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African Literatures and Postcolonialism: Projections into the Twenty-First Century

> What the [African] writers see around them as they survive their political and social environment since independence is a recurring cycle of misrule, mismanagement, corruption, violent upheaval and general misery. (Jones, "Myth and Modernity: African Writers and Their Roots" 6)

> Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order. Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of "minorities" within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South. (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 171)

This essay does not intend to lock horns with postcolonial theorists, whatever colour their critical garments, however complex their flowering intellectual gowns.[1] Every vein of my discourse here derives from the above two quotations that have simplified what postcolonial African writers conceive as the whirlpool of their literary outpourings. For more than half a century of literary writing, postcolonial experiences dualized an aesthetic-thematic inclination of African literary art: the crisis within and the negotiation without. African works, oral or written, in the past seven decades (and especially in these last five), have battled to survive and to maintain African values, identities, and equality in the new world order. The summation of Jones's and Bhabha's polemics above clearly suggests that issues of protest and commitment never ceased to dominate African literature even after independence.[2] This is analogous to the Yoruba proverb, "If

1 I am grateful to my friends Bayo Toyo, Marianne Herzog, and Nicole Morgan Slipp for their useful criticism.

2 The Negritudists are such writers who still thrive today. Moore, quoting Fanon, describes the Negritude school as "these two metaphysics" (28) meaning their protest against the white primitivist and their efforts to "liberate" the black person from his/her inferiority complex.

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the louse does not leave one's body, the blood will not disappear from one's fingernail." The lice of oppression, mismanagement, and neocolonization are still sucking the blood of Africans. African writing cannot but continue to object to and protest against the injustice. A major difference in the postcolonial protest, however, is that it is primarily against those whom T.M. Aluko identifies as "black white men" (Na'Allah 1991, 14), of whom Armah's minister Koomson is an example. These are perpetrators of African's own imperialism after the end of colonial administration: what Jones calls a "recurring circle of misrule, mismanagement, corruption, violent upheaval and general misery" (6). Perhaps Egharevba captures this even better:

> The euphoria of independence gives way to the frustration of the people due to the perpetuation of the exploitation of the masses by the priviledged class. The focus shifts from cultural assertion to the question of economic survival. As a result, the essence of cultural values gives way to a demand for an end to exploitation, an end to the widening gap between the haves and the have-nots, an end to the crass governmental neglect of the masses, an end to oppression and mismanagement by governmental functionaries. Such social vices cannot but create in a sensitive and committed writer, a radical spirit different from the age when the essential issue was cultural. (26)

However, the foreign contribution to African misery and Africa's own misrule obfuscate the nature of the postindependence protest of African writing. In the last decade of the twentieth century, Africa is left with the same story. It drags the same misery, poverty, oppression, misrule, misdirection, and injustice right into the new century. Is it not time to raise a periscope into the twenty-first century and search into the future of African literary commitment? Will African literature continue to swim in the politics of internal and external misendeavours? Will the issues of poverty, autarchy, injustice, sexism, racism, neocolonialism, colonial vs. indigenous languages, African/Western theories and criticism of African literature, etc. which inform contemporary polemics in African writing continue to dominate in the twenty-first century? Or will African literature emerge with a new strength that can finally turn Africa's fortune around? This is the time to launch a debate on "African Literature in the Twenty-First Century: What Role, Which Direction?" African literature is the vehicle that can transport the continent into an era of peace, progress, and prosperity. The artists have the ignition key. They have the sword and the power to finally redeem African integrity and "force" the imperialist nations to recognize and respect African countries as equal partners in the global community.

This essay debates the various options that are available to African literature in the next century. It identifies important roles for African intellectuals in the diaspora and writers resident on the continent in the march towards a new future. Drawing examples from an African oral performance, the paper highlights the strengths and the threats to traditional oral art in Africa, especially modern

writers' negative attitude to oral literature. It strongly argues for a working relationship between modern African writers and traditional oral artists, insisting that only when this is in place can African literature lead the continent into socioeconomic emancipation in the twenty-first century.

ISSUES GERMANE TO AFRICAN LITERATURE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The dialectics of African literature today supersede riddles of "art for art's sake" and questions of canonization that pervade discussions in Western literature. In "The Dynamics of Domination: Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz*, Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*," Glasberg, referring to Richard Rubenstein, offers insight into what he calls the "contemporary malaise" in Western civilization:

> Richard Rubenstein is on the right track when he endeavors to link the epic horrors of our century with trends deeply rooted in our civilization's heritage. A separation from the sacred seems to allow for humanity's ability to act with a total lack of restraint in the treatment of those deemed superfluous, and that separation began with the Hebrews envisaging a God beyond all conception. The rise of science and technology within the last few centuries not only rendered the idea of God obsolete, but also made human possibilities of freedom problematic. As Jacques Ellul points out, in a technological society human choice is limited to that which technology offers and one is effectively precluded from choosing to accept or reject the technological system itself. (680-81)

The so-called "separation from the sacred," the opportunities offered by science and technology and a buoyant economy have a direct impact on contemporary Western polemics. Conversely, the failures of the twentieth century stare African writers in the face and challenge them to move forward with greater urgency and determination for a new birth in the twenty-first century. Françoise Lionnet adequately captures the predicament of the Third World writer when she submits:

> For us who are natives of the so-called Third World, it has become imperative to understand and to participate fully in the process of re-vision begun by our contemporary writers and theorists. The latter are engaged in an enterprise which converges toward other efforts at economic and political survival but which is unique in its focus on memory — the oral trace of the past — as the instrument for giving us access to our histories. (5)

The pragmatics of African experience firmly roots African literature in the continent's sociocultural life. Expectations are that, by the end of the twentieth century, colonial and neocolonial demons would finally commit themselves to earth. Then, the twenty-first century will surface with a new strength to forge ahead. Alas, Africa is emerging into a new century with a backlog of inadequacies and complaints. Writers, who are "surgeons of the heart and souls of a

community" (Ngugi ix), must confront these realities with vigor. The continent still produces the most indebted nations of the world. Political instability, militocracy, bad leadership and ineptitude, all still prevail.[3]

In the twenty-first century, African literature may not claim a more beneficial function than a political one. It is of course problematic to insist on a unified focus. Because of the enormous failures of Africa's past (some of them are actually traceable to the doorstep of a brand of African writing), the next century has no room for artistic escapism and stereotyping. The twenty-first century must not be another experiment. The success of South African independence confirms that with commitment, determination and fervent raising of conscience and mobilization of people, art can open widely the door to greater glories. Lindfors, referring to the middle-of-the-road writers and formalist critics, succinctly explains that:

> The books and articles we write tend to be text-bound, seldom venturing beyond the novel, play, poem or essay we are scrutinising, seldom striving to capture the essence of the unique individual behind the work. We are content to analyse the words and images on a page without reference to the peculiarities of the personality that produced them. We write as if the literary work has its own autonomous existence, a life entirely independent of its creator. We sometimes pride ourselves on our formalistic rigour, our attention to details and patterns that have no relevance to real life. (14)

The point is that in African literature, the eras of text-bound criticism and formalist's "art for art's sake" creativity are long gone with the wind. The magnitude of Africa's problems toward the end of the twentieth century does not allow conscientious writers to become insensitive, and to extend elitism to the new century. This issue is not about authorial scrutiny alone, but also, and more important, about thematic relevance. The socio-historicity of Africa for the past two centuries culminates in a current situation in which African authors can no longer afford the luxury of playful aesthetics. The literary work certainly has no existence outside society. Criticism has the same blood that flows in a human being.

The politics of language in African literature will definitely resurface in the twenty-first century. The dominance of colonial languages, such as English, French, and Portuguese as media of African written literature in the past two

3 These are the dominant themes of African writing from the 1960s: Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1962), *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987); Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), *Why Are We So Blest?* (1974); Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* (1973), *Poems of Black Africa* (1975); Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child* (1964), *I Will Marry When I Want* (1982); Ousmane's *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* (1962), *Xala* (1980); Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1980); Osundare's *Village Voices* (1984); p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol* (1984); Awoonor's *Rediscovery...* (1964). There are far too many works by these and other writers to offer a more elaborate and representative list.

centuries has attracted highly controversial views. This explosive postcolonial discourse has sharply divided African scholars into two camps: the pro-European languages camp led by Sédar Senghor, Chinua Achebe, and Wole Soyinka; and its opposition camp led by Obi Wali, David Diop and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. In *The Theory of African Literature*, Chidi Amuta clearly describes how the issue has divided African writers:

> The issue, which has been articulated mainly at the emotional level, has also managed to attract to itself the most heated controversies. Two dominant positions have emerged, each drawing advocates from writers and critics alike. There are those ... who insist that African literature written in European languages to communicate African experiencies enriches both the languages in question and the literature itself. These writers also recognize the legitimacy of literature in African languages. Squarely opposed to this accommodationist/assimilationist position are others ... who insist on linguistic indigenization as a minimum condition for the existence of African literature.... This side of the argument has tried to find ideological mooring in the fact that the European languages were a crucial part of the arsenal of colonialism while African languages still hold the reservoir of values and institutions that stand in antithetical opposition to imperialism. (112)

African writers must control their emotions and summon their patriotism to resolve this problem. Since Africans want sustained interaction with the outside world, nobody can subdue the growth and importance of colonial languages in Africa, even in the twenty-first century. It is not an overstatement that English is today the most popular language of international communication. French is obviously the second. Nevertheless, nobody can conveniently deny Ngugi's castigatory perspective on the continued use of European languages in African literary creativity. He has placed his position in context:

> On the contrary I am lamenting a neo-colonial situation which meant the European bourgeoisie once again stealing our talents and geniuses as they have stolen our economics. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Europe stole art and treasures from Africa to decorate their houses and museums; in the twentieth century Europe is stealing the treasures of the mind to enrich their languages and cultures. Africa needs back its economy, its politics, its cultures, its languages and all its patriotic writers. (xii)

The same Ngugi, who thenceforth vowed to write his future works in either Gikuyu or Kiswahili, declaring a "farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings," turned round to say: "However, I hope that through the age-old medium of translation I shall be able to continue dialogue with all" (xiv). Granted, if one prides oneself on having superior dance moves, let him first display them at home. What claim to success can African writers make if they remain unknown in their villages, countries, continent, but are glittering stars abroad? Works such as *Songs of Lawino*, *Village Songs*, *Moonsongs* with their

strong sociopolitical messages (even in the so-called "language of the marketplace"), and despite heavy exploration of traditional myths and history as in *Kinjeketile*, *Morountodun*, and *Kondo le requin*, have they had any impact all these years among the downtrodden populations of the African continent? Have the authors not been just ivory tower writers and critics in all these decades? I asked these questions at the British Council/University of Ibadan International Conference on "Communicative Competence and the Role of English as a Second Language"[4] of a distinguished panel of writers chaired by the poet of the marketplace himself, Niyi Osundare, but no one seemed willing to give me a critical explication of this issue. I strongly feel, like Ngugi, that we have to attack the language question with greater vigor, especially in the next century. Ngugi is alone in trying to convince modern African writers to adopt African languages. To change the situation of past indifference, African writers using a colonial language should endeavor to pick at least one other language (African indigenous) of comfortable expertise for creativity. If every modern African writer learns to write in his/her mother tongue or whatever language of his/her immediate village, the next century shall be a great success for African literature. They can also have their works translated into and from the colonial languages, and reach both local and international audiences. Even writers who traditionally operate within local linguistic media could be encouraged to write in colonial languages *pari passu*. This will afford them more audiences outside their language group(s), including of course an international audience. The "pluri-lingual" nature of Africa and lack of political will of most Africans to institutionalize indigenous national languages for African countries make colonial languages common media for interethnic communication. Nigeria, for example, has about 400 languages. The three major language groups are always suspicious of each other (Gérard 55). The experimentation by Ken Saro Wiwa and Tunde Fatunde with rotten and pidgin English respectively have been minimally successful. Such writers will have greater effect if they also adopt their indigenous languages. Let every writer go bilingual. This will do Africa well.

To me, the idea of discarding foreign languages in literary creativity is synonymous with the unrealistic thinking that only Africans can constructively and efficiently evaluate African writing. I shall take up these constructs one by one. First, Africa itself is heavily heterogeneous. It is not an island unto itself: no nation is. Improved communication has made the world a global village, and Africans have to interact with other peoples. Much as African masses are primarily vital to their nations' emancipation, they require the good will, support and understanding of other peoples to realize a lasting success, especially in today's

4 I was a participant and a rapporteur at the conference that took place at IITA Ibadan, Nigeria from December 13 to 19, 1993. It was jointly organized by the British Council and the University of Ibadan.

world order. The peoples of the world need education about each other, especially in this post-cold-war era, to engender human intermingling. We realized the liberation of South Africa, despite the internal struggle of South Africans themselves, only with the solidarity of the world community. Again, the question of foreign language is a complex postcolonial discourse. We cannot answer it simply by abandoning the colonial languages. Will Africans also abandon brothers and sisters in diaspora? Or are we already disclaiming them? They certainly have lost their African languages and can only get to their roots through these "foreign" tongues. All Africans abroad, whether occasionally resident in other countries or permanently diasporic, have a right to maintain their links to Africa. More so, all African intellectuals overseas (especially occasionally resident ones) are intellectual traders in academe, and are bridges between Africa and the First World. Their primary duty is to negotiate for Africa. Gayatri Spivak's theory of negotiation is highly pertinent here. Her theory demonstrates an articulate political program for Third World diasporic intellectuals. She contends: "As far as I can understand, in order to intervene one must negotiate. If there is anything I have learnt in and through the last 23 years of teaching, it is that the more vulnerable your position, the more you have to negotiate" (qtd. in Harasym 72). Spivak defines scholars as academics in the business of ideological production. She submits that Third World diasporic academics' most constructive duty is to "negotiate with structures of violence" (101) and the "structures of oppression within postcolonial space" (157). Like diasporic Israelis have negotiated for the Jewish state, African intellectuals must, in the twenty-first century, collaborate in their teachings and critical polemics so as to achieve meaningful negotiation. They can only mobilize the First World in its own languages, just like the Africans at home in their own languages. That is the only remedy to imperialistic mansuetude and ultimate neocolonial dismantling of Africa. Yoruba, Xhosa or Amharic cannot do the trick with the West. We need Western language(s), with sound skills in Western maneuvering. I will return to the issue of negotiation.

The maxim that European scholars lack *loci standi* to criticize African works demands quick scrutiny. Claiming this to be so because of sins of colonization and racism is a reverse discrimination. We cannot, of course, dismiss some of the contentions of the trio of Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike, who are the most fervent of these anti-European critics, with a wave of a hand. But they have exceeded genuine constraints in their reductionist polemics. The only argument that I find acceptable is in their rejection of the eurocentric thrust of primitivist critics:

> There is a long list of charges usually leveled against the African novel by the Western critics... Where these charges do not emanate from the importation into the African literary scene of problems and pseudo-problems within the Western tradition, they are either the expression of a literary tourist mentality addicted to a nouveaumania whose

easily jaded sensibilities cry out for new supplies of exotica or they are underhanded efforts to defend the Western imperialist... For instance with respect to technique, some African novels are said to suffer from inadequate description or inadequate characterization ... and awkward dialogue, or from alleged problems in the conception and handling of time and space. Others are faulted for being too short... With respect to their themes, some novels are denounced as "situational"... With respect to ideological matters, some critics claim that there is too much didactism, or not enough of the right kind. (7)

We can easily educate such Eurocentric antagonists that African realities and culture differ from their myopic perspectives. We can tell them that African creativity, though in European languages, is not an extension of European national literature and it cannot be subjected to Eurocentric conventions. However, to sweepingly disqualify even European Africanists who labor hard to comprehend African traditional culture and its contemporary backgrounds, and genuinely critique African works with and for greater understanding, is to be guilty of negritudic fundamentalism. The success and liberation of African literature as a discipline in American and European academia today are consequent upon both African and European Africanists' decades of struggles and sacrifices (see Arnold). Unfortunately, fundamentalism is becoming epidemic as evidenced by Mazrui and Ogundipe-Leslie's outpourings (Mazrui 1993a, 1993b; Ogundipe-Leslie). A further conservative trend can be found in the discussion of the gender issue in African literary criticism. The issue has been reduced to sexist arguments, i.e., can a man discuss women's issues? Can a woman discuss men's issues? These two giants in African studies, Mazrui and Ogundipe-Leslie, exchange literary venom, even calling each other's scholarly credentials into question. Yet both of them seem to agree that "there are many ways in which precolonial Africa treated women better than postcolonial Africa has done. But that was because women in precolonial Africa were less marginalized" (Mazrui 1993b, 160).

While African scholars as cultural producers must move our continent to greater heights, we must be cautious in our penchant to problematize cultural constructs. African metanarratives cannot be subjected to a fanatical disconstruction by fundamentalist postindustrialists.[5] Postcolonial discourse must continue

5 It is acceptable to deconstruct in order to understand the cultural hegemony and existentialism in the Third World. One could even deconstruct the metanarratives for clearer perceptions of the intrinsic tendencies of the African people. It will, however, become disconstructive the moment that the theorist begins to disregard the value and cultural system of a people, especially where these people respect such culture and are proud to be identified with it. In this line of my argument, to deconstruct is to conduct a search, to open up a closed form, substance, matter, like an anatomist will open up one's body. It becomes disconstruction, after discovering that the elements therein suit the form, when one insists on castigating it, on harming its cherished order — the surgeon turning the organs that keep the patient alive upside down. An intelligent anatomist will only see, learn and leave.

to strive to develop within the cultural dynamism of an African/Third World reality. Africans need to participate in the postmodern discourse only as a platform for negotiation with the West. The Yorubas have a saying that whoever wishes to apprehend a monkey must behave like a monkey.

Relativist African scholars have already lost their rights to polemical justification in the African idiomatics. One cannot "disconstruct" a premise and then turn around to seek its guidance. Postcolonial critics, whether diasporic or resident, must not lose sight of their cultural origin in the intoxication of poststructuralist parlance. Especially if they still look for an audience in Africa and are persons who cannot manage without running to African proverbs[6] for theoretical authority and linguistic embellishment. They must not succumb to postcolonial tension, which Irele identifies as the result of conflicting cultures. Irele further contends: "The present focus of African reflection, as dictated by the realities of the postcolonial era, has been the immediate and practical issues of 'development,' understood as a process of the accommodation of African lives to the demands of modernity" (9). Modern demands on Africa are postcolonial demands. The rubrics of postindustrial philosophy are antithetical to modernism (Botwinick 17). Alex Callinicos, quoting Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, defines "postmodern":

> By contrast, I define postmodern as "incredulity toward metanarratives." The denial which Lyotard holds to be characteristic of postmodernism — namely of the existence of any general pattern on which to base our conception of a true theory or a just society — are clearly related to the pluralism and anti-realism championed by poststructuralism. (3)

The African drums shall continue to be drummed in proverbs. Only those who have ears will hear them. Only the intelligent will decode them. Recently when the people of the republic of Benin protested against President Nicephore Soglo for gorging his cabinet with his relatives, they easily found endorsement in the traditional Beninese proverb: "We cannot adore the horse, and adore its excrement and its anus."[7] African proverbs are laws and code of conduct even in contemporary predicaments.

A denial of Africa's metanarratives is a denial of African essence and identity. They epitomize African religion, ethics, laws, philosophy and cosmological view. As Ong observes: "the law itself in oral cultures is enshrined in formulaic sayings, proverbs, which are not mere jurisprudential decorations, but themselves constitute the law" (35). These are still dear to an African's pragmatics of life even as a postcolonial personality. That is why African written narratives are

6 For more on African proverbs and poetry, see Na'Allah 1994, 500-15.

7 A news item on the internet, naijanews@obitaiwan.iig "UN Summit Agrees 'Historic' War on Poverty" Wire Service: RTna (Reuters North America), Friday March 10, 1995.

rooted in strong oral elements, from Soyinka to Ngugi, Beti to Armah. African drama has also explored oral narrative technics as depicted in the emergent dramaturgy of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Femi Osofisan, Ebrahim Hussein, and Olu Obafemi. Conteh-Morgan perhaps best summarizes this point:

> The oral tradition — in the sense of a stock of oral narratives and their performance traditions on the one hand, and a body of beliefs, customs and practices on the other — constitutes the single most important source of inspiration for the African dramatist writing in French. Even when he seems farthest from its concerns, like when he is making an artistic statement on issues of contemporary relevance, or of general human significance, he still remains firmly tethered to it, borrowing from its resources of legend, heroic song, myth and folktale not only characters (human, animal and mythical) but also subjects, situations and formal procedures. (115)

The concept of total theater that is the hallmark of modern African drama emanates from oral performances. The unity of dialogue, song, dance, mime and costume as elements of total theater are rooted in African orature (see Ogunbiyi; Rotimi 329). Most modern African poets are heavily indebted to traditional orature. Scholars familiar with the rhythm of oral poetry on a village square will marvel at the weaving skill of our modern poets. If colonial languages had a flavour of African linguistic contour, our talking drums and musical flutes would give fulfilment to the foreign language African poetry. The negritudist poetry of Senghor, the Ogunian poetry of Soyinka, the Acolic poetry of p'Bitek, the folkloric poetry of Niyi Osundare, and the Ewenian melody of Kofi Awoonor are case-vapours of the fertility in the African literary forests. It is certain that the twenty-first-century African written literature will develop towards greater orality.

And now we are back to the postcolonial negotiation discourse. The aim of the negotiation must be for total emancipation of the Third World. The March 1995 United Nations Social Summit's historic War on Poverty plan is clearly in this realm. The Copenhagen[8] declaration for an end to poverty and social injustice in the world is definitely feasible for Africa. African diasporic intelligentsia must, however, not leave the struggle to African politicians alone. Decades of experience have shown that the only game African politicians have perfected is corruption. Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful* [sic] *Ones Are Not Yet Born* is still the correct metaphor for African politicians, military or civilian. Achebe's *Anthills of the Savanna* clearly shows that nothing has changed in Nigeria (and Africa) since his *A Man of the People*. Military dictatorship still strives; coup and counter-coup are still the order of the day. The post-Cold War syndrome has

8 The UN Social Summit (1995) was held in Copenhagen, Denmark. The conference Chairman, Juan Somavia, declared that developing countries are home to the world's 1.3 billion poor (NAIJANEWS, 10 March 1995).

further pushed Third World nations into the background. Hunger, depression, and parasitism that Sembene Ousmane depicts in his *God's Bits of Wood* and *The Money Order*, are worsening among the African poor from coast to coast, desert to desert. The twenty-first century can bring the rain of life, energy and happiness to wretched Africans.

AFRICAN ORAL LITERATURE AND POSTCOLONIALITY

Modern writers have failed in their struggle to make an extensive impact on Africa because of their complete negligence of oral artists. Anyidoho laments the lack of consideration of what he calls "the world of the earwitness" (12) in modern studies in African literature. He emphasizes that "our writers are the minority representatives of African poetic potential," (13) and that "this domain of the earwitness [oral art] is the dominant poetic world of Africa" (13).

My preoccupation this time is not even in oral literature research. Since Anyindoho's paper, great strides have been made in oral literature scholarship and research within and without African academia. More books have been published on oral literature. Journals on African literature, national and international, have devoted several special editions to scholarship on African oral literature. The real problem lies in modern African writers' misconception of a contemporary artist. Most of them condemn oral art to the periphery. They see themselves as intellectuals and qualify oral artists as stark illiterates, lacking the awareness of modern literary polemics. They perceive oral literature as belonging to the past. Many African writers always impose on the word "tradition" connotations of archaism. This situation is very dangerous to the African writer's struggle for emancipation of the African continent.

Oral artists are intellectuals in their own right. They may not occupy formal academic positions in schools and universities, but that is a pitfall of Western education and colonialism. Oral artists have greater calling in the larger world of Africa and are professors of culture. Ong rightly recognizes the measure of their literary production and delivery and describes their experience as intellectual (36). Oral artists are highly current. They are polydisciplinarians: religion and culture, politics, economics, history, etc. They know their communities inside out. Anyidoho describes the oral artist in the practice of his profession: "A great deal of the vitality of oral literature in performances is due to its ability to update the past, to make the past alive and relevant to the present, and to its ability to project the present into the future" (5).

African writers need to involve oral artists in the enlightenment and mobilization of the African people. There is a necessity for a pact between the "earwitness" and the "eyewitness" for society to move forward. There should be an association of African artists in all African towns and cities, which should eventually spread to the villages and hamlets. The African Literature Association, the African Studies Association, and all other international intellectual bodies should

establish contact with traditional oral artists and start useful exchanges. The result of this practical exploration of literature and oral artists would be magnificent. Such cooperation will benefit professional African oral artists and they would provide a better understanding of the effects of postcolonialism on art. The greatest enemy of oral literature, mostly in African urban areas, is Western influence. Luckily, unlike the new societal bourgeoisie, the villages and hamlets are free of this craze for Western taste. It is a wave that will destroy African society if it is not arrested.

I shall draw my examples for this process from *Dadakuada,* a traditional oral genre in Ilorin, capital city of Kwara State, Nigeria. Ilorin was founded in the early seventeenth century. Many immigrants — Yoruba, Hausa, Nupe, Fulani, Gobir, Baruba, Kemberi, and Beriberi — later settled in Ilorin. It thus became a multilingual, multicultural community. Islam eventually gained the upper hand and the community now has a very strong Islamic presence. There are numerous Arabic and Islamic educational and cultural institutions with an Emir, the traditional head, regarded as the custodian of Islamic values. There are many Ilorin indigenes who have spent several years in Arab cities and countries, especially in Cairo, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Iran.[9] The foreign-educated are mostly teachers and Islamic preachers. Ilorin is also highly Westernized; as the capital city of Kwara State since 1967, it has witnessed tremendous developments in infra- and suprastructures: Western schools (which far outnumber the Islamic schools), the governor's house, ministry headquarters, government board and council headquarters, a few industries, companies (local and international), and private businesses. It also houses military and police schools and bases. It has an international airport and a federal government university. Apart from the traditional and Islamic leaders, it has some strong Western trained bourgeois lords. Very many of them are state and national politicians. A few of the rich lords are, however, illiterate in their own languages let alone in a Western language. There are a few as well who cannot function in English but are literate in Arabic. The very few people who speak French are not bourgeois, they are teachers and civil servants. Most of the Ilorin population, which is around three million, are peasant farmers. Some are traditional cloth weavers, pot makers, professional drivers, and civil servants.

The Dadakuada poets are professional oral artists. They also farm on a subsistence basis to feed themselves and their families. They are at the lowest level of the social ladder; however, some of them, as public singers, do accumulate wealth. They perform for anybody, sometimes even without invitation, mostly in the afternoons and early evenings.

9 We have three sets of intellectuals in Ilorin: Western educated, mainly Arabic/Islamic educated, and a mixture of Arabic and Western educated. They all form the educated elite class.

As a traditional genre which took root in an *Egungun* cultic performance, *Dadakuada*'s basic musical tools were *gangan* drums. Today, two new drum tools, *Pakeke* and *Akuba*, have been added to *Dadakuada* performance, all of Hausa origin, the most widely spoken language in Nigeria. Some Hausa/Fulani who migrated to Ilorin, first in the mid-eighteenth century and again in the nineteenth century, eventually converted most of the Ilorin people to Islam. They actually inaugurated the first ruling dynasty in Ilorin. To date, the traditional leader of Ilorin, the Emir, is Hausa/Fulani. It is therefore significant that the first impact on *Dadakuada* came from Hausa.[10] A postcolonial threat to *Dadakuada* was also Western technology. Microphones and loudspeakers were first introduced in 1957 by poet Omoekee Amao to modernize the performance, and they were eventually adopted by many others in urban Ilorin around 1964. Amao said when he first used the equipment, many of his fans stopped coming to hear him. It soon circulated within the community that he was bastardizing *Dadakuada* with a *dòn gbùrù*, an oversize thing. It took seven years for other poets and the community to accept this "innovation." And even today the use of a microphone is limited to urban Ilorin poets, who obviously lay greater claim to "civilization."

Many poets in the town sing more for the bourgeoisie and the feudal lords than for the peasants. These poets need to compete in the sophisticated social life of the urban town and need heavy capital to survive. They submit to bourgeois dictates in exchange for money. Almost every member of the dominant group has a poet identified as his/her singer. For example, Ajibaye was the singer to the late Emir of Ilorin, Zulu Gambari. Some bourgeois even import Western gadgets from abroad for the poets to force them to abandon traditional tools. Jaibade Alao, *Oba olorin*, king of Ilorin poets, identifies one Ilorin millionaire, Saaro Aminu, as having imported some instruments for him:

Saaro omo Aminu ni'le Olokonla
Olowo n lanla, owo to tobi!
Olowo to ko se n kan to tobi fun mi
Ayinla to lo Londonu to ra irinse mi bo wa'le bansikan
Ayinla owo re loo 'lu Oba
Ayinla 'gun omo Jaji n sale aluko.

Saaro, the offspring of Aminu in the Olokonla household
The highly rich, a great wealth indeed!
The rich who first (among others) offered me a great thing
Ayinla who went to London, bought home instruments in bulk for me
Ayinla, your money goes to the Queen's land!
Ayinla'gun, the child of Jaji in Isale-Aluko.[11]

10 For the History of Ilorin and a deeper discussion on the *Dadakuada* oral genre see Na'Allah 1988 and 1992.

11 Jaigbade Alao, "Kole ba wa lo gigi" Chief Records, LPCRL 001A, 1987. I have also attended a field performance where Jaigbade performed Saro's song, which I recorded (15 September 1987). All the *Dadakuada* songs I discuss here were originally rendered in Yoruba. All trans-

This extremely rich man could have bought the same Western implements in Nigeria; after all, the country has become a dumping ground for all such petty Western gadgets. This pattern renders Africans redundant at work and make people impotent even in usual traditional performances such as oral singing. Aminu would rather go to London to buy the items to fully prove his taste and to show that he has London connections. The bourgeoisie in Africa are always at haste to project neocolonial links. It is a special pride for them. Even when a rich African does not attend Western schools and cannot speak the colonial language, English for instance, he adopts the bourgeois form of the indigenous language. He frequently peppers his speech with English words he has memorized. He imports his shoes and his laces. He almost imports the air he breathes! The postcolonial bourgeoisie in Africa is behaving according to Dolgov's contention that the bourgeoisie and the ruling class will always do all they can to make it difficult for the working people, the peasants, to gain access to cultural values. They "make them [the poor] captives of false ideas and concepts" (9). Colonial lords adopted the same technics to program their victims to perpetual dependency.

The *Dadakuada* oral singers also employ some English words in their performances. Examine the following song rendered during a particular performance that I personally recorded. It was a launching ceremony of a local elitist association:[12]

Alabi: Omoluabi a won okunrin,
Fine, *fine* gbajuma ti n wu yan.
E ba n pe won o o, awon oko mi gbogbo
How now?

Boto: *Carry on my dear*!

Alabi: Decent gentlemen,
Fine, fine, the famous people after my hearts.
Please, beseech them for me, they're all my husbands.
How now?

Boto: Carry on my dear! (Performance Idiape, Ilorin, 20 July 1991)

There is no doubt that they have used English to please the elitist group they are performing for. None of the members of the group can converse in English. They

lations into English are mine. The poet can neither read nor write in Roman script; even in Arabic, he performs only what he has memorized as a practicing Muslim. All the songs cited here have been used in Na'Allah 1991.

12 The English words are emphasized.

are local business men whom we describe as "local heroes" because they have attained a nouveau riche status. The poets thus used English here in acknowledgement of the petty bourgeois status of their patrons.

Another artist, Odolaye Aremu, in another instance sings the following:

Sani-aba, omo durowoju,
The masita, our masita,
Fura oo, ifura lagba ogun

Sani-aba, the offspring of Durowoju
The master, our master.
Keep vigilant, vigilance is the greatest medicine. (Field Performance Abayawo, Ilorin, 9 August 1987)

Here, Aremu is praising one Sani Aba, a bourgeois. He describes him as "the masita, our masita." We realize that in the original song, the poet's indigenous linguistic reality affects his pronunciation of the English word *master*. Yoruba, his native language, does not allow for a consonant cluster: there is always a vowel after every consonant. So, *master* which has /s/ and /t/ clustering is declustered through the insertion of the vowel /i/ between them. Even his pronunciation of "our" — /auɔ̂/ sounds more like /awa/. What is important in this code-switching situation is that the oral poet's adoption of English in this song is to satisfy the tastes of his postcolonial bourgeois patron.

My last example is a song performed for a feudal ruler of an Ilorin ward, the present *Balogun Gambari*, Laaro Balogun. The poet, Odolaye Aremu, declares:

Jeki won o gan o oo
Iran baba n la baba ti won ni n gan ni
Awon a benu yagua yagua bi ese sokoto
Awon a bi namba n waju bi oko ti n r'onisa
Awon abi furo janjan bi a n soda Ilumata.

Let them talk ill of you,
It is the lineage of their great-grand fathers that speaks ill of people:
Those ones with wide mouths like the legs of trousers
Those ones with bold marks on their fore-heads like the lorry that heads for Onicha
Those ones with big bottoms like the cross of Ilumata.

The oral poet uses many similes here to condemn his patron's "imaginary enemies." This kind of song definitely abuses the privilege of a poet whose primary duty has always been to speak for the community. That Laaro Balogun is a feudal lord in Ilorin is beyond contention. He is, in this capitalist setup, likely to step on the toes of the poor whom he rules. The poor masses are also bound to complain about him and sometime even condemn him publicly. The

poet who should show solidarity with the poor masses, implies that such people do not even have a right to complain. This is what is becoming of the duty of a traditional oral poet in the face of bourgeois aesthetics. These same poets' major preoccupation in ancient times (precolonial Africa), according to Dolgov, was with the welfare of people (14). These are the same African poets who, Amuta says, "as [men] of culture devote their art and lives to the pursuit of justice and freedom." (177)

There is no doubt that many issues confront African literatures today. I must restate, however, that there is a need for the African intellectuals, the writers, the oral artists and the entire peoples of Africa to approach the twenty-first century with renewed vigor and hope. It is clear that joint efforts of creative minds in and outside Africa can reduce such impediments like the bourgeois aesthetic influence on oral artists. Modern African writers should also stop their neglect of traditional oral performers. It is with fingers, together, that we beat the chest. Strength, according to this adage, lies in a collective struggle.

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