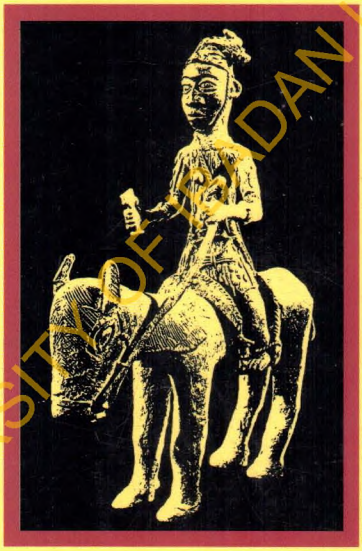
RETHINKING
AFRICAN ARTS
AND
CULTURE



Edited by

DELE LAYIWOLA

The Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society (CASAS)

CASAS BOOK SERIES NO 4

RETHINKING AFRICAN ARTS AND CULTURE

Edited by

DELE LAYIWOLA

Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society
CASAS Book Series 4

Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society
P.O. Box 352
7800 Plumstead
Cape Town
South Africa

First published 2000

ISBN 1-919799-35-4

Typesetting by Sue Sandrock Design
Printed and bound by Creda Communications

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS vii
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS viii

INTRODUCTION 1
Dele Layiwola

PART ONE: THE SEARCH FOR THEORY

1. The 'Otherness' Syndrome and the Study of African Visual Art 5
Cornelius O. Adepegba

2. Beyond 'Protest': New Directions in South African Literature 23
Njabulo Ndebele

3. African Studies and the African Identity: An Essay on the Theory of Culture 37
Dele Layiwola

PART TWO: METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

4. Recording and Dissemination of Traditional Music 55
J.H. Kwabena Nketia

5. The Fired Image: Literary Beginnings from Cultural Ends 69
Dan Izevbaye

6. Africana Choreo-Musical Productions Methodology and Critical Approaches 85
Esi Kinni-Olusanyin

PART THREE: OF HISTORY AND PEDAGOGY

7. Literature and the African Public 101
Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin

8. African Literature 113
and the Crises of Post-Structuralist Theorising
Niyi Osundare

9. Yoruba Tragic Drama: 129
A Note on the Origins of Nigerian Theatre
Dele Layiwola

10. African Theatre: 137
The Issue of an Historical Approach
Joel Adedeji

CONSOLIDATED BIBLIOGRAPHY 147

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the co-operation of the French Institute (Ibadan) in the production of this work. Special thanks go to Grace Naidoo, Silindiwe Sibanda, Jo Sandrock and Sue Sandrock for the work they have variously put in towards the realisation of this book.

Other acknowledgements have been included in the Introduction.

Professor K.K. Prah
Director of CASAS

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Joel Adedeji was formerly a Professor and the Head of the Theatre Arts Department and the Director of the School of Drama at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria. His works on the Traditional Travelling Theatres of the Yoruba have remained authoritative references on the subject.

Cornelius Adepegba is a Professor of Art History and Director of African Studies at Ibadan University in Nigeria. He was recently the curator of an exhibition of African sculpture for the Trout Gallery in Carlisle. He has authored numerous books on this subject and is easily one of the foremost scholars on African Art History.

Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin is Ethiopia's foremost dramatist and was Director of the National Theatre of Ethiopia for many years.

Dan Izevbaye is Professor of English and former Chair, later Provost of School, at Ibadan. He has been in the front line of African literary criticism for more than two decades.

The late ***Esi Kinni-Olusanyin*** was Senior Lecturer in Theatre Studies at Ibadan University in Nigeria. She was previously known and published as Sylvia Kinney, and had numerous publications to her credit on the subject of music and ritual performances in West Africa.

Dele Layiwola is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, where he teaches Theatre Studies and Dance Research. He was a visiting scholar at the University of Ulster in Coleraine, Northern Ireland.

Njabulo Ndebele, writer, university lecturer and administrator, was Vice-Rector at the University of the Western Cape, and Vice-Chancellor at the University of the North, both in South Africa. He has recently been appointed Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town. He won the Noma Book Award for his collection of short stories, *Fools and Other Stories*, in 1984.

J.H. Kwabena Nketia is Professor and Director of the International Centre for African Music and Dance situated at the University of Legon, Ghana. Professor Nketia, eminent scholar and teacher, is Africa's leading ethnomusicologist and has published widely on the subject.

Niyi Osundare, poet and critic, held the Chair of English at Ibadan. He won the Noma Book award for poetry in 1990 and was a Fulbright Scholar at Madison in 1991 and 1992.

PART ONE

The Search for Theory

INTRODUCTION

Dele Layiwola

The issue of theory and approach is almost always parallel with such concepts as tradition, canon and history. This seems to be the reason for its having assumed such fundamental dimensions in intellectual and cultural study. Because it is so basic to the understanding of social and political rubric, scholars often find it as exciting and liberating as it is contentious and vexing. But fundamental assumptions are not often as objective as they would appear to be, and can be overly tendentious even when this is not what the researcher intends. Whilst, for instance, Claude Lévi-Strauss began his monumental work on the structural study of societies, he probably did not envisage that he was establishing the basis of structuralism in language, literature and philosophy. Profound as his works could be, they are not free of assumptions or tendencies which he could not have seen himself because he observed those societies from the standpoint of an outsider. At times, beliefs and notions – mere suppositions – then turned themselves into gospel truths and facts though he did not mean them to be so.

Secondly, theory and methodology can be curiously tied to matters of identity as much as the understanding of a particular tongue holds the key to the philosophy and culture of its society. We are hard put to see language as a structure or scaffolding on to which communication and communal exchanges are hung or after which they are patterned. It is therefore understandable why certain complex issues are predicated on linguistic motifs, particularly in those societies where language is tonal and inflexional and oscillates between metaphoric and metonymic usage. Within such groups of language communities, a particular word, depending on its musical variance, could relate to three or four sense paradigms. It is not unusual to find that certain African societies with complex linguistic formations often possess complex political and urban structures to go along with them. Ideologues may wish to argue conversely that it is the complex political structures which actually gave rise to such complex linguistic adaptations, but it should be

easy to insist otherwise given that the development of language predates political institutions.

Dated as Gabre-Medhin's paper might appear – it was originally presented to a writers' conference in 1970 – some of these insights in linguistic or expressional identity often recur on what the role of literature should be between the writer-elite and his or her rearguard public. This is subtly reinforced in Dan Izevbaye's exploratory article on the same subject looked at in the light of new linguistic and stylistic impositions of colonialism and cultural hegemony. The counterbalancing of a *modus vivendi* between an artist and an historian is examined in both Joel Adedeji's piece and that of Izevbaye. Adedeji takes particular care to elucidate what might be the problems of method in pre-literate societies. This would seem to re-echo in Adepegba's paper on art history as he highlights the dangers of fieldwork and field methods, the role of informants, and the latent prejudices of a participant or a passive observer. But the distinction between points of reference and method of definition is the forte of Adepegba's analysis. He illuminates his work with his own experience both as an art historian and as a curator. The subtle distinction between art history and anthropology will continue to be a bone of contention in these matters.

The area of ethno-musicology and dance, with all its elusive attributes, is tackled from the perspectives of both practice and theory in Kwabena Nketia's and Kinni-Olusanyin's papers. Kinni-Olusanyin's article is nuanced by a certain polyphony that derives from her having been an African-American who felt at home within the mystic depths of African religious productions. She held recitals and divination sessions with traditionalists, with audiences in attendance, and travelled around to every village festival. This basic approach by a researcher who felt earthed in the performance medium gives her analysis its often arcane overtones and immediacy. Kwabena Nketia, a dark horse in the study of African music and dance, is well known for his telescopic understanding of issues in the documentation and teaching of that subject.

If Osundare's study anticipates the need for a more expansive, broadly based reconstruction of Western theories, Ndebele initiates a new direction in which theory would establish a post-apartheid society where theories would dwell on the idea of the Other, thus conceptually leading apartheid or other forms of oppression into desuetude. This, in the end, becomes a psycho-affective means of purging society of its inertia, even rage, once an evil system is defeated and dismantled. Ndebele's is the bedrock of praxis in a new cultural and political context.

My own papers in the collection have focused on the need for consistency within tradition and canons drawing on the origins of a theatre tradition in an African society; and discussing comparative issues in identity and cultural studies. Apart from the fact that African literatures are often expressed in foreign – albeit more cosmopolitan – tongues, in a parallel manner museums in the metropoles now regale and celebrate themselves through the medium of African plastic arts and crafts. There is an obvious sense in which transmigration through varying spatial media cause a loss or bastardisation of identity. A skewed application of less than home-grown theories to Africanist writings and art as lamented by Adepegba and Osundare, or their lack of documentation in the context of their own cultures as implied by Nketia, creates a monumental problem for contemporary scholarship in this field. This applies even more so for posterity in Africa and in newly cultivated lands where those works are presently domiciled or exiled. Those communal artefacts, communally authored, have often been bastardised and referenced as 'tribal art'. The sacrilege done to their memory is enough in chloroformed plexiglas cases of museums and art repositories; their immortality only truly lies in the life-filled arena of dances and festivals. Even greater attacks are made upon their dignity by turning them away from their initial functions into commercialised objects and mementoes. It is hoped that these `curious' works with which Africa spreads itself into new worlds in far away places will eventually, like a new-age computer, serve to explain the impact of the art of a continent on modern civilisation and productivity.

A certain basic misunderstanding, occasionally deliberate misrepresentation, of African literature and art abounds. It is even more dangerous when such postulations, bereft of truth and light, assume the cloak of theories and canons. The dangers they pose to the future of scholarship in Africanist-derived studies are better imagined than described. It is hoped that this modest effort will complement the work of others across the globe to place the creativity of and about a continent and its diverse – multi-ethnic and multi-racial – cultures in true perspective.

The division into the three parts as exemplified here is not meant to be a surgically precise one since knowledge, facts and analyses often dovetail across experiences, disciplines, backgrounds and perspectives. This shows from the sketchy discussion of some of the basic ideas in this collection. The medium is an expansive, elastic mesh and there are bound to be ripples across it most of the time. Certainly, the last word is far from being uttered on the matters discussed in these papers; this is just the beginning. I am confident

that many other colleagues and friends who could have contributed to this volume, and who have demonstrated genuine enthusiasm, will find appropriate space in a future edition if and whenever the need arises.

In editing and compiling this book, I have fallen into the debt, not only of all the contributors who enthusiastically gave me their manuscripts with words of encouragement; I am also in the debt of several institutions. The Nordic Africa Institute, for instance, granted me permission to reprint Njabulo Ndebele's paper; and the Danish International Development Agency gave me licence to reprint Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin's seminal paper. I am grateful, also, to Professor Mosunmola Omibiyi-Obidike for conveying Professor Nketia's paper from Legon. I must not forget to mention the helpful comments of Professor Mohammed Bamyeh of New York University. In like manner, immense thanks are due to Dr Yann Lebeau, Director of the French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA) at Ibadan, and to Professor Kwesi Prah, Director of the Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society in Cape Town, who both ably facilitated the process of publication. My unending gratitude is due also to all other sisters and brothers involved in the various stages of this project, including those great friends who are too modest to allow me to pay tribute to them.

1 THE 'OTHERNESS' SYNDROME AND THE STUDY OF AFRICAN VISUAL ART

Cornelius O. Adepegba

As in the arts of other erstwhile non-literate societies, academic interest in African art is not left only to traditional art scholars: anthropologists and culture-related social scientists (ethnographers and sociologists as well as specialists in African traditional religions), foreign visitors and sojourners in the societies of origin of some of the art objects are specialists or accorded recognition as experts in the study of the art. The publications on the art, mostly catalogues of exhibitions and holdings of collections, sometimes owner-sponsored and publicity-orientated, are found on the shelves of bookstores throughout the Western world. However, differing in their interests and traditional focuses as the various disciplines associated with the art are, their approaches to it as a field of knowledge are neither individually defined nor different from one another. Nor do any of the disciplines seem satisfied with how the study of the art has so far been developed. The traditional focuses of anthropology and art history – the two disciplines most associated with the subject – are not the same. While anthropology focuses on culture and sees art objects as illustrations of its symbolic and extra-aesthetic aspects, art history focuses on art forms which it may or may not care to see in the light of other aspects of culture, and neither of the two disciplines has adhered strictly to its traditional methodology in its study of the art.

No consensual theoretical approach exists for the anthropological study of the arts of non-Western and non-Asiatic societies to which anthropological interest in art is limited. The anthropological study of the arts is only inspired by this, but not in the mainstream of anthropology; it is only marginal to the mainstream, and the relationship between it and the rest of anthropology is asymmetrical (Coote and Shelton 1992). Whether anthropology should be

studying art or not is even a bone of contention among anthropologists, the unscientific nature of art having been considered discordant with that discipline's scientific bent by some social anthropologists. As William Fagg observes,

> Many social anthropologists have tried so hard to make an exact science out of what must always remain at bottom a humanity ... that they have been led into a materialistic approach which in effect excludes the more spiritual aspects of culture, such as art, from their field of study. For whatever reason, the modern school of social anthropology in Great Britain, justly famous though it is for its extensive field-work, has almost uniformly ignored art. (Fagg *et al.* 1982:7)

It was just such a controversy that prompted a series of seminars to be published as an up-to-date anthropological account and assessment of anthropology in the study of the arts (Coote and Shelton 1992).

In the study of African art, the focus of art history, the Western traditional discipline of art, is yet to be identified. Initially, there was a divide between its classic approach of looking at art objects only from their immanent or formal qualities and those of anthropology and related humanistic social sciences which place a premium on cultural contexts. The earliest and the only two publications on African art before 1930, Einstein, *Negerplastik* (1915), and Guillaume and Monroe, *Primitive Negro Sculpture* (1926), inspired by the artistic recognition of the sculptural objects of Africa and other non-European non-literate societies by the European avant-garde artists of the first decade of this century, focused only on the formal attributes of the art objects. The culture-related social sciences, on the other hand, following the findings from the field investigations of Griaule and his students in the 1930s, served as the bases for subsequent advocacy of emphases on the cultural significance of the art objects. It is not unusual to see the art-historical and anthropological study of the arts of non-Western and non-Asiatic societies as two extremes in the study of art. Fagg, a foremost anthropologist in the study of African art in the late 1950s, regarded verbal comments on the forms or immanent qualities of African sculptures as 'irrelevant verbiage'; he therefore preferred only to provide his readers with photographs of the objects instead of discussing their formal qualities, thereby leaving the formal appreciation of the objects to his readers' individual perceptibilities (1958).

As recently as the 1980s some scholars still continued to castigate studies that failed to see African art objects from their cultural significance as art-historical. 'It is therefore a strange fact that many writers and art historians when they come to "primitive art" imagine that it is possible to appreciate it without any knowledge of the social background and the world of ideas which [it] reflects[s]', commented Robert Brain (1980). The art-historical concern with form and spatio-temporal provenance, and the anthropological concern with socio-cultural context, are often seen as poles between which researchers oscillate as they try to understand art (Coote and Shelton 1992).

But the dichotomy between the approaches of social sciences and art history in their study of African art has not remained unchanged. With continuous advocacy, the anthropological cultural context approach became noticeably popular among most disciplines interested in the study, and by the early 1970s Willett had observed that differences were hard to see between the works of the anthropologists and of the art historians studying African art (1971:42). The influence of the cultural context approach on art history has even spread to the study of European art and the pervading spread of this approach to the study of art has generated position-taking discussions among philosophers. Monroe (1982) and Margolis (1980), separately disapproving the cultural context approach, have pleaded that there should be a difference between art and its embodiment or cultural ambience. The rightness or wrongness of their entreaties, however, is not the issue here; their pleas are only to show how well known the spread of the approach from anthropology to art history has been: cardinal before passing judgements or making any suggestions is the proponents' justification for the approach *vis-à-vis* their successes and failures in its use.

The approach is often referred to as anthropological but the words, 'holistic', 'interdisciplinary' or 'multidisciplinary' have become its other epithets. Initially in the study of African art, the cultural context approach appeared reactionary, aimed only to correct the earlier notion that the art objects could be viewed purely as art in the same way as Modern Western art, on the back of which it rode to recognition, is usually seen. The tone of the advocacy of the approach by culture-related social scientists studying the art is mostly jubilant, somehow suggestive of a feeling of a welcome comeback of the art to its original custodians, the social science institutions which had preserved the objects for centuries before they were recognised as art.

Although the extolling of this approach suggests the persistence of the need to correct the early notion of the objects as *l'art pour l'art*, the epithets,

'holistic', 'interdisciplinary' and 'multidisciplinary' imply that the approach is aimed at seeing the objects in their totality *as* objects; to show at least how they are seen not only as art but also from other angles within their cultures of origin. The goal is most desirable, but the implication of the approach advocated is that all the values of an object are to be seen only in the light of its culture of origin. African art specialists, led by the strong advocacy of the cultural significance approach, have even ventured into querying the terms of aesthetic appraisal of some individual societies. Sample responses to their traditional art forms were taken from members of such societies to systematise their terms of aesthetic appraisal (Thompson 1973).

But all the values of an art object, especially its aesthetic values, cannot be confined to the object's culture of origin, and neither is every member of the producer or user society born with artistic perceptibility. Hardly, therefore, can aesthetic valuations in a given society be reduced to strict communal codes. Art objects of a particular period or society may display common features by which they are identified as belonging to their era or society; this does not mean that only the people of the era or society can perceive those features by which the objects are identified either as art or as belonging to their time or society. If the artistic perception of African sculptures were culture-bound, the European avant-garde artists of the early decades of this century would not have been able to see and popularise their artistic values. Thus the methodology as advocated is certainly circumscriptive of the researcher's aesthetic perceptibility of the objects.

The anthropologists with whom the approach is commonly associated do not claim to be interested in the artistic aspects of the objects in their study: the goal of the anthropological study of art is obviously not to study cultures of origin to understand art, but to study art to further understand its culture of origin. This is reflected in the usual justification for anthropological involvement in art – that art objects can at least throw light on their cultures of origin – often adduced by interested anthropologists to fellow anthropologists who are not interested, and are opposed to art being part of their discipline. 'And yet as the researches of Griaule and his collaborators have shown, successful studies of tribal art may throw more light on tribal life and society than anything else', says Fagg, pleading with the British social anthropologists not to ignore art (Fagg *et al.* 1982). The art historians studying the art, who are supposed to focus on the artistic aspects of the objects have been either cowed or carried away by the persistence and vociferous advocacy of the anthropological or social sciences approach. They

forget that what is done in the anthropological study of art is nothing special that art historians or scholars from other disciplines cannot easily do or follow – at best, a descriptive or narrative analysis of culture which mainly involves human activities which are easier to narrate or describe than artistic forms which in African art are mostly abstract, normally perceptible, yet hard to put into words.

In fact, the two disciplines, anthropology and art history, do not appear to truly understand each other's methodology. Art historians know next to nothing about mainstream methodology of anthropology, while anthropologists only know that art historians emphasise forms; they forget that art history is not totally opposed to the use of culture to explain forms. What else could have explained the adoption of easel paintings in seventeenth-century Holland better than the republican and Calvinistic backgrounds to which the paintings belonged, and why would the study of European culture still be emphasised in the study of European art today when European culture has been well documented and is well known to the European audience of the European art historians?

ACHIEVEMENTS, LIMITATIONS AND SHORTCOMINGS

The most notable achievement of the methodology in the study of African art is the unrelenting emphasis on field investigation of individual cultures. Although Leo Frobenius had carried out field research in Africa at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, his investigation was not limited to individual cultures as has been the case after the achievements of Griaule and his followers. Individual art-producing peoples of sub-Saharan Africa are individually focused on as research areas, and researchers' field investigations have resulted in dissertations and publications which provide valuable information on the individual ethnic groups as well as on their arts. Such materials are useful as a comprehensive data bank for the general study of the art of the entire sub-Saharan region. The study of African art has been established in many institutions, especially in Europe and America; journals specifically devoted to the study have been established and scholars have bound themselves together as disciplinary bodies to promote the subject further through publications as well as in the organisation of conferences and seminars.

The cultural significance approach is, however, not without its limitations. 'Those who accept sociology as simply one means towards more perfect knowledge have no reason to minimise either its undeniable limitations of a

sociology of art', says Hauser about the corresponding cultural context approach for Western art (1985:17). The same applies to scholars whose interests are in the arts of non-Western societies, and the most obvious of the limitations is how to codify the information gathered by scholars in dealing with their subject. How do they suppress and balance their individual disciplinary interests with those of others? Seeing all the sides of the object, therefore, cannot but present some difficulties, hence there are some noticeable problems and weak points, regardless of the disciplines involved in the study of the art.

Both anthropologists and art historians have problems in the relationship between field information and theories: theories are mostly taken as the starting points from which information seems to be doctored. Fagg, speaking on the state of African art studies in the early 1980s, observed that the studies were overloaded with speculative theories largely unsupported by evidence. According to him, 'all of us will be better employed clearing away the premature syntheses than erecting new ones' and such 'demolition is not of course the end in itself but a preliminary to the reinstatement of a truly inductive method of study' in which 'theories will be formed directly from objects and facts and not imposed on them' (Fagg *et al.* 1980). A leading figure in African art history, Roy Sieber, suspecting the relationship between field information and theories, also has this to say, 'I am suspicious of field studies that attempt to prove (or disprove) theories' (1986:76-77). Other lapses that he observed in the art-historical study of the art are in the study of forms, specifically style studies, with an emphasis on change over time – history, morphological studies relating again to history and 'iconography, the penetrating study of symbols'. These are very pertinent as African sculptural objects are said to be art, regardless of the disciplines studying them, and what determines whether any object is art or an artefact is its form, which in African art has not been given serious attention.

Anthropologists are just not interested in it; the socio-cultural contexts rather than the stylistic or formal aspects of the art objects are their main concern, and their discipline has to date focused only on the functions and symbolic meanings of the art objects rather than on the objects' essential powers as artistic objects (Coote and Shelton 1992). Art historians, who by their traditional concern are supposed to focus on forms, are in their own case faced with the problem of the nature of forms in the arts. Their forms, mostly schematised, are non-narrative, non-descriptive or non-representative of activities and events as in Western art. As Vogel rightly observed,

> in the context of Western art history, a striking feature of African art is that it is not normally narrative, does not depict movement or groups of figures interacting, and is not pictorial; it does not seek to create any illusion of motion, of perspective or verisimilitude. If an artist wants hair on his figure or mask that exactly resembles hair, he will not hesitate to attach some of the real thing. If movement was wanted, the mask or figure could be worn or carried in dance. (Thompson and Vogel 1990:80)

In their different poses, African images are typological with little or no change over times. In sub-Saharan African sculpture, only Benin metal art tradition shows stylistic change over time and these works, too, are typological according to their periods. The same thing is true of Ife heads and figures which can be said to be most naturalistic. In places where African images are depicted engaged in specific activities such as in an Esie stone image depicted eating, they are made after their types and are very rigid in form.

Up to the 1980s, stylistic studies of African art were done according to their ethnic origins and types of objects, the only exception being the stylistic periodisation of Benin art just mentioned. But from the mid-1980s, efforts have been made to discuss the form of individual objects, particularly in catalogues of exhibitions or collections. Although such remarks about form were limited to 'praiseful descriptions' (ibid.:7), and not addressed to historical questions, they are nevertheless useful in focusing readers' attention on the peculiarity of forms in individual pieces and go a long way to promote the artistic appreciation of the objects.

Historical study of African sculpture can hardly be said to have begun. Although efforts have been made to have historical overviews of the arts of some ethnic groups such as the Akan in Ghana and the Yoruba in Nigeria, up to 1984 only two attempts were made at looking at a general history of African art. In that year, two publications appeared: Jan Vansina's *Art History in Africa* which examines the problem of how the history of the art of the continent should be written, highlighting the areas to be included as well as sources and uses of data, and Werner Gillon's *A Short History of African Art*, the first attempt to write the history of the art of the continent.

Since then the only other attempt was the catalogue of an exhibition of the African sculpture in the collection of the Trout Gallery of Dickinson College, Carlisle in Pennsylvania, of which I was the curator, in late 1994

(Adepegba 1994a). But none of these can be said to be a definitive general historical study of the art. While Vansina only focuses on how to write the history, Gillon, whose book is the actual history, succumbed to the traditional way of studying the art according to its geographical spread and, as such, is not chronological. Mine, which is somewhat chronological, is based on the very few societies represented in the collection, and is still to be tested with material from many more societies. The fact that there are only three attempts made so far among the numerous publications on African art is a clear indication of the lack of interest in, and indifference to, the history of the art by scholars.

Generally, the study of the objects as art is yet to be realised and a close examination of the excuses often given for the way it has been studied shows that the art has not been considered as 'artistic' as Western art. 'Even so there are many Western people, even those who have no racial prejudices, for whom African art remains marginal. To them the very idea of comparing a fetish with an Apollo or a medieval Virgin or even an Egyptian god or a Buddha, is repugnant', observe Leiris and Fry (1986:33). If the objects were ever seen as art, they were art of a different rating and there has always been an undercurrent of feeling about the 'otherness' to which all or most of the lapses in its study can be traced.

Certainly, it is to Europe that credit should go for the collection, preservation and the bulk of the eventual study of the objects, especially as many of the societies to which the objects originally belonged were not in the habit of preserving them for an indefinite future, and, indeed, the climate, as well as other factors, does not favour their doing so. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that the sculptural objects being studied as art had been in Europe, locked up in private homes or stores of ethnographic collections for centuries before they were recognised as art. In the early seventeenth century, when the first African sculpture ever to be documented in a museum collection was entered into the record of the Wieckmann Collection of the Ulm museum in Germany, naturalism reigned supreme in the artistic judgement of Europe and nobody could see any artistic quality in the commonly abstracted African sculptures. This was true even up to the nineteenth century when items of Benin art, which are among the most naturalistic and now most highly prized of African sculpture, were taken to Europe.

To regard such objects as art was inconceivable as up to the early twentieth century naturalism was the hallmark of art in Europe. Hence the works of the European avant garde artists of the first decade of the twentieth

century, whose activities eventually led to the recognition of the sculptures as art – similarly abstracted – were not accepted as art without reluctance in their own society. Therefore, what the cultural context approach has been saying all along is that if the objects are art – which certainly they are – they are not as 'artistic' as Western art.

Any available information regarding the cultural background of the sculptural objects that can help to sustain this outlook is usually given prominence, while common sense is sometimes ignored in the interpretation of the object. The most frequently referred to of such cultural phenomena is the functional role of the objects within their cultures, always portrayed as absent in Western art. As invariably emphasised, there is no 'art for art's sake' in Africa. But is 'art for art's sake' truly absent in all types and periods of Western art? What about architecture, a major Western art form, which, regardless of period, is basically functional? If what makes an object art is the freedom of its form from practical functions, how appropriate is it to use what basically negates the 'artness' of any art forms to interpret African art objects as art? Functions and meanings are often interwoven in interpreting art and, understandably, African sculptural pieces, mostly religious symbols, have religious meanings in addition to their practical functions, in the same way as Christian icons do. But are forms similarly ignored in art historical study of Christian icons? Truly African sculptures are abstracted in one way or the other and they could be difficult to interpret because of the aforementioned hard-to-describe nature of their form. But how have art historians been able to interpret the various abstractions of twentieth-century European art that similarly does not suggest nature? What these questions imply is that art historians studying African art, too, are either unaware of the scope of their own discipline in Western art or are yet to exhaust the options at their disposal in their study of African art.

An aspect of African culture that is often pointed to in support of a segregationist view of African art is the absence of distinctive words for beauty and goodness in African languages, which, as Leiris and Fry have pointed out, should not be mistaken for lack of aesthetic judgement among Africans (ibid.:25-56). They have made reference to various African societies in which researchers have observed that Africans are capable of artistic judgement, and the fact that the same word is used for more than one idea does not mean that the word means the same thing in all its contexts. This argument is not just persuasive, but so exhaustive that one would expect it to have put paid to the use of the linguistic claim for point-scoring in

arguments on the methodology for the study of the art. But scholars of African art have, from time to time, recalled the claim to sustain their idiosyncratic outlook towards the art. In fact, I did not know of Delange's argument against the claim when I first came across it in a coffee-table European-authored publication, that by Atmore and Stacey, *Black Kingdoms, Black Peoples* (1979), which for credibility seems to have been intentionally given to a Nigerian publisher to publish. The intention of the authors – to portray West African peoples, their political institutions, religions and arts as unscientific, uncivilised, superstitious and (perhaps unvoiced) less human – runs through the book from cover to cover. In my review of the book (Adepegba 1982), I, too, observed that the fact that some known languages of West Africa do not have different words for beautiful and good does not mean their words for the ideas mean the same thing when used in different contexts, and I cited the case of Yoruba, which has different words for beauty and goodness to finally challenge the claim on the grounds that it was presumptuous as many West African languages were yet to be written, much less analysed for their aesthetic terminologies. But interestingly, a similar use of the claim was made seven years later, citing a dozen African languages still emphasising the view that the art objects should be seen differently from other arts as they have more than aesthetic values within their cultures of origin (Vogel 1986:xii-xvii).

Whether the claim is adduced to support or deny the existence of aesthetic judgement in Africa, even this is not the question. More important seems to be the relevance of beauty itself in the valuation of art, especially, as beauty implied in these arguments is taken to be the only criterion for accepting objects as art. It is true that certain ancient artistic traditions, in their different ways, idealised forms to show their subjects as sublime and without blemish. Notable among such traditions are the ancient Egyptian, the Greek classical period and even the ancient Ife arts from Africa. In ancient Egyptian tradition the subjects, especially royalty, represented in their prime of life, were depicted to look faultless: the arts celebrate god kings. As for the Greek classical figures, they were not depictions of particularly handsome individuals, but those possessing the best human physical attributes. In the Ife terracotta and cast metal tradition, human heads and figures are especially idealised in their representation at the prime of life, as well as in their prominent and well defined eyeballs (*eyinju ege*) and their spiralled or ringed necks (*wiwe lorun bi okoto*) which are local attributes of human beauty (Adepegba 1994b). The differing ways in which beauty has been portrayed in these artistic

traditions clearly indicate that beauty, not only in art but in almost all things, depends on the people and the times, and, in fact, even depends on individuals in the same place and at the same time. As a Yoruba proverb has it, *Eyi to wu mi ko wu e ni ko i je ka pa 'wo po fe obinrin* (What appeals to me may not appeal to you hence men do not jointly marry the same woman). Many objects that appear ugly and grotesque to many individuals have found their ways into museums as masterpieces, highly valued for attributes other than beauty. 'Aesthetic', which has commonly been taken to mean 'beauty' in discussing artistic value, is not even as specific as it is often used. It is usually not clear whether it refers to beauty or artistic quality. Thus efforts made by scholars to codify attributes of African art or Africans' terms of artistic perception virtually amount to segregating the art because it does not belong to most of its researchers' societies.

The ways some other aspects of culture are used for interpreting forms in African art are so ridiculous that African readers are lost as to what the writers are trying to do; they hardly understand whether it is the arts they are explaining or whether they simply want to amuse their readers by explaining the art forms in terms of the exotic aspects of African life that appear to them odd or bizarre. Because African sculptures are used mostly in religious contexts, the notion of Africans as peoples with animistic views is made prominent in such interpretations and explanations of forms. Very surprising also is the way unprovable religious interpretations are preferred to obvious, plausible and commonsense alternatives. In some instances, such explanations are personal interpretations made by individual scholars, while in others they are said to have been directly derived from field investigations. But how much of such information was freely given to researchers (and not put in the informant's mouth) is hard to determine, as neither all the researchers nor the native informants appear to be entirely honest. The researcher, before going into the field, has got his or her set of oddities to reinforce with field information, and the native informants, too, understand what to say to satisfy researchers, especially rich ones from the developed countries. Indeed, their financial rewards to the informants have made research information unaffordable to poorer African researchers.

Here are some instances of such interpretations from Nigeria. For a long time before the kind of skin used as the cover for the Ekoi or Ejargam skin-covered mask was verified as being that of an animal, the skin cover was always said to be that of a human being, used for providing the masks with human attributes. Any second thought was not even suggested by the

fact that the masks are in both human and animal forms and that the skin might have been employed to conceal possible cracking of the wet wood, traditionally carved into masks and figures in Africa. The general carving of the wood when wet, which must have facilitated carving with limited carving tools, is, to date, explained as a means of harnessing the life force from the wood carved into the images. It is also not unlikely that it is in the same vein that the propitiation before the felling of the trees to obtain the wood for carving and the involvement of rituals in the process of carving often alluded to, have been newly brought into being. Every aspect of the art, the artistic production and the uses to which the art objects were put seems to have been hung on animistic views of the world in which inanimate objects are ascribed supernatural power. No room is even given to the expediency of production. The carver himself is mystified or sometimes led into surrounding himself with self-ordained mystery or supernatural aura. A Kalabari carver observed by Robin Horton claimed that when he was called upon to replace the old carving in a sanctuary, he was not only chosen as the carver for the new carving by the deity to which the sanctuary belonged, but he completely took over the priesthood of the deity for the entire period of the carving, even though his name, Tom, obviously suggests a previous European connection (Horton 1965:17). Worth mentioning also is an explanation that the theme of mother and child common in Yoruba sculpture is commonly represented for purity because nursing mothers, like pregnant women, do not menstruate (Vogel 1986:xvi). Whether it is only among the Yoruba that nursing mothers do not menstruate, or whether it is a general female characteristic, is not indicated. But as the claim is biologically incorrect, it ought to have been avoided – except that it was made only to portray African ways of thinking as strange and odd.

For some researchers, African art, specifically sculpture, is still a living art and should be seen as still being produced and used as it was before outside influences on African ways of life became apparent during this century. The art, as well as its traditional milieu, is presented as if unaffected by the forces of internationalism consequent upon the increasing exposure of the continent to outside religions, trade and alien forms of government, whereas in actual fact the art, in its authentic traditional setting has ceased to exist, having persistently bowed to the forces of change which have occurred in the last hundred years. Such a situation in which newly collected data on the cultural context of the art are fixed to a single time frame – the past – and are not mindful of possible changes over time, cannot but raise

credibility and relevance problems. The form may still be copied to conform to tradition, but it is hardly higher than the pieces intended for the tourist trade.

Certainly, the sources of data from field investigation have been tremendously expanded. Initially, only a few individuals, or even a single individual, in the society were the source of the claims made about African societies and their art. But more people are now being interviewed to obtain more commonly accepted meanings about different aspects of African culture. However, the continual desire to entertain readers has tended to make most publications on art more artistic than the art itself, and the emphasis on cultural context is as full of inappropriate description as the initial formal approach to the art.

Even now, researchers continue to harp on the same phenomena in their interpretations of the objects, and there is no indication that any serious progress is being made in the study of the art. It is noteworthy, however, that there is an array of new vernacular names and terminology often used as proof of the researchers' knowledge of the subject. The form of the art object is still not given due attention. In many publications and other write-ups on African art it is only in the titles that the objects are described as art.

However, scholars are not insensitive to the need for progress in the study of the art. William Fagg observed that much study remained to be done in museum and private art collections, and that the documentation available on the art in Europe is very limited. He has also pointed out the need for field research among Africans themselves because, in fact, many African scholars have shown no interest in the study of the art of their own people (Fagg *et al.* 1982). But even such involvement cannot substantially change the picture. African scholars, like their Western counterparts, want recognition in their fields, and such recognition is highly prized and exciting when it is from Europe and America where most of these scholars, especially the earlier ones, have been educated. Their Western counterparts, upon whom such recognition depends, would naturally not tolerate opposing views. At present African scholars are strikingly disadvantaged, their only advantage over their Western counterparts being their mother tongue with which they can interact better when investigating their own culture. Even with this, however, it should not be forgotten that they and most of their informants are not the same as their ancestors. It may therefore apply only in aspects of their language that are handed down from generation to generation, such as in old maxims and proverbs, where the past can be

seen, but in this, too, it is not uncommon for the speakers to know only their contextual uses rather than their original sources.

The case of Supo Koseemani, a Yoruba elder so revered that he was given a regular programme on explanations and meanings of Yoruba proverbs and sayings on a local radio station in Ibadan, is a good example. His explanations of different Yoruba proverbs and maxims were preceded and followed by Yoruba lineage praise songs, *oriki*, which were always chanted to show him as belonging to all the Oyo lineages among whom such praise songs are common. The programme in question used to be on the local radio every evening just before six o'clock in the programme, *Owe l' esin oro*. But on one particular evening his explanation was inadequate as he only indicated the contextual use of the proverb he was asked to explain rather than its *raison d'être*. The proverb, a dialogue, *Orisa b'oo le gbe mi, se mi b'oo ti ba mi*, means 'Orisa' – the Yoruba god of creation – 'if you cannot help or profit me, leave me as I am.' Ordinarily, it simply means 'If I cannot gain in any deal or venture, I should not lose', and that was the only explanation he gave as the meaning of the proverb. But the *raison d'être* is clear from a local song which I heard from Bandaru of Okebola village near Ikoyi when I was a young village schoolteacher in the early 1960s. The song, *Arigbede, b'oo fe mi mo o, orisa ma b'aale le mi. Oroajoso, b'o ba ye, k'oo wi o,* literally means 'Arigbede, if you do not love me any more, do not de-pigment me'. It refers to a common Yoruba religious practice. Various Yoruba gods are associated with powers of affliction, especially upon erring worshippers. Sango is known for killing with thunder – hence he is referred to as the god of thunder – while Orisa, the god of creation is associated with de-pigmentation of the skin to patches of white. The de-pigmentation is believed to be either an affliction from Orisa priests or an after-effect of syphilis, and both the de-pigmentation and syphilis are known as *aale*, as in the song. Thus it is obvious that the proverb originated from the religious practice, and means that if worshippers could not be blessed by the deity, they should be allowed to go free or stop worshipping him without punishment.

If such an inadequacy could occur in a situation where every recipient of the explanation could at least be credited with the basic understanding of his or her culture, how much less dependable could such information be collected by researchers that are non-natives, especially when collected from one or a few individuals, as in the early days of field investigation on African art. The implication is that field investigations may not provide truer information on the objects than the authentic objects themselves. We will

remain as blind in our vision of the art as the old Dogon, Ogotemmeli, who never saw the Dogon couple figures that were interpreted with the information he gave to Griaule. If we link our understanding of the art mainly to the same kind of cultural context information, we would be as far from the truth as ever.

STEPS FORWARD

For meaningful progress to be made in the study of African art, the study should be more reflective, especially on forms hitherto neglected. If the cultural context approach is truly multi-disciplinary, forms and cultural context should be balanced. The persistent advice that African art should be approached differently from other art because it is from another society should be de-emphasised, and more attention should be given to factual data and plausible reflection, rather than myth, fable or even fabrication. Researchers should be free to come up with their individual, objective and unbiased interpretation of forms. As the object is being referred to as art by all the disciplines involved in its study, the starting point of its future study should be the object itself, and not the culture. Fortunately, authentic objects abound for such a venture, in museums and private collections in Europe and America. It is only in the countries of origin of the objects, which are now poor in both the authentic art objects and the economic resources to collect, keep and study them, that the venture may pose a problem.

Although changes are minimal between typological pieces of the art works, thereby limiting the possibility of perceiving the art forms historically, research can start anew with comparative analyses of forms in the individual types of the objects already amassed in museums and private collections. Possibilities of the focus on form is infinite, and understanding the formal variations in each of the typological objects enriches the appreciation and perception of forms. Comparative analyses of styles in individual types of objects can be followed by comparative study of all the typological objects from the same individual producer or user of ethnic origin. Although a lot has been done on the stylistic variations between the art-producing ethnic groups of the continent, an effort towards closer study of styles, if combined with increased attention to scientific dating of the objects, will go a long way towards determining the historicity of forms either within ethnic confines or in the entire sculpture-producing region. If much is not forthcoming on the symbolism of forms from such an exercise, more light will certainly be thrown

on the technical and artistic expediency of formal compositions. Common sense and universal aspects of life, rather than ridiculous idiosyncrasies hitherto employed only to amuse audiences, should be the researchers' goal in interpreting the art objects. To be different as peoples is not the same thing as to be ridiculous and laughable.

Willett, in reacting to the complaint from a senior figure in the study of African art, said that one of his colleagues would prefer his students specialising in African art to be anthropologists rather than art historians (1971:42). He was of the view that it is from both anthropology and art history that the study of African art should continue to draw expertise. This is especially pertinent as the ultimate goal of an holistic approach is to have an overall knowledge of the subjects being studied and neither of the two disciplines, anthropology or art history, denies the fact that the objects being studied are artistic. If the artistic angle of the study of the object has hitherto been neglected, it stands to reason that the study should first correct this imbalance. However, the possibility of this cannot but sound remote, especially as the already trained scholars in the field have so far not seen any need seriously to understand each other's methodology in order to forge a uniform focus for the study of the art. It is for this reason that I would urge fellow scholars of African art to agree with Suzanne Blier (1987) who, on recounting how students of African art were isolated in her student days, says that it is at the training stage and not after qualifying that specialists in the study of the art should be more exposed to (and therefore interact better with) students of Western art history. As the objects being studied are accepted as art, their 'artness' should not be limited to the titles of publications on them; it should be seen clearly in the contents of the publications. The artistic aspect of the study should not be subsumed in the cultural context which, to no small extent, has blinded interested scholars to the universally accepted attributes of their subject.

Unintentionally, the cultural context approach has stifled the study of contemporary African art which, like Western art, is more about formal values than cultural uses and meanings. While publications have appeared in their hundreds, or even thousands, on traditional African art, there are scarcely ten internationally known publications on the contemporary art of the continent. African art scholars, having been tied strictly to explaining the art objects only from their cultural significance point of view, are lost as to what to do when confronted with the contemporary art of the continent. The strict adherence of the specialists to the cultural context approach has

confined them only to the traditional objects, and to most of them, in the words of William Fagg, anything that is not tribal is not African, and contemporary African art, like skyscrapers, are extensions of Europe in Africa (1963a:121).

But denying the existence of a contemporary art that comes from the continent is not the issue: African art does not end with traditional art objects. A suitably uniform approach for both the traditional and contemporary arts of the continent will have to be sought. Since the difficulty about contemporary African art is caused by its detachment from its culture of origin, the focus of African art will have to be directed towards form. When Western art is being looked at sociologically, the goal is still to understand form. But when African art is looked at 'anthropologically', attention to form is hardly considered necessary. For the art to be truly studied as art, the emphasis needs to change.

2 BEYOND 'PROTEST'

New Directions in South African Literature

Njabulo Ndebele

Recently* I have suggested that what has been called 'protest literature' may have run its own course in South Africa (Ndebele 1986). It is my intention here to probe further into this evaluation by attempting to bring out clearly its theoretical foundations. Basically, the problem is that 'protest literature' appears to have lost its objective basis. The fact that much of the writing produced in the townships of South Africa since 1976 still reproduces this protest tradition with little modification, reveals what seems to me to be the characteristics of a socially entrenched manner of thinking about the South African reality; a manner of thinking which, over the years, has gathered its own momentum and now reproduces itself uncritically. It is like a train whose driver has lost control; it runs dangerously on its fixed rails, passing, with great speed, where it is supposed to stop. The difference might be that in the case of the train, its driver will know almost immediately that he is in trouble. He is, after all, not the train. In the case of the writer of 'protest literature', on the other hand, it may not be so easy for him to separate himself momentarily from his mind.

The problem is to be located in the nature of South African oppression and how its unabating pervasiveness has induced, almost universally in the country, a distinctive manner of thinking about the socio-political realities in the country. It has induced a socio-political epistemology that conceives of reality purely in terms of a total polarity of absolutes. Such an epistemology is, of course, entirely understandable: South African society is a highly

* This paper was written before the unbanning of the African National Congress in 1990 and the first democratic elections in 1994 and is included for the importance it has in the historical context. – Ed.

polarised society. It is understandable that its constituent polarities should dominate the thinking of its citizens. This is even more so when we realise that one major characteristic of the South African social formation is how the racist rulers have done very little to hide the polarities produced by their iniquitous domination. On the contrary, these polarities have been and continue to be fully displayed. There can be no doubt, for example, about who is in power and who is not; no doubt about who commands vast resources of wealth, and who lives in abject poverty. There is no doubt also, in general terms, why things are the way they are.

In general, this situation has resulted in two ways of perceiving the South African reality. For the oppressed, political knowledge came to be equated with the recognition of the blatant injustice which occurs in various forms throughout the country. To know has been to know how badly one has been treated. Every other thing is irrelevant if it is perceived as not contributing to the extension of this knowledge. Beyond that, having this knowledge implied that one either gives in to the bleak reality revealed, or commits oneself to removing this general condition of injustice. How this is actually carried out will depend on what means are available to the oppressed at any particular moment.

On the other hand, for the ruling white racists, knowledge has been equated with the quest for mastery over the political and economic means of maintaining privilege and domination. To know has been to find ways of maintaining dominance. As a result, the white racists have, over the years, built, and now have access to a complex structure of government and its related institutions, as well as an array of other social and economic institutions, all of which have diversified the sources as well as the means of acquiring information and knowledge for the preservation of political and economic domination.

In order for us to get a practical sense of this situation, I thought it useful that we examine a recent drama between African miners and the white mine managers of the Impala Platinum Mine in that part of South Africa called Bophuthatswana. This particular drama seems to play out for me some important aspects of the history of the African struggle for freedom in South Africa.

Recently in South Africa some 23 000 African miners were summarily dismissed from their jobs. This figure is immense, but the real figure is much larger, when we consider the fact that the dismissed men came from families who depended on them for a livelihood. So there is a real sense in which it

was not just the miners who were dismissed, but also at least 100 000 other people. But the drama of South African oppression is such that it has become customary for its observers, both those involved and those on the sidelines, to focus on its most observable aberrations. We concentrate on the 23 000 men, the most observable proof of injustice, and consequently, the most immediate in terms of the imperatives of political activism. The other 100 000 maintain a blurred presence, seldom becoming a serious factor of analysis and reflection. They were not there at the scene of the action. This point I shall come back to later.

The two parties involved in this labour dispute reveal their perceptions of the problems before them in the following manner. Following their dismissal, a representative of the striking miners observed: 'Management does not have sympathy for people. They don't listen to what we have to say. They regard us as animals. That is why it is possible for them to do this' (*Weekly Mail*, Johannesburg, 10-16 Jan. 1986). On the other hand, a representative of the mine management observed: 'You run into a point where they get completely unreasonable. The alternative is to get rid of the whole labour force and replace them. There is a condition of massive unemployment in the country and that encourages us to take this kind of action' (ibid.).

Firstly, at the most immediate pre-critical level, we cannot fail to recognise the them-us polarity. There is no need to even state that the management is white and the miners are black. The them-us polarity already exists within that other larger polarity. Secondly, the miners seem to be almost completely powerless against the massive power of the management. The management controls the means of livelihood. It controls a complex organisation which is itself firmly placed within the even more complex structure of exploitation characteristic of the South African social formation. Furthermore, the habit of working within a complex system develops the manipulative capacity of those in control of the system to take advantage of the laws of that system to their own benefit.

Against all this, the miners, having been effectively denied the opportunity to create comparable adversary systems of their own, have had no opportunity to develop their own manipulative capacity.[1] They have nothing of comparable organisational status to set in motion in order to defend and project their interests. Indeed, all they have is their voice, and the capacity of that voice, under the circumstances, is limited largely to articulating grievance, drawing its strength and validity from the moral law: 'Management does not have sympathy for people.' But, as it is clear, the moral law can be tragically

impotent in the face of economic laws that do not recognise its intrinsic validity.

It seems clear that in this situation, the structural position of the miners (the aggrieved) permits them, in their response to their terrible ordeal, very few options besides the mere articulation of grievance. This structural position of the miners in this case, is identical, it seems to me, to the structural position of the oppressed majority in South Africa during that time in that country's history when protest literature flourished: the period between 1948 and 1961. It was a period characterised by a greater institutionalisation of repression. There was much organised resistance, but it was often brutally crushed. This increased repression created a charged atmosphere for protest such that the resulting articulation of grievance, at both organisational and personal levels, became the very index of powerlessness.

The result of this situation was that increasingly, the material dimensions of oppression soon assumed a rhetorical form in which the three chief components were: first, the identification and highlighting of instances of general oppression; second, the drawing of appropriate moral conclusions from the revealed evidence, and lastly, the implicit belief in the inherent persuasiveness of the moral position. The identified outward evidence of oppression prompted a rhetoric which emphasised the moral embitterment of the oppressed. It is this kind of rhetoric that began to dominate the consciousness of the oppressed in such a way that the oppressed could easily lose the sense of the actual mechanisms of their own oppression. This condition can have devastating effects on the capacity of the oppressed to develop a creatively analytical approach to their predicament.

For example, the pervasive images of wealth and poverty, of power and powerlessness, of knowledge and ignorance, of form and formlessness, may easily lead to the simplification and trivialisation of moral perception. The oppressed need only cast their eyes around and they see a universal confirmation of their status. Evil abounds. There is no need for further analysis. The mere pointing of a finger provides proof. In this situation, the rhetorical identification of social and political evil may easily become coincident with political and intellectual insight. The recognition of a source of grievance does not necessarily imply an understanding of a possible range of political implications which that recognition may entail. This problem, as has been hinted above, might give us some understanding of the effect of oppression on the general intellectual development of the oppressed.

It needs to be stated that the moral position, when we consider the overall circumstances in which recourse to it was taken, was, of course, entirely valid

and correct. What one is attempting to do here is hint at its possible limitations. This task is essential when a particular way of viewing reality gathers its own momentum over a period of time and becomes a predominant mode of perception even when the conditions justifying its existence have passed. At that point the mode of perception, by failing to transcend its own limitations, can become part of the oppression it sought to understand and undermine. It does not do so intentionally, of course: it simply becomes trapped. Such a trap may even lead to the development of a dangerous predisposition to reform rather than to radical change.

Indeed, the trapping of resistance in an unreflective rhetoric of protest could easily be one of the sources of reactionary politics even among the oppressed. Where the dialectic between good and evil has been simplified, the predisposition on the part of the powerful to satisfy the oppressed's moral sense with minimum concessions asserts itself. This happens at those moments when the oppressors feel that it is in their own interests to make concessions. Such concessions, if they can be perceived as significant gains, particularly by the oppressed, can lead to the politics of reform. Reform easily appeals to the moral sentiment, whereas radical change relies on continuous critical engagement with reality such that not only nothing is taken for granted, but also that the reformist manipulations of the oppressor can even be anticipated and neutralised. However, that the moral sentiment can be compromised in this manner does not invalidate it; it is simply that the conditions in which it can continue to inspire confidence ought to be brought into being, for they do not as yet exist.

I have so far devoted much of this paper to a discussion of the general situation in order to suggest the unenviably onerous position of the writer in this situation; to indicate how writers can themselves be encapsulated by the material and intellectual culture of oppression, and how difficult it can be for them to achieve a transcendence. For example, it became the responsibility of the writers to codify the predominant modes of political perception by transforming those perceptions into literary figures. This led to the predominance of certain themes, characters, and situations which were welded into a recognisable grammar of protest. We were shown the predictable drama between the merciless oppressors and their pitiful victims: ruthless policeman and their cowed, bewildered prisoners, brutal farmers and their exploited farm hands, cruel administrative officials and the bewildered residents of the townships, crowded trains and the terrible violence that goes on in them among the oppressed, and a variety of similar situations. Of course, what we

are looking at here is a trend. There were other writings that handled the issues very differently.

For the bulk of the writings, however, their characteristics, as has been suggested above, are entirely understandable when we consider not only the structural position of the oppressed African population as a whole in the South African social formation, but also the social position of the writers within the oppressed population. The bulk of them were either teachers or journalists or both, more often than not with an Anglican educational or religious background. It is understandable that they should express the predicament of the oppressed not in terms of what structurally produced it, but in terms of its implied opposite; white political and economic power and privilege. There lay the moral problem. The writing sharpened the moral sense which, under the circumstances, may have been the only effective way to validate and maintain the sense of legitimate political opposition. From this perspective, moral opposition should properly be regarded as both historically and politically apt.

If protest writing in the 1950s was in tune with protest politics, protest writing in the 1960s and 1970s was not entirely in tune with political developments. Protest politics effectively ends in 1968 with the establishment of the South African Students' Organization (SASO), and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM).[2] But protest writing, significantly, did not end with the end of protest politics. It simply assumed a different form of protest. Certainly, it reflected the militancy and confrontational attitude of the new movement, but while the new movement represented a decisively new political orientation, the writing that it inspired represented no remarkable contribution to literary figuration. The new writing did not appropriate the analytical sophistication of the BCM into its own handling of literary form.

The reason for this situation is not hard to find. The political analysis of the role of literature in the struggle for liberation did not go beyond the general agreement that literature must be committed. A rhetorical attitude toward literature was adopted which did not analytically spell out how literature could express its commitment. What we have, as a result, is protest literature that merely changed emphasis: from the moral evil of apartheid to the existential and moral worth of blackness, from moral indignation to anger, from relatively self-composed reasonableness to uncompromising bitterness, from the exterior manifestations of oppression to the interior psychology of that oppression. That may be why the bulk of the writing was

poetry. But while the poetry turns its attention towards the self, it is still very much conscious of the white 'Other'. Although the new writing has begun to make a move away from that preoccupation with the Other, it is still rooted in the emotional and intellectual polarities of South African oppression as discussed above. And this is the point at which protest literature turns into a pathology: when the objective conditions no longer justify or support an entirely emotional or moral attitude.

There is much to indicate that the structural position of the oppressed in South Africa had altered significantly, particularly from the time of the labour strikes that shook the country from 1973 onwards. The phenomenal growth of the economy up to that time is clearly responsible for a significant change in relations of power between the oppressed and the oppressor. Increased industrialisation had enhanced the capacity of working people to assert their collective power. The intensity of the labour disputes, for example, led eventually to the capitulation of the state to the demands for the legal unionisation of labour. Meanwhile the events of June 1976 also helped to consolidate the new relations of power. Clearly the structural position of the oppressed now was such that they could no longer be cowed into the kind of submission reminiscent of the 1950s. The inevitable growth and consolidation of this new power would definitely lead to the new general perceptions of what was possible. While the range of what was possible had been severely limited by the condition of powerlessness, now the newly found power could extend that range considerably in all kinds of directions. Suddenly, the possibilities are immense.

The rest of this essay is premised on the belief that the greatest challenge of the South African revolution is in the search for ways of thinking, ways of perception, that will help to break down the closed epistemological structures of South African oppression, structures which can severely compromise resistance by domination thinking itself. The challenge is to free the entire social imagination of the oppressed from the laws of perception that have characterised apartheid society. For writers this means freeing the creative process itself from those very laws. It means extending the writer's perception of what can be written about, and the means and methods of writing.

It seems to me that we begin to formulate a redemptive approach when we as writers ask the question: where is the struggle in South Africa at the moment? Many events have led to that question. For example, the prolonged school boycott that began in 1976 has finally led to similar questions with regard to education: where do we go from here? What kind of education do

we want for the future? It is the momentum of events that has led inevitably to these questions. Such questions already suggest that the closed structures of thought under oppression have been cracked. Anything is now possible. Indeed, the possibilities of answering the questions are themselves infinitely vast.

It seems to me these are the most important questions that have been asked by our people in recent times, and they are questions that can only be fully answered from a full understanding of the position from which they are asked. They suggest that as far as education is concerned, the oppressed have reached a position at which an aspect of the structure of domination has, through their own actions, been rendered completely inoperative. A point has been reached, therefore, whereby the oppressed have now to ask themselves fundamental questions about their own future. In this case, the issue is no longer the moral condemnation of Bantu Education; rather, it is the creation of a new kind of education.

The significance of these questions is that they indicate the freeing of the social imagination from the constraints of attempting to envision the future under the limitations of oppression. The future is, at this point, a clean slate; a clean sheet of paper waiting to be written upon. It is a challenging yet daunting task, amenable to no easy answers, for it represents the very beginnings of a new society. The task of an alternative ideology, therefore, is to provide, among other things, new ways of thinking about the future of South Africa.

The starting point is the need and demand of the oppressed for liberation. The political imperatives of that demand are the positing of an alternative future followed by the seizure of state power. For the political activist, the task seems clear. For the producer of cultural artefacts, on the other hand, the situation may not be so clear because his role as well as that of his work, has not been so clearly defined. The South African writer, in particular, appears not to have begun to ask fundamental questions about his role, as well as that of his artistic practice. By and large, he appears not to have handed over this task to the political activist, who may not himself have articulated a comprehensively analytical position about the role of the arts in the struggle. This situation, it seems to me, has been responsible for much of the slow growth of South African literature.

The problem has been that questions about art and society have been easily settled after a general consensus about commitment. This has led to the prescription of solutions even before all the problems have been discovered

and analysed. The writer, as a result, has tended to plunge into the task of writing without fully grappling with the theoretical demands of that task in all its dimensions. Armed with notions of artistic commitment still constrained by outmoded protest-bound perceptions of the role of art and of what constitutes political relevance in art, the writer set about reproducing a dead end. Consequently, the limited range of explorable experience characteristic of writing under the protest ethos has continued to plague South African writing. We can perhaps begin to edge away from the situation by addressing the issue of the nature of art as well as the question of what constitutes relevance under a situation of radical flux.

One accusation that has often been levelled at writers, particularly in those countries hungry for radical change, is that many of them have not offered solutions to the problems they may have graphically described. It seems to me that this accusation has always revealed a certain confusion, on the part of the accusers, on what the nature of the relationship between art and society really is. More often than not, the accusation has been premised on the demand that artists produce works that will incite people to political action. That, we will all agree, is strictly speaking the task of the professional propagandist. The aims of the propagandist are immediate action: propagandist intentions are entirely practical.

The artist, on the other hand, although desiring action, often with as much passion as the propagandist, can never be free from the rules of irony. Irony is the literary manifestation of the principle of contradiction. Its fundamental property, for the literary arts in particular, is that everything involving human society is in a constant state of flux; that the dialectic between appearance and reality in the conduct of human affairs is always operative and constantly problematic, and that consequently, in the representation of human reality, nothing can be taken for granted. If writers have an ideological goal, and they always do, they have to reach that goal through a serious and inevitable confrontation with irony. They must earn their conclusions through the resulting sweat. And when they have won that battle, they will most likely leave us, the readers, more committed, but only on the necessary condition that we have been made to reflect deeply on the nature and implications of their commitment. The relationship between politics and art is by definition always mediated by reflection. We distinguish only between immediate action, on the one hand, and delayed action, on the other. We do not choose between politics and art; rather, we participate in the dialectic between them. To understand this is to understand the creative possibilities of both.

The way seems clear now for us to deal with the question of relevance. The more limited understanding of the relationship between politics and literature would define relevance as any subject or act that is perceived to contribute dramatically to the struggle for liberation. The operative word here is dramatic. What is dramatic is often defined according to the imperatives of *realpolitik*. The dramatic can easily be determined: strike action, demonstrations; alternatively, the brutality of the oppressive system. It should not be difficult to realise that the range of what is traditionally regarded as relevant is tragically limited in comparison to the complex structure of oppression itself. The system does not only send tanks into the townships. It does a lot more. It works at subtle co-optation; it tries to produce a middle class; it sets up a series of diplomatic initiatives; it seeks to create normality by insidiously spreading a hegemony that the oppressed are designed to accept willingly. It mobilises its own range of extra-governmental institutions in an attempt to impose and propagate its hegemony. For example, it will open up private schools to Africans where they can absorb a wide range of hegemonic practices that may ultimately not be in their own interest. In other words, the system responds as a total system.

Clearly, if it is the entire society that has to be re-created, then no aspect of society can be deemed irrelevant to the progress of liberation. Clearly, the broader the focus, the more inclusive, then the more multifold and more complex the attack. In this context, relevance, for the post-protest South African writer, begins, as it should, with the need for the seizure of state power, but this need, during the process of struggle, necessarily fragments into a concern with an infinite number of specific social details which constitute the primary reason why the struggle occurs in the first place, and why state power ought to be seized eventually.

However, and most paradoxically, for writers, the immediate problem, just at the point at which they sit down to write their novels, is not the seizure of power. Far from it. It is the single-minded focusing on a range of social conditions, most of which are left out of the purview of populist politics, which are the major ingredients of social consciousness. Otherwise, exclusion on the grounds of dramatic political statement will limit the possibilities of any revolution, by limiting its imagination.

What are the practical implications of all this? We have already seen how the structural status of the oppressed within the South African social formation has altered radically. The implications of this newly found power are the writer's starting point. That power is clearly aware of itself, and that

self-consciousness seems destined to grow. But, judging from the fundamental questions being asked, that power is still not fully aware of what can actually be achieved with it. Details still have to be worked out. And this is where the writers' role becomes crucial. It is their task to contribute effectively to the consolidation of that power by consolidating consciousness of it at all levels of society. They can do so in a number of ways.

To start with, there must be a freeing of the imagination in which what constitutes the field of relevance is extended considerably. What is relevant is the entire community of the oppressed. Politics is not only the seizure of state power, it is also the seizure of power in a women's burial society in the township; it is the seizure of family power by children, thus altering drastically the nature of the family, something that might have tremendous implications for the new society to be born.

This issue is so important that a few more examples should be given. Firstly, for a highly industrialised society such as South Africa, there is a tragic paucity of imaginative re-creations of the confrontations between the oppressed and the tools of science. Supposing a character wants to study science, what goes on in his mind when he makes that decision? What is his vision of the social role of scientific endeavour? Turgenev, for example, in *Fathers and Sons* provides a compelling view of the impact of the scientific method on human behaviour. Alternatively, what kind of relationships are created between a worker in a factory and his machine? The answer to this question is not necessarily obvious. Will he necessarily feel oppressed and alienated, as traditional wisdom would assume? There is much to suggest that this confrontation is much more problematic than is traditionally thought.

Secondly, we have, for better or for worse, a group of politicians in the so-called independent countries of South Africa. Stooges, no doubt. But what are the intricacies of their flawed diplomatic practice? We have no literature of diplomacy which can reveal the human dimension to the barrenness of this kind of politics. It behoves an artist to help the reader bury the stooges while understanding something of their motivations. That way the reader learns something about the psychology of the co-opted. The aesthetics of protest would be content to kill off the stooge, thus enacting what might be necessary, but leaving us with no knowledge.

Thirdly, the pressures of modern life on family life have been immense. We know the causes: migrant labour, influx control laws and a variety of others. Protest literature has done a commendable job in keeping these causes in our minds. But what has happened to the family itself? If the ethical codes

that governed family relationships have been changed, what have they become, and how have the new codes helped to bring about either relief or more misery?

Fourthly, the energetic and creative world of sport and fashion has seldom been treated beyond the sensationalism of the popular press. Since Mphahlele's 'Grieg on a Stolen Piano', that particular theme has not received much imaginative attention. Lastly, I have commented in the past about the lack of compelling imaginative re-creations of rural life in our literature (1984). All we know about are dejected peasants, suffering pathetically under a tyrannical Boer farmer. Alternatively, the peasants are the focus of Christian evangelism. Beyond these two examples, the settings as well as the themes are infinite.

One other way the South African writer can move effectively into the post-protest era is, in certain circumstances, by working towards a radical displacement of the white oppressor as an active, dominant player in the imagination of the oppressed. This tactical absence will mean that the writer can consolidate the sense of a viable, psychologically self-sufficient community among the oppressed. This attitude can only work, though, if the writer genuinely believes in the oppressed, in the first instance, as makers of the future. This implies a radical rearrangement of the dialectical poles. Where the thesis was the oppressor, it is now the oppressed confidently introducing new definitions of the future to which the oppressor will have of necessity to respond. The latter, no longer having the power nor the intellectual capability to initiate necessary redemptive action, has to be relegated to the reactive pole of the dialectic. He is no longer in possession of the initiative.

Finally, there must be an accompanying change of discourse from the rhetoric of oppression to that of process and exploration. This would imply an open-endedness in the use of language, a search for originality of expression and a sensitivity to dialogue. The complexity of the day-to-day problems of living in fact coincides with the demands of creativity. As the writers begin working on that story, they may not know where it is going, and how it is going to get somewhere, but they have to find a way. That means a search for appropriate form and technique, which would enable them to grasp the complexity and render it understandable.

Earlier, in my discussion of the mine dispute, I made reference to the fact that at least 100 000 people were dismissed by the mine management. It is the silent 100 000 that our writers must also turn their attention to. I use this issue analogically, of course. The operative principle of composition in post-protest literature is that it should probe beyond the observable facts, to

reveal new worlds where it was thought they did not exist, and to reveal process and movement where they were hidden. This way, the social imagination of the oppressed can be extended considerably and made ready in concrete terms to deal with the demands of a complex future. The aim is to extend the range of personal and social experience as far as possible in order to contribute to bringing about a highly conscious, sensitive new person in a new society. This, it seems to me, is the function of art in, and its contribution to, the ongoing revolution in South Africa. It means that writers have to develop a range of artistic techniques that will enable them to grasp the complexity and render it understandable. All this would appear to indicate that probably the novel, because of its ability to explore any chosen human perspective fully and comprehensively, is the only art form that can encompass the range of problems before us, organising them into a comprehensible totality.

These suggestions, it should be stated, are put forward not as laws, but as possible guidelines by which our writers can conduct a debate and bring to bear further analysis on the tasks of writers and the role of their art in the unfolding revolution in South Africa. The tasks themselves are immense and challenging, and vigorous discussion of them will, in itself, I believe, be a significant act of freedom.

NOTES

1. Although miners outside the Bantustans have access to trade union organisations, those working in Bophuthatswana still cannot legally form unions.
2. Of course, the major liberation movements, the ANC and the PAC, in opting for the armed struggle immediately following their banning in 1961, declared the end of the politics of protest. But, at the time, that new approach did not have a lasting impact in the country.

3 AFRICAN STUDIES AND THE AFRICAN IDENTITY

An Essay on the Theory of Culture

Dele Layiwola

The inauguration of African Studies Associations, the proliferation of Africanist institutes and centres is a *sine qua non* for the study and appreciation of African history, literature, art, music, anthropology, archaeology, drama or dance. This is because the existence of institutions is necessary to foster the development of knowledge in particular, as well as, in diverse disciplines. It is particularly noteworthy to observe that decades after the formation of African studies forums in Britain and America, institutions are responding to their activities by establishing African programmes within their frameworks and curricula. What we should therefore tackle at the present time is the problem of theory and methodology. When disciplines are established and studied outside their home bases, there exists the possibility that such disciplines may be studied askew. This possibility is more apparent when indigenous languages and traditions are crucial elements of culture. My preoccupation in this paper, therefore, will be to highlight ingredients of culture, especially as disciplines of knowledge, and conceptualise them as identity-specific materials. In this way I hope to be able to show how learning and culture are ways of life indicative of specific identities. This can then serve as a beginning, a foundation for ascribing methods and theories to indices of culture. Studies of this kind are necessary now that much of African artefacts and skills are being gradually domesticated in cultures other than theirs.

SCHOLARSHIP AS HEGEMONY

What indeed is African studies in relation to the idea of an African identity? In other words what is the *raison d'être* for the development of African studies

and identity? In my view, the need to establish an African identity within the mélange begs for no justification. It is obvious because it is its own reason. Therefore instead of seeking to define the already obvious, we can identify issues, problematise them and either rationalise or solve them. One of the most popular and profitable backdrops against which the analysis of African affairs are often predicated is colonialism. As Afigbo and others have affirmed: 'It was not one of the aims of colonialism to preserve the cultural identity of subject peoples. In fact the opposite was the case' (Afigbo 1981:384; Awe 1991:5-6). Worse still, where colonialism has undermined or destroyed the basis of African traditions, economy and identity, it has produced no reliable substitute for the stability of the social and political life of Africans.

Earlier in the last century, about 1915, one of those who felt that new studies must begin on the Africanist question so that we can re-establish a new identity was W.E.B. Du Bois. Though he realised that he was incapacitated by field work and data, he nevertheless wrote in the preface to his monograph, *The Negro*:

> The time has not yet come for a complete history of the Negro peoples. Archaeological research in Africa has just begun, and many sources of information in Arabian, Portuguese and other tongues are not fully at our command; and, too, it must frankly be confessed, racial prejudice against darker peoples is still too strong in so-called civilised centres for judicial appraisement of the peoples of Africa. Much intensive monographic work in history and science is needed to clear mooted points and quiet the controversialist who mistakes present personal desire for scientific proof. (1970:3)

The passage I have just quoted is of historical interest since Du Bois wrote this nearly a century ago, at a time when it was fashionable to say whether research and knowledge was adequate or not on Africa. In those days, Du Bois and his fellows were the pioneers.

However, today the reality is still as grim as ever. Africa remains a continent of sharp contrasts and myths; of inspiration and tragic events; of drought and plenty; of facts and fiction. Today, there is sufficient research on Africa, there are enough resources and knowledge to illuminate its dark areas but the prejudices have also increased tenfold. In spite of the amount of research and knowledge that there is on Africa and its peoples there are

many who write about universal theories and histories and exclude Africa from the records. There are those who are still avidly in search of the dark continent and the 'typical negro'. But how can one discount the heritage of Carthage and Ethiopia, the civilisation of Egypt and Zimbabwe? The fact that this is a continuous possibility makes 'Africa at once the most romantic and at the same time the most tragic of continents' (ibid.:5). As a factual digression, it is interesting to note that as late as the 1970s some of the most prominent writers of Africa discovered that established institutions or key individuals in England and America 'did not believe in any such mythical beast as "African Literature"' (Soyinka 1976:vii). Is there any surprise, therefore, that the existence of an African civilisation is vaguely denied? Let us assume that we have moved slightly beyond this. But the foregoing is indicative of two facts:

i. That research and scholarship in culture are highly necessary for the advancement of particular civilisations.
ii. That each cultural area needs the support of sympathetic, unbiased researchers as well as the environment for its own advancement.

In an attempt to define these claims, I should like to cite the extent to which scholarship and research could wield a hegemony. In the summer of 1954 Mallory Wober recorded that a collaborative research began between Dr R.F.A.Dean and Dr (Ms) Geber at Mulago Hospital in Kampala, Uganda. Mulago had been one of the research centres where research was focused on kwashiorkor in infants. Dr Dean, the Director of the Medical Research Council's Infantile Malnutrition Unit, contacted the World Health Organisation to ask for someone who could carry out a study on the psychological effects of kwashiorkor on children. Dr Dean, from Britain, organised the appointment of Dr Geber, from France, who had been the Director of the Child Guidance Clinics at Aisne, near Paris.

When Dr Geber arrived in Kampala, she decided that to understand the problems of kwashiorkor, it might be necessary to first study the development of normal African infants from birth. From the first 37 infants Geber tested, she writes that 'it was immediately obvious that the distribution of muscle tone in the African child differed from that of the European' (Wober 1975:3). In European children, the 'Moro reflex' in response to shock was a little more pronounced that in the African child. The Kampala children often had wide open eyes, and a 'lively look'. An unusually precocious action was seen

in a day-old child who, at birth, had received a slight scalp wound; it continually fingered the bandage over the wound. In all, Geber tested 107 Ugandan children and discovered precocity in all of them.

The first hypothesis for explaining this was tentatively to attribute it either to altitude (since Kampala was about 1 200 metres above sea level) or to climate. It was thereby thought that European or Indian children born in Kampala would also give similar evidence of precocity. When, however, they were tested, the 'European children gave the same results that were found in Europe and the Indian children gave almost similar results' (ibid.:4). This ruled out altitude and climate as factors responsible for precocity in African infants. Attention was then turned to other factors of material diet, attitudes and other unresearched factors.

All these factors were tested to no avail, and attention had to be directed to the social class and background of the babies, and the attitude of mothers to their pregnancies.

Geber and Dean expanded the scope of their research to 183 infants, having realised that the children tested better in their natural social environments than when they were artificially isolated for the process of experiment. Wober further notes:

> From this testing 'Gesell quotients' [analogous to intelligence quotients in the way they are calculated, but based on what Gesell found to be normal standards for American whites in the 1930s] were calculated. For 33 infants aged six months or less, quotients ranged from 100 to 345 (for motor development) and 300 (for verbal or vocal development). By a year old the highest quotients were around 150; between two and three years old, among 36 children, motor activity quotients up to 137, language development quotients up to 130, and none less than 100 were reported. (Ibid.:5)

Though the research samples were in no way representative of all African, nor even of all Ugandans, the striking element was that the experiments were confirmed in parallel experiments carried out in Senegal. When Geber and Dean could not find a proven explanation for the precocity of African infants, they concluded that it probably had a genetic basis. A lot of controversy has since attended Geber's thesis. It is probably wise to say that genetically or racially determined values are not always fashionable. It might

be that the advantage that African infants have is determined by cultural or attitudinal values which are yet to be discovered. But now we have come to the crux of the matter. Would there have been much controversy if the experiments had discovered the same values in favour of white infants? Probably not; because in 1969 something happened. Some Western researchers had become uneasy over scientific, clinical experiments that had found that black children get a better 'head start' in life than white children. Worse still, the thesis was confirmed by white researchers themselves. Instead of those researchers proposing a requisite, equally scientific, explanation based on Geber's findings, they resorted to racist insinuations. I shall quote Mallory Wober for the last time:

> For in 1969 a widespread controversy arose in Western countries following an article by Professor Arthur Jensen of Berkeley University, California. It was pointed out by some protagonists that it was characteristic of subhuman primates that their offspring matured more rapidly than among humans; and the insinuation was made, using reference to Geber's results, that because their infants were precocious, Africans were genetically substandard compared with other types of humans. It is important to note that Madame Geber herself denies this interpretation of her results, which only arose at third hand following a phrase which inadvertently appeared in this one only of her many publications. (Ibid:5-6)

There is absolutely no doubt that humanistic research and scholarship are often generally not the impersonal medium that they are supposed to be. Arthur Jensen is among those Du Bois referred to as 'the controversialist who mistakes present personal desire for scientific proof'. Even in the so-called 'progressive' or left-wing literatures of Western thought, there are abundant occasions of embarrassing racist references which will tell the Africanist that he needs his own forum. Karl Marx once described the black people of Algeria thus:

> ... out of all the inhabitants, it is most likely the Moors who least deserve any respect. As city-dwellers they are more inclined to luxury than the Arabs and the Kabyles and, on account of the constant oppression of the Turkish governors, they are a

> timid race which has, notwithstanding, preserved its cruel and vindictive character while being of a very low moral level. (Quoted in Ladimeji 1974:40)

Friedrich Engels, Marx's right-hand man, is no better. He believes the brutal victory of the French over the Algerians, was a progressive event:

> The conquest of Algeria is an important and fortunate fact of the progress of civilisation ... And, after all, the modern bourgeois, with civilisation, industry, order, and at least relative enlightenment following him, is preferable to the feudal lord or the marauding robber with the barbarian state of society to which they belong. (Quoted in ibid.)

If Engels defended brutal colonisation and colonialism in Algeria, there is every reason to believe that he would defend the same in Nigeria, Ghana, Zimbabwe or any other colony. He even went further to say that highly developed forms of thought such as mathematical axioms could only be for Europeans, and certainly not for Bushmen and Australian Negroes (ibid.:40). I make bold to say that if Engels had the chance, he would say the same thing for other intellectual forms of thought such as history, literature, geography, art or philosophy. I must however admit that their racist gibes apart, much of their work illuminates the understanding of historical development.

THE NEED FOR A NATIONAL CULTURE

All that I have concluded so far is that Africanists at the present time do not only need an association; they need a forum as well as a frontier to articulate a world view. This will help to fashion a national culture, and if possible, a continental lingua franca. A heterogeneous but uniform culture and a shared linguistic medium, as we know from experience, helps solidarity and the idea of a common destiny. Let us quickly admit that as Africans we are inheritors of a great civilisation, but today the civilisations of Mali and Songhai lie buried under the sands of the Sahara, and much of what we now have to show for them consists in war, famine, hunger and drought. Lest we forget, these matters have been complicated by the lack of any purposeful leadership before the end of the twentieth century. In this respect if we recount our past

achievements, it is also well to record our present lack of achievements. One can affirm, without fear of contradiction, that the present-day intelligentsia realise that something is lost to the past which they must go back to re-discover. There is an African history somewhere which we have not been able to find but in which lies the key to the future.

I do not need to re-emphasise here the disillusionment of our people with Structural Adjustment Programmes and the rest of them – monetised economy, modernisation of poverty, and so on. The truth to all this is that colonialism, whether in the earlier forms or in its new attempts, can only foist on its outposts an artificially structured economy. In itself, it is a violent phenomenon capable of a growth which is outwardly directed, but lacking in genuine development. There will be more money in circulation but more poverty because the currencies in circulation carry little value. Echoes of this kind of situation are found in theories of the Martiniquan thinker and culture enthusiast, Frantz Fanon, and he writes:

> I admit that all the proofs of a wonderful Songhai civilisation will not change the fact that today the Songhais are underfed and illiterate, thrown between sky and water with empty heads and empty eyes. But it has been remarked several times that this passionate search for a national culture which existed before the colonial era finds its legitimate reason in the anxiety shared by native intellectuals to shrink away from that Western culture in which they all risk being swamped. (1978:168)

By its very nature, colonialism does not only enslave people in a new way of life, it also seeks to convince them that they have no past worthy of exhibition. Once it has misrepresented that past, the neo-colonial state is cut off from that fountain of history and its citizens are set adrift in a disembodied era. Once there is no past, and the present unstable, institutions can hardly thrive or develop. Indeed colonial domination sets out to discredit a culture in such a way as to convince its owners that their whole history has been one dark patch on the world from which they must seek redemption. Let me illustrate with one concrete example. At the inception of the colonial adventure, African artists were great carvers of wood and stone, and smelters of bronze for upwards of ten centuries. The skill had reached such a stage of perfection that explorers and missionaries were astounded by the civilisation they met. Because these works had a high degree of consistency, it could no longer be

denied that the art was indigenous (Eyo 1977:100). Besides, it proved that a great civilisation had indeed flourished before colonisation began. Countless works of wood were committed to bonfires by 'missionaries' sometimes in an attempt to destroy the material evidence of such a civilisation. But because the skill and the tradition had become entrenched, the more they burned, the more were produced. Nearly a century after these events, and long convinced that the evidence of those civilisations could not be destroyed, the colonists now began the avid acquisition of these works.

Today the best of African art works lie in European and American museums, and the ones left in private hands have become the target of speculators and quacks whose only appreciation of art lies in how much money it can yield. No sooner had African plastic arts rivalled the best in Hellenic and Roman civilisations than the likes of Arthur Jensen of Berkeley began to liken precocity to primitivity and to tribality. The British art collector and critic, William Fagg, began a subtly racist campaign against the precocity of African Art (ibid.:38; Fagg 1963a). He began to call them names, referring to them as 'images', and further desecrated them by referring to them as 'tribal art'. To Fagg, anything he could not understand in the tradition of European Art tradition did not qualify as modern art; rather it was tribal art. Well, the only thing humble critics like ourselves could have asked our Eurocentric critic was why he continued to acquire more of such art he gleefully called 'tribal' for the British Museum. Why would he not continue to acquire the art of his own environment in the same proportions? We have suffered for too long at the hands of prejudiced critics of African studies to allow them exclusive control of the field. The recent formation of an African Studies Association in Nigeria is as necessary as it was a little over three decades ago; Fanon noted of the African Cultural Society:

> This Society had been created by African intellectuals who wished to get to know each other and to compare their experiences and the results of their respective research work. The aim of this Society was therefore to affirm the existence of an African Culture, to evaluate this culture on the plane of distinct nations and to reveal the internal motive forces of each of their national cultures. But at the same time, this Society fulfilled another need: the need to exist side by side with the European Cultural Society, which threatened to transform itself into a universal cultural society. There was therefore at the

bottom of this decision the anxiety to be present at the universal trysting place fully armed, with a culture springing from the very heart of the African continent ...

If it is not accomplished there will be serious psycho-affective injuries and the result will be individuals without an anchor, without a horizon, colourless, stateless, rootless – a race of angels. (1978:172-75)

THE LANGUAGE QUESTION

There are some intellectuals who believe that the determination of a true national culture depends on whether or not Africa could achieve a lingua franca, and make a clean break from the languages of Europe. Even if this desire were considered extreme, there was a point to be made nevertheless. Soon after the Second World War, the University of London set up overseas colleges in Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Sierra Leone. The various departments of English taught the history of English Literature and the great traditions of the English language. Naturally, the literatures of the 'native' countries were considered inferior, especially as they were largely oral and bereft of a written tradition. The great dilemma for the African student, therefore, was to trace approximations in his own literature from the dominant mainstream literature of the West. Apart from a cultural alienation of the African elite being reared in such contexts, there was also the problem of what Fanon had earlier described as the 'serious psycho-affective injuries' which the 'native' might suffer from the assault of an alien culture.

Of course, we must not lose sight of the positive possibilities that this might equally engender through the medium of positive action. In this respect, a number of innovative students and scholars are likely to write their own literatures in the accepted or given traditions of the dominant literatures. Whilst we have suffered from the disadvantages of a colonial education, we have been able to wring some positive consequences from it as well.

Once this problem was highlighted, reactions to it have been in two forms, generally speaking. The first had been to advocate the teaching and writing of African literatures in the indigenous languages of Africa rather than in the metropolitan languages of Europe. The first salvo came from David Diop, in 1956, and he writes:

> The African creator, deprived of the use of his language and cut off from his people, might turn out to be only the representative of a literary trend and that is not necessarily the least gratuitous of the conquering nation. His works, having become a perfect illustration of the assimilationist policy through imagination and style, will doubtless rouse the warm applause of a certain group of critics. In fact, these praises will go mostly to colonialism which, when it can no longer keep its subjects in slavery, transforms them into docile intellectuals patterned after Western literary fashions which, besides, is another more subtle form of bastardisation. (Quoted in Ngugi 1987:25)

In an article in *Transition* in 1963, Obi Wali declared that the uncritical acceptance of English and French as the medium of educated writing in Africa is largely misdirected and that it will not advance the cause of African literature and culture. He further affirms that until African literatures are written in African languages, African writers are merely pursuing a dead end (ibid.).

If one realises that language and religious ideology (or faith) are two great cultural routes to the soul of any ethnic group or race, then one would realise the gravity of what those gentlemen are advocating. It is not an exaggeration to say that language and faith (whether as religion or ideology) have remained at the fountain-springs of the colonialist onslaught. In response to this call, the Kenyan writer, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o decided from about 1980 or so that he would no longer write in any other than the Kikuyu language, his mother tongue, and the one indigenous language he knows very well. Accordingly, he called on all other African writers to do the same so that the English, French, Portuguese or Spanish versions of those works would be translations. This is crucial because, for him:

> Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, at their politics and at the social production of wealth, at their entire relationship to nature and to other beings. Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world. (Ibid.:16)

He further observes that in order to control a people's economic and political life, colonialism mentally alienated them from their language and culture.

> The real aim of colonialism was to control the people's wealth: what they produced, how they produced it, and how it was distributed, to control, in other words, the entire realm of the language of real life ... But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonised, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world ... To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others. (Ibid.)

The second form of reaction to the language and culture question was somewhat more variegated. It consisted largely in the founding of various departments of African languages and literatures which would, in turn, intensify the intellectual study and analyses of African languages and oral literature, as well as new forms of literary writings. The names of African writers and philosophers now appeared on the college curricula and a new historiography complemented what used to be 'imported' forms of African history. Along with this new awareness came the formation of the Institutes of African Studies, Centres of Cultural Studies and other research and documentation centres on African culture and tradition. The Institutes of African Studies were supposed to focus on field research, collect new data and preserve various forms of African culture for documentation as well as for analysis. It was realised at the time that knowledge in the conventional departments within the humanities was too Eurocentric to make a lasting model of an African personality and identity. We are all witnesses to the little that those efforts have been able to achieve so far. For me, the language question goes beyond a mere lingua franca; the furthest implications of what Ngugi advocates will be the invention of a mode of discourse in speech, writing and cultural communication.

PHILOSOPHY AND NATURAL SCIENCE

I feel inclined to make a few clarifications and remarks on the relevance of philosophy and natural science to the development or evolution of culture. It will be recalled that I earlier quoted Friedrich Engels where he writes that Bushmen, that is Africans, and other black peoples are incapable of highly

developed forms of thought such as mathematical axioms, and by implication, science. Such racist views have been used in the past as a subtle but potent form of mental conditioning to discourage developing nations from aspiring to scientific research and advanced technology. The tragedy of this kind of mental conditioning is that it has actually dissuaded many African leaders from pursuing an independent policy on scientific development. Hence they rely on the West to transfer technology and science to them. So we are used to hearing such phrases as 'the transfer of technology'.

There certainly can be no such thing as the transfer of technology. No nation will gladly give up her hard-earned ideas of science and development gratis. Technology is never given out; it is either built or derived according to the peculiarities of one's own culture. Let it also be affirmed that science and technology, like civilisation, is not the exclusive preserve of any one race or culture; it is the heritage of the whole of humanity. There is always, however, a flourishing culture of art, architecture, drama, music and literature that precedes the evolution of science and a flourishing technology. Without the art and culture of the Greek and Romans, there would have been no Western science and technology as we know it today.

It will also be found that those who discount African races as incapable of technological development often foist the mystery of magic and fetish on the black man. We must here affirm, without equivocation, that all human cultures possess a history of magic, fetish or witchcraft, and the practice of religion and soothsaying. What other advanced (particularly Western) cultures have done is to advance the rudiments of magic into science. Here is a convincing example: it was generally believed in medieval times that witches flew like aeroplanes, or on broomsticks. It was also believed that they had inimical powers against human beings and other natural elements. The Church and the state therefore legislated against witchcraft, the most important ecclesiastical directive being granted by Pope Innocent VII in 1484. The use of torture to extract confessions was legitimised, providing what was taken to be convincing evidence of guilt; these confessions confirmed the superstitions of the ignorant. At times witch-hunting became a mania, and the climax came in England, Scotland and America in the seventeenth century. Great numbers of people were cruelly put to death, commonly by burning. It was reported, however, that by the early eighteenth century people had become sceptical. In 1736, therefore, all legislation against witches was repealed in England and Scotland (*Longman Encyclopaedic Dictionary* 1980).

If the imagination of people could invent flying witches even when they did not see them, and would tie them to the stake and burn them so long as they confessed what nobody witnessed or confirmed; then why could machines not be invented to fly as aeroplanes? Where such great ideas are treated as myth and metaphysics, they remain in the human imagination and in dreams. But where they are reduced to technological principles and material science, they manifest as machines in flight. Science explains the world in principles; myth and magic rationalise it. In both instances, however, the material medium is culture. I would have liked to take up here in more lengthy disquisition the arrogant, racist abuse of Hume and Hegel that Africans are inferior to whites (Hegel 1956:91-99; Ngugi 1987:18) but in the face of a balanced philosophical position by Placide Tempels, I beg to be allowed to quote Tempels at length (1959:40-41):

> For the Bantu there is interaction of being with being, that is to say of force with force. Transcending the mechanical, chemical and psychological interactions, they see a relationship of forces which we should call ontological. In the created force (a contingent being) the Bantu sees a causal action emanating from the very nature of that created force and influencing other forces. One force will reinforce or weaken another. This causality is in no way supernatural in the sense of going beyond the proper attributes of created nature. It is, on the contrary, a metaphysical action which flows out of the very nature of a created being. General knowledge of these activities belongs to the realm of natural knowledge and constitutes philosophy properly so called. The observation of the action of these forces in their specific concrete applications would constitute Bantu Natural Science.
>
> This interaction of beings has been denoted by the word 'magic'. If it is desired to keep the term, it must be modified so that it is understood in conformity with the content of Bantu thought. In what Europeans call 'primitive magic' there is, to primitive eyes, no operation of supernatural, indeterminate forces, but simply the interaction between natural forces, as they were created by God and as they were put by him at the disposal of men.

> In their studies of magic, authors distinguish 'imitative magic', 'sympathetic magic', 'contagious magic', 'magic of expressed desire', etc. Whatever the resemblance, contact, or the expression of desire, does not arise out of the essence of what is indicated by magic, that is to say, the interaction of creatures. The very fact that there should have been recourse to different terms to distinguish the 'kinds' of magic, proves that any attempt to penetrate to the real nature of magic has been given up in favour of a classification in terms of secondary characters only.
>
> The child, even the adult, remains always for the Bantu a man, a force, in causal dependence and ontological subordination to the forces which are his father and mother. The older force ever dominates the younger. It continues to exercise its living influence over it. This is said to give a first example of the Bantu conception in accordance with which the 'beings-forces' of the universe are not a multitude of independent forces placed in juxtaposition from being to being ... Nothing moves in this universe of forces without influencing other forces by its movement. The world of forces is held like a spider's web of which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network.
>
> It has been maintained that 'beings' only acquire 'power' to act upon other beings or forces through the intervention of spirits and manes. This contention emanates from European observers; it does not exist in the minds of Africans. The dead intervene on occasion to make known to the living the nature and quality of certain forces, but they do not thereby change that nature at those qualities which are preordained as belonging to that force. Africans expressly say that creatures are forces, created by God as such; and that the intervention of spirits or manes changes nothing: such changes are a white man's idea.

That another philosopher from the same cultural milieu as Hume and Hegel has done so much advocacy in the explication of African philosophy and science leaves us only to excuse the ignorance of those racist philosophical exponents who have chosen to pervert their talents and substitute personal sentiments for scientific facts.

TOWARDS AN AFRICANIST RENAISSANCE

The fact that African studies have taken root in alien cultures which have hitherto remained hostile is a mark of the fact that it has something to contribute to world civilisation. The test of its lasting value is borne out by the endurance it has shown in the African diaspora and the New World. There is therefore little doubt that scholars and artists will continue to take African Studies very seriously, even at the risk of stretching their point. I believe that much of African thought and traditions are still waiting to be collected, documented and analysed in the field. The real need to derive the genuine interpretation of available data will therefore attract more and more indigenous scholars who know the culture first hand. It will also attract genuine, honest researchers, whatever their circumstances of birth or nationality. My feeling here is fairly well captured by another Africanist of the present generation. He writes:

> I believe that in the years to come, African art will take on new dimensions that no one has yet imagined – discussions that will not only connect it more fully and effectively with cognate academic disciplines but will also fulfil many of the yearnings and aspirations of distinguished scholars in the field. Present interest in the exploration of African art through 'sight' and 'sound' will include the element of 'soul'. By this I mean that the current conventional anthropological and art-historical approaches – which emphasise direct representational reaction and formal analysis to the detriment of culturally based studies in aesthetics and art criticism – will make full use of the philosophies of African peoples.
>
> There will be renewed interest in field research, but this time around, the role and involvement of African scholars will be much greater. The goal will be to interpret African art from inside the culture that gave it birth rather than from outside. In a bid to allow the culture to speak for itself, scholars will give more credibility and importance to primary sources, which consist mainly of oral traditions, than to secondary sources, which may have become authoritative simply because they were in print. Oral traditions will become a highly efficient means of studying culture, retrieving history, and reconstructing artistic

> values. Used properly, oral traditions will reveal forgotten meanings that would be hard or even impossible to obtain from the most co-operative informant. The recognition of how important African languages and literatures are to the understanding of African art will lead to a reconsideration of many 'closed' issues, theoretical frameworks, and artistic concepts, a redefinition of much terminology; and a reappraisal of the present style and techniques of displaying African art objects in museums and exhibition halls. I believe that these changes will mark the beginning of a truly interdisciplinary study and lay the foundation of a joint search for those values and concepts which lie behind the creation of African art. (Abiodun 1990:64)

All we need do is substitute the word 'art' with the word 'studies' in the above quotation, and the message and the vision remains the same. It is my fervent belief that the inauguration of African Studies Associations and allied institutions is a healthy development. It is the beginning of a new Africanist advance in this field.

NOTE

This paper was first delivered as a Keynote Address at the Inaugural Meeting of the African Studies Association of Nigeria (ASAN), Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria, 30 October 1992.

PART TWO

Methodology and Approach

4 RECORDING AND DISSEMINATION OF TRADITIONAL MUSIC

J.H. Kwabena Nketia

The initiative taken by the Western world to record, preserve, promote and disseminate knowledge of traditional music, cultivated in various parts of the world, is a remarkable achievement of the twentieth century. It has brought new challenges not only to the music public but also to creative musicians, performers, educators and administrators, while the modern recording technology, field methodology, approaches to documentation and archiving that have facilitated the growth and development of this initiative now make it possible for this task to be undertaken by competent members of the societies whose musical cultures have long been the object of field expeditions by Western researchers and collectors. With the growing consciousness of non-Western peoples in the treasures of their cultural heritage and their eagerness to safeguard them, one can look forward to a time when recordings of traditional music will increasingly become a local or regional initiative within the framework of national policies for education, culture and development that take into account local needs and goals, as well as the challenges of inter-cultural communication and international cultural exchange.

This progression can be accelerated by new modes of collaboration and the adoption of a number of transitional measures that can facilitate the launching of new initiatives, the provision of technical and cultural assistance in programme planning and implementation, reciprocity in acquisition and dissemination of materials, and the establishment of individual and institutional networks, as well as strategies of co-ordination on national, regional and international levels in order to ensure optimum utilisation of resources and the successful outcome of field research.

RESEARCHERS AND COLLECTORS

The making of field recordings of traditional music on a systematic basis has never been the monopoly of any one group of field workers, although this is not always readily conceded by researchers. Shortly after ethno-musicology emerged as a successor to comparative musicology, some of our French colleagues stated that they preferred to be identified as scholars engaged in musical folklore rather than ethno-musicology. This was because at the height of the new folk-song movement, many folk-song enthusiasts and entrepreneurs were going around the countryside with tape recorders and calling themselves ethno-musicologists. It seemed critical to the scholars to keep to the old-fashioned term 'musical folklore' in order to emphasise that their goals were scholarly. To them and, indeed, to other scholars, field recordings were first and foremost musicological documents or sources of ethnological data, while for the new folk-song enthusiasts they served only as performance and creative models and sources of listening pleasure.

Western colleagues in African area studies who held a similar view of recordings as musicological or ethnological documents did not always see eye to eye with collectors like Hugh Tracey, the great pioneer in the recording and dissemination of the music of Africa. They criticised his 'White Knight' approach, his field methodology and sometimes the kind of items he selected for dissemination, for it seemed to many that his objective was the sampling of African music for broadcasting and listening pleasure rather than the creating of ethnological documents, although he himself was sure that he was doing both.

Hugh Tracey in turn took a dim view of the so-called scholars, and now and then made sly digs at them in his editorials and commentaries (1963,1966/67, 1972). Inspired by the example of Cecil Sharp and encouraged by the enthusiasm of Gustav Holst and Vaughan Williams, he strongly believed that priority must be given to the building of libraries of recordings that would make the music of Africa accessible to those who could not experience it at first hand. Having traversed many territories and recorded many musicians, most of them for the first time, he believed that sensitive awareness of the wide range of musical experience offered by African music was a necessary prerequisite for its proper study. No one should abrogate to himself the right to theorise about African music in general until he has experienced it. Naturally researchers and collectors follow a different order of priority, and this was evident in the early history of African musicology (see Nketia

1980). While researchers concentrated on specific ethnic groups or themes they wished to study, Hugh Tracey's primary objective was not unlike that of Laura Boulton, 'the music hunter' who set out 'to capture, absorb and bring back the music of the people - their expressions in songs of sadness and joy, their outpourings in times of tragedy and in times of exhilaration' (Tracey 1963:5). With the rapid changes taking place in Africa, Hugh Tracey felt that the immediate thrust must be on preservation, with special emphasis on field recordings (1948,1950,1952,1957,1960). Accordingly, when he visited Ghana in the late 1950s to see what we were doing, he was insistent that transcription and analysis of African music could wait. To him field collectors, broadcasters, producers and promoters of African music, and performers and their audiences were the key people in any movement towards cultural renaissance in Africa and inter-cultural communication in music, and not those who study some aspects of African music in order to achieve academic merit.

There was also a difference in his approach and that of the scholars to dissemination. To the academics it meant producing scholarly papers with illustrative recordings or the occasional record, while the systematic publication of gramophone records was Hugh Tracey's primary preoccupation. Keeping the general public in mind, he limited background documentation to the bare essentials that the private individual or a radio producer flipping records and information cards could handle. Where he believed the occasional anecdote or explanation would be of interest, he would put this on the recording rather than in the liner notes or presentation cards, a practice that did not escape criticism, especially from those who preferred to listen to the voices of the music makers rather than that of the producer.

To Hugh Tracey dissemination also meant dealing with practical issues that could contribute or impede acceptance of the musical culture or specific items presented by a producer; these would include combating widely held prejudices against the integrity of African music, promoting awareness and appreciation of the artistic merits and cultural values of this music through broadcasting and the print media (including journals and magazines), as well as through the creation of a network of friends and supporters of the musical tradition. Accordingly, he published his field reports and a few monographs, and also whipped up enthusiasm through the formation of the African Music Society. As the membership of the Society was unfortunately limited by the colonial and apartheid environment in which it was set up, he

tried to counteract this by encouraging, without much success, the formation of African music clubs in neighbouring territories. Thus, unlike scholars who tend to communicate among themselves, he was more interested in the music public than in learned societies, in meeting collectors and promoters of traditional music who patronised the International Folk Music Council from whom he appears to have sought personal recognition at their conference held in Biarritz in 1953 as the chief spokesman for Africa. He states in his paper:

> It is only because we have found that the African is pathetically incapable of defending his own culture and indeed is largely indifferent to its fate that we, who subscribe wholeheartedly to the ideals of our international council, are attempting to ride over the period during which irreparable damage can be done, until Africans, themselves, will be capable of appearing at our conferences as well-informed representatives of their own people. (Tracey 1954:8)

Tracey's attitude again contrasted with that of scholars like Wachsmann (1966a,b), who took an interest in African scholars and teachers in Uganda, such as Kygamibiddiwa and Sempebbwa, and were aware of Africans elsewhere who could speak for 'their own people'. But the point I wish to stress here is not so much Tracey's paternalism as his effort to find a group with whom he could identify, for in the past collectors, folk song enthusiasts and scholars belonged to different fraternities:

1. The fraternity that values music primarily as an object of aesthetic interest or listening pleasure
2. The fraternity of creative musicians and performers who approach music in a similar manner and also as sources of creative and performance models
3. The fraternity of scholars who look at gramophone records as materials for study and who may produce ten or twenty-page booklets of ethnographic and musicological information for each of their recordings

These fraternities have certainly influenced one another, for scholars are paying more and more attention to the quality and scope of what they record and select to publish, while collectors try to do more in the field than just act as music hunters. This in fact can also be attributed to the few leading scholars

who find a place in all the different fraternities and who exert their scholarly influence on folk music associations and remind learned music associations now and then of the relevance of the musical experience.

The cleavage between collectors and scholars has not become serious among Africans: most African scholars are also collectors. Independent professional collectors like Tracey have not emerged. However, because of the fear which has haunted us for almost a hundred years that traditional African music will disappear from the face of the earth, and the incessant cry to 'safeguard' or 'preserve it for posterity', some of our Western colleagues seem to think that what Africa needs in the short term are people trained in recording techniques who, armed with detailed interview forms, can bring back recordings from the field along with sheets of meticulously classified information they can file with each recording.

In this connection the forms devised by Herbert Pepper for this purpose when he was invited by President Senghor to set up a Music Archive in Dakar were extremely detailed and systematic. He seemed to have done all the thinking for his field assistants, the primary collectors, for he left nothing to chance. As far as models of repositories were concerned, there was the example of OSTROM (Organisme de Recherche Scientifique des Territoires d'Outre-Mer) while SORAFOM (Société de Rediffusion de la France d'Outre-Mer) founded in 1956 and its successor OCORA (Office de Co-operation Radiophonique) established in 1962, have given abundant demonstration of what can be achieved by a team of dedicated collectors, though it is clear from the writings of some of them, such as Charles Duvelle and Tolia Nikiprowetsky, that some of them aspired to be more than collectors and believed that they were also musicologists or ethnomusicologists of a sort.

One suspects that the same sort of approach underlies the operation of the regional Documentation Centres set up by UNESCO at the request of member states as far as the collection of music and oral literature is concerned, but I may be wrong. Projects based on the same collectors concept, such as ERPAMO(Étude et Recherche sur le Patrimoine Musicale de l'Afrique de l'Ouest), a Francophone West African project, which selected and assembled 'collectors' from each of the countries to plan and implement an agreed field collection programme, and CERDOTOLA (Centre Régional de Documentation en Traditions Orales et Langues Africaines) in Central Africa, began with a great burst of enthusiasm and faded out just as quickly because they were based on the short-term model. Most Africans, unlike Western people, do not have the mania for collecting, an impulse that drives people

to collect not only antiques, curios and works of art of all kinds, but also postage stamps.

What Africa needs at this period in her history are not only collectors but researchers who will combine collecting with scholarly studies; researchers who can see the implications of what they collect for culture and development, education and creativity, or for scholarly investigation into traditional and contemporary problems in their particular field of African studies – Africans in full command of the materials they collect. Of course not every one may turn out to be a scholar. But by the same token, we cannot put the lid on those with scholarly potential.

LOCAL ARCHIVES OF SOUND RECORDINGS

The development of archives of sound recordings in Africa has lagged behind research and recording of traditional music in spite of the testimony of Alan Lomax that 'Africa is the best recorded of the continents' (1968:xvi), for except in South Africa where Hugh Tracey's International Library of African Music is housed, the bulk of the recordings made in the colonial period can only be found in archives in the Western hemisphere. There is nevertheless a growing accumulation of field recordings in Africa itself that could form the nucleus of archives in individual African countries. They include private collections, recordings at broadcasting and television stations, Ministries of Tourism, Culture and Information, museums and academic institutions.

There is at present very little information about how much or what is held in these collections, and whether they are managed as archives with properly documented card catalogues and so on. The first step might be to collate this information, create a general consciousness of the need for proper archiving, follow this with seminars on archival management, and identify training needs, so that common policies regarding acquisitions, use, exchanges, and so forth can be worked out. The creation of national policies on sound archives might facilitate the grouping of these materials for developing:

1. *Private Archives*. Archives not normally open to the general public, such as the archives of corporations (broadcasting, television and film corporations).
2. *Institutional Archives*. Archives administered as units within research institutions, arts centres and museums and which may grow out of the

work of a scholar or a collector associated with the institution and the contributions of other scholars and field collectors who share a collective vision.

3. *Public Archives.* Archives that emerge through an administrative mechanism for bringing together scattered collections in private custody that are donated or acquired, holdings in Ministries and Departments, as well as in other public institutions.

Given the present economic condition of African countries, the development of Public Archives of Sound Recordings may be premature and perhaps also unrealistic in terms of how much they will be used by the public. In the Western hemisphere where there is a long tradition of libraries and archives which are constantly used by scholars and the general public, the creation and development of public archives of recordings makes sense, particularly where the laws of a country make it compulsory for copies of published recordings to be placed in a designated depository. The situation in many African countries does not warrant the creation of this kind of facility at the moment.

Materials in private and institutional archives, on the other hand, are constantly used as reference and programme materials and their proper development and management need to be given attention.

RESEARCH AND DISSEMINATION

Since there is an important relationship between field research and archival development (including collection policy and dissemination), the planning of research in institutional settings must be carefully considered to ensure a steady but meaningful growth in the field recordings that are brought back to an archive. Much depends on whether one is starting from scratch or joining an established programme. The strategy I followed when I embarked on my research in 1952 was guided by both a number of research objectives and a collection policy. Since the music I had to study did not exist in written form and could only be reached through performances, I decided, as I planned my work, that my objective and strategy would be as follows:

1. The focus of my field research would be on musical events, including any event that incorporated music. Accordingly my primary data would be drawn from observation and documentation (including recording of

the music) of such events in selected societies. The variety of the events defined in part the scope of the musical culture with particular reference to the genres and the selected items performed.

2. The research programme would be based on the study of selected topics that would allow for particular formal and contextual problems or themes to be investigated in the field and not on the detailed study of the cultures of individual societies in their totality. In this respect my approach would be different from that of my anthropological colleagues in the Department of Sociology where I was based.
3. The research programme would document oral traditions about music and musical instruments. This would be related to musical events or specific topics being investigated or to unsolicited topics raised by those I talked to.
4. To ensure that varying scope was given to research and collection as the occasion or the situation demanded, a distinction would be maintained between 'studies' and 'documentation'. The former would be intensive, while the latter would be extensive, involving recordings of the repertoire of individual societies or events for archival purpose rather than for immediate analysis and study, since the building of such an archive of sound recordings would be a major part of the programme.
5. The documentation would also include transcriptions of song texts and drum language since these are created and used by musicians. Textual studies had to be part of my concept of African musicology not only because of what texts revealed about a culture but also because of what they revealed about the creative process and about larger issues of communication in music.
6. The programme would explore other sources of data, particularly from published accounts as well as unpublished materials at the national radio station, and the information department. The latter often maintains an archive of photographs that includes photographs of musical events, performing groups, and musical instruments encountered by press photographers. In a situation in which research in certain areas had to start from scratch, every available source had to be utilised.
7. The programme would build a collection of musical instruments and would explore the possibility of establishing performing groups or extension courses on the university campus, for my objective was not just collecting music to build an archive but developing a programme of music research and performance that would be served by an archive.

This incidentally was also part of my concept of dissemination.

The archival holdings were gradually enlarged with early commercial recordings of music retrieved from local record companies in Ghana, recordings from other parts of Africa, and field recordings that scholars donated. The growth of the archive was halted by the economic depression that gripped Ghana from the 1970s and which made field work on the old basis impossible. Some of the earlier reel-to-reel tapes of the 1950s showed signs of deterioration, but lack of resources held up action. The restoration of these tapes, expansion of the archival holdings and plans for local dissemination of some of the materials in the archive are under active consideration.

In the 1960s the research and archival programme outlined above branched out to other important areas of dissemination. A School of Music, Dance and Drama, and a National Dance Company were established on the campus of the University of Legon under the aegis of the Institute of African Studies. A two-year diploma course was also established in the Institute of African Studies for retraining those who had diplomas in Western music, while those with first degrees could do graduate courses in African Studies with music as a field of specialisation. Students and lecturers who joined the School and the Institute could thus participate in the performance, instructional and research programmes in African music and dance.

Another aspect of the dissemination programme was the preparation of annotated texts of songs, drum language and poetic recitations for use as readers and literature in elementary and secondary schools. Some of the more sophisticated texts published in this period are now studied at the degree level from the perspective of literature and textual criticism in Ghanaian languages.

Attempts were made to share the results of our research with the general public through the medium of broadcasting and television and also through the dance programme directed by my colleague, Albert Mawere Opoku, with whom I worked closely. Articles on music and dance appeared in local newspapers and magazines at the request of various editors, while the outside readership of academics was reached through monographs, articles and papers read at conferences.

Thus in many ways I shared a similar practical approach to dissemination with Hugh Tracey except that I followed a different course; first, because for me scholarship, applied research and creativity were not incompatible, and second, because while Hugh Tracey acted as a spokesman for cultures he did

not belong to, I spoke for cultures with which I identified and which I was in the process of rediscovering and reinterpreting. I was a 'participant-observer' of my own culture and those of my neighbours. To me research was not only a process of discovery but also a learning process which enabled me to acquire new knowledge of the arts and cultures of Ghanaians and other African peoples, knowledge I tried to systematise and share in diverse ways at home and abroad.

The only thing I withheld was the publication of discs of my field recordings which, at that time, I could only have done in Europe and the United States. I did not want to do this without first publishing some of them locally in much the same manner as I did for my early monographs like Funeral Dirges of the Akan People, Drumming in Akan Communities, African Music in Ghana, and so forth, some of which found co-publishers abroad. All my artists performed virtually free of charge because they understood that I was recording for research and educational purposes and for posterity. Hence all along my hope has been that they can be issued some day under a national label for instructional and cultural programmes that contribute to culture and development as well as in some appropriate format for the world of music.

Recent developments in the recording and marketing of local pop and religious music show that something can now be done to promote and disseminate cassettes of traditional music locally. There are also indications from radio listeners' choice programmes that attractive selections of traditional music can be marketed locally. To me, keeping abreast of the latest developments in recording technology – digital cassettes, CD-rom – is not as much a priority when it comes to dissemination in Africa as finding ways of producing limited editions of materials on regular cassettes for targeted audiences, including educational institutions and non-literate listeners who have little or no use for liner notes. It is my hope, therefore, that this phase of our programme which needs support and collaboration will materialise.

CULTURAL POLICY

It is evident that such developments cannot take place without a cultural policy that encourages commitments on the part of both government and institutions of higher learning. The idea of a university as a centre for the creative arts had to be accepted by my University, while the philosophy of

the African Personality which guided Ghana's national cultural policy for the preservation of the cultural heritage and the promotion of consciousness of identity in the post-colonial period facilitated implementation of the development plan I had conceived. In that period, preservation meant not only recording and archiving but also promoting performances of traditional music through national festivals and special programmes as well as a national theatre movement. All these, together with the air time given to Ghanaian languages and cultures every day which kept traditional music alive, brought a new national consciousness of the arts and created a public that was ready not only to watch performances of the music and dance of different ethnic groups in the country but also to read about them.

A similar trend occurred in other African countries though not in the integrated form it took in Ghana. As the 1960s was a period of political transition in which the assertion of cultural identity became a primary mode of behaviour, Institutes of African Studies, Cultural Studies Centres, and Institutes of Fine Arts sprang up in a number of African countries. National dance companies and theatre groups also emerged, the former outside universities and formal institutions, and the latter partly at universities that had drama and theatre departments.

The idea of developing archives of sound recordings was not vigorously pursued everywhere as part of institutional research objectives even though field recordings were accumulated at the time. A few countries like Senegal, Burkina Faso, Zaïre and Gabon embarked on the creation of national repositories with the help of Western specialists who provided on-the-job training for their local assistants. A similar initiative was taken by UNESCO to create a few regional documentation centres in Africa at the request of member states.

In the light of these developments and the increased role that traditional music played in national festivals and other programmes, UNESCO was requested by the Intergovernmental Conference on National Cultural Policies – held under its auspices in Accra in 1975 – and the Organisation of African Unity to initiate action on a ten-year development plan for the performing arts of Africa, for it became evident that there was a need for new initiatives as well as some co-ordination of programmes and the sharing of ideas and experiences both within individual countries and the region as a whole.

The period of institutional change also brought a new factor into the pursuit of field research in African countries by foreign scholars. Some governments drew up regulations that required field researchers to deposit

copies of their materials in the country in which they worked, while regulations for monitoring the work of the field collector also came into force. Such was the impact of the change that Hugh Tracey expressed grave concern in an editorial in his journal *African Music*, because he apparently began to experience 'considerable difficulty ... in obtaining an adequate amount of original research matter for publication' owing to what he described as 'the increasingly disturbed political situation throughout the continent' which, in many territories, had 'militated against the possibility of field work in musical subjects' (1963:5).

The issue of the legal protection of folklore, including traditional music, has now complicated the matter even further since traditional music has become a marketable commodity. While this is likely to restrict commercial reproductions of field recordings abroad, it may also lead in a positive way to a new era of international co-operation in research – in the creation of new forms of partnership with producers and publishers on behalf of artists whose performances are recorded.

OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

It will be evident that there is much that can be done to carry existing programmes forward if goals and strategies are redefined in relation to the development needs of Africa, as well as the need for collaboration and reciprocity both within and outside the continent. It is in the light of these and other considerations that we have taken another step forward to establish, with Foundation assistance, the International Centre for African Music and Dance, to provide, among other things, a forum for the identification and examination of issues such as the foregoing, the planning of concerted programmes, exchange of field recordings, co-operation in the development of a central archive and study centre, and a regional database for different categories of information. International linkages are being established with other archives to facilitate not only the acquisition of early recordings of African music and other materials of interest but also the training of music archivists and the organisation of periodic seminars in archival management.

The Centre will maintain a close relationship with the music and dance units of African Studies Centres and similar institutions through its subregional representatives as well as with the Regional Documentation Centres set up by UNESCO and the Programme Exchange Centre of URTNA (Union des Radios et Télévisions Nationales Africaines) in Nairobi and, of

course, with the international community of researchers, collectors and producers of African music and dance.

It is my fervent hope that this collaboration will be pursued by the younger generation of scholars and artists and that it will lead to the growth of both a Central Archive and a network of local and national archives that will facilitate and promote the preservation, cultivation and study of Africa's heritage of music and dance.

5 THE FIRED IMAGE

Literary Beginnings from Cultural Ends

Dan Izevbaye

The literary history of Nigeria as a method of structuring and interpreting the movement of creative activity in that country has drawn mainly on the English language tradition and its development. The other literary traditions – all of them indigenous and antecedent to English – tend to be treated mainly as tributaries: as influences on the new English material, as generic models and sources of creative inspiration for writing in English, and even as derivations from the English language tradition. This is ironical because English is the only literary tradition in Nigeria without roots in a local culture. But in spite of being contingent on relatively recent culture contacts, English has remained remarkably successful, partly because its hegemony depends on institutions that have survived their colonial origins, and partly because of its internationality. This historical advantage is complemented by the adoption of English at the social levels which matter most – the educational and the bureaucratic. In addition, English has been an effective medium of national integration because of its adaptability and because it is considered the most politically neutral among the languages competing for national acceptance in Nigeria. The contemporary dominance of English and the subordination of vernacular traditions is only one stage in the historical evolution of a multicultural national tradition. We cannot begin to understand the concept of literature and the national experience without an analysis of the historical and contemporary interplay of the cultural traditions which at present provide the only viable basis for the making of Nigerian literature.

Two kinds of relations immediately suggest themselves here: the evolution of Nigerian literature in time, as distinct from its distribution in space. This division of literature by temporal development and spatial distribution may at first seem a rather artificial way to begin to talk about a

national literature. It may be true, to some extent, that the present geographical pattern of literary production is a result of its history. But as I will try to show presently, the main types of literary culture in Nigeria that can be accounted for in terms of, originally, the indigenous cultures whose literary conventions developed from the accumulation of literary practices over a long period. Superimposed on these are new cultures from which new traditions of literary practice were diligently cultivated according to a pattern which reflected the correspondence of geographical factors and literary policy. In other words, the literary map of Nigeria consists of two basic kinds of literary culture. First, there are groups of visible overgrowths nurtured according to Islamic and European ideas that have been carried here from great distances across deserts and seas. Second, beneath these flourishing growths are the much older, if less visible, undergrowths of the oral literatures in the different languages. Sometimes the existing cultures were nourished side by side with the new transplants; but sometimes they were simply weeded out in order to create aesthetic space for the cultivation of new literary practices.

It should be obvious from this summary that the beginning of a new literature is linked with the end of an existing culture: one makes the other possible. A new literary culture is often a means of propagating and sustaining the goals of a new social culture. The old forms are superseded or displaced if they cannot be adapted to the ends of the new culture. In moments of culture change the creative resources of literature are necessary for making the new reality possible, even if these resources do not appear in an explicitly literary form. I do not think it is extravagant to argue that no other human activity is quite capable of producing the same power and scope of representation which we have come to expect in literature. Because we are consistently under the influence of that imaginative activity which we most closely identify with literature, we are able to approach the past, not as something that is dead, but as an area of true experience that we can revive and re-enter.

At different periods in society, the strong faith in the reality of those characters and events that are described as historical hardly ever depends on the strength of available evidence or facts but on the imaginative power with which this past is evoked. What we often accept as historical truth is what is made credible by the creative power of imagination, unless there is a level of consciousness which can resist its fabrication. In other words, the past has no meaning outside our present consciousness which recreates and sometimes

endows it with the only real significance that it has. The literary imagination is thus an important key to the process by which the texts about reality are created, including the retrieval of past events, since its creative play is mainly the source of our knowledge of the idols who sustain our historical and political faiths.

Let me illustrate. The pre-colonial past of many Nigerian communities is recreated through the myths and legends which remain politically important in spite of their cautious use by historians and their occurrence in diverse, sometimes conflicting, versions. It will be enough for me to illustrate with two of the best known and politically influential examples of such myths and legends – those of Bayajidda and Oduduwa, who are accepted as the culture heroes of the Hausa and the Yoruba respectively.

Oduduwa emerges as three distinct personalities from the cluster of narratives about him. In one version, he is the creative aspect of the godhead, for he is literally the assistant of the supreme deity from whom each Yoruba *oba* derives his titular attributes as the deputy of the divinities and the possessor of earth and well-being. But in other versions, Oduduwa is either the hero who led the Yoruba into their present land from the Middle East, or he is the political genius who wrested power from his predecessor, Obatala. But, we may ask, could the real Oduduwa have been any of these mythical personalities who at different times have supplanted each other in the consciousness of different communities according to the spiritual or political need of the times? The historical Oduduwa is shrouded in the mists of time. The Oduduwa that we know is the revived personage who functions as the unifying focus for the consciousness of the descendants of Oduduwa.

There is greater consistency among the various legends of Bayajidda, whose other name was Abu Yazid, the fugitive from royal treachery at the Bornu court, liberator of Daura and husband of Daura,[1] founder of the seven Hausa states whose descendants include Bauwo the father of Bagauda, the first Sarkin Kano who began his reign in the year 389 according to the Islamic calendar. You would think, from the chronicling of these facts and figures, that, unlike Oduduwa, there can be no question of the historicity of Bayajidda. Apart from the force of its unifying ideology, this impression arises mainly from the stability which writing gives to traditional narratives and from the techniques of the historical chronicle by which the legend is clarified and reduced to manageable form. However, the chronicle depends on the motif of the serpent-slayer, a widespread folktale formula that recurs in hero myths, but is alien to historical narratives.

Historians do not believe that historical events behave literally in this stereotyped manner. Consequently, the Bayajidda legend, like the Oduduwa myth, has been treated as an allegorical tale and rationalised by a critical interpretation which reduces the heroic narrative to a human scale. Even as early as 1928, one historian had, by his interpretation, transformed it from an heroic monomyth to an allegory of the early social and political history of the Central Sudan. Thus Palmer interprets the Daura legend in the following manner:

> An invasion by a more highly civilised people overcame the primitive aborigines, seized the power, and taught the new arts to a grateful people while at the same time adopting many of the tribal customs of the conquered. (1928:136; see also Hallam 1966; on Oduduwa, see Willett 1967:196; Atanda 1980:4-7)

When events get more distant from us, and history tails into myth, and mythical heroes are admitted into king lists and chronicles where they hardly belong, historians are forced to adopt the techniques of interpretation that are borrowed from the criticism of allegorical poetry and the scriptures. The reason is to be found in Afigbo's explanation of the problem with myth as history. The social and political contributions of many generations are reduced to the heroic achievements of a single golden age. This contradicts 'the proper conception of history as change (for good or ill) over time' (Afigbo 1977:84).

This need for a rational understanding makes an allegorical reading of myths attractive to historians. But an allegorical interpretation of such traditional texts is initially handicapped by the way it sets out to produce a formally coherent meaning which reconciles the contradictions surviving from the source materials into the traditional story, even when it is not certain that parts of the text are not pure fiction. One problem is the occurrence of anachronisms and the tendency for stories belonging to different time scales to be telescoped into a single time channel.[2] Particularly problematic is the attempt to incorporate those events that occurred before the arrival or ascendancy of the ruling class into myths in which origins are dated from the standpoint of the patrons served by the myths. That these inconsistencies exist in such a hidden form is evidence that a traditional narrative can be appropriated for use in transmitting the political and

religious ideology imposed by a new culture. But because the form itself transmits an existing convention for communicating the values of the superseded culture, it may be under the threat of being itself displaced by new forms.

The creative imagination is necessary for the existence of human reality. Certainly, the past cannot exist if consciousness does not create it. The social world begins only when this level of human consciousness is willing to let it begin. It fixes dates for the beginning of human institutions and groups. But it is part of the process of continuity and change, for the existing sense of history and reality needs to be revised and enlarged because of the emergence of a new social order. For example, a mythic history is not likely to be upset by the appearance of material evidence which challenges the existing view of the world, as may happen with archaeological findings. The new item is merely re-interpreted and incorporated in existing myths, as probably happened in the case of the *opa oranyan* at Ife. The time frame may not even need to be adjusted to accomplish this incorporation.

There is a stage, however, when the challenge to the existing order is more than revisionist, and the ideological differences are irreconcilable. The new interests to be served are not merely political – like the legitimacy of a new dynasty – they entail a radically different view of the world. These differences are often so fundamental in exposing sharp contradictions when existing concepts and personages are taken over and incorporated into new myths,[3] that new means of transmitting them have to be created. At different times during this stage of historical development in Nigeria, the traditional cultures became all but submerged by the deluge of two new traditions, the Arabic-Islamic and the Christian-European cultures. Both these impositions on the age-old strata of local traditions have brought along their own legitimising narratives with their own conceptions of beginnings.[4] Following on the heels of the traditional culture, heroes are the new agents of transformation whose religious activities helped to undermine the earlier heritage, and who helped to map out the new territorial configuration of the culture – as Shehu dan Fodio did after Bayajidda, and Bishop Crowther after Oduduwa. These recent transformations can be seen in the spatial differentiation of cultural traditions, and in the ensuing conflict of world views. Islamic and Christian explanatory myths of origins and migration have been superimposed on local myths.

It is this contradiction that gave rise to the cultural nationalism of the period just before independence. The story of that period is now quite familiar.

The world began anew for writers like Achebe, Clark, Okigbo and Soyinka, who initiated a literary resistance to Christian ends and partially revived and made relevant the memories of the old literary culture by the new educated elite. That legacy has been transmitted through the work of a younger group of inheritors which includes Osofisan, Osundare and Ojaide. It is an historical irony that some of these younger authors feel distant from, if not directly hostile to, the new tradition whose conventions and values they help to sustain and transmit.

There is a remarkably close relationship between the post-literacy threat to traditional Nigerian literatures and their survival and transmission. I will now examine this age-old process which, because it never really results in the complete annihilation of an artistic culture, should be seen as an interconnected process of destruction and renewal, of a new culture growing out of an old, of something durable salvaged from the fires of destruction. This two-sided process is what I refer to in my title as 'the fired image'; it involves a chain-like succession of traditions of figuration or iconography, periodically disrupted by acts of iconoclasm. I choose my illustrations of this process from three separate descriptions or representations of cultural or historical activities which took place in different parts of Nigeria in the distant past, the recent past and the present.

My first example comes from a traditional technique of figuration used by Bini artists (as brassworkers at Igbo-Ukwu, Tada, Ife, Owo, must have done in the past). Philip Dark describes this method, surviving since the fourteenth century, in the following words: when the artists have moulded the images to be cast in bronze,

> the moulds, which have been air-dried, are placed in a fire and heated so that the wax can be melted and poured off and the clay mould heated to the point where it is sufficiently fired to permit molten brass to be poured in without collapsing. (1973:49)

In this process, the fired image retains the basic lineament of the original model and gives it permanent form. A rich artistic heritage is conserved and accumulated in this way. But the necessary material waste is also to be noted. The wax which initially fills the mould and surrounds the core is melted and poured away in the process. The actual and symbolic significance of this process for power relations within the culture is that it formalises and

concretises the ruling ideas which create particular forms of social institutions and authorises the subject to be commemorated. By this means, it helps to recreate, in material form, the particular conception of reality sanctioned by the ruling social order. A similar process of fashioning an acceptable reality through the agency of art was at work in traditional literature, except that literature is more independent of wealth by which alone the materials of art can be obtained. Thus verbal art is less dependent on patronage than figural art, and therefore less amenable to coercion. In other words, as a form that is not so dependent on the material resources of culture, literature can operate in a more flexible way through a wide range of forms, from expressive lyrics and satirical songs to king lists and ritual chants. It can thus be authorised as much by the least socially important individual as by a ruling class. But, as with iconography, form in literature is a means of selecting and transmitting those cultural ideas that are most highly regarded in each epoch. It is a means of preserving and enhancing the value of material resources and the formal conventions that artists have created.

My second illustration is a more recent literary account of the radical solution that each culture adopts when a tradition that began with conservation declines into conservatism: that is, when the forms show a tendency towards the static and decadent. Here, too, fire is the key agent. But in this case fire is not used to refine and preserve; it consumes. But the cultural memory transcends it, and the inherited forms which the images transmit are salvaged and adapted for use in new ways. This stage in the transformation of culture is basically revisionist. The situation is made familiar to us by the action of the villagers in *Arrow of God* whose deity was discredited and set on fire because its once vital and socially relevant spiritual essence had become exhausted. This is precisely the same political gesture enacted at a personal level in Soyinka's poem, 'Cremation of a Wormy Caryatid' (1989:63-70). The action of the poem consists in setting fire to a carved image. The image is a typical Yoruba wood carving, a horseman with a retinue – a superstructure reflecting the social order. This 'caryatid' has been made porous by the infestation of wood-worms identified as 'enemies within, / gnawing entrails of strict hierarchies'.

The poet resists the temptation to salvage something for a 'Second,/ Third or Fourth idolatry', even though the necessity to burn an object that was once a valuable possession is a bitter pill for him to swallow. His mixed feelings are captured by an implied pun on 'wormwood' conjured up by the various images of wood and worms and the tension between temptation and

resolution. The burning seems on the surface to be 'a sacrilege with match and kerosene'; in reality it is

> a mercy death.
> To save the grave, we isolate the tree;
> Beyond all cure, uproot, incinerate.

This, then, is not an iconoclastic act. It is in a sense an act of cultural transmission. The creative tradition survives not only in the aesthetic memory which the poet evokes through the ironic but colourful interplay of blazing flames and stubborn form, but also in the commemorative fact of the poem as a memorial to the image and its tradition. A regenerative process is evident in this bush-burning approach to the cultivation of tradition. Yoruba elegies routinely include the truism that when fire dies it veils itself with ash, just as the young plantain shoot takes the place of the dying parent plant.

This sentiment was not, however, relevant to the new activities of the invading cultures whose radical fires ravaged and consumed completely those traditional images that were likely to obstruct their missionary goals. My third example comes from the radical Islamic movement which swept like a *harmattan* fire across the Central Sudan in the nineteenth century: but examples can be multiplied from the proselytising activities of Christian missionaries in the forest regions of southern Nigeria, not the least notable being the incident in Nembe (Brass). According to Ade Ajayi, at Nembe, 'the missionaries got the chiefs ... to alter the national custom to the point of abolishing, destroying and desecrating objects formerly held sacred ... In 1899, after a short devotional service, "Juju House" was pulled down and burnt' with all its images (1965:226-27). This account is not unique. It faintly echoes the account, in the *Kano Chronicle*, of the burning down of the house of the snake cult at different times in Kano in the fourteenth century (Palmer 1908:98, 103, 108, 122).

The story is similar in other areas. One notable example, among many others, is that of Abd-al-Salam who 'ruthlessly destroyed Nupe idols during his conquest of this area' (Bravmann 1974:14). But iconoclasm is not the real issue here. The main issue is the forcible creation of new cultural conditions for literature; and it is important to examine the philosophical and ideological support for these conditions.

A rewarding starting point will be the profound concern of Islamic leaders with certain forms of learning and literature in the nineteenth century. These

leaders were not only theologians and politicians, but also poets (Bello 1922:87, 114). Shehu dan Fodio, Waziri Abdullahi, Sultan Bello and Aminu el-Kanemi all composed poems either to commemorate the battles they fought, or as personal expressions and responses to the political controversies in which they were engaged.[5]

Part of the evidence cited as an example of the religious persecution which led to the Hijra of Usman dan Fodio in 1804 was the provocative vandalisation of books. Under Yunfa, who became Sarkin Gobir in 1802, the enemy had entered the houses of the Muslims in the month of Ramadan, 'and scattered their books and burnt their wooden writing tables' (ibid.:48; cf.105). Ironically, the same offence was later attributed to the followers of Shehu dan Fodio himself by Aminu el-Kanemi, in a letter to Muhammed Bello in which he alleged: 'You are destroying books; you are scattering them in the roads; you are throwing them in the dirt' (ibid.:103). To fully comprehend the emotional significance of this image of cultural barbarism, we should refer to the cultural status of books in nineteenth-century Islamic society in the Sudanese states, especially their manual product and their religious and political significance and use. The war poems composed by Sultan Bello and his uncle Waziri Abdullahi (ibid.:84, 89-90, 57-60), are not to be read as poems in the epic or heroic mode, but as versified historical accounts imbued with personal religious fervour, and inserted in the texts as milestones in the stages of the advance of the Jihad, and as expressions of personal elation at the accomplishment of a spiritual purpose. For only a thin line separated poetry from words of worship. Books were carefully scripted as records, as well as repositories of religious knowledge. And they were the preferred means of the transmission of knowledge. Muhammed Bello once accused el-Kanemi of ignorance because el-Kanemi based his allegations on information received 'from those people who could not read or write' (ibid.:104). Books were not used as sources of entertainment. Literary pleasure was primarily a by-product of knowledge (ibid.:2). A nineteenth-century account included 'passion for amusement, song and dance' in the list of shameful customs which undermined the foundations of religion.[6]

The deeply felt vexation and frustration of Muhammed Bello soon after the capture of one of the towns of Katsina in 1807, is to be understood in this context:

> I climbed a hill to see what was being done in the town. Then I saw papers being blown about by the wind. They were falling

> into the dirt. I endeavoured to pick them up, till I was weary for they were very many. So I returned and was vexed all day. (Ibid.:107)

In Islamic culture then and now, books are to be treated with reverence, because they share in the material essence of the sacred Qur'an, which is accepted as an incarnation of the divine word, and the only way in which the word is made directly manifest. In his letter to Bello, el-Kanemi wrote that 'the name of God is on these books and you know that he who throws the name of God in the dirt is a heathen' (ibid.:103).

According to the idealist ideology which sustains this attitude, the material world is a direct product of divine creativity. Islam is therefore hostile to mimetic art, especially all forms of realistic representations that are made in three dimensions. The classical exemplar for Islamic action against icons is the Prophet's destruction of idols in the Ka'abah on his victorious entry into Makkah. Subsequent acts of iconoclasm in the name of Islam are re-enactments of the original object lesson. Contemporary examples of iconoclasm are not too hard to come by,[7] though most establishments avoid directly using it to consolidate their cultural gains. From the Islamic point of view, a more orthodox approach is reflected in the recent banning of a set of images by a panel of Islamic jurists. While this did not involve the actual burning of images, it was a pre-emptive pronouncement which had the same effect as firing images. Furthermore, it clarifies the limits of iconoclasm by distinguishing between sculptural art and fine art. I would like to quote my source at length:

> Based on the Islamic teaching on idols, the Fatwa Committee [Committee of Jurists] of the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs recommended the rejection of the request of Messrs Carpas AG of Switzerland for clearance to bring in to Nigeria replicas (in miniature) of the Holy Ka'abah situated in Makkah and the distribution of same to Muslims in the country. The main argument (among others) of the committee was that the replica is a physical image of the Ka'abah casting a shadow of its own when placed in light (as distinct from a picture or sketch); it is therefore forbidden. Moreover, it is most probable that some Muslims may develop the attitude of regarding the replica as standing for the Ka'abah itself and therefore becoming inclined

> to accord it the sacredness that is due only to the true Ka'abah.
> (Noibi 1990)

This familiar distinction between the object and its copy, reality and its illusion, the true and the false, has a direct bearing not only on the production of art works and their reception, but also on the aesthetics emerging from, or giving support to, the development of certain kinds of literary culture. The underlying attitude to mimetic art is that the artist has, by his work, set himself up in competition with God the only creator. He thus tempts people away from the worship of God to idolatry. Thus, orthodox Islam is not merely aniconic – that is, prone to tolerate images though it would not itself encourage figuration, as some researchers have discovered in certain areas (e.g. Bravmann 1974) – it has often been intolerant of icons when it has not been directly iconoclastic. One can deduce from this with what horror the austere, savannah-based nineteenth-century Islamic scholar must have regarded the widespread creative simulation of the fecundity and plenitude of natural forms by traditional African artists in richly forested regions.[8]

Art historians have generally agreed that African visual art is more conceptual than naturalistic. Representational or even mimetic art is by no means alien to its traditions, as is clearly evident in the bronzes of Ife and Benin; but conventions for depicting the marvellous and the fantastic are far more universal in Africa. These formal conventions are reflected in the dominance of oral narrative traditions by the spirit of the marvellous that is in striking contrast to the newer realism introduced in the novel tradition. Traditional art did not aspire towards a faithful or pictorial representation of the subject. In response to the physical environment, its tendency has been towards a reproduction or regeneration of forms, and this sometimes involves the decay or degeneration of an earlier work through neglect or, as in Soyinka's poem, by a deliberate destruction of the art object in order to create aesthetic space for a new work of art.[9]

The perishable nature of the medium, wood, which facilitated the creation and use of such aesthetic space, also encouraged the colonial intervention in such space as if it were an aesthetic vacuum. It also encouraged the introduction of the concept of mimesis into modern African literary cultures. This concept developed from the belief in the ideal and formal perfection of nature and the practice of art as an attempt at copying or reproducing this perfection. Thus the artist imitates God. The history of European literature and art has produced a set of artistic techniques for

reproducing reality as accurately as possible, verbally or visually. The European form of the novel is the most felicitous literary expression of this concept. It represents the pinnacle of realistic representation in literature, and was regularly held up as a mirror for aspiring African fiction writers. This explains the difficulty that R.M. East had with his experiment in the development of the novel among the Hausa who had recently been introduced to literacy in the Western script while remaining within their Islamic world (East 1936:354-57). That experiment is best understood as part of a generative programme for the emergence of an African literature that is aesthetically pleasing according to European taste.

Given the large material and professional investments in the programme, it might seem uncharitable at this point to argue that the European culture in Africa stood to gain by the eventual consolidation of the ideological basis of its aesthetic norms. To give one of the most important examples of such investments, in 1945 the budget of the colonial government included 'a grant of £90,000 intended to expand the literature bureau at Zaria, and to convert *Gaskiya ta fi Kwabo* to a biweekly, and ultimately, into a daily' (Swanzy 1945:97).[10]

A less quantifiable but more enduring legacy of the colonial programme for African literature is to be seen in the origin of the group of texts that have formed the literary canon and have continued to provide an important reference point for the production and appreciation of literature in indigenous languages. In this respect, the present vernacular traditions of Nigerian writing are partly in the line of descent from the products of the experiment which began in the 1930s with the Africa-wide competitions organised by various colonial institutions, including the International African Institute and the regional education departments and literature bureaux. As a result of this development, the literacy programmes of the preceding decades had begun to bear rich fruit: *Ruwan Bagaja* by Abubakar Imam, the editor of *Gaskiya ta fi Kwabo*, and *Gandoki*, by Imam's brother, Bello Kagara, were described by R.M. East as the most promising of the manuscripts submitted in response to a 1933 scheme by the Director of Education in Nigeria to produce non-educational books in Hausa (1936:351-56). D.O. Fagunwa's *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale* was the winner of a Yoruba competition organised in 1936 (Bamgbose 1974:3). In 1932 Pita Nwana's *Omenuko* led a field of twenty-one Igbo language entries which included Bell Gam's *Odumodu*. E.N. Amaku's *Abasi Ekpeyon* topped a list of six entries in the Efik language in 1936.

The question of sources, models, roots inevitably surfaces in a discussion of the attempts to generate, or at least stimulate, literatures in the languages of the different Nigerian ethnic groups. There was no shortage of concern over the possible negative effect of English on indigenous forms of creative expression. So it is pertinent to draw attention to the nature of the academic foundation on which these writers often built. In 1957 an Education Department survey carried out by W.A. Perkins, the Principal of King's College, Lagos, revealed that 80 per cent of the 109 secondary schools in Nigeria were still teaching Latin by 1954, while the vernaculars 'occurred in more or less half the schools'. The report came to a conclusion that can hardly be considered startling. It was that 'the curriculum of the Nigerian Secondary Schools taken as a whole was a reflection of the English grammar school' (Perkins 1957:6). Given the themes and development of works like *Gandoki* and Tafawa Balcwa's *Shaihu Umar*, a roughly similar conclusion – with respect to Islam – may be reached about certain areas of the former Northern Nigeria. However, a separate carefully researched comparative study is still required. This should address the issues peculiar to the development of creative writing in the local languages, paying particular attention to the Roman and Arabic scripts, the history of literacy and the emergence of the present religious cultures.

Two key issues arise. The first is that of literature and the national question. Given our multilingual situation, it is not at all certain that we can, at present, speak of a Nigerian literature except in the not-too-precise manner that we usually speak of the loosely related literary productions that we describe as African literature. And it would be unwise to sacrifice this exciting profusion of literary cultures for the Utopian dream of a Nigerian literature in a dominant Nigerian lingua franca, the kind of monophonic dream that failed the Latin Middle Ages and the French colonial empire.

The second issue relates to the social responsibility of literature and criticism. If we ignore the largely informal manipulation of literary affairs by the media and the publishing houses, the social influence of literature is usually controlled through the policies and activities of three groups. Government arts councils or ministries of culture largely control policy formulation and direct patronage in matters relating to the arts in society. Writers' associations are concerned with the development of creative writing and the welfare of the producers of literature. Learned societies are expected to consider matters directly connected with the study of literature and its relations, including the evaluation of its ontological and affective status. They

are the only group outside the realities of classroom prescription and practice that are effectively organised to influence the serious study of literature.

The Literary Society of Nigeria was inaugurated at a time when, as scholar-critics and teachers, we were not able to count on a single active learned society to perform functions that are comparable to those performed by the Modern Language Association of America, the African Literature Association and the Historical Society of Nigeria. The Nigeria English Studies Association has a strong language orientation and it caters as much for secondary as for tertiary institutions. The various other bodies that have emerged so far provide (admittedly very useful) forums for conferences and research communication. By its constitution, the Literary Society of Nigeria should ideally not limit its activities to the holding of conferences, the publication of learned papers and the dissemination of information to members. Its responsibility should now extend not only to university literature curricula and to various neglected areas of literary scholarship, but also to the various relations of literature, including the consequences of bureaucratic activities and policies. To make these commitments meaningful, the participation of teachers of literature and researchers in our higher institutions is necessary. Following on this professional involvement, the Literary Society should seek to be accepted as a key source of expert opinion to be consulted on matters relating to the academic study of literature, by the organs of the Federal and State governments entrusted with higher education matters. It is not too late in the day for the Literary Society to give thought to these issues, especially now that we seem to be taking a major turn in university education, with the formulation and execution of new policies aimed at standardising the content of tertiary literature curricula. A society like this should normally be in a position to take part in – at least advise on – the designing, vetting and revising of whatever proposals concerning the literature curricula may be officially proposed, in addition to the not-so-formal but more conventional responsibility for scholarly inquiry into the theory and practice of literary study.

NOTES

A slightly longer version of this paper was delivered as Keynote address at the meeting of the Literary Society of Nigeria, Jos, 4 June 1990. The conference theme was 'Literature and the National Experience'.

1. Daura, the name of the Queen of Daura, is differentiated from the name of the town by the pronunciation.
2. Willett is of the opinion that 'Egharevba made the mistake of regarding, as successive generations, a sequence of kings who were two groups of brothers, thus producing an error of about a century in his dates' (1967:211, n.133).
3. A classic instance of such a problem is the identification of Esu, the Yoruba trickster divinity, as the Christian Devil. That this equation was not necessary is evident in the use of the Yoruba form of Satan, 'Satani' (Abraham 1958:583). Idowu says of the equation: 'He [Esu] is certainly not the devil of our New Testament acquaintance' (1962:8).
4. Achebe's conception of his career as writer is that of one beginning anew by challenging the new narratives that set out to legitimise the world view of the colonising powers.
5. For an account of the literary activity in Sokoto, see Last 1967:207-22.
6. This may appear to reinforce East's comment that 'the influence of Islam on the Hamitic strain in Northern Nigeria produces an extremely serious-minded type of person' (East 1940:351-52). However, it must not be allowed to leave the impression that the Hausa were completely averse to song and dance. The comment merely reflects a particular tradition at a period of serious social and political change, as well as the attitude of a particular class. In a more peaceful period, the comment of Last, reproduced below, would be more apposite. The impression of the renaissance ideal of a scholar-gentleman, which Last gives, reflects a cultural situation in which learning was largely dominated by a small class drawn from the aristocracy and the cleric: 'to write poetry in Arabic was the attainment of a cultured man, and the famous poems of the founders of the Sokoto caliphate became part of Sokoto culture' (1967:222).
7. In the early hours of Monday 5 May 1986 a group of unknown people forced their way into the Chapel of the Resurrection at the University

of Ibadan. They set fire to the image of the Risen Christ carved in wood by the sculptor, Ben Enwonwu. The chapel committee decided not to replace, repair or renovate the damaged image. Contained in this one incident are two deliberately symbolic statements from different theological positions: iconoclasm on the one hand, suffering and martyrdom on the other.

8. The position of the Eastern Orthodox Church concerning iconography parallels the essential humanism of African sculptural traditions. While icons of God (the Supreme Deity, in Africa) are inconceivable because he is pure spirit, the icons of Christ (like those of minor African divinities) are not only permitted; they are considered essential because he is not divine only; he is also (half) human; and to refuse to fashion icons of him is to deny the humanity in him. (I am indebted here to a BBC talk on Eastern Orthodox iconography by the Reverend Maxfield of North Wales.)

9. Cf. Fagg: 'In Africa wood carvings decay or are eaten by ants in a very few years. This perishability of the artist's material has no doubt been one of the main conditioning factors in the growth of fine art ... Since variations may be introduced at each replacement, the tempo of evolution may be very quick (1963b:269).

10. *Gaskiya ta fi Kwabo* was founded as a Hausa language newspaper in 1930. It was meant 'to contradict false rumours ... It sold for one penny – that is "kwabo" in Hausa. The title is literally "Truth is worth more than a penny", the point being that, in the words of the Superintendent of the Northern Nigerian Literature Bureau, "A native of Nigeria can be kept in food for several days on 6d, and he can hardly be expected to pay so vast a sum for such an ephemeral thing as a newspaper." (The old government paper, *News Sheet*, at the time, cost sixpence.)' (East 1940:84).

6 AFRICANA CHOREO-MUSICAL PRODUCTIONS

Methodology and Critical Approaches

Esi Kinni-Olusanyin

For some time I have been concerned about several problems, conditions and circumstances rather peculiar to African theatre. These are issues which crop up repeatedly on both sides of the Atlantic. It behoves me then to focus largely upon the staging of tradition and the 'classics' – professionalism in practice – and this involves informed and objective criticism and the unfolding of canons and theory. I intend to offer differing ramifications, pro and con, in order to cover several aspects of the question and have produced this paper precisely because of the paucity of documentation and work on the subject.

TRADITION

Tradition is not a nebulous term. It is the continuity of customs, information, attitudes, actions, beliefs, social patterns and institutions bequeathed to a community, large or small, which are in use by all or a segment of the population historically or in the present. In terms of the arts and aesthetics, it implies a convention, valued and cherished for its beauty, rarity, projection, power, and/or form and style.

The handling of tradition is an important part of contemporary theatre (whether popular, academic, professional, or commercial) and is a very delicate matter which deserves sensitive attention (which it does not often receive). Having been attacked so vehemently by colonialists inside and outside Africa, then misnamed and exploited so ruthlessly in the Americas, it has become chic and sophisticated in many quarters for blacks themselves, who have imbibed this posture, to despise the ancient arts. But seemingly in satire, elite

black society is now the only one which rejects its own treasures, abandoning them for other races to appreciate, collect, promote and utilise from the outside. This particular cultural crisis, this malady of mind and soul, affects every aspect of the African heritage and its arts. (Indeed, I have taken legal action 1988 to 1992 regarding it [Alli 1988]). Black society must realise that by debasing art, especially the mystical arts, one is misguidedly reducing its status and proving exactly what the negrophile erroneously sought to launch as a lack of African history, civility and culture.

Modernity versus Classicism

The integrity of African customs should not be apologised for, sheepishly justified, extravagantly defended, held as quaint, nor hybridised by those who hold the prerogative of choice and selection. The wisdom and ingenuity of these ancestors are to be as revered and cherished as any other – not that there ever was the perfect society; the indigenous worldview was indeed abounding with creativity, refinement and philosophy. In the lively arts, many forms have matured impeccably, throughout tradition and have become classic – definitive masterpieces. We may take the Asante (Akan) *adowa* or *fontomfrom* and the Yoruba (Oyo) *bata* dances as fine examples. To attempt to 'modernise' or corrupt them only destroys a well established precept and theory: firstly that of the form, and secondly its maintenance. The desire should rather be to maximise the aesthetic potential upon each rendition. When new forms are desired, however, they should be created in and of themselves, but the classics must be extolled as such; held in esteem and celebrated. This is deemed a canon.

Grace and Malleability

Firstly, in the consideration of tradition on stage, it has to be decided whether a given piece of tradition is truly adaptable for presentation: what is considered is not only its liveliness and conjunctive appeal, but its total impact, as well as whether particular portions or the whole work is to be used. Often it has to be condensed extensively, but efficaciously, and one sometimes finds that the very medium of 'the stage' is unacceptable. The Western proscenium stage, too, is a hindrance, hence a reversion to theatre in the round or semi-circle, and more natural settings such as gardens, courtyards and market squares, as used traditionally, can be introduced, especially for filming original

stage works. (Of course, this has to be positioned so that the wind does not blow away the sound from dancers and audience). Likewise, the theory of traditional African dance (sans boot and masquerade entities) is that the foot must touch the earth. That is why the foot is bared for contact with the floor.

If we consider a piece appropriate in and of itself, there are other factors about which to be cautious. Can the complexities be reduced compatibly enough to contain the greater outline of the source, at least; and is this acceptable? If so, how can this be executed? Is so much omitted that we distort the tradition? How realistic should it be? Should it be secularised? Is there anything in our portion that is so private that it does not lend itself to public showing? Can a female play a normally male role of a masquerader, or a particular part that tradition may not allow? (Males in some societies have played female roles, but there has been little in reverse.) If so, is she placed in jeopardy of being injured spiritually – is the mask or play real or ritualistic? Is one's rendition of theatre going to attract 'phenomena' at all? How 'fortified' are the properties and appurtenances? How much authenticity is desirable or necessary? One factor may conflict with the other.

One also has to consider the entertainment value of tradition versus ritual. When the ceremony is moved out of context, does it shed some of its sacredness? If so, when, why and how? If either the Efik Ekpe or the Yoruba Gelede masquerades serve as an example – the Efik leopard masquerade (the typology and institution of which are widespread) occurs within a ritual, fraternal-cum-communal context. The dance, which focuses upon the solo leopard character and sports an intense ensemble, is as atmospherically-environmentally dependent as any. This is to infer that the illuminating drum-song-chant-linguistic-colour and design constituents, the ritual-seasonal-typographical-historical, social and sub-cultural factors which electrify the 'play' are immediate – as realised within all the charged and symbolic, dexterous and hypnotic plays of a formidable feline apparition. In like manner, the popular Gelede performance is an art which is very well rehearsed for an annual or three-year event of appeasement and placation. It is best known for its innovative song texts, the appearance and function of the masquerade characters, its dance, instrumental ensembles and communal responses. It is a spectacular showing which usually occurs overnight. How then, would co-opted performers carry such a system hundreds of miles away to a sterile university stage, just to walk on, play and slide off? They must receive comprehensive permission, both from temporal leaders and the spiritual

patron, make an offering, and decide which and how many masks are to be used (not the most important of them, to be sure); which maskers will perform, which instrumentation will represent them, and so on (believe it or not, such occasions often do not allow performers an opportunity to warm up). But a very lacklustre performance can result, even from the correct source, if the people do not feel that the ritualistic aspect is of value to the audience, and that they even understand or care about what it is. They might not even complete the text, but ad lib portions of it. In that case, they are not performing Gelede or Ekpe at all, but are going through the motions. Not only that, it is the devout, unsullied performance which inspires people to act the most. This attitude is not at all necessary, but familiar for the reasons stated above. On the other hand, there are performances at which the actors savour every bit of spirituality and give their very best because of feeling a part of, or empathy with, the programme, having brought with them a sense of displaying the full art of the medium. There have been many cases where isolated performers inspire or commune with each other with total comprehension and of commitment to what they are doing. Sometimes, they even forget that they are 'out of sync', and enjoy the performance for themselves and make the stage their own.

Ritual actors, however, who are merely fitted in, are not very adaptable to theatre, and can pose a problem if they are not well co-ordinated, or lack some artistic quality desired of them if they are inserted into a commercial production. Short of training them to fit into an ensemble, one has probably to rework their role, double or chorus the part, or have them ghost-play or mime others. It has happened that the ritual specialists most available (say for chanting) are painfully shy, awkward and have very little stage presence.

The difference between the priest who is also an artist and a general practitioner is that the singular priest as well as the layman cannot readily adapt himself to the diverse movements, forms and styles, and reconcile them with the time-frame required (days or weeks rather than years or decades) for the theatre. The mystical artist, in this case, can perceive beyond the bounds of the cultural, sub-cultural or particular form.

THE REALISTIC AND EXPRESSIONISTIC

This also goes to say what previously had been alluded to: that much more effect and far less affectation (not affect) is provided in Oriental (Afro-Asian) than in Occidental performances. The fire that is shot out, eaten, or is danced

upon, and the encounter with sharp swords which are bandied and thrashed about (except in the University setting) are usually authentic. The ritual may be correct. Spirits may be interacting (positively or negatively) with or without inducement. Although the Western audience may find this incredible and attempt to argue vehemently against the very possibility, and of the state as untenable, it nevertheless is the hard fact! Therefore far more preparation and skill are demanded. This is why Western periodicals, even those of African arts, find it uncomfortable to accept articles which go into any of it in depth. Such alienating, obsolete policy has to be completely revised.

In Oriental theatre the effulgent, transcendental element (shining radiance and experience beyond normal comprehension) is a great asset. Actors from the Occident are constantly researching to capture just that finesse of Oriental performance which is incomparable and which, in itself, heightens the performance to enchantment. This evinces itself either in purely secular or in ritual theatre, but practitioners have various levels or intensities of absorption which they feel or exhibit at different times. Many factors (charms, costuming and instrumentation) beyond atmosphere, psychic state and initiations affect the actor. But sometimes great technique and the 'acting' (in character) of the part are confused with the spiritual dimension, just as artful or deceptive persons may feign levels of 'possession' on the stage or in pure ritual. The state of 'natural high' most often stems from an affinity with nature spirits, ancestral spirits or deities, which need not be called upon deliberately nor are easy to dispel. Such conditions must be developed and controlled. We not only want to stage dance and play with – and in – 'spirit' when we want it, but as much as we need and want. As in masquerade dances, at what point is the spirit there or not? It may not be predictable. Is it desirable at all on stage?

From there, we might ponder the opposite type of display that is largely portrayed by the manipulation of spirits as conjuration, as opposed to magic which is illusion or sleight of hand (Kinni-Olusanyin 1990:55). There the conjurer, talking drummers, praise singers and dancers appeal to and control the metaphysical to transform one manifestation to another and the phenomena work at their own pace. This kind of performance of power-in concentration is lengthy and filled with virtuoso music, dance-acrobatics, audience responses, singing and pageantry. It does not roll off second by second like an edited film strip, as Western spectators would demand. The space-time, entry-exit, movement around, theatrical dramatics, music and dance are all to be consumed critically as to intent, meaning, structure and

position or function in the performance. The language of the drums and the independent and corporate lines and punctuation of the music provide much of the impact. It is the culture of Africa or a highly professional audience, who appreciate this to the full, and who do not recoil with distaste at the so-called gory elements. The latter, in fact, excite the knowledgeable simply because of such feats as dismembering and rejoining the body. It is not sadistic behaviour but rather great mastery of occult arts. But it is just this facet of reality (effect) in ritual theatre, which gives it the great advantage of power. Intrigue and the possibility of danger lurking about often are the fantastic, bitter-sweet attraction.

Part of its veritableness, of course, just what separates conjuration from magic, is that everyone is free to examine the materials or the actors and to interact thoroughly. Of course, the 'conjure' is in the drumming and chanting, incantations and costumes, but one is also 'raised up and let down'. After conjuration, 'magic' is but pale. There are astute professional magicians who are in search of the arts of conjuration, to develop themselves. Why then should an educational theatre house, which has had the benefit of the former, acquiesce to bill both of them indiscriminately, without benefit of critical evaluation (as indeed did happen in 1987 – conjuration, and 1989 – magic)?

It is obvious that traditional culture has much to offer the theatre. The indigenous theatrical set-up is inherent in the processing of rites, even when they focus on a palace, the market, shrine, hill, grove or river. Every deity has a 'theatre' with in its own idiomatic styles of presentation. Traditionally, a king might summon a number of these 'theatres' to perform for him in his courtyard and he, himself, might not even be seen. A secular audience might not be present, although a full-scale performance is in operation.

Professional performance, however, is nothing new either in the ritual or the secular realm. But tradition on stage cannot transcend present bifurcation in cultural knowledge and values, because of limited visions and techniques, of the weaker composer-directors even more than the aforementioned 'misconstruction' of the stage.

MIXED BLESSINGS

A situation which often turns out to be a puzzle in professional theatre is that of the extraordinarily high percentage of gifted amateurs in black society, due to the tenacious consumption-absorption of intricate rhythmic movement (metronome sense) and tonal forms/idioms which are part of the culture.

How do we harness all this talent and direct it appropriately? Such seemingly brilliant people may be pulled into a production on an ad-hoc basis and fringe (the near outskirts) or even inside the theatre without the proper attitude, intimate knowledge or any training at all and gradually ease his/her way up to the formal *métier*, only to wreak havoc upon the profession when settled, again by grasping far beyond their limitations. (This point is quite different from that of single performers or groups who excel on their own, point by point, and are rated upon their personality, flair and artistry; nor does it apply to those of genius, many of whom are singers.) Furthermore, we receive the most self-styled, redundant, disjointed, preposterous, dull choreography which is not culture-based from such persons. This plight permeates studios, culture centres and 'national' dance companies in African society. For some crass reason, albeit dance is not very well entrenched in the academic programme, very many try to capitalise upon it, thus demeaning the field, and this diminishes the reputation of dance and choreography as a discipline and as an art form.

At this juncture, let us compare the quality of music output to dance and choreography, a subject which requires tact to discuss.

'DELIVERY'

The emphasis upon percussive effect (fundamentally, most dance to percussion; most sing to strings and/or percussion), which relates to the 'drum mentality' deserves brief mention, for it is asserted, both in Africa and its diaspora, that one 'hears and feels something' extra musical-linguistic from the sonorities. That certain ken, a sensation, impression, vibration, throb, penetration; then the propulsion and driving force (which also releases a 'dancing spirit' recognised in the African psyche) which is compelling, that even beseeches one to dance and that allows one to dance 'into' the music is cardinal. That it also leads to an altered state of consciousness (possession) is *a priori.*

The realisation that many persons receive the appropriate meaning or symbolism from the music, has not only to do with latent culture or enculturation, but with ethos – a sensibility and receptivity towards the output which embraces (or apprehends) an intelligence and recomposes it; in tradition this would stem from the *eleda* (in Yoruba) or one's substratal cognition. The music exudes an invisible essence, with which one is empathetic.

It is with professional traditional performers that we often find that the music, say drumming and playing of the xylophone, are far superior and more suited to the dance offered on 'stage', again because of low intrinsic value choreography, other arrangements and dance personnel who cannot really compete because they just do not have the skill. Singing, too, may be incongruous (Western intonation and voice production) thus being 'out of character'. But there are opposite and bizarre instances where professional dancers find themselves in intolerable situations with amateurish drummers who either cannot produce or maintain the required patterns or, worse, have no music at all to play other than a constant running pulsation. Imagine trying to dance in a lively way before an audience of hundreds with such lacklustre impetus.

The 'joker' becomes apparent when drummers throw dancers off the beat by ineptitude, sometimes on heretofore seemingly unobtrusive parts of orchestration; and at those infrequent moments when a matching or harmonious dance cue or statement is mislaid due to the exasperating misdemeanour of inattention. Signals, too, rather than sustaining many counts for patterns or changes as in the West, are the norm. The danger is that the dancer is highly dependent upon the drummer who might forget or alter the signal. If the dancer happens not even to hear the signal, all is lost. The signal, however, is the most artful manner of procedure.

It is with chagrin that I mention some tedious 'expired capacity' dancers who can execute one or a few specific cultural patterns or forms beautifully but cannot or will not adjust to any other movements or configurations whatsoever. Our enjoyment is unprogressive.

Somewhat similarly but in respect of area and stylistic preference, since the mid-1970s New York City has witnessed excitement surrounding the wider-Mandingo, West African dance style which has been imported and deliberately taught by some continental performers. Despite the fact that many people have spent weeks incapacitated from injuries so incurred in pursuit of this scheme, it is still proceeding. The relevant factor, however, is that most of the black American practitioners are adherents and otherwise dedicated priests of their own Afro-Yoruba (Lucumi or Nago) tradition. Ironically, as individuals, they are more interested in Mandingo dance than the Yoruba, who are the most receptive at ceremonies while being overwhelmed by a deity. Because of this new focus, I even had some difficulty in procuring either enough students, or ensemble members for a Fon-Yoruba-Jazz orientated company in the mid-1970s – and the curious trend has not abated.

Just as irksome as the 'expired capacity', but with a better prognosis for amelioration, is another state: the unstable 'decisive moment' dancers who try to rationalise less exertion during rehearsal by begging to amble or shuffle only through the choreography and to lightly mark the movements, instead of employing the full thrust of body, saving this for the performance. The tragic outcome of this, however, is that it hardly ever works. Unless the dancers receive tremendous support from the spectators immediately they arrive on stage, the same labour-saving device which was practised is going to be performed; that is, they contract stage fright and become self-conscious because of a poor attitude, and become 'absorbed in the moment', which does not allow them to achieve the zenith which they had not even yet acquired. When the dynamic music is not activated, we experience frustration and disappointment. That also accounts for just one of the reasons why instrumentalists in West Africa, at least, frequently have to be reprimanded for insulting wayward, uncoordinated, out-of-step dancers by music language, which always provokes a disruptive reply from the abused. These are yet other idiosyncratic pitfalls in African performance which would not arise, as such, elsewhere.

We find that because of the spontaneous, improvisatory character of African music and dance, both percussionists and solo dancers may spring out of control, in that the latter may decide to 'show' and therefore not stop at the required time during production. And likewise, drummers sometimes refuse to cease but accelerate eagerly, long beyond the dancer's endurance, before cadencing out to a finale. Be that as it may, because percussionists and dancers play 'to' each other, even when not facing, the activating, elastic adaptations and buoyancy of the live performance still is, and eternally will be, the goal or epitome of every potent exchange.

STYLE AND FORM

A far more important concern, however, is that of crossing well established ethnic styles, or the maintenance of given stylistic consistency. Experience has shown me, both in theory and in practice, that it is very difficult for professional musicians, excepting those of Diaspora jazz, worldwide, let alone in the normal African society, to alter stylistic principles enough to concertise credibly in differing ethnic styles.

It often happens that in conventional institutions and companies musicians are required to render whatever a director, a board, or the necessities

of a contest, require, so that they need to possess a flexibility that does not exist. How then do we expect Dagomba drummers (this applies to dancers too) who trained in such idiom for over twenty years, to radically convert to play Akan, as Igbo, the Bambara, and to Jazz, for instance, or any one of these? They seldom do. Unless the director is very confident and well grounded in music and has most likely notated and memorised some essential parts in order to compare and control, the drummers (for example) merely run away with the music by resistance, habit and philosophical nescience. If indeed the technical aspects are properly demonstrated and grasped, it will revert and deteriorate until it is almost, if not totally, Dagomban again, even though a musician of the odd ethnic group might be present. This, of course, drastically modifies the dance. But even more difficult is that professional musicians might change the content of the music which they themselves offer for a particular dance, so that both the dance form and choreography must correspondingly be renewed at each and every rehearsal, and debate does not remedy the predicament. The reasons for this are numerous and have much to do with the structure of African music itself. Although variety is infinite, the number of rhythmic patterns is not very large, so that gong time-lines, for instance, often portray subtle but pertinent deviation in rhythm, and the primary dance locution is based 'to' them. The relationship between all the components is so complex in the cross poly-rhythmic music that the major difference between one piece and another, from form to form, or from ethnic group to ethnic group, in many cases, might be in more overriding aspects of style. Phrasing, swing, shifting syncopes and accents, dynamics, change of parts, instrumentation, orchestration, timbre (tone quality), arrangement and improvisation all account for this, excluding talking instrumental language, chanting, signing techniques, scales, and so on.

It is just these minor but all-important divergences which make it onerous for the musician who remains outside the ethos of the performance. Nevertheless, when the music presents a startling contrast either in kinetic treatment, rhythmic or dynamic impetus, we encounter yet another exigency.

Sometimes a production which is rendered technically correct becomes so mechanical for lack of cultivation that the spectators and, especially, the dancers receive no lift or sparkle from it – sparkle being the very effervescence which carries the performance. The brilliance must be sustained.

Particular points that are implied throughout this essay are those of perception and interpretation. In the arts we rely immensely upon intuitive powers. But our glowing perception also demands a broad and deep

theoretical base of the discipline and of the particular subject matter for sustained and informed visualisation. We interpret positively or negatively, accurately or not; eruditely, beautifully, inspiringly, elaborately, expressively, romantically, sympathetically, politically, diplomatically, and so on. We even reinvent. But then again the indigenous African interpretation or response to a given situation is as diverse as are the discrete cultures and ingenuity therein, even though there is a commonality of attitude and approach. It is required, thus canonical, that African people have an in-depth perception, thus having the capacity for expressive, objective and prolific interpretation of the performing arts, which will disallow anything less substantial.

SUMMARY

In summary, I have discussed several unique factors, challenges and especially canons of choreo-musico execution in African stage settings (as opposed to those of the Occidental world, whose presence everyone has had to recognise in contemporary theatre). That the highest standards of professionalism be elegantly maintained is not merely to be presumed, but judiciously scrutinised at all times, to avoid complacency and the superficiality of flash success.

The requirements of stylistic consistency cannot be dictated when confronted with colourful, polytypic cultural adaptations. But it must be exercised diligently when necessary, that is, in a state of mental or cerebral discernment of a real entity, without compromising any norms.

Furthermore, as a principle, we unconditionally acknowledge the positive and illuminating role of tradition in theatre. Moreover, one of the most important criteria of tradition is the dancing 'foot touches earth'. Whereas the earnest art of dancing and choreography must be projected and polished; the invention of neoteric composition is laudable and requisite but the precious classics are inviolate. Let them not be adulterated but remain genuine.

We also must recognise that there is great effect and little affectation in African works and that the mystical and transcendental application is valid and often obligatory. Therefore, let it be mandated that as both the performing and plastic arts (including conjuration) are legitimate and multi-lateral topics of academic inquiry, the inclusion of their dynamic and preternatural magnitude is proper and responsible.

Tradition on stage shall be viewed as a luxuriance of place, so that the imperative respect and approach be affirmed; that we employ cultural property well, not only for the sake of society, but for ourselves, as the ethical

and committed. If there is no in-depth perception within us, let us gracefully avoid all tradition.

Therein lies probably the greatest perceptual, qualitative distinction between Oriental and Occidental methodology in choreo-musical productions.

– APPENDIX –

Experiment in Technique of a Single Ensemble Dance: Bambose

Part of my small Yoruba *bata* dance ensemble, 1994, was an example of professional drummers (two) who are good dancers, which is a perfect combination. That notwithstanding, initially they found the group-dance precision technique arduous and complicated, because the choreography was deliberately unique but off the substructure of traditional stylistics. This was to expand the 'dramatic' motifs for stage. The other five members were less fortunate and thought the choreography insurmountable at its introduction because of their reactionary tendencies.

My students in three courses, who were taught exactly the same vigorous dance (of only two minutes in duration) understood it variously: the two graduating students who had one and a half years of challenging dance class previously, digested it readily (and one even used the portion of material taught thus far for his own production, under his own name) without pain to themselves or to the lecturer.

The second-year students, of whom there were thirty-six in number, were stunned at what was expected of them, but eventually managed it with grace and some with finesse, but many of them had been dancing in the other productions which my own graduating students organised, for assessment.

Of the first-year candidates, which were only sixteen strong and a brighter group than their seniors anyway, some began to dance with *élan*. Four of them, who are hard workers intellectually, came from zero (that is, literally from falling off the stage) to about a hundred per cent; one who had former experience was quite good and only one normally serious student had been hopeless, but eventually became adequate. The awkwardness was possibly due to the sudden strain upon her physique (tall and gangling). Her case was not such a surprise, for a man student in the second year, who was also intellectually sound and responsive, had the same quirk of lack of control.

The single student who missed no rehearsals and was in the top echelon of his class was the most impressive and committed.

Actually, they were taught a number of isolated patterns and all but five figures were used to flow into the dance when it was presented as a unit. In fact, I had not finished choreographing it when those first patterns were dictated.

The personal dance method employed is highly developed: I proffer a number of patterns and designs and change dynamics, tempo, metre, levels, nuances, and so forth to form a particular dance from my original concept of it. Although inspired, the Bambose piece (of 1994) was formulated in exactly this manner.

The experiment reveals that I should continue in the trend so inaugurated. A few students, however, who are not as well versed as town practitioners technically, were able to dance to their same level, but none of them was as developed in character or equalled the dancer-drummers in intensity. Incidentally, at the combined student performance, the three trained professional drummers for this composition were invited to play the same arrangement but one of the dancers understudied the drum part without extra rehearsal, while the other (with a praise chanter) danced the solo (of deified King Sango) with full ceremonial costume and conjuration (smoke and sparks). Much which hitherto had been discussed in class was finally realised on stage.

It is my long-standing opinion that dancers, whether Occidental or Oriental, do not know enough music. This insufficiency affects their entire attitude (receptivity) to presentation.

There are particular problems in choreographing and arranging *bata* dance and music, if they are to become stage-ready (but not to destroy classic, traditional form): the dance projections are expected to agree accentually, exactly to the master drum, or occasionally some other part, unlike most African drumming. Furthermore, a punctilious fashioning of choral dance for *bata* is uncommon, since the form is movable and semi-agreement only occurs at cadence points. Therefore, to organise just a portion of it in a less enigmatic manner for stage, and certainly to present it to a Western audience which does not comprehend the subtleties of both the sub-aesthetic and the inner-aesthetic, can pose a perpetual conundrum both to drummer and dancer.

PART THREE

Of History and Pedagogy

7 LITERATURE AND THE AFRICAN PUBLIC

Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin

'Taken in by surprise, the people, their ways of life, their values, all by surprise ...,' commented a writer-anthropologist generalising on the fate of the African societies, both traditional and modern, ever since the black man's emergence into the Western historic awareness. How much of this truth remains true also of the literature of the people is what this paper attempts to discuss.

In discussing this or these literatures we need to qualify the role of the creative writer in connection with his existing realities out of which background he is born:* his faculties, his tools, and more particularly his commitments. There is hardly an uncommitted creative writer in any given society, time and condition, since the very phenomena of being inspirationally engaged embodies the sense of being spiritually and/or emotionally committed. Committed to what? Of course to his conscience first, and through his art to the conscious understanding of the needs, aspirations, prejudices and limitations of his society, and finally, through the conscious service of that society's expression, a commitment to the service of universal art, since all art, after all, converges at the fundamental human level.

Before we come to the question of where African literature stands in this body of universality, or even more precisely to the old hoary question of what in fact African literature is, I would like to digress for a moment and consider it under more detached questions: What, in concrete terms, are the

* As I remarked in the Introduction, this paper was written in 1970; the conventions of the day – giving Africa the feminine gender and all human beings, especially writers and artists, the masculine – have been preserved. – Ed.

languages that should make African literatures, and what, in appraising these literatures, is the commitment of the writer to a given society? Certainly, it is not by avoiding the former all too well beaten argument – 'What is African Literature?' 'What our writers, patrons or critics tell us it should or should not be concerned in' – that we can get close to the heart of the matter. We must simply admit that there is no one single body of African Literature just like there is no one single body of Asiatic or European Literature with a capital 'L' and an exclamation mark. Yet, perhaps, by once again trying to define the role and commitment of any writer in any given society, or even by at least eliminating that literature which is not born out of the indigenous African vernaculars, we should be able to arrive at what makes African literature or not. Thus, Hausa literature is African and Bengali is not, Zulu is and English is not, and so forth.

But, as to why these trees of African languages were not so far given enough chance to bear fruit, demands that we face certain rigid factors of history and politics.

What was Africa considered to be before the colonial days? The Westerners had mostly to rely on what their travellers, their ivory hunters and slave traders reported to them, followed by the information from their missionaries and finally through the suppressed echoes of the whip of their colonial administrators. As such, the first introduction of the black man in the concept of the Westerners was in the image of a humiliated humanity. The slander to his dignity, to his way of life, to his values, which so incessantly recur as a matter of fact across the 'civilised' world today, drew breath then. Although his social systems were almost destroyed, although condemned to grapple with these world-wide historic and current realities which negate his values, yet it was not his capacity as an individual, not his success or failure as a member of a group, but the colour of his skin and his physical characteristics that appeared to be the core of the element by which the Western master judged him. He was put on trial by his very appearance and played the underdog of his country's class structures.

Out of these and against these, the African was taught to protest in his master's ways, in his master's values, in his master's language. Yet Africa was never mute in her own heritage of self-expression before or after the colonial days. The problem is how to record her abundant oral literatures in her own languages and preserve them for her children; first, how to record the very many social traditions both in their similar and contradicting shades and evolve them in a harmony of oneness through the test of time and the criteria

of their own humane level, since any language should be given time to develop its potential of literature.

The writer-sons of those who yesterday had to interpret their ways of life to their masters under the point of the coloniser's gun and under his conditions, should be the ones, whose commitment it is, to reincarnate these languages.

The challenge is not whether they could or could not, but whether they should at all, and there is a double edge to this 'should'.

The first is, should Africa,

— who must face the hard reality of her main political and economic languages being English and French –
— who must face the obvious multiplicity and limitations that the mother languages present paramount problems of insufficient expression, and that one cannot place these vernaculars overnight into one huge literary common denominator –
— who must face the reality that the two inherited English and French languages have successfully proved to Africa, and through her to the world, that they have brought her standard of higher education side by side with that of the Western academic scale –
— who must face the reality that her appeal through these two world-wide languages had, or should have, started a dialogue of understanding between the 'mass' of the outside world and the African public, considering herself 'lucky' to be the inheritor of these major languages –

Should Africa abandon these useful tools of communication and literature which history so inevitably put at her service?

The second edge is, should Africa,

— who must face the reality of the cultural bastardisation that has been and is being forced down the throats of the existing human conditions of her societies –
— who must face the time-honoured reality that the language any 'native' dreams in is the one nearest perfect tool to record or recount his experiences in, and that no full-grown culture or healthy tree, can, without losing a good part of its nuance essence or destroying that of its counterpart, be transported, transplanted, translated or trans-anything on to another root of tradition –

— who must face the responsibility that Africa's own cultural trees should be given chances to bear fruit for their own consumers; the quality and content of the fruit to be enjoyed or denounced by those societies out of whose background conditions, settings, experiences is born the urge of inspiration that carry the scar and laughter of their life, and by the criteria of those who have developed a conscious taste for their vernaculars, and are now awakening into a new blood of national characteristics and historic awareness –
— who must realise that these shall always be an obvious and understandable French and/or English cultural prerogative in all those African writings of these expressions, and that as a contrast result, a gradual shrinkage and eventual extinction of the vernaculars is inevitable –
— who must realise, that the creative offspring of these French and English cultural prerogatives, however localised they might have been made to appear, are bound to tag Africa's values on to their own priorities, thereby exposing a bastardised culture of an Anglo-French well calculated midwifery –

Should Africa, at this point take heed and peel away any lumping up of colonial cultures which shatter her authentic heritages, under the cover of 'hard realities'? Realities they both are; a dilemma of realities. Yet, by the use of English and French, the nearest we achieve would be an Africanised English or an Africanised French, but not an African literature, since the imported languages do not spring from the life root of the people's expression. This too is a reality. Is it not because Shakespeare originally dreamt in English that he had the courage to refrain from playing his talent into the lure of Greek and Latin which held the platform of international repute then? Can young African talents, unlike Shakespeare and his contemporaries, afford to play their gifts into the classified columns of Paris and London literary papers, and by so doing live apart and above the needs and realities of their societies? We have already said that these very many vernaculars are all too limited in scope to accommodate sufficient expression for modern thought. But whatever effort and will that has been exerted in them so far has been more in the line of the research of language sciences, and not in helping them develop as possible tools of literary mediums. Besides, 'limitation' had once been the big challenge at the root of all the major languages of today.

It is by recording ideas in the very language one dreamt in, first, and then having the same translated into foreign languages, second, that the

recognition and growth of vernaculars into wider instruments of literature is guaranteed; that is, the language of conception is the one given priority to express in, however limited its scope happens to be at the beginning. In other words, the work is more complete when recorded in the language of its original conception, even though it might appear limited in the extent of its expression. Having dreamt or conceived an idea in one's own language and then depicting the same into the written words of that same language, is not an all too simple process, let alone having to translate or adapt the original idea or dream into the idiom of an alien tongue whose approach, warmth and attitude of thought is a far cry from that of the conceiver's dream. It is a generally accepted fact that the very sense of a translated idea in literature disallows full-blooded completeness in the work concerned. The focus would be concentrated more on the skeleton and theme only, and less on the form and quality of the content.

Perhaps enough has not yet been said about the dilemma of these realities one is supposed to challenge. The language, or particularly the social dilemma of the African public (both being the close concern of the writer), arise not only from the multiplicity of tribal vernaculars which greatly hinder both inter-African and inter-state communication, but, also from the fact that to a major extent, the African continent, being born out of traditionally humane communal societies of collectivism, is now bordering on the problem of how to bring about a modern image of Africanist thought without having to succumb to the materialistic hands of technological civilisation, or without having to gamble with the possible contamination of a Marxist ideology; on how to bring about a modern image of the Africanist thought, acceptable by all concerned and adaptable into their own particular variations while at the same time the core of their value judgement would converge into an historic solidarity of African purpose. Between these hard realities we are confronted with the conflicting African image, and the survival of our cultural, linguistic and social values which we cherish lies with this image. Our conscious question, then, is how to bridge this inevitable transitional precipice for a modern Africa. Since free Africa is an Africa politically torn between the forces of these world-patronising ideologies, each force pulling her away from the 'isms' of their disfavour: Washington pulling her away from the 'menace of Communism', Moscow/Peking pulling her away from 'the menace of Capitalism', whether she likes it or not, it merely accelerates the dilemma of the creative artist who must at least live with the wishful thinking that his gift is a vehicle of free thought and not a battlefield for the game of dogma-

wrestlers. Added to this, new African governments, having made politicians and militarists run amok with power greed, are cutting as many images of the Africanist concept as their egos need them to feed upon, and mystifying the questions which the artist looks for behind the ready-made answers fabricated to blunt the thrust of his sincerity. Coupled with this is the old world which, on the one hand, like the toothless terror of a deadly wounded god, plagues and exasperates the modern ideas of the writer into a host of complexities; into a sense of guilt for the role he affects as the sensitive medium where the timeless old values conflicted with the inconsistent and untested new; into a sense of incapacity for his lack of knowledge concerning what exactly each tribal tradition and religious custom imposed in a similar or contradicting manner to one another; into a sense of defence against the dangerously sensational misinterpretation of the Western film consumers' outlook of Africa; into a sense of awareness (and acceptance with a pinch of salt) of a seemingly 'civilised' technological world which uprooted man and his centuries of effort with its two major wars, presenting Africa with a *fait accompli* and still threatening life with a third and fatal if not total war. On the other hand, the heritage of his fathers which his 'civiliser' almost effaced and which the artist selects at his own discretion to keep and bridge for a future African generation, framing it into a form of a modern angry expression, would add to his mental exasperation whenever the questions raised by his ideals fail to gain corresponding answers under the test of concrete research.

Out of these, each forms a theory, an image, each in his own Africanness, differing in the interpretation of his national or local heritage and experience, and each expressing the self and society inside the uniform black-cloth (which is but a pigment cover of the self). Several theories have already been formed, either out of well-meaning intention like Negritude and Pan-Africanism, or out of sinister motives, like apartheid. Yet the image of the Africanness which we indigenous Africans have in common (however much it might have been interpreted or distorted to fit into the manner and motive of each politician, writer, critic or racial supremacist) cannot be based on any of these new theories, whether Negritude, African cultures of English expression for Commonwealth members, apartheid or Black Power for that matter, but on the predominant basis of a traditionally humane society. It is their geographic and, particularly, glaring historical factors, that have necessitated the birth of these theories (and perhaps of more to come) – the factors in which, and because of which, Africa suffered and still suffers a psychological, moral,

physical and economic disalienation. Disregarding those degenerate theories of sinister motives for a moment, that is, the theory of the apartheid clan or its extreme counterpart, and considering those theories of healthy intent which are born out of Africa's indigenous interest, whatever differences they appear to have had so far in their supplement towards a total African image are differences of degree and not fundamental. This is because, born Negritude and the theories expressed in its disfavour from the ex-British colonies arise from the same historical backbone of an Africa Lost and Regained. Regained in an historic factor of violent engagement and still facing the constant shock of alienation, still living in the oppressed-oppressor ring of combatant in protest and jailer in guilt. It is in the regaining of this total Africanness that her sons cannot afford to prostitute her traditional sensibilities; sensibilities which are at the core of her identity and are at the same time both age-bound and current; current because her die-hard sensibilities are still challenged and influenced by East-West values; age-bound because these sensibilities which we treasure have their own established governing values and should awaken into a transitional context by her own right and not by being bogged down into threatening forces with doubtful motives. The threat lies within

— the exodus to the cities, mainly because of the centralised economic opportunities, leaving the communal background, family concern, language and values behind, thus creating a vacuum whose substitutes are usually elements that sap the energy of traditional ideas, resulting in a total alteration of the personality;
— it lies within the tendency of the African conscious writer, being lured and drained into government services out of necessity for his livelihood, and from where he dares not make objective statements at variance with the existing political thought of his state;
— it lies within the avoided ugly question of how British certain Commonwealth African States have become, or how French the Senegalese have become (however much they might hate or love themselves for it);
— it lies within the evaluation of the thrill and fear-ridden god-masks that will have soon lost their terror but not their traditional significance and social timelessness in the forming of a people's national characteristics, since, out of all religious cults evolves a people's cultural backbone, and out of the craft of the carver, a nation's art;
— it lies within the realisation and acceptance of the fact that we cannot

> afford to concentrate literature or the aristocracy of the speech-making intellectuals on their exportation to the patrons' newspapers, but must embrace and involve all groups of tribe or clan societies.

And the only way to do so is by using their vernaculars.

I should add this, lest I appear merely advising against the idea of all 'Westernist' or 'Easternist' processes of assimilation which of course have already taken us by the head. My meaning is simply that we, like them, should be allowed to preserve our cultural identities (language being the most conscious tool of culture), our experiences, our conditions and our needs with the awareness and responsible contribution towards man's universality at the basic human level. By stressing that all authentic African settings and the everyday realities originating in an African experience should be first recorded for the African in his own language is not to set any form of imaginary boundary between the basic and universal human nature expressed in all sorts of literatures, but once more to underscore the fact that there can be no true African literature without the use of her own languages. Nor is this a mere attitude of aloofness over one's Africanness, a nostalgic defiance in favour of the Motherland's nationalism. It is a matter of need, a purpose of concern, for the poet-engaged, the painter, critic, politician and all concerned in the development of a true cultural personality of the Africans.

These are a few lines by the West Indian novelist, E.R. Braithwaite, from his *To Sir with Love* (1971):

> 'I have grown up British in every way, myself, my parents, and my parents' parents, none of us knew or could know any other way of living, of thinking, of being; we knew no other cultural pattern,' and then, 'I realised at that moment that I was British but evidently not a Briton ... I would need to examine myself and my whole future in terms of this new appraisal.'

And we ask no less of an appraisal for Africa, only she needs not wait until she has lost it all; a cultural right growing side by side with her political right is what she must appraise before it is too late, as it appears to be for the West Indian in Braithwaite's novel. And surely one's own language is the lifeblood of one's culture. The Greek philosopher, Aristotle, whom

Shakespeare well understood, once said 'To have one's own language is the dignity of a people.'

Besides, it is not the mere assertion, protest, or political-moralist declamation in the oppressor's language to the oppressor, but the mirroring of a society in all her complexities and in the literature of her own language which expresses her to herself, that exposes her to her own image, that she is finally absolved. And it is within this absolution that the duty of the writer artist lies.

If priding yourself in your colour (whatever that is supposed to mean), and exclaiming it out loud in French or English poetry, implied that you were once taught to be ashamed of the same or made to feel little because of it; why not record and proclaim the poem in the vernacular you dreamt it in, to embrace and involve your own people first, and if and when necessary, translate it into the foreign idiom? Why not?

Perhaps, from among the African nations, Ethiopia is one of the lucky ones in this context, in that, 'the best that has been known and said' has, through the centuries, been recorded and expressed in the languages of her heritage, in the literature of her own script since 800 BC, first in Geez, in Tigre-Tigregna, and finally in Amharic, all languages of wide scope and not mere dialects as some Western misconceptionists consider them to be. They are all derivatives of the same Geez root, a most ancient script, from one of Ethiopia's earliest of people, the Ag-Azi of the time-old Adulis, Beha, and Acum cities whose ruins still stand, depicting the country's historic and cultural backbone. The Western thought which abandoned African painting and sculpture as crude and primitive has had to reconsider its cocksure disdain in the words of Elie Faure who wrote of African art as characterising 'the universe itself', and as reflecting 'the orderliness of the Cosmos ...'. Who knows what African literatures would do if only given the chance of survival by us, her young writers who appear to have abandoned her languages? Certainly, what our new African languages need for their development, as possible literary tools, are the attractions of modern realities adapted into the roots of their own existing potentials, to attract the realities outside the boundaries of their circulation and cross-fertilise them into their own circumstances without effacing the essential characteristics of their cultural inheritance, and at the same time considering the nature of the new qualities that make themselves newly acceptable to the African warmth; unless, by refusing a wider range of accommodation for the newer realities, we invite the dangers of parochialism that may lag the transitional forces long set in

motion, and by so trying create some sensitively narrow customs edged into their own rigid sterility. Narrow provincialism or clan sense would render us, in literature as in progress, crippled exhibitionists supporting falling tribal walls against one another, and the energies we exert would only hasten our being buried with them.

Yet it is not by allowing our spirit to be hypnotised by the spectre of West-East ideologies or bogged down by their cultural inoculations that we can help realise a totality of an African image, particularly when this practical and immediate necessity cannot be solved within our endless debates of abstractions instigated by the sinister motives of the selfsame 'friendly' pharaohs. The African writer, is not long past the period of questioning his idea as to what ingredient of his African totality might have been eliminated in the process of his alien rehabilitating techniques, and what essentials of language, art and literature he cannot afford to overlook in the grave responsibilities he exercises in the guidance and background formation of younger writers. Although he might not be able to afford to disregard these current forces which are at work and are in a better position to influence the temper of the times, it must at least be with the conscious awareness that the influence cannot be at the risk of mental or cultural colonisation, as, for instance, in the degenerate 'go white – go beautiful' notion, inculcated into certain lighter-skinned Negro Americans, or the back-handed encouragement of apartheid (the deadliest wedge thrust in the soul of our African-ness), glaring at us behind the idle but calculated silence of Anglo-American Incorporated. Within this lies the core of our conflicting value judgements. We might heed Benjamin Franklin's words here, 'As we must account for every idle word, so we must for every idle silence', or that a friend cannot be a flatterer at the same time. Certainly, there will be little or no African art if our laws of creativity were out of touch with these hideous realities being played against our cultural values.

Thus it is only literature that involves all groups to this awareness, the literature of Africa's expression by right of indigenous birth, in transcending time and dogma and on the digestion of time and generations, that would help the writer and the consumer to form a conscious thought of an African future, no longer alienated in determining the pace and direction of a world that concerns her. It is, therefore, more with the literatures that embrace each and every group who have developed a conscious taste for his vernacular, in the recalling to life and awareness the structural backbone of the ways of the colonial and traditional survivals, in forecasting for him what new realities

Africa's culture is about to naturalise, what social impact this new naturalisation represents in relation to, or in conflict with, that of his past or passing realities, in the findings of what it might reflect on the East-West ideological impact as envisaged through the image of his Africanness, and, in the depiction of these messages which unfortunately happen too fast for Africa's pace and in which she is incessantly hamstrung, that the engagement of the African writer should first stand. It is more in the literatures of a total African involvement and less in his contemporary niche in the temple of fame, that the commitment and excitement of the African man of letters who stands out as her culture reincarnate and the embodiment of her literatures, would find himself his rightful and deserving responsibility.

8 AFRICAN LITERATURE AND THE CRISES OF POST-STRUCTURALIST THEORISING

Niyi Osundare

INTERROGATING THE INTERROGATORS

Let me begin by confessing to a nagging unease about the 'post-ness' tagged on to contemporary theorising in general: post-structural, post-modernist, post-colonial, post-Marxist, post-industrial, and so on. There is also talk about the 'post-humanist' era, though we hope in all earnestness that the 'post-human' society will never arrive! This innocuous-looking prefix 'post' kicks up temporal, spatial, even epistemological problems, operates most times on a set of fallacies which seduce us into a false consciousness that human thoughts, ideas, actions, experiences, and the significant events they generate are arrangeable in a linear, x-before-y, y-after-x framework, very much like a series of temporal scenarios in an overdeterministic succession.

Implicit in this linear arrangement is a suggestion of misleading chronology, a temporal-ideational faction which constructs progression as a process in which ideas are used and discarded, then superseded and supplanted by new ones. This method hardly looks back except for self-justification and self-authentication (Jeyifo 1990a:2), it is so full of contemporaneist bravado about the relative (at times absolute) superiority of its own perceptual ideology, theoretical re-categorisation and analytical methodology. However, the prefix 'post' raises issues of a fundamental philosophical nature. When used with a temporal signifier, it acquires a clearer, more originary power than when yoked up with the ideational. Compare 'post-1945' and 'post-structuralist'. While it is possible to point to January 1946 as the specific, immediate commencement of 'post-1945', we would be hard put to it to tell specifically when 'post-structuralism' began – the time and place it was born, its progenitors, its birth weight, the attending midwives, and so forth. This is

why, despite the several claimants to its originary authorship, we still find it difficult to say in unmistakable terms who the 'founders' of post-structuralism were or are. There is an inevitable fuzziness, even indeterminacy about these things which theories of the 'post' variety are often too hasty to admit.

It is an irony that a theoretical theology such as post-structuralism, whose principal tenet is the deconstruction of dichotomy, should have its own temple erected on a similar binarism: structuralism versus post-structuralism, modernism versus post-modernism, and the rest. For one of the abiding concerns of the New Historicism is the reconstruction of our view of history not as a progressional, evolutionary inevitability, but as a multidirectional network of ruptured continuities in which cause may be effect, effect cause; a complex, supratemporal artefact in which the present derives its force from the unpastness of the past.

Post-structuralist practice understands this temporal and ideational fluidity, even if its theory appears to negate it. More than any other literary theory in recent times, post-structuralist practice derives a great number of its paradigms from the 'unpastness of the past'. In a rarely eclectic case of archaeology and necromancy – deconstructionists have exhumed the sagacious bones of Plato, Nietzsche, Schlegel, Hegel, Schopenhaur, Heldegger, Marx, Sartre, Bakhitin, and others. For critical and analytical terminologies (and methods) they have dug deep into the catacombs of Classical rhetoric: tropes, topos, metaphor, metonymy, hypostasis, aporia, polysemy, and so on have all been dusted up and sent on 'new' post-structuralist errands.

There is thus a significant 'bending over backwards' in post-structuralism, a rummaging through the jungle of primeval epochs. How really self-assuredly new, then, are these terminologies, these methods, even in their new significations and functions, when their very origination interrogates the 'post-ness' of their 'structuralism'. Most times the old-new wine of post-structuralist analytical idioms feels quite ill at ease in the old wine-skin of its theory. Contemporary literary discourse is thus clogged with mongrel jargon, cultic, overprofessionalised, trapped in hermitic closures. The newer things appear to be, the older they really are.

HOW 'POST-COLONIAL' IS POST-COLONIAL DISCOURSE?

The world is shaped – frequently determined – by the words we use for expressing it. In naming the world we also name ourselves, evoking a

recognisable, tangible construct of that panoply of realities which constitutes what we call the human experience. Names serve as the door to the house of experience, a guide to hidden meanings in the shadowy nooks of time and place. Names tell stories, liberate or imprison; they may also serve as self-fulfilling prophecies. Names commit; which is why the Yoruba say that it is only mad people who do not mind what names they are called, or who refuse to see the difference between the names they choose to bear and the ones the world prefers to call them by. The negative 'politics of representation', so famous in contemporary literary discourse, is very much the product of misapprehension as it is of mis-naming and mis-verbalisation. There are times people do not need to call a dog a bad name to hang it: the bad name does the hanging itself.

Conscious of the politics of naming, many African writers have expressed profound apprehension about the term 'post-colonial' as applied to the African situation in general and African writing in particular. For instance, speaking at a Commonwealth conference in London in 1991, Ama Ata Aidoo, playwright and novelist, challenged her audience in these words: 'Ask any village woman how post-colonial her life is.' 'Colonialism,' she added, 'has not been "posted" anywhere at all' (Chreachain 1991). Most appropriately, the paper from which these words emerged was titled 'Collective Amnesia and the Role of the African Writer'.

First let us collectively remember to ask a few questions: Whose invention or re-invention is the term 'post-colonial'? Who was the first to apply it to the writings of Africa and other parts of the developing world? Since when has it become fashionable, theoretically and critically correct, to refer to these parts of the world by this term? What social and cultural constructions are thrust up by this concept? How are we committed by this term, having so profoundly naturalised its meaning without pausing to think about its implications? To re-echo our former trope, this terminology names us, but do we know its own name and the origin and giver of that name?

It is pertinent to ask these questions for the term 'post-colonial' is not just another literary-critical construct to be used with the same terminological certitude and blissful complacency with which we employ its counterparts such as 'post-structural', 'post-modernist', and others. More than other terminologies of the 'post-' variety, 'post-colonial' is a highly sensitive historical – and geographical – trope which calls into significant attention a whole epoch in the relationship between the West and the developing world, an epoch which played a vital role in the institutionalisation and strengthening

of the metropole-periphery/centre-margin dichotomy. We are talking about a trope which brings memories of gunboats and mortars, conquests and dominations, a trope whose accent is bloodstained. We are talking about a terminology whose 'name' and meaning are fraught with the burdens of history and the anxieties of contemporary reality.

The first of these burdens concerns the politics of the genealogy of the term 'post-colonial'. Like many other phrases and concepts which define the African reality, this terminology owes its origination to foreign Adams. It is yet another instance of a 'name' invented for the African experience from outside, a name which finds little or no acceptance among its African objects. It is undoubtedly this conflict between the African reality and the exogenist determination and representation of it that led Finnime N. Chreachain to this conclusion about the Commonwealth conference mentioned earlier on in this essay: 'It is obvious to anyone familiar with British Africanist circles that a vast gulf exists between critical perspectives within Africa and those prevalent among British Africanists' (1991:4). For 'British' substitute 'Western'. Chreachain's views here possess a thrust similar to that of Biodun Jeyifo in his critique of the 'exclusively and prescriptively Western monument of High Theory'. Jeyifo observes further:

> the contemporary understanding of theory not only renders it an exclusively Western phenomenon of a very specialised activity, but also implicitly (and explicitly) inscribes the view that theory does not exist, cannot exist outside of this High Canonical Western orbit. (1990a:3)

This apprehension about the imperialism of theory is by no means an exclusively African concern. In an interview with Gayatri Spivak in New Delhi, Rashmi Bhatnager, Lola Chatterjee and Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan took their learned guest to task on the use of 'First World elite theory' for the literatures of the 'colonies':

> Now there is a certain uneasiness here about the ideological contamination of theory by the specific historical origins which produce it and therefore about the implications of employing it in our own context. Would you defend the post-colonial intellectual dependence upon Western models as historical necessity? (Spivak 1990)

It is instructive to note that Spivak's short, cryptic, and evasive answer to this very important question indeed ends up in another question counterposed to her interviewers: 'What is an indigenous theory?'

For ideological and intellectual reasons, it must be stressed here that what is really at issue in this argument is not simply the provenance of theories, but the ease and complacency with which Western theories take over the global literary and intellectual arena, the way they inscribe themselves as though the other parts of the world were a *tabula rasa*. There is something ethnocentric about this 'universalism', an attitude and behaviour which constitute the world's literary discourse into a monumental Western Monologue. In several ways, this totalises literary experience and the way people relate to it. So rigidly located in one place, how can we see the Great Mask of the world from different angles?

The second problem with the term 'post-colonial' is its denotative and descriptive inadequacy. What are the semantic – and socio-semiotic – designations of this compounded word: beyond-colonialism, past-colonial, after-colonial, free-from-colonial, anti-colonial, or simply not-colonial? In other words, is 'post-colonial' a qualitative tag or a mere temporal phase-marker?

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin wrestle bravely with the monster sprung up by this term when they declare in *The Empire Writes Back*, a very valuable even if controversial book:

> We use the term 'post-colonial' to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day. (1989:2)

This declaration gives the prefix morpheme 'post' a new and baffling meaning. At work here is an aberrant, one-catch-all metonymy in which the part is too small for the whole it is used to represent. The logic of this definition puts works as far apart as *When Love Whispers* (1947), *The Palmwine Drunkard* (1952), *Fragments* (1969), and *I Will Marry when I Want* (1982) in the same 'post-colonial' bag. There is no doubt that this container is also large enough to swallow the works of D.O. Fagunwa, or the poetry of Sheban Roberts!

Further down the page, attention shifts from 'culture' to place, and the authors disclose the enormous assortedness of the fishes in the post-colonial net: Africa, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, the Caribbean, India, Malaysia,

Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific, Sri Lanka – and the United States of America! Needless to say, what we have here is an unconscionably mixed bag whose constitutive items are so gross and so general that very little room is left for the crucial specificities of individual parts. And what's more, to so liberally apply the 'post-colonial' label to places such as Africa and Australia, the Caribbean and Canada – places whose colonial pasts are so fundamentally different – is tantamount to mocking the real wounds of the colonial infliction where they are deepest and most enduring. We certainly need to distinguish formal and superficial coloniality in places like Canada, Australia and New Zealand from the systematic exploitative – and, above all, racist – coloniality in the rest of the countries in the list.

Colonialism is a complex, protean monster with various levels, degrees, and complexions. Its intricate mutations defy a simple, short-hand name, its continuities make a mockery of a totalising, comprehensive nomenclature. Thus, Ashcroft *et al.*'s submission that 'The Idea of "post-colonial" literary theory emerges from the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing' (ibid.:2) sounds ironical in the face of the inadequacy of the emergent 'idea' itself.

And besides, who needs this adumbrative tag with its own 'false notions of the universal'? Wasn't this name invented by Western Theory as a convenient nomenclatural handle on their epistemic spheres of influence? To reiterate our earlier point, the 'tag' post-colonial is more useful for those who invented it than it is for those who are supposed to wear it, its passive signifieds. It rings truer for those who have 'posted' colonialism in posh conference halls and arcane seminar rooms conveniently far from the real battleground of colonial encounter.

And this explains the problem of misrecognition and the resultant misrepresentation plaguing the term 'post-colonial'. Whether used ideationally or temporally, the term lures us into a false sense of security, a seeming pastness of a past that is still painfully present. It is common knowledge (no longer restricted to social scientists, especially of the political economics persuasion) that to apply the term 'post-colonial' to the real situation in Africa today is to be plainly naïve or majestically futuristic, no matter what the degree of metaphoric extension we are prepared to grant that term. We are talking about a continent with very, very little control over its economy and politics, whose intra-continental interactions are still

dominated by the same old colonial languages – a continent so heavily indebted to the financial houses of the advanced industrialised world that many of its governments are virtually under foreign receiverships. How can we talk so glibly, so confidently about the 'post-coloniality' of a place so neo-colonial? Shouldn't we distinguish 'flag post-coloniality' from its genuine, purposive namesake? We need a new dictionary of contemporary literary terms.

The term 'post-colonial' is thus more loaded, more polysemic, more positional than its inventors and users are readily aware of. It even carries an (unintended) taint. The word 'post-colonial' endows its principal morpheme 'colonial' with an originary privilege. 'Colonial' carries the voice of the beginning; it is the moving force, the significant point of departure. African literature, oral or written, in whatever language and style, is presented as having no identity, no name except in reference to it. However, history frequently intervenes with its intriguing fluidity. Consider the example of Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* written in the 'post-colonial' period, but whose content and politics are so aggressively pre-colonial; or Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* written in the colonial period, but whose narrative thrust straddles both pre-colonial and colonial epochs. What name, relative to 'colonial' shall we call those epics which thrived in many parts of Africa when history was once-upon-a-time and the white man had not made his momentous entry? What makes a work 'post-colonial': the time and place of its author or its own intrinsic subject?

Lastly, the phatic import of that term. How does it sound, how does it feel to be called a 'post-colonial writer'? Should Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Achebe, Aidoo, and the others feel happy for having attained the 'post-colonial' status? When you meet me in the corridors tomorrow will you congratulate me on my 'post-colonial' poetry? In brief, is there life besides 'coloniality'?

UNDECONSTRUCTED SILENCES

All theories leak. Old assumptions give way to new ones. Pre-existing platitudes get spruced up in new raiment, and what used to be called 'six' receives a brave new baptism of 'half-dozen'. Post-structuralism in its various mutations and manifestations is, no doubt, a grand ambitious project. Its grounding in history, philosophy, and linguistics certainly gave it a rigorous, even radical head start. Its interrogative methods have provoked answers from shadowy silences, or gingered those answers into further questions.

But, like Oedipus, post-structuralism's swollen foot emanated from its origins. As an 'exclusively and prescriptively Western' theory (Jeyifo 1990a:2), post-structuralism has erected the West into a monumental metonym for the world, another instance of that part which considers itself larger than the whole. Because Africa (and the rest of the developing world) is absent or abscised from the post-structuralist Master Theory, most of its theoretical and conceptual projects have proved grossly inadequate in the analysis and apprehension of issues and developments outside the Western orbit. Literary space is inundated by a plethora of 'new' terminologies, methods and discursive practices, but these are hardly matched by a new consciousness about the world outside Europe and the United States, by a new grasp of the social, political, economic and cultural specificities of those parts of the universe pushed to the fringe.

In no aspect is this exclusivist ideology more palpable than the dialect of the celebrated practitioners of contemporary theorising, their preoccupation with Western topoi and exempla, their cultivation of impenetrable jargon, their demonstration of utter lack of awareness about places and peoples outside their own locales. In fact, many aspects of post-structuralist theorising have made the humanisation of discourse impossible, as a result of their fetishisation of the text and its theory. The over-abstract, reified processes of contemporary theorising have hitherto not shown any efficient medium of recognising, analysing and representing the urgent concrete specificities of the developing world. Old prejudices, myths, fallacies, and misconceptions have not been deconstructed; on the contrary, they have been re-constructed into faddish frameworks couched in new-fangled lingo. The interrogative power of contemporary theories has been severely selective.

Let us illustrate some of the points above by examining a book on Conrad: *Heart of Darkness: Case Study in Contemporary Criticism* (Murfin 1989a). It must be said to the credit of this book that it provides a potentially solid pedagogical tool for the study of Conrad's most famous book. It is compact, well-researched and informative, a long overdue attempt at bridging the gap between post-structuralist theorising and post-structuralist literary analysis. And it takes Conrad through the diversity of contemporary projects: a chapter each on Psychoanalytic Criticism, Reader-response Criticism, Feminist Criticism, Deconstruction, and the New Historicism.

I grabbed this book with enthusiasm, eager to see Conrad's archetypal silences and ambivalences unravelled, the gaps in the tale filled in, the old parable interrogated with a revolutionary critical weapon in the last quarter

of the twentieth century. I was anxious to see which theoretical practice would be able to engage the story, enter the text, initiate a humane dialogue with Conrad, ask him why there are no African human beings in a 'yarn' whose setting is Africa. I was expecting a post-structuralist open surgery on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, but what I got was a complex series of evasions, open-eyed blindness, wilful forgetfulness, or, simply, an intellectual and racial connivance with the European novelist.

Instead of a set of new and vigorous perspectives, what hit my eye were the same old critical shibboleths in tinsel post-structuralist phraseology: the Chinese box narrative structure, the dangerously thin divide between civilisation (Europe) and barbarism (Africa), the ordeal of the civilised European mind when thrown in the heart of African darkness, and one or two suppressed murmurs about Conrad's view of imperialism. In none of these chapters is Conrad's systematic and pervasive dehumanisation of Africans discussed, much less interrogated. Our critics simply join Conrad in a 'post-structuralist', 'post-colonialist' voyage down the Congo, they too being 'wanderers on a prehistoric earth' (*HOD*, p.50)[1] surrounded by 'black shadows' (p.3), 'black bones' (p.31), cannibals splashing around and pushing (p.49), appalled by the 'smelly mud' (p.35) of the Congo – several miles, several centuries away from 'the tranquil dignity' (p.18) of the Thames. To them, too, Africa is nothing more than a 'wild and passionate uproar' (p.51).

And yet, one of the most significant chapters in Murfin's book is on a 'reader-response' approach to *Heart of Darkness*. Now, reader-response criticism operates through an empowerment of the reader, making her/him 'an active, necessary, and often self-conscious participant in the making of a text's meaning' (Rosmarin 1989:155). Meaning becomes an event through which the reader comes to a deeper, fuller understanding of the art and the persons it fabricates. The reader, too, is expected to live through the text, probe its absences, fill in its gaps. The act of reading thus becomes an art in itself, a conscious, dynamic process of unravelling. This process functions through collaboration or confrontation with the text and its originary spirit.

It goes without saying that this chapter has opted for collaboration with Conrad and his vision, or rather, with the Western reader of Conrad and her/his vision. Or how could Adena Rosmarin have arrived at this 'reading' of Conrad's colour code?

> While it is true that dark men in this tale tend to behave in ways more moral and more civilised than do white men –

> virtually every critic notes, for example that the near-starving cannibals on board keep their hungry eyes off their masters – darkness remains the place and mode of Marlow's terminal struggle with Kurtz. (1989: 161)

So much then for noble savages and benevolent cannibals and their missionary restraint! Rejoice, oh black anthropophagi! You are 'more moral and more civilised' than white men in Africa. And you have the magnanimity of Conrad and the naïvety of his critic to thank for this! And for this piece of unmatchable wisdom Rosmarin has the authority of 'virtually every critic' (ibid.) as source of ready appeal. Need we ask who such critics are, and what their intellectual and racial identity is?

On page 156, Rosmarin asks a crucial question: 'What is the experience of reading *Heart of Darkness* like?' How I wish she had included the African in her group of respondents. But as is customary in most Western discourse on *Heart of Darkness*, the African is conspicuous by her/his very absence. After all, in Conrad's tale, it is the forests, the shrubs, the river which possess the active, transitive impulse; not the Africans who are nothing more than a swarm of 'naked breasts, arms, legs, and glaring eyes' (*HOD*, p.60). The African response can only matter if you agree that she/he is a human being in the first place. But if, like Conrad, you believe she/he is not, why should you waste precious time seeking the response of a savage beast?

Rosmarin's reader-response criticism of *Heart of Darkness* is a clear demonstration of the fundamental ethnocentrism of most post-structuralist theorising, its several blindnesses, and pitfalls; and, in particular, of the new metaphysics of readerly power and authority. For the questions which are left perpetually unanswered include: Who is the reader? What kind of pre-text – social, cultural, ideological, epistemic, etc. is she/he importing into the text? Is or isn't the text really what the reader means it to mean?

The chapter on 'The New Historicism and *Heart of Darkness*' begins with a cautious, dubitative concession (the only such concession in the whole book): 'It [*Heart of Darkness*] tells us little, *perhaps*, about Congolese peoples' (Murfin 1989b:226, my emphasis). But earlier on in the paragraph Ross Murfin has hit the reader with this magisterial 'new historicist' proclamation:

> A work of art, it [*Heart of Darkness*] is at the same time a kind of historical document. It *undoubtedly* presents as *accurate* a

> picture of a colonised Africa as many other supposedly non-fictional accounts written during the same period. (Ibid., my emphasis)

By the impeccable logic of this assertion, Conrad's jaundiced fiction is Africa's historical fact, a European novel 'about' Africa becomes an 'accurate' chronicle of Africa by some other name. But there is some method in the madness of the above proclamation: the 'non-fictional accounts' mentioned as parallel text here are, indeed, most likely to contain the same 'history', being invariably the accounts of colonial functionaries, European missionaries, or various 'discoverers' and 'explorers' of the African 'darkness'. But some information about modern African historiography would have instructed Murfin on the kind of 'history' in such accounts. However, this is not the place to ask how much or what kind of African history our author knows. We can only wonder how seriously to take those critics who embark upon a 'new historicist' analysis without a thorough and comprehensive apprehension of the text and its context; critics who practice 'historicism' without history.

In fairness to Brook Thomas, his new historicist analysis is the one that shows the most prominent awareness of the African in *Heart of Darkness*. Unfortunately this awareness only comes in brief, pale flickers, the analytical channel having got thoroughly clogged by mountains of received critical baggage.

For instance, Thomas follows on the old beaten path. Conrad remains for him the Christian of human experience (1989:237). Africans, even of the late nineteenth century, 'exist in a state prior to history' (ibid.:248); a journey to Africa is both a physical and temporal journey into darkness; African savagery is the context in which European civilisation finds its truth, Africa remains the abode of the unconscious, contrasting sharply with Europe's triumphant rationality.

Most times, Thomas's 'interrogative' reading leads to further perversity. Just as Rosmarin mentioned earlier on, he too awards Africans who accompany Marlow up the river a medal for restraint for not 'killing and eating the whites' (ibid.:251) despite their lingering starvation. Even more intriguing is Thomas's reading of the following passage which is Conrad's clearest summative testament to the African's sub-humanity:

> The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster but there – there you

> could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were – no, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it – this suspicion of their not being inhuman... (Quoted in ibid.:245).

Note here the complex dubitabilities, the stalking, stammering syntax of a mind which puts the African's claim to humanity to a monologic European debate. Note the tortuous indirectness which finds expression in the choice of double negatives: 'their not being inhuman'. The word 'human' occurs twice in this passage, undermined each time by the negative prefix 'in-'. In the final analysis, the African's humanity is a mere 'thought', a 'suspicion', her/his relationship to the world dims into a 'remote kinship' from 'the night of first ages'. Conrad's Africans 'howled and leaped, and spun', and made horrid faces; engaged in a wild and passionate uproar; they were 'ugly'. In spite of these and several other implicit and explicit textual signals so prevalent in the novel, Thomas comes up with the conclusion that Conrad's narrative 'disrupts' commonplace racial prejudices. He seems to have been misled by the jejune 'chinese box' narrative trickery which puts those rabidly racist words and thoughts in the mouth of a distant narrator while granting Conrad, their creator, an absolute indemnity.

Even so, Thomas reinforces rather than deconstructs the ontological binarism which confirms Conrad's studied Manichaeism:

> The West versus Africa
> Future versus Prehistory
> European civilisation versus African savagery
> Rational versus Unconscious
> Language versus Silence
> Light versus Darkness
> European Self versus African Other

The last pair in the series is particularly important here. For although Thomas makes some attempt at critiquing the 'Eurocentric perspective' (ibid.:242) which constructs itself into a Self that constantly distances 'the Other', he himself demonstrates a Eurocentric inability to recognise that 'Other', to apprehend her/his ontology, and lay out an unambiguous interrogation of her/his misrepresentation. This is partly so because, like Conrad and his critics, Thomas neither knows nor understands the African 'Other', and

therefore cannot sympathise with her/him as a victim of a Eurocentric discursive and cognitive violence. For, in actual fact, Conrad's construction of the African in *Heart of Darkness* is other than the 'Other'. The sense of complementarity which shores up the relationship between the self and the Other cannot exist in a situation of an absolute negation of that Other. It would be enormously charitable to picture Conrad's African as the true Other of the European, for what does not exist cannot, except by some liberal metaphoric licence, aspire to the alter ego of what does. In Conrad's Africa, the real absent factor is the African.

A practical, incontestable demonstration of this dehumanisation and abscising is Conrad's denial to his African that most supremely human of all attributes: language. Africans 'howled' and 'shrieked'; these beings are so rudimentarised by the novelist that their 'wild and passionate uproar' never rises to the level of linguistic sublimity. There is sound and noise all right, but no language, no articulatory competence, no discursive command. A pathological silence entraps the 'natives', as they become, in Toni Morrison's words, 'Conrad's unspeaking' (1989:9). Any wonder then that for a definition and articulation of the African's world-view (if she/he is ever credited with any such thing in the novel) we have to rely on the pronouncement of a new Prospero, of another 'bud of the nobler race'?

But the real pathology here is Conrad's, a victim of a chronic ethnocentric malaise which springs instant hostility to and denigration of what he does not understand. To such afflicted souls, difference (on the other side) is defect, variance is abnormality. Since Conrad never understood, and never considered worth understanding, the linguistic 'peculiarities' of his Africans, whatever language they possessed could not have been anything more than 'a violent babble of uncouth sounds'. After all, his Africans spoke no Polish, no French, no English.

And yet a prevalent, perplexing blindness/silence has fallen on this aspect of Conrad's ethnocentrism in Western criticism. For instance, Brook Thomas makes the very important point that language is humanity's 'only access to truth' (1989:250), but his 'new historicist' project at no time interrogates the denial of that 'access' to Conrad's Africans.

This combination of silence and blindness has characterised Conrad scholarship in the West since the debut of *Heart of Darkness*. Ross Murfin's case study, despite its post-structuralist aspirations, is no exception. It is noteworthy, for instance, that apart from Brook Thomas who cited Chinua Achebe's thoughtful and seminal essay (1989) in his reference, no other

contributor to this book showed any awareness of an African response. Even Thomas's magnanimity is limited: although Achebe's essay is listed under 'Recent Historical Studies of Conrad' (ibid.:257), his own new historicist study does not betray even the slightest trace of the content of Achebe's essay. With this process of 'unfair selectivity' and 'preferred visions' (Jeyifo 1990b:10) late twentieth-century Western critics have continued Conrad's silencing and negation of Africans.[2] Contemporary Western critics are still co-pilgrims in the steamer up the Congo; for them, the African's humanity still remains a 'thought', a fragile 'suspicion'.

Either as a result of the politics of their provenance or an inherent crisis in their modes and methods of analysis and application (or both), 'mainstream' Western post-structuralist theories have demonstrated little or no adequacy in the apprehension, analysis, and articulation of African writing and its long and troubled context. This essay is not intended to push an exclusivist, essentialist viewpoint that 'our' literature cannot be apprehended by 'their' theory. But it is the case that the ethnocentric universalism of contemporary theoretical practice: its reification of theory into some oracular Western canonical monologue, its fetishisation of text and disregard for the deeper reaches of referentiality, its replacement of theory itself with masochistic theoreticism – all these crises have produced a kind of radical conservatism, an anti-hegemonic hegemony which distances Western theory from the fundamental peculiarities of non-Western peoples.

In many ways, post-structuralist methods and tools of analysis lack the depth of perception, cogency of insight, and clarity of procedure displayed by other theories (Osundare 1989). Deconstruction, for instance, confuses rather than explains, pontificates instead of interpreting. Its treatment of African literature has demonstrated that 'new' is not necessarily better, and that a project which sounds 'post-colonialist' in intent may turn out to be neo-colonialist, even 're-colonialist' in practice.

The preceding submissions are not another 'anti-theory', anti-rigour campaign, and should not be construed as such. Theories matter. They provide a neat, handy background aid to methodological and analytical procedures. They foster and enhance a reflective globality on issues while sharpening that predictive and speculative capability which facilitates the marriage of imagination and knowledge. So a critique of one type of theory (in this case the post-structuralist variety) should not be mistaken for a negation and rejection of all theories. As post-structuralist theories are beginning to accept, thanks to the New Historicism, all theories are positional, contingent,

connected, even partisan. In their original, epistemological, and analytical presumptions, the 'major' literary theories in the world today are exclusively Western and oracular. They have yet to demonstrate adequate capability for coping with issues and events in other parts of the world.

NOTES

1. All page references are to the Ross Murfin (1989) edition of *Heart of Darkness*, abbreviated here as *HOD*.
2. For further demonstration of this attitude, see readers' responses to Gerald Graff's very significant article, 'What has Literary Theory Wrought?' *(Chronicle of Higher Education* 12 Feb. 1992:A48), in the issue of 11 March 1992 of the same periodical, p.84.

9 YORUBA TRAGIC DRAMA

A Note on the Origins of Nigerian Theatre

Dele Layiwola

Improvisation was fundamental to the origins of most theatrical forms and to their subsequent development (Aristotle 1965:36-37; Rose 1965:129-36). The general understanding that King Sango instituted the beginnings of costumed Yoruba drama, setting up an invocation cult at the royal mausoleum, is only part of the matter. It is noted in history that he founded the Bara or royal mausoleum on the outskirts of ancient Oyo and nominated a high priestess to care for the chambers of his ancestors. The priestess is known as the Iyamode (Johnson 1921:43-44). She invokes the spirits of the ancestors on ritual occasions. The invoked spirits, appearing as costumed figures, are thus the prototype of the Egungun masquerades in the Oyo period of Yoruba history.

It is not likely that this is the actual inauguration of the cult of the dead and its enactments as there are many other quasi-mythic references to such enactments as belonging to an earlier date. What seems to me to be of import is just that Sango brought the initiation of the female chorus into the performances of the cult and its various dramas.

It must be emphasised that Sango's description in history as a magic worker and a conjurer of fire has far greater implications than is always supposed. That man was an adroit juggler and a creator of spectacle. It was, therefore, not surprising that he incorporated other possibilities into what he knew to be a burgeoning dramatic art. Samuel Johnson writes of him:

> He was of a very wild disposition, fiery temper, and skilful in sleight of hand tricks. He had a habit of emitting fire and smoke out of his mouth, by which he greatly increased the dread his subjects had for him. (Ibid.:149)

It was most probably Sango's introduction of the female character into these mystical dramas which marked the beginning of the ubiquitous chorus of female singers who regularly contributed to the performances that were done in the King's court. The choral group of the king's women which provided the interlude to the dramatic sketches of the Alarinjo as recorded by Captain Clapperton in 1829 is a surviving element of this form (1829:56). The Ijuba choruses of the Ogunde theatre and its numerous disciples are actually derived from this chorus of women singers. The major contribution of Ogunde and his myriad contemporaries is that they liberated formalised theatre from the hold of religious cults, churches and the court of kings. As a consequence, they took it to the market places, the cinema halls, and the public at large. This is the whole enterprise that Ebun Clark sets out to document in her book on Ogunde theatre (1979). The chorus of women also celebrates the death of the king or the obligatory immolation of the Crown Prince (subsequently of the king's horseman) as part of the royal obsequies.[1]

This article will detail an example of a public sepulchral re-enactment of a Yoruba funerary cult in an account of an Iseku (funeral) ceremony witnessed and rendered by Isaac Delano in his book, *The Soul of Nigeria* (1937). He notes that this re-enactment of the dead traditionally takes place on the fortieth day, when the image or the persona of the man is heralded by drums after a long vigil. The dead man then emerges accompanied by two 'guards' to be seen by all relatives, mourners and well-wishers. The position of the female chorus as the invocationary spirits of the rite is unmistakable:

> The women stopped dancing at once. A song was started, the music was compelling, and the dance was resumed. But not the women only this time; two men danced out from the house to each of the circles, and then back again. On their return a few women accompanied them, as if to act as an escort, and then they rejoined their companions ...
>
> The music stopped and the songs with it. Then two women started singing solos in rich soprano voices. The words were all concerning the dead man. It was almost like invoking his spirit. (Delano 1937:115-16)

After what seemed to be a long invocation, a stilling of all movement ushered in the man:

> Dead silence. The man came slowly, very slowly. His gait, his action, his movements and dress. He even carried a walking stick!
>
> What struck me most forcibly was that the bones of his body had been made whole. There was no pretence about it. The walking stick was not carried in support of weakened feet. These had been made sound and strong. It was carried for effect. The man walked straight and gracefully ... He quickened his step. Then I noticed there were two men, one in front, the other behind him, acting as bodyguard.
>
> His face was not covered. It must have been very successfully painted, for the wrinkles and scars were all there as evidence of his identity. (Ibid).

Thereafter the man inspected his former bedroom and went on to the graveyard where he received supplications and gave his blessings in mute response.

The two bodyguards that the author mentions are also found with high-ranking *egunguns*: supposed ancestral embodiments who must not be touched or defiled in any way. Obviously that could not have been the dead man, an actor who had similar features was simply made up and costumed to act the role.

Most dramatic enactments, especially those of the tragic passions of gods and heroes, still remain in the repertory of their various cults as 'copyright' materials. A few are staged publicly at post-harvest festivals. An example is the annual enactment of the captivity and ransom of the suffering deity, Obatala, as an aspect of the cathartic induction of death and regeneration (Beier 1959).

We must recall here that the essential aspect of Yoruba tragic mysteries was probably connected with a defunct, pristine chorus, for in the poetic repertory of Ifa has been found a certain story. It tells that the essential paraphernalia of the Egungun cult belonged to women and that it was later that men asserted their rights and appropriated it by guile from its original custodians. This *odu*, or corpus, Osa Meji, was collected by Pierre Verger (1965) and as he rightly conjectured, there was a time in the past when society was matriarchal and it was only at the inception of settled communities that men seized the political initiative. This is more than mere extrapolation because the ancient myths of other cultures also bear marks that show that

certain cultural initiatives had a primal association with feminine intuition. I have speculated on this elsewhere (Layiwola 1986). It is actually this lost initiative that Sango restores to the feminine model. This again is one of the reasons why in Sango mysteries it is often argued that though he is in historical terms the most recent of the deities, he is the elder to his compeers.[2] Thus for him the saying is true - 'The child is father to the man'. That is, the historical Sango of the fourteenth century was a later manifestation of a much older phenomenon.

The Nigerian scholar and critic J.A. Adedeji has painstakingly gleaned various shades of fact from the ancient corpus of Ifa so that he might attempt a coherent chronological development of the Yoruba Masque theatre (1970). He cites various Odus and Orikis where mention has been made of the Masque theatre and its practitioners but the various representation of facts in mystico-poetic chants, as is to be expected, hardly shows any consistency of chronological data. In the first place, these documentary evidences have as many sources as there are versions, and inasmuch as they make mention of factual events and characters, the kind of linguistic and aesthetic economy which is adopted by oral documentations often codifies, conceptualises and re-arranges events in mythical serialisation so that their exact time in history is obscured by the ciphers. It is in this respect that Adedeji's model, an otherwise invaluable work, suffers from assumed simplifications. Traditional materials, as Babayemi has cautioned (1980:21), are to be scrutinised before they are interpreted. Babayemi's own accounts are also varied but he does not draw any far-reaching historical conclusions from them. Thus Adedeji's is a more elaborate venture.

The accounts of Ifa narrative, for instance that Olugbee Agan, the supposed initiator of professionalism into masque dramaturgy, was raped by a gorilla are of especial concern to us here. Adedeji adopts the rather mythical account as an historical truth and subsequently works on that assumption, associating him with some historical personalities and placing him in the seventeenth century. The chronological accounts of Oyo kings are political and historical accounts and could be verified in time and space; but certainly not that of this quasi-mythical character. The claim that the account of the actor being fathered by a gorilla could be taken as true because there were reports of such instances in ancient times is also unfounded (Smith 1965:64). There may have been ancient instances whereby warriors and marauders of some sort from rival clans and kingdoms disguised themselves as gorillas to rape the women of their rivals or plunder their homes. In fact,

a known historical example is the Igbo-Ife confrontations and the instance of Moremi's heroism where a rival clan would disguise its warriors to plunder a neighbouring state. The truth of Olugbee Agan's malformed features, especially when other dramatic entertainers have been reputed to be hunchbacked or deformed, will be found in a different explanation as I shall presently discuss. The fact also that theatrical troupes carry the red monkey as Olugbee's symbol is just the mere recognition of a totem or a patron element. This is a sociological fact in traditional communities – where patents are adopted by families and personalities. Samuel Johnson, in fact, noted that some diviners keep these totems, pretending that they inspire magical communication with natural forces (1921:29).

So we arrive at the roots of the matter; how come that the archetypal entertainer, the artist, is a man and an animal or is reputed to have combined both features? Or let us voice it in the thoughts of Friedrich Nietzsche: 'What does that synthesis of god and goat in the Satyr point to?' (1974:7). Much as the Greeks thought of the Dionysiac hero as a god and a satyr, the Yorubas enunciate the vision of the revelling spirit as the schismatic as well as the complementary purveyor of tortured mirth.

The optimistic morality of the community that seeks outlets in festivals and occasions of relaxed, unburdened consciousness realises that the same moment of time that bears such lofty visions of release must, of necessity, equally accommodate pessimism. The schismatic consciousness is thus an exemplary model of true reality. One harmonious and glorious excess of the artist-singer is thus counterbalanced by the rigours of creative ecstasy. This, perhaps, rings forth in the language of Shakespeare, voiced by Florizel in *The Winter's Tale* (IV:iii):

> The gods themselves
> Humbling their deities to love, have taken
> The shape of beasts upon them: Jupiter
> Became a bull, and bellowed; the green Neptune
> A ram, and bleated; and the fire-rob'd god,
> Golden Apollo, a poor humble swain,
> As I seem now: – their transformations
> Were never for a piece of beauty rarer, –
> Not in a way so chaste, since my desires
> Run not before mine honour, nor my lusts
> Burn hotter than my faith.

Such also is the excess portrayed by Titania's lust after the performer, Bottom, who is for the purpose cast as half man, half ass in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The traditional representation of the reveller as symbolic of the man and the beast in the lurid visions of his unconscious realisation is a legacy of many ancient civilisations and have been found among Yoruba ancients too. The artist, in a creative enterprise, espouses the essential mystical suffusion of being as a fluidic whole and thereby merges a fragmentation of disparate psyches as a Dionysiac orgiastic, and also as a redemptive Apollonian persona. The muse is therefore the nexus of a varied confluence of forces.

An interesting phenomenon in the story rendered in the Ifa citation of Qwqnrinsé that the ancient family of the artistic cult (the Ologbin) at the palace of the Alafin all belong to a lineage of hunchbacks is of importance (Adedeji 1970:72). It is recorded that the primordial performer of the drama was an old man from the forests who was a hunchback. We recall this instance to prove the fact that the contorted personality of the actor, the aspiration, apart from the beauty of his art, towards a kind of conceptual ugliness, is a legacy of many ancient cultures, Hellenic and African. As a contrived alternative to the optimistic spirit of festival display there was also the subconscious transformation which yielded the tragic instinct. This is the inception of the tragic form. The plastic realisation of the form to supplement the bare improvisation of the contorted ego or destiny is the invention of the mask, carved or moulded.

Naturally, varied and distinct sub-forms emerged from the mask in experimentation with the shades of 'disguise', even though its earliest conception was ritual and ceremonial. Not only as a lurid representation of the dead and the invocation of the alter-ego, but also as an essential aspiration towards the arrest of time and the geometric or virtual abolition of temporality and discrete moments in space. The array of Epa masks and the examples of Gelede masks in Yoruba plastic conceptions are clear illustrations of this point. Their serenity and stability of transcendent form is without equal.

Some of the terracotta masks and images excavated from the sites of the ancient Nok civilisation in Northern Nigeria bear a striking resemblance to some of the functional masks used in Gelede dances (Eyo and Willet 1982:28). This is a valid hint that the ceremonial masks of Gelede cult dramas are, perhaps, later fashions of the art heritage of the same people. The kinetic or dynamistic qualities of these carvings reveal that their intentions are ritual rather than just static decorative forms. It is possible to see in the works the

incorporation of the fourth dimension of temporal energies. This is almost always a fundamental matrix in the dimensions of ritual plasticism, at least in Yoruba symbolic emblems and cult objects.

There is absolutely no doubt that the genesis of African tragic forms is elevated from the ritual concourse of dramatic re-enactment of personalities and figures practised by the accredited cults of the dead and the threnodic antiphons of the female chorus that often accompany them. The patent proof of this is to be found in the natures and functions of the masks that have been unearthed in Ile-Ife and Owo from sepulchral remains and tombs laid out to heroes and kings (Willet 1966). In line with my earlier affirmation, what King Sango did in the fourteenth century to inaugurate a ritual worship as a cult for his fathers is just an innovative convention following older traditions. The origins of Yoruba theatre therefore date back beyond the Alarinjo troupes. The art of the Alarinjo mummers was merely a later innovation to fashion entertainment in a 'profane' version of the form of what used to be a tragical art and preoccupation. It is in this respect that another of Adedeji's most resourceful essays on this subject (1978) is only an historical exposition of the craft of comedy, satire and allied genre rather than the study of the pristine origins of the dramatic endeavour.

The communal property of art as the aesthetic and psychotechnic channel of force must be well acknowledged. In the passions of gods and heroes, in the mysteries of ritual and dramatic cults, are to be found the predisposition to the release and guidance of earth energies in metasocial endeavours: festivals. The motions of the various dance dramas, orgies, and ecstatic motivations of ceremonies often apprehend the extra-literal dimension of geometric constructs of space and time. The traditional actor, immersed in the manipulation and control of the physical as well as psychic potential, becomes the human vessel for the expression of a god. This is because role-acting is, at its best, an intuitive process. The empathy of man with nature and the co-ordinated reaffirmation of the totality of being is a sustained balance of the cosmic channels of force.

It is true, as it is often observed, that such an attitude, which emerges from total immersion into the expansive depths of ritual or celebrative consciousness, undermines the intellectual conception and mastery of matter and seeks cowardly refuge in its spiritual identification whilst attenuating the historical purview of linear time. But we must accept, on the other hand, that the dynamistic conception of time or the kinetic apprehension of form does inspire phenomenal artistry and this was probably the reason why ancient

Africa has been able to produce, more than anywhere in the world, such prolific traditions of wood carving and sculpture. In spite of a certain basic misunderstanding of what constitutes tribal art as opposed to contemporary art, even William Fagg concedes that the intellectual simplifications consequent on industrial civilisation often stifle dynamistic apprehension and render emerging art forms static (1982:34).

The dramatic nature of the concept of immanent energy affirms itself in varying, even dialectical patterns. In its very fluid, unstable nature, it governs the trajectory of the fiery hoop of ether that neatly circumscribes the frenzied pleats of the tutu skirt of a Sango votary in pirouette, or the nimble, suave and calculated design of parquetry that a *bata* dancer weaves on the margin of dance. In a different category, it constitutes the totality of fossilised temporal quality arrested on the frame of a mask. Both are aspects of the same dramatic construct. In contemporary theatre practice, the plays of Duro Ladipo and Wole Soyinka have laid the prime exegesis on the theme of African tragic dramas. The operas of Ladipo espouse the former of the categories mentioned above and those of Soyinka, the latter.

It is the ritual impregnation of the masker or the serene avocal mien of the human mute that is the basis of Soyinka's dramatic exposition in *The Road*. That is why he notes that Murano, the mute character, serves as an arresting of time, the mystique of reference being the Mask of Agemo, a cult of the dead.

The most vibrant assimilation of the tragic essence, the consciousness that bridges the gulf between life and death, being and non-being, joy and tragedy, and all such emerging contrarieties of the human condition form the underlying experience behind the aesthetic notion of tragedy and the resource, and perhaps, resolution, of dynamic immanent energies.

NOTES

1. I have described elsewhere Duro Ladipo's enactment of the ancient ritual in Oba Waja and Soyinka's adaptation of the same theme in Ladipo 1986:Chs 2 and 3.
2. Once in a discussion with me at Osogbo, Western Nigeria, the Afro-Austrian ethnologist, Susan Wenger also repeatedly affirmed this point.

10 AFRICAN THEATRE

The Issue of an Historical Approach

Joel Adedeji

The writing of African history before European adventurism and eventual colonisation has been a subject of unusual academic controversy. Thanks to the research and scholarship of the Ibadan School of History with its concrete methodological assertions and assorted contributions, making Oral Tradition not only a subject of literary significance for use as documentary evidence but equally the subject matter for the study of African History before AD 1500. The study of African theatre history has benefited immensely from this exegesis, particularly in our study of the Alarinjo, the traditional masque theatre of the Yoruba peoples of Western Nigeria (Adedeji 1969). This study has provided a vast field of knowledge and insight into the making of theatre as an art form, its emergence as an aspect of social and political history, and its development as a literary corpus.

In constructing the historical aspect of the study we had recourse to a methodology based on an hypothesis made by the eminent theologian, historian and journalist, Chris Johnson, who said, *inter alia*,

> It is common practice in every civilised community to set up in brass or marble, in work of art or literature, in songs or traditions, worthy memorials to perpetuate the achievements of its scions with noble aims. (*Nigerian Chronicle* 5 Feb. 1909, p.6)

African cultural arts yield valuable source material which can be structured into a series of sequences to form themes or headings for the theatre historian. Theatrical art combines the poetry of motion and a design factor. It is brought about by an interesting and graceful exercise known as Terpischorean Art.

Based on the instinct of 'play', and using the imitative principle, the strength of this form of art results from the human achievement through a recourse to the arts of communication set in place in an arena of voluntary exchange which is informed by a tradition that is mutually understood. People realise themselves in a communicative situation where they express themselves and bring up their creative energies to bear on, and in response to, their environmental exigencies. To this extent, the emergence of the theatre which is basic to an imitative principle, develops along lines which differ from community to community, and from one culture to another. Drama or the play element, which is basic to the theatre, uses the raw material of human experience in shaping and/or re-ordering its own existence. As an activity, whether in its pristine form as a ritual, or its subsequent development as a social art, the dramatic art is based on creative artists' own adjustment to the facts of existence, the factors of their own culture, the presence in the environment of influential forces and of course, ultimately, the security which they enjoy amongst their fellow artists whose co-operation they must seek. Thus, the content of theatre varies and is found in endless variety and differing combinations in the cultures of the world. As a complex artistic form involving many apparently independent arts in its composition, the theatre encapsulates and summarises the content of life and the life-style of a people. It conveys important information to its own audience and, as a performance art, its parameters can be exclusive. We are familiar with such distinctions and peculiarities which inform the theatrical art of Western civilisation which developed from the Dionysian rituals of ancient Greece, from those which produced the Chinese Opera, the Natyasastra of the Hindus of India, and the Alarinjo of the Yoruba of Western Nigeria. Theatre historians are agreed that each culture produces its own theatrical art. Despite the pervasiveness and expansive nature of Western civilisation, the record of the history of each theatre attests to the influence of each people's culture as a point of departure.

CREATING A METHODOLOGY OF WRITING THE HISTORY OF AFRICAN THEATRE

Historiography or the writing of history as a discipline is based on the critical examination of sources, the selection of particulars from the authentic materials, and the synthesis of such particulars into a narrative that will stand the test of critical methods. How do we purpose these distinctions in

writing a history of an African art phenomenon which originates and proceeds from Oral Tradition, Oral History and what is now generally referred to as Oral Literature? The root elements of African theatre are the mimetic masks, the chant/song and the dance. Since a theatrical performance is the sum total of all of these and the united product of gesture and costume, the art of the theatre is best appreciated within the framework of its history, the aesthetics of the art form and the sensibilities of the people. The specific obligations of the art form in terms of its function over and above its means of entertainment, namely education and edification, are intrinsic to meaning and significance.

Jan Vansina's book, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology* (1965), is an important compendium for writing a history based on Oral Tradition. This book, in particular, explores the possibility and examines the difficulties of reconstructing the history of non-literate peoples from their oral traditions. The author also surveys existing literature on the subject.

It is generally agreed that a knowledge of the African past must be gleaned from myths, legends, folktales, chants or praise-songs, as well as from their sculptures and other forms of artistic manifestations. This is true also of theatrical history. The nature of investigations must include an understanding of the systems of thought and ritual worship, of oral wisdom and verbal arts which are prominent features and special attributes of the performance art.

In creating an historiographic methodology and a theory of the art of the African theatre, the following sources are crucial determinants:

- System of Divination
- Myths, Legends and Tales
- Verbal Arts
- Visual Arts
- Performance Art

System of Divination

The system of divination in African society is esoteric by tradition. It is characterised by an order of priesthood, the use of artefacts and a cultic mode of performance and disposition. An example among the Yoruba is Ifa Divination which, in a systematic way, constitutes the religious philosophy of the Yoruba.

What distinguishes the African system of divination from others is its exponential frames which allow for the discovery of hidden and open-ended knowledge. Its divinatory component includes myth, legend and history. Very

much like the liturgy of the Christian church, its centralised feature includes performance involving the use of gestures, patterns and cadences which are theatrical. With its varied forms of human expression, including the use of historical antecedents in its recitations and narratives, the African system of divination provides a ready source for historical reconstruction in a medley of select items and elements both mystical and explicit.

Myths, Legends and Tales

These are stories which attempt to explain the African world, its culture and society. Using the narrative form, they vary in contextual and attributive detail, one from the other.

Myths are religious in character and are usually narrated during ritual or festival occasions. They are usually intended to control the conduct of the worshippers and govern their faith. Significantly, myths relate historical events connected to beliefs, institution and natural phenomena. Because myths are tied to religious rites and beliefs, they are given uncritical acceptance by the members of the group for whom they are designed.

Legends are narrative accounts of the lives of heroes and heroines, usually those regarded as founders of the people's settlements whose bravery and exploits are of historical significance for purpose of commemoration in rituals and festivals.

Tales are fictitious narratives drawn from the imagination. Sometimes they contain allusions to historical episodes and may be conceptually secular with mythical traditions. Usually tales are used to draw out moral lessons. Characteristically a tale may be common to a group for the purpose of amusement and moral instruction. There are tales which are narratives of events or a sequence of some actual legendary or fictitious events. Tales based on folklore, legends of great men or a series of facts which are told with explanatory statements or with intent to entertain or amuse may be uncritical or inaccurate in terms of time sequence and/or place of occurrence. It is therefore essential to know whether a tale is spun by a moralist or by a raconteur and if it is regarded as a historical fact or fiction.

Verbal Arts

Africans are known for their skills in the use of words. Thus certain individuals are appointed to the office of speaker or spokesman. Verbal artists are also

found among raconteurs and the spoken word can be the most fixed and reliable section of oral tradition. Verbal arts are expressions relating to, or concerned with words, used sometimes for effect rather than meaning, but adroitly put together with painstaking and sometimes elaborate detail. Some are in categories which combine music or a chanting mode; some use the drum and syncopated music and counterpoint, which are not only artistic by design, but add significantly to the sensibility of meaning.

What has been defined as verbal art is a unique system which includes compositions like the Yoruba Oriki, Esa or Ewi (praise chants of guilds) which can be used in the tracing of pedigrees or the origin of certain traditional settlements. There are also poems in this category which contain personal and place names, addresses of family lineages, and salutations of certain plants and animals which are integral to life and the life-styles of the people.

As a mode of communication a verbal art can assume a conventional mode of artistic expression in the hands of guilds or professional chanters. Some of the poems are historical, even though the historical and the mythical may be mixed together in the same framework or layout. It is significant that the medley usually includes wise sayings (proverbs, riddles and epigrams) and oral wisdom.

The artistic style of each category of a verbal art is a constant order of composition. Presentation can be a thing of beauty because of its spectrum of original inspiration and its attribute as essential part of traditional lore and philosophy.

Visual Arts

Except for a few cases of paintings (on wall or rock), most African visual art form is sculptural. The art of carving, cutting, hewing, moulding or constructing materials into ornaments, statues or figures is so pervasive that African art is almost entirely summarised in its avalanche of sculpture. Even the paintings have sculpturesque qualities which make their two-dimensional frames flow in the manner of sculptures in their aesthetic attributes.

African sculptures are found to be of historical value because most of them commemorate events, draw upon anecdotes about legendary or mythical figures, or illustrate observations on periodic happenings or current history.

Many African artists indulge in caricature. This art of deliberate distortion or ludicrous exaggeration can be extended to mythological characters as well as to important social figures. This feature of African life

is also ritually significant and can be extracted in chants or included in performance as a way of pin-pointing by humouring or explaining through a subtle form of amusement. Examples of this form of artistic representation can be found in door panels, bas-reliefs and wall paintings.

African visual arts, therefore, serve as a record of events of happenings in society and can be dated by their periodic styles. They furnish illustrations of dress, ornament, material culture, and sometimes the custom of the people at particular points in time. They also help in tracing artistic growth over the long period of African history before and during the contact with Europeans, Arabs and Asians. This artistic technique is described by Father K. Carrol as 'humanistic' because 'the artist sympathetically observes and represents life that he sees around him' (1829).

Performance Art

Many African religious observances include enactments of historical scenes. At many festivals and during installation ceremonies of priests and chiefs, the events of history are revealed in a type of stage-acting or dramatisation which forms part of the total ceremony. We have found that the enactments or re-enactments help to trace history even though they are not specifically designed to record it. For example, although the Adamuorisa Play in Lagos, Nigeria, marks an important landmark in the history of this metropolis, yet the performance, which is still re-enacted as often as there is an occasion that warrants the celebration, is ritually significant. The historical evidence of the House of Ado, the conflict between Kings Akitoye and Dosumu, and British intervention, can only be gleaned from the interplay of characters and dramatis personae in the larger structure of the drama in the theatrical arena.

There are festivals which commemorate certain historic events and personalities. These include dramatisations to characterise certain important features of the historic events like warfare or battles, use of dated weaponry and other relics or artefacts which are historic. An example is the Obatala Festival at Ede. Such episodic features or enactments may be generalised for the purpose of raising the level of entertainment or subjected to certain cult obligations. Acting out in a ritual ceremony may be done with a view to purport ethical cleansing or drawn out as a sketch designed to humour the gods. One such example of this form of festival play is the Edi Festival or the Play of Moremi at Ile-Ife, Nigeria. This annual festival play commemorates

the history and exploits of Moremi and re-enacts her legendary life over a seven-day cycle. The history of Moremi is displayed in an artistic vision which is mutually compatible with the worship of the heroine who laid down her life so that the city and people of Ife might survive.

It must be noted that enactment ceremonies which dramatise certain essential events of historical or mythical significance honour the substance of the religious or ritual observance of the occasion rather than its historical entity. To this extent, the theatre historian must not participate in the myth as though it were a reality but examine the historical potentialities in detail. Other antecedents which are of value and of related premise may be used comparatively as a guide.

CRITIQUE OF THE SOURCES

The various and varied sources used in historiography would require careful analysis in order that the element of assumption or presumption is minimised. There are certain constants which must be pursued since these would provide the threads in the volume of available material for the historical substance to emerge.

The issue of content and form may be a relevant point of criticism. Since all that is contained in a speech or the volume of any expression may not be specifically related to the body of facts being investigated, and since the main substance or meaning of a narrative or discourse may be tangled up in the form element of expression, it is pertinent for the researcher to distinguish between content and form. Form may be used to give content its own nature and character. Sometimes the content may be an arrangement of several aspects of the parts of a thing which may project an artistic image of great substance. While the concepts of content and form analyses may be in place, care must be taken that aesthetic considerations do not override the dating of period styles which mark out distinctions. African world-view defies logic to a large extent. The concept of the existence of the past in present consciousness may create a measure of diffusion in cultural patterns.

There are art objects, artefacts or even commemorative ceremonies whose historical contexts have become aberrant due to incidences of mysticism or mystification. For example, Sango, the fourth Alafin of Oyo, believed to have reigned during the fourteenth century, may not be acknowledged for emotional reasons as an historical figure but rather as a mythical character grouped in the same pantheon with Obatala, the arch-divinity and Ogun,

the god of iron. The researcher who happened to use any of Sango's worshippers or priests may find undue emphasis placed on his divinity, instead of his humanity as an ancestor. To this extent, the researcher may be consumed by the attributes of Sango, and the symbolic essence of his worship as 'Orisa' or god.

The same measure of confusion may exist in the delineation of the Alarinjo, the Masque Theatre of the Yoruba, from the Egungun, the cult of masqueraders from which the theatrical art originated. Another area of confusion exists in the place of Alafin Abiodun who came to the throne of Oyo in about 1770 (Akinjogbin 1964) when the Oyo Empire became very extensive and reached the apogee of its fame. Because of his patronage of the arts, Abiodun became a popular name among craft guilds. He had encouraged each craft guild to contribute its best art products to enhance the prestige of the Crown. He, in fact, encouraged the theatre guilds to establish themselves along professional lines through commissions, competitive performances and extensive touring programmes (Adedeji 1969:143-45). It was discovered that artists after his reign, who claimed recognition through their ancestors, and who were distinguished during his hegemony, could still refer to their works of art as dating back to the period of this popular king. For example, Lagbayi, a descendant of the famous carver, Olojowon, could be claimed by an successful artist as an ancestor without regard to the factor of dating and, sometimes, period styles.

The Oriki or praise-chant could be another source of confusion due to the significance and premium of the praise-chant in Yoruba society. For example, Ologbin Ologbojo, the creator of the Yoruba Masque Theatre, was King Ogbolu's Ologbo (staff-bearer) at Oyo Igboho towards the end of the sixteenth century. Ogbolu, otherwise called Abipa, was the last of the kings who reigned at Igboho around 1590 (see Smith 1965:70). The masque-theatre as court entertainment developed from his involvement with the phenomenon of the 'Ghost Catcher' stratagem (Johnson 1960:165-66). When Ologbojo died, the body of this versatile court entertainer and dramaturge was carried from Igboho and buried in a court dedicated to his memory and nicknamed 'Ode Ogboluke', that is, *Eni tí Ògbólú fi Òde-ilé ke* (One whom King Ogbolu honoured with a court).

Without distinct recognition of their historical periods but with due acknowledgement of their artistic merits and distinctions the Oriki of Ologbin Ologbojo are sometimes found to be transferred to or identical with those of Esa Ogbin, a native of Ogbojo, a town named after Ologbojo. This

simultaneity of reference can create a problem for the historian who might mistake one for the other. Esa Ogbin, in fact, became a distinguished masque dramaturge at the court of King Abiodun around 1770. He was only a material descendant of Ologbojo through Aladafa, a great and renowned carver, and a maternal relation by some remove. The collector of the praise-chant, Oriki Ologbojo, could be carried away by the encomiums that bring the two great artists to the same level of prominence and attribution. The poetic style and chanting mode may, in fact, be the same, to a large extent, but there are certain important and significant developments which distinguish them from each other. Individualism in Yoruba art creates the element of *ète* (an artistic device). This may make all the difference and it is important to watch out for it as the source is checked and scrutinised.

This brings up the importance of the place and role of the informant. Usually kings and priests are the most trustworthy because their installations require some tutoring in sacred precincts where they receive privileged or coded information. I recall an experience at Iragberi where an attempt was made to initiate me into the essence of the cult of the ritual surrounding the information I needed before it was given by an old priest. Some informants are active participants in the performances while some are spectators. It is useful to have recourse to both perspectives on the same item of information in order to determine their humanistic interests. Conventions of style and medium of artistic expression may bring about certain views and particular circumstances which may lead to generalisations. Interpretation can therefore be faulty if other factors, like religion in particular, are not taken into account during the process of observation and evaluation. There are informants who are originally pagans but are later converted to Islam or Christianity at the stage of encountering them. These may bring up a perspective favourable to their religious persuasion on the artistic phenomenon being discussed with them. Hybridity of information also abounds to create distortion.

CONCLUSION

Artistic canons change from time to time, even within the same historical period, depending on the existence of certain vital forces in the society. The arts of the Yoruba yield valuable source material for the theatre historian but it is important to have recourse to a methodology which can trace history through a combination of sources which are both historical and aesthetic. Source materials could have been structured into a series of sequences to

form themes or headings which by extraction can be useful for the theatre historian even if the intention of the staging of a dramatic performance or the presentation of a work of art was not specifically to record history. Limitations of source materials are identified, especially in view of the incidence of individualism in Yoruba art and the context of generalisation due to particular circumstances which cannot be easily perceived.

The theatre historian has to be critical as it is not sufficient to record only facts. For the purpose of evaluation it may be necessary to recreate the circumstances in which the art work first manifested itself and was then developed. Calculations of probability existed in the past, dates are not usually given, and informants observe certain cult imperatives or obligations which prevent them from divulging coded information. Recourse to aberrations and caricaturing are prolific pastimes in the Yoruba creative enterprise. The context of present happenings and contemporary history may provide adequate thrusts and perspectives on the past in the working out of an adequate methodology. There is no royal road to the Yoruba past, and, therefore, to the issue of its recorded history.

CONSOLIDATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abiodun, Rowland. 1990. The Future of African Art Studies: An African Perspective. In *African Art Studies: The State of the Discipline*. Washington: The National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Abraham, R.C. 1958. *Dictionary of Modern Yoruba*. London: Heinemann.

Achebe, Chinua. 1964. *Arrow of God*. London: Heinemann.

——— 1989. An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays*. New York: Doubleday.

Adedeji, Joel. 1969. The Alarinjo Theatre: The Study of a Yoruba Theatrical Art from its Earliest Beginning to the Present Times. Doctoral thesis, University of Ibadan.

——— 1970.The Origin of Yoruba Masque Theatre: The Use of Ifa Divination Corpus as Historical Evidence. *African Notes* 6(1):70-86.

——— 1978. 'Alarinjo': The Traditional Yoruba Travelling Theatre. In Oyin Ogunba and Abiola Irele (eds), *Theatre in Africa*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, pp.27-51.

Adepegba, C.O. 1982. A Review of Atmore, A. and Stacey, G., *Black Kingdoms, Black Peoples*. *African Notes* 9(1):51-52.

——— 1994a. *Historical Sculpture of West Africa*. A Catalogue of an Exhibition of African Sculpture. Carlisle: Trout Gallery.

——— 1994b. Yoruba Art: Concept and Reality. Odunjo Memorial Lecture. In Olatunde Olatunji (ed.), *The Yoruba: History, Culture and Language*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press for J.F. Odunjo Memorial Lectures, pp.71-94.

Afigbo, A.E. 1977. Fact and myth in Nigerian historiography. *Nigeria Magazine* 122-23:81-98.

——— 1981. *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press.

Ajayi, J.F. Ade. 1965. *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite*. London: Longman.

Akinjogbin, I.A. 1964. The Oyo empire in the 18th century: A re-assessment. *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3(1):38-41.

Alli, I. 1988. Musical Chairs. *Prime People*, May 13-24. Lagos: Prime Publications, p.24.

Aristotle. 1965. On the Art of Poetry. In *Classical Literary Criticism*, trans. T.S. Dorsch. Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp.36-37.

Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G. and Tiffin, H. 1989. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London and New York: Routledge.

Atanda, J.A. 1980. *An Introduction to Yoruba History*. Ibadan University Press.

Awe, Bolanle. 1991. *Hearken to the Ancient Voices*. Ibadan: Association of Oral History and Traditions.

Babayemi, S.O. 1980. *Egungun among the Oyo Yoruba*. Ibadan: Oyo State Council for Arts and Culture.

Bamgbose, Ayo. 1974. *The Novels of D.O. Fagunwa*. Benin City: Ethiope Publishing.

Beier, Ulli. 1959. *A Year of Sacred Festivals in One Yoruba Town*. Lagos: Nigeria Magazine.

Bello, Muhammed. 1922. *Infaku'l Maisuri*. Translated/paraphrased by F.J. Arnett in *The Rise of the Sokoto Fulani*. Kano: School of Oriental and African Studies.

Blier, Suzanne Preston. 1987. African Art Studies at the Crossroads: An American Perspective. In *African Art Studies: The State of the Discipline*. Washington: The National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, pp. 91-107.

Boulton, Laura. 1969. *The Music Hunter*. New York: Doubleday.

Brain, Robert. 1980. Introduction. *Art and Society in Africa*. London and New York: Longman.

Bravmann, Rene A. 1974. *Islam and Tribal Art in West Africa*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Carrol, Father K. 1829. Ekiti-Yoruba wood carving. *Odu* 4:3-10.

Clapperton, Hugh. 1829. *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa from the Bight of Benin to Soccattoo*. London: J. Murray.

Clark, Ebun and Ogunde, Hubert. 1979. *The Making of Nigerian Theatre*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Coote, Jeremy and Shelton, Anthony. 1992. Introduction. In Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (eds), *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp.1-11.

Creachain, F. 1991. Post-colonialism or second independence? *African Literature Association Bulletin* 17(3):5-6.

Dark, Philip J.C. 1973. *An Introduction to Benin Art and Technology*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Delano, Isaac O. 1937. *The Soul of Nigeria*. London: Laurie.

Diop, David. 1956. Contribution to the debate on national poetry. *Présence Africaine* 6.

Du Bois, W.E. Burghardt. 1970. *The Negro*. New York: Oxford University Press.

East, John. 1940. A Hausa journal. *Overseas Education* 11(2), 1:83-94.

East, R.M. 1936. A first essay in imaginative African literature. *Africa* 9(3):350-58.

Eyo, Ekpo. 1977. *Two Thousand Years of Nigerian Art*. Lagos: Federal Department of Antiquities.

Eyo, Ekpo and Willet, Frank. 1982. *Treasures of Ancient Nigeria*. London: Collins.

Fagg, William. 1958. The Text. In Elliot Elisofon (ed.), *The Sculpture of Africa*. New York: Harker Art Books.

———1963a. *Nigerian Images*. London: Lund Humphries.

———1963b. The Tribal Artist. In Jacob Drachler (ed.), *African Heritage: Intimate Views of the Black Africans from Life, Lore and Literature*. New York: Cromwell-Collier.

———1982. The Yoruba and their Past. In Fagg, Pemberton and Holcombe (eds), 1982.

Fagg, William, Pemberton, John and Holcome, Bryce (eds). 1982. *Yoruba Sculpture of West Africa*. London: Collins; New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Fanon, Frantz. 1978. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Gillon, Werner. 1984. *A Short History of African Art*. New York: Viking. Repr. Penguin 1986.

Hallam, W.K.R. 1966. The Bayajida legend in Hausa folklore. *Journal of African History* 7(1):47-60.

Hauser, Arnold. 1985. *The Philosophy of Art History*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Heath, F. 1962. *A Chronicle of Abuja*. Translated and arranged by Frank Heath from the Hausa of Alhaji Hassan and Mallam Shuaibu Na'ibi. Lagos: African University Press.

Hegel, Friedrich. 1956. *The Philosophy of History*. New York: Dover.

Horton, Robin. 1965. *Kalabari Sculpture*. Apapa: Department of Antiquities.

———1981. Ikaki: The Tortoise Masquerade. In Yemi Ogunbiyi (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*. Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, pp.481-94.

Idowu, E. Bolaji. 1962. *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*. London: Longman.

Jeyifo, B. 1990a. Decolonizing Theory: Reconceptualizing the New English Literatures. Paper presented at the M.L.A. Annual Conference, Chicago.

———1990b. For Chinua Achebe: The Resilience and the Predicament of Obierika. Unpublished manuscript.

Johnson, Samuel. 1960 [1921]. *History of the Yorubas*. Lagos: CMS Bookshops.

Kinni-Olusanyin, E. 1990. Original African conjuration in theatrical performance. *Orunmila* 5:55-59.

Ladimeji, O.A. 1974. Nationalism, alienation and the crisis of ideology. *Transition* 9(46):40-51.

Ladipo, Duro. 1986. Stagecraft in Nigerian Dramas. Doctoral thesis, University of Leeds.

Last, M. 1967. *The Sokoto Caliphate*. London: Longman.

Layiwola, Dele. 1986. Sociological Implications of Feminist Motifs in Nigerian Folklore and Drama. Paper presented to the 11th Annual Conference of the

African Literature Association, Michigan State University, 16-19 April.

Leiris, Michel and Fry, Jacqueline (eds). 1986. *African Art*, translated by Michael Ross. London: Thames and Hudson.

Lomax, Alan. 1968. *Folksong Style and Culture*. Washington, DC: American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Margolis, J. 1980. *Art and Philosophy*. Brighton: The Harvester Press.

Merriam, Alan P. 1970. *African Music on LP*. Northwestern University Press.

Marx, Karl. n.d. Textes sur le colonialism. Moscow: Progress.

Monroe, C. Beardsley. 1982. *The Aesthetic Point of View. Selected Essays*, ed. M.J. Wreen and Donald N. Callen. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, pp.352-70.

Morrison, T. 1989. Unspeakable things unspoken: The Afro-American presence in American literature. *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28(1):1-34.

Murfin, R.C. (ed.). 1989a. *Joseph Conrad,* Heart of Darkness: *A Case Study in Contemporary Criticism*. New York: St Martin's Press.

——— 1989b. The New Historicism and *Heart of Darkness*. In Murfin (ed.), 1989a.

Ndebele, N.S. 1984. Turkish tales and some thoughts on South African literature. *Staffrider*.

——— 1986. The rediscovery of the ordinary: Some new writings in South Africa. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 12(2):143-57.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. 1987. *Decolonizing the Mind*. London: James Currey.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1974. *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Wm. A. Haussmann. New York: Gordon.

Nketia, J.H. Kwabena. 1980. African music and Western praxis: A review of Western perspectives on African musicology. *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 20(1):36-56.

Noibi, D.O.S. 1990. Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan, personal communication, 25 May 1990.

Osundare, N. 1989. An empty technology of the text? Deconstruction and African Literature. *Critical Currents in African Literature*.

Palmer, H.R. (ed.). 1908. The Kano Chronicle. Translated with an introduction by H.R. Palmer. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 38:58-98.

——— 1928. *Sudanese Memoirs. Being Mainly Translations of a Number of Arabic Manuscripts Relating to the Central and Western Sudan*. 3 Vols. Lagos: Government of Nigeria.

Perkins, W.A. 1957. Curricula in Nigerian secondary schools. *West African Journal of Education* 1:4-7.

Rose, H.J. 1965. *A Handbook of Greek Literature*. London: Methuen.

Rosmarin, A. 1989. Darkening the Reader: Reader-Response Criticism and *Heart of Darkness*. In Murfin (ed.), 1989a, pp.148-71.

Sieber, Roy. 1986. A Propos. In Leiris and Fry (eds), 1986.
Smith, R.S. 1965. The Alaafin in exile. *Journal of African History* 6.
Soyinka, Wole. 1976. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. London: Cambridge University Press.
——— 1989. *Mandela's Earth and Other Poems*. London: Deutsch.
Spivak, G.C. 1990. *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. New York and London: Routledge.
Swanzy, H. 1954. Quarterly notes. *African Affairs* 14(176):96-97.
Tempels, Placide. 1959. *Bantu Philosophy*. Paris: Présence Africaine.
Thomas, B. 1989. Preserving and Keeping Order by Killing Time in *Heart of Darkness*. In Murfin (ed.), 1989a, pp.237-58.
Thompson, Jerry L. and Vogel, Susan. 1990. *Closeup: Lessons in the Art of Seeing African Sculpture*. New York: The Center for African Art.
Thompson, R.F. 1973. Yoruba Artistic Criticism. In D.L. d'Azevedo (ed.), *Traditional Artists in African Societies*. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, pp.19-61.
Tracey, Hugh. 1948. Recording journey from the Union into the Rhodesias. *African Music Society Newsletter* 1:12-14.
——— 1950. Recording tour 1949 (Moçambique, Belgian Congo, Rhodesia and Nyasaland). *African Music Society Newsletter* 1(3):33-37.
——— 1952. Recording tour in Tanganyika by a team of the African Music Society. *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 32:43-48.
——— 1954. The state of Bantu African music. *African Music* 1(4):8-11.
——— 1957. Recording in the Lost Valley (Zambesi). *African Music* 1 (4):45-47.
——— 1960. *African Music Research Transcription Library of Gramophone Records: Handbook for Librarians*. Johannesburg: Gallo.
——— 1963. Editorial. *African Music* 3(2):5.
——— 1966-67. Editorial. *African Music* 4(1):5.
——— 1972. Editorial. *African Music* 5(2):5.
Vansina, Jan. 1965. *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
——— 1984. *Art History in Africa: An Introduction to Method*. London and New York: Longman.
Verger, Pierre. 1965. Grandeur et décadence du culte de Iyami Osoronga. *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* 35:151-53.
Vogel, Susan Mullin. 1986. *African Aesthetics: The Carlo Monzino Collection*. New York: The Center for African Art.
Wachsmann, K.P. 1966a. Negritude in music. *Composer* 19:16.
——— 1966b. The trend in musicology in Africa. *Selected Reports in Musicology* (University of California at Los Angeles) 1 (1):61-65.
Wali, Obi. 1963. The dead end of African literature. *Transition* 10.

Willet, Frank. 1966. On the funeral effigies of Owo and Benin and Ife, Nigeria. *MAN, Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 1(1):34-45.

——— 1967. *Ife in the History of West African Sculpture*. London: Thames and Hudson.

——— 1971. *African Art*. New York: Praeger.

Wober, Mallory. 1975. *Psychology in Africa*. London: International African Institute.