaking single stories about Africa and African writers who are highlighted by the canon of contemporary literary criticism. With the advent of new writers, the field of African literature has become enriched with more thoughts, perspectives, opinions, criticisms, and representations. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, one of the most popular Nigerian writers of recent times, has paved the way for up-and-coming writers to reconsider matters and write about subjects that had previously always been appropriated by white writers to prove their intellectual superiority to the 'othered' writers. It is believed by the renowned critic and scholar Ernest N. Emenyonu that, as the 'most engaging voice of her era', Adichie has 'bridged gaps and introduced new motifs and narrative varieties that have energized contemporary African fiction' (Emenyonu 1). By bringing forward new literary narratives, Adichie challenges the single lens or singular perception often utilized by contemporary researchers and critics in the process of analysing African literature. Although the names of Chinua Achebe, Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o have found their places in the academic curriculum, people are still not sufficiently aware of contemporary African writers who are serious in experimenting with genres and subjects.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is one such writer who has broken the stereotypical representations of the African identity by publishing stories of gender dynamics, power, and culture with which many readers may have been unfamiliar. While her speech 'We Should All Be Feminists' made headlines, not much attention has been given to the fact that her novels also portray manifestations of masculinities. In most of the prominent works of African literature, the portrayals of the dominant masculine figures have been one-dimensional, but Adichie attempts to increase the depth of masculine representations by including figures

of complicit and subordinate masculinities within her literary oeuvre. While analysis of 'Black Feminism' has become a popular topic in contemporary research works, the ideas and representations of 'Black Masculinity' are yet to gain such prominence. The whole notion of blackness has been constructed by white people in their own interests. It is by creating the idea of the 'other' that white colonizers tried to legitimize their superiority and their hegemony over the colonized. In this connection, 'black male gender identities have been culturally constructed through complex dialectics of power' and thus unveiling this complex system can expose the hypocrisy of the white hegemonic structure (Pochmara 12). Adichie initiates a conversation on 'Black Masculinity' by investing her fictional narratives with characters that represent different shades of masculinity. Reflecting upon the depictions of masculinities in her novels *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, it is clear that through her novels she emphasizes the transforming definitions of black masculinity. The trajectory of the notion of black masculinity finds expression through Adichie's literary endeavours as these novels are representative of the stages of its evolution.

Being a social construct, the notion of 'masculinity' changes over time according to the evolution of the culture, the experiences of individuals, and their reactions to situations. By emphasizing the socio-political and socio-cultural contexts, it is possible to trace the story of the transition of the notion of masculinity. Adichie creates that graph, and by analysing which readers were able to decipher what, we can see what led to the changes in the notion of black masculinity and how this change has been instrumental in bringing forth a transformation in black identity. To break free from the single story of black masculinity that focuses either on hyper-masculine traits or on the passive silence of the subjugated, Adichie engages in a dynamic study of masculinity through her characters, who represent several traits, types, and meanings of masculinity. She intends to reveal how the history and politics of the country have shaped Nigerian identities over time, and paved the way for the establishment of several shades of masculinity that were unknown in pre-colonial Nigeria. As 'manhood means different things at different times', it is essential to acknowledge that the dynamics of black masculinity is also a product of colonial history (Lemelle 11). A postcolonial reading of Adichie's works remains incomplete if the notion of masculinity is not taken into consideration.

Adichie's engagement with the questions of black masculinity and its manifestations enhances the argument that African literature is definitely coming of age as it she conveys ideas that are often depicted

only one-dimensionally in earlier writings. Masculinity studies made their way into the field of gender studies in the 1960s, and just like feminism, they were misunderstood as a counter-reading rather than an extension of the arguments of feminism. The theoretical frames of masculinity studies reveal the dynamics of a hegemonic social structure that subjugates both male and female in order to retain its position. The application of this theoretical structure reveals how the literary canon of Adichie is reinforced with characters that show different types of masculinities: literary representations of hegemonic, complicit, and subordinate masculine figures who maintain gender-power dynamics. An in-depth analysis of her strategies for the implementation of complexity in her male characters, and the designing of a complementary structure to contain these, reveal that her narratives show a continuous trend of degeneration in the hegemonic masculine figures. The turmoil of postcolonial Nigerian society is represented with all its complexities and intricacies by Adichie, as she engages in conversations about history, politics, wars, genders, and emotions in her novels.

Nigeria's exposure to colonialism led to the development of new social hegemonies which gave way to the establishment of new power-structures in the society. Precolonial social hegemonies were challenged by the advent of the colonizers who took over the power structures and redefined the dynamics. Within the context of this socio-political aspect of Nigeria, it is possible to understand the dynamic manifestations of black masculinities and Adichie's justifications for the subversion of the existing hegemonic structures. Adichie has challenged the fixity of the hegemonic masculine structures that manifested patterns of white dominance; her counter-structure has the capacity to destabilize the existing structure and drive its gradual degeneration. That is the reason a constant pattern of the rise of subordinate masculinities (which includes both masculine females and feminine males) at the cost of the hegemonic and complicit masculine portraits, can be seen in her novels. Since 'both masculinity and femininity are continuously subject to a process of reinterpretation' for being a part of 'history and culture', Adichie exposes her characters to situations in which they must justify the development of their gendered selves (Brittan 1). She has not limited her literary designs to the depiction of the nature of masculine structure that is at play, rather she has highlighted the intricate complexities of the structure so as to answer how and why this structure functions in the way it does.

Nigerians have come across different interpretations of masculinity, as they went through varied socio-political experiences. Prior to their exposure to colonialism, Nigerians had a traditional gender-power structure with men at the apex of the hierarchy, followed by women, children, and subordinate males (males who do not conform to conventional masculine characteristics and role playing). But with the advent of colonialism, the hierarchical positioning changed so that the colonizer's masculinity rose to the peak of the hegemonic structure, followed by black masculinity, other subordinate masculinities and femininity. So, females remained at the bottom of the gender-power structure. They were the ones who were doubly colonized because of being both black and women.

In the traditional gender-power structure females faced subjugation because of their gender identities and the stereotypes attached to it. But with the advent of colonizers and the implementation of their values within the social structures, women suffered most in terms of gender politics. The emasculation of black males was necessary for the colonizers to 'assert their own masculine agency' and thus they reconstructed the gender-power structures and established their hierarchy through the appropriation of black males (Pochmara 11). This complicated the sustenance of the idea of black hegemonic masculinity in Nigeria, with black males left with the options either to negotiate or challenge. This created figures of complicit masculinity who did not 'openly challenge the white man's status', but aspired to gain that position only to be able to assert their powers over their personal relations (Pochmara 31).

Regarding the exposure of Nigerians to these changing notions of masculinity and the gradual transformations of their identities, Adichie highlights the creation of new masculinities as a product of this process. The placement of subordinate masculinities (which constitutes both feminine males and masculine females, those who do not conform to traditional gender roles) in her stories who experience subjugation initially, only to rise up and subvert the hegemonic structure, reflects her desire to reinterpret power. It is because people 'have been so conditioned to think of power as male, and that a powerful woman is an aberration,' that Adichie finds it reasonable to break that convention and reinterpret power (Adichie 2018, 24). It is through this reinterpretation of the manifestations of power that Adichie provides a subverted view of the history of Nigeria and its transforming gender politics.

In Adichie's literary narratives, the notion of black masculinity is effectively depicted. It finds an elaborate representation of its evolution

from the early days of postcolonial Nigeria to its war-torn history and ultimately political stability. In *Purple Hibiscus* (originally published in 2003) Adichie reveals the politics behind the decline of the hegemonic and complicit masculine figures in the face of subordinate masculinities. It is in the character of Father Benedict that one may find the patterns of the dominant-white masculinity, while Eugene Achike's role can be perceived as an example of complicit masculinity. The advent of whites in Nigeria altered gender power structures owing to the usurpation of the social hegemonic structures and the subsequent process of redefining the boundaries of the structures. In this newly established structure, therefore, the earlier hegemonic black masculine figures either took the subordinate roles or negotiated with power to hold the complicit masculine roles. The persistence of the white masculine ideals led to the creation of black masculinity as the 'other'. Observing Father Benedict's role, it is possible to predict the strategies a hegemonic masculine figure might use to sustain his power. The insistence that the Credo and Kyrie be recited only in Latin, indicated that Igbo was not acceptable (Adichie 2013, 4). Father Benedict embodies the typical tendencies of a white hegemonic figure that imposes language and culture as tools to ensure the sustenance of power. The hegemonic figures feel the need 'to maintain, reproduce, and salvage [their] power relations' only because they are aware of the existence of counter structures that can dismantle their authority (Lemelle 17).

Eugene is yet another figure that seems to echo the Western values that are promoted by Father Benedict, and thus he becomes a bearer of complicit masculine traits. His tendency to negate anything that is pagan and native definitely identify him as 'too much of a colonial product' who cannot abandon the habit of idolizing Western culture and tradition (Adichie 2013, 13). Furthermore, as he 'changed his accent when he spoke sounding British', it can be understood how Adichie forms each layer of this masculine power structure only to show how these structures function through the maintenance of dynamic relationships. In the socio-political context, Eugene was the subordinate male who either had to exist silently at the periphery or negotiate with the hegemonic figure and maintain a comparatively better position in the structure. Eugene chose to stay in an advantageous position by assimilating himself with the dominant culture group and becoming their advocate Thus his encouraging village people to speak English and his family to abide by the Christian norms at the cost of their native language and culture can be categorized under the behaviour of complicit masculinity. Eugene was aware that 'to be

masculine requires not only self reliance and self control, but control over other people', and he manifested his masculinity over his family and his native community (Brittain 5). In order to reinforce his power in his house, Eugene resorts to violence as that is the only emotional outburst that male hegemony expects of him. Believing in the idea that 'Real men get mad' and 'their madness no matter how violent or violating, is deemed natural' is what leads the dominant males like Eugene to adapt to this 'masculine pretense' (Hooks 7; 6). To guard his vulnerability, Eugene stops showing his softer emotions in front of his family. He is constantly torn between the roles of a caring father and husband and that of the emotionless dominant male of the family. In his constant struggle to live up to the expectations of the role of a hegemonic male figure, one may find the seeds of his downfall. Since the value of men in a patriarchal structure is 'determined by what they do', men like Eugene feel the constant pressure of being productive and not surrendering to passivity (Hooks 11).

On the one hand, the 'black males were expected to perform the hyper masculine role; on the other hand, they were expected to be feminized vis-à-vis white males' and that shows exactly the dynamic position of Eugene in the entire structure (Lemelle 15). Within the family structure, he was the dominant figure but his authority was challenged from time to time by his children, father, sister, and even his wife Beatrice. In these sections of the novel, Adichie's brilliance as a writer is established as she moves beyond the tendency to project a one-dimensional aspect of masculinity. Eugene is shown as the abusive husband and father, on the one hand, and a caring person on the other, who provides for the community.

The degeneration of these hegemonic figures is noticed as the subordinate figures come to the forefront. As Beatrice subverts the structure of oppression that prevailed at home, her masculine traits shine prominently. Beatrice along with Jaja, Kambili, and Ifeoma act as a unit to drive the degeneration of the hegemony of Eugene. 'Being a defiant can be a good thing sometimes' because that allows the margins to claim the central position, and thus catalyse the fall of the hegemonic figure (Adichie 2013, 144). Beatrice's slow poisoning of Eugene, and Kambili and Jaja's continuous acts of defying the norms set by their father, embody the empowerment of the subordinate masculine. Beatrice takes the role of masculine female who takes charge to fight against the structure that subjugates her, and she also ensures the safety of children in the process. So, the primary male duties of being a protector and provider are taken up by Beatrice, Kambili,

and Ifeoma in several instances, while Jaja being the subordinate male figure is shown to gain prominence through his repeated acts of defiance. As 'marginalization is always relative to the authorization of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group', Adichie equips her characters with enough power to deny the authority (Connell 80).

As a social construct, the notion of masculinity has several overlapping ideas intertwined with it, and Adichie attempts to unveil each of these ideas to show how the changing notions of black masculinity have manifested a dynamic identity for Nigerians. She reveals that 'there are good masculine performances and bad masculine performances' and it depends on time, place, and social situations to decide which traits are to be grouped in which category (Lemelle 15). The history of the establishment of white masculine hegemony, the complicit masculine entities, and the subjection and later empowerment of the subordinate masculinities informed the new black identity. None of these histories can be overlooked if one tries to understand the real dynamics behind the formation of the idea of black masculinity. Until the advent of colonizers, Nigerians were accustomed to a certain type of dominant masculinity which was characterized by the authority of males over females. But with the history of colonization, that earlier notion of masculinity was redefined as black masculinity so as to give authority to the hegemonic position of the white males. This reflects on the idea that 'to understand masculinity, then, is to understand it in social relations of various stakeholder classes' because by analysing the position of these stakeholders the strategies of the structure can be unravelled (Lemelle 16).

In her *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), Adichie shows the elaborate procedure of destabilizing the hegemonic masculine structure by exposing her characters to a war that reveals their vulnerabilities. The 'assertive and virile ideology of masculinity' comes to a vulnerable point when they are challenged by the fatal conditions of war (Pochmara 10). Although their hyper masculine expectations might guide them to manifest their manhood in these situations, and become the ones who protect and fight, Adichie's male characters do not show such tendencies. The representation of 'militarized masculinity' in the popular male-authored Nigerian war narratives was instrumental in making 'women invisible at wartime' and Adichie intends to subvert those biased narratives (Njoku 154). She gives voice to this silent gender group by representing 'women's significant roles as combatants, leaders, decision makers and active participants in war' through the characters of Kainene and Olanna in her novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (Njoku 155).

In the face of war and political turmoil, Odenigbo and Richard, the representatives of black and white masculinities, reveal their emotional vulnerabilities. This at once points towards their effeminate tendencies, as in a masculine structure emotional beings are tagged as effeminates. The actions and intentions of both of the male figures, from the beginning of the novel, hint that they are not the typical hegemonic male figures who could subjugate their female counterparts or be concerned about how to retain their dominant positions. As Odenigbo tells Ugwu that 'Sir is arbitrary, you could be the Sir tomorrow' (Adichie 2006, 13), the unconventionality of the character is understood (Adichie 2006, 13). Unlike hegemonic masculine figures, both Odenigbo and Richard were comfortable in sharing powers with their partners. By placing the masculine female characters against these feminine males, Adichie justifies the decline of the structure of hegemonic masculinity. The leading characters of this novel are invested with unconventional traits. As Kainene engages in saving the victims of war and also ensuring the safety of her family, Adichie's purpose in representing 'war narratives (…) through an undistorted gender lens' to 'form a reasonable historical substitute that can feed future generations with unbiased historical knowledge of a heroic past' is clearly revealed (Njoku 158). This obviously challenges the hyper-masculine narratives of war that only celebrate the contributions of men and highlight the victimhood of women.

Adichie's strategy of evolving unconventional female characters who are filled with masculine traits implies that she wanted to show the gradual transformation of black identity in postcolonial Nigeria. These narratives over-write those single perspective tales that depict African females as subjugated and silent beings who are not provided with the proper education and tools required to subvert oppressive gender structures. In the androgynous representation of the character of Kainene, the matured face of African literature comes to prominence. By not allowing the 'sexist male' figures to shatter 'alternative masculinities' in her narratives, Adichie gives space to Kainene's 'androgynous selfhood' and allows it to flourish (Hooks 40). Her intimidating presence and destabilizing gaze are enough to prove her power in the existing gender-power structures. Her 'brazenly red lipstick, her tight dress, her smoking' and her overpowering personality were enough to make Richard feel 'adolescent with her gaze on him' (Adichie 2006, 57; 59). '[T]raditional machismo always included not only dominance but protection and rescue' and Kainene represents that in the story (Lemelle 14). In the face of war, she

becomes the one who provides food and shelter to Richard, Olanna, and Odenigbo. Adichie establishes 'Feminine hegemony' to justify the degeneration of the existing masculine hegemony (Lemelle 14). Olanna's role may be regarded as an aspect of Adichie's strategy as she represents unconventionality by not staying silent about the events that has hurt her dignity. She is bold enough to ensure that there is equality in the relationship that she shares with Odenigbo. Thus, she equals his act of cheating to make him feel the pain that she went through. Adichie creates a new structure of feminine hegemony by giving voice, courage, and power to her female characters.

Masculinity 'is a power relationship (…) pervasive in human interaction' and Adichie invests her stories with these interactions which create, challenge, and destroy the social hegemonies (Lemelle 15). She does this by subverting the conventional notions and paving the way for the development of new ideas. On the one hand, she reinterprets silence and uses it as a tool of power to challenge the oppressive structures, and on the other hand she shows the advent of feminine hegemony as a result of such reinterpretation. Reflecting upon Beatrice (in *Purple Hibiscus*) and Kainene (in *Half of a Yellow Sun*), it is clear how they use silence to destabilize the existing power structures. Beatrice plans the murder of her abusive husband silently, and Kainene intimidates people with her silent gaze, so the application of silence becomes a strategy for Adichie to empower her subordinate masculine characters. Adichie's narratives prove the point that 'where there is power there is resistance and individuals have scripts (that is, tactics) available to them at multiple points in the social fabric "to play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations"' (Lemelle16). Her subordinate masculine characters constantly destabilize the existing hegemonic structure by claiming their authority, and that leads to the complete degeneration of the hegemonic masculine figures.

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Transformative Female Narratives & New Visions in African Women's Writing

A Re-reading of NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* & Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

NONYE CHINYERE AHUMIBE

One of the factors that provoked the writing and proliferation of African literature globally was Africans' protest against their misrepresentation and stereotyping in Western literature. Chinua Achebe clearly stated in his essay entitled 'The Novelist as Teacher' that he would be satisfied if his novels, especially the ones that he set in the past, 'did no more than teach my 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' (Achebe 1975, 6). Thus, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* in their religious, judicial, and social systems reveal the sense of order and maturity of their people. More narratives emerged from Africa's colonial encounter with Britain, but they were dominated by men such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Ferdinand Oyono, etc., who in most of their works naturally gave prominence and insignificance respectively to their male and female characters. The largely negative and obscure portrayal of female characters in these narratives gave rise to another kind of protest, this time from African female writers who believed that they were unjustly represented. Like their male counterparts, they began to write their own stories in order to capture the realities of women from a woman's perspective.

However, African female writing merely shifted the position of female characters from minor, insignificant roles to major roles by creating female protagonists who are oppressed, victimized, and dominated by the men in their lives. This affirmed the earlier views of men about women in African societies. This repeated portrayal of female characters even in the works of female African writers may suggest that their realities indeed revolve around victimization, marginalization, and servitude; and these narratives when read outside African spaces may offer an inferior picture to foreigners about African

women. It is also evident that much of the movie industry in Africa portrays women in their films through belittling images, for instance in Nollywood's *Hire a Man* and in *June,* financially independent and educated women are presented as pathetic and miserable because they are unmarried. The impression is that regardless of a woman's social and economic achievements, she is incomplete and nothing without a husband. This is another version of the denigration of women in Africa. These lopsided narratives about African women, consciously or unconsciously told, carry the power to perpetually put African women in the background if other stories that portray them in positive light or reveal their strength and complexity are not offered to the world. Maureen Eke in an interview notes, 'We achieved a tremendous development in the area of women's writing, more specifically black women's writing and writing about black women or scholarship about black women. That is not to say that we have really made the kind of progress we should have made or could have made in improving the lives of black women' (527). This implies that writing ought to recreate or re-imagine a future that the writers hope for. Eke also vests the responsibility for that recreation in African female writers.

Consequently, this chapter examines Noviolet Bulawayo and Chimamanda Adichies' re-invention of the concept of womanhood in *We Need New Names* and *Americanah.* It draws from Adichie's 2009 TED Talk entitled 'The Danger of a Single Story' and her 2017 feminist manifesto entitled *Dear Ijeawele.* The choice to base the framework for this work on Adichie's 'The Danger of a Single Story' and *Dear Ijeawele* is informed by the transformative agenda of her views as expressed in her TED Talk and in her feminist manifesto; these both connect to the main thrust of this chapter. I argue that the offering of alternative stories about African women that exhibit their complexity and multi-dimensionality by Bulawayo and Adichie is a powerful way of recreating and changing society's poor perception of women, and enhancing women's sense of self and value. Through a review of the portrayal of female characters in early African female writings and the presentation of women in these two primary texts, this chapter demonstrates the change in the works of Bulawayo and Adichie, and enhances the appreciation of what these writers have done in attempting to reclaim power for African women. To appreciate the strength of the new women in these two novels by Bulawayo and Adichie, a review of the presentation of women in the early works of African female writers is imperative.

In Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and *One is Enough* (1981), the women experience the hostility and pain of childlessness; and still remain

loyal to their husbands. Even when Amaka in *One is Enough* finally gets pregnant by a Catholic priest in the city after the failure of her first marriage, she is considered a bad woman for supposedly seducing a priest. Equally, in Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* (1974), *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977) and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) etc., Emecheta creates promising young female protagonists, who are armed with education and financial independence with which to overcome the stringent oppression of patriarchy; they attain appreciable victories over their various challenges, have considerable agency but are suddenly defeated through death, voodoo, physical abuse, or retrogression. This pattern is consistent with the previously mentioned texts, and seems to warn women against fighting for equality with men.

Most of the time, Emecheta allows women to be massively exploited by the men in their lives. Helen Chukwuma notes that 'This theme of economic exploitation and denial of opportunity of the female for the expressed benefit of the male is dominant in Emecheta's novels. Two of her novels explore this theme in great depth. *The Bride Price* (1976) and *The Slave Girl* (1977) show the economic value of women as analogous to chattels of trade and property for sale' (3).

Mariama Ba, like Emecheta, puts forward a not-too-impressive image of her protagonist in *So Long a Letter* (1981). Ramatoulaye, an educated and financially strong woman, refuses to quit her marriage, and mourns her deceased husband in spite of his betrayal of her. She bears all the ill-treatment and embarrassment from relatives at the funeral, and afterwards faces the challenge of financial bankruptcy alone: the result of her late husband's mismanagement of their collective funds and efforts.

Ifeoma Okoye in *Behind the Clouds* (1982) equally creates a protagonist who, regardless of her moral and financial support to her husband, is betrayed by him. After the many years of pain and embarrassment emanating from her childlessness, Ije discovers that her husband is impotent. Charles Nnolim decries Okoye's portrayal of her protagonist and other characters, 'All the characters of Ifeoma Okoye are types. Ije is too good a wife to even exchange a harsh word with the wicked mother-in-law who obviously sees no good in her' (33).

Amma Darko, like Emecheta, also offers a negative narrative about African women in her *Beyond the Horizon* (1995). Her protagonist spends the prime of her life as a sex worker, enslaved by herself and her husband. Her redemption comes belatedly, offering little difference to her already diminished life. Uche Umezuruike in an essay on *Beyond*

the Horizon comments on the futility of the protagonist's salvation, 'Mara achieves all she sets out to do and regains her "subjectivity," yet it turns out that she is trapped in the dominant patriarchal practices of sexual objectification as her determination to "do the [porn] films and stage shows and all there is to it" (131) demonstrates' (158).

Furthermore, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo in *Children of the Eagle* (2002) creates sophisticated female characters that fight to create a balance in the power relations between men and women in their society. Nevertheless, they are constantly compelled to channel their causes through men. Regardless of their educational and financial achievements, patriarchal institutions persistently consider them minors and incapable of engaging the male subject in serious public matters.

This review presents women as powerless. The few with minimal promise of escape attain little progress and so the stories repeated for more than four decades about African women suggest that women are powerless against patriarchy. What the female characters in these texts have in common are patriarchal discourses that are entrenched by either monolithic or a blend of traditional religious/Christian/Islamic practices. These are inherent in the cultural environment that glorifies the differences between male and female genders and therefore persistently consolidates the suppression of women. These narratives about the suppression of African women may be factual, but they do not constitute the only stories about African women. Thus, the need to tell stories that represent the realities of African women from myriad angles is paramount to avoid the definition of these women solely from the available lopsided ones. It is also imperative to create stories that capture the realities that Africans hope to see for their women as noted by Eke. Adichie's notions on 'The Danger of a Single Story' and *Dear Ijeawele*, which project new attitudes and balanced sensibilities for a better African society, are therefore apt frameworks for this chapter.

Adichie's 'The Danger of a Single Story' (2009) draws attention to the implications of using a singular idea about a people, an individual, or something to measure their totality. From her childhood experiences, she noted how the single story about their domestic help, which summed him up as poor, limited her perception of him and his family until she encountered them personally and realized they were more than that a singular story of poverty. Also, her childhood attempts at writing were narrow, depicting only European environments and sensibilities because of her singular exposure to Western literature. However, the works of Achebe and Camare Laye opened up new writing possibilities for her, 'So what the discovery

of African writers did for me was this. It saved me from having a single story of what books are.' She recounted also the shocking surprise of her roommate in the United States at her command of the English language; a response that sprang from the single story of backwardness and timidity about Africa that was circulated in the media. Adichie further observed 'show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become.' She noted the challenge with single stories, 'the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.' '[I]t robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar.' Stories, therefore, are powerful and can be used to either perpetually build up or destroy a people's reputation. Thus, the repeated stories of the oppression of African women offer the outside world a pitiable, derogatory, and second-class impression that could lead to discriminatory practices against them. Consequently, the inability of African writers or societies to depict women positively could be attributed to this same single-story syndrome. The need to de-emphasize difference and focus on similarities and strength is indeed an imperative for the creation of better societies in the future.

Also in her 2017 *Dear Ijeawele,* Adichie discussed fifteen suggestions about the best way to raise a girl-child into a fully developed and self-reliant individual. The letter touched on a wide-range of subject matters such as sex, sexuality, heterosexual romance, the incorporation of gender-neutrality in domestic and care-giving responsibilities, marriage, education, individuality, normalizing difference, etc. These topics refute and challenge the traditional ways of raising girls, which turn them into malleable, passive, and dependent females, whose images encourage the dominant depiction of them as feeble-minded and impoverished. She noted that raising girls with her fifteen suggestions would offer society strong, fearless, independent women and make the world a better place. Adichie observed that the transformation was achievable via the erasing of difference or inequality and the endorsing of gender-neutrality in matters of toy and colour preferences for boys and girls, career and job choices, assigning of tasks and responsibilities in public and private spaces, etc. Under the subject matter of marriage, she averred that girls should not be trained to focus their entire attention on marriage while boys are encouraged to expend huge energy on other things:

> Never speak of marriage as an achievement (…) We condition girls to aspire to marriage and we do not condition boys to aspire to marriage, and so there is already a terrible imbalance at the start. The girls will grow up to be women who are preoccupied with marriage. The boys will grow up to be men who are not preoccupied with marriage (…) The relationship is automatically uneven because the institution matters more to one than the other. (Adichie, 20–1)

From the foregoing, Adichie connects the challenges that many marriages face today to the problem of difference that is ingrained in the raising of boys and girls in various African societies.

Evidently, Adichie's 'The Danger of a Single Story' and *Dear Ijeawele* share certain concerns in common which make the blending of both views for this work appropriate. 'The Danger of a Single Story' focuses on the importance of defining or judging a thing from a comprehensive point of view, while *Dear Ijeawele* discusses ways that could enhance the raising of a girl into a total and full human being. Both conceptions connect in terms of underscoring the significance of erasing gender difference and all other differences that facilitate discrimination against women while focusing on the similarities in men and women that promote the recognition of their equal humanity. The views are equally centred on comprehensiveness, totality, and fullness, which lead to transformation and newness in a positive way and are therefore fit as frameworks for assessing the weight of transformation in the primary texts for this essay.

In March 2013 during the 'Women of the World Festival' at Southbank Centre, London, the panelists at a session entitled 'What's New in African Feminisms, Pop, People and Politics' offered insightful, subversive perspectives on gender and African woman's liberation, by underscoring the significance of using music and any other forces in transformative ways to create the kind of societies they wanted. In May 2013, Bulawayo's debut novel was published, and in an interview she said that writing was a kind of unconscious activism for her, 'I am thinking in terms of activism (…) for me it's not conscious. If it's not conscious, then I think it says something, reflects something about the kind of space I'm coming from (…) If I'm able to do it without thinking, then it means that, without it even being considered an issue, women from where I come from inhabit those problematic spaces' (Driver). Thus, in the spirit of the transformative movements alive in many forces in society, Bulawayo and Adichie created stories where they incorporated many dimensions to women's liberation and offered women power in myriad spaces that were initially the province

of men. These changes in the texts are examined in the following areas: *Bildungsroman* motif, women's autonomy over their bodies as well as power relations between men and women.

In Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* and Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, the protagonists' migration to the city are initiated for economic and domestic reasons primarily for the benefit of the men in their lives. They spring from their roles in facilitating the ambitions and personal interests of other people. Since no conscious effort or resource is invested in their personal development, whatever growth or advancement they attain comes by chance or accident. However, Bulawayo changes this script by creating a story where the protagonist and another female character's journeys are undertaken solely for their advantage and personal advancement. Fostalina migrates to America in search of a better life, and in turn invites Darling over. Each of them works hard for her self-development. Fostalina does three jobs, lives comfortably abroad and financially assists her sister in Zimbabwe. She adopts certain American sensibilities that encourage her to assert herself, embrace who she has become, and boldly accept relationships that enhance her life. She equally retains aspects of her African cultural attitudes that enhance her relationship with fellow Africans both in the diaspora and in Zimbabwe. Thus, Bulawayo aptly anticipates Adichie's suggestions in *Dear Ijeawele* about emancipating women from the cradle through a different kind of upbringing for girls, for Fostalina attains the level of what Adichie calls a 'full self' (26). She has a healthy self-esteem, has autonomy and respects other human beings; proof of her respect for other human beings is seen in her relationship with her niece, Darling.

Fostalina is the mother figure in Darling's life abroad, and facilitates her growth into a self-confident young girl. In her home, Darling attains some level of agency by getting a job and saving towards her education. Every moral, social, and economic investment in her is aimed at herself-advancement and fulfilment. Her sense of maturity and humanity is evident when she evades insensitive and unnecessary calls from her mother in Zimbabwe requesting financial assistance from her aunt. Her exposure to the harsh realities of life in America as an illegal black immigrant and her ability to survive facilitate her advancement in the *Bildungsroman* pattern. Bulawayo changes the *Bildungsroman* story pattern found in Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* and *Second Class Citizen*, and Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* where girls or women migrate for the sake of other people, not themselves.

Adichie does the same thing with Uju and Ifemelu in *Americanah*. Uju migrates first to the US with her baby for security reasons and

later sponsors Ifemelu's migration. Her challenges are immense as she combines her work, education, and single parenting roles. Her failures, especially in her medical examinations and her huge struggles to fit into the American society as a black woman, transform her into an irritable and short-tempered person. She quits her unhealthy romantic relationship and focuses on her career and in nurturing her son. By putting Uju in an unfriendly environment where she needs to survive on her own, Adichie causes her to maximize her potential, learn to do new things, and even multi-task, all of which combine to develop her strength, give her independence and power.

Ifemelu gets to the US in pursuit of her education. Without the economic and social protection of any father or mother figure for her there, she grapples with financial difficulties and a job search that plunges her into depression. Finally, the quest for survival forces her to take full charge of her life. She discovers how to be independent, and manage rejection and racism. Through these influences, she gains liberty and freedom in that aggressive environment without losing her sense of identity. She grows into a successful blogger, and all through her time in the US, she focuses mainly on her job and her relationship with Uju's family. Her romantic relationships are treated as secondary to her career and individuality. Therefore, Adichie and Bulawayo re-invent a counter narrative blueprint for female characters by empowering them to have the financial wherewithal to sponsor their own immigration and that of fellow females. They change the narrative about men exclusively possessing the economic and social power to initiate the migration of women or girls to the city or abroad. They equally alter one of the dominant reasons for girls'/women's migration from marriage to education. Mary Jane Androne in her essay on *Americanah* points out:

> While the usual pattern of the *Bildungsroman* as it developed in European literature centered on male experience and the process of males achieving autonomy and agency in a single, straightforward linear plot, this does not fit the experiences of female development. In his study of the African *Bildungsroman* Watter Collins comments on the contrasting plots of male and female protagonists and cites the critiques of Susan Rosowski, Elizabeth Abel, and Marianne Hirsch who problematize this genre as it applies to women. They argue that the male pattern of this genre emphasizes individual achievement as the primary goal and affiliation with a woman as a secondary action that differs from the female *Bildungsroman*. As Abel and Hirsch point out 'the heroine's developmental course is more conflicted, less direct: separation tugs against longing for fusion, and the heroine encounters

> the conviction that identity resides in intimate relationships' (Abel, Hirsch and Langland 1983, 10–11). Rowowski sees the female *Bildungsroman* as resulting in an 'awakening to limitations', since the growth that male characters experience is not available to her (quoted in Collins 2006, 26). (232)

Here, both authors modify the conventional model of the female *Bildungsroman* found in African literature by offering their female characters the same exposure made available to male characters thus giving their female protagonists self-reliance and full equality with their male counterparts. Also, the authors add value to single mothers, young girls, and middle-aged spinsters by according them respect and identity through their self-determination and economic freedom rather than via marriage or intimate relationships, which is typically the case in some female African migrant *Bildungsroman*. These new patterns reflect the realities obtainable in many African societies as more women achieve financial independence and freedom.

Another aspect of the paradigm shift found in *We Need New Names* and *Americanah* is in the female's autonomy over her body. This autonomy emanates from the weakening of the family structure. Bulawayo presents a family system with an absent father and an involuntarily single mother. The desertion of her husband leaves her solely shouldering the financial weight of the family including finding another source for her emotional health and stability. Also, Fostalina finds herself another man, when Kojo, her 'husband', fails to live up to his moral and emotional responsibilities. Darling observes:

> She was cleaning the basement one weekend and discovered the stashes and stashes of bottles. They talked about it but then it kept going on. That meant she and Uncle Kojo were done; now they are just living together, like neighbouring countries. Last week, I came home and caught Aunt Fostalina with Eliot (…) He took me by surprise and I screamed. A little while later, aunt Fostalina rushed in to see what was happening, wrapped in her favorite wrap cloth, the one with the little fading flags of our country. (Bulawayo 2013, 281)

The motif of 'little fading flags of our country' reflects the diminishing of her respect and loyalty to African conventions with regards to 'marriage' relationships. Even though her relationship with Kojo lacks legal recognition, the conventional marriage ethics sometimes influence the conduct of co-habiting African couples. However, Fostalina discards these codes and takes on new ones. Apart from Darling's slight disapproval of these women's doings, nothing else indicates that

their manners are transgressive. Typically, in many African novels, men initiate the dissolution of marriages or relationships. This is the case in Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, and Nwapa's *One is Enough,* and even in instances where the women initiate the move (Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter)*, they pack their belongings and quit their matrimonial homes. However, in Bulawayo's text, both Darling's mother and Fostalina move on in their hearts but remain in their homes. From their homes they nourish and build the new relationships. Their bold expression of their power over their bodies and their society's silence over it, suggest that the sensibilities of their environment have begun to embrace the equal humanity of both men and women.

Similarly, Adichie gives her female characters absolute rights over their bodies. This is evident when Ifemelu subverts the patriarchal culture that invests men with the exclusive right of initiating the physical expression of sexual love or tenderness in heterosexual relationships when she interrogates Obinze:

> 'Aren't we going to kiss?' She asked.
> He seemed startled. 'Where did that come from?'
> 'I'm just asking. We've been sitting here for so long.'
> 'I don't want you to think that is all I want.'
> 'What about what I want?'
> 'What do you want?'
> (…)
> 'You make me shy,' he said.
> 'Are you serious? Because you make me shy.'
> 'I don't believe anything makes you shy,' he said. (Adichie 2013, 62)

Ifemelu's request is a surprise to Obinze probably because he is not used to being asked such a question by a girl. His response suggests that he believes the move is his to initiate. However, the influence of his unorthodox upbringing as well as his liberal disposition towards life helps him to oblige her. Obinze's initial response reflects the traditional attitude of men over women's bodies. In some African female narratives such as Emecheta's *The Slave Girl,* Darko's *Beyond the Horizon,* and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle*, women's sexual needs are not always recognized and it is uncommon for a woman to initiate the sexual move. However, through Ifemelu, Adichie introduces a gender-neutral pattern for this necessity, and Obinze's acceptance of it is a transformative way of cleaning off difference and focusing on similarity, which recognizes that women also have sexual and emotional needs just like men.

Adichie, through another female character, Uju, reveals how women are reclaiming their bodies. Uju gets pregnant and decides to keep her pregnancy. Her family members respect her decision and accept it. Her decision to keep the baby is indicative of her right over her body. In some earlier texts, when unmarried girls find themselves in such situations, hurried arrangements are made between both families for the relationship to transform into a marriage. This is seen in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* and in Emecheta's *The Slave Girl.* Akachi Adimora contrives another way of handling such matters in *Children of the Eagle.* She transforms Eagle woman, the mother of the pregnant girl, into the pregnant one and she metaphorically bears the baby. Thus, in these traditional texts, the man's (legal) right over the woman's body gives the pregnant body societal acceptance. However, Adichie undermines that gender script by according respect and value to a pregnant body with no male husband figure by its side to authenticate it.

In addition, both authors create domestic violence-free spaces for their major female characters. In *We Need New Names,* though there is evidence of violence against women in terms of sexual molestation, it occurs sparingly; an indication that the author is not presenting a utopian society. Just like in 'The Danger of a Single Story', Bulawayo shows the good and the bad sides; refusing to present a single story. Thus, Fostalina and Darling's mother are exempted from such violence. Both interact with their partners as equals and there is no hint of fear in their relationships with the men in their lives. Similarly, Adichie does not create a paradise in *Americanah*, rather she reveals an abrupt change in Uju's relationship with the General that culminates in her independence and self-development. Before his demise, the General attempts to absolutely dominate her by making her entirely dependent on him for every naira. She is also forbidden in a diplomatic way from dating other men. These control measures are devoid of violence and so she embraces them gratefully. However, the sudden death of the General forces her to embrace a new way of life: independence. Thus, Adichie uses Uju's mistake and its consequences to proffer an alternative way of being for women. In her view, economic independence is paramount for all women if they are to be free from patriarchal control. Furthermore, Adichie relocates Uju to the US, an environment that already accepts the notion of single parenthood, where Uju will better survive as a single mother.

Also, in Ifemelu's relationships in Nigeria and abroad, she relates with her partners as equals. They show mutual respect for each other

and even when there are disagreements, these are resolved without physical or verbal violence. This is Adichie's way of recreating society through her stories. Ifemelu interacts with men who have gender-neutral attitudes towards life and through their peaceful co-existence, new ways of being are introduced into society.

Another modification in the previous styles found in texts written by African women is Bulawayo's and Adichie's consistency in ensuring that female characters, especially their protagonists and major characters, are not economically exploited. Patterns of economic exploitation of female characters are seen in Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* and *The Joys of Motherhood*, Darko's *Beyond the Horizon,* Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*, Unigiwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, etc. In all these examples, except for Unigwe's text, the women's or girls' money is employed in the advancement of their ungrateful male counterparts. The culture of exploiting the female to advance the male may be seen as a form of gender politics that promotes the subjugation of the female in order to establish the male. However, in the two texts, the female characters use their money for self-advancement and the advancement of fellow women. This is evident in the relationship between Fostalina and Darling in *We Need New Names* and between Uju and Ifemelu in *Americanah.* In addition, the mother-figure model found in these two texts is different from Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* and Emecheta's *The Slave Girl.* In *Beyond the Horizon,* Mara's mother figure in Ghana, Mama Kiosk, attempts to teach her self-independence but fails. In Germany, her mother figure repeats Mama Kiosk's method of prodding her and believing that her epiphany will come. Equally in *The Slave Girl,* Mama Palagada gently teaches Ogbanje but after her death, Ogbanje retreats even more into naivety and backwardness.

Bulawayo and Adichie reject the earlier pattern of gentle coaching, which is not progressive, and instead provide mother figures who uproot their mentees from their former environments into new and foreign ones, and then practically introduce them to unfamiliar territories of competition, hostility, etc, where their personalities are forced, through their struggle for survival, to toughen and mature. Thus, through this practical exposure, these female protagonists achieve autonomy and agency, which is a dominant transformative feature for progress and development.

In conclusion, Bulawayo explains what she does with her writings in one of her interviews, 'it is through writing that we speak the unspoken. It's interesting because some of the things that I write about are things that I never ever say. Because we have a language that does

not allow you to have those kinds of conversations' (Driver). Thus, coming from a patriarchal society where oral language is constrained to communicate certain codes, Bulawayo uses her art to express what she believes is healthy for women and society. This political move of correcting things via literary texts has long been in existence, for Achebe mentions that his art is functional and arms him with the power to recreate his world. Bulawayo and Adichie, therefore, recreate their world through their works and because literature shapes and is shaped by society, the hope of Maureen Eke (2012), which is that a better world be created for women by women, gradually begins to set into African societies as more writers continue to push the boundaries of women's roles and society's expectations of them. Through offering their female characters the *Bildungsroman* version previously used for men, granting women rights over their bodies, providing a more practical mother-figure, erasing the incidence of domestic violence, and ensuring that economic exploitation of female characters is non-existent, Bulawayo and Adichie invent better ways of reconstructing society's perception of women, which could transform into men and women's recognition of their equal humanity.

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Religion, Capitalism & Politics

The Revolutionary Imagination in the Plays of Nawal El Saadawi

H. OBY OKOLOCHA

Nawal El Saadawi's plays are, to say the least, bold, fearless, unconventional, and of course controversial, much like their author. The issues she addresses are audacious and barge into areas where 'angels fear to tread'. Reading El Saadawi is often like a dangerous roller-coaster ride in a circus, fearful and at the same time exhilarating, but no one can ignore her messages or the questions she raises. Her literary texts show that her creative imagination is indeed revolutionary and is geared towards achieving social justice and equity.

God Resigns at the Summit Meeting (1996, henceforth referred to as *God Resigns*) and *Isis* (1985) are primarily concerned with the operations of religious institutions in the world at large, but particularly in Africa and the Middle East. The plays courageously question the political and capitalist tendencies inherent in religious practices, expose the ways in which old and new religion(s), especially monotheistic religions, are structured and distorted to oppress and exploit the masses, build cultures of ignorance, and encourage social stratification. Saadawi attributes the root of injustice to misinterpretation and blind adherence to religious doctrines. Her two plays highlight how religious practices jettison reason and point out that religious fanaticism ultimately results in chaos, destruction, oppression, poverty, and death. In particular, the plays showcase the oppression of women inherent in religious doctrines and practices. Common to both plays is the strongly voiced call for the abolition of totalitarian doctrines. Above all, Saadawi uses her plays to instigate the resistance and debate that would lead to a functional democracy. The plays represent El Saadawi's most irrepressible qualities. She is incurably dissident and fearless.

Based on depictions in the plays, this chapter argues that there is a close similarity between the operations of religion, capitalism, and politics. It demonstrates that the three social institutions exploit the populace, discriminate against women, and create class distinctions. It

shows that violence, an intrinsic part of religious and political operations, is also a trademark of capitalism. Furthermore, this chapter highlights transgressive and challenging ideas emanating from the plays, such as the idea that God has failed to deliver the ideas he represents: justice, peace and love to his people. It concludes that religion, as presented by Saadawi in *God Resigns* and *Isis*, 'has been misused to camouflage unholy realities such as the aggression and exploitation of the masses' (Brinda J. Mehta, 13). In addition, events in the plays enable the paper to illustrate that the operations of religion are synonymous with the operations of power politics. Also, Saadawi's presentations suggest that religion is inherently an oppressive construct, and shares similarities with capitalism. The chapter evaluates events in *God Resigns* and *Isis* in line with the characteristics of capitalism and concepts of politics.

Mike Haralambos and Martin Holborn assert that 'politics occurs when there are differentials in power; any social relationship that involves power differentials is political' (521). Therefore, it means that all social relationships in which there is the quest for, or the acquisition, use, misuse, retention, or loss of power are political. Apart from glaring contexts of power differentials in *God Resigns* and *Isis*, the plays are replete with situations of 'acquisition, use, misuse of power and varied power hierarchies.'

Extending the frontiers of politics indicated by Haralambos and Holborn, Kate Millet argues that politics is not an activity confined to political parties and parliaments, but one which exists in all 'power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another' (23). In Millet's view, every relationship in which there is power or advantage over others is political because the essence of politics is the acquisition of power. Millet's views enable the work to show that the religious arena is, indeed, an underrated space of power politics.

The plays also display the operations of capitalism in religious practices. Karl Marx was convinced that social stratification and inequality in human society are economically determined. Marx was particularly interested in the two classes that emerge from the capitalist system: the capitalists (bourgeoisie), who own the means of production – the machinery and the factories – and the proletariat or working class, (Schaefer 207). In line with Marx, Richard Schaefer identifies 'private ownership and maximization of profit' as the most significant characteristics of capitalist systems and that capitalism 'tolerates monopolistic practices' (446). Marx's convictions and Schaefer's explanations, adequately illustrated in both plays, enable

this chapter to confirm the capitalist tendencies of religious operations.

Of particular interest to this study is Marx's prediction:

> [The economic] exploitation of the proletariat will inevitably lead to the destruction of the capitalist system because the workers will revolt. First, the working class must develop *class consciousness* – a subjective awareness of common vested interests and the need for collective political action to bring about social change (…) Revolutionary leaders will guide the working class in its class struggle. (Summarized in Schaefer 207, emphasis in the original)

True to Marx's prediction, capitalism, the platform of exploitation and oppression in both plays, necessitates the revolt in *God Resigns* and *Isis*.

Although El Saadawi's works continue to receive critical reviews, Ernest Emenyonu and Maureen Eke state that El Saadawi 'deserves far more than the critical acclaim and attention she has received so far from scholars' (2). They explain that the shortfall is partly because most of the literary world do not have access to her writings because she is:

> An incurably courageous free spirit whose writings denounce political injustice, social corruption, and gender inequities in an era of lethal democracy; an ultra-feminist intellectual whose ideas are unalterably in conflict with the very pillars and foundations of absolute patriarchy; a fearless universal mouthpiece for marginalized womanhood. (Emenyonu and Eke 3)

Emenyonu and Eke's description recall the image of Cervantes' Don Quixote, a champion of difficult causes. However, presentations in *God Resigns* and *Isis* demonstrate that El Sadaawi is not an impractical idealist like the mid-17th century hero. Her plays proffer practical solutions to societal problems.

In the same vein as Emenyonu, and Eke, Brinda J. Mehta describes Saadawi as:

> One of the most controversial and outspoken defenders of human rights from the Arab world. Her relentless fight for justice and equality…has made her the object of religious and political targeting (…) These aggressions manipulated by the state and its agencies have had the opposite effect from silencing this veteran of dissidence and creative action by making her even more tenacious in her fight against the inequities of class-based, capitalist patriarchal structures in Egypt and the so- called Third World (7–8)

Mehta and Emenyonu's descriptions of Saadawi attest to her indomitable spirit and affirm her revolutionary quest for social justice through creativity.

Elaborating on the inaccessibility of El Sadaawi's writings, Adele S. Newson-Horst reveals that *God Resigns* 'caused quite a stir in the Islamic World' and that the police ordered Saadawi's publisher to destroy all the copies of the play and that he obeyed to thwart persecution (11). The fact that El Sadaawi's fictional representations of her society can cause the authorities this level of discomfort confirms Emenyonu's opinion of the playwright as 'an ultra-feminist intellectual whose ideas are unalterably in conflict with the very pillars and foundations of absolute patriarchy' (Emenyonu and Eke 3). Such situations probably account for why scholars do not have easy access to her texts.

Commenting on *God Resigns* and *Isis*, Newson-Hurst posits: 'Common to both works is a call for democracy – the participation of those who have been disenfranchised. Isis, the female antagonist of the play named after her, and a dethroned goddess, mobilizes the peasants and slaves while Bint Allah calls for broad participation in the summit' (Newson-Horst,16). Embedded in 'the call for democracy' mentioned by Newson- Horst, is Marx's class-consciousness, the collective awareness of inequities and situations of injustice and 'the need for collective political action to bring about social change' (quoted in Schaefer 207). Isis and Bint Allah represent the revolutionary leaders that will provide directions in the struggle for justice.

Jane Plastow, seasoned theatre practitioner and literary scholar, describes El Saadawi's *God Resigns* as an 'investigation into the roots, mythologies, and absurdities of these religions' (123). She further states: 'El Saadawi has argued against distortions of Islam that allow patriarchal oppression of women throughout the body of her writing and against the capitalism of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim religions that connive to suppress ordinary people' (123). Plastow's identification of patriarchal oppression and the capitalism embedded in all the religions as well as Newson-Horst's recognition of disenfranchisement, form the platform of Marx's prediction that oppressive and disenfranchised situations will inevitably lead to revolt. These negative situations and the resulting quest for justice is effectively demonstrated in the two plays.

God Resigns at the Summit Meeting is set in the Middle East. The play begins by invoking the founders of the dominant religions: Christianity represented by Jesus Christ, Judaism represented by Abraham and Moses, and Islam represented by the Prophet Muhammad. They have

come together in the desert to lament the failure of God's promises to his people. These iconic religious leaders, other famous religious characters such as Satan, Eve, and Bint Allah, and goddesses and a crowd of ordinary people go to the mountain where God resides and demand entry to heaven to speak with him. Saadawi gives this visit to God a dialectical thrust by including people well known in history as well as current world leaders. Thus, the gathering includes Anwar El Sadat of Egypt, Anthony and Cleopatra, Queen Nefertiti, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Ronald Reagan, King Farouk, Bill Clinton, Benjamin Netanyahu, George Bush and many others famed for varied attributes. This 'motley crowd' also comprises ordinary folk such as factory workers, pawnbrokers, doctors, peasants, prostitutes, soldiers, students, and agricultural workers (148).

However, God's messenger, Radwan, intends to let in only the great prophets, but the people, having given Radwan offerings as usual, rush through the door and enter. They all see God. They all have many problems that baffle them, so they seek answers from God. Jesus wants to know why his father allowed him to be betrayed on the cross and why he downplayed the role of his mother, who has always supported him. Jesus asks why God has permitted such confusion in the world, made men unable to understand one another and wage bloody wars in his name. Mohammad wonders why God has allowed corrupt Islamic leaders to prosper and become more economically powerful than the ordinary faithful and why he has allowed the deliberate misinterpretations of the holy book. Abraham confesses that his conscience is burdened because he has done many wrongs in compliance with God's orders. Eve questions the marginalization of women; she wonders why all the prophets and emissaries are men. She asks: 'Is there not a single woman good enough to be a prophet?' (164).

Bint Allah, Saadawi's voice of logic, reason, and justice confronts God about the historical oppression of women. She asks God why he has only sons and no daughters and why there are no female prophets. She asks him why he ordered the people of Israel to kill women prisoners who were not virgins and, at the same time, hand over the virgins to soldiers who would rape them. Her questions are many and disturbing. She wants to know why God has allowed millions of people who profess his name to fight each other in his name. Worst of all, she asks why God has made his good book so ambiguous and open to such varied and contradictory interpretations that it enables his representatives, priests, and prophets to use his word for more evil than good. Finally, Bint Allah points out the failure of religion to solve problems.

Ironically, Satan is also a complainant. He is disenchanted with the state of the universe and his role in it. He wants to resign because all he gets for his operations in the universe are curses. These characters speak their various complaints to God. Male and female personages emphasize his injustice to women. They ask God a multitude of questions to which he is unable to provide answers. All of them wonder why God never speaks back to them no matter how much they pray to him. These people, silent, obedient and faithful in executing God's commands express doubts about his messages and the confusion they feel, exposing their innately logical minds. Will God react with vengeance and punish them for daring to question his authority? Using the confrontation with God, Saadawi opens a floodgate for the introspective re-assessment of religious beliefs and raises fearful questions. It would be impossible for this article to deal with the entire spectrum of social, political, spiritual, and religious questions Saadawi raises in these plays.

Unlike *God Resigns*, *Isis* is set in polytheistic Egypt before the advent of Christianity, Islam, or Judaism, in the era of the worship of numerous gods and goddesses. The play begins with a discussion between the new self-styled Almighty God, Ra, and Seth the newly installed God of the earth. They celebrate their successful coup d'état in which they have murdered or dethroned other weaker gods and goddesses. The protagonist, Ra, establishes a new world order, an 'era of supreme men, the era of masculinity, the era strong men rulers' (29). Ra proclaims himself the supreme god, ruler of the sun and sky. He kills Geb, the god of the earth and enthrones Seth, Geb's son, and his faithful loyalist as the god of the earth. Ra rules with three principal doctrines: that he is the only god, and there can be no other gods beside him; whoever doubts the sacred quality of Ra will be burned to death or thrown to the wild animals to be devoured; and that only sons can inherit him.

The opening scene in *Isis* brings the major issues of the play to the fore. First is the use of religion as a tool for the acquisition of power, political dominance, wealth, and influence. Seth boasts that they have 'won the battle with the power of our faith, our weapons, and men's solidarity' (29). Ra argues that 'holy war is what assures victory to the just god over the false god and the fake goddesses' (36). At any slight opposition, Ra recourses to burning people to death or throwing them to wild animals to be devoured, confirming that tyrannical acquisition of power can only be sustained by violence, falsehood, and ignorance. Notably, Ra insists: 'Obedience does not survive without terror, and terror does not exist without strong authority and dreadful fright' (33).

The play also highlights the total disregard for women. Ra is emphatic that daughters cannot inherit the throne after him. He declares, 'only a son may inherit while a daughter has no share' (14). The disregard for women is so entrenched in the fabric of ancient Egyptian society that the Army Chief thinks that the best way to acquire a woman is simply to rape her. He says to Seth: 'I, my lord, do not comprehend any relationship with women except for rape. There is no other way to conquer women except by force' (64). The Army Chief is puzzled that Seth cannot win Isis over. He asks Seth: 'Have you not tried to rape her, my lord? Women adore being raped' (64). Seth too is convinced that 'a woman was not created to rule. She was created to become an affectionate mother and a gentle, quiet wife who waits for her husband with a tender smile, a cheerful face, and a soft, perfumed body (…) Nothing disturbs her mind or heart except her husband' (79). Furthermore, Ra keeps a harem and enforces polygamy to ensure the purity of children's bloodlines. However, the rigid restrictions for the harem and proscriptions for women suffer a setback when Ra catches his favourite wife in bed with his harem keeper. The audacity of Ra's wife having an affair with her husband's slave is the playwright's revolutionary breaking of the bonds that chain women to forced relationships and other social limitations.

In *Isis*, El Saadawi carefully illustrates that corruption, greed, and avarice have always existed among men and gods since the inception of the world. Ra rewards Seth's devotion by killing Geb (Seth's father) and enthroning him as the god of the earth in place of his father. Seth's thirst for power is such that he readily sacrifices his blood relatives. He assures Ra that his devotion 'is above my relationship with my sister, brother, or any blood relatives. I have fought on your side against my mother, Nut, and there is no closer blood relation than the mother' (31). Like Ra, Seth is power hungry, wantonly brutal, corrupt, and far removed from being godly. Not only does the playwright illustrate that religious practice is often far removed from godliness, but she also highlights the exploitative structure of religious operations, which shares close similarities with the structure of capitalist operations.

The following similarities between religion and capitalism stand out in the plays. All religions, including the traditional ones, require blind allegiance and obedience without question. By emphasizing faith, belief in destiny, and reliance on divine solutions, these religions discourage knowledge, reason, and logic, thereby perpetuating ignorance. For blind obedience, believers expect to be rewarded with prayers answered here on earth and eternal life in heaven. In *Isis,*

Almighty Ra will not tolerate any disobedience, lack of faith, questions that contradict him, or any sign of doubt in him or his absolute powers. His doctrines are firm: 'Let all of them know that I am the god Ra, who may forgive all flaws except the flaw of skepticism and unfaithfulness' (30). Ra positions himself as unquestionable and undefinable and he inscribes a death sentence by burning for 'whoever doubts [his] scared quality'. He reiterates, 'I am the god Ra, god of the sun, who owns all the sky, and there is no god, but I sitting on the throne of the sky (*Isis,* 33). Claiming ownership of the endless concept of sky is a declaration of total supremacy and power.

In *God Resigns*, power belongs to one almighty monotheistic male god, who wields absolute power and whose nature cannot be deciphered by mere mortals. The Abrahamic male God invests certain powers in his representatives here on earth, such as priests and prophets, who exercise these powers as they please. In the play, prophets and lay faithful execute all of God's commands, but now they express doubts and confusion over his messages. Prophet Abraham is confused and afraid. He confronts God:

> My conscience is stricken and I fear to die before having let out what torments me. (…) I have done many wrongs, all of them in compliance with your orders. I have killed people, and stolen their lands unjustly (…) Yet, at the same time my faith in you has never been shaken (…) I executed your orders to the letter, at times, I questioned your decisions to kill, asked you why we should massacre thousands of people just because one of them refused to obey you? But you never listened to me. You listened only to yourself, worshipped yourself and made us your slaves, forced upon us blind obedience (*God Resigns*, 146)

Prophet Abraham's statement exonerates mortals of blame for their wrongdoings if their actions are strictly in obedience to a higher unquestionable authority. Therefore, the failure of mankind becomes equivalent to the failure of the instructing authority or who they worship. Prophet Abraham also exposes the rational minds of mortals. Abraham's doubts and questions are apt and necessary, but the reader wonders if mortals will be punished for daring to question God's absolute power and authority. As El Saadawi intends, these presentations enable an introspective re-evaluation of long-standing beliefs and dogma.

Similarly, in capitalist social structures, power belongs to the capitalists who exercise it as they please. In religion and capitalism, only a limited few have power, even then, the power is stratified. Like religion, capitalism requires total submission of the people to

an absolute power. For example, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's play, *Hands that Crush Stone*, depicts the operations of capitalism. Chief Mbu, the stone quarry owner, pays low wages for hard work. He does not tolerate civil requests for pay increases, neither does he tolerate any questions because questions from his workers are construed as dissident behaviour. The stone quarry workers are expected to obey all oppressive rules silently. Capitalists, typified by Ezeigbo's fictional Chief Mbu, utilize people's labour wilfully, and the masses have no control over their wages, neither do they have a say in the allocation of communal resources. The operation of capitalism in Adimora-Ezeigbo's play is much like the religious operations in Saadawi's plays. In capitalism, the workers/masses are powerless and in religion, God or his prophets and disciples have the ultimate authority, the masses are only required to obey blindly.

Like capitalism, religion exploits the masses. Even the poorest people must offer sacrifices at considerable costs to avoid the supreme being's anger and gain his blessings. In *Isis*, the God Ra accepts only hefty sacrifices, and this would translate to tithes and offerings in contemporary times. The Army Chief in *Isis* reminds Seth as they get ready to pray 'that god Ra does not accept a prayer bare like this (…) The deities need the gore too. There is no prayer without slaughter and meat (…) Sacrifices, gore, slaughter, all the same (…) *There is nothing for free*' (my emphasis, 58). The Army Chief goes further to state that 'Almighty Ra does not accept a single bull anymore. That was before the vogue of higher prices' (58). Saadawi satirizes the fact that even prayer is not for free. Not only has prayer become expensive, but it also depends on inflation and economic conditions.

In addition, priests do not have to labour to earn a living like ordinary people, so the old priest in the temple of Geb cannot conceive of working to earn a living like others do. He demands sacrifices and the following conversation ensues:

> ISIS: People in the village are poor peasants who sell their eggs and cannot afford to eat them (…) How do we ask them to offer us sacrifices sir?
>
> THE PRIEST: And how do the deities and priests eat? We do not have a source of income except through the sacrifices (…) I have never in my life seen deities who sweat for their means of survival. What is the difference then between deities and the people if everyone must work? *It is the people who are supposed to work and suffer while deities sit on the thrones, where the sacrifices are brought to them without work or effort* (my

emphasis, *Isis* 85)

Clearly, religious practices function like capitalism, in which the upper class exploit the labour and resources of the poor people. However, Saadawi's female characters actively resist capitalist attitudes through critical questions. They reject blind obedience thereby upholding the author's vision for a just society.

Similarly, in *God Resigns*, everyone must bring something to God at every visit. Master Radwan informs the people that God has benevolently agreed to see them because he was in 'a good mood at the time'. He asks them: 'did you remember to bring slaughterings with you? My master accepts only lamb, or veal, or young cow's meat. Those of you who have come empty-handed had better go back to where you came from' (*God Resigns* 144). Clearly, only those who can afford expensive offerings and gifts will be granted access and an audience. In both plays, the gods and their representatives live on the labour of the people.

Another issue is that both religion and capitalism create class distinctions. The gods and other high-ranking personages in *Isis* do not interact directly with ordinary people. The old priest in *Isis* states clearly that the office of a priest is higher than that of ordinary men so he cannot dirty his hands with labour. The Army Chief in *Isis* states that 'the poor do not count. They are simply a number. What is important is the class of elites, the descendants of the kings and the gods' (60). Ra and Seth are distant from the people they govern. Only Isis and Maat live among the people, work and interact with common people closely. The old priest's perception that only ordinary people are supposed to work and suffer while priests and deities receive free sacrifices is also an indication of class consciousness (85). Notably, Saadawi's characters question the idea of inequality between people. They overturn class distinction and institute a new system in which everyone is equal.

In *God Resigns*, class distinction is also evident. One of the complaints of the people is God's refusal to interact with them. All the prophets have been searching for him and wanting to meet him. Many do not even have a fax number or an address to reach God. Now, the people have gathered wanting to know why God never speaks back to them; no matter how much they pray to him, he does not interact with them. Like the gods in *Isis*, the monotheistic all-powerful God is unreachable. The two plays show that religion creates definite class distinctions just as in capitalist social systems.

The playwright illustrates how religion oppresses women in

various ways. For example, in *Isis*, Ra kills Nut, the female goddess of the sky, takes over, and declares it 'an era of supreme men, the era of masculinity, the era of strong men rulers' (29). Furthermore, he declares that only sons can inherit property and positions of authority and that daughters have no place in the scheme of things. Ra has dissolved female power totally, but he does not achieve complete success in subduing women. When he discovers his wife's affair with his Ethiopian slave and his harem keeper, Ra is outraged at her audacity. In response, he castrates all the slaves who have access to his harem and circumcises all the women as punishment for the grave transgression of adultery. Saadawi's representations tell readers that religion never sanctioned circumcision, but it was, like many other issues, motivated by the need to control women by suppressing their sexual desires.

In the same vein, in *God Resigns,* the irrepressible Bint Allah, cast as the daughter of Allah, is El Sadaawi's mouthpiece. The idea of Allah having a daughter is sacrilegious. Still, it is a comic counterpart to Christ as the son of God. Bint Allah questions the patriarchal construction of religion and its oppression of women. She raises several issues mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Embedded in traditional and modern religions is a deliberate distortion of history to delete the contributions of women to society throughout the ages and the existence of goddesses, and to relegate women to the background. In her revolutionary bid for justice, El Saadawi struggles to debunk patriarchal myths by digging up hidden truths. Mehta argues that Saadawi reclaims a woman's place by 'uncovering the obscured feminized roots of religious history through the decoding of established historiographies and the retrieval of forgotten archival knowledge' (13). Saadawi clearly retrieves forgotten knowledge in her depictions in *God Resigns*. She suggests that contrary to patriarchal intentions, women are in fact the masterminds of civilization since the creation of Eve, the first woman. Eve's inquisitive spirit leads mankind to knowledge. Eve challenges Radwan:

> Master Radwan, I wonder why my name does not appear among the women who played a role in history. Why are you (…) denying that I was the first to lead the human race to knowledge and not death as he says in his books? He mentioned my name in his first book, the Torah, but accused me of original sin. Then, he left out my name completely from his third book, the Qur'an. (174)

Altering or deleting history is an effective way of dehumanizing an

individual. In retelling 'the original sin', Eve is cast as a villain, instead of a heroine who insists on knowledge instead of blissful ignorance. Instead of being all-knowing, God cannot provide answers to any of the questions they ask him, implying that he is ignorant, arbitrary, and often sadistic and wanton. El Saadawi's imagination is indeed audacious as well as revolutionary.

A major point emanating from *God Resigns* and *Isis* is that religion uses violence to ensure capitulation. Ra, Seth, and the General apply violence to ensure total obedience to unjust laws. Ra is quick to burn people alive, cut off their genitals, or throw them to wild animals to devour them as punishment for lack of faith or disobedience (*Isis*, 30). Ra emphasizes: 'I need the holy book and the dagger together. A god cannot neglect either of them' (36). Violence is also seen in the message of hellfire and proscriptions applicable to those who are disobedient. The situation is the same in *God Resigns*. Bint Allah reminds God that all the wars fought are in his name. She states: 'Leaders of the world declare war holding the Torah, or the Bible or the Qur'an between their hands. They carry your Books, my Lord, and fight wars from Israel to South Africa, from Asia to Latin America. My Lord, you have made wars of plunder sacred' (162). Nations and people go to war, perpetrate gruesome violence on others holding the Bible, Qua'ran or the Torah as justification.

Violence is also a trademark of capitalism. Bint Allah reminds the reader that millions of people all over the world were forced to believe in tyrannical world leaders such as Hitler, Benjamin Netanyahu, Saddam Hussein, Anwar Sadat, and many others for fear of death, torture or imprisonment (*God Resigns*, 161). Nations with military might have used violence to acquire wealth and natural resources belonging to other nations. The violent struggle for resources and the wars in the contemporary Middle East, which inevitably involve other parts of the world, is evidence that capitalism also relies on violence to succeed. The transition from faith-based myths to identifiable facts and situations in *God Resigns* is used to illustrate the close similarity between the operations of religious doctrines/structures and modern capitalist societies. The only difference between religion and capitalism appears to be the divine nature of God, while capitalism consist of a class of persons who are involved in primitive acquisition, oppression, and exploitation.

Significantly, *God Resigns* and *Isis* expose religion as a political construct. Throughout the ages, religious leaders have used religion to keep their followers malleable, curb inquisitive spirits, subdue reason, and make it possible for people to adhere to subversive laws. Bint

Allah captures the situation when she states that 'Millions of people continue to believe because they are afraid of being punished in this world or in the next, of being burnt in hellfire, of being chased out of their land, or killed because they have disobeyed Allah, the Imam or God's representatives on earth' (161).

Apart from El Saadawi's plays, history books abound with tales of European invasion of other nations in the guise of spreading Christianity to other regions of the world. The plunder of other lands and resources, a capitalist venture, was accomplished by violence and sustained by religion. The colonialists used it to seduce the minds of Africans while pursuing economic acquisition and a political agenda, and contemporary African political leaders continue to use religion in much the same manner as the white imperialists used it. As *God Resigns* illustrates clearly, the various governments fighting for supremacy in the oil-rich Middle East are doing so in the name of God with the active support of religious leaders who misinterpret religious texts to suit varied economic, political, and other nefarious purposes.

However, El Saadawi presents solutions to the problems she raises. She advocates critical thinking, reason, logic, questions, courage, persistence, and the rejection of blind adherence to doctrines. These attitudes will guarantee justice and equity. The goddess Isis exemplifies Saadawi's ideals. Although Ra has destroyed the temples of female goddesses, their images, and their place in history, some people persist in the worship of Isis as the goddess and symbol of love, intelligence, and mercy. Isis and her husband live in a small village and set up an egalitarian community where all persons are equal; gods, goddesses, priests, and peasants work for a living, and no one is worthy of sacrifices. Seth discovers the new community and plans to attack and eliminate it, but Isis rallies the people and convenes a court to judge Seth's crimes. It finds Seth guilty. This shows that justice will prevail if or when, as Marx predicts, people become aware of 'common vested interests and the need for collective political action to bring about social change.' With these dramatic presentations, El Saadawi advocates the democratic participation of all disenfranchised groups in society.

The awareness of common oppression and exploitation, amounting to 'vested interest', is what motivates and energizes both prophets and lay faithful to adamantly seek audience with God. The playwright proposes Bint Allah as a prophet. She uses varied discussions to ask God why he has repeatedly failed to offer love and justice, the ideas he is supposed to represent to his people. She is the voice of reason and logic. God is unable to counter her logic. Her tough questions

in the debate contribute to God's decision to resign. At the end of the play, God admits to and repents of sexism, racism, favouritism towards the rich and powerful, and his history of self-worship. He confesses that he stole these ideas from older gods. More importantly, he acknowledges that these ideas are wrong and recognizes that there cannot be love when people rule through fear and proscriptions. At this point, God wishes to resign and live as a human being. Having God resign his duty as an abject failure is probably the most revolutionary take anyone can imagine.

God Resigns and *Isis* denounce social and political injustice, reject gender inequality, and vehemently urge people to discard blind dogma innate in religious doctrines. In both plays, El Saadawi suggests that religious doctrines have been deliberately misinterpreted and distorted to achieve varied capitalist and political purposes. She demonstrates that religious teachings, which demand blind faith and obedience, necessarily reject logic and reason, thereby building a culture of ignorance. This culture of ignorance enables the oppression and exploitation of the poor.

The playwright questions the concept of God as presented in different religions and indicates that these ideas of God in the Bible, Quar'an and Torah are not really original, as they have been borrowed from earlier traditional religions and manipulated to serve contemporary patriarchal, capitalist, and political ideals. In both plays, she suggests that the solution to religion is logic and reason, which will make room for equity and justice. She advocates awareness, unity, and collective activism as necessary requisites with which to combat oppression.

However, the most challenging and transgressive idea that emanates from the two plays is that God is a cultural construction of the collective unconscious imagination of humans. El Saadawi implies that God is an idea just as people are afraid of ghosts, witches, and the supernatural. He is fiction! Which is why Jane Plastow describes the events at the end of *God Resigns* as a final meta-theatrical twist. The Chief of Police comes to arrest Bint Allah and she declares in astonishment, 'But it's only a play, something imagined.' Then, the Chief of Police asks her 'Do you want it to be real too?' (*God Resigns,* 201). These presentations attest that Nawal El Saadawi is indeed a revolutionary playwright.

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Approaching Gang Violence on the Cape Flats in Rehana Rossouw's What Will People Say?

ALEXANDRA NEGRI

The Cape Flats are a suburb located between the Cape Peninsula and the mountains south-east of Cape Town in South Africa. Once a seabed, this sandy plain on the city's outskirts is isolated from the CBD (Central Business District) and the formerly white areas by the N2 highway in the north, False Bay in the south, the M5 highway in the west, and Lansdowne Road in the east – an island of danger that looms like a dark shadow over the glittering facades of the Waterfront and the sleek Camps Bay cafés that feature so prominently in tourist guides of the Mother City. The crime-ridden townships of the Cape Flats are a blatant reminder of the spatial legacy of segregation as a feature of apartheid, and the mass removals from District Six. It is to the predominantly so-called coloured Cape Flats areas such as Elsies River, Bonteheuvel, Mitchell's Plain and Manenberg that most District Sixers were relocated post-1950. As Steffen Jensen asserts, District Six was essentially held together by 'an elaborate social web (…) that broke down in relation to the forced removals to the Cape Flats'. (44) Similarly, Don Pinnock points out that '[t]he difference between District Six and newer places like Manenberg and Lavender Hill (…) is that the former was a community which cohered and policed itself and the latter are, comparatively, socially disarrayed and organisationally unglued' (186). It is to this 'shadow city' – 'woven deeply into the urban tapestry of Cape Town (…), its threads firmly anchored in the capitalist economy, knotted into local control and governance systems (…), its activities (…) hidden to all but those who know where to look' (Pinnock 2016, 77) – that Rehana Rossouw's novel *What Will People Say?* (2015a) also turns.

Set in 1986 Hanover Park, it revolves around the tribulations and eventual dissolution of the Fourie family: churchgoing mother Magda, who strives to raise her children 'decent'; father Neville, traumatized by childhood abuse by churchmen and so involved in his vigilante

group that he fails to see what is going on under his nose until it is too late; the oldest daughter, Suzette, set on escaping the confines of the Cape Flats by becoming a model; the middle child, Nicky, who slowly becomes involved in anti-apartheid politics; and the youngest, Anthony, who, after getting lured into joining the Junky Funky Kids (JFK) gang, spirals down into the vortices of the 'shadow city' as the novel moves inexorably towards its gruesome climax and final catastrophe.

Trapped in the claustrophobic banality of a scramble for respectable life, the Lurie children eventually forge a path for themselves that leads out of the triad of home, church, and school, within whose deceptively safe boundaries their parents, especially Magda, hope to see them navigate their lives. While Suzette's modelling is deemed indecent by her mother and her younger sister's political activity inappropriate, it is Anthony's involvement with the JFKs that brings about the eventual collapse of the family's carefully built 'house of respectability'. The key conflict is between notions of respectability on the one hand and *coloured* gangsterism on the other. Where Magda wishes her children to lead their lives in accordance with middle-class standards of respectability, none of her children manages to conform to the latter, with Anthony embodying what Steffen Jensen calls 'an abstract coloured man (…) who is the embodiment of danger and crime' (3).

For Magda, her children's respectability revolves around their satisfying school performances in general, and the sexual (and political) restraint and marriageability of her daughters, as well as the non-involvement in criminal activities of her son in particular. In short: church, home, and school are the main sources of self-esteem; they are the 'respectable' sword and shield against the befouling moral corruption and shameful disgrace associated with the dreaded counter-space of the *agterbuurte* or backstreet. As Suzette laments at the beginning of the novel: 'The whole year Mummy had been on her case. She wasn't allowed to go anywhere or do anything. (…) Mummy said it was for her own good. Her childhood was ending and it was time to learn to be a woman. The lessons started with Mummy teaching her to iron shirts' (Rossouw 2015a, 24). Shortly afterwards, 'Dedda and Mummy had her life all worked out. They found a college where she could learn typing and shorthand next year. (…) No thank you very much, Suzette wanted to tell him (…). Secretaries wore white shirts and grey skirts. And kak beige pantyhose' (ibid. 47).

Magda's and Neville's value system is a reaction to the plethora of negative associations that were attached to the *coloured* identity, such as immorality, sexual promiscuity, untrustworthiness, propensities for

criminality, drug and alcohol abuse, and vulgar behaviour. In terms of sexual control, Magda's fear is that her daughters may become typical loose women of colour. In accordance with the fact that, as Steffen Jensen asserts, '[o]n the Cape Flats, religious, sexual and class controls were nearly always imbued with notions of race' (57), she deprecates the modelling career of some of her factory co-workers, which of course ironically foreshadows her own daughter Suzette's later path: '"After all I've done for these girls, this is how they thank me. They go off prancing for the buyers. Some of them even model lingerie. Decent girls don't walk around in their lingerie in front of strange men"' (Rossouw 2015a, 39). When Magda eventually finds out that Suzette has dropped out of school and started modelling underwear for 'Planet Fashions', she accordingly does not hesitate to unceremoniously slap her daughter out of the apartment: 'No daughter of mine is going to be an underwear model, finish and klaar. What will people say if they must find out my daughter is an underwear model? (…) You might as well stand on the corner in your underwear. *Klap*. It's the same thing. *Klap*. I didn't raise you to be a hoer. *Klap*. (…) Get out of my house' (182–3).

While the middle child, Nicky, does not put (what her mother deems as) her sexual decency in a compromising position, her involvement with the young anti-apartheid activist Kevin Van Wyk and, after his arrest, with his sickly mother, rings Magda's alarm bells, too: 'Mummy wanted her [Nicky] to have nothing to do with Mrs Van Wyk or the comrades. (…) "You losing respect, that's what is happening! That's what the communists want. They want to destroy family life. What will people say if they must find out my daughter is involved with communists?"' (Rossouw 2015a, 127).

The sexual and political restraints expected of Suzette and Nicky, respectively, in fact, mirror each other because in both cases Magda's yardstick of ostensibly 'decent' behaviour heavily reverberates with apartheid indoctrination. In other words: sexualized and racialized apartheid-stereotypes on the one hand, and apartheid-allegations of a *rooi gevaar* (red peril) on the other, are accepted, internalized and deployed rather than questioned by Magda. Political and sexual assertions are seen as incompatible with religion, which Magda – much to the annoyance of her husband, who endured abuse by churchmen as a child – construes as the vehicle through which to become a moral person. Says Lee Middleton: '[I]t must be noted that religion and gangs are two competing aspects of life on the Cape Flats, a place where the ubiquity of gangs is matched only by the superabundance of religious institutions' (24).

While Magda welcomes the church as the embodiment of respectability and decency through which to control the moral community from within, Neville joins the neighbourhood's vigilante group in order to police the *agterbuurte*'s '*gam maniere*' (the backstreet's 'Ham-ways') from the outside. Both parents are clearly concerned with the safety of their children, and in order to ensure the latter they draw a neat line between the 'civilised' part of Hanover Park and that which is seen as *gam*. As Steffen Jensen notes, '[p]ivotal for the social practices of separation was the attempt to control the movements of children. The lives of a number of girls and boys were characterized by sometimes severe restrictions on movement. (…) This related to the ever-prevalent fear of rape and pregnancy. Controlling boys was a completely different task. The paradox was that boys might turn into the worst nightmare of all, *skollies*' (63). However, Magda's and Neville's attempt to confine Suzette, Nicky, and Anthony within the morally and physically controlled areas of the Flats is bound to fail because it ignores the permeability of this imagined boundary and the seduction of easily earned money.

The story is presented from a first-person point of view, alternating from chapter to chapter between the focalization of one of the five family members, which allows for a relatively balanced exploration of each of the latter's experiential worlds. In her first draft, Rossouw admits however, 'the delinquents took up all the space. The bad guys tend to be more compelling than the good daughter who goes to church every Sunday' (2015b, np.). While it is partially true that, as she also asserts, '[t]here is no chief protagonist; the book's about the entire family,' it is nonetheless Anthony's story around which his family members' stories seem to cluster as the novel progresses. It is he who does not only stray furthest from the realm of respectability, but whose life is literally destroyed by his involvement with the JFK gang. And it is the latter which also engenders, at the end of the novel, that kind of *skinder stories* or gossip which Magda's fear of 'What-will-people-say?' encapsulates, eventually stripping away the wish-fulfilling illusion of an impenetrably bounded respectable realm in Hanover Park.

Anthony's introduction into the JFK starts innocuously: he is spotted playing soccer by the gang leader Ougat and then invited to hang out in his *shebeen* (illegal township bar). The thirteen-year-old boy is immediately drawn to the gang members' hyper-masculine machismo, likening Ougat – in a heartrendingly naïve comparison – to Mr T. in *The A-Team* after witnessing what he perceives as a triumphant fight with a fellow gang-member. Before he knows any better, he finds

himself visiting the *shebeen* on a regular basis because, as he reminds himself, '[t]he one time he had gone to the *shebeen*, Ougat treated him like he was one of the ouens' (Rossouw 2015a, 77). Also, his erroneous assumption that the gang leader is essentially a good person seems to be confirmed by a brief encounter with the latter's mother, who proudly announces that 'Ougat's young, but he takes care of all of us. Not one of his three sisters is working. That boy works very hard' (ibid. 79). 'Anthony,' we are told, 'couldn't believe his eyes how gentle Ougat was with his mother. The man with a reputation all over the neighborhood was talking to his old lady like she was a baby' (80).

The incongruous double-role of hard-boiled *skollie* on the one hand and good son on the other is not a figment of Rossouw's fictional world but, disturbingly, it corresponds to a township reality which serves to occlude, as Steffen Jensen succinctly notes, the brutal sub-culture of the gang. In his Heideveld investigative study, he indicates that:

> [m]en occupied a double position within this moral community. First, they needed to be strong and able to defend their turf. On the streets of Manenberg and Heideveld, this meant being an ou. (….) The second role they occupied (…) was that of good sons or goeie seuns. Hence, the moral habitus of young men, or ouens, depended less on their destructive practices as gangsters than on their kinship with respectable women. Respectable mothers 'rendered the gang ideology, practices, and aesthetics socially invisible,' subsumed under the narrative of the good son (Jensen 155; citation: Salo 211).

The respectable role of a good son thus serves to render invisible and legitimize, at least partially, the aggressive hyper-masculinity of the gang. Furthermore, the respectability of the gangster's natural kinship with 'his' women is extended and super-imposed onto the 'gang family'. This transforms its members into so-called *brus* or *ouens* and serves as an ideological vehicle of physical control over one's ostensibly rightful turf and violence against one's alleged enemies, 'though respectability remains out of reach', says Pinnock (161). This goes some way towards explaining why Anthony, like so many of his real-life counterparts, gets so easily lured into the gang and it also speaks to the fact that gangs in South Africa increasingly target 'vulnerable young people for recruitment (…) because, if arrested and tried, they [are] less likely to face a long prison sentence.' (Dziewanski, np.) This new generation of child-gangsters is mostly initiated 'between the ages of 13 and 15, and [is] immediately armed with guns. Younger members are expected to assume the front lines in confrontations, to prove their mettle to

senior members.' (Wide Angle, np.) Anthony's downward path into gangsterism, while purely fictional, therefore reverberates with the *de facto* recruitment strategies of gangs in the Cape Flats. Too late does he realize that the drug errands which he initially runs for Ougat and his gang have entrapped him in a world in which 'once you are in, you are *in*', and which inexorably leads from such relatively harmless delinquencies towards a vortex of violence whose gravitational pull he will be unable to resist. Anthony's increasing admiration for and involvement in Ougat's drug business and his unquestioning adoption of the JFK's bias against the Americans gang make him blind to his insidious entrapment by the gang's orbit:

> Anthony was delivering parcels all over Hanover Park. Ougat said no one would hassle a decent-looking boy in a school uniform. (…) Anthony was paid well, up to five rand a week depending on whose turf he had to cross. Ougat showed him how to be on the lookout for gang signs as he moved across the township. (…) He was delivering mostly dagga. Ougat (…) started a wholesale business after he found a supplier in the Eastern Cape. That's why the Americans attacked him; they were fokken jealous of how big his business was growing (Rossouw 2015a, 113).

Long before he is officially initiated into the gang, Anthony has thus unwittingly become a de facto JFK member, in spite of his naïve conviction that '[h]e wasn't a member of the gang; they didn't involve him in their war against the Americans.' (Rossouw 2015a, 112) Even after Ougat entrusts him with hiding Methaqualone (commonly known as 'Mandrax,' a highly addictive, illegal synthetic drug) at his parents' place, with which he complies despite a mounting sense of terror – 'Anthony's nerves jumped like fleas under his skin. (…) He didn't want to deliver Mandrax. The Junky Funky Kids were getting too serious for him. He was only thirteen.' (120) – he cannot resist the lure of easily accessible drugs and what he convinces himself is no more than light-hearted conviviality with no strings attached: 'Ougat was generous. He was a businessman but he took time to show interest in a bangbroek laaitie [a cowardly boy]. Anthony wondered why he had been so scared of Ougat (…) He was welcome at the shebeen any time, to smoke a skyf [joint] and play pool. He didn't have to do anything else if he didn't want to' (149). The tension between, on the one hand, the 'poepscared' (121 and 153) boy Anthony who, after hiding the Mandrax, 'stare[s] at the front door for three hours before [falling] asleep, listening out for policemen coming up the stairs' (121) and, on

the other hand, his bloated sense of hyper-masculine self(importance) and obliviousness to Ougat's game of pawns – 'Anthony changed into someone else when he walked into the shebeen. His shoulders dropped down and his arms hung loose' (147) – is brilliantly captured by Rossouw's alternation between Anthony's free indirect speech, split between a naive child's and a (would-be) man's perspective – and the subtle intrusion of a heterodiegetic narrator, for example when the latter's perception of Anthony as a mere boy is super-imposed onto his own distorted self-perception: 'A boy ran all the way [to the shebeen]; a man with a heavy load between his legs walked slowly inside.' Or when she describes how '[a] small boy ran home from the shebeen, crying all the way' (153) before Anthony's own focalization takes over again: 'Anthony was poepscared. His life was a horror film and he couldn't see a way back to his bioscope seat. He didn't want a knife in his back. He also didn't want to be a full-on gangster. He was too young. Going to the shebeen was the worst idea he ever had. He should have stayed at home with his schoolbooks' (153–4). The realization, of course, comes too late. Harking back to the pessimistic naturalist tradition, Rossouw places Anthony within the deterministic undertow of the gang's logic, his self-determined decision-making foreclosed by Ougat's ownership over him: '"Don't fok with me laaitie. Djy's myne. You belong to me. Tell me now – are you with the Junky Funkies or against them? Or you think you too kwaai [cool] for us?"' (153) And, after Ougat has beaten him: 'There was only one thing to say. "Ja. I'm with the Junky Funkies"' (153).

To be initiated into the Junky Funky Kids, Anthony participates in an abominable rite of passage, first under coercion but then, disturbingly, with an increasing sense of pleasure. For the first stage of the initiation process, he is seated with the gang's 'kring' (circle) and 'invited' to smoke a 'white pipe' (a glass pipe filled with a mixture of cannabis and Mandrax) before being 'stamped' (tattooed). Once he has received his JFK 'tshappie' (tattoo), the group 'anoint Anthony with a ceremonial pipe' (Rossouw 2015a,193) and then ask him to 'prove loyalty to the JFKs' (195) by raping a girl named Shirley whose sister's boyfriend is the leader of a rival gang and who also happens to be the best friend of Anthony's sister, Suzette. Disturbingly, the act of rape is cast as an almost inevitable outcome of Anthony's gang environment: coerced into smoking dagga (marihuana) and Mandrax and then held at knifepoint, he comes to the conclusion that '[t]here was nothing he could do.' (195) And despite his initial concern about Shirley's well-being, he manages to somehow suppress the gnawing

knowledge that he personally knows the victim and to reduce her to a disembodied sex organ: 'He couldn't think about who it belonged to, this one was available' (196). What is more, spurred on by the other group members, his initial repulsion is swiftly replaced by (physical) pleasure and it is only after having committed the rape that he comes back to moral consciousness, asking himself '[w]hat had he done [and lifting] his face up to the rain to cool himself down and wash away some of his sin' (197).

What I have attempted to briefly summarise in the above paragraph extends over a total of twelve of the novel's pages (Rossouw 2015a, 188–200), five of which consist of a minute description, from Anthony's point of view, of Shirley's gang rape. It is apposite to ask: even if the framing of rape from the rapist's point of view were capable of exposing its cruelty, at what cost does it do so? I am not arguing against the inclusion of rape in literature; on the contrary. In a country rated first for rape crimes by the United Nations report for the period 1998–2000, and where it is estimated that a woman is raped every 36 seconds and that more than 40 per cent of South African women will probably be raped in their lifetime, the topicality of rape is undeniable. However, an overtly explicit portrayal of violence, as is the case here, runs the risk of not only putting it on the agenda, but of also (un)wittingly becoming, in itself, complicit in the violence portrayed. Accordingly, I do not agree with Dominick La Capra's contention that radically fragmentary representations of violence may be counter-productive exactly because the reader may not be able to be 'emphatically unsettled' by a situation or character that has been 'disembodied' by the use of disruptive narrative devices (49–50), nor with Silver and Higgins's anti-postmodernist call to keep rape literal (318) or Tanner's insistence that the reader should be offered 'the fullest experience of reading violence' and reminded of her own violability (Tanner 12–3). Instead, I tend to believe that a certain degree of narrative distancing is to be recommended, especially in the portrayal of intimate violence, in order not to turn it, as Graham points out, 'into a pornographic spectacle that implicate[s] the viewer' (441).

The gang rape scene undoubtedly constitutes the nodal event in Rossouw's novel in that it overwrites the multiple strands of sub-plots that precede it, namely by highlighting their insignificance as compared to the atrocity of Anthony's deed. The latter is shown falling into a catatonic state in which, unable to bear his palpable yet elusive guilt, he loses his ability to speak, literally paralysed by the unspeakable fact that, as he realizes, 'he was a JFK and a rapist' (Rossouw 2015a,

199). Rossouw's depiction of the after-effects of rape are in line with a larger tradition in which the rape victim is silenced after violation (Higgins and Silver 256). However, the amorphous post-rape horror is located in the perpetrator's rather than the victim's trauma: 'When he was alone with his filthy body, all he could think about was how to hurt it. (…) No one (…) forced him to do what he did to Shirley. He brought it on himself. (…)] The night he raped Shirley was like a poison inside him, paralysing his body as it spread.' (Rossouw 2015a, 237–41) In a thought-provoking narrative twist, Anthony emerges as both perpetrator *and* victim of his own deed, almost as if he had, paradoxically, raped himself. When Ougat eventually seeks him out because he has fallen short of reporting to him upon his initiation, Anthony braces himself for what he thinks will be the just and deserved punishment for his fall into sin – his own rape at the hands of a new JFK recruit: 'Did they plan for the new recruit to rape him? Anthony decided that was ok. He deserved to be punished for what he had done to Shirley; he had to feel what he put her through' (244). The social determinism which underpins Anthony's entanglement with the gang apart, his belated recognition of Shirley as like unto himself and the concomitant hope that the rape he has committed will somehow be erased by his own rape admittedly offers an interesting approach to what Merleau-Ponty has described as the reversibility of the body-as-flesh. This much being said, though, one also has to concede that the TRC-like moral amnesty which the narrative seems to implicitly grant him both ante-actively (through enforced gang membership pre-rape) and retroactively (through his coming-to-moral-consciousness post-rape) before he is (not raped but) executed by the new JFK recruit seems debatable.

Ironically, it is the pastor whom Magda held in such high esteem who reveals to the congregation at Anthony's funeral service that the latter was a gang member, insisting that he will henceforth refuse to bury gangsters in his church. Even worse, he places the blame for Anthony's misdemeanour squarely on Anthony's parents, announcing that 'he [Anthony] was failed, in the place where he needed guidance most, in his own home.' (Rossouw 2015a, 288) The pastor's rash and problematic condemnation thus strips the façade of *ordentlikheid* (respectability) which Magda tried to uphold, setting loose exactly the kind of *skinderstories* which she so dreaded. The narrative then swiftly moves ten years ahead, drawing towards a double-resolution in which Magda's and Nicky's narrative of female expiation is counterbalanced by Suzette's Cinderella-narrative.

While, after Anthony's disastrous funeral service, Suzette – 'desperate to outrace the dark cloud of skandaal' (301) – leaves Hanover Park for good to pursue her modelling career, and a defeated Neville seeks refuge in the arms of his helpful and kindly neighbour Moira, it is Magda and the middle child Nicky who take on the responsibility for Anthony's deed. The child to whom Shirley gives birth as a result of her rape is unquestioningly assumed to be Anthony's (rather than one of the other rapists'), and her pregnancy post-rape represented as the embodiment of a de-personalised, *coloured* guilt which Magda and Nicky voluntarily assume in Anthony's stead. As the child is named Anthony, we also witness a symbolic rebirth in innocence.

The way in which the two women – as a result of their blood ties with Anthony and, by extension, the *coloured skollie* in general – accept their implied *ersatz*-culpability is reminiscent of J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*. While Rossouw shifts the focus from the trope of interracial rape and the black-and-white womb to intra-racial violation and the *coloured* womb as its locus, it nonetheless subscribes to a strikingly similar logic in that the amorphous disgrace committed by one's ethnic community is portrayed as being both de-individualized and contagious. Whether it is J.M. Coetzee's controversial concept of an inherited Afrikaner guilt against the black population or Rossouw's notion of an inherited *coloured* guilt against its own members, the underlying paradigm seems to suggest that the sins of the fathers are passed on from one generation to the other – not to its sons but to the women that remain behind. This concept of sacrificial female expiation undermines the deterministic logic of the (male) revenge trope through the symbolism of female nurturing and female-induced rebirth, thus offering the reader a comforting sense of narrative relief.

Furthermore, Suzette's storyline, which is reinserted into the novel's denouement, counter-balances Magda's and Nicky's sombre redemption narrative by unexpectedly introducing into an otherwise excruciatingly realist novel a Sapphire Press-like glitter. The nuanced earlier depictions of the disenchanting modelling world of Suzette's shallow consumerist aspirations and Hollywood-influenced self-delusions, are happily coated with a rags-to-supermodel story that intrudes like an unexpectedly sentimental element into an otherwise bitter novel. 'Magazines featuring her daughter,' we are told, 'piled so high on [Magda's] coffee table that it couldn't be used for anything else' (Rossouw 2015a, 319). Even more, Rossouw pastes her protagonist into the glossy images of Naomi Campbell and Nelson Mandela which the yellow press keeps on circulating like recyclable dream packaging:

Magda 'had framed the photo of Suzette with Naomi Campbell and Nelson Mandela and put it on the lounge wall' (329). This glitterati image of Suzette is, however, overshadowed by the fact that to ensure her success she had to discard and deny all intimate family ties, which to some extent is understandable, given the catastrophic vortex into which much of her family has been drawn.

Taken together, the incongruous double-resolution of female expiation on the one hand, and rags-to-supermodel story on the other is nonetheless indicative of a double bind in which not only contemporary South African novelists but the post-apartheid nation as a whole seem to be caught: how to best cope with past and present sins committed by one's community while clinging, nonetheless, to the hope that, somehow, 'everything will come right' in the new South Africa – how to accept that South Africa *was,* as Mandela famously asserted as he took his presidential oath in 1994, 'the skunk of the world' and simultaneously embrace the hope that it *will* meet up to the promises of the so-called Rainbow Nation — and, maybe most importantly, how to grapple with being South African in the meantime.

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The Denunciation of Religious Collusion with Colonization in Devil on the Cross & Matigari

CHRISTOPHE SÉKÈNE DIOUF

INTRODUCTION

In *Devil on the Cross* as well as in *Matigari*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o draws upon biblical elements to depict the prevailing situations in Kenya during the colonial and postcolonial periods. Even though these novels were first written in Gikuyu, they are full of images excerpted from the Bible. To analyse them, it is noteworthy that Ngũgĩ attended a missionary school, and was baptized James Ngũgĩ. However, being aware of the sufferings of his countrymen and the roles played by the missionaries in colonialism, he virulently attacks their unchristian practices by which the masses have been brainwashed. He asserts: 'I am not a man of the Church. I am not even a Christian' (Ngũgĩ, *Homecoming* 31). This declaration sheds light on one aspect of the use of the biblical language in the two novels under study: *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari*.

To deal with the subject of religious collusion with colonialism, we will utilize the Marxist and postcolonial approaches. These approaches will help in the analyses of diverse notions. The Marxist literary theory is an essential guideline to examine Ngũgĩ's opposition to the different forces that hamper the liberation and prosperity of Kenyan people. It represents a central instrument of struggle in both novels. This study demonstrates that Ngũgĩ's artistic genius enables him to mix Gikuyu and the Marxist philosophical doctrine with biblical elements to convey his messages. He is prominent for his commitment to fight against all the shackles that hinder the true emancipation of Kenyan people. In almost all his literary works, his determination for social justice is very manifest. While considering the place of African writers in the socio-political problems of the continent, one recognizes a well-known figure named Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Today, studying *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* is another way to rediscover the value of a man

who perpetually supports the masses in the struggle for a full and true liberation. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has 'used the pen in the service of the truth' (Ngũgĩ, *Barrel of a Pen* 69). At this point, it is necessary to define some key terms: the biblical language and the notion of aesthetics.

The biblical language refers to the diverse elements, signs, symbols, parables, events, and stories which are extracted from the Bible. It is figuratively used in different ways in the two novels studied in this chapter. The different items from the Bible bear diverse meanings. Some of them are mainly implicit allusions whereas others are incorporated accurately. The notion of aesthetics alludes to the way of using a language in an artistic manner to convey messages. According to *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, aesthetics is concerned with beauty in the artistic style. In the field of literature, the style of a writer is fused with the aesthetic aspects that are also linked to the content. We develop our corpus in the light of these definitions.

One of the key facts during colonization was the involvement of missionaries in the process of domination in Africa. The administrators worked closely with the missionaries, whose main mission was to proclaim the Gospel, to conquer, dominate, and exploit. This is succinctly captured by Leonard Kibera in these terms: 'Christianity often came to Africa as a way of introducing the more ruthless realities of imperialism' (Kibera 84–5). Through this assertion, Kibera highlights that the colonial enterprise used the missionaries as a smoke screen to better reach its goals; the religion of the missionaries was taken as an ideological apparatus for the sake of the colonizers. No matter how strong their will to ever spread the Gospel throughout the world, some of the missionaries undoubtedly participated in the colonizing projects. This fact can be particularly perceived in the following biblical elements: the Beatitudes, often called the Sermon on the Mount, and the Commandments.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT (BEATITUDES) & THE COMMANDMENTS

To succeed in their objective, the colonizers found methods through which they could easily alienate the natives. A clear example was the brainwashing system of the missionaries. It was through teachings that they tried to infuse a certain degree of alienation in the minds of the African people. Indeed, the role played by missionaries was all the more profitable to colonizers as they had recourse to the Church when the

situations became difficult. Some priests represented determinant actors on whom the colonial administrators could rely to reinforce their policies of exploitation. In both novels, the so-called 'men of God' manipulate workers and peasants by trying to convince them that it is beneficial for them to be obedient to the white civil servants. The Beatitudes or Sermon on the Mount and the Commandments are subverted in these novels. In the Holy Scriptures, the Beatitudes are often called the Sermon on the Mount. Christ in his early mission gathered the disciples on the mount and taught them tenets that are related to their earthly and heavenly lives. He encouraged them to practise good deeds and enhanced their faith given the sufferings they would face while announcing the Gospel. Thus, in the Gospel of Matthew 5: 1–12 it is written:

> Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven
> Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted
> Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth
> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied
> Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy
> Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God
> Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God
> Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
> For theirs is the kingdom of heaven
> Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and falsely say
> All kinds of evil against you because of Me
> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the
> Same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you
> (*Bible of Jerusalem*, Matthew 5: 1–12)

In *Matigari*, the Beatitudes are subverted to strengthen the power of the colonizers. To get the colonized to give up any form of revolt, the priests use these biblical words. Instead of reminding the political authorities that the social conditions of this class of marginalized people should be improved, they exert their priesthood in the interest of 'those- who- reap-where- they- never- sow' (Ngũgĩ, *Matigari* 75).

This expression is indicative of the high degree of exploitation that the people suffer. It confirms that the masses sow with their hands, labour for long periods of harsh work, while the colonizers come to steal all the produce they obtain to ensure their survival. Nothing remains but fear, cries, and grief, for they are taught that such situations are legitimate. They are also taught to accept such situations as their salvation depends on those situations. Within this context, Tshibola Bibiane Kallengayi observes that:

> The missionary takes his Bible, goes through pages and tells them that as God's people being in quest for eternal salvation, they must accept all the difficult situations for, those who strengthen their faith on the Gospel. Thus, does he contribute, in favour of the colonizer, to silence the minds, suppress the revolts and maintain the Black in a perfect submissive way. (Kallengayi 23)

Essentially, Kallengayi recognizes the conspiracy of some missionaries with the colonizer. She adds that for the African writer, the missionary appears as an efficient weapon serving the colonizer to better subjugate the black people. It is through this analysis that the use of these biblical tenets enables Ngũgĩ to denounce the abusive and unfaithful discourses of the missionaries. In contrast, given as basic guidelines to believers, the Commandments and the Beatitudes are at the core of religious practices. However, the so-called churchmen hide the truth to serve the colonizers.

In *Devil on the Cross*, the narrator shows expressively the psychological indoctrination that the natives undergo. The onerous fate of black people is heightened by a mental alienation. The religious men interpret the Holy Scriptures in favour of the dominators and to the detriment of the downtrodden. For instance, to keep them in a pacific and submissive acceptation of their difficult social conditions, they call for biblical sermons, as depicted in the novel:

> Every Sunday the workers will be read sermons that will instruct them that the system of milking human sweat, human blood and human brains, the system of robbery of human labour power and human skill – is ordained by God, and that has something to do with the eventual salvation of their soul. It is written in the Holy Scriptures: Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are they that visit an ill man, for they shall see God. Blessed are they that daily observe the three Commandments: 'Thou shall not lie, Thou shall not steal, Thou shall not covet other people's property, for they shall inherit wealth in Heaven'. (188)

Ngũgĩ satirizes the missionaries to underscore their collusions with the exploiters. The Beatitudes reflect in *Devil on the Cross* the sufferings of the natives. The striking aspect of the people's sufferings manifests in the deprivation of the people's natural rights and the reduction to souls that live in perpetual submission waiting to rejoice in Heaven, as taught by the missionaries. In this connection, the South African activist, Steve Biko asserts that 'the most potent weapon in the hand of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed' (Biko 92).

In the light of the above, Biko, like Ngũgĩ, has examined the ways that psychological force served to better enforce domination on colonized people. Biko's thought has highlighted our understanding of the Kenyan writer's criticism of missionary teachings. It sustains the argument that the Ten Commandments in *Devil on the Cross* or the Beatitudes in *Matigari* are used as instruments to suppress all attempts of resistance and ensure the imperialists' supremacy. Although Biko alluded to the apartheid system, it is also an expression of all forms of oppression.

Relatedly, Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* deals with the phenomenon of indoctrination during the colonial era. The book portrays the relation between colonialism and alienation. Fanon posits that psychological domination was the first step towards a total control of the masses. In his views, Fanon maintains that the consolidation of political power passed through a process of alienation; and Potholm illustrates that 'Fanon's work demonstrates that even more terrible than the colonization of a country is the colonization of the mind' (Polthom 4). At this point, the Commandments in *Matigari* give evidence that the 'churchmen' hypocritically hide the truth from those who claim to incarnate 'Truth and Justice'.

Similarly to the Beatitudes quoted above, the Commandments in *Matigari* are used to uphold the exploiting system. Being aware of the ongoing injustice which leads workers and peasants to rebellious acts, the minister brings along the priest so that he reads the Commandments. According to him, it is necessary to become sensitize to obtain insight concerning the masses' attempt at uprising. In order better to grasp the essence of this point, an explanation from the Bible is necessary. Given as guidelines to believers, the Commandments are at the core of religious practices. They refer to the Law of God which Moses received, and was ordained to teach the Hebrews respect and obedience in their daily lives, Exodus 20: 1-17.

Furthermore, in *Matigari* the brainwashing strategy reaches a very high level to an extent that the minister declares that in Kenya, 'the law works under Christian democracy' (129). That expression is quite explicit, as it demonstrates that religious and political authorities are closely linked. The conspiracy between them allows that some religious men are in the service of the secular power. By way of illustration, the minister addresses the villagers as follows:

> I shall now call upon the preacher to read us the Ten Commandments.
> I want you to listen very attentively to God's Commandments:
> Thou shall have no other gods before me

> Thou shall not make unto thee any graven image
> Thou shall not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain
> Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days thou shall labour;
> But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God. In it, thou shall not do any work.
> Honour thy father, thy mother thy days may be long
> Thou shall not kill.
> Thou shall not commit adultery.
> Thou shall not steal.
> Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbour's things;
> Thou shall not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his cows nor anything that is thy neighbour's. (121)

The reading of these commandments is a means to silence the masses. It indicates that the Minister for Truth and Justice strives to keep the people from whom they get enriched in total ignorance of their difficult living conditions. It is at this point that the Commandments have similarities with the Beatitudes mentioned previously. Both are elements through which Ngũgĩ reveals the disgraceful facts about the missionaries. Besides, these elements are seen as embodying a critical and satirical analysis of the Christian missionaries: 'Ngũgĩ deplores Christianity as a means of conditioning people into an acceptance of colonial and neo-colonial exploitation. As he comes increasingly to deplore it, biblical allusions are employed with an increasingly ironic edge' (Cook and Okenimkpe 123).

Prominently, the use of biblical elements becomes in one way a medium for Ngũgĩ to attack the missionaries. It underscores anew his aim as a writer, which is to plead and be the spokesman of the marginalized people.

In another way, the biblical allegories are combined with Marxist ideology. At the time Ngũgĩ wrote these two novels, he was deeply influenced by Marxists. Marx's point of view has implications for different aspects of life, as highlighted below:

> Religious distress is at the time the Expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people. (Marx and Engels 38)

In fact, thinkers protest against the way some people use religion to satisfy their own interests rather than working for the well-being of the lower classes. In his contact with Christianity, Ngũgĩ has analysed the role played by some 'churchmen' in the different projects of exploiters. This is what he describes in his prison diary:

> Obedience of the oppressed to the oppressor; peace and harmony between the exploited and the exploiter; the slave to love his master and pray that God grant that the master may long reign over us: these were the ultimate aesthetic goals of colonial culture carefully nurtured by nailed boots, police truncheons and military bayonets and by the carrot of a personal heaven for a select few. The end was to school Kenyans in the aesthetic of submission and blind obedience to authority reflected in that Christian refrain, Trust and Obey:
>
> Trust and Obey
> For there is no other way
> To be happy in Jesus
> But Trust and Obey. (Ngũgĩ, *Detained* 42)

Ngũgĩ notes further that he uses his pen through art to write about the enslaving teachings of the missionaries who implemented schools and churches as a way of designing subjugation. In fact, the use of the Beatitudes and the Commandments is to give the reader a clear view of the starting point of oppression. Almost all of African writers' works have dealt with the effects of indoctrination on the masses. But, Ngũgĩ does not merely describe this phenomenon. His Marxist view is that the victims must struggle.

The Sermon on the Mount or Beatitudes and the Commandments are depicted in *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* as psychological tools which the colonizers and the neo-colonialists, through the aid of some missionaries, instil in the minds of the natives to exploit them more intensively. This fact is what Louis Althusser calls an 'ideological apparatus'. According to him, some institutions function by ideology in relation to society. For him, the powerful forces try to convince the subjects that the actions of the dominators are quite right or even natural. Thus, the subjects are willingly submitted to exploitation. Althusser asserts that the masses consent or obey because of the psychological persuasion that alienates them. In other words, ideology represents a seminal tool through which human beings become assimilated and recognize themselves as subjects. Accordingly, they live in conformity with the rules established by a given institution.

In the same perspective, the process of disclosing the diverse strategies of the exploiters is what our second section proposes to examine through the biblical allegory of temptation.

TEMPTATION

In Kenya, as well as in many African countries, colonization had colluded with a so-called 'civilizing mission'. When the different European powers came, they leaned on some institutions, prominent among which was the Church. Their interests lay in a strong need to exploit the resources of the discovered lands. That was the case in Kenya where the inhabitants were victims of the seizure of lands by the British authorities. In this regard, Ngũgĩ observes that 'In Kenya, while European settlers robbed people of their land and the product of their sweat, the missionary robbed people of their soul' (Ngũgĩ, *Homecoming* 32).

This assertion emphasizes the double exploitation suffered by Kenyan people. On the one hand, all the properties that belonged to them were taken by force. On the other, missionaries strove to strip them of their customs and traditions, the 'soul' of their cultures.

In *Devil on the Cross*, two opposite forces struggle: Good and Evil. The latter is strongly armed to capture its prey. Here, Ngũgĩ's determination to subvert and unveil the evil deeds of the 'Devil's Angels' is visible. A case in point here is the class of the Rich Old Man from Ngorika who has betrayed Wariinga and Boss Kihara trying by all means to gain the confidence of Kareendi with convincing words:

> Please Kareendi, little fruit of my heart, listen to me carefully so that I will tell you beautiful things. I will rent a house for you on Furaha Leo Estate, or in the centre, Kenyatta Avenue, or any other part of the city. Choose any flat or house you like. I will have the place decorated with furniture, carpets, mattresses, and curtains from Paris, London, Berlin, Rome, New York, Tokyo, Stockholm or Hong Kong (…) Kareendi, my little fruit, my little orange, flower of my heart, come to me and say bye-bye to poverty. (22)

It is as if the exploiters adopt the discourse of the missionaries whom Ngũgĩ reminds us, 'the tongue of the white man was coating with sugar, his humility was touching' (Ngũgĩ, *Homecoming* 10). These expressions give evidence to the allegorical name attributed to them, the 'Devils Angels'. This new class of civil servants, whose economic position allows them to gain more privileges, is what temptation symbolizes. In their appearances and speeches, they seem to behave rightly whereas their actions are rooted in an incessant will to steal people's properties. In fact, this biblical word can be better understood if its source in the Bible is revisited.

Temptation is drawn upon the Gospel of Matthew. It stands for the fact that when Jesus went to the Mount fasting, the devil tried to mislead him. As taught in Matthew, the temptation of Christ is an important step of his mission. In the same way that Christ was tempted by the devil, Ngũgĩ establishes an analogy to evince the persisting tactics of the exploiters. He draws a parallel between the devil as an invisible force and the 'immaculate' beings or 'devil's Angels' who eagerly spend their times exploiting the population.

In *Devil on the Cross*, the Voice narrates the diverse strategies used by the exploiters to convince people like Wariinga. In this novel, a dialogue is established to clearly portray the story of temptation. It sheds light on the way exploitation operates. The Voice epitomizes the powerful exploiters. The language of the Voice has a profound ring:

> Come. Come. Follow me, and I'll take you up into the big Illmorog mountains, and I'll show you all the glories of the world (…) I'll give them all to you (…) Yes, if you kneel down before me and sing my praises (…) Oppressor. Exploiter. Liar. Grabber. I am worshipped by those who love to dispose of goods that have been produced by others. Give me your soul, and I will guard it for you. (192)

In the analysis of temptation in *Devil on the Cross*, the language used, through the character of the Voice, is similar to that in Matthew 4:1–12:

> Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. And the tempter came and said to him: 'the devil took him to a very High mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their Glory and said to him 'All these things I will give you, if you fall down and worship me'. (194)

In comparison with the spirit we can say that the aim of the Voice is to show Wariinga that it is a powerful force imbued with things that can be useful to her. Knowing her social status as a poor girl who is looking for better living conditions, the spirit, which epitomized the new bourgeoisie, uses its materialism to prosper. This wealthy new class uses the advantage of its position to seduce the innocent girls. The latter become properties exposed to sexual abuse by men. Being deprived of income in a society where gender identity is analysed through a binary relation – possessor/possessed, dominator/dominated, master/property, and others – women do not escape the temptation of businessmen. The special emphasis of this allegory is also to be perceived in Ngũgĩ's denunciation of the capitalist system.

In fact, in a society which is becoming more and more capitalist, poor people are sold as properties to wealthy men from the comprador class. Cook and Okenimkpe observe that:

> Wariinga plays the part of Christ in her temptation by the Devil, explicitly in her cry of 'Get behind me, Satan'. She takes over Christ's role as a man and eliminates any suggestion of godhead in doing so. But she thereby identifies herself without arrogance since this is a visionary sequence with Christ's moral position. (…) Wariinga totally rejects the materialistic worldly-wisdom of Satan's proposals as adamantly as does Christ in the New Testament. It is the wealthy and socially complacent who minister to the Devil as they take him from the cross. (124)

At this point, temptation relates the attitudes of the middle class towards the female gender. For instance, because of the lifestyle of the Rich Old Man who incarnates the newly rich man, Wariinga's uncle decides to offer her as a sexual prize in exchange for a bank loan and a piece of land to buy. Innocently the girl is fascinated, and consequently becomes pregnant by the man of Ngorika.

As a matter of fact, temptation is used figuratively to describe the constant actions of the 'devil's angels' to ensnare ingenious people. In this respect, Cook and Okenimkpe add:

> It is true that this 'spirit eventually uses these revelations' to try and ensnare Wariinga into submission to worldly wisdom. But Wariinga has her work cut out to convince herself later that this was the father of lies speaking and not a prophetic spokesman for the humanist ideal. (125).

Tempters are especially identified with the diverse men whose acts are, by and large, embodied in the projects of the devil. Their plan involves filling their pockets and going in search of young girls, given that such wealth offers opportunities for sex. Temptation is made explicit as follows:

> Let me show you palaces hedged round with flowers of all different colours of the rainbow, take you on a tour of golf courses carpets with green, guide you to night clubs where a ride in a car that moves smoothly over tarmac highways with the grace of young sliding across the perfumed body of a woman. All those wonders will belong to you. (Ngũgĩ, *Devil on the Cross* 192)

These words are illustrative of the way the class of tempters tries to persuade girls that they will get all they need once they accept to collaborate. They make clear the illusionary possessions in the hands of the local businessman that stress their continuous quest for satisfactory sex.

Furthermore, the class of Boss Kihara and that of Kimeendeeri use praise words, and make promises for the purpose of obtaining what they want from girls who belong to the downtrodden class. The recurrence of the verb 'will' demonstrates the power of temptation. What favours the tempters are the unfortunate situations of the masses. The tempters see their material properties as glorious things which help them reach their goals.

Another biblical element: Resurrection focuses on the survival of the exploiters.

RESURRECTION

To underscore the way neo-colonialism has been instituted, the author emphasizes the functioning of this system. In a state which has just been liberated from British occupation, a new destructive power emerges. The 'local watchdogs' are eager to act as foreign handmaidens. As a result, the masses become more and more unfortunate because men resurrected to impose starvation on them. The narrative voice avers:

> And there and then the people crucified the Devil on the Cross, and they went away singing songs of victory. After three days, there came others dressed in suits and ties, who, keeping close to the wall of darkness, lift the Devil down from the Cross. And they knelt before him, and they prayed to him in loud voices, besee-ching him to give them a portion of his robes of cunning. (13)

The allegorical meaning of the Resurrection can be better perceived by focalizing on its relation with the Crucifixion. However, a clarification is essential for the sense in Ngũgĩ's novel. Resurrection is one of the most meaningful aspects of the Christian doctrine: that Jesus was resurrected to save mankind from damnation.

In the Gospel of Luke, it is held that 'the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day and that repentance and forgiveness would be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem' (Luke 24: 46–7). In its reinterpretation, it embodies a negative sign. It is ironically depicted. No matter how the 'disciples of Satan' have been sentenced to death by the guerrilla fighters during the Emergency, they reincarnated as real forces of evil. Such a reincarnation makes them recover the skills of their instructors.

Through resurrection, the author of *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* retraces the long process of European education that many of the new leaders of the independent states have been prepared to perpetuate. A

transmission of competences in the service of exploitation has operated in the new nations. It has been 'a process of conditioning, subjugating or conquering the mind and, therefore of altering the personality, of which colonial education was guilty' (Cook and Okenimkpe 17).

These words deeply analyse the way neo-colonialism was settled despite the strong resistance of patriots. In other words, resurrection stresses particularly a deconstruction to satirize the comprador class who has chosen to betray Kenyan people by allying with European dominators. It suggests that the presence of colonialism is still felt through neo-colonialism. With this biblical allegory, Ngũgĩ keeps on dealing with the malaise of the new independent states of Africa as a whole. According to him, the effects of colonialism are transferred in the power of leaders who compete to degrade the menial possessions of their own communities. In fact, resurrection is essentially revealing of Ngũgĩ's disillusionment with the new leaders.

That aspect has been also thoroughly explained by James Ogude, who states: 'In the grotesque image of the Devil that appears to Wariinga, Ngũgĩ seems to suggest a linear and continuing relationship between the Devil (…) and the black elite (comprador bourgeoisie) that takes over at independence' (Ogude 48). According to this critic, the Devil which Ngũgĩ describes in *Devil on the Cross* is suggestively a designation of the unchanging nature of independence compared to the times of European domination. He underlines that the relationships between the white master and the native intellectual have been based on a will on both sides to maintain powerful exploitation of the masses. The aesthetic element of this biblical allegory can be seen as a technique to attract the reader about the connection between the two systems of exploitation: colonialism and neo-colonialism. As Ngara states: 'The aesthetic appeal may be regarded as determining the writer's power of persuasion' (Ngara 23).

Through the allegorical use of this biblical element, the committed Kenyan writer finds it appropriate to explain the situations of the new sovereign countries. What is at stake is to speak for the voiceless people through the pen. As he asserts:

> Our pen should be used to increase the anxieties of all oppressive regimes. At the very least, the pen should be used 'to murder their sleep' by constantly reminding them of their crimes against the people and making them know that they are being seen. The pen may not be mightier than the sword, but used in the service of truth it can be a mighty force. (Ngũgĩ, *Homecoming* 69)

Through this assertion, Ngũgĩ recognizes that it is of paramount importance that the writer plays a key role in society. The fact of comparing the pen to a sword is to meditate beyond the simple words in order to comprehend the message of the writer. This proves that in the allegorical use of the word resurrection, it is clear that what the writer conveys is the close link that exists between colonialism and neo-colonialism:

> It is now the Devil, ruthless genius of the cash nexus, who in a vision is crucified by workers and peasants, and is then taken from the cross towards resurrection by the rich and the powerful (immaculately dressed) who lives by Satan's creed and prospers as he prospers. (*Devil on the Cross* 123).

The above highlights the figurative nature of the word resurrection. In this analysis, it is shown that the struggle led by workers and peasants which consequently brought about political independence, has not purified the country of evil. A case in point is that the resurrected people have acquired the strength of the master: the Devil. What characterizes them are narcotic elements which enable them to be as oppressive as or even more oppressive than their predecessors. As depicted in Wariinga's nightmare:

> She would see the Devil, with skin as white as that of a fat European she once saw near the Rift Valley Sports Club, (…) and after three days, when he was in the throes of death, he would be taken from the Cross by black people in suits and ties, and, thus restored to life, he would mock Wariinga. (13)

While warrior heroes were fighting the enemies in the battlefields, some Kenyan agents on the other side were preparing to considerably manage the country by imitating the former dominators. Accordingly, after the struggles for independence, Kenya continues to suffer mismanagement from a class of people who secretly are tied to the ancient rulers. Similarly, Baydallaye Kane notes that: 'The system ensures its own reproduction and perpetuates its exploitive and oppressive traditions. In *Devil on the Cross*, this idea is illustrated by the metaphor of the resurrection of the devil as it appears in the nightmare which recurrently troubles Wariinga's sleep' (Kane 224).

Ngũgĩ demonstrates that colonialism and neo-colonialism are only separate in terms of time, but the realities remain the same. Both are manifestly characterized by an obsessive oppression, and above all, the exploitation of the masses' products. The harmful actions of the

former dominators are still evident in the post-independent state led by rulers who are getting more and more authoritarian. As a result, the dreams of the people are illusions that end in disenchantment given that nothing has changed. In spite of the fact that they have been longing for a better future, the ruled see their hopes betrayed. Then, similarly to their predecessors, the new managers have succeeded in setting up strong 'state apparatuses' to protect their interests. By doing so, they are richer and richer while their people are poorer and poorer.

Indeed, through the metaphor of the resurrection of the devil, the writer shows that colonialism as well as neo-colonialism reflect the aims of a minority to exploit a majority. The comprador class loots the wealth of the community, and strengthens its power of domination in all the sectors. These agents intensify their strategies to strictly preserve what they have accumulated. It is for this purpose that the police, and the court, etc, intervene to sustain them.

Ogude insists on the power of new managers to acquire the evil deeds of the former oppressors, and consequently progress in their projects of destroying the people's lives. It seems that they are even more oppressive because, as members of the community, they know well the strategies to adopt. According to Ogude: 'Ngũgĩ further suggests that the desire of the comprador class which rescues the Devil, thereby introducing a new form of colonialism is to inherit the Devil's worst qualities' (Ogude 62–3). The main focus of resurrection remains the way neo-colonialism has been set up. It refers to the persisting facts in a state which is considered to be independent, sovereign, and freed from colonial domination. Worse, the country witnesses a re-establishment of the projects of the former administrators. In fact, beyond its ironic use, resurrection is aesthetically satirical. It suggests that relationships between the ancient colonial agents are transformed in other ways that are more efficient for the organization of a new system. As Reddy declares: 'what follows (the independence) is the transformation of colonialism into a neo-colonialism – only a change of actors at the centre stage, black zombies in place of white master. But the flute player and the tune-caller remain the same' (Reddy 81).

This implies the substitution of colonialism with neo-colonialism that resurrection allegorized in *Devil on the Cross*. Prominently, Ngũgĩ does not only denounce the evil deeds of colonizers. He also draws the attention to leaders concerning their alliances with foreigners.

CONCLUSION

The points that have been explored in the two novels by Ngũgĩ in this chapter are the collusive actions of missionaries/churchmen in the projects of colonialism and neo-colonialism. It is noted that Ngũgĩ lifts the veil on the role played by religious men in the oppression and exploitation of the masses. These novels highlight the brainwashing strategy that facilitates domination.

As a committed writer, Ngũgĩ, analyses all the forces that have variously affected the humanity of people. However, he calls for awareness from the oppressed to act. In his will to restore truth and justice, and regenerate peace and justice in the society, he resorts to the Bible to convey messages. In addition to the denunciatory aspects, biblical elements are used to provide a thorough understanding of realities. They represent literary devices through which Ngũgĩ depicts key issues such as the impoverishment of the peasantry class and the excessive exploitation of the workers. We have also identified that biblical elements are well constructed to give a panoramic view of the evolution of relations in society. This means that the style is significant to the facts presented. If only each stratum of the society could listen to the voice of the writer whose writing is born from commitment, African nations would emerge in the globalizing process.

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The Weapons of Subjugation in Imbolo Mbue's How Beautiful We Were

BENEDICTA ADEOLA EHANIRE

When stories of the subjugation of people, whether racial, gender, or class, are told, the counter-action usually associated with such stories is resistance. The factors which make such subjugation possible are hardly considered. This study, therefore, takes on an irregular route to bring to the fore such factors as they are gleaned from *How Beautiful We Were* by the Cameroonian writer, Imbolo Mbue. These factors, which are insensitivity, intimidation, and divide and rule mechanism, are regarded as weapons because they facilitate the oppressors' cause.

The novel is the author's second after *Behold the Dreamers* (2016), which has been highly acclaimed and which won the PEN/Faulkner Prize. Published in 2021, *How Beautiful We Were* is a story spanning forty years of the subjugation of the people of Kosawa, a fictional African village that is created by Mbue to expose a global phenomenon of the brute force of the powerful over the weak. The powerful American oil company, Pexton, egged on by the federal government, engages with reckless abandon in the drilling of oil in the village. The operations lead to the despoliation and degradation of the land as well as the pollution of the waters. These result in deaths – uncountable deaths – especially of children who are obviously among the most vulnerable. It takes the courage of Konga, a mentally deranged man, to wake the people up to some resistance, albeit ill-planned and ill-executed. The kidnap of officials of the company and government functionaries from Bezam, the administrative headquarters of the country, is instigated by Konga. At first the rebellion appears to be succeeding until one of the captives, an American, dies in the custody of the local chieftain, Woja Beki, who was cajoled into joining the rebellion. What follows is a massacre. Many of the villagers die and the village knows no peace thenceforth. The central character, Thula, eventually takes on the fight after an American-sponsored education but is herself, killed.

The global phenomenon of the subjugation of the disadvantaged is a pitiable story, rendered skillfully, in *How Beautiful We Were* by three generations of first-person narrators. They are Yaya, the grandmother; Sahel, the mother; Thula, the central character (initially a child but later a grown lady); Thula's brother, Juba; and the omnibus narrator identified as Children. This technical experimentation by Mbue with multiple narrators enables the reader to get a wider perspective of happenings in the novel from eclectic sources and strengthens the book, artistically. The methodology for the research in this chapter is qualitative and issues of subjugation are explained as well as evaluated within the context of three theories. They are: the environmental justice theory, the social justice theory and the psycho-analytic theory. Since the preponderance of incidents which leads to the tragedy in the novel are environmental in nature, the people are subjugated because there is profit to be made by the exploration for oil in their land even when it results in exploitation and degradation. Not even the tragic deaths of the Kosawa people deter the oil giant. In a broader sense, the social justice theory is also used to explain what happens because of the inhumane treatment meted out to the villagers by Pexton Oil Company officials, who are hand-in-glove with the government of the day, which is headed by a ruthless and cold-blooded dictator referred to in the novel as his Excellency. The psycho-analytic theory is applied peripherally to evaluate some aspects of the emotions which are engendered by the oppressors' actions.

Historically and in contemporary times, man is pre-occupied with power struggles, the uneven distribution of resources, and subjugation or oppression. Nations and societies are also replete with stories of struggles and resistance against subjugation. Thus, the issue of social justice, as a universal phenomenon, has been polemic. From the ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle, through to Karl Marx and to contemporary theorists and scholars, social justice has been viewed from the perspectives of power play, ethics, and 'beneficence which nurtures and enhances the function or end of humanity' (McCarthy 10). It could also be adduced that Aristotle's standpoint of social justice as grounded in politics and ethics (10) may have shaped Marx's application of the term to:

> a broad range of issues, such as workers' control and creativity, producer associations, human rights and human needs, fairness and reciprocity in exchange, wealth distribution, political emancipation, economic and ecological crises, and economic democracy. (10)

McCarthy's summation of Marx's theory of social justice, especially as it concerns human rights, fairness, reciprocity in exchange, and ecological crises are key factors in assessing the incidents that Mbue renders in her novel through the multiple narrators. Another social justice theorist, John Rawls, views justice as 'fairness (…) the ideal situation where an initial position of equality should define the fundamental terms of all social relations' (13). Whereas Rawls' opinion of justice as fairness is appropriate to define the matter of injustice in *How Beautiful We Were*, his reference to equality does not apply in the novel. The issue at stake is not equality of any sort, but damage to the environment. Since the main incidents centre on land grabbing and dispossession, and the reluctance or outright failure by Pexton Oil to compensate the Kosawa villagers – people whose mainstay has been forcefully taken from them – it is appropriate that the issues be evaluated also from the viewpoint of environmental justice.

Lynelle Watts and David Hodgson opine that environmental justice is ecological and environment concerns with focus on global equality (9). They state further that the issue of ecological disaster 'dampens utility – enhancing cooperative efforts (…) generating divergent unstable expectations about future behaviour, eroding trust and civic norms among different social groups' (9). Watts' and Hodgson's point drives home the fact that when the environment is abused by external (not natural) forces, disunity, which fuels under-development, is bound to prevail. Also, David Schlosberg defines environmental justice as 'distributive conceptions of justice that must also embrace notions of justice based on recognition, capabilities, and participation' (1). Schlosberg throws up the involvement of the people, no matter their positions and circumstances (although he alludes to capabilities) in the enforcement and development of environmental laws and policies because they are affected by such laws and policies.

On her part, Leah Temper avers that environmental justice is 'the struggle for access to a safe and healthy environment, free from pollution and to the environmental resources needed for survival, wellbeing and social reproduction' (np.). Temper's definition is apt for this study as it vividly captures the dilemma faced by the people of Kosawa. The despoliation of their environment by the giant American company and the indifference of the company's executives as well as the federal government constitute a violation of the people's freedom to life and safety. It is a negation of their right to the 'inseparability of the environment from everyday life' because the environment represents 'the places where people live, work and play' (Temper np). These are

germane issues which have continuously dominated the discourse on people's right to their environment and raise the question of whether a foreign entity has the right to turn a natural resource, that should ordinarily be a blessing, into a source of pain and anguish for the people. The Ogoni people of Southern Nigeria have been affected by the phenomenon of environmental injustice and have been engaged in agitations to stop the despoliation of their land and natural resources for years (French np.).

Another vital tool of evaluation deployed in this research is psycho-analytic literary theory because of the emotions of fear that the intimidation by the oppressors arouse among the villagers. The evolution of the psycho-analytic theory is traced to Sigmund Freud. The theory creates 'a procedure for the analysis and therapy of neuroses (…) and many developments and practices in the history of civilization, including warfare, mythology and religion, as well as literature and the other arts' (Abrams and Harpham 320). The theory is concerned with the state of mind of an individual that is prompted, usually, by occurrences around him.

Whereas contemporary theorists and critics after Freud, such as Patrick Colm Hogan (2003) and Celine Surprenant (2017), have expressed diverse perspectives of the theory and how psycho-analysis could be applied, Badegul Can Emir's postulation that psycho-analysis deals with the human mind and circumstances which create diverse emotions (50) is utilized here because of the balanced view of literature and psychology that Emir puts forward. He proposes that 'while psychology studies human behaviour and their causes, literature depicts human behaviour through fiction' (51). That is what Mbue does in her novel to explore the feelings and reactions of the people as they experience environmental abuse. In that regard, the author mirrors the fear that is perceived to be the product of the intimidation of the Kosawa villagers by their oppressors. This falls under emotions generated by the human mind or soul.

Regarding scholarly reviews of the novel, *How Beautiful We Were* has had a handful of newspaper reviews. To the knowledge of this researcher, it would appear that not much critical appraisals have been carried out about the book. This chapter may, therefore, be one of the earliest critical analyses of the novel. It is, however, pertinent at this point to give a summary of some of the reviews of the novel so far. Omar El-Akkad describes the novel as one of 'a moral claustrophobia which hangs over the people of Kosawa' (np.). He catalogues the woes that the villagers are subjected to when the oil company's pipelines

and drilling sites leave the fields fallow and water poisoned. The people engage in various struggles to get the company out, and their land restored. El-Akkad's review succinctly lays bare the feeling of the villagers but leaves out the series of negotiations by some of the elders for monetary compensation. The implication of their action is that if they were adequately compensated, some of the elders were willing to look the other way while the degradation of their land persists. This raises a lot of moral questions.

Another moral question is raised by Rachael Barenbaum when she draws attention to the tendency of the developed world to 'bask on the sweat and discomfort of poor African countries with potentials for wealth, which is milked by the developed world' (np.). She writes about the revolutionary role of Thula, the novel's central character, and the capacity of one generation to sacrifice itself for another (np.). Barenbaum's assessment of issues in the novel is germane and touches on the fundamental principle of self-will and determination. Thula, from being a reticent little girl, grows to become a selfless young lady who literally puts aside every personal pleasure for the restoration of the people and their land.

Another reviewer, Stuart Miller, laments the deaths of children that occur in the novel because their land and water are poisoned by an American oil company. He points out that 'when some parents protest, they vanish, presumably killed for their efforts. Others are tortured, hanged or even gunned down in front of their children' (np.). The reviewer further highlights the indifference and apathy of government and the company that greet the people's protests. The ineffective help rendered by activists from America is also referenced by Miller. These are robust observations about the novel and serve to put the anomalies in their proper perspectives. Also robust is the argument put forward by Ron Charles about the Kosawa villagers' misplaced trust in American decency. He juxtaposes what happens in Mbue's first novel, *Behold the Dreamers,* where an African, Jende Jonda, 'struggles to become an accepted member of the American society' (np.), and the crisis in *How Beautiful We Were* that deals with the people's efforts to get the American oil giant to stop the dangerous drilling of oil in their land. Charles' effort to draw this difference between the two novels is revealing. His summation is that whereas Jonda seeks recognition in a society that has clearly not regarded him as worthy, the people of Kosawa would prefer not to have any dealings with the foreign company.

Finally in this segment, Sudhirendar Sharma writes on 'the powerful polemic and nuanced exploration of human nature' (np.)

in the novel. He hinges his argument on the Kosawa people's reaction when their 'way of life, lived in close proximity to nature, is being systematically destroyed by the demands of development' (np.). The reviewer points out that the presumption of the end at the opening of the novel foreshadows the defeat that the village eventually suffers at the hands of a corporate giant. Sharma's portraiture of happenings in the novel is pertinent. So also is his attention to the author's depiction of the 'individual suffering which usually gets subsumed in records of mass oppression and tussle between a ruthless oil company and a defiant forest community' (np).

These reviews are indeed wholesome and summarize the novel's subject-matters. It would appear, to the knowledge of this researcher, as stated earlier in this chapter, that there is a dearth of critical articles on the novel. It is hoped that this chapter will open the floodgate of critical assessments and evaluations of the novel with regard, especially to the subject of might against right. It is in that respect, therefore, that the insensitivity of the oppressors, the deployment of intimidation to create fear and confusion, as well as their divide and rule mechanism, are perceived as enablers in the perpetuation of the subjugation of the Kosawa villagers. Insensitivity is the lack of care exhibited by someone to another or others.

Insensitivity is utilized in *How Beautiful We Were* by the American oil company as they perpetrate their uncharitable actions against the desire of the Kosawa people. When viewed as a weapon, insensitivity assumes a psychological dimension and the results are far-reaching even though not physical. It is a subtle means by which the people are cowed to submission. In one of the experiences narrated by the omnibus narrator – children – the Americans' insensitivity to the plight of the people is expressed thus: 'How could they be happy when we were dying for their sake? Why wouldn't they ask their friend at Pexton to stop killing us? Was it possible they knew nothing of our plight? Was Pexton lying to them, just as they were lying to us?' (72). Too many rhetorical questions by the narrator to which the villagers have no answers. The disturbing issue arises from the visit of one of the American overseers. Although the white man appears overtly joyful and friendly when the local people greet him, the narrator cannot fathom how the man can smile in the midst of the villagers' woes. That the white man smiles gleefully when his company's actions violate the basic environmental rule of freedom to enjoy 'safe and healthy environment, free from pollution' (Temper np.) is, in the estimation of the omnibus narrator, the height of insensitivity and impunity.

If the Kosawa people do not think deeply about the remorseless treatment they receive from Pexton Oil, the company's driver throws it directly at them at the end of a meeting. He says to the trio of Woja Beki, Bongo, and Lusaka, elders of the village:

> 'Please don't make me laugh' the driver says. I turn to him, surprised (…) 'Why would I make you laugh?' 'Because you are talking like people who were dropped from the sky and landed in this country only yesterday (…) No one in Bezam cares about villagers like you, okay? Absolutely no one in the government, no one at Pexton, no one whatsoever. (94)

The above passage reflects the true situation: neither Pexton nor the government are worried about the effects of the pollution of the village's environment and water. All they care about is the profit that accrues to them from the oil exploration. Their action negates the principle of environmental justice because the environment represents 'the places where people live, work and play' (Temper np.). The driver's statement quoted above could be described as a mirror of the mindset of the oppressors, who act with insensitivity and impunity because the damage to the environment and the people's well-being matters less to them.

The oppressors' insensitivity becomes more glaring when the ownership of the land becomes a controversial subject:

> When we had asked them, at the last meeting, when they thought Pexton would leave, would it be years or decades, they had replied that, 'well, that was a tough question to answer (…)' The land was our land. It would never be theirs, no matter how often they said so. The Sweet One responded that he understood and completely agreed with us, but the ownership of the land was now a matter of law, only the government could determine who owned what land. (205–6)

The Sweet One – the American 'sympathizer' – turns out to be deceptive because it is clear to whose side the pendulum would swing when the argument about land ownership is brought to the fore. The white man's statement shocks the people just as the matter of land-use decrees, enacted by governments in parts of the world, remain an issue of perpetual contention. The Sweet One's statement is insensitive, it smacks of impunity and the people resist it vehemently. The land is their land, they tell him in response, but their response is feeble and of no effect. Certain actions in the novel such as the sensitization of the outside world about the people's plight by Austin, the American journalist, may have attracted some palliatives (only in the form of occasional monetary

compensation). The danger of land exploitation and pollution of the natural resources continue unabated because of the next weapon of subjugation – intimidation – which is as potent as insensitivity.

Intimidation is the act of creating fear and confusion in people. This is a strong weapon that Pexton Oil, with the support of the federal government, deploys to subjugate the people. The tool is successful because the federal government supports Pexton Oil Company by drafting soldiers who are more or less 'weapons of mass destruction' against the Kosawa poor and helpless masses. The villagers have very little chance of withstanding such military might. Through intimidation, the government ensures that the people are afraid and unable to oppose the negative actions of the oil company. Early in the novel, the reader encounters a scene where some officials of government and the oil company undertake a routine visit to Kosawa. It is learnt, through a flashback, that six men from the village had earlier gone to the capital to seek solutions to their ecological problems but 'disappeared' and never returned. On the fateful day of this visit by the government and company officials, however, Konga, a mad man, seizes the car key from the driver in order to hold the visitors captive. In the tense and confusing atmosphere that Konga's action creates, Woja Beki, the local chieftain, attempts to further intimidate the people:

> 'Your fathers cannot fight,' he said. 'Your mothers are old; your wives old, your children are weak. If you don't do what is right, who will? I promise you, if you continue standing there and allow Konga to bring us harm, the wind will sing songs about a village that was laid to waste because his young men were cowards.' (21)

In this passage Woja Beki, who ought to be on the side of the people to fight the oppressors, joins the oppressors. He foresees what is coming – a revolt. His statement aims to create fear and confusion. He taunts them. He also paints a picture of imminent defeat because he believes that the villagers cannot win under the circumstance. That circumstance is born out of the misconception that the official delegation, with the backing of the government, is a superior power against which the people cannot fight. This feeling is strengthened by Lynell Watts and David Hodgson's argument, though in another situation, that 'the foundation of injustice is often perpetrated by many socially misconstrued erroneous myths. These myths may include the myth of racial or gender superiority' (3). Woja Beki understands these dynamics of power and uses them to cow the people to stop Konga from acting against the visitors. His statement turns out, however,

to be prophetic as Konga's action snowballs into other unintended consequences; one of the visitors dies a few days after and mayhem is visited on the village and the people. Woja Beki's remarks aim to instil fear in the people and intimidate them. This weapon succeeds, initially, as the people remain timid and unable to join Konga's rebellion against the visitors. Derisively, the village head reminds them of their forebears' weaknesses in order to create the impression that the present action could only bring them more woes. Fear, which results from intimidation, is a form of pathos which debilitates and belongs to the class of emotions described by Abrams and Harpham as 'the conflict between the need for expression and the compulsion to repress such self-revelation' (320). This is apt in the case of the Kosawa villagers because of their initial immobility.

There are several instances in the novel where the people fail to take action out of fear of reprisal. It is the result of their intimidation by their oppressors. Narrating the prelude to the novel's first massacre, Thula, the central character, gives the picture of how intimidated the people were when one of the men, held captive following Konga's action, dies in the custody of the village head. 'We could tell from our mothers' faces and their trembling hands, and how tightly they held our younger siblings to their bosom, that they too were in fragments' (128). Their hands tremble because they have been brow-beaten to believe that if anything happens to any white man or government official, they will be in trouble. That is what happens in the novel. It is unfortunate that it is not only the white men who intimidate the people; the Kosawa people are also bullied by their fellow Africans because of the weapon of divide and rule deployed by the oppressors.

Divide and rule is a tool by which people manipulate others and enforce their dominance by choosing a few willing stooges among the oppressed to do the oppressors' biddings. The divide and rule weapon of subjugation is discerned in the novel as both physical and non-physical. The actions which fall under this description ensure that the people are perpetually divided and unable to speak with one voice. The colonialists successfully deployed the method when they appointed certain people to serve as warrant chiefs or whatever name they chose to call them. In this novel, such local chieftains are referred to as Woja. They often enjoy certain privileges above the other members of the oppressed people. Also, locals from the city are favoured above Kosawa villagers in the provision of jobs by Pexton Oil. The aim, as we learn, is to pitch the people against one another and to ensure that

they do not speak with one voice against the oppressors. This passage paints the picture succinctly:

> By the time our fathers came of age, around when Pexton began drilling its third well, it had become clear to everyone in Kosawa that the only way to partake in the oil well was to work for Pexton. But every time our fathers went to Gardens to apply for work, the supervisors told them there were no jobs – all the jobs had been taken by men brought in from villages around Bezam, men whose brothers and uncles and cousins and tribesmen worked in government office and had no doubt conducted secret meetings and signed cryptic documents to ensure that whatever prosperity the oil wells brought would be reserved for their families (74)

The above scenario of divide and rule is not only an aberration; it violates the norm of social justice. Watts and Hodgson quote Cournover's explanation of the phenomenon, though in another circumstance, as the absence of 'distributive justice (the fair and just distribution of a society's resources, opportunities and burdens) (…) and environmental injustice' (24).

The lack of fairness that Pexton Oil exhibits is worse because the people whose land is exploited and vandalized by the company's operations are cut off completely from the wealth created by the operation. Instead, they suffer the woes of ill-health and deaths. The act of favouring the Kosawa neighbours is targeted at ensuring that none of the neighbours will join them to oppose the company because such neighbours have been compensated adequately. The divide and rule approach is further perfected by Pexton Oil when years later, and following agitations by the Kosawa villagers, the company chooses to further pitch the elders against the people by indulging them. Here is an example:

> We lifted our glasses high, to imitate the American, grinning like giddy goats. Mr. Fish clinked his glass against Sonni's, and we began clinking our glasses against each other's (…) We walked out of the house that evening with three bottles of the drink, his gift to us. That night we shared it with all the men of Kosawa as we recounted the story of the meeting, enjoying this moment of unity that had long eluded us. We told ourselves not to celebrate quite yet (265)

In this passage, the executives of Pexton begin courting some elders of the village as a way of placating the few and getting them on their side even as the majority suffers. They gratify them with exotic drinks gifts and even get them drunk in some cases. The narrator writes that

they became 'giddy like goats'. They soon realize it is a mere pyrrhic victory. All this while, the effects of oil spill and pollution do not abate:

> That all happened about six years before Thula returned home. In that time, we did nothing to hurt Pexton. Oil spilled on our land and we did nothing. Our children coughed and we did nothing. We sat on the bus to Lokunja with the labourers and we did nothing to them. We'd given Pexton our word. We kept it. (265)

This is total victory for the divide and rule mechanism adopted by the oil company's functionaries. They ensure that they win over the few men who have the tendency to rebel. That way, the men keep mute, sheath their swords, so to speak, while the company persists in degrading their environment and causing the people pain as well as death. They are unable to act because their consciences have been bought by the oppressors who manipulate them to gain advantage over them.

Although at various points, there appear to be solutions to the people's woes, such as enticing them with education and placating some of the leaders, financially, such solutions end up being ephemeral. At certain points also, the people attempt some rebellious actions, intended to get the oil company to quit their land or compensate them adequately. The village is eventually sacked as they do not survive a second massacre following the killing of more white men.

Amidst the failure of actions to checkmate the environmental pollution and degradation in the fictional African society of Kosawa, Imbolo Mbue paints a picture of the hopelessness of the people who are victims of the insensitivity of imperialists and their own (villagers') federal government. She mirrors also the high level of intimidation of the people who are timid and disunited to act decisively against their subjugation because of the divide and rule technique adopted by the executives of the oil company and their collaborators. These weapons of insensitivity, intimidation and divide and rule are skilfully yet ruthlessly deployed against the villagers.

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Abrogating Aesthetic Boundaries in Contemporary Nigerian Poetry

A Reading of Femi Abodunrin's Poetry as Drama

SANI GAMBO

In recent times, poetry has generally experienced a gradual and systematic shift in favour of a new performance paradigm which points to the fluid nature of the genre. In this context, the poetic genre has generally become ever more performative in outlook. The implication of this is that the traditional notion of poetry, and those of prose, drama, and even orature as distinct artistic categories have come under serious contemporary scrutiny. This development facilitates the emergence of a new form of poetry rendition which Moses Tsenongu describes as 'neo-performance'. As Tsenongu theorizes, neo-performance is a form of poetry rendition 'characterised by heavy performativity' because in it, 'the boundaries of various genres and modes of the art are collapsing rapidly' (69) due to the 'radical cross-fertilisation of categories' (68) it espouses. With reference to Femi Abodunrin's poetry collection, *It Would Take Time: Conversation with Living Ancestors* (2002), this chapter demonstrates the fluid nature of contemporary Nigerian literature accentuated by the coalescence of literary categories to the extent that the distinctions between genres are gradually disappearing. The fusion of categories in contemporary literature is possible through a process that Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin describe as abrogation. According to them, abrogation is 'the rejection by post-colonial writers of a normative concept of "correct" or "standard" English used by certain classes or groups, and of the corresponding concepts of inferior "dialects" or "marginal variants"' (3–4).

This definition enhances the understanding of abrogation as the rejection of the traditional or normative concept of genres in modern literature. This is possible through appropriation which, in the context of this enquiry, is the process of revising and redefining literary categories by introducing the elements of one genre into another, resulting in fluid/hybrid forms such as neo-performance. What these suggest is the centrality of performance in the creation and reception

of modern African poetry. This assumption is partly motivated by the view that African poets have returned to the oral cadences of their communities. To this end, Robert Fraser observes that, through a contemporary African poet like Odia Ofeimun, 'as through many of his contemporaries, the oral poets of Africa's past seem to stir and sing again' (310). The implication of Fraser's observation is that contemporary African poets give 'voice' to the oral tradition by amplifying it through their writings and the performance of their writings. The significance of this development is that African poetry projects new forms of rendition which rely heavily on performative modes. This neo-performative trend is manifest in an emergent form of poetry presentation known as the Spoken Word (Slam Poetry or Stand-Up Poetry) with Dike Chukwumerije as one of its most prominent practitioners. This Spoken Word artist performs on the stage before large audiences as well as through electronic media. The performative texture of poetry in contemporary times transcends the landscapes of oral poetic performance; it has indeed crossed into the territories of the scripted word. This chapter examines how this trend of cross-fertilizing genres in Nigerian poetry challenges and redefines existing creative practices.

Kofi Anyidoho articulates the performance potentialities of African poetry by categorizing the performance of poetry by African poets into three different levels including: (1) dramatic reading; (2) the fusion of poetry, music, and action; and (3) total art (Anyidoho 384). Anyidoho's postulation confirms that African poetry has become more performance-oriented than ever. Although poetry has always expressed itself through the various levels highlighted by Anyidoho, this trend has not been as developed as it is now. The practice of poetry reading or the transformation of poetry into total art incorporating music, action, and other elements of drama has, in recent times, gained currency across the world. In Nigeria, this practice is blossoming for two reasons. The first is the need to bring poetry closer to the predominantly illiterate and semi-literate public. Second, performance aesthetics are ready tools for poetic engagements because poets like Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark-Bekederemo, Okinba Launko (Femi Osofisan), Niyi Osundare, Olu Obafemi, Esiaba Irobi, Fred Agbeyegbe, Denja Abdullahi, Hyginus Ekwuazi, and Sunday Ododo are also competent dramatists. Other poets like Tanure Ojaide, Odia Ofeimun, Ezenwa-Ohaeto, Remi Raji, Femi Abodunrin, and Akeem Lasisi who do not directly operate as dramatists still find ways to imbue their poems with the aesthetics of drama and performance.

Since this chapter examines Abodunrin's poetry as drama, it is imperative to briefly consider the concept of drama. According to M.H. Abrams, drama is a 'form of composition designed for performance in the theatre, in which actors take the roles of the characters, perform the indicated actions, and utter the written dialogue' (69). The key components of drama identified by Aristotle include: plot, character, thought, diction, music, and spectacle (Nwabueze 69). Although drama and poetry are traditionally distinct categories of literature, they exist in a symbiotic relationship expressed by Johnson's conception of drama, as revealed by Bradbury, as 'a poem written for representation' (Bradbury 63). The relationship between drama and poetry is further suggested by Baldick's conception of dramatic poetry as 'a category of verse composition for theatrical performance' (71). These submissions presuppose the possibilities of composing a poem in the form of drama or drama in the form of verse, and performing a poem before an audience as if it is a dramatic script. These possibilities become more realistic because of the increasing appropriation of the aesthetics of drama into the framework of poetry. In view of this, Nwachukwu-Agbada has this to say about Ezenwa-Ohaeto's poetry: 'As a creative writer, Ezenwa-Ohaeto was essentially a poet. He infused drama into his poetic lines such that he could have been a dramatist if he chose' (Nwachukwu-Agbada 7). Due to the manifestation of similar aesthetic sensibilities in Ofeimun's recent poetry, Effiok B. Uwatt can boldly speak of an 'Odia Ofeimun's dramaturgy' (Uwatt 75) even though Ofeimun is not known to be a dramatist in the conventional sense. What Ofeimun does is to compose his poems in such a way that they can easily be adapted for stage performance. These remarks are valid as they reflect the quest for innovation and radical experimentation in contemporary Nigerian poetry. The use of drama by Nigerian poets is exemplified by Soyinka's 'Telephone Conversation', Clark-Bekederemo's 'Streamside Exchange', Osundare's 'Olowo debates Talaka' in *Songs of the Season*, Raji's 'Prologue' in *Lovesong for My Wasteland*, and entire volumes like Ofeimun's trilogy of 'Poems for Dance Drama': *Under African Skies*, *A Feast of Return*, and *Nigeria the Beautiful*, Ifeoma Chinwuba's *African Romance*, and Abodunrin's *It Would Take Time*. This chapter demonstrates the authenticity of this discourse by examining Abodunrin's appropriation of the structure and basic components of drama such as character, dialogue, conflict, stage direction, acts and scenes, and chorus, to abrogate aesthetic boundaries and interrogate the nature of poetry in *It Would Take Time*.

In the preface to *It Would Take Time*, Abodunrin observes that the history of Africa is characterized by the 'unending presence of disorder and disorder' (9). He stresses that this permanent state of disorder in Africa is irrigated by a range of factors which include 'the transatlantic slave trade, fratricidal and internecine wars, colonialism, neo-colonialism and above all, the rush to modernize the "relative pseudo-scientific" outlook of African cultures' (8). Since literature does not exist in a vacuum but is situated within a socio-historical matrix, Abodunrin's poetry foregrounds the grim socio-historical developments of Africa within the fabric of its thematic schema. Framed in the tradition of protest literature, *It Would Take Time* laments this undying presence of chaos in Africa. The volume is concerned with the challenges of a society in transition, a society caught in a permanent state of (un)becoming. Owing to this, Abodunrin believes that Africa's arrested development and continuous romance with anarchy can only be reversed through an aggressive process of decolonization, and this is what he pursues in the volume. The poet enthuses:

> *It Would Take Time* is engaged in what should be the simultaneous act of eliciting from history, mythology, and literature, for the benefit of both genuine aliens and alienated Africans, a continuing process of self-apprehension whose temporary dislocation appears to have persuaded many of its irrelevance (16–17)

Basic to Abodunrin's quest for decolonization is the mixing of languages and aesthetic forms in the text. Like many African writers who imbue their works with local languages as vehicles of decolonization, Abodunrin makes profuse use of Yoruba language and expressions in the text. He mixes Yoruba and English, which he describes as a 'tool with which a world has been textually constructed' (16). Apart from language, the poet also mixes literary genres through appropriation to underscore his rejection of the traditional notion of literature. Through this experimental, innovative practice, the poet challenges and reworks the original literary orthodoxy of genre categories. He justifies this trend in his poetry by insisting that

> [a]t the level of experimentation with form – perhaps the primary objective of *It Would Take Time* is best realisable in terms of what Kancherla Indrasena Reddy has described in relation to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's paradigmatic novel, *Matigari* – in the following way: 'Although he has not tried his hand at poetry as a practicing poet does, his *Matigari* is an attempt to *blur the boundaries between genres*; and it does have provision for poetry too, of the orature brand, in the form of songs!' (16)

It is obvious from this submission that *It Would Take Time* is Abodunrin's attempt to accomplish with poetry what Ngũgĩ accomplished with the novel by blurring the boundaries between genres. He appropriates some elements of drama into his poetry to lament the endless state of disorder which defines the African experience. The possibility of such an engagement is affirmed by Ademola Dasylva and Olutoyin B. Jegede who observe that later developments in dramatic poetry 'confirm the possibility of a dramatic verse having a dramatic situation in which characters engage in a dialogue' (24).

The book, *It Would Take Time*, is sub-divided into four parts with each part consisting of a long poem or a series of poems interrelated by an overriding motif. The first part is titled 'It would take time'; the second is titled 'The drama of consolation I'; the third is titled 'Conversation with living ancestors'; while the fourth is titled 'The drama of consolation II'. The volume ends with an epilogue of eight units. All the sub-divisions show, by their titles which are consistent with the title of the volume, the intention of the poet to make drama out of poetry, or poetry out of drama. Some of the aesthetics of drama employed by the poet to query and shift the boundaries of the genres include: dialogue, conflict, acts and scenes, stage direction, characters, and chorus.

The text, *It Would Take Time*, is a series of dialogues occasionally interspersed by monologic utterances. One instance of the application of monologues is the first part titled 'It would take time', which is narrated by Mosunmola. But the manner of narration makes prominent the presence of a listener who is understood to be Abiodun Arobiogun Shobowale, the narrator's elder brother. Although the poem is essentially a monologue, it is clearly 'orient[ed] towards an addressee' (Egya 75) by its constant reference to the listener through the phrase, 'child of my mother', which occurs throughout the book. 'It would take time' is a long poem of five movements which sets the tone of the discourse for the entire volume. From the beginning, the first persona, Mosunmola, whose narrative introduces the ensuing discourse, is unpretentious about her preference for the epic form, which is part of traditional orature, over and above the sonnet, which is entirely a foreign mode. The choice of epic as the medium of discourse arises from its flexibility, which enhances the dialogic and thus the dramatic structure of the text. The quest for dialogicity/dialogization through the epic medium is stated thus:

> So let's have the epic to be dialogic
> we can jettison the iambic to confound the enemies of our race.

> Let the sonnet receive our overwhelming contempt
> if they must know that we understand its limitations! (24)

To be dialogic is to employ a duality or multiplicity of voices to construct dialogue(s). Simply put, dialogue is 'the verbal exchanges between the characters' (Jacobus 20). Maria Ajima and Sarah Shittu add that dialogue is

> the speech of characters in any kind of narrative, story or play. Dialogue is very important in a play as what a character says tells us about his character. What other characters say about a particular character also reinforces what his nature is. It also reveals the motive(s) of the characters. The audience need to scrutinise or weigh dialogue to enable them judge a character rightly. (43)

According to Emeka Nwabueze, '[d]ramatic dialogue must be appropriate to the different characters in the play' (104). This implies that dialogue should reflect characters' social, educational, gender, religious, economic, and political status. In *It Would Take Time*, Abodunrin employs a series of dialogues to construct relevant socio-political and cultural discourses and imbue his poetry with a dramatic quality. One of such dialogic encounters is the conversation between Latosa and Atunda in the second movement of part four:

> **Latosa**
> (*in severe pain*) Atunda?
>
> **Atunda**
> I am here my Lord!
>
> **Latosa**
> Atunda, the great one of primordial remembrance!
>
> **Atunda**
> May my Lord live forever!
>
> **Latosa**
> Atunda, father of knowledge!
>
> **Atunda**
> I answer not to my own glory, my Lord!
>
> **Latosa**
> How many times did I call you, great one?
>
> **Atunda**
> THREE TIMES! Lapota! (66–67)

It Would Take Time is a volume of many voices in the form of multiple personae and characters. The monologic vituperations of the opening part end with the first persona setting the stage for the dialogic structure of the entire text. It is the first persona, Mosunmola, who invites the second persona, Shobowale, to add his voice to the discourse by presenting his masterpiece, '*The Drama of Consolation*', as indicated below:

> But to convince you that these are no disturbed reveries
> That I am no priest of cultic obduracists philosophising
> on riddles, I shall make good my promise to be dialogic.
> To convince this hypocritical hostile age that
>
> your creative oversights are genuine and that
> my desire to conceive an epic that would take time
> is not an idle indulgence, I would allow your voice –
> ancient and apocalyptic to be heard even at the risk of
>
> muffling my own. Shall we begin with your magnum opus:
> *The Drama of Consolation*? It strikes me as a good point
> – elder brother, reflecting your obstinacy since mother
> conceived us as the Siamese twins we resemble
> but me doff my raffia hat for you master of rhetoric. (29–30)

Consequent to this invitation is the introduction of drama, '*The Drama of Consolation*', into the structure of the poetic text. The adoption of this metafictional approach enhances the dialogic and performative framework of the text by giving voice to a coterie of characters like Latosa, Atunda, Morenike, Pariola, Batola, and Alasofunfun, who all advance the discourse initiated at the beginning of the volume by the first persona. The second part of the text therefore begins with a brief response by the second persona, Shobowale, to the charges earlier established against him by the first persona, Mosunmola. From the fourth movement of part two onward, other aesthetics of drama built into the structure of the volume begin to emerge. The process being described is a novel attempt by the poet to circumvent the normative practice of literature by allowing the genres to dovetail with one another. In this process, the text is able to interrogate and challenge its own form and structure, as well as the very nature of literature as a creative enterprise. In other words, by conflating literary categories, the text is commenting on and critiquing its own conventional practices and techniques in a self-referential manner.

In the poem under exploration, the reference to 'the enemies of our race' by Mosunmola in the lines, 'so let's have the epic to be dialogic /

we can jettison the iambic to confound the enemies of our race' (24) reveals the tensions and conflicts that pervade the landscapes of Abodunrin's poetry as if it is a dramatic text. This conflict operates on different levels simultaneously. The first level of conflict is a filial one, between Mosunmola and Shobowale, who is the custodian of native custom. She rebukes him for failing to preserve traditional culture. As a result of Shobowale's indifference to the violation of native custom by imperial forces and their local collaborators, conflict ensued between him and Mosunmola, who takes him to task as follows:

> But was the dance – the macabre dance, not initiated by you?
> Now can you see what the toads of culture have done,
> to consummate a pyrrhic victory you never quite condemned-
>
> what they've done to make cultural clash seem routine, and
> neo-colonial angst seem irreverent? How can I adumbrate
> your effusive claim that you never partook in their
> orgy of violence nor consented to be knighted by them
>
> – elder brother! soon to be remembered…! child of my mother
> when it was you who had the sensibility, mythic or mutilated
> to set the metaphysical boulder of our race on its course? (24)

Shobowale denies being indifferent as charged by Mosunmola through a series of rhetorical and vituperative outbursts, loaded with abusive expressions. His denial of this charge is captured and summarized by the following rhetorical expression: 'Who in his right mind would dethrone dialogue and replace it with silence?' (49)

As a text implicated in the process of decolonization, *It Would Take Time* is thematically influenced by the conflict of tradition and modernity, a subject of interest to African writers since Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. This conflict is evinced by the reference to 'cultural clash' and 'enemies of our race' in Mosunmola's outbursts quoted above. Culture conflict is the consequence of cultural, racial, economic, and political struggles characterized by the 'orgy of violence' by the colonizing powers on the colonized subjects. These struggles result in the systematic erasure of the tradition of the colonized subjects in favour of those of the imperial powers. Consequently, European languages such as English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish remain the *lingua franca* in most parts of the world. The conflict of tradition and modernity and its after-effects are thus some of the leitmotifs of Abodunrin's work.

Also built into the fabric of Abodunrin's poetry is the conflict between the rich and the poor highlighted by the determination of the 'Iscariots of our race' to 'create the poor' in society. The reference

to Iscariot is an allusion to Judas Iscariot, one of the disciples of Jesus Christ who, for the love of money, betrayed his master. Like their treacherous ancestor, Judas, the 'Iscariots of our race' – the privileged few – prefer the wealth and recognition of the imperial powers to the collective welfare of their societies. Therefore, they conspire with the colonisers to sabotage, frustrate, and derail the collective aspirations of the men and women who hold them in highest trust. This conflict is implied thus:

> but these Iscariots of our race shrieking dementedly:
> 'let us create the poor in our own image!'
> Imaginators of a world spurious, unreal and epileptic. (24)

The expression, 'let us create the poor in our own image', is a deliberate attempt by men to repudiate and revise God's work as enunciated in the Holy Scriptures: 'And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth"' (Genesis 1:26). By revising the divine order, these men only impoverish and destroy the world as they become '[i]maginators of a world spurious, unreal and epileptic'. The various dimensions of conflict explored above imbue the text with a dramatic quality. By appropriating traditional properties of drama such as these, the text interrogates the ways in which performativity enhances the themes of the poem such as the critique of colonial practices, class dichotomy, interpersonal relationship, and more.

Some parts of *It Would Take Time* are composed in the form of acts and scenes to enhance the performative structure of the text. According to J.A. Cuddon, an act is 'a major division in a play. Each act may have one or more scenes' (8). Nwabueze adds that besides '[constituting] the major divisions in a play', acts 'mark out complete units of action which contribute effectively to the total action' (101). He states further that '[i]n traditional structure, the acts constitute the larger units of the play, while the scenes are the smaller units of the acts. Every scene has its own structural pattern, which sometimes constitute the rise and fall of the dramatic action' (103). The use of acts and scenes for poetic effects is respectively exemplified by the fourth movement of part two and the second movement of part four of *It Would Take Time*. The fourth movement of part two exemplifies these dramatic features:

Act One: Scene One
Simply called *The Drama of Consolation or our Redeemers –*
the first act of the play we are told:

Takes place at Igbo-Igbale,
a fearful forest in a Baluban society.
Igbo-Igbale is the enclave of the Baluban deity
Esu-Elegbara: enigmatic, intractable and
utterly incomprehensible. Esu symbolises
different things to different people. (36)

A similar mode of expression is adopted in the second movement of part four which describes the setting of the play under 'act one' as follows:

Act One – The Past
The Primordial Act

(A market-place)

(*Oja-Oba or the king's market*
is a centre of intense activities
where fortunes are made and lost.

If the Stock Exchange epitomises
the highest attainment of a free market enterprises,
Oja-Oba is its closest ally in a pastoral agrarian setting.

But unlike the Stock Exchange,
no one is excluded because it is also the scene
of intense politico-cultural and social activities.

The dead, the living and the unborn co-habit at Oja-Oba.
Let us say quite simply that it is the core of organic society –
The king's palace might be an enclosure adjacent to the Oja,
but Oja-Oba is an open space and therein we find
the grotesque, the ornate and the refined!). (62)

These illustrations show the existence of drama in Abodunrin's poetry. Among the genres of literature, only drama is traditionally conceived in acts and scenes. Furthermore, the references to 'play' and 'drama' in a poetic context exemplified by the first extract above show that the poet is consciously striving to construct poetry in the form of drama or drama in the form of poetry. This practice illustrates how Abodunrin rejects or attacks the orthodox idea of genres and his relentless quest to abrogate or shift aesthetic boundaries. The fact that each of the above examples is similar to stage direction is noteworthy as the poet also employs stage direction in his poetry.

The use of stage direction is another element of drama transposed into Abodunrin's poetry. In a dramatic script, stage direction provides information necessary for the understanding of the setting, atmosphere, characters, and action of the play. Nwabueze stresses the importance of stage direction by saying that

> [m]odern playwrights use stage directions to create atmosphere and mood, describe the general background of the play, make comments on the play, and give a clear description of the characters. Stage directions, therefore, help the reader to feel the total impact of the play. They also help the director and the actors to realise the play as theatre. (106)

In a performance context, stage direction may be provided by the narrator who brings certain details of the performance to the audience. This assertion is true of Abodunrin's poetry. But unlike conventional drama in which stage direction normally precedes the action or the scene, it is, in Abodurin's work, inserted into the body of the poem as typified by the fourth movement of the second part titled 'The drama of consolation I'. In this instance, stage direction occurs in the middle of a conversation among Batola, Morenike, and Pariola, as exemplified below:

Batola
(*To the 2nd and 3rd Narrators*)
Comrades, please go and bring
Before our guests,
The oxymoronic celebrants of our glorious past!

(*The forest lights up,*
depicting an atmosphere of brilliant sunshine.

Enter a retinue of dancers, colourfully dressed.
Prominent among them are Obas,
Obis and Chiefs, Emirs, Zulu kings and warriors,
Madinka and Gikuyu fighters, the Nupes and the Ibibios,
the Yorubas and the Hausas, etc.

The royalty of each and the splendour
of their courts portrayed by the number of their hangers-on!
Bata drums, the Konga, dundun and gangan
enact a rhythm of apocalyptic frenzy.

As the dancers disperse, ushered by the narrators,
the stage is prepared for the slower pace
of the dirge in which
the retinue of dancers return to participate.

This is a dance of choice,
of accusations and counter-accusations,
of abuses and curses,
at the end of which the 'congregation'
is divided over what path to follow.
The symbols in the dance are three goats
For whom the following song has been composed). (39)

A similar instance of stage direction also appears in the middle of the second movement of part four titled 'The drama of consolation II':

The 1st, 2nd, and 3rd narrators occupy prominent positions
among the audience from where they observe the primordial act.
Enter Latosa, Alasofunfun and Atunda –
it is the late evening preceding a glorious dawn and
the activities of the transcendental beings span
the entire period before the market resumes its business
in buying and selling, including visitations from the dead! (62–3)

The introduction of drama into Abodurin's poetry means the introduction of characters because there can be no drama without characters. A character is 'a person depicted in a NARRATIVE or DRAMA' (Quinn 72). As a corollary to this, part two, 'The drama of consolation I', is enacted by fictitious characters like Batola, Morenike, and Pariola; while in part four, 'The drama of consolation II', these characters are joined by others like Atunda, Latosa, and Alasofunfun, with historical figures such as Du Bois, Garvey, James, and Nkurmah all mentioned in the cast. In 'The drama of consolation II', Abodunrin goes further to include a cast in the manner of conventional drama as follows:

Cast
Latosa – manifestation of Esu-Elegbara
a carnivalesque-essence
often described as the trickster God
Alasofunfun – manifestation of Obatala
(God of creation) otherwise known as the White One
Atunda – Primordial slave
Batola – 1st Narrator
Morenike – 2nd Narrator
Pariola – 3rd Narrator
Iya Aburo – leader of the market-women
Segilola, Motunde & Tinuola – 1st, 2nd & 3rd women
Chief Modawaye – Industrialist
Professor Oni – Social historian

Dr. Lasunkanmi – Lecturer
Du Bois – Historical personage
Garvey – " "
James – " "
Nkurmah – " "
Slaves in the Middle-Passage
Dancers & Singers. (61-62)

Chorus is another aspect of drama used in Abodunrin's poetry. Chorus is 'a group of singers distinct from the principal performers in a dramatic or musical performance; also the song or refrain that they sing' (Baldick 39). Through songs, the chorus reflects on, and comments on events in a performance. In *It Would Take Time*, chorus is deployed in the fourth movement of part two, 'The drama of consolation I', in vernacular (Yoruba) exchanges between the lead singers and the chorus with the latter echoing the former:

Lead Singers: Ewure meta lo nbe nile yin;
Chorus: Ewure meta lo nbe nile yin!
L. Singers: Okan nfenu jeun bi Aja;
Chorus: Okan nfenu jeun bi Aja!
L. Singers: Okan now ijele bi Aguntan;
Chorus: Okan now ijele bi Aguntan! (39–40)

The foregoing analysis shows that Abodunrin's *It Would Take Time* is an exercise in poetic experiment in which different genres conflate due to the poet's quest to revise and shift aesthetic boundaries. This experimental and novel approach is facilitated by the poet's resort to metapoetics through which he succeeds in cross-fertilizing genres to offer significant commentaries and extensive critiques of colonial and postcolonial practices. The components of drama appropriated to abrogate or erase the boundaries of the genres in the text include: character, conflict, dialogue, stage direction, acts and scenes, dance, costumes, lighting, drumming, and ritual. These do not merely add to the fluid and neo-performative sensibilities of the text, but also function as aesthetic tools through which the poet is able to interrogate the nature of literature.

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The End of Robert Mugabe

On Knowledge Production & Political Power

TINASHE MUSHAKAVANHU

Julie Frederikse's book *None But Ourselves*, published in 1982, opens with an exchange the author had with an unnamed ex-Rhodesian army soldier:

> HE SAID: A lot of stuff went up in smoke in this country in early 1980. A helluva lot. Salisbury was surrounded by a little cloud of black smoke, from all the army camps, government offices, police stations. And shredding, too. The Special Branch shredders were working overtime. You've never seen so much paper, in some of these police posts, cartons of files, all being carted off to the incinerators and shredders. When the city incinerators were all full, they sent us off to the crematorium for more burning.
>
> FREDERIKSE ASKED: What was destroyed?
>
> HE SAID: The past. Records of interrogations, army set-ups and strategies, profiles of people, personal records. TV films and radio tapes. All the propaganda. Anything that had to do with the conflict, that had been used against the enemy, was destroyed, starting with the ceasefire, and then reaching a kind of fever pitch at the time of elections.
>
> (Frederikse 1982, iv–v)

These revelations became the spur to *Reading Zimbabwe*'s[1] investment in establishing a genealogy of local intellectual traditions and their part in Zimbabwe's knowledge production, a kind of salvaging the past, making meaning from ashes. Born out of curiosity and a thirst to know about Zimbabwe and its place in the world, *Reading Zimbabwe* is a bibliographic website that maps the country's published history from 1956 onwards.

In November 2017, Robert Mugabe, the independence leader of Zimbabwe, was removed from power through a military coup.

I was not in Zimbabwe to be a witness to this moment. I watched events unfold on a computer screen from another continent, as a generation's repressed joy burst into street parties with car horns in the background. Young people screamed and sang with draped flags over their shoulders. They gathered in groups to celebrate the end of Mugabe who had presided over their misery, which was characterized by job losses, record high inflation, company closures, and an iron-fist rule that trampled on human rights and property rights. The infrastructures that enabled and facilitated civic life had been radically constrained, or completely destroyed.

After the removal of Robert Mugabe from power, there was this huge pent-up demand from so many years of repression and censorship. A generation that had been born under Mugabe's dictatorship could for the first time ask questions about themselves and their pasts beyond the spectre of his figure.

Mugabe's hold on the Zimbabwean imagination for almost four decades necessitated the creation of a new set of questions, new practices and methodologies that might allow us to harness the inventiveness and generative resilience of Zimbabwean society. What emerged was an intricate web of knowledge production and publishing patterns related to Zimbabwe's colonial and postcolonial history that reveals how, despite the ubiquity of the internet, the country's memories have been systematically erased. *Reading Zimbabwe* plays its part in this landscape of Zimbabwe's knowledge production. It has also been able to recreate information and documents that no longer exist or have never existed in their home country using the power of the internet and new digital media: a symbolic return of power in knowledge to Zimbabwean people themselves.

The website was set up as a simple URL to restore the Zimbabwean literary archive, to give visibility and easy access to an otherwise submerged canon. The project became a way to discover more about what has been written about Zimbabwe, and to interrogate the power to name and assign value beyond the figure of Mugabe. *Reading Zimbabwe* became a way to reimagine the country differently around the issues of memory, the afterlives of colonialism, and the forms of narrative that are commensurate with telling a nation's stories.

Examining the final days of Robert Mugabe, this chapter asks for a re-reading of Zimbabwe's recent history by looking at the impact of his legacy. How do we employ the technologies of the internet to read a country? What does the representation of a country on the internet

look like? How do we engage with digital and analogue archives as sites of erasure? How do we archive gaps? How do we fill historical voids? And how can we translate these experiences into a form of critical knowledge production?

It was a surreal two weeks in November, as Douglas Rogers (2019) puts it, that changed the course of Zimbabwe's history, for better or worse. The build-up was tense. Government propaganda was on overdrive trying to out-spin the inevitable. Mugabe had refused to publicly resign. Military tanks surrounded the capital Harare until eventually a man in full military uniform appeared on national television for a short but history-defining broadcast to announce a rare coup d'état in southern Africa. Major General Sibusiso Moyo, who in early 2021 was to die from Covid-19 complications, announced in an early dawn broadcast:

> Good morning Zimbabwe.
>
> Fellow Zimbabweans (…) the situation in our country has moved to another level.
>
> Firstly, we wish to assure our nation, His Excellency, the president of the republic of Zimbabwe and commander in chief of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces, comrade R.G. Mugabe and his family are safe and sound and their security is guaranteed.
>
> We are only targeting criminals around him who are committing crimes that are causing social and economic suffering in the country in order to bring them to justice.
>
> As soon as we have accomplished our mission we expect that the situation will return to normalcy.

Mugabe's omnipresence had been finally shattered. For two generations it had been inconceivable that Mugabe's rule had an end. By the time it arrived, it was not a matter of if, but when. Mugabe, who was then 93 years old, had been daring everyone he could go on for another century. Zimbabwe was under his vice grip. Mugabe's wizardry, which had kept him in power for so long, was his cunning manipulation. He had cultivated the idea of being a political mystic who had paranormal powers. His will to power was concealed behind masterfully managed illusions, fictions, falsehoods about and by Mugabe himself. In many ways Mugabe spoke and performed himself into power. The mobilization of historical mythology played a prominent part in his

politics. In the twilight of his years, his wife Grace had become an extension of his voice, and parroted his wishes. At one of the political rallies Mrs Mugabe had taunted their enemies:

> President Mugabe you are an unparalleled leader and because you have stuck to principle even in the face of sanctions, your people believe you. We want you to remain our leader. We want you to lead this country even from your grave, while you lie at the National Heroes' Acre. (*Newsday*, 26 May 2016)

Even though Mugabe had become a representation of a long-gone era, his acolytes pushed his political agenda. The intrigue was always that for a man who was rumoured to hold seven university degrees, he left behind no treatise or record of his political philosophy besides collections of his speeches berating his perceived enemies and advancing what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) and others have called Mugabeism. Jethro Mpofu in *Robert Mugabe and the Will to Power in an African Postcolony* (2021) argues that Mugabe was the intellectual anti-intellectual. In the same vein, a friend who had researched and written a book about black leaders at the University of Fort Hare told me that he was surprised to find in the institution's archives records that showed Mugabe had failed history as a student (Massey 2010). For a man who used history as a weapon against his people, or to prop himself, it was an astounding revelation.

Part of Mugabe's enduring legacy had been built around his persona. He had tactfully positioned himself and was embraced as one of the key figures in the history of pan-Africanism, and an embodiment of black self-determination. In 1980 Bob Marley performed 'Zimbabwe' at Rufaro Stadium, a song he wrote anticipating the country's independence. But with time, because of his excesses and blind spots, Mugabe had become another failed African leader.

The coup of November 2017 became a form of decommissioning. Mugabe was failing and had become ineffective as a leader; he was exhausted and had to be retired by the threat of the gun. Days and weeks after he was no longer president, Mugabe suddenly appeared aged, looking like the 93-year-old he really was. He was now pushed around in a wheelchair. His dress changed too. His suits, once bespoke, shiny, expensive, fitted, had been replaced by oversize blazers and grandpa loafers. It was as if his rented wardrobe had been taken back. He no longer had his costume, or demagoguery armour. He was relegated to being just another old man and forced into a long overdue retirement.

In the 1950s, Mugabe had become the face of the nationalist movement in Rhodesia as its publicity secretary, before rising through the ranks. His forays to independent Ghana contributed to his enigma; to his peers he was the 'homeboy' who had been to independent Africa and even brought back with him a Ghanaian wife – Sarah Francesca 'Sally' Mugabe (née Hayfron). In that nascent period of nationalism in Rhodesia, Mugabe was not remarkable, he was just another able, supporting character in the fight for liberation, for there were many leaders who were able, smart, charismatic, and senior to him. Nathan Shamuyarira in his book *Crisis in Rhodesia* (1966) wrote that the nationalist movement was 'run by committee' and not reliant on individual figureheads. And this was the case until the Rhodesia government decided to divide and conquer by detaining the leadership and distributing them in separate prisons across the country. But Mugabe was always ambitious. It was in prison that he perfected his political strategy and built a coalition around him to oust the founding president of Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), the Revd Ndabaningi Sithole. When he became Zimbabwe's leader at independence in 1980, hagiographies were written about Mugabe, reinforcing his entitlement to power. But, at some point, he stopped giving interviews to journalists and scholars. A choir of praise singers surrounded him. Mugabe might now be out of power and dead, but the political culture he naturalized and normalized remains intact.

As a young literary scholar who grew up in Zimbabwe, I was always curious about who Mugabe was. How did he write about himself? How does he figure in history? To answer these questions, I needed a set of tools and apparatus. So, two colleagues and I decided to create *Reading Zimbabwe*. It made its debut on the internet in 2016, a year before the removal of Robert Mugabe from power. *Reading Zimbabwe* provides a record of the nation's published history from 1956 onwards. This was the same year that the treason trial of Nelson Mandela and his co-accused began on the other side of the border. At that time, colonial authorities in southern Africa were encountering a major test of their powers.

Reading Zimbabwe has been collecting, cataloguing, digitizing, and making available information from as many Zimbabwean publications as it is possible to identify and locate. The country's national archive now appears to be buried or lost and so this record of its own history is threatened with extinction: many of the key books of Zimbabwe's literary canon, for example, are now out of print.

Reading Zimbabwe came from a place of neglect and necessity. The feeling of urgency to recover the nation's history was informed by a sense of deliberate sabotage and nothingness. After many years of decline, the build-up to the coup d'état that removed Mugabe from power was fraught with political tensions that were playing out in the local public media, and this project's mission was to intervene in subtle ways because a paranoid government sensitive to criticism has eyes and ears everywhere.

A few months before the coup, in September 2017, I was on my way home in Harare at night after a conference after-party at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe when a red 4X4 without number plates appeared and the driver stopped to talk to me. He rolled down the car's tinted windows and said, 'I know you; I know who you are. You're Mr Reading Zimbabwe. Who is funding you, what are you trying to achieve? Are you trying to embarrass the government?' This midnight exchange on an empty Harare street was not an unexpected encounter. The central intelligence office (CIO), a unit that operates under the direct control of the country's president, is known for its dark arts, for kidnappings, murder, and violence to silence critics and perceived enemies. Journalist and activist Itai Dzamara, for example, was abducted on 9 March 2015 by five men while he was at a barbershop in a township in Harare and has never been seen or heard from since (Sieff 2015, A10)

In an authoritarian state, any perceived threat to the system can result in total elimination. In short, it means death. The decision that *Reading Zimbabwe* should be an index of metadata was a strategic way of avoiding political and physical censorship. Instead of directly confronting the status quo, or pointing out political failings, the project's questions shifted from being about how to read inaccurate or inconsistent political archives of a controversial figure like Robert Mugabe, to how to source an archive about who we are as a Zimbabwean people. What do we do when archives are gone? What about times when material was never accessioned, or was lost, or when it was mutilated or destroyed? How do we read the history of events that were never written down? How do we read a country's history separate from its leader who claimed to personify it with utterances such as this: 'I will never, never sell my country. I will never, never, never surrender. Zimbabwe is mine…'

The *Reading Zimbabwe* webliography has forty categories: each a point of curiosity about how we read a country. The 'Mugabe' category is the only one directly themed, others are more generic and abstract.

The Mugabe category tracks and traces the ways in which Mugabe has been written about and read since the 1950s when he joined active politics. It shows a fluctuating graph of a tempestuous figure, who is loved and hated in equal measure. But what is remarkable is that Mugabe never made an attempt to get his story told or written for the historical record. There is no autobiography or authorized biography of Mugabe published, except for two volumes of speeches published by his government's ministry of information as propaganda booklets in 1983 and 2003. Teresa Barnes (2021, 718) comments:

> After an initial collected volume of speeches and interviews was published in 1983—soon after he had come to power—no additional compilations of his letters, essays, or policy reflections were produced. In contrast, a virtual industry promulgates sources on the political evolution of Nelson Mandela, Mugabe's contemporary to the south; there are published letters about Mandela's published letters. But Mugabe went to his grave maintaining virtual radio silence about his life. Other than a fair number of journalistic political interviews collected on YouTube, Mugabe's views on the trajectories of his own personal, political, and professional conduct were never expressed.

This is peculiar. Was this always Mugabe's strategy to obfuscate his past? In death, as in his life, Mugabe remains an elusive figure. It seems part of his political strategy was built around myth, rumour, speculation, innuendo, conjecture, and violence was for him the ultimate arbiter of conflicts or disagreement. Mugabe boasted on many occasions of having 'degrees in violence', which underpin his brutal legacy as one of the most notable 20th-century dictators (Blair 2003).

Men and women who worked alongside Mugabe, as civil servants and cabinet ministers, were at independence involuntarily at service to his history project. Upon attainment of independence in 1980, many Zimbabweans who had been exiled in Europe, North America, and other parts of Africa, returned home with so much enthusiasm, ready to work to build the nation. These individuals were intellectuals, politicians, medical doctors, businessmen, educators, writers, and their level of intellectual productivity was really astounding. They were eager to write themselves back into history, but so too was their boss, who had emerged from a deeply fractional leadership battle.

Mugabe was the ultimate political survivor, his rivals were discredited, or died in mysterious circumstances. The 1980s were a purple patch in Zimbabwean publishing, and in less than a decade, Harare quickly established itself as the book capital of sub-Saharan Africa with the

founding of the Zimbabwe International Book Fair. This environment was fertile for Mugabe's narcissism to be the story itself. There was no room for other versions. And as Mugabe's generation started to grow old and die in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it seemed history stopped. Archives started disappearing. There were fewer and fewer people for Mugabe to be accountable to, or who knew his political past well.

In a quest for answers, one of the most important decisions from the outset at *Reading Zimbabwe* was to avoid any editorialising in order to minimise political risk, because any opinion or narrative that contradicted the official position was dangerous. Everyone who has been engaged in this project has done so on a voluntary basis. This need to hold back was a necessary preservation method so no one's life was endangered in the process. The focus was therefore trained on metadata, because a data-driven project should hold two realities in tension: the truth, on the one hand, of people's varied and disparate lived experiences and the equal truth, on the other, of the real political, social, and legal implications of the way people are classified. A database, no matter how well conceived, tolerates relatively little ambiguity.

It is a predicament of modern Zimbabwe that its young, published history is receding from view. The country's written literature symbolically begins in 1956 when three black Zimbabwean intellectuals – Ndabaningi Sithole, Herbert Chitepo, and Solomon Mutswairo – produced the first books in Ndebele and Shona. This represents the first time black Zimbabwean intellectuals could 'officially' write and publish books in their own languages. These early writers belonged to the elite educated Africans in Rhodesia, a formative group in the rise of nationalism. In many cases, writers became politicians or politicians were also writers. Their writing was often semi-fictional or directly documentary. Prior to that, black writers had intermittently published folk tales and short stories in newspapers and magazines dating back to the early 1900s.

This first group of writers had attained secondary education in schools and colleges in South Africa, others had spent a considerable length of time abroad. At that time, there was still no provision for secondary schooling for Africans in southern Rhodesia. The first government secondary school in Rhodesia was only opened in 1946. Prior to these developments many of today's intellectual and political leaders in Zimbabwe did their secondary and higher education at South African institutions or other neighbouring schools. To be a writer of English, black Zimbabweans had to publish overseas.

The first manuscripts were smuggled out of the country and printed by multinational presses such as Oxford University Press in

Nairobi and London or Longmans, Green & Co. in Cape Town. The Rhodesia Literature Bureau in partnership with the Catholic Mission Press (later known as Mambo Press) was only set up in 1957, making a huge impact on publishing Shona and Ndebele literature in Rhodesia. Almost 250 books in Shona and Ndebele were published between 1957 and 1980. But this canon, though important, is also problematic in that the condition for publication for the writers was that they could only write on prescribed themes that did not offend or question the Rhodesian government.

Writing in English was not actively encouraged for blacks living in Rhodesia and those who dared to do so were often banned or detained over periods of time. The marginalization of black intellectuals in Rhodesia became an 'unofficial' policy after 1965 when the Rhodesian government issued the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from its mother country, the United Kingdom. The devastating consequences of UDI on black intellectual traditions have not been adequately scrutinized. The isolation from the rest of Africa at a period of rapid decolonization, the lack of fruitful contact between Zimbabwe's black intellectuals and their peers on the continent, has had adverse effects on the country's post-independence development. In most of Africa's influential journals and literary magazines published in the '60s and '70s, such as *Black Orpheous, Drum* or *Transition,* there was little or nothing at all from black Rhodesia. It was the silent decade when black Rhodesia was muted by a rogue white government in defiance of international law.

As a result, no work of fiction or creative expression by a black Zimbabwean writer or intellectual in English could be published in Rhodesia until 1980. Charles Mungoshi, who never left the country for exile, had his book *Coming of the Dry Season* banned in 1972 on the grounds that it was designed to cause hatred and ill feeling in African minds against Europeans and that the circulation of this book was likely to harm relations between the white and black sections of the public. This case was a major deterrent, a censorship mechanism to discourage any form of critical writing. As a result of this, most of the English material created in the '60s and '70s was published outside the country and some of it is still not available in the country itself. It is not surprising that in the uncertainties of exile Zimbabweans found little opportunity to preserve and bring home such material at independence in 1980.

Despite the ubiquity the internet promises, it is hard to locate writings from and about Zimbabwe. Material is scattered online or appears not to exist. In many instances, older Zimbabwean texts lack

bibliographical information or descriptions on the internet. As these books have become rare and can only be acquired through an auction system or through online marketplaces such as Amazon and eBay, for the most part, prices for the books are extremely expensive. Purchasing them comes down to luck of the draw and their condition varies – no covers, torn in parts, autographed by past owners, discarded ex-library copies. The scarcity is also a design of power and control as most of these materials are hidden in basements and storage facilities of museums and libraries in Europe and North America. They remain undigitized and to access them African researchers and scholars are forced to fly across the world.

Our challenge then was simple. How do we code these dynamics into a website? How do we deploy digital technologies to read and annotate this history? The design of *Reading Zimbabwe* was influenced by the legend of Great Zimbabwe, a historical monument, from which the name Zimbabwe comes, meaning 'house of stone', and an African kingdom that existed between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries. The architecture of the website, coded in its aesthetics, is also primarily inspired by the kingdom of Great Zimbabwe.

The kingdom's history is widely contested, and some claims to this history implicitly denied African agency and that African culture could be so sophisticated. The most famous presentation of the white mythology was Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1886), which established the paradigm for a whole school of colonial literature. The minority white government of Rhodesia even put political pressure on archaeologists and researchers to refute that native African people constructed these monuments. According to Paul Sinclair, interviewed for *None But Ourselves* (Frederikse 1982, 10):

> I was the archaeologist stationed at Great Zimbabwe. I was told by the then-director of the Museums and Monuments organisation to be extremely careful about talking to the press about the origins of the [Great] Zimbabwe state. I was told that the museum service was in a difficult situation, that the government was pressurising them to withhold the correct information. Censorship of guidebooks, museum displays, school textbooks, radio programmes, newspapers and films was a daily occurrence. Once a member of the Museum Board of Trustees threatened me with losing my job if I said publicly that blacks had built Zimbabwe. He said it was okay to say the yellow people had built it, but I wasn't allowed to mention radio carbon dates (…) It was the first time since Germany in the thirties that archaeology has been so directly censored.

Reading Zimbabwe employs, therefore, a complex and symbolic cartography that challenges the colonial archive as much as it questions its memory, bringing many contradictory texts into dialogue with one another. Using books as bricks, and the internet as mortar, the project is building paths and mapping directions to the past and other pasts.

Mugabe died in September 2019, two years after the coup d'état. There was no celebration. No dancing in the streets. In the end, he died a sympathetic figure. From time to time, leaked photos of him in designer tracksuits made it into the public domain. He looked out of place – a 20th-century figure living in the wrong era, one who had artfully concealed his true self behind performances of invincibility. The coup was his first spectacular death, and a permanent humiliation to a man whose life had been defined by spectacular feats. The only second act he had was to transcend to the afterlife. In a final gesture of defiance, Mugabe had refused to be buried at the National Heroes Acre – a cemetery on top of a hill at the edge of Harare, built with the support of North Korea – where for decades he had eulogized his fallen comrades. His wish to be buried at his rural homestead in Zvimba district was a refusal to endorse the coup, which some journalists, scholars and writers had given an inane term – coup non coup – a subtle acceptance of the new military order by deflecting its reality. Even in death, Mugabe did not want his own version of history to be contaminated. He wanted to be remembered as defiant and singular. This is then the final lesson of Robert Mugabe: history is an invention.

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The Text & Textual Fields of African Popular Literature

The Agency of Nigerian Stand-Up Comedy

JOHN UWA

This chapter examines selected live performances of Nigerian stand-up comedy, remediated on DVD and social media, to articulate the changing trajectories of African literature in the wake of the postmodernist conception of 'the literary'. It shows how popular entertainment forms generate their text, and how space and time have been crucial in morphing the productions of popular entertainment across forms and 'medialities' into what has become Nigerian stand-up comedy. Nigerian stand-up comedy is defined here as a solo performance in which actors take turns with the microphone to entertain the audience with jokes and humour, punctuating their renditions with intermittent punchlines that should evoke laughter and applause. It is a non-elitist response to 'literary theatre' in Nigeria; a form that speaks of the determination of a subaltern group to be heard in the theory and practice of dramatic theatre in Nigeria. It is a syncretic product that metamorphoses and transforms traditional forms like griot culture, storytelling, Ototа (local MCs), and a popular entertainment form known as 'Wording' in Warri Province of Delta State, Nigeria. And it was when this everyday street entertainment was ready to go commercial, through medialities and remediation, that it took up a new identity as Nigerian stand-up comedy.

Before the emergence of Nigerian stand-up comedy, Nigerian popular drama was synonymous with the Yoruba Travelling Theatre; but given its decline and the emergence of new forms and ones allied to it, there is a need to rethink the idea of Nigerian popular drama to reflect contemporary popular dramatic forms. And one way to do this is to explore interesting ways in which Nigerian stand-up comedy collects and suggests its text. In her submission on the historicity, decline, and changing fortune of Yoruba Travelling Theatre, and other popular forms of the time, Karin Barber (1997) predicted the emergence of a new live theatre in Africa by simply arguing that the distinct popular ethos and enormous imaginative energy of historical entertainment forms and their

audiences could not easily evaporate, but might be resilient enough to 'reassert their distinct popular ethos through television, film, video, or indeed through a new phase of live theatre in the future' (54). While these historical forms may have been unable to keep pace with urbanisation and technological advancement of the time, and may not have returned to the contemporary stage in the flesh, their distinct popular ethos is remediating themselves through Nigerian stand-up comedy. Also, they have come to embody postmodern art by rejecting the rigid boundaries between high and low culture and also mixing high and low culture through what Biodun Jeyifo refers to as 'mutual borrowing between the popular and the literary' (1981, 507).

This investigation represents the interpretation of one-on-one interviews conducted, transcribed, and translated over two years, and selected stand-up comedy performances recorded on DVD and remediated on digital media, juxtaposed with related essays. The intended objectives are to understand how canonical exclusion of allied forms inspired the transformation of an otherwise 'street entertainment' from Warri into a commercial brand in Lagos, challenge academic notions of 'literary text' (print culture) through the concept of 'entextualisation', and contest the dichotomies between 'literary relativism' and 'literary universalism' and between 'mainstream' and 'popular' literature. Through these objectives, key methodological questions are raised: are popular dramatic forms in Africa better studied in comparison to 'literary' drama? Or are they better studied in relation to the socio-cultural context of their production and consumption? In what genre of literature do we include the syncretic-natured Nigerian stand-up comedy and, beyond Eurocentric curiosity and footnote mentions of popular drama from 'postcolonies', how do we develop home-grown evaluative criteria for the criticism of African popular drama? These questions emanate from the socio-cultural contexts of producers and consumers and call for a deep rethinking of the 'literary text' that might challenge received conclusions.

One of the most interesting discoveries of African popular drama, which often goes unrecognised in mainstream critical discourses, is the presence of textual fields. These textual fields, which are places where the texts of African popular art forms are produced, reproduced, stored, disseminated, mediated, and remediated, often pose evaluative problems for critics whose first, and perhaps only, understanding of the 'literary text' is from the purview of print culture. This problem emanates from the compelling, legitimate attention popular drama is attracting in an era where reception is shifting from readership of the text to viewership of performance; where popular forms are moving from the fringes of what is considered literary, in

the mainstream, into spaces that were exclusive to mainstream forms. And even more interestingly, these popular art forms are starting to proliferate in spaces like digital media platforms when mainstream forms are still struggling to register their presence. This enormous quality of popular dramatic forms to reinvent themselves along with social change is what prompted Karin Barber to challenge scholars of African popular art forms to develop evaluative criteria for the criticism of popular forms in Africa by paying attention to the local context of production and reception of the forms, and the cultural repertoires and experiential resources common to the production of their texts (Barber 2014, xii, xv, xix, xx, xxi). Explaining how Nigerian stand-up comedy generates its text from the textual fields of African popular culture and presenting this text across medialities as spoken performance on live or transmediated platforms, where spoken performance may be conceptualised as text, proves to be an acceptance of Barber's challenge in this essay.

To understand the text of Nigerian stand-up comedy, as distinct from the written text, we must first appreciate Bakhtin's (103) proposition of the text from a broad perspective as harmonious complex data which is 'interpretable' (Hanks 95) and can be made available for analysis in time and space and across medialities. This broad perspective of the text dislocates the orthodoxy of the text from print into other formats common to popular and oral art forms in Africa. Locating or excavating the text situated within different media is what entextualisation entails.

In the context of this study, entextualisation connotes detaching or distilling the spoken performance of Nigerian stand-up comedy from its original context of production – the everyday life, reproduced, stored across mediality, and then disseminated to various audiences and critics for entertainment and critical analysis respectively. To that extent, we can agree that the 'text' of Nigerian stand-up comedy encapsulates the original performance of everyday life through popular culture in informal spaces at neighbourhoods, homes, schools, marriages, parties, and other social gatherings. This form, which was originally referred to as Wording in Warri province, was undocumented. However, it has had to cross the boundaries between popular and mainstream entertainment to arrive on a more organised live stage as commercialised production. Therefore, when talking about the text of Nigerian stand-up comedy, we are discussing the performance and in this context, we have a merger between the spoken and the performed, to account for the idea of spoken performance, or what linguistic anthropologists refer to as the performance of the spoken word.

In Katherine Hoffman's opinion, understanding the text would require a broadening of 'the notion of "text" to the one used by folklorists and linguistic anthropologists, and that includes the spoken word' (419). The medium, which may be determined by the arrays of audiences, in the first instance, is the live theatre and later, other trans-mediated forms like DVD/CD (audio and video) and the digital media. These media – together with their scripts, transcripts, manuals, manuscripts and translations – are by no means excluded from what this chapter refers to as a medium of storage and dissemination of text to the different categories of audiences. In other words, the text of Nigerian stand-up comedy is not only mobile, it may be stored in different media platforms like DVD, laptops, android phones, and other internet media. It can also be disseminated to different audiences – live, audio, audiovisual, and digital – situated within the different mediating platforms.

The performances were shared on Facebook, received 126 likes and smiles, shared 60 times, viewed 1,900 times and commented upon seven times. Chat boxes, likes, and shares allow the digital audiences to interact with the performance on the digital platform. This development means that we can no longer assign fixed and static meanings to the idea of the literary text, as Hoffman (419) also argues, but must relate meanings to context and different, multiple audiences, audiences who play roles in the production and consumption of Nigerian stand-up comedy. The capacity of the live performance to provide interactive platforms for both audiences and critics of the form is what qualifies the performance as text. The exercise of distilling the text from the medium is what entextualisation entails.

To that extent, if texts are 'social and historical facts whose forms, transformation and dispersal can be studied empirically' (Barber 2007), then the spoken performances of everyday street entertainment, which has metamorphosed into Nigerian stand-up comedy and become available for the empirical study of Nigerian popular drama, can be conceptualised as a form of text in its own right. This is most likely if we consider the fact that the spoken performances of Nigerian stand-up comedy provide materials for validating the assumption that 'imagined' literary texts or 'situated texts' and textualities also exist within genres that are not necessarily disseminated or transmitted in print. And while the fluidity and sublimity with which verbal dramatic performance like stand-up arouse humour, laughter, and entertainment is something worthy of scholarly interest, the knowledge that Nigerian stand-up performances speak of a sustained effort to preserve cultural history is even more revealing and interesting. For example, a study

of Nigerian stand-up comedy will lead us into a study of how verbal dramatic performance emerged from historical street entertainment like Wording, and its transformation into Nigerian stand-up comedy.

In secondary schools around the 1980s in Warri, students usually gathered together during break hours for a popular solo dramatic entertainment known as Wording. Usually, a single performer takes centre stage and begins to tell stories, mocking individuals and generating humour and laughter in the process. This activity, as well as the improvised venue, was something everyone anticipated during break hours, although the improvised stage may not comply with the Aristotelian notion of a 'stage', which is 'set aside' for dramatic entertainment. As some of these performers graduated from secondary schools, they moved their performance into other venues until they eventually landed on a more organised live stage as stand-up comedians. Therefore, if we agree that spoken performance, in this context, is a text, then we could trace the origin of the text of popular entertainment, trace how the comedians generate their text from popular experiences, how the text travels through time and space, responding to a different setting and generating new texts from what Barber refers to as 'textual fields' (2007, 218). These fields, which open vistas for textualities, are concerned with how textual materials – verbal performances of varying degrees, techniques, and style – are 'circulated, recycled, assembled, expounded or otherwise employed in the construction of new texts' (2007, 218).

To that extent, the text of Nigerian stand-up comedy – the spoken performance of popular street entertainment – speaks to us of the social process and pattern of popular entertainment in Nigeria: how it is produced, sustained and transformed from one historical society to another. For example, among the Warri and Urhobo people of the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria – a region credited with having produced some of the most successful comedians in Nigeria such as Ali Baba, I Go Die, Gordons, Akpororo, I Go Save, Bovi, AY, Gandoki etc – there existed a traditional solo dramatic entertainment known as 'Igbesia'. The Igbesia, which is now historical, was usually entertainment that was paid for. While this form existed in a different historical and linguistic society from present-day stand-up, it may have undergone transformation, mutation and upgrade, and then obtained the other dramatic quintessentials required for the modern-day stage to present itself as new and distinct. In an interview with a prominent Urhobo chief on the emergence of Nigerian stand-up comedy, the respondent posits that 'Igbesia and Ototа are all over Urhobo clans, and are hired to

perform everywhere' (interview with chief, pers. comm.). Going further, the chief reiterated that 'I believe strongly that the present-day stand-up comedians may find their root in Urhobo storytelling tradition known as Igbesia' (interview with chief, pers. comm., 5 May 2019).

The above allusion to the metamorphosis of the form into 'comic practices in schools' is what I have already identified as Wording. But by making itself available for empirical critical discourse, the text and textuality of Nigerian stand-up comedy tend to reveal the socio-cultural histories of popular entertainment: the producers, the audiences, and the changing spaces for the reception of the form. This includes knowledge of changing social experiences, means of communication, and means of addressivity. By distilling the text of Nigerian stand-up comedy from the cultural histories of societies that gave rise to the form and its various transformations, we come to understand social behaviours that led to the generation of the text, we come to see the text as commentary on social reality, or an effort to make social reality acceptable for consumption through mediation and remediation. To that extent, we can see the text as reflexive. We see this reflexivity of verbal performances in politics, social institutions, and religion. More interestingly, it takes us back in history by identifying its intertextual linkages, the textual culture that gave rise to it, and a capacity to reveal the deep process of formation and transformation of its genre.

The transcribed excerpt below demonstrates both how Nigerian stand-up comedy has evolved into a 'global' production (not just with a capacity to be absorbed into the print culture) and also a form that mirrors society, shows commitment to socio-political mores, and runs critical commentaries on past and present political activities in society. In this transcription, a solo performer, named Gordons, with a microphone on a live stage, is using pidgin, exaggeration, gesticulation, and intermittent punchlines to entertain a live audience through jokes and humour while taking us back into our recent political history:

> Nowadays, people are now returning from prison to become President. I am afraid of this development because I am aware that Rev King is still in prison. Only God can deliver us if that man regains freedom.
>
> Obasanjo granted an interview where he said that he wants to be life President. I said to myself, 'What is this? You have ruled this country for almost fourteen years; at the expiration of your tenure you went to Ota and became the President of Young Farmers Association; as if that was not enough, you became President of Youths, and now, having enrolled as a student in the University of Lagos – you are struggling

> to become the Student Union President. I know that if that man dies, he will become the President of Spirits' [the audiences respond with thunderous laughter]. (Godwin Komone 2015)

The above joke was performed live by Gordons (Godwin Komone) on the '*Nite of a Thousand Laughs*' comedy platform, reproduced as *Nite of a Thousand Laughs Vol. 17* by Opa William, and streamed on other digitalised mediated platforms like YouTube (Okey Bakassi 2018). The performance is entertaining and didactic, dealing with the socio-political aberrations of society through entertainment, humour, jokes, and irony to balance form and content. However, it is a snide commentary on President Olusegun Obasanjo, who came out of prison to become president of Nigeria from 1999 to 2006 having been military head of state in the 1970s, and Revd King, a pastor who was arrested and sentenced for the torture and murder of some of his adherents. The performance came after the botched attempt of President Olusegun Obasanjo to arbitrarily remain in power as president of Nigeria, against constitutional provisions, for a third term. This was a very serious national issue that sparked heated debates and tension among politicians and public commentators at the time. But here is a comedian who employs literary devices like humour, irony, metaphor, exaggeration, sarcasm, and gesticulation to present serious issues, before a live audience, as a joke. Yet researchers on stand-up have had to spend time establishing the literariness of a form whose literariness should not, in the first instance, be in doubt. This arises mainly because of perceived notions of literature as print.

To that extent, there is a general dismissal of stand-up as a form of dramatic literature in Nigeria. This is mainly because the printed text has come to synonymise what is considered literature, especially in formal institutions of learning. However, it is interesting to note that the texts of most popular forms are not situated within the print culture of Nigeria but in places where they can be perceived as situated texts (Newell 6), domiciled in performance, artefacts, orality, and spoken words which can be referenced and commented upon from time to time (Barber 2007, 21–30). Therefore, how do we trace a text that has reproduced itself across the modalities of street performance, to the conventional live stage, to DVD, and other digital media?

In answering this question, we may need to broaden our idea of literary text by moving our conception of the text further away from printed books to artefacts, performances, spoken words, newspapers, etc., which are profitable for critical analysis in literature. With such an expanded view of the text comes the realisation that the text can

be perceived as an extended category in which writing and print may constitute a text differently from the way speech and performance will be. To that extent, the definition of text is not limited to print or written document but also to 'oral configuration of words'. From this vantage position of seeing the text, one could argue that the main text of Nigerian stand-up comedy inheres in the spoken performance of everyday popular life and entertainment, and the multiple arrays of subtexts which are determined by mediation, transmediation, and remediation of the original text. That is to say, when the main text – the spoken performance of everyday street life/entertainment – yields to monetary pressure by moving itself to a more conventional live stage, and then to multiple media platforms like DVD, audio CD, and other digital media, medialities are created. And since spoken performance is common to all situated texts of Nigerian stand-up comedy, it becomes easy to see the spoken performance as text.

Spoken performance is primordial to African art, but it has repeatedly fallen under the radar due to emphasis on print culture. With Nigerian stand-up comedy, what we have before us is a form in which the audiences play a vital role in the communicative structure and sequential movement of the plot. While the comedian stands as a storyteller, he requires constant responses from the audience to hit at the punch-line. And to do this, he asks his audience questions, now and again, in a manner that will pass for natural conversation or direct address. In other words, the performer or comedian, unlike characters in a regular drama, is aware of the presence of the audience, and by the same token, the audiences are aware that the performer or comedian is aware of their presence. This awareness creates room for direct address or makes direct address a quintessential part of Nigerian stand-up comedy. In other words, the stand-up comedian cannot sustain the verbal performance without a conversational response from the audience. The intermittent response from the audience is required for the comedian to proceed with his jokes. When he is not getting one, he interjects with the 'call and response' formula. We may hear interjections like 'please clap for yourself', 'a round of applause for all the beautiful ladies in the house', 'Helloo?', etc. In the following examples, we see the comedians sustaining the tempo of their performances by having a direct conversation with their audiences:

(…) now, it is at this point in the story that I will pick a girl and a chair

[Casting a lot, crossed the divide between the audience and the stage to pick a lady from the audience]

I don't know why you are turning your face
I had no intention of picking you
But the way you deliberately turned your face in the other direction (…)

[holds her by the hand and takes her to the stage to help him perform a role]
(Okey Bakassi 2018)

Due to the centrality of 'the spoken' to Nigerian stand-up comedy, most aspects of the physical performance are often subsumed within the spoken word. So, when other performance arts like music requires song and dance, regular drama requires dialogue, characters, and characterisation. Stand-up up comedy conveys its action more in the spoken words by employing figures of speech that convey sound effects and other physical aspects of performance. Ideophones and formulas can be identified as some of the linguistic components that help in converting physical performances into spoken performances. These performances embedded within the speech art inform the idea of spoken performance in this study, depict a marked departure from print to verbal in the criticism of African popular drama, and open up vistas for the ethnography of spoken performance and literary stylistics.

So, when we are dealing with performance as a cultural product, we must also consider the enormous impact of the performer on the overall success of the performance. This means that the full understanding of stand-up comedy as a performance art comes from a combination of addressivity and performativity; in the same way that the cultural aspect of Nigerian stand-up comedy, which is signified by everyday life, combines with creativity, which is the entertainment bent, to create an intellectual space for anthropological and literary exploration of Nigerian stand-up comedy. Therefore, addressivity and performativity conceptualise the performance as language intended to manipulate or direct the audiences towards an expected end. Both concepts help to convey the actual intent of the comedian so as to direct the audiences on how to receive the joke. This is how the comedian makes the serious get to us as unserious. Therefore, the spoken performance not only conveys words in a particular way that suggests definitive meaning but also provides audiences with a standpoint to assimilate and interpret the utterance, making the rhetoric and the expected reactions constituent of the spoken genre. From the above performance, we notice an affirmation of Bakhtin's treatment of utterance and reception of it as addressivity, that is, 'the quality of turning to someone' or the constituent element of utterance

which gives life and death to the utterance (99). Going further, Bakhtin tells us that 'the various typical forms this addressivity assumes and the various concept of the addressee are constitutive, definitive features of various speech genres (99). To that extent, we can assume that the spoken performance of Nigerian stand-up comedy suggests to its audiences how to receive and react to the text or performance. This relationship between the audiences and the performer – represented by the production, consumption, and reaction to performance – is exactly the whole essence of addressivity, an essence that determines the texts of Nigerian stand-up comedy through mutual synchronisation between the text and the audiences. In this way, we can assume that addressivity of spoken performance is key to the emergence of spoken performance as a genre. The genre of spoken performance takes a more solid shape as the comedians – with their texts – meet their audiences, and their audiences—with their expectations – meet the comedians. Therefore, genres come into being through the convocation of texts and expectations, and therein lies the deeper implication of addressivity for the genre of spoken performance.

As a form that stretches in all directions raising questions about what constitutes the 'text' and 'storage' of Nigerian stand-up comedy, a study of the transformation and transmediation could perhaps open up vistas for the understanding of popular dramatic forms in Africa. This could lead to discourses relating to textual criticism of stand-up comedy and questions relating to the text, storage, and dissemination of Nigerian stand-up comedy. Therefore, is it possible to look at current media interventions or developments in Nigerian popular theatre as a medium of storage and dissemination of popular life and culture? What are the pitfalls that arise from views of textuality that see literature as synonymous with print culture? What is the future of literature with the emergence of digital culture or transmediated texts? How can literature and indeed literary criticism respond to the emergence of the new theatrical audiences of the 21st century? These are some of the issues contemporary scholarship must grapple with as we enter a new performance space that can be conceptualised as post-dramatic theatre.

Generating a template for evaluating such an art form would mean a deep rethinking of mainstream notions and assumptions of popular art forms that were reached without adequately considering the cultural context, the process of production and consumption, and the people whose ways of life it illuminates. These hasty assumptions and conclusions in the mainstream evaluation of popular art forms have made it practically difficult to develop research questions,

methodologies, and theoretical assumptions that will guide scholars and students in criticism of popular theatrical forms like Nigerian stand-up comedy. To therefore think of Nigerian stand-up comedy in terms of a specific cultural form, especially when looking at its emergence, may be problematic from the very beginning due to its eclectic and syncretic nature. The proper thing to do is to see how the various cultural materials are unified in one single genre. This approach will eventually lead to important discoveries revealing the extent to which Nigerian stand-up comedy may be considered as a sub-genre within the corpus of Nigerian popular theatre or post-drama.

NOTE

[1] *Reading Zimbabwe* refers to https://readingzimbabwe.com/, a bibliographic website created by Tinashe Mushakavanhu, Nontsikelelo Mutiti, and Corey Tegeler.

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Literary Supplement

Ezuga (Short Story)

KASIMMA

October the eleventh. That was the day I became a figure for the public. The day I joined the league of men and women whose lives are like nude statues behind a glass case, in the middle of the city, aired out like clothes on a line. Those people who no longer have secrets: who can no longer cough or choke in peace without it being news. Those people who cannot laugh, cry, dance — hell, even walk—, without seeing their pictures splotched on newspapers. October the eleventh was the day Twitter made me a public figure.

I sat up on my couch, stretched, rubbed my eyes, and yawned. My breath gave me a strong message. I fanned it off. I unclicked the airplane mode on my phone before heading to the bathroom. My mouth was foaming in fluoride when my phone rang. After brushing, I shut down my laptop and tossed it in its bag. I took my purple mug to the sink and filled it with water. Though used, the mug looked neat and very dry. That's why I prefer dark-coloured mugs to bright-coloured ones. The coffee would have smeared a white mug with irritation. My phone rang again. I rushed to it.

'Ada, sup?' I asked.

'I barely survived the night, Ezuga. Please come.'

Whatever would make Adaolisa whisper must be serious. So I rang off and dashed to the bathroom. I did not want to visit a sick friend smelling like a skunk. Adaolisa was like an American: always excited. Her voice was always high-pitched and alive. I wore no makeup, not as if I cared. I grabbed my laptop bag, my phone, my wallet, and I was out. Imagine my unpleasant surprise when I arrived at Adaolisa's and found her sorting out mugs from the cupboard. A kettle fumed on the stove. I snapped the stove off. The plates on the sink were covered in lather. Adaolisa grinned at me mischievously.

'Adaolisa…'

'Take a seat, Ezuga,' she said, closing the cupboard, and returning to the sink, holding a black mug and a white one. 'I know you've not had breakfast.'

'How will I have breakfast when you called me and lied that you barely survived the night.'

'Relax. This is the morning, not night.'

I sat on the white plastic chair leaning on the wall and lowered my bag on the sparkling yellow tiles. I rested my hand on the white plastic table moping at me. I'd always found it interesting and beautiful that Adaolisa would use yellow tiles for her kitchen floor and the partition of the wall between her sink and the base of her cabinet. I never asked why because I liked the idea of imagining it and thinking about it. The aroma of frying eggs filled my nostrils. The tigers in my stomach chuffed as pleasantries to the expectant meal. Adaolisa must have heard my stomach's grumble because she looked at me and smiled.

The table was set sooner than I thought. I dived into the scrambled eggs and bread, forgetting to wet my mouth with water or coffee as usual. Thankfully, I had finished the first bed of bread when I noticed Adaolisa looking at me, a slice of smile as thin as a sheer cloth stamped on her lips; her meal just one bite down.

'What?' I asked.

'You are not even aware of what is going on, are you?'

'What's going on?'

She smiled lopsidedly. 'How many followers have you got on Twitter?'

'Maybe a thousand, I don't know.'

'Wrong. Thirty-five dot five k friends.'

The bread dropped from my grip.

'You are trending on Twitter. You are a celeb o!'

She chuckled and took a second bite of her bread. What did she mean? Trending for what? It did not occur to me to check my phone. I hardly ever comment on anything on Twitter or post anything except my story publications. I deactivated my comments and messages. I do not even have my picture on my status. So what would make me trend? A bright light flashed into my eyes. Adaolisa was pushing her phone to my face.

My name was number one on the trending list. A certain huge Hollywood actress had retweeted my story and captioned it:

Please does anyone know how I can reach this writer? Her 'fiction' story, 'On the Beyond' is my true story.

It was a trend. So I permitted Twitter to show this trend. She had

uploaded a picture. When I saw the picture of a long exercise book, tied up in a green ribbon, I felt dizzy. The thread read,

I have avoided going into my father's room since he died six months ago. I stumbled upon 'On the Beyond,' while surfing the net. I felt instantly cold as I read because the happening around the death of the protagonist, a ghost, was exactly as it happened when my father died. I saw myself in the story, literally. Out of curiosity, I went to his wardrobe, checked inside his blue travelling box, and I found this notebook, just as described in the story! It's an unfinished manuscript that my father started. And in 'On the Beyond,' the ghost tells the necromancer to ask his daughter to finish up the story and publish it in his name and hers. I am so blown away. I have not slept in my house for days. Is this coincidence? Or did my father's ghost actually appear to this Nigerian writer? Please I need to reach her; I need to ask her.

I looked at Adaolisa. She smiled at me and slurped her coffee. I continued scanning the Trend Feed. One American middle-aged lady said the ghost in my story, *Don't*, fit, perfectly, the description of her mother who died of cancer. And that she found a note on a red paper, under her mother's bed, where her mother managed to pen her thoughts about how much she would miss her daughter when she died. A Scottish judge, confirmed that the ghost in my story, *If Only*, was his daughter's. She was fifteen when she killed herself. He had blamed his divorce and himself and his ex-wife. But in my story, she tells him that she killed herself because she was raped by some boys in her class. She mentioned their names. He has since filed a report against them because those names exist and they were her classmates in real life.

My hands trembled like leaves in the wind. I remembered those stories clearly; I wrote them. I started a blog to publish my own stories when the rejections from literary journals got too much. Those ghosts spoke Igbo in the stories. How then was it that they were real stories of people from America, Scotland, Morocco, Spain? I wondered, like the commentators, if my stories, the ones I sat up at night writing on my laptop, were fiction or nonfiction. Fear descended on me. Had I been entertaining ghosts without knowing?

'So, Ezuga, what is going on?' Adaolisa asked.

My mouth became instantly filled, not with words though. I made it to the toilet bowl before I emptied the contents of my stomach.

Noise: too much noise. Six weeks was all it took, since that damned tweet, for my life to make a thunderous 360° turn like an owl's neck. I thought that if I kept mute, the noise on Twitter would die down, or

other news would make me redundant. I would later accept that that decision was as futile as sweeping the beach clean of sand. Adaolisa was right: my silence fuelled the noise.

After one restless night at Adaolisa's, I took a walk at dawn, my eyes covered with dark sunshades, my nose and lips hidden behind my black facemask. I needed to quieten my head. I walked past joggers, strollers, workers, and I wondered which of them was a ghost. Those stories were fiction. I'm not even a writer. I'm a banker: was. I'd since lost my job. After my photos were splashed on every phone screen, people started asking me to take pictures with them whenever they entered the banking hall. Some came to the banking hall just to see me. The banking hall was always crowded and it was difficult to tell the customers from the fans. Our service rating started to drop because customers threw tantrums about the excessive queues in the bank. I was taken off operations to the marketing department. That was when I understood what 'from frying pan to fire' meant. Prospective customers opened accounts because of me, but most times, they would ask to hang out. Sometimes, I arrived at their offices to find them waiting with their friends. And they always wanted pictures, always. I always declined, always. One day, Adaolisa showed me a photo of a customer and me that surfaced on the internet. I remembered that dusty office and its hirsute owner. No wonder he wanted us to sit facing the window. I threatened to resign from the bank. They promoted me and increased my salary. I still resigned.

As it became brighter, during my morning walk, a woman—dressed in an orange fitted dress and a dark green jacket—walked towards me. I stared at her, wondering what inspired this senior citizen to dress up looking like a mango. She returned my stares. Even though my eyes were covered with shades, she still looked right at me. I wondered if she knew me, recognised me, or if she was a ghost. The last became an option only six weeks ago. I shivered as I walked past her. She reminded me of the first story I wrote. I met the woman—who, I'm now certain, was a ghost—on my way home after work. I could not find a cab that day so I decided to walk. This was a few weeks after I left Tobi. Tobi was my dream man. I loved the way his arms enveloped me when he hugged me. Our sex life was amazing, yet, Tobi cheated. I remember vomiting after he confessed to me. I asked questions whose answers I was not ready for. I asked for details. He told me everything, just to pacify me. He described the sexual intercourse: the oral, the doggy, the missionary, the believers and unbelievers. So I've sucked a penis that entered another vagina, kissed lips that have

drunk another's vagina juice. It seemed to me as though I had gone to a messy public toilet, raised the toilet seat, and licked the toilet bowl clean. That was when I puked. I vomited the hurt, the irritation, and the marriage. And when everyone else, family and friends inclusive, said, 'Men will always be men, Ezuga. He cheated just once, just once, and he is sorry,' I called them *ndi iberibe* and walked away. I walked home, that day, thinking of Tobi, when I noticed this woman looking at me. Her honey-coloured skin was a slate of wrinkles, yet she walked agilely. My thoughts wrapped around how she managed to look so dry, old, and frail, yet behave so strong. She smiled at me. I smiled back and nodded. Then she froze. She stopped walking, her mouth and eyes shaped like O. I looked at myself, wondering if something was wrong with my black suit pants or blue shirt: nothing. I walked past her, looked back, and still found her status quo. I hastened my steps. I thought she was crazy: as in she was still in the kindergarten class of madness. I dreamed of her that night. I dreamed that she died in a hospital while her daughter rubbed her arm. In my dream, her daughter would not stop crying. She was an unmarried only child of a single mother who was now dead. Next thing, the girl was in her mother's room, going through her mother's things, when she found a note written on a red, thick paper, under her mother's bed. It was like in the movies when someone is reading silently, but the viewers can hear the person's voice. That was how it was to me standing in her room, watching her read the note. Tears rolled down her eyes as she read the letter her mother wrote to her—when she was told that the malignant growth in her lungs had become cancerous—reminiscing about their life together. She smiled when her mother said she would be her mother again in the next world. She chuckled when her mother said she would still buy the same sperm she bought in this world because she wanted to have her the way she was. The recipient lady cried even more after reading the love letter. I woke up and reproduced the dream as a fictional short story.

The actors in my dream were Igbos; the characters in my stories, Igbos. How then was it that an American woman would read my story, that I published in my blog for my own consumption, and claim that that was her life story? Her mother died of cancer in the hospital while she rubbed her arm, not leg, arm, just as in the story. So, according to her, she thought she just might see a note if she checked. As fate would continue playing chess with her life, she found a note in her mother's travel bag, written on a red, thick, paper; and the contents exactly the same as that in my story. I imagined her trembling like quaking

earth when she found the note. Maybe she even peed on her body. Everything else in the story played out. How did this American even come across my blog in the first place?

Why me, I wondered. How did these ghosts find me? Then why hadn't I seen my parents? Surely if dead Americans and Spanish and co reached out to me, then I must be somewhat popular in the spirit world. Did it mean that my parents had not heard of me or that they did not know it's me? My aunty, the woman who raised me, would blame the devil for everything. So was the devil responsible for my dead parents' silence? I giggled remembering her response when I called her to inform her of my new, unwanted fame. I imagined her spitting and circling her hand round her head and snapping her fingers as she exclaimed, 'Tufiakwa! Ezuga, nwam, resist the devil and he will flee. This is a gift from the devil.'

'How did the devil find me, Aunty?'

'How will I know? But, shaa, we will defeat him. He cannot use you. Nothing good comes from the devil. He gives with one hand and takes with another hand.'

'But he gives, Aunty, doesn't he?'

I passed by a beautiful man who walked like a model on the catwalk. I wondered if he had a hip problem or if that was how he walked. I took care not to give him a second look in case he too was a ghost, *maka adighi amama*.

The second ghost story was a figment of my imagination: other stories were all dreams. This one, I was in a supermarket. I picked up a pack of cornflakes. The faded brownish colour of the pack filled me with nostalgia. I stood there, the pack of cornflakes in my hand, staring at the brown pack, but seeing myself at a strange house. The ground was sandy and the house was decorated with white and purple linens. People were crying. Somewhere close to the wall, the earth was being dug. I went to one of the crying women, whom I did not know, and squeezed her hand. So that night, I developed that imagery into a story. I wrote the story from the ghost's point of view. I added that he manipulated his daughter's mind to his room where he showed her his unfinished manuscript with the instructions he left. This was the story that happened to be the story of the American actress that started all these talks. After her tweet, my blog entertained a myriad of visitors. And that was when the other four persons came out to say that they found themselves in my story. I had written only five works of fiction and all five belonged to actual human beings. I now had requests from others begging me to locate their late loved ones and ask this and that.

I now had a queue of literary agents asking to represent my collection of short stories. I had no prior idea of who a literary agent was neither had I collected any stories. Journalists from different parts of the world emailed me, inviting me to their countries for an interview.

It was noise, too much noise. I just wanted to rest. I wanted to sleep peacefully without being afraid that some ghosts were lurking around, waiting for me to write their stories. I wanted so badly to vacate Adaolisa's bed and move back into my house. I desperately wanted the fear to leave me. But they wouldn't stop talking; my name wouldn't stop trending, and the noise wouldn't cease. I decided it was about time I said something. If my silence was noise, maybe my voice would bring silence. Adaolisa thought that I should engage the public. She advised me to grant an interview and explain myself so that the requests would cease. My aunty felt otherwise. She said that as soon as I showed myself in public, the rest of the ghosts in the world would notice me, then I will know what spiritual disturbance means.

My phone vibrated. Talk about the angel. I answered the call. I had not even greeted when my aunty said,

'Ezuga, please come home for lunch today. See you.'

My foster parents and I sat around a circle-shaped dining table. Scratches of half-eaten food scattered on our plates. It was a Saturday so they had been at home all day, yet I was surprised when they showed up to eat food looking all dressed up. My uncle wore brown shorts and a red T-shirt while my aunty wore a loose floral gown. Her hair was neatly packed and oiled. I, the visitor, felt underdressed for lunch. They discussed other mundane things that flew off my head almost as soon as they entered. I knew why they had called me. That was what I wanted to hear. My eardrums beat in glee when, after the plates had been cleared by the maid, and we remained at the table, sipping wine, my uncle said.

'Ezuga, I know you know that we did not invite you here just to eat.'

I nodded.

'I have had this discussion with my wife. Though she disagrees, I will still tell you.'

I nodded again. My aunty sipped her wine. Her face was bereft of emotions.

'We have kept this from you, at your aunty's request, but you are old enough to know now. And with all these things happening, it's best you know.'

It's best you know what? Why was he driving around the roundabout?

'Your late mother was childless for a long time. So, in desperation, she made a pact with Ezekoro. She promised to give you up in the service of the deity when you were old enough. That was the word she insisted that she had used, 'old enough.' Well, she realised she was pregnant three weeks after that visit. She could no longer remember if she had intercourse with your father before or after the meeting with Ezekoro. So that when Ezekoro's mouthpiece, Ezemmuo, sent a messenger to remind your mother of her promise, your mother became greedy. She said you were so small: indeed, you were. You were about four years. Ezemmuo would have none of that. So your mother 'denied' that Ezemmuo gave her any charms that helped get her pregnant. Ezemmuo later died mysteriously. He was the last Ezemmuo of Achina. So when your mother had that ghastly accident that took your father and her, I believe your father was unfortunate to be in the car with her when Ezekoro came with a clay pot to fetch her blood. We took you to a church where the pastor prayed and declared you free. Now, here we are again.'

All the while my uncle spoke, I was transported. If a fly or a mosquito sang in my ear, I did not hear. I imagined Ezekoro there, at the scene of my parents' accident, scooping blood with a hollow pot. I imagined its stomach becoming bulgier as he drank and his hairy face, redder. I wondered what my parents' corpses looked like. Flat? Did their corpses resemble a fabric of flesh?

'Uncle, you mean I am possessed?'

My aunty circled her hand round her head and snapped her fingers. 'You are not possessed, God forbid.'

'You are not possessed. But I think that that deity is responsible for your seeing spirits.'

'She does not see spirits,' my aunty said. 'Ezuga, gbo, do you see spirits?'

I shook my head.

My uncle snapped, 'Wait let me finish before you say your own.'

My aunty crossed her arms across her chest, looked away, and scrunched up her nose. My uncle sighed and looked at me.

'We don't give names for the necessity of it in Igboland. Names come with meaning. Ever wondered why your name is Chiezugamozi? I am beginning to think that this is that errand Chukwu has brought you to the world to do. In fact, I have told your story to a friend who is well-grounded in our Igbo cosmological beliefs. He said he suspects that your gift is from Ezekoro. Ezekoro wants to use you as an informant to pass messages between the living and the dead.'

My aunty snorted, shaking her legs as though impatient to speak. I broke out in a sweat.

My uncle looked at her and shook his head. 'Ngwa, talk, since your body is scratching you.'

'Christiana.' My aunty drew closer to the edge of her seat. 'Don't mind your uncle. You are not possessed. You. Are. A. Child. Of. God,' she said, striking the table with her index, one word per strike. 'Light and darkness have no business. The dead are dead and gone. Which one is 'passing message between the living and the dead'?'

'So how do you explain what she is experiencing now?' my uncle asked.

'Ọkwa when you were talking you asked me not to talk?' my aunty asked, eyes on the ground. 'Please it is my turn. Just rest, let me talk my own.'

My throat was dry. I sipped my wine.

'Christiana, you are a Christian. Christ bought you at a high price. Don't listen to fetish talks. What happened with your stories is purely coincidental. Your parents' death was an accident. So is he saying that were you in the car, the deity would have killed you too? What then would happen to this so-called gift?'

'That's why the deity took them when she was not in the car,' my uncle said.

'Okay, why did Ezekoro take Okechukwu? Okechukwu had no hand in the pact. Why did not it take only Amaka?'

'It's unfortunate that he was in the car with his wife.'

'Unfortunate, ọkwia? Well, it is also unfortunate that those deities are powerless. They can neither give nor take life. They cannot even possess my child. She is free in Jesus name.'

My uncle hissed. 'Let her explore both angles. It is the same God we…'

'How is it the same God? God is merciful. He does not kill his children as if they are rats.'

'He does not? What happened in Sodom and Gomorrah? What of in…'

'How can you use Sodom and Gomorrah as an example? Don't you know what they did?'

I stopped listening. That argument was not to end anytime soon. They were always like that. My aunty was a staunch Christian and her husband was a staunch believer in Igbo ontology. I don't know how they had managed to stay married for four decades.

The rest of the week saw me thinking of what my uncle said. It

made some sense. How come my Nigerian characters were real people and ghosts and occurrences in another corner of the earth? I browsed the internet about death and what death meant. Some scholars believe that death is just the process of returning the body we borrowed from dust and reverting to our default spirit mood. Others said death is the key that unlocks the door to heaven. Ezuga: was that what I was on earth to do, to be a medium between the living and the dead?

For the first time since that day six weeks ago, I went on Twitter and read what people said about me. I watched the news the five beneficiaries of my stories granted. All of them were in tears as they narrated the joy in their hearts when they found the messages their loved ones left them. One man even said he went to dig out his wife's photo from the basement where he hid it and reinstalled it on his bedside stool. But suppose my aunty was right? Suppose if I put myself out there and the other spirits find me and come to ask for one favour or the other? How would I cope? Would they find me either way?

The least I could do, I figured, was help these former humans who could no longer communicate to communicate. The best I could do for myself was to quieten the noise. Adaolisa was right. The more I stayed silent, the louder the noise around me became.

I replied to one of the lingering emails.

Dear Ms. Amanpour,
I hope this note finds you well.
I apologise for my delayed response.
Yes, I accept your invitation to London. It's about time I spoke up.
Please let me know your plans on how we can proceed.
Accept the assurance of my highest regards.

Jisie ike,
Ezeamama, Ezuga.

Four Poems

EUGEN M. BACON

Mis/Identity

We cartwheel from the sky precious metals in gold platinum silver shimmering down into summer fields full of maize and arrow roots everyone has forgotten the more we hit the fertile ground one and all refuse to notice the less visible we become to those clutching with bare hands a naked disbelief in referents or ghosts though they are unsure why/ we speak to them in a language of radical futurism but by the time we seep into their hearts someone has dialled emergency services and a brigade not an exorcist arrives with

maps and graphs for sandbags
of migration and hybridity
our ancestors – bless them
could never argue with

Portable Longing

There's an album full of digital pumpkins
balanced on pillared photographs
in past present dark rooms
reeled with future matter
loaded in night-time language
developed on monochrome clairvoyance
and a phosphorescence of leaders
who can't heliograph a quality fade
so they're not so great after all

Darkling Shores

You broke fingers in compliance and self-regulation so you could juggle a marathon and five-ball yoga to colonialise your sleep. The episode drew attention to itself in mindful ways, becoming a liability in the dawn of drought, misappropriation and poverty. The predicament grew worse with an alarm clock's wail, so you broke more fingers one by one, calling for technology and data dearest in a final renunciation

of convalesced dreams
pirouetting etchings
of a zoning grid
comprising no more
than all your fault.

Mea Culpa

Once upon a time guilt was a day when reason got nothing done and the silver sun refused to gleam. Dusk fell with the fervour of a night runner who launched at you with juju smelted in your dreams and transgressions without which you could have saved one person – yourself or Mother Africa. Your follies were precisely:

no comment
an ineptitude for parables
inexistence on the fence
and maddening the hell
out of poor people.

Tributes

Remembering Professor Charles R. Larson (14 January 1938–22 May 2021)

TIJAN M. SALLAH

In the past few years, modern African literature has lost some of its brilliant pioneer critics: Emmanuel Obiechina, Abiola Irele, G.D. Killam and now Charles Raymond Larson (better known as Charles R. Larson). Dr Larson passed away from complications from prostate cancer on 22 May 2021 at his Chevy Chase, Maryland home. He was 83. Born in Sioux City, Iowa, on 14 January 1938, Larson grew up as a mid-Western city lad whose father, Ray Olaf Larson, ran a department store and whose mother, Miriam Kamphoefner Larson, a home maker, provided dance lessons.[1] He studied at the University of Colorado, where he did his bachelors and masters in 1959 and 1961 respectively in English literature. He later discovered how deficient his early education was, since he had not by then read any African American writing, not to mention works by non-Western writers. He notes in a talk he gave at the Harry Ransom Center of the University of Texas at Austin, where his papers are held: 'The man who directed my MA thesis and taught the American literature survey course I took never mentioned a single African American writer, yet he was an African American.'[2] It was not lost on Larson that even the African American who taught him ignored crucial narratives from his own world.

In 1961, when President John F. Kennedy created the Peace Corps, Larson was among the first 1,000 volunteers in the programme and was assigned to Nigeria. From October 1962 to August 1964, Larson taught English Language and Literature at an Anglican school, Oraukwu Grammar School, founded in 1959, in the town of Oraukwu (not far from Chinua Achebe's hometown of Ogidi) in Eastern Nigeria.[3] As a pacifist, he volunteered for the Peace Corps to get draft deferment from military service in Vietnam, for he had learned, very early, the power of 'soft power', of building connections and forging cultural bridges. When asked about this and if the Peace Corps triggered his love-fest with Africa, he replied: 'Absolutely, I didn't even know

anything about Africa until I went there. Nothing. Have I told you how that happened? I was avoiding the draft. I'd been drafted.'[4] When asked if it was for Vietnam, he replied:

> For Vietnam. My draft board said they would not defer me anymore. They called me for military service. The Peace Corps was brand new, less than a year old. The Peace Corps had what you'd call a psychological aptitude test in those days, mechanically scored. That was how they determined if they would accept you for training or not.
>
> I took that on a Friday afternoon in May of 1962, and on the following Monday the Peace Corps called to see if I wanted to go to Nigeria. I didn't know where Nigeria was, but I said, 'Yes!' and then I went to my draft board to ask them, 'Will you defer me for the Peace Corps?' And they said, 'What's the Peace Corps? We don't know what it is.' And I explained what it was and they said, 'Well, we don't know, we will have to think about this, discuss this, and we'll let you know.
>
> And a week later, as I was waiting, they called and said, 'Yes, we'll defer you for the Peace Corps.'[5]

The Peace Corps venture proved just right for Larson. While teaching high school English at this grammar school for boys in Eastern Nigeria, he discovered how keen to learn these kids were and the dearth of books available to them. So, he made it his mission to acquire books from US publishers to build the school's library. Mr Hezekiah Chiwuzie, the founding principal of the school, in July 1964 wrote about Larson: 'He practically built up our library. He helped us to get a number of invaluable books from various American publishers. He initiated the first systematic accessing and cataloguing of our books. He has made the library a centre where (students) love to go to.'[6] In addition, he noted, 'Mr. Larson introduced baseball into the school(…) He has a rare gift of attracting people to himself.'[7] Not many African literary critics can claim to have had this kind of profound early influence, but it is a testament to what was to evolve into a stellar literary career.

Following his Peace Corp years, Larson wanted to pursue his doctorate in African literature but such a programme of studies was rare in those days. So, he initially embarked on a programme in African American literature at Howard University but subsequently transferred to pursue a PhD in Comparative Literature at Indiana University, completing it in 1970. He went on to serve for forty years at American University in Washington DC, where he rose to the rank of full Professor of Literature and served as Chair of the Department of Literature for four years.[8]

In remembering Larson, I would like to discuss his contributions in four crucial areas, including: (1) criticism, (2) compiling anthologies, (3) creative writing, and (4) literary activism, teaching and humanitarian work.

LARSON AS A VENTURE LITERARY CRITIC

I wish to argue that Dr Larson was a venture literary critic, for he, like a venture entrepreneur, broke into new areas of literature, took high risks and, where successful, reaped high returns. Venture critics have two qualities in abundance: curiosity and risk-taking ambition. Larson had both. Larson was a pioneer scholar of immense productivity in the field of criticism of African literature and comparative literature, and in the promotion and teaching of African, African American, and non-Western literatures in the American Academy. His first book, *The Emergence of African Fiction* (1972), was seen as a foundational text on the criticism of African literature in the American Academy. The book was important in the range of modern African fiction and its pioneer authors it evaluated: from Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, to Onitsha Market Literature, to the fantasy (magical realism) works of Amos Tutuola, to the 'situational' novels of Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o (then called James Ngũgĩ), to the novels of Camara Laye and Lenrie Peters, to that of Wole Soyinka and Ayi Kwei Armah. The South African novelist/critic, Ezekiel (Es'kia) Mphahlele, in a blurb on the back cover of Larson's book, stated:

> I find it challenging, provocative. Helps break down myths about African literature while at the same time being exploratory, sifting critical approaches through a close look at the text themselves. His is a wholesome empirical approach that accommodates the past, present and future trends of African writing. One will not always agree with him, but no one can question his sincerity and passion and insight.[9]

The book was, in short, impressive in its diversity, amplitude and ambition.

But the book was not without its critics, as two prominent novelists whose work Larson evaluated – the Nigerian Chinua Achebe and the Ghanaian Ayi Kwei Armah – took their angled jabs at the book, both alleging Larson applied Western criteria to African literary texts. Achebe criticized Larson's conflation of 'universalism' with Western critical standards and Armah chastised Larson for missing some personal details about his life, which made him unhappy and prompted his ad hominem diatribes, even coining the term 'Larsony' to describe Larson's brand of criticism.

Achebe took on Larson with his customary brilliance – he first challenged Larson's approach in his analyses of Lenrie Peter's novel, *The Second Round*, where Larson mentioned the novel's 'universality' because of ' its very limited concerns with Africa itself'.[10] But even Larson himself is not entirely sold on his own approach when he sowed his own seed of self-doubt about Lenrie Peter's novel, 'Or am I deluding myself in considering the work universal? Maybe what I really mean is that *The Second Round* is to a great degree Western and therefore scarcely African at all.'[11] Achebe goes on to make a larger point challenging Larson's Western brand of criticism:

> Does it ever occur to these universalists to try out their game of changing names of characters and places in an American novel, say, a Philip Roth or an Updike, and slotting in African names just to see how it works? But of course it would not occur to them. It would never occur to them to doubt the universality of their own literature. In the nature of things the work of a Western writer is automatically informed by universality. It is only others who must strain to achieve it. So-and-so's work is universal; he has truly arrived! As though universality was some distant bend in the road which you may take if you travel out far enough in the direction of Europe or America, if you put adequate distance between yourself and your home. I should like to see the word 'universal' banned altogether from discussions of African literature until such a time as people cease to use it as a synonym for the narrow, self-serving parochialism of Europe, until their horizon extends to include all the world.[12]

Ayi Kwei Armah's criticism was initially similarly highly logical but subsequently grew personal and ferocious. His essay 'Larsony or Fiction as Criticism of Fiction' was a diatribe against not only Larson's work, but against Larson himself. He started with a few *general axioms* and then moved particularly to Larson and his criticism. He began his essay by probing into the interiority of the Western mindset, making the following arguments:

> Now as far as prejudices go, Western assumptions about Africa are well known. There is no need here for an exhaustive listing. It's enough to point out one key Western idea, and the way all the other pet assumptions of Western racism lies open: Africa is inferior; the West is superior (…) Among those attendant ideas is the assumption that human intelligence happens to be native-born in the West, but that Africa is a rarity, a total stranger in a hostile environment bound to reject it—naturally and necessarily.[13]

The oppositionality, the Manichaean posture, between the West and the Rest – in this essay – is presented starkly. Armah went on to argue that the Western critic is not a disembodied consciousness; he does not innocently interpret texts from other cultural universes, with independent disinterestedness. Instead, he carries with him his own cultural baggage and reflects it in the arguments of his pen. He noted that the Western critic 'operates from a received framework of Western values and prejudices'.[14] This, however, is not a startling statement. Chinua Achebe had talked about the plain honesty of a colonial professor he encountered at the University of Ibadan – Professor Claude Welch. Professor Welch had been brutally honest with him when he stated, 'We may not be able to teach you what you want or even what you need. *We can only teach you what we know*.'[15] So, any outsider to any autochthonous cultural universe is limited, shaped uniquely by his received education and experience.

When we consider Armah's criticism of Larson, Armah stands as an anti-imperialist. He develops his general axioms and further presents them carefully:

> It so happens that creativity is the highest instance of human intelligence at work. African creative activity is the highest instance of human intelligence at work and at home in Africa. This is plain and logical. But for the Western critic of African literature it constitutes a problem…. The skillful Western critic of African Literature can deny the Africanness or the creativity of it—or both. If it proves impossible to deny creativity, a Western source must be found for it, against the evidence if the evidence insists on being uncooperative.[16]

In short, Armah was alleging that the skillful Western critic was tied to the stratagems of empire--denying the claims to any human intellectual achievement in Africa. Up to this point, Armah's anti-imperial axioms were robust enough to stand the test of deniability.

But then – he moves to the particular, the personal – which starts by initially giving Larson his due regard:

> I proposed to examine some of the expert pronouncements of one of the more famous Western critics of African Literature, Charles Larson. Professor Larson, to give him his due. Larson professes expertly in the fertile and profitable field of African Literature. He has edited books of short stories written by African writers, the *field hands* of African Literature. More to the point, Larson is the author of a widely acclaimed book, *The Emergence of African Fiction*, (Indiana, 1971 and 1972), an expert's critical appraisal of part of African Literature. *I propose to appraise the appraiser*.[17]

Armah had an ongoing dialectic. He carefully identified African writers as workers, 'as *field hands* (italics mine)', as 'slaves' – if it can be put that way, as the dexterous producers, whom the 'mercenary Western critic' seeks to plunder. Armah then presents some convincing arguments about facts of his biography that Larson missed and interpretations of his work and leaps of fact that he found misleading. He notes, for example, that Larson had stated that Armah was influenced by James Joyce, when he (Armah) had never read Joyce; that he was in exile, when he had voluntarily travelled; and that he did not speak his mother tongue when that was not the case.[18] So, Armah further argued:

> So Larson, after transporting me physically to the West, also endows me with a Western source for my creativity. But he isn't satisfied. He must take care to block off any remnant possibility of my having access to African sources, even through my own mother tongue. Such a task would discourage cowards, but Larson is very brave. He accomplishes it in one bold stroke: by asserting that I don't know my mother tongue. (…)
>
> Plainly, the statement that I don't speak my mother tongue would look obviously stupid if Larson presents it on his own authority. So Larson does a clever little thing. He puts the statement he wants to make into my own mouth. How? Simply by saying Armah has himself said so: 'He has said he no longer remembers his African language.'
>
> Ordinarily, a scholar indicates the source of this type of information as precisely as he can. But Larson does the opposite. He takes great care not to indicate in any way the source of his expert information about me.
>
> (…) And all the time the truth he is so careful to hide is that Larson does not know me, has never talked to me, never. [19]

It is clear from these passages that Armah was making the case for veracity in criticism. He was not a Western attention seeker; he sincerely believed in his truth-telling. He notes that, 'Many African writers discuss their work and themselves quite willingly, sometimes even eagerly, with Western critics, newspapermen, magazine pundits, radio commentators, television hosts, and just plain dilettantes. That is their choice. I don't.'[20] Armah had a point. He believed in his writerly mission and thought that the Western critic evaluating African works needed to be humble enough to learn the facts about particular oeuvres and their producers before making bold critical judgements.

Although Armah made several persuasive arguments in his essay, at the end his tone and message became increasingly personal. He noted:

> Larson, the critic of African Literature, is a Westerner. From the evidence of his work he is plainly committed to the values and prejudices of his own society, just as much as any other Western expert hustling Africa, be he businessman, an economic advisor or a mercenary dog.
>
> Personally I do not feel like appealing to him or protesting against him and his work (…) his integrity is low; his intelligence is average (…) It would only be a befitting tribute of this bold, resourceful and enterprising Western critic of African Literature if his name became synonymous with the style of scholarly criticism of which he is such an inimitably brilliant exponent, that style which consists of the judicious distortion of African truths to fit Western prejudices, the art of using fiction as criticism of fiction. I suggest we call it LARSONY.[21]

Armah's overall point was that Larson had done an inadequate job with respect to confirming facts about his biography and work. For an impartial reader, a fiction writer arguing about misinterpretation by a critic of his life and work is fair game. But could Armah also have been carried away by the excesses of his pen by being so ad hominem, by questioning Larson's intelligence and integrity?

Fiction writers and their critics rarely converge as amicable bedfellows. Partly, this is an issue of positionality and perspective and partly that of emotional investment: the mother that gives birth to a child maintains proximity, has greater emotional investment, and sees her child differently from a probing admirer or one rendering independent judgments. Wole Soyinka captures that tension and takes a more nuanced view of this, by recently, and posthumously, stating the following about Larson:

> Urbane, in all circumstances in which we interacted, unflappable. He at least understood that while writers and critics serve the same Muse, they mostly interact closer to the clashing rocks of Scylla and Charybdis. As long as literature continued to emerge unscathed despite such risk-laden rites of passage, Charles Larson remained content with his role as expositor. He pursued his partnership in that mission with intellectual ease – and he certainly needed such virtues in relating to an immediate postcolonial generation. That was one season of feisty, culture-assertive and independent-minded writers, impatient with any signs of imperial imposition or condescension! At the base of it all, a human warmth, compassionate, genuine friendship. Far too often, one fervently wished there were just a few more in the Charles Larson mold. [22]

Although Larson's pioneer book had flaws, it was rich and ambitious in other respects. The question remains as to whether the shortcomings advanced by Armah about Larson's evaluation and interpretation of

his work were sufficiently generalizable to the other African writers and texts discussed in Larson's book. With the exception of Achebe's quibble with Larson's concept of 'universalism', other writers treated in Larson's book did not express any discernible objections. So, was Armah's critique an 'outlier' or a representative of the voice of the other writers treated in Larson's book, whom I would dub the 'quieter rest'?

The Armah critique aside, Larson's work was hugely significant in setting the foundations for African literary criticism in the American Academy. Armah's incisive diatribe, however, seemed to have gained the upper hand in the minds of many critics of African literature. This sadly led Larson on to the path of avoiding African literature conferences. Ernest Emenyonu captures this best:

> Larson's *The Emergence of African Fiction* (1972) helped to set the stage for the serious study of African literature and its criticism in the Academy. Like many pioneers, Chuck was chastised, castigated, and ridiculed for some views he expressed in the book, with some of the diatribes coming from people who had nothing better, if anything at all, to offer. Sadly, they succeeded in forcing Chuck to shrink and recoil and, like the proverbial snail, he pulled in his antennae and avoided collision with the menacing intruder. However, Chuck withdrawn did not mean Chuck disarmed and silenced. He simply stayed away from view, avoiding African Literature conferences where Ayi Kwei Armah's 'Larsony' (the term used to ridicule Larson's criticism of African literature) seemed to have become a planted and somewhat accepted theory. Chuck continued working behind the scenes, prolifically producing with impetus more and more works that lent integrity and credibility to the study of African literature.[23]

Emenyonu is tellingly correct. Larson abstained from conferences to avoid conflict, but did not give up on his work of criticism and exposition of African and non-Western literatures. He continued to review and interpret old and new African literary texts to American audiences in a variety of fora: from *Counterpunch* magazine to *Books Abroad* (which became later *World Literature Today*), *The New Republic*, *Newsweek*, *Harpers Magazine, Saturday Review*, *The Nation*, *Africa Today*, *Phylon*, *Negro Digest, Library Journal, The American Scholar, The Times Literary Supplement, Black Renaissance Noir, DC Examiner, Africa Report, CLA Journal, Africana Library Journal, National Observer, World Literature Written in English, Chicago Tribune Book World, Washington Post Book World, Detroit News, The Philadelphia Inquirer, Africana Journal, The MLA Stylesheet, The World and I*, *Worldview*, *Publishers Weekly*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, and *The New York Times Book*

Review. The sheer range and diversity of journals in which he reviewed and discussed African and other non-Western literatures were simply breathtaking. He was, in this sense, a hugely popular scholar. We now turn to Larson's work in compiling anthologies.

LARSON AS AN ANTHOLOGIST & EDITOR

Apart from his criticism work, Larson promoted African and African-American creative writers through several anthologies that he edited and wrote introductions for, as follows: *African Short Stories* (Collier Books, 1970); *Prejudice: Twenty Tales of Oppression and Liberation* (New American Library 1971); *More Modern African Stories* (Fontana Books, 1975) (retitled *Opaque Shadows and Other African Stories* (Inscape Corp., 1976); *An Intimation of Things Distant: The Collected Fiction of Neila Larsen* (Anchor Books, 2001); *Worlds of Fiction* (with his wife, Roberta Rubenstein) (Macmillan, 1993), and his mega anthology of African short stories, *Under African Skies: African Short Stories* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1997), which was described as 'the richest and most diverse collection of 20th-century African stories.'[24] James Allan McPherson, premier black Pulitzer Prize for fiction recipient, notes also about Larson's *Opaque Shadows* anthology, he 'selected superb stories that focus, without self-consciousness or remonstration, on the human condition as it presently exists among a variety of African people'.[25]

In addition to compiling and editing anthologies, Larson served on the editorial board of several magazines and journals, for example as Associate Editor of *PUCRED* (satirical literary review) (1972–74), Editorial Board Member of *World Literature Today (1972–1984)*, Books Editor of *English Around the World* (publication of English-Speaking Union), and Fiction and Book Review Editor of *Worldview* Magazine (1996–). Perhaps his most important editorial work was when he served as the General Editor of the African/American Library series for Collier Books (The Macmillan Company) from 1968 to 1975 in which he oversaw the publishing of about thirty-five, high literary quality titles by African, African American, and West Indian writers targeted for the popular-readership market. These works ranged from fiction by Peter Abrahams, Cheikh Hamidou Kane, Mongo Beti, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Wole Soyinka, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiongo, and Camara Laye to those by Charles Chesnutt, Langston Hughes, Nella Larsen, Jacques Roumain, Melvin Tolson, Paul Laurence Dunbar, George Lamming,

and other significant African, African American and Afro-Caribbean writers. We now turn to Larson's creative writing endeavours.

LARSON AS A CREATIVE WRITER

A little-known fact about Larson was that he worked on both sides of the writing spectrum: as both a critic and creative writer. The latter is particularly unknown about him but it reflects Larson's versatility as a writer, able to move between the cognitive and the affective. He had published three novels: *Academia Nuts* (The Bobbs-Merill Co., 1977), *The Insect Colony* (Rinehart and Winston, 1978), and *Arthur Dimmesdale* (A &W Publishers, Inc., 1983). Perhaps the best description of these works is presented by his faculty colleague, the 1986 Pulitzer Prize winner for Poetry, Henry Taylor, who taught with Larson at American University. Taylor noted:

> I treasure his other published work as well, some of it deeply serious, some of it humorous, verging even on the frivolous, and all of it rooted in a keen sensitivity to human folly of many kinds, in and out of the academic profession. *Academia Nuts* (1977) presents the invented insights of a student named Clara LePage, but before you succumb to the notion that this is yet another gathering of the grotesqueries to which student writing is susceptible, bear in mind the maxim laid down by the master Miyagi in *The Karate Kid*: 'There are no bad students. Only bad teachers.' Clara's views may have their murkiness, but they are clear enough to cause us in the profession to watch ourselves. Parts of this book arose from Chuck's association, in the early 1970s, with a satirical periodical that he helped found and edit, called *PUCRED*, the title an acronym like *PMLA*, standing perhaps for *Publications of the University of California at Riverside English Department*. It published articles with such titles as 'Pope's Lack of Influence on Matthew Arnold: A Reassessment of the New Dubiety.'
>
> Far more seriously and substantially, there came along, in 1978 and 1983, respectively, the novels *The Insect Colony* and *Arthur Dimmesdale*. In something like an inversion of Larson's own explorations in Africa, *The Insect Colony* enacts the gradual realization of its protagonist that he has much in common with previous white appropriators of African culture. Hunter Schuld is an entomologist studying spiders in West Africa, and can for a while comfort himself with the notion that his studies are scientific, objective, and apolitical. Soon enough he sees in himself more and more of one of his ancestors, a participant in Stanley's expedition in the late 1880s to 'relieve' Mehmed Emin Pasha,

the appointed governor of Equatoria, a colonial entity in South Sudan that was the joint 'condominium' of England and Egypt.

Chuck's next and final novel, *Arthur Dimmesdale*, recasts Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* from Dimmesdale's point of view, amplifying his sense of guilt as it also deepens the cold hypocrisy of Roger Chillingworth. It is a stunning achievement, bringing Hawthorne's characters into a vibrant life that reveals the cruelties and illusions of Puritan North America. Much more trivially, it enabled me to require Hawthorne and Larson in a class, which ended up reading both with an enthusiasm that is hard to imagine students feeling for Hawthorne alone.[26]

We now turn to Larson's work as a literary activist and humanitarian.

LARSON AS A LITERARY ACTIVIST, HUMANITARIAN & TEACHER

Dr Larson was unique in that he was not only a literary critic and creative writer, he was also concerned about the condition of African writers and the dissemination of books and the library culture of Africa. He championed the cause of persecuted African writers in Africa, such as the Nigeria Ogoni writer and Delta region activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa. In May 2005, at the University of Calabar (Nigeria) International Conference on African Literature and the English Language (ICALEL), he gave a rousing keynote speech, which was praised by the audience.[27] He noted some 'disturbing stories':

November 10, 1995 – almost ten years ago – Ken Saro-Wiwa was executed, rapidly, after a military tribunal declared him guilty, before the rest of the world had fathomed what had happened – not that the West would have done that much anyway. His crime? Trumped-up charges of murdering four pro-government Ogoni leaders, while Saro-Wiwa himself was in prison. His real crime? Of thinking of Ogoni secession, so that the oil fields on Ogoni land would no longer be controlled by Nigerian thugs, namely General Sani Abacha, the country's ruthless military dictator who died a few years later from an overdose of Viagra.

Before his murder, Ken Saro-Wiwa's popularity on the streets had equaled that of any other Nigerian literary figure, not because of his imaginative fiction, but because of the sit-com *Basi & Co.*, which ran on Nigerian TV from 1985 to 1990 for 150 episodes. Saro-Wiwa was a prolific writer and journalist, as well as a publisher, but then he dared to veer off into dangerous territory – political commentary – once he saw what was happening to his Ogoni people, to the country's environment, to the billions of dollars misappropriated from the oil industry. He must have cried his heart out, because in one of his celebrated short stories,

> 'Africa Kills Her Sun' (1989), Bana, the narrator, declares that in a state as corrupt as Nigeria, he'd prefer to die rather than be 'condemned, like most others, to live.'
>
> These were chilling statements that a dictator even as ruthless as Abacha must have understood, not that he would have read Saro-Wiwa's short story. But Abacha must have been aware of the implications of the title of one of the last of Saro-Wiwa's books, when he had moved from creative work to political commentary: *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy* (1992). Saro-Wiwa was executed in such a despicable fashion that even the method became a warning. The man charged with the duty had to hang Saro-Wiwa five times before the poor man was dead.[28]

Championing against the injustices done to Saro-Wiwa, Larson went on further in his speech to challenge the Nigeria government (and for that matter other African governments) to avoid persecuting their writers and artists but, instead, to honour them:

> What about naming streets and parks and buildings for African writers? What about postage stamps? African nations have postal services that issue stamps – too often with Western images such as Elvis Presley, in order to sell these stamps to philatelists in the West…. Hasn't the time arrived for Leopold Sedar Senghor (one of the fathers of *Négritude*) to be honored as part of an African Postal Series celebrating African writers? Shouldn't Chief D.O. Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Cyprian Ekwensi, and Christopher Okigbo be printed on Nigerian postage stamps? And Bessie Head be honored on a postage stamp in Botswana? What better way to heal the wounds of the past? And, no doubt, it's past time to instigate a little pride in what is, after all, the continent's most prized possession: its writers.[29]

Interestingly, following Larson's visit, the Nigerian government heeded the advice and issued the first ever postage stamps bearing the image of Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka.[30]

It is also because of his persistent concern about the condition of African writers that Larson collected testimonies from African writers and wrote *The Ordeal of the African Writer*, in which he documented 'decades of gruesome experiences of African writers trying to break into print'.[31] After some 40 years of involvement in African literature, he was concerned that not only was the African literary text in danger but its creators were also in danger. He wrote his book to bring world attention to the challenges African writers faced of readerships unable to afford books, language, publishing – including both indigenous and Western – and their encounters with the economic crises and political repression in their countries. These were areas seldom investigated

by scholars and were often the domain of journalists, but Larson was adventurous with his scholarship. He took risks to give insights and force dialogue about ignored, pertinent areas affecting African writing with one mission: to help improve the environment for African writers. Larson was also a popular and influential teacher and leaves behind, among his student-proteges, several writers and scholars, who have gone on to distinguish themselves in their own rights: James Gibbs, Marita Golden, Meena Nayak and Manthia Diawara, to name a few.

In the 1990s, Larson, concerned about poor access to reading material and the dearth of libraries in Africa, started an African Skies Library Foundation to mobilize philanthropic funding to acquire books and roll them out into village libraries in Africa.[32] He approached companies like Mars, Inc., aiming to teach them corporate social responsibility – especially since some of these companies benefited from raw materials (such as cocoa for their chocolates) taken from Africa – to see if they could be influenced to 'return the elevator' by doing good in communities from which they benefited financially. Unfortunately, finding insufficient donations to fund this worthy project, he later reluctantly abandoned it. He quickly discovered that the nobility which guided his personal convictions to do social good was not shared by corporations driven by profit.[33]

In conclusion, in remembering Professor Charles Larson, I have discussed his biography as a curious mid-Western young man whose Peace Corps experience in Eastern Nigeria, teaching English, altered his view of Africa and brought about an enduring love and engagement with its literary narratives and writers. Larson was a world-class intellectual who pioneered the criticism of African literature in the American Academy through his classic book, *The Emergence of African Fiction,* which was also controversial. That book, with its ambition, strength, and shortcomings earned his criticism the underserved name of Larsony, what Ayi Kwei Armah defined as 'fiction criticizing fiction'. He was undoubtedly a prolific scholar, creative writer, anthologist, effective teacher, humanist, and literary activist, who popularized African literary criticism through a wide swathe of mostly American journals and magazines that was breath-taking in scope. He also championed the cause of justice for African writers. He will be remembered as a venture literary critic, the committed outsider who continued to speak at an African literary feast, who wanted to do good, who took risks and loved Africa, and forged friendships with Africans, and who left us a bountiful harvest of perspectives to mull over.

NOTES

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15 Tijan M. Sallah and Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala. *Chinua Achebe: Teacher of Light.* Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2003. 54.

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17 Armah. 2–3.

18 Armah. 3–12.

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The End of an Era

A Tribute to Nawal El Saadawi (27 October 1931–21 March 2021)

RAZINAT T. MOHAMMED

I first heard the name Nawal El Saadawi around the mid-1990s from the first female novelist (in English expression) from northern Nigeria, Professor Zaynab Alkali. Alkali had then just resumed work at the Department of English, University of Maiduguri where I was a post-graduate student. She was assigned to supervise my dissertation having recently completed her doctoral thesis on El Saadawi's works. What first stirred my interest was the sound of the name and, perhaps, the way that Alkali pronounced it. It was for me a magical moment because I fell in love with the sound of the name at that first hearing. After I bade good bye to Alkali that fateful day, I could not find peace within me; the name resurged with a forceful attack on my psyche that kept nagging until I put a face to the name after a quick search in the library the following day. From that day on, the name El Saadawi became a recurrent mention in my household. I became vividly obsessed with the name after reading her *Woman at Point Zero* (1973), that quintessential novel that many believe represents the typical El Saadawi novel, although her two earlier novels, *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* (1958) and *The Absent One* (1969), later published under the title *Searching* (1988), are no less significant in the qualities that suggest a typical El Saadawian novel. Although a psychiatrist by training, Nawal stood out as a novelist, playwright, essayist, and, above all, a revolutionary, socio-political activist whose writings delve into not only the physical pains of deprivation that women in the Arab world face but also the psychological trauma that women have to contend with. She wrote consistently against religious fanaticism and abuse of power by rulers who also continue to censor her books in many parts of the Arab world. I remember traversing most parts of Cairo during my first visit in 2011 and no book store had a copy of any of her works, until I was advised to check the American University Bookshop around the famous Tahrir Square,

where she had stood in protest with thousands of other Egyptians at the onset of the Arab Spring protest in 2011.

When Professor Ernest Emenyonu announced the eventual demise of our mutual friend, Dr Nawal El Saadawi, to me on the eventful day, I was inconsolable. This was because through divine will, my path crossed that of this eminent scholar in 2017 in Lagos when he served as the Chairman of the Panel of Judges for the prestigious Nigerian Natural Liquefied Gas (NNLG) annual prize for literature. I was one of the judges for that year and after one of our sessions, I sat beside Professor Emenyonu at dinner and he asked about my research interest. The first sentence I spoke that evening had Nawal El Saadawi's name in it. That would have been expected if Professor Emenyonu had known me previously. At the mention of that name, Professor Emenyonu wiped his mouth with the brown table linen and pushed himself back on his seat. 'Oh, really?' he said and our excitement was mutual. 'I will connect you to Nawal,' he said after a short while and I guess that he noticed that I had no further interest in the sumptuous meal that was before me. 'Eat, eat your meal. I will not only connect you to Nawal but I will assure you that you will meet with her soon, too.' How could I continue to eat after hearing that I was going to meet my literary idol? That fearless voice that had come to project the woes of oppressed women, of not only the Arab world, but of women across the globe who no less identify with her mission to change the oppressive systems of the world. My first husband until his death saw me as toeing the path of dissidence which Nawal had charted for me and what he called 'other foolish women' like me, and he strongly believed that his marriage to me broke down irreparably because I got to know and read Nawal El Saadawi's books during my romance with the university while doing a master's degree. Back then, I remember always telling my young, primary-school-aged children that I had found a new companion in a writer in faraway Egypt. I told them that for me, Nawal El Saadawi primarily represented the path of truth and justice for other women in many patriarchal societies. So, when the highly respected Professor Emenyonu told me I would meet face to face with the author of *Two Women in One*, *Woman at Point Zero*, *The Circling Song*, *She Has No Place in Paradise*, I knew that however much he coaxed me that evening, I could not consider a single morsel more. I was done eating, at least, for that day. Professor Emenyonu kept to his words because, before we departed Lagos two days later, I received a golden email from my beloved Nawal. She was brief and sweet. She appreciated my interest in her works and wished that I

could send her my PhD thesis and a paper I had written earlier on the colour of the eyes. This was what she said regarding the paper: 'Thank you Razinat for your message and creative paper on the eye, you have a very sensitive eye by which you look, read and see the unseen' and that made my year.

So, on the 6th day of May 2018, keeping to his promise, I had arrived Cairo ahead of Professor Emenyonu and his wife, Dr Patricia Emenyonu. Nawal had sent her driver of forty years, Mr Hussein, to take me from the airport to my hotel. It was not until Friday 10 May 2018 that I was finally face to face with the legendary, revolutionary feminist writer, Nawal El Saadawi, in her home situated at No.19 Maahad Naseer street, blg one, Shoubra 11241, Cairo, Egypt.

When I met her on that memorable day, she wore plain grey coloured pants with a sky-blue long sleeved shirt over it. Her characteristic fluffy white hair convinced me that indeed I was standing before a kindred spirit. Although she looked petit and carried herself swiftly with a slight bend around her shoulders, she ushered us into her simple Mediterranean home herself. I was not very worried about the bend because I could imagine her stooping over her laptop for long hours to write the quantum of publications (over 50) that are credited to her name. At 87, Nawal was very agile, quick witted, and above all humorous.

That first visit lasted nearly four hours. I recollect her love for her home and its spectacular view. She was so excited to show us the whole of Cairo from a large, glass kitchen window on the eastern side of the house from where we could see the extensive belly of the gargantuan city below the high-rise altitude of her home. It was a view to kill for. She took us round the apartment. First, it was to her living room, adorned by numerous plaques on the wall and on her antique consultation table that announced the recognition she had been accorded from around the globe. She had a story for each one of the plaques but her all-time favourite, as she informed us, was a translucent glass plaque, which was issued by the PAN African Writers' Association (PAWA). I was particularly thrilled by that revelation. In her bedroom, I recollect the chill running down my back. It was unbelievably simple given her standing in the eyes of the world. On her wooden work-table were one or two books, a writing pad and, of course, her laptop. She told us that she was working on a book on the politics of globalization. I marvelled at the 87-year-old lady, standing before me and still having the mind to work on another legacy which she was hoping to leave for the world. She turned and pointed towards her wooden bed beside which was a

small wooden drawer with three of my books (which I had presented to her earlier that afternoon) placed conspicuously on top. As a matter of fact, I had sent Nawal those same copies of my books by registered post, at her request in 2017. She never received them. She pointed at the books and said 'I will devour them. You know, I eat books.' And we all laughed out loud.

The bed was simply made. I remember wondering if the 'low level' bed with a lone pillow was actually where my own dear Nawal slept every night. After that she excused herself and went out of the room, leaving us three to quickly navigate towards a door which Professor Emenyonu, rightly, believed to be her restroom. It was a good size with the usual porcelain hardware and some knitted woollen hand towels that hung on a door rack. The place was white and I remember feeling like being in a limestone grotto. The entire atmosphere was hermitic, a testimony to the choices and sacrifices that Nawal had to make in order to better the lives of the downtrodden, especially women, in the Arab world and elsewhere.

She had challenged the long-existing Islamic system of marriage and obedience to husbands and the State. Although she was circumcised at the age of six, she stood her ground against the practice of female circumcision, the continuous oppression of women under patriarchy, and the inequalities in the way and manner that society treats male and female children. She was fearless in her recreation of these realities in her works and public speeches, all of which have cumulatively earned her the sack from her job as the Medical Director at the Ministry of Health in 1972, the closure in 1991 of the Arab Women's Solidarity Association, which she founded, a State declaration to dissolve her marriage to late Sherif Hetata in 2002, and a death sentence and accusation of apostasy and heresy resulting from the publication of some of her works like *God Resigns at the Summit Meeting* in 2007.

Nawal was a conscientious writer who felt the pains of other women whose lives have been affected by the unfair laws made by politicians and other patriarchs in positions of power. In the preface to one of her contentious publications, *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*, she fearlessly challenges the continual exploitation of the labour of the woman in the home as well as in the public domain. She states the urgent need for a complete re-ordering of society in the political, economic, cultural, moral, and psychological spheres. She believed so strongly in the abilities of women to effect this changes in society when she called for 'the creation of women's movement in each Arab country, capable of mobilizing the women in every home, village,

town or city, of drawing into its ranks the illiterate peasant woman, the female factory worker, the educated professional woman, will mean that the Arab movement for democracy, progress and socialism is capable of reaching every woman, and attaining the stage where it is a real mass movement and not just the instrument of a specific class' (El Saadawi 65).

In contemporary times, Nawal was without doubt the greatest female voice from the Arab world. She did not think twice whenever choosing a title for her books. The strictly Muslim society that she belonged to could not reconcile itself to such audacious titles as *Women and Sex* (1969), *Men and Sex* (1973), *Woman is the Origin* (1971), *God Dies by the Nile* (1984) *The Fall of the Imam* (1987) *The Innocence of the Devil* (1995) or even *A King, A Woman and God* (2012), and many more seditious titles to her name. She founded and co-founded numerous women's organizations and magazines all in the effort to make the silent voices of women come to life. She was at several periods in the history of Egypt banned from talking to the media; her mail was always subjected to scrutiny and seized. In fact, Nawal lived under what one can call an unspecified house-arrest because her house was constantly under watch until her death.

When Nawal returned to the room, she chatted with the Emenyonus but my mind had left them and their conversation. I was thinking about Nawal's presidential pursuit in 2004. I smiled to myself because I had just then imagined what the fate of many traditional Egyptian men and those of the Brotherhood would have been.

When Hussein (same name as her driver), her cook of over forty years, set our lunch, I found myself living the Nawal El Saadawi life by eating her kind of food. Delicious kebabs, exotic grilled vegetables and other Egyptian cuisines that were all products of the oven because Nawal asserted that everything she ate had to come from the oven. She was vividly excited to be in our company and in her home that day for her enthusiasm translated in the documents, CDs, DVDs, and other recordings that she made available to us for the book project (*Nawal Speaks: Conversations with Nawal El Saadawi on Feminism, Literature and Dissidence*) that took us to Cairo in the first place.

As a mouthpiece for marginalized women in the Arab world and women around the globe who also live under different levels of patriarchal influence, Nawal was a 'lone wolf' who did not get the support that she needed because it was not easy to find another woman who could willingly subject herself to imprisonment, threats to life, interference with a harmonious married life, and a disturbed

motherhood in the way that Nawal had endured. Most men in her society remained apprehensive of her fearlessness and her ability to pen the truth, while her womenfolk have been too frightened to embark on such dangerous missions. Even when women secretly sourced and read her works, they remained muted because only a Nawal could be so 'incurably rebellious.' (Emenyonu, 2021).

Her footprints are large on the sands of time. I wonder who can fill the gaping hole that her exit has created in feminist studies especially as it concerns women of the Arab world. This without doubt is the end of an era for the lone voice has finally taken a bow and is never to rise to speak again, not for herself, as was always the case, but for the sorrows of other women. Adieu, dear friend, rest in peace my Nawal El Saadawi, the 'Daughter of Isis that Walked through Fire' on this other path of life.

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Reviews

Kasimma. *All Shades of Iberibe.*
South Portland, ME: Sandorf Passage, 2021, 197 pp. $18.95
ISBN 9789533513409, paperback

All Shades of Iberibe is a collection of fourteen short stories that vary in length from the shortest ones such as 'My "Late" Grandfather' and 'Life of His Wife', which are about four to five pages' to the longest ones, 'Jesus Yard' and 'Shit Faces', which are twenty-one and twenty-four pages respectively. Some of the narratives are really very interesting and the collection covers a wide range of themes and subject matters such as Igbo traditional religious belief systems, sexuality and rape, disillusionment and betrayal, poverty and the challenges of living in and sharing a public yard, climate change, wisdom and love. However, the stories have two unifying factors: their focus on the challenges and struggles encountered by individuals in their private lives, and the abrupt manner in which the stories end.

The narratives on Igbo traditional religious belief system such as 'Ogbanje', 'The Man', and 'Shit Faces' explore the intersection between the existential lives of individuals and the spirit world. The perspective captured here views the physical world as being controlled by the spiritual world. Kasimma's re-enactment of J.P. Clark's and Wole Soyinka's 'Abiku' and Chinua Achebe's 'Ogbanje' in the 'Ogbanje' story with its clear indication of the time and day of the demise of the 'ogbanje' kids, despite all the precautions taken to prevent this, points to the mystery connected to their deaths. The eventual stopping of the deaths by a native doctor performing some rituals affirms rather than denigrates traditional ways of solving such problems. In 'The Man', the focus is on dying well, which is attained via the burial rites performed for deceased relations. The author echoes Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* where the aim is for the dead to be ushered into their ancestral homes in the world beyond with honour through performing appropriate burial rituals for them. However, when this is denied, a deceased relation gets even with his living relations by destroying all their efforts to achieve progress in life. In 'Shit Faces', the psychological effects of the discriminatory practices against an osu are examined. The victim's harsh circumstances emanate from how she is born, and her status as a pariah turns her into a bitter person. Her tough life is preordained from the moment her mother consults a native doctor for conception.

This focus on the power of the spiritual world is even more evident in 'My "Late" Grandfather', where the narrative is concerned with

the Igbo traditional rituals used to close and re-open the interaction between the dead and the living. Burials are employed to end the interactions between the dead and the living. However, when someone is mistakenly buried, as in the case of the grandfather in this story, he is buried symbolically as a tall plantain tree and all burial rites are performed on his head. When it is discovered that he is actually alive, another ritual is enacted so he can re-enter the community of the living as a human being.

In 'All Shades of Senselessness,' Kasimma offers us another dimension to the tradition of permitting a daughter to remain unmarried in her parents' home and have children for her father in order to perpetuate the family name. In this story, to forestall any future fights or embarrassment from any of the men who might father the girl's children in future, the father of the daughter prefers to impregnate his daughter himself. Thus, the challenges of modern times have compelled individuals to attempt to moderate the tradition.

Dealing with the themes of sexuality and rape captured in 'Where One Falls is where their God Pushed them Down' and 'Virgin Ronke', the author joins in the conversation about homosexuality and lesbianism respectively. The central character is frustrated and her frustration is heightened by her medical doctor mother's refusal to use her sophisticated knowledge of her field to either encourage her to maintain her on-the-margin sexual orientation or help her to change and accept heterosexual relationships. In 'Virgin Ronke', the traumatic experience of a rape victim is revealed as she attempts to erase the rape incident through engaging in numerous sexual escapades, thus further damaging herself psychologically. Furthermore, in 'Caked Memories', the concern is marital infidelity, amnesia, betrayal, and disillusionment. The central character's recovery from her memory loss and her discovery that her marriage is totally messed up, compels her to decide to leave her marriage in order to have the strength to live again and fight her enemies.

In 'Jesus Yard' the author comments on the challenges of overcrowding in a public yard where tenants have to stand in queues to use the bathroom or toilets, and experience frequent fights that result from a small space being shared by many people with different views and backgrounds. In 'Mbuze' and 'Croscat Volcanos', the narratives explore nature as a destroyer and a healer respectively. 'Mbuze' comments on the negative effects of climate change where flooding destroys the lives and homes of people and renders those who remain homeless and some orphaned; while in 'Croscat Volcanos', a cancer patient is seen

admiring the beauty of nature and is soothed and experiences healing effects from merely observing nature. In the story entitled 'Strength is Worthless', the focus is on the building and acquiring of wisdom rather than glorying in physical strength. The lament of Adamma's people over her death reveals that if they had embraced wisdom and shunned the dictations of tradition and encouraged their abused daughter to quit her marriage, her untimely and violent death could have been averted.

Evidently, the dominant perspective and approach of the collection as a whole is sad and sombre. One is not therefore surprised that the only narrative on love, 'Life of His Wife', has just four pages; one is not allowed to experience love vicariously. The love story is so short and can easily be forgotten: the message seems to be that life's challenges offer little or no room for real love. The abrupt ending of many of the stories, without a heart-warming resolution, is Kasimma's method of inviting the readership and literary scholars into the conversation, to proffer their own perspectives on these challenges, which are faced by many in myriad Igbo communities. The focus of many writers recently has been on migration, the diaspora experience, gender and feminism, and postcolonialism. Thus, Kasimma's well-written and readable stories are timely, and will ensure that every challenge, whether or not considered global or political, is given ample attention so that individuals in their private lives can breathe more easily.

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Ikechukwu Otuu Egbuta and Nnenna Vivien Chukwu (eds). *World on the Brinks: An Anthology of Covid-19 Pandemic*.
Lagos: Cityway Books, 2020, 242 pp. ₦3,000
ISBN 9789789834143, hardback

World on the Brinks: An Anthology of Covid-19 Pandemic is a volume of 138 poems by 68 different poets as well as 14 photographs, most of which dwell on the experience of the coronavirus pandemic currently

ravaging the globe. Edited by Ikechukwu Otuu Egbuta and Nnenna Vivien Chukwu, the volume of 230 pages (in addition to 12 prefatory pages) was published by Cityway Book Ventures, Lagos in August 2020. In an obvious gesture to foreground the inclusiveness of the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic, the poets are drawn from various countries of the globe such as Nigeria, New Zealand, India, Zimbabwe, South Africa, the Philippines, and Yemen. It is indeed signal that in the few cases where the nationality of a poet is unclear, the indistinctness easily transforms the voice of such a poet into a representative, global human voice, transcending a specific place or locality to articulate the commonality of the anguished human experience of the pandemic. The photographs are equally carefully chosen to reinforce the sense of the limitless frontiers of the focal human experience in the volume.

The commonality of the Covid-19 pandemic experience is, as one would expect, a presiding subject of the poems in the anthology. For sure, one of the most dramatic disclosures of the coronavirus pandemic is that social hierarchy is a critical factor in determining vulnerability to the disease. Its principal revelation, however, remains the susceptibility of all humans to mortality. Many of the poets in the volume reaffirm this sober fact. In the poem 'Corona is Here', Ade' Adejumo meditates on the mobility of spaces and the intangibility of borders in the wake of the pandemic:

> From Milan to Monrovia
> Distance shrinks in the magical speed
> Of the awful gnat …corona!
> Alas! Sinews of stunning silence (3)

The poem also underscores how the universal lamentation of the scourge of the virus sets in relief the shortness of the passage from 'Wuhan to Wales' and 'From the fashion-draped streets of Paris / To the boisterous alleys of boastful Pretoria' (3). In a similar vein, Azih Paul Tochukwu locates the virus at the core of the human fold irrespective of social classifications or ideological persuasions: 'Rich or poor, we're all casualties, / Irrespective of our ideologies' (52). Chinyere Otuu Egbuta is equally explicit in highlighting the proneness of all humankind to the virus: 'Without respect to colour / From China to Europe / And to America / And Africa / To the end of the globe / You ravaged / Informing All and Sundry / That beyond the skin colour / Is our collective Humanity!' (93). In a poem in pidgin English 'Coro-Hunger', Linda Edem-Davies dwells on the virus's defiance of social borders but also creates subtle room for political commentary by

likening the ruthlessness of the corona virus to the inhumanity of African leaders:

> Social strata, Coro don bridge
> African Presidents sef no wicked reach
> Money e no collect, pity e no send
> Coro don kolo, Nigerians don bend. (161)

The combination of pidgin expression with traditional techniques of English poetry such as puns and rhymes makes this truly hybrid poem fascinating. By their constant reaffirmation of the trenchant mobility of the virus, the poets invariably foreground the porosity of sovereign state territoriality, and affirm the common bonds of the human race.

There is a sharp disparity, though, in how the poets perceive the pandemic. Not a few of the poets in the anthology are terrified by the fatality of the virus. Ayodele Kuburat Olaosebikan identifies the virus as 'the grim reaper' (47), 'the levelling general', and describes it as

> Grim-faced, heartless with fangs-
> Venom of pains
> Wreaking havoc in bones and marrows- (49)

If the scientific veracity of the corona virus's alleged pitiless crushing of bones and marrows is questionable, the poetic truth of its laying waste of the human body is incontestable. All through the anthology, the virus elicits a considerable repertoire of infernal praise names and epithets. Adebanjo Adebagbo calls it a 'bestial spirit' (6); Adnan Alsobihy identifies it as 'the culprit' for the devastation of the human world (13); Akachi Adimora-Ezigbo calls it 'the ugly virus'; Balogun Kehinde describes it as 'Ruddy, cruddy, and full of anger' (57); Chimeziri Charity Ogbedeto likens it to 'a million demons' (85); Ekaete George calls it a 'grim traveller' (117); Ikechukwu Otuu Egbuta refers to it as an 'impudent harvester' (141); Francis Ejiofor Onah 'the merciless devourer' (125); Michael Onaiwu 'the dragon' (178); and Gabriel Sunday Afolayan 'the demonic dragon' (126). It is, of course, with the deepest conceivable irony that Nnenna Vivien Chukwu calls the corona virus '"Sweet Damsel of Wuhan"' (182). Ade' Adejumo is closer to the spirit of the public discourse when he tells us that 'every phoneme of its name [is] / Corrosive like the acid rain / From the wonder skies of Wuhan / China's gift to the helpless globe' (4). The title of the anthology itself evokes an apocalyptic image: a world on the brink, and Mar Charmain Tshabalala reinforces that notion when she describes the impact of the pandemic as 'a dark cloud hanging

over planet earth' (177). In an even more forceful metaphor in 'Song of a Caged Bird' – an apt title for the entire anthology – Adimora-Ezeigbo laments the transformation of the world into a cemetery, with her personae's room turned into 'an enlarged coffin' where she is condemned like a caged bird to invent new ways of survival (22). It is in terror then that Chidiebere Enyia wonders: 'Covid-19! Could this be the end of time?' (79), and Hilda I. Rowland Osunu asks: 'Has God forsaken the earth?' (131).

The recurring answer to that soul-searching question, though, is in the negative. Defiance, hope, and optimism characterise the mood of a great majority of the poems. Ayodele Kuburat Olaosebikan affirms that 'This too shall pass' (47). Azih Paul Tochukwu concurs: 'Surely we'll survive, / Yes we'll survive' (55). Tertsea Ikyoive thanks corona for providing space for a universal vacation and underscores the futility of its challenge of the human adventure by affirming the invincibility of humans on earth. The poet personae's confrontation of corona epitomizes his defiance:

> Listen to me COVID
> Whether you are nineteen or twenty
> I don't care! (221)

Michael Onaiwu is surer of the numerical component of corona's name but so too is he certain of the temporality of the pandemic. But alas, his highest imaginative leap is no higher than a cliché: 'COVID-19! Your days are numbered' (179). When in the last line of the anthology, Egbuta and Chukwu in euphoria assert 'The world is at peace again', they make no statement of fact for we do not yet live in a post-corona era; they instead utter a prophecy, a heart-felt prayer. But then again, the line is lacking in imaginative force. It is only in a poem like Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika's 'The Earth Is at Peace Again' that we discern an accomplished poetic voice in a sober appraisal of the envisaged portentous new normal:

> The marauding moon tickles the firmaments again
> Like Enemma was not lost in the dark nights!
> The sinister stars are out to play again
> Like Nwanyike never bled to her death before their gaze!
> The randy rain showers kisses again
> Like the flood never came! (137)

Enemma and Nwanyike are fabled figures of folklore rather than personalities of contemporary history. But the evocation of their enchanted lives is a powerful signal that even the rebirth of the awesome

grandeur of the universe does not completely obliterate past human catastrophes nor the world's inherent capacity for new treachery.

World on the Brinks is demonstrably a work of its times. The topicality of the poems in the anthology is evident in their constant replications, allusions, interrogations, and appropriations of current discourses on the pandemic. Iquo Diana Abasi shows even the impact of the virus on language by documenting an inventory of terms whose meanings have accumulated new accentuations by their association with the pandemic:

> Sanitizer, positive, breathing,
> Isolate, distancing, intubate,
> Ventilator, DNR, DNI:
> Our badges of a time best forgotten. (145)

To read *World on the Brinks* is to seek to understand the agony of a besieged world, the discourses generated by the effort to make sense of the crisis, and its gestures towards a rebirth.

Ezechi Onyerionwu reminds us in the 'Foreword' to the anthology that poems in the volume were conceived and executed in the middle of the pandemic. He appraises the aesthetic implications of this positively by suggesting that the imposition of worldwide lockdowns provided ample space for deep introspection. This may be so in some cases. However, the quality of the editing is not consistently painstaking. It is doubtful that the editors rejected any submission. Yet, by their themes, and even more importantly by their complete lack of quality, some of the poems should have been avoided like the corona virus itself. Spellings are occasionally awry, grammar askew. Throughout the anthology there is a recurring use of Elizabethan and Biblical language as poetic diction. Other oddities abound, too. Poetry does not reside only in the eternity of the truth envisioned by the poet; it inheres even more crucially in the quality of the language. In the circumstance, poetry of any specie is a veritable act of defiance, even of heroism. This glowing assessment of poetry is indeed the crucial subtext of the entire volume.

World on the Brinks is an impassioned cry by humans at an apocalyptic moment to make sense of what threatened them, to mourn their dead, lionize their heroes, exorcise the forces that endangered the human species, and especially affirm life as an invaluable experience in spite of even such frightful vicissitudes as Covid-19. It is only too proper that that cry, to be imperishable, is in the form of poetry, which, as William Blake tells us, is the only means of communication between time and

eternity which neither the flood of time nor place has eroded. *World on the Brinks* has the distinction of being one of the earliest poetry anthologies published on the subject of the Covid-19 pandemic, not only in Nigeria but in the globe. It is an anthology we should all own and read closely.

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Evelyn N. Urama (ed). *The Writer in the Mirror: Conversations with Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo.*

Ibadan: University Press PLC & Purple Shelves Limited, 2021, 490 pp. ₦7,000
ISBN 9789789408498, paperback.

The Writer in the Mirror: Conversations with Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, edited by Evelyn N. Urama, serves as both a celebration of Professor Akachi Ezeigbo as well as an importance source offering greater insight into both her life and works. Ezeigbo notes in one of the interviews that 'Adimora', her maiden name, precedes 'Ezeigbo' in the hyphenated version of her surname, reserved for her creative writing. This variation of her name served as a way of honouring her late father who had encouraged her in her creative writing and details like these, which are scattered across this anthology of interviews, shed light on Ezeigbo's family dynamics, personal history, and heritage. This collection of forty-two interviews, conducted over approximately thirty years, enables its readers to gain greater insight into both Ezeigbo's evolving positions, as well as her definitive stance on a number of issues. It provides a series of vignettes into her life and works, allowing readers to develop a clearer sense of the motivations and inspirations around her creative and scholarly writing. Ezeigbo is very much a scholar with a public platform, and many of the interviews included in this book were originally published in Nigerian newspapers, revealing the important position Ezeigbo occupies as a public intellectual.

Evelyn N. Urama's introduction to the collection sets out the multiple accomplishments of Professor Akachi Ezeigbo as an academic and as a creative writer. Drawing attention to some of the highpoints

in her illustrious career, such as her winning the NLNG prize for literature, her international fellowships in the UK and Germany, and her induction into the Nigerian Academy of Letters, Urama sets out the trajectory of Ezeigbo's rise to prominence. The introduction notes that as 'interest in her [Ezeigbo's] works continues to grow around the world, researchers are bound to look for materials to make new points about her works or validate old ones' (xxiv).

The editor thus positions this collection as an important tool in burgeoning scholarship on Ezeigbo, providing a useful resource for current and future researchers. The collection features two forewords, one by Professor Stephanie Newell of Yale University and the second by Ezeigbo's former colleague at the University of Lagos, Dr Patrick Oloko. The invitation extended to these two well-respected scholars, who both know Ezeigbo in a personal and professional capacity, and their careful consideration of the important space that Ezeigbo occupies, signals to Ezeigbo's standing with the scholarly community in Nigeria and abroad. The inclusion of selected photographs provides a glimpse into Ezeigbo's personal and professional life, showing images of her with family members as well as photos of Ezeigbo participating in international conferences and amongst colleagues in Nigeria. The book also includes a series of useful bibliographies which detail Ezeigbo's publications, as well as selected scholarship on her work.

We learn from the introduction that Akachi Ezeigbo played an important role in the curation of this collection, handing over newspaper clippings as well as 'journals and other sources' to Evelyn Urama following Urama's suggestion for a published volume of interviews. As such, Ezeigbo has had significant input in the shaping of this collection, having played the role of archivist in building up a library of materials.

Given the range of publications from which *The Writer in the Mirror* sources its interviews, the tone of the contributions ranges from the journalistic to the scholarly, with variety showing in the lengths, focus, and styles of the interviews. Akachi Ezeigbo's revelation that her early aspiration had been to pursue a career in journalism sheds light on the good relationship she has fostered with Nigerian newspapers, apparent in the number of interviews she has granted the press over the years. It is worth noting that the majority of the collection's interviews are conducted by Nigerians based within the country or abroad, often for a Nigerian audience, shaping the dynamics of the interview.

The Writer in the Mirror is organized into six sections according to the following themes: Profile, Career Development, Gender Issues,

International Scholarship, Literature and Society and Celebrated Literary Icons. As with any attempt at cataloguing, the discussion points featured in interviews placed in different sections overlap and inform each. Since many interviewers begin with questions that attempt to situate Ezeigbo's creative writing and scholarship within her familial context, there is a significant amount of repeated biographical material, and so the question arises as to whether this collection would have benefitted from publishing abridged versions of the interviews. Recurrent themes which emerge across this collection include the importance of one's mother tongue, literature and the socialization of children, the Nigeria–Biafra war and feminism in Nigeria. Conversations range from the personal, which discuss her identity and role as a mother, wife, and daughter, to those that engage specifically with her writing. Collectively these interviews provide a portrait of Ezeigbo over time, bringing us into our contemporary moment with discussions on the impact of the Covid-9 pandemic on creative writers.

The first interview in the collection seeks to set out the dynamics of Ezeigbo's family home as she grew up: it introduces her parents, her role and responsibilities as their first born, and discusses the strong-women role models in her life – her mother and her two grandmothers. The Nigeria–Biafra war forms a part of the narrative of Ezeigbo's childhood and this interview provides the first glimpse into a conflict which deeply affected her. Ezeigbo has published both scholarly and creative works on the war, notably *Fact and Fiction in the Literature of the Nigerian Civil War* (1991) and *Roses and Bullets* (2011). In an interview with Maik Nwosu a year after *Fact and Fiction* was published, Ezeigbo speaks to the personal toll the war had had on her, saying 'It was a truly brutalising experience. […] I could not forget the war even after it ended. At the back of my mind was the desire to write about the war.' (337) *Fact and Fiction* was Ezeigbo's first monograph, a revised version of her doctoral thesis. On the subject of war, Ezeigbo had also written the children's book *The Buried Treasure* (1992) and co-edited 'The Literatures of War', a special issue of the *Journal of African Languages and Cultures* (1991). Given the compulsion that Ezeigbo expresses to write about the war, it is unsurprising that this subject emerges frequently across the interviews, as it has become an important aspect of both her scholarship and her creative writing.

As a creative writer, what is apparent is the range that Ezeigbo has shown in her writing. In one interview she notes that I may choose to write about a subject that happened decades ago, as I did in my historical novel, *The Last of the Strong Ones*. Or I may choose to write

about something very contemporary as I did in the novel, *Trafficked*, based on human trafficking which is a current scourge in our society. I wrote about the Nigerian Civil War also known as the Biafran War which was fought between 1967 and 1970 in my novel, *Roses and Bullets* (145)

She sheds light on her philanthropic endeavours in funding a number of creative writing prizes for emerging Nigerian writers, whilst working with young writers to develop their craft.

Ezeigbo's writing has been shaped by her feminism, and the interviews in this collection illuminate her efforts to develop a feminist framework which has its roots in Igbo philosophy. In an interview with Uchechukwu Agbo in 2020, Ezeigbo notes that her coinage of 'snail-sense feminism […] posits that dialogue and negotiation are superior to aggression, confrontation and fighting'. The name 'hinges on the Igbo proverb which states that a snail crawls over thorns, boulders and rocks with a well lubricated tongue, by negotiating with the obstacles it encounters on its way, and will arrive at its destination unharmed.' (61). Ezeigbo published the monograph *Snail-Sense Feminism: Building on an Indigenous Model* (2012), which provides a more expansive discussion of this concept, but in reading Ezeigbo's engagement with 'snail-sense feminism' vis-à-vis stories from her life (such as the challenges she faced when passed over for promotion), the resolve she has shown in her calm perseverance provides insight into how her own experiences have shaped her critical standpoint on women in society.

Whilst African women writers largely dominate the African literary landscape, Africa-based women writers are under-represented in the scholarship on contemporary writing. *The Writer in the Mirror* is a useful resource in the study of an important woman in both the literary and scholarly spheres. This collection adds to existing substantial publications which spotlight Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo and her works, which includes *The Fiction of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo: Issues & Perspectives* (2008) edited by Patrick Oloko, *Emerging Perspectives on Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo* (2017) edited by Blessing Diala-Ogamba and Rose Sackeyfio; and the biography *Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo: Life and Literature* (2017) by Ezechi Onyerionwu.

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Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. 'Zikora: A Short Story'.

Amazon Original Stories, 2020, 39 pp. $1.99
ISBN n/a, Kindle

Zikora by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a short story published by Amazon Original Stories in October 2020. The short story revolves around the challenges of being black as well as being a woman which Bell Hooks refers to as 'double tragedy'. It exposes the problems most black women face as single mothers and the conditions that lead to it. It vividly portrays a scenario of what professional women go through in their quest for a family. Race has always been an issue in America especially for migrants who suddenly realize that the colour of their skin matters in America. The protagonist is named after the title of the short story as all events revolves around her, which is very significant in its development as the story progresses.

Racism intrudes in all aspects of the lives of immigrants and manifests greatly in infant mortality. There has been an on-going debate about the rise in the death toll of African Americans especially pregnant women and their babies. Adichie recreates this in her short story as she uses the character of Zikora to portray what most women of colour experience during childbirth. She states, 'My heart was beating fast. I'd read somewhere that maternal mortality was higher in America than anywhere else in the Western world – or was it just higher for black women? The subject had never really interested me. I'd felt at most a faraway concern, as though it was something that happened to other people. I should have paid more attention' (6).

Adichie examines the pain of childbirth in her short story and vividly portrays what most women go through in order to bring forth a new life. The pain that comes with the childbirth is associated with the processes that a woman's body goes through while birthing a child. Maternal and infant mortality of black people has been on the increase as most research studies suggest. Zikora in this instance imagines how she could die as a result of pain during childbirth and be added to the data on women of colour who have lost their lives while giving birth. Zikora promises to pay attention when such issues are discussed, a change from her previously nonchalant attitude to maternal mortality in America.

However, she exposes most of the problems that women of colour encounter accessing better health insurance that will offer them the opportunity to choose a good hospital. Most health insurance companies do not allow the choice of one of the best hospitals in the

city because of the limited funding they offer to cover such expenses. White women do not have to go through these hassles with their health insurance company.

Adichie's protagonists are usually educated female because she believes that education gives a woman much needed liberation in a patriarchal world. Zikora is a highly educated lawyer who resides in Washington DC where she met Kwame, who is of Ghanaian descent, at a book launch. Kwame is also a successful lawyer whose parents reside in America. Their friendship blossoms and Zikora looks forward to a 'happily ever after' with Kwame but he has other plans for their relationship. Kwame refuses to have anything to do with Zikora immediately she informs him about her pregnancy. He stops picking her calls and every other forms of communication. It was very difficult for Zikora to believe that Kwame can be so cruel at a point when she needs him the most. Zikora laments, 'Ours was an ancient story, the woman wants the baby and the man doesn't want the baby and a middle ground does not exist' (6).

In essence, Adichie presents the injustices that most black women face at the hands of black men. Zikora is swayed by Kwame's physical attributes, including his colour. Because he is black, she feels that he won't judge her as he is also an African brother, if not Nigerian at least from an African country. This hints at how African people become one once beyond the shores of their continent; when they return, they will start differentiating between themselves. Zikora easily accepts his friendship as a result of this African affinity, which in turn becomes a wrong decision when she gets pregnant. It also exposes the irresponsibility of men once pregnancy is involved; Kwame displays the highest form of irresponsibility by abandoning her. Single motherhood seems rampant among African immigrants in America, and Adichie portrays, through Kwame's behaviour, the cause of it: the problems of abandonment and of the absent black father.

Furthermore, Adichie in her story reflects on the importance attached to male children in an African setting. Zikora is an only child and her father married another woman when it became obvious that her mother would not be able to give birth to more children. In the African tradition, a male child signifies an extension of a man's lineage while female children signify an end to a man's lineage because the female child will eventually get married, leave her father's house and change her name to her husband's. She portrays Zikora's mother as a good woman who accepts the challenges she faces in her husband's home by not reacting or opposing her husband's choice of a second

wife. She is content with her only daughter, Zikora, and willing to accept her fate. Zikora describes her mother as '[u]ncommon and normal' as a result of the challenges she faces in her marriage which did not break her in any way. Not all women could tolerate such betrayal. Obviously, she is crushed and wounded but due to her inner strength, she is able to overcome her challenges. Zikora's mother suffered three miscarriages and went through an emergency hysterectomy in order to save her life.

Despite her life-threatening conditions, her husband insists on having a male child, an attitude prevalent in Africa, especially in Nigeria. He marries again and has sons who will inherit the family property. Adichie uses this to address the importance accorded to male children and the idea of giving them full ownership of whatever the man acquires while neglecting the females in the family. In the Western world, male children receive no special attention for each child is regarded as a great gift from God.

Loneliness is a major thematic preoccupation in this short story; Zikora's mother became a lonely woman due to her inability to give birth to other children. When her husband abandons her and marries another woman, she searches for solace through her very deep commitment and love for her only child. In spite of her mother's love, Zikora's story, however, seems more pathetic and heightened; it replays her mother's tragedy when Kwame abandons her immediately she informs him of her pregnancy. She goes through the terrifying journey alone and eventually becomes a single mother as nothing she does changes Kwame's heart, even when she brings her son back from the hospital after childbirth. In essence, Adichie hints that even a male child, in the culturally normless space of the diaspora, cannot sustain a strained relationship or ignite a cold marriage. She compares Zikora's mother, who is not able to give birth to more children or even a son, to Zikora, who gives birth to a son yet is abandoned by Kwame. This further affirms the popular adage that 'a woman can only keep a man that wants to be kept'.

Adichie's *Zikora* vividly explores the issue of patriarchy, the preference for the male-child, racism, single motherhood, loneliness, and alienation. In exposing the danger of patriarchy, especially its effects on women, Adichie opens a new way of exploring the problem inherent in the Western world as well as in most African countries built on a phallocentric order. African culture values the male child, as I have noted, more than the female, which creates tension for women unable to give birth to male children as reflected in the character

of Zikora's mother. Adichie does ironically present in *Zikora* two conflicting scenarios, one where Zikora's mother is oppressed due to her inability to birth a male child, and the other of Zikora, who is abandoned by Kwame despite giving birth to a male child that the tradition values greatly. What does this say about Adichie's narrative project in this story? It may be a way of educating African people that each child despite its gender is vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the relationship of two adults that may fail, and that no matter the strain, or the encoded values that underscore these human relationships, the child must come first – be protected – as Zikora does with her son and Zikora's own abandoned mother does with her. Adichie is also most certainly celebrating the strength of women as the protectors of life, when all else fails. It is typical Adichie: multilayered and rendered in elegant, accessible language.

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Isidore Diala (ed). *Obumselu on African Literature: The Intellectual Muse.*

Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019, 326 pp.
ISBN 978152752305-0, hardback

That the late Professor Benedict Obumselu (1930–2017) bestrode the field of African literary criticism for well over four decades is beyond dispute. The editor, in his introduction to this book, believes that Obumselu's scholarly engagement in the field of African literary criticism embodies a comparative sweep that consolidates the interaction between culture, art, politics, diplomacy, and even entrepreneurship; a sweep that demands that a compendium of major Obumselu essays be made; a compendium of fifteen chapters, most of them already published in various other sources and written between 1966 and 2018.

The first chapter is titled 'The Background of Modern African Literature'. In this essay, Obumselu uses the word 'background' to

denote the imaginative ideas which an artist sifts from the culture that mainly informs his work of art and then remodulates for his audience. Obumselu insists that for modern African literature to qualify to be regarded as 'African literature', there must be a continuity between that literature and its vernacular form translated into European languages. In this regard the Amharic verse that has informed 'many contemporary African poets' must be acknowledge, as must the *Oriki* tradition which Okigbo borrowed from the Yoruba oral poetry, and the 'best example of Modern African Praise' which Senghor borrowed from the Senegalese oral tradition.

Chapter two is a 1970 essay titled 'African Eden: Cultural Nationalism in the African Novel', where Obumselu discusses ten African novels and two European novels on Africa, in relation to the perpetual conflict between intuition and reason, between feeling and the intellect, which any perceptive creative writer is often called upon to balance in the attempt to penetratingly delineate fictional character. Obumselu argues that African writings have reflected more of the intuitive than the intellectual. He distinguishes between character individuation in an intuitive, subjective role and the separation of characters one from another as social entities, arguing that Achebe, master though he is in the art of analytical prose, presents his character, Okonkwo, in *Things Fall Apart*, as deficient in emotional stability, which 'impoverishment' assumes an ethnic defect of the Igbo man in the novel.

In chapter three, titled 'Marx, Politics and the African Novel', first published in 1973, Obumselu selects three African novels – Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are not Yet Born*, Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* – which he discusses, not necessarily because they satisfy the appellation of 'Marxist novels' but because they were written under the noticeable influence of Marxist literary predilections. He observes that whereas Marx, through the interpretations of him by Frantz Fanon in relation to the African situation, recommends that literature should present man realistically, so that we see all men as people like ourselves, the images of man offered to the reader in many literary representations by African writers fail to reflect the realities of the African socio-political environment. He then proceeds to discuss the three chosen African socialist-oriented novels in relation to this observation.

In chapter four, '*A Grain of Wheat*: Ngũgĩ's Debt to Conrad' (1974), Obumselu critiques the novel, which he regards as 'a national epic', in relation to its sources of inspiration. He recognizes that the perspective of this African novel is firmly based on the recognition of human

weakness, which is a 20th century concern not peculiar to Africa, except that, in the African situation, that weakness is built around the corruption in African politics. The novel, however, relies eminently on other, rather European sources for its structure and character delineation. Obumselu argues that Ngũgĩ, however, has not quite internalized his borrowings from Conrad and other European sources and to that extent his rendering reveals gaps that could only have arisen when a writer who is in his early years as a novelist has relied heavily on his readings of some master draftsmen other than himself.

Chapter five is a 1976 essay titled 'Mofolo's *Chaka* and the Folk Tradition' and in the essay the author reminds us that even though Chaka was a true historical figure, Mofolo's intention in writing his story was not to relate, in its true legendary nuances, the legend of a Zulu king cut down by ethnic and colonialist forces. Mofolo, a Sotho writing about a Zulu, was instead more of a Christian writing about a pagan, and eager to please the Christian missionary spirit of his mentors.

In chapter six, 'Chinua Achebe's African Aesthetics: A Reconsideration of *A Man of the People*' (1977), Obumselu praises Achebe's ability as a novelist to create new resources, structures and images that bring new characters to life, adding that the novelist has left a mark, reminiscent of Fanon and Senghor, in shaping 'the landscape of contemporary sensibilities in Africa'. Unfortunately, his fourth novel, *A Man of the People*, does not aspire towards the complete autonomy of Achebe's other novels. What seemed the uppermost intention of Achebe was to give this novel a political relevance and in so doing he sacrificed some aesthetic demands that would have been more satisfying to a more sophisticated reader.

The seventh chapter is a 1980 essay titled 'The French and Moslem Backgrounds of *The Radiance of the King*', Camara Laye's novel which elsewhere, in chapter fourteen, Obumselu describes as 'the African novel par excellence' (.284). Obumselu in this essay recognizes the impressive welcome which early reviewers of the novel accorded it, and joins them in praising Laye's fidelity to detail and the persistent accuracy with which he presents the novel's rural activities. Whereas there is indeed a kind of conflict between spirituality and sensuality in the novel, an attempt by any critic to focus on this conflict is likely to overshadow the basic myth on which the theme and events of the novel are structured: the myth of man's universal search for God. The real meaning of the novel, Obumselu suggests somewhat disapprovingly, does not, however, lie in the privileged racial perspective often adopted by Eurocentric critics of the novel, but is to be found in the 20th century intellectualism of France, a search for completeness which Sartre says 'haunts our consciousness' (123).

As to the Moslem background, pursues Obumselu, the fact that Clarence (the hero of the novel) is very much attached to the beggar from the beginning to the end is a reflection of that background; this attachment illustrates the hero's dependent status. For the beggar occupies a special place in the Moslem world and one notes the symbolic role of the mendicant in the novel as a reminder of man's spiritual poverty. The path of Clarence suggests the Sufi way in the hero's search for the extinction of individuality in the union with God.

Chapter eight, written in 2004, is on 'In the Oriki Tradition' in which Obumselu regards the Yoruba poetic *Oriki* 'as an African continental form' (137). The tradition, which is perhaps the highest developed praise tradition in Africa, is quintessentially rhythmic and has manifested itself in other parts of the continent in an expanded capacity, changing itself in time into 'heroic chants, dynastic histories, ceremonial odes and recreational tales' (152). Even modern poets like Oswald Mtshali and Mazisi Kunene of South Africa have borrowed from the tradition, as have Duro Ladipo, Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo and Camara Laye, with differing intensities.

Diala devotes chapters nine and ten to Christopher Okigbo. The ninth chapter written in 2006, is titled 'Christopher Okigbo: A Poet's Identity', and in it Obumselu examines some of Okigbo's earliest poems up to 1961. The main substance of the discussion is to show that Okigbo's poetry can best be appreciated as an artistic development closely linked with the events and experiences that took place in the life of the poet from 1958 to 1966. In all these, Okigbo was selecting from outside of himself materials that helped to define his own being, and we can see why Obumselu concludes that 'Okigbo's most enchanting and memorable poem is himself' (161).

The tenth chapter, 'Cambridge House Ibadan, 1962–66: Politics and Poetics in Okigbo's Last Year', was written in 2010. We are reminded early in this essay of Okigbo's continued 'boasting' to his interviewers that 'he did not ever set out to communicate meaning [in his poetry], but to make music' (182). This practice which he had learnt from the French Mallarme dominates his poetic efforts from 1962 to his death in 1966, and the obvious pedagogical implication is that reading Okigbo amounts to immense intellectual effort; the poet's craft was thus a kind of devotion to making a poem difficult; thus, according to Obumselu, Okigbo's determination to be among the best made him end up writing only very few poems to completion.

From Okigbo's poetry the book shifts to another discourse of the novel genre, this time 'Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*: A Reevaluation',

written in 2011. Some of Obumselu's earlier observations, especially in relation to the status of folklore not only in African literary traditions but elsewhere, indicate that he [Obumselu] has a preference for the 'magical realism' which the novel genre can utilize for the inner delineation of character, theme, setting, plot, and style in African fiction. Okri's *The Famished Road* naturally attracts Obumselu's eye in this regard. He argues that this novel, whose theme is built on 'the mystery of the road of life', is heavily influenced by the novelist's obvious knowledge of Kafka's *The Castle*, but that the novelist also relies for his success on a capacity to hybridize and synthesize other literary traditions.

Chapter twelve is a previously unpublished essay with the title of 'Two Pioneer African Novelists': Tshetosho Solomon Plaatje's *Mhudi* (1917–1922) published in South Africa in 1930 and Mofolo's *Chaka* (1909) published in the Sotho language in 1925, the latter's 'folk tradition' being the subject of Obumselu's discourse in chapter five of this compendium. In this chapter, the scholar-critic examines these novels as pioneer, modern prose fiction in sub-Saharan Africa. He regards both novelists as practitioners of the African folk tradition of historical myth and as having made first-step attempts at writing African realistic prose fiction.

Chapter 13 is a 2018 essay, 'Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*: The Literary Context', in which the critic insists that the novel demands a totally new reading which sees Yoruba creation stories fusing with the Joycean myth of Ulysses of the creative artist in quest of meaning. Here the Ogun legend that saturates Soyinka's creative consciousness functions best in the context of a modernist stream of consciousness in which a character, like Sekoni, is an image of 'the artist as a young man'.

The two concluding chapters of the book, 'An African Critic on African Literary Criticism: Interview with Ben Obumselu' (chapter 14) and 'We need an Element of Prophecy in New Nigerian Writing' (chapter 15), are respectively 1989 and 2012 interviews in which Obumselu expatiates on his beliefs, practices and expectations as an African literary scholar and critic. He categorizes three phases of criticism of African Literature as: 'the Golden School' phase, the 'Burning Spear' phase, and the 'Research School' phase. He argues further that much of what is called 'criticism' in Africa is 'journalistic appreciation', whereas meaningful criticism should be able to deal, not only with the text of a work of art, but also with the history / biography/autobiography surrounding the work of art, the cultural and political imperatives of the text, the writer's possible influences, the psychological underpinnings of the text, and even the biological/

racial notations and denotations of the writer and his/her text. Obumselu does not believe that the diasporic tendency among African critics amounts to a brain-drain, for African writers and intellectuals do need to spend some of their time abroad in order to nurture and add twilight to their activities as 'great thinkers', since, 'in literature and art, national boundaries have no significance', (295).

In the process, the literary scholar-critics finds it necessary to relate literary theory to its criticism. The two interviews referred to above articulate what might be regarded as the Obumselu literary quintessence, fully captured by the fifteen chapters of this compendium and constituted of the following:

i an amazing knowledge of the literatures of other parts of the world as they relate to Africa;
ii an in-depth appreciation of the inner mechanics of the expression 'poetry' as being more of a pattern of linguistic expressions that point to, but not necessarily implying, a message;
iii a preference for reading literary texts in their original;
iv a critical scholar's knowledge of other arts – music, painting, sculpture, fine art, photography/cinematography – all appreciated in their proper registers and collocations;
v an inquisitive knowledge of the geography on which a literary material is based;
vi an approval of the imaginative foray into the world of the fantastic in order to sift out symbolic/metaphoric materials for the exploration and re-interpretation of the realities of modern life;
vii finally, a literary catholicity suggesting not only the interlinking of cultures but also the audacious allowance which the artist exercises in foraging into the cultural world of people, no matter how weird, earthly or complex, in search of materials for artistic portraiture.

The rigorous commitment which Professor Isidore Diala imposed on himself in order to present this Obumselu literary quintessence in a compendium has paid off, and serious scholars of African Literature can now heave a sigh of relief that the Obumselu imprint on African Literature has finally been domiciled.

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Imbolo Mbue. *Behold the Dreamers.*
New York: Penguin-Random House, 2016, 382 pp. $21.23
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Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* examines the American dream and the quest for identity which has become a prevalent issue in recent times for African-Americans and other non-American citizens. J. Armstrong, F.L. Carlos and Julia H. Jones posit, 'The American Dream (TAD) is an ideological symbol of achievement and success in American culture' (1). American dream is the belief that the possession of the American green card and citizenship is an end to all forms of life's struggles and challenges. The novel examines how Imbolo Mbue re-imagines the quest for the American dream and its challenges as reflected in the lives of the Jongas and other immigrants. It also exposes the racial boundary between African immigrants and the Americans which is reflected in every aspect of their life ranging from job, accommodation to way of life. It further reveals the insecurity and dangers of those who are American citizens. From the perspective of Patricia Hill Collins' concept of the 'Outsider within', the novel argues for the importance of recognizing how the 'Outsider within' viewpoint features in Imbolo Mbue's novel and its narration of cultural hegemony in the US, which exposes the dangers of the lives of most non-Americans as reflected in the lives of the Jongas who reside in the US but are yet to attain their full citizenship.

Behold the Dreamers is a 21st century realist novel. Imbolo Mbue worked in New York in the corporate sector but eventually lost her job as a result of the American economic recession, which inspired her to write the novel. The author's personal experiences of how immigration works in America signifies the difficulties in successfully going through it. One could say that much of the novel reflects the real-life experiences of most immigrant blacks in America who travel legally in order to acquire American citizenship. Those who cannot achieve it in time are forced to become illegal immigrants because going back to their countries of origin is often out of the question. They have to seek for means of staying in America despite the humiliating challenges they encounter.

The novel critically examines the quest for the American dream and how identity plays a major role in its actualization, which further traumatizes those involved. Besides the complexity of the idea of the American dream, Mbolo's novel also examines the financial struggles, hopelessness, and hardship immigrants endure in the American

underbelly. The event depicted in the novel clearly captures the trauma and emotional turbulence of dealing with an identity crisis and the quest to belong in an alien country. The harsh immigration policy in America is not left out as Mbue posits that 'the novel connects the character's experiences and feelings with those of her own financial struggles as an immigrant. She has stressed the importance of literature providing empathy, which she feels is lacked in immigration policies and overall politics' (1). She is of the view that 'coming to America has exposed her in so many ways and she had to learn to stand up, to stand out, I had to learn to be bolder. I don't put up with things here that I would have in Limbe' (1). In essence, discrimination serves as a determining factor why African-Americans may not be able to achieve the American dream. Those who do are those who engage in more successful careers like in the healthcare sector, which gives them more financial wealth and a higher life of satisfaction.

There are several novels which focus on identity, exile and 'otherness' but Imbolo Mbue in *Behold the Dreamer's* clearly opens a new path to these lingering issues in America. Her approach is different from the recent scholarship and as such, exposes some of the latest ordeals of seeking the American dream by immigrants irrespective of colour or nationality. Her novel represents a new discourse in the on-going experiences of those in the diaspora not just from Africa but all over the world.

The American dream and the quest for an American identity compels Jende Jonga to leave his hometown Limbe in Cameroon to seek for greener pastures. His work experience in Limbe as a street cleaner and the economic situation there cannot be compared to what he is exposed to in Harlem where he resides. He does lots of job – washing dishes in Manhattan, cab driving in the Bronx – which he takes depending on their availability and the pay. He has never attended an interview because the jobs he gets do not require one. When he is invited by Lehman Brothers to be an executive chauffeur it became very necessary for him to get a resume.

In Mbue's novel, non-Americans are often faced with immigration problems which worsen with time. There is always this feeling of 'otherness' when challenged with immigration problems. As the immigration policies become tougher, immigrants look for a better way to get their green card, which is a ticket to achieving their American dream. The lawyers also charge huge sums of money for their services, but unfortunately the asylum process is stricter than imagined and has frustrated those who have applied. It is also a way to track those who

apply so that the authorities can to deport the applicant if the asylum application fails.

Jende's predicaments worsen when Clark lays him off as a result of the economic recession in America. The crashing of his world is greater because the job is the only consolation he has. The news from Clark makes him speechless and confused and he presses for answers which he will not get. Jende believes that Cindy must have convinced her husband to sack him since he could not tell her the truth about her husband's infidelity, but Clark refuses to accept it. Being a hardworking man, Jende calls his former employer, Mr Jones, to see if he can start driving his cabs but he is informed that there is no vacancy, which further frustrates him.

Mbue portrays the importance of education as a gateway for success in America especially for immigrants. Winston reiterates this when Jende informs him of his decision to go back to Limbe, which is the best he could do with his educational background. Education has become a key to a successful life in America as Winston reiterates while advising Jende about it.

Illegal immigrants leaving America voluntarily is very rare but Mbue structures her story in such a manner to demonstrate the hopelessness of the American dream that is difficult to achieve for most blacks and other immigrants. Going back to Limbe without achieving the American dream hurts Neni, Jende's wife, so much. New York is like the 'god' she worships and she is ready to do anything to please that 'god'. But all her efforts were fruitless; she has to choose her family over her love for New York City. Jende is stronger than Neni and dreads New York so much as a result of all that he has gone through in getting a good job. He also convinces his son, Liomi, that going home is the best for them.

Imbolo Mbue in this novel powerfully articulates and captures the experiences of immigrants with the sheer richness of her language which gives compelling force to the picture of immigrant anguish and the anxiety of place and displacement. The high rate of discrimination and racism that pervades the American immigration system poses a great challenge to them especially for blacks and other immigrants. Jende Jonga's family and the problems they encounter in achieving their American dream is a signification of the political apocalypse that pervades the American system in relation to their immigration encounter and issues. Neni's difficulty in finishing her degree and transferring to Pharmacy clearly exposes the racial boundaries that exist in America. The dean in her faculty clearly explains why she

cannot achieve her dream of becoming a Pharmacist as an international student despite being an honours member. Jende Jonga, through his decision to go back home where he belongs and where his identity will not matter, clearly shows resolve, but also the bruising challenges of trying to fit into an alien country no matter how hard he tries.

It was a difficult decision to make but he had to in order to stop the life of misery he is living in, despite being inside the famed glitter of a magnificent city like New York. As most people believe, New York is 'paradise.' But the Jongas embody what Hill Collins identifies as the 'Outsider within'. Mbue exposes the insensitivity of the immigration judge through the events that surround Jende Jonga's family and other immigrants seeking American citizenship. Their American dream was thwarted as a result of their blackness, which poses a big problem, as well as the harsh American immigration policies that categorizes and drives a certain class of seekers into the vast underground of illegal migrancy. The novel concludes that the American dream is a farce; it is not the end of all life's challenges as is believed by many Africans and other immigrants who suffer through the broken American immigration system.

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Tijan M. Sallah. *Saani Baat: Aspects of African Literature and Culture.*

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In the large frame of modern African literature, particularly in the anglophone tradition, Gambia is stuck in the armpit of giants. Well, that's the general view, until we read Tijan Sallah's, *Saani Baat: Aspects of African Literature and Culture,* which offers the reader of African literature some new perspectives. In the first eight chapters of this ten-chaptered book, Sallah guides the reader to a new appreciation and apprehension of the range and vitality of Gambia's literary production

and engagement, from its modern to its oral forms. What connects Phyllis Wheatley, Alex Haley, and Lenrie Peters? The Gambia, even as it is, 'just a narrow sliver of land along the river that gives it sustenance' (Jon Woronoff, in Hughes and Perfect, xiii). With a population of about 1.5 million people, Gambia is a small country – in fact, the smallest non-island nation in Africa – nestling on West Africa's Atlantic coast. Although its population is overwhelmingly Muslim, Gambia's national cultural identity is a very complex mix of animism, Islam, and Christianity – particularly Roman Catholicism – as well as the English or ,rather, Anglican, texture of its colonial experience. Gambia forms a part of the quintet of Anglophone West African nations. Gambia, however, achieved independence from British colonialism in February 1965, stuck in a most awkward geographical location surrounded by French Senegal. As Jon Woronoff declares in his Foreword to Hughes and Perfect's *Historical Dictionary of the Gambia,* 'of all Africa's artificial boundaries, none is more artificial than that surrounding the Gambia' (xiii). This very artificial boundary first drawn in 1889 by British and French delegates in Paris gives important weight to both the significance and implications of the scramble for Africa, as well as to the axiom that geography is destiny.

The demarcation sundered the natural ethnic lines of the region, and confined the modern nation of Gambia into a strip of land 'approximately the size of Lebanon or Jamaica'. As a result, today this 'exclude[s] the Gambia from free access to its natural hinterland and divide[s] the Gambia Wolof, Jola, Mandinka, Serere (Serer), and Fula (Fulbe) people from Senegal' (xxxii). As Hughes, indeed, further notes: 'The present day boundary presents specific problems for historians. Much of its history was not confined to the narrow serpentine state, but extended over the broad savannah and Sahel areas that today compose Senegal. This is particularly true of the period extending from the 13th to the 16th century when the Gambia valley was populated by a series of complex migrations' (xxxii). The beginnings of what would become modern Gambia, in that sense, are rooted in that concatenation of movements from the 13th century, 'the period of Malian hegemony', of which the Mandinka, Hughes notes, formed its westernmost extension; a period of rapid Islamization, which also roughly coincides, around the 15th century, with the first European explorations of the Gambia river, starting with the adventurers the Venetian explorer and slave trader Alvise da Cadamosto and the Genoese Antoniotto Usidimere; then the rise of the Islamic theocracy in the Futa Toro, in the 18th century, with its large-scale conversion of Gambians, particularly the

Fula. Gambia became part of the British West Africa settlements with its headquarters in Sierra Leone on 19 February 1866.

Modern Gambian identity is thus irreducible to a single, linear formation. Like most postcolonial societies, it is hybrid. But Gambia's formal national culture, the basis of its national literature, is still rooted in its colonial experience and moorings. This, in some measure, is Tijan Sallah's subtle conclusion in his book, *Saani Baat: Aspects of African Literature and Culture*. 'To speak of a Gambian national literature,' writes Sallah, 'is to speak to that narrative which engaged with the colonial construction of a Gambia nation.' This does prompt the question: what therefore, is the Gambian nation? What are the grounds for contemporary Gambian identity? How does identity formation situate the shaping of a 'national mind'? Does the postcolonial African nation, with its historical fatalities, coming essentially from its distorted colonial boundaries, have a mind? Can it generate a true national literature; a symbolic order; a sustained myth of the nation around which should accrete its power of the imaginary and its rituals of collective memory, which is what a national literature enacts? These are important questions and aspects of the 'specific problems' which Sallah's books uncovers and with which it grapples.

Tijan M. Sallah's approach in *Saani Baat: Aspects of African Literature and Culture* is expository. He dispenses with the hard, theoretical style in his analysis of the cultural systems of the Gambia. He argues for a broader, more complex look at the literary production of Gambia in the larger picture or context of Africa's literary tradition. Gambia, he suggests, has a very rich and complex field that demands closer, critical attention beyond the surface of our contemporary regard and canonizing acts. The proliferation of ideas about African literature has always, largely, circulated around the African literary power houses – Nigeria, South Africa, Senegal, Kenya, and, at the crossroads of African and Arabic/Middle Eastern literature, Egypt, for instance. But African literary culture and its system of ideas, as Tijan Sallah demonstrates, is far more complex and far-reaching. Essentially, this critical text is situated within this slice of the Senegambia cultural theatre, whose literary importance, but for the iconic presence of Lenrie Peters, is often either ignored or seen precisely as non-existent. This is why Sallah's book offers an important shift in the ways we must begin to see, redress, and reassess literary culture and its development in Africa.

The book begins quite audaciously with a chapter on 'Dreams of Katchikali: the Challenge of a Gambian National Literature', and the questions Tijani Sallah raises are: 'What does it mean to be a Gambian;

to be part of a population of about two million; to be dependent on a groundnuts or peanuts monocrop economy; to be geographically surrounded, except for the coastline, by Senegal; to be the confluence of some four major ethnic groups: Mandinka, Wolof/Serer, Fula/Tukolor, and Jola; to be defined spiritually by the predominant import of Islam mixed into a sumptuous syncretism with the folk beliefs of an atavistic past?' (1). He narrows his answers to these questions to certain basic principles: modern Gambia may be the sum of its imaginary, but Gambia's national literature cannot be restricted to the 'ethnic text' which, as Tijan Sallah conceives it, though drawing its body from the 'rich repository of folk repertoire', provides little spark, because these 'ethnic texts' have not broken parochial boundaries; nor could it in fact be literature written in the language of Islam – Arabic – a language which to Sallah, even in its 'transethnic appeal', is still restricted, and restrictive, because of its limitations to a 'religious milieu'. A national literature for Gambia, Sallah avers, must 'permeate the boundaries' of its multi-ethnic formation and language barriers, and to that effect therefore, because the colonial English language has become the lingua franca of Gambia, it must then carry the weight of this national literature: 'in this sense, ethnic texts could perhaps qualify if they get translated in the English lingua franca that all Gambians have the freedom and in some cases the opportunity to learn and use' (3). Needless to say, Tijan Sallah's conclusion and prescriptions may seem very problematic in the sense that they validate and promote colonial agency, and may ruffle the patience of critics and advocates of decolonization such as Ngũgĩ or Chinweizu, and disturb those who value their critique of colonialism and colonial mentality in African literature.

But if the English language must do the work which Tijan Sallah proposes for it, who best embodies this task but Gambia's iconic poet, Lenrie Peters – 'that pater familias of a national Gambian literature in English' (3)? Tijan Sallah projects Lenrie Peters' book of poems, *Katchikali* (1971), which appropriates and celebrates the sacred shrine of Katchikali, perhaps the pre-eminent centre of indigenous religious worship and a cultural heritage of the Gambia, as the exemplar of Gambia's national literature. *Katchikali* is remarkable for its symbolism, and so is the poet Lenrie Peters. Born Lenrie Leopold Wilfrid Peters in Bathurst, Gambia, in 1932, to one of the most prominent, well-established creole families of Gambia, the poet embodies the deeply Anglican values that Sallah valorizes. The creole aristocracy, of which Peters is a veritable product and embodiment, reflects a most critical study in ambiguity from its heritage of transatlantic crossings. Lenrie

Peters' father, Lenrie Ingram Peters, was the prominent editor of the *Gambia Echo*, and his family's roots went back to the foundation of the 'krio' community in Freetown from the Nova Scotia returnees, who founded the Freetown settlement. He studied the Classics at Fourah Bay, and worked as an accountant and newspaper editor, latterly in Bathurst, to which he migrated from Sierra Leone. It was in Bathurst that he met Lenrie's mother, Keziah Peters, who also came from a very prominent, privileged creole 'aristocracy', which counts among its members the Maxwells, the first African graduates of Oxford. Tijan Sallah lays this all out in excruciating detail in this book.

Lenrie Peters himself attended the Methodist Boys High School in Bathurst, and the Prince of Wales School in Freetown, and from there went on to Cambridge where he studied Natural Sciences between 1953 and 1956, thereafter studying medicine at University College Hospital in London. He began writing poetry at Cambridge and contributed to the BBC. The publication of his first collection of poems, by Mbari in Ibadan in 1962, firmly established his reputation and his stature as Gambia's pre-eminent modern poet and writer – the grand old man of modern Gambian literature. Gambia's creole population, mostly descendants of the Aku returnees from Nova Scotia from the 18th century, is a minority – but a powerful minority – characterized by its cultural inbreeding. It was Westernized – Anglican, Christian, and alienated: it was the 'buffer class' between the colonizer and the colonized. Lenrie Peters fell firmly within this class. Cosmopolitan, and even solidly Pan-Africanist, Lenrie Peters' creolized identity, his 'uprootedness' and alienation, his cultural in-betweenness ironically fed his Pan-Africanism. As he said, quoted appropriately by Tijan Sallah from a conference on World Cultures in Berne: 'My family has been detribalized for nearly four generations. I am like Alex Haley. I am looking for my roots' (4–5). That kind of aloof nationalism (not 'deracination' thankfully) produces the 'detribalized' literature which Tijan Sallah idealizes and values as key in the emergence of a Gambian national literature.

Other chapters in the book deal with various aspects of Gambian literature and thought aligned to this question of its national imaginary and identity. Chapter 2, for instance, on 'Senegambian Wolof Poetry', focuses on the oral poetry tradition of the Wolof, across the Senegambian belt: the 'woi', 'tanga', 'baaku', and 'kassak' – each form of this oral poetic heritage is given appropriate context, to indicate the social and aesthetic worth of Wolof performative and philosophical expression. 'Wolof poetics is intimately linked to the propagation of

socially redeeming values,' (29) writes Sallah, to drive home the facts. Chapter 3 is a more extended version of Wolof hermeneutics: 'Towards Wolof Metaphysics and Philosophy: Some Preliminary Reflections'. It takes us through interpretations of the conceptual universe of the Wolof: from the Wolof concept of man, to its concept of time, space, and number. The Wolof concept of the human – '*Nit nitai garabam*' (a human is medicine to another) – presumably situates a not so strange idea of complementary humanity and social responsibility as a virtue of Wolof humanism. But crucial here is Sallah's disclosure of the relationship of Wolof with the Serer worldview, seen through the life and work of Wolof philosophers like Kochy Barma Faal. This, of course, should not be surprising as the Senegalese anthropologist Cheik Anta Diop in his own writing actually mapped a unity of cultural values and practices that extend within African cultures. The chapter on 'Jolla Verbal Arts on the Senegambia' lays out an important claim for the Jolla, the 'dominant ethnic group in the Casamance region of Senegal and the Fogni region of Gambia', but who are still the most marginalized in both national spheres as an ethnic minority. The question Tijan Sallah outlines in this chapter is quite simple: is there evidence of literature in Jolla culture? His answer is equally definite: 'Although it is difficult to point to any distinct texts that represents the existence of a Jola literature, the Jola do have a rich orature (the vast majority of which is not yet recorded) which characterize and enrich Jola life and attitude to the world' (71). The fact of Jola's cultural 'self-apprehension', as the basis of its cultural resistance to colonialism, and the rise of such resistance icons as its famous sibylline figure, the woman prophet Aline Sitoe Jatta of Kabrousse, and of course the more recent rise of Yahya Jammeh, the maverick dictator of Gambia, are drawn out to properly situate the Jola, who inhabit three points, from the Casamance in Senegal, to Guinea-Bissau, and in the Gambia. The chapters on 'New Gambian Poets and their Poetry', and the extended, additional tribute to Gambia's national poet, Lenrie Peters, further elaborates on the theme of Gambia's national culture and literary production. Other aspects of this book, with chapters on Phyllis Wheatley, the Harlem Renaissance, the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe, and the poet Tanure Ojaide, complete the picture which Tijan Sallah inadvertently constructs.

It is, in a sense, an ironic picture: the book began by asking the important questions: what does it mean to be Gambian? Can a small, resource-poor, serpentine country, surrounded by the francophone behemoth, Senegal, produce great literature? What literature? Perhaps

that should have been the single remit of this critical excursion: to situate the Gambian imagination as its own primary experience of value. The book should have wholly made its own point on this matter. It does, to some agreeable extent, but it also seems that the additional element – the later chapters in this collection – belong to a different book. These last chapters feel like an intrusion in the specific frame of *Saani Baat*. In some ways, the book seems to suggest that modern Gambian literature cannot exist without riding on the back of a bigger concept of world literature – Anglophone, Diaspora, African – and therefore, the question Tijan M. Sallah asks at the beginning of this book seems very moot. In general, certainly, very substantial thinking is evident in the making of this text. There are very useful insights for the reader, for instance, that yield from the discussion of the poetry of the Nigerian Tanure Ojaide. However, not much is pathbreaking in the book in terms of approach, method, or even revelations. These lacks in themselves do not totally undermine the thrusts of the book, nor its vitality or value. In sum, the true point of the essays collected in *Saani Baat: Aspects of African Literature and Culture*, aside from its central project of 'worlding' Gambian literary thought and its production, is to remind critics and readers of Africa literature of the multifocality and the subtle dimensions of that literature.

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