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EDITORIAL NOTE

The *Ethiope Journal of English, Literary, and Cultural Studies* (ISSN: 0795-5413) is an interdisciplinary journal that explores topical and generative issues in English linguistics and in literary and cultural studies. We recognise that African humanities research is both problem-based and knowledge oriented, and our aim is to provide a platform for scholars to analyse and theorise Africa in a way that is generative, conversational and decolonial. Specifically, the journal focuses on both the analytical and theoretical approaches to knowledge production in the context of Africa and the Global South. We want to curate papers that are hinged on African indigenous paradigms and approaches or that seek to extend, reimagine, or contextualise current theoretical or analytical approaches in English language studies and in literary and cultural studies.

We invite papers that dwell on all aspects of English language studies, including phonetics/phonology, semantics, syntax, discourse analysis, pragmatics, stylistics, ESL, ESP etc. We also welcome papers that theorise literary and cultural texts, including film, still and moving images, music and dance, photographs, cultural objects, spaces and places, society and social formations, and other relevant corpora. While we accept purely analytical essays, we encourage authors to focus on theorising the texts or data they engage with. In particular, we welcome theoretical conversations that implicate postcolonial subjecthood, ecocritical approaches (especially postcolonial ecocriticism), feminism and gender studies, new trends in linguistics, object-oriented criticism and approaches, and other generative approaches to knowledge production. Authors are encouraged to do original theorisation rather than adopt extant theoretical frameworks. They may also extend the scope of extant theories and approaches based on the material they present and discuss.

Furthermore, papers with interdisciplinary approaches are also welcomed. We recognise that knowledge production is an elastic phenomenon, and that bright ideas might implicate various fields. Interesting multi-modal, eclectic, or collaborative research is encouraged in this journal.

JOURNAL POLICY

The *Ethiope Journal of English, Literary and Cultural Studies* is published biennially by the Department of English and Literary Studies, Delta State University Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria. All papers submitted to this maiden edition of the journal had undergone double-blind peer review and published papers are well researched, original and data-driven.

Contributors are to submit an e-copy of their manuscript for assessment and publication to ethiopejournal@delsu.edu.ng or ethiopejournal@gmail.com. Such manuscripts should be original and not under consideration for publication elsewhere and should not have been published in any other journal.

Submitted manuscript which should not exceed 7000 words should be typeset in MS Word Times New Roman Font 12, with double line spacing. The first page should include the title of the manuscript, name(s), and institutional affiliation/address, abstract (not more than 250 words and with not more than six keywords). Manuscripts should conform to the current APA or MLA style sheet. Author(s) of published papers will derive the benefits from peer-review of contributions by seasoned scholars, global visibility and receipt of hard copies as well as soft copies of their papers.

The twelve papers in this maiden edition of the journal cut across disciplines in cultural, media studies and sub-disciplines in English and literary studies. The contributors include seasoned and renowned scholars of international repute and young astute scholars with burning desire to excel in academics. The first article titled: "Folklore and African Poetry in the Age of Globalization" by Prof Ojaide is on cultural studies. Prof. Ojaide is a renowned poet and professor of international repute from the University of North Carolina, USA. It is pertinent to note that the contributors are from universities across the globe. We believe that the twelve articles will be of immense interest to researchers and students.

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CONTENTS

FOLKLORE AND AFRICAN POETRY IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

Tanure Ojaide, Ph.D.
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Introduction

Once upon a time, folklore was a people's heritage. It is still defined as such in terms of material and immaterial aspects of a people's culture. Taken broadly, a people's folklore involves their oral traditions, festivals, belief systems, divinities, and whatever they inherited that gives them an identity as a people. The oral traditions include folktales, myths, epics, legends, folksongs, proverbs, riddles, and tongue twisters. African folklore is generally transmitted from one generation to another: tales by word of mouth and others through visual arts in the forms of sculpture and painting.

Modern African poets before now had resorted to their respective folklores to enrich their poetries in English, French, and Portuguese. In fact, one could say that their poetic thoughts were embedded in their folkloric heritage and expressed in the language of their choice. The content and form of their poetic works were influenced by their folklore; hence the duality of their work in the sense of fusing African and Western literary styles. Thus, an African like Wole Soyinka, writing in English, was seen as an African poet because of his infusion of Yoruba folklore into the content and form of his work. His "Idanre" and "Prayer for My Daughter" are examples of the poetic methodology of writing in English, a foreign language, and yet having local content to which he has deployed the indigenous folklore of his people. Can one say the same of contemporary African poets? How much folklore features in the works of contemporary African poets? Is folklore dying from African poetry written in the postcolonial languages?

Folklore enhances the Africanity of modern African poetry. As Enajite Ojaruega puts it, writing on the writer's poetry, there is the use of "orature to establish not only a cultural identity for his work but also organise style and form to effectively express his themes. In doing so, the poet also succeeds in exposing to the present generation and readers an idea of their traditional heritage and how it can be used to express current and enduring thoughts and feelings" (142). Also, recent futuristic works relate to fantasy or magic borne by the oral traditions. As I wrote in the Foreword to my poetry collection, *Adult Love*, "The futuristic of today echoes the folkloric heritage that we need to sustain." If African poets jettison their folklore from their poetic compositions, what tradition does their poetry belong to? Are they strengthening a foreign poetry tradition or their own? How is globalization affecting their thought patterns and poetic writings? In this essay, I will endeavour to answer most of these questions which are central to the topic of folklore in modern African poetry.

First and Second Generations of African Poetry

The first generation of modern African poets drew much from their respective ethnic folklore. Much as Chinweizu and others in *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* described these poets as "euromodernists" because of their modernist style of learned allusions, obscurity, and fragmentation, there were two strands that can be described as modernist-influenced and African tradition-influenced. Soyinka and Okigbo represent those who were influenced by the modernist style while Mazisi Kunene, Okot p'Bitek, and Kofi Awoonor were influenced by traditional African poetic forms. In fact, the traditionalists of the first generation would influence the second generation described as Alter/Native poets. What is significant is that whether their style was modernist or traditional African, these poets engaged indigenous folklore in their poetic works.

Wole Soyinka in *Myth, Literature and the African World* draws parallels between Yoruba and Greek gods. He writes: "Ogun, for his part, is best understood in Hellenic values as a totality of the Dionysian, Apollonian and Promethean virtues" (141). Soyinka

foraged the Yoruba pantheon for images to fortify his poetic expression. He specifically chose Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron and of creativity and destruction as his poetic symbol. To him, "traditional poetry records him as 'protector of orphans', 'roof over the homeless', 'terrible guardian of the sacred oath'; Ogun stands for a transcendental, humane but rigidly restorative justice" (141). His *Idanre* is suffused with images of Ogun as a destroyer and creator. The Yoruba deity who is the muse of creation could also turn against his people and kill them in the battlefield. That paradox runs through many of Soyinka's poems: the capacity to create and to destroy rests in one hand! J.P. Clark invoked Tamara, the Ijo Supreme God and Christopher Okigbo prayed to Idoto, the Igbo deity of Oguta, before whom he stood as a supplicant. Mazisi Kunene, Okot p'Bitek, and Kofi Awoonor also excavated from the respective folklores of their peoples. This was done not only to indigenize their creative works as African poets but also to infuse their poetic writings with the vitality of their African cultures.

The generation that followed, tagged the Alter/Native group, consciously modelled works on their oral traditions, the bedrock of folklore. Poets from Ghana, Nigeria, and Malawi, among many others, represent this tradition that attempted to decolonize modern African poetry written in European languages. Steve Chimombo's *Napolo and the Python* deals with the myths of his Malawian people. Jack Mapanje writes about Chigwe's Hole, a part of the environment of the Zomba area of Malawi, infused with traditional Chewa beliefs. Kofi Ayindoho mentions Mawu, the Ewe god, in "Tsitsa." I have embraced Aridon, the Urhobo god of memory, as my muse. Similarly, Femi Osofisan in his *Opon Ifa* incorporated aspects of Yoruba Ifa divination into his poetry to make the poet a diviner. Niyi Osundare refers to rocks in his hometown and Olusanta that are associated with beliefs of the people. Other poets of the Alter/Native tradition best known for their efforts to indigenize their poetry though written in European/colonial languages include Nigeria's Chimalum Nwankwo, Ghanaian Banyinwa Horne, and Malawian Lupenga Mphande. Chimalum Nwankwo looks at the sacred udala tree in *The Womb in the Heart* and relates how future mothers, then young girls,

went to pick fruits and while there be chosen by spirit children to be the future mothers of these girls when grown up and married. This practice is an interesting part of Igbo folklore which sees the experience of the people influenced by spirituality in their beliefs. I explored the selfless mother of Urhobo folklore called Ayayughe in my "Ayayughe" a poem dedicated to Anne on Mother's Day, 1994:

> You must be Ayayughe
> through whose gate every dead
> would want to come back a child.
> Always waiting for the little ones
> never filled from the mother pot,
> you bring yam to the table
> but never get to eat of it.
> You must be Ayayughe
> who shames gerry-curled graduates
> of the new home school (*Delta Blues & Home* Songs, 27)

In this poem and others that tap into folklore, there is the effort to imbue current figures or situations with qualities or virtues of past heroes or heroines.

Deployment and Significance of Folklore in Modern African Poetry

Folklore, as deployed in poetry by first- and second-generation African writers, carries some kind of spirituality in the poems. In "Ouverture," the opening poem of Okigbo's *Heavensgate*, the poet intones:

> Before you, mother Idoto
> naked I stand,
> before your watery presence,
> a prodigal,
> leaning on an oil bean,
> lost in your legend. . . .
> Under your power wait I on barefoot,
> watchman for the watchword at Heaven Gate;
> out of the depths my cry

give ear and hearken.

There is so much of spirituality associated with "mother Idoto" before whom the supplicant has to stand "naked" in her "watery presence" as "a prodigal" "leaning on an oil bean." The supplicant is on "barefoot" waiting for the emergence from "the depths" the goddess who should listen to his prayers.

In "Idanre" the human keeps company of gods. In the first movement of the poem, the storm brings together two powerful Yoruba gods, Sango, "the axe-handed one," the god of lightning and electricity and Ogun, "the iron one." One can interpret the union of Sango and Ogun, "two violent forces" as leading to the harnessing of electric power. The poet relates the natural happenings as the backdrop of divine interventions in the affairs of humans. Soyinka thus deploys the Ogun myth to explore Idanre with its mountainous rocks, the harvest festival, and iron associated with the god. What is noted in "Idanre" holds for other such African poems: "Though some of the mythical allusions may appear esoteric, they generally tend to be comprehensible in their particular contexts. These allusions give Soyinka's poetry a sense of specificity and concreteness" (Ojaide, *The Poetry of Wole Soyinka*, 51).

Indebtedness to Traditional Oral Forms

As observed earlier, folklore encompasses oral traditions of a people and many African poets of the first and second generations did not only borrow from their respective folklore to enrich the content of their works but also from the forms and techniques of their oral poetry to reinforce their own poems as African poets writing in English or whatever European language they used. A few examples will suffice to illustrate this trait in older African poets. Soyinka's "Muhammad Ali at the Ringside, 1985" (*Mandela's Earth*) is modelled on the poet's Yoruba oriki poetic form of praise-chanting. Part of the poem reads:

Black tarantula whose antics hypnotize the foe!
Butterfly sideslipping death from rocket probes.
Bee whose sting, unsheathed, picks the teeth

Of the raging hippopotamus, then fans
The jaw's convergence with its flighty wings.
Needle that threads the snapping fangs
Of crocodiles, knots the tusks of elephants
On rampage. Cricket that claps and chirrups
Round the flailing horn of the rhinoceros,
Then shuffles, does a bugalloo, tap-dances on its tip.
Space that yields, then drowns the intruder
In showers of sparks—oh Ali! Ali! (48)

The poem continues:

The wasp-tail legend. . .
Mortar that goads the pestle: do you call that
Pounding? The yam is not yet smooth.
Pound, dope, pound! (49)

Niyi Osundare in *The Eye of the Earth* also models one of his poems on the oriki tradition to sing the praises of the earth thus:

Temporary basement
and lasting roof

first clayey coyness
and last alluvial joy

breadbasket
and compost bed . . . .

silence of the twilight sea
echoes of the noonsome tide

milk of mellowing moon
fire of tropical hearth

spouse of the roving sky
virgin of a thousand offspring
Ogeeere amokoyeri (the one that shaves his head with the hoe)

(*Selected Poems*, 30).

The quoted Soyinka and Osundare poems have modernized, so to say, the oriki tradition to convey in English their respective admiration and respect for Muhammad Ali and the Earth. The aesthetic success of the two poems lies in their contents being infused with tropes and rhythms that derive from Yoruba folklore.

Kofi Awoonor's "Songs of Sorrow" is known for its derivation from Ewe Akpalu's own 'songs of sorrow'. Though written in English, the poem's diction echoes the Ewe language and leaves a subtext that gives profundity to the poetry. Similarly, Mazisi Kunene used his poetic career to translate Zulu poems into English and also to model his poems in English on Zulu traditional antecedents. A culture known for izibongo, Kunene's "Sword Eulogizing Itself after a Massacre" in *The Ancestors & the Sacred Mountain*, takes its cue from the Zulu traditional poetic form:

By the skills of broken men, I was moulded
I reared my head proud of my heritage of steel
I tore into the bowels of men
And tasted the sweetness of blood.
My appetites were roused
Again and again, I returned to the feast.
To hear the tales of foolish men;
They who boasted their feats of killing.
I lay down and watched their frightened eyes (13).

As a poet who grew up in the period of the 1980s when Chinweizu and others condemned "euro-modernist" African poets and called for the decolonization of modern African poetry, I went back to my folkloric heritage for models for my poetic renditions. Ojaruega writes that "Ojaide's use of folklore in his poetry does not end with the use of past figures alone. He also adumbrates aspects of the oral literature in the forms of songs, folktales, and proverbs to enrich the bases of his poetic style, form, and thematic expression" (149). I did not have to look far as udje, the oral poetic performance tradition of the Urhobo people was there for me. While udje has been a consistent influence on the form and techniques of many of my poems, it is in *Delta Blues & Home Songs* that I came closest to

writing this Urhobo oral satiric genre. “Odebala”, “Professor Kuta”, “My relatives-in-law”, and “My townsman in the army” were written in the udje tradition of song-poetry and they obey the battle tradition of the genre's composition. Here is one of the poems, “Professor Kuta”

I would have kept my peace
if Professor Kuta doesn't parade himself
in a field where he doesn't belong.

A trail of hisses always follows the so-called don.
Robber don, adulterer don, don of nothing learned.
If you know Professor Kuta, you would pity him.
He is a robber masked in an academic gown--
if you don't pay five hundred naira for his three-page
handout,
he will fail you even if your head is a computer.
Unless you give five thousand naira to change F to A!
Once he asked a female student all over him
after enjoying themselves in the office,
"Na sex I go chop. Bring money jare!"
The student shouted "Rape" but he silenced the committee
set up to probe his indiscretion and *moral turpitude*.

The collar of his shirt is caked with ochre,
the sole of his shoes shines with holes.
Teachers are poor but Professor Kuta's unbelievable.
By the tenth of the month, his eyes are red with
desperation;
if you don't give him a gift, his wife won't go to the market.
His car long wrecked, he is pitiable in his long trek.
I will not encourage any of my children to be a professor.
Kuta has lost his mind--he doesn't look better
than a madman or the mechanic in half-clothes.
Those he went to college with drive big cars.

His relatives have confessed to bewitching him,
there's no other explanation for his wretched plight.

He professes poverty, professes robbery of young ones;
professes nothing scholarly--no book to his credit;
of the articles he cites in his cv, three appeared
in *The Nigerian Observer* and *The Daily Times*;
the other two paid for and printed in street tabloids.
Students have discovered his handouts are lifted
from his undergraduate notebooks wholesale.
If one's mouth conferred authority, Kuta would be a
professor.
I heard from his colleagues that he has no Ph.D.
but an ABD, he thrice flunked his Ed.D. defence.

Who doesn't know some doctors are impostors?
Tell Professor Kuta to bring his transcripts for all to see.
The sort of Professor Kuta would be better off trading
than robbing students in the mantle of a don.

Kuta is not a professor he calls himself.
I would have shut my mouth to his masking,
if he doesn't parade himself as a university don.

Many of the poets were very conscious of traditional oral poetic forms of satire, praise, and dirges. Closely linked to modelling poems in English or other postcolonial languages on forms such as dirges, the oriki, ijala, udje, halo, izibongo, and other traditional African forms is the use of repetition and refrains as commonly occur in traditional poetry. In my "For Festus Iyayi", there is the refrain of "To zee." Nwankwo repeats in a hallucinatory manner "under the udala tree" in *The Womb in the Heart*."

Environment and Spiritual Bond of Humans and Nonhumans

It appears most of the older poets had sacred places such as waters, rivers, lakes, mountains, and forests. Okigbo's water maid comes from the waters in a flash. Kunene's ancestors reside in the sacred

mountains, and Soyinka's "Idanre" is set in a rocky and forested area. In the following generation that includes Niyi Osundare, Nnimmo Bassey, and myself, there was much attention to the environment before the Anthropocene took over the globalists. In the environmental poetry of these poets, they lament the violation of the pristine and sacred environment out of profit motives in the extraction of minerals. The natural resources of the people/communities which made the people live a wholesome life were not only extracted but the entire sources of livelihood were destroyed by greed. The fauna and flora of the poets' environment carried symbolic and sometimes spiritual connotations. There was a bond the poets established between humans and nonhumans that affirmed a kind of spirituality. Look at the poet and Idanre; the poet and mother Idoto; the poet, his ancestors, and the sacred mountain; the poet and the god of memory and muse; and so on. Doubtless, these poets grew up in those nature-endowed environments and experienced them before capitalist greed started to destroy the environment that they once conveyed as an Edenic space.

What seems to be going on presently is that the older poets are still deploying folklore into their poetic expression as allusions, metaphors, symbols, and ideational signification. Recent works of Osundare and Ojaide show these folkloric traits. On the other hand, the younger poets, mostly younger than 50, do not seem to know their folkloric heritage and do not seem to make the necessary effort to know about their folklore and so write poetry devoid of that rich resource. What are the consequences of folklore or its absence in contemporary African poetry?

Folklore and its Impact on Poetic Diction

Cultural identity is important as literature is a cultural production. While it may not be the only feature that establishes the identity of a people's artistic production, no doubt folklore is one of the major indices of a people's literature. It affects the foreign language (here English) that the poet writes in. With many Englishes, which English is African? The English of Kofi Awoonor's "Songs of Sorrow" is unmistakably African in its use of Ewe syntax, meaning, and other

linguistic aspects. The first two stanzas make the point about the uniqueness of this English which is like a transliteration of Ewe:

Dzogbese Lisa has treated me thus
It has led me among the sharps of the forest
Returning is not possible
And going forward is a great difficulty
The affairs of this world are like the chameleon faeces
Into which I have stepped
When I clean it cannot go.

I am on the world's extreme corner,
I am not sitting in the row with the eminent
But those who are lucky
Sit in the middle and forget
I am on the world's extreme corner
I can only go beyond and forget (Moore and Beier 89)

The language of this poem is folkloric Ewe. The notion of "When I clean it cannot go" is not British or English but Ewe/African. Chameleon faeces cannot come off the body however thorough you want to remove it from where it is. To the Ewe/African, going beyond and forgetting means dying and ridding oneself of the sufferings of earthly life. The last stanza deals with the African belief that the dead are not dead but guard and guide their living; hence:

Agosu if you go tell them,
Tell Nyidevu, Kpeti, and Kove
That they have done us evil;
Tell them their house is falling
And the trees in the fence
Have been eaten by termites;
That the martels curse them.
Ask them why they idle there
While we suffer, and eat sand,
And the crow and the vulture
Hover always above our broken fences
And strangers walk over our portion (idem 90).

This is modern African poetry in the sense that though written in

English it carries African thought and language patterns. With this type of English as used in "Songs of Sorrow" one used to be categorical in defining modern African poetry as having undertones of African culture that the folklore emblematizes. What separates modern African poetry today from Western/European world or Asian poetry? Folklore used to carry the cultural nuances of Africa in its poetry as Western poetry does its poetry. And then globalization came in!

Globalization and Contemporary African Poetry

The fast growth of technology that led to globalization ensured faster means of communication, and free movement of people, and shrank the world into a global village. With this closeness of peoples brought together by globalization came cultural influences with traditional media such as radio and television and new media such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and many others that brought more closeness and convenience to the world. Globalization encouraged migration as the developed countries were able to get cheap labour from the developing countries whose economies and political states were weak and unstable. Globalization in its beginning was expected, if not in supposition, to be a two-way traffic between the Global North and the Global South, euphemisms for the developed and developing countries respectively. However, in practice over time, it has not been so. Rather, it was a one-way traffic as economic and political conditions helped the Western world of Europe and North America to suck talents from the developing world of Africa, Asia, and Latin America to fill crucial positions in their countries at a much cheaper rate.

A major feature of globalization is that the developed world of high technology was able to sell their cultural habits to the developing countries that did not have the economic resources to market their own values or culture. The BBC and CNN were major propagators of globalization as they spread Western lifestyles and information that glamorized North America and Europe at the expense of the rest of the world. American culture was promoted to absorb other cultures of poor nations. It is for this reason that Peter L. Berger defines

globalization as "American economic and political hegemony, with its cultural consequences being a homogenized world resembling a sort of metastasized Disneyland" (Wiarda 22). Since African cultures are generally weak, it is not surprising that they become the target cultures absorbing the pop cultures of the Global North. Thus, many Africans abandon their cultures for foreign ones while the European world peoples stick to their own. This happens to contemporary African poetry.

One striking feature of contemporary African poetry is the way African poets want to attach themselves to other poets. I have noticed this phenomenon in one Nigerian poet, Ismail Garba. This and some other poets tend to model or write "after" Western poets they have read. Does this mean mere acknowledgement of works read or deferring to superior writers? Whatever it is, there is the appearance of evoking foreign authors for their renown and gaining respect for their own poems fashioned after those outside poets. One wonders why these African poets seek foreign poets to model poems on while their indigenous cultures have many untapped resources for poetic expression. One would like these poets to look inward rather than only outward. They lose an aspect of futuristic writing from the oral traditions for which African cultures are very strong. Loss of the orality in folklore makes the African reader miss what connects the poet and the reader. From these writers, one wonders if what differentiates us is still important or matters. If the American and European poets that they evoke keep to their own traditions, why should Africans cede their identity? No matter how good the African poet is, he or she will not be accepted as, for instance, American or British/English because they have their own canon which eliminates the "other" that the African poet is to them. At best a postcolonial poet, the African poet may find his way to anthologies of World Literature/Poetry but not into their national or cultural spaces. The universal is not necessarily Western and can also be African.

I have noticed another trend in Obari Gomba's poetry, especially in *The Lilt of the Rebel*. He does not go back to his Nigerian roots as those of the first- and second-generation poets did but appears to be influenced by what he has read. He refers to Shakespeare's Caliban in

"The Poetry of Bad Manners." In "The Tyranny of the Reader," he writes:

> Dear Poem, he can be a haughty
> demon behind a genteel mask.
> He can be a neo-Philistine,
> updating his philistinism (21).

It is significant that the mask in the poem is the generic metaphor for cover and not an ancestral mask in African culture. The poet in "I Have Burnt Poems" speaks of the "dragon fly" and "the erotica of Anais Nin" (24). There are allusions to Biblical folklore in Pontius Pilate washing his hands off the victimization of Christ in "Crucifixion: Before and After" (62-3). Other biblical references include "To Jesus" (64), "To Judas (69), "Didymus" (70), and "The Forbidden" (72). Similarly, in "Between Us and the Dead" there are references to hell, heaven, purgatory, and paradise (96). A secular Western allusion to the Grim Reaper occurs in "A Country or a Cemetery" (119). Two instances of what comes closest to African orature is "In Everything" where "they believe they can quench / the sun with their spittle" (40) and the reference to "deities of iron" (165). In all, while not referring directly to indigenous folklore as the Alter/Native poets, Gomba is still able to express his feelings and thoughts effectively about life and death with what he has gained from experience in literary references.

Another contemporary Nigerian poet whose poetry shows the absence or the scarcity of indigenous folklore is Su'eddie Vershima Agema in his *Memory and the Call of Water.* A poet of Tiv ethnicity, Agema barely displays African cultural awareness apart from a passing singular reference to Aondo and Oshun. In "Memory's Hold on Mother's Day," the poet writes:

> *Aondo, if you live above the clouds as you do in our hearts*
> *best author writing our tales*
> *please, rid her of every torment and rewrite her tale to grace*

(20-1).

Aondo is the Supreme God of the Tiv people of Nigeria. In "The Owner of All," the poet says "Aondo does not leave his child tied overnight" (50). However, in the same poem he invokes Aondo, there

are Christian/biblical "crosses", "ascension," and "grace". The same admixture of Christian/biblical, Western Greco-Roman lore and African folklore is found in "The Genesis of Belief":

I save Gaea as I cleanse the land of the filth of a lot growing fat on fear
(May I be spared any blood that might call from the earth—
Maybe these Cains would wear the cloak of Abel in death)

And let Oshun drink her fill as she watches these clerks of the devil
Find their way to Hades or what eternity reserves for them (17).

Here the speaker of the poem feels comfortable in identifying the self with Gaia where Cain and Abel are contesting for the soul or health of the land. Oshun, the Yoruba river deity, is presented as passive, just watching as evil doers go to hell or where "eternity reserves for them." This spiritual concept of ending life in hell is very Western, quite unlike traditional African belief in a cyclical life of a coming and going that goes on forever. Another reference to Hades is found in "Beast in a Bottle" (40) and there is the allusion to the cliché Western piper who dictates the tune in "Memory's Hold on Mother's Day" (20). Agema appears more familiar with Western classical mythologies and biblical references than African cultural ones in his poetry.

It is in the same category of young contemporary African poets of Gomba and Agema who are losing touch with their indigenous folklore but holding to Western and biblical lore that Umar Yogiza belongs. In a *taste of stone*, the poet appears involved in a quest of the self. The persona lights up at the invocation of Kaka, the indigenous deity of his Gwandara people who inhabit Nassarawa State of Nigeria. Kaka is the name of a water goddess and coincidentally the poet's mother. The poet is lucky to have his mother and a goddess as his guide in the quest. In "Sarcophagus," with its Ancient Egyptian connotation, the poet assumes the persona of "Pontius, washing off commitment / From the tattered hopes of the cross bearers" (52) as he talks of "the Messiah" and "Golgotha" (52). References to "the heavens" and "hades" also occur in the poem as he pleads, "Kaka / Command me, Kaka, command me" (52). In "Stench of a Damaged Testament," the poetic voice rises to an epiphany in

Oh! Kaka, if I cannot write a rocket poem better
than rocket makers, then nobody would write
the contours of my country's scars better than I do (68).

The poet deploys the indigenous folklore to sum up his quest to articulate his dedication to his nation, the poetic "mother." One wished there were more poetic sparkles occasioned by the deployment of African folklore than the allusions to the Bible or Western folklore which looks distant from the poetic self.

Complex Identities

There is no doubt that identities change and in Africa this has happened with globalization, migration, socio-political issues, and individual concerns. This trend has become significant. There are African poets out there who see their individual identities in areas of gender and sexuality and have declared themselves gay. Such poets though from Africa will thus follow what they think further their conveniences as a gay community rather than choose to be culturally African where most tend to hide their true selves.

Migration has also complicated identity issues in contemporary African poetry. Many poets might not have had the chance or the appetite for the culture before migrating to the Global North where certain lifestyles are considered normal and protected by law, unlike in many parts of Africa where they are still frowned upon. With a black person flaunting a minority status of, for instance, gay or lesbian, the person gains an outside community embracing him or her. The shifting identity makes one not just Nigerian, African, Yoruba but gay in a rainbow tent that protects the individual. Romeo Oriogun can be seen in this light. Part of his "Coming Out" reads:

The woman on the bar stool knows your body
is a journey into songs,
the door into a moth flirting with fire,
which means there's a pretty boy
living under your skin.
I do not wish to come to you
but I can't help it,
you look drunk like a man

seeking a way out of himself
or a way into the beginning of his voice.
The city knows how to kill a man like you
and on the face of some men
I can see you burning. (*Sacrament of Bodies*)

The title of the poem itself tells its content which is framed in elusive but poetically poignant lines about the poet's persona. It appears the speaker of the poem had been hiding or in a closet but now wants to come out of the hiding. The speaker suggests a lifestyle which has not been publicly acknowledged but deserves his personhood and respect.

Unfortunately, every writer is put in a box. It could be national, as Nigerian, South African, American, or British. That box could also be cultural as African, Asian, or European/Western. There is also the religious box in which there are Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and other writers of religious designations. Small and large regions are boxes too such as Nigeria's Niger Delta, the Caribbean, or West African. There is the historical box of postcolonial literature arising from the European colonization of countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Other categorizations are gender and sexual orientation as to whether one is feminist or gay. In some countries in the Global North like Canada, there is immigrant literature/poetry. One should not forget the Native American and the First Nations poets of the United States and Canada respectively. The question is which box the writer fits into because every writer is in one and, based on his or her work, could be denied inclusion in some other boxes. That is why Ben Okri who has written many poems though known for his fiction remains a postcolonial writer and not a British/English poet! A poet like Uche Nduka who is originally from Nigeria and lived in Europe for a long time before relocating to the United States is not a Dutch or German poet though he lived in their lands, nor is he an American poet because he currently resides in the United States. He remains either an immigrant poet or a Nigerian poet. Many African poets living outside Africa are still African even when they express a diasporic consciousness in their works. Call these boxes canonization but they are there. And that is why the awareness or lack

of folklore is important for a people's poetry. There is no world poet. Lenrie Peters of The Gambia tried to brand himself a universal poet but within a short while wrote *Katchikali* which had a strong Aku/African cultural provenance. A poet writes in a language, writes from a place and for a people that should have relevance to his work.

The Future of African Poetry

The signs are that African folklore's influence is getting less and less in the writings of many African poets. More people are not studying their cultures, and many do not just care. Others already outside Africa and in the Global North want to integrate into the Western society by steering away from what will foreclose their works to their immigrant hosts. It does not matter whether they will not be accepted into the mainstream or not, but they do it, if only to get a hearing and good sales of their books. Many of the immigrant poets are not even read in Africa and are in limbo; neither here nor there in their African homeland or in North America or Europe where they now reside.

In Africa, there is the popularity of the Spoken Word poetry which, because it is more of a performance art that is instantaneous and not a literary art as the poetry I have been discussing is. It entertains more than it is meant for reflection as many traditional poetic genres as Udje and Halo and modern poetry in the European languages do. Spoken Word poetry is growing in different parts of Africa and should not be critiqued with the same criteria as I have used in judging literary poetry as to whether they are rooted in the traditions of the people.

Conclusion

African literary poetry is in a period of fermentation. One cannot forecast what the result will be. After all, culture is dynamic as the poetic art of the people. Folklore also is not static but many aspects of it change with the times. In addition to the identity that it gives to poetry of a people, it encapsulates the liveliness and aesthetic power of the creative work. It is the current of the river, the spirit of the mask, the blood of the human, and the force that gives life to the poetic work. To quote Ojaruega again, “the local folklore is deployed to

tackle global issues such as that of climate change and environmental pollution and degradation. The same is done of universal and human issues and problems. . . as a poet seems to be saying that the small groups of the world have their own knowledge to contribute in the cultural discourse of poetry to make life better than it is" (158).

As time goes on, fewer and fewer poets take their cultural identity and their Africanness less seriously. Even though English used to be indigenized with African folkloric allusions and tropes, there is the tendency by those now writing in Africa and in their immigrant homes in North America and Europe to get dissociated from their original roots and become a part of the global flow that leaves them cultureless. However, new folklore in the form of urban myths and legends could spring up to bind the people into a unity of equivalence that folklore brought to earlier poets. The irony of those who do not care for their own culture is that they want to assimilate into a culture that resists, if not rejects, them. For those African poets who still recourse to folklore in all its ramifications, there is hope that an identifiable African poetry will remain for a long time and still bring together the resources of the cultures together to approach new poetic challenges.

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