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BOOK REVIEWS

Die afbakening van die kern van die Afrikaanse poësiesisteem (2000–2022)

Burgert Senekal

Delineating the core of the Afrikaans poetry system (2000–2022)

A core/periphery structure is a concept often used in various disciplines to examine the structure of different systems. In the study of Afrikaans literature, this structural facet is also a well-known topic and one that has already been written about extensively. It is generally assumed that actors within the core of a system are more important, authoritative, established and stable, while actors on the periphery often fulfill less important roles, are more dynamic and are also often newcomers. However, the question arises how it can be determined scientifically which role players function within the core of the system, and how the core can be demarcated. In this article, a network analysis of the contemporary Afrikaans poetry system is undertaken, and with the help of network concepts such as the k-core and eccentricity, it is shown how and where the core and the absolute core of the Afrikaans poetry system can be delineated. This approach provides an objective and scientific way to examine the structure of the poetry system. As such, the study connects to previous studies of the Afrikaans poetry system as a system and as a network, but the current study applies new criteria to a new data set and delineates the core of this system. **Keywords:** Afrikaans literature; Afrikaans poetry; eccentricity; k-core; core/periphery structure; network theory; polysystem theory.

Inleiding

'n Kern/periferiestruktuur is 'n bekende struktuurfaset van sisteme wat van besonderse belang vir literêre sisteme is. Daar word gereeld binne studies van, en ander publikasies rondom, die Afrikaanse literêre sisteem daarna verwys dat skrywer A binne die kern of sentrum van die Afrikaanse literêre sisteem funksioneer, terwyl skrywer B op die periferie aangetref word. Hiervolgens word die kern gewoonlik gesien as gevestig, gesaghebbend, invloedryk, stabiel en dominant, terwyl die periferie gesien word as minder belangrik, minder invloedryk, onstabiel, en dikwels eksperimenteel of alternatief. Die vraag ontstaan egter hoe die kern van die periferie onderskei kan word, waar die skeidslyn lê, en hoe om die onderskeid wetenskaplik te bepaal.

Die huidige artikel sluit aan by my vorige publikasie "Aktiwiteit en sentraliteit in die Afrikaanse poësiesisteem van die afgelope twee dekades (2000–2019), met spesifieke verwysing na Joan Hambidge se rol daarbinne", waar sentrale rolspelers in die hedendaagse Afrikaanse poësiesisteem uitgelig en bespreek is. Die artikel sluit ook aan by my vorige studies van die Afrikaanse poësiesisteem as netwerk (soos "'n Netwerkontleding van die Afrikaanse poësienetwerk vanaf 2000 tot 2012" en "Die hedendaagse Afrikaanse poësiesisteem: Op soek na die mees verteenwoordigende wiskundige model van die rolspelerverhoudings daarbinne"). Anders as in "Aktiwiteit en sentraliteit" gebruik die huidige studie maatstawwe wat 'n duidelike onderskeid tussen die kern en die periferie in hierdie sisteem kan tref en wat nog nie binne die Afrikaanse literatuurstudie toegepas is nie, en die datastel word vergroot en opgedateer.

Die artikel is soos volg gestruktureer. Eerstens word 'n kort oorsig oor die kern-/periferie-onderskeid in sisteme en netwerke verskaf, met 'n spesifieke klem op maatstawwe wat binne die netwerkteorie ontwikkel is om hierdie onderskeid wetenskaplik te bepaal. Hierna word die datastel bespreek wat vir die huidige studie saamgestel is. Hierop volg 'n bespreking van die bevindinge. Die artikel sluit af met slotopmerkings en voorstelle vir verdere navorsing.

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Die kern en periferie in komplekse netwerke

Die netwerkwetenskap is 'n benaderingswyse binne die sisteemteorie wat insigte vanuit wiskundige grafiekteorie, sosiologie, antropologie, rekenaarwetenskap en ander dissiplines kombineer ten einde die samehang tussen entiteite (genoem 'nodusse') binne sisteme wiskundig te kan bestudeer (Von Bertalanffy 416; Barabási 7; Senekal, "Aktiwiteit en sentraliteit" 66; Zelenkovski *et al.* 3). Verskeie maatstawwe is oor die afgelope paar dekades binne die netwerkwetenskap ontwikkel om fasette van sisteme mee te kan bestudeer, insluitend die netwerkstruktuur as geheel, om belangrike nodusse te identifiseer en om gemeenskappe binne die netwerk mee te identifiseer (Barabási, Yanchenko en Sengupta). Die huidige artikel fokus op die kern/periferiestruktuur van netwerke.

Na aanleiding van die werk van Prebisch, is een van die belangrikste struktuurelemente van netwerke (ook genoem 'grafieke') dat hulle 'n kern/periferiestruktuur vertoon, met belangriker nodusse binne die kern of sentrum geposisioneer en minder belangrike nodusse op die periferie (Csermely *et al.* 111; Fraiberger *et al.* 825; Nordlund 348; Juhász, Tóth en Lengyel). Vroeë netwerkteoretici soos White, Boorman en Breiger het die term 'sentrum' verkies, terwyl latere netwerkteoretici soos Borgatti en Everett die term 'kern' verkies (Nordlund 348). Die kern is gewoonlik hegter verbind as die periferie, oefen beheer uit oor die hele netwerk, bevorder netwerkstabiliteit en bevorder robuustheid (Csermely *et al.* 111; Juhász, Tóth en Lengyel; Yanchenko en Sengupta 44). Hierteenoor is die periferie meer dinamies, aanpasbaar en beweeglik (Csermely *et al.* 111; Juhász, Tóth en Lengyel). Tussen die kern en periferie is ook 'n tussengebied wat soms na verwys word as die 'semi-kern', waar nodusse aangetref word wat minder belangrik of sentraal as dié in die kern is, maar meer belangrik of sentraal as dié op die periferie is (Riaza).

Daar is reeds heelwat oor die Afrikaanse poësiesisteem *as sisteem* geskryf, gewoonlik met behulp van Even-Zohar se polisisteemteorie, en ook met verwysing na hierdie sisteem se kern/periferiestruktuur (Adendorff; Vosloo; Kleyn; Vermeulen; Senekal, "Aktiwiteit en sentraliteit"). Kortom stem die polisisteemteorie van Even-Zohar sterk ooreen met bostaande opvatting van die kern/periferiestruktuur in netwerke, soos afgelees kan word uit die volgende stellings: die kern bevat meer gevestigde rolspelers en die periferie is waar nuwelinge aangetref word, die kern bevat gesaghebbende rolspelers wat oor 'n groot hoeveelheid sosiale kapitaal beskik, en die kern bevorder die stabiliteit van die literêre sisteem (sien byvoorbeeld Adendorff 17; Vosloo 41; Kleyn 33; Vermeulen 8). Posisies word dikwels bepaal deur institusionele strukture, soos uitgewers, literêre tydskrifte en akademiese instellings. Skrywers wat deur hierdie institusionele strukture ondersteun en erken word, het 'n groter kans om in die kern van die sisteem te funksioneer. Aan die ander kant word skrywers wat buite hierdie strukture val dikwels na die periferie van die sisteem gedwing. Daar is ook ruimte vir 'n tussengebied in die polisisteemteorie, en in Kleyn (33) en Vermeulen (55) word die semi-kern 'n 'oorgangsone' genoem. Olga Kirsch se posisie in die Afrikaanse literêre sisteem, soos uitgewys in my vorige publikasie "Olga Kirsch se posisie in die Afrikaanse literêre sisteem (1900–1978)", kan as 'n posisie in die semi-kern of oorgangsone beskryf word. Die vraag is egter hoe bepaal kan word watter rolspelers hulself binne die kern van die sisteem bevind, en waar en hoe die kern afgebaken kan word.

Een manier om aan te toon of nodusse binne die kern of op die periferie van 'n netwerk aangetref word, is deur gebruik te maak van datavisualisasie in die vorm van 'n kraggebaseerde uitleg-algoritme soos dié van Frucherman en Reingold. In 'n vorige publikasie ("Olga Kirsch") is aangedui hoe hierdie en ander kraggebaseerde uitleg-algoritmes belangrike rolspelers binne die kern van enige netwerk posisioneer, ook met betrekking tot die Afrikaanse literêre sisteem. Hierdie benadering is egter slegs sinvol indien die netwerk betreklik klein en nie besonder dig verweef is nie, want met groter en digter netwerke word die netwerkgrafiek onleesbaar. 'n Ander nadeel is dat 'n visuele posisionering van 'n nodus nie 'n duidelike skeidslyn aandui van waar die kern eindig en die semi-kern begin nie.

Volgens Yanchenko en Sengupta (44) kan die meeste metodes om wiskundig tussen die kern en periferie van 'n netwerk te onderskei in twee kategorieë verdeel word: metodes om die mees verbinde deel van die netwerk te identifiseer, wat dan as die netwerkkern gesien word, en metodes om nodusse te identifiseer wat naby aan die meeste ander nodusse geposisioneer is en daarom tot die netwerkkern behoort. Ek volg hulle indeling in die res van die huidige afdeling.

In die eerste plek kan die digtheid van skakels tussen nodusse in berekening gebring word, met die nodusse wat die hoogste mate van onderlinge skakeling het in die kern, terwyl minder verbinde nodusse op die periferie aangetref word. Voorbeelde van sulke metodes sluit in dié deur Everett en Borgatti, Boyd *et al.*, García Muñiz en Ramos Carvajal, en Rombach *et al.* ("Core-Periphery Structure in Networks" en "Core-Periphery Structure in Networks (Revisited)"). 'n Eenvoudige weergawe van hierdie denkwyse is die *k*-kern, soos algemeen bereken

met behulp van Seidman se algoritme. Die *k*-kern verteenwoordig die maksimum subnetwerk waarin elke nodus ten minste *k* verbindings met ander nodusse in die subnetwerk het (Li *et al*. 3; Kong *et al*. 2). Die *k*-kern word algemeen gebruik om die mees sentrale nodusse in 'n netwerk mee te identifiseer, en kan ook gebruik word om die ruggraat van die netwerk te onttrek en sodoende die netwerk te vereenvoudig en makliker leesbaar te maak vir 'n netwerkvisualisering (Kong *et al*. 28). Die *k*-kern word gedefinieer soos in Vergelyking (1), waar die getal skakels tussen nodusse in subnetwerk *H* ('n subnetwerk van die hoofnetwerk *G*, dus $H \subseteq G$) groter of gelyk aan *k* is (Seidman 73).

$$\delta(H) \geq k \qquad (1)$$

'n Nadeel van digtheidsgebaseerde kern/periferie-afbakenings soos die *k*-kern is egter dat dit 'n groep nodusse identifiseer wat die grootste getal skakels onderling het, maar nie individuele nodusse se netwerkposisies ten volle verreken nie. 'n Nodus wat binne die *k*-kern aangetref word, is byvoorbeeld nie noodwendig naby aan die meeste ander nodusse in die hele netwerk nie. Verder identifiseer die *k*-kern wel die kern van die netwerk, sowel as sy grens, maar hierdie maatstaf kan nie gebruik word om die periferie te identifiseer nie.

'n Ander manier om nodusse aan te dui wat binne die kern aangetref word, is deur gebruik te maak van maatstawwe wat nodusse se afstand van ander nodusse in berekening bring, en in hierdie geval is veral nabyheidsentraliteit en eksentrisiteit van belang. Freeman se nabyheidsentraliteit, wat een van drie maatstawwe is wat hy ontwikkel het om die belangrikheid van 'n nodus in 'n netwerk mee te bepaal (die ander twee is graad- en tussenliggingsentraliteit), identifiseer die nodusse wat gemiddeld die meeste ander nodusse met 'n kort pad kan bereik (Knoke en Yang 65). Omdat nodusse in die kern van die netwerk die meeste ander nodusse met 'n kort pad kan bereik, word die meeste nodusse met 'n hoë nabyheidsentraliteitswaarde ook binne die kern aangetref (Yanchenko en Sengupta 51; Zelenkovski *et al*. 6). In die hedendaagse Afrikaanse poësienetwerk is byvoorbeeld aangedui dat Joan Hambidge een van die hoogste nabyheidsentraliteitswaardes in hierdie netwerk het en boonop binne die kern van die netwerk geposisioneer word deur bogenoemde kraggebaseerde uitleg-algoritme van Frucherman en Reingold (Senekal, "Aktiwiteit en sentraliteit" 77).

Formeel word nabyheidsentraliteit met behulp van Vergelyking (2) vir nodus *v* bereken ($C_{C(v)}$), waar *d(v,w)* die kortste afstand tussen nodusse *v* en *w* verteenwoordig (Takes en Kosters 104).

$$C_c(v) = \frac{1}{n}\sum_{w \epsilon V} d(v,w) \qquad (2)$$

Nabyheidsentraliteit het egter ook beperkinge wat betref die identifisering van nodusse binne die kern van 'n netwerk. Eerstens kan nabyheidsentraliteit slegs vir 'n verbinde komponent van 'n netwerk bereken word (Knoke en Yang 65; Senekal, "Aktiwiteit en sentraliteit" 77). Wanneer onverbinde komponente (komponente wat onderling verbind is maar nie skakels met die res van die netwerk het nie) binne 'n netwerk voorkom, sal periferale nodusse ook 'n hoë nabyheidsentraliteitswaarde hê omdat hulle die kern van hul eie komponent van die netwerk mag vorm, alhoewel hulle nie binne die kern van die hele netwerk aangetref word nie. Daarom moet eers bepaal word uit hoeveel komponente 'n netwerk bestaan, byvoorbeeld deur die toepassing van Tarjan se algoritme, en daarná kan die reusekomponent (die grootste verbinde komponent) onttrek word en nabyheidsentraliteit word dan slegs vir daardie komponent bereken (Senekal, "Aktiwiteit en sentraliteit" 68). Hierdie probleem word hieronder in Figuur 1 uitgewys. Benewens die probleem met onverbinde komponente kan nabyheidsentraliteit ook nie 'n grens tussen die kern en periferie aandui nie, maar verskaf dit eerder 'n glyskaal van nabyheidsentraliteitswaardes. Dít is veral 'n probleem met nodusse wat in die tussengebied (semi-kern of oorgangsone) aangetref word: nodusse met die hoogste nabyheidsentraliteitswaardes is uiteraard binne die kern van die netwerk geposisioneer, en dié met die laagste nabyheidsentraliteitswaardes is op die periferie, maar *waar* word hierdie gebiede afgebaken?

Nog 'n manier om die kern van 'n netwerk te identifiseer is deur gebruik te maak van Hage en Harary se eksentrisiteitsberekening. Eksentrisiteit verwys in hierdie opsig na die lengte van die langste kortste pad tussen nodusse (Takes en Kosters 102; Riaza 2; Zelenkovski *et al*. 5). Eksentrisiteit is soortgelyk aan nabyheidsentraliteit, met die belangrikste verskil dat 'n nodus met 'n baie lae eksentrisiteitswaarde relatief naby aan *elke* ander nodus is, terwyl 'n nodus met 'n hoë nabyheidsentraliteitswaarde *gemiddeld* naby aan al die ander nodusse is (Takes en Kosters 101). Alhoewel soortgelyk, verskil eksentrisiteit en nabyheidsentraliteit tot so 'n mate dat Meghanathan (17–8) slegs 'n middelmatige korrelasie tussen die waardes van eksentrisiteit en nabyheidsentraliteit vir die verskeidenheid netwerke in daardie studie gevind het.

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Die eksentrisiteit van nodus *v* ($\varepsilon(v)$) word gedefinieer in Vergelyking (3), waar $d(v,w)$ die kortste afstand (d) tussen nodusse *v* en *w* verteenwoordig (Hage en Harary 58; Takes en Kosters 102; Zelenkovski *et al.* 4).

$$(v) = maks_{w\epsilon V}\, d(v,w) \qquad (3)$$

Die deursnee van 'n grafiek ($\Delta(G)$) is die maksimum eksentrisiteit van nodusse in die grafiek en word deur Vergelyking (4) bereken (Hage en Harary 58; Takes en Kosters 102).

$$\Delta(G) = maks_{v\epsilon V}\, \varepsilon(v) \qquad (4)$$

Die radius van die grafiek ($\Gamma(G)$) is die minimum eksentrisiteit van nodusse in die grafiek en word deur Vergelyking (5) bereken (Hage en Harary 58; Takes en Kosters 102).

$$\Gamma(G) = min_{v\epsilon V}\, \varepsilon(v) \qquad (5)$$

Eksentrisiteit deel nabyheidsentraliteit se nadeel deur laer waardes aan nodusse toe te ken wat nie met die res van die netwerk verbind is nie, met ander woorde nodusse wat nie in die reusekomponent voorkom nie. Figuur 1 hieronder wys 'n voorbeeld van hierdie tekortkoming in 'n voorbeeldnetwerk. Op sigself verskaf eksentrisiteit ook 'n glyskaal van waardes soos wat die geval met nabyheidsentraliteit is, wat dit nie moontlik maak om te bepaal waar die onderskeid tussen kern, semi-kern en periferie lê nie. Hierdie tekortkominge word oorkom deur nodusse op 'n binêre wyse in die kern of op die periferie van die netwerk in te deel op grond van Vergelykings (6) en (7) hieronder, waarvolgens die absolute kern en absolute periferie bepaal kan word. Die absolute kern van die grafiek ($K(G)$) is dan die stel nodusse met eksentrisiteitswaardes gelykstaande aan die radius van die grafiek ($\Gamma(G)$), soos in Vergelyking (6) (Hage en Harary 59; Takes en Kosters 102).

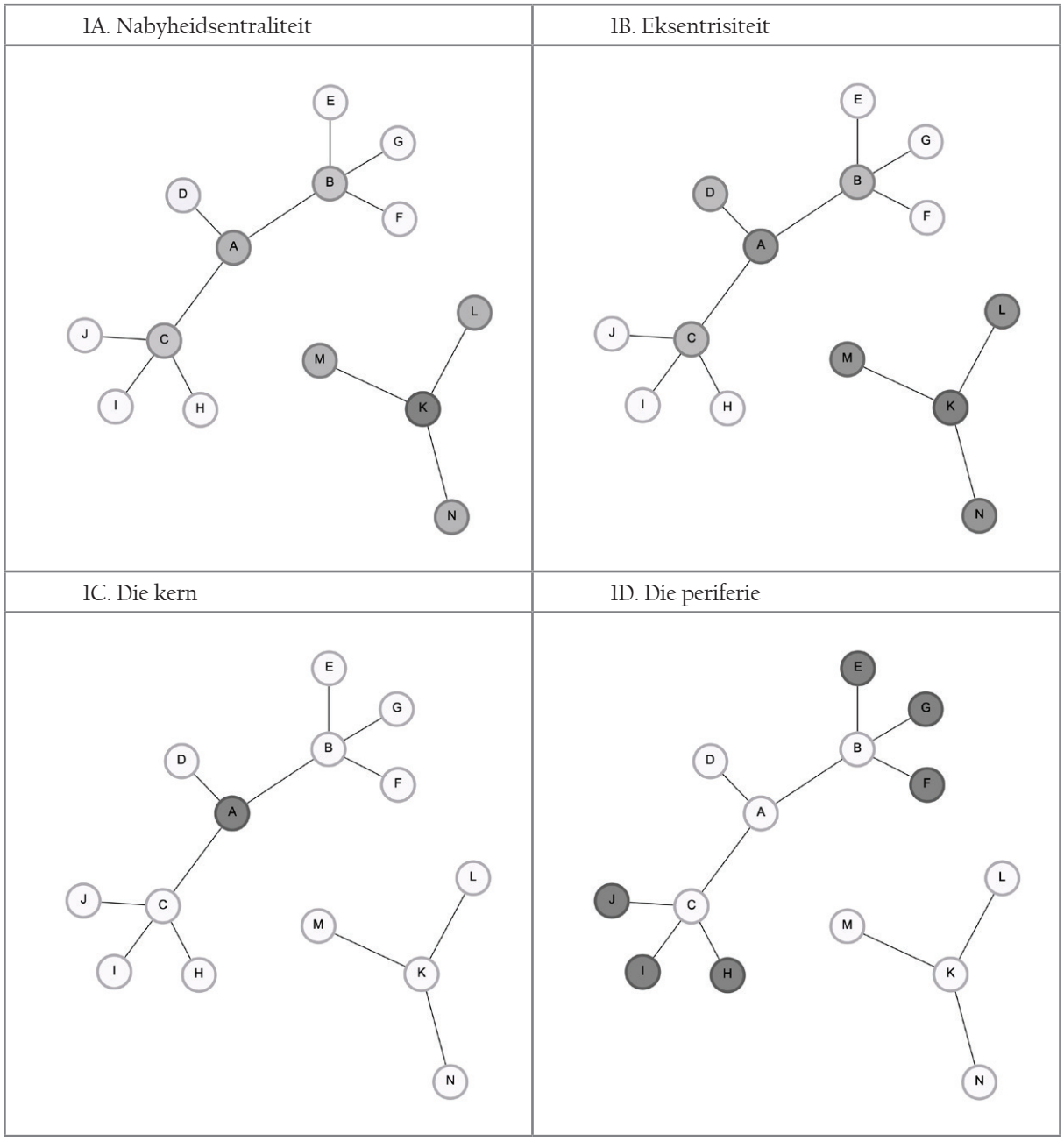
$$K(G) = \{v\epsilon V | \varepsilon(v) = \Gamma(G)\} \qquad (6)$$

Op 'n soortgelyke wyse is die periferie van die grafiek ($P(G)$) die stel nodusse met eksentrisiteitswaardes gelykstaande aan die deursnee van die grafiek ($\Delta(G)$), soos in Vergelyking (7) (Takes en Kosters 103).

$$P(G) = \{v\epsilon V | \varepsilon(v) = \Delta(G)\} \qquad (7)$$

Die semi-kern of oorgangsgebied van die netwerk is dan die nodusse met eksentrisiteitswaardes groter as die radius, maar kleiner as die deursnee.

Soos die voorbeeldnetwerk in Figuur 1 aandui, is daar 'n groot mate van oorvleueling tussen nabyheidsentraliteit en eksentrisiteit, alhoewel hierdie twee maatstawwe nie identies is nie. In Figuur 1A is nodusse donkerder gekleur wanneer hulle hoër nabyheidsentraliteitswaardes het, en hier kan gesien word dat nodus K in die kleiner komponent (wat bestaan uit nodusse K, L, M en N) die hoogste nabyheidsentraliteit in die hele netwerk het, alhoewel hierdie komponent nie met die grootste komponent (die reusekomponent) verbind is nie. Nodus A het die hoogste nabyheidsentraliteit van nodusse binne die reusekomponent. Figuur 1B wys eksentrisiteitswaardes, met nodusse met laer eksentrisiteitswaardes deur donkerder kleure aangedui omdat eksentrisiteit andersom werk as nabyheidsentraliteit (hoe laer 'n nodus se eksentrisiteit, hoe nader is die nodus aan die radius van die netwerk en daarom nader aan die kern). Hier kan gesien word dat nodus K weereens 'n voordelige posisie volgens eksentrisiteit het soos wat die geval met nabyheidsentraliteit was, alhoewel hierdie nodus tot 'n kleiner komponent van die netwerk behoort. Nietemin het nodus A steeds die laagste eksentrisiteitswaarde binne die reusekomponent. Figuur 1C wys die kern van die netwerk soos deur die klassifikasie in Vergelyking (6) uitgewys, en in hierdie geval verskaf die onverbinde tweede komponent nie 'n wanvoorstelling van nodusse se posisie in die netwerk nie, aangesien nodus A uitgelig word as die enigste nodus binne die kern. Figuur 1D wys die periferie van die netwerk soos deur Vergelyking (7) uitgewys, en hier kan gesien word dat nodusse E, F, G, H, I en J by die periferie ingedeel is, maar nie nodusse uit die tweede komponent nie. Nodusse wat nie tot die kern of periferie behoort nie, is dan nodusse binne die semi-kern, naamlik B, C en D, en die nodusse in die kleiner komponent. Konsepsueel maak dit egter meer sin om nodusse buite die reusekomponent as periferaal te reken omdat hulle nie met die res van die nodusse verbind is nie.



Figuur 1: Voorbeelde van nabyheidsentraliteit, eksentrisiteit, die kern en die periferie

Die volgende afdeling bespreek hoe data versamel, gemodelleer en ontleed is ten einde bostaande kern-identifiseringsmetodes toe te pas op die hedendaagse Afrikaanse poësiesisteem.

Metodes

Knoke en Yang (21) beklemtoon dat enige netwerkstudie met drie vrae begin: waar om die grens te stel (afbakening), hoe om netwerkentiteite te monster (dataversameling), en watter verhoudings om te meet (datamodellering). Hierby moet gevoeg word watter maatstawwe om te gebruik om die data te analiseer (data-ontleding). Die huidige afdeling bespreek hoe hierdie vier vrae in die huidige studie beantwoord is.

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Afbakening

Soos in my vorige studies ("'n Netwerkontleding", "Olga Kirsch" en "Aktiwiteit en sentraliteit"), is die webtuiste *Versindaba* gebruik om 'n lys van Afrikaanse digbundels saam te stel wat tussen 2000 en 2022 verskyn het, waarná verdere soektogte gedoen is om resensies en studies oor hierdie digbundels te vind. Daar is gefokus op publikasies wat spesifiek oor hierdie digbundels handel, met ander woorde die fokuspunt is die digbundel self en nie die digter nie. Dit is gedoen omdat, soos in "Aktiwiteit en sentraliteit" (71) aangevoer is, verskeie digters ook in ander tydperke, genres en tale gepubliseer het, maar die fokus is in die huidige studie op die Afrikaanse poësiesisteem vanaf 2000 tot 2022. Die insluitingskriteria is met ander woorde dat die digbundel se titel in die publikasie genoem moet word, maar terloopse vermeldings, byvoorbeeld 'n opnoem van publikasies by die sterfte van 'n digter, is nie ingesluit nie, en ook nie publikasies wat slegs noem dat 'n digbundel 'n prys ontvang het nie. Die minimumkriteria vir insluiting is met ander woorde 'n bespreking van die digbundel of gedigte wat in die digbundel opgeneem is, en die formaat van die publikasie kan 'n resensie, onderhoud, vakkundige artikel, verhandeling of proefskrif wees. Anders as in vorige publikasies (byvoorbeeld "Aktiwiteit en sentraliteit") is die huidige studie nie beperk tot publikasies wat die digbundel in die titel van 'n publikasie vermeld nie. Eerder is enige bespreking—ook as deel van 'n oorsig oor die poësie—hierby ingesluit. Adendorff se magisterverhandeling sou byvoorbeeld nie volgens die insluitingskriteria in "Aktiwiteit en sentraliteit" ingesluit word nie, maar is in die huidige studie ingesluit. Dit beteken dat die insluitingskriteria in die huidige studie breër is as in "Aktiwiteit en sentraliteit", wat tot gevolg het dat meer publikasies ingesluit word. Daar is 1 071 rekords in "'n Netwerkontleding" (71,4 rekords per jaar), 1 535 rekords in "Die hedendaagse Afrikaanse poësiesisteem" (102,3 rekords per jaar), 2 042 rekords in "Aktiwiteit en sentraliteit" (107,5 rekords per jaar), maar 3 121 rekords in die huidige studie (141,9 rekords per jaar). Die volgende onderafdeling bespreek hoe hierdie data versamel is.

Dataversameling

Vir die huidige studie is "Aktiwiteit en sentraliteit" se data as wegspringplek gebruik en opgedateer tot einde 2022, met 'n totaal van 484 digbundels wat ingesluit is. Publikasies oor hierdie digbundels is gesoek deur die Nasionale Afrikaanse Letterkundige Museum en Navorsingsentrum (NALN) se digitale knipselversameling te raadpleeg. NALN se digitale knipselversameling is onlangs beduidend uitgebrei en agterstande is ingehaal (Senekal, "Die digitalisering van NALN se knipselversameling: jongste verslag"), en omdat alle materiaal in 'n digitale formaat en masjienleesbaar is, kon volteksoektogte vir elkeen van hierdie 484 digbundels oor die hele korpus uitgevoer word. Alle resensies en studies wat in "Aktiwiteit en sentraliteit" ingesluit is, is ook vantevore by NALN se knipselversameling gevoeg ten einde volledigheid te verseker. Die datastel is ook nagegaan vir konsekwentheid en persone se name is gestandaardiseer, byvoorbeeld B. J. Odendaal en Bernard Odendaal is deurgaans as Bernard Odendaal aangedui.

Datamodellering

Daar is in die huidige studie, soos in "Aktiwiteit en sentraliteit", gebruik gemaak van vier soorte nodusse: mense (digters en letterkundiges), digbundels, uitgewerye en platforms (byvoorbeeld *Netwerk24* of *LitNet*). Vir die netwerkkonstruksie is daar 'n skakel aangedui tussen die digter en sy/haar digbundel, tussen die digbundel en die uitgewery waar die digbundel verskyn het, tussen die kritikus of letterkundige wat oor die digbundel skryf en die digbundel self, en tussen die digbundel en die platform waar 'n resensie of studie oor daardie digbundel verskyn het. In "Aktiwiteit en sentraliteit" het ek oor hierdie datamodelleringstrategie opgemerk:

> Hierdie datamodel bevoordeel die digbundel: vir elke resensie sal die resensent een skakel hê, die digter een, die uitgewery een en die platform een, maar die digbundel self het vier skakels [...] Dit het die voordeel dat die digbundel sentraal geplaas word: alhoewel die sisteemteoretiese uitgangspunt stel dat literatuur nie literatuur is sonder verhoudinge nie, is die kern van die literatuur myns insiens die teks self.

Skakels is sonder rigting aangedui omdat verhoudings wederkerig is: 'n digter word byvoorbeeld met 'n digbundel verbind, maar 'n digbundel word ook met 'n digter verbind. Daar is egter gewigte aan skakels toegeken omdat dit betekenisvol mag wees dat 'n digbundel herhaaldelik op dieselfde platform geresenseer is.

Omdat hierdie datamodelleringstrategie die digbundel sentraal plaas, is dit moontlik dat digters self nie deur 'n eksentrisiteitsberekening uitgelig word nie. Om hierdie rede is 'n tweede soort netwerk ook saamgestel, naamlik 'n netwerk met slegs mense as nodusse en met 'n skakel aangedui indien persoon A oor persoon B se

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werk geskryf het. Hierdie netwerk is met ander woorde 'n wie-skryf-oor-wie-netwerk, soos wat ek voorheen met betrekking tot die Afrikaanse poësie en wiskundige modelle onderneem het, in "Die hedendaagse Afrikaanse poësiesisteem". Hierdie netwerk sluit met ander woorde persone in wat digbundels skryf, maar ook persone wat oor digbundels skryf, wat beteken dat die ontleding hieronder digters sowel as resensente en akademici kan uitlig, of mense wat in verskeie rolle funksioneer. In hierdie geval is die rigting van skakels ook nie aangedui nie, maar gewigte is aan skakels toegeken omdat dit betekenisvol mag wees dat persoon A gereeld oor persoon B se werke skryf maar ongereeld oor persoon C se werke.

Data-ontleding

Gephi (vergelyk Bastian, Heymann en Jacomy) is gebruik om netwerkontledings te behartig. Teen die agtergrond van die bespreking van die kern/semi-kern/periferiestruktuur van netwerke word daar gefokus op die *k*-kern, nabyheidsentraliteit en eksentrisiteit, met laasgenoemde hoofsaaklik gefokus op die identifisering van die kern/semi-kern/periferiestruktuur in hierdie netwerk deur middel van Takes en Kosters se algoritme. Onverbinde komponente is met behulp van Tarjan se algoritme geïdentifiseer ten einde die reusekomponent te kon onttrek vir die berekening van nabyheidsentraliteit. Ek volg ook Meghanathan in die berekening van die korrelasie (*r*) tussen nabyheidsentraliteit en eksentrisiteit ten einde die mate van ooreenkoms tussen hierdie twee maatstawwe te kan bepaal. Laastens word gebruik gemaak van die kraggebaseerde uitlegalgoritme van Fruchterman en Reingold om 'n oorhoofse beeld van die rolspelers binne die kern van die netwerk te verkry.

Resultate

'n Oorsig van die datastel

Tabel 1 verskaf 'n oorsig van die datastel. Daar is 484 digbundels ingesluit wat by 66 uitgewerye verskyn het en deur 238 digters gepubliseer is, en 3 121 resensies en studies oor hierdie digbundels wat deur 517 persone op 105 publikasieplatforms gepubliseer is. Neem in ag dat hierdie resensies en studies oor 'n tydperk van 22 jaar gepubliseer is, dat die datastel nie beperk is tot hoofstroompublikasies by byvoorbeeld *Netwerk24* of *LitNet* nie, en dat enigeen 'n resensie kan skryf. Gelees teen "Aktiwiteit en sentraliteit" (73–4) se statistieke, neem die huidige studie die grootste datastel oor die hedendaagse Afrikaanse poësiesisteem in ag wat tot nou toe onderneem is.

Veranderlike	Waarde
Getal digbundels	484
Gemiddelde digbundels per jaar	22.0
Getal digters	238
Getal uitgewerye	66
Getal publikasies	3121
Getal kritici/letterkundiges	517
Getal publikasieplatforms	105

Tabel 1: 'n Oorsig van die datastel

Netwerke

Wanneer alle rolspelers in berekening gebring word met die datamodel soos voorheen uiteengesit, is daar 1 337 nodusse en 5 806 skakels in die netwerk. Die reusekomponent bestaan uit 98,06% van nodusse, wat beteken dat slegs 'n baie klein aantal rolspelers nie met die res van die netwerk verbind is nie. In die netwerk wat slegs uit mense bestaan, is daar 661 nodusse en 2 025 skakels, met die reusekomponent wat 97,28% van nodusse insluit. In beide weergawes van die netwerk is die oorgrote meerderheid nodusse met ander woorde onderling verbind.

Die k-kern

Eerstens is die *k*-kern vir beide weergawes van die netwerk onttrek. Figuur 2 dui die *k*-kern aan van die netwerk waar alle rolspelers in ag geneem is, wat onttrek is van die hele netwerk wat hieronder in Figuur 4A aangedui word. Digbundels is in pienk aangedui, mense in groen, uitgewerye in blou en platforms in oranje. Hier kan gesien word dat platforms soos *Versindaba*, *LitNet*, *Stilet*, *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* en *Volksblad* almal binne die *k*-kern aangetref word, tesame met uitgewerye soos Human & Rousseau, Tafelberg en Protea Boekhuis. Mense wat in die *k*-kern

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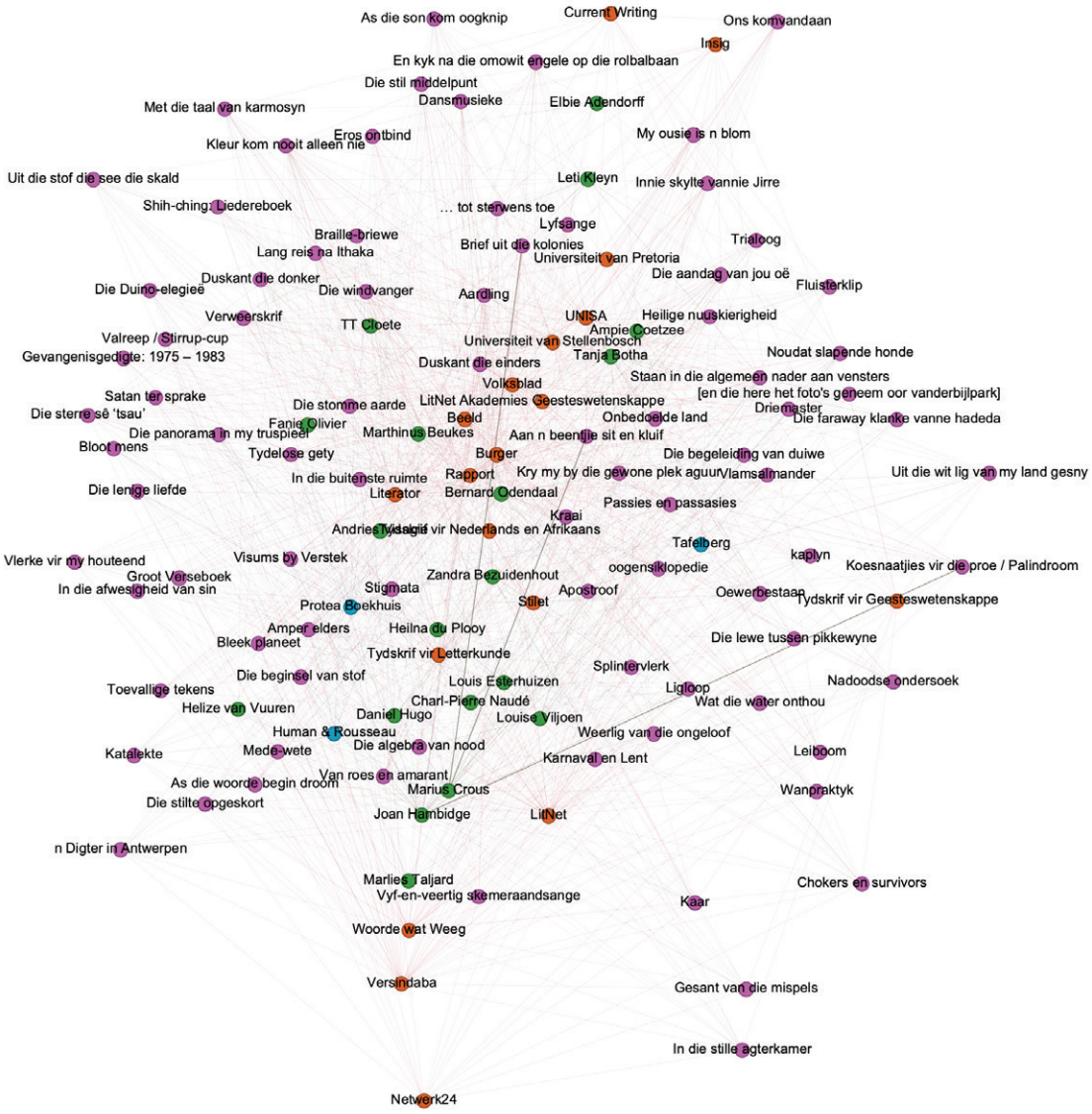
aangetref word, is Elbie Adendorff, Leti Kleyn, T. T. Cloete, Ampie Coetzee, Tanja Botha, Fanie Olivier, Marthinus Beukes, Bernard Odendaal, Andries Visagie, Zandra Bezuidenhout, Heilna du Plooy, Louis Esterhuizen, Charl-Pierre Naudé, Daniel Hugo, Louise Viljoen, Helize van Vuuren, Marius Crous, Joan Hambidge en Marlies Taljard. Hierdie is dan die dig verweefste kernkomponent van die hedendaagse Afrikaanse poësiesisteem.



Figuur 2: Die k-kern vir alle rolspelers in die hedendaagse Afrikaanse poësiesisteem

Figuur 3 dui die *k*-kern aan vir die netwerk wat slegs mense in ag neem, wat onttrek is van die hele netwerk soos hieronder in Figuur 4C aangedui word. Hierdie netwerk is heelwat meer gefokus, maar sluit ook baie van die mense in wat in die k-kern met alle rolspelers in Figuur 2 aangetref word. Ongeag hoe die netwerk saamgestel word, word baie van dieselfde persone met ander woorde binne die *k*-kern aangetref, maar hierdie netwerkgrafiek is heelwat duideliker wanneer dit kom by die *k*-kern van persone in hierdie netwerk en die netwerk sluit ook ander persone in as wat hierbo in Figuur 2 aangedui is (49 persone in Figuur 3 teenoor 19 persone in Figuur 2). Aangesien Breyten Breytenbach en Antjie Krog in hierdie *k*-kern ingesluit is, maar nie hierbo in Figuur 2 nie, is die *k*-kern vir die wie-skryf-oor-wie-netwerk 'n beter voorstelling van persone se posisies in die hedendaagse Afrikaanse poësiesisteem as die netwerk wat alle rolspelers in ag neem. Hierdie persone in Figuur 3 verteenwoordig dan die kern van persone in die hedendaagse Afrikaanse poësiesisteem.

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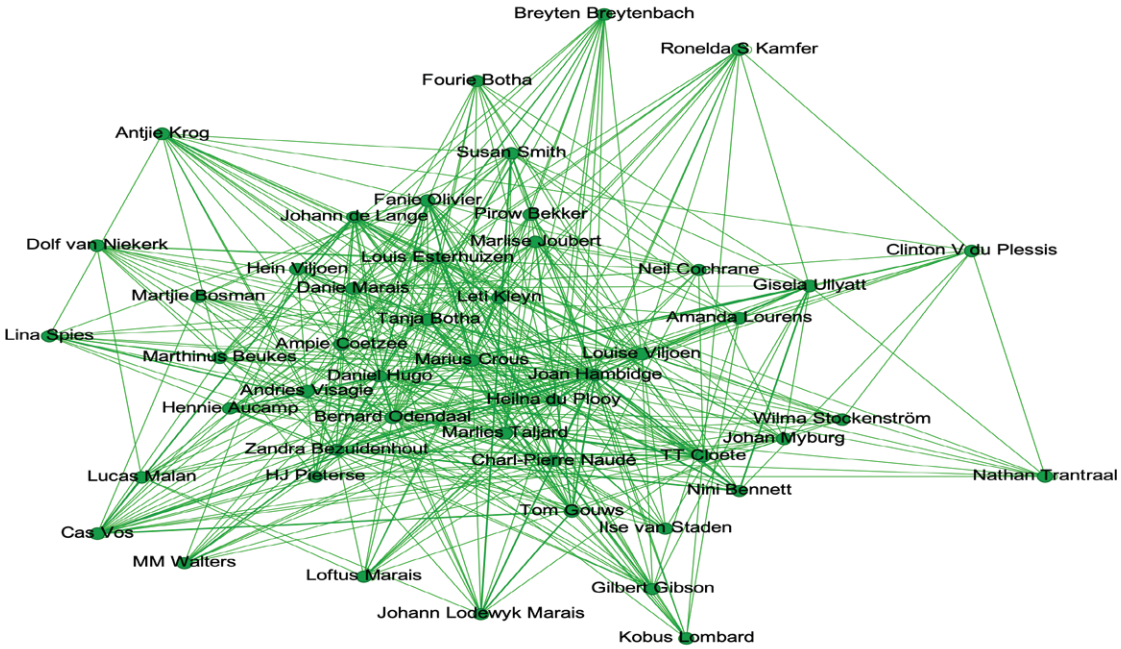

Figuur 3: Die k-kern vir mense in die hedendaagse Afrikaanse poësiesisteem

Nabyheidsentraliteit en eksentrisiteit

Figuur 4 dui 'n vergelyking van nabyheidsentraliteitswaardes en eksentrisiteitswaardes aan, vir die hele netwerk sowel as vir slegs mense in hierdie netwerk, en in beide gevalle word hier slegs die reusekomponent weergegee. Die reusekomponent vir alle nodusse bestaan uit 1 297 nodusse (n) en 5 758 skakels (m), en die reusekomponent van die netwerk met slegs mense bestaan uit 643 nodusse (n) en 2 012 skakels (m). Groter nodusse dui op hoër waardes vir nabyheidsentraliteit en op laer waardes vir eksentrisiteit. Dit is opmerklik dat kleiner nodusse in figure 4A en 4B op die periferie geposisioneer word, en groter nodusse binne die kern, wat dui op 'n mate van oorvleueling tussen nabyheisentraliteitswaardes, eksentrisiteitswaardes en visuele posisionering. Nietemin is daar slegs 'n middelmatig swak positiewe korrelasie tussen nabyheidsentraliteit en eksentrisiteit van r = 0,28 vir die hele netwerk bereken, wat beteken dat daar nie 'n beduidende verband tussen hierdie twee maatstawwe is nie. In Figuur 4A kan ook gesien word dat 'n klein aantal mense (groen), uitgewerye (blou) en platforms (oranje) binne die sentrum aangetref word, omring deur digbundels (pienk) en 'n groot hoeveelheid ander rolspelers. Hierdie klein aantal persone, platforms en uitgewerye in die kern is hierbo in Figuur 2 as die k-kern uitgelig. Figuur 4C en 4D wys onderskeidelik nabyheidsentraliteit en eksentrisiteit vir die netwerk wat slegs uit mense bestaan, met hoër nabyheidsentraliteit en laer eksentrisiteit met groter nodusse aangedui, en in hierdie geval is dit ook duidelik dat daar 'n mate van oorvleueling tussen nabyheidsentraliteitswaardes, eksentrisiteitswaardes en visuele posisionering is. Vir slegs mense is daar 'n sterk negatiewe korrelasie tussen nabyheidsentraliteit en eksentrisiteit van r = -0,78 bereken, wat beteken dat daar in hierdie geval 'n aantoonbare verband tussen hierdie twee maatstawwe is. Die negatiewe aard van die korrelasie is te wagte, aangesien hoër nabyheidsentraliteitswaardes en laer eksentrisiteitswaardes op 'n meer sentrale posisie dui.

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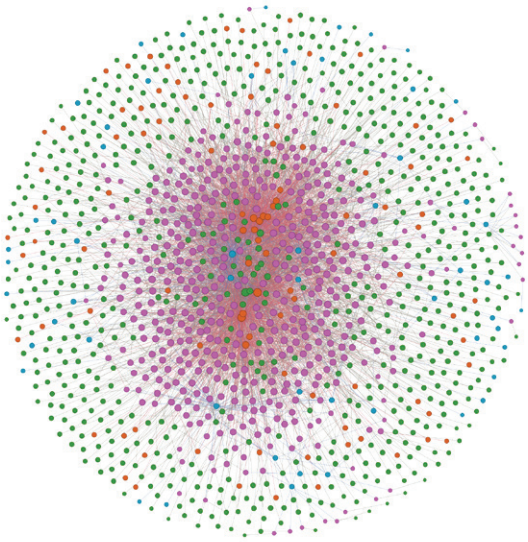
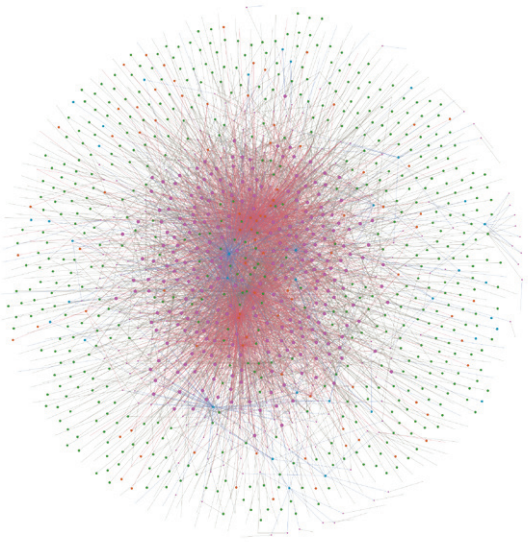
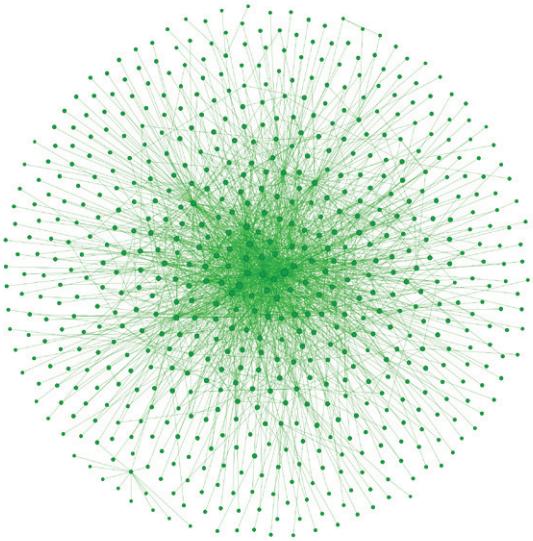
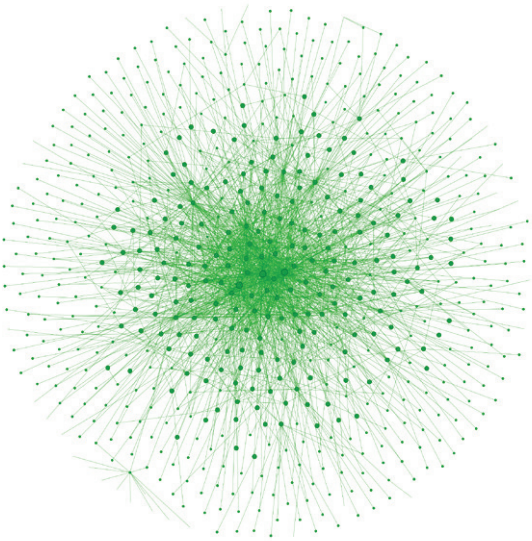
4A. Nabyheidsentraliteit vir alle rolspelers (reusekomponent, n = 1297, m = 5758)	4B. Eksentrisiteit vir alle rolspelers (reusekomponent, n = 1297, m = 5758)
	
4C. Nabyheidsentraliteit vir persone (reusekomponent, n = 643, m = 2012)	4D. Eksentrisiteit vir persone (reusekomponent, n = 643, m = 2012)
	

Figuur 4: Nabyheidsentraliteit en eksentrisiteit van rolspelers in die hedendaagse Afrikaanse poësiesisteem

Die absolute kern

Vir die netwerk met alle rolspelers is die deursnee 8 en die radius 5, met 'n gemiddelde pad van 3,56. Dit beteken dat nodusse met 'n eksentrisiteitswaarde van 8 hieronder op die periferie geplaas sal word, en nodusse met eksentrisiteitswaardes van 5 binne die kern. Vir die netwerk met slegs mense is die deursnee 6 en die radius 3, met 'n gemiddelde pad van 3,27.

Figuur 5 dui die kern, semi-kern en periferie van beide netwerke aan, met nodusse binne die kern in pienk aangedui, nodusse in die semi-kern in groen en nodusse op die periferie in oranje. Kern-/perifieposisies is soos bepaal deur Takes en Kosters se algoritme, soos voorheen bespreek.

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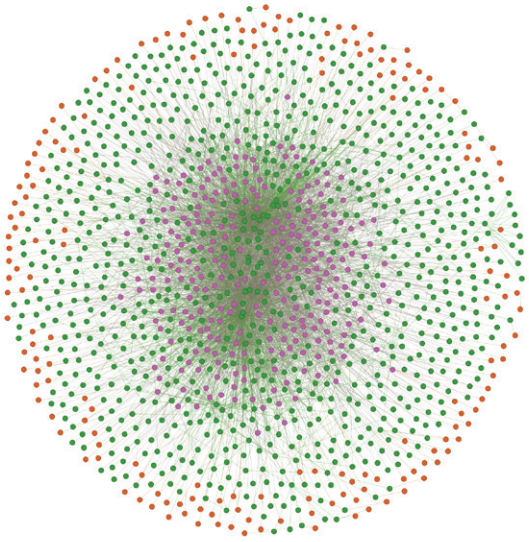
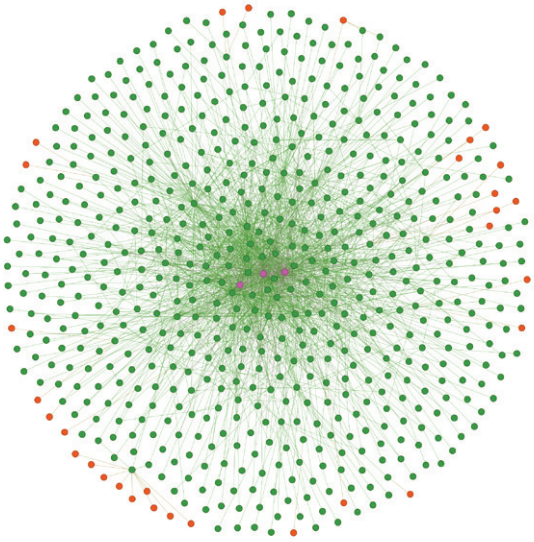
5A. Die kern/semi-kern/periferie vir alle rolspelers	5B. Die kern/semi-kern/periferie vir mense
	

Figuur 5: Die kern/semi-kern/periferiestruktuur van die hedendaagse Afrikaanse poësiesisteem

Die datamodelleringstrategie het daartoe gelei dat slegs digbundels volgens Takes en Kosters se algoritme binne die kern geposisioneer is, en boonop is 256 digbundels (20% van alle nodusse) binne die kern geposisioneer. Daar is 870 nodusse (67% van nodusse) in die semi-kern geposisioneer en 171 nodusse (13% van nodusse) op die periferie. Die groot aantal digbundels binne die kern beteken dat die kern/periferie-onderskeid met behulp van Takes en Kosters se algoritme nie baie bruikbaar is vir hierdie netwerk nie, aangesien 53% van alle digbundels binne die kern geposisioneer is en geen ander rolspelers hiermee geklassifiseer is as behorende tot die kern nie. Hierdie algoritme was met ander woorde nie bruikbaar om die kern van die hedendaagse Afrikaanse poësiesisteem te identifiseer wanneer alle rolspelers in ag geneem is nie.

Takes en Kosters se algoritme is egter bruikbaar vir die netwerk wat slegs uit mense bestaan. Hiervolgens is slegs drie persone binne die kern geposisioneer: Joan Hambidge, Marius Crous en Bernard Odendaal. Al drie hierdie persone is baie aktief betrokke by die bestudering en resensering van Afrikaanse poësie, al drie het meer as een digbundel in hierdie tydperk gepubliseer, en al drie se senioriteit is met professorate erken. Boonop het vorige studies van die Afrikaanse poësiesisteem as netwerk ook met ander datastelle en maatstawwe hierdie drie rolspelers uitgesonder as belangrike rolspelers in die hedendaagse Afrikaanse poësiesisteem (Senekal, "'n Netwerkontleding" 118; "Die hedendaagse Afrikaanse poësiesisteem" 181 en "Aktiwiteit en sentraliteit" 75). Hou egter in gedagte dat die soort nodus in hierdie netwerk mense is, nie in hul rolle as digters, resensente, akademici of in verskeie rolle nie. Hierdie is met ander woorde nie die digters (of resensente of letterkundiges) wat binne die kern van die Afrikaanse poësiesisteem funksioneer nie, maar die persone wat—met inagneming van hul bydraes tot die Afrikaanse poësiesisteem (in watter rol ook al)—sentraal binne die hedendaagse Afrikaanse poësiesisteem funksioneer. Boonop kan hierdie bevinding nie gelees word as 'n aanduiding van wie die "beste" digter, resensent of akademikus is nie—sulke uitsprake sal altyd op subjektiewe oordele berus. Hierdie posisie binne die kern is 'n netwerkposisie, gegrond op wie oor wie geskryf het.

Takes en Kosters se algoritme het 32 persone op die periferie geposisioneer, wat meesal onbekende persone is of persone wat hoofsaaklik in ander velde werksaam is, byvoorbeeld die filosoof Johann Rossouw. Daar is ook 608 persone wat binne die semi-kern geposisioneer is.

Bostaande beteken dat die kern van die hedendaagse Afrikaanse poësiesisteem die rolspelers in Figuur 2 is, maar vir persone self is Figuur 3 'n beter aanduiding van waar die kern van die Afrikaanse poësiesisteem afgebaken is. Met behulp van Takes en Kosters kan die absolute kern ook geïdentifiseer word, maar slegs vir persone, en dit is dan hierdie drie persone, Joan Hambidge, Marius Crous en Bernard Odendaal, wat die absolute kern van die hedendaagse Afrikaanse poësiesisteem verteenwoordig.

Alhoewel hierdie die omvattendste netwerkstudie oor die hedendaagse Afrikaanse poësiesisteem tot op datum is, moet egter op 'n paar beperkinge gelet word. Eerstens is die netwerk as staties hanteer sonder om die datums van publikasies in ag te neem, en toekomstige studies sou veranderinge oor tyd kon bestudeer en so die dinamiese aard van hierdie netwerk in berekening bring. Tweedens is 'n groot hoeveelheid bronne ingesluit, maar geen boeke nie. Namate meer Afrikaanse boeke digitaal beskikbaar word, sal 'n meer volledige blik op die totale Afrikaanse poësiesisteem verkry kan word.

Slot

Die voorafgaande studie het aangetoon hoe die Afrikaanse poësiesisteem in 'n kern, semi-kern en periferie verdeel kan word. Deur gebruik te maak van die *k*-kern is aangedui dat uitgewerye soos Protea Boekhuis, Tafelberg en Human & Rousseau in die kern van die hedendaagse Afrikaanse poësiesisteem funksioneer, tesame met publikasieplatforms soos *LitNet*, *Versindaba* en *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*. Daar is ook 19 persone wat hiervolgens binne die kern van die Afrikaanse poësiesisteem funksioneer. Die k-kern vir die wie-skryf-oor-wie netwerk is ook onttrek, met 49 persone wat uitgelig is, en daar is aangevoer dat hierdie 49 persone die kern van die hedendaagse Afrikaanse poësiesisteem verteenwoordig. Daar is verder gebruik gemaak van die konsep van eksentrisiteit om die absolute kern en absolute periferie te onderskei, en Marius Crous, Joan Hambidge en Bernard Odendaal is uitgelig as die absolute kern van hierdie netwerk.

Toekomstige studies kan ook die dinamiese aard van die Afrikaanse poësiesisteem verreken, en daardeur ondersoek instel na hoe rolspelers tussen die kern, semi-kern en periferie beweeg.

Erkenning

National Research Foundation

Hierdie werk is gebaseer op die navorsing wat gedeeltelik ondersteun word deur die Nasionale Navorsingstigting van Suid-Afrika (toekenningnommer 151721).

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Stand-up documentary: An emerging narrative device in Yvonne Orji's comedy

Rowland Chukwuemeka Amaefula

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Stand-up documentary—the inclusion of video film footage in stand-up performances—is a growing trend in comedy specials. Gary Gulman in *The Great Depresh* and Whitmer Thomas in *The Golden One* are some of the earliest comedians to employ documentary clips in creating portraits of their real-life circumstances on stage. More recently, Yvonne Orji's comedy special for Home Box Office (HBO) entitled *Momma, I Made It!* also utilizes documentary video films of the comedienne's experience in Nigeria to bring the Nigerian experience closer to her American audience. In this article I bring to the academic mainstream the understudied subject of stand-up documentary in humour studies. Through close reading and nuanced analyses of the gig, I examine stand-up documentary as a novel device of narration through which Orji introduces her audience to life in Nigeria through an exposition of her experiences growing up. Accentuating the differences between Nigerians and Americans and playing on Nigerian stereotypes, the comedienne deploys the clips as precise proofs transitioning her American audience into the alternate Nigerian contexts in *Momma, I Made It!* I conclude that stand-up documentary enhances the credibility of the performance, shapes perceptions of Nigerians, and facilitates audience understanding of cultural contexts that would otherwise remain unfamiliar to them. **Keywords:** Yvonne Orji, America, Nigeria, comedy, stand-up documentary, stand-up.

Introduction

There exists a scholarly consensus that stand-up performance is a cult of one person (Karim 20; Harbidge 128). It is seen as an art form that "prioritizes the individual performer", placing the entire burden of stage performance on him (Smith 70). Put differently, a stand-up comedian's art involves the presence of a live audience and urgency in creating hilarious situations; the comic is usually caught in the peril-applause apprehension during delivery. There is no fourth wall on the stand-up stage, "meaning that the comedian directly addresses the audience [...] The audience reactions are spontaneous, unpredictable" (Nedelea 95). A stand-up is saddled with the arduous tasks of giving backgrounds to and contextualizing joke narratives to enable spectators to identify with the punchlines while being cautious not to "offend" them (Zimbardo 4). The success of the stand-up performance, therefore, relies on shared sentiments and laughter between the performer and audience. To achieve this, the performer must adopt effective methods and devices of narration on stage. Strategies of unfurling stories—especially comic setup, in this context—and punching amongst other performance indices are about the most technical aspects of one's acts. Given that stand-up documentary is a theatre genre marked by immediacy and liveness, the use of different ways of rending jokes on stage shows the performer's creativity. Recent studies identify re-incorporation, alliteration, assonance, intonation, greeting/salutation, reporting and informing, and call-response as narrative devices available to stand-ups (Rutter 308; Sesan 10). However, contemporary performances show that artistes are increasingly adopting narrative devices that go beyond these widely recognised methods. This is because the art form under study is dynamic, responsive to societal changes, and thus subject to the creative agencies of artistes. For instance, the recent explosion of digital technology provides possibilities for stand-ups to upgrade the visual appeals of their productions as well as experiment with innovative narrative devices. Since the 20th century, modern theatre began incorporating epic elements into theatre—"the stage began to narrate". This is most

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exemplified in the theatre of Bertolt Brecht where static projection of slogans substantiated a character's speech or provided statistics or proof of happenings on stage (Brecht 22). Contemporary stand-up comedians mostly use video footage to bring their audience into the world of their lived experiences. In this regard, digital technologies influence humour staging elements, enabling possibilities for experimental multimedia performances. The distinguishing features of such stage acts range from simple video projections to "a new culture of scenography, supplementing the space of the stage with a variable, spatial composition, special effects [...]" (Tonkoshkura 35). This explains Orji's inclusion of video clips in *Momma, I Made It!* An autobiographical stand-up performance, *Momma, I Made It!* includes documentary footage that complements her narrative and takes the audience through her lived experiences while bringing her family and hometown in Nigeria onstage. The documentary video clips provide expository contexts or setups for the jokes she tells.

Stand-up documentary has become increasingly adopted as a narrative device in comedy specials in the last decade. However, its use has been reinforced since 2019 when comics began to use footage to create portraits of their real-life circumstances on stage such that the entire performance consists of a combination of video projections and the comic's narration throughout the show. Gary Gulman and Whitmer Thomas are the earliest comedians to employ footage in creating portraits of their personal stories on stage for their Home Box Office (HBO) shows. In *The Great Depresh*, Gulman effectively employs the docu-special device to relay to his audience information about his family and his past experiences of depression. In the show, which is described as "a mixture of confessional comedy special and mini-documentary" (Keller), we see Gulman struggling with depression as a child living with his mother as well as an adult. Thomas, for his part, employs this same narrative method in *The Golden One* to recount his mourning after his mother's death (The A. V. Club). Like Gulman's *The Great Depresh*, Thomas's *The Golden One* is also an autobiographical piece that reveals the traumatic experiences of the comic. The audience encounters his mother's twin sister who belonged to a band with his mother. They also encounter Thomas's father, cousins, and other family members and discover how they were all involved in his life. Overall, the special reveals how Thomas's life has been shaped by trauma. It is a heartbreaking performance of humour (The A. V. Club).

In her first-ever comedy special, *Stage Fright*, Jenny Slate adopts the part-stand-up, part-documentary strategy to create a portrait of her world for the audience. It includes funny stories about her adulthood and conversations with members of her family in her childhood home (Cinema). It is important to note that the deployment of documentaries in these performances demonstrates in detail the performers' journeys so far and exteriorises their internal narrative in ways that connect their audiences emotionally to the comic agonies of their stories.

Orji adopted the stand-up documentary device for her first televised comedy special for HBO entitled *Momma, I Made It!* in 2020 and in the 2022 HBO special entitled *Yvonne Orji: A Whole Me*. While the earlier mentioned stand-up documentaries mostly provide exposition about the funny and painful experiences of the performers, Orji's comedy is remarkably different for focusing on her humble beginnings and her path to success. She uses video footage of her real-life experiences to make Nigeria familiar to her audience at the venue of the show, Howard Theatre in the United States. Throughout the footage, her performance foregrounds her experiences as both Nigerian and American. Although Adenike Olanrewaju (1) has highlighted the potential of video clips to undermine the flow of the show, I view Orji's use of footage in the special as productive in that they function as a way of mobilising modern technology to represent Nigerian culture on the American stage.

Orji is a well-known actress, writer, and comedienne mostly celebrated for playing the role of Molly Carter in the TV series *Insecure* which earned her nominations for various awards. Born in Port Harcourt, Nigeria in 1983 to Nigerian parents, she moved to the US with her family in 1989 and eventually earned two degrees at George Washington University. Influenced by Wanda Skyes, Tiffany Haddish, and Lori Ann Rambough (professionally known as Sommore), all of whom were stand-ups and actresses, Orji began stand-up comedy as a contestant in the Miss Nigeria in America pageant in 2006. She describes herself in an interview with Fast Company Magazine as follows:

> So before I was Molly on *Insecure*, I was this black girl trying to do comedy [since 2006]. HBO executives would come at different moments and see me perform. So it just became the right time. They are such a good network in that they give you the liberty to be your creative self. They don't like to impede on your vision. I high-key pitched them a documentary, music video, comedy show. Have you met me? I'm Nigerian—we're extra. When I came out [in the special], I did a whole one-and-a-half [hour] music video. (Ifeanyi 1)

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Despite being involved in stand-up comedy since 2006, Orji remains better known as an actress. No academic inquiry has been made on her stage performances, especially her use of footage for joke setups in the special *Momma, I Made It!* and, as such, in this article I attempt to fill this lacuna, focusing on her deployment of video footage to illustrate alternate contexts, accentuate truth-telling, and shape perceptions of Nigerians in stand-up comedy. The article is an effort to contribute to existing research on stand-up performances and other forms of cultural expressions produced by Africans in the diaspora.

Representing the real in Orji's *Momma, I Made It!*

A documentary is a visual and auditory representation of actual experiences and incidents. Coined by John Grierson in 1926 (Grierson 49), it is seen as a video film genre that focuses on "reality, real people" and incidents that happen in the "real world" (Nichols 201). A documentary entails "the creative treatment of actuality" (Smith and Rock 58). Creative treatment here suggests the fictionalisation of reality. Given that performances are largely political, documentaries involve the manipulation of space, character, time, and camera shots and angles as well as post-production practices to create specific perspectives or messages that serve the purposes of a filmmaker. Recent productions of documentaries increasingly blur their differences with feature films, leading to the conclusion that both docu-dramas and fictional video films are products of the same creative processes (Derrick 18). Documentaries adopt creative aesthetics to imagine real-life situations. The point here is that if an author of a documentary adopts creativity in producing footage, it would certainly revive the long-standing philosophical debates on 'objective truth'. It will, therefore, be safe to view documentaries as a video film form that may not present the truth but shows events as the truth. This supports the view of Smith and Rock (62) that "the intent behind the communication" in a documentary defines its extent of actuality. Thus, a documentary involves the presentation of non-fiction as the truth. It usually employs and foregrounds "strategies and organizations other than those, such as plot and narration, that define narrative cinema" (Corrigan and White 272). In the context of stand-ups, the footage is integrated into the plot of gigs such that joke renditions by the comedian are interspersed with the documentaries. The video clips are arranged in such a way that they provide insights into a joke narrative and "engage and empower" spectators (Aufderheide and Nisbet 456). They also serve to enlighten the audience on alternative backgrounds for set-ups as well as enhance the laughter experience. In this article, I examine how Orji has deployed elements of the documentary genre in *Momma, I Made It!* to portray important aspects of her lived experiences. This analysis is divided into two parts. In the first part, I examine the depiction of her Nigerian background and in the second, her rise to success as a comedienne.

Localising Nigeria on the American stage: Footage on Orji's background

In *Momma, I Made It!*, Orji uses seven documentary clips to introduce the audience to her family. She highlights the environment of her home in Ihiala, Anambra State in Southeast Nigeria and shows the tensions associated with parental expectations of children, the challenges of dating, and her personal experiences of success, all from the different points of view of a Nigerian and an American. Orji maintains a huge stage presence as a comedienne, both as a character in her jokes and as a character in the footage. In the show, she is shown in multiple identities: as a Nigerian haggling with a student loan company, a pedestrian asking passers-by for directions, or as a well-known comedienne in Nigeria, among others. In these ways, *Momma, I Made It!* relies on documentaries to achieve truth-telling about the stand-up and the entire Orji family.

The special begins with footage showing the Orjis in Ihiala in a setting that represents the roots of the comedienne and her narrative material. In a voiceover in the footage, she states the following:

> I'm gonna bring you all here to my home to let you know all the parts that make me me. When you see my people, we always have joy. It is beautiful chaos. (indistinct sounds) There is no way I could do a special about my life without showing you my life. I think a lot of my jokes are very personal. They come from home and what home means to me. ("Momma, I Made It!")

The mise-en-scene of this footage shows happy people trapped in an environment that is marked by squalor and neglect. It resonates with the view that Nigerians are "suffering and smiling" (Ali 246). The idea is that "[i]f happiness depends on health, financial security, power, electricity, good road [sic], and social amenities, then most Nigerians will not be happy" (Zombobah 334). Nigerians' ability to live happily in the face of malevolent leadership and the consequent lack of basic infrastructure has arguably made them tough. The documentary

footage provides Orji's audience with firsthand knowledge of her family background—that is, where she comes from—and the struggles in between. Importantly also, the applause of audience members at the end of the documentary clip evokes nostalgic sensations for her mostly African American audience. They sing the theme song of the show with the comedienne who weathered many hurdles before making it at last. Clearly, the footage celebrates Orji's resilience and hard work and, by extension, extols African nationals in the audience who are working hard and thriving happily despite coming from countries that are starved of the necessities of life. Audience applause here proves the effectiveness of the footage in shaping perceptions of Nigerians as resilient amid lack—'beautiful chaos'. The excitement, ovation, and laughter that mark this scene tie in with the view that humour is vital in contesting and shaping the public domain (Obadare 244).

Building on her background, Orji pokes fun at her love for haggling and experiences when she goes shopping at local markets:

> I love going back home. I feel, like, energized. I feel like, "Ah, my people, we are here." But my favourite thing to do when I go back home though is to go to the market. I feel like market experiences are essential for my life. 'Cause I love haggling. And I like haggling like how people like gambling. Like, you know what I'm sayin'? It's an addiction, right? I don't even need the stuff I'm haggling for. (audience laughter) I just like the opportunity to be like, "How much did you get that for? Ha. Me, I got it for half that price." Like, I just. (audience laughter) I like the bragging rights of winning, right? ("Momma")

Through this joke, she portrays Nigerians as people who haggle a lot and are very savvy with money. Elsewhere, she says that she bargains in the United States where prices are fixed and tries to negotiate her student loans. This sounds absurd and hilarious to her American audience. What triggers laughter here is the audience's foreknowledge of her haggling experiences as shown in the previous video clip; a conflation of the noisy, carefree haggling experience in the Nigerian market shown in the documentary with the organized American society where prices of everything, including student loans, are fixed draws mirth from the audience. Continuing, Orji states that whenever she is involved in haggling, her 'Nigerian accents' automatically become very clear. 'Accent' here is used to indicate her dual identities as Nigerian and American—the different ways of speaking highlight the differences between nationals of both countries. This relates to Patrick Chesi Lumasia's application of the transglossic framework in Kenya's *Churchill Show* "to show the differences in speech patterns of Kenya's social classes, reggae fans, and visitors from Seattle in the US" (110). Even though Orji might not have personally done all that she said in this joke, she owns the stories and tells them as hers. Telling them as "someone else's narrative would not have had the same experience" and effect "as when [they are] about her. So what matters is not the veracity of what is told but the fervency of honest narration surrounding the telling. This is what draws out mirth in audiences" (Amaefula, "Africa on the British Stage: Laughter-making Mechanics of Andi Osho and Daliso Chaponda" 223).

Making herself the butt of the joke does not only enhance hilarity; it also highlights her cultural background. Orji's habit of haggling and marketplace experiences can be associated with some Igbo cultural practices. The Igbo people of Nigeria are mainly known for their business expertise. Through Igba-boi, an apprenticeship system described as "the largest business incubator in the world" (Ekekwe), they achieve immense success in entrepreneurship (Iwara, Ekene Amaechi, and Netshandama 227). It is therefore not surprising that, in the documentary clip that provides receipts for Orji's love for haggling and market experiences, she haggles prices of goods with a twelve-year-old boy in a shop. She enquires, "Na your shop be this?" (is this your shop?) and he answers in the affirmative, leading to Orji's conclusion: "Okay, if you're not owning a shop at 12 years old, you're not doing nothing with your life" ("Momma"). Here, Orji contextualises the Nigerian setting more, introducing her American audience to Pidgin English, which is widely spoken in Nigeria (Agbo and Plag 352). Through her continuous switch between Nigerian and American accents throughout the gig, Orji shows the audience the linguistic aspect of Nigerian cultural life.

She also showcases her linguistic identity—the Igbo language. Identifying the pictures of her grandfather and his colleagues as "Ogbuefi" (an Igbo word for High Chief), she rejects her father's wish to take one dollar as her bride price thus: "Tufiakwa!" ("Momma"). "Tufiakwa!" is an Igbo exclamation showing complete disgust and rejection, prompting her father to explain that the bride price in the Igbo tradition is "symbolic", not the actual worth of the bride ("Momma"). The expression, in this context, clarifies how the Igbo culture places values over money in the traditional marriage processes. Through these means, the artiste enlightens her audience about

interesting aspects of Nigerian culture, which she describes as her strength and source of jokes ("Momma"). This section of the gig resists media representations of Africans in the diaspora as social liabilities (Aloh 149). While disclosing the rustic milieu of her community, Orji affirms her identity and cultural values, dislocating negative labels for Nigerians mostly built on unfounded stereotypes. The market setting also illustrates the industry of many young Nigerians, who, according to the comedienne, can begin trading as early as twelve years old. Although twelve-year-olds do not own shops in Nigeria, Orji says this to exaggerate the business acumen of Nigerians. She creatively treats the footage backgrounding this joke as the truth. Overall, the clip becomes proof of her earlier joke on bargaining in markets and influences public perceptions of Nigerians.

She further creates a situation where a seller offers her an outrageously high price for a handbag. Orji says that she immediately feigns dislike for the bag: "Here [the seller] go: (audience laughter. Pause) 'Because it's you [...] Ah, because it's you, just give me [...] I don't know, (audience laughter) give me 50,000'". Orji says: "'50,000? Me? A whole me?' (audience laughter)" ("Momma"). Based on the way many people in the audience re-echo the line and react to it when she says it, one can deduce that it has become a popular line for them—"A whole me?" It gradually becomes a recurring line to which she returns in different joke narratives. For instance, she creates a situation where a Nigerian man rushing somewhere scuffs a black American man's shoes and the latter accosts the former: "Homie was like, 'Come on, man! Look what you did to my shoes! Man, watch where you going, you stupid motherfucker'". Orji suddenly takes on the persona of the Nigeran man, shocked at this vulgarity: "'(in Nigerian accent) A stupid mother what? Me? [...]' Audience: 'A whole me?' (audience laughter and cheering)" ("Momma"). The audience does not wait for Orji to say the punchline; they instead repeat it aloud: "A whole me?" By so doing, Orji turns this punchline into a chorus. The popularisation of this phrase, which was hitherto unimportant to members of the audience, together with the footage includes some of the methods of narration that the comic uses to bring people close to her African background/culture. It is not surprising that, two years later, her comedy special is entitled *Yvonne Orji: A Whole Me*.

Orji's routines are remarkable for turning everyday happenings into jokes. She demonstrates skills in creating mirth from the foibles of Nigerians that have long been normalized. For instance, she dramatizes the claim that Nigerians respond to questions with questions, creating a scene where people who ask for directions may get lost due to endless questions or vague descriptions:

> But we're also, we're not good at a lot of things, either. Like, for instance, we're not good at giving directions [...] If you ask a Nigerian for directions to the theatre tonight, it would be the most frustrating experience of your life. You would still be on your way here, okay? (audience laughter) 'Cause you'd be like, "Excuse me. Can you please tell me how to get to the Howard Theatre?" Here they go (in Nigerian accent): "Howard Theatre [...]? (audience laughter) Howard Theatre?" (in American accent): "Also, what is this move?" (touching her lower abdomen) (audience laughter). "Is this your GPS?" (audience laughter) "What's going on, sir?" (in Nigerian accent): "Howard Theatre. Mmm [...] What's happening there?" (audience continues laughing) "No, no. Not the question I was asking." He's like (in Nigerian accent): "Oh, so you're having a party?" (audience laughter) "And you did not invite me? (chuckle) Is that nice?" (audience laughter). "Sir, I am in a hurry". (In Nigerian accent): "Slow down!" (audience laughter) "The race is not given to the swift" (audience laughter). (In American voice): "What are these proverbs? I don't have time for this nonsense!" And they get mad at you (audience laughs more). (In Nigerian accent): "Okay, okay, okay, okay. Because you are in a rush (waving her hands and gazing into a distance). "Howard Theatre. Howard. Howard, Howard, Howard, Howard [...]". (In American voice): "Are you [...] What is this?" (audience laughter increases). (In Nigerian accent): "Howard. I know the place. I know the place. I'm seeing it. Okay, okay, here's what you want to do. You want to go all [...] the way down. Just go down. Down, down, down, down, down. Eh? (audience laughter continues) All the way to the end of the road. At the end of this street, you will see a stop sign. At that stop sign, stop". (audience laughter intensifies) ("Momma")

In informal contexts, some Nigerians often respond to a question by posing another question. This supposed shortcoming is the subject of this joke. Though taken for granted in Nigeria, Orji highlights how it could frustrate one who is in a hurry and needs people's directions to get to a desired destination. Thus, when she shows documentary footage to background the narrative, different people in the clip give explanations that confuse her on how to reach her desired destination. Some of the ridiculous directions given to her in response to her question on how to get to Obalande include going through the road by her right hand and then stopping whenever she sees a bus stop. Two boys in particular, looking at her suspiciously, say, "[She] can use Google Maps [...] Just use Google Maps" ("Momma"). These responses do not help her to locate Obalande but rather trigger laughter. Stand-up comedians "explore and analyze the seemingly inconsequential normative qualities of culture" (Timler 59). They

bring to the fore the often-neglected aspects of people's daily lives and subject them to humorous interrogations. In tandem with this view, Orji brings the issue of giving vague directions and responding to a question with another to the performance space and then advances her personal opinions. Highlighting the frustrations that people suffer when others refuse to direct them or give vague directions, the comic negotiates and mediates the need to consciously guide people who seek directions to their destinations. This illustrates how African comics in the diaspora play on local stereotypes. Orji is not alone in this. Gina Yashere, a Nigerian-British woman stand-up, also dwells on exaggerated typecasts. In one of her sets, she declares that Nigerian police cannot investigate a murder case (Sydney Comedy Festival). Jokes of this nature do not necessarily demonise police officers in the country but ridicule their flaws and challenge them to perform better. Jokes of this nature not only serve as social critiques but also as a way Yashere and diasporic comediennes of her ilk stay in touch with their Nigerian roots (Nwoke 108). What is fascinating about Orji's version here is the video clip which serves as a visual representation of Nigerian daily experiences on the American stage.

In another joke narrative, Orji ridicules fraudsters. Breaking the fourth wall, she points at members of the audience and jokingly enquires if they are the senders of those e-mails:

> What's happening? (audience laughter) Y'all are the ones sending those emails? Is that what's going on? (audience laughter) Y'all know the emails! Y'all probably got one in your inbox right now, don't you? They all start out the same. It's like (in Nigerian accent): "Good afternoon [...] sir or madam" (audience laughter) "My name is Umbellelo, and I have just inherited five hundred thousand billion dollars!" (audience laughter) "And I want to share it with you." It's like, no, you don't. You don't even know me (audience laughter). But don't think just because I'm Nigerian that I'm exempt from getting them though. I get them, but as an African, I feel obligated to respond (audience laughter). So, I write back (in Nigerian accent): "My brother [...] (audience laughter) I am one of you". They respond, "Hey, my sister, we are so sorry. Please, delete it". ("Momma")

Here, Orji mocks fraudsters' dearth of ingenuity in their e-mails; her use of a thick Nigerian accent to describe the sameness of their expressions and writing styles ridicules them and their victims' inability to detect deception. She stresses the "five hundred thousand billion dollars" and "And I want to share it with you" lines, indicating that this incredible sum of money and the decision to share it with a stranger should arouse a potential victim's suspicion. The idea of a stranger seeking to share such an outrageous amount of money with a random person should be a source of worry to recipients of such e-mails. While ridiculing fraudsters, she equally emphasises that there are always signals showing the duplicity of such e-mails. She concludes by recommending a hilarious response that proves to the fraudsters that they are dealing with the wrong person. While this joke rendition elicits much laughter from the audience, Orji interrogates a serious subject matter that has increasingly endangered cyberspace. On the surface, the line "My brother [...] I am one of you" could suggest that the Business E-mail Compromise is perpetrated by only her people. However, I read it here as an embodiment of critiques of Nigerians, eliciting from the audience critical laughter that, in turn, targets narrow perspectives absolving other parts of the world of fraud. The joke foregrounds the inanity of associating fraud with only black people even when Africans also fall victim to fraudulent activities perpetrated by non-Africans. The suggested response and the fictional fraudster's apology in the joke make a caricature of views (BBC) classifying Nigerians as a gang of fraudsters insulated from the harms resulting from scams.

Orji's comedy career: From frivolity to fame

Orji also explores the challenges of surmounting the hurdles of a career choice as a Nigerian. Choosing a profession outside the so-called dignified professions often brings some children into direct conflict with their parents. This becomes even worse when the child opts for stand-up comedy which has been traditionally viewed as a frivolous "pastime" (Omoko 1). It is within this context that Orji, in another joke, interrogates parenting in Nigeria in relation to children's agency. She makes fun of Nigerians who are not genuinely happy with other people's achievements. Narrowing it down to a personal experience with her mother, she recounts as follows:

> And it's hard for Nigerians to be, like, happy for other Nigerians when, like, you got something at home that's not all the way right. Like, you understand? […] [A]nd so my mom would be like, "Huh, well (clicks tongue). You're doing something, I guess, with your life, but […] in the meantime, did you hear? Nneka, ha, has gotten engaged" (audience laughter) (Orji laughing). And I'm like, "Oh yeah. Like, I saw it on Facebook". "So, you know" (audience laughter). I'm like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah". "And how does that make you feel?" (audience laughter). I'm like, "Momma, I'm happy for her". "You're ha […]" (audience laughter). "You're happy for her? Well, tell me, Yvonne. When can I be happy for you?" (applause, laughter). I'm like, "You're not? What is […] What is happening?" (audience laughter). Like, "You're just happy. You're just happy for everybody, while you're struggling. Okay" (audience laughter). ("Momma")

Orji reveals the tensions that characterize parents' expectations of their children. In Nigeria, parenting is perceived to take different forms that aim to shape the child to become a responsible adult. As in other parts of the world, Nigerian parents raise their children to be competitive and success-oriented by holding them to high expectations. Often, when their children do not meet these expectations, they shame the youngsters by comparing them to their peers. In a study conducted on parenting in Nigeria, Ghana, and Liberia, it was revealed that parents encourage as well as challenge their children to excel through a strange blend of kindness and embarrassment (Amos 67). Clearly, Orji's mother means to shame her for being unmarried: "You're doing something, I guess, with your life, but […] in the meantime, did you hear? Nneka, ha, has gotten engaged" ("Momma"). Her reference to "You're doing something" is also a subtle mockery of her daughter's choice of making jokes for a living in defiance of her parents' desire to have her become a medical doctor. In the footage that follows, her parents rue that: "She was hard-working. She was smart. Very hard working. Her GPA [Grade Point Average] was always so high. That made us think that Yvonne was heading *somewhere*. She said she was getting ready for her MCAT. And we were very happy. (Soberly) But then […] so she decided to start making jokes" ("Momma", emphasis added).

Her mother's tone here shows regret and resignation to fate. Obviously, she believes that stand-up comedy is not a dignified profession that could lead anybody to 'somewhere'; she would rather her daughter pursue a career for which she would use her master's degree in public health, a degree the comedienne said she had earned to please her parents before going into full-time stand-up comedy. Her mother's disdain for comedy coheres with Nigerians' earlier perception of comedians as "jesters" and never-do-wells before they began attaining fame and wealth (Amaefula, "No Longer a Laughing Matter: Women Comics and the Social Media Space" 139). Even after stand-ups began achieving fame and affluence, some Nigerians still do not hold much respect for them, causing Julius Agwu, an established and famous stand-up artiste in the country, to lament in a newspaper interview that "nobody takes [comedians] seriously" even when they are serious about an issue (Emedolibe 1). Further to the contemptuous description of comedy, Orji's mother embarrasses her in the earlier conversation by reminding her that her mates such as Nneka have been getting engaged and are set for marriage. Even though Orji refuses to be embarrassed and says she is happy about the news, her mother challenges her: "When can I be happy for you? […] You're just happy. You're just happy for everybody, while you're struggling. Okay" ("Momma"). This punchline ridicules some Nigerians' parenting style which combines shame and compassion to encourage and challenge children to prioritise success. Although the comedienne understands that her mother means well in this joke, it also gestures towards the kind of parenting young Nigerians are given. Footage is deployed here to emphasise the training processes and local values in the country which stress diligence as a route to success. By so doing, the footage is used to influence the portrait of Nigerians positively, in contrast to the earlier joke on fraud.

In another clip that shows Orji as a star comedienne in Nigeria, her parents celebrate her for 'making' it at last. This explains the title of the special, *Momma, I Made It!* In the interview that follows the performance, she explains her long walk to success: "'Cause I used to host this comedy show in New York. And I was broke. And I remember just saying, you know, all all of us want, who are chasing any dream, […] is to be able to make that phone call home. Be like, 'Momma, I did it! Momma, I made it!'" ("Momma").

Although her parents continue to pray for Orji to get married as quickly as possible, they acknowledge that she has defied their emphasis on education. Nigerians generally believe that there are four options for a young person: to become a doctor, a lawyer, an engineer, or a disappointment. Before Orji's success in comedy, her mother would always shame her for failing to practice medicine. In one clip, she narrates as follows:

> My mom, she uses every opportunity to remind me that I wasn't a doctor. Like, I was helping her in the kitchen cook. I cut my finger. Just a tiny cut. I'm bleeding, and I'm like, "Mom, can you help me? You got anything? You got a Band-Aid?" "You bleeding". (clicks tongue) (audience laughter) "If you were a doctor, you'd be giving yourself stitches by now!" (audience laughter) "But you want to be a jester". Chee-chee! "Laugh and make yourself feel better!" (audience laughter) That's how you feel? Like, did you just call me a jester? I don't juggle balls. What are we doin'? (audience laughter) And my mom was the kind, like, she was the worst-case scenario kind of mom. Like, she had the worst-case scenario. I said, "Mom, I wanna do comedy". She heard, "So, you want to [...] prostitute yourself all over the world!" (audience laughter) "Is that what you want?" (audience laughter). ("Momma")

This joke narrative shows some Nigerian parents' earlier distaste for comedy and comedians. They believed that comediennes would end up as prostitutes and bring shame to their families. These gender-based inhibitions are not peculiar to Nigeria; they also exist in other parts of Africa, especially in Zimbabwe where women are increasingly disrupting the norms and speaking up (Källstig 57). However, Orji 'makes it' by trouncing these stereotypes and performing her experiences. Her autobiographical special is a source of encouragement for young Nigerians to persevere in chasing their dreams. Hence, the documentary footage serves as evidence of her success, a way of influencing perceptions of Nigerians and a healthy challenge to the "several young people who believe or assume that they have the natural gift [to do comedy]" (Fosudo11) and desire to become stand-up comics.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have paid to attention Orji's innovative adoption of video footage as a narrative device. Although reviewers have criticised the video clips as distractions to the flow of the show, I argue that they are vital to enhancing the image of Nigerians and Africans in the diaspora. Bringing to academic mainstream the understudied subject of stand-up documentary in humour studies, this research foregrounds the video clips as a veritable means of bringing visuals of the comedienne's Nigerian background and struggles closer to her audience in America. They facilitate the autobiographical perspective of the special and serve as precise proofs for setups in several joke renditions in the performance. More so, the footage is seen in this paper as mirror images of Nigerians which clearly distinguish them from Americans in ways that highlight stereotypes, sharpen incongruities, and accentuate the general laughter experience. Stand-up documentaries contextualise Orji's joke narratives and enlighten her audience on the alternate background that informs her acts. Thus, I conclude that documentary footage builds fidelity, heightens truth-telling, and welcomes the audience to cultures that would otherwise remain unfamiliar to them.

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Metaphor patterns in Sesotho fiction: The case of the novel *Chaka*

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Metaphor patterns in Sesotho fiction: The case of the novel *Chaka*

In this study, we examine the nature, distribution, and stylistic effect of metaphors used in the Sesotho novel *Chaka*. Previous studies have discussed the metaphoric language in Thomas Mofolo's work, revealing that, among others, Mofolo uses metaphors to articulate his themes and for stylistic effect. We begin our analysis by identifying and listing all the linguistic and underlying conceptual metaphors used in our sample data. We then analyse the linguistic and conceptual metaphors in terms of whether they are conventional or novel and whether they are creatively employed or not. We also explore the distribution of linguistic metaphors across word classes. Lastly, we explore the stylistic effects of these metaphors. The metaphor patterns in *Chaka* reflect a strong influence of Sesotho cultural and cognitive structures, including orature. The majority of the linguistic metaphors in the novel are the conventional and non-creative ones whose metaphorical meanings are found in Sesotho dictionaries and whose function is to create a text that can resonate with early 20th century Basotho. Our analysis shows that, to a lesser extent, the metaphors were used to create a text similar to Western literary texts and to promote Christianity. Seemingly, it is this attribute of having a deep relationship with other Sesotho texts and cultural practices, including Sesotho orature, that led to the delay in the publication of the novel after it had been completed.
Keywords: *Chaka*, continuity, discontinuity, fiction, literature, metaphor.

Introduction

In this study we aim to reveal the nature, frequency, and stylistic effect of the metaphors in the novel *Chaka* by Thomas Mofolo (1876–1948). *Chaka* is a mythological tale of the rise and fall of the 19th-century king, King Chaka/Shaka (Maake 67). The novel traces Chaka's life from his conception, which is portrayed as one of the factors that are attributed to his rise and fall and death. The novel was published in 1925, more than ten years after it was written, during an era of Sesotho literature that has been referred to as the missionary period (Zulu 77). The literary works produced during this period concerned themselves with religion, customs, and moral issues. In terms of structure, style, and the use of language, they show an influence of Sesotho texts that were produced in the pre-literary period (Zulu 77–8) and western canons, particularly the English canon and Judea-Christianity. Past studies have shown that one of the areas in which these works have been influenced by the pre-literary tradition is in the use of metaphors, especially warrior metaphors that are usually used in warrior poetry (Kunene 16; Chaka 80).

Similar to the other novels produced during the missionary period, *Chaka* gives some attention to moral issues. One of these issues is the conception of the protagonist, Chaka. The narrator labels the birth of Chaka, which came about as a result of an extramarital affair between his parents, as "the result of sin", and portrays it as a major factor that led to the friction between Chaka and his father, which in turn affected Chaka's psychological development (Kunene 16). The novel portrays Chaka as an ambitious and brutal king and traces this to the tough upbringing he had following his father's rejection.

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However, it has been postulated that, in comparison to other Sesotho literary texts published during the missionary period, including Mofolo's other works, *Chaka* shows a greater influence of Sesotho culture and orature and was less influenced by Christianity (Kunene 16). Kunene observes that, while there are instances where "the author sermonizes and moralizes" in *Chaka*, "there is much less of it here than in Mofolo's other novels" (16–7). This has been cited as the major factor that led to the delay in the publication of the novel. Krog shows that even after its publication, some missionaries still criticised *Chaka* for being "nothing but an apology for pagan superstitions" (87).

Previous studies have shown that metaphors serve a significant role in Mofolo's work. The literature shows that Mofolo uses a variety of metaphors in his work for a variety of functions that include the articulation of his themes (Tekateka 14, 91; Vassilatos 42, 50). Additionally, previous studies have revealed that Mofolo uses metaphors for stylistic effect and that the analysis of metaphors in Mofolo's work can reveal the traditions that have influenced his works (Tekateka 91; Vassilatos 169; Makamane 105–6, 198). However, as far as we can ascertain, no study has focused on how metaphors are employed as a tool for stylistic effect in *Chaka*. This type of research as it can provide insights on the style used in *Chaka*, including how the style has been influenced by other literary traditions. In this study we set out to examine this issue and employ Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) (Kövecses 4–6) as the framework of our study.

As far as we are aware, no study has been carried out that uses CMT to explore the stylistic effect of metaphors in *Chaka*. This has created a gap that has to be filled, especially since, as indicated, the research on both the African continent and outside the continent reveals that the deployment of metaphors in literature is influenced by context, including the cultural context. It is the need to fill this gap and provide information about the ways in which Sesotho literary texts use metaphors that has led to the undertaking of the current study. The overall goal of the study is to reveal the use of metaphors in the Sesotho novel *Chaka* and to provide answers to the following questions: What is the frequency of linguistic metaphors in *Chaka*? How are the linguistic metaphors distributed across word classes in the novel? Which of the linguistic metaphors and the underlying conceptual metaphors are conventional and which of these metaphors are novel? What is the stylistic effect of the metaphors?

First, we provide a background of *Chaka*, with a focus on the second chapter, which is used in the analysis. This is followed by a review of the literature, with a focus on studies that explore metaphors in literary texts. The analysis part outlines the methods used and shows the analysis of metaphors in the novel. Finally, we present the findings of the study based on the analysis.

Background

When he wrote *Chaka*, Mofolo, who had been educated by missionaries and subscribed to Christianity, was working at the Morija Book Depot, where his employers were the missionaries of the Paris Evangelical Mission (PEMS). Working at the Morija Book Depot exposed Mofolo to Christian texts and the Western literary canon (Gill 32). It is generally agreed that, in addition to his background as a Mosotho who lived among Basotho and knew their cultural practices, Mofolo's worldview and writings were greatly shaped by his Christian faith and his exposure to the Western literary canon (Chaka 64; Krog 87–9).

Chaka was the third of Mofolo's works. Before the publication thereof, Mofolo published two other novels, *Moeti oa Bochabela* (A Traveller to the East) (1907) and *Pitseng* (1910) (Chaka 64). While Mofolo's novels are similar in some aspects such as their themes and style, *Chaka* is unique in that its protagonist is based on a historical figure, King Shaka kaSenzangakhona. *Chaka* has also been outstanding considering the number of accolades it has won, not only among Mofolo's works, but among works written in Southern Bantu languages. The novel was included in the list of "100 Best Books" ever written on the African continent and in the list of 12 Best African Novels (Maake 67). Considered a masterpiece, *Chaka* has been translated and adapted into multiple languages (Vassilatos 167). Maake remarks that "the novels *Chaka* and *Monono ke Muowane* [...] are arguably the highest watermarks in Sesotho literature, especially in terms of their narrative technique, mesmerising style and creative capabilities" (67).

Data used in this study were obtained from the hard copy of the novel *Chaka*. Due to considerations of space, we used Chapter 2 of the novel as the sample chapter. Chapter 2 was purposively selected on the fact that it would give us the required data, namely the linguistic metaphors and underlying conceptual metaphors

While Chapter 1 of *Chaka* narrates the events that led to his birth, including the extramarital affair his parents had that led to his conception and his parent's hasty marriage (which was intended to hide the scandal), Chapter 2

focuses on the events that took place just after his birth. The main focus of this chapter is his father's rejection. The chapter shows that, soon after Chaka's birth, his father's other wives (Chaka's father, Senzangakhona, already had several wives when he married Chaka's mother, Nandi) gave birth to other male children. This situation altered matters for Chaka, as the new mothers now perceived him as a threat to their sons' inheritance, particularly because he was the first male child born to Senzangakhona and was therefore favoured by the primogeniture system that prevailed at that time.

To prevent this from happening, these women forced Senzangakhona to reject the boy and his mother and expel them from his kingdom. To achieve this, the women resorted to blackmail, threatening to reveal the circumstances that led to Chaka's conception to the public if King Senzangakhona did not accede to their demands. Since the punishment for extramarital affairs was death, King Senzangakhona decided to do as his wives demanded. He rejected Chaka and his mother, expelling the two from his kingdom. The chapter ends with their expulsion from the village.

Metaphors in literary texts

The term "metaphor" is used to refer to the representation of one concept by another (Kövecses 4). Previous research on metaphors, especially research using CMT as the framework, has revealed that these representations have levels which lead to different types of metaphors (Kövecses 4). Previous studies have revealed that, as proposed by CMT, the primary metaphor is the conceptual one. A conceptual metaphor refers to a representation that occurs at the cognitive level when one domain of experience is viewed in terms of another (Seepheephe 97). For instance, the conceptual metaphor, "Argument is war", is employed when an argument is viewed as war (Kövecses 6).

Another type of metaphor is a linguistic one. A linguistic metaphor involves a representation of a concept by a linguistic expression that usually represents another concept (Steen *et al*. 32). Research using CMT has demonstrated that these other types of metaphors are influenced by underlying conceptual metaphors and are reflections of cross-mappings between domains (Kövecses 4). Metaphors, including conceptual metaphors, can be categorized on the basis of their conventionality. Metaphors are regarded as conventional if they are entrenched in a particular culture and can be used in everyday interactions (Seepheephe 67). In contrast, unconventional, or novel metaphors, are not used in everyday language but usually appear as part of figurative structures (Kövecses 35).

The study of metaphors in literary texts goes back to the times of Aristotle. There are numerous records of Aristotle devoting space to the discussion of metaphors in literary texts (Kövecses XII). Since the introduction of the cognitive-based approach towards metaphor in the early 1980s, a number of studies have used CMT as a framework (Kövecses 49). These studies have used CMT to explore the use of metaphors for stylistic effect and for theme promotion (Maledo and Emama 169; Ononye and Chiluwa 275). One of the studies was carried out by Dorst (49) who explored the use of metaphors in fiction produced in Western Europe and found that the style of the fiction written in this part of the world involves a high frequency of conventional linguistic metaphors that appear in everyday interactions and are based on culturally shared conceptual metaphors. Similarly, a study carried out by Lapasau found that the style of Indonesian literary texts involves a high frequency of conventional metaphors that are based on conventional conceptual metaphors that are reflective of the Indonesian culture and language (335). What is significant about the results of these studies is that they show that the use of metaphors is influenced by the context in which the literary text is produced.

Similar findings have been reported by scholars who focused on the African continent (Hermanson 4; Maledo and Emama 169; Ononye and Chiluwa 275). The results of these studies, too, support the notion that the use of metaphors in literary texts is influenced by context. Ononye and Chiluwa found that the linguistic and conceptual metaphors used in literary texts produced in West Africa promote various themes about this region and are based on West African cultures and experiences (275). This includes the use of novel metaphors (Ononye and Chiluwa 275). Hermanson's study of metaphors used in isiZulu literary texts has revealed that isiZulu literature abounds with conventional linguistic metaphors that appear in everyday interactions between isiZulu speakers and are based on conceptual metaphors that are part of isiZulu and other Southern African cultures (41).

Two traditions dominate the research on metaphors in literary texts, namely, the tradition that views metaphors as an ordinary element of language that appears in everyday discourse, and tradition that has been influenced by the classical view of metaphors as an extraordinary use of language that is mastered by great poets—

this is the more prominent of the two approaches (Dorst 79). Researchers in this tradition see a "discontinuity" between literature and other genres in their use of metaphors (Dorst 79).

The trend in the discontinuity approach is to treat metaphors in the same way as tropes such as irony and hyperbole; in this line of research, the discussion of metaphors in literary texts is only introduced when the discussion is on figurative language. It is within this framework that metaphors in Sesotho literature, including metaphors found in *Chaka*, has mainly been examined (Kunene 16; Tšiu 35; Chaka 74, 75, 80, 81). Kunene analyses the warrior and sin metaphors in *Chaka*, focusing on how the novel employs figurative expression to promote certain themes (16).

The "continuity approach, which is closely related to [CMT], sees metaphors in ordinary language as primary and considers metaphors in literature to be creative elaborations and extensions" (Dorst 82). This research tradition aligns with the proposal of cognitive frameworks such as CMT that view metaphors as something that pervades human thinking, behaviour, and language (Seepheephe 67).

It is the scholars who subscribe to the continuity approach who have explored the conventionality and the distribution of metaphors. Researchers employing the continuity approach have revealed that, despite its tendency to use novel and creative linguistic metaphors, literature does not differ from other genres regarding conceptual metaphors (Dorst 82). Previous studies have reported the existence of linguistic metaphors in literature that are based on well-documented conceptual metaphors such as "Death is sleep" (Kövecses 53). The findings reveal that the majority of linguistic metaphors are conventional. Additionally, the research using the discontinuity approach shows that even the novel linguistic metaphors are based on existing conceptual metaphors (Lakoff and Tuner 1989). The research reports four techniques that are used in the creation of original, creative metaphors that may be found in literature. These are "extension", "elaboration", "questioning", and "composition" of conceptual metaphors (Kövecses 53–5).

Similar findings are reported by research on Bantu languages. For instance, Hermanson's study, which explored the linguistic and conceptual metaphors in isiZulu texts, shows that isiZulu literature is filled with conventional linguistic metaphors that are based on conceptual metaphors that seem to be shared by isiZulu speakers. The use of the names of ferocious, big animals such as *ingonyama* (lion) and *indlovu* (elephant) as address terms for Zulu kings and the use of animal names such as 'dogs' to denote an inferior status of the referents are some examples (41–4). As observed by Hermanson (41), this group of linguistic metaphors reflects the conceptual metaphor, "People are animals".

Qualitative research supports the notion that there are numerous cases of overlap between literature and other genres regarding the use of metaphors, and that literary texts contain more conventional metaphors than the novel, creative ones (Kövecses 53–5; Seepheephe 109). An example is Dorst's study, which explored the frequency of linguistic metaphors in British English fiction, their distribution across word classes, and their conventionality (102). Dorst used the data provided by four-million-word BNC-Baby, which is the sub-corpus of the hundred-million British National Corpus (BNC) (102). The results show that 11. 4% of the words in British English fiction are metaphorically used and majority of linguistic metaphors are verbs (29.4%), followed by prepositions (26.7%) and nouns (19.2%).

These findings were compared with those reported for other genres (Seepheephe 109). For instance, studies that have used CMT to explore metaphors in Sesotho literary texts, including in *Chaka*, show that there is still a lack of research that used CMT to explore the conventionality and frequency of metaphors and how this has contributed to the style of a literary text (Seepheephe and Makha-Ntlaloe 68). Seephepe's study used both CMT and frequency patterns to observe metaphors in Sesotho in newspaper discourse (108). Similar to studies exploring newspaper communication in other languages, the study reports a high proliferation of conventional metaphors (Seepheephe108–10). Additionally, the study reports a metaphor incidence of 8.4% and has shown that majority of metaphors in Sesotho newspapers are nouns.

The lack of research that uses CMT and frequency patterns to explore the conventionality and distribution of metaphors in Sesotho literary texts necessitates studies such as the current one. Previous studies have shown that there are some language-specific elements of Sesotho that can affect the use and analysis of metaphors in literary texts (Seepheephe, Ekanjume-Ilongo, and Thuube 69). Some of these elements are the Sesotho word classes which differ, for instance, from languages such as English. Seepheephe has proposed that one of the major reasons why Sesotho newspaper discourse has lower metaphor frequency than English discourse is because Sesotho has a high number of function words in a sentence, which are brought about by the use of agreement markers (also

referred to as concords) in Sesotho sentences (108). Since the function of markers is purely grammatical, they are not candidates for metaphorical representation (Seepheephe 108).

Sesotho also uses a disjunctive writing system that separates items that are usually regarded as elements of one orthographic word in some Bantu languages (Seepheephe, Ekanjume-Ilongo, and Thuube 274). This situation may increase the number of metaphors in Sesotho. It has also been revealed that Sesotho literary texts draw on Sesotho oral literature such as oral poetry (Franz 1). This aspect has the potential to affect the nature of literary texts, including their use of metaphors.

In this study we have employed the continuity approach and used CMT as its framework. A major strength of CMT is that it categorises metaphors into types such as conceptual and linguistic metaphors, thus enabling the researcher to examine metaphors at different levels (Dorst 31). One of the limitations of CMT is that it puts emphasis on conceptual structures at the expense of linguistic metaphors and metaphors in discourse (Dorst 49). To counter this problem, we have employed tools offered by descriptive statistics, using frequencies to examine metaphor patterns in the novel.

Analysis of *Chaka*

Research that involves the examination of linguistic metaphors has emphasised the importance of the use of a transparent procedure for metaphor identification that can be replicated and tested for statistical significance (Seepheephe 102). It has been observed that, without a set of guidelines provided by a clear procedure, researchers tend to be subjective and biased in deciding on which words qualify as linguistic metaphors, with different researchers coming up with different results despite using the same data (Dorst 345).

We used the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit (MIPVU), a development and expansion of the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) (Seepheephe 98). The procedure examines metaphors at the level of a word, although multiple-word expressions that are regarded as single units by dictionaries, such as compounds and phrasal verbs, are treated as single entities (Steen *et al*. 23–38). An expression is regarded as a metaphor if the meaning it has in context contrasts with its more basic meaning and can be understood in comparison with it. To check the more basic meanings of words, a dictionary should be used. MIPVU provides tools for analysing similes, which are referred to as direct metaphors (Seepheephe 68). One can also use metaphor flags—words that flag a comparison of one concept with another—to identify the direct metaphors (i.e. similes).

The use of a clear procedure is very important for a study such as ours which examines the frequencies of metaphors. It is important, in such research, to employ a method of metaphor identification that is not only reliable but can be easily replicated (Seepheephe 101). Therefore, before analysing the data, we annotated the data for metaphors using the procedure that has been adjusted for Sesotho by Seepheephe, Ekanjume-Ilongo, and Thuube (268–87). This procedure proposes the use of the *Sesuto-English Dictionary*.

After identifying linguistic metaphors from Chapter 2 of *Chaka*, we checked their word classes and used this to group them. We then examined the frequency of metaphors in each word class and explored the conventionality and creative nature of each metaphor by checking if their metaphoric senses are reported in the dictionary. Lastly, we worked out the conceptual metaphors represented by each linguistic metaphor. To determine this, we relied on the repository of conceptual metaphors provided by previous works. In some works, these metaphors appear twice, during the discussions of metaphors and in the lists of conceptual metaphors usually provided at the end. For instance, after discussing different types of metaphors, Kövecses provides an index of conceptual metaphors and metonymies (369–75). We used works such as Kövecses's (369–75) as our reference for determining the conceptual metaphors underlying each linguistic metaphor.

Fifty-five words are metaphorically used in Chapter 2 of *Chaka*. This means that 5.2% of the words in the corpus are metaphorically used.

Metaphorically used nouns

Out of the 55 words that are metaphorically used, 11 are nouns. Two of these expressions are direct metaphors (i.e. linguistic metaphors that are highlighted by the use of simile). This means that nouns account for 20% of the metaphors found in the corpus. Table one presents examples of nouns that have been metaphorically used.

Metaphorically used expression	Contextual meaning	Conventionality	Underlying conceptual metaphor
Lelinyane la tau (young one of a lion)	A brave person	Novel; creatively used	People are animals
Taoana (cub)	A brave son of a chief	Novel; creatively used	People are animals
Ntja (dog)	A person of inferior status	Novel; creatively used	People are animals
Mofumahali (queen)	Precious person	Conventional; creatively used	Being treated well is being a monarch
Tholoana (fruit)	Consequence	Conventional; used in a non-creative way	Life is a farm

Table 1: Metaphorically used nouns

The most frequent conceptual metaphor underlying the metaphorically used nouns and noun phrases in Chapter 2 of *Chaka* is "People are animals", which is reflected six times. This metaphor involves a cross-domain mapping in which the elements of the domain 'animal' are projected onto the elements of the domain 'human being' (Hermanson 41). An example of a text that features nouns or noun phrases that are based on the conceptual metaphor "People are animals" is given below (Mofolo 11):

Ke lelinyane la tau
ke mmootloana oa sebata
ke taoana e ncha

He young-one of lion
He puppy of beast
He cub it new

'He is *the young one of a lion*
He is *the puppy of a beast*
He is *the new cub*.'

This extract features three metaphorically used noun phrases which have a similar message and play a similar role; the expressions *lelinyane la tau* (the young one of a lion), *mootloana oa sebata* (the puppy of a beast), and *taoana e ncha* (the new cub) liken the protagonist, Chaka, to the 'young one' of revered wild animal as a way of highlighting his bravery and the nobility of his birth. These expressions project the attributes of the source domain, 'animal', onto Chaka.

The style seen in the above extract, where similar expressions with similar meanings are placed alongside each other, is very common in Sesotho oral poetry (Tšiu 74, 82). Adopting this style creates a hybrid text that has some elements of Sesotho oral poetry. With the exception of two cases, all the linguistic metaphors based on the metaphor "People are animals" fall under the class of indirect metaphors (metaphors which are similar to the metaphors given in the extract above).

One example of a direct metaphor that involves the use of a noun phrase is given here, where the metaphor flag *joale ka* (similar to) is used as a clue for a comparison/simile (Mofolo 17):

A utloe a thaba, a khathaloha hamonate, joale ka noha e mahloko.

He feel happy, he rejuvenate nicely, similar to snake with venom.

'Then, like *a snake with venom*, he would usually feel very happy, and much rejuvenated.'

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Other conceptual metaphors that involve the use of nouns and noun phrases are: "Life is a farm", "Life is a journey", "Good life is royalty", and "Status is size". The metaphoric use of 'fruit' to represent a consequence of an action is the following (Mofolo 16):

E bohloko hakaakang tholoana ea sebe

The fruit of sinning is pain.

'Sinning leads to death.'

Here, the author used 'fruit' to refer to the consequences of the actions of the protagonist's parents. The parents of the protagonist had an extramarital affair, which the author, seemingly influenced by Christian beliefs, disapproves of and labels a 'sin'. The author views the hardships that the protagonist suffered, framed as 'death', as nothing but the negative 'consequence' of his parents' actions. The use of the sin metaphor gives the novel the sermonising element, as highlighted by Kunene (16–7).

The metaphors involving the use of nouns are predominantly unconventional, with their metaphoric meanings not registered in Sesotho dictionaries.

Metaphorically used verbs

Verbs account for 31 or 56.3% of the linguistic metaphors in the chapter. Table 2 presents some examples of the verbs that are metaphorically used.

Metaphorically used expression	**Contextual meaning**	**Conventionality**	**Underlying conceptual metaphor**
Hlabeha (pierced by a sharp object)	Emotionally hurt	Conventional; non-creative	Emotional pain is a sharp object/emotions are surfaces
Kopa (hold within one's hand/ embrace)	Defeat/manage	Conventional; non-creative	To have power over something is to hold it
Tiisa (to pull/hold tightly	To say something with sincerity	Conventional; non-creative	Sincerity is holding/pulling tightly
Lella (cry for something)	Yearn for something	Conventional; non-creative	The heart is the seat of emotions

Table 2: Metaphorically used verbs

The analysis of the data shows that verbs account for more than ten types of conceptual metaphors. The most frequent of these metaphors is "The mind is the body" which is realised when aspects of the source domain, the mind, are used to represent aspects of the body (the source domain). Linguistic metaphors that are based on this conceptual metaphor include those that reflect the specific-level metaphor "Thinking about something is looking at it". An example is given below, where 'to focus' on someone is metaphorically structured as 'to direct eyes' towards them (Mofolo 12):

Mafumahali a lebisa mahlo ho bana ba tsoetsoeng morao.

Wives-of-the-chief they direct eyes to children they born behind.

'The wives of the chief *turned their eyes* to those who were born behind/after.'

The metaphor given here and others that are based on the conceptual metaphor "Thinking about something is looking at it" are conventional and appear in Sesotho dictionaries such as *Sesuto-English Dictionary* (Mabille and Dieterlen 163). Additionally, all these metaphors appear to have been used in non-creative ways.

Other conceptual metaphors that involve the use of verbs are: "Life is a journey"; "Time is a distance"; "Time is a movement"; "The heart is the seat of emotions"; "Emotions are human beings"; "Living is eating"; "Anger is a sharp surface/emotions are surfaces and emotions are wounds".

The citation below is an example of a linguistic metaphor that is based on the two metaphors, "The heart is the seat of emotions" and "Thinking about something is looking at it". The heart is used to represent the emotions of love and the process of the heart 'turning away' to represent a situation in which a person is rejected (Mofolo 12):

Ea reteletsa pelo ea Senzangakhona ho Nandi.

He turned-away heart of Senzangakhona to Nandi.

'He *turned* Senzangakhona's *heart away* from Nandi.'

The heart is framed as a place where emotions such as love reside. The heart seems to have eyes, which it can direct towards individuals. As evidenced by its presence in Sesotho dictionaries (Mabille and Dieterlen 383), the metaphoric use of *reteleha* (turn away) to represent rejection is conventional.

The following extract is an example of a linguistic metaphor that is based on the metaphor "Anger is a sharp surface", which, at the generic level, is based on the metaphor "Emotions are surfaces". The sentence likens 'being angry' to being 'pierced by a sharp object'. The sentence uses the conventional metaphor 'to be pierced' to represent the emotion of anger that the other wives of the protagonist's father (the chief) felt when the protagonist was treated well (Mofolo 13):

Mafumahali a hlabeha.

Chieftainesses they pierce.

'The wives of the chief got angry.'

The linguistic metaphor used here is conventional and the sense given therein is recorded in Sesotho dictionaries (Mabille and Dieterlen 76).

Other verbs are those that are based on the following conceptual metaphors: "Wounds are animals"; "Being surrounded by people is the same as being helped to dress by them""; "Control is a container"; "A situation is a location"; "A bad reputation is a stain and kingdom is a cloth." All the verbs that are based on these conceptual metaphors, similar to the conceptual metaphors themselves, are conventional and are used in non-creative ways. The use of these metaphors creates a text that has a style that is like that of other Sesotho texts and to that of texts written in the West (Dorst 222).

Metaphorically used adjectives

While the word 'adjective' is restricted to a specific type of qualificative in some Sesotho manuals, its use in this article covers all expressions that are employed to qualify a noun/noun phrase. Adjectives account for 9 or 16.3% of the metaphorically used expressions in the chapter. Examples used are given in Table 3.

Metaphorically used expression	Contextual meaning	Conventionality	Underlying conceptual metaphor
E telele (long) (of time)	A lot (of time)	Conventional; non-creative	Time is distance
Boima (heavy)	Difficult (of affairs)	Conventional; non-creative	Difficulties are burdens
Kholo (big)	Important	Conventional; non-creative	Status is size
leholo (big)	Intense (of emotion)	Conventional.	Intensity is size
Bohale (sharp)	Prone to anger	Conventional; non-creative	Anger is a sharp surface/ emotions are surfaces

Table 3: Metaphorically used adjectives

One of the metaphors involving the use of adjectives is given below in which the expression *kholo* (big) is used to show the importance or high status of something or someone. As evidenced by its appearance in Sesotho dictionaries (Mabille and Dieterlen 142), the use of *kholo* to denote "high status" is conventional (Mofolo 12).

Nandi e ne e le ntho e kholo Nombaba.

Nandi she she thing big Nombaba.

'Nandi was a very big person/object Nombaba.'

The use of *kholo* to represent abstract concepts such as 'status' appears to be influenced by the conceptual metaphor "Status is size".

The other conceptual metaphor that involves the use of adverbs is "Anger is a sharp object". This metaphor is reflected by words such as *bohale* (sharp) which, as can be seen in in the following extract, is used to describe the quality of being prone to anger and having a desire for fighting (Mofolo 17):

E la e etsa hore a be bohale, a lakatse ntoa.

It do that he be sharp, he desire fighting.

'It turned him into a sharp person that has a strong desire for fighting.'

The use of *bohale* to denote being angry is listed in Sesotho dictionaries (Mabille and Dieterlen 15). This serves as an indication that the metaphor used in the extract above is conventional. Lastly, the use of the word *boima* (heavy) in reference to the difficulties that the protagonist is projected to encounter in his life is given here:

Litaba tsa ngoana e noa li kholo haholo, mme li boima.

Affairs of child he this they big very, and they heavy.

'The affairs surrounding the life of this child are big, and are *heavy* matters.'

The conceptual metaphor reflected in the above extract is "Difficulties are burdens". This metaphoric meaning of *boima* as 'heaviness' and 'difficulty' is given in Sesotho dictionaries (Mabille and Dieterlen 21).

Like metaphorically used verbs, the metaphorically used adjectives create a text that shows the style of both Sesotho literary texts and that of Western literature.

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Metaphorically used adverbs

Only 4, or 7% of the linguistic metaphors are adverbs. These metaphors are presented in Table 4 below.

Metaphorically used expression	Contextual meaning	Conventionality	Underlying conceptual metaphor
Morao (behind)	Earlier	Conventional; non-creative	Time is distance
Ha lelele (for long	Spanning many minutes (of time)	Conventional; non-creative	Time is distance
Bohloko boo a bo utluileng pelong (the pain he that he felt in his heart)	Emotional pain experienced	Conventional; non-creative	The heart is the seat of emotions
Ka ng'a e ngoe (on the other side)	However	Conventional; non creative	Discussion is physical space

Table 4: Metaphorically used adverbs

As can be seen from table four, two of the metaphorically used adverbs are employed to describe time. Both linguistic metaphors appear to be based on the "Time is a distance" conceptual metaphor. One of these linguistic metaphors, 'behind', does this by depicting an earlier period as a place that one has left behind. The other metaphor, 'for long', does this by depicting duration of time as distance. The two metaphors are conventional, and their meanings are given in Sesotho dictionaries (Mabille and Dieterlen 72, 289).

The use of the metaphors identified in this section reflects the influence of Sesotho culture and cognitive structures. Additionally, the high frequency of conventional metaphors exhibits the influence of the Western canon, which past research has shown predominantly uses conventional metaphors (Dorst 222).

Findings

Our findings show that 55 of the 3,005 words used in Chapter 2 of the novel are linguistic metaphors. This means that linguistic metaphors account for 5.2% of the words used in Chapter 2. This figure is not very different from the one Seepheephe has provided as the frequency of metaphors in Sesotho newspaper discourse (108). Seepheephe shows that 8.4% of words used in Sesotho newspapers discourse on HIV and AIDS are metaphoric expressions (108). The similarities between the two genres regarding the linguistic metaphor frequencies suggest that Sesotho fiction uses metaphors in a similar way to other genres. This finding adds further weight to the argument that there are more similarities than there are differences in the use of linguistic metaphors between literary works and non-literary genres (Kövecses 35, 53). Additionally, the pattern reported above serves as evidence that Mofolo was influenced by Sesotho cultural structures in writing *Chaka.*

Furthermore, our findings show that the majority of linguistic metaphors in Chapter 2 of *Chaka* are verbs. Of the 55 metaphorically used expressions, 31 (56.3%) are verbs, 11 (20%) are nouns, 9 (16.3%) are adjectives, and 4 (7%) are adverbs. These patterns almost match those found in English literature, where the highest frequencies of linguistic metaphors involve the use of verbs, nouns, and prepositions (Dorst 164–222). Seemingly, in writing the novel, and specifically in his use of metaphors, Mofolo was also influenced by the English canon that he was exposed to.

Regarding the conventionality of the metaphors, our findings show that majority of the linguistic metaphors are highly conventionalised, and are used in non-creative, everyday ways. This is particularly true with the metaphorically used verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. The majority of the metaphorically used verbs, adjective, and adverbs can be regarded as 'dead' metaphors whose metaphoricity is no longer visible to the speakers of the language (Kövecses 35). The conventionality of these metaphoric meanings is attested by their presence in Sesotho dictionaries A few of the metaphors show the influence of Christianity.

With regards to the conceptual metaphors underlying the linguistic metaphors, the study reveals that all of them are conventional. Majority of these conceptual metaphors have been documented in the literature. Quite significantly, some of the conceptual metaphors appear to be universal, appearing in languages other than Sesotho. For instance, the findings reveal that the use of several expressions that are based on the metaphors "People are

animals"; "The body is the mind"; and "Difficulties are burdens"—all of which have been observed to be productive in languages such as isiZulu and English (Hermanson 41, 71; Kövecses 257).

The metaphor patterns observed in the study support the proposal made by some scholars (see Kunene 16; Krog 87) that one of the major factors that led to *Chaka* being delayed is that it drew more from Sesotho cultural and cognitive structures than it did from Christianity and Western literature.

Conclusion

The analysis we carried out in this study has revealed that the frequency of metaphors in the novel *Chaka* is around 5%, which is similar to the frequency of metaphors in other Sesotho texts. Furthermore, the study has shown that, despite some cases of unique metaphorical structures, *Chaka* is characterised by conventional linguistic metaphors that have been used in non-creative ways. These linguistic metaphors are based on conventional conceptual metaphors found among the Basotho and other people. The use of the metaphors shows a strong influence of Sesotho cultural and cognitive structures. The metaphor patterns also show that the author of *Chaka* was influenced by the Western canon and Christianity to some extent.

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The seeing eye, the narrating I: Animals in Eben Venter's *Decima* (2023)

Karl van Wyk

The seeing eye, the narrating I: Animals in Eben Venter's Decima (2023)

Eben Venter's 2023 novel, *Decima*, centres on the titular rhinoceros living in the Great Fish River Reserve, South Africa, under constant threat of poachers after her horn. Decima shares the narrative with human characters, some out to harm her (poachers, the rhinoceros-horn kingpin, practitioners of Traditional Chinese Medicine—TCM) and those willing to protect her (scientists intent on debunking the efficacy of TCM, conservationists working at the reserve). The novel's remarkable quirk is that we are privy to Decima's thoughts, feelings and her perceptions. The relationship between how animals look and how that looking is narrated, by both the narrator and the animals themselves, is the concern of this article. The various eyes that look within and look out of the text serve to validate the experiences of the beings who observe. This is especially true of the novel's animals—Venter reminds us through their eyes, which the novel designates as indexes of life and power, that animals can look back, that what they perceive in the material world and internally with their mind's eye is a story of which they are in full possession, but one we may never know completely.
Keywords: Eben Venter, *Decima*, zoocriticism, rhinoceros horn, perception.

Our first encounter with a rhinoceros in Eben Venter's *Decima* (2023) is one whose tragic fate is suggested in the first paragraph in which it is introduced. The Gujarat, then Khambat, rhinoceros is temporally and geographically removed from the novel's titular rhinoceros, who lives in the text's present in South Africa's Great Fish River Reserve. The Gujarat rhinoceros is captured in 1515 by poachers; this rare creature is ultimately meant as a gift for Pope Leo X. It is from here that "[t]he rhinoceros will never return to that lush savannah or wade into its cool emerald pools again, the rest of the crash twitching their tails, waiting on their never-to-return friend" (21). The ship transporting the rhinoceros sails round the Cape of Good Hope and makes its way to Europe. But off the coast of Italy, the ship capsizes. We are with the chained rhinoceros in its last moments as it descends into the frigid seawater. The narrator takes time describing the animal's death, focusing on different parts of the creature's body as those parts meet the fatal water. The first of the rhinoceros's body to touch the water are the feet. The water rises up its legs. It is through this bodily encounter that Venter's narrator makes us aware of the creature's interiority, that it feels "nothing but fear" (23), that it "has no experience of this, no knowledge would've been transferred about this sort of thing" (22). The water then moves further up the rhinoceros's body, up to the eye. Before the water submerges the rhinoceros's head and horn, eventually drowning the creature, the narrator pauses at the creature's eye, "that gentle almond-shaped eye with its half-moon of wispy lashes" (22). It is by the eye of the drowning rhinoceros that the narrator, stepping briefly into his present, recalls the eye of an orphaned rhinoceros calf, with the narrator able to care and establish familiarity between the two creatures across centuries: "This fineness of feature is not unlike that which I'd admired on a rhinoceros calf in the Rhino Sanctuary near Mbombela […]. [I]t happened to be the left eye, copperish and pleading, asking for nothing more than its place in the bush" (22). The eye elicits care and empathy; it is a conduit for the rhinoceros's interiority. Yet it is not only the eye of the drowning rhinoceros we observe in this introductory portion of the text. Once the eyes of the rhinoceros are described, we then learn something of Pope Leo X through a description of his eyes, albeit his eyes as they are painted by Raphael: "The left hand holds a magnifying glass to affirm the depth of his Renaissance knowledge […]. But his gaze is directed to the right, insidious, the eyes pouchy, and below, a pout" (23). Once

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the eyes of the Pope are described, the Gujarat rhinoceros, already having drowned in the preceding paragraph, is described once more, again with a focus on its eyes as it once again is submerged in the Mediterranean: "I keep thinking of those moments when [...] the dreck reaches the low head of the rhinoceros, the horn rubbing against the paling, the animal shackled, bewildered. There is nothing but fear. Still the water pushes up, so fast, flooding first the nostrils, up, up, then drowning its eye" (23). The rhinoceros drowns twice. This drowning rhinoceros, almost certainly going to die as we first meet it, haunts the rest of the text, haunts the narrator as its eye is among the last of its body parts to succumb in the sinking ship (without almost any mention of his horn, the obsession of so many humans in the novel, yet incidental to the narrator).

The novel's interest in eyes, the eyes of its characters, and especially the eyes of Decima, is the trope that carries the narrative along. To varying degrees, eyes have preoccupied Venter's creativity in many of his novels, with the English translations of his Afrikaans texts as my points of reference—importantly, English is this article's language of interest since *Decima* was conceived first as an English novel (Titlestad, "'Decima is indeed about love': Eben Venter on his Startling Novel Centred on a Rhino" n. p.). In *My Beautiful Death* (1996, as *Ek stamel, Ek Sterwe*, with the English translation published in 2006) there is a protagonist, Konstant, who becomes progressively blind as he nears his eventual death from a terminal illness; in *Wolf, Wolf* (with the Afrikaans and English published in 2013, both with the same title) the patriarch of the Duiker family lies blind and dying on his deathbed, figuratively blind to his son's homosexual identity; and the richness of the world's colour is used as a metaphor to explore the sexuality of Simon, the protagonist, in *Green as the Sky is Blue* (2017, *Groen Soos die Hemel Daarbo*, with the English in 2018). In *Decima*, as reflected in the interests of this article, eyes are used to explore a zoological crisis on a global scale, with a focus mainly on South Africa. The eyes to which the novel calls attention are varied in biology and narrative. There are the eyes of rhinoceroses, vultures and humans; the eyes of poachers, traditional medicine men, academics, an ivory kingpin and storytellers. There are also about as many narrative strands to the novel as pairs of eyes, with each part describing a different aspect in the life of Decima, who is constituted through this composite of gazes, with her own perceptions of the world a part of it. I read Venter's characters' eyes alongside how they assert their presence in the world; that is, how they assert their 'I', with eyes and 'I's cohering and informing each other in Venter's language at various points in the text. Reading the novel's eyes and 'I's alongside each other demonstrates the complexity with which Venter expresses the text's political and zoocritical interests: it is a novel that warns against species extinction (in this case, for the most part, the rhinoceros) by the cause of human ignorance, political corruption and indifference to other beings. Through this, Venter creates a poetics of looking and narrative identity to explore what it means to be at the point of extinction in the contemporary moment, particularly as it concerns animals. I use 'animal' instead of the more common 'non-human' and its variants in the discipline of zoocriticism. The term 'non-human' suggests that humans are the yardstick by which all modes of biological being are measured—this seems to undermine the moral position of zoocriticism which advocates for equal care of all species. The word 'animal', I hope, signals the difference and, therefore, the unknowability between humans and this radically Other group. It is also the word used in the novel.

The novel's dense morality has interested early reviewers. Michael Titlestad writes about the novel's determination to render all actors in the rhinoceros horn trade, human and animal alike, as beings who warrant readers' patience and understanding. Titlestad suggests that, to know Decima's story completely, especially as it is one, in this current ecological context, that is implicated in the trade of rhinoceros horn, we must also come to know the poachers, kingpins, conservationists, academics and the communities, human and animal, that make up this story. He suggests furthermore that we must recognise the desperation of each party's stake in this. Beginning with the fraught intimacies between poacher and rhinoceros, between academic and herbalist, Titlestad's conclusions are global: "The rhinoceros will be long extinct before corrupt, negligent states begin acting in the interests of the marginalized. [...] 'Truths' in the public spheres are now 'my truth' or 'our truth,' and it would take a brave activist to walk the streets of Hong Kong, Hanoi or Bangkok proclaiming that what many of their citizens believe is nonsense" ("'Few novels preoccupy me; *Decima* inhabits me'" n. p.).

Of the novelist's extended empathy, Louise Viljoen, writing in Afrikaans, shows that "[t]hrough Venter's ability to weave acute detail, dialogue and empathy for his characters in his narrative, the poachers are given life and are more than scheming personifications of evil" (n. p., my translation). Venter's empathy, or, as Viljoen calls it, his "respect" (respek), marks the novel's success, where, in this context, we may think of respect as a way of living that assumes that all life on our planet has equal value. As such, it is "respect" that Viljoen argues comes to define Venter's narrative, respect the author feels for his characters and therefore the same respect

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the author attempts to have his readers extend to all species. Viljoen illustrates how the novel's respect across species is exemplified through loss, particularly the loss of mothers: Decima who loses her mother, and who is herself eventually lost to her child, and the loss of the mother of the narrator-author who appears as a character in the novel.[1] The respect Venter affords his plot and characterisation is as important as the respect he affords his language, Viljoen observes: "The potential loss of his mother [the narrator-author's] and the language that they spoke [Afrikaans], is as terrifying for him as the extinction of the rhinoceros as a species" (n. p., my translation).

Viljoen reads the Afrikaans translation of the novel, with *Decima*, unusually for Venter, written initially in English and then translated, by Venter, into Afrikaans instead of the other way. The author is in complete command of both versions of the same narrative; similarly, characters (animal and human alike) are in full possession of their voices and the bodies from which those voices emerge. This signals a narrative feat made more impressive when considering the large cast who inhabit Venter's text.

Different humans perceive Decima differently, with this difference often marked by how Decima is valued. In one such instance, academics Roslyn Lung and Leigh-Ann Biggs travel to Hong Kong in 2016 to visit practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). They are funded by the University of Brisbane to investigate the rationale behind the use of rhinoceros horn in TCM. The identities of all practitioners are kept secret. Among the more forthcoming of the practitioners they interview is dubbed "Brown Eyes" by Roslyn (32). In a moment of weakness, Roslyn offends Brown Eyes by asking him who his supplier is. Brown Eyes asks the researchers to leave. With this, their research time in Hong Kong comes to an end. Leigh-Ann goes back to Brisbane to continue working on their paper, but Roslyn stays behind further to interrogate one of their practitioner participants without Leigh-Ann's knowledge.

In the morning before the trip to the practitioner, Roslyn wakes up with a slight fever, the very condition that TCM practitioners claim rhinoceros horn may treat. She spends some of the morning trying to exacerbate the fever by consuming hot soup before eventually arriving at the practitioner's office. Once there, the practitioner is clearly reluctant about providing Roslyn with the treatment she came to receive. Roslyn shows the practitioner the treatment she would like, with the formula for the treatment that uses rhinoceros horn written down in her notebook. "This is not intended for you, he says and taps the page. […] Your eyes are hungry ghosts, you close your eyelids and your soul will still not be at rest. You are not my client" (38). Roslyn becomes impatient both with the practitioner's reluctance in administering the crushed horn, and with his belief that it will cure anything at all. She takes out a photograph of a slain rhinoceros and "With both hands she shoves the photograph into the face of the man, her hands shaking. […] This is where the horn comes from, she says" (39). The practitioner, annoyed, "grabs the stone pestle and waves it at her. Get out, he says, his eyes shot with jet" (39).

Roslyn's method of confronting the practitioner elicits only resistance from him as he claims her eyes are "ghosts". The ghostly transparency of her eyes suggests an openness to the world that threatens the practitioner. The blackness of the practitioner's eyes suggest that nothing may enter as he clings to an invalid and failed science, but one upon which his livelihood is built. Yet there is perhaps something else in Roslyn's gaze that unnerves the practitioner. The significance of the difference in their eye colouration may again be observed in the difference in their attitudes to the photograph onto which Roslyn holds. Roslyn's ghostly eyes suggest the spectral presence of the dead rhinoceros depicted in her photograph; she carries the death of the animal in her eyes. It is a death with which the practitioner, instructing Roslyn to leave, cannot contend. Varying ways of seeing are what define the interactions in this scene, define the characters' communication and miscommunication.

Then there is Frankie, who is poor. For this, along with Athule, Frankie's equally desperate colleague, they turn to poaching and the promise of the temporary wealth it will afford them. Here, Venter marks the tragic reciprocity between poverty and species extinction. In his study of various twentieth-century African ecopoets, writing under colonial or postcolonial conditions, Syned Dale Makani Mthatiwa shows that "[m]any social and ecological problems stem from animal exploitation. Similarly, there are many social and ecological problems that are rooted in human exploitation" (360). Along with the devastation and exploitation of land and indigenous populations during colonial expansion in Africa, the animals that inhabited these spaces were hunted or exterminated, and, as such, "it was the colonial encounter, the contact between whites and blacks, that worsened the relationship between humans and animals in Africa" (Mthatiwa 11). Venter shows how poaching becomes an extension of this colonial logic—postcolonial concerns are inseparable from zoological concerns. Frankie finds himself an actor at the centre of this entanglement.

Frankie meets with the ruthless poaching kingpin to receive his instructions. After feeling rattled by an intimidating and tense meeting with the kingpin, Frankie drives on the N2 out of Port Elizabeth and thinks of his wife and her "two round black eyes watching him, two pricks of poison, right there on the road in front of him" (70). The blackness of Frankie's wife's eyes is used to different effect here compared to the jet-blackness of the practitioner's eyes. In this instance, I read the blackness of the eye as a product of Frankie's imagination, a sign of the guilt and shame he has internalised after committing to killing a rhinoceros. His wife's eyes bring "terror to his mind" (70). Frankie's guilt continues to consume him as "his mind's eye forces on him a photograph he's seen of a slain rhinoceros; the horn cut so deep that the growth plates and sinus cavities of the animal are exposed, puddles of blood all around the head" (70).

But soon after the appearance of this disturbing image, Frankie focuses on a different aspect of the photograph: "He remembers something else. He had spotted something that wasn't mentioned in the words under the photo, something he knew to look for: a cross—cut into the eye of the rhino. Now the animal will not see the man who has killed it. He's protected" (70). Frankie disarms the animal's psychological threat by crossing out its eyes and negating its gaze. By implication, it is the gaze, communication without words, that instils in him a feeling of guilt and fear. There is language in looking, Venter seems to suggest.

As in the scene between Roslyn and the TCM practitioner, we have here another photograph, or at least the memory of one, of a rhinoceros, this one dead. In several examples, humans look upon rhinoceroses not eye-to-eye, but by way of re-presentation. Frankie and the practitioner must reckon with a photograph of a dead rhinoceros. Ziyanda Nelson, the gamekeeper in the reserve in which Decima is homed, protects the rhinoceroses on her land by, in part, looking upon them on the screen that broadcasts from the security cameras around the areas frequented by Decima. The imagistic presences of various rhinoceroses, including Decima, permeates the text. The rhinoceroses' images are also political—they are sometimes meant to provoke or shame humans into caring for the rhinoceroses with whom they share the planet. Practically, there are few instances in which human characters look upon a rhinoceros in shared space, so the way they are recalled is through photography and film. This means the reader is in a particularly privileged position in walking with Decima, sharing her space, identifying her individuality in a way that proximity allows. As Samantha Vice points out in *The Ethics of Animal Beauty* (2023), while there is merit in humans looking at animals from afar, in game reserves, say—it affords us some objectivity in understanding the animal—Vice is also wary of looking at animals in only this way, since

> the kind of looking it encourages is general and exemplary. While it allows us to admire individual animals, we are admiring them as instances of a kind. We are not searching out individuality or personality, or distinction from others in ways not captured by the language of tokens and types, and so we may overlook the separate, non-exemplary existence of each animal. (55)

In looking at animals in shared space, "our aesthetic experience is deepened and expanded" (55). Up close, we see Decima's individuality, "her relationship with the black rhinoceros crash in the park, […] her fondness for spekboom leaves and fingers of young euphorbia, […] her awareness of the danger she is in", these details among the more commendable aspects of the novel for reviewer Andries Visagie (14, my translation). Witnessing these specificities means that Decima's eventual death is not only a tragedy of the continued decline of her species, but also of the finitude of an individual life.

Similarly, in Venter's *Wolf, Wolf*, our first significant encounter with an animal, or perhaps the animalistic, occurs when Mattheüs (Matt, the protagonist and narrator) sees the face of a wolf on the security-camera screen of his family's home—Matt is distanced from the animal, but he is frightened, nevertheless, knowing that it is on his property. As a prank, his lover, Jack, wears a wolf mask upon arriving at a house to which he is explicitly unwelcome—Matt's homophobic father does not approve of his son's sexuality (153–4). The wolf-lover arrives as a predatory threat, intent on preying on Matt Duiker, whose family name is a reference to what is among the smaller of the southern African antelopes. Here, Venter's use of animals and animal imagery is entirely metaphorical. In *Decima*, the author's interest in rhinoceroses is in and of themselves, their individual and particular personalities, and not only as a reflection of human states of being. This sincere interest in the animal is reflected in how Venter gives Decima space to assert her own meaning—there are several scenes in which Decima is the main or only character.

In the context of this novel, we may imagine Venter working as a Cubist painter would, with the rhinoceros at the centre of his studio as Venter moves around his subject, painting part of his subject from this angle, stepping

to the left of his subject and then painting her from that angle. By the end, we have a Decima that is something akin to the kind of animal that adorns the cover of the novel, which is of an image of the Gujarat rhinoceros, the deep folds of its skin suggesting that it is composed of loose-fitting parts that seem as though they have been transplanted from different beasts.

The same rhinoceros, especially its famous artistic rendering, inspired Lawrence Norfolk's novel, *The Pope's Rhinoceros* (1996). Writing on Norfolk's text, Carmen-Veronica Borbély explains the composition and cultural currency of the image, which was produced in 1515 from Albrecht Dürer's woodcut:

> Purportedly derived from an eye-witness account of the outlandish gift presented to the Portuguese King, Manuel I by a Gujarati Sultan [before it is arranged to be gifted to Pope Leo X], Dürer's imaginative retrieval of what would become affixed for centuries in the European mind as the quintessential rhinocerotic image evinces a radically composite morphology indebted […] to a plethora of textual and visual precedents. (169)

Norfolk's text is playfully ahistorical, telling of the capture and unsuccessful transportation of the rhinoceros to Pope Leo X in Rome. The sought-after animal goes by these names: Gomda, Ezodu, Rosserus, and, the narrator's most-used term, Beast (Norfolk's capitalisation). Before it is captured, it is often called an Enigma (also capitalised). Several names are imposed upon the rhinoceros who is always only barely visible throughout. Even when it is transported through Italy, then a drowned and dead corpse, no one can see it:

> [I]t was overlooked in Arenula, disregarded in Trevi, missed in Morgi, skipped in Ripa, went unheeded in Pigna, and pretermitted in both Campitelli and the Campo Marzio. The Beast does not enter Rome so much as materialise out of it, leaving the shadows of its sloughed former selves on plastered walls and iron-braced doors, in broom-choked porticoes and rubbish-filled vaults. It wipes itself off the travertine and tufa of Rome's rioni leaving not after-images but only the surprise occasioned by their disappearance, a déjà-déjà-vu. (715)

What is at the forefront of the public's impression of the rhinoceros is its illusiveness; its absence becomes its overwhelming and most recognisable feature. The rhinoceros in Norfolk's text is represented through lack; Decima in Venter's text, however, is seen by many: poachers, gamekeepers, other animals, readers. Though rendered by opposite means, both authors' techniques attempt to show that the rhinoceros is unknowable by upholding its irrepresentability. That is, Norfolk almost never depicts the animal, and Venter demonstrates that presenting the rhinoceros by one image, or through one set of eyes, is to fall short of understanding the animal's intricacy. Such a depiction makes of Decima something that is unsettled, the opposite of a still life.

We are reminded by Bruno Latour, in *Facing Gaia* (2017), a series of lectures that challenge the kinds of metaphors we use in an age of ecological catastrophe, of the dangers of containing nature and its objects in art, particularly the kind of art that began in Europe in the 1400s (16). Such images, Latour explains, adhere to the kind of "*scopic regime*" that demonstrates a

> symmetrical strangeness that gives the object the very odd role of being there only so as to be seen by a subject. Someone who is looking […] at a still life […] is entirely programmed so as to become the subject in relation to this *type* of object, whereas the objects […] have no role other than to be presented to the sight of *this particular type* of gaze. (17, emphasis in original)

This limits both the object (that which is depicted in the image, and how it may be read) and the subject (the viewer, and the number of possible readings available to her). Venter's Decima is written against this kind of imagery. The Decima we are given is not a neat and coherent depiction of the animal, but a more modernist impression of her, perhaps more productive for Venter's purposes, which is to observe the animal from this and that subject's perspective, to observe Decima across time, to observe her from outside and in-.

As an addendum to the novel, in a section of "Acknowledgements", Venter lists his "use of the following material in the writing of this book". Among those listed is John Berger's canonical zoocritical essay "Why Look at Animals?" from his anthology *About Looking* (1980). At the heart of Berger's argument are the abuses animals endure in the capitalist west, in which animals are caged in zoos and commodified. This widens the gulf between humans and animals as zoos become sites in which animals are looked at and are no longer active participants in the exchange of looking.

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Before the nineteenth century, according to Berger, animals and humans both looked at each other. With this looking came an epistemology of the (human) self:

> The animal scrutinises him across a narrow abyss of non-comprehension. [...] The man too is looking across a similar, but not identical, abyss of non-comprehension. And this is so wherever he looks. He is always looking across ignorance and fear. And so, when he is being seen by the animal, he is *being seen* as his surroundings are seen by him. His recognition of this is what makes the look of the animal familiar. And yet the animal is distinct, and can never be confused with man. Thus, a power is ascribed to the animal, comparable with human power but never coinciding with it. (3, emphasis in original)

There is a poignant irony that describes the looking that occurs between human and animal before the nineteenth century. At once, we were both ignorant of each other; yet it is precisely this mutual ignorance that afforded human and animal some common ground, and therefore afforded us more or less equal power. In the contemporary moment, however, the moment in which animals are caged and commodified, "animals are always the observed. The fact that they can observe us has lost all significance. They are the objects of our ever-extending knowledge. What we know about them is an index of our power, and thus an index of what separates us from them" (Berger 14). An extension of this logic is the image of the animal, in which humans may stare at the animal in an image without affording the animal subject the opportunity to stare in return. Power and knowledge are unidirectional and this means we cannot truly know each other since we are, through human power, spatially removed from one another.

Venter's text acts as a response to Berger's premises, and adopts the kind of looking described by Berger evident in the pre-1800 west in which animals and humans were able to look upon each other. Decima is seen by the reader, but she is also an active observer in the world. Her eyes are not only looked upon but look out as well. It is also an eye supplemented by narrated thought. After Decima's granddaughter is born, we see the two playing. While they do, Decima recalls a recent ancestor, a rhinoceros killed in Kenya, caught in Theodore Roosevelt's game murder spree in 1909: "But it is the eye of the creature lying there [...], the eye forever staring down the years—and so many years it's been. It is the pain, the pleading, the long memory—that is what wakes Decima up" (126). To understand the significance of this seeing, we may turn to *The Climate of History*, in which Dipesh Chakrabarty advocates for appreciating and, to use Chakrabarty's word, *seeing* the world as a planet, a recognition of Earth as a celestial body billions of years old, an object in the universe that far exceeds the human understanding of Earth as world with its politics, economies and national borders. This is also necessarily to see Earth in the time by which it operates, to see it in deep time (against human time): "Today, the work of deep time is beginning to break into our everyday consciousness of human-historical time, calling on us to witness [...] the convulsive nature of this planet" (192). Chakrabarty advocates that we see time differently, that we see the Earth not merely as a backdrop of human action, but as an object that predates our existence. Decima's time, though certainly not deep time, functions in a similar fashion, along similar principles: she sees herself in relation to a time before she was born. When she dreams of her murdered ancestor (an animal with whom she has never shared space), we see Decima seeing, where her seeing is not only in the materiality of the world, but extends also to memory—she sees with her mind's eye. We see how Decima sees internally and across time.

Through this, Venter attempts to restore what Berger deems lost in human-animal relations, which is human recognition of the capacity of the animal to see, recognition of the animal to command her own narrative through seeing. Venter writes the looking of animals back into narrative and introduces it into modernity, the very era that has brought her to her death. But Venter's adherence to Berger is not blind. Along with the Berger essay, "Why Look at Animals?", Venter cites an essay that is critical of Berger's position, Jonathan Burt's "John Berger's 'Why Look at Animals?': A Close Reading" (2005). Though Burt is still in favour of the moral basis of Berger's argument, where the target of Berger's criticism is uncaring humans' cruelty toward animals, Burt's reservations of Berger's position has mainly to do with how Berger goes about this, particularly the assumptions Berger makes regarding the depiction of animals in images. Burt proposes that "the idea that animal imagery is itself fluid and ambiguous appears lost in the fervour of Berger's stance against imagery" (204). For Burt, Berger is far too rigid in his understanding of the moral and aesthetic possibilities of images and looking at animals. Animal visibility is much more complex by Burt's estimation, especially when studying the history of this practice, arguing that, for

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example, "animal welfare politics has been highly dependent on illustrations, photographs and film for the power of its message and its success" (213). Burt continues:

> As the discourse of animal welfare and rights is given increasing expression in the nineteenth century it is also the case that the status of the animal in public visual culture undergoes a change and the two are to some extent connected. Animals needed to be *seen* to be treated correctly which was an important and measurable criterion of welfare and an index of what it was to be a visibly civilised society. (213, emphasis in original)

The transference of animals into images is not, per se, indicative of the cause of their decimation, Burt argues. Animal conservation organisations, according to Burt, seemed to understand better than Berger did about the capacity of humans to care for Others through strategically composed animal images. Yet the care elicited from seeing is not altogether altruistic. Burt notes in the final sentence that the metrics of a good society was determined, in part, by the capacity to care for animals: if we may look upon animals with care, then we may, in turn, be looked upon favourably.

The language Berger uses to describe the peril of the animal in modernity is also, for Burt, telling of the limitations of Berger's appreciation of an alarming situation. For Berger, animals, in their collective groups of species, do not die so much as disappear in modernity: "Everywhere animals disappear. In zoos they constitute the living monument to their own disappearance" (24). And where animals have disappeared into are images; they have been transposed into text. "The treatment of animals in 19th century [sic] romantic painting was already an acknowledgement of their impending disappearance", explains Berger; he continues: "[t]he images are of animals receding into a wildness that existed only in the imagination" (15). For Burt, Berger's suspicions about animal imagery are limited by Berger's reluctance to speak directly about animal death, substituting these occurrences as mere disappearance. Burt believes that because Berger is "drawn to the spectacle of captivity as [his] main point of focus rather than, say, the spectacle of slaughter, [Berger is] drawn to what is still visible rather than directly challenging what has in fact become invisible" (214).

Burt's use of visibility and invisibility, or disappearance as Berger would have it, is more dynamic than Berger's well-intentioned uses of the terms. Not all instances of animals in imagery are harmful; and when animals become invisible, or disappear, it is not always mere disappearance—these instances may be indicative of something crueller, more sinister.

Venter's text attempts to navigate the same matters of the points at which animality and representation meet, particularly in the context of extinction. As a response, Venter uses the text to make the animal not only visible, but to elicit care from the human reader (as seen in the role of photographs in the scenes of Frankie and Roslyn described earlier). While Berger sees animal-as-text as a sign of their demise, their consumption, Venter, like Burt, reinscribes power into text to make the loss of the rhinoceros mournable. And it is not only through photographs, not only by looking at animals, that Venter intends to elicit this care; it is also elicited by narrating instances in which animals look back. Venter makes Decima's eye matter by imbuing that which is behind the eye with the relatability of consciousness. We are privy always to Decima's thoughts, her mind's eye.

In his favourable review of the novel, Michael Titlestad speaks of the care with which Venter renders the animals in his text, aware, too, of the limitations of these expressions: "We are reminded of the ethical and philosophical shortcomings of anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism [...]. It is not that we need to 'humanise' animals—to do so is reductive and disrespectful. It estranges them from us. [...] Decima's life is lived and experienced beyond the reach of discourse" ("'*Decima* inhabits me'" n. p.).

Indeed: reading animals in African literature, and drawing on works from Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (2013), and Karen Barad, "Nature's Queer Performativity" (2011), Evan Maina Mwangi argues that we would be remiss if we were to read animals in African folktales exclusively as instantiations of humans and human interests: "the animals have their own interests and intrinsic value beyond serving as metaphors of the human condition" (54). Yet Mwangi also cautions that rendering animals in and of themselves may not always be the author's intention (82). *Decima* intends to sidestep this danger of having animals primarily serve human interests, desires and selfishness; it is a novel that works against the assumption of the rhinoceros's killability, to use Barad's phrase (123). Yet given the context of poaching, it is also a text that addresses instances in which humans intend to justify killing rhinoceroses by speaking on behalf of the animal, dismissing any possibility of sentience, for the animal to 'speak' for itself. The various ways this anthropocentrism functions and fails warrants interrogation.

There is a telling interaction between Frankie and the Kingpin, who tries to ready Frankie for his job. The Kingpin, through insult, tells Frankie about how there is no reason to fear the rhinoceros he is about to kill: "Are you a weak person? […] Remember that animal standing there can't talk, so that means he can't think, you are the one thinking. So why are you scared?" (66). Frankie thinks his response to the rhetorical question without uttering it: "Is this man trying to be clever or what? Why does he talk this shit when he knows the rhinoceros is the angriest of all animals?" (66). The Kingpin, as though alleviating himself of any potential guilt at killing a sentient being, declares that the rhinoceros is without thought because it is without language. The causal relationship between the two, thought and language, of course denies the rhinoceros any experience, memory or emotion that the novel sets out to afford her, the kind of emotional complexity acknowledged by Frankie who must eventually face her.

The novel references the language of science as another mode that attempts not to expound on the consciousness of a rhinoceros, but is modelled as a specific kind of discourse that is sympathetic to the rhinoceros as an animal with as much right to survival as humans. Roslyn Lung and Leigh-Ann Biggs are of course the scientists intent on exposing the fraudulence of TCM. However, recognising an incoherence between her feelings and what their research claims, Roslyn is "not happy with the tone of the article. It's too mild". Leigh-Ann, exhausted by their exhaustive research, decides that it is "perfect", suggesting that the language of science ought to be appreciated because of its detachment from its subject—animals in this case. Leigh-Ann encourages Roslyn to move on (71). Roslyn does not back down, insisting that the language of their research contain more "punch", arguing that the work of the TCM practitioners is the cause of "slaughtering, no, murdering of rhinos" (72). The paper is eventually published (158–9), and the novelist narrator informs us that "[i]n all likelihood, the article will have no effect on the activities or beliefs of the various players in the rhino game. As my mother would say: it means boggerol [bugger all]" (159).

For Dewald Koen, "[i]n this respect, Venter delivers indirect critique of the scientific establishment who sit in proverbial ivory towers and research about poaching, where their research rarely brings attention of this evil practice to the public's attention" (73, my translation). Titlestad believes Venter is perhaps more scathing: "In some ways, academics come off worse than poachers" ("'*Decima* inhabits me'" n. p.). (In measuring the work of the academic against the work of the novelist in this context of poaching, it may be worth noting that the figure of the novelist in the text is not subject to the same disparagement.) Yet the novel's appendix argues differently to the novelist's mother with respect to the function of the academic in zoological justice. Venter cites Helen P. Laburn and Duncan Mitchell's scientific paper "Extracts of Rhinoceros Horn Are Not Antipyretic in Rabbits" as having informed the writing of his novel. Both science and political action are needed, Venter seems to say in the end, a sentiment echoed also in the writing of Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's discussion on the use of scientific language in the plight of elephants in the ivory trade (170). Science may only take us so far in ending the trade in rhinoceros horn (the actions of nations, cultures, conservationists are perhaps more consequential and urgent), but, as far as Venter is concerned, science, and its language, are necessary components for animal welfare.

Various discourses around Decima compete with the stories Decima tells of herself. Yet the novel's structure, in which different voices are used to speak to Decima's different experiences and how she is differently received, shows that all forms of storytelling, anthropomorphic or not, are more than the sum of its parts in rendering Decima whole. And the narrator does not try to explain Decima, at least not in any direct way; rather, the narrator allows Decima to speak for herself, both in thought and, for a brief moment, in speech.

Decima, for about three pages of the novel, engages in an exchange with her friend, Skalpie, a vulture (116–8). After Decima expresses some mild irritation about the arrival of her friend the vulture, they speak about oxpeckers, they speak of the heat of the day, about the waxing moon (where its increasing brightness anticipates the danger of nocturnal poachers), and they speak of death, the deaths of both their kin. The conversation is a bold turn in the novel, and we never see its like again, the narrator making us privy only to Decima's thoughts and emotions before and after this moment. When Decima and Skalpie speak, as is the case whenever a human speaks, the novel represents this direct speech unconventionally without quotation marks. The language of narrator, human and animal exist on the same narrative plane. This marks a democracy of voice and ontology in the text, where all

speak as part of the same narrative. In his interview with Michael Titlestad, Venter explains his decision to have Decima and Skalpie speak:

> One voice was still missing: the voice of Decima, the black rhino mother. Can I really suspend the disbelief of the reader and let the rhino herself talk in the book? My partner read the first draft of my novel and, when he got to Decima chatting away with Skalpie the vulture, exclaimed: "Oh, this sounds just like a Disney cartoon." Maybe, and that was OK too. ("about love" n. p.)

But perhaps only speaking through the mind of Decima is sufficient for Venter's objectives. To have Decima speak, also with another species, is perhaps to undermine the animals' special difference from humans. Also, this speech may seem misplaced since it appears fairly late into the text, long after the rules of what is and is not physically and ontologically possible and expected in this world is set up so carefully by Venter. Nevertheless, Venter's representation of speech, both in style and context, never loses sight of the novel's larger political and ecological objectives.

When Skalpie and Decima speak, they use "I" to mark their presence. For example, explaining how she will defend herself against a human attack, Decima says, "I will if I can, and I can, says Decima, I will storm them and throw them into the air against the light of the moon" (118). She positions herself as the subject of her own narrative by use of the narrative 'I'. Yet in most instances in which we are privy to animals' internal monologue, often expressed indirectly through the narrator (language without speech), the narrative is stylistically and grammatically different from the kind of narration and language we see from the human characters in the novel. Consider for example a thought from one of the rhinoceros bulls who enters the midden shared by Decima and the rest of the crash: "One of homecoming it is, of love for this midden, for cow and calf as they wander past: this is the thing, our thing" (163). Another example from Decima occurs earlier in the novel, when she smells a butterfly carrying the scent of one of the gamekeepers, Ziyanda Nelson: "Now Decima knows for sure it is her, that tawny scent from her female skin brought by butterfly, she it is" (30). In conventional English sentences, the subject of the sentence is placed first, followed by the verb, and the object comes last in the sequence. Yet, in many instances, when the animals express their thoughts, the object and subject swap position, allowing the object of the sentence to take precedence. (It is worth noting once again that the novel was published in English first and then translated in Afrikaans by Venter himself. Afrikaans and English structure sentences the same way in terms of subject and object position; that is, both conventionally place the subject first and the object last. However, in the two examples cited, the grammatical quirk in the English version is absent in the Afrikaans version.) What takes precedence is the thing being acted on (the object) rather than the actor (the subject) of the sentence, similar to how Venter reminds us that animals, when looked upon by humans, may also be active lookers—the object may be as important as the subject.

Narrative 'I's, the mode through which we are able to discern the speaker as participant and observer in the world, and the eyes through which the subject observes, are varied and used to political effect by Venter. We learn from the novel's animal characters about affording prominence and care to actors who are often neglected, often acted upon, observed but seldom appreciated as observers, whose stories and observations may be narrated about but are almost never acknowledged as agents of their own narratives. The use of eyes in the novel are such that we are aware not only of those who look upon Decima, those who objectify her (as horn, as object of care, or representative of a species that is worth saving, as friend, as mate, as daughter, as mother), but we are also aware of how Decima looks upon and narrates the world on her own terms.

Animals of different species can communicate with each other in the novel, as Decima and Skalpie do. And there is also communication from animal to human, but only insofar as that human is the reader. While Decima and other animals think in human language (in this case English or Afrikaans), or speak to each other in human language, human readers of the novel are always privy to their linguistic expressions. That we readers cannot speak back echoes the fact that humans within the text cannot speak to animals in the text, either. We may only observe what Decima observes and look upon the subjects and objects of her narration.

Though they are never perfectly as we are, the adoption of our languages suggests that there is ontological continuity between human and animal: we are similar but not the same; we may understand each other, see what the other sees, but with limitations. In some instances, Decima's sentences lack subjects completely. When jackals are about the midden, Decima becomes anxious for the safety of her kin: "Must warn them against this racket, the scallywags" (89). By removing herself as a subject of the sentence, by removing her 'I', Decima effaces

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her being from the sentence entirely, and is instead preoccupied with the crash who are in danger in the presence of the jackals. What matters more than her is the crash to which she belongs, all reflected in her grammar.[2]

The extraction of the subject of the sentence, the self-erasure, may also speak to something more sinister: Decima's eventual death. It is a technique used also in Venter's *My Beautiful Death*, when Konstant, protagonist and narrator, succumbs to death towards the end of the text. At this point, he begins to lose his body along with his 'I' in relation to his materiality in the world: "Verbs don't fit my *I* anymore, *I* am not to be found anymore" (269, emphasis in original). Decima's lack of 'I' marks her impending murder by the novel's end—she comes from a line of murdered ancestors. Her grandmother was killed by Theodore Roosevelt, and her mother was killed by poachers for her horn. In the instance in which her mother is killed, the young Decima's ear is nipped by hyenas who begin to consume her mother's murdered body (75). From this, Decima continues to carry the event as a reminder of humans' cruelty; she carries the memory in and on her body: "The time between the attack on the body that was her mother's and now, here, with her rump in shady spekboom. That time is not known to Decima in weeks, months or even in years, but as a memory carved into her flesh" (75). Decima carries with her a lineage of death by murder. Death, or decimation, is inscribed in her name and in her history. It is from this that we assume the likelihood of her death by the end of the novel, and the question that sustains our reading of the text is not if Decima will die but when and how she will die.

When Decima, as a calf, witnesses her mother's death by poachers, the hacking of her mother's horn is described in graphic detail. Decima's death is approached differently. The "sentient being" (171), as the narrator describes her, smells the danger of the poachers nearby, and "charges" (172). Immediately after, "[a] sound cracks the night air of the Great Fish River land" (172). The scene shifts to Ziyanda, the gamekeeper, who witnesses the dead Decima on her monitor. We are never told what Ziyanda sees, but her devastated reaction affirms the novel's stance that images of animals have some moral efficacy to them. The hacking of the horn, its sale and medicinal use go unrepresented, unseen—the reader only ever assumes this inevitability. All that finally matters, the novel seems to suggest, is that Decima has died. The trade of her horn is not a story worth telling or an event worth seeing.

Michael Titlestad confirms that "in writing *Decima*, [Venter] had made little effort to keep author and narrator apart" ("*Decima* inhabits me" n. p.). Yet Venter's author-narrator is never domineering; the author abstains from his position as the sole, narrating 'I' of the novel, sidestepping his importance in favour of the animals about whom he writes. Venter explains in an interview with Michael Titlestad that, in the final moments of the text, he

> took the risk of letting Skalpie, of all animals, the vulture, have the last word. … Skalpie mourns the loss of his old friend, Mrs Rhino, he moves away from light into shadow and mourns for himself, and by the time he tucks his head into the pale fold of his wing, he mourns for the entire planet. At the centre of his mourning is not the anthropos, but the animal. ("'about love'" n. p.)

This narrative generosity is motivated by the eye of the rhinoceros. When the narrator describes the novel's first rhinoceros, the Gujarat rhinoceros who drowns in the Mediterranean, it is the eye of the drowning creature that drives him "to write about this great mammal, restoring the respect that is its due" (22). 'Eyes' and 'I's of various kinds are used as devices to work toward restoring animals as beings in possession of both body and mind, in possession of eye and narrating 'I'. It is precisely because of this variety of looking and telling that informs the novel's strengths.

Notes

1. Dewald Koen, in his review of the novel, notices, too, Venter's interest in drawing parallels between human and animal female ancestry (73).
2. The same sentence in the Afrikaans reads as follows: "O, sy moet hulle tog waarsku teen sulke raasbekkigheid, die swernote" (91). With the inclusion of "sy"—"she"—Decima, as syntactic subject, is re-inserted into the sentence. Venter's zoological objectives are expressed differently in the Afrikaans when compared to the English, especially in subtleties of language.

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Creative dynamism and religious syncretism in Igbo oral funeral songs

Onyebuchi Nwosu

Creative dynamism and religious syncretism in Igbo oral funeral songs

Igbo oral funeral songs are dynamic and resilient oral forms. Applying the tenets of an infracultural model of ethnopoetics to study Igbo oral funeral songs collected during fieldwork, in this article, I examine the emerging trend in most Igbo communities of the co-existence, modification, and adaptation of Christian/western ideals into the mainstream repertoire of Igbo oral funeral songs. I therefore examine a situation where Igbo oral performers are drawing inspiration from western religious, linguistic, and cultural philosophies and applying them to the trajectory of Igbo oral funeral poetry. Observing that the reason for this is to accord the deceased a befitting funeral rite, I underscore the resilience of Igbo oral funeral poetry which acculturates western cultural elements into its oral funeral performances which are deployed to help reduce the pain of bereavement and assist the dead to successfully find their way as they journey to join their ancestors. **Keywords:** Igbo oral funeral songs, creative dynamism, religious syncretism, Christian influence on oral tradition, infracultural ethnopoetics.

Introduction

African oral traditions are facing many challenges posed by westernisation and globalisation. Added to this is the increased death of elders who constitute a large number of the performers of native creative lore. Mark Turin asserts that "oral traditions that are encoded in the speech forms become threatened when elders die or when livelihoods are disrupted. Such creative works of oral literature are increasingly endangered as globalization and rapid socio-economic changes exert even more complex pressure on smaller communities, often challenging traditional knowledge practices" (xvii). Oscar Jan is another scholar who is concerned about a "considerable decline in the transmission of culture from one generation to another" in Africa (2). He argues that African culture, especially the oral literary heritage "is seriously threatened by [the] rapid rate of urbanization, large scale migration, industrialization and environmental change [as] globalization and rapid socio-economic change exert complex pressure on our rich cultural heritage" (2).

Commenting specifically on oral literature, Elizabeth Gunner believes that "the pressure exerted on oral literature by written genres seem[s] to threaten their continued existence, yet oral genres continue to have significant power in contemporary culture and politics" (31). Oral literature, to her, is resilient and able to withstand the shock of western encroachment and urbanisation. With particular reference to the Igbo oral tradition, Udochukwu Emmanuel Ndukwe, Innocent Paschal Ihechu, and Onyinye Ralph-Nwachukwu are of the view that "there is hardly any aspect of the Igbo culture that education and Christianity has not influenced in one way or the other" (34). As regards burial rites and rituals, they observe that "in ancient periods, funeral rites in most African communities were colourful and engrossed in ritual practices, but with the arrival of Christian missionaries in 1843, the ritual practices associated with burial in Igbo land began to change" (30). To cap it all, they insist that "modernity has had its toll on the Igbo burial rituals" (37). Among these rituals is funeral rendition during burials.

My position in this article is that, in spite of the effects of western culture, composers and performers of Igbo oral funeral songs exhibit a high sense of creativity and dynamism as they produce songs that reflect the vibrant nature of Igbo oral poetry and adapt elements from western culture to produce, most times, a variant elegiac

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performance or funeral song that is contextually robust. This is as a result of the kind of religious syncretism noticeable in Igbo culture. In this light, this article is organised into four segments. While the first part explores the notion of dynamism and syncretism in Igbo society, the second part explains the theoretical framework applied in the study. The third segment is an analysis of creative dynamism and religious syncretism of Igbo oral funeral songs with relevant illustrations, and the last part is the conclusion.

Creative dynamism and religious syncretism in Igboland

According to John Mbiti, death to an African is not annihilation but transition, for Africans believe that:

> after the physical death, the individual continues to exist [...] at that point, such a person is usually remembered by relatives and friends who knew him in this life and those who have survived him. Those who survive him call him by name [...] they remember his entire personality, his character, his words and most often, the incidents of his lifetime. (qtd in Ndukwe, Ihechu, and Ralph-Nwachukwu 31)

Drawing from the above, Ndukwe, Ihechu, and Ralph-Nwachukwu remark that "death in Igbo land is therefore not seen as the end of Man; rather, it is seen as the transition from the physical realm to the spirit world" (31–2). Owing to this, the Igbo observe elaborate funeral practices in honour of the dead. According to John Odo Onu, "among the cultural practices which have become dominant in Igboland are the burial rites and the associated funeral dirges" (13). Explaining the rationale behind these elaborate burial rites, he observed that:

> the Igbo mythology appreciated the fact that man was composed of body and soul, that these spirits by ways of decent burial receive a kind of worship by ways of undeniable and very necessary rites for the progressive journey of the soul to the spirit world. There are also mythological propositions, that without decent burial rites, the spirit of the dead roam about helplessly. (73)

Chief among these funeral rites is the observation of a funeral wake in honour of the dead. During this time, songs that recreate the activities, achievements, and memories of the deceased, as well as songs that help the funeral attendees meditate on the phenomenon of death in order to grapple with the pangs of bereavement, are rendered.

Austin Echema sees this view as one of the most important reasons why the Igbo accord the dead momentous funeral rites. He observes that "the burial rites are, therefore, the means through which the spirit of the dead reaches its final resting place and be at peace" (29). Giving another reason why the Igbo give the dead a decent burial, he asserts that "it is believed that unless these [funeral rites] are properly observed, the disembodied spirit is doomed to ceaseless wandering to and fro in no man's land or spirit land" (29). He therefore refers to the interregnum between a person's death and the observance of necessary funeral ceremonies as a period of torment for the dead. Echema adds that "it is believed that the longer the dead stay under this miserable condition, the more mischievous they become, especially if the deceased's relatives have the means to perform the rites" (29). Owing to this, "the Igbo would do anything to secure a safe passage for the dying and eventually guarantee protection of the living" (30).

The Igbo, therefore, are a people known for celebration both in moments of joy and in sorrowful and hard times. This is due to their continued efforts to "make the best out of life, because they believe that although life may be full of uncertainties, such uncertainties are only temporary. So, the Igbo would celebrate whatever fortune brings in the knowledge that tomorrow will definitely be different" (Asad and Nawait 1). From the foregoing, Igbo "funerals are a time for the community to be in solidarity and to regain its identity" (Echema 30) after the loss of one of its members. According to John Onu, "a funeral ceremony in Igbo society involves sacrifices, singing and dancing" (74). However, this singing and dancing entail the rendition of oral funeral songs, which are said to be involved in some kind of creative dynamism and religious syncretism, which are the subjects of this study.

Dynamism, as a word, indicates a kind of force or ability to adapt to changing moments, needs, and expectations. It is the power to withstand the challenging vagaries of life and situations or the ability to successfully move along with changing situations. It is also the presence of the energy or force to inspire the production of new ideas that will help further achievements despite bottlenecks and challenges.

The Igbo inhabit a geographical area in south-eastern Nigeria. They are one of the most widely dispersed groups in Africa, a fact that Seun Onanuga *et al.* acknowledge when they say that "the Igbo are perhaps the ethnic group found abroad in larger numbers than any group in all Africa. There is perhaps no sphere where their influence is not felt, and no region where their fame has not been spread. There are no borders they have not crossed and

no nations, however distant, they are not found" (23). Because they migrate a lot, Igbo culture is highly dynamic as it is influenced by many cultures and social conditions such as Christianity and western culture/education. According to Aghaegbuna H. Uwazuoke and Greg O. Obiamalu, "Westernization and Christianity, no doubt, have been major contributory factors responsible for much inflicted change on the Igbo cultural heritage" (1). Through colonisation, European cultures have greatly impacted Igbo culture. This, according to Burabari Deezia, is like opening Pandora's box because "it has adversely affected the traditional cultures of the indigenous African people to the extent that many traditional beliefs, customs and rituals were either totally bastardized, ignored or destroyed" (2). Some Igbo ways of life may be negatively impacted by western culture, but Mary Emeribe and Longinus Chinagorom are of the view that western culture has positive influences. This is what they termed creative dynamism. To them, "dynamism [...] suggests, projects and focuses on the varieties, and practical manner where the Igbo people could make their culture and language come into life in every aspect of life" (14). Despite the tautological ending of the above statement, the meaning is clear: Igbo dynamism suggests the Igbo people's ability to transform their culture to incorporate all aspects of their life, including grappling with the ever-changing realities of life, as well as contending with other competing cultures. The focus of this work is on a particular aspect of Igbo life—the rendition of oral funeral songs to celebrate and mourn the dead—and the analysis will dwell on how the practice is carried out in the face of western influences.

Syncretism, on the other hand, connotes a system in which a person practises or observes the fundamental aspects of a religion or culture but also believes and practises some aspects of another culture or religion. It entails the co-existence of two or more religious practices or cultural observances at a place or in a given moment. According to Mushin Balogun, "syncretism in a broader sense will mean the process of borrowing elements by one religion and another in such a way as not to change the basic character of the receiving religion" (36). Similarly, while commenting on the current composition of people in Igbo land in a monograph entitled *An Outline of Igbo History*, notable Igbo scholar Adiele Afigbo quotes Sylvia Leith-Ross as having poignantly characterised the Igbo in the following terms:

> [...] with no strain nor conflict "the modern Igbo" can attend communion and believe in "medicine", keep, until he is found out, a "church" wife and several native marriage wives, tie up preciously in the same corner of a handkerchief his rosary and the shaped bit of "iron for juju" made for him by an Awka blacksmith, plant side by side in the garden round his new cement and pan-roofed house the hibiscus of "civilization" and the ogirisi tree of pagan family rites. (19)

The above description of the typical Igbo is reminiscent of a popular saying among the Igbo that "*amaghi ebe nzoputa si abia*" (it's not easily discernible, where salvation will come from). The excerpt points to the fact that the practice of merging western and traditional ideals in Igbo land has led to a kind of religious syncretism. Ian Stevenson corroborates this when he says that Elizabeth Isichie only associated this phenomenon with the first generation of Igbo Christians who "tried to meld two religions" (14). However, the practice has persisted for some time now.

What I regard as syncretism in this article is what Echema calls the "ambivalent behaviour of the Igbo Christians" that "could be traced to the inability of Christian rituals to solve their problems" (69). To him, the Igbo regard religion as a "practical problem solver" (69), so any religion that fails in this regard is abandoned by the Igbo, be the religion traditional or western. Echema quotes Emile Durkheim to have said that, in such a situation, "the two faiths [Christian and traditional] seem to hang rather precariously in the convert's single mind. [...] The proof is the rate at which old Christians, even intellectuals, fall back on the traditional religion in time of crisis" (69). The disposition to be committed to both traditional and Christian religions held sway in many Igbo communities up to the late 1980s when Christian Pentecostal churches began to spring up in various Igbo communities. Members of these new Christian Pentecostal churches like the Believers' Gospel Mission, Assemblies of God, and Christian Pentecostal Mission, who were fewer in number then but are now rapidly growing in the present times, adhere strictly to Biblical injunctions and hardly participate in any form of traditional communal engagement. Before the emergence of these Pentecostal sects, there was a large number of adherents of early Christian churches in the community (who worship as Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, and Lutherans) whose practice of religious syncretism, or the attitude of religious ambivalence, was very strong. With the presence of more Orthodox Christians and a small number of Pentecostal Christians in the present Umuawuchi community, death and funeral observances in the community have taken two different dimensions. While the burial of a professed Pentecostal Christian takes a pure Christian outlook and the sympathisers and mourners are mostly very few, that of an Orthodox Christian is a blend of Christian and traditional observances.

The funeral songs that I analyse in this article were harvested from fieldwork I carried out in the course of my PhD programme (I defended my dissertation in 2017). The fieldwork concentrated on a particular Igbo community, the Umuawuchi, in the central Igbo region. During my fieldwork, my efforts were concentrated on the funeral ceremonies of some Orthodox Christians where I observed a kind of harmony and interplay between Christian obsequies (practices) and traditional funeral proceedings. I observed these two burial practices—the traditional and the western—to have existed side by side. I also observed that Orthodox Christian choruses/hymns and traditional funeral songs were rendered simultaneously (one after the other) during the burial ceremony of an Orthodox Christian in the Igbo community. Such phenomenon is neither new nor peculiar to Igbo communities; it is noticeable in other African communities as observed by Confidence Gbolo Sanka in his study of the dirge of Sisaala people of Ghana:

> The reality is that the two religions [Christianity and Moslems] as well as Western education have come to meet the culture of the people. And though majority of local people have joined either of the two religions, they still find no problem in mourning the dead in the traditional way alongside Christian and Moslem practices. The new development is that it is the followers of the two religions who prepare, handle, and bury the corpse in the Christian or Moslem context. Dirge performance is, however, done the traditional way with the whole community participating in the rendering of such pieces. (195)

The same scenario is noticeable in most Igbo communities where the practice of rendering Christian hymns/choruses and oral funeral songs during wakes and funeral ceremonies is observed. Recognising this dynamism of oral poetry, Ruth Finnegan acknowledges that "oral poetry is not just something of far away and long ago. In a sense, it is all around us still" (4). This scenario is equally found in most Igbo communities where some Christian hymns and choruses, having been translated, learned, and internalised by the natives, are rendered in their native languages while some are entirely formulated and composed in these indigenous languages. This has made it possible that, during any moment of bereavement, both Christian requiem songs and traditional funeral songs are rendered intermittently, thus leading to the intermingling of Christian and traditional funeral ideals.

Conceptual and critical principles

As noted earlier, data for this article were collected from fieldwork trips I carried out to record Igbo oral performances during funeral ceremonies in Umuawuchi—an Igbo community in Ihitte-Uboma Local Government Area of Imo State in south-eastern Nigeria between May and November 2015. In addition, I conducted interviews with key stakeholders like elders, performers, opinion leaders, and titleholders.

I applied the theory of ethnopoetics in the study. According to Dennis Tedlock, it is:

> [T]he study of the verbal art in a worldwide range of language and cultures. Primary attention is given to the vocal-auditory channel of communication in which speaking, chanting, or singing voices give shape to proverbs, riddles, curses, laments, praises, prayers, prophecies, public announcements, and narratives. The aim is not only to analyse and interpret oral performances but to make them directly accessible through transcriptions and translations that display their qualities as works of art. (8)

Here, Tedlock focuses not only on the aesthetics and cultural capital of the verbal art but talks of mechanisms through which they can be carefully collected, meaningfully transcribed, and translated in order to elucidate their artistic qualities. According to Catherine S. Quick, "proponents of ethnopoetics analyze texts in their original language and context to discover how individual elements function within a cultural performance of that text" (95). It is, therefore, obvious that studying the performance elements of the oral text would help "in understanding not only the role of poetry in society that created it, but also the aesthetic value of the poem" (Quick 95). Put in the context of this study, ethnopoetics would help us ascertain the roles of some dynamic funeral songs in most Igbo communities, especially as regards the purpose they serve for the people who mourn their dead. It will also help in examining the changes the funeral songs are undergoing as a result of western influence and their beauty as poetic oral expressions. That is why Ayman Elhallaq opines that ethnopoetics is "the study of the verbal art of the pre-literate cultures that aims at discovering the cultural and aesthetic aspects of their oral poetics [...] [that] focuses on texts, their rhetorical structure and presentational form" (1). This means that, apart from considering the artistic values of oral art, the ethnopoetist considers the figurative implications of oral texts as well as their manner of performance, which is the "presentational form".

The infracultural model of ethnopoetics as propounded by Ezekiel Alembi is a mélange of the much older concepts developed by Dell Hymes and Tedlock. As Alembi puts it, the theory "emphasizes the interpretation of words and actions within a specific cultural context" (7). Explaining this, he says that it "means that the meaning of the words and the action [used during an oral performance] can only be located within the perceptions of the studied community" (7). Thus, "the assigning of meaning to oral texts is defined by the culture and traditions of the performer and the audience" (9). According to Mercy Onu, this model brings together the researcher and the community in a reflective process where information about the community's beliefs, expectations, fears, and perceptions of death are gathered through observation and participation (3). As Mercy Onu further observes, instead of concentrating on Hymes' view of ethnopoetics, which places emphasis on 'written texts', or Tedlock's strand, which pays more attention to the 'living discourse', the infracultural model gives credence to 'performance'. Thus, it requires the researcher's dedication and resourceful involvement with the people in the process of data collection. This makes it a system of research that interprets an oral text in light of the understanding and traditions of the performers and the audience.

In view of the above, I am not only going to examine the expressional beauty of Igbo oral funeral songs with emphasis on their power of adaptation; I will also highlight their cultural signification and import and analyse their mode of performance and the effects of dynamism and syncretism on Igbo culture or the context that produces them. The aim is to establish not only their literary undercurrents but to also assess their ability to adapt to social change, incorporate traditional and Christian ideals with finesse, and as tools used in verbal mourning. By this, I argue that mourners of Igbo extraction deploy both Igbo traditional oral songs and Christian hymns and choruses to mourn their dead, and there is no friction, misunderstanding, or disruptions emanating from the application of this dual cultural or religious approach to achieve the goal of facilitating the peaceful repose of their dead.

Creative dynamism and religious syncretism in Igbo oral funeral songs

Man, by nature, is an ontologically expressive being whose life is permeated by singing and dancing (Avorgbedoe 208). In most Igbo traditional societies, performances that have poetic texture are mostly regarded as songs. While explaining this, Afam Ebeogu observes that "in the folk traditions, heroic recitations, chants, incantations, invocations can, because of their mode of utterance, be regarded as belonging to the sung art" (11). According to Isidore Okpewho, a song is characterized by the highest degree of musicality (both vocal and instrumental) and other aspects of performance (e.g. audience participation) (*African Oral Literature: Background, Character and Continuity* 133). Shedding light on this, he comments that: "in the song, however, we reach the highest level of vocal manipulation [...] the singer exploits the high and low tones of speech at several levels to achieve an even higher degree of affecting melody. [...] But it is in the areas of instrumental accompaniment and audience participation that the song demonstrates its superiority to the other modes of performance" (133–4).

A song can be performed by an individual or by a group but, most times, as Okpewho notes, people prefer a group singing in which they can participate in the singing, clapping, and dancing as opposed to listening to a solo performance by an individual artist. Significantly, there is hardly any occasion in African traditional society where singing and dancing do not feature. Such instances are enumerated by Okpewho to include:

> when a child is born [...] when a child is crying or about to sleep. [...] During the ceremonies marking entry into adolescence [...] when the adult gets married ... [when carrying out] various honest occupations of men and women [...] [when relaxing after the day's hard labour, when an individual is] rewarded by the community with a chieftaincy title [or at] the death of the individual. (*African Oral Literature* 138–9)

Igbo people sing on every occasion and one such occasion is a funeral ceremony associated with death, a phenomenon recognised as one of the major rites of passage: "Birth, marriage, and death constitute the rites of passage and as important landmarks in the life of an individual, they provoke great poetry" (Uzochukwu 27). Death is one such situation in Igbo land in which songs are rendered. As Sam Uzochukwu further reveals: "in any given situation in Igbo culture, be it marriage ceremony, the birth of a child or funeral celebration, songs feature prominently and the tunes and words of the songs on each occasion must be appropriate to the occasion" (27). Igbo funeral songs include sober and reflective singing and dancing carried out by members of an Igbo community during the funeral or memorial occasions slated to mourn a departed member, relation, or friend of the community. One remarkable feature of an Igbo funeral song is that it is performed by groups or in groups. Igbo

funeral songs carry messages that help in consoling the bereaved, highlighting the achievements of the deceased, and contemplating generally about life and death.

The Igbo oral funeral songs are to be analysed not as ordinary poetic texts (written forms) but as performance-based texts whose meanings and interpretations are dependent on the context of their production or the occasion that informs their enactment, which is death or bereavement. They are studied as verbal instruments of mourning that are performed and are thus accompanied by gestural features that add to their message, value, and functions. By this, I mean that, in order to effectively communicate their thoughts and feelings in the contemporary environment that includes Christians and traditionalists, Igbo oral performers reorganise, restructure, and incorporate contemporary items into their poetry.

The first mark of creative dynamism in Igbo oral funeral songs is code-switching. Charlotte Hoffmann, cited in Ngozi Emeka-Nwobia, said that code-switching is "the alternate use of two [or more] [...] languages within the same conversation" (2). Hloniphani Ndebele says that it is "the mixing of different codes by speakers in the same conversation and this switch may take place at any level of language differentiation" (v). This, in Igbo parlance, is called 'Engligbo', or the act of speaking English and Igbo together. A typical example is the song below, which is a funeral song rendered by a group of over thirty youths in Umuawuchi community during the funeral of a sturdy and athletic man on 20 October 2015:

S: *Iwe iwe ee*
Ch: *Iwe!*
S: *Iwe Ọ na ewe unu e?*
Ch: *AEhee! Iwe na ewe anyi o*
Na anyi ahughi Papa anyi o
Somtini alala ụkpọrọ
Somtini!

S: Anger! Anger!
Ch: Anger!
S: Are you people angry?
Ch: Yes, we are angry
That we didn't see our father
Something is wasted!
Something!

Most Igbo oral funeral songs are antiphonal, meaning they follow a singer-response pattern. There is a lead singer, or "soloist", who leads while the remaining people chant the response or the "chorus". In the song above, as well as in other songs used as examples in the article, the letter "S" represents the lines taken by the lead singer while the letters "Ch" signify those taken by the other performers in unison.

To depict their anger, pain, and frustration at the loss of the deceased to whom the song is dedicated I noticed during the performance that the youths moved about in a disorderly, restive mood as they rendered the song. In order to effectively express the depth of their anger, the English word "something" is Igbolised to form the expression "*somtini alala ukporo*" (something is wasted). This code-mixing is used in the song for one particular reason. Because the song is performed by youths, it will be highly disrespectful of them to directly weave the name of the man whose death they are mourning into the song. Such an act will draw the ire of the elders. So, faced with such a dilemma, they opted for an English word which they Igbolised and employed as euphemism. Furthermore, at the denotative level, the youths also take some liberty by reengineering the words without losing the semantic import. As people who have attained some level of maturity and education, they are lamenting the loss of the man's sexual prowess in the song. As it is disrespectful for them to openly invoke the man's genitalia in such a sombre situation, they chose the Igbolised English word "*somtini*" (something) to whittle down the obscene and vulgarised import of the song. Apart from that, the word "*somtini*", as used in the song, connotes many things. It could refer to *mmadu* (human being), *amu* (penis), *amamihe* (wisdom), *ike* (strength), or *obioma* (kindness). *Somtini* sums up many the deceased's physical and behavioural characteristics, which his death has ultimately wasted. Furthermore, an interaction with some of the youths immediately after the burial ceremony revealed more ideas to

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buttress this point. The youths recited another song where "*somtini*" is used euphemistically to denote an amorous situation. The song goes thus:

Ayam sọri mgbe ahu I biara
Mgbe ahu I biara
Anọ m n'elu sọmtini.

I am sorry that time you came
That time you came
I was having fun [sex].

The expression "*Ayam sọri*" is an Igbolised version of the English expression "I am sorry". In the song above, the performers are insinuating that when the addressee arrived, they were 'on top of something', meaning', meaning they were having sexual intercourse. But, to tone down the vulgar nature of the expression, they used the code-mixed expression "*somtini*". When probed further, they said that they were ashamed or shy to use the lewd or licentious Igbo word for sex and preferred to use the Igbolised and euphemised English version.

At the same funeral, the song leader suddenly intoned a new song. The song which is in Pidgin English is completely Igbolised in tone and tune and it goes thus:

S: Wan dee wan de na ya ooon
Wan dee wan de na mai ooonuooo!

Ch: Wan dee wan de na ya ooon
Wan dee wan de na mai ooonuooo!

S: One day one day na your own
One day one day na my own o!

Ch: One day one day na your own
One day one day na your own o!

Surprisingly, even the predominantly non-literate, non-English speaking participants among the performers sang the song with gusto. Having paid equal attention to both poetic musicality and transmission of the message, their reactions evidently betrayed their understanding of the lyrics of the funeral song. Both the literate and non-literate, old and young, women and youth, as well as some men, sang and danced in tune with the song, indicating that they understood the meaning thereof—that one day, it would be their individual turn to answer the irresistible call of death, just as the deceased has done. After singing the Pidgin-English song for a while, the performers switched to an Igbo funeral song with a seamless shift. Their ease in understanding poetic language, especially the use of Pidgin-English as an inter-language, is an element of the funeral song performers' creative dynamism. With it, they make their oral funeral rendition accessible to even non-natives in their midst, and their attitude and physical display show that, though the song is in Pidgin-English, it has become part of their oral funeral lore. Though it is not composed or rendered strictly in their language, it is their funeral song.

The contextualisation of Christianity in Africa has produced "African Christianity", as Joel Mokhoathi notes: "So far, the contextualization of Christianity seems to have permitted syncretism. It has resulted in the emergence of 'African Christianity', which is the amalgamation of Christianity and African Traditional Religion" (1). Conversely, the in-roads made by Christianity in Igboland has resulted in a kind of Christianised Igbo who practices Christianity while also observing important aspects of their African culture and religion. As a result of this religious syncretism, some Christians in most Igbo communities still observe their traditional practices such that during occasions of bereavement, Christian choruses/hymns are rendered side by side with traditional funeral songs. In moments of bereavement, for instance, such Christian hymns and choruses are rendered next to traditional funeral songs. Sometimes, an entire church choir is invited to participate in the burial ceremony. This is also observable in other African countries. As Babila Mutia notes about the Bakweri people of Northern Cameroon: "Because of the influence of Christianity, particularly in the more urban towns, it is now fashionable for the deceased's relative to invite church choirs (*velongi*) to sing and dance during [...][the] wake" (388). The above scenario is also obtainable in Igboland as Uzochukwu notes: "There is now a growing awareness in some

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areas of Igboland that the traditional mode of funeral celebration is not inherently fetish nor is it necessarily at variance with the Christian mode, for both aim at giving the deceased a befitting funeral which will guarantee for him some form of life after death" (117).

This interplay of Christian ideas and Igbo traditional philosophy has resulted in the permeation of traditional lore into some Christian funeral choruses, and certain traditional songs have benefited from their composition and rendition.

The first example is the lyrical reconstruction or the re-composition of some strictly Christian songs into traditional lyrical funeral songs. The following song illustrates this:

Ikpe ikpe ikpe mara ya
Ikpe ikpe ikpe mara ya
Ikpe ikpe ikpe mara ya
Onye na enweghi umunna ikpe mara ya!

Guilty, guilty, the person is guilty
Guilty, guilty, the person is guilty
Guilty, guilty, the person is guilty
One without kinsmen is already doomed.

This is a slight restructuring of a powerful Igbo Christian chorus:

Ikpe ikpe ikpe mara ya
Ikpe ikpe ikpe mara ya
Ikpe ikpe ikpe mara ya
Onye na enweghi Jizọs ikpe mara ya!

Guilty, guilty, the person is guilty
Guilty, guilty, the person is guilty
Guilty, guilty, the person is guilty
One without Jesus is already doomed.

The song equates the love for Jesus and belonging to a Christian fold—"having Jesus"—to that of communal brotherhood—"belonging to the fold of one's kinsmen". During the rendition of the song, I observed that none of the Christians who were in the congregation experienced this song as blasphemous. There was no religious antagonism; instead, in the spirit of religious syncretism, they all sang and danced until the song leader switched over to another song.

In another funeral song, death is said to have given a terrible blow to a person and so, the people are there to sympathise with the deceased's family and relatives. The song has a double interpretation, depending on one's religion. To the traditionalists, it laments the havoc death has caused by killing a very simple-minded human being, leaving the deceased's remains for them to bury. The expression 'son of man' as used here by the traditionalists is generic as the song was recorded on 29 March 2015 during the burial of an old woman who could be referred to as a 'daughter of man'. To the Christians among them, it was an allusion to the Bible verse in which Jesus said that "the son of man has no place to lay his head" (Luke 9:58). The song goes thus:

S: *Nwa nke mmadu o*
Ch: *Ọnwụ e mee ya aru o*
S: *Nwa nke mmadu o*
Ch: *Ọnwụ e mee ya aru o!*

S: Oh son of Man
Ch: Death dealt with him
S: Son of Man
Ch: Death dealt with him!

The functionality of this song lies in the fact that it bemoans the fate of the deceased, who, as a woman, is not a 'son of man' but a 'daughter of man' whose life has been snatched away by wicked death. The singing and dancing that accompany the song had an electrifying effect on the mourners once intoned. They displayed various forms

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of choreographic display by rhythmically stamping their feet on the ground while snapping their fingers loudly and shaking their heads abjectly, followed by displays of skilful dancing steps. This can be juxtaposed with the song below, in which a western artifact, a wristwatch, is appropriated as a key element of comparison in a song composed and rendered primarily by rural women.

Gbara ọgwụgwụ oge
Di ka elekere
Ka ọ ghara I di ka
O mere gi na amaghi ama!
Gbara ọgwụgwụ oge di ka elekere!

Wear end-time like a watch
So that it won't be like
It took you by surprise
Wear end-time like a watch

The above song is an illustration of the main thesis of this article as it indicates the resilience of the Igbo oral tradition, which survives by incorporating western, Christian, and contemporary aspects or elements. The clock is an important western invention and wearing a watch makes the wearer time conscious. Thus, the above song advises that advises people to wear the end-time around the wrist like a watch encourages them to be mindful of their acts, utterances, and movements at every point in time. The funeral song talks about the Christian epoch of rapture or end-of-time. However, the significant thing about the song is that it was not rendered by a particular church choir but by a traditional women's group, *umumwanyi amara ulo* (a kinswomen group that came to mourn their departed member). As members of different Orthodox churches in the community, they were able to appropriate a western memento—a watch—to compose a traditional funeral song with a Christian message. In this sense, the use of the watch as a simile in the song portrays the dynamism and adaptability of the Igbo language to the current realities of life. It indicates that the ideas and thoughts associated with the language are in-tune with the trend of technological innovations—and that, in Igbo land, time is no longer measured with natural phenomena like the position of the sun, as in the days gone by, but rather with a watch.

Similarly, the biblical precept by Job, who professed that he came to the world empty-handed and will leave same way, is observed in another Igbo traditional funeral song that was rendered by elderly men on 11 September 2015 as they moved around the village in a symbolic search for the deceased. The lyrics of the song go thus:

Agbara m aka bia n'uwa
Agba m aka ala
Ihe n'ile m nwere n'uwa
Onweghi nke m ji ala!

I came into the world empty-handed
I will leave empty-handed
All that I have in the world
There is none I will take along!

Though the song is steeped in the Christian ideology of the futility of life as expressed by Job, it is rendered as a pure, traditional funeral song. In the song, the people associate the fate of all humans with that of Job, especially when it is necessary to draw their attention to the issue of the futility of human riches, to discourage people against get-rich-quick syndrome, or to warn those who are miserly in their attitude towards others and themselves. I observed this particular funeral song was during the burial of an old man in the community on 19 September 2015. It was rendered by the few remaining members of his age after his body had been interred, and they had been presented with refreshments. The old, grey-haired men invited the man's first daughter to carry his enlarged photograph while they moved about the village, symbolically searching for him. Age grade group is a traditional social institution in most Igbo communities, and not a religious one, though most of the members are Christians. As such, it was easy for them to fall back on the community's funeral lore in mourning one of their own. There is a dramatic tilt to the song, as I observed during the fieldwork, that touches on the performance essence of the song. This is one of the central concerns of infracultural ethnopoetics. As the performers rendered the last two

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lines of the song, they turned their arms and showed their empty palms to the audience, dramatizing the idea of leaving the world as empty-handed as you arrived at birth. With that, they emphasised with their gestures that all efforts to amass property and wealth are meaningless, as you are unable to leave this earth with any of the things acquired here.

As they were coming back from their symbolic search, the same group of men also sang the song below, which has embedded in it the biblical myth of creation that suggests that being descendants of Adam who was said to have been created with sand, humans' physical make-up is also sand:

Aja ka anyi bu
Aja ka anyi ga alaghachi
Chukwu kere uwa
Ọnwụ siri na mmehie bia

Sand we are
Sand we shall return back to
Oh God creator of the world
Death came through sin.

As the above funeral song points to the Adamic nature of humans by recollecting how sin entered the world—through the disobedience of Adam and Eve—it is rendered as a traditional funeral song, not a Christian hymn. It is not rendered by a band or Christian choir but by a group of elderly men in the Igbo community made up of Christians and African traditional worshippers. Their interest, per se, is not in the religious import of the song but in the existentialist message it carries and the fact that people should desist from committing sin. There is also a dramatic angle to the song as the performers, in a bid to dramatize the song, bent down and picked some particles of sand which they threw into the air. Incidentally, one of them digressed a little by chanting, "*I ma onye m bu? Unu makwa onye m bu?*" (Do you know me? Do you people know who I am?). Then, picking up particles of sand and throwing them into the air, he further chants, "*Lee ihe m bu! Aja ka m bu?*" (This is what I am! I am sand). The dramatization attracted the attention of many sympathisers who shook their heads abjectly, humbled by the fact that, no matter how powerful or weak anyone is, he or she will die someday. The burial of their kinsmen and the funeral song as rendered by the deceased's age mates offered them the opportunity to ruminate on the real essence of life.

Furthermore, in the spirit of intertextuality, the main ideas in an Igbo Anglican hymn are recast and restructured, thus giving it a traditional flavour, especially when the hymn is too long. Consider this song, which is an abridged form of a popular Anglican hymn:

Ihe eji echeta mmadu
Bu *ọlụ*, *ọ lụrụ* n'*ụ*wa
Ihe eji echeta mmadu
Bu ọlụ!

What we remember someone with
Is by the work he has done in the world
What we remember someone with
Is by just the work!

The above Igbo oral funeral song makes vigorous allusion to a popular Anglican hymn, "Only Remembered", composed by Horatius Bonar and set to music by Ira D. Sankey in England in 1891. It was first rendered at the funeral of Charles H. Spurgeon, the great English philosophical preacher and writer of the highly moralistic book

John Ploughman's Talk. Compare the wording of the above Igbo oral funeral song with an excerpt from the English and Igbo versions of the Anglican funeral hymn, "Only Remembered":

Nani n'ọlu-ayi, nani n'ọlụ-ayi
Nani n'olu-ayi k'ageji cheta'ayi
Otu a k'ayi gesi si n'ọlụwa nka la;
Nani n'ọlu-ayi k'ageji cheta ayi. (*Ekpere na Abu* 196)

Only remembered, only remembered
Only remembered by what we have done;
Thus would we pass from the earth and its toiling.

It is apparent that the themes of both the traditional funeral song and the Christian hymn emphasise the fact that the major thing one is remembered for after death is the works they have done. There seems to be a kind of cross-fertilisation between the Christian hymn and the Igbo funeral song. It is uncertain which one influenced the other, but they express the same thought. The songs are rendered side-by-side specifically during the funeral of someone whose life has touched the lives of many people in numerous positive ways. It indicates a level of cross-religious permeation of Christian and traditional religious ideals in most Igbo communities. While the songs are composed in the Igbo language, the texts or lyrics are all stored in people's memory as songs to mourn or celebrate the dead. So, once someone dies, whether a Christian or a traditionalist, the songs are recalled and rendered in groups, to help give a befitting burial to the deceased.

Similarly, in the course of my fieldwork, I discovered that just as some Christian tenets have been incorporated into traditional funeral songs, some traditional tenets have also been woven into Christian choruses. In the following song, Igbo's two most important rites of passage, birth and death, are woven into an Igbo Christian chorus which depicts the importance attached to each:

S: *Abali abụọ!*
Ch: *Abali abụọ ka mmadu nwere n'uwa*
Ụbọchi ọmụmụ, n'ụbọchi ọnwụ ya!

S: Two days!
Ch: Only two remarkable days does one have in this world
The day of his birth and that of his death!

Due to the importance attached to these two events (birth and death) in the life of any Igbo person, the Christian chorus hyperbolically sums up all the days a human being has in his or her lifetime on earth to be equal to only two days—"the day of his birth and that of his death". In traditional Igbo society, the birth of a child attracts much fanfare and merrymaking, as Igbo people place many premiums on procreation. The same thing applies to death, when people come from far and near to pay their last respects to the deceased. This makes these two moments the most significant in the life of any Igbo person. In the course of my fieldwork, this song was part of the Christian elegiacs intoned by a Christian youth group during the funeral wake of an old woman on 29 March 2015 in Umuawuchi community. They fused these core elements of Igbo cosmology into a Christian song that had been included in the Christian lore for the mourning of one of their own.

Compare the above song with the one rendered by the same group of people which carries a sterling Igbo worldview into a Christian funeral chorus:

S: *Anyi na ala ala e?*
Ch: *Na ofe mmiri oma*
S: *Anyi na ala ala?*
Ch: *Na ofe mmiri oma*
S: *Nwanne I gakwa ala ala e?*
Ch: *Na ofe mmiri oma*
Na ofe mmiri oma.

S: We are going [sailing]
Ch: Across the good river!
S: We are going?
Ch: To the place where the water is clean!
S: My brother will you go?
Ch: Across the good river!
S: My sister will you go?
Ch: To the place where the water is clean!

Sailing across a good, mild, or non-turbulent river (water), as sung here, means going to a place where one can have peace of mind. It also means going to a place that is calm; where one would have access to 'clean water', which signifies the good things in life that have been dearly missed in this mundane world. This second meaning is quite apt. As the Igbo would say, "*anu pu ụzọ na añu mmiri ọma*" (the first animal to get to the stream drinks the cleanest water). Metaphorically, it means that the first to arrive at any event or place enjoys the juiciest of things. However, the song projects a double meaning to the audience. For Christians, 'sailing across the beautiful river' or going to a place where there is 'good water' connotes going to heaven: a place of infinite serenity, joy, and happiness; a place that is devoid of the hardship and mayhem that characterise life in this mundane world. For the traditionalists, the song has an entirely different meaning. According to Igbo cosmology, anyone coming into the world or the 'land of the living' at birth passes through a river called *Oshimiri*. When that person completes the tasks assigned to him by his *Chi* on earth, he takes the same route back. In explaining this aspect of Igbo philosophy of creation, Chinwe Achebe avers:

> Man journeys from the land of the spirits to the land of the living where he takes the physical form [...] The journey to the earth is negotiated across a river. Each set of creatures are ferried into the world of the living in the same boat. Each individual is ferried back when he has finished shopping; for life is like going on a huge shopping spree with some people shopping successfully and others not so successfully. (16–7)

In the funeral song, quick allusion is made to going across a "good river", which is drawn from a typical Igbo worldview. The performers comprised Christians and non-Christians, and there was no rancour during the wake as efforts were made to accord the deceased a befitting farewell based on both Christian and traditional lore.

In the course of this research, I observed that there was no segregation among the people of Umuawuchi community while mourning the dead. While rendering Christian funeral choruses, the Christian choir in the community could intone a core traditional oral funeral song, and everybody (both the Christians and traditionalists) would sing and dance along to the end. In the same vein, a group of native women who assembled as co-wives to a deceased could lace their performances with Christian-based oral songs. I also noticed that the interest of most oral funeral performers in the community was to deploy whichever funeral song came to their mind in mourning a departed member of their society without minding whether it was traditional or Christian. In the same vein, there is a kind of decorum that exists in the Igbo community which has given rise to the parallel existence of traditional funeral songs and Christian hymns and choruses and their deployment by oral funeral performers to accord their dead a respectable funeral rite. With this, it is evident that the performance of Igbo oral funeral songs is undergoing a moment of transition and transformation with attendant colourations and dislocations. It is expanding its boundaries by adopting western and Christian principles while also infusing a basic Igbo philosophical worldview into the Christian consciousness.

Conclusion

In this article, I established that there are elements of creative dynamism and religious syncretism in the performance of Igbo oral funeral songs in the performances that I observed in 2015. In these performances, code-switching involving the alternate use of Igbo and English structures in the composition and rendition of most Igbo oral funeral songs was an important marker of syncretism. Furthermore, some western-cum-Christian concepts were incorporated into the repertoire of Igbo oral funeral rendition, thus leading to a kind of cross-fertilisation. I observed a harmonious co-existence of Igbo thoughts and ideals with those of the west in some areas, thereby indicating the dynamism and adaptive capabilities of Igbo verbal lore.

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Liminality in Tanzanian Young Adult fiction

John Wakota

Liminality in Tanzanian Young Adult fiction

Common in many young adult novels are the challenges of transitioning from childhood to adulthood. During this transition, young adult characters take on ambiguous statuses and responsibilities. The liminal or threshold state is the term used to describe this transition. This article examines the transition along with how the young adult characters in selected Tanzanian young adult novels navigate it: *The Birthday Party* (2013) by Mkama Mwijarubi, *The Temporary Orphan* (2014) by Hussein Tuwa, *The Adventures of Kulwa and Doto* (2017) by Hussein Kayera, and *If She Were Alive* (2019) by Deus Lubacha. In this case, liminality serves as a framework for analysing the portrayal of the precariousness of the transition and the different strategies that young adult characters use to reveal just how the transition is both limiting and enabling. Nonetheless, given the disparity in power between the young adults and their parents/guardians, and awareness of their vulnerability, the young adult characters invent different strategies to pretend to be conforming to parental expectations while simultaneously crafting alternative ways to expose the shortcomings of the adult society. Many of the tensions in the texts can be attributed to the parents and the young adult characters' differing ideas of what it means to be a child and an adult. Put otherwise, the notions of childhood and adulthood are just as elusive as the transition itself. **Keywords:** adulthood, childhood, liminality, young adult characters, Tanzania, Young Adult fiction.

Introduction

In this article, I present my analysis of selected Tanzanian Young Adult (YA) novels: *The Birthday Party* (2013) by Mkama Mwijarubi, *The Temporary Orphan* (2014) by Hussein Tuwa, *The Adventures of Kulwa and Doto* (2017) by Hussein Kayera, and *If She Were Alive* (2019) by Deus Lubacha. I contend that the young adult characters live in a liminal zone between childhood and adulthood. I analyse the different strategies they use to negotiate their position in this liminal domain. First, the concept of YA fiction is briefly outlined, followed by a brief historical contextualisation of YA literature in Tanzania. Second, a conceptualisation of liminality and its tenets, starting with Arnold van Gennep and followed by Victor Turner and Homi Bhabha, among others, is provided. Third, the application of this conceptualisation of liminality is illustrated through an analysis of four young adult novels. The article closes with a conclusion.

Characteristics of YA fiction and contextualization of the genre in Tanzania

Discussions surrounding YA literature have encompassed various topics, including the challenges of defining the specific audience for YA fiction, determining the boundaries of young adulthood, and examining crossover fiction, which refers to fiction that appeals to both adult and child audiences. Regarding the targeted readers, Rachel Falconer maintains that "the main character, who may also serve as the first-person narrator, falls between the ages of 11 and 19, and the intended reader of the text is assumed to be of a similar age" (90–1). For Thomas Bean and Karen Moni, the age group for this literature is 12 to 20 years, while for Belbin, the corresponding age bracket is 13 to 20. These age groups indicate that YA literature is aimed at teenagers. Defining YA fiction based on readership becomes complex due to crossover readers. For example, Falconer points out that in today's world, "not only are there children zooming to adulthood," but there are also "adults tumbling into childhood" (92). Therefore, it is reasonable to anticipate diversity in the readership of YA fiction. Robert Carlsen argues that in the YA text,

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the protagonist is "either a teenager or one who approaches problems from a teenage perspective" (48). Carlsen further claims that such texts "describe initiation into the adult world or the surmounting of a contemporary problem forced upon the protagonist(s) by the adult world" which suggests that although they are "generally written for a teenage reader" they "address the entire spectrum of life" (48). This definition is consistent with that offered by Rachel Wadham and Jonathan Ostenson, who emphasise the "teenage perspective on the world" as a defining feature of YA fiction (14). Thematically, the focus of this genre is problems of both transition and occupation of space between childhood and adulthood, or as Johanna Risku has called it, the "liminal state between childhood and adulthood" and a "blurry margin between adult and child" (30). Joyce Stallworth claims that YA fiction is often didactic and primarily inspires young adults to enjoy "reading and exploring who they are" (59). In exploring who they are, Katherine Butcher and Kaavonia Hinton argue that it "allows [young adults] to explore life experiences and realities, and helps them understand the many joys, trials, successes, and problems of life" (1). Thus, YA fiction is essential in helping adolescents become aware of themselves and answer questions about their lives. It functions as a mirror through which they can view themselves and others. In terms of structure, Alfred Malugu (51–3) states that YA novels have simple storylines and fast-paced action with chronological narration. A good ending, usually in favour of the young adult protagonist, is a common narrative strategy.

According to Leonard Bakize, the history of children's literature in Tanzania is short in that the writing of children's works, especially novels, became a phenomenon after independence in 1961; it then gained some momentum in the 1970s and 1980s and further accelerated in the 1990s (61–2). Nyambura Alice Mpesha as well as Flavia Traore bemoan the fact that before the 1990s, children's literature was significantly limited in quality and quantity in Tanzania—it was a sporadic activity for Tanzanian writers and publishers. There is a consensus among scholars such as Bakize, Edith Lyimo, Traore, Mugyabuso Mulokozi, and Irmi Maral-Hanak, among others, that what pushed the writing of children's fiction forward in Tanzania was the Tanzania Children's Book Project (CBP) that began in 1991 and was funded by the Canadian Organization for Development through Education (CODE). According to Traore, the project's success lies in the release of 237 Swahili titles, which were then distributed to 3642 primary schools throughout the nation. In terms of contents, these books included novels for young readers. Another development was the BURT Literary Award for writers of English YA novels, which began in 2008.[1] Between 2008 and 2018, the project produced 21 YA titles. Since the project aims to support the publication of culturally relevant books, the novels are realistic in that they deal with contemporary social issues in Tanzania while also stressing the importance of a young adult as an individual. This social realism orientation deals with the hardship in the adolescent's social life. For example, in her review of selected BURT award Tanzanian YA texts, Mpale Yvonne Silkiluwasha notes how contemporary issues are a central preoccupation of the novels, mentioning, for example, ongoing environmental issues in texts such as *Tree Land: The Land of Laughter*, and *Face Under the Sea* by Mkama Mwijarubi and William Mkufya respectively. Young adult characters' agency is another recurring theme, and Nahida Esmail's *Living in the Shade: Aiming for the Summit* (2017) details how a young girl with albinism overcomes all the challenges that combine to disadvantage her. Helping the family is another recurring theme, and Edwin Semzaba's *The Adventures of Tunda and Zamaradi* (2016) recounts how young adults can help their parents. Many of the texts are didactic, for example, Tune Salim's *Close Calls* (2012), Mwamgwirani Mwakimatu's *The Wish* (2014), and *Run Free* (2013) by Richard Mabala . Didacticism seems so recurring that even when a text is investigative, such as *The Detectives of Shangani* (2014) by Esmail or Elias Mutani's *Human Poachers* (2015), the denouements in them always teach morals. The novels are short, mostly between 80 and 120 pages.

This article focuses on *The Birthday Party* (2013) by Mwijarubi, *The Temporary Orphan* (2014) by Hussein Tuwa, *The Adventures of Kulwa and Doto* (2017) by Hussein Kayera, and *If She Were Alive* (2019) by Deus Lubacha, all of which were developed as BURT award manuscripts and deploy young adult protagonists between the ages of 12 and 15. The most notable trajectory in the texts is that of the young adult characters being exposed to challenging problems—often problems with parents and their attempts to overcome them. Typical of many YA texts, despite all the odds, somehow through their ingenuity or the help of other people, or sometimes through sheer luck, they overcome the problems and lay a foundation for the fulfilment of their dreams. All the protagonists are in school and going through puberty, or about to go through it.

The four novels variously focus on the problem of biological and social orphanhood, particularly the causes of it. Through this problem of orphanhood, other issues are incorporated, such as forced marriage, rape, child labour, child marriage, abusive stepparents, inattentive biological parents, and oppressive cultural institutions. The novel's main argument is that the young adult characters who are biologically or socially orphaned can develop

strategies to live with it or even change it. For example, *The Birthday Party* and *The Adventures of Kulwa and Doto* focus on the problem of social orphanhood in that the young adult characters have both parents living but somehow one of their parents has abandoned them. They are deprived of complete parental care in a way like that of a child whose parent is dead. The novels use the protagonists as moral beacons, portraying them as morally redemptive figures dedicated to mending their broken families. By using these texts and reading them using the concept of liminality, I hope to shed light on the relationships between these young adults and their guardians during this transition to adulthood.

The concept of liminality

The concept of liminality is credited to Gennep in *The Rites of Passage* which describes the life transitions of the Aborigines of Australia, focusing on birth, puberty, marriage, and death. For each of these, he developed three stages: separation, transition, and incorporation. During separation, the individual is removed from his previous social position. This is followed by a temporary transition period, during which the individual is on the borderline between the two positions. Gennep called this the *liminal* phase. The third phase is the full entry into the position. By being liminal, the subjects, argued Gennep, elude all forms of classification because they are in-between positions and inhabit an ambiguous state. Victor Turner further developed Gennep's notion of liminality and focused on the transition category. In *The Ritual Process: Structures and Anti-structure*, he mainly demonstrates how rituals bring about transitions for persons and groups. He theorises that in the liminal phase, the characteristics of the ritual subject are "ambiguous" because the subject "passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state" (359). The liminal personae, he claimed, are "threshold people" and are "neither here nor there, they are betwixt and between positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" and as such they display "ambiguous and indeterminate attributes" (360). He argues that transition, as a liminal space, is characterised by in-betweenness and indeterminacy. In *The Forest of Symbols*, he argues that the strength of liminal space is that "[i]t is a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise" (97) and it is a "stage of reflection" (105). Like Gennep, Turner links liminality with temporariness rather than permanence. In liminal spaces, people make decisions and choices to move on. It is for this reason that Juha Pentikäinen advises that symbolically, transformation is possible in the liminal space because actors "are beyond the boundaries of the normal social structure, its values, norms and obligations" and as such, they may behave "according to the habits and norms which do not coincide with those of the 'normal' social structure and its conditions" (156). Emphasizing the transgressional possibility of liminality, Turner notes: "In liminality, profane-social relations may be discontinued, former rights and obligations are suspended, the social order may seem to have been turned upside down" ("Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology" 59). Therefore, liminality may also include subversive possibilities.

What Turner calls the interstices of structure or "threshold", Homi Bhabha, in his book *The Location of Culture*, calls the "third space"—the "in-between" space characterised by hybridity and "difference within" (19). Bhabha argues that the third space is interstitial because it is characterised by the "overlap and displacement of domains of differences" (2). Resulting from this context, Bhabha argues, a liminal subject is a hybrid subject, a "reformed, recognizable other [...] a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (18). Gennep, Turner, and Bhabha emphasise ambiguity, indeterminacy, hybridity, and transformation as critical attributes of the liminal space. These tenets have given the concept of liminality a privileged position in postcolonial studies. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin argue that the usefulness of the concept lies in its ability to "describe an 'in-between' space in which changes may occur. It is an area where "strategies for personal or communal self-hood may be elaborated; a region in which there is a continual process of movement and interchange between different states" (130). As theorised by these scholars, liminality is a fruitful concept in understanding the portrayal of young adult characters as liminal subjects. Drawing insights from this theorisation, I selected YA fiction as a gateway to understanding young adult characters' lives as a case of liminality. I show how, as "liminal personas" or "threshold people", they are, as Turner has claimed, "necessarily ambiguous" and "elude or slip through the network of classification" (*Ritual Process* 359). The article also shows how this space allows them to exercise their agency and craft their subjectivities as they seek to belong, participate, and create meanings in this symbolic space.

Liminal experiences of young adult characters in the selected novels

In *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas notes that danger "lies in the transitional states simply because the transition is neither one state nor the next" and the transitional figure is "himself in danger and emanates danger to others" (97). This is because the transition "separates him from his old status, segregates him for a time" (97). Hussein Tuwa's protagonist in *The Temporary Orphan* fits well in this theorisation and interrogates the dangers of transition from childhood to adulthood in the context of a dysfunctional family. At the age of 15, Kidani, a young girl, is forced to live with a single father because of her parents' separation. When Kidani has her first menstrual period, her father plans to marry her off and even receives the money for the bride price in advance. The girl's puberty is, therefore, a dangerous feat and is placing her at risk of being married off against her will. This arranged marriage is an impediment to Kidani and a threat to her dream of becoming a Miss Tanzania.

Conflict between parents and young adults are among the distinctive characteristics of young adult literature, and in most cases, they expose adolescents to dangers. Portrayed as perceptive and independent, Kidani escapes the night before the wedding and runs away to the next village where her mother lives with her new husband. As if to suggest that running from a problem does not help to solve it, Kidani finds herself in difficult circumstances again. Her stay with her mother is short-lived because her stepfather begins "looking at her with lust" and attempting to seduce her to sleep with him. When she reports him to her mother, the mother does not believe her and instead accuses her of trying to sleep with her stepfather (44). This way, Kidani is pitted against two hostile adults in their own home. Typical of YA fiction, the action is fast-paced, and Kidani runs away to the next township and seeks refuge at an orphanage where she believes she is not meant to stay permanently, thus the title of the novel, *The Temporary Orphan*. Although Kidani's parents are still alive, she is forced to live like an orphan, and this way, she becomes a social orphan.

At the novel's centre is the problem of young adults becoming 'adults' overnight by shouldering adult responsibilities. When Kidani's parents divorce and her mother leaves for another man, she becomes a provider for the family—ensuring that her drunkard father and aging paternal grandmother are taken care of. At this young age, Kidani is experiencing a process which Jahnine Davis and Nicholas Marsh have called adultification—treating and perceiving children as "as being more adult-like" (255). By shouldering adult responsibilities at her age, she becomes an adult—that is, she is both an adult and an adolescent at the same time. At the age of 15, this is a sudden transition. By showing that Kidani is quickly becoming an adult against her age and that his father is quickly regressing and becoming a child-adult—immature and irresponsible—the novel offers a critique of the failure of the adults within this society.

Kidani's status is blurred in that she is forced to be both a child and an adult simultaneously. As if to illustrate this confusion, when she has had her first menstruation, her father is happy that she has finally "grown up. She is now a woman" (31). While there seems to be a consensus in the village that she is an 'adult' now, Kidani, on the contrary, thinks that she is "still a child" because she goes to school (31). Even the father hovers between taking Kidani to be a 'child' and an 'adult' at the same time. For him, Kidani is an 'adult' because she has experienced her first menstrual blood and is, therefore, marriageable. Yet, Kidani is still a 'child' because she is not allowed by custom to negotiate her destiny with her father, let alone decide when to get married. This demonstrates the challenges and identity crisis that young adults face while transitioning to adulthood. Kidani does not belong to her previous child status and is still not yet part of the adult world. Thus, the failure to reconcile the meaning of child and adult becomes the main problem between adolescents and parents.

According to Claudia Schnugg (2018), liminality is characterised by blurring and merging of distinction" and "simultaneous presence of the familiar and the unfamiliar" (82). While Kidani is still obsessed with her ambition to complete school and become a Miss Tanzania, her family is embarking on a secret mission of preparing her for marriage. A special trainer or *somo* is hired for this preparation to be smooth. She must teach her "things to do with marital life"—things that are "never taught in school" (31). For Kidani, the teachings from her *somo* are not only absurd and unfamiliar but are also "outdated" and must be "changed", and she will "not allow her family and relatives to follow it" (37). This deployment of an assertive Kidani is a deliberate strategy for critiquing the adult society and the institutions that disadvantage adolescent girls.

The theme of irresponsible parenting also features in Deus Lubacha's *If She Were Alive*, in which Wema, a young girl of 12 years, becomes vulnerable due to a dysfunctional family. At the start of the novel, Wema's mother, an elder wife of Mzee Daudi, is on her deathbed as a result of an incurable cancer. She is abandoned by both her husband and a co-wife, Mama Kabula. Thus, Mama Wema only has her daughter, Wema, who must balance

her schoolwork and caring for her dying mother. She has no choice but to become an adult herself. For example, she has to wake up at the first cock crow, go to the well to fetch water, start a fire, warm water for her mother, cook porridge for her, escort her to the bathroom, and then go to school. This state of affairs causes a great deal of psychological strain. At school, she is a regular object of punishment and "nobody wondered about the way teachers treated her because she was a chronic latecomer" (14).

Subsequently, Wema needs to transition from the time when her mother was alive to when she is no longer there. The liminal period after the loss of a loved one is the most critical in the life of a person. If not managed well, the transition in this period can seriously affect a young adult character like Wema. For example, immediately after Mama Wema's funeral, Mama Kabula forcefully snatches away the little things and money that the late Mama Wema left for her daughter and even threatens her with unpleasant repercussions should she report the matter to her father.

A hostile family environment can be a factor for a young adult character to leave home in search of relief. Flight becomes the only strategy for leaving the insecurity of the home environment. When Wema's her father beats after she dares to tell him the truth about Mama Kabula, she runs away without even knowing where she is going. She faints during her journey and is miraculously rescued by the Mayalas, a family in another village. By speaking out, Wema has achieved an important step, but one that involves more danger than relief. Her liminal position has increased her sense of reflection, which is consistent with Turner, who claims that liminal occasions are "privileged spaces where people are allowed to think about how they think, about the terms in which they conduct their thinking, or to feel about how they feel in daily life" (*The Anthropology of Performance* 102). By speaking up and running away, Wema questions her father's values and authority.

By running away, Wema becomes an outcast and is forced to stay with strangers almost in the same way as Kidani, who seeks refuge in the orphanage in *The Temporary Orphan* analysed above. Like Kidani, Wema is trying to create a new home for herself. Wema's new homes, first with the Mayalas and later with Sister Mihayo, are more homely than her original home. In the same way, the Mayalas are more caring than Mzee Daudi and Mama Kabula. In other words, Wema is seeking a new home and looking for someone who can take her parents' place. Although these new homes are meant to be transitional and temporary, they are consistent with Turner's theorisation of interim liminality in *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* in which he talks about "the possibility of standing aside not only from one's social position but from all social positions and of formulating unlimited series of social arrangements" (13–4). Consistent with this theorisation, Wema has stood aside from the traumatizing guardians.

Liminality involves the exploration and testing of alternative coping strategies. Wema knows that her survival in her new home will depend on her extravagant blandishment of her hosts. She resorts to working very hard for the Mayalas in the hope that they will send her to school. For her, it doesn't matter what strategies she uses to return to school. She finally fakes being possessed by demons and has these fake demons insinuate that she wants to go to school. When her father is informed about her strange illness and possession by demons, he suggests engaging a witch doctor. As they wait for a witch doctor, a psychologist discovers that she is faking being possessed. In his study of spirit possession, Ioan Lewis argues that spirit possession is among how "depressed categories" of people "exert pressures upon their superiors in circumstances of deprivation and frustration" (318). That is to say, feigned spirit possession may represent a covert form of social protest for the oppressed, especially for whom any open protest would be exceptionally dangerous. By dramatizing this, Wema's strategy fits very well in this theory, and although it doesn't work out for her, she makes it known that she only wants to return to school.

In this transition, Wema is constantly haunted by ambiguity. When the Mayalas finally send her to live with Sister Mihayo, her host is unsure whether to treat her as a child or an adult, only to learn that Wema can "work all day, serving customers" (94). What Sister Mihayo doesn't know is that Wema has been hardened by life to take everything as it comes and pretend that all is well even though by evening, "the headache and back pain bore on her" (94). Pretending and feigning ignorance are some of the strategies Wema is using here to cope with life with Sister Mihayo. When she has to share a bed with Sister Mihayo who invites lovers for sex at night, Sister Mihayo thinks Wema "knows nothing about this stuff" while, in fact, "she knew what they were doing but kept quiet so as not to disturb their pleasure" (95). Thus, for Sister Mihayo, Wema is both a child and an adult, depending on context.

In summary, Kidani and Wema, who are the protagonists of *The Temporary Orphan* and *If She Were Alive*, are determined to overcome one problem after another by transgressing and running away from their families without seeking to mend these broken families. Whereas they run away from their dysfunctional families and seek to restart their lives elsewhere, the protagonists in *The Birthday Party* and *The Adventures of Kulwa and Doto* seek to repair their broken families as they are victims of social orphanhood because they have both parents living but one of their parents has abandoned them. They are deprived of complete parental care in a way similar to that of a child whose parent is dead, as is the case for Wema and Kidani in *If She Were Alive* and *The Temporary Orphan*, respectively. Since the young adults live like social orphans, the two novels deliberately turn them into moral beacons ready to mend their broken families.

Since a successful transition to adulthood will be stress-free within a peaceful family set-up, the novels show that the young adult characters can strategically work to reform their dysfunctional families. In *The Birthday Party*, Kiss, a twelve-year-old girl prepares for her 13th birthday. Since she has been staying with her grandmother in Mbeya, she and her grandmother must travel to Dar es Salaam and celebrate with her family. The birthday is meant to bring together a disrupted family: a mother who stays alone, Kiddo, a son who stays with his father, and a daughter who stays with her maternal grandmother. When Kiss and Kiddo finally meet, they constantly pester their mother about why she chose to separate from their father: "Yes, I'm grown-up Mama, tell me the truth now. Why are you and Baba not staying together?" (44). Rather than be a bystander in the matrimonial fight, Kiss and Kiddo are ready to drag themselves into this adult issue. While their mother and grandmother feel that they are "too young to know" these adult issues, they argue that they "are no longer little ones" and should be told everything (49). The dilemma is that while they see themselves as grown-ups, their parents see them as too young to get involved in the whole issue. Liminality helps them to negotiate for their status; the young adult characters, their mother, and their grandmother are playing with the concepts of childhood and adulthood. For Kiss and Kiddo, the play allows them access their parents' matrimonial conflict, while the mother and grandmother aim to deny them access.

One of the most common sources of conflict between parents and their adolescents is the perceived difference in the latter's maturity. This difference is usually manifested by parents insisting that their children are still 'children' while the children feel they are no longer children. This characterises their liminal phase to be full of surprises and tensions. In the text, Kiss is not happy that her mother has refused to share her beauty products with her because she is too young for the products. In a surprising turn of events, she makes her mother knock on her door before entering, a bold move to show that she is a grown-up. While Kiss's action seems to be unrealistic and strange in the context where parents wield power, the text seems to suggest that young adults can believe in themselves and convince the older generation. This theme of resistance against the older generation and questioning parents' decisions is the hallmark of liminality.

Liminality allows different ways for young adults to express their feelings. Although the parents are separated, the children's basic needs have been adequately met; all they lack is their parents' care, love, and attention. The effect of this social orphanhood is that they feel useless, isolated, and unworthy. When Mama Kiss adamantly suggests that Kiss will return to Mbeya and her brother Kiddo to his father after the birthday, the children's response is unanimously rebellious: "No way, we are going nowhere" (49). This boldness means they are willing to take on their parents on issues affecting their lives. As the family prepares for eating, Mama Kiss instructs that Kiss should serve all the adults first before serving the children, to which Kiss suggests, "Why not start with the children? It is their day" (100). Here, Kiss questions her mother and the custom in general and shows that it should be re-evaluated. This conforms with Turner's claim that liminality is usually "anti-structure" in that it challenges the authority (*Ritual Process* 52). As an empowering and enabling space, liminality offers young adults an opportunity to articulate diverse social stances. As children transition from childhood to adulthood, they attempt to create alternative arrangements, and in the course of doing so, they become more adventurous and risk-takers. Kiss and Kiddo are optimistic that their parents should restart their lives as husband and wife, which is a daunting feat. They aim to see them staying together and be able to 'speak to each other" just as they did in the past. "They wanted them to forgive each other" (115).

Immediately after the birthday party, they lock the door while the parents are inside and throw away the key. In a typical happy ending fashion of a young adult text, when neighbours gather to help open the door, and Kiss and Kiddo are brought up to answer, they respond in unison: "We wanted to see you and Baba together; We want to be a family again" (120). Yet, in taking this obligation, the text falls short in that it offers a simplistic

solution that works only in the text in that it helps reunite the parents, but in the real-life context may not be the best option. What is positive is that the young adult characters are willing to mediate and arbitrate the parents' conflict is only possible because they are liminal figures. This way, liminality is akin to neutrality, which is crucial for them to play a redemptive role in their family. As neutrals and in-between, the kids function as a bridge that can potentially reconnect their parents into a new marriage.

If in *The Birthday Party* the young adult characters have deliberately worked to resuscitate their failing family, in *The Adventures of Kulwa and Doto*, the young adult characters also miraculously bring their separated parents together to redress the problem of social orphanhood. In both cases, the parents reflect and decide to restart their family. The text deals with parents' absence due to conflict and the anxiety it causes the children. The focus of the story is Kulwa and Doto, the teenage twins. When their parents separate, they are torn between staying with their mother and remaining with their father in Masaki or following him to Kisumu in Kenya. This in-betweenness is further complicated by the fact that they are also in transition—transitioning from living with two parents to living with one parent, transitioning from the affluent Masaki area and life to a life in the poverty-stricken Mabibo area, and transitioning from studying in private well-to-do English medium schools to learning in a poorly-serviced government school. Caught in this situation, the twins harbour feelings of anger and grief about their parents' decision to divorce. This transition and the resulting challenges indicate that adolescence, as a liminal stage, is characterised by instability and complicates the childhood-adulthood transition. For example, while Kulwa has always been the best pupil in her English medium school, she struggles in her current school. The transition from English to Kiswahili medium school means the twins have to work hard to compensate for their language deficit.

In "The World and the Home" Bhabha theorises that the condition of in-betweenness leads to unhomeliness which is an "estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed space" (445). Kulwa and Doto are not homeless but are unhomely in the new setting. The disorientation of these two youngsters is psychologically traumatizing, primarily when they associate their current poor life with their parent's decision to divorce. The poorly-managed public school, poor neighbourhoods and housing in the Mabibo area, tiny houses with small rooms, lack of indoor plumbing, absence of gardens, lack of fences and gates, few televisions and satellite dishes, dirty and unpaved narrow streets, small retail businesses everywhere' and each house with a small business—these youngsters identify all these as resulting from parents' separation. This way, divorce has disoriented them, and they cannot help but ask, "Why did Mama and Baba divorce?" (72). This contemplation of their situation is meant to incite a reflection on the limitations of adult behaviour within a broader context. For the twins, the parents' divorce has initiated a rite of passage—a three-stage schema: separation from their father—almost like having their father die; a period of liminality—learning to live without him; and coping with new life or getting used to living without their father. The twins' transition shows that liminality is a precarious state.

In their application of the concept of liminality to youth culture, Paulo Jesus, Maria das Dores Formosinho and Maria Helena Damião theorise about the prevalence of "risk-taking" behaviour in youth culture. Liminality, they argue, is characterised by "self-experimentation" that "involves the refusal of social norms" and is characterised by "resistance to social constraints", and love of "risk-taking initiatives" (456). When Kulwa and Doto secretly hatch a plan to look for their father, the aim is to fill the void of having no father in their home. Their decision to hatch and finance a secret mission of traveling thousands of kilometres to rejoin their father is one example of risk-taking displayed by the twins. When finally, the twins see their father after a spell of near-death travails on their journey, their father is remorseful and declares that he "should have been more attentive to their needs" ((8). What began as Kulwa and Doto's childish adventure to see their father quickly turns into a family affair. When they finally meet in Mwanza, with both parents, they "had a good time with their mother and father" (98) and "witnessed their mother and father getting closer and closer again" (98). The meeting rekindled something in their hearts that seemed to have been lost. As liminal figures between their parents, the twins have finally succeeded, though accidentally, in bringing their divorced parents together and in a typical happy ending style of all YA novels, the father confirms that they are all going home and "Your mother and I have talked about our differences that we had in the past and have decided to put them aside. We are all going to live together as a family again" (98). This solution has been orchestrated by the liminal figures—the young adult figures. Although this happy ending to the story seems to be possible only by dint of a miracle, it offers an important basis for confidence, particularly for young adults who can personally relate to the twins' problems.

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Conclusion

In this article, I have examined how young adult characters' transition from childhood to adulthood is portrayed. I have shown that since they are in transition, the young adult characters exist in a liminal space that is both enabling and restricting. I have also demonstrated how inconsistent the parents' and young adult characters' ideas of what defines a "child" and an "adult" are throughout the texts. In turn, this inconsistency explains a great deal of the tensions and conflicts that arise between the young adult characters and their parents. Yet, because of the power differences between them and their parents, the young adult characters are mindful of their vulnerability. Thus, the flight motif, among other techniques employed by the protagonists in the first two novels, is partly in recognition of this power imbalance. It is a conscious narrative strategy to relocate and allow them to reflect, learn, and relearn from outsiders. Through some sheer luck, flight helps Wema in *If She Were Alive* to go back to school while Kidani in *The Temporary Orphan* commits to staying at the orphanage not because she is a biological orphan, but because the orphanage offers her a more promising future than her parents. The young adult characters' attempts to question their parents' decisions in *The Temporary Orphan* and *If She Were Alive* and their attempts to resuscitate their failing families in *The Birthday Party* and *The Adventures of Kulwa and Doto* means that the liminal space is not only limiting but is also transformative. Across the texts, the problems that the protagonists face are simply too many and challenging to an extent that the element of fantastic or luck aids them in overcoming them. Pitted against so many, sometimes seemingly insurmountable challenges, the victories of the young adult protagonists in all the texts are crucial for revealing their parents' faults. The victory of these young adults against their parents, Kidani in *The Temporary Orphan*, Wema in *If She Were Alive*, Kiss and Kiddo in *The Birthday Party*, and Kulwa and Doto in *The Adventures of Kulwa and Doto*, are the authors' attempts to show hope in a hopeless context as they help dispel the reliance on destiny in difficult contexts.

Notes

1. The BURT Literary Award is named after Bill Burt, a Canadian philanthropist and sponsor. It is an initiative that identifies excellence in YA literature and provides young readers (12 to 18 years of age) with high-quality, engaging books.

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In praise of Ịjọ folklore: *A Sailor's Son* by Christian Otobotekere

Imomotimi Armstrong

In praise of Ịjọ folklore: *A Sailor's Son* by Christian Otobotekere

The intersection of modern African poetry and folklore is a much-researched topic in African literary scholarship. However, literary scholars have not examined this relationship in the poetry of Christian Otobotekere, a king and poet whose cultural productions have been mostly studied from the perspective of ecocriticism. Therefore, in this article, I look at the place of Ịjọ (also spelt "Ijaw") folklore in Otobotekere's *A Sailor's Son 1: In the Wake of Games and Dances* (2015). I find that, in this collection, Otobotekere frequently employs the folklore of his people, including dirge, drum poetry, lullabies, moonlight stories, dance patterns, and musical styles, as well as elements of Ịjọ songs such as simplicity, repetition, allusion, dialogue, and direct address. I further discover that Otobotekere's incorporation of Ịjọ folklore makes his poetry performative and helps it to achieve the quality of what is usually referred to as "written orality". I argue that Otobotekere makes it his main aim to showcase these aspects of folklore to the non-Ịjọ reader and to document them for future generations in the Ịjọ community in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta region. This study appeals to scholars in the fields of literature and folklore as it contributes to the decades-long conversation on the interaction between the two disciplines. **Keywords:** Christian Otobotekere, folklore, the *Okun*, Ịjọ, traditional song, Isinabo.

Introduction

Folklore, sometimes also referred to as oral tradition, orality, orature, oral literature, and verbal art, has been a central focus of discussions amongst critics since the emergence of modern African literature in the middle of the 20th century. Indeed, in his book *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora*, the Nigerian literary critic Abiola Irele argues that folklore or "oral literature represents the basic intertext of the African imagination" (11). Irele characterises the African imagination as "a conjunction of impulses that have been given a unified expression in a body of literary texts" (4). In any case, these debates on folklore have mostly centred on its relationship with modern African writers. For instance, Ezenwa-Ohaeto avers that modern African poetry "derives much strength and vitality from African folklore" (70). Olakunle George, too, has pointed out that folklore gives "effective authentication" to modern African cultural productions (16). For the Nigerian poet and scholar Tanure, folklore "feeds" modern African writers "stylistic models […] to express their cultural identity" ("Orality in Recent West African Poetry" 303–4).

In this article, I investigate the oral-literacy intersection in the collection, *A Sailor's Son 1: In the Wake of Games and Dances* (subsequently, *A Sailor's Son*) by Christian Otobotekere (1925–2023), a king who was also a prominent published poet. Otobotekere's works are often studied from the perspective of ecocriticism (Egya; Okuyade; Ojaide, *Indegeneity, Globalization and African Literature: Personally Speaking*), but I will not be focusing on that aspect. Firstly, I recount a personal meeting with Otobotekere that provides significant background to the role of folklore in his poetry. Thereafter, I analyse several examples of folklore in his collection *A Sailor's Son* and indicate their function in the collection.

The importance of oral performance for Otobotekere

In the first quarter of 2018, I went to Otobotekere's home. As somebody who was already a published poet, being 93 years of age, the acting king of Ekpetiama *ibe* (clan), and *Okun* (paramount ruler) of Tombia town, I was convinced

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he would have enviable knowledge of Ịjọ traditional expressive culture.[1] I was in Nigeria at the time to collect data on Ịjọ traditional literature for my PhD dissertation, that I completed at Rhodes University in Makhanda, South Africa in 2020. Some minutes into our discussion, I had cause to sing some songs that are no longer performed in Ịjọland and seized upon the opportunity—research into the oral literature of this ethnic group has enabled me to acquire knowledge in this regard. What surprised me was that, as I was singing, Otobotekere was actualising the songs I was singing in performance. He was dancing, using his hands to mimic the actual beating of a drum, and sometimes beating his chest. Why was I taken aback? I did not expect the acting king of an *ibe* or an *Okun* to perform a song a child—whether by age, achievements, social status, or knowledge of Ịjọ folklore—was singing. After the performance, Otobotekere went on to lament the non-performance of many genres of traditional literature in society today. When the discussion ended, he brought out one of his poetry collections, signed it, and handed it to me. But his choice of text, *A Sailor's Son*, is significant. In the acknowledgements section of the collection, Otobotekere pointed out:

> I would like to acknowledge the heroes and heroines of our land whose activities I had witnessed from boyhood to manhood. As a boy I was thrilled and carried away in the joy of their performances, with no idea that I would one day come to report to others what I was witnessing. Of course, I was at that time far removed from any thought of putting pen to paper to let others share in my enjoyment. The prompting in me to communicate only grew gradually but became a pressing obligation later. Thank God, the pressure is now off my chest. (8)

These "performances", which Otobotekere said "constitute the essence of" *A Sailor's Son* (10), include wrestling, masquerade displays, festivals, dances, and various forms and elements of traditional literature. According to Otobotekere, aside from entertainment, the collection was written to create "awareness among younger generations, an awareness of the unique experiences of past days" (*A Sailor's Son* 11). Indeed, on the front cover of the collection are pictures of a traditional wrestler at a public square filled with spectators and two hands on a drum. In light of these facts, it is no wonder that Otobotekere selected *A Sailor's Son* out of all his published poetry to give to me.[2] In this article, I investigate some of the features and types of Ịjọ folklore Otobotekere incorporates in *A Sailor's Son*.

A Sailor's Son: Celebrating Ịjọ folklore

Until some years ago, traditional poetry in the Ịjọ community consisted of only songs and drum poetry. Indeed, the deceased British linguist and foremost authority on the languages spoken by the Ịjọ, Kay Williamson, pointed this out long ago: "All Ịzon poetry is apparently sung or drummed. I am aware of no chanted or spoken poetry" (21). As I have noted elsewhere, chanted poetry, a widespread practice in Africa, was imported into the Ịjọ community during the contemporary period from the Yoruba of south-western Nigeria (Imomotimi Armstrong, "The Emergence of Praise-Poetry Recitation in the Ịjọ Community"). Even today, it is likely that 98% of the Ịjọ are not familiar with this form of poetry. For one, its sole practitioner, Chief Adolphus Munamuna, lives in Yenagoa, the capital city of the Ịjọ state of Bayelsa. He performs the poetry in Yenagoa and sometimes in rural areas on invitation by the few who know him and appreciate the poetic form (see I. Armstrong, "Chief Adolphus Munamuna, *Ọụbẹbẹ Kẹnị Ịjọ Ibe* (the Chief Oral Poet of the Ịjọ Nation): The Ịjọ Praise Poet and the Niger Delta Issue" on the reception of this poetry by the Ịjọ). What I have been trying to point out, perhaps laboriously, is that it is traditional song, not some chanted poetic form, with which every Ịjọ in the Niger Delta is familiar. They have different sub-categories of song, and all of them have their local terminologies. The major sub-genres include children's songs, funeral songs, war songs, circumcision songs, moonlight songs, marriage songs, and religious songs. For the major category, song, the Kolokuma Ịjọ use the word "*duma*", while it is called "*numu*" in some other *ibe mọ*. It is likely that Otobotekere, too, was not familiar with the new poetic form in his community. Unsurprisingly, it is the traditional song that he incorporates into *A Sailor's Son*.

Otobotekere employs the traditional song in two distinct ways in the collection. In the first instance, he uses the features of the Ịjọ traditional song, including simplicity, repetition, direct address, figures of sound, dialogue, allusion, simile, and metaphor to make the written poems sound and look songlike. This is similar to what the Ugandan poet Okot p'Bitek did with Acoli traditional song in *Song of Lawino*, a classic in traditional and modern African literature (Okumu; Ofuani). In the second instance, Otobotekere reproduces, without any alteration, the traditional song the way it has always been sung in his society. By so doing, he has retrieved and documented a sub-genre of the traditional song for scholars and future generations. In his *Myth in Africa*, Insidore

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Okpewho characterises this sort of relationship between tradition and the modern African writer as "tradition preserved" (161). Undoubtedly, it can be averred that Otobotekere was a collector of Ịjọ folklore and, therefore, is comparable to other collectors of African oral traditions, including J. P. Clark (his fellow Ịjọ poet and dramatist), Okpewho, Wande Abimbola, Adeboye Babalola, Ruth Finnegan, John William Johnson, Gordon Innes, Masizi Kunene, and Jeff Opland. Otobotekere reproduced twelve traditional songs in the collection, eleven of which, according to him, were "contributed" (*A Sailor's Son* 119) by Tarilayefa Kenikiou Tulagha, formerly an anchor of radio programmes in Bayelsa State, and Gambo Otobotekere (possibly his wife, but I could not be confirm this). In other words, the two women were Otobotekere's respondents in his fieldwork. He collected the other song himself, as it were. Otobotekere calls the traditional songs he collected "moonlight songs" and goes on to mourn their non-performance:

> What of moonlight games
> Of pretty fairy-like girls
> Encircled by spectators in
> Evening relaxation?
> Games of thrilling songs, rhymes
> And laughter!
> Where are they gone?
> Where? Here are some, only some. (*Sailor's Son* 115)

But not all 12 songs belong to the moonlight sub-genre. For example, most Ịjọ readers will immediately identify "Song 5" as a lullaby (I. Armstrong, "A Thematic Study of the Lullaby amongst the Ịjọ of Nigeria"):

> *Tuu tuu, tuu tuu*
> *Kala bele two kpo*
> *Ye ipiri figha*
> *Opu bele two kpo*
> *Ye ipiri figha*
> *Tobou dei arau youyemoo,*
> *Mama boo; mama boo.*
>
> *Tuu tuu, tuu tuu*
> When the small pot was used to cook
> You didn't give me to eat
> When the big pot was used to cook
> You didn't give me to eat
> Babysitter is crying
> Mother, come; mother, come. (*Sailor's Son* 116)

It could be that the Ekpetiama Ịjọ, Otobotekere's clan, performed it alongside moonlight songs, even though I never saw lullabies performed together with those of the moonlight genre in my town in Kolokuma *ibe* when I was growing up. However, oral literary scholars have noted that the boundaries of oral literature genres are not fixed but fluid and loose (Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context*; *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts: A Guide to Research Practices*; Barber; Ben-Amos; Olatunji; Abrahams). Differently said, the divisions of traditional literature genres are not definitive. In any case, it is noteworthy that the poet calls the moonlight songs "song-drama" (*A Sailor's Son* 119). These songs, as with oral literature genres anywhere, are actualised in performance. Nearly every song in the sub-category had its own distinct performance. While some would warrant performers to impersonate the behaviour or actions of certain animals and humans, others required them to dramatise certain myths of the ethnic group. But it is not my purpose here to revisit old debates and contend whether these performances should be considered full-fledged dramas, quasi-dramatic dramas, or pre-dramas (for these debates, see Echeruo; Enekwe).

In any case, Otobotekere should be commended for being able to reproduce these songs in *A Sailor's Son*. In my dissertation, I was at pains to leave out, on account of obscurity and issues of translation, these interesting and well-loved songs that elderly women recall with enjoyment many of the times that I collect Ịjọ folklore. Unfortunately, the poet neither translates the songs into English nor provides answers in this regard (the translation of the above

lullaby was done by me). Perhaps Otobotekere faced the same challenges I encountered. This clearly defeats, in some ways, the reason why he wrote the text—exposing the non-Ịjọ reader to Ịjọ traditional performances—because the songs are accessible to only those who speak the various dialects of the Ịzọn language. In the following paragraphs, I examine some of the resources of the traditional Ịjọ song that I noted Otobotekere employs in *A Sailor's Son* earlier. I begin with dirge.

Dirge—a form of traditional literature modern African poets, especially Anglophone West Africans, often exploit, sometimes to greater effects—is employed in the poem "Isinabo 11". The poem is an evocative dirge—not sung but spoken—in honour of a deceased wrestler in the poet's community. The evocative dirge is usually performed by elderly men when a relative or friend of some standing has passed on to what the Ịjọ call "*fịama bou*" (land of the dead). It is not usually performed by a woman or a young man who, in most cases, are considered to be unable to control their emotions. In the first stanza, the speaker says:

> Victor of 'D' day!
> Is it you, lying this low?
> Is it you, silent! (*Sailor's Son* 109)

This is the classic manner in which an elderly man begins a spoken dirge when he sees the corpse of a relative or friend. Like the speaker in the excerpt, the performer, with eyes fixed on the corpse, calls their name. In most cases, the deceased is addressed by their pet name or praise title, as in this poem. Next, the deceased is repeatedly asked whether they are the one who has died. The second line in the excerpt, in an actual performance, is rendered in various ways, including, "Is it you who lay dead here?" and "Is it you who have turned a corpse here?" Indeed, this phenomenon bears on the importance of variability as a foremost characteristic of oral literature in any society. Thereafter, the mourner goes on to address the deceased by their praise title and foregrounds the prowess and activity for which the diseased was known thus:

> Leopard of the Land,
> Fierce and free
>
> [...]
>
> Proof of muscle power
>
> [...]
>
> Who would dare your lifted
> Weighty right hand?
> Or withstand a sudden
> Leg manipulation? The fastest!
> Who would dare the racing terror
> Of double power?
> Or, withstand your parrying pushing hand?
>
> [...]
>
> Where are your bells—
> Where are your bells now barking
> For umpires to monitor— (*Sailor's Son* 109)

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Clearly, the deceased was a renowned wrestler. The speaker tells us Isinabo was a "receiver of titles upon titles". As a champion wrestler, the deceased certainly had a large following who sang his praises at wrestling championships. Not surprisingly, the mourner asks Isinabo's lifeless body:

> Are the maids still singing,
> Tilting their necks and clapping,
> Praising, acclaiming
> In endless chorus?
>
> [...]
>
> Are the fans still crowding
> In ringing cheer,
> In joyous jamboree
> And as ever encircling you—
> Victor Ludorum, Victor Ludorum,
> In hearty bell-and-song dance? (*Sailor's Son* 110)

As a champion wrestler, certainly there were people who became great wrestlers under Isinabo's tutelage. As a mourning man would sometimes ask a corpse what will become of their acolytes in a particular activity by calling out their names, or a woman would of her deceased husband about their children, the speaker, too, asks in the eulogy:

> Where are your genetic offspring,
> [...] the Victors,
> The Jephtah's, the Ayaokpo's
> Trophy winners of later days
> Encircling you in heated chorus? (*Sailor's Son* 109–10)

But there is solace for these great wrestlers and other fans. The mourner notes that Isinabo:

> [...] Is also bound to win
> Accolades there.
> There, when we all later go,
> He would receive us into untold
> Kingdom of power. (*Sailor's Son* 111)

In this excerpt, Otobotekere highlights a fundamental belief of the Ịjọ: as with other African societies in sub-Saharan Africa, they believe that death does not end somebody's life. As I have pointed out elsewhere, it is claimed that a person transits to *fịama bou* (the land of the dead) at death (I. Armstrong, "Context, Performance and Beliefs in *Dụwẹị-igbela* (Ịjọ Funeral Poetry)"). It is further said that *fịama bou* parallels the world of the living. The only difference is the existence of complete happiness in the former. Thus, Isinabo shall continue with the sport that gave him fame when he was in the land of the living. But the poem lacks two aspects of the Ịjọ dirge. First, in the formal dirge, whether spoken or sung, a deceased becomes the means through which a mourner sends greetings and messages to friends, children, or relatives who are already in *fịama bou*. Second, a mourner usually details the names of those already in *fịama bou* who became famous in the activity in which the deceased also engaged. The speaker tries to remedy this second lacuna in "Isinabo III" but still falls short by not mentioning any notable deceased wrestler in the Ịjọ community who will keep Isinabo busy with wrestling contests:

> Did you receive a call
> From our ancestors, great wrestlers,
> Who left decades of decades ago? (*Sailor's Son* 112)

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Otobotekere also reflects Ịjọ epic singing culture in *A Sailor's Son*. As an example, the speaker nostalgically comments in "Heroic Song":

> [...] the drumming that gingered
> The long forgotten tales
> Which thrilled my forefathers
> And my young eyes
> Seven days long! (*Sailor's Son* 135)

The excerpt is a reference to a past tradition among the Ịjọ in which some tales were told over seven days. As Otobotekere points out in this excerpt, these tales were told to the accompaniment of drumming. In answering me when I questioned him about it, the Ịjọ linguist Odingowei Kwokwo said that, in the villages of the Gbarain Ịjọ, there were storytelling clubs that told tales lasting a week. He further notes that it was from one such club in his *ibe* that he first heard of the Ozidi epic before he saw its print version as an undergraduate student. The narration of tales over a period of seven days was exclusive to men, as Desmond Orumieyefa, a middle-aged man of the Kokokuma Ịjọ, was told by his ancestors (Orumieyefa and Armstrong). In the introduction to the Ozidi epic that he documented for scholars and posterity, Clark informs us that the tale is "told and acted in seven nights to dance, music, mime, and ritual" (ix). Even the version he recorded in Ibadan in south-western Nigeria from Okabou Ojobolo, an Ịjọ man, was narrated for one week.

Because these tales, apart from Ozidi, are no longer told, most Ịjọ are only aware of tales that last less than one hour. To an extent, I belonged to this category of Ịjọ. For a long time, I had thought that it was only the Ozidi epic that was told over seven days. However, my research on Otobotekere's poetry made me ask questions about the tradition. I was told that the Ozidi epic that formed the basis of much of Okpewho's scholarship on the African epic was only one of several such tales. My efforts to record some of these tales have not yielded any results because the tellers whom I have been directed to meet are either incapacitated due to old age or dead. Perhaps wide-ranging fieldwork by oral literary scholars, historians, or cultural anthropologists will someday reveal that the Ịjọ have other tales that can be classified as epics.

Otobotekere also employs dialogue which scholars have pointed out is an important feature of African folklore (Ojaide, "Orality"). An example of this occurs in the poem "Not only for bygone days", in which the poet, as a child, praises the moon for beaming its light on earth for children to play, and the moon responds:

> What a beauty you are,
> Fair emblem of night sky,
> My love for you cannot wane.
> And still waxes most, when,
> You are visibly overheard
> The one and only lamp
> Attended by slow-moving clouds
>
> [...]
>
> You are not only for bygone days.
>
> Whether bygone days or not,
> Enough is enough, dear kid,
> Foster child, now go to bed
> To refresh your body
> And relax your nimble limbs
> In sweet sleep.
>
> Meanwhile, I shall continue to protect
> Your surroundings and atmosphere
> With sleep-inducing light
>
> [...]
>
> Sleep well, Bye, till next moonlit night. (*Sailor's Son* 133)

Direct address is another quality of Ịjọ verbal arts Otobotekere uses. In this society, it is common to see a priest directly addressing his god on behalf of someone seeking a solution to a problem, or a young woman, in tears and uncontrollable, addressing the corpse of her dead husband taken too soon from her, or a man asking his ancestors, as if they were present, why they allowed his son or daughter to die by accident. An instance of direct address occurs in the first poem of *A Sailor's Son* in which the speaker extends an invitation to the reader and tells them to leave their urban world behind and experience the beauty and magical charm of the fauna and flora of the Niger Delta region and cultural performances of his people:

> Have you received your card?
> Here it is.
> To a fairy-land fair
> Once-in-a-year.
>
> O leave the world behind
> And step into a new.
> Favoured with colourful
> *Cocta spectabilis*.
>
> O glide in, drive in, walk in,
> Into salutations free
> With open arms, both,
> *Atoo-Atoo*, heart to heart. (*Sailor's Son* 19)

In another instance, the speaker sees a white egret and, performing a popular Nigerian children's song, pleads with it to have some of the colour on his fingernails:

> Leke-leke give me
> One finger
> I go give you [I will give you]
> Two fingers
>
> Leke-leke give me
> Two fingers,
> I go give you [I will give you]
> Three fingers (*Sailor's Son* 63)

Earlier, I cited Williamson's observation that poetry is either "sung or drummed" in Ịjọ society. To elucidate the linguist's position, the drum that produces poetry in this society, the talking drum, is called *opu eze* (literarily, big drum) in some *ibe mọ* and regarded by them as the most important drum. As I have pointed out elsewhere, *opu eze* is used to welcome great men at assemblies, cultural performances, and royal courts by beating their praise titles and achievements (I. Armstrong, "Emergence"). For example, on sighting a retired great wrestler at a wrestling competition, the man behind the *opu eze*, in drum language, will let the audience know that so-and-so wrestler is at the arena too. Sometimes, the talking drum is also used to interview the two champion wrestlers in rival camps at an arena. Moreover, it is a key feature of warboats. Otobotekere celebrates this drum tradition in *A Sailor's Son*. In the text, *opu eze* is variously called "calling drum", "signature drum", "big drum", "giant drum",

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and "praise drum". In "What is in these drums?" the poet begins on a note of innocence or lack of knowledge with respect to drum poetry:

What is that?
A voice, a human voice?
What is that pulsating
My titular name—
Both the name and a. k. a
That evokes immediate response.

But how did it come by my name
And my popular a. k. a
Who or what is in these drums?
What living tongue is there? (*Sailor's Son* 190)

What the speaker refers to as his "a. k. a" is his praise title.

As I pointed out in an earlier article, the use of praise titles is an important practice of men in this community, and every *ibe*, town, or village has a praise title (I. Armstrong, "Stylistic Elements in the Praise Poetry of Chief Adolphus Munamuna, Ọụbẹbẹ Kẹnị Ịjọ Ibe (the Chief Oral Poet of the Ịjọ Nation)" 396–7). In the past, this was also true of adult men, who introduced themselves by their praise titles at the beginning of a formal meeting. Today, some adult men in Ịjọ urban spaces do not have praise titles. Oftentimes, the praise title of an *ibe*, town, or village is the praise title of the man who founded it. Moreover, a man's male children are sometimes addressed by his praise titles. Some have more than three praise titles—perhaps having given themselves, in addition to their own, the titles of their late father and late grandfather. The crying out of praise names to cheer up and motivate the bearers at competitions is an enduring practice amongst this people. However, in this community, unlike the baSotho, praise titles are gained not only through heroic feats but also given to oneself based on your understanding of the world (see Kunene). It is also noteworthy that a man's praise titles have responses; when you shout out a man's praise title, his response will tell you what it means.

In the excerpt below, the tone of nescience the speaker exhibits in the first two stanzas changes to that of someone who understands the traditions of his people in the latter stanzas:

The mandatory voice as we know it
Summons warriors and paddlers
At quarter-to-dawn to rise and muster
For battle.
It summons and rules crowds at will.
O it can move them against their will.
It manages all-night vigils and predicates
Societal and religious ceremonies.
It breathes mood into actors
It fans protests and riots!
It can also disperse them.

[…]

Drum speech evokes

[…]

Drum speech inflates the ego,
Energises fist muscle
And pushes dancer or wrestler
Into involuntary moves.

[…]

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The umpire, the internet of
Village game-fields,
Dictates the tempo.
Drum speech rules all. (*Sailor's Son* 190–3)

Indeed, *opu eze* is so pervasive and important in Ịjọ society that the speaker avers that it has "usurp[ed] […] human voice and kingly authority" (190). Otobotekere's poetry foregrounds the beliefs of the Ịjọ too. For example, in "Arrival", the speaker observes:

Before the sweeper
Launches her first steps,
Liquid fresh eggs
Fly North, South-South, East and West
Sweeten unseen spectators. (*Sailor's Son* 209)

The Ịjọ claim that the audience of a cultural performance comprises the living, the dead, gods, and goddesses. It is further said that some of these souls and deities are evil and ready to cause harm to performers. For example, loss of voice and consciousness while singing and dislocation of a wrestler's bone in a contest, amongst others, are attributed to these evil forces. As such, before a performance begins in some rural areas, prayers and food are offered to these malevolent, invisible spirits to quieten them. However, in some performances, prayers are rather offered to God to ensure that nothing evil happens. Moreover, it is said that certain birds are bearers of messages. It is very common to hear a woman say it was a bird that announced somebody's death to her on her farm. It is also claimed that birds can tell whether there are fish in the traps someone plans to inspect in the morning. Not surprisingly, some Ịjọ pay special attention to birds that perch and chirp close to their homes. While reflecting on the harmonious relationship that once existed between the Ịjọ and their natural environment, Otobotekere reflects the belief of birds being messengers in the poem "Floods of glee":

O bird, spirit-animated bird
Cheerful messenger,
Have you got a message
For me today
As was yesterday? (*Sailor's Son* 24)

Additionally, he relates some of the folk dances and musical styles of his people in *A Sailor's Son*. For instance, in "Dance of Seniors", the speaker recollects the *egene* or *agene* (depending on the *ibe*) dance style and *ekpete*, which he claims go together:

Now see dance steps reel:
    Ekpete calling, Ekpete calling
    And Egene, step by step
Simple and subtle, subtler than
You ever could imagine. (*Sailor's Son* 35)

However, those who have some knowledge of Ịjọ folk dance steps know that *ekpete* is not a dance (Otobotekere repeats in the footnote of this poem that *ekpete* is a dance style). Rather, it is a musical instrument that is often found in many dance ensembles. As a musical instrument, it can go with *egene*. But it cannot go with *egene* as a dance step because there is no such dance style. In Clark's introductory essay to the Ozidi epic that I referred to earlier, he notes of the *egene* dance:

> *Agene* or *keni-kene-koro* […] literally translated means "one-one-you-may-drop." This directive as to the leg movement is not as simple as it sounds, it is in fact deceptive. But done by Ijo men and women, their bodies bent fully forward from the waist, their arms held out in front and bent at the elbows, *agene* is an intricate, floating dance in which the feet seem never to touch the ground at any one given moment. (xxxi)

As Sunday Abraye, too, has correctly noted, in the *agene* dance in which both men and women are performers and where a dancer "assumes a medium plane […] the flow of energy is concentrated in the legs which punch on the

ground. So it is the waist downwards that burns up the energy. The energy is directed down the legs through the waist to the soles of the feet" (224). The speaker further claims in the same poem ("Dance of Seniors"):

> Oh no.
> Only a little bit
> Is left with us:
>
> [...]
>
> Practised art.
> O come back, come back. (*Sailor's Son* 36)

But this is far from the true situation in the Ịjọ community. *Ẹkpete* is still blown in many musical and dance performances, including *owigiri*, the premier neo-traditional music in this ethnic group. The same is true of *egene*. In many of these performances, as Clark notes, not only one dance step is used but rather a conglomeration of different dance steps, which is the beauty of a performance. In another poem, "Wriggle upon wriggle", Otobotekere showcases *egbelegbele*, a popular dance troupe of his people:

> Have you heard?
> Have you seen?
> The latest of the latest?
> Dance of the dances:
> Little ones, extra sensational!
> Step by step their feet, (*Sailor's Son* 37)

The *egbelegbele* performance consists of young women dancers younger than 18 years of age and adult male instrumentalists. An *egbelegbele* performance starts when an instrumentalist, in trumpet language, calls the lead dancer of the ensemble onto the stage. After some time, the other dancers dance onto the stage and immediately form two lines, each led by the lead dancer and a dancer called the Queen of the House, while still dancing. As Undutimi Armstrong (25) points out:

> It is the music of the instrumentation that determines their body movements as they are dancing. The music provided by the percussions tells them when to stand, raise hand, shake head and when to bend towards the left or right. Sometimes they turn their backs to the audience; at other times all the girls would stand in different directions, giving privilege to a particular girl to perform. In most cases, this single-dancer performance is done by the lead dancer. She has the license or freedom to stand in the front, middle or back of the two lines, depending on where, as the claim goes, the spirit leads her.

The climax of the performance is when the lead dancer, while dancing, climbs up an artistically designed ladder positioned on the stage, dances for some minutes on the ladder's flat top, and dances down to the shouts of the audience. The performance of *egbelegbele* highlights issues of love, identity, and gender.

The dance performance originated in Amassoma, the host town of Niger Delta University, and spread to other places in Ịjọland. It is not that the dance performance is a recent development or "the latest of the latest" in this community, as Otobotekere claims. In an interview with Undutimi Armstrong, Macduff Ben Makpah, the present director of the troupe, notes that *egbelegbele* is an ancient cultural performance (Undutimi Armstrong 1). What is true is that it was confined to the town from which it originated and a few others in Ogboin *ibe*. It became popular in the 1990s, especially at the beginning of the 21st century when Chief D. S. P. Alamieyeseigha, an indigene of Amassoma, became the first executive governor of Bayelsa State. With the financial backing of Alamieyeseigha, the troupe could travel to anywhere in Ịjọland for a performance. It further became the unofficial traditional performance for the entertainment of official visitors to the state and was funded by the state government to compete at both national and international cultural competitions. As a result of *ekpelegbele*'s mass appeal, it was copied by several towns in the ethnic group. However, it is claimed by some that the troupe from Amassoma,

to date, remains the premier one. In any case, the origins of *egbelegbe*, like many traditional performances in Ịjọ society, is traced to a performance by otherworldly creatures. Undutimi Armstrong (1) notes:

> There exists a strong mythology which narrates the story of an old woman called "Egbele" who was believed to have mysteriously disappeared in the forest for defying the traditional law of the people: staying at home on market days. Egbele, who was in the forest for seven days, witnessed this form of performance while trying to trace her way back home to the community. It is claimed that she was given the directive by the people of the forest to tutor young girls within the age range of five to twelve to perform the dancing steps she saw in the forest; failure to do so would lead to her death.

Otobotekere also writes about festivals in his society. For example, in "Okolode Calling", the poet celebrates the premier annual festival in his *ibe*: Okolode. In fact, the title of this poem immediately reminds some of Gabriel Okara's often anthologized "The Call of the River Nun". Okara, from the town of Bomoundi, shared the same *ibe* with Otobotekere. The poets were friends, and it is very likely that Otobotekere had read the poem composed by his clansman. However, if Okara's poem is simultaneously a perpetual call from the Nun River to the poet who was then in south-eastern Nigeria to come back to his roots and a reminder of death because of aging, then Otobotekere's is a call to those who live outside Ekpetiama to come back to the *ibe* in large numbers during Okolode, something common with other festivals in his society:

> Is it the gala day?
> (5th of June or nearest) when
> The total of humanity,
> Male and female,
> Rulers and their subjects
> Crowd this rural haven
> With pump and pageantry?
> For a societal jamboree.
> Yes, with gaiety and flowery dressing. (*Sailor's Son* 97)

Okolode, the "festival of festivals" (*A Sailor's Son* 97), is *aya bury fị uge* (literally, a new-yam eating festival). Even though the festival, as the speaker notes, falls on 5 June every year, a celebratory atmosphere surrounds the *ibe* from the first day of June. As Dennis Ebipa Okpotolomo informed me (Dennis Ebipa Okpotolomo and I. Armstrong), in the past, the Ekpetiama axis of the Nun River was closed from 26 December to 31 May. During this period, no fishing was done in the river. When the river was opened on 1 June, fishing began in preparation for the festival, which came up after four days. It was the fish caught during this period that was used to cook the new yam, as it were. Usually, new yams were harvested from May. However, married men were not permitted to eat them until the day the festival began. Even then, the chiefs, paramount rulers, and the king of the *ibe* did not eat the new yams until the last day of the festival. Today, some of these traditions are no longer observed, including not fishing on the Nun River and not eating yams until a specific day. In any case, from 5 June, different cultural competitions, including wrestling, drumming, dances, masquerade performances, and recently, football matches, are held. Each town in the *ibe* takes a day to hold these performances:

> Feelings and sentiments explode
> In song and dance
>
> [...]
>
> turn by turn
> Community by community
> Club by club in
> Distinctive attire
>
> [...]
>
> hearty drumming, trumpeting,
> Waving flags and colourful banners
>
> [...]

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dance of the year,
Dance of every soul
For the first fruits—
Turn by turn,
Community after community,
Till another year. (*Sailor's Son* 97–8)

The climax of the festival occurs on the final day when the men, including chiefs, heads of towns, invited important personalities, and the king travel to the host town to eat the new yams. The host town is the one which presents its performances on the final day of the festival. Prior to that day, all women in the *ibe* had contributed yams to the head of the women of the host town. Okolode is famed for providing an opportunity for attendees to meet their future spouses. The poet reflects this by commenting:

Honey moons [sic] also get fixed
To the pleasure of waiting parents. (*Sailor's Son* 98)

Finally, masquerade performances are also referenced in *A Sailor's Son*. Scholars note that these performances are a common sight in the Ịjọ community (Titus-Green; Agoro; Hlavácová). In Ịjọ society, masquerade performances are performed both on their own and as part of annual festivals. Among the *ibe mọ* in Eastern Ịjọ, masquerades are performed by the well-organised and structured famous *Sekiapu/Ekine* and *Owu-Ogbo* societies (Anderson; Horton). These societies have "authority to exercise discipline over citizens in certain matters" in their towns or villages, as the Ịjọ historian Ebiegberi Joe Alagoa observes of those in Eastern Ịjọ (qtd in Titus-Green 74). However, it is not so in Central Ịjọ where the tradition of masquerade is not as developed as in Eastern Ịjọ. In fact, in most places today, there are no longer masquerade performances, unlike Eastern Ịjọ. For instance, in my village in Kolokuma *ibe*, there has been no performance for at least 20 years now. Saviour Nathan A. Agoro also speaks of the "demise of the masquerade phenomenon" in Epie *ibe* (18). Not surprisingly, in the poem "What of those games? Where?", Otobotekere asks whether the tradition is "gone forever". For the poet, as with Agoro, the problem lies with Christianity:

You're far beyond

[…]

The puerile curses rained on you by
Certain New-born-agains or
Extra-born-agains? who,

[…]

now look
More foreign than your good self

[…]

Why must they try to block your way,
To deny you passage
From generation to generation? (*Sailor's Son* 88–9)

From the analysis above, it emerges that folklore nourishes Otobotekere's poetry and gives it vitality. The Okun's use of folklore, especially the incorporation of different Ịjọ percussions, further gives his poetry high musicality. Moreover, I would aver that the use of folklore ensures that the poetry can be read aloud for enjoyment or easily be realised in performances like oral literature genres. Folklore also provides insights into the geographical setting of Otobotekere's poetry. A foremost impact of folklore on the poems, though, is their simplicity. Folklore is created for public consumption, a public that comprises even children. As such, it is generally expressed in simple language. Otobotekere follows this tradition by writing in a language that is easily accessible.

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Conclusion

In this article, I have analysed several poems from the collection *A Sailor's Son 1: In the Wake of Games and Dances* to demonstrate ways in which Otobotekere integrates Ịjọ folklore. In the text, he intentionally "reports" the vanishing folklore of his people, including dance styles, festivals, music forms, and beliefs, to outsiders and those Ịjọ who do not know this oral tradition. The poet further employs forms of traditional Ịjọ literature and some of its elements, such as dirge, drum poetry, dialogue, and direct address. In this same collection, the poet becomes a collector of Ịjọ folklore as he reproduces some songs in their originals. In the article, I interpreted Otobotekere's utilisation of folklore in *A Sailor's Son* as significant in various respects.

Notes

1. An *ibe* in the Ịjọ community, usually rendered in English as a clan, comprises a few villages or towns that are founded by a man's male child in which the people speak the same dialect of the languages spoken by the ethnic group. There are over forty of these *ibe mo* (the plural form) in Ịjọland (Alagoa, *et al.*).
2. At the time I met Otobotekere, his list of poetic works included *Playful Notes and Keys* (1987), *Around and About 1* (2005), *Around and About 2* (2005), *Lives to Live* (2009), *Beyond Sound and Voice* (2010), *Next to Reality* (2011), *Light* (2014), and *My River: Poems on Riverine Ecology* (2014).

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Social commentary in the song "Chineke doo" by Sam Ojukwu

Sunday Ofuani & Comfort Onyekachukwu Ofuani

Social commentary in the song "Chineke doo" by Sam Ojukwu

Early art music in Nigeria was not based on nor conceived as a medium for social commentary. However, through cultural reawakening, contemporary Nigerian-Igbo composers now deliberately utilise social commentary themes in their music. This practice enhances their musical works as social-cum-functional art—a notable essence of music in traditional Africa. There is a dearth of studies on Igbo art music composers and social commentary. In this study, we focus on Sam Ojukwu and his composition "Chineke doo" (A prayer for Nigeria) to explicate the compositional utility of social commentary themes in the Nigerian-Igbo context. The selection of the piece is based on its social relevance and the composer's creativity, output, and consistency in social commentary art music. Textual data extracted from the piece and an interview with the composer provided the primary data for the study. Altogether, we discuss the contemporary Nigerian socio-political ironies recreated in "Chineke doo". Through the socio-cultural context, along with suitable musical text examples, we deepen the understanding and appreciation of how social commentary in music relates to specific social and political issues in Nigeria. The study is significant in the evaluation, appreciation, and justification of Ojukwu as a music-composer-social-commentator and poet who thrives in social commentary art music compositions for the sake of societal engineering and transformation.
Keywords: Sam Ojukwu, Nigerian-Igbo art music, social commentary, composer-poets.

Introduction

In this article, we study the song "Chineke doo" (A prayer for Nigeria) by the art music composer Sam Ojukwu. Firstly, we provide some general background to the phenomenon of art music in Nigeria before focusing specifically on 'composer-poets' who write the lyrics to songs themselves in order to be fully independent and to imbue their works with social relevance. While we extensively discuss Ojukwu, brief references are made to other notable Igbo composers engaging in social commentary through art music. We then analyse the various instances of social commentary in "Chineke doo."

Social commentary in Nigerian (art) music

Art music (as introduced to Nigerian society through Christian missionaries, colonialism, and Western education) was not based on nor conceived as a medium for social commentary. Consequently, the composers did not really feature such themes in the early periods—rather, they focused on the creative, aesthetic, and contemplative objectives.[1] Cultural reawakening among contemporary Nigerian-Igbo composers led to the deliberate utilization of indigenous music concepts that would enhance their art music as social-cum-functional art—a notable essence of music in traditional Africa.

Music composers are creative personalities saddled with the responsibility of putting sounds and other sonic elements together as their medium of expression. Scholars such as Norman Demuth, and Lazarus Ekwueme

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("Composing contemporary African choral music: Problems and prospects" 17–8) agree that how composers create their music largely depends on their individual skill, knowledge of the art, music form, cultural exposure, audience, context, and state of affairs in society in which the composer lives.

Composing vocal music involves a fusion of two disciplines (music and textual language). Consequently, composers usually rely on specialised text writers for lyrics of their musical works. However, this is different from the Nigerian-Igbo tradition where, according to Ekwueme, the composers are also text writers of their respective music ("African music in Christian liturgy: The Igbo experiment" 19). This study hinges on Femi Adedeji's concept of "transformative art music composition" (4) and Ekwueme's creative textual theory which says: "In true Igbo tradition, the music composer is also the poet, for he/she has to create his/her own words to his tune" ("African music in Christian liturgy" 19). Drawing from Ekwueme's theory, which hitherto exists in practice, any Nigerian-Igbo art music composer who doubles as the text creator of their music is, in this study, conceptualised and categorised as 'composer-poet'.

There has been a notable movement that involves a deliberate appropriation of indigenous music concepts among contemporary Nigerian-Igbo art music composers. The composers now draw conceptual, creative, idiomatic, and stylistic inspirations from their traditional music practices. For example, Grace Lawrence-Hart (463) studies the traditional music practices of the Bonny people; Sunday Ofuani ("Application of the commentary role of ine festival songs of Aniocha people to contemporary social issues" 42–53) examines social commentary among the Aniocha; and Justice Okoro and Ofuani (283–4) identify the Abigbo traditional music of the Mbaise people as social commentary in essence. These scholars indicate that musical commentary on social issues is not new in Igbo culture as most of the lyrics of their various traditional festival songs and some other folk music are largely based on social commentary. Thus, social commentary in Nigerian-Igbo art music compositions provides a focused study of appropriation and cultural continuum in contemporary African music-making. All of the above entails that the Nigerian-Igbo music composer should be able to take the responsibility of creating social commentary texts and appropriate them in music to scrutinise the society, satirise defaulters of social norms and values, and negotiate for societal transformation.

Studies such as those conducted by Sjaak van der Geest and Nimrod Asante-Darko, Phua Chye and Lily Kong, Annemette Kirkegaard, Cherry Muhanji and Jack Straton, Isaac Idamoyibo, John Mizzoni, Albert Oikelome, Olukayode Eesuola, and Juliet Hess confirm that social commentary is a prominent phenomenon among some pop musicians. For example, Fela Anikulapo Kuti, a Nigerian Afro-beat musician, is notable in the art of socio-political commentary, so much so that his music was banned by the federal government of his time (see Oikelome; Eesuola).

Ingrid Byerly confirms the art of social commentary in the South African art music composition context, especially with reference to apartheid and post-apartheid pieces, but avers the composers are mostly interested in the aesthetical and contemplative values. However, Adedeji recommends that African composers should focus more on creating works that address social issues. Hence, he conceptualises the "transformative composition theory" (4) and strongly encourages African composers to create works that would transform society and its social challenges in order for them to be more relevant and valued by society (4). Adedeji's theory and recommendation are in tandem with music-making in the Igbo performance context where transformative music seems to be more valued than the mere entertainment types. This claim is strongly justified by Christian Onyeji and Elizabeth Onyeji's hierarchical order of the value of music *vis-à-vis* the "philosophy of African [Igbo] music practice and creativity" in which entertainment is found and considered to be the very last in the value ranking. According to them, "Although entertainment is a significant aspect of African music practice, it seems to be ranked the lowest in the hierarchy of value in African [Igbo] music" (28) while "[t]he philosophy of humanistic commitment" (21–4); "the philosophy of education, enlightenment and moral force" (24–5); "the philosophy of social and political order" (26–7); and "[t]he philosophy of communal therapy and spirituality" (27–8) are ranked higher.

The primary function of music is to involve people in shared experiences within the framework of their socio-cultural experience (Blacking 21). So, the common axiom "music is a human phenomenon" (21) probably stems from its social, political, cultural, communicative, and emotional traits. Composers of such music are usually also creative in text writing and function as social poets and activists. For, rather than depend on the subjective opinions of the specialised poets, the Nigerian-Igbo music-composer-poets take it upon themselves to create texts that are inspired by society. By this compositional practice, some composers of Nigerian-Igbo art music fulfil the "transformative composition theory". Therefore, the composer-poets' efforts to comment on social

issues through music in order to be relevant in their immediate society and the paucity of specialised text writers in Nigeria are some major factors that motivate Nigerian-Igbo art music composers to double as text writers.

The relationship between language and music

Neurological studies have shown that language has an important and complex function in humans. Its perception involves a number of brain regions. However, the same brain structures are responsible for music and language perceptions. For example, Kunert Richard, Roel Willems, and Peter Hagoort's neurological findings indicate that "[t]he neural pathways for language and music share a crossroads" (1). While music communicates through sounds, words are its vehicle for disseminating intelligible information. Thus, the communicative, intellectual, aesthetic, and emotional efficacies of music are maximised where it fuses with its sibling—poetry.

Isaac Idamoyibo says the limitation of textual communication in social commentary contexts is that the real meaning of the information strongly depends on the socio-cultural and/or socio-political context of the immediate environment it was created for. So, such a piece of music would definitely generate mixed reactions among listeners due to differences in language, socio-cultural backgrounds, environmental experiences, and associated imageries (144). This suggests that natural knowledge of all the aforementioned differences is required in understanding textual music that is rooted in a people's language and socio-political milieu. For example, social commentary music written in a Nigerian language will appeal more to the immediate society than it would to speakers of other languages in the same country. Therefore, the art music composers' social commentaries could be considered local art for local consumption as the pieces are most efficacious and best appreciated by participants and observers involved in the issues commented on; otherwise, others listen to it for mere aesthetical, recreational, and touristic reasons (145).

The interdisciplinary relationship of music and poetry is the hallmark of African musical practices (Agu, "Foundations of pragmatics: The primacy of language in African music theory, practice and education" 11). Thus, as a pure vessel of expression, African music unambiguously communicates through human language, various musical gestures derived from speech, and some musical instruments that are capable of surrogating spoken words ("Foundations" 11). Although instrumental surrogates for words such as drumming and abstraction of sound can be encountered in some Nigerian traditional music-making, as explicated by Nzewi, Anyahuru and Ohiaraumunna (94); Josephine Mokwunyei (353); and Atinuke Idamoyibo (135), the art of intelligible narratives eludes the instrumental medium. Even the sonically coded messages from musical instruments are sometimes ambiguous, especially to non-members or foreigners in a given culture. More so, Ekwueme asserts: "The human voice is the only instrument which can transmit intelligible language unequivocally to an audience. All other forms of meaning ascribed to or ascertained from non-vocal music are subjective and vague, ambiguous and imprecise" (Ekwueme, "Composing contemporary African choral music" 18). Also, Desmond Sergeant and Evangelos Himonide's empirical study of music and intelligible meaning affirms Ekwueme's assertion. Therefore, instrumental music cannot, for now, match the intelligible, communicative, and emotional powers of textual music made from the human language (Ekwueme, "Composing contemporary African choral music" 18).

Poetry allows humans to express things (such as social commentary) in indirect ways (Rexroth 4). For Kenneth Rexroth, poetry makes language a more effective tool for controlling and appreciating physical and abstract experiences. It communicates the experiences of a highly developed view of society. It weighs value and takes cognisance of its purpose and significance. Poetry also functions as a symbolic criticism of value. It reorganises and restates the entire value judgments of society in a manner that more clearly inspires awareness of what is interesting and dull, what is lovable and mean, what is beautiful and ugly, and most importantly, what is good and bad. It increases and guides our awareness of immediate experience (4).

Music penetrates where spoken words (such as poetry) have failed. Julian Fernandez affirms that music has the command of triggering human emotional neurons towards a thoughtful state of mind as well as exciting ecstasy (98). For, while music subtly attracts attention, it inherently entertains, informs, educates, softens, and holds spellbound the hard-hearted. We are conversant with the statement: "If music is the food of love, then play on [...] so that my appetite [...] may sicken to death" (William Shakespeare, Twelfth Night, Act 1, Scene 1). Dan Agu defines music as "[...] a language of emotions analogous to speech" ("Foundations" 13).

These emotional and communicative efficacies imbued in both poetry and music are more heightened when the two arts fuse. A common example of this amalgamation is the hymnody, which is efficacious among Christian congregations (Eniolawun 468–9).

Socio-cultural and political contexts of social commentary art music composition

As Chinua Achebe observed, "The Igbo are a very democratic people. They express strong antimonarchy sentiment—*Eze bu ilo*. Their culture illustrates a clear-cut opposition to kingship, because, I think, Igbo people had seen what the uncontrolled power of kings could do" (246). Igbo communities are fortified with several traditional music media and institutions that fight against unacceptable social acts (Okoro and Ofuani 387). One such example is the "spirit-manifest cult", loosely called "masquerade" (Umoh 102), which directly confronts and arrests perpetrators and unleashes consequential punishment on a culprit: "Apart from entertaining the public [with music and dance] during their outings, masquerades were crime detectors whose main task was making public the identities of perpetrators of social ills. Even chiefs indulging in criminal and obnoxious activities could not be spared the masquerades' chastising whips" (Umoh 102). Thus, Igbo people are culturally characterised by the "fight against social ills".

In recent decades, contemporary Nigeria could be considered as being saddled with rising corruption (Akindele; Nmah); unemployment (Virk, Nelson, and Dele-Adedeji); the dilapidation of social amenities such as the educational, healthcare, power and energy, transportation (roads), and pipe-borne water sectors, which also lead to labour unions' industrial action on a regular basis; extreme poverty (Ucha); ritual killings (Salihu, Isiaka, and Abdulaziz); internet scams (Ayodele, Oyedeji, and Badmos); public protests (Goteng; Ikalewumi); illegal migration to developed countries around the world —especially the English speaking countries—this type of migration is termed "japa" in Nigerian parlance (Okunade and Awosusi); ethnic militancy (Osabiya) and ethno-religious violence (Salawu); extreme insecurity of life and property (Odalonu); and a non-inclusive governmental system informed by ethno-religious bigotry (Salawu). Consequently, social, economic, and political problems regularly loom in the country (Dajo and Akor). Meanwhile, intercommunity wars over landownership and boundary disputes are also overwhelmingly prevalent (Ibeogu, Abah, and Chukwu). Furthermore, the struggle for the protection of lives and properties, economic survival, ethnic identity, and resource control have led to unconventional community policing and militancy (Osabiya).

Ojukwu and other Nigerian-Igbo art music composers such as Agu, Joe Onyekwelu, Izuchukwu Ewulu, and Ofuani, whose personalities reflect Igbo cultural attributes deploy their compositional art of social commentary towards negotiating for an ideal society in the interest of humanity as observers and participants in these situations. For example, the consequence of the aforementioned socio-political problems in Nigeria is the disappearance of peace and peaceful coexistence in the country (Salawu). This endangers progress, meaningful development, and the fundamentals of modern civilisation. For example, insecurity discourages foreign, and even local, investors (Dajo and Akor). Based on this situation, in his composition titled "Udo amaka" (Peace is Supreme), Agu comments on the importance of "peace" in all spheres of progress, development, and civilisation and advises that peace should reign in all. Agu considers peace fundamental to attaining national unity and development.

Ofuani's "Pụta k'anyi dozie obodo anyi" (Come, let's rebuild our country) (*Oka Abu—Nigerian Solo Songs Vol. 1* 31–7) comments on the collapse of social amenities in Nigeria and appeals to everyone to arise and rebuild them. Another composition titled "Ndi okọli" (Gossipers) (*Oka* 46–55) laments the fact that sycophants and gossipers have destroyed kings, leaders, governments, friends, marriages, and peoples and subsequently warns perpetrators to desist from these acts.

In his folk-opera composition titled "Reconciliation", Onyekwelu takes up the theme of inter-community war arising from landownership and boundary disputes. The lyrics present a fictional, persistent inter-community war over landownership and boundary disputes that lasted for over a century. Peace is eventually achieved through a decisive intermarriage between the prince and princess of the warring villages. It is interesting that the young prince and princess secretly planned the marriage to weaken their warring fathers' persistence and compel them to embrace peace.

Generally, the composition "Reconciliation" implies that contemporary Nigerian youths can strategise a friendly social integration framework and harness peaceful ways (such as decisive rejection of their fathers' preoccupation with ethnic bigotry and intercommunity wars) to abate these issues. "Ije ụwa" (The journey of life) by Ewulu laments the ups and downs of life, with reference to the unbearable socio-economic, political, and insecurity situations in Nigeria, and consoles listeners to remain positively focused despite these situations. In another composition titled "Anya fụlụ ugo" (The eagle on the iroko tree), Ewulu appeals to people, particularly the wealthy, to always uphold the ideals of "live and let live". In the piece titled "Jide nti gi eka" (Be warned), Ewulu advises Nigerian peoples, leaders, and governments of various levels to always heed good advice. His

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piece "Oruasi" (The Talkative) criticises talkative personalities who—like the character of Squealer in Orwell's *Animal Farm*—swiftly upturn situations and propagandise issues through alluring speeches. The song warns such persons to be good and sincere to all. He also created a composition titled "Eje, ana" (To and fro—the ultimate), which stresses the importance of safety and consideration for others while traveling. "Dim Onyalagu" (Onyalagu my husband) by Agu and "Di nta" (The great hunter) by Ojukwu speak about the theme of domestic violence against wives; "Ikemefune" by Ojukwu bemoans the evils of child molestation and highlights the suffering of mothers in such circumstances.

Analysis of Ojukwu's "Chineke doo"

Ojukwu (12 November 1940–19 May 2024) from Nnewi, Anambra State, was a Knight of St Christopher, a profound and eminent Nigerian choral composer of Igbo background. He composed based on the concept of "intercultural creativity" as delineated by Akin Euba (116–7). It enabled him to fuse European and Igbo indigenous music traits with his works which were dominantly written in the Igbo language. This creative mixture was inspired by his exposure to Igbo musical culture, Western music education, and Western music traditions in the Anglican church, where he developed his early musical skills. Ojukwu's preferred medium in composition was SATB Chorus—an outright influence of his church music background. Although indigenous church anthems constitute the highest number of his compositional outputs, his social commentary works are also quite notable (as shown above). He was also a refined organist, choral director, and conductor.

Ojukwu composed the text and music of the anthem of the University of Nigeria in Nsukka while in the second year of his undergraduate studies in music (1962). On graduation in 1965 he received the Fela Sowande Academic Award, a music award from the University of Nigeria.[2] He also won the Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Academic Excellence in Music Composition. In Nigeria, musicians and music audiences alike call Ojukwu the "Handel of Africa". And according to foreign music theorist Carter-Ényì: "Another one of Sam Ojukwu's pieces Jehova Eme Wo has been described to me as the African Hallelujah Chorus" (480). He lectured in music from 1975 at Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri, Nigeria and retired in 2005.

"Chineke doo" is the most popular and socially appealing of Ojukwu's compositions on social commentary themes and, perhaps, the most popular in Nigerian-Igbo social commentary composition repertory in terms of its performance rate and public appreciation. It holistically addresses multiple extant issues that affect Nigeria socially, economically, and politically. The text is a blend of prayer and commentary, and the music is a quasi-simulation of Igbo highlife style.[3] Some other social commentary compositions of his include "Udo, ebele ụmụ ụwa n'emem" (Peace, I pity the people of the world) in which he pities the entire human race for the ceaseless anarchies and wars all over the world; "Were ire gi gụo eze gi ọnụ" (Be mindful of your action) demands that people should strive to maintain a positive attitude in society; and "O ko to ko Nigeria" (an Igbo sound allusion or metaphor which means big for nothing—implying that "Nigeria is big for nothing"), composed in 1968 during the Nigerian Civil War, mocks the Nigerian Army for their loss to the Biafran Armed Forces at Abagana. The piece was performed by Ojukwu's choir at the Biafran Armed Forces barracks during the war period several times. The composition date of "Chineke doo" (1984) shows that it predates Adedeji's proposal for social commentary in African art music by almost three decades.

Our study of Ojukwu's social commentary pieces reveals that he created his music in such a way that it would be effective and unambiguous. Nevertheless, some aspects of the texts are usually masked with fables, figures of speech, local adages, and parables which assisted him to enhance his lyrics with indigenous impetus. Also, in relation to a prevailing textual theme, he expressed or enunciated unhappy moods or sad imagery by crafting the music to sound subtle, gloomy, and melancholic through the creative use of relevant expressive tonal effects, harmonic idioms, rhythmic patterns, and/or dynamic shadings. Consequently, the creative conception of the music developed from the textual content (the poetry). This implies that text inspired the necessary musical idioms, styles, and devices he utilised in his compositions on social commentary. Thus, in this compositional concept, text and music are analogous, which necessitates strict creative matching of the natural tone properties of words. Ojukwu crafted the works to be culturally relevant through the adoption of Igbo music elements, instruments, and structural forms. The following textual explication of "Chineke doo" divulges the extant socio-political and humanistic relevancies of the poetic texts.

It is noteworthy that Ojukwu deployed the 'prayer technique' to mask the textual theme of "Chineke doo", hence the English translation of the title: A prayer for Nigeria. According to him, once any form of threat came

his way with reference to the textual music, he simply claimed: "I only prayed for Nigeria, my country" (Ojukwu and Ofuani).

Indeed, the major socio-political problems that disillusion the people of Nigeria are encapsulated in "Chineke doo". Ojukwu composed the text and music in 1984 when the country was morally, economically, politically, and socially far better off than it is today (Ikelegbe 490; Oludele). Thus, the words of the music are considered more relevant in present-day Nigeria. The poetic text places Ojukwu as a prophet, visionary, and social commentator. This is so, at least, for the fact that all of the societal ills he commented and lamented on (in the music) are arguably normal and acceptable to some extent in contemporary Nigerian society. Those who are involved in some of the ills are celebrated by society—even some religious bodies in the country celebrate them. It appears everybody (including those who indulge in some of the ills) utter prayers similar to lines one to eight (which is regularly recaptured as a refrain in the composed music):

Chukwu nna biko,
Nụr'aririọ anyi o.
Onye kɛr'ụwa,
Nụr'a kw'ụmụ gi o.
Mgbe'ọnwụnwa n'amaghari'a nyi
K'ebili miri.
Chineke doo, Zọpụt'anyi o!
O chi moo!

God our Father, please,
Hearken to our prayers.
Creator of the universe,
Hear your children's cry.
When temptation blows us up and down
Like ocean waves.
God, please, deliver us!
Oh my God!

In verse two, the reasons why the country is not working effectively are captured. It is necessary to note that sonic imagery is onomatopoeically figured as "*Kpo ko lo*" (empty dangling tin) and "*Pi jom*" (more you look, less you see) in lines 10 to 14 to represent the seemingly unstable and deceptive state of the country. An empty tin makes the loudest noise and is easily kicked about with insignificant strength. On the other hand, "*Pi jom*" suggests a lack of truthfulness, a phenomenon that Nigerians commonly refer to as "More you look, less you see". Ojukwu creatively deployed "*Kpo ko lo*" and "*Pi jom*" as what we can term "onomatopoeic imagery syllables", "sound syllables" (Ofuani, ""Nonsensical syllable"? An inquiry into its rational in Sub-Sahara African music-making" 139–62), or "impressionistic syllables" (Nwamara 32–5).

Nekene k'obodo anyi si ada
Kpọ kọ lọ
Pi jom

Behold, how our country is falling
Empty dangling tin
More you look, less you see

That some officeholders and political leaders orchestrate inhuman obstacles for others could be considered to be widespread in the country (see Achebe 76). It seems that those who pay unlawful allegiance to them are illicitly promoted and controlled by them, too (lines 15 to 18). According to Achebe: "The ploy in the Nigerian context is simple and crude: Get the achievers out and replace them with less qualified individuals from the desired ethnic background so as to gain access to the resources of the state" (76). This attitude hinders many developmental achievements and constitutes several fundamental problems such as the promotion of ethnic bigotry, mediocrity, youth restiveness, dominance, dictatorship, possessiveness, fundamental human rights infringements, and all sorts of corruption, among others.

In the song, the social issue of orchestrated hindrance is considered the reason certain governmental policies, programmes, and entitlements are scraped after those in power have enjoyed them. As the practice has escalated into all sectors of the country, some people have found consolation in the slogan "It shall be my (or my relation's) turn one day". Thus, this predicament can be likened to a relay race in which the baton is expected to be transferred to the next sprinter, implying that the issues may not be abated soonest. The hindrance syndrome and its associates are encapsulated in an Igbo proverb, which Ojukwu creatively adopted. Although the proverb literally means, "After one has attained success, he/she constitutes a hindrance on the ways of others". The proverb is followed by other statements which explicate it further:

Onye gafe ogwe:
Ọ si ogwe jisisia kpam kpam!
Onye gafe ogwe:
Ọ si ogwe gbajisia.

After one has crossed the bridge:
One tells the bridge to collapse completely!
After one has crossed the bridge:
One tells the bridge to break-up against others.

In verse three the issue of negligence of African traditional philosophy, norms, and values of siblinghood is raised. Ojukwu comments on the concept of 'survival of the fittest' as it is contrary to the African traditional tenets of brotherhood/sisterhood which demand that someone cannot be wealthy while his/her people are hungry and suffering. Functionally, this type of brotherhood/sisterhood is not necessarily informed by biological, communal, socio-political, religious, or ethnic factors but rather by deep humanistic emotions.

Again, Ojukwu laments the situation using an imagery technique, wherein he skilfully utilised the Igbo fable proverb "*Oke n'ọhia: Ngwele n'ulo*" (Rat runs to the bush, lizard to the house), which literally means "Everyone on his/her own way: nobody cares for one another" or "Everybody has scattered home and abroad: Nobody cares for others". This factor could be considered a major cause of the lack of value for human life and human rights, scanty philanthropic projects, and rare non-beneficial social work and community development by some wealthy citizens in the country. Wealth seems to be mostly accumulated by some powerful individuals who in turn unduly use it to influence communal and national politics and perpetuate injustice to suit their selfish desires:

Nekenenụ na nwanne amagh kwa Nwanne ya;
Nekenenụ na nwanne amagh kwa Nwanne nke ya o.
Oke n'ọhia: Ngwele n'ulo.
Oke n'ọhia: Ngwele n'ulo

Behold, relationship is no longer a thing of value
Oh, behold, blood is no longer thicker than water
Rats run to the bush, lizards to the house.
Rats run to the bush, lizards to the house.

In verse four, social challenges such as untruthfulness, sycophancy, deceitfulness, and betrayal are exposed. Beginning from family to public justice systems up to the official social justice systems in the country, disillusionment brought about by dishonesty seems to be the order of the day. Access to social justice is often largely determined by social influence and wealth (which Nigerians refer to as "connection"). Here again, Ojukwu laments the circumstances using an Igbo proverb, which means, "Oh, behold! There is no honesty in our country: Friends become enemies at one's back". This attitude seems very common as a means to access power, promotion, and success of any type. It is mostly explored by the mediocre and it often works for them (see Achebe 76). Some professionals and honest people suffer at the hands of mediocre and dishonest people who are already at the

helm of public affairs. For this reason, some of the compatriots do not dedicate their time to execute their careers proficiently. Mediocrity as a shortcut appears to be mostly preferred:

Nekenenụ n'eziokwu adigh kwa n'obodo anyi;
Nekenenụ n'eziokwu adigh kwa n'obodo
Melemele n'iru: Gwọmpiti n'azụ
Melemele n'iru: Gwọmpiti n'azụ

Behold, there is no more truth in our country!
Oh, behold, there is no more honesty in our country!
Friends become enemies at one's back.
Friends become enemies at one's back.

In verse five, ill means explored by some people to make money are exposed. Recently, this social challenge seems to be escalating excessively among a good number of people. Scams ("419s" in Nigerian parlance), armed robbery, money rituals, diabolism, ritual killings, sorcery, kidnapping, human trafficking, and rape are very common, especially among youths who are already restive. People probably indulge in these acts for survival or to acquire formidable wealth, power, recognition, influence, and connection that can launch them into a network of political monsters:

Nekene k'ụfọdụ si achụ naira
n'ụzọ di njọ;
E zute ori, A gwọta nsi
E gbunyereya mmadụ.

Behold, how some people make money
through evil means;
They rob, they diabolize,
They even kill human beings on it.

In verse six, the unstable state of the country is restated as in verse one but extended with the addition of other social ills that characterise the country, namely, greediness, jealousy, hatred, and unnecessary arguments and propaganda:

Any'uku,
Ekworo,
I kpọ asi
Okwu n'ụka
A karila n'o bodo anyi o.

Greediness,
Jealousy,
Hatred,
Unnecessary arguments and propaganda
Are too much and unbearable in our country.

Conclusion

In this article we have shown that Ojukwu deliberately implemented social commentary in his song "Chineke doo". This enhances the status of this song as social, political, cum-functional-art—a notable essence of music-making in some traditional sub-Saharan African settings. The exploration of the socio-cultural and socio-political contexts, along with detailed examples, deepens the understanding of how social commentary in music relates to specific social and political issues in Nigeria. In turn, this suggests that the Nigerian socio-political environment is responsible for the appropriation of social commentary themes in art music compositions to help expose the prevailing social issues in the country. Ojukwu spotlighted socio-political issues as a form of edutainment. Instead of imposing the truth, he preferred to creatively help people understand it through his compositions, leaving them to make their own choices afterwards. This particularly endows Ojukwu with the role of social commentator and makes him socially relevant beyond the aesthetic function of his music.

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We further found that the creative use of traditional speech idioms such as proverbs creates apt imagery in "Chineke doo". The use of fables, proverbs, parables, and figures of speech not only enabled Ojukwu to capture a wide array of messages in a succinct way but also helped him to indigenise his lyrics.

Notes

1. The term "art music" denotes high-art music compositions that are primarily created for aesthetical and contemplative purposes. And, as opposed to traditional and pop music-making (which are oral arts in Nigeria), art music is essentially conceived and presented in written tradition—using the staff notation and/or the likes. In this study, such a musical work/piece is referred to as "art music" and the composer as an "art music composer".
2. Fela Sowande (1905–1987) was a Nigerian pioneer art music composer and organist who was famous around the globe.
3. "Highlife" is an intercultural indigenous pop music genre developed and popularised in West African countries such as Ghana and Nigeria. Indigenous instruments, idioms, and styles of the individual musician's ethnic background are strongly emphasised in the music. Thus, the music is often deployed by the musicians and societies to assert their various identities of ethnicity/place.

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Kinderlê.
Lynthia Julius.
Kaapstad: Queillerie, 2024. 107 pp.
ISBN 9780795802706.

Lynthia Julius debuteer in 2020 met haar bundel *Uit die kroes*. Hierdie bundel plaas Julius vinnig op die voorgrond as 'n jong digter om dop te hou. Die verskyning van haar tweede bundel, *Kinderlê* (2024) is 'n welkome verwikkeling. In *Kinderlê* neem die fragmente van onthou en heimwee die vorm van 'n narratiewe terapie aan. Dié narratief het ten doel om veral rou—nie net oor die digter se eie verlies nie, maar ook dié van die kinders van Namakwaland—te verwerk in die vorm van 'n digbundel.

Kinderlê handhaaf reeds vanaf die omslag 'n sterk feministiese ondertoon. Die omslagontwerp sinspeel op die vroulike geslagsorgaan wat beide lewe voortbring en plesier verskaf. Die verskillende kleure waaruit hierdie geslagsorgaan bestaan, kan myns insiens simbolies dui op belangrike tematiek in die bundel—die donker- na ligrooi-pienk kan verteenwoordigend wees van bloed wat sinspeel op verlies en ook misgeboorte. Die skakerings van groen na seegroen-blou kan weer simbolies wees van hoop, nuwe lewe en selfs 'n wedergeboorte/doop voorstel. Hierdie simboliek is reeds 'n vooruitwysing na die bundelinhoud waarin die diepte van menslike emosies—spesifiek vroulike emosies—verken word, 'n bundel waarin pyn en plesier tegelykertyd kan bestaan.

Die titel van die bundel is veral funksioneel vanweë die letterlike verwysing na kinders wat lê (verwysend na die monument by Steinkopf in die Noord-Kaap ter herinnering aan 'n kinderuitwissing in 1867), asook die figuurlike verwysing na die verlies van 'n kind en terselfdertyd 'n bepaalde onskuld.

Met betrekking tot die tipografiese inhoud en struktuur van die bundel, maak Julius gebruik van 'n variasie van omgangstaal deur beide Gariep- en Nama-Afrikaans te gebruik. Julius maak ook gebruik van poëtiese eksperimentering met tipografie soos byvoorbeeld wisselende reëllengtes en die distorsie van sinne. Vergelyk in hierdie verband die afdeling "Goed val breek", en veral die gedig "Lady Lazarus" (48):

val
teen
als
gryp
teen
als
houvas
teen
als

Die afdeling "Goed val breek" gaan hoofsaaklik oor die spreker se geestessiekte en haar opname in 'n inrigting. Die distorsie en onreëlmatige reëllengtes kan in hierdie afdeling 'n konkrete aanduiding wees van die spreker se geestestoestand.

Die bundel is verdeel in agt opeenvolgende afdelings wat as 'n chronologiese narratief gelees kan word. Dit is asof elke afdeling se slotgedig die inleiding tot die volgende afdeling voorhou, soos byvoorbeeld in die afdeling "Klipkont". Die laaste gedig in dié afdeling, naamlik "Beautiful in Kimberley" (43), handel oor die spreker wat droom dat haar romantiese verhouding besig is om te eindig; terwyl daar in die daaropvolgende afdeling "Goed val breek" verskeie dinge nie na wense verloop nie—soos die afdelingtitel reeds illustreer.

Daar bestaan heelwat ooreenkomste tussen Julius se *Uit die kroes* (2020) en *Kinderlê* (2024). Die digter maak in beide gebruik van Gariep- en Nama-Afrikaans en die Noord-Kaapse ruimte staan steeds in *Kinderlê* sentraal. Die toon van beide bundels is geset in pyn, woede en verlies, aspekte wat ook tematies op die voorgrond funksioneer in beide bundels. In *Kinderlê* word daar ook gebruik gemaak van 'n vorm van appropriasie deur bekende gebeure en verse uit die Bybel as inspirasie vir 'n herbewerking te gebruik, om sodoende 'n persoonlike perspektief en betekenis weer te gee. Vergelyk in hierdie verband byvoorbeeld die opstanding van Jesus in "Ménage à moi" (29):

> Lynthia is gebore
> Lynthia het uit die selfdoodbed opgestaan
> Lynthia kom weer

Die postmodernistiese tendens van introspeksie en selfrefleksiwiteit kom soos in Julius se debuut

steeds voor in hierdie bundel en kan reeds vanaf die openingsgedig "1 Gepubliseerdiërs 13" (9) gesien word:

> Al herskryf ek Tristia
> en studeer filosofie,
> is ek net bruin metaal,
> 'n klinkende identiteitsimbaal.

As resultaat van haar selfrefleksiwiteit besef die spreker in bogenoemde gedig ook dat sy nie onafhanklik van haar veltaal kan bestaan nie en die hibriditeit van haar identiteit moet omarm:

> maar ek skryf nie soos hulle nie,
> is ek 'n bruin teef wat blaf. (9)

Julius se gebruik van interteks blyk uit die hulde wat sy bring aan bekende verse soos "Repos ailleurs" (33) en "'n Ma kom kry" (106) wat Totius se "Repos ailleurs" en "o Die pyn-gedagte" oproep, maar strek ook verder om die postmoderne aard van haar werk te illustreer wanneer sy bestaande poësie approprieer, ondermyn en herskryf. Julius se "Toemaar die witman" (66), 'n interteks van Ingrid Jonker se "Toemaar die donker man", werk met die stereotipes van ras, waar die donker man in Jonker se gedig die bedreiging is, word die wit man die bedreiging in Julius se gedig. 'n Ander voorbeeld is N. P. van Wyk Louw se "Karoo-dorp: someraand" wat herskryf word as "Namakwaland-dorp: someraand" (61). Julius se herskrywing behels dat die onskuld van die Karoo in Van Wyk Louw se gedig omgeskakel word na 'n meer onheilspellende perspektief op die Namakwalandse ruimte.

Tematies bou Julius se *Kinderlê* voort op die temas van geestessiekte, die rol van die moederfiguur en dubbele marginalisering ten opsigte van ras en geslag—wat reeds in *Uit die kroes* teenwoordig is. Hiervan getuig gedigte soos "Daai tyd van die maand" (11), "Born frees" (34), "Die braai" (41) en "Bruinfuga" (68). In *Kinderlê* word die tema van verlies tot op die spits gedryf. Die intense belewenis van verskillende vorme van verlies—swangerskapverlies, die stryd teen geestessiekte en byna die verlies van 'n eie lewe, die verlies van kinders, asook van geloof—word met intense eerlikheid uitgebeeld. Die afwesige vaderfiguur kom egter nie so prominent in *Kinderlê* voor soos in *Uit die kroes* (2020) nie, die spreker fokus meer in hierdie bundel daarop om die verhouding met die ma uit verskeie invalshoeke te belig en die kompleksheid daarvan te ondersoek, soos gesien in verse soos "Deoksiribonukleïensuur" (90) en "Steak-en-kidney-pie" (92).

Kinderlê is na my oorwoë mening geslaagd vir die tydsgewrig waarin dit geskryf is. Dit blyk net moeilik om die veelvlakkige verkenning van die verskeie temas in een resensie vas te pen, maar dit laat veel ruimte vir verdere literêre ondersoeke en veral vergelykende studies rakende feminisme, identiteit en postmodernisme.

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Die lewe is 'n asem lank: Gedigte oor verlies en vertroosting.
Frieda van den Heever (red.).
Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 2023. 160 pp.
ISBN 9780624092209.

Die woord 'bloemlesing' is van Griekse oorsprong en beteken "'n versameling blomme". Dit is besonder gepas vir *Die lewe is 'n asem lank: Gedigte oor verlies en vertroosting*, 'n versamelbundel waarin 'n ruiker gedigte oor die dood en verlies as geskenk vir die leser aangebied word. Dikwels ontbreek woorde in tye van groot emosionele intensiteit—dan gryp mense na ander se woorde om te probeer sin maak van hul eie pyn en verlies. Juis daarom is 'n versamelbundel soos hierdie so geslaagd.

Op die agterplat van hierdie mooi hardeband-uitgawe staan daar dat gedigte oor die dood, afskeid, verganklikheid en die kwesbaarheid van menswees in die bundel opgeneem is, met Frieda van den Heever—wat bekend is vir die aanbied van *Vers en klank* op RSG—as die samesteller. In die voorwoord verduidelik Van den Heever dat sy 'n liefhebber en leser (nie 'n kenner nie) van die Afrikaanse letterkundelandskap is. Van den Heever skryf dat sy 'n "loergat oor 'n groot uitsig van 'n asemrowende, vreesaanjaende en beeldskone landskap" (9) het. Alhoewel sy as 'buitestaander' op die rand van die literêre sisteem eerstens as leser (en nie as letterkundige nie) poësie waardeer, is die seleksie van 100 gedigte deur 50 digters 'n getuigskrif van deeglike begrip en kennis van hierdie sisteem.

Die seleksie van die gedigte word geregverdig as 'n idiosinkratiese leserskeuse wat nie noodwendig die seleksie as 'n kundige benader nie, maar wat met 'n eie persoonlike vooroordeel gedigte geselekteer het. Die bloemlesing is daarom nie 'n probeerslag om die beste of bekendste gedigte tematies te verbind nie. Van den Heever verduidelik verder dat haar persoonlike reis met die verlies van haar man (en hond) tydens die samestelling ook 'n invloed op die keuses van gedigte

gehad het. Die eie ervaring van die dood, afskeid en verlies maak dit daarom 'n eg persoonlike en roerende versameling.

Die titel van die bundel *Die lewe is 'n asem lank* is ontleen uit die bekende Breytenbach-gedig "26 November 1975". Dié gedig word ook volledig na die voorwoord aangebied. Breytenbach is die digter wat die meeste verteenwoordig word met nege gedigte wat opgeneem is, asook drie van die afdelingmotto's wat uit Breytenbach-gedigte ontleen word. Een ikoniese ouer gedig wat volgens my ontbreek, is Eugène Marais se "Skoppensboer". Die spektrum van gedigte wat in die bloemlesing opgeneem is, strek vanaf die Dertigers (N. P. van Wyk Louw, Elizabeth Eybers) tot kontemporêre Afrikaanse digters. Die gedigseleksie word goed afgewissel deur die verteenwoordiging van ouer en jonger digters. Dit is verblydend om bekroonde nuwe stemme soos Ashwin Arendse, Jolyn Phillips en Pieter Odendaal raak te lees, sowel as minder bekende stemme soos Susan Ongansie, Kobus Lombard en Pieter Hugo.

Die teikengehoor (die gewone poësieliefhebber) is telkens in gedagte gehou en Van den Heever verduidelik dat een van die bepalende kriteria vir die seleksie haar oorweging was van hoe sy "vermoed die gedig sal resoneer met die bedoelde leser" (10). Die gebruikersvriendelike en toeganklike kenmerke van die bundel word só vir die groter publiek beskikbaar gemaak. Sy argumenteer dat die dood "[…] hom nie tot orde [laat] roep nie" (10), maar dat sy nogtans probeer het om 'n bepaalde orde in die bloemlesing te handhaaf. Die bundel word gerubriseer in ses afdelings wat telkens met 'n gepaste motto ingelei word. Dié afdelings is "Sterflikheid", "Sterf", "Ter aarde bestem", "Laaste wens", "Verlies" en "Heengaan as terugkeer". Die weerloosheid van alle lewende dinge (dink maar aan Lucebert), begrafnisreëlings, gesprekke rondom praktiese implikasies en die siklisiteit van die proses tussen lewe en dood word ook in die afdelings subtiel en dalk (on)bewus aangevoer. Die afdeling wat by verre die meeste gedigte bevat, is "Verlies", wat dalk ook aanduidend kan wees van die dood se grootse impak op die wat agterbly.

Van die gedigte is ook bekende toonsettings, byvoorbeeld WL van der Merwe se "voortaan sal ek winterskemer vleilangs loop" wat as "Vir 'n pepermossie" deur Laurika Rauch getoonset is. Laurinda Hofmeyr het ook verskeie van die Breytenbach-gedigte getoonset, byvoorbeeld "ek sal sterf en na my vader gaan", asook Fanie Olivier se "Last grave at Dimbaza". Churchil Naudé se "Die ou vannie oomblik"—wat oorspronklik in sy bundel *Drol innie drinkwater* (2020) gepubliseer is—getuig verder van die moontlikhede vir die wisselwerking tussen die kultuurvorme van musiek en poësie aangesien Naudé eerstens as kletsrymer bekend is.

Die tematiese strekking van die bloemlesing sluit ook in dat 'n gedig betrek word wat nie alleen verlies aanspreek nie, maar ook as aktuele vers kan dien. So byvoorbeeld word Diana Ferrus se "Vir Sara Baartman" in die *Ter aarde bestem*-afdeling ingesluit. Dié gedig se impak op die werklikheid het veroorsaak dat Sara Baartman se oorskot kon terugkom na Suid-Afrika en sy jare na haar dood 'n heldebegrafnis op eie grond kon ontvang.

Die hele bloemlesing eggo die woorde van die gedig uit die voorwoord "Seën vir die gebrokenes van hart" deur Henry David Thoreau. Dit beklemtoon die noodsaaklikheid van hoop, liefde en genesing in tye van duisternis en gebrokenheid. Die digters se woorde laat "'n spoor lig" (9) en die oogmerk van die bloemlesing is helder: die enigste "genesing vir liefde / is meer liefde" (11).

Ten slotte haal ek Van den Heever (10) aan: "Hoewel die dood in al sy gestaltes onteenseglik is, help die digter(s) deur vertwyfeling vlot te praat om die dood in die oë te kyk en voluit voort te leef—hopelik tot afgeronde menslikheid. Om stilhuilend voort te leef teen verlies, radelose verlange en groeiende onvoltooidheid, onwillekeurige onthou en dreigende vergetelheid in. Afwesigheid word 'n ander vorm van blywende teenwoordigheid." Hierdie bloemlesing is 'n versameling poësie-blomme wat vir enige persoon troos sal bied wanneer die donker van verlies aan die deur kom klop.

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Weerskyn.
Alwyn Roux.
Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2024. 96 pp.
ISBN 9781485315438.

Weerskyn is die debuutbundel van Alwyn Roux. Dié bundel verskyn tien jaar nadat hy in 2014 as een van die digters in die versamelbundel *Nuwe stemme 5* opgeneem is.

Anders as wat die gebruik is, lei die titelgedig van Alwyn Roux se digbundel nie die teks in nie, maar is dit

eerder die slotgedig van die bundel. Die gedig skakel met die titel, met sy betekenis van refleksie of afspieëling. Die implikasie is dat gedigte die werklikheid reflekteer, en andersom. Die twee komponente *weer* en *skyn* is rigtinggewend, want dit is veral die manipulerende digterspen wat sy interpretasie gee. Soms moet die digter egter, soos in die slotgedig "weerskyn" erken, dat "wolke kennelik as wolke"(88) bestaan.

Die slotgedig moet saamgelees word met die eerste gedig "teken" (9) aangesien dit dieselfde tema reflekteer. Hier is nou sprake van 'n "digtersfluit" wat "vermomde voëls / as voëls besing". Eweneens vat die slotreëls dit soos volg saam:

> [...] Wat bly oor van voëls
> in nabootsing? Ek seël die woorde dig en droom
> van voëls wat kennelik vermom as voëls gesing het.

Aangesien die digproses sentraal staan, is dit sinvol om vervolgens die gedig "ars poetica"(76) te betrek. Kenmerkend van Roux se gedigte is die anaforiese inslag, soos ook in hierdie gedig waar elk van die strofes begin met "die versreëls spoel soos golwe strand", terwyl die vierde strofe net uit dié reël bestaan. Die skryfproses word hier gekoppel aan die waarneming van die natuur, die beskrywing van die strandtoneel—maar illustreer ook die digter se weergee of weerskyning van die oorspronklike, waar branders en golwe omgetoor word tot versreëls.

Die digterlike manipulering van dit wat waargeneem word, kom ook ter sprake in "'n vreemdeling se graf" (10) wat begin soos volg: "Wonder of dié dag my iets gaan leer van jou skielike afsterwe / jy wat nog nie eens gedagte of gedigte was nie." Die vreemde dooie word vervolgens "in die gedig begrawe". Die gedig word met die volgende treffende slot afgesluit: "Ek het jou verbeel, ek het / elkeen van julle verbeel en die woorde het reeds ontbind."

Verganklikheid en sterflikheid staan sentraal in die bundel. Etlike verse word gewy aan die pa se afsterwe; die vaderfiguur wat ironies genoeg, die een was wat aan ander die doodsberigte moes oordra (28). Die angstigheid wat met hospitale geassosieer is tydens die inperkingsperiode vorm die kern van 'n sentrale gedig en die spreker besin of die aflaai van sy pa by die hospitaal soortgelyk is aan die bootvaart saam met Charon oor die Styx.

In kontras met die vader se dood is daar verse oor die nuutgeborene; die kind vir wie die spreker so lief is buite homself (87); hy beskryf sy liefde as iets soortgelyks aan "te buite gaan" (87). Ironies dat die doodsboot van vroeër nou "'n roeibootjie van die vaak" genoem word wat die kind in "wiegeliedjie vir Sebastian" (86) neem na "die land van slaap".

Eiesoortige liefdesverse kom ook in die teks voor, as 'n teenhanger vir dié oor die dood. Die liefde word beskryf as 'n spookagtige verskyning, 'n verskansing, maar ook 'n huiwerigheid by die spreker. Dit is trouens in die gedig "Huiwering" (31) wat ek die woord "broeknaai" geleer het.

Roux se gedigte het 'n intellektuele onderbou en tree intertekstueel in gesprek met Heidegger, met Opperman en Van Wyk Louw, en sommige is nadigtings van bekendes soos onder meer Louise Glück en Lucebert. Dit is beslis een van die sterker debuutbundels in Afrikaans en ek sien uit na waarheen Roux se volgende bundel ons gaan neem, "terug / met papier op reis terug" (56).

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Die man wattie kinnes vang.
Nathan Trantraal.
Kaapstad: Kwela Boeke, 2024. 64 pp.
ISBN 9780795710995.

Naas sy bydraes as essayis en digter tree Nathan Trantraal ook as skrywer en illustreerder van grafiese romans op. In dié hoedanigheid werk hy saam met sy broer aan die Afrikaanse en Engelse tekste *Stormkaap: Drome kom altyd andersom uit* (2008), *Coloureds* (2010), *All Rise: Resistance and rebellion in South Africa* (2021), en *Crossroads* (2022). Met *Die man wattie kinnes vang* vertel Trantraal as enkelouteur en -illustreerder die verhaal van Damian de Jong, 'n skrywer wat die verhale van werklike reeksmoordenaars wil fiksionaliseer. Die leser stap saam met hom terwyl hy ondersoek instel na die gebeure rondom die moorde op bruin laerskoolseuns en die berugte stasiemoordenaar wat mettertyd daarvoor geboet het. Damian sukkel egter om die kloutjie by die oor te bring, want 'n aantal van die gegewens maak nie volkome sin nie, soveel so dat daar twyfel ontstaan oor die regmatige arrestasie van die (fiktiewe) beskuldigde, Winston Davids.

Deur die storie van Winston Davids (oftewel Norman Simons) te vertel, betree Trantraal 'n gevestigde tradisie binne grafiese romans, naamlik die skep van kronieke oor bekende reeksmoordenaars.

Dink hier aan *My friend Dahmer* (John Backderf), *Bible John* (Grant Morrison en Daniel Vallely), *Did you hear what Eddie Gein done?* (Harold Schechter en Eric Powell) en *Torso* (Brian Bendis en Marc Andreyko) wat die ware gebeure rondom sowel die moorde as die ontstaan van die moorddadige figure belig. Dikwels probeer dié romans ook die menslike kant van beide die moordenaars en die speurders wat op hulle jag maak, verken. Sommige verhale, soos die prysenswaardige *From Hell* (Alan Moore en Eddie Campbell), vervleg feit en fiksie op meesterlike wyse om 'n uiters spekulatiewe teks oor 'n moordenaar daar te stel. Vir my lê Trantraal se teks tussenin—dit beywer om 'n indruk van die gebeure rondom die stasiemoorde te gee en poog om die menslike kant van alle betrokkenes te belig. Terselfdertyd gebruik hy ware gebeure om 'n storie te versin en omtrent die arrestasie en identiteit van die stasiemoordenaar te spekuleer. As sodanig tree Trantraal se roman goed tot die gesprek toe.

Die man wattie kinnes vang is egter nie bloot 'n gruvertelling oor 'n beweerde reeksmoordenaar nie. In die bestek van ongeveer 40 bladsye hanteer die roman aansienlik meer. Trouens, die roman handel tot 'n mindere mate oor die stasiemoorde en meer omtrent die verhale daarrondom. Reeds op die titelblad sien lesers 'n beeld van 'n skilpop; 'n aanduider dat die teks uit verskillende lae bestaan. Om die verhaal van die moordenaar te verstaan, benodig 'n leser meer inligting aangaande die mense wat direk deur die moorde geraak is: hulle omstandighede, uitdagings en vrese. Om die mense te verstaan, asook die hantering van die speurtog, moet 'n leser die invloed van die politieke bestel begryp. Benede hierdie lae is daar ook die verhaal van die hoofkarakter, sy ervaring as laerskoolseun en sy blik op gebeure en die uitwerking wat dit op sy naastes gehad het. 'n Soortgelyke blik word aan die vermeende reeksmoordenaar se kinderjare afgestaan. Lesers kan selfs die feite rondom die moorde as matrjosjkas beskou; om die skuldige vas te trek, moet saakgelastigdes (en lesers) die poppie afskil om die oënskynlike waarheid te bereik. Trantraal lê voorts intertekstuele verbande met Andrei Tsjikatilo, die sogenaamde Slagter van Rostof wat meer as 50 moorde gepleeg het en waarvan die meeste kinders was. Daar is verskeie ooreenkomste met Simons, soos die feit dat Tsjikatilo 'n onderwyser was, sy slagoffers weggelei en verkrag het, en dat ander soms vir sy misdade beskuldig is. Deur die ooreenkomste met Tsjikatilo uit te wys, lê Trantraal die verbande tussen die apartheidsregime en die sosialistiese bestel van die Sowjetunie behendig bloot. Al twee sisteme bied vermoedelik 'n korrupte teelaarde vir figure soos Simons en Tsjikatilo, en belangriker nog 'n stelsel waar misdaadbekamping waarskynlik om die stelsel self handel en nié om die slagoffers nie.

Die roman kan bowendien op taal- en literêre vlak as gelaag beskou word. Hoewel die intertekstuele proloog in Engels verskyn, word die res van die verhaal in Afrikaans vertel. Die Afrikaans is veelsydig en weerspieël sowel Trantraal se eiesoortige vorm van Kaaps as ander variëteite van Kaaps en Standaardafrikaans. Só dui Trantraal die uiteenlopendheid van die taalgemeenskap aan en verleen terselfdertyd 'n geloofwaardigheid aan karakters.

Behalwe vir die ooglopende taalsosiologiese belang, is 'n kognitieftaalkundige perspektief op *honger* as konseptuele metafoor ewe interessant: die metafore HONGER IS BEGEERTE en HONGER IS MOTIVERING staan voorop. Reeds in die proloog word die maag van sameswering beskuldig, die verdraaier van mense tot monsters. Mense wat honger ly, word deur hul mae voorgesê. Dié metafore kom deurlopend voor, soms voor die hand liggend en soms subtiel: 'n honger vir kos, 'n honger vir aanvaarding, 'n honger om raakgesien te word en 'n honger vir geregtigheid. By tye word die honger gestil, maar meestal nie. Dieselfde geld vir die motivering van die moorde en die vastrek van die verdagtes.

Die roman bied ook 'n metapoëtikale wyse om van gedigte te praat. Die karakter, Damian, bekla die feit dat hy 'n boek wil skryf, maar dat die teks telkens as gedigte na vore tree. Hy wil nie gedigte skryf nie, want digkuns is miteskepping en taksidermie. Hy sê (28):

> Jy hal die insides vannie ding yt, stuff it.
> Jy hallie hart yt, die guts en organs en
> replace it met foam. Jy behou nettie coat
> vannie dier, die resemblance van nature,
> sit glas oë in sy kop. Jy pose it, en ammal
> kô verby en admire it vi hoe lifelike it is.

Hoewel Damian digkuns aan dierstoppery gelyk stel, gaan die beeld van die matrjosjka nie verlore nie. Die implikasie is wel dat die digter die skilpop met nuwe inhoud volprop maar nog steeds as die oorspronklike skilpop voorhou. Vir Damian bied gedigte nie 'n manier om die verhaal van kinders te vertel wat sonder seën of waardigheid begrawe is nie. Damian se siening verklap dus iets omtrent die plek en funksie van digkuns. Ironies kom 'n aantal gedigte in die roman voor, wat aandui dat Damian homself ondermyn.

As grafiese roman slaag die teks redelik goed. Die geskrewe teks is intelligent en kompleks en komplementeer die meegaande strip. Die geskrewe teks word geensins deur die grafika gedra nie (wat soms die geval by stripverhale is). Diegene wat egter

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meer uit die afbeeldings van grafiese romans put, sal nie teleurgestel wees nie. Die onderskeie karakters se leefwêrelde word kleurvol uitgebeeld, met ag vir historiese en kontemporêre uitbeeldings. Só vang Trantraal twee periodes in Suid-Afrika noukeurig vas—die tyd van die moorde vóór 1994, en tydens Damian se ondersoek in 2022. Die kleurgebruik is ook opvallend. Agtergrondkleure kom sag voor, wat die grafiese uitbeelding bedrieglik onskuldig laat voorkom. Die roman bevat ook verskillende visuele simbole wat nie noodwendig eksplisiet deur die teks verklaar word nie. Naas die skilpop is daar vlinders, speelgoed en 'n verwysing na die veerman van die Styxrivier. Hoewel kort, is die roman klaarblyklik ryk aan stof.

My punte van kritiek sluit in dat sommige karakters jonger lyk as wat hulle veronderstel is om te wees. Die twaalfjarige Andrei Tsjikatilo lyk nader aan vyf, en speurder Wakefield lyk byna twintig jaar jonger as haar vermoedelike vyftigs. En hoewel dié grafiese roman by verre nie die enigste is wat spekulatief met ware gebeure omgaan nie, skep dié soort spekulasie wel 'n gevaar dat die verhaal tot sameswerinsgteorie verlaag kan word. Nietemin, *Die man wattie kinnes vang* is 'n welkome bydrae tot die genre in Suid-Afrika oor die algemeen en Afrikaans in die besonder.

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Deelfontein.
Nicole Jaekel Strauss.
Kaapstad: Queillerie, 2023. 384 pp.
ISBN 9780795802645.

Nicole Jaekel Strauss se *Deelfontein* (2023) is 'n historiese roman in drie dele wat oor verskeie generasies afspeel. In deel een en twee volg die leser die jong Engelse dokter, Oliver Glenville, se reise na die Karoodorp, Deelfontein, waar die Imperial Yeomanry Hospital tydens die Suid-Afrikaanse Oorlog opgerig is. Die hospitaal beskik histories oor een van die wêreld se eerste x-straal masjiene, lopende, gefiltreerde water en terapeutiese saunas (Marais). Saans drink die personeel en dokters "glo sjampanje uit kristalglase [en] whisky met die soetste water uit die fontein" (16), hoewel dit vinnig duidelik word dat die hospitaal beslis nie 'n ruimte van jolyt is nie. Oliver word met sy aankoms vereis om te opereer wanneer 'n trein vol gewonde soldate arriveer. Ná sy aankoms in Deelfontein wissel sy dae by die hospitaal af tussen verslae oor gewondes en beskrywings oor die milieu.

Dit is tydens een van sy stiller oomblikke tussen pasiënte in 'n operasieteater waar Oliver verlief raak op 'n skoonmaker, Klara Grootboom, wat omsien na haar sterwende pa in 'n klein hut op 'n plaas in die omgewing. Net soos die twee se verhouding vlam vat met die afsterwe van Klara se pa, besef Klara dat sy swanger is, en breek kontak met Oliver en die hospitaal. Die ellende van die kampe en die Verskroeideaardebeleid dryf Oliver om na Sjina te vlug, waar hy in deel twee van die roman trou en onder die mag van ondergrondse dwelmhandel moet uitkom en terug na Londen vlug. Die vertelling oor Oliver Glenville stop met sy terugkeer en die fokus in deel drie van die roman verskuif na die kunstenaar Klarissa Grootboom, wat meer as 'n honderd jaar later onverwags kennis maak met 'n halfniggie uit Londen. Oliver se agterkleindogters deel verhale oor die kennis wat hulle beskik oor hul grootoupa Oliver en hul grootmoeders se onderskeie lewens.

Gerda Taljaard-Gilson identifiseer in haar artikel "'n Ondersoek na die waarde van historiese fiksie: drie geskiedkundige romans in oënskou geneem" (2013) enkele belangrike funksies wat historiese romans verrig. Dit kan as identiteitsoeke funksioneer, 'n traumatiese geskiedenis verwerk, 'n bepaalde erkenning van aandadigheid uitbeeld, en as regstellende aksie van 'n versweë geskiedenis dien. Verder kan historiese romans ook 'n dokumenteringsfunksie inhou wat bepaalde mense, gebeure en gewoontes bewaar. In *Deelfontein* wil dit aanvanklik voorkom of die verhaal hoofsaaklik as dokumentering van die Suid-Afrikaanse Oorlog en die konflik tussen Afrikaanse boere en Engelse soldate dien. Dit word egter duidelik hoe verder die roman vorder, dat 'n dokumentering van die gebeure en konflik van die Suid-Afrikaanse Oorlog bloot as sekondêre funksie dien.

Die aanvanklike haak wat die leser intrek in die verhaal is die uitbeelding en beskrywing van die merkwaardige hospitaal wat die leser saam met Oliver vir die eerste keer ervaar. Daar word deurgaans verwys na Oliver wat sy reise dokumenteer met sy Brownie kamera. Hy maak byvoorbeeld 'n punt daarvan om "Leeuwen Kop en dan die Tafelberg" (19) te fotografeer. Ons maak ook kennis met bekende geskiedkundige figure soos Arthur Conan Doyle, wat "die saadjie in [Oliver se] onderbewussyn geplant het om [gebeure met mense] te dokumenteer" (94). Ons word ingelig van die daaglikse werking van 'n hospitaal in die middel van die Karoo, gebeure tydens die oorlog, die impak

daarvan op die plaaslike gemeenskap, en die nagevolge van oorlog op beide soldate en die Afrikaanse boere.

Jaekel Strauss gaan egter verder as slegs blote dokumentering van die Suid-Afrikaanse oorlog. *Deelfontein* dien ook as regstelling van die narratiewe waarin die ellende van die wit Afrikaner se lyding tydens die oorlog op die voorgrond geplaas is, en funksioneer as uitdaging teen die gebruik van hierdie lyding as motivering vir Afrikanernasionalisme. Jaekel Strauss daag hierdie narratiewe uit deur ook, en hoofsaaklik, die leiding van die swart Ander tydens die oorlog ten toon te stel. Die leser word byvoorbeeld bekendgestel aan die swart kampe waar "daai kinders […] gewoonlik nie eens [het] wat [wit kinders] vanoggend gehad het nie" (157). Deur die dagboek van Klara Grootboom te kontrasteer met die vertelling en belewenis wat die leser deur Oliver Glenville ervaar, word wat Taljaard-Gilson noem die Afrikaner se "heroïek van die verlede" gerelativeer en gedekonstrueer "as deel van die konfrontasie met die verwerking van skuld van die verlede".

Die dekonstruksie in Jaekel Strauss se roman is egter van so 'n aard dat dit nie slegs op die herskrywing van die wit Afrikaner se oorsprongsverhaal dui nie, maar ook feministies in aanslag is. Jaekel Strauss daag die aanname van tradisionele genderrolle uit deur byvoorbeeld vir Klara Grootboom 'n geweldige goeie jagter te maak. Klara se bravade en bevoegdheid met 'n geweer word gekontrasteer met Oliver wat "kiekies bo karkasse" (102) verkies. So ook is Oliver se Sjinese vrou Mei-Ling wat teenoor hulle dogter "glad nie moederlik optree nie" (208) en haar politieke ywer en ondersteuning van Mao Zedong (210; 221) 'n dekonstruksie en herbesinning van wat as selfsprekende tradisionele en geskiedkundige gendernorme aanvaar is.

Hoewel die sprong van meer as 'n honderd jaar volgens my opvallend en aanvanklik steurend is, is deel drie van die roman juis wat Jaekel Strauss se roman so geslaagd maak. Terwyl ons dikwels sukkel om te vereenselwig met Oliver, sy onvermoë om sy eie aandadigheid te aanvaar, en sy voortdurende ontvlugting, is Klarissa Grootboom die karakter wat geloofwaardig en besonders humoristies uitgebeeld word. Haar karakter toon die nodige kompleksiteit wat die leser in die laaste hoofstukke opnuut boei. Klarissa, die Kaapse kunstenaar wat in 2020 deur die Covid-19-pandemie leef, is die goue draad wat die geskiedenis en die impak daarvan op die Suid-Afrikaanse onderbewussyn en sosiale organisering uitbeeld. Haar soeke na identiteit, en die worsteling van die twee pole Afrikaner/Brits wat haar gevorm het, is wat hierdie roman uiters geslaagd maak. Jaekel Strauss se geskiedkundige roman kan gemaklik sit tussen Ingrid Winterbach se *Niggie* en P.G. du Plessis se *Fees van die ongenooides*, en herinner met die beskrywing van die Karoo en geeste met tye aan Etienne van Heerden se *Die swye van Mario Salviati*.

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Sluitstuk.
Johann Rossouw.
Kaapstad: Umuzi, 2023. 185 pp.

ISBN 9781415210031.

Sluitstuk is Johann Rossouw se derde roman. As akademikus is sy vakgebied die filosofie, spesifiek die werk van die Franse filosowe Foucault en Stiegler. Hy het verskeie Franse tekste in Afrikaans vertaal, en publiseer gereeld akademiese en verwante bydraes in vaktydskrifte, dagblaaie en op e-platforms.

Opvallende temas in *Sluitstuk* sluit eerstens mentor- en skrywerskap in, en tweedens die verwerking van verlies te midde van gevoelens van verwerping, verraad en selfs vergelding. Die romanstorie vertel hoe 'n jong aspirantskrywer (Markus Lourens) aan die grootste romanskrywer in Afrikaans (Rudolf Eksteen) skryf om sy bewondering vir sy jongste roman oor te dra en te vra of hy hom sal leer skryf. Tot sy verbasing lei dit tot 'n verdiepende vriendskap met persoonlike kontak, wat egter plotseling deur die groot skrywer beëindig word. Vervolgens gaan die aspirantskrywer na 'n Zen-tempel in Frankryk (wat die groot skrywer vroeër onder sy aandag gebring het), waar hy as 'n Zen-monnik opgelei word. Vyftien jaar later keer hy na Bloemfontein terug en aanvaar 'n akademiese pos aan die universiteit. En dan, na dekades van geen kontak,

nader die groot skrywer sy eertydse vakleerling en vra 'n herontmoeting aan, met verreikende emosionele gevolge.

Bostaande storie word vertel binne die raam van 'n onderhoud (drie jaar na die groot skrywer se selfdood) tussen die akademikus en 'n Nederlandse vrou wat navorsing doen vir die skryf van 'n biografie oor die groot skrywer. Tydens die onderhoud, wat regdeur die nag duur, word intieme en onthutsende onthullings deur albei gespreksgenote gemaak, gestaaf deur dokumentêre bewyse (insluitend briewe wat deur die akademikus bewaar is).

Reeds by die lees van die lokteks op die agterblad is dit duidelik dat *Sluitstuk* op ware gebeure en werklike mense gebaseer is, al word hul identiteit deur die gebruik van skuilname versluier. Die opdrag aan die slot van die boek bevestig dat Rudolf Eksteen eintlik Karel Schoeman is en die foto, twee bladsye verder, dat Markus Lourens eintlik Johann Rossouw, die skrywer van *Sluitstuk*, is. Irene Reynders is herkenbaar as Ria Winters, wat al in *Reise met Schoeman* (2020) oor haar biografiese navorsing verslag doen. Dit, saam met verifieerbare gegewens, en verskeie gepubliseerde artikels (so onlangs as 2023) deur Rossouw oor sy vriendskap met Schoeman, wek die indruk dat die gegewens in die roman waar moet wees. Dié aanname maak die onthullings in *Sluitstuk* des te meer onthutsend, omdat dit aspekte onthul wat Schoeman nooit aan die openbare klok gehang het nie, en omdat die leser die waarheid van die onthullings nie kan toets nie. Maar dan tree daar, minstens vir die leser wat belese is oor Schoeman, teen die einde van die roman inligting na vore wat wel kontroleerbaar is en feitelik onwaar blyk te wees.

Lesers raak dikwels ontstig deur literêre tekste met 'n opvallende vermenging van feite en fiksie. Min Afrikaanse skrywers het soveel opspraak as die kortverhaalskrywer Koos Prinsloo verwek weens sy onverbloemde inbedding, in sy fiksie, van feitelike gegewens en onthullende, kontroversiële persoonlike dokumente, soos outentieke foto's, briewe en dagboeke van en oor identifiseerbare, meermale nog lewende mense met wie die verteller/abstrakte outeur/konkrete outeur 'n intieme verbintenis gehad het. Gerrit Olivier beskryf insiggewend hoe Prinsloo met toenemende vaardigheid hierdie tegniek in sy vier bundels (1982–93) bemeester het, en sodoende 'n besondere veelvlakkigheid en samehang in sy oeuvre kon opbou. In sy vierde bundel lei dit tot 'n "oomblik van doodsaanvaarding" (1001), waarmee Prinsloo die outobiografiese lyn (of lewensreis) in sy oeuvre afsluit. *Sluitstuk* toon verskeie ooreenkomste hiermee in die vertelling van hoe Eksteen sy lewensreis afsluit en beëindig, al stem elemente van die gebeure in die doodstoneel aan die slot van die roman nie biografies met dié van Schoeman se dood ooreen nie (vergelyk Landman, asook persberigte wat ten tyde van Schoeman se dood verskyn het).

Die tegniek wat Rossouw in *Sluitstuk* volg, is dus eie aan 'n gevestigde tradisie in die Afrikaanse letterkunde. Lank voor T.T. Cloete in 1984 "die waarheid gelieg" het, het S.J. du Toit dit al in *Di koningin fan Skeba* (1898) gedoen. Abraham H. de Vries verklaar dat, wat stories betref, die verskil tussen waarheid en leuen, werklikheid en verdigsel, nie ter sake is nie. Koos Prinsloo integreer die werklikheid struktureel met die storie. Karel Schoeman skryf self verskeie biografiese romans waarin herkenbare en kontroleerbare biografiese feite by wyse van fiksie aan die leser oorgedra word, net soos in sy roman *Titaan* (2009). *Sluitstuk* staan in dié opsig egter die naaste aan *Die noorderlig* (1975) waarin, soos Daniel Hugo in *Stiltes en stemme* aandui, Francois en Estelle se storie eintlik dié van Ingrid Jonker en André P. Brink is, met die verteller Paul wat Karel Schoeman self verteenwoordig. Maar waar Brink met 'n venynige persoonlike aanval op Schoeman gereageer het, reageer Ria Winters in 'n 2023-onderhoud met Jaap Goedegebuure (Zuid-Afrikahuis) gelykmatig op die moontlikheid dat lesers Irene, haar 'dubbelganger' in *Sluitstuk*, se onthullings in die teks moontlik as die reine waarheid kan beskou.

Ten slotte: wat anders val in *Sluitstuk* op naas die vervlegting van waarheid en versinsel? Dat Rossouw hierdie roman nie uit sy mou geskud het nie, maar ses jaar lank daaraan gewerk en herskryf het (met insette deur verskeie kritiese lesers). Dat die roman vlot en boeiend lees. Dat dit stilisties goed versorg is (ondanks enkele Nederlandse taal- of spelfoute) en dat die styl inderdaad ooreenkomste met dié van Schoeman toon. *Sluitstuk* kan gelees te word as 'n raamvertelling, 'n Bildungsroman, 'n roman oor individuasie (Jung), en as 'n fiksionalisering van die lewe van Schoeman, Rossouw, en hulle vriendskap. Die lokteks tipeer *Sluitstuk* as 'n "elegiese roman"; die leser moet dus die versoeking weerstaan om dit as 'n wetenskaplik betroubare biografie te wil lees. Sluitstuk is veral ook 'n roman oor skrywerskap en oor skryf—dit wat Schoeman se hele lewe gerig het—en 'n interessante en verdienstelike toevoeging tot literatuur oor "Afrikaans se grootste romansier" (8).

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Hemel en aarde en ons.

Zirk van den Berg.
Kaapstad: Queillerie, 2024. 214 pp.
ISBN 9780795802683.

Hemel en aarde en ons is Zirk van den Berg se elfde Afrikaanstalige roman, en reeds op die voorblad word sekere kodes van dié roman se inhoud, maar ook die plek daarvan in die skrywer se oeuvre, geaktiveer. Die voorblad pronk met 'n treffende foto, geneem deur Van den Berg self, van 'n blik vanuit 'n verweerde vensterraam in 'n verlate huis op die spookdorp, Kolmanskop.

Met die eerste oogopslag sluit hierdie roman aan by die skrywer se sogenaamde *Duitswes-trilogie*, met Siegfried Bock as hoofkarakter. Die leser kom wel vinnig agter dat daar met hierdie roman 'n ander blik op die verlede geplaas word, naamlik die vlietende rykdom van die dorp met sy diamantdelwery—en die mense wat hierdie dorp bewoon het. Die titel, wat weens goeie uitlegwerk, die voorbladfoto eggo (die woorde "hemel" en "aarde" is só geplaas om hulle semantiese verwysings te weerspieël) is 'n belangrike sleutel in die ontsluiting van die inhoud van die roman. Dit plaas enersyds fokus op die ruimte en andersyds fokus op die karakters in die verhaal, die "ons".

Die verhaal speel, soos reeds genoem, in Kolmanskop af, asook in Lüderitzbucht. Die eersgenoemde dorpie en omliggende woestyn word as simbool aangewend vir die verganklike aard van die mens (die "ons" in die titel) en hul doen en late. In die roman se openingsparagraaf word die vergelyking getref tussen die woestynruimte en die mens se geheue: "Die vervloënheid bly my by, die samehang ontgaan my. Daar is 'n sifting ter sprake, diamant uit die duinesand, die eiening van waarheid, die saamsnoer van mense en gebeure in plek en tyd. […] Gewaarwording verskyn uit die spookdorp van die geheue, verdring die hede. Die onmiddellikheid van herinnering. Só was dit toe …" (7).

Met hierdie eerste paragraaf begin die eerste-persoonsverteller, wat vir 'n groot gedeelte van die roman nie bekend aan die leser is nie, met 'n raamvertelling en keer terug na die vroeë 1900's, na 'n tyd waar vroue en mense van kleur min tot geen regte of seggenskap gehad het nie, en waar 'n rassistiese en chauvinistiese bestel aan die orde van die dag was. Die mynbestuurder, Hans-Peter Kranz is in die besonder 'n voorbeeld hiervan. Iemand wat gesag afdwing by sy onderdane by die myn, sy huis en by uitstek die hele dorpie. Hierteenoor staan die hoofkarakter, dokter Alexandra Stackelberg. 'n Vrydenkende en intelligente vrou wat deur die mynbestuurder aangestel word as die dorp se dokter, én om die nuutste x-straalmasjien te gebruik om diamantdiewe te vang. Van den Berg skep 'n genuanseerde karakter wat beslis die stereotipe van daardie jare uitdaag—hy gebruik byvoorbeeld Eugène Delacroix se skildery *La Liberté guidant le peuple* (Vryheid lei die mense) (1830) as interteks om vir Alexandra te beskryf: "Haar figuur is die soort wat, vaandel in die hand, dalk met ontblote bors, 'n skare moet lei in die soeke na 'n ideaal—vryheid dalk, nie skoonheid nie" (10).

In haar werk as geneesheer is daar 'n insident waar een van haar pasiënte sterf en sy haarself in 'n morele dilemma bevind—waar sy moet besluit wat die grense is tussen reg en verkeerd, tussen hemel en aarde.

Die agterbladteks bestempel die roman as 'n "veelvlakkige whodunit met 'n konseptuele kinkel". Die tradisionele *whodunit*-roman (soos die werk van Christie en Doyle) is komplekse verhaal- of plotgedrewe speurfiksie waar 'n moord gepleeg word. Die res van die roman word dan gewy aan 'n speurderagtige karakter wat die moordenaar identifiseer en sy of haar motiewe vasstel. In die geval van *Hemel en aarde en ons* word die identiteit van die moordenaar sowel as die vermoorde eers aan die einde van die roman bekendgemaak (hoewel mens reeds op p. 15 lees van 'n man wat vermoor word). Ook wie die ek-verteller is, bly tot aan die einde van die teks 'n geheim. Dit is hierdie spanning wat die leser noop om verder te lees en die ander karakters te leer ken—elkeen met sy of haar eie goeie motivering om die moord te gepleeg het. Vir die skerp

leser word daar deurgaans in die roman leidrade gegee, wat aan die einde gebruik kan word om 'n eie afleiding te maak oor wie die ware moordenaar is. Kan die skuld by die individu gelê word? Van den Berg laat dit oor aan die leser: "Ons is almal eenders. In 'n klein dorpie soos Kolmanskop versmelt individuele identiteit maar alte gou in die kollektiewe bewussyn" (24).

Daar is wel enkele dinge wat kwel in terme van hierdie roman. Die besluit om nie die verhaal in hoofstukke te verdeel nie, maar eerder gebruik te maak van paragrawe waar die eerste woord in hoofletters 'n nuwe gedeelte aandui, is hinderlik. Die leser raak wel mettertyd gewoond aan die ritme van die verhaal met die afwisseling van vertellers en perspektiewe. Dit dra moontlik by tot die oproep van 'n verlede en die fragmentering van herinneringe. 'n Stilistiese vreemdheid is die keuse om Kolmanskop se Afrikaanse naam te gebruik, maar eerder die Duitse "Lüderitzbucht" (vir Lüderitzbaai).

Bogenoemde kwelpunte is egter nietighede in 'n andersyds pragtig geskrewe roman wat die leser terugneem na 'n deel van die Namibiese geskiedenis en dit vervleg met meditasies oor medemenslikheid, relasionaliteit en verganklikheid (203–4).

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Laaste kans.
Marita van der Vyver.
Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 2023. 283 pp.
ISBN 9780624094043.

Lesers wat Marita van der Vyver se *Wegkomkans* (1999) geniet het, kon hulle verheug in die vooruitsig om weer op te vang met die geliefde karakters in die opvolgverhaal, *Laaste kans*, wat in 2023 verskyn. Die vriende van *Wegkomkans* kom weer bymekaar, vir 'n laaste naweek langs die see, na 25 jaar, net voor die wêreld eindig.

Dis Maart 2020, en Adriaan—kunstenaar, rokjagter, charmeur, smulpaap—word 70. Almal van die laaste groepfoto, geneem in 1995, is daar, almal wat nog leef. Mila het gekom uit België, Paul uit Kalifornië. Meer nog, want die kinders is nou groot. Die kinders het nou kinders. En hulle is almal óók daar.

Laaste kans begin met 'n groepfoto (soos *Wegkomkans* ook het), dit is die foto van die laaste keer wat al die vriende bymekaar was en waarmee *Wegkomkans* geëindig het. Hiermee word die leser herinner aan wie en wat die karakters in 1995 was. Die prentjie van die verlede word geskets, maar ook geplaas teenoor die vertelling van wat die karakters op die foto deur die jare heen met die foto gedoen het. Dit dien as 'n interessante karakteriseringstegniek, wat vinnig weer 'n familiariteit skep met die karakters.

Deur die loop van Adriaan se verjaardagnaweek word die leser op 'n warrelwindreis deur die onderskeie karakters se lewens geneem, 'n blik op wat van elkeen geword het en waar hulle opgeëindig het. *Laaste kans* bied 'n venster op waar elkeen in die hede is, tydens hierdie belangrike laaste naweek, voor die wêreldwye grendeltydperk en verwoesting van Covid-19 begin.

Alhoewel die verbande tussen *Wegkomkans* en *Laaste kans* beduidend is, staan *Laaste kans* as volwaardige roman op eie bene. Dit is met ander woorde nie noodsaaklik om eers *Wegkomkans* te lees nie, maar dit verryk wel die leeservaring. *Wegkomkans* het die karakters van die oorspronklike groep vriende méns gemaak en dit is juis die meemaak van al die wegkomkansnaweke voor die eeuwending, wat die reünie (bestekopname) in *Laaste kans* soveel soeter maak. Om aan die einde van 'n lewe te kan staan, en kollektief te kan terugkyk, verbind nie alleen die karakters nie, maar ook die karakters en die lesers oor verskillende generasies heen: "As jy alleen gil, wil Bobby vir haar dogter sê, hoor niemand jou nie. As jy saam met jou beste vriende gil, bly daar dalk 'n eggo oor waarna die volgende geslag kan luister" (223).

Dit is onteenseglik dat Marita van der Vyver vir aanhangers groot leesplesier bring met die laaste bymekaarkom van ou vriende. Nie net vir die gewone heerlikheid van saamkuier, lekker kos, en goeie musiek nie (dit is daar baie van), maar ook vir die dieper dink oor die sin van die lewe. Temas van verganklikheid, ontnugtering met die lewe, en wat miskien die teengif vir die verlies sou kon wees, word in *Laaste kans* vernuftig vervleg met die jolyt en plesierige samesyn.

Dit is veral die ouer karakters wat deur verganklikheid agtervolg word. "*Hoe het dit skielik so laat geword*", lees Yvette vroeër die week uit 'n gedig van Olga Kirsch voor (18). "[O]ns lewe al meer van verlies tot verlies", merk Liane teenoor Mila op (85). "Ons moet al hoe meer geliefdes verloor. Al hoe meer drome en ideale en illusies", dink Bobby terwyl sy haarself herinner aan 'n gesprek oor oudword wat sy met haar seun gehad het (91). "Op sy leeftyd loop die dood daagliks saam met jou. Jy maak asof jy hom nie raaksien nie, maar hy gooi

elke dag 'n langer skaduwee oor jou. Elke dag kry jy 'n bietjie kouer", mymer Ralph (161).

Die dood raak die ouer karakters almal direk, hetsy deur geliefdes wat hulle deur die jare moes afstaan, of die felheid van die dood wat sommiges in die gesig moet staar as gevolg van 'n terminale siekte (die inligting oor wie dié siekte het, word wel van die ander vriende weerhou om nie "die pret van die naweek vir hulle te bederf nie"). Die ouer karakters bly egter deurgaans bewus van die dood: "*So kom ons om, so kom ons om*. Dis die refrein wat in sy [Ralph se] kop bly draai" (159).

Die ontnugtering wat die ou bekende karakters met die lewe het, is veral treffend in *Laaste kans*. Liane, wat in *Wegkomkans* geskets is as besonder optimisties, staan nou ontnugter voor vele drome wat nie bewaarheid is nie. Haar man, Max, dink op 'n stadium dat Liane se grootste trauma die verlies van haar illusies is (99). Sy het geglo sy is spesiaal en toe gebeur die lewe met haar.

Laaste kans laat 'n mens dink dat die voortsit van stories moontlik die enigste beswering van verganklikheid kan bied. Die stories wat oorgedra word van geslag tot geslag (en van roman tot roman) verbind die karakters aan die lewe. Dit is ook nie verniet dat dit Emma—die skrywer in die verhaal—se dogter is wat opmerk "ons kan nie wegkom van ons ma's se stories nie, nè" (170).

Die stories word inderdaad voortgesit, veral in die voortsetting van en uitbreiding op tematiek soos die onderlinge drif, onbeantwoorde liefde, maatskaplike vrae en politiek. Dít word alles oorgedra na die volgende geslag, Ralph dink byvoorbeeld in hierdie sin aan sy kleinkind wat op pad is, "[o]f dalk is hierdie tweede kind tog 'n manier om hulle te help. Te sorg dat hulle storie voortgaan" (151).

Die ouer karakters wys as't ware vir die jonger karakters die pad vorentoe, "[d]ans [...] teen the dying of the light" sê Adriaan (166). Dit is egter opmerklik hoe die jonger geslag meer wantrouig is oor wat vir hulle voorlê in die lewe as wat die vorige geslag in *Wegkomkans* was. Daar bestaan 'n groter bewustheid van wat alles eintlik verkeerd kan loop. Ben, die jongste van die jonger geslag en nog op hoërskool, dink byvoorbeeld "Wat verkeerd is, wil hy vir sy ma sê, is dat hy nie kan verstaan hoe de fok almal van hulle dit regkry om verder te lewe nie" (91). Dit is besonder funksioneel dat die skrywer juis die jongste karakter kies om dit te dink. Die kontras tussen die huidige siening van die jeug teenoor die siening van die karakters van 25 jaar gelede word op hierdie wyse beklemtoon: Tóé het "hulle [nogtans] aanhou lag, aanhou dans, aanhou beweeg en geraas maak," en ook "[i]n die ou dae het elke naweek saam met hierdie spul die een drama na die ander opgelewer" dink Bobby (223).

Die konteks van *Laaste kans* is wel anders, die dreigende virus lê op die lippe van die jonger geslag, dis hulle wat daaroor fluister in stil oomblikke in die donker, daaroor boodskappe stuur op WhatsApp. Die oueres besweer die virus deur die noem daarvan bloot te verbied sodat 'n lekker naweek nie daardeur bederf word nie.

Ouerskap figureer deurlopend en is 'n sterk tema in die roman. Dit bring 'n nuwe dimensie wat aan die karakters se storie gegee word sedert *Wegkomkans*—die verhouding met hulle (meestal volwasse) kinders. Vele besinnings en gewaarwordinge van ouerskap word in die roman meegedeel, soos byvoorbeeld "[o]uerskap is om op 'n strand te staan en te kyk hoe jou kinders se skuit al hoe verder van jou wegdryf. Jy kan nie in daai skuit gaan klim nie, hulle moet dit self stuur. Jy kan maar net hoop die see is hulle genadig" (96–7).

Laaste kans speel af in 'n nuwe wêreld, 'n wêreld wat baie anders lyk as drie dekades gelede. Daar word WhatsApps Frankryk toe gestuur (dié gedagte ondenkbaar in die wêreld van 25 jaar gelede) en musiek word oor Spotify geluister. Ook sosiale media kom onder die loep (Adriaan skop natuurlik viervoet daarteen vas). Adriaan se vrou, Yvette, spreek haar vrese oor die tegnologiese vooruitgang uit: "Een van die dae gaan almal soos hulle avatars op Facebook lyk. [...] Ewig jeugdig. Altyd pragtig. Nêrens 'n plooi in sig nie. Dit maak my bang" (121).

Op die laaste oggend van *Laaste kans*, is die see—'n motief wat deurgaans 'n belangrike rol speel—einde ten laaste in mis gehul (teenoor die helder uitbundigheid daarvan oor die hele naweek). Die teenwoordigheid van die see is so tasbaar in *Laaste kans*, soos wat dit ook was in *Wegkomkans*, dat dit die gestalte van 'n karakter aanneem. Die see word die ander vriend, die een wat nie praat nie, maar wat baie aan die leser kommunikeer deur die wyse waarop elke karakter die see fokaliseer. "Hoewel die mis vanoggend so vas aan die kus kleef dat sy [Yvette] skaars die see kan sien. Dit word 'n ouditiewe eerder as 'n visuele ervaring. Sy maak haar oë toe, konsentreer op die suisende, sussende reëlmaat van die branders, terwyl sy diep asemhaal" (249). Soos met die lewe, die virus, en die ouderdom, sak die mis toe, letterlik maar beslis ook simbolies. Die kleuter Stephan mompel met 'n mond vol Rice Krispies, "Ouma sê die mis gaan nooit weg nie" (255).

Die narratief van *Laaste kans* berus hoofsaaklik op die geleentheid wat aan die leser gebied word om deur al die karakters ('n goeie twintig) se oë te kyk na die

naweek se gebeure. Dit is egter baie invalshoeke, en die gevaar ontstaan dat dit te rumoerig kan raak met al die stemme teenwoordig. Gelukkig is Van der Vyver 'n meesterstorieverteller, en sy ken haar karakters grondig. Gevolglik lei die vele hoeke van fokalisasie nie tot verwarring nie, maar skep 'n gelaagde teks.

Marita van der Vyver bly relevant, en met *Laaste kans* pak sy die besinning oor die lewe opnuut aan saam met nuwe en ou karakters. Die roman verken die idee om op 'n ander manier die lewe te probeer verstaan, en wat dit beteken om nog 'n kans te kry.

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Kwaaiwater.
Irna van Zyl.
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Speuradjudant Storm van der Merwe is terug in Irna van Zyl se jongste misdaadriller, *Kwaaiwater*. Lesers wat bekend is met hierdie geliefde karakter sal weet, daar waar Storm is, volg moord en intrige.

Van Zyl draai sommer met die intrapslag die spanningswyser tot op die maksimum. Die verhaal begin op dag vyf van die aksie, waar Storm en oudpolitikus Emèl (vroeër bekend as Marie-Louisa) Botha saam met 'n selfmoordbomaanvaller in 'n hysbak in die ou Absa-gebou in Kaapstad vasgekeer is.

Direk na dié senutergende openingstoneel flits die verhaal terug na dag 1. Dit is die eerste dag van Hermanus se heel eerste skrywersfees. Die Covid-inperkings is pas opgehef en Storm en haar span speel half-verveeld oppassers by die geleentheid. Dan daag die gewilde plaaslike skrywer Isa Du Bois nie op vir haar sessie nie. Haar liggaam word kort daarna in Kwaaiwater se Mosselrivier gevind. Isa ontvang al meer as 'n jaar dreigemente en het gevrees vir haar lewe. Moerdyk, Storm se oudkollega wat deesdae as 'n privaatspeurder en lyfwag werk, is gehuur om die skuldige vas te trek, maar kon nie sy werksgewer se dood verhoed nie.

Teen die volgende dag het Storm steeds meer vrae as antwoorde. Is die moordenaar 'n jaloerse medeskrywer óf 'n vyandige resensent? Óf het haar man Stephanus uiteindelik genoeg gehad van haar buite-egtelike verhoudings? Daar is egter nie tyd vir selftwyfel nie, want die liggaam van nog 'n vrou word deur 'n vissersman ontdek. Hierdie keer 'n mooi, jong student met 'n gevaarlike deeltydse werk.

Dan, 'n dag later, die derde slagoffer. Drie dae, drie vroue. Almal met 'n fietsketting verwurg. Skielik het Storm met 'n reeksmoordenaar te doen. Asof drie moorde nie genoeg is nie, wroeg Storm ook met 'n string persoonlike probleme. Was haar oorlede biologiese pa Lewis Witvoet regtig betrokke by staatskaping? Wat maak Whitey van Worcester, die man wat deur die polisie gesoek word vir die moord op Lewis, skielik in Hermanus? Kan sy en Moerdyk vrede maak? Én hoekom kan sy nie ontslae raak van haar kloppende hoofpyn nie?

Met *Kwaaiwater* bewys Van Zyl weereens dat sy die kuns van die spanningsverhaal verfyn het. Kort, kragtige hoofstukke gee 'n vinnige pas aan en daar word vernuftig met tydswisseling gespeel om die spanning vol te hou.

In Deel I wissel die storie vinnig tussen die eerste vier dae van die skrywersfees en die hysbaktoneel op dag 5. Terugflitse na vroeëre tydperke dra ook by tot die samehang van die storielyn en knoop 'n paar los drade uit vorige boeke in die reeks saam. Deel II neem ons terug na die ontknoping van die gyselaarsdrama in die hysbak, waarna die verhaal chronologies ontvou.

Kwaaiwater voel soos 'n liefdesbrief aan Hermanus. Van Zyl neem die leser teen kronkelende kuspaadjies uit, langs Grotto, Voëlklip en Langbaai se wit strande af, en maak sommer 'n paar draaie by bekende kuierplekke. Dié idilliese agtergrond is in sterk teenstelling met die gruwelike gebeure wat in die verhaal afspeel. Soos die titulêre Kwaaiwater se bedrieglike skoonheid wat teen hooggety gevare inhou, skuil daar ook maalstrome diep onder die samelewing van hierdie poskaartmooie kusdorp.

Met 'n groep uiteenlopende, fynbeskrewe karakters, slim leidrade en speelse verwysings na ander tekste, hou *Kwaaiwater* lesers op hulle tone. 'n Mens moet by tye mooi kophou, maar die beloning is 'n boeiende, senutergende roman wat die bedlampies tot laataand sal laat brand.

Kwaaiwater is die vierde boek in van Zyl se Storm van der Merwe-reeks. Alhoewel die boek alleenstaande gelees kan word, sal lesers die ander boeke in die reeks

Moordvis (2016), *Gifbeker* (2018) en *Bloedsteen* (2020) ook geniet.

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Al wat tel.
Irma Venter.
Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 2024. 373pp.
ISBN 9780624094838

Die derde Ami Prinsloo-roman is op die rakke en dit kan dalk net gereken word as die beste een sover. Irma Venter het haarself deeglik as krimiskrywer gevestig, eers met haar S-reeks, en nou met die derde aflewering van haar huidige reeks. Eers was daar *Minder as niks* (2021), toe *Die verkeerde vrou* (2022) en nou *Al wat tel* (2024), weer met die joernalis van Nuus360, die gefolterde en aantreklike Ami, as hoofkarakter.

Dit is lekker om met die lees van die drie boeke Ami se groei as joernalis en as karakter te sien. Venter neem die leser geleidelik al hoe dieper onder haar vel in. 'n Motto van Nietzsche voorin *Al wat tel* suggereer 'n karaktereienskap van die enigmatiese Ami, een van haar grootste struikelblokke, die onvermoë om te vertrou: "Objection, evasion, joyous distrust, and love of irony are signs of health; everything absolute belongs to pathology".

Die voorblad van *Al wat tel* vang reeds die leser se aandag vas. In hierdie geval het ons duidelik 'n misdaadtoneel, maar aan die bokant is daar bome, 'n karakter wat stap, en die melodramatiese lokwoorde: "Net die sterkste sal oorleef". Die misdaadtoneel maak na die lees van die eerste hoofstuk reeds sin, maar die leser eers moet vorder tot na die halfpadmerk om behoorlik sin te maak van die boonste deel van die voorblad.

Die roman open in die middel van 'n binnegesprek wat die nuuskierigheid laat opvlam. Ami worstel met 'n weddenskap wat sy met haar byna-byna geliefde, Geo, gemaak het. Die leser word ook daaraan herinner dat Ami 'n voormalige Olimpiese vlinderslagkampioen is, iets wat deeglik in die vorige twee boeke ontgin is en iets wat Ami tot 'n groot mate bly definieer. Tydens haar gesprek met Geo, kry Ami 'n selfoonboodskap dat iemand voor haar nabygeleë gimnasium doodgeskiet is en sy is blitsvinnig op die toneel. Dit is nie net sy wat groot belangstelling toon nie, die Valke is ook reeds daar. Dit moet dus 'n BBP wees wat geskiet is.

Hier begin al die tergende vrae: Was dit 'n sluipmoord of wou die sogenaamde Rolex-bende net die man se indrukwekkende horlosie steel? Wie is die jong, blonde vrou op die toneel en waarom is haar lewe gespaar? Hoekom lyk dit of 'n speurder op die toneel iets in sy sak druk?

Dit kom vinnig aan die lig dat die oorledene 'n gesiene sakeman is. Hoe meer Ami delf, hoe meer raak sy oortuig dat hierdie nie net nog 'n gewone moord is nie. Sy kruis boonop paaie met 'n Duitse joernalis wat besig is om grusame gebeure kort anderkant die grens, in Mosambiek, te ondersoek. Kan daar 'n verband tussen hierdie skynbaar uiteenlopende voorvalle wees?

Ami staan soos gewoonlik nie terug nie en binnekort is haar lewe in groot gevaar. Sy word deur die Valke se woordvoerder gewaarsku: "Die fight vir die siel van hierdie land is besig om lelik te raak. Luister na my en los hierdie storie. Nou dadelik (106)." Dit skrik natuurlik nie vir Ami af nie. Sy is nie 'n gevoellose joernalis nie, maar sy kan 'n storie soos 'n bloedhond beetkry. Sy dink: "Dalk is dit die sinisme en paranoia wat na 'n paar jaar posvat. Die feit dat die mensdom jou eenvoudig nie meer kan verras nie en jy presies weet waartoe jou medesterflinge in staat is (114)."

Wat in hierdie roman gebeur, daag egter selfs Ami se sinisme uit. Die storie kring wyer en wyer uit: van die dood van die sakeman na geldwassery na brutaliteit in die wreedste graad. Ami bly deurgaans nouliks op die spoor van die ontwikkelende storie, maar sy weet dit is iets wat vertel móét word: "Een wat sy al die pad na die bitter einde gaan volg, maak nie saak wat nie" (171).

Die tweede helfte van die roman beweeg blitsvinnig en die leser belê in Ami se welstand en wil hê sy moet oorleef. Die titel begin al hoe meer sin maak: "Dis soos die Olimpiese Spele. Sy moet eenhonderd persent gefokus wees. Al wat nou saak maak, is om heel anderkant uit te kom. Dis wragtig al wat tel" (283).

Ami se medekarakters gee verdere kleur aan die verhaal. Die data-analis, Geo, en sy kuberkraker-suster, Sarah, help met inligting wat Ami nie andersins sou verkry nie. Die feit dat Sarah Ami nie voor haar oë kan verdra nie, sorg vir broodnodige humor. Die fotograaf, Jules Koopman, met 'n tatoeëermerk van 'n Meksikaanse skedel op haar rug, voel ook na 'n egte karakter.

Dit is voorts Venter se vermoë om die bekende en onbekende te vermeng wat die roman geloof-waardig laat voel. Sy daag wel soms die leser se realiteitsbelewing uit, maar min dinge verbaas 'n mens

nog in ons misdaadvose land. Hierdie feit benut Venter ten volle en einde ten laaste skep die roman 'n gevoel van tevredenheid, en terselfdertyd 'n gewaarwording dat maklike oplossings nie moontlik is nie.

Venter het 'n wenresep beet wat weereens nie teleurstel nie. Sy trek met 'n vaardige skrywershand al die toutjies bymekaar soos wat die verhaal tot 'n einde kom, maar altyd sonder om die leser te verveel. *Al wat tel* is beslis ook meer as net 'n misdaadroman—daar is baie stof tot nadenke. Mag Ami nog lank haar stories jaag én aanhou verslag lewer, want soos sy sê: "Dis nie my werk om mense te kry om my te like nie. Ek moet net seker maak dat almal se stories gehoor word. Dis al wat tel" (355).

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Duifeling.
Lize Albertyn du-Toit.
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"Die spieël bo die enamelkom wasem toe. Sara probeer iets van haarself sien deur die wasem. 'Wie is jy? Wat is jy Sara?—'n duif of 'n duiwel?" (252).

Lize Albertyn-du Toit bou voort op die storie-vertelling wat sy met haar debuutroman *Die kinders van Spookwerwe* (2019) aangebied het, en plaas in *Duifeling* weer die kollig op stories, karakters en omgewings wat reeds in haar debuut bekendgestel is. Die sterk visuele teenwoordigheid van die Karoolandskap, word reeds met die voorblad van *Duifeling* gesuggereer. Verder gee die donker skynsel wat oor landskap hang en die vrou in die verte, amper buite sig, 'n leidraad oor die romaninhoud.

In *Duifeling* verskyn die hoofkarakter Sara eendag op Rooiduin nadat sy uit Keimoes gevlug het. Sara se verhaal begin in *Die kinders van Spookwerwe* met 'n reeks traumatiese insidente, en nou probeer sy in Rooiduin 'n nuwe lewe skep. Sara bly by Kaaitjie, Piet en Kuikentjie aan huis. Sy skakel maklik in by die dorp, kry werk, maak vriende en vind 'n tuiste by die mense van Rooiduin. Sara tree op as 'n surrogaatmoeder wanneer sy Kuikentjie versorg, sy vind susterskap by haar vriendin Roos en die ander vrouens op die dorp, en later vind sy ook liefde. Alhoewel Sara aanvanklik aan die periferie van gemeenskapsgeleenthede staan, soos die Kersdagvieringe en later Soutman se begrafnis, tree sy met verloop van tyd na die sentrum van die dorp. Terselfdertyd is daar dreigende tekens dat die sentrum verkrummel. Sara sien armoede, siekte en mishandeling in die onderskeie gesinne in die dorp, asook in die huis waar sy tuisgaan. Piet is die "bangmaakding" in hulle huis (169) en Sara probeer in haar hoedanigheid as beskermengel van die huis sterk staan teen hom. Saam met die ineenstorting van gesinne en verhoudings, bly hoop en geloof in die dorp teenwoordig. Sara merk op: "Niks is meer reg nie, Herklaas, en daarom gaan alles weer regkom" (264). Terwyl sy die ander karakters bystaan in tye van swaarkry, leer sy jy moet met die verlede afreken. Sara leer dat God haar reeds vergewe het en voel later gereed om haar verlede af te sluit, want "[n]iks kan jou verlede verander nie" (136).

Die roman is nie 'n familiesage, liefdesverhaal of plaasverhaal nie, maar is eerder episodies gestruktureer met elemente van hierdie genres in elkeen van die kort hoofstukke. Om die beurt word die leser ook aan die verskeie gesinne (soos uiteengesit in die karakterlys) se unieke verhale bekendgestel. Een hiervan is !Guri-aos wat by die rivier bly soos die voorouers en dien as die "smeerouma" vir die dorp (79). Deur haar word verskeie Nama-volkselemente en uitdrukkings van die mense van die omgewing in die verhaal geïnkorporeer.

Duifeling se driedelige struktuur kan beskou word as 'n tipe raamvertelling, aangesien Deel 1 en 3 onderskeidelik op 12 Januarie 1985 en 13 Januarie 1985 afspeel. Deel 2 dien as vertelling van die gebeure wat drie jaar vantevore afgespeel het, asook die aanloop tot die twee genoemde datums. Dele 1 en 3 is kort en plotgedrewe. Deel 2 beslaan die meerderheid van die boek en is meer atmosferies van aard. In Deel 2 kry die titel betekenis en meerheid karakters en die landskap—waarop voortgebou word in Deel 3—word bekendgestel. Wanneer die verhale stelselmatig begin afsluit in Deel 3 kry die leser duidelikheid oor die gebeure van Dele 1 en 2, asook Sara se aandeel in *Die kinders van Spookwerwe.*

Onderliggend aan die roman is die waarde van menseverhoudings wat deur die troop van *found family* geskep word, en dit is veral die deurlopende ondersteuning tussen vrouekarakters wat die leser bybly. Hulle kuier, eet saam en leen die nodige vir mekaar. Korreltjie maak rokke vir die vroue en leer later ook vir Sara hoe om klere te maak. Spriet se huis staan altyd oop vir Sara en Kuikentjie. Hierdie tema is veral prominent wanneer die vroue die jong en swanger Hettie na ouma !Guri-aos toe neem om gesmeer te word, en later wanneer die vroue byeenkom om Kaaitjie by

haar oorlede dogter se graf te ondersteun. Deur hierdie en ander tonele poog die skrywer om te wys eerder as voor te skryf wat goeie medemenslikheid en familie is, en die leser word aangemoedig om na te dink oor hierdie dorp se mense en hulle verhoudings.

Soos met *Die kinders van Spookwerwe* word die skilderagtige landskappe en natuur met merkwaardige poëtiese taalgebruik aangebied:

> 'n Lou reënasem stoot oor die droë landskap. Weerlig speel en dit grom in die swartblou wolke. Bliksemstrale gee vir mekaar swepe aan en daar word op klip geklap en vuur gespoeg. Herklaas ruik die swael. Weerligvingers wortel aarde toe asof hulle vir die water vooruit wys waar die droë lope lê. Toe val die eerste vet druppels op die sinkdak. (215)

Die merkwaardige prosa en aangrypende gebeure boei die leser vanaf daardie rampspoedige dag in Deel 1 tot by die stowwerige Rooiduin, en wys dat daar altyd 'n nuwe dag sal wees, want "Môre skyn die son weer" (137).

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Diana se dag.
Helene de Kock.
Kaapstad: Human & Rousseau, 2023. 288 pp.
ISBN 9780798183857.

By die Stellenbosch Woordfees in 2023 praat Helene de Kock en Anchien Troskie met Susan Booyens oor hoe skryf terapie kan wees en hoe dit ons kan help om trauma te hanteer. Helene de Kock is nie net 'n bekende in die Afrikaanse literêre kringe nie (met 'n wye oeuvre wat vanaf 1979 strek), maar is ook vertroud met trauma nadat sy haar oudste seun in 2004 in 'n motorongeluk verloor.

In haar nuutste roman, *Diana se dag* (Diana uitgespreek soos die Prinses van Wallis se naam), kom temas van vooroordeel en buitestaanderskap sterk na vore. Alhoewel die boek as romantiese ontspanningsfiksie tipeer kan word, is die verhaal verweef met die onderliggende trauma van gebeure uit Diana se jeug, waaraan sy geen toedoen gehad het nie. Dit is letterlik 'n geval van 'die sondes van die vaders' wat vir jare 'n effek op haar lewe het, waar sy die las van skande erf waaraan sy geen skuld dra nie.

Die roman sentreer rondom die karakter, Diana, wat die leser ontmoet as 'n jong, maar belowende wynmaker op 'n spogplaas in Stellenbosch. Gou word dit egter duidelik dat Diana se agtergrond en grootwordjare alles behalwe idillies was. Met etlike direkte verwysings daarna in die teks self, word Diana Ferrus se idee van ons 'komvandaan', soos dit neerslag vind in haar 2006 digbundel, *Ons komvandaan*, geaktiveer. Vir Ferrus is jou identiteit en menswees geskoei op waar jy vandaan kom. Jou toekomstige interaksie en verhouding met die mense om jou, maar ook met jouself, word onlosmaaklik beïnvloed deur die gebeure in jou verlede.

In die roman word Diana se pa gedurende haar hoërskooljare van bedrog of onregmatige besigheids-transaksies aangekla en beland in die tronk. Van hul eens welgestelde lewe in 'n gegoede buurt in Bloemfontein, moet Diana, haar ma en haar broer in 'n krotbuurt buite die stad gaan bly nadat hulle alles verloor. Gou kom Diana agter dat iets so eenvoudig soos toiletpapier en gloeilampe onontbeerlik, maar onbekostigbaar is.

Met gevoelens van skaamte en verleentheid, gaan kruip Diana pouses in die fietsloods weg sodat sy nie ander kinders in die oë hoef te kyk nie. Dit is hier waar sy vir Lutz Weilandt ontmoet en 'n hegte vriendskap van wedersydse begrip en empatie ontstaan tussen hulle.

Navorsing oor trauma en die letterkunde dui daarop dat mense kan leer uit hierdie soort traumanarratiewe en oor die jare het 'n letterkundige stroom ontwikkel rondom hierdie temas. 'n Literêre teks kan trauma ontbloot, maar ook verskuil laat agter fiksionele karakters en situasies. Dit kan vir beide skrywer en leser moontlikhede bied van heling, uitkoms en terapie, alhoewel de Kock en Troskie dit eens is dat trauma nie bloot weg- of uitgeskryf kan word nie. De Kock sê self in haar reeds genoemde onderhoud met Booyens, "die onderliggende seer is altyd in jou boeke teenwoordig, meestal sonder opset".

Vroeg in die roman lees ons hoe Diana met herinneringe van trauma gekonfronteer word: "Dis 'n wind wat ou herinneringe uit haar losskeur. Haar dwing om daarna te kyk; dit te probeer verteer" (18). Haar lewe verander skielik handomkeer en sy, haar ma en haar broer trek dan "[v]an die spoghuis in 'n stadslandgoed na 'n lamlendige kasarmpie in die plattelandse armmansbuurt vlak langs die plakkerskamp" (18). Hierdie herinneringe volg haar soos 'n skaduwee en dié deel van haar verlede, tesame met die feit dat eers haar pa en toe haar broer tronk toe is, bly by haar spook. Sy vrees deurentyd dat die

vernedering van haar verlede sal uitkom en haar nuwe, suksesvolle loopbaan in Stellenbosch omver sal werp.

Diana se verlede word byna versinnebeeld in die figuur van Lutz Weilandt. Al was hy haar vriend, kom hy uit die buurt waar sy en haar ma in armoede gebly het. Wanneer sy hom jare later weer in Stellenbosch raakloop, is dit hy wat "alles weer ontsluit, al was niks daarvan sy skuld nie" (22).

Die verlede het 'n onuitwisbare impak op hierdie twee sterk karakters gelaat. Diana leef in vrees dat iemand gaan uitvind van haar verlede en op sy beurt is dit asof Lutz nie emosioneel by iemand anders betrokke kan raak nie. Hy beskryf sy verlede en die feit dat hy sonder 'n pa grootgeword het as 'n wond wat nie meer bloei nie, maar 'n letsel wat steeds daar is (243). Verder beskryf hy homself ook as, "[m]y hele samestelling is [...] soms vir myself onontsyferbaar" (244). Saam moet hulle dan die verlede konfronteer. Diana moet leer om kop omhoog die toekoms in te gaan en vir Lutz "die deure na sy eie binneste moet help oopmaak" (244).

Diana en Lutz kry op die ou end albei hul dag. Dit is 'n deernisvolle storie wat handel oor die skaamte en skuld wat mense dikwels saamdra ten spyte van die feit dat hulle geen aandeel in die oorsaak daarvan gehad het nie. Dit bewys dat mense nie net alles in 'n oogwink kan verloor nie, maar ook kan uitstyg bo hul omstandighede en verlede. Die roman is tipies van die genre en alhoewel dit 'n ligte, lekkerleeservaring bied, is daar tog 'n dieper boodskap wat die leser aan die dink sal sit.

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In die rede geval: Waarom die mens mites maak.
Charl-Pierre Naudé.
Gansbaai: Naledi, 2023. 516 pp.
ISBN 9781776172979.

Charl-Pierre Naudé se doktorale tesis in filosofie aan die Universiteit van die Vrystaat is in boekvorm gepubliseer as *In die rede geval: Waarom die mens mites maak* (2023). Twee akademiese artikels, verwerk uit sy tesis, het dieselfde jaar in *LitNet Akademies* verskyn, wat Naudé se veelsydigheid as digter, romansier, vertaler, resensent en filosoof bevestig. Sy filosofiese werk het 'n sterk verband met sy kreatiewe werk, soos gesien in sy gedig uit *In die geheim van die dag* (2004): "Selfs die Goeie moet 'n oog kan toemaak. / En waar die Rede sluimer, word die Skone gebore". Naudé se teks bied 'n uitgebreide ontleding van Hans Blumenberg se *Arbeit am Mythos* (1979), bekend as *Work on Myth* (1990), om die vraag, "Waarom maak die mens mites?" breedvoerig te ondersoek.

Hoofstuk een bied 'n inleidende oorsig van die kernkwessies wat in die daaropvolgende hoofstukke ondersoek word. In die tweede hoofstuk, "Die skrik baar skatte", verduidelik Naudé (46) hoe die oermens sy oorspronklike natuurlike tuiste, geassosieer met "toegeweefde bosse", verloor het weens 'n traumatiese gebeurtenis (soos natuurlike seleksie of klimaatsverandering). Dit het die oermens gedwing om die oop ruimte te betree, wat oorlewing bemoeilik en aanpassing vereis het. Hierin verduidelik Naudé (65) aan die hand van Blumenberg hoe die vroeë mens se eerste konfrontasie met die "absolutisme van die realiteit" tot 'n toestand van intense onrustigheid gelei het, wat uiteindelik aanleiding gegee het tot die konsep van 'n meerdere mag en die ontstaan van gode. Hierdie proses van mitevorming, wat die mens se angs oor 'n onbekende bedreiging kanaliseer, word beskryf as 'n "daad van die denke", wat die basis vorm vir die ontwikkeling van funksionaliteit, metaforisering en "reokkupasie" (50). Vervolgens beskryf Naudé (51) twee pole van die oermens se bestaan: die gevaarlike ooptes en die veilige grot, waar illusies en magiese denke ontwikkel is om hierdie ooptes te oorwin. Volgens Blumenberg se teorie ondermyn hierdie perspektief die konvensionele skeiding tussen mite en rede, hoewel die funksionaliteit van elkeen verskil: mites bied geborgenheid, terwyl rede die werklikheid probeer verstaan sonder om in die mens se behoefte aan sekerheid te voorsien (71). Naudé wys op Blumenberg se verkenning van die werking van menslike denke, wat aan die een kant deel uitmaak van die miteskeppende modus van denke, en aan die ander kant van die rasionele modus van menslike denke.

In die derde hoofstuk, "Waarop kan die mens hoop?," wys Naudé hoe kennisvorming beide mitewerkend of teoreties, as vorms van redewerking, kan wees. Die fokus lê op betekenisvorming, wat "uit die situasie van primordiale angs gebore word en [...] 'n proses is wat afstand tussen daardie angs en die mens wil bewerkstellig" (77). Soos reeds genoem, is die belangrikste verskil dat "by mitewerking die behoeftes van die mens sentraal staan in die kennismodel, terwyl by teorie die mens en sy behoeftes aan die kantlyn staan" (79). Hierdie verskil word onder andere deur die Oedipus-mite verduidelik: die mite vergestalt die

menslike situasie en dra lewenskennis oor, terwyl teorie streef na die manipulering van die werklikheid (80).

Vervolgens neem Naudé die leser op 'n filosofiese reis deur die geskiedenis van Westerse metafisika, van die antieke denke van Plato tot die moderne kritiek van Nietzsche, om die vraag te ondersoek waarop die mens kan hoop. Aanvanklik was die antwoord: op die gode se genade, wat gesien word in 'n wêreldbeskouing waar 'n afwesige God geen direkte belangstelling by die mens het nie. Met die verskuiwing na 'n teologie waar God wel betrokke is by die wêreld, bly die kernvraag oor menslike hoop dieselfde, maar die fokus skuif na die mens se vermoë om die werklikheid te verstaan en te beheer—"om meer oor die skepping te wete te kom" (101–2). 'n Belangrike aspek van die reokkupasieproses in hierdie konteks is dat die mens voortdurend sy angs oor die eksistensiële onbekende (die absolutisme van die realiteit) op 'n veilige afstand moet hou. Hierdie afstand maak dit moontlik vir narratiewe om die mens se begrip van sy bestaan te vorm en te struktureer (111). Dié proses ontwikkel deur "deurlopendheid (kontinuïteit) wat afwissel met afbrekings (diskontinuïteit)", wat ruimte skep waarin "die ongedinkte gedink kan word", terwyl die mens steeds 'n gevoel van bekendheid en sekerheid oor sy eie bestaan behou (117). Naudé (70) wys daarop dat daar egter in Nietzsche se werk "nie mitewerking wat as rede voordoen soos in Christelike dogma nie, maar redewerking wat mitewerking gebruik ten einde te redeneer" gevind word. Dit beklemtoon terselfdertyd Blumenberg se projek in *Work on Myth*, waarin gewys word dat hierdie twee denkmodusse intrinsiek met mekaar verweef is en mekaar nodig het.

In die vierde hoofstuk, "Betekenisgewing se oudste vorm", word geskryf dat een van die "vroegste vorms van die optekening van mite" die poësie was (132). Die funksie van die poësie was juis nie om die werklikheidsimpak van die verskrikking op te roep nie, maar om dit verminderd voor te stel (133). Hierin haal Naudé vir Rilke (soos vertaal deur H. J. Pieterse) aan, wat die ontsag uitdruk wat die "numineuse ervaring" kenmerk, terwyl die ervaring terselfdertyd op 'n sidderende afstand gehou word:

> Elke engel is skrikwekkend. En nogtans, wee my,
> sing ek tot julle, byna dodelike voëls van die siel,
> en weet ek van julle. (135)

Naudé plaas klem daarop dat 'n aktiewe bestanddeel van mitewerking die Duitse woord *Bedeutung* is, wat in Afrikaans as "beduidenis", "veelseggendheid", "sinvolheid", "sinrykheid", "draagwydte" en "betekenisvolheid" vertaal kan word (136). Hierin bied mitewerking "weerstand teen die slytasie van tyd en faktore wat verstrooiing en uitwissing aanhelp" (137). Vervolgens stel Naudé (153) dat skrywers naby aan mitewerking leef, wat hy van toepassing maak op die poësie van onder andere Breyten Breytenbach, Robert Frost en Edward Thomas. Oor die slotstrofe van Frost se gedig "The Road Not Taken" merk hy op dat dit juis "die botsing tussen mitewerking en rasionele keuse" is wat die gedig goed maak, "want hoe kan gesê word dat die mymerende ou man in die laaste strofe […] wel die beter weg ingeslaan het" (157):

> I shall be telling this with a sigh
> Somewhere ages and ages hence;
> Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
> I took the one less traveled by,
> And that has made all the difference.

In hoofstukke vyf en ses word die mitewerkende behoefte aan "die ander god" en die verskillende gedaantes van die ander god bespreek. Naudé (441) beskryf die soeke na ander gode, wat die heersende godheid uitdaag, as "'n oorgeërfde psigiese struktuur". In Eugène Marais se kortverhaal "Salas y Gomez" word die hoofkarakter Hendrik voorgestel as 'n voorbeeldige volgeling van Calvyn, maar met eienaardige (teologiese) wendings van sy eie, wat hom in 'n krisis tot 'n alternatiewe god—sy medemens—laat wend, omdat God in die hemel nie genader kon word nie. Daarna verbind hoofstukke sewe en agt, met die sewende hoofstuk getiteld "Die vergeefse projek", wat fokus op die strewe na die finale mite. Naudé (352) voer aan, ingevolge Blumenberg: "Namate die mens daarin slaag om homself van die afgrondelikheid van die werklikheid te verwyder deur middel van instellings en kultuur, versterk sy strewe om hom van die oerafhanklikheid van mites ook te bevry." Tog blyk dit 'n strewe te wees wat nooit ten volle bereik sal word nie—nie in die wetenskap nie, nie in die filosofie nie: "Die kenniskorpus wat voldonge sluit, bly uit."

Naudé se *In die rede geval* bied 'n uitdagende blik op die verhouding tussen mite en rede in die menslike bewussyn. Deur 'n noukeurige ontleding van Westerse metafisika, met toepassings op vele kontekste, insluitende die letterkunde en teologie, herinner Naudé lesers aan die steeds veranderende en interafhanklike verhouding tussen hierdie twee maniere van betekenisvorming. In 'n tydperk waar rasionaliteit dikwels voorgestel word as die oorheersende modus van denke, stel Naudé 'n noodsaaklike vraag: Kan ons herbesin oor die waarde van mites en hulle herwaardeer as 'n integrale deel van ons kulturele en intellektuele

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erfenis? Sy werk daag lesers uit om die rol van beide rede en mite in ons moderne wêreld te heroorweeg.

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'n Huldiging. Digter van die kwiksilwerwoord: Ina Rousseau.
Daniel Hugo (red.).
Pretoria: Naledi, 2023. 337 pp.
ISBN 9781991256447.

Hierdie huldigingsbundel vir Ina Rousseau, Hertzog-pryswenner vir *'n Onbekende jaartal* (1995), spreek van deeglik oorwoë keuses deur die samesteller. Dit volg die konvensies vir hierdie reeks oor Hertzogpryswenners deur akademiese sowel as nie-akademiese bydraes in te sluit, maar oorhoofs bied dit veral 'n volronde blik op Rousseau en haar werk.

Ina Rousseau is by die leserspubliek (maar waarskynlik ook onder akademici) veral as digter bekend. Hiernaas was sy ook kortverhaalskrywer en vertaler—feite wat dalk nie so algemeen bekend is nie. Bernard Odendaal, outeur van die akademiese bydrae oor haar as literêre vertaler, erken ruiterlik hoe hy "onkant betrap" (220) is deur hierdie faset van haar werk. Sy geskakeerde blik op haar verskillende vertalings dien egter die doel om haar rol en posisie binne die literêre sisteem meer volledig te verreken; terselfdertyd slaag hy uitstekend daarin om aan te dui hoe kinder- en jeugliteratuur—wat onder andere deur Rousseau vertaal is—oor die afgelope twee dekades 'n al hoe sterker posisie in die sisteem begin inneem het.

Haar kortverhaalkuns word belig in Francois Smith se ondersoek van enkele gebundelde verhale sowel as die enkele bundel, *Soutsjokolade* (1979). Smith slaag daarin om reeds vanuit eersgenoemde sekere kenmerke van haar kortkuns aan te toon, maar die lesing van laasgenoemde bied 'n insiggewende omlyning van die belangrikste temas: karakters se blindheid vir hulle eie foute en magtelose posisies; versmade vroue se verknegting en hulle pogings om via offergawes van velerlei aard hulle identiteitsloosheid te beveg. Diegene wat nie met Rousseau se prosa vertroud is nie, sal beslis deur hierdie bydrae geïnspireer word om die verhale te wil lees.

Fanie Olivier se resepsieondersoek betreffende *Die verlate tuin* (1954), is 'n behendige naasmekaarlees van resensies en 'n vergelyking van uitsprake deur 'n handvol bekende resensente van destyds. Hy slaag uitstekend daarin om sekere lyne te trek, en wys byvoorbeeld op Ernst van Heerden en S. Ignatius Mocke wat die bundel onderskeidelik bestempel as "'vroulike' verse" (43) en waarin "vrou-wees" sentraal staan (47), en wys terselfdertyd op die afwesigheid van sodanige tipering deur Ernst Lindenberg.

Hein Viljoen se bydrae oor Rousseau se laaste bundel, *'n Onbekende jaartal* (1995), gee kortliks aandag aan die (uiteindelike) verering van hierdie digter deur die toekenning van die Hertzogprys in 1996. Ek reken dit is belangrik dat hy Réna Pretorius aanhaal wat in 2016 hierdie laat erkenning as "'n leemte in ons bekroningsisteem" (74) bestempel, asook Brink wat reeds in 2003 skryf dat sy "nog skaars na haar werklike waarde in Afrikaans geskat is" (75). Wat volg, is 'n uitstaande voorbeeld van die toepassing van die stipleesmetode om vier gedigte uit die bundel te ontleed, en waarna dosente hulle studente gerus kan verwys.

Die verhouding tussen Ina Rousseau en Peter Blum in 1950, en die intertekstuele proses wat tussen hulle onderskeie werke ontstaan het, is die interessante onderwerp van Tania Colyn se bydrae (gebaseer op haar doktorale studie aan die UK met die titel "Tussen mentors en minnaars"). Sy betrek ook die aspek van genderrolle, alhoewel dit my indruk is dat dit ietwat los van die res van die bespreking staan, soos ook blyk uit die strukturele inrigting van die bydrae wat aanvanklik genderrolle in Rousseau se werk beskou, en dan eers oorgaan na die biografiese agtergrond van die twee digters en hulle verhouding. Die bespreking van die gedigte wat na aanleiding van die verhouding (en die einde daarvan) tot stand gekom het, is wel boeiende leesstof.

Op akademiese vlak is daar hier en daar van Colyn se argumente of aannames wat verfyning verg, soos byvoorbeeld die uitspraak dat "Rousseau se werk […] moontlik nie sterk aan[sluit] by die konsep van die 'feminine écriture' [*sic*] nie, omdat daar nie 'n sterk feministiese draad deur haar oeuvre loop nie" (127). Cixous se *écriture feminine* is nie noodwendig gekoppel aan 'n feministiese ingesteldheid nie, en slaan eerder op 'n soort vloeibare, kreatiewe taal wat op die marges van die Lacaniaanse simboliese orde sigbaar raak, en ook heg aan die vroulike liggaam verbind is. Interessant genoeg reken Rousseau juis in "Welwitschia Bainesii" (Rousseau 48) af met die "barbaarse taal", waarskynlik

behorende tot die simboliese orde, en suggereer 'n vloeiende taalvorm as alternatief.

Die terrein van genetiese teksondersoeke is die konteks vir Shané Kleyn se bydrae (gebaseer op haar magisterstudie aan die US) oor die diachroniese voorkoms van variante in Rousseau se poësie. Sy bied naamlik 'n variante-apparaat aan wat die drukgeskiedenis van 253 gedigte objektief kon registreer, sodat 'n volledige beeld gebied word van alle veranderinge wat die digter mettertyd aan die aanvanklike gedrukte weergawe (die *editio princeps*) gemaak het. Akademiese asook nie-akademiese lesers behoort hierdie noukeurige speurtog na Rousseau se voortdurend slypende hand—'n eienskap wat dan ook deur verskeie bydraes beklemtoon word—baie insiggewend te vind.

Die invloede van Rousseau op Johann de Lange is die onderwerp van Daniel Hugo se akademiese bydrae. Deeglike stiplees en netjiese verbandlegging word hier gesien, en die leser kan aan die hand van 'n heerlik praktiese benadering besef watter invloed sy op hierdie belangrike digter se digterskap gehad het.

Wat die akademiese bydraes betref, is dit opmerklik dat die samesteller 'n baie goeie balans handhaaf tussen gevestigde en jonger navorsers. Terselfdertyd is die akademiese bydraes almal hoogs leesbaar, en gaan nie mank aan swaarwigtige formulerings nie. 'n Mens wonder wel waarom slegs vyf van die sewe akademiese bydraes aan portuurbeoordeling onderwerp is.

Rousseau as vertaler van poësie word belig deur Hugo se bydraes oor onderskeidelik haar Engelse vertalings van haar eie gedigte, asook vier versvertalings wat sy uit Italiaans onderneem het—wat my beslis verras het.

Erika Terblanche se oorsig oor Rousseau se lewe en werk lees hoogs onderhoudend. Haar persoonlikheid word geteken deur byvoorbeeld aanhalings van haar uitsprake, sommige heel vermaaklik, soos wanneer Rousseau oor haar kort rukkie in die onderwys opmerk dat sy "glad nie 'n onderwyseres [was] nie, maar dat sy en die leerders wel "meer pret gehad [...] [het] as enigiets anders" (13). Die digter se beskeie aard word baie goed belig deur haar aan te haal as dat sy in haar jeug gereken het "dat dit op die een of ander wyse onbetaamlik is om 'n vers te publiseer. So asof 'n mens daarmee wil pronk" (16).

Die foto's van Rousseau was vir my besonder genietlik, nie net omdat dit 'n blik op haar familie en gesinslewe bied nie, maar ook omdat dit haar uitbeeld, enersyds as jong vrou in allerlei stylvolle uitrustings van die jare veertig tot vroeë sestigs en andersyds as ouer vrou in 'n tekstuurryke uitrusting saam met Uys Krige, en sodoende ook hierdie faset van haar persoonlikheid belig.

Literatuurliefhebbers wat die boek nog nie aangeskaf het nie, kan dit gerus op die lysie vir die Kerskous plaas.

Geraadpleegde bron

Rousseau, I. *Versamelde gedigte 1954–1984.* Kaapstad: Human & Rousseau, 1984.

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Queer Bodies in African Films.

Gibson Ncube.
Makhanda: African Humanities Association, 2022. 159 pp.
ISBN 978-1-920033-99-6.

In his book *Queer Bodies in African Films* (2022), Gibson Ncube offers striking new ways of reading and interpreting the filmed human body, with implications that are important to scholarly understandings of what can and should constitute text, expression, resistance, and legibility in the burgeoning and increasingly complex field of queer African studies. Through his detailed analyses of a selected array of queer-themed films from different parts of the continent, Ncube zooms in on the materiality and corporeality of human bodies as they are depicted in films, focusing his attention on the naked and the clothed body; on bodily movements and gestures; on touch and intimacy (or the lack thereof); and on the skin, scars, scabs, implants, and genitals that comprise and define the complex and shifting lives of the protagonists on the screen. In reading and analysing the queer body itself—the flesh and skin and organs that it consists of, how it moves, and how it robes or disrobes itself—Ncube makes the central contention that queer bodies have their own "linguistic code" (2) and their "own grammars and lexicon" (8) through which they are able to "weave and tell stories" (xiii). In other words, Ncube sees the material queer body not only as a text that can be interpreted, but as a mode of expression that can intervene in and subvert the hetero-patriarchal norms and contexts in which it is located. This attention to corporeality as a form of language and expression is especially pertinent to queer lived realities on the African continent, which

continue to be overwhelmingly silenced, erased, and marginalised in social and political discourses. As Ncube rightly points out, the significance of bodies as "discursive and textualized sociocultural phenomena" (2) has largely been overlooked in this field, so that "queer bodies themselves, their embodiment, their erotic and sexual potentialities, and their relationality, have not been considered as viable and worthwhile areas of understanding queer social realities" (15).

As closely related to his focus on embodiment, I find Ncube's readings of the silences that surround and emanate from the filmed queer body to be particularly pertinent. In analysing the choices made by filmmakers and directors from the Maghreb, for instance, Ncube highlights how the foregrounding of diegetic sound, the use of minimal dialogue, and the decision to *not* screen queer intimacy can all be read as reflective of the "social silence" (42) that is imposed on non-normative sexualities in the Maghreb countries. This highlights how knowledge and an understanding of queer lived realities on the African continent can be derived "not only from what is represented, screened, and said", but also "from what remains unsaid, unrepresented, and unscreened" (44). Conversely, Ncube also demonstrates how queer agency, resistance, and expression can also be forged within silence, the unspoken, and the non-verbal. In his discussion of "ambivalent" same-sex sexualities as portrayed in a selection of Egyptian films, for instance, he shows how the movements of bodies—their gestures, actions, and forms of touching and relating to other bodies—can all be read as modes of expression and assertions of agency. Similarly, in his reading of the 2020 Kenyan film *I Am Samuel*, Ncube explores how the protagonists negotiate their queerness in both rural and urban settings, and in relation to familial ties and acceptance, primarily through the corporeal and the non-verbal, so that their bodies ultimately "speak (in) a silent language which articulates a generative form of transgression" (71).

This attention to subtle and often unspoken modes of transgression resonates with the work of other scholars in queer African studies who are demonstrating an increased interest in how queer lived experiences on the continent do not necessarily follow the script of overt resistance, 'coming out', or a desire for 'visibility' that is seen in Western models of sexualities and identities. Ncube references Lindsey Green-Simms's recent book *Queer African Cinemas* (2022) in this regard, but similar ideas have also been explored by theorists such as Stella Nyanzi (2015) and Eddie Ombagi (2019). For Ncube, in fact, there is a crucial distinction to be made between "visibility" and "legibility": whereas the former is "perfunctory and superficial" (62), the latter gestures towards the more complex ways that queer bodies "enter discursivity" (62) and become socially understood and understandable within their specific contexts. Legibility in this sense is often achieved through "small and everyday acts" (66) that centre the corporeal and the unspoken, enacting subtle shifts in social relations.

In addition to enlarging our understandings of how queer bodies and bodily expressions can offer their own forms of text, grammar, and lexicon, I appreciate the numerous other ways that this book consciously moves away from well-trodden ground in queer African studies. In his two opening chapters, Ncube focuses on films from North Africa: looking first at Maghrebian films and then at Egyptian films. These geographical regions, as Ncube contends, are not only usually overlooked in many queer African studies but are typically considered separately to other parts of the continent, so that this field of study is generally "bifurcated" (2) between North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, with scholars tending to focus exclusively on works from one of these regions. By contrast, Ncube's aim with this book is to move away from this "fragmented and regionalised" (4) approach, as he brings his readings of Maghrebian and Egyptian films into conversation with his analyses of East African and South African films, which form the focus of his third and fourth chapters respectively. Ncube is able to draw on his multilingual training and experience in both English and French literary studies in this regard, bringing a new cross-continental and "Pan-African" (4) approach that I found to be refreshing and informative, as my work and reading in this field has thus far centred only on sub-Saharan Africa: a confirmation of Ncube's argument that scholars tend to work exclusively on separate regions of the continent.

There were several other elements of the book that I found to be innovative and reflective of a conscious decision to forge new roads of inquiry in this field. Ncube chooses, for instance, to not focus on films from West Africa at all, given that films from this region have already "elicited considerable scholarly debates" (5). He also examines films from a wide timespan, ranging from the 1970s to the 2020s, an approach that differs considerably from recent studies that focus exclusively on 21st-century cultural production. His attention to trans identity in his analysis of the Ugandan documentary *The Pearl of Africa* (2016) broadens the scope of his inquiry from same-sex sexuality to gender identity, bringing added dimensions to his exploration of queer legibility as mediated through the body.

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Finally, his analysis of South African films demonstrates a novel reading of "how intersectional bodies have evolved from the apartheid era to the contemporary post-apartheid period" (96). This comparative reading of films set within these two different eras allows him to trace the shifts in attitudes, constructions, and possibilities surrounding queer bodies located at divergent intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality in the country's history—a method that contrasts notably with many similar studies in the field that have chosen to only examine the post-apartheid period.

Taken as a whole, Ncube's book demonstrates several commendable and markedly new scopes of inquiry in queer African studies, foregrounding methods, ideas, and insights that I am sure will be productively taken up by other scholars working in this field.

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Translation Flows: Exploring Networks of People, Processes and Products.

Ilse Feinauer, Amanda Marais and Marius Swart (eds.). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2023. 252 pp.
ISBN 9789027214249.

In 2019, the European Society for Translation Studies for the first time held its Congress outside Europe—in Stellenbosch, South Africa. *Translation Flows* is the resulting volume of 12 discerningly selected, double-blind peer reviewed papers read at that 9th Congress. Departing from translation as a social practice, emphasis is placed not so much on the products of translation, but on how and what translation transfers, that is, on the dynamics of how translation 'flows' and on the networks associated with translation processes and practices, and the people involved.

The field of translation studies is enriched by the diversity (in terms of languages, cultures, methodologies, and objectives) of the participants who contribute to it. In this volume, contributions on translation practices outside Europe add new insights and perspectives, mostly within our common and familiar Eurocentric theoretical frameworks. Organised in two sections, one on historical and the other on contemporary perspectives and practices, other binary lines are also identifiable (such as recent contemplations, in the wake of decolonisation, on physical geospaces like the Global South and the Global North, and the conceptual spaces/dichotomies of African versus Western philosophies).

The volume opens with five contributions in the historical section. The first, by Anthony Pym (who holds positions on three different continents), "naïvely" (4) but thought-provokingly reflects on whether translation took place between Aboriginal languages in pre-Invasion Australia (before 1788) and what its nature would have been. Much information was inferred from secondary sources and gleaned from experts in anthropology and linguistics—but also from descendants of the First Nations, who, in the 21st century, still adhere to Aboriginal cultural practices intimately tied to language and communication. Pym describes striking differences between Western and Aboriginal views and practices, ranging from culturally entrenched 'rules' on mediation ("who has the right to speak with whom", 4) and the hermeneutics of interpretation (assigning meaning to a story, 17) to the use of non-linguistic semiotic resources (sign languages, message sticks, etc.). Despite the speakers being polyglots, thus limiting the need for interlingual translation, carefully chosen messengers would be sent forth to cross language boundaries to deliver a message, and those messengers would translate orally as would be appropriate in a specific situation. Intriguingly, Pym highlights numerous differences between Western and Aboriginal thinking on translation, concluding that "slower cultural practices [that] spend longer on collective sense-making across several media" (18) are not only conducive to, but in fact imperative for allowing for a free flow of information.

In some respects, South African scholar Maricel Botha's contribution runs parallel to that of Pym. In contemporary Nigeria and the surrounding West African countries, many indigenous languages are spoken, but owing to the hegemony of ex-colonial languages in the post-independence period, indigenous languages barely figure in inter-societal information flows that involve translation. The exception is the hugely successful way in which Nigerian (Nollywood) films produced in the informal economy by amateur film makers cross national borders into neighbouring countries. These films use indigenous languages, which are highly regarded as expressions of identity (130), and the subject matter of these films draw on topics that are culturally relevant (137) in the local societies

and among diasporic communities outside Africa. Translations are mostly done by lay practitioners, who work at lightning speed under poor conditions and receive a meagre remuneration for their efforts, which are often of poor quality (131, 139). Mediation strategies include subtitling, 'dubbing' by a single person who translates all roles and perform cultural mediation (by omission and/or insertion), live oral interpreting at public screenings (142) and even the production of DVDs that contain 'dubbing' of an indigenous-language film but creates a soundtrack that is 'invented', based on the visual imagery of the film (142). Botha uses Tyulenev's application of Luhmann's social systems theory to describe this phenomenon and how it works. She concludes that the benefits of the unique 'informal' system of film translation in Nigeria include elevating the status of the indigenous languages, disrupting language imperialism, and creating a form of post-colonial cultural pan-Africanism (137).

Community-driven video-game fan translation practices form the focus of the chapter by Selahattin Karagöz. Undertaken by gamers with an intimate knowledge of the gaming industry, strong personal preferences, and few (if any) expectations of commercial gain, the situational correspondences with film subtitling in Nigeria seem apparent. Another point of correspondence is the location of the study outside Western Europe—in Turkey, which features in two more contributions. One is a historically oriented study by Sare Rabia Öztürk of how the classical Ottoman intercultural scene came to be; the other is Dyugu Tekgül-Akin's investigation of the role literary agents play in commissioning translations, contributing to image building, and influencing the overall flow of translated texts. Literary circulation in the Caribbean is the topic of Lëtitia Saint-Loubert's chapter that connects Caribbean Studies and Translation Studies in studying translation flows from the Caribbean. The transnational flow of Chinese texts in translation is the topic of an empirical study in which Bei Hu concludes that readers' trust in the (individual) translator increases their willingness to accept translation trade-offs that seem mutually contradictive, by compromising at the perceived intersection of maximum desired effects and minimum risks.

The remaining five chapters cover more 'traditional' and 'familiar' ground in terms of translation in Europe, although in Sofía Monzón Rodríguez's investigation, the directionality of translations of Spanish and Catalan romans à clef is from Argentina to Franco's Spain. In another historical study, Philipp Hofeneder investigates the circulation of knowledge versus the mobility of translation; a phenomenon that is also studied by Paola Gentile in her research on how translation policy and imagology combine in the case of Dutch literature in Italy. The role of politically committed publishers in Spain is investigated by Fruela Fernández, who asks, "Recognition versus redistribution?" (a historical perspective). An evaluation of contemporary politics is the subject of Yvonne Lindqvist's consideration whether four major intersecting events that led to Caribbean author Maryse Condé having been awarded the Alternative Nobel Prize have annulled her chances of being awarded the 'regular' Nobel Prize in Literature.

Like translation, reviewing also calls for choices and trade-offs. I hope my detailed discussion of the contributions by Pym and Botha serves as an aperitif, enticing readers to indulge in the other ten chapters of Translation Flows, which I could only briefly introduce within the scope of this review.

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Sons of Mud.
Johan Vlok Louw.
Cape Town: Umuzi, 2023. 247 pp.
ISBN 9781415210635.

Sons of Mud is an anti-war narrative that uses satire to highlight the brutality of apartheid through the lens of young white males, described by the narrator as "the fruity kids of Cain" (8), who have been conscripted to the South African Defence Force (SADF) to perform military service. Louw provides a historiographic portrayal of the Voortrekkerhoogte military base (renamed Thaba Tshwane in 1998), drawing parallels between it and the Auschwitz concentration camp which reveal how apartheid symbolized horror, genocide, and trauma, particularly for the black victims of the security forces. However, he also suggests that some of the young white males, who are involuntarily conscripted into becoming "killer machines" (42), are also negatively affected, as they are subjected to physical and psychological torture. For example, the young conscripts in the novel are called "little shits" (11), "useless little pustule[s]" (12) and are verbally abused through statements such as: "I pray to God they shoot your cock off in Angola so that no bitch

girlfriend of yours can ever have babies!" (85). These are a few instances which demonstrate Louw's negative representation of conscription as "the horror", a phrase repeated throughout the novel.

The aforementioned analogy between apartheid as a crime against humanity and the Holocaust in Germany has been utilized by other writers, such as André Brink, Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee, as a way of protesting against the former regime in South Africa. In addition, Louw interrogates the issue of freedom and autonomy in the situation of white male youths who are displaced from their homes and involuntarily recruited into the military service after school, since these conscripts have no choice with regards to their involvement in the state's response to the political struggle. The stringent laws in place at the time subjected them to imprisonment or exile for resistance.

The title of the novel, *Sons of Mud*, symbolises the young conscripts: "a multitude of heavily tanned faces under floppy bush hats embedded in a sea of South African Defence Force brown. It is difficult to determine where their skin ends and their battle fatigue begins. They're simply a smelly mud-brown creature" (68). This reifies their abjection and dehumanization as they are turned from "kids [...] into killing machines" (42). However, *Sons of Mud* is also the title of the Dominee's sermon in the novel, which implies that the church played a significant role in the ideological formation and justification of the system of apartheid, together with its literal defence. However, perhaps one of the critiques that might be levelled against the novel is Louw's failure to acknowledge the role liberation theology played in apartheid South Africa and faith-based conscientious objection.

The novel is stylistically divided into three parts: "Protectors of the Realm", "The Skeleton", and "A Boy of Some Importance". In "Part 1: Protectors of the Realm", Louw utilizes first-person singular and plural narration, shifting between "I" and "we" pronouns to document the personal and collective experiences of those directly affected by the militarization of white youth during apartheid. In this regard, the narration accentuates the inhumane conditions experienced first-hand by those confined to the "[f]reaking prison dorm" (19), and the physical and psychological abuse and trauma to which the recruited youth were exposed. However, Louw unmasks the discrimination and oppression that were directed at homosexuals in the SADF, as the narrator reveals that "[b]eing a moffie in the army will get you shock treatment in One Mil's Basement" (74). The latter statement directly refers to the Aversion project, whereby homosexual conscripts were subjected to torture as a form of punishment and aversive therapy was used to supposedly 'cure' their homosexuality. Additionally, those accused of assault, theft and drug abuse were subjected to punitive treatment in detention.

In "Part Two: The Skeleton", the narrative focus shifts to Riejkardt Jurgens, an Afrikaans conscript, the 'investigation' following his assault of three physical training instructors (PTI) corporals, and his detention. The investigator in charge is a character named Colonel, but the reader learns that he is not actually probing the case, as he exclaims: "We're not [...] investigating. We don't investigate any-fokken-thing, boet" (144). However, through the assistance of Andrew Howard-Smythe—the narrator and a surfer from Durban who, when conscripted to the army, "feels like a Jew boy heading for Auschwitz" (8)—, Riejkardt's offence is censored and he is recruited into a special military assignment across the border. This signals the high levels of secrecy and corruption during apartheid. "Part 3: A Boy of Some Importance" tracks Riejkardt's mission as a henchman. In this part, he is given the title "The Skeleton Keeper" as a result of his involvement in and suppression of apartheid crimes.

Sons of Mud is characteristic of much post-apartheid South African fiction, as it blends English, Afrikaans and Fanakalo to indicate the country's multilingualism and multiculturalism. Furthermore, there are various references to familiar South African settings, buildings, cars, music, and food, which are utilized to strengthen the realism of the narrative, as well as a repetition of phrases such as "Swapo is cruising for a bruising" (30, 216) and "the past is in the present, there is no escape" (94, 218) to convey the cycles of violence and oppression prevalent in the country. Louw's narrator also uses wry nicknames for characters in the text: a man who bear an uncanny resemblance to Arnold Schwarzenegger is called "Arnold" and Riejkardt is referred to as the "giant" boy because of his physique, which is described as a cross between a heavyweight wrestler and orangutan.

Ultimately, *Sons of Mud* is an exemplary anti-war manifesto as Louw exposes the ideological pressures for white male youth during the apartheid era due to conscription and highlights the interrelatedness of the personal and the political. Through his use of satire,

he critiques the apartheid political system, but also employs humour to restore agency to the conscripts.

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Inkwenkwezi efihlakeleyo.
K. Sello Duiker (Xolisa Guzula, transl.).
Cape Town: Penguin, 2023, 241 pp.
ISBN 9781415210871.

Reviewing a translation raises several important questions. Does one review the translation as an independent work of art, in which you judge it on its own merits for style and fluency in the target language? Do you review the translation against the original text with a focus on the accurate translation of the intent of the source language? To what extent does the reviewer judge how the translator captures the cultural expressions, readability and all the nuances of literary works? I believe a combination of these approaches provides valuable insights. Guided by Wardle's framework—as explained in her 2020 article "Reviewing the Reviewers: (Re)Translations and the Literary Press"—the aim of this review is to assess the translation on its own merits focusing mainly on readability and cultural resonance. The second aspect is to assess the extent to which the original text has been preserved. The final aspect of the review is to comment on the technical aspect of translated text.

Inkwenkwezi efihlakeleyo is the 2023 Xhosa translation of K. Sello Duiker's South African novel, *The hidden star*. It is in essence a story of self-discovery. Nolitye, an 11-year-old who lives with her mother Thembi, ventures into the dark areas of the Phola township in an adventure that seeks to restore balance to nature by removing magical stones from the bad hands. Nolitye, whose name loosely translates to "the keeper of the stone" or "the keeper of knowledge", has developed a hobby of collecting stones. This is indeed in line with naming practices amongst speakers of Bantu languages, where children are expected to follow the traits associated with their names. At the beginning of the novel, Nolitye's life is that of a typical 11-year-old who lives in a shack in a crowded township. Everything sounds typical, the drunk men who sing at night, the stray dogs and cats that scavenge for food, and the neighbours who know each other's names. However, as the novel develops, the reader is captured regardless of their age. The novel relates to both young and old in that the stories weave together fiction, realism, and magic. As Nolitye learns about the magical powers of one of the stones, she also discovers the powers that she has, such as standing up to bullies, speaking to animals, fighting witches, as well as restoring peace by discovering and rescuing missing children.

On the subject of the clarity of translation, this novel reads well. It is very easy to understand because the translator has used common words that the speakers of the language understand. The language used generally allows for a nice flow when reading, with punctuation facilitating pauses where sentences tend to be longer. The tone is consistent throughout the book.

In terms of the cultural nuances, the translation reflects the typical linguistic landscape of Phola, a mixture of English as reflected in the names of the dogs, Afrikaans, as in *Moeder* (the head teacher), Sesotho, as in *Mamani* and *Ntate* Matthews, *MaMokoena* and the majority of names in isiXhosa, including *Thembi*, *Nolitye* and *Mamtonga*, to mention some. In addition to this, because the setting of the novel is in a multilingual area, it feels natural to have a combination of all these languages in one text.

The next aspect of this review is the comparison of the source text and the target text. While the combination of languages facilitates the translation of cultures, some phrases feel socio-linguistically misplaced. For example, when using Sesotho, it is often unacceptable for a child to use an elder's name without prefixing a kinship term as is the case with *Ntate Mokoena.* There are many instances for example "Dumela MaMokoena" (26) and "Dumela MaZwane" (28) where Nolitye greets older people without saying Mme or Mama. This is the unfortunate transportation of the English culture into Sesotho and then into isiXhosa via translation. While the translator stayed true to the text, it sits uncomfortably in isiXhosa, but perhaps that was what the original text wanted to convey.

Regarding the technical aspects of *Inkwenkwezi efihlakeleyo*, the orthographic convention does not adhere to the standards prescribed by PanSALB in 2019. For instance, the auxiliary verb in the future tense is frequently separated from the predicate. Additionally, while there are some typographical errors throughout the text, pages 88–90 require revision for future editions. Lastly, the author's birth year is incorrectly

stated as 1994 on the final page, which will also need to be corrected.

In conclusion, Xolisa Guzula's translation of this novel offers access to a classic children's story that explores societal issues in a unique manner, reminiscent of traditional *iintsomi* (folktales) but with its own distinctive approach. Through themes such as bullying, poverty, and witchcraft, the story explores complex social challenges. This work exemplifies a fresh and innovative reinvention of post-1994 literature, contributing meaningfully to contemporary narratives.

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