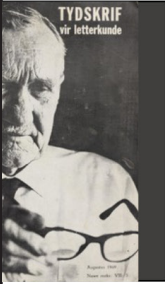


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Grief, resurrection, and the Nigerian Civil War in Isidore Diala's *The Lure of Ash* Solomon Awuzie

Grief, resurrection, and the Nigerian Civil War in Isidore Diala's *The Lure of Ash*


As part of the third generation of Nigerian poetry, Isidore Diala's *The Lure of Ash* focuses on the Nigerian Civil War experience of 1967–1970, the grief associated with it, and the resurrection of the Biafran agitation. Being a collection that is derived from the rural world of the Igbo cosmology, Diala's *The Lure of Ash* portrays the Nigerian Civil War in a sensuous and emotive tone. It accounts for the poet's belief in the regeneration of the lives of the dead Biafran soldiers. The symbols of fire and ash are significant for interpreting the poet-speaker's grief in the collection. The collection also succeeds in painting a picture of the Nigerian Civil War experience where the bitter memory of the war resonates, while representing poetry as the healer of the pain and wounds of the war. **Keywords:** grief, resurrection, Nigerian Civil War, third generation Nigerian poetry, Isidore Diala.

Despite the very little attention Isidore Diala's *The Lure of Ash* (1997) has received from critics, the collection remains an important work of third-generation Nigerian poetry that addresses the Nigerian Civil War experience, the grief that is associated with it, and the resurrection of the Biafran agitation.¹ Being a collection that was produced and published in the 1990s, a decade when Ralph Uwazurike, the leader of the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), rekindled the painful feelings associated with the Civil War by starting a nationwide radical campaign and agitation for Biafra, the collection reacts to this disposition by focusing on the resurrected Biafran agitation while drawing heavily from the grief of the war experience.² The collection particularly forges a link between the resurrected Biafran agitation and the poet-speaker's imagination of the war experience through the use of grief as a major trope. However, grief is not a new trope in Nigerian Civil War poetry discourse in that it has persistently been used to reflect on the message of the futility of war. One of the reasons for this is that grief has the ability to calm the tension of the war that has continued to simmer even though the war ended fifty years ago. Also, grief has been used to attract sympathy to the victims of the war and to stress the effects of the war on the Biafran people. In Diala's *The Lure of Ash*, grief is engaged to paint a picture of the Nigerian Civil War in order to bear testimony to what 'really happened' and, in the words of Emmanuel Obiechina, to "ascribe distinct potency to poetry [...] as the healer of the self, the people and the wounded soul of [the] society in the harsh [and] bad times" (529).

The manipulation of grief has led to the categorization of Nigerian Civil War poetry as follows: one, poetry which focuses on people and places and, two, poetry which is derived from the local or rural world of Igbo cosmology and vegetation. The first category is found more among the poetry produced by the Hausa poets, much of it as a result of a 1968 poetry competition asking for poems in praise of the federal forces, and some poetry produced by the Yoruba and Mid-Western poets that seeks to calm the tension of the war (Furniss 21). While the Hausa poets exploit the three modes of Hausa oral and written verse, namely praise, vilification, and narrative, the little poetry produced by the Yoruba and Mid-Western poets expresses their bitterness over the war and the colossal waste in human and material resources. The second category of the Nigerian Civil War poetry refers to the poetry derived from local Igbo symbols, vegetation, and cosmology and has mostly been written by Eastern Nigerian poets. This poetry uses dominant animal images as well as some aspects of traditional mythology to symbolize the imagined Biafran nation. Diala's *The Lure of Ash* falls into this category. As a collection that is derived from the rural world of the Igbo cosmology, *The Lure of Ash* portrays the Nigerian Civil War in a sensuous and emotive tone. Through this

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portrayal, the collection accounts for the poet's belief in the regeneration of the lives of the dead Biafran soldiers. The particular use of fire and ash as emotive symbols underlines the theme of grief, which, in addition to the experience of the Civil War itself and the more recent Biafran agitation, will be of central interest in this article.

In this article I show how Diala engages grief in the collection and reveals how he has used it to recreate the war experience in order to put the Biafran agitation in proper perspective. Not only does the poet-speaker's representation of the war experience evoke sympathy for the Igbo victims of the war, it also suggests that the Igbo war victims will be reborn to continue the Biafran agitation. Grief is used to reflect on the war as an unending experience in the mind of the poet. At the same time, the traditional Igbo lore, from which Diala extracted the philosophy that underlies this poetry, has rich emotive values and helps articulate a symbolic understanding of grief. Igbo lore presupposes a symbolic underpinning of everything: things are encrypted in symbols in order to create out of them a larger-than-life kind of meaning. Hence, grief is used to convey strong symbolic messages and to advance an Igbo belief in the regeneration of life—the same concept which Abba A. Abba explains as “the Igbo worldview”, that is, a “worldview in which reincarnation is central in the conception of life and death” (2). He explains this further thus:

Igbo proverbial lore consistently draws attention to the caveat that life, salvaged and preserved, will be surrendered inevitably to death and that death is a debt which every human being owes to mother earth [...]. Although life brings a large measure of suffering, death is considered the greatest suffering of all; yet this apprehension of death in the Igbo worldview has given way to a new idiom in which death is reconstituted as a glorious becoming. The awareness of its ontological significance partly has led to the radical change in its perception as finality. (2)

Grief interrogates the Igbo worldview and questions its idea of the dead being reborn into an eternal circle of life. Diala explains this connection in his article entitled “Okigbo's Drum Elegies” when he posits that, in Igbo cosmic belief, death and bereavement speak volumes of human life and interrogate “humans' inward delusions of immortality” (93). Diala describes “the sublimation of the grief of bereavement into music” as a conquest and the “translation of the fear and pain of death” as an artistic triumph (93). He explains that, apart from the arrangement for the burial of a deceased, “a traditional Igbo burial ceremony, inspired by and rooted in the belief in reincarnation, typically constitutes a cosmic drama engaged in a sober reappraisal of life as a worthwhile experience even in the face and in defiance of death” (86).

It is for this reason that grief can be said to give the Igbo lore a certain aura of sacredness and potency, and that the association between grief and lore has been deployed in poetry as a tool to reflect on the wound of a devastating Nigerian Civil War experience. Grief has been reflected in Nigerian Civil War poetry to demonstrate “the power of poetry to distil from human catastrophes significant, unforgettable and redemptive truth” (Obiechina 531). In an inaugural lecture at Imo State University, Diala explained that the reason for this portrayal in poetry is to underscore the fact that “writers pay close attention to war given its proclivity to foreground experiences that underline the abiding paradox of the human situation: the grandeur of the human spirit and the mortality of the human condition, human capacity for heroism, and will for unbridled evil to which war also gives full rein” (*Dionysos, Christ, Agwu and the African Writer* 47). Hence Diala is able to reflect on the war in such a way that not only the memory of the experience of the war is represented, but the activities of the Biafran leader-turned-hero-and-legend, Odumegwu Ojukwu, during the war are also celebrated. It is for this reason his account of the war experience transcends the immediate response to the Civil War. As a matter of fact, he uses *The Lure of Ash* to reveal the healing that must follow because of the peculiarities of the war and to stress the capacity of poetry to help heal the wound of the war. The poet-speaker imagines the possibility of healing the wounds of the Civil War by addressing important lingering issues: the many Biafrans who laid down their lives in defense of their homestead, the futility of war and the wasted energies that were put into it, and, finally, the enduring impact of the conflict in the country's socio-political landscape. With all of these ills in mind, the collection advances the idea of regeneration in order to promote the poet-speaker's belief in the rebirth of all who died in the war. Since the Nigerian Civil War experience produced sorrow, the mood of the Igbo poets who focus on it reflects grief. As such, grief has continued to resurface in the Nigerian Civil War poetry produced by the Igbo poets.

In order to capture these aspects of the war, *The Lure of Ash* is divided into three subsections: “The hues of ash”, “The swell of ash”, and “The trail of ash”. All are woven together to reflect on the theme of grief. While “The hues of ash” begins by exalting the idea of death during the Civil War as creative rebirth, “The swell of ash” contemplates the activities of the Biafran forces as acts of self-preservation as well as the vicissitudes of life through grief. “The

trail of ash”, on the other hand, reflects on Amadioha as the symbol of the Biafran army. Amadioha in the Igbo pantheon is a god of justice and of a consuming fire: it protects the morally upright supplicant and avenges the wrong that is done to him. Hence it is replicated among some Igbo Christians as the “holy ghost fire”. In the poem entitled “The priest and the pilgrim”, Amadioha is described as the Biafran Army “who with bare hands” is capable of wreaking havoc on the Nigerian space by killing many federal Nigerian soldiers at the slightest provocation. For this reason, it is expected that Amadioha be given the right military hardware, i.e. heavy arms, to do the job it is good at doing. This is evident in the line where the poet-speaker expresses his worry that instead of heavy arms, Amadioha was offered “a blunt cutlass”, in reference to the under preparedness of the historical Biafran army (*The Lure of Ash* 47).³

The critical disposition of the poet towards the war is strongly portrayed in the collection through his constant reference to Amadioha as well as his frequent use of “fire” and “ash” as symbols. While fire as a symbol in the collection refers to the ‘white light’ which Amadioha bellows, ash connects to death: it represents that state of nothingness which every material thing must return to. It is a symbol that signals the death of the soldiers on both sides as well as the destruction of property. Ash is also used to refer more specifically to the death of Biafran soldiers: it indicates that their death, already contemplated as a loss, would change its state by transcending into a glorious reawakening. It depicts the significance of death as the primordial creative rebirth. With this, the collection forges a very important link with Diala’s play *The Pyre*, where death is presented as the end to one phase of life and the beginning of the eternal circle of life. For this reason, the dead Biafran soldiers are represented as the *ogbanje* haunting the Nigerian nation until they can be reborn.⁴ Given the level of death and destruction, *The Lure of Ash* justifies the Igbo proverb that *Onwu anagi eshi ama*, which means “death does not end a race”. The entire collection seems to illustrate this proverb.

This revelation is first made in the collection with the poem entitled “Ululation”. The poem explains how the Nigerian Civil War, represented through the symbol of fire, caused the death of many who were forced to defend themselves as a result of the exigencies of the war. It also expresses the belief in the generation of the dead Biafrans reborn to advance the agitation for ‘Biafra’ as ideal or idealized nation. The poet-speaker maintains that mourners’ grief for the dead during the war softens the creation clay; hence death during the war represents “home-going” which must spiral into “home-coming”. This is captured in the lines where the poet-speaker says: “The grave like the yam-mound is earth’s pregnancy: / Life like a dance swings in circles” (*Lure* 3). The poet-speaker also notes that every birth song afterwards is the call of the race to the Biafran soldiers who are still in the afterlife to return. This is evident in the line where the poet-speaker posits: “The birth song is our call to eternity” (3). The poet-speaker stresses his faith in the ability of the generations of the reborn army to recreate the dream of the ideal nation, which he describes in “The Beckoning” as “the inspiring dream” (*Lure* 15). The grief that runs through “Ululation” is also expressed in the poem entitled “Earth’s Lament”. This poem laments the bloodbath and tears that characterised both the Nigerian Civil War and the present Nigerian landscape. In this poem, this situation is expressed in the lines thus: “Grief is incarnate as a bereaved mother’s tears” and “Earth wails in fierce shudders of rebirth” (*Lure* 8). In “The Awaited”, the poet-speaker prays that his faith in the generation to be reborn and in the ideal nation should not be in vain. He prays that the “eye” that experienced the killings and the destruction during the war may “behold the divine event” of the Biafran agitation “[b]lazing forth in spectacular flames on the holy pyre” (*Lure* 49). The grief in the poem reflects especially on the killings and destruction of property belonging to the Igbo during and after the Nigerian Civil War.

Throughout the collection, the poet-speaker reiterates the gory emphasis that characterizes the third generation of Nigerian Civil War poetry. In various poems, *The Lure of Ash* makes repeated references to Christopher Okigbo—the prominent Nigerian poet of the first generation, a civilian who was commissioned a major by the Biafran government, and who died defending the homestead—in order to stress Diala’s belief and faith in the generation of the dead Biafrans who will be mystically reborn to continue the struggle for justice. In most of the poems, the poet-speaker contemplates Christopher Okigbo’s sacrifice as well as those of other prominent Biafran soldiers. These include Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu, one of the five majors who led the first Nigerian coup of 1966 and who died defending Biafra, and Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, the first Nigerian military head of state, who was killed in the counter-coup of the same year. In one poem entitled “Okigbo’s Quarter Century Sleep”, where the poet-speaker expresses his faith in Okigbo’s reawakening, he notes that Okigbo and all other Biafran soldiers who laid down their lives in defense of their homestead did not die in vain. In the same poem he expresses his belief in the death of the Biafran soldiers as a re-enforcement, which must come, as he puts it in “The Beckon-

ing”, after the “weary pilgrim [...] [a]cross the timeless realms of dreams” (15). He explains that, for instance, even though Okigbo died during the war, dust is only the curve where his flesh reclines and that his immortality is assured. The poet-speaker affirms his faith in Okigbo being reborn to further unclasp “the unborn truth wrapped in the folds of mystery” (9). The faith he has for Okigbo underscores his penchant for the dead Biafran soldier in the last stanza of the poem entitled “The Beckoning”:

I sing you Okigbo of the Ogene voice
That trod the path of thunder on the night of steel
And like the flaming god himself, to blaze the truth,
Burned too intensely and merged with the undying light. (*Lure* 9)

In this stanza, the poet-speaker celebrates Okigbo for joining the war. Like Jesus Christ, Okigbo’s sacrifice in the war is redemptive.

The poet-speaker sees Okigbo’s death in the war as revealing how justified the war was, for the people of the former Eastern Nigeria were left with no option but to defend their homestead, even though it meant fighting with bare hands and naked bodies. This is also reiterated in “On a Tombstone”, where he praises Okigbo for laying down his life in defense of the ideal nation, Biafra. He refers to Okigbo in the poem as the light and the signpost to the living and hopes that Okigbo makes eternal allies with others who died in the war and who are still in the world beyond. In a parallel way, in “Nzeogwu’s Epitaph”, Chukwuma Nzeogwu is also praised for fighting in the war. The poet-speaker describes Nzeogwu as a soldier who “sought to extract / The ash in the fl-ash of light” (*Lure* 11). In this poem, *ash*, for the first time, refers to corruption and thunder signifies the 1966 coup that brought the military into the Nigerian political arena. In the poem, Nzeogwu is represented as having joined the war because he believed that the people of the former Eastern Nigeria were fighting a just war. This informs the reasons his name is included as one of the names that were celebrated during the war, which is evident in the poem’s title.

The point is further emphasized in “Warrior’s Chant”, where the poet-speaker describes the thirty thousand Eastern Nigerian people who were slaughtered in the Northern Nigerian massacre before the war. Ironsi, Nzeogwu, and Okigbo, all seen as Biafran martyrs, are described as “*Enyie Biafra*”, which literally translates to “Biafran elephants” (*Lure* 54). In “Warrior’s Chant”, the death of these Igbo soldiers and many civilians-turned-soldiers during the war is commemorated in a way that reminds the reader of the hostilities that preceded the war. The poem sings of the communion of the dead soldiers and the awakening of the Eastern Nigerian people represented in the poem as the deprived. It expresses the hope that one day the decades of grievances of the people will lead to a stronger agitation for the Biafran dream because “no more shall silence speak our endorsement of tyranny” (56). In the poem, the activities of the federal forces during the Civil War are engaged through the use of the fire symbol, which ultimately represents killing and destruction. This is accompanied with the use of the ash symbol, which is also a symbol of death. In order to pursue the paradoxes that are inherent in these symbols, the poet-speaker appropriates some of Okigbo’s enigmatic poetic styles. His play on symbols to contemplate the war experience in the poem runs like a very beautiful sorrow song that is difficult to communicate. Of course the use of this poetic style is not limited to the poem: it runs through most of the poems of the collection. In other words, this makes Diala, to use a description that has been applied to Okigbo, to “appear confused, carried away by music and [sometimes] forgetful of his failure to make sense” (Egudu 153). This somewhat cryptic quality explains why Diala’s poetry has not received the kind of attention it deserves despite its beauty, alternating as it does between a cry and sorrowful music.

The poem entitled “Rites of Flame” describes the war and the deaths it caused as an “apocalyptic fire rage” (*Lure* 22). The poet-speaker sees the communities during the war as a place where earth, air, and sea reek of dead bodies and where death unrolls its “cleansing tongue like a flaming scythe” (22). In “A Voice From Zango-Kataf”, the poet-speaker laments that the killings are not limited to wartime. They have continued and become a day-to-day Nigerian occurrence long after the end of the war. The poem particularly focuses on the many riots that took place in the 1990s in the Northern part of the country, where many Igbo people were killed. The poet-speaker grieves over these deaths. He posits that, while the dead were alive, the country never showed any form of care towards them. He describes how those Igbo people suffered to make ends meet and in the mix of their suffering they were consumed in the many Northern Nigerian massacres of the 1990s. Traversing all these in a country which is also theirs and struggling to come to terms with their conditions, they were “touched by the bliss of eternity” and their lives “mercifully sealed by the grave silence of death” (*Lure* 17). In this same poem, the poet-speaker stresses

that the lifeless bodies of the victims who were murdered in the massacres will forever remain perfect insofar as “they will never again howl for bread” (17). The poem emphasizes the ethnic unrest that took place during those years as a continuation of the Civil War in order to reflect on the collective disenchantment with the socio-political realities of the present Nigerian state.

In “Forbidden Ascent”, the poet-speaker recalls the many Igbo who died in the notorious and suspicious plane crash in Ejigbo, near Lagos, in 1992. He laments that, after the crash, he hears his kindred crying. He hears the same funeral chants he recognizes. He sees their “ash-bespattered faces / Gazing forever forlorn into the vacant sky” (*Lure* 18). Like “A Voice From Zango-Kataf”, this piece deplores the fate of the Igbo in the Nigerian federation even in the decades after the war. It describes the Nigerian nation as a pyre that is always ablaze and a place where Easterners, particularly Igbo, are always fed “to a cruel flame”. In another line, the country is described as “one vast anxious tomb” where the people are “the elect heirs of martyrdom” (18). In “Invocations”, the poet-speaker posits that, years after the war, there have been many cases of killings and violence against the Eastern Nigerian people. Hence the poet-speaker prays and hopes that he and his people be saved “From the plumage of hollow laughs / Forged in the seething ore of hate” (*Lure* 4). He also prays that his people may witness a genuine change that will put the traumatic memories of death and destruction to rest.

Finally, it is important to note that the collection seems to call for the resurrection of the Biafran nation—perhaps symbolically, but with clear political overtones. Perhaps most explicitly, “Rites of Flame” expresses a faith in Biafra’s reawakening by exclaiming, “Let the dying nation wake” (*Lure* 22). In a more enigmatic register, “Worksong” addresses the watery deity of the River Niger and laments the ongoing plight of the Igbo in the Nigerian federation. The poet-speaker tells of the Biafran scar and how the Igbo survivors of the war were deprived of all their belongings. He restates his faith in the reawakening of the Biafran dream and affirms that, despite its challenges, this dream will live:

But the kite swoops on the burning bush
seeking its mother in vain;
The vulture takes the legendary bath
that deepens its ugliness;
The snake rears and strikes the fabulous tortoise
cracks its fangs on the carapace. (*Lure* 7)

The lines that make up the above stanza capture the attempts by successive Nigerian governments to frustrate the Biafran agitation and how the attempts have all ended in futility. The poet-speaker represents the successive Nigerian governments in different symbols. First is the symbol of the kite, followed by the symbol of the vulture, and the symbol of the snake. In all three attempts, Nigeria is imagined as a predator that has failed to kill its prey. Since the nation is always seeking Biafran people’s reaction by constantly bringing war to them, these lines seem to assure the reader that the prey, the “fabulous tortoise”, one day answers to the savage call by destroying the predator. The claim is further expressed with the use of the symbol of the “fallow forest”, which emphasizes a reawakening inner human: “The man in us answers the call of the fallow forest” and “clears the path to the ancestral barn” (*Lure* 7). The poet-speaker notes with all finality that, though the people “wear the morning dew like a crown”, they will one day reawaken the dying ideal nation.

In the last poem of the collection, entitled “My chant”, the poet-speaker summarizes the message of the entire collection in three stanzas, thus:

My chant is the flame
Around which suppliants keep uneasy vigil,
Garnering an avalanche of ash and tears

My chant is a dirge
Blossoming in caverns of grief
Wailing, wailing for the resurrection.

My chant is the voice
Of my country—a ravished amputee—
Shrieking for the healing herb,
Wailing for crutches of reed. (63)

In these stanzas the poet-speaker refers to the whole of *The Lure of Ash* as “my chant”. In the first stanza he posits that the collection serves as a medium through which Eastern Nigerian people are reminded about what happened to them during the war. He describes his poetry as the “flame” which reignites their memories of the war. In the second stanza he describes the collection as a dirge that comes alive as one remembers or imagines the anguish of the people during the war. This anguish has made the people nostalgic for the Biafran dream that animated the war in the first place. The last stanza casts *The Lure of Ash* as the voice through which the Biafran nation, though battered, can still be heard. Even though the nation is “a ravished amputee”, it is reaching for “the healing herb” and the “crutches of reed”. The poet-speaker is hopeful that this poetry will advance the cause for healing. The pains and the wounds of the war have yet to heal; they have festered and need attention. The fact that the Nigerian nation is home to irresponsible successive governments that have continued to fan the embers of disunity leave one to wonder whether this healing is possible.

Notes

1. Even though the use of the term “generation” as a marker in Nigerian literary landscape has been criticized by Harry Garuba, who is of the view that the term results in the problem of thematic fluidity and temporal overlaps (51), the term has been upheld as a useful term for repositioning and for foregrounding tropes in Nigerian literary terrain. The third generation is “widely believed to have been announced by and in the 1988 anthology entitled *Voices from the Fringe: An ANA Anthony of New Nigerian Poets*, edited by Harry Garuba” (Egya 426). The term “generation” was first used by a group of Nigerian writers to announce the focus of their writing as a continuum in the production of postcolonial Nigerian literary tradition. This group of writers was led by Niyi Osundare, Kole Omotoso, and Femi Osofisan (Currey 52). These writers described Chinua Achebe and Christopher Okigbo as belonging to the first generation and themselves as the second. While they accuse Achebe and Okigbo’s generation as being “too concerned with explaining Africa to Europeans” (52), they note that their own writings would be concerned with Africa’s “contemporary social and political reality and must explain Africa to Africans” (52). Sule Egya describes the poets of the third generation as poets that are “engaged, by birth, by circumstances, by comradeship, and most importantly by personal will in a cultural struggle in the sense prescribed by their precursors” (426). Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton describe third-generation Nigerian literature as “texts born into the scopic regime of the postcolonial and the postmodern” (15; see also Ushie 11). They also see it as “an order of knowledge in which questions of subjecthood and agency are not only massively overdetermined by the politics of identity in a multicultural and transnational frame but in which the tropes of Otherness and subalternity are being remapped by questioning erstwhile totalities such as history, nation, gender, and their representative symbolgies” (Adesanmi and Dunton 15).¹ I have argued elsewhere that the third generation Nigerian poetry spans between 1988 and the present and that the generation is of two parts (Awuzie 82). The first part is the early third generation. It is between 1988 and 1999 and pertains to military despotism and its corrupting influence on the country. The second part is the latter third generation and it is between the year 2000 and the present. It concerns the corrupt civilian regimes and lampoons the level of corruption in the country.
2. A nation that was declared by Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the then governor of the former Eastern Nigeria, in response to the massacre of the Igbo in the North. Biafra ceased to be a nation in 1970 when its armed forces lost to the Nigerian federal forces. Since the end of the war in 1970, there has been a continuous Biafran agitation and this has been met with serious military crackdown by the Nigerian government. Among the leading organizations in the frontline Biafran agitation are the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) led by Ralph Uwazurike and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) led by Nnamdi Kanu.
3. Parenthetical citations from *The Lure of Ash* refer to page numbers, not line numbers.
4. *Ogbanje* is an Igbo word that refers to a child who alternates between the land of the spirits and the land of the living.\

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Fiction as prosthesis: Reading the contemporary African queer short story

Wesley Paul Macheso

Fiction as prosthesis: Reading the contemporary African queer short story

In this article, I read contemporary African queer fiction as a tool employed by writers to represent and rehumanise queer identities in Sub-Saharan African societies. In these societies, heteropatriarchal authorities strive to disable queer agency by dehumanising queer subjects. I argue that African queer identities, desires, and experiences are controlled and restricted under the heterosexual gaze, which strives to ensure that human sexuality benefits patriarchy, promoting heterosexual desire as ‘natural’ and authentically African and pathologising homosexuality. African writers then employ fiction as a means of rehumanising queer subjects in these disabling heteronormative societies to grant voice and agency to identities that have been multifariously subjugated and/or deliberately erased, and fiction acts as a type of prosthesis, a term I borrow from disability studies. Rewriting such lives in fiction does not only afford discursive spaces to queer identities, but also reconstructs the queer person as a human subject worth the dignity that they are often denied. In the article, I analyse a selection of six short stories from the collections *Queer Africa 2: New Stories* and *Fairytales for Lost Children* to demonstrate how these stories function as prosthesis for queer people in disabling societies. **Keywords:** queer, African fiction, short stories, prosthesis, heterosexual gaze, agency.


Introduction

In this article, I focus on the role of fiction in rehumanising queer people and reclaiming space for queerness in Sub-Saharan African countries where homosexuality is overtly criminalised by law and/or discriminated against by political figures, cultures, and religions. I analyse a selection of six queer short stories collected in two anthologies: *Queer Africa 2: New Stories* (2017) (henceforth referred to as *Queer Africa 2*), edited by Makhosazana Xaba and Karen Martin, and *Fairytales for Lost Children* (2013) (henceforth referred to as *Fairytales*) written by Diriye Osman.¹ What brings the two anthologies in conversation with each other is their thematic threads that revolve around questions of belonging, place, home, and the multiple ways in which queer agency can be cultivated in situations where characters are vulnerable to violence or discrimination. In my reading of the stories, I argue that the writers employ fiction as a tool for rehumanising queer subjects in heteronormative African societies by granting voice and agency to identities that have been subjugated in multiple ways by hetero-patriarchal forces. In most African societies, queer lives are dehumanised (Matebeni, Munro and Reddy 2), and rewriting such lives in fiction does not only afford discursive spaces to queerness but also reconstructs the queer person as a human subject worth the dignity that they are often denied in these societies. In the discussion I employ the theory of “prosthesis”, mainly used in disability studies, to demonstrate how fiction becomes an enabling tool in countering the disabling frameworks of queer lives in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The six stories that I discuss here include Yvonne Fly Onakeme Etaghene’s “Iyawo”, which is a story of two Nigerian lesbian lovers who are ostracised by homophobic regimes in their home country and seek exile elsewhere. I also analyse Juliet Kushaba’s “This Tomorrow was Christmas” where the lesbian protagonist, Siima, marries her lover, Nyonyozi, despite her family and community’s disapproval of the union. H. W. Mukami’s “Pub 360” explores the experience of lesbian women in public spaces in Kenya where homosexuality is illegal. Amatesiro Dore’s “The Day he Came” explores a Christian protagonist who struggles with the shackles of patriarchy, masculinity, and religion in his quest to come out as gay. The discussion will conclude with a brief analysis of Diriye

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Osman's "Shoga" and "Tell the Sun not to Shine" which represent experiences of living as an African, Muslim, and gay man in an extremely repressive Somali community.

The analysis is informed by the fact that, despite increasing scholarship on African queer literature, the short story as a genre has not been given enough critical attention as compared to the novel, for example. This is the case even though the short story is a genre that is widely adopted by writers on the continent. Apart from its focus on genre, in this article I advance a theoretical approach that utilises the synergies between disability studies, African masculinities, and feminist thinking in analysing representations of queer identities in African fiction. In this endeavour, I will mainly build on Laura Mulvey's concept of "the male gaze" and David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder's "prosthesis" in analysing the ways in which African writers engage with queerness in contemporary short stories.

Scholars such as Lindsey Green-Simms, Taiwo Osinubi, and Brenna Munro have described African queer writing in the twenty-first century as an emergent genre. By this, they mean that the novelty of such works also evokes notions of "emergency" in that writers have suddenly felt the need to address topics that have been ignored for a long time in African literary history (Munro 188). Munro further argues that "the short story in particular lends itself to trying out ideas" (189). She quotes Catherine Jonet who contends that "for some authors, the short story is the place to openly confront difficult subjects that powerfully affect marginalised groups within a culture" (qtd in Munro 189). For Munro, it is "the as yet to be nature of queer African lives [that] suits the temporalities of the short story" (189). This conception casts the queer African short story as an experimental genre yet to gain full traction.

I agree with the observations by Munro and Jonet in arguing that the short stories that represent queer narratives emerging out of Africa are forms of activism challenging the vulnerability that haunts queer people on the continent and beyond. My analysis further posits that the representation of queer identities in these short stories has now moved past the state of being "emergent" to becoming an established sub-genre that addresses the vulnerability, agency, and activism of marginalised groups within African literature. In its challenge to normative ideologies and institutions, queer African writing has become oppositional in its transformative agenda, as was the early African writing against colonial domination in the 1960s, which include novels like Stanlake Samkange's *On Trial for My Country* (1967) and James Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child* (1964), for example. These queer representations are, in essence, deconstructive tools used against the tyranny of heteronormative structures, creating a canonical space for queer subjects in African literature.

These short stories become tools for queer activism in that "they offer vital counter-narratives to widespread homophobia" (Andrews 3) and afford their authors "the opportunity for voicing realities which are often suppressed" (2). As a genre for activism, the short story has varying qualities that make it more effective than, say, the novel. Sally Ann Murray observes that, as a genre, the short story is in itself queer by its unconventionality in form and accessibility as compared to the novel or other forms of writing (80). She argues that "the adaptability of the short story as an outsider configuration has served it well, and seen it foray into service for multiple imaginative engagements with marginality" (Murray 80). The short story as an unconventional or an outsider genre mostly eludes multiple forms of censorship by finding easy ways to publication and distribution through different channels, such as personal blogs and e-magazines, that operate outside the capitalistic confines of traditional publishing. Nevertheless, the biggest challenge in queer activism that the short story faces in most parts of Sub-Saharan Africa is perhaps the economic and linguistic barriers to access faced by the majority of underprivileged and rural populations.

Despite such challenges to access, these stories have the potential to serve as "marginal archives" which "preserve materials excluded from the mainstream" (Hamilton, Harris and Reid 11). As an archive for the existence of gay lives, fiction becomes prosthesis in that it aids in documenting the histories of sexual minorities, thus curating space for them in mainstream discourses on gender and sexuality in Africa, as well as shaping future perceptions of sexual minorities on the continent. As Graeme Reid reiterates, "the way in which lesbians and gay men have been perceived is reflected in the way in which lives and histories have been constructed and documented within the archival holdings of public institutions" (194). As public archives, the short stories under discussion could be essential in reconstructing the often negative image of gay people prevalent in homophobic African societies.

Writing queer lives in African socio-political contexts can be extremely significant in changing social attitudes and increasing visibility for queer issues. Although in some Sub-Saharan African countries (such as the Ivory Coast, Mali, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Rwanda, and others) same-sex intimacy

has never been overtly criminalised, thirty-four African countries have outlawed same-sex sexual acts or relationships (Hawley, “In Transition: Self-expression in Recent African LGBTIQ Narratives” 121). For those countries that are silent on the rights of sexual minorities, the question that arises is: to what extent can such silences on the rights of sexual minorities amount to a different form of marginalisation that is just as detrimental as the overt criminalisation of homoerotic desire? Writing about queerness goes a long way in breaking the silence on this topic and has the potential of granting agency to queer people as a vulnerable group deliberately pushed to the margins of these societies.

Ayodele Sogunro observes that “[the] invisibility and consequent perception of non-existence [of queer people in most parts of Sub-Saharan Africa] has a serious repercussion” in that “it can be propelled as evidence of socio-cultural disapproval of LGBTI persons and then used to justify further violations against sexual minorities” (636). He further argues that the dehumanisation of queer identities also places the African queer writer in a precarious position.² This vulnerability of the writer is evident in countries like Nigeria and Uganda where the law even prohibits advocating for queer rights in any form (Sogunro 633). In such environments, life writing by queer subjects, for example, becomes a life-threatening endeavour since the identification of the author with the protagonist in the work may put such authors at risk of persecution, arrest, and even violence or death. Unlike in South Africa, where constitutional provisions have tried to open avenues for the expression of queer lived experiences, alternative genres of writing, like fiction, become convenient in societies where it is illegal to identify as queer. It should also be mentioned that, despite South Africa’s “constitutional commitment granting rights to sexual minorities, people with nonconforming gender identities still face several challenges that threaten their basic rights to equality in the country” (Macheso 1). This is where writers as activists (whether the activism is intended or unconscious) are needed to employ writing fiction as a tool for the expression of non-normative and vilified identities. I thus explore these short stories as forms of visibilising queer African experiences through a genre that offers creative possibilities in its propensity to experimentation. I regard this work as activism since it challenges the erasure of queer lives from African societies.

The heterosexual gaze and prosthesis in African queer fiction

As highlighted earlier, my approach to reading the significance of these short stories relies on ideas from disability studies, feminist theory, and concepts from African masculinities studies. I have employed this intersectional theoretical approach in order to be able to identify the roots of queer marginalisation, which is perpetuated by patriarchal systems in African cultures, and to demonstrate ways in which the writing of fiction has come to serve as a tool for disrupting such normative dictates so as to grant agency and voice to the marginalised. On the one hand, patriarchy and its set of idealised traditional gender roles marginalises queerness under what I call “the heterosexual gaze”, a form of scrutiny and surveillance from state, culture, religion, and social groups which controls sexuality, creating a disabling environment for queer subjects in many societies, including most parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. On the other hand, writers employ the writing of fiction as prosthesis, allowing them to bring to the fore identities and sexual practises that these societies try to suppress. In this way, fiction becomes an agentic tool for queer activism in Africa’s heteronormative societies.

In her landmark work *Visual and Other Pleasures* (1989), Laura Mulvey discusses how women come to occupy subordinate positions in patriarchal societies and the means through which patriarchy gains and maintains such control over time. She notices that “woman [...] stands in patriarchal culture as the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning” (Mulvey 15). Mulvey ties the subordination and objectification of women to what she calls “the determining male gaze [which] projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly” (19). Although her coinage of “the male gaze” specifically refers to the roles of women in visual media and particularly cinema, Mulvey’s ideas broadly speak to the position of power held by heterosexual men over women in patriarchal societies. I conceive the “gaze” as that position of privilege from which women’s bodies and their sexualities are controlled under the watch of patriarchy. I adopt this concept to speak about the way sexual and gender minorities are viewed and framed within heteropatriarchal societies. I regard the “gaze” as a reading strategy employed by those in power to subject bodies and lived sexual realities under the control of heteronormativity.

Mulvey’s concept of the male gaze is essential, not only in understanding the relationship between men and women in society, but also in comprehending the contentious nature of all relationships that centre on gender.

The gaze that she evokes is not only male, but also heteropatriarchal, and it plays a crucial role in controlling and commodifying sexuality in heteronormative societies, consequently oppressing homosexuality as it exists outside the parameters of normative gender roles. As Judith Butler argues, “heterosexuality is cultivated through prohibitions, where these prohibitions take as one of their objects homosexual attachments, thereby forcing the loss of those attachments” (25). In this regard, the oppression of homosexual subjects under the male gaze is achieved through manifestations of heterosexual hegemonic masculinities that ensure the dominance of heterosexual men over their homosexual counterparts (Connell 78).

Through the mechanisms of patriarchal control in heteronormative societies, the gaze that controls sexuality is broadened from not merely being male but also heterosexual. I define the heterosexual gaze as that position of privilege and authority occupied by both heterosexual men and women who exercise power over gender and enforce sexual normativity in these societies. As Catherine Hakim relates, “patriarchy has proved a useful concept in feminist theory, identifying how men, and the social institutions created and controlled by men, have actively subordinated women [...]” (2), and by extension, homosexual men. Heterosexual women have also become actively interpellated in the social structures and practices of patriarchy in that they have come to play active roles in controlling what are regarded as dissident sexual desires in the form of same-sex sexualities.

The short stories I analyse here reveal that the control that heteropatriarchy exercises on people’s sexuality tends to be capitalistic in that there is a dire need in patriarchy to commodify sexuality for its own benefit. To borrow from Nicole Constable, “in Marxist terms, commodification refers to the process of assigning market value to goods or services that previously existed outside of the market” (50). The idea of assigning market value entails an anticipation of profit from whatever form of relationship exists between the parties involved therein. For purposes of this analysis, I employ the concept commodification of sexuality to refer to the anticipated value, profit, or gain that patriarchy attaches to social practices and interactions. There is an underlying assumption that human (sexual) behaviour must benefit the needs of heteropatriarchal authority and therefore must be put under a constant gaze in order to, in Foucauldian terms, ‘discipline and punish’ nonconformity (Foucault 1977). Such anticipated gains may range from sexual reproduction and bride prices received for heterosexual marriage arrangements, to elusive conceptions of family dignity, communal coherence, cultural preservation, and achievements of high moral standards that are seen to emanate from conformity to heteronormativity.

In my reading of these short stories, I regard creative fiction as a tool that has deliberately been taken up by some African writers in bringing to light subjects that cannot be discussed freely in Sub-Saharan African countries that criminalise same-sex sexuality and gender nonconformity. In doing so, I rethink the concept of prosthesis from its application in disability studies to how it may be reconceived in other instances within narratives of lives of ‘marked identities’. To quote Mitchell and Snyder, “under gender, gay men and women constitute ‘marked’ identities while their heterosexual counterparts are considered normal” (ix). In their adaptation of David Wills’ concept of “prosthesis” to disability studies, Mitchell and Snyder examine how the disabled body is represented in literature and argue that “literary works often leave the disabled body as a troubled and troubling position within culture” (8). They coined the term “narrative prosthesis” to unveil the ways in which representations of disability in creative art have failed to challenge the marginalisation faced by disabled people and disability in general.

While Mitchell and Snyder critique the representation of disability as narrative prosthesis in that it harbours the risk of reproducing marginality through metaphorical representations that entail lack and deficiency in people with disabilities, I do not regard the presence of queer characters in these short stories as narrative prosthesis. Rather, I consider the writing of fiction itself as prosthesis in disabling environments where it may be too risky to employ other forms of representation. I conceive most nation-states in Sub-Saharan Africa as disabling environments for people with queer identities and same-sex sexualities due to punitive laws, culture, and religion that work together to incapacitate queer agents. As such, literary artists seek prosthetic tools to represent and rehumanise queer identities in these societies where heteropatriarchal authorities have dehumanised and marginalised queer people.

Fiction, through its imaginative capacity, proves to be one of the most potent tools in this endeavour, and as the short stories discussed in this article reveal, creative fiction as prosthesis has worked to transcend normative boundaries on what is and what is not allowed in public discourses in these disabling socio-political environments, and has enabled the presence of queer people in spaces where they previously were excluded and made invisible. The potency of the imaginative capacity of fiction in challenging heteronormativity firstly lies in its imi-

tation and representation of real-life experiences in ways that go beyond mere mimesis to suggesting possibilities for alternative worldviews and modes of expressing gender and sexuality through creative reimagining of current social systems. As prosthesis, fiction does not only depict queer lives as they are, but also represents them as they could be.

Apart from humanising queer people in social relations, fictional representation as prosthesis also functions as a tool for expressing the quotidian challenges faced by queer subjects and establishing their legitimate claims to space as equal members of the human society. In most of the stories under discussion, queer characters have been represented as complex characters with everyday concerns and aspirations, in addition to facing marginalisation due to their same-sex sexualities. In this way, literary fiction becomes a means of countering the invisibility of queer people in heteronormative African contexts. Queer identities, same-sex sexualities, and non-normative gender expression have mostly been restricted to private spaces in most parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, and one way of countering such marginalisation is by creating space for such experiences in the public domain for the recognition and acceptance of difference. As alluded to earlier, public literary works are accessible to a broad audience and offer the possibility of recognition for queer people in repressive societies.

African lesbians and the (im)possibilities of love

As discussed above, the heterosexual gaze is capitalistic in nature in that it commodifies sexual relations and defines normativity in terms of that which benefits patriarchal male figures. In order to maintain this ideology, societies in Sub-Saharan Africa exercise control over sexual minorities to the extent that queer identities are vilified as abominable and queer subjects are relegated to the margins as the undesirable others. In countries like Nigeria, Uganda, and Kenya, where laws prohibit lesbian desire, lesbian women often struggle with feelings of alienation, not only from their countries, but also from their sexual identities that might be seen to estrange them from their immediate environment. Dobrota Pucherova notices that the emergence of 21st century African lesbian fiction has highlighted “the ways women are victimised through patriarchal control over their sexuality” (107). African women, especially lesbians, “have been excluded from equal citizenship, their desires and needs sacrificed for the survival of ‘tradition’” (110). Lesbian women on the continent are considered outcasts since hegemonic African masculinities define a “real” African woman as one who is available to satisfy the sexual appetites of heterosexual men (Ratele 124). As such, contemporary African lesbian fiction “seeks to not only challenge homophobia in Africa, but to redefine the idea of African femininity, the African family, and African society away from heteronormativity” (Pucherova 110).

In the stories that depict lesbian desire in both *Queer Africa 2* and *Fairytales*, women who are in love with other women are represented as subject to the heterosexual gaze in multiple ways. The stories reveal that there is a need in men in these texts to control female sexuality through heterosexual marriage in which women’s bodies should serve to satisfy male desire and be vessels for reproduction. In a conversation with her lover, Ronke, the Nigerian lesbian protagonist in Etaghene’s “Iyawo” reminds her that “[t]here are men in the other room who expect us to bear them babies, bare our bodies to them, keep the house, shut up and laugh at their jokes [...] Obligation is slavery” (37). She continues to argue that “I don’t believe in marriage—the institution, the obligation, the compulsory baby-making, the bullshit” (Etaghene 38). In such statements, the narrator unpacks the ways in which heteropatriarchy strives to exercise control over female sexuality by repudiating lesbianism through the promotion of heterosexual marriage, which benefits patriarchy by reproducing its structure of power differentials between men and women.

The yoke of heterosexual marriage also proves to be a burden for the lesbian narrator, Siima, in Kushaba’s “This Tomorrow was Christmas” where her family refuses to recognise her lover, Nyonyozi, as a possible suitor because she is a woman. Set in Uganda, Kushaba begins the story by describing the intimidating figure of a pastor who condemns Siima because she “refused to marry a man from one of the most affluent families in the village, [and she] denied [her] widowed mother the numerous cows the suitor’s family was willing to give her for [her] bride wealth” (12). Here, Siima’s choice in refusing to marry a wealthy man becomes a condemnable gesture and a perceived loss to heteropatriarchy. Both the pastor and her family operate in service of the patriarchal authority as Siima is scrutinised under the heterosexual gaze to enforce normativity by making sure that she lives according to social expectations. It is such enforcement of heterosexual norms that deny lesbians their agency and control over their bodies and sexualities and threaten their basic survival in such societies. As evidenced here, the society tries to commodify Siima’s sexuality so that it profits the demands of patriarchy through bride wealth and the

possibility of a heterosexual family setup. As such, her same-sex sexuality is condemned as it is a direct challenge to patriarchal control.

Kushaba employs fiction as prosthesis to bring to light such challenges faced by lesbians in the face of heteronormativity. Normally, these forms of oppression are not discussed in public, fuelled by public discourses that lesbians do not exist in African societies, and thus taking away their agency. However, the ending of her story demonstrates the possibilities of the agency of queer people in the face of heteropatriarchal constraints. Despite that Nyonyozi is not recognised by the society as a possible suitor, Siima still gathers the courage to tell her mother that “Nyonyozi and I are married [...] We got married two years ago and tomorrow is our anniversary” (Kushaba 178). The story ends with this revelation and the author does not afford the mother a chance for a response.

Kushaba’s narrative strategy to give voice to Siima’s coming out and deny her mother a possible reprimand aims to portray that the decision and final say on whom one loves and chooses to be with lies with the subject in question. Another interesting feature in the story is that Siima and Nyonyozi are to celebrate the anniversary of their union on Christmas day. Here, the author destabilises the moral egotism in most Christian establishments by casting the importance of the birth of a queer union over the birth of a prominent figure within one of the impediments to queer agency—Christianity. In most African countries, religion (especially Christianity and Islam), coupled with patriarchal traditional cultures, are upheld as guides to morality and are responsible for the policing of gender and sexual variance (Olaoluwa 20–1). Considering this, the marriage of Siima and Nyonyozi on Christmas day becomes one of the story’s central challenges to heteronormative authority.

In her story, “Pub 360”, Kenyan author H. W. Mukami demonstrates the operation of the heterosexual gaze through her portrayal of a barman who disapproves of sexual desire between two women. The two women, Ashuni and Oluchi, meet in a bar called Pub 360 which is owned by a closeted lesbian woman who also acts as narrator of the story. The two women begin a conversation, and their mutual attraction is obvious. This offends the barman in the pub who “muttered inaudibly under his breath and his brow creased. He looked disturbed” (Mukami 239). The disgust in the barman’s attitude is due to his disapproval of lesbian affection in public places in Kenya. As a patriarchal figure, the barman feels that it is his duty and responsibility to enforce his ideal of ‘moral correctness’ and discipline the two women. When the lovers eventually “locked their arms and held each other” (240), the barman erupts in anger, chases the two women out of the bar, and uses homophobic and sexist epithets.

Firstly, he calls the women “a pair of black whores” (240) since they operate outside the expectations of his male, heterosexual gaze. As Amanda Lock Swarr remarks, lesbians are often persecuted because they “are perceived as both threatening and unavailable by men in their communities” (962). The barman’s remark that the two women are performing “free pornography” (Mukami 240) reveals his underlying assumption that same-sex affection or attraction between women ought to be staged for the satisfaction of the heterosexual male gaze. In addition, because the women challenge heteronormativity, the barman regards the women as immoral and wants to create a discourse of shame in order to enforce limits on their agency.

The women in the story challenge heteropatriarchal power as exercised by the barman. Upon noticing the abuse, the narrator steps forward and immediately fires the barman for his actions. She contemplates: “Who had done wrong? Was it so wrong to feel, to be who you are?” (241). She concludes by resolving that “[i]t was time to right a wrong, and I had to start somewhere” (241). Her agency is geared towards the creation of space for queer identities in African heteronormative societies, something that the short stories as prosthetic tools also endeavour to do. It is vital to notice that her pub only becomes a safe space for the lesbian women upon the removal of the barman, which may symbolise the need to dispose of patriarchal practices, structures, and systems in order to create safe spaces for queer individuals in these punitively heteronormative societies. The story demonstrates how such safe spaces reduce the risk of danger and become sites of agency for queer people.

Despite often being denied agency in public spaces, the lesbian characters in these stories exercise relative authority over their sexualities, mostly outside the ambits of the restrictive heterosexual gaze, and make counter-normative choices. As the protagonist in Etaghene’s “Iyawo” laments, “[i]f we made this world with our bare hands instead of by the accidental destiny of birth, our love, this love between us women, would be sanctified in public spaces, temples, in the market, on the dirt roads we were raised on” (35). But in the absence of such recognition for same-sex sexuality in her society, she argues that lesbian love can still flourish in private spaces where women can “laugh when it’s funny, roll [their] eyes when it’s not, fuck [their] best friends in the middle of the night with *hard, rough tenderness* then go back to fathers, lovers, husbands, brothers” (36, emphasis in original). While such performances of queer desires and identities are still not fully enabling, they can signify agency for

these lesbian characters and can demystify the concept of queer people as others and dispel ideas of the threat that queer people supposedly pose in these societies. As prosthesis, the stories discussed here work in redefining established ideas of African womanhood, femininity, love, and the African family in their challenge to homophobia in African societies.

Gay bashing and the invisibility of queer men in African 'straight spaces'

For same-sex sexualities in women, the heterosexual gaze often strives to control women's sexuality through social expectations of compulsory heterosexual marriage and pathologizing same-sex desire; however, with male homosexuality, it is often the masculinity of gay men that is questioned by the heteronormative culture. Most of the short stories that explore the lives of gay characters in the two anthologies reveal that gay bashing is one of the main ways through which gay subjects are dehumanised to deny them space in mainstream culture.³ In these stories, gay bashing often starts with verbal abuse before it turns into physical violence. Straight characters taunt their gay counterparts by calling them names that connote aspects of uncleanness, effeminacy, and abnormality, in order to marginalise them. These practices are normalised in heteronormative societies and the psychological distress of the targeted gay subjects is often ignored. Due to their invisibility in these societies, gay men often suffer in silence and their victimisation is seldom given audience. As such, the short stories under discussion serve as prosthesis by bringing to the fore the impact of such abuses on gay men generally in these disabling social environments. Telling such stories can become enabling as it may open avenues for public discourses on the plight of gay men in homophobic African societies.

Robert Morrel contends that hegemonic masculinity, which is often identified with heterosexual middle-class men, does not only function through the oppression of women, but also through ensuring the subordination and silencing of other masculinities (608). He further argues that, among the defining features of this form of masculinity, are misogyny, compulsory heterosexuality, and homophobia (608). This entails that the masculinities of gay men are considered inferior under hegemonic masculinity, and such conceptions of inferiority justify the victimisation of sexual minorities through social practices like gay bashing.

Kopano Ratele notices that it is very difficult to define and perform hegemonic African masculinity since this form of masculinity is already undermined by power differentials based on racism and capitalism, for example (117). As such, he argues that it is in this way that homophobia and forms of gender-based violence have their "uses" in Africa as a kind of explanation (or better still, displacement) of the impossibility of attaining and maintaining traditionally hegemonic African masculinity. The 'homosexual' then, is what a real African man is *not*, and a defining characteristic of the dominant male position is violence" (Ratele 117, emphasis in original). The violence that heterosexual men perpetrate on sexual minorities can thus be argued to stem from the need to demonstrate the purported power that their hegemonic masculinity affords them. And since hegemonic masculinity is always threatened by the existence of different forms of masculinity that constantly challenge it (Morrel 608), its insecurities lead to both verbal and physical violence against gay men in heteronormative African societies and cultures.

In Dore's "The Day He Came", the protagonist, Larry, struggles with feelings of insecurity about his masculinity as he believes his effeminate traits give him away as gay. Larry grows up in a Christian home where his father is a well-known pastor and his mother a gospel musician. Renaming himself from Peter to Larry (at least among his peers) becomes one of the ways the protagonist rids himself of the pressure of religious expectations from his parents as he relinquishes the Biblical name. In the home, Larry is often compared to his twin brother, Paul, who is celebrated by the father as "the real man". The feeling that he is not masculine enough becomes obsessive, and he does not want anyone to remind him of what he regards as a deficiency. When a friend, Michael, calls him "pretty", Larry challenges him vehemently, telling him that "I object to and take offence at every attempt to abrogate my manhood and circumscribe my sexuality" (Dore 49).

His insecurity borders on the fear that he is not "man enough" as per the requirements of heteronormative African ideals of masculinity. Larry fails to measure up to the standard of how "putative 'real men' should behave as a cultural ideal" (Morrel 608). Due to this fear, he keeps his sexuality secret for most of the story. One of the reasons for staying in the closet is that, since his secondary school days, Michael verbally abuses him for his femininity, and he feels unable to come out as gay. Among other things, Michael calls him "Laura" (Dore 53) instead of Larry as a way of reminding him that he is not man enough.

Larry recounts "[h]ow [he] hated secondary school and felt suicidal because of [Michael's] name-calling, the feminine pronouns he designated for [him] and how he treated [him] like a girl" (53). Larry remembers these

moments upon realising that his abuser had always been gay despite his constant gay bashing. Michael referring to Larry in feminine terms demonstrates one way that heteropatriarchal culture discriminates against gay men, and also reveals Michael's ambivalent attitude towards his own repressed homosexuality. Michael thinks that by appearing to be anti-gay, his homosexual desire would be concealed, and he would remain invisible to the controlling heterosexual gaze. In this way, he does not only take away agency from Larry, but diminishes his own ability to accept his sexuality.

In "Shoga", Osman's narrator first experiences gay bashing from his immediate family. His grandmother disapproves of his effeminate mannerisms and tells him that "[w]aryaa, if you grow up to be gay, *walaahi* I will do *saar*" (Osman, *Fairytales* 33). The narrator explains that "Saar was a brand of Somali exorcism. Those 'possessed'—which was code for the mentally unstable—were put through their paces" (Osman, *Fairytales* 33). The association of same-sex desire with mental illness runs through most of the stories in *Fairytales*. The fact that Osman himself is a gay man who was diagnosed with psychosis and institutionalised (Osman, "How Mental Illness Fed My Creativity" n. p.) makes most of these stories read as semi-autobiographical testimonies of living as a queer, Muslim, and African man, something that has similarly been observed by other scholars (see for example Aragon; Lombardi; Binternagel).

Osman's semi-autobiographical narratives in some of the stories in *Fairytales* demonstrate the role of literary fiction as prosthesis in that, by blending his real-life experiences within fictive imaginaries, he is able to extend such experiences by not only telling what is/was, but also what could be. Writing fiction enables him to use his lived experiences to narrate the plight of other queer people in heteronormative societies by detaching the experience from himself to his characters with whom other gay people can identify. In this way, Osman solicits empathy, not only for himself, but for queer people in general who may be facing similar challenges in different places. Commenting on the history of experimentation in South African autobiographical novels and fictional autobiographies, Gabeba Baderoon notices that the blurring of borders between autobiography and fiction "confront[s] the vulnerability of autobiography to claims of distortion, lying, and misinterpretation, and use[s] the very imprecision, fragility, and blurred edges of self-writing to potent effect to create new forms of subjectivity and political belonging" (898). In the case of Osman, the fact that his stories are published as fiction while containing autobiographical elements leaves them open to interpretation beyond the analytical limits that come with the identification of the author's life with the text in autobiographical studies.

The verbal abuse identified in these stories does not only affect gay men, but also lesbian women, who in Somali society are called "*Khaniis*" (Osman, *Fairytales* 41). One of the most detrimental effects of gay bashing is that it leads to the invisibility of queer people from what are regarded as 'straight spaces' in heteronormative societies. The short stories demonstrate that, for fear of abuse, queer people either become completely silenced or create alternative spaces where they can perform their queer identities. In the story "Tell the Sun not to Shine", Osman details the challenges of coming out in patriarchal and heteronormative Muslim communities. The story's narrator is in love with Labaan, an Imam at his mosque, but they keep their relationship secret for fear of scorn from their community. He recalls that, after a night of intimacy, the two lovers "would go about [their] day wondering if the previous night even happened" since Labaan "was trying to dodge a life of complications" (Osman, *Fairytales* 10).

The narrator recognises that his relationship with Labaan is complicated due to its secrecy and what coming out would entail. This becomes a constant cause of psychological distress for him throughout the story. To make matters worse, the narrator is later disowned by his parents upon coming out and Labaan was married to a woman all along. The complications in this relationship are reflected in the title of the story as it suggests that the drive to make queer people invisible as a strategy to somehow expel their same-sex sexualities is as impractical and implausible as telling the sun not to shine. As prosthesis, this story is crucial in that it enables Osman to tread dangerous terrain as, through fiction, he is able to talk about same-sex sexuality within restrictive Muslim-majority communities which have been identified as "being the least accepting of gays in the world" (Hawley, "Desiring Africans: An Introduction" 3). In this way, fiction becomes an enabling endeavour.

Most of the stories in *Fairytales* focus on the experiences of the protagonists as children and/or adolescents growing up in heteronormative societies where queer realities are absent in broader sociocultural discourses. Bernie Lombardi contends that "[i]n twenty-first century African writing, the proliferation of queer childhood, as a common trope, increasingly demands re-imaginings of belonging beyond the nation without rejecting African geography as its locus" (688). He goes further to argue that such narratives are efforts by queer African writers to disrupt African ontologies as queer childhoods demonstrate the continued existence of queer individuals, even

in the future (688). Adding to Lombardi's observation, portrayals of queer childhoods also open possibilities for queer futures by disrupting the workings of the heterosexual gaze by proving false the assumption that all humans are heterosexually oriented from childhood all the way through adulthood. Additionally, such depictions point to the roots of homophobia in African societies by exposing the invisibilising of queer people in social discourses, including school curriculums, which lead to prejudice and gay bashing. To evoke Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, such misconceptions are often products of psychological discourses that present queer adulthoods as cases of psychopathology resulting from a failure to correct "proto-gay" childhoods (22). As prosthesis, the short stories discussed here attempt to challenge such misunderstandings of queer people by asserting belonging for African queer people and writing same-sex sexualities in the African imaginary.

Conclusion

In this article, I have analysed a selection of African queer short stories from two collections: *Queer Africa 2: New Stories* and *Fairytales for Lost Children*. My discussion has established that contemporary African writers capitalise on the potency of literary fiction in creating narratives that act as prosthesis to bring to light the realities of queer people in punitively heteronormative Sub-Saharan African countries where same-sex intimacy is outlawed. The short stories demonstrate that same-sex sexuality is abhorred in most parts of Sub-Saharan Africa mainly because queer intimacy challenges the controlling gaze of heteronormativity and patriarchy. As such, patriarchal systems and structures inhibit the agency of lesbian women and gay men, relegating them to the margins of society where they become invisible. Based on this invisibility, heteropatriarchal authority erroneously sees same-sex sexuality as un-African in justifying the victimisation of queer people. In consequence, there is a growing trend among African writers to create spaces that are freer from harm for queer people on the continent. The representations of queer identities in these narratives unearth the multiple challenges that sexual minorities face in Africa while at the same time giving room to possibilities for agency and possible futures of emancipation, as well as soliciting empathy for queer people in Africa.

Notes

1. Osman's short stories in this collection feature African characters (mostly Somali), most of whom live in exile in Kenya and the United Kingdom. The two stories that I analyse here are set in Kenya where the main characters struggle against the homophobia around them. It should, however, be mentioned that even those characters who search for refuge overseas in some of the short stories still become victims of homophobia, mostly from their immediate families who believe that same-sex sexuality is un-African.
2. In his article, Sogunro uses the term 'African queer writer' to refer to writers who explicitly identify as queer in their gender and sexual orientation. In addition, African writers who engage with queer themes may also be referred to as 'queer writers' by the mere fact that their narratives deviate from the 'norm' in African literature. Such writers can also be at risk of abuse from homophobic publics or structures.
3. Peter M. Nardi and Ralph Bolton define gay bashing as "violence, threats of physical harm, verbal abuse, and other types of aggression directed against individuals because of their sexual orientation" (349).

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Flânerie in Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*

Magdalena Pfalzgraf

Flânerie in Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*

Valerie Tagwira's debut novel *The Uncertainty of Hope*, set in Harare in 2005, depicts the city on the brink of collapse, characterized by the effects of economic crisis and political violence against the urban poor. Political marginalization of the working classes and gender-based violence intersect and diminish the prospects for the social and spatial mobility of the urban poor. In this article I apply the lens of flânerie to the pedestrian movements of Tagwira's protagonist Onai Moyo, an impoverished woman who makes a living by selling vegetables on Harare's streets. In order to make a case for Onai's 'flânerie against all odds', I revisit Walter Benjamin's theorization as well as recent scholarly engagements with flânerie in non-European settings. By giving her protagonist a gaze traditionally associated with a European middle-class urbanity of the 19th century, Tagwira expands a tradition of city writing/walking and, like other contemporary engagements with flânerie, also breathes new life into a concept often pronounced inappropriate or unproductive for readings of non-European literature. **Keywords:** Zimbabwean literature, Valerie Tagwira, mobility, flânerie, urban walking, modernity, gender.

Introduction


According to Basile Ndjio, a contemporary African city embroiled in political and economic crisis is an unlikely walking ground for the Benjaminian flâneur. In his study on Douala, which he describes as a "city of crime and death" (104), he writes:

If Benjamin's bourgeois flâneur had lived in this African necropolis, he would not have enjoyed walking down the streets, because the few available sidewalks have been turned into free markets by street vendors, or are constantly congested by drivers who are trying to get around the potholes that generally riddle the roads. Benjamin's famous character would also have been in danger, since at night there are no streetlights to prevent the walker from falling into one of the countless open sewers that deface the public space [...]. (105)¹

In such a city, Ndjio suggests, the flâneur would shun public space and seek the seclusion of the fortress-like enclaves of the elite. What about those city dwellers, however, who cannot withdraw into their private spheres, who are forced to move through the city on foot because their livelihood depends on the informal urban economy? Is it not possible that one of the street vendors referenced by Ndjio might also at times look at the city through the eyes of Walter Benjamin's "dreaming idler" (*The Arcades Project* 419)? In this article I apply the lens of flânerie to the pedestrian movements of Onai Moyo, the protagonist of Valerie Tagwira's debut novel *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006). Onai is an impoverished woman who makes a living by selling vegetables on Harare's streets. By depicting her protagonist's walks through the city's different areas, during which Onai becomes aware of visible and implicit boundaries separating the city's quarters, Tagwira critically interrogates the spatial regime of urban Zimbabwe in the year 2005, but she also allows Onai desires and experiences traditionally associated with the leisurely strolling of Benjamin's bourgeois character. As she sets out to tout her wares, Onai perceives the landscape of the crisis-ridden and violent city through a gaze that is often remarkably close to Benjamin's flâneur.

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Tagwira's novel has received considerable academic attention. The aspects discussed by scholars are quite varied, reflecting that Tagwira excels at addressing a broad range of literary and social concerns. Two topics, however, have clearly attracted the bulk of interest: the text's portrayal of Operation Murambatsvina, a government-initiated program which started in May 2005 and involved the destruction of informal urban housing and the informal business infrastructure under the pretext of a clean-up program (Muchemwa, "Old and New Fictions: Rearranging the Geographies of Urban Space and Identities in Post-2006 Zimbabwean Fiction" 136–8; *Imagining the City in Zimbabwean Literature 1949 to 2009* 128–34; Musanga, 107–14; Ncube, 50–1), and its commitment to exploring the gendered nature of domestic, political, and economic violence, in particular as they relate to the protagonist Onai.

Critics have commented on Tagwira's detailed engagement with the numerous hardships faced by women. Where domestic and political violence intersect, most seem to agree, women are particularly vulnerable. Kizito Muchemwa (*Imagining* 131), for instance, emphasizes the role of internalized patriarchal ideals in his commentary on Tagwira's female characters who endure marital violence (see also Nyambi 43–4). Anna Chitando points to the intersection of the patriarchal legacy of colonialism and of contemporary Afrocentrist nationalism, arguing that the "status of women in Zimbabwe has [...] been compromised by the coming together of various patriarchies" (217). Other contributions emphasize Tagwira's portrayal of the HIV/AIDS crisis. Lene Bull Christiansen, for instance, writes that "[i]n this novel the problems of marriage in a time of AIDS are the catalyst in the plot" (517). Like Chitando, she also points out the co-existence of different patriarchal ideologies (513). Nonetheless, most scholars move beyond a 'victim narrative' and stress the agency and resilience displayed by Tagwira's (female) characters in the face of oppression and economic hardship, a perspective which I will also apply. Oliver Nyambi and Tendai Mangena, for instance, argue that, due to Zimbabwe's economic crisis, traditional gender roles are shifting, as women are often taking over as primary providers for their families: "The re-gendering of breadwinning is triggered by the emasculation of men who lose jobs in a deindustrializing economy" (11). In a different article, Nyambi points to an almost activist impetus in the novel which transcends the immediate reading experience, and might even add to social change:

Recognition in *The Uncertainty of Hope* involves seeing Onai in the context of a new cul-de-sac situation which is rooted in the enduring patriarchal culture and exacerbated by an emergent economic crisis. The resulting emotional attachment and sympathetic feelings stirred by this process can potentially shift previous perceptions (particularly in patriarchally-minded readers) of women. (499)

For the present purposes, the contributions by Muchemwa ("Fictions"; *Imagining*) and Terrence Musanga are particularly relevant, as they examine Tagwira's treatment of gender and of political violence—in particular Operation Murambatsvina—in relation to social and intra-urban mobility. Both scholars interrogate the link between gender and (social and spatial) mobility: "It is always men who inhabit sites of privilege and are in positions of power and influence that assist women portrayed largely as dependent on men. In this respect, the intra-urban mobility of most women is facilitated by men" (Musanga 114). In addition, they consider Onai's situation in a wider context of a politics which marginalizes the urban poor, including the residents of the 'townships' and the street vendors. Musanga argues that crossing the spatial boundaries between the city's affluent spaces and those inhabited by the urban poor carries the promise of subversion and empowerment: "intra-urban mobility is testimony of the transgression of spatial boundaries and is reflective of either upward or downward economic and social mobility. [T]his transgression is not just physical but metaphorically represents ideological and discursive migrations" (103). My main argument is twofold: through her traversal of urban space, Onai stages a quiet form of resistance against the structures of class- and gender-based violence and exclusion and, furthermore, she also seeks the fleeting moments of pleasure, diversion, and modernity which still exist despite the backdrop of crisis and decay. By imbuing her protagonist with affinities with the Benjaminian flâneur, Tagwira not only transports the originally European concept of flânerie into 21st-century Harare in an unexpected and innovative way, she also gives emphasis to flânerie's potentially subversive politics.

Movement in *The Uncertainty of Hope* as a symptom of urban crisis

In “The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire”, Benjamin ties the emergence of the flâneur to the rapid expansion of industrialism and modern consumer culture in the second half of the 19th century. As a member of the moneyed urban leisure class, the flâneur was, not surprisingly, most comfortable in the covered, splendidly ornamented shopping passages which flourished in Paris during Charles Baudelaire’s time:

Flânerie could hardly have assumed the importance it did without the arcades. “These arcades, a recent invention of industrial luxury”, says an illustrated guide to Paris of 1852, “are glass-roofed, marble-paneled corridors extending through whole blocks of buildings, whose owners have joined together for such enterprises. Lining both sides of these corridors, which get their light from above, are the most elegant shops, so that the passage is a city, a world in miniature.” It is in this world that the flâneur is at home; he provides the arcade—“the favorite venue of strollers and smokers, the haunt of all sorts of little métiers”—with its chronicler and philosopher. (68)

Like Douala, Harare as represented by Tagwira provides little of the splendor described above. Her characters are afflicted by the myriad consequences of the so-called Zimbabwe Crisis in the post-2000 period: poverty, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, hyperinflation, food shortages, the breakdown of the formal economy, and political violence. Due to these circumstances, Harare indeed bears resemblance to the “thespian city where insecurity, violence, and terror have become the daily experience of the vast majority of city dwellers, whose lives are permanently subjugated to the power of hazard and uncertainty, and above all to the tyranny of death” described by Ndjio (103); in Tagwira’s Harare, caesarean sections are performed by candlelight due to electricity shortages and power cuts, cemeteries run out of burial space, and citizens are defenseless against the cynical brutality of state power which tries to restore Harare to its “former ‘sunshine city’ status” (*Uncertainty* 135) by demolishing homes and evicting unlicensed vendors like Onai from the inner-city areas.

In this context, movement through the city has little to do with leisurely strolling but is, first and foremost, connected to survival. Like other members of the informal street economy, Onai is constantly on the move through the city: vending, queuing, and chasing options for securing food and other commodities. At the beginning of the novel, she sells vegetables at Harare’s large market Mbare Musika, but after its demolition in the course of Operation Murambatsvina, she takes to “making door-to-door sales in the high-density townships” (180) and to “undercover vending in the city center” (195). This constant need to be on the move does not only relate to Onai, but reflects a pattern which pervades the novel, and also includes movements to other places in Zimbabwe and abroad, undertaken in order to secure basic supplies for everyday life. As resources in the city are diminished, people from all walks of life engage in frequent domestic and transnational travel to source basic commodities and pursue income strategies unavailable at home: Onai’s best friend Katy is a cross-border trader, Katy’s husband traffics women across the border to South Africa and smuggles foreign currency back home, and their daughter’s fiancé has a flower business which takes him on trips to the UK. Furthermore, the erosion of livelihoods and the informalization of the economy have fostered a dependence on remittances from relatives abroad. Onai’s frequent movements through Harare also have to do with the fact that, unlike most characters in this novel, she cannot travel transnationally; as her husband does not allow her to own a passport and to travel to South Africa in order to buy goods, she has to tap into the limited local resources and make the most of what the urban economy of her home town has to offer.

Here lies a significant difference to the main source for Benjamin’s theorization of the flâneur, namely Baudelaire’s prose poetry, where movement takes place against the backdrop of a rapidly flourishing urban modernity. In *The Uncertainty of Hope*, movement is the result of the opposite development. The frenetic movement of Tagwira’s characters should not be confused with the modern global city’s “characteristic urban restlessness” described by Zygmunt Bauman as a defining feature of urban modernity (5), and neither can it be understood in terms of Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe’s characterization of Johannesburg’s specific brand of urban modernity, in which they see a “culture of indifference and restlessness” (282) producing “an original form, if not of African cosmopolitanism, then of worldliness” (282). In Tagwira’s novel, frenetic movements are symptoms of crisis. “All that is solid melts into air”—the fundamental experience of modernity as theorized in Marshall Berman’s seminal study of this title—is given a specific twist in *The Uncertainty of Hope*: the city’s frenzy results from the breakdown of previously existing modern urban infrastructures. This is highlighted by Onai’s nostalgia for the stability and security before the crisis years “when schools provided all the textbooks required by their pupils; a time when a school fees’ invoice meant nominal charges for people in difficult circumstances like her, and a time when the

words ‘social welfare’ had held a meaning of sorts” (*Uncertainty* 33). More permanent forms of transnational migration play a marginal role—the emphasis is on circular, short-term migrations undertaken with the aim of bringing goods and money back home. Mobility is thus represented as a way to keep life going in Harare. Rather than getting away from the site of crisis, Tagwira’s characters move in order to stay put.

Flânerie as lens for Tagwira’s novel

At first glance, little seems to speak in favor of reading Onai’s inner-city movements through the lens of a concept which is so firmly grounded in the streets and shopping arcades of mid-19th century Paris, where the flâneur could only be imagined as male, white, and affluent.² In Baudelaire’s famous essay “The Painter of Modern Life”, one of the main sources for Benjamin’s concept, the roles ascribed to this figure are male: “Observer, philosopher, *flâneur*, call him what you will [...]. Sometimes he is a poet [...].” (4–5, emphasis in original). Not surprisingly, these characterizations have been emphasized by critics of the flâneur: “An aesthete who uniquely manages to engage with the realities of the modern city without fully surrendering to them, the flâneur can be—and has been—condemned as a fatally bourgeois figure attempting to reprivatize public space” (Vermeulen 41). In a similar vein, feminist scholars such as Janet Wolff have questioned this iconic figure’s value for understanding female engagements with urban modernity, arguing that modernist literature’s conception of public space as unequivocally male renders women absent or at best objects of the flâneur’s male gaze. As will become clear in my discussion of Tagwira’s text, this is a reductive reading of Benjamin’s original concept. To dismiss the flâneur for these reasons means, furthermore, to overlook that this iconic literary figure has long overcome the constraints of 19th-century Parisian high capitalism and has, in fact, experienced a revival of sorts in recent years.³

A famous example is Julius, the protagonist of Teju Cole’s novel *Open City* who engages in “aimless wandering” (4) through New York and Brussels, and soon finds that these walks constitute not merely “a counterpoint to [...] busy days at the hospital” (4) but also an immediate, intimate form of communion with urban space: “New York City worked itself into my life at walking pace” (4).⁴ In Cole’s novel, we can see a glimpse of the flâneur’s capacity of challenging racial stereotypes of a black person moving through the city space, an aspect which is easily overlooked by those who see the flâneur as merely elitist and self-indulgent: “Julius does not fit the stereotype of the black man who walks the streets aimlessly. Far from being homeless or down-and-out, he is a refined, cultured flâneur: a type easily recognized in a white character, but less so in a black African” (Varvogli 240). Further examples of contemporary postcolonial flânerie are discussed in Patricia Fox’s analysis of crime novels by Richard Crompton and Kwei Quartei, set in Nairobi and in Accra, respectively. According to Fox, both authors’ detective protagonists can be seen as “contemporary Afropolitan” (62) reincarnations of the traditional Benjaminian flâneur: “By design or by coincidence, both crime novel detectives recall the figure of the flâneur that so intrigued German philosopher Walter Benjamin: [...] the urban setting, the commercial backdrop, and their sensory acuity by virtue of their nature and standing (not to mention a stature that sets them above the crowds), which distinguish them from the oblivious or gawking throngs” (62).

In a similar vein, Bibi Burger refers to the narrator of the Afrikaans-language novel *Werfsonde* as a “Johannesburg flâneur”. She disagrees with critics who argue that this “novel’s protagonist cannot be considered a flâneur” because “the concept has a very specific meaning in European literary history” (37) and rightfully points out that such an understanding rests on a truncated understanding of the flâneur and does not do justice to the complexity of both Baudelaire’s urban poetry and to Benjamin’s theorization:

Benjamin [...] doesn’t conceive the flâneur simply as someone who wanders, but argues that a flâneur text is one in which the explicit political commentary of the writer or narrator is of less importance than the ways in which the text is marked by the urban environment through which the flâneur moves. Through these marks the contradictions of the society in which the flâneur is situated are exposed. (38)

In addition to this example from contemporary South African literature, we may also point to an older history of flânerie in South African city writing. Corinne Sandwith analyses Dhlomo’s column “R. Roamer Esq.”, published weekly from 1933 to 1943, which “invokes both the pleasures (and provocation) of aimless city wandering and looking” (22) and thereby creates a “nexus of storytelling and city journeying [which] bears a close resemblance to the European flâneur tradition” (23). Sandwith’s discussion of Dhlomo’s column not only confirms the long history of the flâneur in Southern African literature, but also points to this character’s specific capacity for observing and chronicling urban realities as well as for subverting colonial policing of movement:

As in the European tradition, the city of Johannesburg in Dhlomo's column is presented at street level, from the perspective of the mobile traveller-observer. Archiving a compendium of city movements and city stories, the column [...] complicates the nineteenth-century European ideal by drawing attention to the ways in which this mobility is curtailed by the regulating norms and material-legal practices of 1930s segregationist South Africa. (24)

Whereas these examples relate to male characters, and might therefore be seen as confirming the flâneur's invariable male identity, female characters have also articulated their 'right to the city' by engaging in flânerie. Kirsten Ortega applies this concept to "In the Mecca", a poem by the American writer Gwendolyn Brooks which deals with violence against women and segregation, and which centers on movement in a city which, similar to Harare in 2005, "imposes restrictions and surveillance" (Ortega 141) on inner-city communities and particularly on women. Far from being content with common perceptions that "flânerie is simply off-limits to women" (141), Ortega argues that, "[c]onsidering 'In the Mecca' through the lens of flânerie unfolds the layers of literary, racial, gender, and spatial restrictions which Brooks negotiated in the city" (139). In Zimbabwean literature, the theme of a woman walking to create space for herself in the city has been established in Yvonne Vera's city novels which portray women as "reconstructing the city, traversing various spaces that lead them to contest how they are restricted and figured in particular spaces and in the process remaking themselves" (Muchemwa, *Imagining* 88). This aspect is also explored in Frank Schulze-Engler's analysis of Vera's *The Stone Virgins*, in which he identifies the activity of loitering on street corners as a form of resistance through which Bulawayo's black population transform the blind spots of colonial town planning into spaces where a black urban modernity can be embodied: "the street corners, originally markers of exclusion from the 'white' interiors of built-up city space, become galvanizing points of a 'sudden and miraculous' black modernity. Vera's 'history of the present' thus begins with a poetic account of fleeting moments of sly urban civility lived against all odds 'outside' the architecture of racial exclusion" (Schulze-Engler 270). As I will demonstrate, a similar reading can be applied to Onai's traversal of the post-independence city.

The multiple examples above illustrate the long history of flânerie in non-European contexts and in depictions of urban walkers which disturb the tradition of flânerie as a middle-class, male activity. The concept's validity as a framework for Tagwira's city portrayal becomes clearest, however, when returning to Benjamin's original concept. There are significant parallels between Baudelaire's European mid-19th century world and post-2000 Harare. These enable us to understand that, far from being merely a spoilt idler who remains aloof to suffering, the flâneur's strolls are as much tied to political crisis as to a thriving bourgeois consumerism. The flâneur's original walking ground, namely Paris during the Second French Empire, was not only defined by the rise of capitalist modernity and decadent consumerism, but also by an authoritarian regime, rampant misery, and the desire for revolt. Paris was, moreover, home to the flâneur's impoverished counterpart: the "ragpicker" (Benjamin, "Paris" 54), a recognizable Parisian stock type who shared the middle classes' desire for revolt and reflected their fears of downward mobility (108). Baudelaire recognized in this figure a kinship to the wandering poet, as Benjamin explains: "Ragpicker and poet: both are concerned with refuse, and both go about their solitary business while other citizens are sleeping [...] [T]he gait of the poet who roams the city in search of rhyme-booty [...] is also the gait of the ragpicker, who is obliged to come to a halt every few moments to gather up the refuse he encounters" (108). Despite his affluence, Paris held its own confinements for the bourgeois flâneur, for whom the marble-floored passages not only promised diversion, but also refuge from the despotism of the totalitarian regime of his time: "the arcade provides him with an unending remedy for the kind of boredom that easily arises under the baleful eye of a sated reactionary regime" (68). Benjamin makes it clear that the rise of the leisure class constituted a counterpoint to political authoritarianism, and that the wandering poet and chronicler was well aware that "life in all its variety and inexhaustible wealth of permutations can thrive only among the gray cobblestones and against the gray background of despotism" (69). As the following discussion will show, similar circumstances impact on Onai's urban wanderings, and she enacts a similarly subversive role in her flânerie.

Urban walking in *The Uncertainty of Hope*

The novel's interest in exploring the relationship between agency and urban walking first surfaces in a passage which describes Onai's walk from Mbare to the city center for a day of "undercover vending" (*Uncertainty* 195) shortly after Operation Murambatsvina:

The fuel queues were longer these days and that meant more potential customers. She was beginning to get used to city vending; even to enjoy it a little. [...] Onai [...] set off on the long walk into the city centre. Far from tiring her, the walk filled her with a sense of purpose. With one basket balanced on her head and holding the other with her hand, she pounded the tarred road with fierce determination. By the time she entered the central business district, she was panting, but still felt herself to be in high spirits. (195)

The direction of her walk, from the 'township' to the city center, and the fact that it takes place after Operation Murambatsvina, speak to Harare's economic and spatial divisions. As noted by Musanga (104) and Muchemwa (*Imagining* 117; 127–34), the mapping of post-independence Harare as depicted in *The Uncertainty of Hope* reproduces the violence of the colonial city: the structures of Salisbury's racial segregation are still intact and visible, albeit redefined in terms of class, gender, and, I would add, political affiliation and power. The city's oldest dormitory township, Mbare, is now an impoverished working-class area, and the formerly white residential areas have become the spaces of a new elite. The buzzing activity of traders, vendors, and transnational travelers is thus contrasted with the rigid barriers separating the city's wealthier quarters from its high-density areas. Musanga notes that these boundaries are not completely static, and that movement between the two spheres occurs in both directions: wealthy and powerful people cross into Mbare for temporary stays and to maintain personal or business relations, and a few residents of Mbare manage to climb the social ladder and move away (Musanga 106). But for the city's most vulnerable like Onai, the prospects for upward social mobility through relocation to better areas are very limited. Tagwira places her engagement with Operation Murambatsvina within this history of spatial control. Murambatsvina—a Shona word whose official meaning is "restore order", but which can also be translated as "drive out rubbish" (Potts 274)—reflects a politics of exclusion which privileges nativist versions of citizenship and displaces those considered undesirable from city and nation (see also Muchemwa, "Fictions" 136–7). Tagwira portrays the disastrous consequences of Operation Murambatsvina for Mbare—toddlers die under the rubble of bulldozed houses, entire families are made to camp in the open, livelihoods are destroyed—but also explores its effects on the wider cityscape, and in particular on the ways in which people are allowed to move through the city's different quarters. Operation Murambatsvina diminishes the space for commercial activity in the city through the displacement of vendors and the demolition of informal businesses, thus leading to a quieter, emptier, and, hence, consistent with its agenda, 'cleaner' city space: "The face of Harare had changed drastically. There was no sign of the street kids who had spent their days loitering on pavements: begging, rummaging through bins and sometimes being a general nuisance. There were no vendors at street corners inviting city strollers to buy cigarettes, bananas, sweets or pens" (*Uncertainty* 163).

As a result, the intra-urban mobility of those working in the informal sector is subjected to control and surveillance from state authorities; when conducting sales, they have "to be constantly watchful, in readiness to run away should the figures of authority appear" (180). In addition, Onai is also made to feel unwelcome by well-off citizens who resent her presence in the city center: "I thought they'd got rid of these people in Murambatsvina and dumped them in the rural areas! Look how quickly they're back on the streets!" (196). These dynamics illustrate an instance of liberation and empowerment in unlikely circumstances. When Onai finds that she is "beginning to get used to city vending; even to enjoy it a little" (195) and stands up for herself, she transforms an activity born out of crisis and need, and which is potentially dangerous due to harsh law enforcement against unlicensed vendors, into a positive and restorative experience. In fact, she manages to transform the marginalized and precarious position of an informal vendor into one she positively inhabits and makes her own. This is also indicated by the fact that she does not simply walk but "pound[s] the tarred road with fierce determination" (195), which evokes Michel de Certeau's conception of pedestrians as active writers of the city text (93) as well as the activity of "botanizing on the asphalt"—a metaphor employed by Benjamin ("Paris" 68) which suggests that the observant walker experiences the city similarly to a park or garden landscape—and thus highlights her sense of control over the city space and, quite literally, its materiality. It also reminds us of Cole's protagonist Julius, for whom walking facilitates an intense relationship with the city. It is hence no coincidence that this passage contains one of the few instances where the meek and gentle Onai stands up for herself and openly defies the well-off pedestrians who

would like her expelled from the Central Business District: "I am a respectable married woman. I'm only trying to raise my family in difficult times. Not everyone is living well like you" (*Uncertainty* 196). This passage underlines the link between spatial and economic mobility, as well as the role of personal agency in Onai's flânerie; it is her walk away from Mbare and into the Central Business District which affords her the opportunity to sell her wares and carry home "lots and lots of notes" (196).

The aspects explored above are part of the broader theme of movement explored throughout the novel. This becomes clear in a passage which depicts movement in the opposite direction: Onai has been discharged from a hospital in Avondale and, together with her friend Katy, she must walk home to Mbare. While one would expect the walk to be exhausting and distressing, given the fact that Onai is recovering from injuries inflicted by her husband Gari, the women's outlook is very different:

The two women decided against a bus to the city centre just in order to find connecting transport to Mbare; it simply doubled the expense. Such luxuries they could not afford. Instead, they chose the long walk home, which would cost them nothing, apart from their time and energy. They had both in abundance, but a determination to reach home in the shortest possible time put a lively spring in their steps. They shared township gossip and companionable laughter as they walked through the bustling Southerton industrial area. (52)⁵

Undertaking a walk from a more developed area, Avondale, to Mbare changes Onai's perception of her home and strengthens her desire for social and spatial mobility: "Onai took in her surroundings with fresh eyes. She admitted to herself that this was not the place where she wanted her children to grow into adulthood" (52).

These moments highlight how Onai's walking reflects her desire for upward economic mobility and allows her to assert her presence in spaces from which she is excluded. She claims her right to the city by walking across boundaries of gender and class.

The next example from the text similarly includes aspects of subversion and transgression, but also illustrates Onai's desire to experience the city through an urban modernity from which she is excluded in her everyday life, and to indulge in a form of escapism and search for beauty. Walking home to Mbare "empty-handed and dejected" (104) after a morning of fruitless queuing for food and an encounter with the riot police, Onai suddenly decides to set out on a stroll to the city center which will take her from Speke Avenue to First Street and, finally, to Africa Unity Square. In so doing, she hopes to momentarily escape not only the squalor of her surroundings, but also to reclaim an identity crushed under her many obligations as a wife and mother: "She did not want anything particular, but she felt the desire for an hour alone to briefly experience an existence that was not related to anyone else; to exist unfettered, not as a mother or a wife, but simply as herself" (104). In the lengthy passage depicting this excursion, Onai is most clearly depicted as a flâneur, but it is also revealed that she encounters obstacles and frustrations that differ from her Parisian precursor. Onai's solitary stroll into the city center is an expression of her desire to experience the inspiring and pleasurable aspects of city life and partake in an urban modernity unavailable to her in her home and neighborhood: among other things, she enjoys the singing of a street musician and stands with a crowd to admire the balancing acts of an acrobat. The image of Benjamin's "dreaming idler" (*Arcades* 419) on Harare's streets is evoked when Onai indulges in daydreaming: "From Speke Avenue, she wandered towards First Street. She let herself idle, her thoughts remarkably far away from soap and groceries. She passed a beggar just outside Clicks. Blind, he was singing a Bob Marley song to a guitar that he played beautifully" (*Uncertainty* 104). Furthermore, this passage evokes the desire for "solitude [...] in a crowd" (Benjamin, "Paris" 81) which is a central motif in 'classic' flânerie.

Throughout this passage, Onai remains an observer and bystander who does not make contact with other passers-by. It is interesting to note that, while listening to the street musician, there is a subtle shift in Onai's position. The blind beggar who is singing Bob Marley songs becomes the object of her gaze which, in this moment, is similar to that of a middle-class, bourgeois spectator: "The plate by his side was empty. Onai had nothing to spare for him either, but that did not stop her from enjoying his singing" (104). In a way, Onai looks at the blind beggar like Baudelaire looked at the Parisian "ragpicker". It is notable that her outlook changes based on her economic behavior and the products she covets. The passages depicting this lengthy walk are among the few instances in this book where movement in the city is not connected to securing basic needs. In fact, it is explicitly mentioned that the products of everyday life that are often lacking—soap and groceries—are for the moment pushed to the back of her mind. Instead, Onai turns her attention to the few items of 'luxury' consumption and goes window-shopping:

The beautiful clothes in Topics Store caught her eye as she walked on along First Street. [...] Onai hung around the entrance to Topics, briefly intimidated by the atmosphere of sophistication within the shop, and by the sweet perfume that wafted towards the entrance. She gathered her courage and entered, thinking to herself, "Who knows, I might shop here one day. Even better, I might even make clothes for them." Dreams, dreams. (105–6)

The representation of public space, and in particular the streets, as the only sphere offering escape resonates with Benjamin's characterization of Baudelaire's Paris as a space where "life in all its variety and inexhaustible wealth of permutations can thrive only among the gray cobblestones and against the gray background of despotism" (Benjamin, "Paris" 69). Like her Parisian counterpart, she seeks not only refuge and invisibility in the urban masses but also what Benjamin describes as the experience of "intoxication" ("Paris" 81) of being abandoned in a crowd which "permeates [the flâneur] blissfully, like a narcotic that can compensate him for many humiliations" (85).

These motifs are continued in the depiction of Onai's stroll from First Street up to Africa Unity Square. Again, it is not so much what the crisis-ridden city offers, but the change in her perspective that allows her to be transformed into a flâneur:

She continued her languid stroll up First Street. There was no reason to linger in town, but Onai had no desire to make her way back to Mbare. [...] She decided to walk up to Africa Unity Square to admire the jacaranda trees whose beauty she'd always loved, and to browse among the art and craftwork stalls on the periphery of the square. (*Uncertainty* 107)

The description of this part of her walk also emphasizes the defiance and subversion inherent in this re-classed, re-gendered version of the flâneur. This is indicated when Onai walks up from First Street to Africa Unity Square, which was formerly known as Cecil Square in dedication to Cecil Rhodes. The square contains the jacarandas and flamboyant trees Onai longs to admire, craft and book stalls, and a large water fountain with a plaque honoring Robert Mugabe. Her walk to Africa Unity Square thus becomes an attempt to cross into the geographic center of the capital and also into a symbolic center of power.⁶

Despite the fact that this stroll entails empowerment and can be read as a form of appropriation of urban space by those displaced through Operation Murambatsvina and other exclusionary policies against the urban poor, Onai's flânerie brings only momentary escape, but no lasting transformation of her position and outlook. Her enraptured gaze is consistently disturbed by incidents which remind her of the reality of urban crisis, and eventually of her own vulnerability. The street musician mentioned earlier is a blind beggar, most likely forced into his occupation because he has no other way to support himself, and her brief stay at the clothes shop ends abruptly when she is made to feel unwelcome because of her frumpy attire. In addition, her absorption in the acrobats' spectacle she enjoys while standing in the crowd is equally short-lived; she spots a thief and realizes that the crowd offers no protection from violence or crime, and that her moments of reverie and escapism are very fleeting:

Out of the corner of her eye, she spotted a smartly dressed young man dipping his hand into an unsuspecting woman's handbag as she was engrossed in the lively street entertainment. The man's eyes locked with Onai's. Silently, he raised an index finger and passed it across his neck. Onai got the message. Speaking out was not safe. When had it ever been? (105)

As for the jacaranda and flamboyant trees which inspire her walk to Africa Unity Square—it is winter and the only flowers Onai can look at are artificial bouquets for funerals which bring back painful memories of deaths in her family, marring her initial delight at the things she sees while walking in the city: "Abruptly, she turned away, overcome by the power of memory" (107). These incidents reinforce her exclusion and indicate that, outside of the township, Onai is not wanted, and that the city offers little to fulfill her desire for social mobility, diversion, beauty, and freedom. As Muchemwa writes in reference to the portrayal of women's spaces in the colonial city as represented by Vera, Onai's momentary escape and participation in an urban modernity can only be performed in "cracks and interstices" (*Imagining* 103) of the crisis-ridden space of Harare.

However, while this might be seen as indicating that the concept of flânerie is incongruous with Onai's experiences, the fact that Onai's flâneur gaze is so easily broken is a further link to Benjamin's original conception. The ambivalence that characterizes Tagwira's engagement with mobility is also inherent to Baudelaire's own development: Benjamin writes that, in the early days,

[Baudelaire] set out to conquer the streets—in images. Later, when he abandoned one part of his bourgeois existence after another, the street increasingly became a place of refuge for him. But in flânerie, there was from the outset an awareness of the fragility of this existence. It makes a virtue out of necessity, and in this displays the structure which is in every way characteristic of Baudelaire's conception of a hero. ("Paris" 99–100)

This is not unlike the transience and fragility which characterizes the sense of escape and liberation Onai experiences while walking.

Conclusion

With her stylistically and aesthetically humble, almost simple prose, Tagwira creates a vivid and nuanced portrayal of urban life before and shortly after Operation Murambatsvina and engages sensitively with life in post-2000 Harare, mainly from the perspective of frequently overlooked and neglected citizens like Onai. Her depiction of Onai's experiences of being unwanted in other parts of the city is testimony to enduring spatial regimes which originate in colonialism and which have been appropriated by the post-independence regime of Mugabe's ZANU-PF and its anti-urban, anti-working class policies. Ambivalence remains at the core of Tagwira's engagement with mobility and modernity in 2005 Harare. Although movement is represented as the result of a deteriorating urban economy, and as a way to survive, her protagonist Onai also moves through the city in search of something beyond survival. In this context, the activity of *flânerie* as theorized by Benjamin becomes a productive trope for understanding how Onai stages a quiet and inconspicuous resistance against the structures of oppression and asserts belonging. In her strolls through the city, Onai combines the archetypal characteristics of Benjamin's concept—such as the search for diversion and beauty, the experience of getting lost in a crowd, and of inhabiting the streets while not getting directly involved—with de Certeau's concept of walking in the city, where the pedestrian passer-by is not merely an observer, but makes the city and becomes an active practitioner of urban modernity (de Certeau 91–110). The landscape of the crisis-ridden and violent city presents itself to Onai as one she seeks to enjoy, while simultaneously walking out of the confinements of class, gender, and political marginalization. Although, as the concluding passages of the discussion have shown, Onai's "sly urban civility", to borrow from Schulze-Engler (270), is ultimately quite limited, the unexpected figure of a marginalized woman acting as a *flâneur* reveals that Tagwira engages in what Ortega has termed—in relation to Brooks's city poetry—"urban feminist poetics" (139). By giving her protagonist a gaze traditionally associated with a European middle-class urbanity of the 19th century, Tagwira expands a tradition of city writing/walking and, like other contemporary engagements with *flânerie*, also breathes new life into a concept often pronounced inappropriate or unproductive for readings of postcolonial literature. Indeed, her interpretation and appropriation of the *flâneur* concept reveals this activity's frequently overlooked or denied subversive potential. In Tagwira's novel, the attempt to take ownership of the street, to "reprivatize public space" (Vermeulen 41) and seek out the few aesthetically pleasing experiences and consumer options available cannot be dismissed as a merely idle, 'bourgeois' pastime; instead, it becomes an act of resistance.

Acknowledgment

A different version of this article appeared on pp. 51–69 of my monograph, *Mobility in Contemporary Zimbabwean Literature in English: Crossing Borders, Transcending Boundaries* (published 6 July 2021).

Notes

1. AbdouMaliq Simone provides a different, more optimistic perspective on Douala in "The Urbanity of Movement".
2. A further aspect worth considering is Tagwira's social realism, which is very different from the aestheticism of Baudelaire's prose poetry (and also from the complex artistry and postmodernism of Vera's style), hence this might constitute a genre in which we might not expect to encounter the motif of leisurely walking and detached observation of Benjamin's figure. The complexity of Tagwira's fiction lies less in her use of language and style (which is rather simple and unembellished) but in the dense detail and accuracy of her depiction of the physical environment and social conditions of 2005 Harare. Furthermore, she weaves together numerous storylines and introduces readers to various settings and a plethora of characters from different social strata. This adds to a particularized and varied mapping of Harare's different geographical, social, and economic terrains. Her social critique is hence more indirect and also in marked contrast to that of other contemporary women writers such as Petina Gappah or NoViolet Bulawayo, who formulate their social critique through irony and satire.
3. Alexander Hartwiger provides a very helpful overview on discussions of the postcolonial *flâneur*.
4. For further discussions of Cole's protagonist in relation to the *flâneur* see Hartwiger; Aliko Varvogli; Pieter Vermeulen reads this protagonist alongside its more sinister counterpart, the *fuguer*.
5. Although the choice of Gari's name might be coincidental, it is interesting to consider that it is a shortened version of Garikayi or Garikai, a name derived from the Shona verb *garika* which means to prosper or make successful. This correlation adds a touch of sad irony to Onai's marriage to a man who embodies the failed prospects of her life. It also links him to Operation Garikai, a 'rebuilding' program following Operation Murambatsvina (Mpofu) which the novel, however, portrays as corrupt: when Onai tries to sign up for a new house under Operation Garikai, the official

molests her and tries to extort sex from her in exchange for a place on the Garikai housing list. This makes Onai's fate emblematic of the fate of the urban poor under pressure from the government and links the abusive husband to the repressive state: the aggression against the poor in Harare, the choice of Gari's name suggests, is the violence and injustice of the Moyo household writ large.

6. In recent years, Africa Unity Square has become the site of civil society protests and activism such as "Occupy Africa Unity Square".

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Sydney Clouts's poetry: Looking inwards, looking outwards

Michael Chapman

Sydney Clouts's poetry: Looking inwards, looking outwards

Intimate Lightning, by Dan Wylie, presents a detailed account and evaluation of Sydney Clouts's poetry as phenomenologically driven: a poetry that invites readers to look inwards to the "speck and the fleck" of things in the natural world. At the same time, Wylie posits that Clouts is the finest poet of his generation in South Africa of the 1960s. In this article, I acknowledge Wylie's engagement with the poetry while I question whether the somewhat relentless focus inwards is not too neglectful of those poems in which Clouts looks outwards to human interaction in the world. Such poems of abbreviated narrative, some of which I analyse in the course of my argument, suggest that looking outwards is necessary, at least, to consider Wylie's claim that Clouts's poetry is yet to receive its wider and just recognition. Given that Wylie offers little, if any, substantiation of Clouts's standing as a poet among his peers, I move to a 'summary' perspective on Clouts in relation to what, I contend, is a rich and various poetry scene in 1960s South Africa. This leads me to the conclusion that the question of whether Clouts is the finest poet of his generation is not perhaps the question best pursued in *Intimate Lightning*. Where Wylie's study succeeds is in reminding us that Clouts is a poet quite unlike any other we will encounter. **Keywords:** Sydney Clouts, Dan Wylie, sensory perception, human interaction, South African poetry in the 1960s.


The "speck and the fleck"

Intimate Lightning. Sydney Clouts: Poet—the study by Dan Wylie published in 2019, which is my starting point in this article—seeks to rescue Clouts from what Wylie regards as the poet's relative and undeserved obscurity. Wylie offers a detailed and illuminating engagement with the poetry in relation to key philosophical and artistic influences upon Clouts's poetic practice. The corollary point—that, "at his best, Clouts is the finest South African poet of his generation" (257)—is given insufficient substantiation to convince me, at least, that Clouts will command a more prominent place than he already does in a wider literary landscape. I acknowledge Wylie's attention to Clouts's poetry as phenomenologically driven: a poetry which, through sensory perception, wants to enter the "thingbeddedness" of things. I go on to suggest, however, that in his somewhat relentless focus on Clouts's poems of the "speck and the fleck"—on poems of close attention to details of nature, to colour, and light—Wylie neglects to give due consideration to those poems in which Clouts attaches the objects in his surroundings to a narrative, however abbreviated, of human interaction in the world. After looking inwards to Clouts's poems, I depart from Wylie to look outwards, as it were, as a prelude to the final section of argument in which, in summary, I attempt to convey something of the literary output and temper of the generation of the 1960s in South Africa. The 1960s is the decade in which most of Clouts's poems were written and which saw the publication of *One Life* in 1966, the only collection of poetry to appear in the poet's lifetime (the posthumously published *Collected Poems* appeared in 1984).

Born in Cape Town in 1926, Sydney Clouts attended the South African College School (SACS) and, after serving in the South African Signal Corp. for the last two years of the Second World War, he pursued a BA in 1950 at the University of Cape Town. He worked as an editor in the International Press Agency in Cape Town until 1961 when, at his wife's urging, he moved with Margery and their three sons to England, a country, as Clouts put it, "whose mediocrity displays itself" ("A country whose mediocrity ..." n. p.). Together with Margery, he established a 'cottage' literary agency prior to his return to South Africa in 1969 for two years as a research fellow at the Institute for the Study of English in Africa at Rhodes University. While in Grahamstown, he completed a master's

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thesis on the South African poets Thomas Pringle, Francis Carey Slater, and Roy Campbell. At the invitation of the British Council, he visited South Africa once more, in 1974, on a reading and lecturing tour of universities and schools. He died in England in 1982.

During his residency at the Institute, Ruth Harnett and Professor Guy Butler (both of the English Department, Rhodes University) recognised Clouts's talent and persuaded a publisher to invest in his poetry. *One Life* won both the Olive Schreiner and the Ingrid Jonker prizes for poetry while a 1984 special edition of the Grahamstown-based journal, *English in Africa*, is devoted to Clouts and includes the considerations of Harnett and Butler. With Clouts's holographic draft poems and other papers housed at the then National English Literary Museum (NELM) in Grahamstown, Wylie draws extensively on previously unpublished material, both poems and correspondence.

In his correspondence, especially with Butler, Clouts offers keen insight into what Harold Bloom referred to as the "anxiety of influence" that can be felt quite intensely by a poet outside of the Western mainstream: how within the traces of prior achievements, does the poet reclaim new possibilities of invention? As Clouts put it: "I've felt for some time rather set against the tradition because I think it's a tradition of anxiety—the European tradition of anxiety, the American-European, the Anglo-American, the European-American tradition of anxiety, which of course we have too" ("Sydney Clouts speaking about his poetry, 1 & 2" 9).

Is the solution to look to 'Africa'? Clouts continues: "[...] one must be careful here, because there's quite a lot of humbug spoken about the effect of Africa upon art, or about what the African, the Black African, might do in contradistinction to what the white man might do in poetry. [...] But [the task of the poet] is to see what words can do" (9). As Wylie puts it in his study, Clouts sought to "transcend the time-bound specifics of culture" (15). Yet time-bound specifics refused to be entirely erased. This is evident in Clouts at his best, as in "Residuum":

Open, Open.

Enter the quick grain: everything is first.

I am in the dewfall ...

...

"History

surprise us!" is one petition.

("Residuum", *Collected Poems* 79, double spacing in the original)

It is also evident in Clouts at his worst, as in his "Hotknife" poems, which display a 'colonial' South Africanness that confirms all the white baas and madam's race and class stereotypes. Speaking in Clouts's rendition of 'Kaaps' ("Nellie newer/tol' me she was married sir"), the 'Coloured' character, Hotknife, is hot to knife, he is a drunkard, a fornicator, and a wheedler of any white person from whom he hopes to extract influence or cash. Wylie, in my opinion, grants too much attention to the "Hotknife" poems (40–6).

Showing less subscription to colonial dependency, Clouts departs from a motif in South African poetry of the 1950s—the decline of the West—to embed Greece and Rome (as Wylie notes) in "imperial violence", not only in "cultural richness" (178), while his poems of 16th-century Portuguese discovery transmute the voyage around the Cape to analogical dimension:

Canary Islands, brightly;

Bojador, in darkness

darkness

esperança!

Rounding the Cape, the sodden

wooden grumble of the wheel. ("The discovery", *Collected Poems* 73)

To quote Clouts: "[This poem] suggests to me something like the voyage of the spirit, but also the discovery of the Cape [...] an imagery resonant of voyage, of discovery, of being as part of being" (qtd in Harnett 130).

My cultural and historical reference notwithstanding, Wylie, as I have suggested, devotes less attention to Clouts in history, and more to Clouts in perception. How, in the poem, to catch the *thisness* of this, or the *thingness*

of the thing? The study accompanies Clouts to coastlines, mountains, and animal kingdoms; to affinities not only with other poets but also with visual artists (Mondrian; Cézanne); and into philosophies of being in Socrates, in Heraclitian fire, Traherne's bright angels, Heidegger's 'dwelling', and particularly in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology (238–43): "a spontaneity which accomplishes what appeared to be impossible when we observed only the separate elements, a spontaneity which gathers together the plurality of monads, past and present, nature and culture, into one sole cloth" (Barbaras 48 qtd in Wylie 242). This, Wylie suggests, is "precisely Clouts's ambition" (242) while Wylie's parallel ambition is to turn the wider reference inwards to the service of the poetry; 'authorities' are integrated into the 'one life' of the poem. Clouts's creatures, animals, and birds all "preserve an instinctual integrity, impenetrable and enviable" (114) like Coleridge's "Starlings in vast flights", it being possible that Clouts, "perhaps unconsciously, derived the title of his single published collection, *One Life*, from Coleridge's poem, 'The Eolian harp'? In the latter the music of the wind, 'like birds of Paradise [...] hovering on untam'd wing', exemplifies 'the one Life within us and abroad/Which meets all motion and becomes its soul'" (119). Or, as Clouts phrased it less in the romantic idiom, more in the idiom of T. S. Eliot's (modernist) impersonality of the 'made' artefact: "The imagination disestablishes its own constructions continually" ("Notes for poetry" 37).¹

Clouts might have said the same of the aphoristic "Residuum", to which I have already referred, albeit briefly:
My tradition is dew on a shrub.

One word is too many; many, too few.

Not for perfection though that is a part of it.

The pressure of silence is about me.
A commotion.

"History
surprise us!" is one petition.

"Society
save us!" is one petition.

Speeding the lizard.

Thingbedded mutterings delay. [...]
A man in Klapmuts breathes the secret.

And a shack on the coast is disputed.

The nervous system ails the stars.

You leapt clothed into the river in spontaneous love for me. (*Collected Poems* 78–9)

Unable to explain exactly why, in certain poems, he separated each line by a double space—perhaps to see each thing, each observation, each action, separately and distinctly—Clouts did 'explain' the final line: "I was walking near a river in Stellenbosch with a girl I loved very much and she jumped into the river in her clothes [...]. And she said, 'That's how I feel'" ("Sydney Clouts speaking" 22).

If such an aside is meant to endorse Clouts's comment, above, that the imagination disestablishes its own constructions continually, then the interpreter (in this case, Wylie) is not given much help from the poet. Rather, Wylie must proceed according to his own phenomenological dictum to discern that the "central philosophical problematic" of Clouts's poetry—"the relationship between mind, word, and object" (119)—is the style of the poem, is the meaning of the poem. I paraphrase Wylie (193–200): First, a rigorous attentiveness: one does not see or watch the land; one performs a 'vigil', one enters the "quick grain", one "dwells" in the Heideggerian sense of inhabiting the earth, poetically, almost jealously, when both existential and political annihilations loom. Despite, or because of, such 'in-dwelling', the poet is conscious of the "stupid[ity]" (Wylie 197) of the petty locality and selfish goal of so much conflict ("And a shack on the coast is disputed"); conscious of the hapless appeals that

the public makes to the abstractions of History and Society, neither of which exists independently of individual choice and behaviour, neither of which is capable of surprising or saving anyone. Outside the artefact of the poem, nevertheless, Clouts wants answers:

[...] we ask either for revelation, or we ask for leadership, or 'the message'. We are so feeble we look to sociologists to solve our problems, so feeble that we want historians to tell us the meaning of culture [...]. I think that the anxieties which come to society are anxieties for which there doesn't seem to be any collective answer at all. ("BBC broadcast" 142)

In the end, as in "Residuum", life is mystery; in the end, words are the instruments of sensation, sensation is transcendence: "No lexicon, just one word accommodates us, quickly said. / No word is my dwelling place". Rather, "I am the method of the speck and the fleck".

One gets Clouts's gist, the gist that Wylie unenviably has to try to convert to the limited language of literary commentary: "The work is the thing" (M. Clouts qtd in Wylie ix). One realises also that in drawing attention to Clouts's apparent dismissal of the value of sociological or historical intervention, both inside and outside the poem, Wylie has inadvertently provided detractors with the ammunition to marginalise Clouts in a South Africa of the political imperative.² In this country, people are killed in disputes about a shack on the coast, or a shack anywhere else.

"Intimate lightning"

The focus on Clouts's poems of the "speck and the fleck", together with his observations on poetry, presents unique insights, but—as I suggested at the outset—can curtail alternative possibilities in the reading of the poetry. Whereas Wylie sees Clouts and things in interfusion, I see Clouts and things as independent entities. A comparison of our respective responses to "After the poem", reproduced below, might illustrate the distinction:

After the poem the coastline took
its place with a forward look
toughly disputing the right of a poem to possess it

It was not a coast that couldn't yet be made
the subject of a poem don't mistake me
nothing to do with 'literary history'

But the coast flashed up—flashed, say, like objections
up to the rocky summit of the Sentinel
that sloped into the sea
such force in it that every line was broken

and the sea came by
the breaking sea came by

(*Collected Poems* 75)

In his study Wylie includes my earlier response to this poem:

The assertiveness of the opening lines (accentuated in the monosyllabic rhyming words, "took/look"); the plosive 'p' sounds ("toughly disputing the right of the poem to possess it"); the 'broken' lines; and the roll of defiance in the concluding couplet—such energy of language and rhythm underscores the idea of the 'self-assertiveness' of independent things (for the coastline resists being pressed into the service of the poem). As a result, the poet is denied the comfort of complicity with phenomena: the natural surroundings resist appropriation to the needs of a human universe. Yet, it is through this failure to 'possess' the coast that Clouts's poem remains true to its own intellectual and aesthetic principles: by admitting that the artefact has no dominion over entities, he proclaims the self-sufficiency of each thing, including his poem. (Chapman 166 qtd in Wylie 100)

While he concurs with most of what I said, Wylie contends that:

those words, “complicity” and “failure” speak of guarded praise [...]. The poet is admitting the independence of words and objects only up to a point. Or in one mode; in another mode, they are indeed complicit, in the sense that the word’s origin in Latin is *plicare*, to fold. Word, mind, and sea are folded into one another, and the structure of the poem embodies this [...]. What the poem deconstructs is the very notion that word and world *are* inevitably distinct; it enacts not an either/or dichotomy so much as a both/and symbiosis, enfolding within a single movement of renewal or upgraded consciousness [...] (101)

Our differences could strike the reader as nitpicking, but whether the poet enters the thing or retains his independence of the thing can have consequences for the attention one is prepared to grant one poem or another. Basically, I wish to free Clouts somewhat from his ‘enfoldedness’ in things, thus granting him a greater freedom to interact with a world of human beings. I end up, in consequence, finding key poems where Wylie evidently does not, at least judging by the limited space he accords poems such as “Is” (the story of the biblical Job given existential purchase in the subtropics), “Idiot child” (a father’s agonising process of attachment to the child of the poem’s title), and, as I shall proceed to discuss, “Epic” and “Folktales”. These poems all resist quick transmutations into analogies of perception (as in the poems of 16th-century Portuguese voyaging) or in poems of “old and strange characters” such as “The street hawker and his barrow” (*Collected Poems* 48), a poem which, to quote Wylie, is “arguably less concerned with the hawker as an individual than with outlining the larger dynamics that have marginalised him” (154). Rather, we encounter in “Is”, “Idiot child”, “Epic”, and “Folktales” abbreviated narratives, in which objects occupy a subsidiary presence to people.

In “Epic” the two heroes, Metaphor and Metaphysics—as their names suggest—can be expected to exemplify the human tendency to devise analogical schemas to confer shape on randomness or the absurd: “Metaphor and Metaphysics / two old men [...] In the long barn of life we have turned over/and sleep on the streaked straw” (*Collected Poems* 67). Any ambition that the pair—the knower and the known—might have had to impose systems and designs upon the world is ignominiously thwarted. Yet a new form emerges, anti-heroic and colloquial, as appropriate to the rough-and-tumble of everyday life. It is a mundanity that is too often excluded from Wylie’s response to Clouts’s poetry.

As in “Epic”, “Folktales” pursues the paradox in a foreshortened narrative of how formal poetics (a system) can be the marshalled against systems that are inimical to new searches for meaning, that is, for fresh consciousness. The protagonist, Nimbilo, the nameless scholar, has subjected reality to ‘interpretation’, only to find himself entrapped in the monotony of his own terminology:

looking out of lakes
in his research
and grew
the arithmetical
the geometrical
the grammatical the economic
the political
and the theological (*Collected Poems* 110)

In attempting to sever his attachment to his secure existence, this nameless scholar seeks the ‘darkness’ which, as far as he is concerned, is synonymous with the adventure of the forest. But habit being too firmly ingrained, he discovers that he cannot for any length of time escape the ‘light’ of systemised knowledge:

the forest’s utmost shinings caught
his whispers as he moved far off within it
to the hut that he had heard of, saying
consciously, “O earth, O aarde”,
he himself, and he, yes even he
gathered or shook the leaves with a sigh
as he approached the light beneath the door. (111)

Playing upon folktale motifs of voyaging and discovery, Clouts implies that the darkness is the true mystery; that regulated living, in contrast, may lead to ‘mystification’, to the enclosure of phenomena within an explanatory

theory (suggested here by the “light beneath the door”) which, despite Nimbilo’s sigh, Wylie sees as “welcoming light”.

Continuing to look outwards, I interpret the key poem “Intimate lightning” quite differently to Wylie, a key poem in that it is this poem that provides the title of the study. With references to colonial trade in Africa, the poem, in retrospect, may be seen to invoke the by now familiar ‘postcolonial’ Achebe/Conrad contretemps about European racism in Africa:

Too succulent for quinces comes
this fresh quo vadis,
Africa

the bud
the blossom
the scent
of intimate lightning

Tusks traded for cash somewhere staling under hessian,
to be fetched for another buyer at the coast.
Tusks, skins, rhinoceros horn. (*Collected Poems* 69)³

Alert to the fact that Clouts, “like so many white settlers and their descendants could not think of himself as African in any systematic or untroubled sense” (183–4), Wylie pursues interpretation that is consistent with his primary assumption of Clouts’s poetics as an interfusion of the poet and the thing, thus ‘opening up’ newness:

What I want, Zambezi’s
abler darkness fools with:
the full penetrant
eye, and more, much more:

eye in whose obstinate tusks and rains
the forest opens;
truth of my long lianas tense with dew. (69)

This explorer, in Wylie’s reading of the poem, discovers ephemeral, but vividly detailed, truths. In contrast, my own reading—as Wylie notes (185)—has Clouts debunking the myth of the white explorer and the shabby, hubristic motives of the European civilising mission. So intent is Clouts’s explorer (a parody of Conrad’s Kurtz?) to discover a higher justification for his venture that he fails to see not only the consequence of colonial corruption, but also the newness of his immediate surrounds. Instead of sensing the “intimate lightning”—the wonder of presence, or, as Wylie phrases it, “the unkempt but insecure wealth within” (112)—the explorer in the narrative of the poem frustrates himself by searching for what is not there. By being true to itself, Africa defeats another intruder, whose cry of aggrieved expectation echoes down the river. Tucked into his scooped log (his ambition sitting awkwardly about him), Clouts’s explorer sails despairingly into his own heart of darkness:

It promised these
Once, but lost them
In me. I
Now, in a scooped log, ride
Upon More, More, the River of Night. (69)

I offer my ‘alternative’ reading of “Intimate lightning” not to dispute the appropriateness of Wylie’s focus on Clouts’s phenomenological attentiveness, but to situate the poet a little more firmly than Wylie does as a ‘live’ voice in current literary discussion. An explorer who, in Africa, finds the light of truth is perhaps less ‘relevant’ to the South than an explorer who, as I read the poem, is left baffled by an Africa that thwarts his penetrant (European) eye.

'Silent decade'

We are left with the issue of Clouts's relative obscurity. It is an issue that raises several subsidiary issues, most of which, as Wylie enumerates (xv–xvi), would have been beyond Clouts's control: only a small number of people in South Africa might be said to belong to a rich "reading culture", poetry is badly taught in schools and universities where it remains the poor cousin of fiction, little magazines struggle to survive, newspaper reviewing rarely exceeds the length of a blurb. English, although the *lingua franca*, is the first language of merely ten percent of the South African population. Whereas Afrikaans publishing has a small but focused readership, English-language output competes with the power of publishing dissemination from the larger English-speaking world.

Clouts had a small output of published poetry and, although unhappy in England while missing the landscape and tang of the Cape, he spent most of his writing life outside of South Africa. At the same time, his close association with the Department of English at Rhodes University has earned him a solipsistic reputation as a 'Grahamstown' poet, as Stephen Gray unkindly put it in a review in the Johannesburg daily, *The Star* (10 September 1985), "Notably his loyal friends in Grahamstown [...] took his silence [after the publication of *One Life*] for truth. His status as the guru of the private archetype of poetry grew out of all proportion" (qtd in Wylie xvi–xvii). Wylie, a member of the Rhodes University English Department, has sought to right such a view.

In addition to all this, there is the political dynamic of the 1960s. It is a decade that has come to be called the 'silent decade': a decade of draconian apartheid legislation, in which the state sought to crush all opposition to its segregationist policies, including the gaoling of opposition leaders (for example, Nelson Mandela) and the banning of anti-apartheid political organisations. On the cultural front it is crucial to recollect that the Publications Control Board was instituted in 1963 and that 'avant-garde' Afrikaans literary expression and commentary found it difficult to be heard in the established literary journals, including *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*. Writers resorted to 'little magazine' ventures. *Sestiger*, launched in 1963, lasted for only three years. The English-language equivalent, *Contrast*, would continue with a slight change of title to the present day while a poetry magazine, *New Coin* (first edition, 1964), was an outcome of Butler's energetic commitment to the local scene. In 1962 A. P. Grové and C. J. D. Harvey—with the assistance of Butler—compiled and edited the 300-page anthology, *Afrikaans Poems with English Translations*, while a certain displeasure in 'official' Afrikaans circles accompanied the decision to award the Hertzog Prize for Literature to the *Sestiger* novelist, Etienne Leroux for *Sewe dae by die Silbersteins*. With English perceived to be under threat by Afrikaner-state nationalism, the English Academy of Southern Africa emerged in the 1960s.

It would seem that the decade was hardly conducive to a flourishing literary scene. Yet, the years produced writers of considerable calibre such as Athol Fugard, André Brink, Etienne Leroux, Alex La Guma, and several affiliated to *Drum* magazine, including Es'kia (then, Ezekiel) Mphahlele, Bloke Modisane, and Can Themba, all of whom were staunch critics of state principles and actions. But to confine my overview to poetry, if Clouts—as Wylie concludes—is the finest poet of his generation, then he has formidable competition, if competition is the appropriate word. Rather, Clouts may be seen to join an array of formidable voices. As I said, I cannot do justice to the entire literary scene of the decade, but I can sketch a landscape for ongoing consideration.

Two significant figures, both of whom Clouts admired, foreshadow the decade: Roy Campbell—"I saw blue thunder when I read Campbell" ("Sydney Clouts speaking" 10) and N. P. van Wyk Louw—"a fullness of sound often sounding spare simply because it is so functional [...] brute wisdom, or brute finesse, which produces tension, mystery, sometimes darkness" ("Letter to Ruth Harnett"). If these two poets ensured that poetry from this country entered the high art of modern expression and technique, then D. J. Opperman and Peter Blum also figure notably at the start of the decade. Whether consciously or not, Clouts entitled one of his poems after Blum's "Wat die hart van vol is" (*Collected Poems* 118).⁴ Blum's earlier poem of that title, in the 1955 collection *Steenbok tot poolsee*, adapted Renaissance and early scientific allusion to the locality of the Cape, including the 'Kaaps' dialect of some of the 'Coloured' people. (As I have said, Clouts would attempt, unsuccessfully in my view, to imitate 'Kaaps' speech in his "Hotknife" sequence of poems.) In Clouts's "Wat die hart ..."—a strangely despairing poem for him—the splendours of Western civilisation (including its Renaissance paintings) are susceptible to what he seems to suggest is the genetically coded violence of the human species.

The decade draws to a close with Opperman's 1970 collection *Edms Bpk*, in which, in "Vele woninge", Opperman pays tribute to abilities which he sought to emulate: Van Wyk Louw's skill in ringing the changes of style and temper in collection after collection. Earlier Opperman, in 1963's *Dolosse*, had penned the tribute to another poet whom he admired, "By die dood van Roy Campbell" (On the death of Roy Campbell). Indeed, the years of the 1960s saw Opperman shift from a confessional mode to a more 'mixed' style that was open to the complexities of

living outside of a Western-European high tradition of literature, as did the Sestigers: those writers of the Sixties, some living in Paris, who adapted French existentialism, surrealism, and modernist experiments with form to new, 'anti-establishment' voices in Afrikaans literature. Breyten Breytenbach's first collection, *Die ysterkoei moet sweet* (1964), found affinities with both the surreal manner and Bertolt Brecht's Marxist-modernism. In *Kouevuur* (1969) he continued to add richness, subtlety, and flexibility to an Afrikaans literary language while prompting the Afrikaner to allow a racist self to die in the search for a true humanity.

If instability of belonging characterises the Sestigers, Douglas Livingstone's first substantial collection in 1964, *Sjambok and Other Poems from Africa*, turned from the plain-speaking voices of a previous generation of English-speaking poets, most notably in Butler and Anthony Delius. Adopting a 'modernist' elevation of a-logical sequence above a grammar of causality, *Sjambok* signalled a radical alertness to the 'wind of change' in southern Africa. Eschewing the fictive mode, the political-activist poetry of Dennis Brutus (statement-like lines infused with romantic undertones) first appeared in 1962's *Sirens, Knuckles, Boots*. As a mentee of Brutus, the younger 'Coloured' poet, Arthur Nortje, began producing experimental, daring, and ambiguous poems on the pain of exile, poems that would be collected posthumously as *Dead Roots* in 1972. In a mingling of styles—from 'Kaaps' to African American spirituals and jazz—Adam Small asserted the 'Self' against official Afrikaans while later, in 1975's *Black Bronze Beautiful*, he would translate into English a selection of Van Wyk Louw's poetry.

The decade witnessed, too, a dramatic shift in women's voices from the quieter poetry of Elizabeth Eybers to the free verse, abrupt juxtapositions, and erotic power of Ingrid Jonker (*Rook en Oker*, 1963). At the same time, Jonker's contemporary, Ruth Miller, pursued the depths of psychological alienation and the challenge of writing creatively about illness and death (*Floating Island*, 1965; *Selected Poems*, 1968). Both poets reached beyond the locality to find resonance with a poetry of intensity abroad, particularly in Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton.

The last years of the decade heard the first sounds in Oswald Mtshali and Mongane Wally Serote of the Black Consciousness voices of the 1970s. The 1960s, in contrast, were less about white/black politics and more about anti-nationalistic, 'dissident' voices seeking to heal division between whites and whites: that is, between Afrikaans and English-speaking South Africans. In this light, we may note, as Wylie does, Clouts's forays into the climate of the decade. His "Roy Kloof" poems have the protagonist, the son of an Afrikaans father and an English mother, lamenting divisions of "rock" and "shire" (*Collected Poems* 74). More substantially, we have two sardonic portraits: one of racist-patriarchal power in "For the thunder"—"the blacks bring in the harvest: he [the farmer] endures the truth of movement, but he can shoot" (*Collected Poems* 101), the other, "Professor Gulf", in which the persona of the poem ironically echoes the Verwoerdian euphemism of separate development—"Nation is separate nation forever [...] a system/guaranteeing good government" (*Collected Poems* 126–7).

Opposition among writers to a repressive political climate sometimes took obvious forms, as in Brutus's explicit poetry of protest. More often in literary circles, however, thought and language resistance took more implicit or indirect forms. It was not a 'resistance' that would, or will, satisfy the political demand but, as Livingstone would subsequently phrase it: "I find that the range, resonance and sinewy-ness of language is a major civilising force" (11). Whether in his more inward-looking poems or his more outward-looking poems, Clouts can be seen to share Livingstone's sentiment. In fact, I invoke Livingstone as a prompt to reflect on whether Clouts has been 'buried' in any greater depth than many deserving poets. Livingstone has a wider range than Clouts and continued to develop and publish up until shortly before his death in the 1990s. Yet only his first two collections, the second in 1970, were published outside of this country: an obstacle to his poetry having attained the world reach that it deserved. (An even greater obstacle to wider dissemination, of course, involves poetry that requires to be translated into the global *lingua franca* of English.)

Like Livingstone, nonetheless, Clouts is well represented where most readers will go to read poetry—to the anthologies. Clouts appears in Butler's *A Book of South African Verse* (1959), Cope and Krige's *The Penguin Book of South African Verse* (1968), Butler and Mann's *A New Book of South African Verse in English* (1979), Chapman's *A Century of South African Poetry* (1981), and Chapman's *The New Century of South African Poetry* (2002; 2018). Admittedly, Clouts is represented by more poems in my 1981 anthology than in the anthologies of 2002 and 2018. But, then, so are many other poets. Publishing costs dictate that anthologies remain at a certain page length; as the years go by, new poets appear and deserve to be anthologised.

Conclusion

Like the poetry to which I have referred above, Clouts's poetry was a long way from the noise of the governing National Party in the silent decade, where the *swart gevaar* (black danger or peril) was seen as the Communist onslaught on white Christian civilisation. By the same token, his poetry is a long way from the clichés and catch-phrases of the current political scene, whether of comrades, cadres, or collective leadership. The more variegated times of today might be more conducive to Clouts's poetic world than the times, in the 1960s, in which *One Life* appeared or the times, in 'struggle years' of the 1980s in South Africa, which saw the posthumous publication of his *Collected Poems*.

To return to Wylie's study, the question of whether Clouts is the finest poet of his generation is not perhaps the primary question to be pursued. *Intimate Lightning* achieves the primary purpose of what it sets out to do. It provokes consideration, or reconsideration, of its subject: its subject being, inseparably, Clouts and the challenges of poetry as a form, a style, an intention, and an ambition. In such consideration, Sydney Clouts emerges from the pages of Dan Wylie's study as what he is: a poet quite unlike any other we will encounter.

Notes

1. "[...] my meaning is, that the poet has not a 'personality' to express, but a particular medium [...]. The emotion of art is impersonal" (Eliot 299–301).
2. See, for example, the negative responses to Clouts of Glenn, Joubert, and Watson.
3. According to Achebe, "Conrad was a thoroughgoing racist" (13).
4. The title is derived from the Afrikaans epigram, "Wat die hart van vol is, loop die mond van oor" (The mouth overflows with the perceptions of the heart).

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Culture and Igbo notions of masculinity in Nigerian children's literature

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Culture and Igbo notions of masculinity in Nigerian children's literature

Children's literature conveys the cultural and indigenous artistic experiences of the people to whom it is attributed. Earlier studies on modern Nigerian children's literature focus mainly on the representation of moral etiquette with little attention to gender. The twin theme of culture and masculinity has not been paid close attention by scholars of children's literature in Nigeria. In applying Igbo notions of masculinity, in this article I examine the role of oral tradition and culture in the construction of masculine identity in children's literature in Nigeria using Ifeanyi Lfoegbuna's *Folake and Her Four Brothers*, Anthonia Ekpa's *Edidem Eyamba and the Edikang-Ikong Soup*, and Ikechukwu Ebonogwu's *The Champion of Echidime*. I show how the ideals of masculinity, as visible and permissible in the traditional Igbo society, are, in particular, constructed and communicated through various oral and cultural norms such as praise poetry, war songs and dance, wrestling, and drumming. I reveal that oral and cultural traditions in children's literature reflect attributes such as strength, toughness, honour, protection, respect, heterosexual desirability, and the projection of self-pride as acceptable and embraced masculine values among the Igbo in Nigeria. I also demonstrate how oral and cultural tradition is replete with masculine ideologies and messages that promote male dominance in the Igbo society. **Keywords:** oral traditions and culture, masculinity, Igbo masculinity, literature, gender, children's literature.


Introduction

Modern Nigerian children's literature reflects socio-cultural experiences and conduct that characterise children. This, no doubt, attests to the sociology of Nigerian literature. In other words, children's literature in Nigeria, and by extension Africa, conveys the cultural heritage and values of the people. Its nature is essentially cultural and didactic. Indeed, from folktales, to myths, proverbs, riddles, and even epic narrations, there is always a teaching to glean and a value to instil in the child. Modern Nigerian children's literature is, therefore, "the repository of the cultural life of the people and is a major source of education for the young everywhere" (Ojaide, "Modern African literature and cultural identity" 45). That is why most Nigerian children's literary texts are stories adapted from the gamut of Nigerian cultural life and customs.

It is, therefore, understandable that studies on children's literature in Nigeria have focused more on the didactic import and richness of oral and cultural traditions, a feature that is intrinsic to the cultural development of children in Nigeria (Emenyonu 584; Diala-Ogamba 54; Sackeyfio 6; Uko 17). In the scholarly works highlighted above, the primary concerns have not gone beyond the various forms of oral and cultural traditions and their values. However, the potential impact of children's literature on young readers is invaluable because children's literature may convey didactic elements, as well as ideals and behaviours that are considered acceptable in the society, including gender behavioural norms. Many children's stories have the potential to shape and affirm gender identities of readers and depict stereotypical images for their futures. A lot of research has provided insights into oral and cultural traditions and how they impact men's behaviours and attitudes in Africa (Oha 18; Turner 196; Ojaide, "Deploying Masculinity in African Oral Poetic Performance: The Man in Udje" 76; Kiyimba, "Men and Power: Masculinity in the Folktales and Proverbs of the Baganda" 35). For instance, in his semiotic study of Igbo proverbs, Oha argues that society tends to neglect the chauvinist tone of oral traditions due to its importance and value-carrying roles. Oha declares: "in the male-dominated Igbo culture particularly, and in some other

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African cultures as well, proverbs are appropriated by men to uphold themselves as producers and custodians of knowledge which women are thought to be incapable of" (18). Furthermore, Turner explores the aspect of male sexuality and the hierarchy of gender in contemporary oral praise poetry of Zulu men. Turner identifies attributes such as virility, sexual prowess, physical attractiveness, strength, and the ability to fight as the predominant features in the praises of Zulu males. Turner further maintains that the predominant qualities are those which serve to reinforce the acceptable male stereotype in contemporary times (196). Kiyimba, in his investigation of the configuration of male power in the oral traditions of the Baganda in Uganda, argues that folktales and proverbs of the Baganda greatly contribute to a process that constructs men as dominant. He reveals that representations of males as boys, husbands, fathers, and political leaders in Baganda folktales and proverbs "are accumulative social constructs that have absorbed many factors and are part of the various mechanisms that the system uses to sustain notions of masculine superiority" ("Men and Power" 36). In another study, Kiyimba examines the portrayal of boys and girls in Baganda oral literature. He notes that gender stereotyping is evident in the oral literature of the Baganda, "as a complex socialisation process that begins in infancy" ("Gendering social destiny" 268). According to him, boys are well received and trained to inherit the political and social space while the girl, portrayed as the weaker sex, must strengthen her role by linking herself primarily to the male sex by using her physical beauty. Ojaide also discusses Urhobo notions of masculinity as expressed through oral poetic performance known as *udje*, a unique type of Urhobo poetry-song in Nigeria in which the male dancers are dressed in a war-like manner. Ojaide reveals that *udje* dramatises toughness, honour, propriety, the capacity for revenge or retaliation, and the projection of self-pride, all of which are the values of Urhobo's notions of masculinity ("Deploying masculinity" 76).

In addition, existing scholarship in children's literature provides valuable insights into representations of masculinity that might be useful. It has been found, for example, that children's literature is generally prone to imbalance in gender representations, with males being portrayed as brave, resilient, violent, and unemotional while females are represented in a one-dimensional and stereotypical way as helpless queens and princesses and weak, emotional, and passive characters (Nodelman 2). At the same time, intersections of masculinity with culture add interesting layers of representation that warrant specific examination. It is against this background that I investigate the intersection between culture and masculinity in Nigerian children's literature. Specifically, the discussion is projected through a textual analysis of some Igbo oral and cultural elements such as wrestling, war songs and dance, praise poetry, and drumming in some randomly selected Nigerian children's texts. Unlocking the means through which the selected texts construct masculinity provides possible insights into how masculinity is perceived, lived, and practised in traditional Igbo society, and how such cultural practices appear as part of a broader mechanism that perpetuates the legacy of male dominance.

Masculinity in the African context

Masculinity has been defined as a collective and unnatural feature of gender identity. It is fluid and socially constructed. According to Ayodabo and Amaefula, "there are hierarchies and rankings of power relations between different classes of men in each society" (2). Hence, there is no one overarching masculinity but variations of masculinities that exist in different societies, across different historical epochs, and are influenced by factors such as sex, race, class, and culture. In Africa, for instance, factors such as culture, colonialism, religion, economic freedom, class structure, and poverty are constitutive of the different forms that masculinity takes. In all the forms of masculinities, hegemonic masculinity—the form of masculinity which reinforces the dominance of men over women and other lesser men—is the most celebrated in most societies. However, hegemonic masculinity is claimed to be predominantly the masculinity of working-class white men, and as a result, has been scrutinised and found wanting (Ratale 117; Mfecane, "'Ndiyindoda' [I am a man]: theorising Xhosa masculinity" 206).

In Africa, scholars have also steadily moved towards an inclusive understanding of masculinity. Important studies have contributed to the evolving field of masculinity, with attention to the understanding of what it means to be a man in various social, cultural, and historical African contexts (Ouzgane and Morrell 7; Mugambi and Allan 4). These studies draw on a variety of subject areas including history, film studies, popular culture, oral art, and cultural studies to illuminate the processes by which masculinity is produced, constructed, contested, and renegotiated in Africa. These works also analyse literary and cultural materials from the perspectives of men's struggle against economic and psychological vulnerabilities and their aggressive feelings towards menacing women as a response to their struggles. What is significant in all these essays is that they provide a space for reflection

on the contemporary theory of gender and masculinity, including the question of how Western masculinities act in relation to indigenous masculinities. To answer these questions, African scholars have also identified alternative theories and ways to analyse men in Africa, including the articles “Analysing males in Africa: Certain useful elements in considering ruling masculinities” and “Hegemonic African masculinities and men’s heterosexual lives: Some uses for homophobia” by Ratele, and “‘Ndiyindoda’ [I am a man]: theorising Xhosa masculinity” and “Towards African-centred theories of masculinity” by Mfecane.

This study follows similar dimensions by analysing the texts through the understanding of masculinity from the perspective of traditional Igbo society, a group of people from the Eastern part of Nigeria. Gender roles and masculine ideology are well entrenched among the Igbo (Achebe; Odimegwu, Pallikadavath, and Adedini 221). In his famous novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Achebe provides a glimpse of traditional Igbo masculine norms and values. He shows that men enact and achieve masculinity in traditional Igbo society through successful farming, wrestling victories, ownership of a large family system, earning titles, as well as the ability to effectively manage a household, among others. These masculine values are also sustained through gender socialisation processes of storytelling, communal activities, birth names, social institutions, and age-group and family systems. For instance, boys are told stories of war, etc. while girls are told ‘softer’ (folk)tales focused on animals, morality, etc. Within the community, women are more active in the domestic space (especially in cooking in preparation for a communal activity) and function as spectators in the public space (especially in wrestling and masquerade performances), while men play lead roles in both spaces: domestic and public. Men and boys are socialised through these systems of gender practices, seeing themselves as better, smarter, and more authoritative than females. This is why boys are favoured at birth, “groomed to be brave, confident, audacious, fearless and virile, whereas girls are raised to be soft, submissive, passive, and frail and gentle” (Odimegwu, Pallikadavath, and Adedini 221). This quiet, yet thorough, instruction on individual gender roles is rooted in the Igbo culture and entrenched in each gender as they grow up.

The scope of this study covers Nigerian children’s short fiction only and stories on Igbo norms and culture. The selected texts are Ifeanyi Ifoegbuna’s *Folake and Her Four Brothers*, Anthonia Ekpa’s *Edidem Eyamba and the Edikang-Ikong Soup*, and Ikechukwu Ebonogwu’s *The Champion of Echidime*. Since I examine notions of Igbo masculinity, all the texts considered are written by Igbo writers and contain dominant notions of Igbo masculinity. I recognise that there are other ethnic groups in Nigeria, however, I have limited this study to the narratives written by Igbo writers solely because they offer one of the most interesting and unique discourses on masculinity in children’s literature in Nigeria. All the texts were read repeatedly for initial understanding of the data. Though the texts are all written in English, some texts infused with local Igbo dialect were translated and transcribed with the help of an Igbo translator. The narratives were then subjected to textual analysis.

Analysis and discussion: Oral traditions, culture, and construction of masculinity

All the texts studied in this article have different forms of oral and cultural traditions in which men have prominence.

The Champion of Echidime

Ikechukwu Ebonogwu’s *The Champion of Echidime* tells the story of Dimgba, a wrestler whose victories in wrestling competitions have been a source of pride to his community, Echidime. Dimgba is well-built and is popular in the society because of his wrestling exploits. The story begins with the villagers anticipating the year’s competition, while also revelling in the victories and strength of the Echidime’s champion, Dimgba. In the competition, Dimgba goes on to beat every man, including Mbonu, his fiercest rival, but falls to an unexpected challenger in the end.

The text reflects the traditional art of wrestling among the Igbo in Nigeria. Although the narrative is didactic, the importance of wrestling to the construction of masculinity in traditional Igbo society is the scaffold for the story. Wrestling, as mirrored in the text, foregrounds the richness of the Igbo’s indigenous arts, locally known as *Mgba* or *Ekere Mgba*. *Mgba* is an ancient, masculine sport organised as an annual festival among different communities during seasons when farming is less intensive. Many Igbo societies employ *mgba* as a rite of passage into manhood, while others utilise it as a bloodless means of settling disputes and wars. *Mgba* is also essential to the construction of masculinity among the Igbo because matches allow both wrestlers and the winning communities to gain respect by validating their masculinity through strength, skills, and victories. Wrestling stresses the text’s alignment with the valorisation of traditional Igbo masculine ideals such as honour, physical strength, hierarchy,

power, and heterosexual desirability. The opening scene of the text, for instance, demonstrates the importance of wrestling to the honour of both the wrestler and his community: "Echidime village was well known for its wrestling matches. Every year, wrestlers came from different villages to compete in a two-day festival. It was a time of great excitement and festivities for the villagers. Winning a wrestling match here meant a great deal, not only to the winner, but also to the village the winner came from" (*Champion 2*).

Echidime's masculine values are heralded and honoured through the character of the legendary Dimgba and his relentless pursuit of personal accomplishment as champion of Echidime. At the onset of the story, the people of Echidime express their excitement about Dimgba. As a champion, he is expected to defeat many challengers in his village and age grade before he can fight Mbonu, an equally strong wrestler from a visiting village. Dimgba is able to prove himself capable of overcoming impossible odds by defeating his challengers, including Nwadbibia, a notorious herbalist, and eventually overthrowing Mbonu, his fiercest rival. This feat brings honour to him, as well as to his village. This pattern of a wrestler defending his title as champion first before representing his community in wrestling matches highlights the importance of pride, honour, and the test of masculinity that comes with being a champion.

The symbolic relevance of the name Dimgba to the art of wrestling in Igbo society is also significant in the construction of masculinity in the text. *Dimgba* in Igbo means master wrestler. It has two symbolic meanings. First, it is an Igbo name given to a baby boy at birth which culturally suggests he will turn out to be a wrestler. Second, it is a title awarded to a skilled wrestler who has just won a wrestling tournament. Desch-Obi corroborates that "through the masterful wrestling in inter-village contests, a wrestler can bring honour to his village and will be recognized as a *di-mgba* and a candidate for heroism" (67). Similarly, Onunwa claims that "one who emerges as the overall winner or champion in the wrestling competition of his Age Grade or in any inter or intra village competition is honoured with the title, Dimgba" (31). Though it is not detailed in the text that Dimgba was his birth name, it is obvious from all indications that he earned the name as a title. He has won many intra and inter-wrestling matches; he is the defending champion of Echidime with outstanding past records. Dimgba is therefore a title owner, due to his feats; he bears the appellation with dignity and pride, just like Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe 1), who at the age of 18, defeated the renowned wrestler, Amalinze. It is, however, important to note that many critics have strongly argued that Okonkwo's vision of masculinity is not one that is shared by everyone in the clan. This is because one of the major limitations of Igbo society conveyed in the novel is its flawed idea of masculinity which defines Okonkwo who, perhaps unconsciously but perpetually, exerts to align himself with the socially and complex concept of 'heroism' and 'masculinity'. To Achebe,

This is a society in *Things Fall Apart* that believes in strength and manliness and the masculine ideals. Okonkwo accepts them in a rather *literal* sense [...] [and] the culture 'betrays' him. He is 'betrayed' because he's doing exactly what the culture preaches. But you see, the culture is devious and flexible, because if it wasn't it wouldn't survive. The culture says you must be strong, you must be this and that, but when the moment comes for absolute strength the culture says, no, hold it! (Jeyifo 57)

Okonkwo's life is dominated primarily by two things: "the fear of failure and of weakness" (Achebe 12), and his quest to establish himself as one of the greatest men of his clan. What is posited against this concept of weakness is the concept of strength that constructs itself only with the negation of sensitivity. Such construction of strength and masculinity, thus, is in opposition with the values of love, kindness, and compassion that society also expects from men. Hence, this creates multiple and ambiguous masculine identities where Okonkwo is expected to be dominant and sympathetic at the same time. Consequently, Okonkwo displayed more brutal form of masculinity than other male characters in the novel. And he is the sole male character that dies as a result. Although Okonkwo's role in this novel is negative, it is partly used to illuminate the complexity of Igbo notions of masculinity as well as dominant white masculinity. For instance, the excessive brutality of the coloniser, as shown in the novel, leaves itself open to Obierika's statement that "That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog [...]" (*Things Fall Apart* 117). From that point of view, we need to look at the factors that are responsible for Okonkwo's downfall *vis-à-vis* the factors that define his masculinity according to the norms of the society. Okonkwo feeds his family on the chief of crops, yams. Besides his qualities as a wrestler and showing prowess in two inter-tribal wars, he has also taken two titles, he is a wealthy farmer, and he has three wives.

These positive aspects of Okonkwo's masculinity are what Dimgba represents. Among the Igbo where the narrative is situated, wrestling matches are organised in age grades, but beyond earning titles, a young wrestler can go on to achieve greater things, including becoming a king and an ancestral hero. In the text, the king of the hosting village reveals the prestige that wrestling bestows on males in the society: "once upon a time I was a wrestler. In my youth I was quite the fighter, and you can see where my fighting spirit has brought me. So I say to you all, never underestimate the power of a determined spirit" (*Champion* 14). Such feats did not only earn the king a higher position in the masculine ladder, but he is also revered by his people. He earns respect as a king and as a wrestler. In addition, such wrestlers in the category of the king are known to have their "burial ceremonies marked by the presence of an *Agaba* masquerade, a symbol of heroic strength and vigour, making their candidacy to become an ancestral hero" (Desch-Obi 67). The graduation from champion wrestler to being a king and eventually a spiritual figure is comparable to the elevation of the male through a variety of masculinities, attaining new powers and responsibilities as one progresses through the hierarchy.

In addition to the honour, prestige, and hierarchical power that winning wrestling matches accrues for Igbo men, winning also attracts sexual gratification, thus confirming women's desirability of such masculinity. Because wrestling brings about security and prestige, popular wrestlers are usually of the most wanted for marriage as part of the dividends that come with holding the Dimbga title (Akubue 180). When Dimgba wins his first set of matches shortly after the commencement of the festival, he decides to relax by moving around the village and baring his body. On sighting the bare-chested Dimgba, one of the ladies in the village remarks, "the dream of every girl is to have a strong man like [Dimgba] as a husband to protect her" (*Champion* 30). The masculine fantasy offered in the narrative is not just about being powerful and triumphing over oppositions, it is also about winning the affection of beautiful women. Though Dimgba and the lady do not marry, her desire for a man like Dimgba is crucial to the construction of hegemonic masculinity. Onunwa stresses the significance of these relationships in Igbo society: "as a result of the wrestler's exploits, women offer themselves easily to such celebrities for marriage" (30). Similarly, Akubue observes that, "in Igboland, physical education competitions are arranged for peers in order to determine the village champion. As part of the major sport, wrestling produces champion names such as Dimgba, Otiaba, Abaeluana, etc. In effect, winners of the competition become instant toasts of the villages and could, by this singular act, warm their way into the hearts of beautiful brides" (180). In addition, when men are awarded with the best girl as a prize for their bravery and skills, this further highlights the perceived negative image of women in Igbo society as romantic prizes and the weaker gender constantly in need of protection. Although children's literature in Nigeria is witnessing increased numbers of female heroes and protagonists, their depiction of gender is still traditional: men are heroic, strong, and brave; women are damsels in distress, love interests, and romantic prizes.

The text also underlines the significance of drums in the construction of masculinity. Generally, the importance of drums during wrestling festivals is to welcome wrestlers into arenas and create excitement. They are also used to evoke wrestlers' emotion. Wrestlers react to this welcome beat in different ways, ranging from dancing to the beat to show their strength, to shouting their names and raging at their opponents or walking boldly around the arena. In the text, drums play a similar function as Dimgba is seen "walking boldly towards the centre of the festival arena" (*Champion* 18) after the sound of the drums. The beat of the drums further invokes another level of excitement in Dimgba: "instantly, the drummers changed their beat and started to drum a message to Dimgba, encouraging him to fight and defend the honour for which Echidime was known" (18). Here, drumming is introduced to trigger fire and desire in Dimgba to conquer and subdue his opponent. The sound of the drums becomes essential in stirring up emotions in the match to inspire excitement and passion. The effect of the beat of the drums is seen as Dimgba vows "not to let [the people] down" (20). During the excitement of the inspiring drumming, he boasts: "whoever doubts the depth of a great river should step into it" (20). In addition, in the narrative the drum appears as an instrument of power that is only associated with men. Images in the text represent drumming as an exclusive duty of men while women sing and dance, a cultural practice that further constructs gender dichotomy and men's supremacy in society. The arena in the text reinforces drummer/dancer gender roles where drummers are marked as masculine, while dancers are considered feminine. The negative and stereotypic gendering of instruments in the text is seen in many cultures across Africa where the ideas of what is and is not suitable for men and women to do are extremely entrenched in the cultures from which they emerge.

Folake and Her Four Brothers

Ifeanyi Ifoegbuna's *Folake and Her Four Brothers* tells the story of Folake, a thirteen-year-old girl. The story starts with the description of Folake's family—a poor family with Mr. Babaji as the head with a meagre pension; his wife, Mrs. Babaji; and their four children: two girls, and four boys. At age eighteen, Folake's sister, Kacha, is already married to a civil servant with two children. In order to supplement the meagre income of her father, Folake, a brilliant girl in grade six, hawks oranges after school hours while her four brothers who had obtained their school certificates and could not proceed to the university because their parents could not afford the fees, "idled away their time in the house practising wrestling, judo and karate" (*Folake* 1). Ifoegbuna successfully portrays gender disparity between Folake and her brothers, and between her father and mother. Elements of gender stereotypes are typified when Folake escapes after she is forced into marriage only for her to fall into danger, needing to be saved by her brothers who have been learning martial arts.

While Ikechukwu's text focuses on a wrestling festival, *Folake and Her Four Brothers* reflects the significance of war dance and song in constructing masculine images of men in traditional Igbo society. This aspect of Igbo culture involves the glorification and expression of high morale in war. In the text, the traditional genre of war dance and songs constructs traits of masculinity in its context, content, and performance. First, in its context, the war dance in the narrative is synonymous with many African war situations. Folake is forced by her father to marry Kassidi, a rich young man, in order to improve their financial status. When Kassidi fails in his attempt to win the Folake's heart in marriage, he arranges to kidnap her. As a member of a cult, Kassidi has the backing of the group's members which also include a chief priest and deadly-looking assassins. When Folake's brothers notice her disappearance, they swing into action by preparing for battle with the cult group: "Folake's four brothers were busy practicing a war dance in the courtyard. People gathered to watch them. They were heavily built, and the crowd admired their vigour and youthfulness" (30). Here, war becomes a masculine art in which physical prowess is displayed to assert the twin qualities of courage and power. The war dance becomes a direct provocation to fight and a part of the battle itself. For the boys, the task of defending and rescuing their sister in the battle against the notorious cult is embraced with the kind of enthusiasm and pride expected of traditional Igbo warriors. A warrior is expected to be glad once an opportunity to fight in a war presents itself. War builds up men's masculinity, and a man's ability in a war is revered if he shows signs of bravery. This idea that there is an inherent value in defending one's masculinity through war is echoed by Okpewho: "once a people have determined to go to war against another people, it is considered cowardly and foolhardy for anyone among them to argue the wisdom of the decision or even attempt to justify it. The warriors are simply glad of an opportunity to show their heroic spirit and have no patience for any form of argument" (152).

Furthermore, during the performance of a war dance, the song that accompanies the dance embodies features of masculinity among the Igbo. In traditional Igbo and other African societies, war songs serve many purposes. Whether they are a mere reinforcement of military strength, an expression of direct incitement to fight, or part of a triumphal procession, war songs are manifestations of manly strength, power, bravery, and honour. Whichever contexts they appear in, such songs are usually "short and onomatopoeic, but mount up to a high pitch of intensity as the men dance, stamping their feet and knocking their shields" (Finnegan 210). In the text, the boys are pictured holding shields, repeatedly dancing and chanting:

Enyimba Enyi!
Nzogbu!
(*Folake* 31)

Translated from Igbo, the war song means, "Trample, trample, we are like elephants, marching to battle, crushing obstacles on our way". The chant is a well-known traditional war song in Igboland. The song, which originated from the Aba area, specifically during the Aba women riot of 1929, began as a protest song against the British rule in Nigeria. It was one of the songs Aba women composed to exemplify their complaints as they danced and marched to the District Officer to present their petitions. The song has since become popular in contemporary times and has been adopted in many contexts such as war, politics, sport, and traditional wrestling matches to rally "people's solidarity and collective sentiments against any adversarial forces and threats that must be urgently crushed" (Omeje 631). Omeje further explains that, "*nzogbu-nzogbu* is a song that evokes the idiom of the presumed bravery and fighting prowess of the menfolk, which is likened to the bulldozing power of elephants, which rely on their extraordinary body mass to trample and crush their adversary" (631). The song is, therefore, used in

the text to inspire optimism and faith in the boys' masculine ability to defeat the notorious cultist. The song also becomes a necessary ingredient in the performance of masculinity that the song represents. For instance, the word "enyi" means 'elephant', an animal with a large body which also symbolises power, strength, and authority. The song focuses on the size and the strength of the animal to intimidate the notorious secret cult known for threatening, kidnapping, killing, and enriching people. The song also features the repetition of "EnyimbaEnyi! Nzogbu!", a refrain to reinforce the intimidation that comes with the performance. The *nzogbu-nzogbu* philosophy presupposes the certainty of victory in the text. Just like the bulldozing power of elephants, facilitated by their mountainous body mass to crush adversaries, the boys are able to subdue and hand them over to the police.

Like in many African societies, war dance and song are also masculine performance traditions in the narrative. Particularly, the Ohafia people of Igboland have a peculiar dance known as War Dance (*Ikprikpi ogu* in Igbo) which is revered as a key masculine performance for celebrating victory in war and bountiful harvest, among others. The four brothers' exhibition of masculinity through their performance of the war dance and song corresponds to the Igbo worldview. They tie a red rope around their heads, waist, and arms. The red rope, a conventional symbol of danger, is associated with the boys' physical strength and their will to fight. It projects a resilient and dominant masculine energy. Moving around in a circle and the stamping of feet on the ground are also indications of excitement, unity, and motivation to take action. This performance also resonates with *udje*. Similarly, Finnegan points out that during *imigubo* (a song before going out to fight in Malawi), "men danced in full war dress with shields and spears and performed in the Paramount Chief's village, the traditional place of mobilization. The women too, join in the dance, and the tempo works up and up to inspire the men with the lust for battle" (204). This idea stressed by Finnegan also points to the dichotomy in war dance and song, where men's dominant abilities suppress women's limited roles. In the narrative, this form of performance is reflected where the boys are seen dancing and stamping their feet on the ground while the women's roles are limited to the clapping of hands to the percussive rhythms of the drumming and chanting the boys' praises. The women's morale-imbued chants are an indication of women's recognition of men's patriarchal world that continues to render women as passive and unimportant. As a memorialisation tradition, the war dance propagates the masculine image of the Igbo. Its performance views these ethnic groups as a land of noble warriors. The dance and song structure the social perception of society's gender system as one comprising visible male warriors (Mbah 42) and women singers, and have been a major internal factor in the equation of Nigerian ethnic societies. Hence, war dance and song in its conception and execution deploy masculinity in a variety of ways to achieve hegemonic and ideological goals to readers.

Edidem Eyamba and the Edikang-Ikong Soup

In Anthonia Ekpa's *Edidem Eyamba and the Edikang-Ikong Soup* the importance attached to a male child and the justification of polygamy is emphasised from the beginning to the end. It is a story about Edidem Eyamba, a wealthy and powerful king who reigns in Eburutu, a kingdom in Cross River. He is known as a great warrior whose fame spread around Eburutu. Not only is he brave at war, people also know him as a young, handsome ruler who fought in many battles and conquered all the towns and villages close to his kingdom. He also has a large family, comprising of four wives and fifteen girls, prompting a search for a son.

Though the social and cultural perception of a male child is the focus of the text, the importance of oral poetry in the construction of masculinity is conspicuous. The chief purpose of praise poetry among the Igbo is praising or extolling the "virtues of manly prowess, of courage and fighting skills, of exceptional hunting ability, of brave leadership and outstanding physical and behavioural presence" (Turner 196). Praise names can be earned through distinction in various manly activities where a man's valour was put to the test. These praise names could be invented by relatives, contemporaries, the persons themselves, or bards attached to the person if they are kings. Men are judged against this background.

The text illustrates the significance of praise poetry in the validation of strength, wealth, war, and yam cultivation as acceptable traits of masculinity in traditional Igbo society through the character of Edidem Eyamba, the very famous king in Eburutu. In the deployment of praise poetry in the text, especially the heroic praise poems addressed to Edidem by his wives and chiefs, masculinity assumes a heightened form not only in the poetry composition but also in its being geared towards extolling those virtues that the Igbo people hold to be admirable in men. These qualities, sometimes related to warrior virtues, are not only integral parts of the culture but are also seen by the people as meeting established rules of behaviour/conduct and action of men, especially kings. For instance, Edidem is described as a great warrior whose fame is well known all around Eburutu. As a result, elaborate

praise poems are composed to eulogise his historical character, wealth, heroic deeds, hunting and farming skills, clan, those associated with him, the places he has been, and the realities of the period in which he lives. Praises rendered to him in the narrative stress Edidem's legitimacy as a king who had fought many battles. In a series of Igbo praise-poems composed by his wives during a visit to Edidem, they highlight the king's manly attributes such as virility, bravery, strength, and invisibility, in lofty and effusive language.

Asandia, the second wife, praises the king, establishing a connection between masculinity and praise poetry which social significance is "bound up with the aristocratic nature of African societies, traditionally based on a hierarchy of rank dependent on birth, and linked by an emphasis on the institutions of kingship and chiefship" (Finnegan 39). In making use of these praises, the author uses allusion, metaphor, and exaggerated images that are entrenched in Igbo society to express the courage and ferocity of the king. The author adopts an allusive style, with references to animals, natural phenomena, and historical events that aim to heighten the masculinity of the king. Notable is the frequent comparisons of the king to animals with astounding traits. For instance, his strength is conveyed in metaphorical terms in "the great lion that reigns in Eburutu" (*Edidem Eyamba* 9). One of his chiefs also extols him as "the tortoise shell which cannot be harmed by the venom of a viper" (10). The subjects of strength, bravery, and heroism echo the king's past heroic deeds and how he has come about his present status. Throughout his past, he "builds a house by the great river" and "swim in the sea and there [he] caught a live crocodile with [his] bare hands" (10). From these praise poems, the subject of bravery, strength, and invincibility as major characteristics of the king's heroism are echoed as reflections of his masculinity. Furthermore, animal metaphors are also used to 'veil' the animals as enemies the king once defeated. In the narratives, the author addresses the king as "the great king that can humble a leopard", "the arrow that blinds the eye of the lion", and "the big sword that cuts through the side of the elephant" (8–10). On the one hand, the animals symbolise the images of the enemies that were subdued by the king in the past, while on the other, the king's ability to defeat these animal-like enemies further reinforces his masculinity.

The narrative is also replete with metaphors of natural phenomena like thunder, wind, trees, and rivers, and to other objects like arrows and swords. It is largely through these figurative and allusive forms of description that actions and qualities of the king are conveyed in the praise poems. Not all forms of "praise poetry take allusion, quite so far, but in general, panegyric seems to exploit allusion and imagery to a higher degree than other forms of poetry in Africa" (Finnegan 117). Hence, in the praise poetry of Edidem, ferocity, strength, bravery, and invulnerability are the masculine qualities exalted. In addition, the poetry highlights how wars, battles, and hunting for survival constitute the important duties of man in traditional Igbo society, especially a king. These qualities and duties, therefore, reinforce the entrenchment of the acceptable masculine stereotypes in both traditional and contemporary times, especially within the context of monarchy. This finding is also echoed by Turner who maintains that praise poetry in Africa reflects references to "virility, sexual prowess, physical attractiveness, strength and fighting" (197) as main qualities that serve to reinforce the entrenchment of the acceptable masculine stereotype in contemporary times.

Conclusion

In this article I have investigated the cultural construction of masculinity in selected Nigerian children's short stories. Using examples from various Igbo oral and cultural traditions in the texts, I have shown that beyond children's literature being a depository of norms, beliefs, and culture of the Nigerian people, there are visible and strong relationships between oral and cultural traditions and masculinity. I have argued that Igbo oral and cultural traditions present a glorified image of men, and assign them a more elevated social and cultural position. For instance, elements of oral and cultural traditions such as praise names and chants, wrestling festivals, and drums reinforce strength, toughness, honour, protection, respect, big muscles, and the projection of self-pride as acceptable and embraced masculine values in Nigerian society. On the other hand, femininity is associated with meekness, weakness, indignity, powerlessness, and constantly being in need of protection. Oral and cultural traditions continue to play a significant role in terms of social roles and relationships in society. As suggested in the stories, some aspects of culture continue to favour men in the legitimisation of their authority in society. This implies that such notions of masculinity that emerge from oral and cultural traditions provide vicarious pleasure for the male readers who consider them as acceptable norms and values.

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Die vermeldingsnetwerk van gekanoniseerde Afrikaanse skrywers in die Afrikaanse literatuurstudie (2000–2020)

Burgert Senekal & Eduan Kotzé

The mention network of canonized Afrikaans writers in Afrikaans literary studies (2000–2020)

From the point of view of systems and field theory, the value attached to a work of art, for example a literary text, is not only the result of the intrinsic characteristics of the text but also includes connections with institutions such as publishers, and factors like literary prizes, the value judgments of literary historians, of reviewers, and of literary critics. The current study examines the mentions of canonized Afrikaans writers in nine academic journals over the past two decades, taking into account more than 5 000 publications and more than 70 000 pages. It is shown which authors are mentioned most, but also which authors are mentioned most often together, and it is shown that authors are mostly mentioned together in the terms of genre. Although the current study represents a large study of the visibility of authors in the study of Afrikaans literature, suggestions for further research are also made. **Keywords:** Afrikaans literary studies, Afrikaans literary system, canonization, cultural fields, cultural networks, mentions.


Inleiding

Literatuur word oor die afgelope paar dekades as 'n sisteem (Even-Zohar; Schmidt) of veld (Bourdieu) gekonseptualiseer, waar die literêre werk nie as outonoom gesien word nie maar eerder as die produk van verskeie verhoudinge binne die literêre sisteem of veld. Oor die afgelope dekades het die beskikbaarheid van groot datastelle, hoëspoedrekenaars en die netwerkwetenskap dit moontlik gemaak om hierdie verhoudinge opnuut en kwantitatief te bestudeer, soos byvoorbeeld Fraiberger, Sinatra, Resch, Riedl en Barabási, asook Askin en Mauskapf, gedoen het. Die huidige studie sluit by hierdie en ander studies aan en neem 'n kwantitatiewe benadering in tot die Afrikaanse literêre sisteem of veld.

In die huidige studie word die vermeldings van die skrywers oor wie profiele in die nuutste drie dele van *Perspektief en profiel* (uitgegee in 2015 en 2016, met H. P. van Coller as redakteur) opgeneem is, in nege akademiese joernale oor 'n tydperk van twee dekades ondersoek. Met 'n datastel wat bestaan uit 5 013 publikasies met 'n totaal van 70 761 bladsye, word aangetoon watter gekanoniseerde Afrikaanse skrywers die sigbaarste in die onlangse Afrikaanse literatuurstudie is, en deur middel van 'n netwerkontleding word die belangrikste skrywers in die Afrikaanse literatuurstudie en die skrywers waarmee hulle geassosieer word, uitgelig. Die vrae wat gevra word, is: Watter gekanoniseerde skrywers word in die meeste publikasies oor die Afrikaanse literatuur genoem en met watter ander skrywers word hulle verbind? Die primêre oogmerk is om te bepaal watter skrywers die gewildste is binne die Afrikaanse literatuurstudie, omdat vermeldings in joernaalpublikasies daarop dui dat skrywers oor genoegsame prestige beskik om bestudeer en na verwys te word. Die sekondêre oogmerk is om te bepaal watter skrywers die meeste *saam* genoem word en daaruit af te lei op grond waarvan skrywers met mekaar geassosieer word, byvoorbeeld ten opsigte van tydperke, style, temas, politieke sienings of genres.


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Die artikel is soos volg gestruktureer: Eerstens word 'n agtergrond oor die belangrikheid van eksterne faktore en veral sosiale invloed in die bepaling van waarde in kulturele sisteme bespreek. Hierna word die metodes bespreek wat in die huidige studie gevolg is, waarop 'n bespreking van die resultate volg. Die artikel sluit af met slotopmerkings en voorstelle vir verdere navorsing.

Agtergrond

Dit is 'n groot uitdaging om die toekomstige sukses van 'n kreatiewe werk te bepaal voordat dit die kulturele mark betree (Askin en Mauskopf 912). Salganik en Watts ("Web-based Experiments for the Study of Collective Social Dynamics in Cultural Markets" 441–2) noem dat agt uitgewerye *Harry Potter* afgekeur het, die televisiekanaal FOX het geglo die sitcom *Friends* sou onsuksesvol wees, die kanale NBC, CBS en ABC het almal *American Idol* afgekeur omdat hulle geglo het dat dié program ongewild sou wees, en The Beatles het aanvanklik gesukkel om 'n platekontrak te kry. Uitgewers en musiek- en televisievervaardigers is veronderstel om kenners van kultuurmarkte te wees, maar sulke mistastings dui daarop dat die interne eienskappe van kulturele produkte nie genoeg is om sukses mee te voorspel nie.

Dit is welbekend dat artistieke meriete tot 'n groot mate deur eksterne faktore soos die waardeoordele van kritici en akademici en die status van uitgewerye en ander instellings bepaal word. Hierdie siening is bekend vanuit die sisteem- of veldteorie, wat reeds vir vier dekades in die Afrikaanse literatuurstudie toegepas word (J. Senekal; Barnard; Adendorff; Van Heerden; Venter; Kleyn). Die invloed van die status van instellings op die waarde van 'n kunswerk is duidelik en op groot skaal geïllustreer in Fraiberger *et al.* (sien ook Kackovic, Bun, Weinberg, Ebbers en Wijnberg, en die voorstellings deur Giuffre, deur De Nooy ("The dynamics of artistic prestige") asook deur Verboord, Janssen en Van Rees).

Fraiberger *et al.* skryf byvoorbeeld:

Quality in art is elusive; art appeals to individual senses, pleasures, feelings, and emotions. Recognition depends on variables external to the work itself, like its attribution, the artist's body of work, the display venue, and the work's relationship to art history as a whole. Recognition and value are shaped by a network of experts, curators, collectors, and art historians whose judgments act as gatekeepers for museums, galleries, and auction houses. (825)

Boonop toon Wang *et al.*, Yucesoy, Varol, Eliassi-Rad en Barabási aan dat boekverkope tot 'n groot mate beïnvloed word deur die uitgewery, deels as gevolg van die prestige wat met die uitgewer se naam saamhang.

Verder word algemeen aanvaar dat die waarde wat aan 'n outeur se werk geheg word tot 'n groot mate afhang van die waarde wat deur kenners daaraan toegeskryf word. Verboord skryf: "An author's prestige is dependent on how s/he is perceived by significant others. Not only does the attribution of value to the author in question have to meet wide general acceptance, both attribution and acceptance increasingly gain weight when coming from persons possessing considerable authority on literary matters" (262). Boonop bevind Kackovic *et al.* dat dit nie alleen die algemene publiek is wat deur kenners se sienings beïnvloed word nie: kenners self word ook deur resensies, pryse en instellingaffiliasies beïnvloed.

Bogenoemde stelling van Verboord (262) word ook ondersteun deur navorsing deur Salganik, Dodds en Watts, en deur Salganik en Watts ("Leading the Herd Astray: an Experimental Study of Self-fulfilling Prophecies in an Artificial Cultural Market"; "Web-based experiments"), wat aantoon dat sosiale invloed 'n groot effek op mense se voorkeure uitoefen (hier ten opsigte van musiek). In pasgenoemde studies het die navorsers ondersoek ingestel na die musiekvoorkeure van persone met en sonder sosiale invloed en bevind: "social institutions that make us aware of the behavior of others—the *New York Times* bestseller list, the *Billboard* album charts, and lists of top-grossing movies—do provide a useful service to individuals, but only at the cost of increasing the overall inequality and unpredictability of the markets themselves" (Salganik en Watts, "Web-based experiments" 452).

Hierdie ongelykheid ten opsigte van die aandag wat kunstenaars ontvang is reeds met betrekking tot die literatuur. Martindale (219) skryf dat 'n klein aantal outeurs 'n groot hoeveelheid aandag in die literatuurstudie ontvang, terwyl ander baie min aandag ontvang, soos Janssen (194) ook bevind. In 'n studie betreffende boekpublikasies oor Engelse, Franse en Amerikaanse digters bring Martindale sy bevindings in verband met studies wat Pareto, Lotka en Zipf onderskeidelik oor dieselfde onderwerp gedoen het en waarin dieselfde sogenaamde kragwet in verskillende velde—onderskeidelik rykdom, wetenskaplike produktiwiteit en woordfrekwensies—geïdentifiseer is. Breedweg beteken hierdie kragwet dat 'n klein aantal datapunte met groot waardes aangetref word, teenoor 'n groot aantal datapunte met klein waardes—'n ongelyke verspreiding. Martindale (231) bring die

“skewe” (ongelyke) verspreiding van aandag vir digters ook in verband met Merton se Matteus-effek, wat daarop neerkom dat dié wat bekend is of oor baie prestige beskik, buite verhouding *meer* bekendheid en prestige verwerf as dié wat onbekend is. In die Afrikaanse poësie is hierdie verskynsel deur Senekal (“Die hedendaagse Afrikaanse poësisisteam: Op soek na die mees verteenwoordigende wiskundige model van die rolspelerverhoudings daarbinne”) bestudeer en in verband gebring met die netwerkmodel van Barabási en Albert (1999), wat die skakelverspreidingspatroon in komplekse netwerke gemodelleer het en ook ’n kragwetverspreiding geïdentifiseer het.

In die Afrikaanse literatuurstudie word die aantal vermeldings van ’n skrywer gereeld gebruik om sy sigbaarheid en prestige te bepaal (Van Coller; Johl; Viljoen; Odendaal; Koch; Du Plooy). Vermeldings word getel, oor ’n verskeidenheid publikasieplatforms, en daaruit word afgelei tot watter mate ’n skrywer in die kanon funksioneer.

Yucesoy en Barabási wys uit dat daar ’n verband tussen bekendheid en kwaliteit is. Hulle bestudeer die bekendheid van tennisspelers en bevind dat die beste tennisspelers—gedefinieer as dié wat die meeste wedstryde wen—ook die meeste bekendheid verwerf, en stel voor dat dieselfde verskynsel ook op ander terreine mag voorkom. Alhoewel hulle nie die kunste spesifiek noem nie, is dit nie vergesog nie om ook voor te stel dat gewildheid soms met betrekking tot die kunste met kwaliteit sal saamhang (alhoewel ’n mens versigtig moet wees met die lê van so ’n verband). Dit is byvoorbeeld onwaarskynlik dat ’n groot aantal akademiëci sal besluit om ’n skrywer te bestudeer as daardie skrywer se werke nie meriete het nie. Dit sal egter ’n fout wees om gewildheid in die kunste oor die algemeen met kwaliteit gelyk te stel, aangesien populêre kunstenaars dan uitgelig sal word as skeppers van die “beste” produkte, wat ons insiens nie die geval is nie. Ciampaglia, Nematzadeh, Menczer en Flammini (5) wys ook daarop dat gewildheid op aanlynplatforms in die meeste gevalle nie saamhang met kwaliteit in die kunste nie, omdat algoritmes wat aanbevelings op aanlynplatforms maak ’n wanindruk van populêre kultuurprodukte kan skep.

Is die waarde wat aan ’n kunswerk toegeskryf word uitsluitlik die gevolg van sosiale invloed, of speel intrinsieke eienskappe ook ’n rol? Waardeoordele in die kunste is bekend daarvoor dat dit uiters subjektief is, maar Askin en Mauskapf (910–44) dui aan dat intrinsieke faktore ’n aantoonbare rol speel in die gewildheid van liedjies. Hulle interessantste bevinding is dat gewilde liedjies soortgelyk is aan ander gewilde liedjies, maar nie té soortgelyk nie – indien liedjies té soortgelyk aan ander is, word hulle minder gewild. Daar is met ander woorde ’n saak daarvoor uit te maak dat die gewildheid van ’n kultuurprodukt nie uitsluitlik op sosiale invloed berus nie. Salganik, Dodds en Watts, asook en Salganik en Watts (“Leading the herd astray”; “Web-based experiments”) noem op hulle beurt liedjies goed wanneer hierdie liedjies gewild was in die afdeling van hulle eksperiment waar sosiale invloed as faktor verwyder is, en gebruik die term *goed* (“good”) ook uitruilbaar met *aantreklik* (“appealing”). Salganik en Watts (“Web-based experiments” 451) skryf: “We note that what we are calling ‘appeal’ is not necessarily the same as quality. Nevertheless, because the behavior of users in the independent condition is, by definition, unaffected by the behavior of others, it provides a natural measure of preexisting population preferences”.

Salganik en Watts (“Leading the herd astray”; “Web-based experiments”) het bevind dat “goeie” liedjies selde ongewild was, ongeag hoe die navorsers sosiale invloed gemanipuleer het. Soos ook Askin en Mauskapf bevind hulle met ander woorde dat die intrinsieke eienskappe van ’n liedjie ook ’n rol speel in sy gewildheid. Salganik en Watts (“Leading the herd astray”; “Web-based experiments”) se definisie van *aantreklikheid* word duideliker in Ciampaglia *et al.* verwoord: “Quality is operationally defined as the probability that an item is selected by a user when not exposed to the popularity of the item” (2).

In aansluiting by die argument van Salganik en Watts (“Leading the herd astray”; “Web-based experiments”) en van Ciampaglia *et al.* kan ’n literêre werk aantreklik genoem word wanneer dit aantreklik is vir lesers. Salganik en Watts (“Leading the herd astray”; “Web-based experiments”) se konsepsualisering van die idee van *aantreklikheid* kan ook voorsiening maak vir verskillende smake, want soos in Senekal (“Straatnaamgewing en -verandering, padnetwerke en die Afrikaanse literêre kanon: Langenhovenpark in Bloemfontein as literatuurgeskiedenis”) aangetoon, verskil die waarde wat letterkundiges en literatuurhistorici aan skrywers heg van die sienings van persone buite die akademie. In die ontleding hieronder gaan dit oor watter skrywers deur letterkundiges as aantreklik beskou word, met inagneming daarvan dat ander datastelle (byvoorbeeld boekbesprekings by leeskringe, lysste van voorgeskrewe boeke en die sienings van die algemene publiek) moontlik ander skrywers as aantreklik sal uitlig.

Bostaande kan soos volg saamgevat word: die waarde van 'n kultuurproduk, byvoorbeeld 'n liedjie, skildery of 'n boek, word tot 'n groot mate bepaal deur sy verbintenis met 'n instelling of uitgewery (Fraiberger *et al.*; Kackovic *et al.*; Wang *et al.*; Verboord, Janssen en Van Rees; Giuffre; De Nooy, “Dynamics of artistic prestige”), asook deur hoe aantreklik ander mense—kenners sowel as eweknieë—die produk gevind het (Salganik en Watts “Leading the herd astray”, “Web-based experiments”; Salganik, Dodds en Watts; Verboord). Terselfdertyd beteken die eksterne toekenning van waarde deur sosiale invloed nie dat die kultuurproduk nie ook oor eienskappe beskik wat dit in die afwesigheid van eksterne faktore aantreklik maak nie (Salganik *et al.*; Salganik en Watts, “Leading the herd astray”, “Web-based experiments”; Askin en Mauskapf).

Hierdie studie fokus op 'n baie spesifieke deel van sosiale invloed in die Afrikaanse literêre sisteem, naamlik die Afrikaanse literatuurstudie. Die volgende afdeling bespreek die metodes wat in die studie gevolg is.

Metodes

Verboord bepaal die status van skrywers op grond van vier faktore: inskrywings in literêre ensiklopedieë, die toekenning van literêre pryse, die aandag wat in die literatuurwetenskap aan hulle gegee word en die status van die uitgewery. In die huidige studie word op vermeldings in akademiese joernale gefokus en ons ondersoek met ander woorde slegs 'n deel van die status van skrywers. Alle publikasies wat vanaf 2000 tot 2020 in die joernale *Stilet*, *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, *Literator*, *Tydskrif vir Literatuurwetenskap*, *Current Writing*, *LitNet Akademies Geesteswetenskappe*, *Werkwinkel* en *SA Theatre Journal* verskyn het, is in berekening gebring. Al hierdie joernale is egter nie vir die hele tydperk in 'n digitale formaat beskikbaar nie: *Stilet* is slegs vanaf 2002 beskikbaar (en net tot 2019), *LitNet Akademies Geesteswetenskappe* sedert 2008, *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe* sedert 2001, en *Werkwinkel* sedert 2014. Omdat die meeste tydskrifte egter vir die hele periode (2000–2020) beskikbaar is, is besluit om nie die tydperk wat hier ondersoek word, te verklein nie.

Publikasies in hierdie nege joernale is ondersoek vir vermeldings van die 73 skrywers waaroor profiele in die nuutste uitgawe van *Perspektief en profiel* opgeneem is, wat beteken dat dit hier gaan om die vermeldings van *gekanoniseerde* skrywers. Toekomstige studies kan meer skrywers betrek, maar enige studie benodig afbakening en gegewe die gesaghebbendheid van *Perspektief en profiel* is besluit om die skrywers van wie daar profiele in hierdie literatuurgeskiedenis-reeks bestaan as die kern van die Afrikaanse literêre kanon in ons studie te betrek.

Anders as Martindale het ons nie slegs publikasies ingesluit wat oor 'n spesifieke skrywer handel nie (wat sou beteken dat die skrywer in die titel van die publikasie vermeld sou moes word), maar *alle* vermeldings van hierdie skrywers is in ag geneem. In totaal is 5 013 publikasies met 'n totaal van 70 761 bladsye en 23 345 290 woorde deurgegaan vir vermeldings van hierdie skrywers. Publikasies wat nie een van hierdie skrywers noem nie, is uit die datastel verwyder. Omdat hierdie joernale ook studies en resensies publiseer wat nie met die Afrikaanse literêre sisteem saamhang nie, byvoorbeeld studies oor politiek of oor Engelse skrywers, is die datastel ook gefynkam met die oog daarop om sulke irrelevante publikasies te verwyder. In totaal bestaan die uiteindelijke datastel uit 1 354 publikasies.

Taal het 'n groot konsepsuele uitdaging ten opsigte van die in- en uitsluiting van publikasies gebied. Nie alles wat oor die Afrikaanse literatuur verskyn, verskyn in Afrikaans nie, byvoorbeeld die artikels deur Barendse of Taljaard-Gilson. Dit sou met ander woorde nie sinvol wees om Engelse of Nederlandse publikasies uit die ontleding te verwyder wanneer sommige van daardie publikasies oor die Afrikaanse literatuur handel nie. Moeiliker nog is 'n publikasie soos dié van Nash wat in Engels oor 'n (oorwegend) Afrikaanse skrywer—Breyten Breytenbach—handel, of publikasies oor die vertalings van Afrikaanse literêre werke. Uiteindelik is besluit dat die insluitingskriterium die vermelding van een van die Afrikaanse skrywers met profiele in *Perspektief en Profiel* is. Dit beteken dat sommige publikasies ingesluit is wat oor die Engelse weergawes van 'n Afrikaanse skrywer se werk handel, maar met meer as 'n driekwart van die publikasies in ons studie wat in Afrikaans verskyn het, sal sulke publikasies in die minderheid wees.

Om die vermelding van skrywers in hierdie publikasies na te gaan, is 'n toepassing in Python 3.7 geskep. Die PDF-lêers is omgeskakel na teksdata-lêers deur gebruik te maak van die oopbron-biblioteek PyPDF4. Daarna is die Gensim oopbron-biblioteek (Řehůřek en Sojka) gebruik om die teksdata skoon te maak, aangesien dit heelwat onnodige etikette (byvoorbeeld “/n”), spasies en leestekens bevat het. Ons het ook alle nieuwoord-karakters met 'n spesiale (regex) uitdrukking verwyder. Laastens is al die verwerkte teksdata omgeskakel na *unicode* deur Gensim se `to_unicode()` funksie te gebruik, omdat *unicode* die internasionale standaard vir die kodering van binêre kodes

na simbole is. Ons het gebruik gemaak van “utf-8”, wat ’n karakterkodering met veranderlike breedte is en gebruik word in digitale dokumente en kommunikasie.

Die skrywer is uit die skoon teksdata geïdentifiseer deur gebruik te maak van ’n string-soekfunksie. Slegs die eerste vermelding van ’n skrywer is aangeteken, omdat die vraag is watter skrywers in die meeste publikasies genoem word; slegs die eerste vermelding was dus nodig. Die afvoer is daarna geskryf na ’n Pandas-dataroom en gestoor in ’n Microsoft Excellêer vir verdere data-ontleding.

Nadat die vermeldings van skrywers in publikasies geïdentifiseer is, is die data as ’n netwerk ontleed. Die netwerkteorie of -wetenskap is aan die een kant ’n benaderingswyse tot sisteme, soos deur Von Bertalanffy (21, 90) aangevoer, en aan die ander kant het die netwerkwetenskap ook tot ’n teorie in eie reg ontwikkel, soos Barabási (7) verduidelik. Kortom: Die netwerkteorie maak die verhoudinge binne ’n sisteem meer tasbaar deur wiskundige berekenings en netwerkvisualisasies te benut. De Nooy (“Fields and networks: correspondence analysis and social network analysis in the framework of field theory”) en Teige meen ook albei dat die netwerkteorie met Bourdieu se veldteorie versoenbaar is.

Die netwerk is in hierdie studie op twee maniere saamgestel. Eerstens is ’n skakel van die titel van die publikasie na die vermelde skrywer aangedui, wat beteken dat dit ’n tweekledige netwerk is wat uit twee soorte nodusse (publikasies en skrywers) bestaan, soos bespreek in Senekal (“Die kwantifisering en toepassing van modulariteit in die Afrikaanse filmbedryf [1994–2014] as ’n komplekse netwerk”). PageRank (sien verderaan) is op hierdie netwerk toegepas. Tweedens is die netwerk van ’n tweekledige na ’n enkelledige netwerk omgeskakel, waar die skakel tussen Skrywer 1 en Publikasie 1 en tussen Skrywer 2 en Publikasie 1 omgeskakel is na ’n skakel tussen skrywers wat in dieselfde publikasie vermeld word. Hierdie omskakeling maak dit moontlik om te bepaal watter skrywers die meeste saam in ’n publikasie vermeld word; die betekenis van die skakel verander tydens die omskakeling van “[skrywer] is genoem in [publikasie]” na “[skrywer1] is saam met [skrywer2] genoem.”

Daar bestaan verskeie maatstawwe in die netwerkteorie waarmee die belangrikheid van ’n nodus bepaal kan word, insluitend graadsentraliteit, tussenliggingsentraliteit en nabyheidsentraliteit, soos bespreek in Senekal (“Straatnaamgewing en -verandering” 67–8). In hierdie studie word PageRank (Brin en Page) gebruik, omdat Fraiberger *et al.* (825–29) aangetoon het dat PageRank geskik is om prestige in kulturele netwerke te bepaal. PageRank is deur die stigters van Google ontwikkel en neem alle skakels in die netwerk in ag, anders as graadsentraliteit, wat slegs direkte skakels in berekening bring. Dit is belangrik om die hele netwerk in ag te neem, want, soos Giuffrè skryf: “Changes in relationships by each actor in the interlocking web of affiliations affects the shape of the whole web and, therefore, the prestige of all other actors in the web” (821). Nietemin het ’n eenvoudige maatstaf soos graadsentraliteit ook waarde, omdat dit in hierdie geval die skrywers sal uitlig wat in die meeste publikasies genoem word.

Daar is ook ondersoek ingestel na die vorming van groeperings of gemeenskappe. ’n *Groepering of gemeenskap* word in die netwerkteorie omskryf as wanneer daar meer intragemeenskaps- as intergemeenskapskakels voorkom en word met behulp van modulariteit gemeet, soos die term bespreek word deur Senekal (“Kwantifisering en toepassing van modulariteit” 665–88). Wanneer die sosiale bande van studente byvoorbeeld ondersoek word, kan daar verwag word dat meer kontak onderling tussen studente in tale en letterkunde en meer onderling tussen rekenaarwetenskapstudente sal voorkom (intragemeenskaplike skakels), eerder as dat sosiale bande gelyk versprei sal word tussen studente van verskeie fakulteite (intergemeenskaplike skakels). Modulariteit skep ’n handige manier om ’n datastel op ’n mesovlak te verken en groepe te identifiseer. Daar bestaan ’n verskeidenheid algoritmes waarmee modulariteit gemeet kan word, maar in hierdie studie word dié van Blondel, Guillaume, Lambiotte en Lefebvre gebruik. Hierdie algoritme ken ook ’n arbitrêre nommer vir verwysingsdoeleindes aan gemeenskappe toe.

Die volgende afdeling bevat die resultate van ons studie.

Resultate

’n Kwantitatiewe oorsig

Die twintig skrywers waarna die meeste verwys is, sowel as in hoeveel publikasies hulle vermeld is, word in Tabel 1 weergegee.

Tabel 1: Die 20 skrywers waarna die meeste verwys word

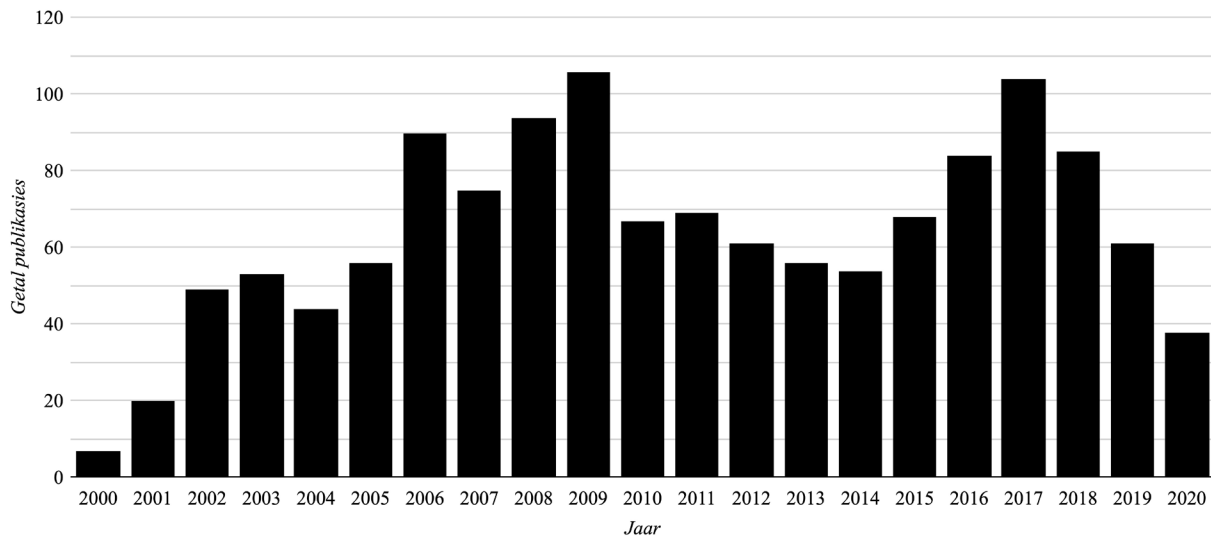
SKRYWER	VERMELDINGS
Antjie Krog	299
Breyten Breytenbach	248
Marlene van Niekerk	204
André P. Brink	203
Karel Schoeman	174
Etienne van Heerden	161
Joan Hambidge	150
Etienne Leroux	131
Hennie Aucamp	126
Ingrid Winterbach	117
Adam Small	116
Ingrid Jonker	94
Elisabeth Eybers	91
Jan Rabie	87
Totius	84
Johann de Lange	77
Elsa Joubert	75
Eben Venter	74
Pieter Fourie	74
Uys Krige	71

Antjie Krog word met ander woorde in die meeste publikasies vermeld, gevolg deur Breyten Breytenbach. Ander studies (B. Senekal, *Canons and connections*; B. Senekal “n Netwerkontleding van die Afrikaanse poësie-netwerk”) het reeds aangetoon dat Krog een van die mees bestudeerde digters in die Afrikaanse poësie-sisteem is, maar Tabel 1 dui aan dat sy ook oor die algemeen die skrywer is wat in die meeste joernalpublikasies vermeld word. Verder is die skrywers wat die meeste saam vermeld word: Krog en Breytenbach (sien verderaan).

Hierdie vooropstelling van Krog, Breytenbach, Van Niekerk, Brink en Schoeman dui daarop dat hulle die gewildste skrywers in die Afrikaanse literatuurstudie is. Alhoewel daar voorheen gestel is dat ’n mens versigtig moet wees met die verband tussen gewildheid en kwaliteit, is hierdie met ander woorde tans die skrywers wat letterkundiges ag as die mees noemenswaardige skrywers in die Afrikaanse letterkunde. Die gereelde vermelding van hierdie skrywers dui daarop dat hulle oor baie prestige beskik en dat hulle bekende name in die Afrikaanse literatuurstudie verteenwoordig.

Dit is ook interessant om die vermeldings van skrywers oor tyd waar te neem. Figuur 1 verskaf ’n oorsig oor die getal publikasies wat hierdie skrywers oor die hele tydperk (2000–2020) noem. Vermeldings van hierdie skrywers bereik ’n hoogtepunt in 2009 en ’n laagtepunt in 2014. Die klein aantal studies in 2000, 2001 en 2020 is die gevolg daarvan dat nie al hierdie joernale vir hierdie jare beskikbaar was nie.

Verwysings na skrywers in die Afrikaanse literatuurstudie (2000-2020)

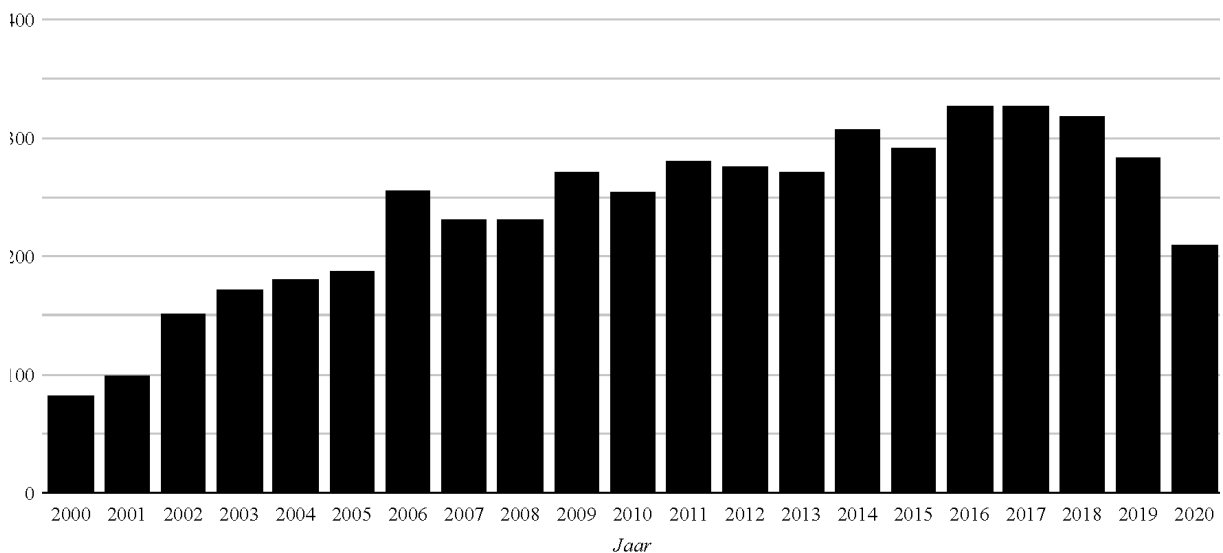


Figuur 1: Die getal publikasies wat na hierdie skrywers verwys, volgens jaar

Met 'n eerste oogopslag kan 'n mens verlei word om die onderliggende data te bevraagteken: Is daar moontlik publikasies wat ontbreek rondom 2013/2014 wat hierdie afname kan verklaar? Figuur 2 wys die totale publikasies wat in ons studie in ag geneem is, ongeag of hulle hierdie skrywers noem of nie.

Figuur 2: Die getal publikasies wat in berekening gebring is, volgens jaar

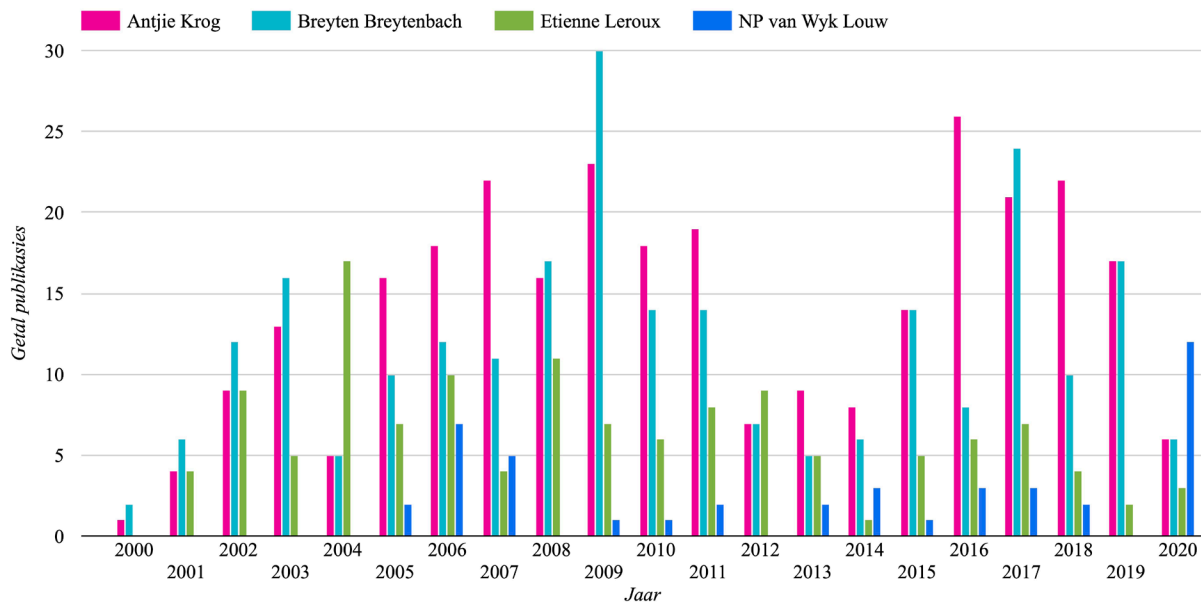
Totale publikasies in die huidige studie (2000-2020)



In Figuur 2 kan gesien word dat daar nie 'n afname in publikasies rondom 2013/2014 is wat die afname in Figuur 1 sou kon verklaar nie, maar wel 'n afname in 2020 met sommige joernale (*SA Theatre Journal* en *Stilet*) wat nie beskikbaar was nie. Die afname in 2013/2014 wat in Figuur 1 waargeneem kan word, dui met ander woorde op 'n tydelike afname in vermeldings van hierdie skrywers. Hierdie tydelike afname mag die gevolg wees daarvan dat meer studies oor niegekanoniseerde skrywers in hierdie tydperk verskyn het, maar om dit te bepaal sal meer skrywers in berekening gebring moet word.

Johl (553) herinner dat die tydperk en platform wat in berekening gebring word 'n groot rol sal speel in hoeveel vermeldings getel word. Sy verwys na spesiale uitgawes oor Krog, Breytenbach en Louw wat in onderskeidelik *Stilet* (2011), *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* (2009) en *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe* (2006 en 2020) verskyn het. Aangesien ons studie wel 'n volledige datastel gebruik, kan ondersoek word hoe die vermeldings van hierdie skrywers oor tyd verskil. Figuur 3 dui die vermeldings van Krog, Breytenbach en Louw aan. In Krog se geval is die spesiale uitgawe in 2011 nie duidelik sigbaar nie en verwysings na haar kom deurgaans voor. In Breytenbach se geval is die spesiale uitgawe in 2009 duidelik sigbaar, terwyl ook die spesiale uitgawes oor Louw in 2006 en 2020 duidelik in sy vermeldings gesien kan word.

Ter aansluiting by Van Collier se studie, "Is Leroux 'n Vergete Skrywer?" is vermeldings van Etienne Leroux bygevoeg in Figuur 3. Hier kan die spesiale uitgawe oor Leroux in *Stilet* in 2004 duidelik gesien word. Dit wil ook voorkom of Leroux daarna nie 'n vergete skrywer geword het nie, ten minste nie ten opsigte van sy vermeldings in hierdie joernaalpublikasies nie. Wat uit die vermeldings van hierdie vier skrywers oor tyd gesien kan word, is dat spesiale uitgawes van joernale in Breytenbach, Louw en Leroux se geval daartoe lei dat die kollig opnuut op hierdie skrywers se bydraes tot die Afrikaanse letterkunde val. In Krog se geval is die kollig egter deurgaans op haar werk en belangstelling in haar bydraes tot die Afrikaanse letterkunde kom deurgaans voor.



Figuur 3: Verwysings na Antjie Krog, Breyten Breytenbach, N. P. van Wyk Louw en Etienne Leroux

Die platforms waar studies verskyn het waarin die meeste na hierdie skrywers verwys is, sowel as die getal verwysings na elke skrywer, word in Tabel 2 weergegee. Die lae aantal vermeldings in *Werkwinkel* is toe te skryf daaraan dat hierdie joernaal slegs sedert 2014 beskikbaar was, terwyl *SA Theatre Journal* nie tot dieselfde mate as die ander joernale op die Afrikaanse literêre sisteem fokus nie en *LitNet Akademies Geesteswetenskappe* slegs sedert 2008 bestaan. Joernale soos *Stilet* en *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* se rol in die Afrikaanse literatuurstudie is duidelik te sien daarin dat elk meer as 1 000 vermeldings van hierdie skrywers insluit.

Tabel 2: Die platforms wat na die meeste skrywers verwys

PLATFORM	TELLING
Stilet	1 156
Tydskrif vir Letterkunde	1 026
Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe	850
Literator	633
Current Writing	180
Journal of Literary Studies	163
Litnet Akademies Geesteswetenskappe	91
SA Theatre Journal	68
Werkwinkel	25

In die volgende onderafdeling word die vermeldingsnetwerk bespreek.

Die vermeldingsnetwerk

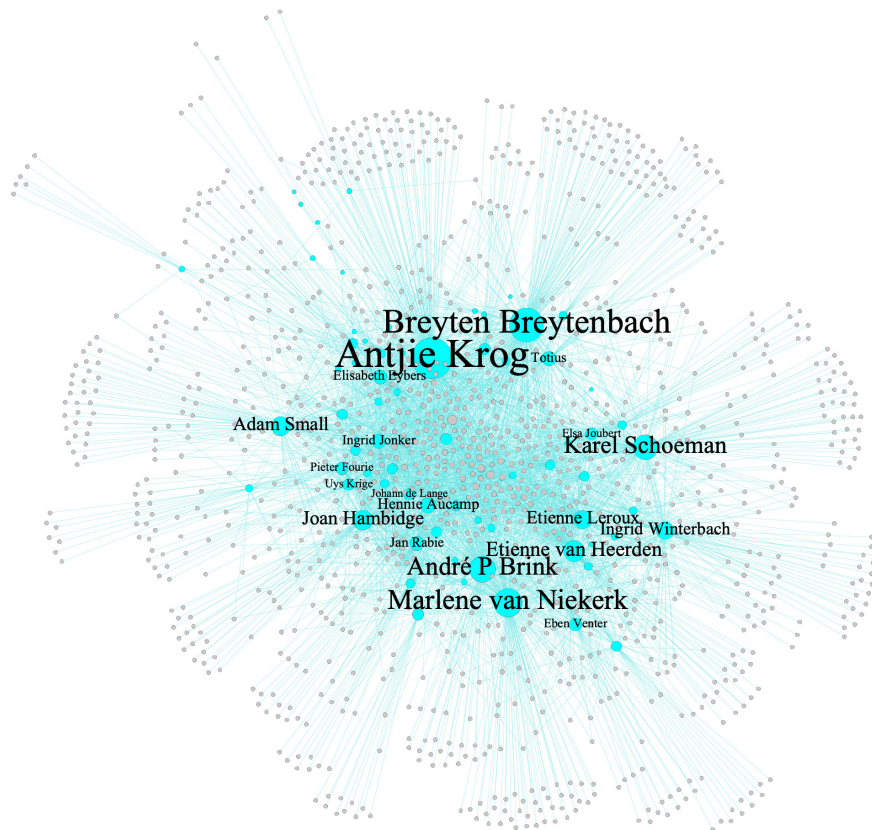
Die data is vervolgens as 'n netwerk saamgestel, met 'n skakel aangedui tussen publikasies en skrywers. Daar is 1 361 nodusse en 4 021 skakels in hierdie netwerk.

Soos voorheen gestel, word daar in hierdie studie gebruik gemaak van PageRank om die belangrikste skrywers in hierdie vermeldingsnetwerk uit te lig. Die twintig skrywers met die hoogste PageRank-waardes kan in Tabel 3 gesien word. Antjie Krog het die hoogste PageRank-sentraliteit, gevolg deur Breyten Breytenbach, Marlene van Niekerk, André P. Brink en Karel Schoeman.

Tabel 3: Die skrywers met die hoogste PageRank-waardes

SKRYWER	PAGERANK
Antjie Krog	0,035824
Breyten Breytenbach	0,029524
Marlene van Niekerk	0,023941
André P. Brink	0,021618
Karel Schoeman	0,020263
Etienne van Heerden	0,016807
Joan Hambidge	0,015410
Adam Small	0,014925
Etienne Leroux	0,014238
Ingrid Winterbach	0,013546
Hennie Aucamp	0,011479
Elisabeth Eybers	0,009937
Jan Rabie	0,009854
Totius	0,009818
Ingrid Jonker	0,009499
Eben Venter	0,008635
Pieter Fourie	0,008154
Elsa Joubert	0,007997
Uys Krige	0,007697
Johann de Lange	0,007491

Die vermeldingsnetwerk kan in Figuur 4 gesien word. Twille van leesbaarheid is slegs die twintig nodusse met die hoogste PageRank-sentraliteitswaardes se name aangedui. Kleure verteenwoordig die twee soorte nodusse: grys is publikasies en turkoois is skrywers. Die grootte van nodusse en etikette dui hul PageRank-waarde aan. Die uitleg is met behulp van Hu se kraggebaseerde uitlegalgoritme gedoen.



Figuur 4: Die vermeldingsnetwerk in die Afrikaanse literatuurstudie (2000–2020)

Dit is interessant dat sommige skrywers nader aan mekaar aangetref word in Figuur 4, wat daarop dui dat hulle gereeld saam in publikasies genoem word. Etienne Leroux word byvoorbeeld naby aan Ingrid Winterbach aangetref in Figuur 4, Breyten Breytenbach naby aan Antjie Krog, Ingrid Jonker naby aan Adam Small en Joan Hambidge naby aan Johann de Lange. Die eenvoudigste wyse om ko-vermeldings te bepaal, is om die netwerk om te skakel na 'n enkelledige netwerk, soos voorheen bespreek is. Tabel 4 dui die skrywers aan wat die meeste saam genoem word.

Tabel 4: Die skrywers wat die meeste saam genoem word

SKRYWER 1	SKRYWER 2	KO-VOORKOMSTE
Antjie Krog	Breyten Breytenbach	80
Antjie Krog	Marlene van Niekerk	66
Marlene van Niekerk	Etienne van Heerden	53
André P. Brink	Etienne van Heerden	51
Antjie Krog	Etienne van Heerden	50
Breyten Breytenbach	André P. Brink	49
Antjie Krog	Joan Hambidge	48
Antjie Krog	André P. Brink	46
Karel Schoeman	Etienne van Heerden	45
André P. Brink	Etienne Leroux	43
Breyten Breytenbach	Etienne van Heerden	42
André P. Brink	Hennie Aucamp	42
Antjie Krog	Karel Schoeman	41
Marlene van Niekerk	André P. Brink	41
Joan Hambidge	Hennie Aucamp	41
Breyten Breytenbach	Marlene van Niekerk	40
André P. Brink	Karel Schoeman	40
André P. Brink	Joan Hambidge	40
Breyten Breytenbach	Karel Schoeman	39
Breyten Breytenbach	Joan Hambidge	39

'n Meer gevorderde manier om ko-vermeldings te bestudeer, is om van modulariteit gebruik te maak. Met behulp van Blondel *et al.* se modulariteitsalgoritme is drie gemeenskappe geïdentifiseer. Die grootste gemeenskap (Gemeenskap 1) bestaan uit 636 nodusse (46,73% van nodusse), gevolg deur Gemeenskap 0 (36,74% van nodusse) en Gemeenskap 2 (16,53% van nodusse). Slegs die skrywers wat die meeste genoem is, word hier onder in gemeenskapsverband bespreek.

Die skrywers in Gemeenskap 1 sluit in Antjie Krog, Breyten Breytenbach, Joan Hambidge, Hennie Aucamp, Ingrid Jonker, Elisabeth Eybers, Totius, Johann de Lange, Uys Krige en Wilma Stockenström. Hierdie is duidelik 'n poësie-georiënteerde gemeenskap en die feit dat dit ook die grootste gemeenskap is, beklemtoon die belangrike rol wat poësie in die Afrikaanse literêre sisteem inneem.

Die skrywers in Gemeenskap 0 sluit in Marlene van Niekerk, André P. Brink, Karel Schoeman, Etienne van Heerden, Etienne Leroux, Ingrid Winterbach, Eben Venter, Elsa Joubert, Chris Barnard en Alexander Strachan. Hierdie gemeenskap is duidelik prosa-georiënteerd. Alhoewel Brink eweneens met die poësie of drama geassosieer kon word, aangesien hy as samesteller van *Groot verseboek* opgetree het en ook dramas geskryf het, word hy meer gereeld in die konteks van ander prosaskrywers genoem. Dieselfde is ook die geval met Marlene van Niekerk en Chris Barnard, wat eweneens in die konteks van ander digters of dramaturge genoem sou kon word.

Die skrywers in Gemeenskap 2 is Adam Small, Jan Rabie, Pieter Fourie, N. P. van Wyk Louw, Deon Opperman, Reza de Wet, D. J. Opperman, T. T. Cloete, P. G. du Plessis en C. J. Langenhoven. In lyn met die ander gemeenskappe is hier ook 'n patroon ten opsigte van genre te bespeur: Alhoewel Cloete oorwegend met poësie geassosieer word en Rabie met prosa, is ander skrywers in hierdie groepering bekende dramaturge (ofskoon hierdie skrywers se oeuvres nie tot die veld van die drama beperk is nie). Louw se insluiting in die drama-groepering is interessant, omdat hy so 'n sterk verbintenis met poësie het. Tog word hy meer saam met ander dramaturge genoem. Dit is ook opmerklik dat die drama-groepering die kleinste groepering is, waardeur Koen (192) se stelling dat drama (benewens ontspanningsliteratuur) die "stiefkind" van die Afrikaanse literatuur is, ondersteun.

Dit is merkwaardig dat groepering volgens genres geskied, maar nie verrassend nie: Dit is byvoorbeeld logies dat 'n studie oor 'n digter eerder ander digters sal vermeld as prosaskrywers. Groeperings sou egter netsowel op grond van tydperke saamgestel kon wees, omdat dit eweneens logies is dat 'n studie oor byvoorbeeld Brink as Sestiger ook ander Sestigters sou vermeld. Dit sou ook kon gebeur dat skrywers gegroep kan word op grond

van politieke sienings, voorkeure van die universiteite waarby letterkundiges betrokke is (dit is byvoorbeeld moontlik dat sommige universiteite op spesifieke skrywers kan fokus), style, temas of ander faktore. Dit is egter nie wat gebeur nie: die skeidslyn is genre. Hierdie groeperings dui met ander woorde aan dat die onderliggende beginsel vir die ko-vermelding van skrywers genre is; nie politiek, tydperk, tema, styl of ander voorkeure nie.

Beperkinge

Hierdie studie het slegs ondersoek ingestel na die vermeldings van gekanoniseerde skrywers, wat gedefinieer is deur hul insluiting in die nuutste uitgawe van *Perspektief en profiel*. Hierdie fokus op gekanoniseerde skrywers beteken dat byvoorbeeld kinder- en jeugliteratuurskrywers, ontspanningsliteratuurskrywers en opkomende stemme nie deel uitgemaak het van die ondersoek nie. Toekomstige studies kan die net wyer gooi en alle Afrikaanse skrywers in ag neem.

Verder het hierdie studie slegs ondersoek ingestel na vermeldings van skrywers in akademiese joernale, terwyl literatuurgeskiedenis, verhandelings en proefskrifte, resensies asook literêre bekronings ook in ag geneem sou kon word, soos deur Verboord (265) voorgestel. Ons studie ondersoek met ander woorde slegs 'n komponent van die huidige Afrikaanse literêre sisteem en verdere studies is nodig om 'n meer volledige beeld van skrywers se posisie in die Afrikaanse literêre sisteem te verkry.

Askin en Mauskapf (910–44) se identifisering van die intrinsieke eienskappe van liedjies wat met hul gewildheid saamhang, suggereer die moontlikheid van iets soortgelyks in die geval van literêre werke. Skrywers wat later in hul loopbane geag word as deel van die kanon word gereeld as nuwelinge in resensies en besprekings in verband gebring met gevestigde skrywers. Dit mag beteken dat nuwe werke ook, soos die liedjies waarna Askin en Mauskapf (910–44) verwys, in sekere opsigte soortgelyk aan vorige werke moet wees ten einde gewild te word onder akademici, maar nie “té soortgelyk” nie.

Hierdie studie het nie gepoog om die intrinsieke eienskappe van literêre werke te ondersoek nie, maar Askin en Mauskapf se bevindinge omtrent gewilde liedjies noop 'n mens om ook intrinsieke eienskappe in ag te neem indien 'n mens die funksionering van die literatuursisteem beter wil begryp. Ons insiens kan so 'n studie met behulp van diepleer en kunsmatige intelligensie vermag word, maar daarvoor sal literêre tekste in 'n digitale formaat benodig word.¹

Slot

Hierdie studie het die sigbaarheid van gekanoniseerde skrywers in die mees onlangse twee dekades van die Afrikaanse literatuurstudie ondersoek. Met behulp van 'n datastel wat uit meer as 5 000 joernaalpublikasies bestaan, is aangetoon dat Antjie Krog in die meeste studies vermeld word, gevolg deur Breyten Breytenbach en Marlene van Niekerk. Hierdie is met ander woorde die sigbaarste gekanoniseerde skrywers, ten minste ten opsigte van hierdie datastel. Die sigbaarheid van hierdie skrywers dui op hul prestige: Krog, Breytenbach en Van Niekerk is tans die skrywers wat die meeste deur letterkundiges in hul publikasies betrek word. Daar is ook aangetoon dat Krog en Breytenbach die meeste saam vermeld word, en met behulp van modulariteit is aangetoon dat skrywers meesal saam in genreverband vermeld word, nie ten opsigte van byvoorbeeld tydperke nie.

Alhoewel hierdie studie 'n groot en omvattende stel publikasies in berekening gebring het en verder gegaan het as byvoorbeeld Martindale, deur alle vermeldings van skrywers te ondersoek, gee die studie nie 'n volledige blik op die prestige van Afrikaanse skrywers nie. Hiervoor sal ook koerantpublikasies, webblaai, verhandelings en proefskrifte, boeke—veral literatuurgeskiedenis—asook literêre bekronings in berekening gebring moet word. Toekomstige studies kan ook hierdie ander publikasieplatforms insluit en die vermeldings van *alle* Afrikaanse skrywers ondersoek.

Aantekening

1. *Diepleer* is 'n onderafdeling van masjienleer en kunsmatige intelligensie wat kunsmatige neurale netwerke van verskillende lae gebruik om funksies uit rou data te onttrek (Goodfellow, Bengio en Courville 13).

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Une si tendre critique: L'Afrique des écrivains migrants d'origine congolaise en Belgique francophone

Renata Bizek-Tatara & Przemysław Szczur

The tender critique: Africa of the Congolese migrant writers in French-speaking Belgium

The article is dedicated to the portrayal of Africa in the writings of the French-speaking Belgian writers of Congolese origins. We analyse subjective representations of Africa, both critical and idealized ones, from which emerges a vision of the continent brimming with contradictions. On the one hand, it is an alluring, vast and fertile land with abundant flora and fauna, as well as climate and landscape dearly missed by migrant writers—the land embodying the concept of “paradise lost” or the notion of a nursing mother identified in the migrant writers’ texts with the idea of homeland. On the other hand, although abundant in natural resources, Africa appears to be the continent of extreme poverty, hunger, violence, racism, persecution and ethnic cleansing—the territory still exploited by global powers on which colonialism unveiled its new face defined by a seemingly neutral term, globalization. This dichotomous representation—a far cry from the simplified, impoverished visions of Africa offered by the European media—is conditioned by the specific existential situation of the migrant writers: remaining physically away from Africa, but still having a deep emotional, mental and cultural connection with their land, they are capable of perceiving it in a different light—thus, from a perspective which sharpens critical thinking and with tenderness resulting from the longing for their homeland. Hence, the circumstances of the migrant writers allow them to take an idiosyncratic, ambivalent, and intellectually-affective stance—a specific critical tenderness, or: tender critique—through the prism of which the writers depict African realities and which can perhaps change the perception of these realities in the consciousness of the European readers.


Keywords: migrant writing, French-speaking Belgium, Africa, Congo, critique.

Introduction

L'histoire mouvementée des relations entre l'ex-Congo belge, aujourd'hui République démocratique du Congo, et son ancienne métropole ne peut annuler les liens humains et intellectuels toujours vivaces entre ces deux points sur la carte littéraire du monde contemporain. La présence en Belgique de nombreux migrants d'origine congolaise, y compris d'écrivains reconnus, contribue à les entretenir. En même temps, la littérature congolaise, en particulier celle de la diaspora, souffre d'un déficit de travaux critiques (Halen). Entre autres, l'image que ses représentants offrent de l'Afrique n'a jamais fait l'objet d'une étude d'ensemble. Nous souhaiterions contribuer à combler cette lacune en étudiant la représentation du continent noir dans les œuvres d'auteurs de la diaspora congolaise en Belgique francophone. Quant au corpus, sans prétendre à l'exhaustivité, nous y incluons des auteurs nés au Congo et établis en Belgique ou ayant la nationalité belge.¹ Nous ne tiendrons pas compte du critère racialement, maintenu même dans certains travaux récents, par exemple dans l'article de Pierre Halen de 2020, et nous prendrons en considération des écrivains d'origine congolaise tant noirs que blancs, issus aussi bien de la communauté des anciens colons (Albert Russo) que de celle des anciens colonisés (les autres auteurs du corpus). En effet, les nombreuses similitudes que nous avons constatées entre leurs œuvres nous semblent justifier leur traitement commun. Les textes analysés relèveront principalement du roman, de la poésie et de l'autobiographie


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et couvriront une période allant de 1990 à 2020. La plupart ont été publiés en France ce qui résulte de l'une des particularités de la littérature belge francophone, à savoir l'existence d'"une réalité franco-belge centrée à Paris" et qui "concerne aussi [...] les agents culturels de la diaspora congolaise en Belgique" (Halen). Choisir l'angle d'approche belge ne relève bien sûr pas d'une volonté d'enfermer les auteurs en question dans le cadre d'une littérature nationale, chose par ailleurs impossible pour les écrivains migrants qui occupent toujours une position intermédiaire entre les champs littéraires nationaux.² Notre étude se tiendra donc sur la frontière belgo-congolaise (ou même belgo-franco-congolaise), tout comme les auteurs sur lesquels nous nous pencherons et dont les œuvres participent souvent à la fois du phénomène d'"Afrique sur Seine" (Cazenave) et de celui d'"Afrique sur Senne", beaucoup plus rarement interrogé par la critique.³

Dimension affective

UN ESPACE SATURÉ D'ÉMOTIONS ET ESTHÉTISÉ

Sans surprise, l'Afrique apparaît tout d'abord chez les auteurs d'origine congolaise comme une réalité spatiale. Toutefois, il ne s'agit jamais d'un espace géographique purement objectif. Les lieux "Afrique" ou "Congo" sont toujours fortement chargés émotionnellement, inséparables des affects de ceux et celles qui en parlent. L'évocation de l'espace africain possède une importante dimension affective, les souvenirs de la terre quittée étant surtout empreints de nostalgie. Celle-ci concerne avant tout la nature africaine. Dans *Léodine l'Africaine* d'Albert Russo (2011), l'héroïne-narratrice parle explicitement du "mal d'Afrique" dont souffre sa mère lorsqu'elle se retrouve aux États-Unis après avoir épousé son père: "Ma mère eut bientôt le mal du pays, ce mal d'Afrique, indéfinissable pour ceux qui ne l'ont pas connu [...] l'odeur sensuelle de la terre était restée comme accrochée à ses poumons" (12-3). La narratrice insiste sur le lien sensuel et intime entre les Africains, y compris les Africains blancs, et leur terre natale. La rupture de ce lien est génératrice de mélancolie et de nostalgie.

Dans l'évocation de l'Afrique par Léodine, ce sont non seulement des images, mais aussi des saveurs et des odeurs qui jouent un rôle important. Lorsqu'elle raconte le voyage de noces de ses parents dans la région des Grands Lacs, qu'elle qualifie d'"idyllique", on a l'impression que les voyageurs se retrouvent au jardin d'Éden:

Ils passèrent leur lune de miel dans la région des Grands Lacs, [...] arpentant les collines aux teintes pastel, jardins suspendus où les bananiers alternaient avec les cultures maraîchères, parcourant les berges volcaniques du Kivu, pour enfin couronner ce séjour par une randonnée au Parc Albert, [...] dans un paysage tour à tour de savane frémissante, à la chaleur torride, et de verdure luxuriante où les oiseaux chamarrés rivalisent de superbe avec les fleurs les plus rares [...] (12)

On retrouve ici une diversité et une abondance extrêmes, ainsi qu'une rhétorique hyperbolique qui font de l'Afrique un lieu enchanté. Dans un autre passage, la région des Grands Lacs est explicitement qualifiée de "terre paradisiaque" (141). La mention de "teintes pastel" introduit aussi une référence à l'art pictural, transformant la nature africaine en un objet esthétique.

La nature contemplée constitue un véritable tableau et suscite d'intenses émotions esthétiques. Dans un autre passage, la référence à la peinture est explicite, l'héroïne qualifiant ce qu'elle voit de "tableau époustouflant" (88); elle compare aussi la chaîne des Virunga à "un amphithéâtre d'une extraordinaire et rutilante beauté" (98); vu du ciel, le paysage africain offre un véritable "spectacle" (100). La savane s'étend devant les voyageurs-spectateurs "dans son immensité verte, où altern[ent] les bruns et les ocres, comme si une main divine y avait nonchalamment agité un pinceau saturé de couleurs" (99-100). Ces références constantes à différents arts (peinture, architecture, théâtre) font de la nature africaine un phénomène artistique à part entière; elle est non seulement esthétisée, mais aussi "spectacularisée". Lorsqu'à la fin du roman, l'héroïne est envoyée chez ses grands-parents aux États-Unis, elle évoque à nouveau ce "mal d'Afrique", cette "nostalgie de [s]a terre natale" (205), qui touchait sa mère au début du récit. Les mentions de cette nostalgie servent donc de cadre à une intrigue où une place de choix revient à une collection d'instantanés de la nature et du paysage africains fortement esthétisés et saturés d'émotions.

Les images esthétisantes du paysage africain constituent une rupture radicale avec une tradition européenne de représentation de l'Afrique, surtout celle équatoriale, en tant qu'"univers féroce et hallucinant" (Mambenga-Ylagou 15), véritable "enfer", dont le paradigme est *Au cœur des ténèbres* de Joseph Conrad. Celui-ci a inauguré cette "rhétorique 'ténébreuse' qui, aujourd'hui encore, entoure [...] de nombreux discours au sujet du continent" (Riva 301). Si, dans la littérature de l'époque coloniale, l'Afrique est souvent vue à travers les yeux d'un Européen qui la perçoit telle une contrée foncièrement hostile, les écrivains qui y sont nés, qu'ils soient issus de la communauté des colons ou de celle des colonisés, l'appréhendent au contraire en tant que terre nourricière et maternelle,

voire “matricielle” (Mambenga-Ylagou 18). Dans ce sens, les textes que nous analysons constituent un exemple de “contre-littérature” (Mouralis) postcoloniale, polémique avec l’image du continent noir dans les lettres coloniales.

Dans *Si le Congo m’était conté* de Clémentine M. Faïk-Nzuji (2020), la nature équatoriale est évoquée à l’aide du topos du jardin paradisiaque, présent déjà en filigrane chez Russo. Voici comment l’héroïne-narratrice décrit sa richesse:

La région abondait en nourriture riche et variée. La terre était fertile et la merveilleuse Ubangui foisonnait de poissons. [...] Dans les villages environnants, les champs produisaient en quantité maïs, arachides, haricots et bien d’autres céréales et légumes, sans compter le gibier, les insectes comestibles et des variétés de champignons comestibles qui, presque sans interruption, poussaient en abondance sous ce climat équatorial. (52)

Loin de l’image inquiétante de la forêt équatoriale sauvage et hostile à l’homme, la nature apparaît ici sous sa forme domestiquée et nourricière. Dans un autre passage, l’héroïne-narratrice se croit transportée aux origines du monde: “Regarder cette eau claire sortir des rochers au-dessus de nos têtes et couler jusqu’à nos pieds m’émerveillait profondément. C’était la magie, le prodige des premiers matins de la création!” (79). C’est une vision quasi-biblique de l’Afrique qui se dégage du texte. Lorsque l’auteure évoque le jardin de la mission catholique de Banzyville, la référence édénique devient explicite: “Le spectacle était époustouflant, irréel. On aurait dit que les missionnaires avaient voulu recréer sur terre le jardin d’Éden!” (87). Faïk-Nzuji inverse ainsi complètement les visions infernales de la nature congolaise que nous devons aux écrivains de l’époque coloniale. Sous sa plume, le Congo se transforme en une contrée propice à la reconstitution par l’homme du paradis perdu de ses origines, tel que dépeint dans la Bible. *Si le Congo m’était conté* prolonge ainsi la façon de représenter la terre natale qui caractérise aussi la poésie de Faïk-Nzuji (notamment son recueil *Kasala et autres poèmes* de 1969), “classée dans la littérature dite d’enracinement” (Riva 105).

LA FIGURE MATERNELLE

La dimension affective de l’image de l’Afrique se réalise non seulement à travers l’exaltation nostalgique des beautés de la nature africaine, mais aussi par le biais d’une composante anthropologique. C’est la figure de la mère qui constitue l’incarnation humaine récurrente du continent dans les textes de notre corpus. Par exemple, *Sang mêlé ou ton fils Léopold* de Russo (1990) raconte l’histoire d’une famille de choix “interculturelle”, formé d’un Américain, Harry Wilson, de son fils adoptif congolais, Léo, et de leur bonne, Mama Malkia, “reine mère” en swahili (13). Selon Licia Reggiani, cette dernière “représente [...] l’archétype de la mère accueillante” et symbolise l’Afrique comme “lieu d’accueil de [...] diversités” (229). En l’occurrence, il s’agit notamment de la diversité sexuelle, car Harry Wilson trouve au Congo belge un lieu où il peut vivre son homosexualité plus facilement que dans sa patrie. Mama Malkia accepte le fait qu’Harry ne soit pas “un homme à femmes”, comme elle le dit, et même si son orientation sexuelle reste pour elle une “bizarrerie”, elle conclut: “On est comme on est. Moi, c’est le cadet de mes soucis!”, avant de lui caresser le front “comme à un petit garçon” (14–5). L’Africaine joue donc le rôle de figure maternelle non seulement auprès du petit Léo, mais aussi de son patron dont la mère est morte en couches. Une telle représentation de l’Afrique renoue avec une mythologie propre à la littérature de l’époque coloniale dans laquelle les terres colonisées étaient souvent représentées comme une sorte de “paradis homosexuel”, du fait qu’elles offraient des “opportunités sexuelles” particulières (Aldrich 201) à des Occidentaux persécutés dans leurs pays d’origine. Mama Malkia est l’incarnation de cette Afrique maternelle, protectrice, capable d’accepter la diversité sexuelle.⁴

Antoine Tshitungu Kongolo offre dans sa poésie une autre figure de mère personnifiant l’héritage culturel et spirituel africain. L’auteur dédie son recueil de poèmes *Te perdre et te retrouver* (2011) à sa propre mère. Celle-ci est non seulement la dédicataire du recueil, mais aussi une figure récurrente dans les textes. Elle incarne l’univers de la tradition, comme dans ce fragment du poème “Par-delà l’absence”:

Elle faisait scintiller
Les fragments de savoirs
Et de sagesse très anciennes
Ceux-là que l'école a bannis
[...]
Qui m'ouvraient à l'alphabet des univers inconnus. (17)

C'est une mère-initiatrice et artiste qui transmet à son fils une sagesse immémoriale, en lui enseignant une poésie et une musique enracinées dans l'héritage culturel de son peuple. Elle est une "prêtresse" (18) et l'initiation qu'elle offre à son enfant a un caractère non seulement artistique et sapientiel, mais aussi métaphysique. Elle lui apporte un ressourcement et lui communique une véritable philosophie de l'existence. Dans le même poème, nous lisons:

Alors j'entends par-delà l'absence
La voix grave de ma mère

Redisant que les plantes
Les humains
Les étoiles sont des nervures
D'un immense arbre généalogique
Dont la sève lactée humecte l'azur
Vibrant de mystères et de merveilles (18).

La sagesse qu'elle transmet est une cosmogonie à part entière dans laquelle terre et ciel se trouvent reliés. Elle est la figure d'un savoir qui dépasse les connaissances purement rationnelles.

Dans cette poésie, la présence maternelle est "une magie" (31), car la mère est une "fée du logis" (34). Elle "co-habit[e] avec l'éternité" (38). Le symbolisme maternel embrasse la vie dans son intégralité, y compris la dimension spirituelle de l'existence. Le vocabulaire religieux, qui revient avec insistance, reflète la sacralité de la figure de la mère. Bien que le recueil soit un long thrène consacré à celle qui n'est plus, le souvenir de sa voix est ce qui ranime le poète:

Ta voix faitière résonne en moi sans fêlure
Ta voix m'invite à quitter les vêtements du deuil
Ta voix m'invite à nouveau aux fastes de la vie. (38)

La mort de la mère, qui incarnait la patrie, signifie également le trépas de cette dernière:

Mon pays s'endort gorge serrée souffle écrasé jugulaire
tranchée les capillaires incisés
la poitrine dépareillée vandalisée. (60)

Cette métaphore du corps mutilé du pays renvoie au corps sans vie de celle qui le personnifiait: la mère du poète. C'est dans cette mesure que le deuil du pays et celui de la mère se confondent. Mais du fait de l'identification de la figure humaine et de l'espace originel, la vitalité et la sacralité de cette première rejaillissent en partie sur ce second. Cette mère qui s'agrandit jusqu'aux dimensions du paysage, par exemple lorsque le poète parle de ses mains "douces comme des palmes [...] Qui se balancent dans les senteurs de la brise" (51), est une mère-Afrique en tant que source de forces vives, malgré "les guerres saisonnières" (74). L'identification effectuée entre la mère et la patrie, ainsi que le recours à une rhétorique du souvenir et de la nostalgie n'excluent pas entièrement la dimension critique de l'image; celle du cadavre du pays natal peut être interprétée comme une forme de critique politique indirecte.

Dimension critique

L'Afrique est également une entité géopolitique dont l'instabilité, due à des facteurs historiques, notamment à l'héritage colonial, est devenue presque proverbiale. Les raisons politiques de leur émigration poussent beaucoup d'écrivains migrants d'origine congolaise à proposer une image critique de la vie publique dans leur patrie et, plus largement, sur tout le continent. L'éloignement de leur pays d'origine leur permet une certaine indépendance, une liberté de ton par rapport au pouvoir en place, stimulant leur critique. La distance géographique semble

propice à la distanciation intellectuelle. Exploitant cette veine, les écrivains de la diaspora congolaise s'inscrivent dans la tradition de la littérature africaine engagée. Dès l'époque coloniale, l'une des dimensions saillantes de celle-ci, surtout du genre romanesque, est précisément sa dimension critique. Jacques Chevrier a ainsi souligné "l'importance considérable accordée à des problèmes qui touchent à la vie de la 'cité' et [...] le caractère volontiers agressif, voire polémique de cette littérature" (137). Les indépendances n'y ont pas apporté de changement majeur, donnant aussi naissance à "une littérature de désenchantement et de désillusion" (139). Bernard Mouralis a également mis en avant la dimension engagée et contestataire des littératures africaines, les plaçant parmi les "contre-littératures" ou littératures fortement politiques, voire protestataires. Cette politisation se trouve accentuée chez les écrivains exilés. Comme l'écrit Silvia Riva à propos de la littérature congolaise des années 1980, "l'exil—forcé ou volontaire—a fait naître [...] des réquisitoires durs et décidés contre le pouvoir et sa violence" (219). Dans les lettres congolaises diasporiques, cette dimension critique ne semble pas avoir faibli depuis. La notion de "littérature de contestation", dont se sert Bibiane Tshibola Kalengayi pour parler des lettres congolaises de la fin de l'époque coloniale (540), peut donc aussi être appliquée à la littérature contemporaine. Bien que plus d'un demi-siècle nous sépare déjà de l'époque des indépendances africaines, la critique qu'effectuent les auteurs congolais migrants touche aussi bien les régimes politiques postcoloniaux que l'époque coloniale. Le lien entre le passé et le présent est dans leur écriture constamment réaffirmé.

CRITIQUE DISCURSIVE

Les auteurs recourent à divers procédés narratifs et rhétoriques pour critiquer la réalité africaine présente ou passée. L'un d'eux est un discours politique ou idéologique explicite, inséré dans la narration ou les propos des personnages, ce que nous proposons d'appeler "critique discursive". Les auteurs, narrateurs et acteurs de la diégèse apparaissent souvent comme des analystes politiques extrêmement lucides. Comme nous l'avons dit, dans nombre de cas, c'est le statut de migrants des personnages qui sert de déclencheur à une analyse critique de la situation politique dans leurs pays d'origine. Ayant été obligés de les quitter, ils sont loin de les idéaliser. Ainsi, dans *Un fou noir au pays des Blancs* de Pie Tshibanda (1999), lorsque le héros, Masikini (pauvre en swahili), se trouve sommé, dans le cadre de la procédure d'octroi du statut de réfugié, d'expliquer les raisons de sa présence en Belgique, il décrit la situation politique au Congo. Toutefois, il ne se réfère pas seulement à l'actualité. Au contraire, il commence par un exposé de l'histoire coloniale du pays. En raison de l'importance des retombées actuelles de celle-ci, l'évocation de l'Afrique chez les écrivains congolais migrants est partiellement tournée vers le passé. Masikini présente sa situation personnelle comme conséquence directe de décisions prises par les colonisateurs: "Mon histoire commence en 1885 à la conférence de Berlin. Les puissances coloniales se réunissent pour se partager un gâteau. Le butin s'appelle 'Afrique'" (23). L'héritage du colonialisme apparaît ainsi comme ce qui continue, dans une large mesure, de déterminer la vie politique de l'Afrique contemporaine. Masikini est en effet forcé à l'exil suite à sa dénonciation de l'épuration ethnique dirigée contre son ethnie, les Kasaiens, au Katanga, région minière du Congo, où les Belges ont fait venir ses ancêtres. La critique qu'effectuent les écrivains a donc un caractère anti- et postcolonial.

Elle est postcoloniale aussi au sens où elle prend pour cible les régimes issus des indépendances africaines, leurs dérives antidémocratiques et leur implication dans une forme de néocolonialisme. À titre d'exemple, dans *Léodine l'Africaine* de Russo, la narratrice commence son récit par ce résumé critique de l'histoire du Congo indépendant: "Après son indépendance, le pays de ma jeunesse a traversé près d'un demi-siècle d'affres et de malheurs en tous genres, aussi bien à cause de la vénalité de ses dirigeants que de la collusion éhontée des grandes puissances et de la non moins délétère convoitise des pays communistes" (7). Si des facteurs internes ne sont pas passés sous silence, l'interventionnisme étranger, de type néocolonial, joue ici le rôle de déterminant primordial de la politique congolaise. L'image catastrophique de celle-ci cadre avec des analyses historiques, comme celle de David Van Reybrouck, qui résume ainsi les débuts de l'indépendance congolaise: "La Première République du Congo fut une époque apocalyptique durant laquelle tout ce qui pouvait mal tourner tourna mal" (364); et le bilan qu'il tire des années Mobutu est aussi peu reluisant. Mais la majeure partie de *Léodine l'Africaine* est consacrée non au Congo indépendant mais au Congo belge, la critique touche donc surtout le régime colonial.

Quant au régime mobutiste, une image critique de celui-ci se dégage de l'essai autobiographique de Charles Djungu-Simba intitulé *La Chèvre, la corde et l'herbe au Congo-Zaïre. Genèse d'une passion d'écrire* (2002). Le caractère politique du texte s'affiche dès la dédicace: le dédicataire est en effet Patrice Lumumba, héros de l'indépendance congolaise. Dans une courte histoire qui ouvre le livre, le Zaïre de Mobutu se trouve comparé à l'enfer ... en pire!

L'auteur constate ensuite une continuité entre les régimes colonial et post-colonial (ou plutôt néocolonial, selon lui): "L'État colonial, d'abord, prédateur et violent à souhait, jusqu'à son succédané, l'État néo-colonial: chicotte, portage, récolte du caoutchouc, révoltes, effort de guerre, crise congolaise, sécessions, rébellions, mal zaïrois, transition, pillages, première guerre de libération, seconde guerre de libération, etc.: autant d'étiquettes pour la même réalité faite de violences et de prédatations" (15). Cette longue énumération de maux est censée résumer l'histoire congolaise. L'indépendance est absente de la liste ce qui en dit long sur son importance toute relative, selon l'auteur. Elle n'aurait apparemment pas institué de coupure décisive, au contraire, son recouvrement, et la dictature de Mobutu qui suit, semblent prolonger une logique étatique prédatrice. L'auteur pose même une équivalence entre "indépendance", "congolisation" et "désordre institutionnalisé" (15). Parmi les maux qui rongent son pays sous Mobutu, il cite notamment le "règne de l'informel et de la corruption", et après sa chute, "le banditisme des chefs de guerre", ce dont résulte une "crise profonde qui le paralyse" (16). Le constat est sans appel et concorde avec des analyses livrées par des historiens, mais aussi avec la tonalité qui domine dans les évocations littéraires de cette période (Riva 314 et suivantes).

Dans *Congo Inc.* d'In Koli Jean Bofane (2014), la critique prend pour cible le Congo actuel dont l'écrivain met en doute la liberté et la faculté à disposer de ses richesses naturelles sans ingérence étrangère. Le néocolonialisme, qui se cache souvent sous les oripeaux de la mondialisation, est dénoncé dès le titre, descriptif et connotatif par excellence (Genette 85): celui-ci suggère l'existence d'un lien entre la RDC, désignée *Congo Inc.* (du mot anglais *incorporated*), et le Congo colonisé auquel se réfère le sous-titre: *Le Testament de Bismarck*. Une citation tirée d'un discours prononcé par le chancelier allemand en clôture de la conférence de Berlin, en 1885, placée en épigraphe, ouvre le roman: "Le nouvel État du Congo est destiné à être un des plus importants exécutants de l'œuvre que nous entendons accomplir ..." (9). À la fin du livre, le narrateur explique en quoi consiste à présent le rôle du pays dans ce qu'est devenue cette "œuvre": "Fidèle au testament de Bismarck, Congo Inc. fut plus récemment désigné comme le pourvoyeur attitré de la mondialisation, chargé de livrer les minerais stratégiques pour la conquête de l'espace, la fabrication d'armements sophistiqués, l'industrie pétrolière, la production de matériel de télécommunication high-tech" (272). La traduction de l'intitulé du roman en mandarin, placée en page de titre, met en évidence les conséquences de la mondialisation pour le continent noir, parmi lesquelles l'ingérence économique de la Chine en Afrique, constitutive de la "Chinafrique" (Michel et Beuret), une sorte de colonie chinoise informelle.⁵ Les paratextes suggèrent ainsi nettement que le pays demeure "prisonnier de ce mécanisme le projetant constamment dans sa condition de subalterne au service de la globalisation, logique qui remonte au colonialisme" (Chariatte 62). Cette vision pessimiste d'un Congo toujours dominé sera confirmée et développée tout au long du roman bofanien.

CRITIQUE DIÉGÉTIQUE

Un autre outil de la critique est la construction d'intrigues centrées sur une problématique politique. Dans ce cas, la critique est inscrite surtout dans le déroulement des événements racontés, parfois aussi dans les propos des personnages ou du narrateur commentant ces derniers, son décodage nécessite donc de la part du lecteur une traduction en termes conceptuels. À ce propos, nous pouvons parler de "critique diégétique". Comme les commentaires politiques explicites, celle-ci peut concerner aussi bien la période postcoloniale que l'époque coloniale, la première étant conditionnée par la seconde. Elle s'exerce en particulier à l'encontre de l'un des éléments les plus tenaces de l'héritage esclavagiste et colonialiste, celui du racisme, voire du racialisme. *Le Cap des illusions* de Russo (1991) est justement consacré à ce problème et, plus précisément, à l'apartheid en Afrique du Sud. Dans un texte autobiographique, dont le titre a valeur de programme: "La moitié africaine de mon être", l'auteur a d'ailleurs présenté les racines de son intérêt pour cette problématique, en l'inscrivant dans une perspective plus large de ses liens avec l'Afrique:

L'Afrique a marqué toute ma jeunesse et elle fait partie de mon héritage. Ayant connu sa beauté, la générosité de sa population, mais ayant aussi été le témoin des bouleversements tragiques qui ont précédé l'indépendance d'au moins quatre pays, je ne peux rester insensible à son évolution, ses peines et ses espoirs. Ainsi, l'apartheid a été une de mes grandes préoccupations, d'autant que j'ai souvent séjourné en Afrique du Sud où j'ai de la famille et des amis (644).

Chez Russo, comme chez les autres auteurs du corpus, la dimension critique des textes apparaît donc non comme l'expression d'un "afro-pessimisme" condescendant et eurocentré, mais résulte d'un véritable souci pour l'avenir

du continent et de ses habitants, motivé biographiquement et affectivement. Les dimensions affective et critique sont profondément liées.

Le héros-narrateur du *Cap des illusions*, Michael, est un jeune Européen qui tombe sous le charme de Prudence Debeer, une Africaine dont la famille a vécu un “déclassement racial”, passant du statut de Blancs à celui de Métis. C’est cette rencontre qui rend le héros sensible au problème du racisme. Comme il est un étranger, il pose sur la réalité sudafricaine un regard distancié alors que les Noirs eux-mêmes, sans parler des colons blancs, sont représentés comme ayant parfaitement intériorisé le système raciste. Sous ce régime ségrégationniste, toute relation entre Michael et Prudence est bien évidemment exclue. L’intrigue s’organise donc surtout autour d’épisodes illustrant la prégnance de l’apartheid dans les mœurs et les mentalités. C’est seulement dans le dernier chapitre, constitué d’une lettre de Michael à Prudence, annonçant la fin du régime, qu’est suggérée la possibilité des retrouvailles entre les personnages, après une séparation de treize ans.

Dans *Léodine l’Africaine* de Russo ou *Si le Congo m’était conté* de Faïk-Nzuji, l’image des contacts entre Blancs et Noirs au Congo belge, ou plutôt de leur absence, ne diffère pas fondamentalement de celle qui se dégage du *Cap des illusions*, ce qui concorde avec cette remarque de Jean-Louis Lippert, autre écrivain que l’on pourrait qualifier de “belgo-congolais”: “[...] au Congo belge, l’idéologie qui prévalait dans le milieu blanc était une idéologie fasciste, une idéologie d’apartheid, comparable à ce qu’elle pouvait être, par exemple, en Afrique du Sud” (cité d’après Desorbay 235). Blancs et Noirs y vivent donc dans des mondes complètement séparés, et Faïk-Nzuji insiste notamment sur une division stricte des espaces publics dans la colonie, dont chacun était accessible à une autre frange de la population, définie par sa distance par rapport à l’idéal blanc. Les auteurs renouent donc avec la comparaison traditionnelle entre régime colonial belge et régime sudafricain, très présente dans les lettres congolaises, “sensibles au problème de l’apartheid” (Tshibola Kalengayi 548).

Dans la mesure où il est et a été source de problèmes politiques majeurs en Afrique, le racisme autour duquel tourne l’intrigue du *Cap des illusions* constitue l’un des principaux fléaux sociaux dénoncés par les écrivains d’origine congolaise, aussi bien en ce qui concerne l’époque coloniale que postcoloniale; et il ne s’agit pas uniquement du racisme imputable aux colons blancs et leurs descendants. Dans les œuvres de la première génération des écrivains africains, souvent engagés contre le colonialisme, Blancs et Noirs étaient couramment représentés d’une façon dichotomique, selon le schéma du bourreau et de la victime, et le racisme était l’un des moyens de domination des premiers sur les seconds. Les écrivains contemporains proposent une vision plus nuancée au sens où la couleur de la peau ne détermine plus forcément les choix idéologiques et la valeur éthique des personnages. Si, dans *Le Cap des illusions*, le racisme est un héritage du colonialisme, les intrigues de *Congo Inc.* et *La Belle de Casa* de Bofane (2018), d’*Un fou noir au pays des Blancs* de Tshibanda ou de *Léodine l’Africaine* de Russo contiennent aussi des épisodes centrés sur la représentation du racisme intra-africain, qu’il s’agisse de celui de populations nordafricaines à l’égard de celles subsahariennes ou de la hiérarchisation ethnique entre Noirs.

L’écriture de Bofane offre à cet égard les exemples les plus probants. Les inégalités raciales intra-africaines hantent particulièrement le roman *La Belle de Casa* dont l’action est située à Casablanca. La jeune Marocaine Ichrak se fait agresser dans la rue par ses compatriotes qui jugent inacceptable le fait qu’elle fréquente des migrants africains: “elle se donne aux Africains [...] Ce n’est plus une femme!”, “on te crève, chienne!” (130).⁶ Même les enfants n’échappent pas au racisme quotidien. Un *shayeur* (vendeur à la sauvette) ouest-africain vendant des DVD pirates dans des lieux publics est attaqué verbalement, puis physiquement, par un Marocain, Slimane Derwich: celui-ci l’insulte en arabe, en le traitant d’“esclave” et de “chien” (170). Les témoins de l’incident prennent parti pour l’agresseur, en disant qu’ils ne sont plus chez eux et qu’il a bien fait en chassant le vendeur. Encouragés par leur réaction, Slimane et Yacine Barzak les invitent à expulser les intrus et “nettoyer” le quartier: “Des vermines qui viennent ici pour nous prendre tout! À commencer par nos femmes”; “Combien de temps allons-nous, nous les hommes, encore supporter cela ? Qui est prêt à se mouiller pour que le quartier devienne comme avant ?” (171). Ils incitent ainsi quelques malfrats à terroriser des résidents africains subsahariens: armés de bâtons et de couteaux, ils font un vrai carnage dans la chambre de Dramé, un migrant sénégalais. Les paroles de Slimane, pleines de haine et de mépris, nous informent nettement sur les relations conflictuelles entre les Africains: les Marocains considèrent les migrants originaires d’Afrique centrale et de l’Ouest comme des “sous-hommes”. Selon Dramé, la situation en Libye est encore pire et l’hostilité raciale envers les migrants africains subsahariens y frôle une haine aveugle: “Tout le monde est armé là-bas, même les enfants. On leur apprend à haïr le Noir tout petit, alors tu as intérêt à raser les murs. [...] Les Noirs, on les aime pas, comme partout, mais là encore moins qu’ailleurs” (95). Soucieux de la condition des migrants intra-africains, Bofane adopte la posture d’un écrivain engagé qui dénonce

le racisme de ses “frères” marocains envers les populations noires, méprisées et traitées d’“esclaves”, victimes de toutes sortes de violences et discriminations. Il critique les survivances du système esclavagiste au Maghreb (voir Marivat).

Dans *Congo Inc.*, il dénonce en revanche la hiérarchisation ethnique. Les Pygmées sont traités avec mépris par d’autres peuples africains à cause de leur petite taille, inférieure à 1,50 m.⁷ Pour l’oncle du personnage principal, Isookanga, cette discrimination est comparable au racisme des Blancs envers les Noirs et le terme “Pygmée” est visiblement dévalorisant:

[...] nous, les Ekonda, sommes discrédités dans le pays. [...] partout nous sommes appelés Pygmées depuis toujours. [...] Les Mongo, des frères pourtant, n’ajoutent-ils pas, à la fin de la seconde syllabe du mot “motshwa”, une sorte de note de mépris décelable par n’importe qui ? [...] Ces Mongo, des clans Mbole, Bokatola, Bolia, Bakutshu, Bantomba, Ngelantano, parce qu’ils ont une taille au-dessus de la normale, se permettent de nous traiter ainsi. En dessous de tout. (20-1)

Arrivé à Kinshasa, Isookanga en fait une expérience douloureuse lorsque sa “pseudo-tante” (en réalité, celle d’un camarade pour qui il se fait passer) le met dehors, le méprisant du fait de sa “trop petite taille”, prétendument caractéristique d’un “Motshwa”: “[...] tu es comme un Pygmée! Un Mongo normal n’est pas petit comme toi!” (47). Comme on le voit, les critiques discursive et diégétique sont liées, l’attitude de ses faux parents citadins envers Isookanga illustrant les propos de son oncle.

CRITIQUE SATIRIQUE

Un autre outil de la critique politique et sociale est l’humour. Celui-ci a chez les auteurs congolais migrants un caractère particulier, souvent grinçant, sinon noir et cinglant, qu’il serait possible de résumer par l’expression oxymorique qui apparaît dans le titre d’un roman classique de l’écrivain congolais Henri Lopès, “le pleurer-rire”. En effet, il ne s’agit pas d’un humour à vocation purement ludique, mais bien d’une forme de dérision à valeur critique précisément. Dans ce cas, il serait possible de parler de “critique satirique”. Dans *La Chèvre, la corde et l’herbe*, Djungu-Simba interprète l’esprit d’autodérision propre selon lui aux Congolais comme stratégie défensive, façon d’affronter les difficultés; la raillerie serait leur “seule arme” face aux puissants (11).

Dans *Congo Inc.*, Bofane dénonce avec ironie toutes les gangrènes qui rongent son pays natal; la liste en est longue: l’exploitation effrénée du sous-sol, la mauvaise gouvernance, la primauté des intérêts des grandes puissances, les compromissions des ONG et des agences internationales, la destruction des écosystèmes. Cette dimension ironique du roman est annoncée dès son seuil. Le texte est dédié “aux filles, aux fillettes, aux femmes du Congo”, ainsi qu’“à l’ONU, au FMI, à l’OMC”: la juxtaposition met en relation le drame d’un demi-million de femmes violées et mutilées et l’existence de ces grandes institutions internationales, fondées pour garantir la paix et la stabilité (politique, économique) dans le monde et empêcher les crimes contre l’humanité. Ce curieux assemblage, mettant côte à côte les victimes et les complices (ne serait-ce qu’en raison de leur inaction) de la violence postcoloniale, est une forme de dénonciation sarcastique de l’inefficacité de ces organisations. Leur “bonne gouvernance” est plusieurs fois ridiculisée dans la diégèse et, ainsi, accusée de contribuer au dysfonctionnement de la RDC. Le jeu vidéo *Raging Trade*, auquel s’adonne avec passion Isookanga, “mondialiste désireux de se faire un peu la main dans le domaine des affaires” (18), illustre parfaitement les mécanismes d’une mondialisation sauvage qui, aux yeux du narrateur, est basée sur une exploitation globalisée des matières premières africaines dont profitent les puissances mondiales. Dans cet univers virtuel, Isookanga incarne Congo Bololo, un “raider”, un “vorace” qui convoite tout: “minerais, pétrole, eau, terres, tout était bon à prendre. [...] Pour atteindre ces objectifs, il préconisait la guerre et tous ses corollaires: bombardements intensifs, nettoyage ethnique, déplacements de population, esclavage ...” (19). Ses ennemis virtuels portent des noms fort éloquentes et, par-là, cocasses, tels que *Skulls and Bones Mining Fields*, *Goldberg & Gils Atomic Project*, *Mass Graves Petroleum*, *Blood and Oil*, *Uranium et Sécurité*, *Kannibal Dawa*, *American Diggers* ou *Hiroshima-Naga*. Prédation économique et instabilité politique y sont clairement mises en relation.

Le narrateur crée souvent un effet comique en traitant un problème sérieux sur un ton humoristique. Ce décalage entre la tonalité du discours et son thème inscrit l’écriture bofanienne dans une perspective loufoque, de même que le comique de mots qui y est également fréquent. Pour en donner un exemple concret, évoquons le discours d’Isookanga défendant la mémoire d’un vendeur à la sauvette et ancien enfant-soldat, Omari. Dans une hyperbole à la fois amusante et faisant référence à la situation internationale, le narrateur qualifie le vacarme qui accompagne ce discours de “la plus vaste cacophonie qu’on ait entendu depuis Babel, sauf peut-être aux assem-

blées de l'ONU juste avant le vote d'une résolution sur la Palestine" (107). Autre exemple: quand Isookanga justifie le vol d'un ordinateur à une africaniste belge, il le situe dans le prolongement du passé colonial africain. Il constate à ce propos: "Mon geste compte pour le remboursement de la dette coloniale" (31). Dans une véritable scène d'anthologie dans le même roman, le narrateur décrit le rapport sexuel entre Isookanga et l'africaniste en recourant également à la phraséologie postcoloniale:

[...] chaque coup de rein qu'il lui portait était—pour elle—comme le fouet que ses ancêtres avaient subi lors de l'esclavage; [...] chaque assaut entre ses cuisses ouvertes était aussi impitoyable que la hache tranchant des mains, que la chicote infligée par Léopold II et ses descendants; [...] chaque secousse dans son ventre sensible résonnait comme les salves tirées par le néocolonialisme sauvage, comme les diktats du Fonds monétaire international, comme les résolutions de l'ONU, comme une réédition du *Tintin au Congo* [...] (195-6)

Après quoi, il pose cette question, dans un passage en focalisation interne: "[...] mais avait-elle suffisamment payé de sa personne pour acquitter la dette que ses ancêtres avaient contractée envers ces peuplades [...] ?" (198). Anciens colonisés et anciens colonisateurs recourent donc à la même métaphore de la dette coloniale que Bofane semble tourner en dérision, en particulier lorsqu'il s'en sert dans un contexte sexuel. Sa critique vise non seulement la réalité africaine, mais aussi les discours tenus sur l'Afrique, y compris par des Occidentaux pétris de bonnes intentions et forts d'une rhétorique postcoloniale, basée sur la repentance, que les héros bofaniens, aussi bien les Africains que les Européens, reprennent volontiers à leur compte, pour l'utiliser à leurs fins.

Une tonalité humoristique agrmente aussi l'intrigue violente de *La Belle de Casa*. Le roman retrace plusieurs situations comiques dont l'histoire du prénom du héros, Sese Seko Tshimanda (34), ou la description de sa profession: il est "brouteur", c'est-à-dire un "cyber-séducteur africain", autrement dit "Un de ces types—très jeunes, souvent—qui entretiennent une cour avec quelques dizaines, parfois même des centaines, de femmes amoureuses, pratiquant une drague forcenée dans le but de leur soutirer de l'argent en jouant sur les stéréotypes de l'Afrique indigente et sur l'éternelle culpabilité de l'Europe esclavagiste et colonialiste mais en quête de rédemption" (20). Pour "fondre le cœur et la carte bleue" des Blanches en mal d'amour, Sese joue bien son rôle de pauvre Noir: il utilise le pseudonyme "Koffi le Grand Ngando" (Koffi le Grand Crocodile) qui, selon le narrateur, sonne plus africain que Sese Seko, peaufine son accent kinois ("Ti sé, y a qu'toi qui pé faire battre mon kèr comme ça, ch't'assire!") et raconte ou plutôt invente une cascade de malheurs qui lui seraient arrivés, ainsi qu'à ses proches, pour attendrir ses proies (21). Sese se sert avec préméditation de l'image stéréotypée d'un pauvre Noir, victime de l'héritage colonial, pour faire tourner son cyber-business, et en tire cyniquement profit. De cette façon, son statut de victime devient rentable, car plus il se pose en Africain indigent, plus il gagne. La satire bofaniennne semble en l'occurrence viser le détournement par certains Africains du discours misérabiliste concernant leur continent.

Bien que l'humour et l'ironie se combinent tout au long des romans bofaniens, ils ne font pas toujours rire, mais engendrent plutôt une sensation de malaise. Nous rions jaune, comme si nous étions gênés. La narration, menée sur un ton hilarant, est sans cesse émaillée de passages qui présentent des scènes de violence qui véhiculent une critique mordante de la réalité congolaise ou, plus largement, africaine. Ces îlots narratifs détonnants bouleversent le lecteur et font que son rire se teinte d'amertume, car ils dénoncent de façon terriblement réaliste les cataclysmes qui secouent le continent africain: les guerres intestines et le nettoyage ethnique, la misère et la faim, le viol et la mutilation des femmes, le racisme, la prostitution, la violence coloniale et postcoloniale. Les situations cocasses et les propos ironiques dont sont truffées les fictions, aussi nombreux et ingénieux soient-ils, n'arrivent pas à ôter l'aspect sérieux aux thèmes abordés. C'est que, chez Bofane, le rire côtoie toujours le grave et cache un grand fond de désespérance. L'alternance du comique et du sérieux, ainsi que le contraste entre les deux, font encore mieux ressortir l'atrocité de certaines situations et rendent la critique satirique particulièrement percutante, pour ne pas dire féroce.

Il faut toutefois souligner que les analyses critiques de la situation congolaise ou, plus largement, africaine, menées dans les textes du corpus, deviennent aussi l'occasion d'évoquer le dynamisme, la résistance et la débrouillardise des Africains. Cet aspect est développé dans tous les romans de Bofane. Célio Matemona, Shasha la Jactance et Adéïto, victimes directes ou indirectes de la violence postcoloniale, parviennent à s'affranchir d'un pouvoir oppresseur et tyrannique et à dépasser leur condition subalterne. Résilients et déterminés, ils luttent pour sortir de la misère, y réussissent et prennent leur place dans la société. Il en est de même pour Isookanga et Sese: persévérants et malins, ces jeunes Rastignac congolais savent s'adapter à chaque situation, transformer des inconvénients en atouts (par exemple profiter de leur statut de victime postcoloniale, soit de "pauvre Noir") et

tirer parti de la mondialisation. Selon une chercheuse, “Les personnages bofaniens acquièrent ainsi une dimension quasi héroïque, en surmontant les obstacles générés par le dysfonctionnement de l’État” (Chariatte 68). Une remarque similaire pourrait être formulée à propos de nombreux personnages de Djungu-Simba. Dans *La Chèvre, la corde et l’herbe au Congo-Zaïre*, c’est un proverbe africain qui sert de point de départ et de leitmotiv à la représentation du Congo: “La chèvre broute l’herbe de l’endroit où elle est attachée” (12). L’auteur exploite la polysémie du proverbe qui revient comme un refrain dans toutes sortes de contextes. L’aspect critique y est très présent dans la mesure où la chèvre devient le “parangon de tous ceux qui abusent de leurs fonctions” (12). Mais lorsque les Congolais se trouvent qualifiés de “chèvres congolaises” (13) et se voient prêter une “mentalité caprine”, il s’avère que c’est la débrouillardise qui en est le trait majeur (14). La critique qui apparaît dans les textes du corpus n’est donc pas synonyme d’auto-apitoiement ou de pessimisme nihiliste. Les Congolais y prennent en main leur destin et sont capables de survivre dans une réalité à première vue invivable, grâce à leur extraordinaire inventivité et à la résilience face aux catastrophes politiques s’abattant régulièrement sur leur pays.

Conclusion

Dans *Si le Congo m’était conté*, Faïk-Nzuji rapporte des scènes où elle-même ou ses amies noires se font prendre, dans des boutiques en Belgique, pour de “pauvres Africaines”:

“C’est trop cher pour vous ?” “C’est moins cher par là ?” “Attendez, j’ai autre chose ...” Mon amie se voyait au Biafra, en Éthiopie, dans un camp de réfugiés en Angola tenant des deux mains un bol de riz couvert de mouches ou en train de se disputer des sachets de nourriture lancés d’un avion de l’ONU pour ses enfants (163).

Les Afropéens se voient ainsi exposés au quotidien aux conséquences d’une image réductionniste et misérabiliste de l’Afrique, d’origine essentiellement médiatique.⁸ Pourtant, ceux parmi eux qui sont des écrivains mettent à la disposition du public européen des textes qui permettent de percevoir le continent noir d’une façon plus diversifiée. Nous avons montré que les écrivains belgo-congolais offraient dans leurs œuvres une image plus riche et nuancée de leur pays d’origine et du continent africain dans son ensemble que ne le font habituellement les discours médiatiques sensationnalistes. Ce qui ne veut pas dire une image idyllique. Comme le suggère notre titre, cette image a une coloration ambivalente. L’ambivalence en question semble tenir à la particularité du positionnement des auteurs migrants; en effet, ils parlent de leur contrée d’origine depuis leur pays d’accueil. Nous l’avons vu: cette position paradoxale de tout écrivain migrant qui est à la fois dehors (physiquement) et dedans (culturellement, mentalement, affectivement), est susceptible de générer un regard particulier, en même temps tendre et distancié, sur la terre quittée. L’oscillation entre la nostalgie et la critique que nous avons relevée chez les auteurs étudiés vient peut-être justement de leur situation de migrants. Les difficultés qu’ils ont dû affronter et la distance géographique qui les sépare de leur patrie créent une forme de distanciation intellectuelle (mais non affective) propice au recul critique, surtout face aux difficultés de la vie politique africaine, en particulier celle congolaise qu’ils connaissent le mieux. Les écrivains belgo-congolais semblent donc avoir tiré de l’exil un certain bénéfice cognitif, l’éloignement géographique stimulant l’esprit critique et favorisant une meilleure compréhension des réalités africaines. Les souvenirs personnels qu’ils en gardent continuent pourtant à produire de la nostalgie. La migration n’a donc pas dressé de barrière imaginaire et affective entre eux et les contrées correspondant à leur passé. Elle a plutôt créé une attitude et une pratique intellectuelle et émotive double, une sorte de tendresse critique ou de critique tendre.

Notes

1. Nous adoptons cette appellation, y compris pour l’époque où le nom officiel du pays était “Zaïre”, désignation adoptée sous Mobutu dans le cadre de sa politique d’“africanisation”, mais qui n’était pas du tout plus authentiquement africaine, le mot constituant le résultat de la mauvaise prononciation du mot “fleuve” en kikongo (*nzadi*) par les Portugais (Van Reybrouck 425–6).
2. L’aveu d’In Koli Jean Bofane, qui se dit “de nationalité belge et de rationalité congolaise” (Desorbay 230), est exemplaire des complexités identitaires des écrivains belgo-congolais migrants. Albert Russo constitue un cas encore plus complexe ce dont cette autoprésentation, tirée de “La moitié africaine de mon être”, permet de rendre compte: “De mère anglaise ayant grandi dans l’ancienne Rhodésie du Sud, aujourd’hui le Zimbabwe, et de père italien et séfarade originaire de Rhodes à l’époque où les îles du Dodécannèse se trouvaient sous domination italienne, je suis né au Zaïre [...]. Ensuite, ma famille et moi nous sommes transférés à Usumbura, la capitale du Ruanda-Urundi, alors territoire sous tutelle administré par la Belgique” (644). Il déclare d’ailleurs explicitement: “[...] c’est aux sang-mêlé que je m’identifie, au propre comme au figuré, et je ne crois qu’à l’interpénétration des cultures” (643). Dans le cas de tels auteurs, les découpages nationaux

du domaine littéraire s'avèrent peu opérants et il est important de prendre en compte tant le contexte de publication des œuvres que celui du pays d'origine des auteurs.

3. La Senne est une rivière qui traverse Bruxelles. Son homonymie avec la "Seine", interprétée symboliquement, en dit long sur l'intrication des champs littéraires belge francophone et français.
4. C'est seulement ce personnage féminin, maternel, qui incarne dans le roman une Afrique accueillante à la diversité sexuelle. Les Anciens du village de Mama Malkia, qui personnifient la figure paternelle et la tradition, jugent Harry Wilson "possédé" lorsqu'elle leur parle de son orientation sexuelle. Cette dichotomie en termes de genre, qui se manifeste en l'occurrence dans l'attitude envers l'homosexualité, renvoie, plus généralement, à une double image de l'Afrique, oscillant entre la nostalgie et la critique, ce que nous analysons dans la suite de cet article. Un seul texte peut donc véhiculer des aspects opposés qui deviennent constitutifs d'une image profondément nuancée.
5. Le même procédé est appliqué aux titres des chapitres.
6. Ce qualificatif désigne au Maghreb les populations noires.
7. Pour mettre en exergue les hiérarchies raciales intra-africaines et le statut ostracisé de la minorité pygmée, Bofane envisageait un autre titre pour son roman: *Putain de pygmée* (Bofane, "Entretien avec In Koli Jean Bofane (28/11/2016)").
8. Ce mot-valise renvoie aux Africains et descendants d'Africains établis en Europe.

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Speculative vertices, Ogun mythopoesis, and (the) fourth/further stage(s)

Chike Okoye

Speculative vertices, Ogun mythopoesis, and (the) fourth/further stage(s)

Wole Soyinka's seminal essay, "The Fourth Stage: Through the Mysteries of Ogun to the Origin of Yoruba Tragedy" which appears as appendix in his collection of critical essays, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976), has been read and critiqued as an important work of myth, mythopoesis, tragedy and the Yoruba pantheon. To date, no meta-critical study has yet treated the essay as essentially speculative fiction, or as an invented model or construct for variegated possible future applications, or even as an authentic African futuristic artistic invention. This is important in present times as a resurgence of earlier genres and trends populate the literary world, thereby raising the need for underpinnings, connections, projections, and confluences such as this article presents. With the application of archetypal author-, text-, and context-oriented theoretical modes alongside historicity, this essay navigates and re-interrogates "The Fourth Stage" and its numerous critiques in the contexts of Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism, finding it a practical model for African futuristic mytho-cultural and literary productions. I also through this essay expose the multiple areas of possible applications of such inventiveness in the reappraisal and re-interrogation of the problematics and maladies of the postcolony. **Keywords:** Africanfuturism, speculative fiction, myth, mythopoesis, archetype, pantheon.

Introduction: Speculative fiction(s)

Raymond Coulombe's conditional "what if?", the impetus that informs and propels the spectral gamut of speculative fiction (Christion), is neither antipodal nor antithetical to verisimilitude. Paying homage to the boundarilessness of ontological existence and human imagination, new thoughts morph into words that create worlds surreal, yet appealing, birthing ideas that roam the range of science fiction, Afrofuturism, Africanfuturism, magical realism, legends, sagas, and myths. The chronological gradient in this listing is indicative and representative of epochs and attendant contexts. Coming from, and belonging to a common backcloth, speculative fiction is the cycloramic canvas, the effort and evidence of humankind conjecturing and extrapolating in an existential bid to understand and explain phenomena and produce desired worlds. Basically, any fiction infused with the supernatural, fantastical, and futuristic, suggesting alternative indices of existence—past, present, and future—from what is quotidian and, in extension constitutes the dream of a new earth and new heaven, is speculative fiction. Ikenna Dieke conflates mythmaking in theorizing speculative fiction in the possible deployment of elements of heroic fantasy in fashioning viable futures by arguing that "this heroic fantasy is expressed in the millenarian myth which, extrapolating from present milieu and knowledge, objectifies the hopes and fears of its time, creating infinite models of social possibility by which it evaluates the present" (284). Dike Okoro for his own part delineates the components of the concept. Okoro leans towards Africa, bringing into sharper focus the boundaries around Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism; and beyond.

For Okoro in "Futuristic Themes and Science Fiction", "narratives by many African fiction writers whose stories incorporate characters and traits found in science or fantasy fiction [...] explore the supernatural, myths, magic and mystery" (379). Okoro's position draws from John Mbiti's stance that Africa's religious *Weltanschauung* is based on the existence of spirits, ancestors, and spirit beings (Mbiti 75). However, Okoro makes an important distinction between Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism—the former *a la* Mark Dery is about writings existing in America "essentially associated with black speculative fiction written by African American SF writers" (379); while the latter "is identifiable in works of fiction by first generation African fiction writers and the succeeding generations that follow their trail" (379).

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Nnedi Okorafor, who coined and started using the term “Africanfuturism”, is of the position that it “is a sub-category of science fiction. Africanjujuism is a sub-category of fantasy that respectfully acknowledges the seamless blend of true existing African spiritualities and cosmologies with the imaginative”. She states this in her *Nnedi’s Wahala Zone Blog* and continues in explication that, though Africanfuturism is similar to Afrofuturism, the difference lies in the former firstly being more rooted in African culture, history, mythology, etc., before seeping into the Black diaspora. For Okorafor, though Africanfuturism is concerned with visions of the future and technology, it is not too occupied with “what could have been” but more with “what is and can/will be”. It is also aware of and projects “what has been”. Its center is Africa, though it often extends beyond. In exemplary extrapolation, Okorafor puts forth: “Afrofuturism: Wakanda [the kingdom of Wakanda in the film *Black Panther*] builds its first outpost in Oakland, CA, USA. Africanfuturism: Wakanda builds its first outpost in a neighboring African country”. In furtherance, she is of the view that Africanfuturism does not necessarily include fantasy; the fantasy is set in the future or involves space explorations and technology, etc., making it more of science fiction than fantasy. Importantly, by virtue of its make-up, Africanfuturism will naturally have elements of mysticism that are authentically African and not made up. However, she admits that certain works “are both Africanfuturist and Afrofuturist, depending on how they are read”.

Interestingly, in “The Mirror of Afrofuturism” Samuel Delaney tries to dismiss the author clause in Afrofuturism’s description—“what’s needed for Afrofuturism is black characters in the future, whatever the race of the writer” (173)—and subsequently lists texts to buttress his position. He states further that “Afrofuturism is pretty much anything you want it to be and not a rigorous category at all” (173) and warns of the need to set up critical mirrors in delineating and theorizing on Afrofuturism, reminding us that the term “was coined by a white critic, Mark Dery in his 1993 essay ‘Black to the Future’” (173). Delaney reasons that, since whatever he writes as a black writer in the science fiction form is Afrofuturism, he still maintains that “historically ‘Afrofuturism’ is a white concept that does not hinge on the race of the writer” (179). Time, according to him, seems to have changed the reflective vertices of Afrofuturism given its “dubious”, apparently non-racial/(racist) beginnings to its vaunted all-black/African affairs of the present. He emphasizes the fluidity and dynamism (akin to difficult seamlessness) in the concrete definition and description of the concept of Afrofuturism.

In her book *Afrofuturism*, Ytasha Womack informs us that some cases of Afrofuturism are basically “a total re-envisioning of the past and speculation about the future rife with cultural critiques” (20). However, on a transitory note to Africanfuturism, it is clear that Afrofuturism embodies black/Negro dominance in a science fiction base, while science fiction is almost always Caucasian/white-based but serves as a ready tool for both the sliver of Afrofuturism and the broader canvas of speculative fiction. As I will show soon, Africanfuturism as part of speculative fiction draws more from African mythological pasts (and presents) to blend with futuristic science. Rudimentary notions of myths as being designed to explain the nature and workings of the universe and as guides on necessary behavioral patterns for successful living, have been found originating in oral tradition; often including elements from legends and folklore. Myths and legends are the earliest stories recorded by people with legends originally based on historical happenings; albeit all of them being exaggerated and/or unreliable (Rosenberg xv, vi; Squire and Squire 2, 3; Akporobaro 48). Akporobaro’s view that “myths are usually distinguished from legends in that they have less of an historical basis ... (and) that mythology (is) a body of related myths shared by members of a given or religion” (49), and Rosenberg’s notion that myths are abstract constructions rather than “narrative tales or symbols of experience” (xxi), are both complementary in their respective informative and intellectual bents. Ivor Hartmann, as quoted by Jane Bryce, is categorical in this: “Most speculative fiction, be it fantasy, sci fi or horror, is firmly rooted in cultural mythologies” (3). Bryce states unequivocally that “(what in literature we now call speculative fiction) has its roots in African modes of storytelling that draw on myth, orality, and indigenous belief systems that lend themselves to the invention of personal mythologies [...]” (1). Alastair Niven describes Ben Okri’s magical realism in *The Famished Road* as “[...] a perpetual story into which flowed the great seas of African dreams, myths, and fables of the world, known and unknown” and Alexandra Alter describes Okorafor’s novels as novels in which “magic, ritual and secrecy are threads that [...] run through [...] a head-spinning menagerie of other-worldly spirits and deities drawn from Nigerian myths and legends”.

D. O. Fagunwa’s *Forest of a Thousand Demons* and Amos Tutuola’s *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* and *The Palmwine Drinkard* form the scribal urtext as copies of embellished oral tradition for the pioneer forebears of speculative fiction in Nigeria. To this duo could be added Elechi Amadi (*The Concubine*) and Cyprain Ekwensi (*An African Night’s Entertainment*). Mark Bould mentions writers in Africa he regards highly as practitioners of African science

fiction—Algerian Mohammed Dib (*Who Remembers the Sea*, 1962), South African J. M. Coetzee (*Waiting for the Barbarians*, 1980), Congolese Sony Labou Tansi (*Life and a Half*, 1977), Kenyan Ngugi wa Thiong'o (*Wizard of the Crow*, 2006), and South African Nadine Gordimer (*July's People*, 1981) (see Okoro 380). Okoro conflates speculative fiction with postcolonial writings: "Some [...] imbue neocolonial experiences with speculative narratives and tropes enriched with magic [...] Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, Kojo Laing's *The Woman of the Aeroplane*, Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*, Syl-Cheney Coker's *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* and Buchi Emecheta's *The Rape of Shavi*" (385).

In whatever mode or to whichever purpose—whether it is in the construct of a derivative meta-tale reflective of Prometheus' sacrifice for humanity, or precludes the ritual commemoration of solidarity by workers on May Day viz-a-viz the shot colleagues of 1841 Chicago (Ofeimun 31, 32), or African writers digging into their rich and fantastical oral or/and urtext to structure and position their writings—Kayode Afolayan's summary of the utilitarian values of mythology is germane. He posits Durkheim's traditionalist view that the purpose of myth is "to bind a society, create a structure governed by rules and habits", and Sorrel's modernist perspective that myth is "not to stabilize but to direct energies and inspire action" (188). Speculative fiction is not new in Africa. The stories handed down through generations which are still told today on the continent contain elements of fantasy and the supernatural and are engrained in the ontology. Its variant in the diaspora as Afrofuturism, which according to Elizabeth Hamilton is "the artistic and aesthetic choice to inject futurity, fantasy, and technology into the creation and discussion of cultural production in the African diaspora" (71), is only a testament to the original blossoming elsewhere. By all means of utilitarian value, Africa's intrinsic belief in its active ontology of archetypal inter-dimensional co-existence of beings—*ogbanje/abiku*, deities/gods, humans, ancestral spirits, liminal beings, etc.—is enough enabling background for literary projections of speculative tenor and texture.

Situating the Ogun mythopoesis: The Soyinka angle

Archetypal, comparative, textual, and contextual critical modes are applied in this essay; all couched in author-, text-, and context-oriented approaches. Historicities are also navigated in my concerns about speculative vertices and myth criticism; exploring and using the Yoruba Ogun mythopoesis as seminally interrogated by Wole Soyinka in "The Fourth Stage". Soyinka's essay essentially features Ogun, a Yoruba god who heroically bridges the gulf(s) of transition in the three planes of existence—the world of the dead, the unborn, and the ancestors—in order to ameliorate the primordial anguish of severance within the gods and with man. Ogun could essentially achieve this partly because his abode is the "liminal ether of the gods". The plan of this article is to launch from this springboard and extrapolate connotations and futures—just as our modern writers consciously appropriate ancient myths for their use.

Variants abound but the crux of the Yoruba pantheon mythology is about disintegration, re-composition, and anguish. In the beginning, an archdivinity, Orisa, was in the company of Orunmila, god of divination and wisdom. They descended into the primeval void to start creation under the auspices of Olodumare, the Supreme. Orisa had gotten himself a slave at the Emure market named Atunda. Soon after being acquired, he sought permission from Orisa to till a piece of land near the house, on top of the hill. His hard work impressed Orisa. By a quirk of nature, envy consumed Atunda and he planned to murder his master and subsequently rolled a massive boulder onto his master's back during one of his visits. The devastating result was the fragmentation on impact of the erstwhile wholesome Orisa into four hundred and one components—this number representing the entire Yoruba pantheon after reassembly by Orunmila, the agency of divination and wisdom.

This act of rebellion by Atunda/Atooda/Atowoda in breaking up the godhead and center of authority is hailed by Soyinka as a revolutionary move aimed at breaking the cycle of eternity and godly authority; made more poignant since Atunda was human. Again, Soyinka holds the dissolution as a momentous night of tragic becoming; the anguish suffered by the god and his votaries and his own soul-shattering ordeal later to be dramatically replayed in the passion plays of Sango and Ogun. A primordial severance with man was a cause of haplessness and frustration among the distraught gods and Ogun came to the rescue, breaking the jinx in creating a path to man. He crossed the inchoate void—the fourth stage—in order to achieve this and was thereafter elevated to king status both by his fellow gods and mankind. This offer of regency by gods and men he duly rejected but later succumbed to the relentless pressure of men—the people of Ire. Of course, his unique multi-valence reared its head, and he slaughtered his own men in a fit of his essence (Layiwola 22; Ebeogu 92, 93; Afolayan 189; Adu-Gyamfi 75, 76).

Many variants of the crux of this story exist for contextually utilitarian purposes. Contrivance and appropriation are the keys and tools in play for Soyinka's character of the void, Ogun (the alter ego and clone of sorts of the Ogun of the Yoruba pantheon). This is because the character (Soyinka's personal god, muse, and kindred spirit) which he widely applies in his literary works and life in different connotations, vertices, and contexts, is the one already conveniently altered to reflect and retain his peculiar caprices on one hand, and on the other, primordial archetypal essence(s), respectively. His own Ogun has attributes that are easily identifiable and sometimes seamlessly inextricable from the other variants of the Ogun myth. Nevertheless, Soyinka's variant suits his purposes. The general and primordial Ogun was supposedly a man before attaining god status: fiery tempered, reckless, always drunk, jovial, kind, protector of the weak, enraged killer of his celebrants, destructive, god-turned-human, power-drunk god of war, god of metallurgy and harvest, and the unpredictable retributive one (Ebeogu 85–90). Afolayan's view is that "Ogun carries dual identities; primarily he creates yet destroys, he solves problems but fans machinations, he is a catalyst for peace and pandemonium [...] (he is also) a rescuer [...] a villain" (189–90). Olatunde Lawuyi enumerates his favorite soothing totems: wine, food, dogs, snails, and palm oil. He also recounts a scene when, out of a lack of attention at his arrival at a merriment scene, he draws his sword on the revelers. But, despite that, Lawuyi still calls Ogun "a leader". He goes further: "[...] Ogun is a hero or a deviant [...] a leader in the forest, a follower of Oduduwa at home; he can sleep with his superior's wife in the forest and lie about it at home" (135), effectively establishing Ogun's reputation as lascivious. Dele Layiwola sees Ogun as an artist: "if we assemble the gods in an aesthetic mould, Ogun always puts the finishing touch" (26) and quotes Bolaji Idowu for support: "As the master artist, it is Ogun who gives the finishing touch to the work of Orisa-nla" (qtd in Layiwola 26). It is Ogun's calcified strength and energies encrusted by his daring breach and bridging of the fourth stage that negatively resurfaces while he is king of humans at Ire. This shows that his human dimension is incapable of containing his demoniacs when unleashed. This is described by Soyinka: "At the first battle the same demonic energies were aroused but this was no world womb, no chthonic lair, no playground of cosmic monsters [...] (and) the divisions between man and man [...] (could not) be perceived by the erstwhile hero of the transitional abyss" (32). He also distinguishes between the serenity associated with Obatala by highlighting Ogun's profound sorrow: "There is no elation [...] nothing like the beatified elation of Obatala [...] only [...] a profound sorrow [...]" (32). The foregoing gives a good overview of the general and historical Ogun, preparing us for Soyinka's appropriated Ogun. Bryce has categorically stated that writers invert, appropriate, and invent myth and history in their productions by saying that "one of the tools [...] has been the invention of personal mythologies and the rewriting of history in the light of future realities" (10). There is ample support for this view on Soyinka and the Ogun myth. Ketu Katrak declares: "Yoruba myths that are used for tragic drama are always molded to comply with the purpose of Soyinka's tragedy" (32). Of his tweaking of Obatala and Ogun, he says: "Soyinka uses their [...] characteristics and transforms the two gods into symbols of his own concept of tragic experience" (41). He adds, in a sure tone: "Soyinka also alters Ogun's traditional role as god of iron and war, into 'first actor [...] in the first art [...] tragic art'" (41). It is clear that he creates for a purpose and applies the speculative mode for a goal. By expanding and weaving the intricate threads to flesh out the Ogun character to suit his needs, he engages in the most utilitarian of inventions.

Odia Ofeimun believes that Soyinka consciously downplays historicity, or better still, "devalues the history to ensure that it does not interfere with the purposes of his myth" (60). He confines Sango to a relegated historical plane while elevating Ogun to mythical sublimity (Ofeimun 61) and touts the efficacy of this approach, especially when he writes: "Soyinka's reduction of the Ogun myth to a written, scribal, culture, made it possible for me to appreciate and subscribe to the historicity of Ogun" (23). Having compared history and Soyinka, Afolayan declares that "Soyinka's mythopoesis must be at variance with the 'authentic' or popular versions of the Ogun myth" (190), while Yaw Adu-Gyamfi simply states that "Soyinka's version of the mythical background to this summary in *Myth, Literature and the African World* is quite different from other anthropological accounts by scholars such as S. A. Babalola and Sandra Barnes" (75). Adu-Gyamfi lets us understand that the reconstruction of the myth entails tweaking aspects of the protagonist—Ogun. He also hints at Soyinka's coalescence of the different variants of the histo-mythological Ogun in his "privatist mode and from the universalist-individualistic outlook" (Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike 235). Afam Ebeogu and Layiwola also agree that Soyinka creates an Ogun from the original pantheon Ogun that suits his varying needs. Soyinka himself admits this. Biodun Jeyifo quotes a conversation between Ulli Beier and Soyinka in which Beier asks Soyinka: "This image of Ogun has accompanied you through your later writing; but it has been said that the Ogun of your play is a rather personal, 'unorthodox' Orisa—that

in fact, you created a new kind of Ogun?” To this, Soyinka replies, “You create Ogun”, “Hmmm [...] that is true”, and “Yes, indeed”.

The evidence and Soyinka’s admittance might appear trite for the informed. However, it is necessary in the course and concern in the writing of this article. My posture is about possibilities of creation, of futurism, of Africanfuturism from the wells of myth and mythologies indigenous to Africa in our confluences of the speculative as constructs for society and its vicissitudes. These vertices as exemplified by the Soyinkaresque Ogun mythopoesis are not mere plasticization of aesthetic license but have utilitarian value—and there is evidence, too, to that effect. Soyinka’s predilection for action, especially revolutionary action bordering on destructive violence, albeit aimed at positive change and creativity/recreation, is partly birthed on the cusp of concept and idiosyncrasy. He extols Atooda, inverting his treacherous rebellion into revolutionary drive as catalytic for reversing hegemony and complacency. Layiwola avers when he says that “purposeful action, as both creation and destruction, becomes a veritable leitmotif in Soyinka’s most profound art” (23). Again, Soyinka is obviously aware, as is evident in his works and worldview, that traditional civilizations do not find a base in history or historicism, but are better off with mythic signposts and models that guide their existentialism, as evident in his downplaying of history in favor of enhanced mythology which he roundly applies in his art. In a commendable and ingenious aesthetic twist, he yokes his Ogun’s ancient forge responsibilities and present automobile oversight functions together (Ogun is god of the road and iron and automobiles are made of iron), thereby consolidating an organic link with practical mythopoesis. It is important to note, however, that whatever the altruistic or artistic reasons or use for his mythopoesis, it has been viewed by some with skepticism. Afolayan’s view is that “Soyinka’s deployment of the Ogun myth has generated a lot of concern with the common denomination bothering on the utility of the Ogun myth” (190).

It is important to note that there are opposing and divergent views to Soyinka’s ideas. Canice Nwosu believes that Soyinka’s theory is less suited for performance analysis. He says that “the earliest theories of J. S. Mbiti, Wole Soyinka and Ngugi wa Thiong’o that ushered in African postmodernism tilt more towards traditional criticism of text than performance analysis” (101). He is also of the view that these theories are not African enough because “the reference point of most modern African theorists remains the precepts of European scholars” (118). He further avers that these theories lack basic theatre approach, are designed for “use in academic institutions”, and are more like “English and literary studies theories” (138). Ofeimun delineates reactions to Soyinka’s essay into those who accuse him of selling out to the West; those who believe that, in his bid to retrieve the African worldview, he has overdone it; and a third position in which he quotes Anthony Appiah: “the Soyinka whose account of Yoruba cosmology is precisely not the Yoruba account; the Soyinka who has taken sometimes Yoruba mythology, but sometimes the world of a long-dead Greek, and demythologized them to his own purposes, making of them something new [...] private and individual” (37). Femi Osofisan, also quoted in Ofeimun, outrightly rejects the “imperialistic sway” of Soyinka’s Ogun, saying that Soyinka’s “recourse to the gods was retrogressive”, choosing Orunmila—another of the Yoruba deities, in charge of divination—as better suited for service in our times (88). Of course, some discomfort should be welcome in creation, just as Soyinka’s Ogun as pathfinder experienced in wading the void. Soyinka does not shirk his path and resolve as the need for utilitarianism (through invention in his case) of the arts is not debatable. He maintains that “Yoruba traditional art is not ideational however, but ‘essential’” (22).

On the basis of cultural relativity and ethnocentrism, the background to Ogun and his mythopoesis is a pointer that civilization is a relative concept. Lawuyi opines that it is both “an indication of religious insight and the expression of a cultural doubt about the supposed backwardness of Africans” (128). This, of course, makes vague allusions to the vaunted Nietzschean *Birth of Tragedy*, a guiding counterfoil and evidence of equipoised cultural relativity with “The Fourth Stage” of Soyinka. An interesting and revealing aspect of Ogun is in his apparent use in the portrayal of historical internecine strife the ancient Yoruba are known for—Ogun in this case becomes an abstract indicative index and corroborating history. Lawuyi puts it this way: “Ogun’s uniqueness as a symbol of war lies in the internal strife and tensions not uncommon among the constitutive subethnic Yoruba” (129). Oyin Ogunba has this to say on Soyinka’s use of Ogun as a personal symbol:

Soyinka has discovered his god, Ogun, who will henceforth be the main source of inspiration not only in his plays but also in his poem “Idanre” and his novel *The Interpreters*. In *A Dance of the Forests*, the duality of Ogun’s character (destructiveness and creativity) is already appreciated, but the emphasis is still on his negative side [...] in “Idanre” he begins to dream of Ogun’s creative and regenerative side dominating his less attractive, less humane qualities. (102)

This dream of a more positive side later appears in *Ogun Abibiman* and Ebeogu confirms that “The arrival of Ogun Abibiman bears out Ogunba’s anticipation of this more positive side of Ogun in Soyinka’s works” (93). Further textual application of Ogun to enhance the plot and drive messages home could be found in *The Road* where drivers who ply the roads worship Ogun as god and guardian of the road. There are cases of Ogun’s possession (Murano) being knocked down by Kotonu’s lorry (made of metal, Ogun’s totem), and the assignation of Murano by the Professor as a tapster of palm wine—Ogun’s favorite brew. The cyclic dynamism and tautness of the Ogun-drenched plot drives home the message more effectively. Other uses of Soyinka’s speculative efforts range from the compactly arcane applications of the Ogun mysteries and attributes as found in Kola’s canvas in *The Interpreters* (qtd in Jeyifo) to Nwosu’s declaration on “The Fourth Stage” and Ogun that Soyinka’s theorization “is among the earliest African theories on conventional criticism of text” (29) and “marks a major paradigm shift towards textual criticism” (121). Below is the excerpt of what Jeyifo calls “canonical” concerning the Yoruba pantheon as it appears on pages 224–5 of *The Interpreters*; the emphasis is Jeyifo’s and portrays Soyinka’s direct application of the mythopoesis in his narrative:

And these floods in the beginning, of the fevered fogs of the beginning, of the first messenger, the thimble of earth, a fowl and ear of corn, seeking the spot where a scratch would become a peopled island; of the first apostate rolling the boulder down the back of the unsuspecting deity [...] and shattering him into fragments which were picked up and pieced together with devotion [...] of the lover of purity, the unblemished one whose large compassion embraced the cripples and the dumb, the dwarf, the epileptic and why not, indeed, for they were creations of his drunken hand and what does it avail, the eternal penance of favoritism and abstinence? Of the lover of gore, invincible in battle, insatiable in love and carnage, the explorer, path-finder, protector of the forge and the creative hands, companion of the gourd whose crimson-misted sight of debauchery set him upon his own and he butchered them until the bitter cry pierced his fog of wine, stayed his hand and hung the sword, foolish like his dropped jaw [...] of the parting of the fog and the retreat of the beginning, and the eternal war of the first procedure with the long sickle head of chance, eternally mocking the pretensions of the bowl of plan mocking lines of order in the ring of chaos [...]. (Jeyifo 26)

It is Jeyifo’s stance that Soyinka has appropriated aspects of Ogun motifs for use in the propagation of his art, identity, message, and symbolic constructions and goes on to mention essays with the Ogun “self-fashioning”: “The Fourth Stage”, “Morality and Aesthetics in the Ritual Archetype”, and “The Credo of Being and Nothingness”. For the imaginative works, he lists “Idanre”; *Ogun Abibiman*; and the plays *A Dance of the Forests*, *The Road*, and *The Bacchae of Euripides*, saying that “all entail strong thematic and emblematic foregrounding of this structure of self-invention through the Ogun motifs” (27).

Soyinka is neither new nor alone in this inventiveness for message and change. Bryce (7) cites Soni Labou Tansi and Veronique Tadjou, who find expression in the “mythical register” where in beauty there is “capacity for magical transformation” of their female characters. She makes it more poignant: “Through [...] mythical devices Tadjou, Tansi, and others satirize and destabilize patriarchal power, suggesting through their destructive feminine archetypes the obverse of victimhood and abjection”. The strength of an instructive past and what it could do for a positive future is reiterated in Godfried Asante and Gloria Pindi’s “(Re)imagining African futures” as such: “*Black Panther* draws on the past to show the audience what constrains Black imaginations of emancipation and to offer possibilities for the future” (222). More specifically, in “Wakanda Africa do you see?”, Elisabeth Osei pinpoints the use of authentic and verifiable African elements of the past such as writing systems, architecture, and feminism in *Black Panther* as she emphasizes that “the idea of reifying the past to theorize the future is, in fact, a characteristic feature of Afrofuturism” (382). Mention is also made of an uncannily similar force such as Ogun’s in the secret ritual of Mevougou in the film *Les Saignantes* by Jean-Pierre Bekolo. Mevougou is described as “neither a living thing nor an object [...] You don’t decide to see Mevougou, Mevougou appears to you [...] invites itself. Mevougou cast its spell on us” (Mollo Olinga qtd in Bryce 8). Bryce continues, “If traditionally Mevougou was an alternative source of power evoked at times of acute national crisis, in the world of the film it is more ambiguous [...] with the potential for both destruction and transformation” (8). In these lines parallels are to be drawn to Ogun’s traditional and contrived forms.

Soyinka’s attachment to his Ogun transcends fiction and art to his own life and person. Many incidents dot the landscape of his life where the impulsive quirk to forcefully, if need be, but more radically, mostly, change the status quo and shake the veils of complacency in the original manner of forging the path through the fourth stage. It is important to remember that the spiritual journey and pilgrimage that Soyinka undertakes towards his epiphanies of the fourth stage mysteries was while in company of Ogun (“Idanre”). As such, when he shouts

“Ogun, comrade, bear witness how your metal is travestied!” (qtd in Jeyifo 23) in silent rage to invoke the wrath of Ogun while being shackled in the cell in *The Man Died*, we cast our minds back to a bond already forged. Jeyifo reminds us that that “is only one of the numerous instances in his writings in which Ogun and many other alter egos, surrogates and ‘doubles’ of the self are invoked [...]” (23). An uncanny twist is narrated by Ofeimun when he paraphrases Jeyifo, saying that Soyinka’s winning of the Nobel Prize with its attendant joy and excitement coincided with the horror and grief of “petrifying events”: the murder of Dele Giwa through the parcel bomb and Mozambican President Samora Machel’s death in a plane crash—a quintessential portrayal of Ogun’s creator and destroyer construct. It is Isidore Okpewho who delivers the clincher:

No doubt that it is becoming increasingly clear to us that the tragic element which Soyinka sees in the African character has been projected largely through his own experience, and that in the end the tormented figure of the Yoruba god, Ogun, which Soyinka has constantly presented to us cannot be separated from the trouble-torn personality of our poet-dramatist (qtd in Jeyifo 29).

The Nietzsche nexus and other confluents

The semi-experimental backdrop of the fourth stage which births Soyinka’s Ogun invention is an abode made of ether in the African worldview. The existence of this phase is not a new discovery as ancient African civilizations and communities have always had an “unnamed” place that permeates, pervades, and surrounds the spaces between the abode of the dead, of the living, and the unborn—becoming substantially the “fourth” stage. Soyinka’s concern with this configuration lies in the idea that, for creation or procreation to occur, there has to be a degree of initial distortion of fundamental components or elements of the creative mix. This inevitable chaos, dissolution, and reaggregation is found in the dynamics of the fourth stage in his “Fourth Stage” and the eventual emergence of the victorious Ogun. Soyinka uses as model Nietzsche’s antithetical construct of pitting the creator, the plasticizing god Apollo, against the controlling god of non-plastic art, music, and poetry, Dionysos, in his *The Birth of Tragedy*. In Soyinka’s version in “The Fourth Stage”, Obatala is the god of creation, effectively pitted against Ogun of poetry, creativity, and destruction. Nietzsche apparently tweaked and bent the Greek gods’ myth to his speculative will, and it is safe to say that Soyinka emulated his structure. Ofeimun captures this thus: “Just as Nietzsche felt free to bend Greek gods to his will, Soyinka felt free to bend the Yoruba gods to his will as a way of engaging spheres of experience in which neither science nor Christianity had any explanatory force” (57). As the gods in Nietzsche’s construct function in the chthonic realm, Soyinka’s fourth stage is also a region in the mythic space where “all the agonies of gods and humankind are experienced, transformed and re-inscribed for the fortification of human will” (Ofeimun 101). Slivers of the speculative give rise to these extrapolations posited by Layiwola in his description of the fourth stage: “The intractable fourth stage which is the resolution ground for imaginative action, dreams, comas, twilight, the loss of consciousness and the split movements just before a birth or just before a death. Even death and mythologies are aspects of the fourth area of experience” (27). The fluidity and intractability of this zone necessitates Soyinka’s plethora of adjectives towards its comprehensive description in in *Art, Dialogue and Outrage*: “universal womb” (27), “transitional abyss” (23), “transitional ether” (24), “infernal gulf” (25), “vortex of archetypes” (26), “metaphysical abyss” (27), “matrix of cosmic creativity”, “universal oneness”, “the unconscious”, “the deep black whirlpool of mythopoeic forces” (29), “chthonic realm” (30), “world womb”, “chthonic lair” (32), etc. Contextual and allied issues are mostly the reason for poetic licenses of creations such as Soyinka’s structuring of guiding indices for his art and theorizations and, in some cases (“Idanre” especially, as its violence was indicative of the bloody unrests of pre-civil war Nigeria), beacons and contemporary commentaries. Reasons such as diasporic settlements of a collection of ethnicities (such as the slave settlements and their descendants in the Caribbean) giving rise to new myths and hybrid pantheons, and epistemological backgrounds giving room for contextual exigencies, are among the reasons for (a) new religious and mythological order(s). Reverence and recognition, and of course veneration and worship (of deities), all depend on extenuating factors: be they cultural and/or religious survival in a strange land or nationalistic socio-literary re-presentation by cultural champions and academic pundits. Other reasons for poetic licenses of creation include the required or desired construct for handling portrayals of horrors such as genocide. Bryce makes a case for such choices, methods, and inventions with Veronique Tadjou’s *Shadow of Imana* about Rwanda after the genocide which she captures in a travelogue. She combines non-fictional techniques of “observation and reportage with fictional elements like interiority, focalization, and voice [...] (because) sites of genocide [...] challenge her capacity for description and analysis” (6). She has inadvertently birthed in and through the speculative mode, a budding mythopoesis because

essentially “traditional references provide a narratorial link between an unspeakable actuality and an imaginary alternative” (6). This case is reminiscent of Okri’s attempt with Azaro in *The Famished Road* as the vicissitudes of Nigeria are successfully cast in magical realism. Other examples abound of such experimental speculative fiction which all employ myth, orality, and indigenous belief systems. Post-independence African writers such as Mda, Laing, Okri, Wa Thiong’o, Amadi, Coker, Benjamin Kwakye, and Okorafor are all in the mix of creators and narrators who mix the fantastical with the real in order to handle and interrogate the postcolony.

Conclusion

The dictum that “new situations demand new magic” (Evans-Pritchard qtd in Comaroff and Comaroff 279) effectively connects with Soyinka’s explanations in his 1986 Nobel Lecture for weaving past and present *chronos* and vice-versa in his works, to the effect of “[it’s] not really to indict the past but to summon it, to the attention of a suicidal, anachronistic present [...]” (7). If we reasonably add the future to this construct, a potentially profitable fluidity could even give rise to what Comaroff and Comaroff see as “planetary species whose existence conflates the virtual with the veritable, the cinematic with the scientific, gods with godzillas, the prophetic with the profitable” (283), bringing to mind the awesome cinematic production of the pan-African vision, *Black Panther* and its kingdom of Wakanda. Such possibilities moor firmly our conviction and application of speculative productions in the form of Africanfuturism to tackle the treacherous terrains of a quicksand-like subversion of the postcolony by heavy and sometimes subtle neocolonial influences. It is clear then that the ability to amalgamate the time phases—present, past, and future—*profitably* in order to boost our flagging consciousness is an imperative in speculative fiction. Sharper and ever-expanding vertices are encouraged in line with speculative optimism firmly rooted in authentic ontological and archetypal mythological underpinnings. Other stages other than and beyond the fourth stage await. A. A. Adeoye has already suggested a fifth stage—projected as a place of de-robing “mythopoeic lamentations”—in order “to facilitate the attractions and detractions in human existence through the re-creation of true-life stories in coded and elegant theatrical mechanics” (159). This is valid in its right.

Every speculative effort involving real, imagined, and contrived denizens is the budding of a potential mythopoesis. I focus on Soyinka in this article for the far-reaching scope and depth of his re-interrogation, reinvention, and rework of the Yoruba pantheon, the fourth stage and the resultant Ogun. I have explored the implications, imbrications, interpretations, and possible applications of that singular act of creativity bordering on the myth-based fantastic in this essay with attendant multiple critiques indicative of its potential and importance. All these belong to the world of speculative fiction. Fecund imaginations blessed and armed with the deeply epistemological and realistically mytho-cultural umbilicus of peoples and nations roam the creative realm. Liminal margins with multiple creative portals are waiting for implantations of fifth and further stages populated with more Oguns, masks, denizens, ogbanjes, abikus, Mezoungous, Shakas, Ojaadilis, aliens, mami-watas, and their ilk; with care taken to avoid non-domestication and inappropriate rooting of semi-alien religious, mythological and cultural models.¹ After all, in our realities and alternate realities, our rooted extensions of the other-worldly should be able to give us comfort and companionship so that we can dream about our ancestral masks in peace—*à la* Achebe²

Notes

1. Akweke Emezi’s *Freshwater* is a good derivation from and a juxtaposition of African folklore and mythology, dealing with the Igbo *ogbanje* (the nearest equivalent or translation is the changeling) concept linked with the Ala/Ani deity of Gaia dimensions. It also intersects all these with mental health issues of multiple personalities disorder, which is showcased by the protagonist, Ada—the multiple-spirit *ogbanje* vessel. The narrative is an exemplary construct of the crux of the article.
2. In his “The Igbo World and its Art”, Chinua Achebe emphasizes the importance of the *process* of art against the *product* itself among the Igbo. He singles out the dance and the masquerade as those that have whetted the Igbo artistic appetite properly. In the masquerade form especially, the concept of process, and therefore motion, is exemplified in dual coda: there is agility and movement in the masquerade display and there is also movement for the spectator who wants to follow the progress fully. This is indicative of the dynamic nexus between the living and the dead. He however bemoans wistfully the decline of many African arts, especially the numinous presences of the ancestral masks and simply declares that “the decline today is merely a symptom of the collapse of a whole eschatology”. But as one lucky enough to remain attuned to the ancients and their arts, masks still appear in his dreams with their tell-tale, now ironic “panic terror of childhood”.

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War and the subaltern: Voice as power in Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra*

Ogbu Chukwuka Nwachukwu, Oyeh O. Otu & Onyekachi Eni

War and the subaltern: Voice as power in Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra*

In Africa, as in most other parts of the world, whenever there is war (or massive violence of any other hue), the common people are used as cannon fodder to protect the powerful upper class formulators of the letters of the war. Women and children are easily the most vulnerable. They are raped, tortured, murdered, starved, widowed, and exposed to all sorts of insecurity and depredation. In the end they are marginally characterized in upper class, male-centered war discourse. In this research, we locate the voice of the subaltern in Buchi Emecheta's civil war novel, *Destination Biafra* (1982). We utilize Subaltern Studies in a qualitative approach to offer the needed agency to female subalterns as well as a few other marginalized groups. We map the trajectory of these voices and show that the subaltern woman and the other margins denounce colonial complicity in the androcentric war, and would rather the society eschewed violence as conflict resolution strategy. With this study we fill an existing gulf in the Nigerian Civil War narrative and create an alternative discourse against the largely upper class, male-centered voices that have hitherto characterized civil war novels.

Keywords: war, subaltern, voice, power, Nigerian civil war, androcentrism, Subaltern Studies, postcolonial criticism.


Introduction

Some schools of thought see war as a struggle to gain or retain power. They claim that it may be a violent conflict necessitated by the need to force an adversary to obey one's will. They insist that, to achieve this objective, the warrior must subject his opponent to a condition that is clearly worse than the sacrifice of surrendering his liberty. They note that war does not take place between individuals but between states or between a nation and a state, often as a result of the necessity for violence where conversation or constructive engagement has failed (Von Clausewitz 2; Rousseau 8–9; Long 1). As Jean-Jacques Rousseau observes, states can only have other states as enemies since “between things disparate in nature, there can be no real relation” (9). This presupposes that individuals within warring states may be only accidental enemies.

Despite this presupposition, individual men and women may be enemies *only* in relation to a state or a nation as war affects people on individual level. Incidentally, while members of the upper echelons of society often engage in actions that precipitate war, it is the people at the margins of society that often suffer the consequences of warfare the heaviest. This segment may be the main victims of war based on their gender, class, race, ethnic origin, religion, or even ideology vis-a-vis the interest of neo-imperialism/cosmopolitanism. Whereas they are often the cannon fodder for the prosecution of war by virtually all belligerents, the poor and the weak are, nevertheless, hardly the ones to write the story of the war. Most often, the elites do. And each time the elites write, they im-


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plicate the subalterns in their story and subsume the voice of the poor and the weak within the framework of an upper-class narrative.

In Korea, for instance, the plight and voice of former ‘comfort women’ (sex slaves) both during WWII and the Korean War were systematically muffled by the Korean establishment and never known outside Korea until the late 1990s. It was the publication of Katharine H. S. Moon’s *Sex Among the Allies* (1997) and Sangemie Choi Schellstede and Soon Mi Yu’s *Comfort Women Speak* (2000) that exposed this war atrocity against women to the outside world. As Tae Yun Lim and Shin Haeng Lee have observed, these subaltern women were often rendered silent by “oppressive ideological mechanisms such as Japanese imperialism and patriarchal/anti-colonialist discourses in Korea that often frustrate victimized women’s attempts to speak out” (5–6).

Regarding the literary output on the Nigerian Civil War, Marie Umeh, Craig McLuckie, Oike Machiko, Abioseh Porter, and Francois Ugochukwu, amongst others, decry the initial lack of focus on the female condition and participation in the war. They take umbrage at writers like Chukwuemeka Ike, Isidore Okpewho, Cyprian Ekwensi, Elechi Amadi, Eddie Iroh, I. N. C. Aniebo, and Ken Saro-Wiwa—all male. In *Sunset at Dawn* (1976), *The Last Duty* (1976), *Survive the Peace and Divided, We Stand* (1976, 1980), *Sunset in Biafra* (1970), *The Siren in the Night* (1984), *The Anonymity of Sacrifice* (1974), and *Sozaboy* (1990), these writers give agency to male characters in their narratives which focus on what they consider active engagement and heroism. Women, children, soldiers of low rank, and other marginalized groups are denied agency and silenced.

Festus Iyayi captures this concern in the novel *Heroes* (1986). In a dialogue with Osime Iyere, the hero of the novel, Sergeant Kesh-Kesh, a subaltern soldier, entreats Iyere to help write the story of the lowly soldiers because: After this war many generals will write their accounts in which they will attempt to show that they were the heroes of this war, that it was their grand strategies that won the war. They will tell the world that they single-handedly fought and won the war. The names of soldiers like Otun, Emmanuel, Ikeshi, and Yemi will never be mentioned. The soldiers take the death and the ambushes and the bullets with their lives. The soldiers pay for the unity of this country with their lives and yet, what happens? Always the officers are the heroes. Always the generals, the officers take the credit. Always the generals get the praise. Always they are the heroes. Always. (86)

Thus, the margins and some other thorny issues resulting from the war are glossed over in what Chimalum Nwankwo has described as “literary exercises better fitted to the full-belly faddish reflections of blasé coteries” (1).

Yet, most of the Nigerian Civil War scholars agree that the war has elicited so much literary focus that it has surpassed all other subjects, including colonialism (Nwachukwu-Agbada 104; Nwuga 194). This is not surprising at all. War is a subject of interest given the pain, depredation, and anguish that it evokes. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie states that the events of the war necessitate recall so that we may *never* forget (207, emphasis added). As a corollary, the Russian writer Yuri Bondarev claims: “I write about it (WWII) not only because war is the most painful ordeal for humanity but also because it is exceedingly important for me to see my character in the most difficult and dramatic situations where moral values are tested to the utmost” (197).

In this study we focus on the depiction of the Nigerian Civil War in relation to the super-ordinates of war and the subaltern classes in Buchi Emecheta’s *Destination Biafra* (1982). It is important to x-ray the import of war to both the elite and the subaltern so as to capture the class that is the most marginalized and faced with the greatest security challenge. The work will trace the path and the voice of the subaltern in the dangerous, life threatening incidence of war in Africa—Nigeria in particular. It is necessary to find the voice of the lower/oppressed classes amid a cacophony of oppressive and master voices so as to situate it as a central concern and provide a credible alternative discourse around the war along gendered and group interest lines. The study appropriates Subaltern Studies to investigate power relations in the cause of the war between the subaltern victims and the elite centers of power.

As “an attempt to allow the people to speak within the pages of elitist historiography”, Subaltern Studies enables the marginalized to “speak for, or to sound the muted voices of the truly oppressed” (Mambrol). Women, peasants, workers, and other groups who have no access to hegemonic power constitute the bastion of subaltern classes. The word “subaltern” is a term for the general attributes of subordination in terms of gender, race, class, ethnicity, etc. Ordinarily, the term refers to “an officer in the British army below the rank of a captain”; and as an adjective it means “of lower status”, or “of inferior quality”. It entered the English lexicon in the 16th century from

its etymological late Latin *subalternus* which means “inferior in rank”, or “secondary importance” (Dharmaraj 26). *Subalternus* itself is a combination of the Latin *sub*, ‘next below’, and *alternus*, ‘every other’.

The Italian Marxist, Antonio Francesco Gramsci, was the first to deploy the term to denote the working class people in Italy and to delimit their history as consequent upon the history of the state; that is, the upper class. He claimed that this will remain so until the subalterns “are able to become a ‘state’” (202). Gramsci pinpointed the connotation of the unrelenting oppression and exploitation of the rural peasantry in Southern Italy in terms of gender, class, caste, race, and culture and proceeded to outline six enabling presumptions for the study of the history of subaltern classes in “Notes on the Italian History” (202–3). Gramsci’s deployment of the term formulates a Eurocentric method of historical investigation of the non- Western peoples of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East in their relation to Western Europe as logo-centric of world history (Prakash 1476). Prakash explains that Eurocentricity in this vein suggests the historicism “that projected Europe as history” (1476).

Subaltern Studies became a branch of postcolonial criticism and gained momentum from 1982 through the efforts of the South Asian Subaltern Studies Group (SSG)—the Subaltern Studies Collective—most outstanding among who are Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Other influential voices include Chakrabarty Dipesh, Gyan Prakash, Partha Chatterjee, Sudipta Kaviraj, and Sussie Tharu. India’s historic-cultural environment and her colonial experience offer fertile grounds for the propagation and espousal of Subaltern Studies. The Hindu caste system and cultural practices such as *dalit*, or untouchables; scheduled tribes; *sati*, or widow immolation; and others, are fertile for the subaltern discourse not only in literary studies but also in history, sociology, anthropology, and psychology. Guha states that the aim of Subaltern Studies was to “rectify the elitist bias characteristic of much research and academic work” in South Asian Studies (“On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India” vii). He explains that this act of rectification was necessary because the elites had exercised dominance, not hegemony, over the subalterns. To him, the subalterns had acted in history on their own, that is, independently of the elites; so, their politics constituted “an autonomous domain, for it neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter” (3–4).

Gayatri Spivak pinpoints the heterogeneity of subalternity and proceeds to expand the group to include muted women, colonized people, oppressed generations, working classes, minority tribes, and black people (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 276). In “The Trajectory of the Subaltern in my Work”, Spivak asserts that subalternity is a position without identity, that the word ‘subaltern’ and the idea of the popular “do not inhabit a continuous space at all”, and that the relationship between the subaltern and the popular is similar to that between class and poverty, race and colour, or gender and sex (3). Spivak is particularly concerned that the gendered subaltern has kept moving down the social strata, lacking “access to the lines of social mobility”. Subalternity, therefore, cannot be autonomous because “there is little autonomy in gender relations. It is all about the woman and her resistance not being recognized” (6).

As a postcolonial theory, subalternity is concerned with the colonial populations who are socially, politically, and geographically outside the hierarchy of power of a colony and of the empire’s metropolitan homeland in describing cultural hegemony as popular history (Ludden 45). It responds to the issue of subordination and silencing of the suppressed and marginalized people in postcolonial societies. Spivak informs us that *sati* practice (self-immolation of widowed Hindu women), for instance, marks the limits of historical knowledge. The voice of the *sati* was not heard to ascertain if she willingly presented herself for immolation or not. It was impossible, therefore, to retrieve the voice of the subaltern woman when she was not given the subject position (“The Making of Americans, the Teaching of English, and the Future of Culture Studies” 35). Spivak holds that it is only when the subalterns’ voice is heard that they cease to be at the margin, for they cannot be represented by their privileged oppressor (“Subaltern” 299–307). To achieve this, subalterns must have agency, become subjects, and build infrastructure (“Trajectory” 3).

As Prakash states, Subaltern Studies gains its force as Postcolonial criticism from “a catachrestic combination” of Marxism, Poststructuralism, Gramsci and Foucault, the modern West and India, archival research, and textual criticism (1490). Dipesh observes that subaltern theorists relied much on ‘textual readings’ due to “the absence of workers’ diaries and other such sources available to British historians” (102). This lends credence to Spivak’s position that “the colonized woman is caught between indigenous patriarchy and the politics of archival production” (“The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives” 247).

Significant to this study is the fact that Subaltern Studies gives voice and power to *all* attributes of subordination. In this study we investigate Emecheta’s delineation of war in *Destination Biafra*, in relation to the subaltern

classes. We engage a clear analysis and evaluation of the whole demographics of victimization and marginalization in the war such as women, Igbo, children, and even the local or *native* upper class in a play of power with the former colonists. We seek to establish colonial complicity in the war atrocities buoyed by selfish neo-colonial interest and to establish the rendering of the subaltern voice and the signification of restiveness in the character of the subalterns—particularly the subaltern women—which indicate their dissatisfaction in their marginalization through war.

The colonial mastermind and the native upper class subaltern

In the novel *Destination Biafra*, in the bid to maintain a neo-colonial stranglehold on the erstwhile colony, a re-treating British colonial coterie enthrones an unpopular government in the newly independent West African state. The puppet government, led by Alhaji Nguru Kano, is mired in administrative profligacy, incompetence, corruption, nepotism, and the promotion of mediocrity. Consequently, a group of missionary soldiers execute a coup, killing most of the leaders perceived to be complicit in the mismanagement of state affairs and resources. The coup is foiled and a new military government is formed. Within a few months, a counter coup is successfully executed and another military regime is enthroned. Large-scale killing of Eastern Nigerians, particularly Igbo, follows. This leads to secession and the declaration of the Biafran Republic, led by Colonel Chijioko Abosi. Debbie Ogedemgbe joins the army from the Nigerian side and is sent to Biafra as a peace envoy. A female soldier, she is faced with dire circumstances en route to Biafra, but she is determined to succeed and to help a few other women survive the dangerous war. Debbie eventually arrives in Biafra and engages in strategic diplomacy in order to survive the belligerents. As Biafra capitulates and the war ends, Debbie resolves to narrate the war from the angle of the oppressed women, and to see to it that the Baby Biafra, most affected by the war, survives to hear the story of the war.

Emecheta implicates colonialism and neo-colonial tendentious meddling in the affairs of colonized subjects as the de facto cause of the Nigerian Civil War. She shows that the imperialists deployed political subterfuge in the post-independence control of the subaltern state in order to continue to secure the country's resources for post-imperial gains.

Prior to Nigeria's independence, Sir Macdonald, the Governor-General, had decided to determine the outcome of the forthcoming election for neo-colonial gain. Emecheta tells us that the colonists desire that "[...] any profit to come out of Nigeria should go to Britain rather than to any other country"; so, they "had to ensure that the first Prime Minister was a Hausa man, preferably the Sarduana" (*Destination Biafra* 15). Pursuant to this ploy, Sir Ferguson Grey had urged Mallam Nguru Kano to allow Hausa/Fulani women to vote in the forthcoming elections to which the latter retorted: "In England you had democracy for years before your women were allowed to vote? I presume this is so?" (10). This riposte signifies the colonial subject's voice of revolt and implies the rescission of colonial order. This notwithstanding, Sir Ferguson Grey engages his son Allan Grey, a colonial commander in the then Nigerian Queen's Own Regiment, to investigate the possible outcome of the impending elections so that, if it should tilt against British interests, some action would be taken.

Macdonald is aware that Dr. Ozimba is the people's favourite candidate, but he thinks that Ozimba and his Igbo kinsmen are too intelligent, too inventive and industrious, and too ambitious to accommodate neo-colonial interests. Similarly, Chief Odumosu and his political party, AG, with his Yoruba supporters, are considered too sophisticated and too much of administrators and economy managers for their African environment. Macdonald, therefore, proceeds to secure the army for the purpose of quelling the anticipated uprising. He tells Allan Grey, "Whatever you do, Grey, keep the army on the alert. I may need them to keep the peace" (16).

As part of the grand design to rig the election, Macdonald waits for "only forty results out of a hundred and ninety from the North" (22) to be declared before he calls, appoints, and congratulates Alhaji Nguru Kano as the new Prime Minister. To consolidate this, he drafts in soldiers to surround Ozimba's residence. The soldiers are to arrest or shoot Ozimba down if he tries to organize a protest with his numerous supporters who are dissatisfied with the outcome of the elections. This action spells trouble for the young republic. Even though Ozimba takes a stoic posture on the glaring imposition of the wrong candidate on the people, some others do not. His assistant, Dr. Eze "felt like crying for this man who had done so much for Nigeria: the imprisonment, self-denial, and the sleepless nights of planning speech after speech—all for nothing". Mrs. Ozimba, in a fit of rage, shouts, "But this is unfair. What have the Hausas done for Nigeria? They sat there in the North while we the Ibos (sic) did everything [...] I can see no peace in this country with this kind of treachery" (22). But the crux of the matter is that

the retreating colonist does not want the *native* who had done so much, who seemed to know what to do, and who is capable of raising a *voice* to effectively reclaim the vassal nation from intended neo-colonial stranglehold. As Ozimba stoically declares, “we are dealing with a power stronger than we are” (23).

Ozimba is popular and truly loved by the people, including members of the armed forces. Colonel John Nwokolo declines the colonist’s order to assassinate Ozimba. Saka Momoh, also a colonel, is dissatisfied with the outcome of the election. In a show of solidarity with Ozimba, the popular and true winner of the election, Momoh complains to Nwokolo: “They call this an election? Pooh!” To which Nwokolo retorts: “It is not an election but a time bomb. It will explode soon, you mark my words. How many of us are going to sit on our backsides and watch this happen? Mallam Nguru Kano the first Prime Minister indeed! This result is like playing Hamlet without the Prince. Can you imagine a Nigerian Government without the great Ozimba?” (25)

This is the stage set for the country’s independence by the retreating colonial mastermind serving his supervening interest over others’. Spivak has expressed doubts that the voice of the subaltern may ever be recovered given the “unimaginable extent of colonial repression and its historical intersection with patriarchy [...]” (“Subaltern” 275). The polity created by the disengaging colonists is adventitious and they desire that it remain so. This naturally leads to a scramble for power, ethnicity, kleptomania, political rivalry, flamboyance, and more social malaise. Then, disillusion follows the formative years of independence, leading inevitably to a military coup, a counter coup, and sustained violent suppression of the people of the Eastern region, particularly the ‘Ibo’ (Igbo), culminating in Chijioke Abosi’s secession and Saka Momoh’s declaration of war against the ‘rebels’.

A dangerous mission, war’s victims, and the voice of the subaltern

Debbie Ogedemgbe is a University of Oxford graduate and the daughter of a slain high profile, but thoroughly corrupt, erstwhile finance minister. She joins the army “to help the Nigerian Army, not as a cook or a nurse, but as a true officer!” (*Destination Biafra* 45). Debbie, female, is aware of the hurdles in the combat section of the army, a male-dominated site. Yet, she is determined to shed the subaltern status foisted on females through hegemonic constructions. She is well educated, and of the upper social class. She holds the view, therefore, that “if intelligent people and graduates were beginning to join the ranks of the Nigerian Queen’s Own Regiment, she intended to be one of them” (45). However, Debbie’s intention to enlist in the army is treated with suspicion and levity. She is eventually enlisted for convenience: to exploit her sexuality, and the verdict is, “well, if she can be a useful tool, I don’t see why we should not use her and others like her” (69, emphasis added).

Aware that she is meddling in a hitherto male-dominated site, Debbie “obeys the masculine rules of war and politics and tries to be more manly than the men” (Machiko 63). This is demonstrated in her first major assignment which is to arrest some Igbo officers in the Ikeja military barracks. Here, she shouts her orders “at the top of her voice” and this causes “the sinew of her thin neck to bulge” (*Destination Biafra* 79). This strident hollering is an attempt to emphasize the need for her voice to be heard and reckoned with in a patriarchal domain. Debbie’s effort is in line with the Spivakian assertion that if the subalterns speak and their voice is heard, they have agency and cease to be at the margin (Dharmaraj 36). The contemptuous amusement on the faces of the arrested Igbo officers seem to taunt Debbie with, “whatever you do, remember that you are a (mere) woman” (Machiko 63). In any case, when Debbie realizes the true import of the arrest that she was sent to effect, she refuses to carry out the assignment because she does not want to continue to aid men in their macho atrocities. Instead, she elects to embark on a dangerous journey to Biafra as a peace envoy. Here again, what is useful to the masculine high command is her sexuality. She is told, “Don’t forget, my dear, that you are a woman. That is why we are giving you this delicate mission” (*Destination Biafra* 129). She is enjoined to utilize her sexuality to entice and destroy Chijioke Abosi, the arch rebel. Otherwise, she is warned not to “meddle in things that are bigger than (her)” (129).

Debbie embarks on the journey, code-named *Destination Biafra*, having been assigned the stereotypical role of a whore and a peacemaker. In the course of this duty, she is raped twice by Nigerian soldiers, who are supposedly her colleagues—first by Bale and company, next by Lawal. Of significance here is the fact that this society has different codes of morality for the male rapist and for the female rape victim. The male rapist is not stigmatized while the female rape victim is seen as unclean, a social deviant, and treated with disdain. Thus, Igwedibia and Yerima implicate society as well as combatant soldiers as a source of serious threat to the female at war (276). Rape is both a psychological weapon and an act of oppression by the strong over the weak. It is often an androcentric

tric weapon that tyrannizes the female (Riberio 21). Georgiads Mboya Kivai also captures the incidence of rape quite succinctly when she avers that:

Rape is an expression of power and authority. It is a form of violence and most of the perpetrators are men. Men desire to rape women in order to assert authority over them. Rape can even be a symptom of inequality and a desire on the part of those who wield power to assert it over the powerless [...]. It is an action rooted in masculine behaviour that serves to perpetuate masculine order. (87)

Debbie is treated with scorn and derision by various rapists, especially because she dared to enlist in the army and actually wears her ill-fitting baggy trousers in the name of a soldier. As her mother observes, Debbie's problem is that, "born a girl, (she) wants to be like a man, and wants the men to know that she wants to be like them, and still wants to retain her womanhood" (*Destination Biafra* 161). Thus, Lawal excoriates and rapes her not only because she is Europeanized and consorts with European men but, importantly, for also challenging the androcentric status quo ante by daring to join the army, a site that is supposedly exclusive to powerful men. Lawal threatens, "I am going to show you that you are a woman, an ordinary woman" (175). From this prismatic point, we see that Lawal uses rape to coerce Debbie in what Kivai describes as "an expression of power and authority" (87). There is also a psychological dimension to Lawal's attempt to rape her. If he had succeeded, he would have exercised power over Debbie's neo-imperialist boyfriend, Alan Grey, to assert superiority over the former colonizer at a symbolic level, at least in his thinking. Lawal fails to achieve coital catharsis with Debbie. However, he sublimates his failure with the claim that it is deleterious to have sex with a woman who consorts with such an immoral European as Alan Grey. Debbie's victory over her traducer is a victory for the subaltern female. She pities Lawal by offering to sleep in his bunk till daybreak to massage the latter's ego. She taunts him with, "You poor, poor men have so many problems to solve, problems you created for yourselves" (*Destination Biafra* 177).

At this second scene of rape, the women are made to watch their husbands get shot. Worse still, these women carry the burden of protecting and caring for their children without their husbands. The pregnant mother of Baby Biafra runs hysterically at the killer of her husband, asking him "what she was supposed to do with the child she was carrying" (186). Debbie tactically refuses to resist rape. Her visionary and missionary motives are to bond with Uzoma Madako, Dorothy, and the rest of the women in order to lead them with their children to safety, *write* their version of the war story, and offer an alternative voice to the dominant hegemonic narratives. Mrs. Madako resolves to survive in spite of the brutal murder of her husband, stating: "Our husbands were useful, yes, very useful; but they have now been killed by other men. We have children to look after. Just like our grandmothers looked after our parents who had us" (213). This confirms Ibekwe Chinweizu's view that, rather than weak, the African woman can be very strong (85–6). Lauren Rackley has also noted that, in dire circumstances, females can cross so-called gender lines "[...] in order to protect themselves and their families" (6).

Destination Biafra narrates women's war. It is their war to survive male onslaught, both literally and metaphorically. Fleeing Biafran soldiers commandeer women for their pleasure and conscript men for war. Advancing federal troops kill men, rape women, and leave them to cater for children whose fathers they had killed. They plunder the land and steal cattle, goats, and chicken. Debbie's wilful entry into a career considered to be men's exclusive preserve questions the Aristotelian view that "woman may be said to be an inferior being" (Kaplan and Anderson 31). In fact, her bravery is a frontal challenge to the claim that "valour in a woman or, unscrupulous cleverness is inappropriate" (31). Debbie's personality and activity vindicate Judith Butler's position that "[...] gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all" (273). Her initial inhuman treatment in the hands of Nigerian male soldiers is enough warning as to the dangerous nature of her journey to Biafra. Yet, rather than being deterred, she grows even more resolute to carry out her assignment. Her decision to wade through the jungles of the mid-west alongside Uzoma Madako, Dorothy, the Nwoba boys, Ngbechi, and others, places her at par with the other subalterns. In fact, her activism is comparable to the activism of Muthoni Likimani with the Kenyan Mau-Mau (James 60–1). Perhaps she is inspired by Christina de Aragon of the Spanish army fame. Perhaps she takes a cue from the Dahomey Amazons who made the days of the Abeokuta male warriors nightmarish (Johnson 106–9).

As a group, the Igbo within Nigeria's territory are made cannon fodder of the war. Lawal deceives them in Benin to "Gwo, gwo, gwo to your Biafra and eat yam. Leave Nigeria where we have given you English bread, gwo there and eat your Abakaliki yams and cocoyams" (*Destination Biafra* 168). Ironically, the same Lawal waylays and massacres them in the bushes of the Mid-West. When the massacre is over, more than two hundred men, many of

whom were younger than sixteen, are killed. After the murder of these Igbo men in cold blood en route to Asaba, Lawal orders “the jeeps, trucks and ambulances to run over the bodies of more than two hundred men” (177). In addition, fifty widowed women are loaded off to their misery, but not before they are dehumanized by the soldiers:

They swaggered up to women passengers, shouting, “Are you sure that you are a woman? Are you sure? Take your clothes off. If you don’t, you are a dead Ibo (sic) liar [...]” the women stripped their clothes off [...]. The soldiers were not satisfied. They now had to touch, they had to squeeze, they had to slap even probe, as the whim took them, to make sure these were really women [...]. (171)

These women suffer double tragedy. They watch as their husbands are killed. They also live with the unfortunate fact that they have to face the war with their children but without their breadwinners. Again, children like Ngebechi, Ogo, and the two Nwoba boys are left with Debbie, Mrs. Madako, and Dorothy (who later dies) to wade through the thick jungles of the Mid-West. The subaltern victims of the war are helpless in the matter. As Lawal remarks, “this is the only way to force Abosi’s hand” (176). In a moment of nostalgic anguish, five-year-old Ogo declares: “when we get to Biafra, the land will be dry, my mother will be there and my father, and my mother will cook fried plantain and chicken stew” (210). This is a picturesque but sad commentary on the helpless nature of the condition of the victims.

In spite of all the odds, these victimized subaltern women show character and strength. Although Lawal attempts to rape her, Debbie defeats him as her frigidity denies him sexual steam. Then she beats him with a slap and Lawal falls back on the bed. This symbolizes the triumph of the subaltern woman over masculine hegemonic symbols of terror and subjugation. Stella Ogedemgbe is resilient. She absorbs her personal humiliation at the rape scene. In spite of her humiliation, she pleads, “Do whatever you want with me, and afterwards kill me. But [...] leave my daughter out of it. Don’t let me see my daughter humiliated” (133). When this plea falls on deaf ears, she rallies, maintains equanimity, and comforts her traumatized daughter. Uzoma Madako is resilient and industrious. Like Stella Ogedemgbe, she has the survival impulse. The mother to the Nwoba boys is self-sacrificing. She allows her two boys to move on with Debbie with a higher possibility of securing their lives than they would have if they tagged along with her, in which case they would probably end up dead, like their father. This shows the resilience and humanity of the female subaltern. She desires for the human race to survive and live in peace. This is in contradistinction with the animalistic tendencies of the male soldiers and their commanders. Through the selection of events and characterization, Emecheta is able to highlight the impact of war on the lowly, notably women; poor Biafran men; and children.

As noted from the outset, the neo-colonists portrayed in the work such as Sir Ferguson Grey, Alan Grey, MacDonald, etc. come with greed, insincerity, exploitative tendencies, and cultural emasculation of the African people. Alan Grey is planted in the Nigerian army just for that purpose. During the war his itinerary as a collector of artifacts and as military expert is a front, a subterfuge to protect British interest and profit. He is two-faced and engages in double game. Grey encourages Momoh to embark on total war against Biafra. The motive for this advice is to create an atmosphere conducive to neo-imperial economic gains. Total war means the deployment of massive and sophisticated war machinery which the British would supply at exorbitant rates. Momoh is to cession lots of oil blocks to the British as payment for the military hardware. To this extent, the *native* (emphasis added) elite involved in the war are treated as subalterns by the superiority-feigning neo-colonists. First, the African leaders are incited to start a fratricidal conflict through robust propaganda and political subterfuge, then they are cajoled to sign strangulating economic pacts.

Alan Grey is ready to be insulted by Momoh “as long as British investment interests were safeguarded”. He reminds Momoh to “[...] sign percentages of the oil revenue over to people who would help win the war. [...] The best combat would be heavy and quick” (152–3). As could be expected, Alan Grey, the neo-imperialist, comes with a bag of tricks feinting towards Momoh’s welfare but cashing in on the man’s idiocy to rake in a good harvest for the undying acquisitive appetite of Sir Ferguson Grey and other neo-colonial British hawks. This is even reflected in his love affair with Debbie. He merely patronizes her when he discovers that she had been raped. “I’ll marry you if that is what you want” (159). Debbie, on her part, rejects this half-hearted marriage proposal which symbolizes neo-colonialism: “I am a woman and a woman of Africa. I am a daughter of Nigeria and if she is in shame, I shall stay and mourn with her in shame [...] I am not ready yet to become the wife of an exploiter of my nation” (258). She is fully aware that British interest in Africa is as insincere as Alan Grey’s marriage proposal. Her rejection of the proposal is symbolic of her rejection of neo-imperialist influence on African affairs. Instead,

Debbie elects to do humanitarian work by saving orphaned Biafran children like the Nwoba boys with her share of her father's money. She is equally determined to "tell those orphans the story of how a few ambitious soldiers from Sand-Hurst tried to make their dreams a reality" (258, emphasis added). This is in consonance with Guha's quest to recover the peasant from the elite (*Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* iv).

But then, it seems difficult to recover the subaltern's voice given that "[...] subalternity signified the impossibility of autonomy" (Prakash, 1490). Again, as Veena Das ruminates, subaltern rebellions offer only fleeting moments of defiance, "a night-time of love, not a life-time of love" (315). Nevertheless, Partha Chatterjee relieves the preceding concern when he states:

[...] in a sense, the subaltern can be made to speak, but made to speak by someone else who interprets their speech on their behalf. Once that kind of interpretation has been given, the interpretation itself is subject to other interpretations. Therefore it becomes open to a wide field of interpretations and representations. Once that happens you can say that the subaltern has become legible (audible too). (Chatterjee and McGrail 2–3)

It stands to reason, then, that Debbie is qualified and suitable to represent the subaltern classes and tell their story from their angle. She is of the elite class, and is a member of the ruling class grappling with the veils of inferiority cast on them by the retreating colonist. She is also a woman, a gender class that "lacked access to lines of social mobility" (Spivak, "Trajectory" 2). The abuses and injustices that she and the other women suffer are symptomatic of the subjugation and inferiorization of women in patriarchal cultures. Debbie, therefore, bonds with Uzoma Madako. Both women resolve to survive to raise future Biafrans and to use their own voice to represent the reality of the war from the subaltern angle, the angle of the most oppressed segment of the male-induced war.

Conclusion

We have investigated how Emecheta locates the voice of the subaltern in her Nigerian Civil War novel *Destination Biafra*. The location of the subaltern voice serves to offer power to the hitherto powerless sections of the war narratives. With the aid of subalternity as a strand of postcolonial theory of the oppressed, we argue that the scheming to gain, retain, and control power in Africa by the retreating colonist was patently selfish and led inexorably to a civil war in Nigeria. We show that, although the subaltern is most adversely affected by the war, (s)he is normally denied a voice when the story of the war is told. Consequently, we show that Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* convincingly situates the voice of the subaltern woman—and other marginalized groups such as the Igbo and children—within the literary framework of the Nigerian Civil War. This is significant because it fills an existing gulf in civil war narratives. Besides, it creates an alternative discourse against the earlier, largely upper class, androcentric voices that characterized civil war fiction. Emecheta's frontal challenge to male-centred discourse on the war played a pioneering role in locating, rescuing, and situating the voice of the female shifted to the margins of narration by the dominant elitist patriarchal tribe of formative writers on the subject. Emecheta, therefore, gave verve and voice to more female writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Sefi Attah, Akachi Ezeigbo, and Dul Johnson who capture changing gender roles, explore the home front, and offer agency to the female subaltern engaged in the war.

We have demonstrated that this study offers a fresh dimension to the reading of the marginalization of women and other minority groups in the Nigerian Civil war. We have shown that it centralizes the voice of the 'other', the voiceless, or the muted voices of the carnage that was the Nigerian Civil War. The research is equally important because it offers a West African variety of Subaltern Studies other than the traditional South Asian studies of a similar nature focused on *dalit*, *sati*, scheduled tribes, and the rest of Indian peasantry.

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The “African male literary tradition” and revisionist polemics in Isidore Okpewho’s writing

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The “African male literary tradition” and revisionist polemics in Isidore Okpewho’s writing

African literature has been very polemically, but usefully engaged, by feminists and other concerned gender stakeholders in the past three decades on the note that its foundational discursive platform of representation is patriarchal, largely representing the female body as ‘absent’ and ‘other’ in the imaginative landscape of canonical African(ist) expression. While these critical efforts have significantly succeeded in interrogating phallocentrism in African male writing, they have, however, failed to recognize several masculinist indicators in the latter that have purposively undermined the hegemonic/patriarchal frame of maleness. In this article I argue, through a reading of Isidore Okpewho’s first three novels, that certain representations of African male writing preceding those of the contemporary turn portray revisionist attitudes to patriarchy, or any form of hegemonic masculinity. In these, the African woman is made to gain visibility and she becomes active on her own social terms. I thus debunk popular feminist-oriented claims that the canonical African literary male tradition *necessarily* inscribes the African woman in the stereotypical narrative of being a ‘mother-nation/mother-Africa image’, ‘prostitute’, ‘witch’, or socio-cultural other. I suggest a more careful, distilled, and responsible approach toward the politics of agency and power involving gender and identity (re)formation in the African world, culture, and literature. **Key Words:** African male writing, female body, masculinity, feminism, postcolonialism, African literature, Isidore Okpewho.


Introduction: The African literary text and gender contestations

The perennial and uneasy position has often been maintained by mainstream gender-conscious criticism of African literature that its epistemological and discursive postcolonial mappings and canonical posture are phallocentric. This unpretentious position, arguably inaugurated in 1966 when Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru* became the first published African female-authored novel (Stratton, “The Shallow Grave: Archetypes of Female Experience in African Fiction”; Andrade, “Rewriting History, Motherhood and Rebellion: Naming an African Women’s Tradition”), began to dominate feminist thought in African literary criticism from the 1980s till date. Writing in a 1987 edition of *African Literature Today*, one of the foundational Africanist journals that notably signified the evolving polemical representations and tensions of gender in African writing, Mineke Schipper suggests that “[i]n Africa, illiteracy is four times more prevalent among women than among men and in the schools the proportion of girls falls as the level of education rises. In this context, it is not surprising to see that most African literature has been written by men, and that most critics of African literature are men as well” (35). Susan Andrade proposes that “[w]hile Africa is explicitly named by Hegel as an epistemic void, the (literary) history of African women has gone unnamed, its absence unnoticed” (“Rewriting History” 91). And reflecting on the intertextual feminist pact between Nwapa’s *Efuru* and Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* in narrativizing the discursive alterity of woman in the continent’s male-dominated writing, she opines that “their intertextual relation is one that ultimately emphasizes the affinities that marginalized women writing in a shared [male] tradition must acknowledge” (105).

In the view of some Africanist feminists, the patriarchal relegation and regulation of the female body informed the gradual ‘peripheral’ gestation of female-authored writing which, despite its subversive interrogations, produced a series of traumatized depictions of womanhood in sordid existential metaphors, signifying the embattled psyche of the author. In “The Shallow Grave” Florence Stratton posits that female characters in African wom-

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en's writing "are enclosed in the restricted spheres of behavior of the stereotypes of a male tradition, their human potential buried in the shallow definitions of sex" (147). It becomes especially noteworthy when one considers the remark of a male critic of the African critical guild which casts a jaundiced view on the pervasive 'sexist' nature of the foundational African literary enterprise. He proposes that "African literature is a male-created, male-oriented, chauvinistic art" in which "[a]n honour roll of our literary giants clearly proves the point: Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Senghor, Soyinka, Achebe, Mphahlele, and others [...] Male is the master; male constitutes majority" (Ojo-Ade 158). Within the setting of this purportedly chauvinistic picture of the African literary canvas, one does not fail to discern the affirmative protest of a member of the female 'other', as she lamentably relates the Manichaeic dimensions of gender in the construction of citizenry, civil codes, and the legitimizing of creative excellence in her African nation state, which predominantly excludes female considerations. In her view, "Nigeria is male, a fact that is daily thrust in myriad ways on the Nigerian woman. An example of this cultural aspect is the national anthem with its incredibly divisive call on compatriots to serve their Fatherland in the tradition of past heroes" (Ogunyemi 60). On this trail, this critic, implicitly echoing the outcry of a growing feminist consciousness in the developing re-definition of modern African culture, literature, and belonging, pursues that "[t]he literature is phallic, dominated as it is by male writers and male critics who deal almost exclusively with male characters and male concerns, naturally aimed at a predominantly male audience" (60). In this development, the female body becomes resolute in signifying socio-cultural and textual agency in confrontation with the subaltern enclave it had been discursively veiled and silenced in due to the long legacy of a perceived literary patriarchy that had designed and endorsed its alterity.

Writing against the grain that African male writing of the purported "African male literary tradition" exhibits an absolute tendency to a patriarchal discourse, I argue that the foundational and contemporary appearance of this literature paradoxically portrays what I call "male types", which demonstrate the subjectivist, class, and cultural heterogeneity of maleness. In this context, we could be confronted with models of hegemonic masculinity as much as patterns of their subordinate(d) variants. As Anthony Lemelle Jr. notes in his study on Black masculinity in the United States, "[n]ot all males are the same. The ease of thinking in terms of such essences is seductive. However, social facts often contradict such declarations" (xi). Along this line, I discuss Okpewho's interventions in his first three novels—*The Victims* (1970), *The Last Duty* (1976), and *Tides* (1993)—as prosaic statements pointing to the fact that African male writing evinces several depictions of maleness which have implications on dynamic levels of interaction with the female body. Not including *Call Me By My Rightful Name* (2004)—his fourth but first "migrancy/postnational" novel—in this discussion, is to focus on his earlier "domestic/nation(alist)" writings which were published within the heady days and frames of dialogue with patriarchy in African literary criticism and feminist literature. Appealing to a deconstructive reading of maleness in relation to femaleness in the texts in focus, I posit that certain aspects of the African male literary tradition install a variety of exchanges between men and women that greatly unsettle popular essentialist assumptions about the 'assigned' othering of woman in African male writing.

African literature, imaginative labyrinths, and the law of the father

The inauguration and bite of vitriolic statements against the practice and days of arrant patriarchy in the African societal and literary space were largely informed by the conscientizing and challenging impacts of a global spate of Euro-American feminism(s) on the African socio-cultural and intellectual experience, coupled with a set of African(ist) feminisms that interrogated a number of socio-cultural male superstructures, and correspondingly, the Eurocentrism of Western feminism. These were further crystallized by the African woman's increased accessibility to Western education, an ironic male-developed and largely structured phenomenon that, in its early evolution, seemed to privilege a binary opposition that read the *mind* as a synecdoche of maleness and the *body* as its female other in the Lacanian mode of gendered psychoanalysis. The African woman thus began to revolutionarily engage in "the discourse of the pen", a largely assigned male protectorate of symbolic signifying arbitrarily run by what Lacan identifies as "the Law of the Father". According to Diane Price Herndl, Lacan's unpretentious association of the socio-cultural running of language—and by extension, all its conduits of knowledge production—with male authorization and systemic surveillance, is "because of its structural similarity to the establishment of paternity and its chronological connection to the Oedipal complex" (486). The African woman's contestation of this marginalizing domain thus began to (re)negotiate the intellectual and moral platform on which the male-dominated African intelligentsia operated, forcing the latter to confront itself in a revisionist dialogue against the 'canon' of

African male-centeredness. In a reading on the transition of African literature from a predominantly racialized postcolonial activism to a gender-considerate discursive gaze, Stratton argues:

And while, as Ashcroft and his colleagues claim, “the process of literary decolonization” can be seen to have “involved a radical dismantling of the European codes”, it has also involved the establishment of internal dialogues, which, because they are internal, can be seen to mark the progress that has been made toward decolonization. The literary dialogue between men and women is particularly significant in this regard in that it is occasioning major changes in the orientation of the African literature—a turning away from a concern with the issue of race to a concern with the issue of gender [...] (*Contemporary African Literature and The Politics of Gender* 11–2)

Yet, in the development of the tradition of African female writing, race was a crucial factor of influence. Woman’s marginalization in African literature can be linked to an early postcolonial literary drive which, in its quest to inscribe an African racial, cultural, and nation(alist) imaginary of difference and identity against colonial heritage, (un)consciously masculinized its discourse in an essentialist mode. This literary orientation thus largely participated in “nationalist discourses” in African postcolonial geo-cultural environments that unfortunately “subtly subsumed concerns about women under what turned out ultimately to be patriarchal concerns under the impetus of a nationalist agenda” (Quayson 587). It has been argued that a major postcolonial impetus of resistance against European cultural imperialism and racist demonizations of Blackness in this move was the cultural-nationalist reaction of Negritude, dating as far back to the 1930s (Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike; Stratton, “Periodic Embodiment: A Ubiquitous Trope in African Men’s Writing”). Several male-authored African writings premised on the Negritude philosophy adopted culturalist idioms and metaphors of racial difference to whiteness embodied in the trope of “Mother Africa”. Stratton proposes that in a number of male-authored modern African poetry such as Senghor’s “Black Woman” (“Femme Noire”) and “Nuit de Sine”, David Diop’s “To My Mother” and “To a Black Dancer”, Okot p’Bitek’s *Song of Lawino* prose fiction such as Nuruddin Farah’s *From a Broken Rib*, Mongo Beti’s *Perpetua and the Habit of Happiness*, Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Petals of Blood*, and Wole Soyinka’s *Season of Anomy*, the Negritude depiction of the African woman as an index of “the pot of culture” or the “sweep of history” is apparent (“Periodic Embodiment” 112–3). She points out that “[h]er body takes the form either of a young girl, nubile and erotic, or of a fecund, nurturing mother; and it is frequently associated with the African landscape [...] As embodying mother, she gives the trope a name: the Mother Africa trope” (“Periodic Embodiment” 113). In its male-oriented postcolonial cast, “this trope operates against the interests of women, excluding them, implicitly if not explicitly, from authorship and citizenship” (“Periodic Embodiment” 112). In her attack against p’Bitek’s *Song of Lawino*, which presents two female personae as metaphors of the tension between “the pot of culture” and “the sweep of history” depictions of Africa in Negritude imagination, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie comments:

The “sophisticated” woman like Okot p’Bitek’s Clementina, co-wife of Lawino in *Song of Lawino* is an unreal being. Counterpoised to this “city girl” is the rural woman, another mirage, the “pot of culture” who is static as history passes her by, who wants the old ways of life, who speaks like a lobotomized idiot about “iron snakes” (railways) and “our husband”. (11)

It is remarkable to note that Ogundipe-Leslie’s reaction as stated above is also in dialogic confrontation with some African male culturalist critical celebrations that (would) applaud p’Bitek’s Negritude example such as Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie, and [Ihechukwu Madubuike’s](#) *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* (1980) and Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) as much as an attack on revisionist phallogocentric anti-Negritude/‘Africanist’ anthologies that had no space for woman such as Soyinka’s *Poems of Black Africa* (1975) and Gerald Moore’s *Twelve African Writers* (1980).

The dialogues of re-writing woman in the economy, politics, and signifying of African literature reveal a range of critical and imaginative cues that have put the male writer, maleness, and the gendered literary establishment (to the disadvantage of the female body) on the defensive. At the ‘decolonial’ entry-point of African literary/critical feminism, the female body discursively began to set itself the task to undo its gendered alterity perceived to be the historic product of colonialism and its enabling institutions (see Andrade, “Rewriting History”; Ladele; Arndt). Susan Arndt proposes that African women in pre-colonial times were visible and notable, however, “since colonialism destroyed most of the spheres of official power which women commanded in traditional African societies, in contemporary Africa in public life, as well as in the family, only unofficial opportunities for influence are available to women” (22). In the same vein, Omolola Ladele links the colonial enterprise of European

missionary schools with an intellectual patriarchy that foregrounded the literary careers of male artists such as “Homer, through Hopkins and Aristotle”, a move that disenfranchised women and produced an “emergent elite” who “were schooled into conceptualizing humanity only in male and phallic terms” (309). This colonialist machination therefore explains why the pioneers of modern African literature were male, and why its canonical orientation revolved around them. This is where the association of indigenous culture with a number of African feminisms, predominantly theorized in Nigeria, becomes instructive.

The scramble for female visibility in the African imaginative space has also contested inferiorizing male-oriented criticisms that view female expression as portraying “the lack of depth, the lack of subtlety” (Nnolim 32), and projecting “more content than technique” (Nwabueze 195). It has also queried the marginalizing tendencies of the male critic in trivializing, or completely annulling the writings of women as pedestrian, or at most merely ambitious, as once echoed in Flora Nwakpa’s rhetorical question: “Are we not sometimes completely ignored?” (qtd in Opara 2). In reaction to the phallic claims that the female tradition of African writing revolved around ‘domestic’/‘private’/‘feminine’ issues as against the “more mature” engagements of male writing with ‘nationalist’/‘public’/‘able-men’ concerns, Andrade contends that “[t]he domestic, where women historically have set their novels, offers as sharp an analytic perspective on collectivity and national politics as does the arena of public political action” (*The Nation Writ Small: African Fictions and Feminisms* 1). The feminist intervention has also interrogated the ‘subaltern’ drawings of women in African male fiction, which, as in Camara Laye’s, Chinua Achebe’s, Elechi Amadi’s, and John Munonye’s inaugural rural/cultural-nationalist novels, or Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s decolonial writings, limited them to the mere roles of housewives, “existential mothers”, communal old women and witches (Ogunyemi; Chukwuma; Arndt; Opara; Ohale). Yemi Mojola notes that in Nwakpa’s novels, for instance, “[m]en are often regarded as nothing more than instruments for procreation as in *One is Enough* [...] Whether as husbands or lovers, men are generally portrayed as irresponsible, immoral exploiters existing in the shadow of the women sometimes as mere nonentities [...]” (20). The inscription of the “male other”, “riff raff”, “intruder”, or “colleague” may also be seen in the works of writers like Zulu Sofola, Mariama Ba, Tess Onwueme, Tsitsi Dangaremba, Emecheta, Akachi Ezeigbo, Assia Djebar, and Ama Ata Aidoo. However, African feminist thought has also not failed to recognize revised male perceptions of the female body. Chioma Opara, along this line, recognizes that “gynandrim or male empathy for women in African writing has given female subjects as well as female writers a robust leverage in the literary canon” (5).

The African male writer’s persuasion into a sympathetic relationship with the feminist project of eroding and erasing patriarchy from the African literary sphere is in dialectical relation to the interrogative glocal/intellectual currents around the predominantly othered female body. Apart from flagging a new dawn of male-authored African literature with deep consideration and respect for gender issues as largely popularized by the second generation of African male writers such as Femi Osofisan, Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide, Okpewho, Festus Iyayi, Meja Mwangi, Bate Besong, to mention but a few, this development also informed the reappraisal of works by the older generation of African male writers in the ranks of Achebe, Soyinka, and Ngugi wa Thiong’o. Stratton indicates, along this line, that Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross* is a female bildungsroman, in this case one written by a male author. It tells the story of Wariiga’s development as she passes from girlhood into adulthood and recognizes her identity and role in the world” (*Contemporary African Literature* 159). In *Detained* (1981), his ‘diary’ of prison experiences, Ngugi wa Thiongo remarks that “[b]ecause the women are the most exploited and oppressed section of the entire working class, I would create a picture of a strong determined woman with a will to resist and to struggle against the conditions of her present being” (qtd in Stratton, *Contemporary African Literature* 158). Commenting on the idea that in Beatrice, his heroine in *Anthills of the Savannah*, he had significantly revised his subordinating portrait of women in his novels, Achebe suggests: “Let me take you back to the novel—*The Man of the People*. It ends with a woman, Eunice, shooting the politician who murdered her lover [...] I’m saying that Beatrice was actually prefigured in Eunice in *A Man of the People*” (120).

Despite the laudable re-orientation of African male writing from the quagmire of sexist affiliation to a noble disposition of gender sensitivity, a second-wave critical tirade against the ‘reformed’ male author posits that this new imaginative turn is merely an “ostensibly positive imaging [...] masked by dominant, phallic gender and sexual politics that privilege patriarchy and represent women as prostitutes and peripheral others” (Tsaaior 186–7). In this kind of reading, man (as biological male) is by implication trapped within a “tyrannical unconscious” whose discourse of the pen must forever reinforce its Lacanian imagistic relation to the phallus as a symbol of superior male productivity, rationality, creativity, and judgment. The African male writer is thus compulsively

absorbed in a phallogocentric thought process and extended textual deployment that *must* represent woman in socio-cultural and discursive absence. Taking a swipe against the figuration of the African woman in what he calls the “mother metaphoric imperative”, James Tsaaio opines:

This mother metaphoric imperative is ideologically embodied in the representation of the nation or Africa as fecund, kind and nurturing mother. The mother-nation dialectic or mother-Africa trope defines much of phallic writing as a dominant epistemological mode [...] Concomitant with this dialectic is the metaphorical representation of mother-Africa in the image of a prostitute. This metaphorical representation, at face value, appears to dignify and humanize womanhood. Fundamentally, however, it ideologically serves to engender gender and sexual politics and encode stereotypical images of women as prostitutes. (181–2)

While Tsaaio’s observation may be acknowledged as valid in some respects, his critical thesis, however, joins the several sweeping statements that construct the grand narrative of an “African male literary tradition” that conceptually and doctrinally ignores dissenting voices against patriarchy within it. Maleness, in this kind of reading, represents by extension all male characters and their various existential contexts (including the house boy, the office clerk who reports to a female manager, and the roadside male beggar pleading alms from a benevolent woman) as oppressive stereotypes, a construct which even more mature models of Black/African feminism such as Womanism, Motherism, Nego-feminism, Stiwanism, Femalism, and Snail-Sense feminism have reviewed, and which much of contemporary African female writing has done away with. It is interesting to note, for example, that femalism, proposed by Opara, relies on the African female body as a metaphor linking “the freedom of woman to that of the African nation”, thus foregrounding a revisionist feminist endorsement and agency of the “mother-nation dialectic or mother-Africa trope” (see Nkealah 68). Andrade, in a poststructuralist reading of Stratton’s identification of the split “psychodynamic of male-identified cultural nationalism” in the latter’s *Contemporary African Literature* (1994), allows that African male writing recognized “its need for an idealized mother [...]” arising from “men’s projection of their own sense of anxiety or degradation” pointing to “an underside to the celebration of masculine agency” (*The Nation* 14).

Virtually all of the African feminisms listed above, which draw much ideological content from indigenous African oral culture as a postcolonial statement against the perceived Eurocentrism of Western feminism(s), accommodate the African male world within their epistemic leanings. Ezeigbo’s inspiration in proposing Snail-Sense feminism as panacea to the African woman’s socio-cultural trials is informed by the insight that “a snail-sense feminist negotiates her way around patriarchy, tolerates sexist men, collaborates with non-sexist ones, avoids confrontation with patriarchs, and applies diplomacy in her dealings with society at large” (68). Collaboration with the African male world arguably grounds the orientation of the Africanist feminist brands highlighted above, albeit in varying ideological frameworks. These feminisms are, however, not without their own individual weaknesses, such as seen in the unspecified categorizing of women in the politics of inclusion and exclusion bordering on class, level of education, heterosexual/lesbian considerations, and so forth that often tend to blur their collective feminist gaze.

Another intriguing area of self-contradiction is that they seem disposed to *voluntary* (incoherent) relationships with patriarchy-endorsed African cultural templates since the dominant core of the indigenous traditional culture was *authorized* or *circulated* by the operating male hegemonic structure which had often oppressed women, in a number of ways. It is, however, fair to note that, at the literary level, women writers have often tended to subvert inimical portraits of indigenous cosmology by re-writing narratives of gendered traditional culture, as in Emecheta’s re-casting of indigenous society’s docile image of motherhood in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and Ezeigbo’s truncation of male spiritual hegemony embodied in *Eaglewoman* in *House of Symbols* (2001).

In what follows, I examine the portrayal of the female body in Okpewho’s first three novels as a revisionist continuum of African male-author textual practice, drawing attention to the difficulty of claiming that the “African male literary tradition” exclusively inscribed patriarchy as a discursive site of male-female relations. In other words, I argue that in Okpewho, straightforward binary portrayals of hegemonic masculinity in relation to the female body is complicated, especially since this tends to violate alternative discourses of masculinity and femininity in the “African male literary tradition”.

Writing in difference to the norm: Okpewho and (counter)discursive representation

Okpewho's demise at the age of 74 on 4 September 2016, in the United States of America after a robust and challenging career as a seminal scholar of African Oral Literature and Creative Writing, induced a response that defined how shocked and devastated a literary world could be when one of its sterling flag-bearers departs. In a tribute entitled "Isidore Okpewho: Scribal Lord of Orature", Odiya Ofeimun, a Nigerian poet and literary contemporary, notes that "[i]t is a tragedy spelt at the level of the knowledge industry" (5). He anchors the fact that "Isidore Okpewho's passing away hits home with Hampate Ba's appreciation of how it is like a whole library burnt down when an old man dies" (5). Osundare, in a similar elegiac tenor, intones that "[t]he loss is hard to bear, the shock almost impossible to endure. A great tree has fallen in our forest of letters" (1). G. G. Darah suggests that "[l]ike an epic story itself, his career was a compendium of creative energies: he was a critic, theorist, essayist, translator, editor, fabulist and novelist" (1). While these accolades rightly celebrate a literary genius and Africanist scholar, this article recalls Okpewho as an iconoclast among the significantly resonant African male writers of the second generational phase who significantly approached an objective re-inscription of the African woman in African literature. His academic training and versatile understanding of the socio-cultural and political contours of his African society contributed immensely to both the creative and ideological horizons of his counter-normative/discursive set of approaches to socio-cultural/political subject matter.

Perhaps one could hazard that Okpewho's most striking contributions to postcolonial discourse and Africanist scholarship were his engagements with African oral literature which particularly helped to debunk Eurocentric views of the African oral tradition and cultural past. Some of his seminal and pioneering books in this field include *The Epic in Africa: Towards a Poetics of the Oral Performance* (1979); *Myth in Africa: A Study of its Aesthetic and Cultural Relevance* (1983); *African Oral Literature: Backgrounds, Character, and Continuity* (1992); *Once Upon a Kingdom: Myth, Hegemony and Identity* (1998); and *Blood on the Tides: The Ozidi Saga and Oral Epic Narratology* (2014). Biodun Jeyifo remarks that "[t]hese were all groundbreaking works of scholarship that brilliantly corrected long-held intellectual biases against the heritage of myth and orature in and of Africa" (138). His orality-based research to a great extent informed his imaginative flight, as demonstrated in all his novels, which have been brilliantly critiqued as fictional theses dissecting complex domestic, national, sociocultural, and political concerns of the Nigerian postcolonial experience (see Ola; Nwachukwu-Agbada, "Oil, Soil and Foil: Isidore Okpewho's Tidal Victims in His Niger Delta Novel of Environment" and "Isidore Okpewho: Scholarship, Imaginative Writing and the Assertion of the African Sensibility"; Ofeimun). In *Call Me by My Rightful Name* (2004), which moves away from his earlier nation-based ruminations to privilege a concern "with general black experience" and the presentation of "the African American's search for his/her authentic name as inextricably linked with his/her search for a true identity and a true home" (Diala 77–8), the affinity to orality is particularly pungent.

Okpewho's evolution as a postcolonial scholar with a deconstructive bent became global in a dramatic and providential manner. As a trained Classicist who was familiar with a number of European and African indigenous traditions, he felt an irresistible pull to challenge a section of Ruth Finnegan's controversial study of the traditional African literary imagination, *Oral Literature in Africa* (1970), which suggests that the Epic, as a creative poetic element, does not exist in Africa. Okpewho's response to this colonialist opinion led to the publication of *The Epic in Africa*, which gained immense popularity in the field of African Oral Literature. His clear intellectual leadership in this field informed his being the President of the International Society for the Oral Literatures of Africa (ISO-LA) for a number of productive years which cemented engagements with African orature as a site of Africanist postcolonial affirmation.

Okpewho's creative output aligns with the revolutionary predilection of his critical oeuvre. However, scholarship on this dynamic African(ist) intellectual has largely omitted his interventions in the gender debate involving African male writing. This is a gap I address in this article.

Polygamy and casualties in *The Victims*

Okpewho's first novel, *The Victims*, celebrates perhaps the most caustic attack on a pervasive and sensitive patriarchal social institution of the African cultural hemisphere: polygamy. Arguably, for the first time in the prose work of a male writer in African literature, this institution is approached with a touch that betrays the internal contradictions and oppressive dimensions it offers the (modern) African family, and by extension, woman, as mother and wife. This preoccupation shows a notable departure from the erstwhile treatment of polygamy as a viable and salutary traditional cultural heritage calculated at foregrounding a postcolonial validation of the tradition-

al African home-setting or identity, a deployment which ironically reinforced/reinforces stereotypes of African women as docile and helpless before the traumatizing psychological and physical pressures of male indifference and incontinence. As Vuyiswa Ndabayakhe and Catherine Addison note, “[d]espite the encroachment of Western culture and the great strides towards gender equity being made in many parts of the continent, polygamy survives as an often fiercely protected symbol of African identity [...] a sign of the unreconstituted patriarchy still prevailing in many African societies today” (89). Within this socio-cultural scenario in *The Victims*, Okpewho affirms the essential humanity of the African woman, her need for life, love, fulfillment, and relevance, just as much as her male counterpart craves these. Locating this concern within a relatively rustic setting, Ozala, Okpewho successfully subverts the arguable authorial misogyny of older male-authored texts such as Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Arrow of God* (1964), set in comparatively rustic communities whose treatment of polygamy invests the husband with a larger-than-life, demi-god personality in relation to his wives.

An immediate recognition of Okpewho’s revisionist stamp in the handling of polygamy is seen at the very beginning of the novel as we encounter the bloody fight between Nwabunor—the first wife—and Obanua, her husband. This is occasioned by the former’s adamant insistence that the latter pays their son’s—Ubaka’s—school fees, a responsibility which he had not been able to fulfill mainly because of his poor sense of family responsibility and shameless addiction to the bottle. This confrontation by Nwabunor, a woman who had been indifferently and callously treated by her husband, first over the inability to bear a child during the first three years of her marriage, and second, for her inability to bear another child over ten years afterwards—a development which leads her husband to marry a second wife, Ogugua—recalls mainstream feminist clamor that women should resist all forms of patriarchal oppression against them, even if the tool is ironically a woman. This self-asserting ingredient had earlier been demonstrated in the novel by Nwabunor upon Obanua’s decision to bring in a second wife into the family. Within the limits of her psychic agony, Nwabunor is forced to desperately decide her line of action: “Nwabunor went away and cried. But with this frustration came a new determination that she was not going to be pulled out of her rightful place. She was the first to come into this house, and she was going to stay first. Anybody else could move in, but nobody was going to make her second” (6).

As a result of the avowal depicted above, Nwabunor packs her belongings from her private room to her husband’s, to deter the sharing of “her rightful place” in her matrimonial home with an outsider. This revolutionary, self-defining stance by Nwabunor in a predominantly rural African environment with a patriarchal socio-cultural outlook on polygamy is a major early achievement of the re-construction and re-writing of the African woman in African male writing as a social change-agent. It sets the atmosphere of deconstructive polemics with older male-authored texts with a similar thematic preoccupation.

Okpewho’s attack on patriarchy in *The Victims* is further delineated in his attitude to events in Obanua’s family, which signifies polygamy as a shortsighted and intrinsically disconnected social institution. An instructive vehicle of this authorial stance is Ogugua, the second wife herself, whose lifestyle of promiscuity and hedonism had culminated in the birth of a set of twin girls out of wedlock with a Portuguese merchant. Ogugua’s insertion into Obanua’s family (though ironically affirming polygamy’s hold in the Euro-modern African experience) can be approached as transgressively pitched against this offensive marital institution and its attendant patriarchal excesses, a fact showcased in her adultery with Gwam Odafe, a community philanderer, after her marriage with Obanua. Upon arrival at her new home, she perceives the “strangeness of the atmosphere she had walked into” and “she didn’t like what she saw or thought, and wondered briefly to herself why she had so foolishly decided to saddle herself with a husband” (7). The spate of violent clashes and ill feelings that follow between Nwabunor and herself eventually descend into an unmanageable crisis that witnesses the loss of Obanua’s authority over his family and the tragic death—through poisoning—of five people in the household: her twin daughters and son, Bomboy; Ubaka; and eventually her own death.

In the novel’s design of rupturing familial patriarchy, Okpewho assembles a string of tragic events that ‘unite’ Obanua’s wives in subjectivist rebellion against oppression at home, while they are in conflict on the discursive plains of their divisive brands of feminism which prove fatal. In the narrative, “the second-wife intruder” in the Western feminist thinking on polygamy is discursively ruptured and (re)presented as a “female type” whose position of in-betweenness in the volatile arena of gender politics is instructive, albeit problematic. Ogugua, in her difficult location as “the other woman”, is notionally (supposed to be) inferior to her husband, signifying the patriarchal establishment, and her “senior wife”, who occupies a yet to be theorized “hegemonic femaleness” in African polygamy. However, in this novel, Ogugua intricately occupies the space of what I call an “in-between

gender(ed) difference”, and also embodies what Djebbar, in *A Sister to Scheherazade* (1987), suggests as the agency of woman’s “erotic body” liberating her patriarchal bondage to the essentializing of her “reproductive body” (Olusegun-Joseph 234). In this regard, “[t]he privileging of [...] woman’s erotic body at the expense of the reproductive puts in place a symbolic crossing from her enclosure to her liberation, her veiling to her visibility and her silence to her right to speak” (234). By extension, Ogugua becomes a gender(ed) subaltern negotiating agency between a systemic male superimposition and a silencing female hierarchization.

Okpewho’s portraiture of Obanua as a lamentable moral cipher and irritable husband figure further accentuates the commanding presence of the African female world in the evolving second-generation, male-authored African novel, intertextually allying with the emasculation of the patriarchal/hegemonic male in the revisionist agenda of revolutionary female writers like Nwakpa, Emecheta, Dangaremba, Djebbar, and Calixthe Beyala. Obanua’s obsession with drinking and his epileptic short appointments at the various places where he worked—products of his ebbing hegemonic masculinity due to familial frustrations—deplete him of the commanding aura of the strong-character husband-figure of Ozala’s patriarchal picture. Obanua becomes ‘castrated’: his loss of prestige—if ever any—and his nightmarish financial descent terminate his previous arrangement that each wife should feed the whole household for a week. Instead, each wife feeds “her own side of the family” (29), and Obanua, in order to keep sane, finds respite at the mercy of a bar mistress and her maid, to whom he is perpetually indebted. Obanua’s claim to male hegemony thus becomes effectively ruptured by a combination of human and existential forces that co-opt the agency of woman as a crucial protagonist.

It is significant to note that the only attractively drawn male characters in the plot of *The Victims* are Ubaka and Bomboy, children whose living and dying depend on the theatre that centers on the survival and sanity of their nurturing mothers. Here, Okpewho imaginatively interrogates the “woman-nation” trope already identified with some male-authored African texts to privilege the natural pragmatic relation of mother and child. The boys spend more time with their mothers than with their father, a statement on the wellbeing of the African society—which patriarchy largely claims lordship over—as being crucially dependent on the vital roles of birthing and breeding which are functionally provided by women. Okpewho’s narrative procedure here, again, arguably preempts Djebbar’s association of dependent boy characters with their mothers in *A Sister to Scheherazade* (1987) as a way of “prophesying man’s future place in the world as a phenomenon that belongs to the direction of the female body’s voice” (Olusegun-Joseph II).

A notable hallmark of Okpewho’s re-casting of the African woman in this novel stems from his keen artistry in the character handling of the two old women who recur frequently in the plot. This is achieved through his innovative reconstruction of *gossip*, a social phenomenon within the African socio-cultural milieu which these women are involved in. This practice, which is often assigned a feminine status, is imaginatively and discursively appropriated to inscribe a postmodern narrative of woman’s presence in social criticism in the patriarchal context of her alterity. Through the intermittent busyboding of these old women on the “real” affairs of society through gossip, we are presented with the “news-within-the-news”, day-to-day unofficial and subjective intervention of the *subaltern* who *speak(s)* to narrate and interrogate male-oriented moral, institutional, and hierarchical codes that condemn women to the margin of silence. Gossip becomes a kind of informal device of surveillance and information gathering by the female body, an unacknowledged but functional media installation of opinionated witnessing which, in its rather “panopticon design”, divulges the happenings in Obanua’s family and the subjective/socio-cultural factors that (il)logically inform them. *The Victims* thus becomes a commentary of shared follies, irresponsibility, losses, and calamities revolving around male and female identities within the grim theatre of polygamy.

It might seem contradictory that, despite Okpewho’s gender revisionism in this novel, the patriarchal pangs of polygamy result in landslide tragedy. The resolution may be found in the pragmatic implication of the novel’s title, *The Victims*, which suggests the fatal result of the collision of female power with offensive male institutions, such as patriarchy. The victims are all that society stands for: individuals, the family institution, cordial and peaceful male-female relationship, social integration, law and order, social identification, and identitarian sense of belonging. The tragic conclusion becomes a catharsis that allows society, humanity, and academia to purge themselves of notions and imaginaries of utopia that eventually become fatalistic when they engender implications of subalternity to some crucial composites within them. This lesson is also consistent with Okpewho’s authorial vision in his subsequent ‘tragic’ novels, *The Last Duty* and *Tides*.

Fragments of affinity in *The Last Duty*

Okpewho's second novel, *The Last Duty* (1976), continues the enormous task of de-centering patriarchy in African male writing and re-inscribing woman in a more visible socio-cultural context. In this novel, the artist seems to be occupied with identifying the operative "gender of adultery" as a social practice. He seems to ask an intriguing question: "What sex *really* gets punished in the event of adultery?" Okpewho's inquiry thrives in this novel within the context of its subject matter, the traumatic psychological dimensions of the Nigerian civil war (1967–1970), and gains aesthetic persuasiveness through what he calls "the collective evidence technique" (qtd in Ola 65), a confessional device in which each protagonist in the story narrates their experience(s). The major actors in this national gory tale are the Igabo (symbolic of the federation of Nigeria) and the Simba (signifying the secessionist Biafra rebels).

The tragic essence of the story revolves around a woman, Aku, whose Simban origin exposes her to an atmosphere of insecurity in Urukpe, the Igabo town in which this story is set. This complex ethnic context is exploited by Toje Onovwakpo, a megalomaniac who capitalizes on the former's 'despicable' Simban origin to launch a most barbaric form of sexual assault against her. His ploy becomes particularly traumatizing considering Aku's shod sexual chastity and integrity through the long and tortuous three years of her husband's incarceration as a prisoner of war. Toje's sinister machination is set against the backdrop of having damaged the potency of his manhood after his adulterous encounter with a prostitute. Aku becomes his choice of assuring himself of his manhood, a scheme which not only informs his sending Trojan gifts to her, but also ensuring the continued imprisonment of her husband. Toje makes his plan clear in saying:

All that concerns me is that Mukoro Oshevire stays in detention [...] Long enough for me to be able to use his wife to prove that I still possess that power which I am sure still lies within me. By now, I believe, she knows what I want, I believe she understands that I am not investing in nothing, and that she has no reason to expect a man who is her husband's commercial rival to every now and then send her and her child clothes and keep. She knows that the whole town is against her and wants her removed. And I am one of the town. (Okpewho, *The Last Duty* 32)

Aku's morality in the novel becomes a solid philosophical platform on which Okpewho builds his argument against the patriarchal African society's reductive view of female humanity's sterling virtues. Oshevire (Aku's husband) amplifies his wife's priceless femininity as he ruminates in detention on her steadfast love in staying with him, even "when every single one of her tribe did not hesitate to desert home and family and take to her heel" (209). However, the tormenting protraction of the war and the continued persecution of the Simbans by the Igabo translate into an unendurable acidic trial for Aku, which eventually results in her crumbling into the shameless sexual scheming of Toje and illicit affair with Odibo, the physically challenged servant character. Eustace Palmer points out that:

We are convincingly shown that Aku succumbs to Odibo, not out of licentiousness or infidelity, but because Toje has aroused and failed to satisfy feelings in her which had long remained submerged. At the start she is determined not to shame her husband and give in to Toje. But when she decides to let him have his way with her it is largely because she has no choice. Toje offers the only protection she has in a very dangerous situation and only he stands between her and starvation. It is Toje who is to be condemned for exploiting a defenseless woman. (30)

Aku's personality, though sexually challenged and tried, looms large in our appreciation of its doggedness in the face of persecution and psychological lynching. Beyond Palmer's argument above, Aku's fall could be seen as being largely occasioned by her consideration for her son whom she could not bear suffering starvation. It stands to reason that Aku might have defied all odds if she had been the only one left to wait for Oshevire. Also, Toje's manipulation in making sure that Major Ali—the Commander of the Brigade Army in Urukpe—does not put Aku in his protective custody after he had been alarmed at her exposure to the community's hostility is an immense factor that affects this tragedy. It goes without saying that had Aku learnt of the Major's plan for her, she could have gladly embraced it.

Aku's plight becomes a problematic trajectory through which Okpewho challenges certain cultural and epistemological orientations in the patriarchal African environment that tend to incriminate against women for sins men are comparatively excused of, if not given an approving nod over. In the context of the Nigerian civil war story depicted in this novel, Okpewho does not navigate woman's tenacity or physical military involvement in warfare as in Djébar's *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* (1985), Osofisan's *Morountodun* (1999), or Maaza Mengiste's

The Shadow King (2019), but explores woman's moral and psychological tallness in the face of the systemic and psychological series of warfare unleashed by patriarchal capitalism and its subjectivist tendencies. Aku is a metaphor of the brutalized conscience of the Nigerian capitalist society's patriarchal depravity which disintegrates into landslide war, symbolized in the military clash between the Igabo and Simba. But beyond this, she personifies an embittered and embattled "mother-nation" ideal (a far cry from the queried feminist picture of this figure), persistently ruptured by the corrupt patriarchal hegemony. This becomes heightened in Aku's incisive spiritual and psychological travails that eventually consummate in the tragedy that leads to Oshevire's death. His death occurs, unfortunately, because he could not project himself beyond the limits of his puerile selfishness and male self-centeredness in comprehending the peculiarity of his wife's dilemma (Palmer 27). But again, just as in *The Victims*, tragedy becomes a fatal consequence society is forced to experience when male incontinence or inimical superimpositions clash with *sacrosanct* projections of the female body. This warfare is dramatically depicted, in another context, when Toje approaches his wife with the insinuation that his present impotence was caused by her probable infidelity, despite the fact that he knew it was caused by his extra-marital philandering. In a confrontation which signifies female agency, Toje's wife affirmatively and bitterly stands up to this implied mudslinging, making her husband remark that "I just couldn't sit there and let her run her mouth and pour her petulance standing over me as though she owned the house" (qtd in Okpewho, "The Last Duty" 74).

The Last Duty can also be viewed as revealing contradictory shades of maleness that construct or strive to appropriate hegemonic masculinity—in socially acknowledged terms—which *may not* necessarily be patriarchal or violent. R. W. Connell and James Messerschmidt contend that hegemonic masculinity engenders "the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it [...] Hege- monic masculinities therefore came into existence in specific circumstances and were open to historical change" (832–3). In this discursive site, "there could be a struggle for hegemony, and older forms of masculinity might be displaced by new ones" (833). This intra-group gender contention is apparent in Toje's clandestine appeal to an old and worn patriarchal form of masculinity which had to stealthily evade a superior and contemporary one personified and formalized in Major Ali's characterization. Felicia Annin and Cynthia Osei note that "[t]he theme of the vanity of human wishes brings to mind men's craving for power, wealth and recognition which Okpewho portrays through the character Toje [...] His arrogance is expressed as 'I am a big man and there's no question about that [...] recognition must be given to where it's due and goes without question'" (19). In this, Annin and Osei rightly capture Toje's megalomaniac tendency, which is a disturbing type of masculinity in the novel. Despite this remark, their reading descends to the flaw of an uncritical feminist politics by representing Toje as a synecdoche of what they call "men's craving for power" despite the presence of men like Major Ali and Oshevire who clearly do not portray Toje's delusionary tendency. Palmer, however, suggests in his appraisal of 'duty' as a masculine index in the novel that Oshevire "comes closest to the ideal" (26). To him, the latter demonstrates the premium masculinist character which "involves standing up to one's enemies in defense of the cause of honesty, justice, and truth, no matter what the consequences" (26), a trait he upholds towards his wife until his unfortunate misjudgment beclouds his reasoning.

Tides and the tempest of nation building

Okpewho's third novel, *Tides* (1993), re-states the place of the woman as fundamental to African male writing and imaginative landscape. Produced in an epistolary mode, the novel x-rays the wracking question of the exploitation and brutalization of minority ethnic groups in African nation-states which ironically contribute significantly to the economy. The novel finds its major artistic strength in the dialogue between the two main characters, Piriye Dukumo and Tonwe Brisibe, who write letters to each other as regards the physical oppression of their minority ethnic group, the Delta, by the Federal Government of Nigeria in collusion with multi-national oil companies in a dizzying display of corruption. This lamentable scenario involves traditional rulers, chiefs, and indigenes of the Delta who are compromised on the platform of self-centered material gains. As J. O. J. Nwachukwu-Agbada observes, "[t]he traitors to the people's cause in Okpewho's *Tides* are more of insiders than outsiders. They are mainly composed of people whose personal interests are of more importance to them than the welfare of their people" (7). The correspondent protagonists, who are community journalists, represent a marginalized section of men in the patriarchal enclave of the Nigerian nation-state. They are victims of mass retrenchment at *Chronicles*, a newspaper outfit, being an extension of a series of administrative persecutions by the hegemonic-male composition of the Federal Government.

Among the offensive projects embarked on by the latter is the construction of the Kwarafa Dam, which greatly reduces the volume of water flowing down the Niger, and so curtails the fishing activity in the Delta. Coupled with this is the construction of oil rigs which impose the ecological disaster of oil spillage on agricultural life, “for many farms are practically buried in thick layers of crude, which kills off many fishes and other forms of life” (Okpewho, *Tides* 2). Every attempt by the naturally concerned indigenes to represent their grievances is met with the most unimaginable indifference, and at times, military force. This development forms the seeming ethnocentric nationalism of the protagonists, but nationally instructive intervention.

The import of the African woman’s social role in this novel is driven home through Lati, a former lady colleague of the protagonists who later becomes Piriye’s fiancée. This is particularly noticed in her intelligent and self-sacrificial intervention in the ideological stalemate imposed on the Beniotu-Delta course through the terrorist position espoused by a highly intelligent and philosophically radical “son of the soil”, Noble Ebika Harrison (‘Bickerburg’), and the moderate, round-table-dialogue stance insinuated by the opposing bloc which includes Piriye and Tonwe. Impelled by the countless torture on his people and his incarcerations by the police ever since his days with the Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC), a pressure group, Harrison becomes hardened into making sure that the nation ‘suffers’ for it. Thus, he embarks on a series of strategic bombings. A fatal pursuit of this resolution is driven home when Harrison bombs an oil rig, causing physical and economic havoc of epic magnitude. This is expertly done in such a way that only his *very* close confidants could ever guess who is behind the scene. However, Lati’s exceptional brilliance in following the trend of bombings makes her to rightly anticipate Harrison’s next likely target, the Kwarafa Dam, which shocks Piriye in a conversation with her: “[...] at this point I was forced upright by the growing revelation—he talked about the Kwarafa Dam. God, Lati, you don’t mean [...]” (*Tides* 189). Piriye’s sluggishness in following up the pictorial aspect of his co-authored book on the Delta experience stirs Lati’s journalistic impulse in risking her life for the opportunity. Consequent tragedy occurs as Harrison blows up the dam before the police’s arrival; Lati (who is pregnant) could not be found. Harrison is eventually arrested and the avalanche of blasts abates.

Lati’s character in this novel is significant in a number of ways. First, with regard to Okpewho’s projection of his protagonist female characters, Lati is arguably a revised version who very comfortably inhabits the space of modernist urbanity, the site and discursive semiotics/negotiations of Euro-modern literacy, the arena and politics of male-dominated knowledge production/media propaganda, and the agency of a more articulate nationally-conscious and transculturally-informed womanhood.

Second, and very significantly, Lati also becomes an interventionist tool with which Okpewho seeks to correct the unequal distribution of gendered bodies involved in redressing the ecological, political, and transnational disasters of oil exploitation in the Niger Delta in Nigerian (male) writing. The writers of Okpewho’s literary generation that have explored the Niger-Delta question, such as Ojaide, Ofeimun, and Ken Saro Wiwa, are/were male, and seem(ed) to be more involved, in structural male terms, with reflecting the heinous human and environmental dimensions of this region’s “petro-woes”, rather than representing gender concerns with a particular ‘liberating’ gaze on the female body. In creating Lati as a journalist and activist female protagonist, Okpewho could be said to have definitively inscribed woman in the national emergency of confronting “petro-tyranny” in the Niger Delta.

Third, Okpewho also arguably transforms the “mother-nation”/“mother metaphoric imperative” stigma of the woman in patriarchal Nigerian (African) writing into a signifier that extends Motherism or femalism (in Acholonu’s and Opara’s terms respective) into a functional *matriarch-martyr* narrative of the dialectically-driven, nation(ally)-conscious woman. In the blow up of the Kwarafa dam, which involves her purported life sacrifice, Lati could be viewed to have exchanged her identity as a would-be mother (being biologically pregnant) for the “higher calling” of a matriarch-martyr ‘pregnant’ of the salvation of a threatened but developing (fetal) nation, which is delivered through her sacrificial death.

A further demonstration of woman’s social capital is made in the authorial interrogation of a socio-cultural stance on the source of childlessness which is often linked to women. This opinion is engaged through the event of the sour marital relationship between Piriye and Tony— his ex-wife—which later fails. In his confession to Tonwe in a letter, Piriye laments: “But why must a man suffer in his own house simply because *he has not given his wife a child?* For some three years now she has not cooked me a single meal or even allowed me to make love to her. What have I done?” (*Tides* 62, emphasis added).

In the above, Okpewho discursively ‘acquits’ women of a social narrative that conventionally demonizes them for “marital non-performance”. Making the husband concede guilt for childlessness in the family is to re-

write that narrative in an idiom that grants the modern African wife agency at the turbulent site of spousal power relations. Tonwe not allowing Piriye “to make love to her” simply seals this revisionist tendency. The male-female relations in this novel significantly defy the marginalizing patriarchy-woman relation in African writing.

Conclusion

In this article, I have demonstrated that gender, as an instrumental tool of power politics in African society and literature, intersects widespread sections of society and sensitive levels of relationships within it. As the novels in focus show, it negotiates a series of influences and dialogues that are fundamental to male-female relations. However, these novels also represent a set of male-authored texts that re-write the African woman who is often portrayed as the stereotypical picture of a ‘witch’, ‘prostitute’, and the “mother metaphoric imperative”. In so doing, Okpewho shows that maleness and femaleness are fluid and negotiable in dynamic socio-cultural and politico-economic contexts that distinctly produce them. The tragic denouement of the novels, however, points to the catalytic agency of the female body to initiate (perhaps in a ritualistic motif) socio-cultural renewal where patriarchal detractions had long been on the way.

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Vorgevoelens, vertolkings en verklarings: resepsie van 'n 19de-eeuse !xam-kum Luan Staphorst

Premonitions, interpretations, and explanations: Reception of a 19th century !xam kum

Although the field of Bushman studies has seen a number of different disciplines being drawn upon to address key questions, the textual material of the Bleek and Lloyd archive is still relatively understudied. Studies which do approach this material, however, tend to do so through an anthropological and/or archaeological lens, with literary analysis often marginalized. This article, through taking account of considerations of the reception theories developed in literary studies, criticises the various interpretations of a 19th century !xam language *kum*, or narrative. Originally published in *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* (1911), the *kum* “Bushman presentiments”, concerning an enigmatic experience narrated by !|kabbo, has led to six distinct interpretations—some of which are in conversation with one another in various ways, but they nevertheless offer differing views. Through a critical review grounded in literary folkloristics and reception theory, the article argues for renewed interest in and study of the *kum* “Bushman presentiments”. It is argued that future studies need to be based on three factors: disciplinary foregrounding, linguistic analysis, and comparative reading. These three factors, the article concludes, are the most glaring limitations of the existing interpretations, and if taken into consideration they could lead to a proliferation of insight into the *kum*. **Keywords:** !xam, !|kabbo, Bleek and Lloyd, Bushman studies, comparatism, disciplinarity, *kukummi*, literary folkloristics, linguistic analysis, reception theory.


Inleiding

Tussen 18 Februarie en 20 Maart 1873 is 'n opspraakwekkende *kum*, oftewel narratief, deur die !xam-man !|kabbo aan Wilhelm Bleek en Lucy Lloyd oorgelewer. In 'n opname wat oor 70 manuskriptsydye strek, verskaf !|kabbo 'n oorsig van een van die mees enigmatiese ervarings wat onder die !xam beleef is. Dié teks is in *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* (1911), die eerste bundel gepubliseerde !xam-materiaal, ingesluit, en is deur die redakteurs Lucy Lloyd en Dorothea Bleek van die titel “Bushman Presentiments” (voortaan “Presentiments”) voorsien. Die misterieuse aard van die vertelling, ten minste soos dit deur Lloyd en Bleek gelees is, word gereflekteer deur die feit dat hierdie teks in die afdeling “Boesmangebruike en -bygelowe” in *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* geplaas is. Dit het sedertdien legendariese status in Boesmanstudies bereik, asook in breër kringe waar gedeeltes daarvan veral deur aanhalings, vertalings, en in digvorm lewend gehou word (vergelyk Krog, *Mede-wete* 45; die agterblad van Krog, *Met woorde soos met kerse*; Markowitz 62; Moran, *Representing Bushmen: South Africa and the origin of language* 128–47; Twidle 19; Von Wielligh, *Versamelde Boesmanstories* 278–80; Watson, *Return of the Moon: Versions from the !Xam* 49; Watson, “Variations on Four !xam and !kun Themes” 175). Die gewildheid daarvan word moontlik slegs geëwenaar deur Diä!k-wain se treursang, “The Broken String”. En, soos die geval is met die treursang oor die gebroke snaar (vergelyk Solomon, “Broken Strings: Interdisciplinarity and !Xam Oral Literature” 26), geniet “Presentiments” ook verskeie interpretasies.

Hierdie artikel gaan vervolgens krities om met dié telkens uiteenlopende interpretasies van “Presentiments”, ook bekend as “Boesman-vorgevoelens” (vergelyk Krog, *Met woorde* 37), en my kritiese beskouing daarvan is begrond in die literêre volkskunde en resepsieteorie. Hierdeur word gepoog om die insigte wat in die verskeie interpretasies geleë is, op te som, asook om vas te stel hoe moontlike verdere studies daar kan uitsien. Die *kum* “Presentiments” word gevolglik eerstens gekontekstualiseer en opgesom, waarna die ses bestaande studies daar-

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van krities bespreek word. Laastens word die leemtes in die bestaande studies uitgelig, en gewys hoe toekomstige bestudering van dié fassinerende vertelling benader kan word.

Voor ek verder gaan, wil ek my benamingskeuse motiveer. Bewus van die voortdurende brandpunt waarin die kwessie van benaming sigself bevind (vergelyk Barnard ix; Ellis, “Ons is Boesmans” 120; Ellis, “Simulacral” 496; Raper 168; Wright 16), word ‘Boesman’, in ’n neutrale sin, in hierdie artikel bo ‘San’ verkies. Dit is in navolging van die voorkeur daarvoor onder teenswoordige Boesmangroepe in Suid-Afrika (Grant 157; Kruiper en Bregin 4), asook in ooreenstemming met die benaming in die Bleek en Lloyd-argief.

Verder van belang is dat die term *Boesman* in die benaming van die studieveld *Boesmanstudies* (“Bushman studies”) voorkom, met dié artikel wat diskursief deel van hierdie veld is. Alhoewel enkele navorsers in meer resente besprekings na “|xam-studies” verwys (Van Vuuren, “Op die spoor van Boesman-letterkunde” 162; Wessels, “The /Xam Narratives of the Bleek and Lloyd Collection: *Questions of Period and Genre*” 27 en “New directions in /Xam studies: some of the implications of Andrew Bank’s *Bushmen in a Victorian world: the remarkable story of the Bleek-Lloyd collection of Bushman folklore*” 69), is dit slegs met verwysing na navorsing wat uitsluitlik op die |xam-materiaal in die Bleek en Lloyd-argief gefokus is. Selfs dié navorsers, egter, gebruik oorwegend die benaming “Boesmanstudies” (Van Vuuren, *A Necklace of Springbok Ears* 82, “’n Besinning oor die benadering tot ’n uitgestorwe kultuur: die /Xam koloniale argief” 160 en “A song sung by the star !gaunu, and especially by Bushman women’: the blossoming of the uintjieblom” 324; Wessels *Bushman Letters* 22), siende dat dit die oorkoepelende veld is waarin |xam-studies as sodanig aangetref word, asook die standaardbenaming vir die interdisiplinêre studieveld wat die geskiedenis en kultuur van die Boesmans as ’n kollektiewe groepering bestudeer (Barnard ix; Moran, “Specimens of ‘Bushman’ studies” 46; Wright en Weintraub 435–6). Vanweë dié interdisiplinariteit, word |xam-materiaal dikwels in verhouding tot die narratiewe materiaal van ander Boesmangroeperings bestudeer—iets wat ook met betrekking tot bogenoemde studies in dié artikel die geval is. Iets soos “egte”, “suiwer” |xam-studies bestaan dus bykans glad nie, en *Boesmanstudies* bly daarom die naam vir die oorkoepelende studieveld en die sentrale verwysingspunt in studies soos hierdie.

Dat die benaming “Boesman” dalk net ’n té problematiese geskiedenis in Afrikaans het, is egter moeilik betwisbaar (vergelyk Willemsse 57), en die gepaste endoniem, |xam, word dus waar moontlik verkies. Aan die ander kant: Om die benaming “Boesman” deurgaans met “|xam” te verruil, impliseer dat die navorser aan inlegkunde skuldig sal staan waar dit studies betref waar narratiewe van Boesmans as ’n kollektiewe groepering, eerder as die |xam in die besonder, ondersoek word. Die benaming “Boesman” kan daarom nié vermy word nie.

Hierbenewens word die term ‘Khoisan’, oftewel ‘Khoesan’, vermy. Alhoewel ’n erkende naam vir ’n taalgroepering wat deur klapklanke gekenmerk word (vergelyk Du Plessis, “The Khoisan Languages of Southern Africa: Facts, Theories and Confusions” 33; en Jones 55), is dit vir die eerste maal in 1928 deur die Duitse volkekundige Leonhard Schultze-Jena (211) gebruik, met verwysing na ’n sogenaamde ‘ras’-groep bestaande uit die ‘Khoi’ en ‘San’. Tot watter mate dit ’n aanvaarbare beskrywing is, is aanvegbaar; dit is wel bekend dat dit min aanklank by teenswoordige groepe, insluitend Namas, Damaras, en Ju|’hoansi—wat as buitelanders kollektief as ‘Khoesan/Khoisan’ benoem word—vind (vergelyk Suzman xii). Daarom word dit nie in hierdie studie gebruik nie.

Verder word die |xam-ortografie wat deur Bleek en Lloyd in *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* gebruik is, gevolg. Volgens dié ortografie word die dentale en laterale klapklanke as | en || weergegee, en nie / en // nie. Daarby word ’n Romeinse letter by eienaam slegs as ’n hoofletter gebruik indien dit nie op ’n klapklank volg nie: k in ||kabbo word vervolgens nie met ’n hoofletter geskryf nie, maar D in Diälkwain wel. Ten spyte van dié motivering word die gebruike van ander navorsers in direkte aanhalings onveranderd gelaat.

Uitgangspunte: literêre volkskunde en die resepsieteorie

Alhoewel die |xam as ’n groepering lank reeds die aandag van navorsers in verskeie velde en dissiplines—veral die volkekunde, en later die antropologie—geniet, is die grootste enkele beskikbare bron betreffende hul geskiedenis, kuns, en sienswyses, die Bleek en Lloyd-argief, nog oorwegend in duisternis gehul. Dit is, in die woorde van Roger Hewitt—die eerste navorser buite die Bleek en Lloyd-familie wat die materiaal met intensie bestudeer het—’n “verseëldde kovert” (Hewitt, “Eine Ethnographische Skizze der /Xam | An Ethnographic Sketch of the /Xam” 33, alle vertalings uit Engels is my eie). Dié verseëldheid is grootliks om historiese redes: vir bykans 90 jaar is die argiefinhoud deur slegs drie persone—Wilhelm Bleek, Lucy Lloyd, en Dorothea Bleek—bestudeer. Studies wat wel onderneem is, beide deur hierdie oorspronklike navorsers asook die eerste generasie wat op hulle gevolg het, is in die volkskunde begrond.

Die *volkskunde* verwys na die bestudering van kulturele artefakte—hetsy volksverhale, volkskuns, of selfs volksweerkunde—in verhouding tot die kultuur waarin daardie artefak geskep is. Die bestudering van mondelinge tradisies, en spesifiek ‘mondelinge literatuur’, oftewel ‘oratuur’, maak deel van die volkskunde uit (vergelyk Op-land 320). Omrede die klem op die bestudering van ’n artefak binne kulturele konteks val, is die volkskunde histories as hulpwetenskap vir, onder andere, volkekunde ingespan (vergelyk Coetzee 1–24). Die volkekunde, soms etnografie genoem, is beide ’n onderdeel, asook voorloper, van kontemporêre antropologie, en die fokus val op die afbakening en bestudering van ‘volke’. Dit is in die strukturalisme begrond, maar waar die volkskunde die studie van kulturele artefakte behels, het die volkekunde die totaliteit van die ‘volk’ as ondersoekterrein.

Volkskundige ondersoek van mondelinge tradisies is grootliks met die uitken en vergelyking van ‘volksverhaaltipes’ (folk tale types) gemoeid, en dus, soos die volkekunde, in die strukturalisme begrond—met rigiede klassifikasiesisteme as raamwerk (vergelyk Schmidt *Catalogue* en *Xam Bushman Traditions* vir voorbeelde van dié klassifikasiesisteme in verhouding tot die |xam mondelinge tradisie). Die Aarne-Thompson-Uther-indeks, wat uit verhaaltipes van regoor die wêreld saamgestel is, is die invloedrykste klassifikasieraamwerk in hierdie verband (Dundes 195). Ruimte vir ‘oper’, ‘vryer’ interpretasie binne dié raamwerk is daar—ten minste op historiese vlak—nie. Verder word die gebrek aan ‘teorie’ in die volkskunde telkens met jammerte bejeën; daar word gereeld oor teoretiese ontwikkeling in die dissipline geargumenteer (vergelyk Fine; Haring). Daarom is die toepassing van raamwerke uit die literatuurwetenskap in die bestudering van mondelinge tradisies grootliks afwesig, ten spyte van die potensiaal om artefakte in daardie tradisies as letterkunde te beskou, en dus as sodanig te bestudeer. Die gevolg is dat artefakte uit mondelinge tradisies selde, indien enigsins, krities buite die konteks van ’n kultuurgerigte, oftewel antropologiese, ondersoek bespreek word.

Dié verbintenis tussen die opgetekende mondelinge materiaal in die Bleek en Lloyd-argief en die antropologie is nie ’n vreemde of eiesoortige verskynsel binne Boesmanstudies in die breë nie. Pippa Skotnes (234) bejeën byvoorbeeld die stand van rotskunskritiek in die 1990’s met spyt—“[d]ie veld van San skilderkunsstudies het binne die dissipline van oudheidkunde wortelgeskiet”—en plaas dit teenoor die potensiaal van rotskuns om in kunsgeskiedenis ’n tuiste te vind. Die ‘kuns’-gesentreerdheid van die |xam kultuurskat, wat hul rotskuns en mondelinge tradisie insluit, is dus telkens onderbeklemtoon in antropologiese ondersoeke wat die hulpwetenskappe volkskunde en oudheidkunde, oftewel argeologie, as uitgangspunte gebruik. Op hierdie wyse het die bestudering van *kukummi*—die meervoud van *kum*—’n historiese skakeling met die volkekunde en die antropologie (vergelyk Guenther, *Tricksters and Trancers: Bushman Religion and Society* 126–45; Hewitt, *Structure, Meaning & Ritual in the Narratives of the Southern San* 44–223; en Lewis-Williams *Myth and Meaning: San-Bushman Folklore in Global Context* 33–46).

Helize van Vuuren word gevolglik die eerste letterkundige wat die tekste in *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* bestudeer toe sy hulle in die 1990’s onder oë neem. Wyle Michael Wessels, nog ’n literator, lewer tussen die laat 2000’s en die 2010’s verdere bydraes. Aangesien dit hoofsaaklik slegs dié twee navorsers is wat die tekste vanuit literêre perspektief benader, is dit te verwagte dat ons letterkundige insigte in die aard van, en die dinamiek tussen, die materiaal nog skraal is. Hierom argumenteer Anne Solomon (“Broken Strings” 27 en “People Who are Different”: *Alterity and the /Xam* 335) sedert die laat 2000’s ten gunste van ’n literêre wending in Boesmanstudies.

Soos duidelik sal word deur die verloop van die artikel, is daar waarde in ’n literêre analise van die argiefmateriaal. Dié studie gebruik egter literêre volkskunde as uitgangspunt. Die literêre volkskunde is ’n benadering wat mondelinge tradisies ondersoek deur teoretiese raamwerke, buiten dié in ’n tradisioneel-volkskundige studie, te betrek. Die aard van mondelinge tradisies word sodoende steeds erken—veral wat die kulturele gesitueerdheid daarvan in tyd en ruimte betref—maar die analise betrek ook insigte uit die tradisionele literatuurwetenskap, beide die algemene en die vergelykende aspekte daarvan. Dit is ’n “interpretatiewe raamwerk wat op die basiese ooreenkomste tussen volkskundige teorieë en leser-resepsieteorie geskoei is” (Stahl). In dié studie word spesifiek die literatuurwetenskaplike raamwerk van resepsieteorie ingespan.

Resepsieteorie is die ondersoek na die wisselwerking tussen teks en leser. Dit verteenwoordig nie ’n enkele, “eenduidige, afgebakende benadering” as sodanig nie, en dit is dus “veel eerder [...] ’n oorkoepelende begrip wat ’n verskeidenheid metodes insluit” (Rossouw 427). Die besondere benadering wat in dié artikel gevolg word, is een wat op die kruispunt(e) tussen die begrippe *artefak*, *konkretisering*, en *estetiese objek* fokus. Die terme *artefak* en *estetiese objek* is deur die Praagse strukturalis Jan Mukařovský (295) gemunt, en verwys na die ‘lewe’ van ’n kunswerk wat tweevoudig van aard is. Die eerste ‘lewe’ van ’n literêre kunswerk is as materiële produk, as artefak. Vir die artefak om betekenisvol te wees, moet dit egter ’n tweede ‘lewe’ aanneem—deur waargeneem, oftewel ‘gelees’, te word. Die leser staan nooit neutraal teenoor die waargenome, oftewel die ‘geleesde’, artefak nie: “die prisma waar-

deur 'n [kuns]werk waargeneem word [...] verander die estetiese objek" (Mukařovský 295). Die wisselwerking tussen waarnemer en artefak, wat van laasgenoemde 'n *estetiese objek* maak, word *konkretisering* genoem (vergelyk Bisschoff 235). Daar kan soveel estetiese objekte uit 'n enkele artefak geskep word as wat daar lesers is.

Naas die konsepte *artefak*, *konkretisering*, en *estetiese objek*, is die begrippe *verwagtingshorison* en *oop plekke* van belang. *Verwagtingshorison* verwys na die "literêre en historiese kulturele agtergrond [...] waarmee lesers tekste benader" (De Jong 568). Die leser het vooropgestelde verwagtings van enige bepaalde artefak voordat die betrokke artefak gekonkretiseer word tot estetiese objek. Die "literêre en historiese kulturele agtergrond" van die leser is daárdie belangrike element wat gedifferensieerde konkretisering moontlik maak. Die ander element is die *leerstellen*, of *oop plekke*, wat by die artefak teenwoordig is. Die 'invul' van die *oop plekke* deur elke leser behels die proses van gedifferensieerde en individuele konkretisering van die artefak tot estetiese objek. Dit is daardie momente in die kunswerk waar die leser se aktiewe rol in die begrip van die kunswerk as geheel sterk inwerk op die artefak. Voorbeelde van die 'invul' van *oop plekke* sluit in die "oorgang van een vertelsituasie na 'n ander, wanneer nuwe personasies of handeling ingevoer word, of wanneer iets nie volledig uitgewerk is in die teks nie" (Rossouw 428).

Siende dat die artikel nie 'n diepgaande bespreking van die *kum* as fokus het nie, is die opsomming in die volgende afdeling bloot 'n skets, 'n kort oorsig wat net hooftrekke weergee. Hierin word die gesitueerdheid van die vertelling uitgelig—nie alleen binne die konteks van die |xam mondelinge tradisie nie, maar binne die konteks van die oorleweringsdinamiek wat tussen ||kabbo, Bleek, en Lloyd uitgespeel het. Vele studies het reeds op die hoogs artifiële aard van die Bleek en Lloyd-optekeningruimte gelet (vergelyk Hall "Earth and Stone: Archaeology as Memory" 185 en "The Proximity of Dr Bleek's Bushman" 143; Lewis-Williams *Stories that Float from Afar: Ancestral Folklore of the San of Southern Africa* 29–32; en Watson *Return* 19), maar selde word dié ruimte erken as belangrik vir die begrip van die materiaal as sodanig, asook hoe dié begrip kan bydra tot die bestudering van 'n betrokke narratief. Die *kum* vorm die artefak, in resepsieteoretiese terme, wat deur die ses geïdentifiseerde interpretasies tot spesifieke estetiese objekte gekonkretiseer word. Wat volg, is 'n opsomming van die artefak, "Presentiments", waarna die ses estetiese objekte krities ondersoek sal word.

"Presentiments": 'n artefak in konteks van die Bleek en Lloyd-opnames

Die inhoud van die bykans 13 000 bladsye wat die Bleek en Lloyd-argief beslaan, is moeilik afbakenbaar in Westerse teoretiese raamwerke. Die |xam het een begrip gehad, *kum*—met die meervoud *kukummi*—wat na, onder andere, "stories, praatjies, geskiedenis, nuus" (D. F. Bleek 106) verwys. Die vele betekenisonderskeidings hierin vervat beteken dat die leser van *kukummi*, veral kritiese lesers, versigtig met beskrywings van die 'aard' of 'essensie' daarvan moet omgaan. Terwyl 'folklore', 'mite', of 'verhaal' telkens as ekwivalente van die term *kum* gebruik word, argumenteer Wessels (*Bushman Letters* 32–9, "/Xam Narratives" 25–46) dat dit meer gepas is om *kukummi* as diskoerse te lees—vervleg met kwessies van mag, verteenwoordiging en ruimte.

Dit is verder belangrik om op die volle prentjie rakende die gesitueerdheid van die vertellings in die Bleek en Lloyd-argief te let, aangesien dit optekeninge is wat deur Bleek en Lloyd bemiddel, vertaal, en neergeskryf is. Die optekeninge in 'n huis in Mowbray, in koloniale Kaapstad, verskaf insig in die mondelinge tradisie van die |xam. Die optekeninge moet egter nie onkrities as die eweknie van die mondelinge tradisie, soos onder die |xam uitgedruk, beskou word nie. Die proses van oorlewing, vertaling, en transkripsie in 'n kunsmatige storievertelruimte in Kaapstad—ver verwyderd van die ruimte van die vuur waar stories spontaan onder die |xam gedeel is in |xam-ka-lau, oftewel Boesmanland in die Noord-Kaap—het 'n besliste invloed op die opgetekende tekste in die Bleek en Lloyd-argief uitgeoefen (vergelyk Bank 72–101; Guenther "Attempting to Contextualise /Xam Oral Tradition" 83; James 16; en Van Vuuren "Die mondelinge tradisie van die /Xam en 'n herlees van Von Wielligh se *Boesman-Stories* (vier dele, 1919–1921)" 30–1). Alhoewel daar beperkte bronne beskikbaar is om die presiese prosesse van ondervraging, vertelling, vertaling, en uiteindelijke neerpenning vas te stel, kan daar wel telkens insiggewende gevolgtrekkings gemaak word deur noukeurig met die beskikbare bronne om te gaan. Hier wil ek dus 'n kort skets van die inhoud, asook vorm, van die vertelling "Presentiments", soos dit in die 1911-publikasie verskyn het, verskaf.

"Die Boesmans se briewe is in hul lywe. Hulle (die briewe) praat, hulle beweeg, hul maak hul (die Boesmans se) lywe beweeg" ("Presentiments" 331). Só word die narratief ingelei met 'n beskrywing van die 'briewe' ("letters") soos deur die |xam ervaar. Dié ervaring is nie net bepaald lyflik in gevoel nie, maar lyflik in verloop: "Hulle (die Boesmans) beveel die ander om stil te wees; 'n man is geheel-en-al stil, wanneer hy voel dat sy lyf binne klop" (331; vertaling van ||kabbo se woorde uit "Presentiments" is my eie.).

Na aanleiding van die geklop maak die kloppende dus ander |xam om hul stil, beveel ander om stil te wees en te luister na die geklop. Hoekom? Omrede dié geklop of kloppings as waarheid geag word, teenoor drome, wat “vals spreek, (want) dit is (’n ding) wat mislei.” Die ‘presentiment’ is dit “wat die waarheid praat; dit is waardeur die Boesmans vleis kry (of raaksien), wanneer dit geklop het” (331). Soos wat uitgewys sal word in die bespreking hier onder, is dit die dominante siening wat ’n raamwerk vir die lees van die *kum* skep: “Presentiments” as verbind tot die jagtog, en die gebruike en gelowe daaromheen.

Die volgende stelling is myns insiens ewe belangrik, maar word minder aangehaal en bespreek: “Die Boesmans neem die aankoms van mense daardeur waar. Die Boesmans voel ’n geklop wanneer ander mense aan die kom is” (333). Dié deel funksioneer as ’n tipe inleidende opsomming, ’n verheldering van die begrip *presentiments* wat so gereeld in die vertelling aan bod kom. Só ’n inleiding is tiperend van Ikabbo se vertelstyl. Hewitt (*Structure, Meaning & Ritual* 194) verduidelik dat narratiewe nooit met ’n toneelopset-beskrywing open nie; amper altyd open hulle met ’n bondige stelling wat lyk om ontwerp te wees om aandag te trek en onmiddellik belangstelling aan te wakker.

Wat volg wil ek as episodes beskryf—’n reeks sketse, oftewel beknopte beskrywings, wat nie noodwendig verhaalmatig op mekaar volg nie, maar eerder ’n meer impressionistiese beeld van die omvang en rykwydte van die klop-ervaring verskaf. In die eerste episode gewaar die verteller kloppings op dieselfde plek op hul lyf as waar hul vader ’n ou wond het: “die kloppings voel dat die ou man stap, sy liggaam beweeg” (333). Die verteller kom tot die gevolgtrekking dat sy vader aan die kom is, en stuur daarom sy kinders na die kruin van die nabygeleë koppie om sy aankoms waar te neem. Die kinders, wat aanvanklik nie die “kloppings” glo nie, bevestig uiteindelik die gevoel. Soos die vader sê: “Ek wou gehad het julle moet sien dat hy regtig aan die kom is. Want julle het my voorgevoel, wat die waarheid spreek, weerspreek” (333).

Episode twee, die langste episode, handel oor die springbokjag, met die verteller wat met lang beskrywings die spesifieke belewing van “kloppings”, genaamd springboksensasies, uitbeeld. Vir vollediger begrip: *Springboksensasies* (“springbok sensations”, in “Presentiments” 333) verwys na ’n vorm van mimesis wat die |xam ervaar, beide op die jagveld asook daarbuite. Die jagter beleef dieselfde ‘gevoel’ as die springbok, maar nie slegs tydens die jagtog nie. Dit is ook die ervaring wanneer daar ’n springbok waargeneem word wat sy oor krap, of sy horings teen ’n klip skuur. Die kern is dus die sensasies van springbokke wat die |xam aan eie lyf ervaar. Die grootste verskil tussen episodes Een en Twee is dat waar die |xam slegs ’n geklop op die plek van die wond van die vader aanvoel, daar nou kloppings op verskeie plekke ervaar word: langs ribbes en agter rugblaai.

Terwyl dié twee episodes direk op mekaar volg, volgens die geredigeerde teks, verskyn daar drie verdere episodes wat saam weergegee word in ’n voetnoot. In die eerste van hierdie kamees word beskryf hoe die |xam ’n volstruis se naderkoms aanvoel wanneer die volstruis sy eie nek krap; die |xam voel ’n sensasie “op dieselfde plek waar die volstruis krap” (337). Hierop volg ’n enkele sin waarin die ervaring met die naderkoms van die volstruis geëggo word: wanneer die springbok naderkom, en sigself krap met eie horing en hoof, “dan voel die Boesman die klopping” (337). ’n Laaste kamee is dié van die vrou met ’n slinger oor haar skouer: “Wanneer ’n vrou wat weggegaan het terugkeer huis toe, die man wat daar sit, voel in sy skouers die riem waarmee die vrou se kind oor haar skouers geslinger is; hy voel die sensasie daar” (337).

Daar is ’n laaste voetnoot van belang. Op die eerste bladsy in die gepubliseerde weergawe (“Presentiments”) word ’n paragraaf uit Bleek se 1875-verslag aan die Kaapse Parlement ingesluit, waarin oor die aard van hierdie optekening kommentaar gelewer word. Betekenisvol is dat dié deel woordeliks uit die *kum* se eerste manuskrip-bladsy kom. In die transkripsieproses het Bleek en Lloyd hul notaboek in twee verdeel: die *recto*-blad is gevul met die |xam en die Engelse vertaling, en die *verso*-blad is gehou vir notas. Dié sisteem is vir die navorser van bykans onskatbare waarde, siende dat die inligting wat op *verso*-bladsye ingesluit is, gebruik kan word om die andersins duistere optekeningproses te help verhelder—veral wat die verloop van die verhaal betref, en hoe inligting later ingevoeg is. Só weet ons byvoorbeeld dat die drie bespreekte kamees op ’n latere stadium ingevoeg is, nadat die twee sentrale episodes oorvertel is.

Verder van belang is dat dié insetsels ook telkens opsommings is van gesprekke tussen Bleek, Lloyd, en die |xam—en nie, soos op die *recto*-bladsye die geval is, redelik direkte optekening nie. Dit is teen hierdie agtergrond wat die genoemde voetnoot gelees moet word—||kabbo het heel moontlik op ’n latere stadium vir Bleek en Lloyd meer inligting verskaf, en die *presentiment*-ervaring as ‘lerings’ (“teachings”) beskryf. Die |xam wat nie na die lerings luister nie, kan in die moeilikheid beland. Langs dié voetnoot is ’n verdere opsommende poging om die “Presenti-

ments” te probeer verklaar: aldus ||kabbo (“Bushmen Presentiments”) is daar !gwe wat die !xam ontvang, met dié !gwe wat soortgelyk is aan briewe wat boodskappe van elders bring.

Wat dié opsomming van die *kum* “Presentiments” uitwys is dat dit verskeie ‘oop plekke’ besit. Daar is twee sentrale episodes, met ’n kort opsomming van die ‘voorgevoel’-fenomeen wat die spil van die vertelling vorm. Benewens die moontlikheid om een of die ander van die twee episodes te oorbeklemtoon, is daar verder enkele voetnote. Die drie voetnote is kort sketse wat as verdere voorbeelde van die ‘voorgevoel’-fenomeen beskou kan word, en ’n laaste voetnoot verskaf insig in hoe ||kabbo die fenomeen aan Bleek en Lloyd verduidelik het. Die gevolg is dat, alhoewel die *kum* om ’n enkele fenomeen sentreer, die struktuur van die gepubliseerde weergawe as byna fragmentaries van aard beskryf kan word—en daarom bied hierdie narratief ’n gunstige omgewing vir uiteenlopende konkretiserings.

’n Sielkundegerigte lesing

Een van die eerste denkers om die vertelling te bespreek, was Nobelpryswenner Elias Canetti. In ’n beskrywing van die mens se inherente vermoë om te transformeer, wend Canetti hom tot “Presentiments”. Hy argumenteer dat, alhoewel almal die vermoë om te transformeer besit, “dit gebruik en as vanselfsprekend ag”, dit tog “een van die grootste raaisels” bly, en min mense besef die waarde van die potensiaal tot transformasie (Canetti, “Vorgefühl und Verwandlung bei den Buschmännern | Presentiment and Transformation among the Bushmen” 101). Canetti se skryfwerk, veral sy magnum opus, *Masse und Macht*, is gemoeid met die sielkunde betreffende die mens as enkeling, asook die mens in groepsverband. Sy bespreking van “Presentiments” kan dus binne hierdie sielkunderaamwerk verstaan word. Ten einde die reeds genoemde “groot raaisel” van sielkundige transformasie te begryp, argumenteer Canetti dat ons ons na Bleek en Lloyd se !xam-optekeninge, “ons mees waardevolle rekord van ons vroeë menslikheid” (“Vorgefühl” 101), kan wend. Alhoewel Canetti se gelykstelling van die !xam met “vroeë menslikheid” aanvegbaar is, bly sy insigte met betrekking tot die teks belangrik.

Sy bespreking van “Presentiments” laat blyk dat hy dit lees as ’n verhaal van “kenmerkende tekens” oftewel “kentekens”. Dié kentekens, soos die wond van die ou man, die rugblaai van die springbok, of die kop van die volstruis, ag Canetti (“Vorgefühl” 106–7)) as die mees kenmerkende deel van daardie bepaalde persoon of dier. Die !xam ken dus sy pa aan sy wond, of ’n spesifieke springbok aan die dier se bebloede kuit. Hierdie kennis gebruik die !xam om vervolgens sterk assosiasies tussen die kentekens van die persoon, en die plek van die kentekens op die lyf, te skep. Kentekens is gevolglik ’n node van verbintenis, en die verbintenis bring ’n tipe transformasie mee: “Die lyf van een en dieselfde Boesman kan in opeenvolging die lyf van sy pa, van sy vrou, van ’n volstruis en van ’n springbok word” (Canetti “Vorgefühl” 107).

Alhoewel dié as ’n insiggewende lees van “Presentiments” beskou kan word, selfs baanbrekend van aard, is daar ’n belangrike deel van die narratief wat Canetti nie aanraak nie—||kabbo se opmerking oor die moontlik noodlottige gevolge indien mens nie na ervarings luister nie. Die afwesigheid van ’n bespreking van hierdie kwesie wil ek uitlig in direkte verband met Canetti se twyfelagtige hantering van die begrip *transformasie*, of eerder, sy moontlik gebrekkige begrip daaraan. Daar word nie ’n juiste definisie van *transformasie* verskaf nie, en alhoewel hierdie ontbrekende verklaring nie sy lees van die *kum* onklaar of ongedaan kan maak nie, moet ’n mens vra wat die rede of motivering sou kon wees vir dié ‘transformasies’ wat die !xam onderling ervaar het.

Die naaste wat Canetti aan ’n antwoord hiervoor kom, word gevind in sy bespreking van die !xam in verhouding tot die jagtog (“Vorgefühl” 107–8). Maar dan, waarom word die ou vader en dié se wond genoem? Die ou vader se wond het niks met die jagtogmotief te make nie. Die verteller vertel bloot hoe hy ’n krieweling voel op die plek van die wond van sy vader, ’n krieweling wat hom noop om sy mede-!xam in te lig oor sy vader se aankoms. Indien die suksesvolle verloop van die jagtog die primêre beweegrede vir die transformasies is, is daar geen rede vir dié transformasie van die verteller na sy vader nie. Wanneer ons dié vraag teenoor Canetti se lees van “Presentiments” plaas, tesame met die vraag oor sy verswyging van ||kabbo se opmerking oor die gevolge van nié na die kloppings te luister nie, word ons met meer vrae as antwoorde gelaat.

’n Wetenskapgerigte lesing

In *The Art of Tracking: the Origin of Science*, ’n teks met klassieke status in Boesmanstudies, antropologie, en evolusionêre biologie, om enkele velde te noem, verskaf Louis Liebenberg die eerste omvattende ontleding van die opgetekende inligting omtrent jag en spoorsny onder Boesmangroeperings. Liebenberg (41–8) gaan ook ’n stap verder, en argumenteer dat dié kennis sentraal staan in die mens se ontwikkelingsgeskiedenis, en dat dit as die

wesentlike oorsprong van wetenskaplike kennis en kuns gelees kan word. Hy stel 'n raam voor met behulp waarvan drie bepaalde vorms van spoorsny onderskei kan word.

Die eerste, eenvoudige vorm van spoorsny behels bloot die volg van die ooglopende: spore, afdrukke van diere se liggame in die veld (in sand, grond, modder ensovoorts), en ander duidelik waarneembare tekens. Dié benadering vereis nie veel kennis of insig nie, en gunstige natuuumstandighede wat die bewaring van die fisieke tekens van diere se teenwoordigheid bemoontlik, is tot voordeel van die uitkenningsproses van hierdie spore en tekens. Hiernaas is daar sistematiese spoorsny: “die sistematiese verkryging van inligting van tekens, tot 'n gedetailleerde aanduiding van wat die dier besig was om te doen en waarheen dit op pad was” (Liebenberg 29). Liebenberg beskryf sistematiese spoorsny as meer verwickeld; beide eenvoudige en sistematiese spoorsny verg egter minder inspanning as die laaste vorm van spoorsny—spekulatiewe spoorsny. Hierdie tegniek behels die vermoë om “diere se handelinge vooruit te loop” (107); om diere se bewegings te antisipeer. Dié antisipasie word verbind aan identifikasie: die spoorsnyer span sy kennis van die dier se gedrag in om met daardie dier te identifiseer, en sodoende word “'n denkbeeldige roete” (107) gevolg, eerder as wat tekens gevolg word.

Die belang van dié onderskeiding lê daarin dat spoorsny nie as simplistiese en algemeen aanvaarde gegewe voorgelê word nie en dat hierdie praktyke nie uitgebeeld word as misties en onverklaarbaar nie. Spoorsny word as 'n bepaalde geletterdheid beskou. Spoorsnyers is spesifiek geletterd in die jagveld as 'n semiotiese sisteem; hierdie geletterdheid kan verskeie vorme aanneem en wisselende bevoegdhede veronderstel (Tomaselli en Grant 191).

Liebenberg tref verder ook onderskeid tussen *wetenskaplike* kennis en sogenaamde *onwetenskaplike* kennis. Hy plaas “Presentiments” in die tweede kategorie, saam met omtrekswaarneming (“peripheral perception”), waarsegery, toorkuns wat die jagtog beïnvloed, mite, en geloof. Dié tipe kennis hou nie verband, aldus Liebenberg (93), met “direkte sintuiglike waarneming en rasonale denke” nie. Hy skep gevolglik 'n “kennis”-raam met behulp waarvan die kennis van spoorsnyers en die diepgaande aard daarvan erken kan word. Hy plaas, naas spoorsny, in hierdie “kennis”-raam ook ander, sogenaamde ‘onwetenskaplike’ kennis wat, só argumenteer hy, onder die Boesmans gevind kan word.

Liebenberg se vertolkings van “Presentiments” as 'n *kum* waarin onwetenskaplike, irrasionele en mistieke kennis lê is egter, myns insiens, ongenuanseerd. Liebenberg vind in “Presentiments” 'n onverklaarbare en duistere vorm van kennis en beskou hierdie bron nie bestuderenswaardig nie. Waar Canetti se siening op die sielkunde gerig is, is Liebenberg se siening op wetenskaplikheid gerig—met “Presentiments”, volgens sy mening, as 'n voorbeeld van sogenaamde ‘onwetenskaplike’ kennis.

'n Jagkunsgerigte lesing

In 2004 het Jeremy Hollmann die verskeie grammatiese studies en volkskundige besprekings wat Dorothea Bleek in die vroeë 1900's oor materiaal in die Bleek en Lloyd-argief gepubliseer het, in 'n enkele bundel saamgebind. Hierdeur is aan beide Bleek se studies, asook die *kukummi* daarin vervat, 'n nuwe geleentheid vir kennisname gebied in 'n tyd van hernude aandag aan die |xam en hul erfenis. Hollmann het egter nie bloot die tekste saamgebind nie, maar kommentaar daarop gelewer. Met verwysing na “Presentiments” argumenteer Hollmann dat “diere verlengings van mense se sintuie was [en dat] deur die gedrag van diere waar te neem, die |xam die limiete van hul eie sintuiglike waarnemings oorskry het”. Hierdeur, gaan Hollmann voort, kon die |xam die sintuie van ander dierspesies meelewend ervaar (66). Dié beskouing som grootliks die sienings op van hulle wat ek die simpatiek-georiënteerde denkskool noem—hulle wat “Presentiments” vertolk en iewers tussen Canetti en Liebenberg se beoordelings plaas.

Die idee van die ‘simpatieke’ kan na een van die grondleggers van die volkskunde en antropologie, James George Frazer, teruggevoer word. Frazer (15) argumenteer dat sogenaamde ‘primitiewe’ kulture en samelewings se wêreldbeskouings grootliks in magiese denkraamwerke begrond is, en dat dié magiese denke met die begrip ‘simpatieke toorkuns’ verbind kan word. Simpatieke, oftewel nabootsende, toorkuns sluit enige aktiwiteit in wat ooreenkomste tussen voorwerp(e) en wese(ns) gebruik om 'n magiese verbintenis tussen daardie voorwerp(e) en wese(ns) te skep, met die doel om een of die ander te beheer (15–6). Die onderliggende logika is dus dat “enige effek bewerkstellig kan word deur na te boots” (15). Alhoewel die term aanvanklik op ‘toorkuns’ van toepassing was, word dit tans met verwysing na enige nabootsende gebruik ingespan (vergelyk Guenther, *Human-Animal Relationships in San and Hunter-Gatherer Cosmology, Volume I: Therianthropes and Transformation* 231). Die simpatiek-georiënteerde denkskool benader dus “Presentiments” met die oog op die vasstel van simpatieke verbintenis, oftewel

imitatiewe (nabootsende) gebruike. Anders as Liebenberg, wat “Presentiments” as ’n bron van ‘onwetenskaplike’ kennis lees, beskryf hulle “Presentiments” juis as wetenskaplik. Soos by Canetti, is daar klem op die transformatiewe aard van ervarings. Die simpatiek-georiënteerde denkskool se benadering kan dus tot ’n mate as ’n voortbou op die reeds besproke vertolkings van “Presentiments” gelees word.

Die belangrikste verskil tree in met die klem op die *nuwe animisme* wat ten grondslag van hierdie soort interpretasie lê. Die *nuwe animisme*, soos dit in die geval van die ‘ou’ animisme was, is ’n antropologiese teorie wat ‘vroeë mense’ of jagterversamelaarsgemeenskappe beskryf as in besit van ’n lewensbeskouing waarin veral mistieke verbintenisse tussen mens en niemens gedy. Een van die kernidees, volgens dié teorie, is ’n ‘pan’-jagterversamelaarsbewussyn waarin alles, insluitend lewende en nielewende materie, verborge sielelebens besit.

Die *nuwe animisme* het veral in die afgelope dekade ’n beduidende invloed op Boesmanstudies uitgeoefen, en kan as die dominante raamwerk vir die bestudering van die !xam, hul lewenswyses, en hul kultuurgoedere soos dit tans daar uitsien, geag word (vergelyk Guenther *Human-Animal* vii; Low 164; McGranaghan 674). Die Boesmans, binne dié raamwerk beskou, bevind hulself in ’n bepaalde intieme verhouding met diere wat gejag word, sodanig só dat die jagter sy posisie verruil vir dié van hul prooi. Die verbintenis word as somaties asook verstandelik beskou (Guenther “The Eyes are No Longer Wild, You Have Taken the Kudu into Your Mind: the Supererogatory Aspect of San Hunting” 4), met die jagter wat met die dier verenig deur in die spoor daarvan te hardloop (6). Die gevolg is dat die kloof tussen mens en niemens vervaag, met die identiteit van jagter en prooi wat vervaag. Dié tipe ‘instemming’ van die jagter skep ’n gevoel van “simpatie [...] met die dier wat agtervolg word” (Bennum 359). Belangrik, egter, is dat die ‘instemming’ steeds ’n jagtegniek bly—“een wat die jagter toelaat om besluite gebaseer op die mees subtiele inligting wat hy ooit geleer het, te neem” (359). Dié somaties-verstandelike eenwording is dus funksioneel. Die transformasie van die self is tydelik, ten einde ’n suksesvolle jagtog te voltooi.

Die belang van ’n jagkunsgerigte lesing is dat dit ’n nuwe beskouing van “Presentiments” impliseer—een waarvolgens hierdie narratief nie mistieke of ‘onwetenskaplike’ kennis openbaar nie; dit openbaar eerder iets van die proses waardeur mens-niemens-inlewing kan plaasvind, en waardeur ’n simpatieke verhouding tussen die mens en die dier uitgebeeld word. Die aanhangers van die simpatiek-georiënteerde denkskool maak myns insiens die fout om dié ervaring van inlewing/eenwording slegs met die mens-dier-verhouding in verband te bring, en daardeur bloot die funksionele uit te lig. Daar is ander episodes in die *kum* waar dieselfde ervaring op mens-mens-interaksie van toepassing is. Teenoor Canetti se gerigtheid op sielkunde, en Liebenberg se gerigtheid op wetenskap, kan dié lesing as antropologies in begronding beskou word, gegewe die klem op die antropologiese teorie van simpatieke verbintenisse tussen jagter en prooi.

’n Rotskunsgerigte lesing

’n Vierde lees van “Presentiments” is een wat dit verbind met rotsskilderkuns. José Manuel De Prada-Samper (“Strokes in Rock and Flesh: Presentiments, Rock Engravings and Landscape in ||kabbo’s place”; “The Pictures of the !xam People are in Their Bodies’: Presentiments, Landscape and Rock Art in ||kabbo’s Country”) argumenteer dat ’n radikale nuwe lees van “Presentiments” nodig is, een wat die teks verwyder van die reeds besproke spoorsny- en jagtogtradisie. Gevolglik begin De Prada-Samper deur terug te keer tot die begrip !gwe, wat as briewe en boeke vertaal is in *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*. Terwyl die gebruik van hierdie begrip in die *kum* van “Presentiments” geensins op dubbelsinnigheid van betekenis dui nie, en geen betekenisonsekerheid daar rondom gereflekteer word nie, verskyn dit in ander *kukummi* waar wel lig op verdere betekenisoonmoontlikhede gewerp word. Die belangrikste hiervan is ’n kort nota wat deur |hanʃkass’o, ||kabbo se skoonseun, mondelings aan Lloyd oorgelewer is in verband met H. C. Schunke se kopie van die Ezeljagdspoor-rotsskuns: “Die reën se ||kerri-si!kauǀ [duisendpoot] is groot; hulle wat ek in die prent gesien het” (Lloyd se Engelse vertaling van die !xam-woorde is aangehaal deur De Prada-Samper (“Pictures” 229); die vertaling uit Engels is my eie).

Hier is “!gwe” deur Lloyd, in die oorspronklike notaboek, vanuit !xam na Engels as *picture* (“prent”) vertaal, en De Prada-Samper gebruik dit as beginpunt vir ’n nuwe begrip van wat “Presentiments” moontlik beteken. Volgens lees die opening van “Presentiments”: “Die Boesmans se prente is in hul liggame”. Om weer na |hanʃkass’o se beskrywing terug te keer: “prent” verwys nie na enige beeld nie, maar spesifiek na rotskuns. Die prente in die !xam se liggame, redeneer De Prada-Samper (“Pictures” 232–4), is nie enige beeld nie, maar hul rotskuns. Die vraag ontstaan nou: Wat is die moontlike waarde van dié insig? De Prada-Samper argumenteer dat die rotskuns van die Boesmans nie bloot as kuns gelees word nie, maar as transformatiewe toorkuns, oftewel simpatieke toorkuns (soos in die vorige afdeling beskryf): iets waardeur “die bewegings van wild” beheer en beïnvloed word (“Pictures”

237). Volgens hierdie siening word beelde wat die !xam oproep op rotse in die landskap ingegraveer en geskilder. Die “prente” word dus oorspronklik geskep om daardie bepaalde beelde te bewaarheid. Die !xam se skilderwerke word ’n vorm van toekomstkuns, iets wat ’n magiese verbintenis tussen die skilder en ’n toekomstvisie smee. Soos genoem, is die logika van simpatieke toorkuns een wat die klem op imitasie plaas: enige effek kan teweeggebring word deur daardie effek na te boots. Die skilder van jagtonele op rotswande is binne die rotskunsgerigte lees- raamwerk só ’n imitasie van ’n beplande jagtog, met die geloof dat die geskilderde beeld die uiteindelijke fisieke gebeurtenis sal beïnvloed en selfs bepaal.

Daar is, myns insiens, drie uitdagings verbonde aan dié interpretasie. De Prada-Samper neem eerstens nie die konteks van die gesprek van ||kabbo met Bleek en Lloyd in ag nie, naamlik dat eersgenoemde besig was om Bleek en Lloyd te onderrig in die ervaring van “presentiments” en die begrip van !gwe. Hy vergeet dus een van die mees kardinale oorwegings wat met die bespreking van mondelinge tradisies in gedagte gehou moet word, naamlik dat “die teks [...] die tekens van sy oriëntasie na ’n gehoor (dra)” (Barber 27). Dat !gwe ook na “prente” kan verwys, soos blyk uit !han#kass’o se kommentaar op die Ezeljagdspoortrotskuns, is nie te betwyfel nie, maar om ||kabbo se verklaring van die verbintenis tussen !gwe en “briewe”, soos die vertaling in “Presentiments” daar uitsien, met ’n betekenisvereenselwiging tussen !gwe en die rotskuns te vervang, is myns insiens ’n groot sprong om te maak.

Tweedens moet in ag geneem word dat De Prada-Samper se idee van *transformatiewe toorkuns* aanklank by David Lewis-Williams se *transteorie* van die Boesmanrotskuns vind—’n teorie waar rotskuns, en die skepping daarvan, as verweef met gebruike van die sjamaan beskou word. Alhoewel dit ’n dominante siening in rotskunsstudies is, is daar vele argumente wat hierdie beskouing oortuigend weerlê (vergelyk Solomon “Writing San Histories” 99). Derdens is daar weereens ’n afwesigheid van die verwysing na die mens-mens verhouding, en die mate waartoe die transformatief-simpatieke toorkuns op daardie verhouding toepaslik is. Alhoewel De Prada-Samper se idees vernuwend is, is daar—teen die agtergrond van ons huidige kennis van die !xam en hul kultuurlewe—te veel gapings om dit as oortuigend te beskou.

’n Geletterdheidsgerigte lesing

Een van die kortste lesings is miskien die insiggewendste. In ’n 1994-artikel, teen die agtergrond van ’n pleidooi vir hernude aandag aan die !xam mondelinge tradisie in Suid-Afrikaanse letterkunde, ondersoek Van Vuuren enkele narratiewe wat deur ||kabbo oorgelewer is. Hierin kom sy tot twee belangrike gevolgtrekkings. Die eerste is dat sekere *kukummi* wat ||kabbo oordra van ’n tipe inheemse literêre teorie spreek (“Forgotten Territory: the Oral Tradition of the /Xam” 63). ||kabbo word, nie bloot as ’n vertolker van ’n tradisie geag nie, maar as ’n intellektueel wat ’n tradisie help skep. Dit is ’n radikaal vernuwend blik op beide ||kabbo en sy *kukummi*.

Hierná ondersoek Van Vuuren kortliks “Presentiments”, en dit bring ons by haar tweede gevolgtrekking, naamlik dat ||kabbo daardeur insig gee in die geletterdheid van die !xam (63). Die manier waarop die !xam hul liggame ‘lees’ is, aldus Van Vuuren (“Forgotten Territory” 63), ’n bewys van ’n verwickelde geletterdheidsstelsel. Alhoewel hulle nie ’n formele alfabetiese skrifstelsel het nie (en mits hul rotskuns nie as ‘piktografiese rotstaal’ beskou word nie; vergelyk Van Vuuren, “Rotskuns as piktografiese rotstaal of vroeë Suider-Afrikaanse skrif-opklip”; en Van Wyk 31), argumenteer sy dat hulle mondelinge tradisie, alhoewel ongeskrewe en dus ‘ongeletterd’ in die mees konkrete betekenis van die woord, wel geletterdheid geveer het om verstaan te kon word (“Forgotten Frontier” 63). Van Vuuren se twee gevolgtrekkings werk op kragtige wyses op mekaar in. Eerstens bring die erkenning van ||kabbo as literatuurteoretikus ’n ommeswaai mee ten opsigte van die raamwerk met behulp waarvan hy en sy *kukummi* gelees kan word. Teen dié agtergrond kan daar, tweedens, oor “Presentiments” in die lig van geletterdheidsteorie besin word—teorie wat veral die idee van die !xam as ongeletterd, dit wil sê as ‘onbeskaafd’ in ’n koloniale Westerse sin, teenstaan.

Dit is belangrik om, na aanleiding van dié lesing en ten opsigte van die begrip *geletterdheid*, van die volgende kennis te neem. Uit die insigte van kritiese geletterdheidstudies blyk dat geletterdheid altyd gekoppel is aan iets buiten die geletterdheid self (Gee 371). Kritiese geletterdheidstudies vra ook dat daar oor die verbintenis tussen kultuur, ‘geletterdheid’, en kultureel-spesifieke semiotiese stelsels gedink moet word. Dit is dus nie genoeg om te sê dat ||kabbo, en by implikasie die !xam, geletterd is nie; die vraag is: Ten opsigte waarvan? Ons kan die moontlikheid erken dat dié geletterdheid aan spoorsny verbind is—iets wat in die idees van die aanhangers van die simpatiek-georiënteerde denkskool deurskemer. Van Vuuren bied egter nie ’n definitiewe antwoord op hierdie vrae nie. Wanneer haar tweetal gevolgtrekkings saam gelees word, word ’n mens wel gedwing om te besin oor

hoe ||kabbo se tipe 'geletterdheid' met terreine soos die letterkunde en kulturele produksie in die breë—en nie alleenlik spoorsny nie—verbind kan wees.

Ten spyte van die afwesigheid van uitsluitel hieroor is die belang van Van Vuuren se lesing, myns insiens, dat die klem op ||kabbo as “outeur” van “teorie” geplaas word—’n aspek wat maklik by ’n bespreking van die Bleek en Lloyd-argiefmateriaal weggelaat word. Alhoewel behorende tot ’n korpus van stemme wat van gedeelde gebruike en gelowe van die l_xam spreek, mag die individuele stem van die betrokke l_xam-verteller, myns insiens, dus nie vergeet word nie. Van Vuuren, as letterkundige, bied vir ons ’n lesing wat duidelik in die literêre teorie begrond is, en waarin kwessies soos geletterdheid en outeurskap aan bod kom—kwessies wat voorheen glad nie geopper is nie.

'n Gemeenskapsgerigte lesing

Die laaste lesing is dié van Antjie Krog. Sedert haar vertaling en omdigting van l_xam-materiaal in Afrikaans, in *Met woorde soos met kerse* en *Die sterre sê 'tsau'*, toon Krog ’n besondere belangstelling in die l_xam. Terwyl digkuns die aanvanklike vertrekpunt was, het sy later meer breedvoerig oor die l_xam en hul kultuur en wêreldbeskouing begin skryf—veral in die derde boek van haar transformasie-drieluik, *Begging to be Black* (vergelyk Wessels, “The Khoisan Origins of the Interconnected World View in Antjie Krog’s *Begging to be Black*” 186 vir ’n kritiese bespreking), in *Mede-wete*, en in haar versameling akademiese essays, *Conditional Tense*. Dit is dan ook in laasgenoemde versameling waar sy “Presentiments” by ’n bespreking van haar begrip *interverbondenheid-tot-heelheid* (vergelyk Voges 145 vir ’n bespreking van dié term) intrek. Sy doen dit verder ook in ’n akademiese artikel in 2014 (“The Young Wind Once Was a Man”, gepubliseer in *International Journal of Public Theology*) en in ’n 2021-boekhoofstuk (“Indigenous Texts, Rich Points and Pluriversal Sources of Knowledge”, gepubliseer in *Language and Decoloniality in Higher Education*).

Anders as by die ander besprekings, word “Presentiments” nie in enige noemenswaardige sin ontleed of daarop kommentaar gelewer nie. Krog haal dit eerder aan as bewys van die gedeelde, gemeenskapsgefokusde bewussyn wat sy by die l_xam bespeur. Die belang hier is dus nie analities nie, maar eerder konseptueel. Deur die vertelling binne ’n breë filosofiese diskoers te plaas, verskuif Krog die klem na ’n hantering verwyderd van die tradisionele stiplees, om erkenning te verleen aan die verweefde aard van ’n groot hoeveelheid van die materiaal wat die Bleek en Lloyd-argief beslaan. Sy wil die aandag rig op die moontlike insigte wat uit só ’n omvattende leesstrategie, gerig op die geheel van verweefde tekste, verkry kan word.

Ontbrekende lesings

Deur op dié ses onderskeie beskouings van “Presentiments” te konsentreer, kon drie belangrike gevolgtrekkings gemaak word. Eerstens: Alhoewel die besprekings van die Bleek en Lloyd-argiefmateriaal in die breë, en “Presentiments” in die besonder, telkens sonder veel aandag aan teoretiese uitgangspunte gedoen is, kon die onderskeie interpretasies met redelike gemak aan spesifieke dissiplines verbind word. Die geleentheid bestaan dus vir meer teoreties gefundeerde studies, aangepak binne welke raamwerk ook al, om die betekenisemoontlikhede van dié fassinerende teks te ontsluit.

Kukummi is, as geheel, epistemies ‘grensloos’, soos reeds vermeld. Daarom sou dit as onderwerp vir ondersoek binne verskeie dissiplines beskou kon word. Die verwickeldhede van die l_xam-kultuurskat (vergelyk Staphorst 106–11) behoort erken te word met die wete dat dié verwickeldhede ’n eis aan die navorser stel—om gepaste dissiplines as ’n hulpmiddel of as bril in te span, maar dit nie as finale ‘segspersoon’ oor die studie te laat ‘heers’ nie. Hier is Jonathan Chimakonam (115) se idee van *gespreksfilosofie*, ’n benadering binne die Afrika-filosofie wat dialoog en gesprek tussen denkers en tradisies van meer waarde ag as om klinkklare antwoorde op vrae te vind, betekenisvol. Die behoefte bestaan dus vir meer teoreties gefundeerde studies, op voorwaarde dat daar met elke studie, elke teorie, bloot ’n faset van die vertelling ondersoek kan word—waarna hierdie studies in gesprek met mekaar gebring moet word.

Tweedens, daar is ’n noemenswaardige leemte ten opsigte van talig-gefundeerde besprekings van die *kum*. In der waarheid bestaan daar nog geen volledige beskrywing van die l_xam-taal as sodanig nie. Benewens enkele sporadiese studies oor die afgelope 110 jaar sedert die publikasie van *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* in 1911, is daar geen sistematiese studie van die taal onderneem nie (Du Plessis, “A Century of the Specimens of Bushman Folklore: 100 Years of Linguistic Neglect” 275)—hoewel Menán du Plessis tans werk aan ’n beskrywende grammatika, ’n eerste en welkome verwysingsbron ten opsigte van die grondtrekke van die l_xam se grammatika (Galloway). Die enigste huidig opgetekende studie waar ’n taalaspek sydelings ter sake is, is dié van De Prada-Samper. Sy fokus is egter op

die betekenis van 'n enkele begrip: !gwe. Alhoewel ons begrip van die !xam-taal nie gevorderd is nie, is daar genoeg verwerkte taaldata om meer taalsensitiewe studies te regverdig, veral ten opsigte van die data wat in *A Bushman Dictionary* (D. F. Bleek) vervat is. Die potensiele navorser moet egter ook bewus wees van verskeie uitdagings aan die gebruik van dié woordeboek verbonde (Du Plessis, “Towards the study of South African Literature as an Integrated Corpus” 2).

Daar is, derdens, 'n afwesigheid van vergelykende besprekings. “Presentiments” en selfs die hele bundel van !xam-materiaal, *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*, verteenwoordig nie eens 'n druppel in die emmer van die ongeveer 13 000 bladsye wat die ganse Bleek en Lloyd-argief beslaan nie. 'n Voor die hand liggende uitdaging is dat nie al die inhoud van dié 13 000 bladsye in vertaalde, versorgde, en geannoteerde weergawes beskikbaar is nie—die navorser moet dus hierdie materiaal oorwegend met die hand deurwerk. Daar is egter 'n *kum* deur Diä!kwain aan Lloyd oorgelewer wat 'n soortgelyke, maar nie gelyknamige !xam-ervaring as dié van ||kabbo nie, beskryf: “höŋ”. Lloyd se Engelse vertaling van hierdie ervaring is ook “presentiments”. Die vraag wat dus gevra behoort te word, is tot welke mate dié twee begrippe na dieselfde fenomeen verwys. Ons kan daarop let dat ||kabbo en Diä!kwain van verskillende dele van !xam-ka-!au, oftewel Boesmanland in die Noord-Kaap, gekom het, en verskillende variante van die dialekkontinuum !xam gebesig het. ||kabbo was, byvoorbeeld, 'n sogenaamde “Vlakteboesman”, terwyl Diä!kwain 'n “Grasboesman” was; vergelyk Deacon (“A Tale of Two Families: Wilhelm Bleek, Lucy Lloyd and the /Xam San of the Northern Cape” 100–13) vir 'n oorsig van die lewensverhale van die !xam wat aan die Bleek en Lloyd-optekeninge deelgeneem het. Soos reeds genoem is ons kennis van die !xam-taal nie volledig nie, en kan ons nie met sekerheid oor al die verskille en nuanses van die verskeie variante kommentaar lewer nie. Ons weet egter dat, ten spyte van die verskille, die onderlinge kommunikasie en begrip tussen !xam-sprekende Boesman-groepe—beide op talige asook kulturele vlak—goed was. Daar bestaan dus 'n geleentheid om die nuanses van dié “presentiment”-ervaring(s) te ondersoek deur middel van 'n vergelykende lees van beide ||kabbo asook Diä!kwain se vertellings.

Van selfs groter belang is die moontlikheid dat so 'n vergelykende lees die taalnuanses en verskille in denke wat onder die !xam-sprekers as 'n gemeenskap bestaan, kan uitlig. ||kabbo, die oudste asook produktiefse verteller van *kukummi*, word gereeld uitgesonder onder die !xam wat aan die Bleek en Lloyd-optekeninge deelgeneem het. Die gevolg is dat hy, “[a]nders as amper al sy vriende en familie [...] dit reggekry [het] om die sluier van geskiedenis te deurdring” (Parkington 76). Verskeie redes hiervoor word geopper—veral, soos telkens uitgelig, ||kabbo se besondere vertelstyl (Brown 65–6; Hewitt *Structure, Meaning & Ritual* 194–200; Rusch 885–6), sy diepgaande kennis van die !xam-kultuur en -gebruike (Deacon, “‘My place is the Bitterpits’: the Home Territory of Bleek and Lloyd’s /Xam San informants”; De Prada-Samper, “The Plant Lore of the /Xam San: //Kabbo and #Kasiŋ’s Identification of ‘Bushman Medicines’” 3–8), asook sy opgewondenheid oor die moontlikheid om die narratiewe in druk te sien, en dit só aan die wêreld bekend te help stel (Lloyd x). Om welke rede ook al, hy word uitgesonder, vereer, en as 'n visioenêre persoon onder die !xam voorgelê; vergelyk, byvoorbeeld, Deacon en Skotnes (vi–vii) asook Hofmeyr (429) vir voorbeelde van dié tipe huldiging. Die gevaar is egter dat ||kabbo ‘namens’ die !xam as geheel ‘praat’—dat hy die rol van die “inheemse informant” (vergeelyk Spivak 6) speel, en dus gebruik word om 'n eenduidige en essensialistiese beeld van die !xam as geheel te skets. In die onderskeie lesings van “Presentiments” wat aangepak is, is gesien dat slegs Van Vuuren 'n kontekstuele blik verskaf wat die vertelling spesifiek aan ||kabbo verbind. Hoewel ||kabbo se oorlewering heel moontlik van 'n gemeenskaplike ervaring spreek, is dit belangrik dat hierdie gegewe nie uit die staanspoor as sulks aanvaar behoort te word nie. 'n Vergelykende lees kan dié potensieel essensialiserende lokval teenwerk.

So 'n vergelykende studie behoort egter ook met betrekking tot die res van die !xam-argief gedoen te word. Hiermee word bedoel dat die eng fokus wat telkens op die Bleek en Lloyd-argief geplaas word, en wat ander argiewe verdring, uitgedaag moet word. 'n Sentrale argief in hierdie verband is dié van Gideon Retief von Wielligh, die amateur volkskundige wat tussen 1880 en 1884 optekeninge van die !xam mondelinge tradisie in Boesmanland onderneem het. Von Wielligh se versameling word gereeld met agterdog bejeën, en gevolglik selde by besprekings van die !xam, hul kultuur, en hul mondelinge tradisie betrek (vergeelyk Van Vuuren *Necklace* 82–4). Daar is egter twee optekeninge in die Von Wielligh-versameling waar ‘voorgevoelens’ aan bod kom—verweef in 'n verhaal oor jagtogbygelowe (*Boesmanstories* 1 230–3), en in 'n direkte, feitlike verwerking van ||kabbo se vertelling (*Boesmanstories* 278–80). Dit is veral die eerste optekening, oor ervarings gekoppel aan die jag, wat by 'n vergelykende studie ingespan behoort te kan word.

Slotwoord

Die artefak 'Bushman Presentiments' is nie bloot enigmaties nie, maar besit 'n aantrekkingskrag wat bykans geen ander *kum* in die Bleek en Lloyd-argief openbaar nie. Soos reeds genoem, word hierdie vertelling gereeld deur verwerkings, vertalings, en ander intertekstuele verwysings in veral die Suid-Afrikaanse literatuursisteem aangetref. Dié vorm van literêre 'herwaardering' is 'n algemene verskynsel wat die werk van grootse skrywers betref: "[s]itering, gesprekvoering, inversie [...] is heenwysing en implisiet huldinging" (Van Vuuren "Tussen 'Grense'" 280). Dit is egter nie bloot literêre verwysings wat die statuur van 'n teks reflekteer nie, maar ook "die skryf van literatuurgeskiedenis en ander verwysingswerke oor die letterkunde, [asook] die produseer van literatuurwetenskaplike en interpretatiewe studies" (Viljoen 269). Die ses bespreekte interpretasies getuig hiervan: Elkeen van die ses konkrete estetiese objekte—onderskeidelik in die sielkunde, wetenskap, antropologie, towerkuns, letterkunde, en wysbegeerte begrond—reflekteer die statuur van ||kabbo en van die vertelling, asook die potensiaal tot die kreatiewe vertolking en verklaring van die *kum*. Dit bevestig die lewenskragtigheid van die narratief, en dit dra sodoende by tot wat Van Vuuren die "nalewing" van 'n skrywer, in dié geval ||kabbo, en hierdie skrywer se oeuvre noem (Van Vuuren, "Tussen 'Grense' en 'Groot ode'. 'n Klein essay oor die poësie van N. P. Van Wyk Louw [1906–1970]" 280).

Verder, teen die agtergrond van die epistemiese 'grensloosheid' van *kukummi* as sodanig, is dié belangstelling in somtyds uiteenlopende sienings van dieselfde teks nie vreemd nie. Noemenswaardig egter: hoewel elke interpretasie belangrike insigte verskaf, ontbreek daar telkens iets ten opsigte van die narratief, duik daar 'n 'oop plek' op. 'n Selektiewe vertolking van die artefak "Presentiments"—waar sekere 'oop plekke' van die *kum* minder aandag ontvang, of selfs buite die bespreking gelaat word—bring 'n proses van konkretisering mee waar die dinamiek van die oorlewering, asook die inhoud van die narratief, telkens slegs ten dele uitgelig en bespreek word. Deur te fokus op die leemtes in die geïdentifiseerde studies—veral ten opsigte van die verskeidenheid dissiplines waarin hulle gefundeer is, ten opsigte van talige aspekte, sowel as met die oog op vergelykende analise—kan die betekenisemoontlikhede van dié invloedryke vertelling ten volle ontsluit word.

Ek beroep my dus daarop dat 'n navorsingsonderwerp soos hierdie, oor die groot en 'onderbenutte' versameling |xam-*kukummi*, tot vele en vrugbare ondersoeke binne verskeie dissiplines kan lei. Daar is nog veel om uit die |xam-*kum* te leer.

Erkenning

Die artikel is gebaseer op gedeeltes uit die verhandeling "Die wond sê dit aan my: die morele wêreldbeskouing van die |xam as ekomorele fenomenologie" ter verwerwing van my M. A.-graad (Filosofie). Hierdie graad is in 2020 aan die Universiteit van Wes-Kaapland voltooi met Antjie Krog as studieleier, en Oritsegubemi Oyowe en William Ellis as medestudieleiers. Die finansiële ondersteuning van die Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns, die Afrikaanse Taal- en Kultuurvereniging, die Ernst en Ethel Eriksen Trust, die Cape Foundation, en UWK se Sentrum vir Meertaligheid- en Diversiteitsstudies, wat die voltooiing van die verhandeling moontlik gemaak het, word graag erken. Die sienings hierin vervat verteenwoordig egter nie noodwendig dié van genoemde liggame nie.

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“We’ve had enough of being trapped in this derelict pondok of history”: An interview with Zoë Wicomb

Zoë Wicomb & Yuan-Chih Yen

Zoë Wicomb, one of South Africa’s most brilliant and celebrated writers, needs no introduction. Her latest novel, *Still Life*, uses the story of a struggling author who calls on several historical figures and fictional characters to help her write a biography of Thomas Pringle, one of the 1820 settlers who later became known in South Africa as the “father” of South African poetry, to explore the legacies of settler colonialism as well as the uses and limits of narrative and notions like truth. Yuan-Chih Yen interviewed Wicomb over email in April 2021.

YY: *A host of real and fictional characters are resurrected in your latest novel Still Life to think through the ambiguous figure of Thomas Pringle, who was both a settler and ostensibly an abolitionist. You mention in your interview with Carla Lever and Nal’ibali that “[t]hese characters allow [you] to interrogate Pringle and the colonial project, and solve [your] problem of how to write his history”. What is it about Pringle and his legacy that drew you to him, and why did you find him—rather than a writer like Olive Schreiner or Pauline Smith—a productive foil to reflect on the “contradictions and dissimulations” (246), as you put it in the novel, of colonialism in South Africa?*


ZW: Perhaps unfair to call Pringle an “ostensible abolitionist”; he was indeed a humanitarian who not only worked as Secretary for the Antislavery Society but was also responsible for getting Mary Prince’s story recorded and published. Back in London he campaigned for the repatriation of the Khoesan chief David Stuurman who had been transported to New South Wales—even if Stuurman died just before his release. I suppose the ambiguities of Pringle’s life and works tell us something about how humanitarianism itself was implicated in race and empire. It was Pringle’s life and his political involvement that interested to me. I am not a fan of his poetry, but there is something piquant about him being Father of South African Poetry when no one in his native Scotland (where I live) has heard of him. And I didn’t set out to reflect on the contradictions and dissimulations of colonialism. Pringle’s is a documented life, but it was really Hinza’s undocumented life that propelled the novel. Examining the ambiguous “adoption” of a Tswana boy perhaps could not fail to expose the fabric of colonialism, not if you look at it from the boy’s point of view.

YY: *The reluctant female writer—who is assigned with the “task of restoring Mr P” by the “ghostly figures” (14) of Mary Prince, whose narrative of enslavement Pringle helped publish, and Hinza Marossi, Pringle’s adopted Tswana son—dramatises the struggles and challenges of writing. This might be read autobiographically, as you indeed mention in your interview with Izak de Vries that you “find it impossibly difficult to write, and it is not until [you’ve] beaten out a first draft, and thus finally discover what the novel is really about, that there is any pleasure to be found in the various redrafts”. What motivates you to push through with the writing to tell the stories that you do, to consider the “ways in which an absence in a story could be fashioned in an alluring manner” (250), as the literary agent Belinda puts it in the novel?*

Zoë Wicomb is the internationally acclaimed author of six works of fiction and one collection of essays, as well as a winner of the 2013 Windham-Campbell Literature Prize.

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ZW: Yes, dramatizing the struggle with writing could be seen as autobiographical, but since my problems with writing apply to all my fiction, it begs the question of why this strategy for *this* project. I can't answer that question. The strategy itself evolves from messing about with my material, trying out different ways of getting started.

I also can't explain why I push through with the writing, except that it seems to be what living is about, pushing at the limits of one's capabilities. I am not especially well endowed, and perhaps it was growing up under the strictures of apartheid that my earliest lessons were about probing those limits. Also a matter of self-respect, I suppose, to persevere. If one has the ability to conceive of a project, no matter how inchoate, then you simply have to see it through, even if the end product reveals your limitations as a writer. Given that I don't know what I'll end up with, what the story is really about, I am immersed in the process, which keeps at bay concerns about how the product will be viewed by others. My publisher, who is the first person to see what I've written, decides whether it could be published or not.

Belinda is not entirely correct about an absence. There is much about the story that pre-exists; the problem is how to tell it and from which angles; besides, my stories sadly fall short of being alluring.

YY: *In the same interview with De Vries, you note that you "did not want the ready-made generic conventions of the historical novel". Could you say a little more about what you think are the uses and the limits of that genre? In addition, how did you come to settle on what we might call, following Saidiya Hartman, the method of "critical fabulation" (11) in your attention to Hinza Marossi?*

ZW: I was referring to the standard historical novel, a genre that I am unable to read. It is not of interest to me. There is undoubtedly much skill involved, but I don't see the point of painstakingly recreating the world of that past and being faithful to the least detail. Uninterested in verisimilitude, I'd rather read an historical text than a fictionalised account. I understand that the writer could shift the focus here or there, shine a torch into dark, forgotten, unexplored corners and so on, but it all falls within the artifice of verisimilitude. Of course, the genre has latterly been manipulated to the extent that *Still Life* itself appeared in the *New York Times* list of ten best historical novels of 2020. Gratifying, but puzzling to me. Perhaps it is because of my struggles with writing that I'd rather come clean and present the constructedness of the text. Also, I want to engage with the fact that the historical material is of interest to me at the time of writing so that there is dialogue between past and present inscribed in the text.

I'm afraid I haven't read Hartman's work. It sounds interesting, but if "critical fabulation" is about combining research, critical theory and fiction, then that is not what I do. I do not build upon critical theories or concepts; rather, I explore lives and to do so I take liberties with the given information about my characters. Hinza, in fact, died not long after arriving in England; I allow him to live as a young man in the twenty-first century who, like any young man, questions his strange origins, rather than one who demonstrates or embodies a theory. Hinza says that he is born out of a text, by which he means Pringle's poem, but my Hinza is also born out of my process of writing. I don't want to present writing as a mysterious or magical thing, but at the same time, I don't know how my various attempts evolve into the final representation.

YY: *What is the relationship between the "derelict pondok of history", as Mary elegantly puts it, and the "house of fiction" (10) that both the writer in Still Life and you yourself are trying to build?*

ZW: It is not my place to comment on the meaning of my own work, so I'll be brief. The narrative starts with a makeshift shelter in which an author finds herself trapped by characters who demand that she write their story. The "pondok", Afrikaans for the commonly found South African shack constructed by the poor out of scrap materials, as well as the reference to Henry James's "house of fiction" (with its many windows) are riffs on a makeshift shelter. Hopefully, they open up meanings about both history and ways of writing or approaching fiction.

YY: *More than 15 years ago now, literary critic Ashraf Jamal provocatively suggested in Predicaments of Culture in South Africa that the South African cultural imaginary is still stuck in rigid and inadequate categories of identification which stem from the divisive logic of cultural solidarity and difference established by apartheid. You expose and question in all your work the discursive constructedness of such categories and the power dynamics that inhere in these investments, and in Still Life particularly, the time-travelling writer-critic Sir Nicholas Greene from Virginia Woolf's Orlando somewhat ironically exclaims to Hinza that "this is the age of identity obsession, of racial authenticity, of seeking out real roots" (121). What do you think are the uses and abuses of identity politics in contemporary South Africa?*

ZW: Identity politics is the inevitable outcome of both historical apartheid and the resistance movement. Some conditions of the past may be changing, but sedimentation has taken place and it can't be sluiced away when so many historical inequities remain in place. The following may be a crude simplification and there are indeed examples of contrary positions, but one can't help registering certain trends. Black nationalism then, a requisite for a liberation movement, digs in its heels and finds new forms of assertion in toxic xenophobia; coloureds select their Khoesan roots, deny miscegenation as well as historical genocide, and take to their bow and arrows; whites deny their privilege, and speak of "reverse apartheid" to refer to bias against them. Bias there may be, but it so happens that we don't have homelands for whites; they do not by law earn less than blacks; they do not have separate, inferior amenities, nor are they barred from voting or from criticizing the government; they are not subjected to a range of indignities and restrictions; indeed, the country's wealth is kept safely in their hands, in spite of cries about black corruption. What then, one might ask, do they think apartheid was about? (I have recently written to the *Collins English Dictionary* to object to their absurd entry of "reverse apartheid"). Antjie Krog's questioning of entrenched attitudes within her own group is routinely met by sighs and shaking of sophisticated heads, weary of such carping. Not only are we stuck in Jamal's "divisive logic of cultural solidarity and difference established by apartheid", there are also strange new manifestations. What does one make, for instance, of the new spelling of place names in the Western Cape, where the once preferred Afrikaans vowel "y" has been replaced by the Dutch vowel "ij"?

Attitudes towards race may well be changing amongst the younger generation, but the economic reality prevents that from making a difference. I'm hard pressed to think of any uses for identity politics in South Africa where there are so many different vying constituencies. In countries like Britain where black people are a minority, identity politics serves to insist on their presence and to lobby for legislative change. I'm not sure what it achieves in South Africa with its ANC government where it manifestly does not and perhaps cannot lead to the levelling of social inequities.

YY: *Mary asks a pertinent question in Still Life: "How hard can it be, the skill of inserting yourself into the world of others?" (221). Do you have any suggestions for how we might go about this difficult task of interacting with the other ethically? In your first novel, David's Story, a waiter that the titular character David encounters muses that "in the New South Africa we need to communicate with each other" (164). How might we begin to foster productive conversations across identitarian divisions in South Africa?*

ZW: I really don't have a clue. I don't remember *David's Story*, but the words of the waiter sound as if they're meant to be read ironically. Hinza's experience in the Cape, in fact, shows that it is hard; although well-meaning, he finds it impossibly difficult to interact with those who occupy different worlds. Mary's position is a truism. Structural inequities and racism exist. The privileged protect their worlds by making them impenetrable, and the poor, necessarily suspicious, protect their own vulnerable, provisional worlds by keeping mum. Hinza, the metropolitan, finds it difficult to speak to either of those groups.

Our bourgeois notion of delicacy, which is Hinza's problem (also my own), feeds into and perpetuates the inability to talk to teach other. We have much to learn from the following ideas about anti-racism in the USA, even if they sound crass: there is no such thing as neutrality or non-racism; only personal accountability and action count as anti-racist. The current movements, in which white people march noisily and carry placards of "Black Lives Matter", openly showing solidarity and acknowledging racism, or where black people in the UK topple statues of slavers, demanding that authorities acknowledge racism and hypocrisy, seem to be the only way. This rude hollering is, of course, a huge step for those of us schooled in delicacy and refined sensibilities, but it is precisely the very opposition of crassness/delicacy that needs to be deconstructed. In whose interest has such an opposition been constructed? Whose privilege does it protect? We underestimate Meghan Markle's courage when she resorts to the "vulgarity" of speaking to Oprah on the subject of racism that is taboo in refined aristocratic circles, a taboo adopted by the middle classes with doubled anxiety.

YY: You indicated in the interview with Andrew van der Vlies (published in the collection of your critical essays that he edited) that you feel that at the moment, so-called theory from the South seem to be more about the need for it, rather than articulation of actual theories. If the South is as the Comaroffs claim a space of experimentation, I look forward to such experimentation, such revitalizing knowledge production. There is an encouraging optimism about their idea of conversion from revolution to revelation and of social regeneration, but the proposed quest for wisdom and redemption is as yet hard to discern in South African political culture. (277)

How do you see your own body of work as contributing to the endeavour to bring about this space of experimentation and social regeneration, and who would you say are some of the other (South) African writers and thinkers doing similar work?

ZW: First and foremost, I am less sanguine about writers of fiction bringing about social regeneration, and so do not see myself making any contribution in that respect. In fact, is writing itself not rather a product of social regeneration?

A shift from slavishly following the West to attend to the conditions and practices of the global South is a welcome one from which there is undoubtedly knowledge to be gained. My problem perhaps lies with the redundant word “theory” to which the humanities have become addicted and on which we have come to rely for gravitas. (Which is not to say that there have not been groundbreaking theories that have shifted the ways in which we think.)

But on further reflection, I can’t imagine how revolution is converted to revelation or even what it might mean in South Africa or elsewhere. In my pessimistic old age, I see only the nasty reality of economics, of the poor stumbling in poverty and dying undignified Covid deaths as they queue at overflowing hospitals, of the third world suffering effects of climate change brought about by over-development. Literary experimentation (carried out by those like myself in our centrally heated houses) seems pathetic in the face of the unsung who work tirelessly for survival in places ravaged by climate change, or a Greta Thunberg who overcomes her personal problems to take on these challenges.

YY: Lastly, could you tell us a little bit about what you’re working on at the moment?

ZW: I cannot speak about current work. I can’t be sure that my scribblings will culminate in anything. Another novel seems out of the question.

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Van pelgrims en planete: 'n Onderhoud met Ingrid Winterbach

Ingrid Winterbach & Thys Human

Ingrid Winterbach se dertiende roman, *Voorouer. Pelgrim. Berg.* het in 2021 by Human & Rousseau verskyn. Thys Human het 'n paar vrae oor hierdie indrukwekkende roman aan haar gestel.

TH: Hoe en waar begin 'n nuwe roman vir jou? By 'n karakter, by 'n konsep; by iets wat jy lees of sien? Of dalk iets heeltemal anders? Wat was die vonk vir hierdie spesifieke roman?

IW: 'n Roman het gewoonlik verskillende beginpunte—nie altyd almal agterhaalbaar nie—maar hierdie roman het begin by Anne Carson se *Plainwater*, en meer spesifiek die onderafdeling “Kinds of Water”. Dit het my so aange-gryp! Ek het dit begin vertaal, en die vertaling het geleidelik deel begin word van 'n ontwikkelende romangegewe.

TH: Die roman is besonder aantreklik uitgegee. Ek sien Michiel Botha was verantwoordelik vir die minimalistiese, dog uiters treffende, bandontwerp (met hier en daar die behoud van visuele elemente van vorige romanvoorblaaie). Hoe sou die roman gelyk het as jy self die voorbladkunswerk moes verskaf, soos wat dit die geval was tot en met die verskyning van *Niggie* (2002)?

IW: Dis moeilik om te sê. Dis al so lank wat ek nie self met iets vorendag hoef te kom, soos in die geval van die *Niggie*- en *Karolina Ferreira*-voorblaaie nie. Ek sou miskien iewers 'n klein tekeninkie van 'n pelgrim ingebring het.

TH: Die roman het 'n buitengewone titel, *Voorouer. Pelgrim. Berg.*, wat ook opvallend verskil van die titels van jou vorige romans. Waarom het jy uiteindelik juis op dié titel besluit?

IW: Ander titels wat ek oorweeg het, is *Die voorouerlike ruim* en *Die voordeligste eienskappe vir pelgrims*. ‘Voorouer’ en ‘pelgrim’ het dus uit die staanspoor in die titels geskuil, en toe min of meer daaruit voortgevloei.

TH: Soos in *Klaaglied* vir Koos en *Die boek van toeval en toeverlaat* (asook dele van *Erf en Vlakwater*) maak jy in *Voorouer. Pelgrim. Berg.* van 'n eerste-persoonsverteller gebruik—die prulskrywer, *Katerina Steenkamp*. Maak 'n ek-verteller dit makliker of moeiliker om die onderskeid tussen die ‘ek as skrywer’ en ‘ek as karakter’ te handhaaf? Of is dié tipe verteller dalk juis 'n uitnodiging tot 'n tipe verbandlegging of vergelyking tussen skrywer en hoofkarakter?

IW: As daar aanvanklik 'n groter identifikasie met die gebruik van die eerste-persoonsverteller tussen die ‘ek as skrywer’ en die ‘ek as karakter’ is, raak dit gou opgehef tydens die skryf van die roman—die proses van fiksionalisering werk onmiddellik en genadiglik bevreedend. Die feit dat die karakter hom/haarself dan in allerlei situasies bevind wat buite my as skrywer se ervaringswêreld val, bring verdere afstand tussen skrywer en karakter.

TH: Die laaste sin van die verhaalopsomming op die agterblad lees soos volg: “As skrywer, ten volle in beheer van haar medium, betree sy [dis nou jy] hier met groot waagmoed verrassend nuwe terrein.” Wat beteken vernuwing vir jou as skrywer/kunstenaar? Voel jy nie dat daar tans 'n buitensporig hoë premie op vernuwing as aanduiding van die gehalte van skryfwerk geplaas word nie?

IW: Ek weet nie. Ek weet sowaar nie. Ek weet nie meer wat met vernuwing bedoel word nie.

Ingrid Winterbach is skrywer én skilder. Sy het al meermale die W. A. Hofmeyr-, die M-Net, die Universiteit van Johannesburg-, die Hertzog-prys en die eerste prys in die Groot Afrikaanse Romanwedstryd verower. Haar werk is in Engels, Nederlands en Frans vertaal.

Thys Human doseer letterkunde in die Vakgroep Afrikaans en Nederlands, Skool vir Tale, Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe van die Noordwes-Universiteit, Potchefstroom, Suid-Afrika. Hy het sy proefskrif oor die werk van Ingrid Winterbach onder leiding van Willie Burger voltooi.

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TH: *Distopiese fiksie is deesdae nogal en vogue in Afrikaans (dink: Koors, Wonderboom, Stof, In 'n land sonder voëls en Simoelégri). Hierdie tekste is dikwels post-apokalipties van aard in dié opsig dat die verhaaldebeure ná een of ander groot ramp afspeel (en ironies genoeg suggereer dat selfs die grootste rampe denkbaar oorleef kán word). Voorouer. Pelgrim. Berg. is eerder pre-apokalipties in dié sin dat algehele uitwissing nog op hande is. Wat is dit van die apokalips wat jou karakters (en dalk selfs jou as skrywer) fassineer?*

IW: Volgens my is almal in die apokalips geïnteresseerd. En waarom nie?! Die apokalips, in welke vorm ook al (atoombomme, meteoriete, gammastrale, verskuivende tektoniese plate, verskuiwingslyne, dag Zero's, ens) het al die elemente van 'n behoorlik vreesaanjaende, adrenaliengedrewe scenario: dis grootskaals, dit bied ekstreme spektakel, en dis lewensbedreigend—met die reële moontlikheid van 'n algehele uitwissing van die lewe op aarde. Daar was al ses groot uitwissings in die aarde se evolusionêre geskiedenis, waarom sou 'n sewende en verdere uitwissings nie moontlik wees nie?!

TH: *Ten spyte daarvan dat Katerina Steenkamp om den brode 'n populêre wraakroman probeer skryf, het sy eintlik 'n baie wye lees- en kunsbelangstelling. In die loop van die roman verwys sy onder andere na Anne Carson se Plainwater, W. G. Sebald se The Emigrants, Edmund de Waal se The White Road, Lars von Trier se film, Melancholia, asook die kunswerke van Kerry James Marshall en George Gittoes. Resensente merk soms op dat jou romans verwickeld is vanweë hierdie intertekstuele gesprekke. Wat hulle egter dikwels nié vermeld nie, is dat lesers geen kennis van hierdie kunstenaars/tekste hoef te hê om jou roman te verstaan of te geniet nie. Trouens, dis juis danksy jou roman dat die leser bekendgestel word aan hierdie wetenswaardige kunstenaars en hul werk.*

Ingrid, soos Katerina, is jy 'n gretige leser, wat wyd en dikwels vreesloos lees. Ek kan my net voorstel dat jy voor en tydens die skryf van 'n nuwe roman onder die indruk van talle skrywers en tekste kom. Hoe besluit jy uiteindelik op die tekste (hier in die wydste sin van die woord bedoel) wat jy by jou roman insluit? Moet dit jou karakters interesseer? Moet dit jou as skrywer interesseer? Of dikteer die verhaal?

IW: Al skryf Katrina 'n populêre roman (*pulp fiction*, sê sy vir Vossie), beteken dit nie sy is 'n ongesofistikeerde leser nie. Sy is per slot van sake ook in die letterkunde opgelei, al het sy taalkunde doseer. Die tekste wat ek in 'n roman insluit, is tekste wat ek toevallig lees tydens die skryf van die roman. Toeval is dus merendeels die deurslaggewende faktor. Maar dan kan so 'n teks die verhaal rig—die manier dikteer waarop die verhaal verder ontwikkel.

Ek wil ook net byvoeg: skrywers is aasdiere, hulle roof, buit en plunder—hulle gebruik alles, alles waarop die oog val, wat die verbeelding aanspreek, wat moontlik bruikbaar is. Etienne Leroux het lank reeds gewaarsku dat hulle gewetenloos is, en dat hulle vir die onthalwe van die roman sonder skroom sal gebruik wat hulle nuttig vind.

TH: *Heelwat kommentatore oor jou werk merk op dat jy jou as skrywer nie veel aan plot steur nie. Tog gebeur daar soveel in jou romans. Waarom dié uiters aanvegbare oordeel oor jou romans, dink jy?*

IW: Miskien het ek gewoon 'n ander opvatting van plot as die meeste kommentatore.

TH: *Voorouer. Pelgrim. Berg. is 'n roman vol besonder onthoubare pelgrimkarakters. Sommige van dié pelgrims is voorouers. Sommige van hulle hou 'n berg stip in die oog, terwyl ander se oë heelwat meer dwalend is. Tog is dit selde pelgrims (suiwer) in die tradisionele sin van die woord (met ander woorde “reisigers op pad na 'n heilige plek; bedevaartgangers”). Wil jy dalk iets sê oor die belang van pelgrims in die roman?*

IW: Die pelgrimotief in *Plainwater* het my by die idee van pelgrims uitgebring. (Hoewel Anne Carson en haar metgesel soos bedevaartgangers op hulle Camino-staptog is, is haar interpretasie van wat 'n pelgrim is besonder verrassend!) Toe het ek gewoon geloop met die idee van pelgrims, en dit—soos Carson—na hartelus uitgebrei.

TH: *Aan die hand van Katerina se eksman, sy vriend Alfred en die begenadigde minnaar, Jakobus Jonker, behels dié roman ook 'n interessante herbesoek aan of hertaksering van die tagtigerjare van die vorige eeu. Waarom die herontginning van juis dié berugte dekade? En, hoeveel het sedert die tagtigerjare in Suid-Afrika verander? Op watter wyses verskil die wêreld wat Katerina deur haar kombuisvenster betrag van die wêreld van die laat-tagtigerjare van die vorige eeu?*

IW: Ek moes besluit hoe oud ek die karakter Katerina wil maak—nie te oud nie, en nie te jonk nie, so middelvftigs. Sy moet dus in die sestigs gebore wees, en volwasse wees in die tagtigs. Terselfdertyd was die tagtigs die tyd waarin ek vir die eerste keer gepubliseer het—politities 'n besonder stormagtige tyd in ons landsgeskiedenis—'n oorgangstydperk, wat aanleiding gegee het tot die Nuwe Suid-Afrika. Dit was interessant om hierdie tydperk in die roman te herbesoek, vanuit 'n agternaperspektief.

In die laattagtigs het 'n karakter by die venster uitgekyk en apartheid gesien. Nou kyk Katerina by haar kombuisvenster uit en sien sy die onveranderde uitsigloosheid van die armes.

TH: 'n Laaste moedswillige vraag: Watter tipe navorsing doen jy om so ingelig, oortuigend en onderhoudend oor chat sites en sekspoppe te kan skryf?

IW: Wat die chat sites betref, het ek sommer my eie reëls opgemaak, en wat die sekspoppe betref, is daar volop inligting (en veral foto's) op die internet.

**Jacmien van Niekerk**

Op 8 September 2011 is die 75^{ste} bestaansjaar van *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* gevier tydens 'n funksie by die Universiteit van Pretoria. Die navorsing wat Jan Stander oor die geskiedenis van die *Jaarboek van die Afrikaanse Skrywerskring* en *TL* gedoen het, asook 'n oorsig deur die toenmalige hoofredakteur, Hein Willemse (“*Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*: 'n Aaneenlopende rekord van 75 jaar”), is in jaargang 48, nommer 2 van *TL* gepubliseer, terwyl die toesprake wat daardie aand deur Henriëtte Roos en Henning J. Pieterse gelewer is, in die daaropvolgende uitgawe verskyn. Hierdie opstelle is almal belangrike argiefdokumente wat die geskiedenis van die tydskrif boekstaaf. Dit is nou tien jaar later en ons vier die 85^{ste} bestaansjaar van *TL*; ek fokus in hierdie redaksionele nota hoofsaaklik op hierdie afgelope tien jaar.

Willemse (“Aaneenlopende rekord”) is beskeie wat sy eie bydrae as hoofredakteur betref. Onder sy leiding het *TL* 'n merkwaardige transformasie ondergaan: van 'n tydskrif wat slegs in Afrikaans publiseer, tot een wat naas Afrikaans ook navorsingsartikels in Engels, Frans en Nederlands publiseer; van 'n tydskrif wat slegs gerig was op 'n eng-gekonsepsualiseerde Afrikaanse letterkunde tot een wat sy visier stel op letterkundige en kulturele produkte vanoor die ganse Afrika én Afrikadiaspora; van 'n tydskrif waar die publikasie van kreatiewe werk die grootste gewig gedra het, tot een wat die klem plaas op oorspronklike navorsingsartikels en nie meer kreatiewe werk publiseer nie; en les bes van 'n tydskrif waarvan vier relatief dun nommers per jaar verskyn het tot een met slegs twee uitgawes, April en September.

Van 2003 tot 2015 was die gedrukte eksemplare van die tydskrif met die pragtige voorblaaie deur ontwerp-kunstenaar Tienie du Plessis (1949–2015) versameliteme. En in 2013 is 'n ooreenkoms met Van Schaik Uitgewers aangegaan om die *Kwê*-reeks uit te gee, spesiale uitgawes van *TL* wat tegelykertyd tydskrif én boek is. Tot dusver het *Kwê* 1 ('n huldigingsbundel vir Heinrich Ohlhoff in 2013) en *Kwê* 2 (*Dogs in southern African literatures*, 2018) verskyn.


Verdere vernuwings is deur Willemse ingelui deur die besluit om *TL* vanaf 2016 'n elektroniese tydskrif met oop toegang te maak. In Augustus 2016 skryf Willemse (“*Tydskrif vir letterkunde @80*”) dat jaargang 53, nommer 2 “die laaste uitgawe van *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* as 'n gedrukte joernaal” is en dat gedrukte eksemplare voortaan slegs via “druk-op-versoek” beskikbaar sal wees (240). 'n Skrale jaar later het ons ook met hierdie stelsel weggedoen en die *Kwê*-uitgawes is nou die enigste geleentheid waarby *TL* in druk verskyn. *TL* het nie meer intekenaars nie, iets wat natuurlik finansiële implikasies gehad het.

Tans word die oorgrote meerderheid van akademiese tydskrifte wêreldwyd deur groot multinasionale uitgewerskorporasies besit wat daardie navorsing ten duurste aan lesers of hul instansies beskikbaar stel. In hierdie konteks is dit vir *TL* belangrik om 'n onafhanklike tydskrif met 'n beskeie begroting te bly (ons hef slegs bladgeld vir outeurs wat aan 'n Suid-Afrikaanse universiteit verbonde is) en alle navorsing wat in die joernaal gepubliseer word gratis verkrygbaar te maak. Dit is vir ons 'n eer en 'n voorreg om deel te wees van die Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) se Khulisa-platform vir tydskrifte met oop toegang. Hulle verskaf nie net uitmuntende tegniese steun nie, maar help ook verseker dat ons tred hou met internasionale standaarde vir die publikasie van navorsing.

In die afgelope vyf jaar is baie tyd en energie daaraan gewy om ons uitgeeformaat en -prosesse te laat voldoen aan hierdie nuwe vereistes. Alle artikels word nou op 'n elektroniese platform voorgelê en die ganse keurproses

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geskied via die aanlynstelsel. Outeurs, keurders en redakteurs moes almal touwys gemaak word om die stelsel te gebruik. Terselfdertyd is ons argief oorgedra na die Khulisa-platform: vanaf 2003 tot op hede is daar 'n volledige elektroniese rekord vir elke afsonderlike uitset, en die uitgawes tussen 1936 en 2001 kan as PDF's afgelaai word. Op enkele vermiste nommers na is ons argief van 85 jaar nou volledig! Ons dank aan Daniël du Plessis, Tienie se seun, wat vanaf April 2016 tot April 2019 die tydskrif vir ons uitgelê het. Vanaf September 2019 is Tercia Klopper ons nuwe uitlegkunstenaar.

Deel van Hein Willemse se onverdrote arbeid was om die nodige prosedures te volg vir *TL* om in die internasionale Web of Science-indeks opgeneem te word (voorheen die "ISI"-lys). Die tydskrif is ook onder andere deel van Elsevier se Scopus/Scimago-indeks, van Scielo Suid-Afrika en die Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). Danksy ons verbintenis met Scielo word *TL* tans outomaties deur die Suid-Afrikaanse Departement vir Hoër Onderwys en Opleiding (DHET) geakkrediteer.

Ek het in 2015 by die redaksie van *TL* aangesluit as streeksredakteur en vanaf 2016 tot 2019 was ek saam met Hein Willemse mede-redakteur. Hy het in 2019 uitgetree en ek is nou die enigste redakteur, hoewel ek gelukkig 'n wonderlike span streeksredakteurs het wat my daaglik in die taak ondersteun: Grant Andrews, Bibi Burger, Willie Burger, Isidore Diala, Muhammed Haron, Kasongo Kapanga, Daniela Merolla, Susan Meyer, Hilde Neus, Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang, Lesibana Rafapa, Antoinette Tidjani Alou en Alex Wanjala.

Daar is ook in die afgelope paar jaar nuwe lewe geblaas in die Tydskrif vir Letterkunde Assosiasie, die entiteit wat *TL* publiseer: die lede van die Assosiasie dien as adviesraad wat onontbeerlike ondersteuning aan my as redakteur bied. Hein Willemse bedank in 2021 as voorsitter van die Assosiasie. Dit is nog vreemd om die tydskrif sonder hom te bestuur; by hierdie geleentheid wil ek hom van harte bedank vir sy mentorskap, leiding en ondersteuning en vir die vertroue wat hy in my geplaas het. Bowenal wil ek hom gelukwens met die ontsaglike prestasie wat hy met *TL* behaal het waarvan die huidige span nog steeds die vrugte pluk.

Jacomien van Niekerk
Pretoria, 18 Oktober 2021

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On 8 September 2011 *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* celebrated its 75th year of existence during a function at the University of Pretoria. The research that Jan Stander conducted on the history of the *Jaarboek van die Afrikaanse Skrywerskring* and *TL*, as well as an overview by the then editor in chief, Hein Willemse ("*Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*: 'n Aaneenlopende rekord van 75 jaar"), was published in volume 48, issue 2 of *TL*, while the speeches that were delivered by Henriëtte Roos and Henning J. Pieterse on the evening were published in the subsequent issue. These essays are important archival documents that chronicle the history of the journal. Ten years have passed and we are celebrating the 85th year of existence of *TL*. In this editorial note I focus primarily on these past ten years.

Willemse ("Aaneenlopende rekord") is modest as far as his own contribution as editor-in-chief is concerned. Under his guidance the journal underwent a remarkable transformation: from a journal that was only published in Afrikaans, to one that, in addition to Afrikaans, also publishes research articles in English, French, and Dutch; from a journal which was aimed at a narrowly conceptualised Afrikaans literature to one that sets its sights on literary and cultural products from all over Africa and the African diaspora; from a journal in which the publication of creative work carried the greatest weight, to one that places emphasis on original research articles and no longer publishes creative work; and, last but not least, from a journal of which four relatively thin issues appeared per year to one with only two issues, April and September.

From 2003 to 2015 the printed copies of the journal with beautiful front pages by designer Tienie du Plesies (1949–2015) were collectables. In 2013 an agreement was entered into with Van Schaik Publishers to publish the Kwê series, special editions of *TL* which function as both journal and book. So far Kwê 1 (a tribute volume to Heinrich Ohlhoff in 2013) and Kwê 2 (*Dogs in southern African literatures*, 2018) have appeared.

Further renewal was initiated by Willemse through the decision to make *TL* an online journal with open access. In August 2016 Willemse ("*Tydskrif vir letterkunde @80*") wrote that volume 53, issue 2 would be "the last issue of *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* as a hard copy". Provision was made for subscribers who requested print-on-demand copies (241). A scant year later we also did away with this system and the Kwê issues are now the only occasion on which *TL* appears in print. *TL* no longer has subscribers, a decision that had financial implications.

Currently, the vast majority of academic journals worldwide are owned by large multinational publishing corporations that make the research available to readers or their institutions at great cost. In this context it is important for *TL* to remain an independent journal with a modest budget (we only charge page fees for authors who are affiliated with a South African university) and for us to make all research which is published in the journal available free of charge. It is an honour and privilege to form part of the Khulisa platform for journals with open access of the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf). They not only provide excellent technical support, but also assist in ensuring that we keep up with international standards for the publication of research.

Over the past five years, much time and energy have been devoted to ensuring that our publishing format and processes meet these new requirements. All articles are now submitted onto an electronic platform and the entire selection process takes place via this online system. Authors, reviewers, and section editors all had to be instructed in how to use the system. At the same time, our archive was carried over to the Khulisa platform: a complete electronic record exists for each output from 2003 to present, and the issues between 1936 and 2001 can be downloaded as PDFs. Except for a few missing issues, our 85-year-old archive is now complete! We thank Daniël du Plessis, Tienie's son, who did the layout of the journal for us from April 2016 to April 2019. Tercia Klopper has been our layout artist since September 2019.

Part of Hein Willemse's tireless work was to follow the necessary procedures for *TL* to be included in the international Web of Science index (previously the "ISI" list"). The journal is also part of Elsevier's Scopus/Scimago index, of Scielo South Africa and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). Thanks to our connection with Scielo, *TL* is currently automatically accredited by the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET).

I joined the editorial staff of *TL* in 2015 as regional editor and from 2016 to 2019 I was co-editor with Hein Willemse. He retired in 2019 and I am currently the only editor, although fortunately I have a wonderful team of regional editors who support me on a daily basis: Grant Andrews, Bibi Burger, Willie Burger, Isidore Diala, Muhammed Haron, Kasongo Kapanga, Daniela Merolla, Susan Meyer, Hilde Neus, Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang, Lesibana Rafapa, Antoinette Tidjani Alou, and Alex Wanjala.

The Tydskrif vir Letterkunde Association, the entity that publishes the journal, has also been revived in recent years: the members of the Association serve as an advisory board that provides indispensable support to me as editor. Hein Willemse resigned as chairman of the Association in 2021. It is still strange to manage the journal without him; I want to make use of this opportunity to thank him from the bottom of my heart for his mentorship, guidance, and support and for the trust he has placed in me. Above all, I want to congratulate him on his tremendous achievements with *TL* from which the current team is still reaping the rewards.

Jacomien van Niekerk
Pretoria, 18 October 2021

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Civilising Grass: The Art of the Lawn on the South African Highveld.

Jonathan Cane.

Johannesburg: Wits U P, 2019. 233 pp.

ISBN 9781776143108.

On the surface, *Civilising Grass* seems to offer a quirky and visually rich aesthetic engagement with the lawn. As one starts reading, the discourses thicken: author Jonathan Cane rejects a seemingly shallow horizontality in favour of a dense and sustained vertical unpicking of the apparent naturalness of the lawn *beyond* the aesthetic. By uprooting familiar lawn landscapes, he poses an understanding of the lawn as a “transplanted concept” that crosses colonial thresholds and hovers between the ideal and the real (22). Through successfully eroding the concept of the lawn’s contradictions (clean/dirty, shallow/deeply rooted, domesticated/wild, inside/outside, human/nonhuman, good/bad), Cane points out the ways in which the lawn can “at best, only ever be a temporary victory” (13).

In the book, which contributes to an international body of literature providing thorough discussions of the lawn-phenomenon since the late 1990s, Cane uses theoretical and conceptual tools provided by interdisciplinary fields such as visual studies, ecocriticism, postcolonial studies and queer theory (2). As the first sustained investigation of the lawn in Africa, the book contributes to conversations about the ambiguous entanglements of humans with these landscapes that have hitherto been considered mere backdrops. The power of Cane’s critique is that he reads the lawn landscape not as an object, but as a process. Following W. J. T. Mitchell, Cane argues that landscapes should be considered “verbs”, “unfinished processes, inconclusive attempts at fixing a permanent vision of nature”, rather than as “nouns” which can be surveyed or owned (3). Through this theorisation, the author teases out the ways in which power relations function in and through landscape.

Ideas about the lawn, much like the grass used for lawns itself, come from elsewhere. In the case of the former, Cane untangles the British imperial roots of the lawn as a site of naturalness, beauty and tranquility, and in the case of the latter he tracks kikuyu grass (South Africa’s most common grass used for lawns) as

originally from the East Africa Protectorate and sent via Pretoria to London for propagation (141). In contrast with the ideas of colonial landscapes as timeless and finished, Cane engages with the lawn as constantly moving, destabilised and changing. In this sense, Cane lets the imperial ideas of landscape as permanent and passive “fail” (5). Further, in the theoretical manoeuvre of queering the landscape, Cane not only successfully foregrounds the work of LGBTIQ+ gardeners, writers and artists but, further, craftily critiques heteronormative constructions of ‘nature’ and dichotomous relationships between the lawn and the wild, and similarly, between human and nonhuman actors.

Civilising Grass’s broad archival engagement must be commended. Its richness is owed to Cane’s consideration of anything “from poetry to pornography, [...] hate speech to children’s homework exercises, physical places to paper plans” as potentially useful (16). The book’s archive is composed of two types of texts roughly divided along the lines of ‘scientific’ and ‘artistic’ (15). Without drawing unnecessary distinctions (who says scientific texts cannot be aesthetic?), the chosen texts are written by historians, administrators, scientists, botanists, teachers, gardeners, garden owners and (landscape) architects. In engaging with this literature, Cane also thoughtfully and masterfully navigates the South African *linguistic* landscape “fraught with discursive danger” (xvii).

The book further includes eclectic visuals of urban design plans and maps, poems, advertisements, ethnographies, literature by Ivan Vladislavić and Marlene van Niekerk and 25 colour reproductions of lawn artworks by South African artists including Sabelo Mlangeni, Moses Tladi, Jane Alexander, Lungiswa Gqunta, Brett Murray and David Goldblatt. The close reading of not only artistic or literary lawns, but also implemented (or almost implemented) architectural lawns makes this work highly applicable to various social situations in that it investigates naturalised historical, gendered and racial aspects of the lawn.

Cane contains his negotiation to the South African highveld and teases out this location in terms of the “unique” combination of historical events that played out here, like the discovery of gold, the Anglo-Boer War and Nelson Mandela’s presidential inauguration on the Union Building lawns (6). Especially the highveld in

winter—characterised by dusty dry veld—is one of the “brownest” landscapes imaginable and is “particularly unwelcoming” to the lawn (14). Imagining a plush and playful lawn here (“never mind actually plant[ing] and keep[ing]” one) pushes the lawn’s ‘naturalness’ to its utmost limits (14).

The author presents the South African lawn as political, as moving, as work, as desiring a family and as a failure (11). He rhizomatically refers to these five theses throughout the book’s chapters, which is each dedicated to “lawn moments” between the late nineteenth century and the present day (14). Chapter 1 provides a thorough definition of the lawn. In texts where the lawn (and its ideological dimensions) was pushed to the back, Cane deliberately foregrounds it as a political act of denaturalisation to make clear the intimate and strange ways in which humans interact with lawns. Chapter 2 engages with the “fundamental quality” of the lawn as something that must be made and kept and which requires labour and resources like money, tools and water. In South Africa these conditions are constituted by racial inequality that dictates which humans of what gender, age and race, for what reward, in what clothes, on which day and with what equipment are responsible for this upkeep (47).

Chapter 3 takes a spade to the roots of the ideals of the lawn promised by modernity in the first half of the twentieth century through reference to utopian discourses in urban design. Historicising the continuously preferred (garden) landscape provides a perspective on lasting apartheid spatiality (111). Drawing on queer theory, Chapter 4 explores the notion of failure as a potential freedom from the goals of heteropatriarchal capitalism. Despite modernist discourses’ best efforts, the lived lawn is a mess oscillating between dying, scratching, soothing, browning and living.

Forming part of an unjust and violent colonial lineage, the lawn cannot be innocent. *Civilising Grass* provides fruitful insights into South Africa’s past and present societies shaped by variegated historical and racial factors. With this in mind, it makes sense that the book’s point of departure is, à la Mitchell, “What does the lawn want?”, implying a shift from *meaning* to *doing* (175). Cane’s engagement with this question is provocative, unexpected and presented in a concise, lively and witty form. The author opens the backdoor for further cross-fertilisations beyond the highveld, even beyond South Africa (14). I suspect this well-crafted book will appeal equally to scholars interested in interdisciplinary approaches, as to the general reading public.

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Decolonisation as Democratisation: Global Insights into the South African Experience.

Siseko Kumalo (ed.).
Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2021. 223 pp.
ISBN 9780796926005.

The edited collection *Decolonisation as Democratisation* arrived at my door approximately four years after the iconic #MustFall student protests first rocked South Africa. As I write this review, the streets have long since been cleared of the marching masses, but the #MustFall embers still smoulder across the university landscape. The physical evidence of what we know now as a decolonial moment is still there. Stumps where colonial altars once stood remain as ugly scars; some graffitied and scarred buildings remain as physical testaments to the moment. However, the ideals of the moment remain more vivid than any of the physical markers and have entrenched themselves firmly and conspicuously into the university’s fabric in the form of discourse.

The collection edited by Kumalo is testament to how far the decolonial imperative, accentuated by the student-activists, has travelled. The book comes at a time when decolonisation, particularly the decolonisation of the university, is facing a hurdle. In action terms, the hurdle can be called a problem of operationalisation, but in conceptual terms it is a question of methodology. To be clear, the question of whether or not to decolonise is a ship that has long sailed, but *how* to decolonise is an imminent institutional dilemma. The book tackles this *how* head-on. In a quest to actualise decolonial demands in the South African university some have gone hastily about the endeavour, resulting in skin-deep re-dress, which has unearthed new problematics in the ideas that institutions hold on what decolonisation means. The book is therefore timely.

The book questions how the university, particularly, can move from here to “a there”—hence decolonial methodology is an overarching theme. However, in the foreword, Mignolo cautions that the methodology of decolonisation cannot lead with a simple *how* question; however compelling it feels. He states that “*who* is investigating *what* and *what for* are three basic issues

for the decolonial option. The fourth one, *how*, depends on the answers given to the previous three. If you do not know who, what and what for, you do not need a method” (xi). My reading of Mignolo here is that while methodology may indeed be the problematic of decolonial discourse presently, it cannot be handled callously. Positionality, episteme and cause have to be equally considered in the process of making the decolonial turn. This is a caution that the contributors heeded critically (see for example, Piribhai-Ilich and Martin’s positional reflections in chapter 4 or Zondi’s in the afterword).

Decolonisation as Democratisation argues that decolonisation is not an end in itself but rather a methodological orientation towards a bigger project of an epistemic and indigenous nature. As Tuck and Yang (3) note, “decolonisation is not a metaphor”—therefore we should guard against its domestication. Kumalo and others heed this assertion as well. Mitova, in chapter 2, for example, demonstrates the dangers of an unnuanced relativism that can seemingly align itself to the pluriversal ideals held in decolonial work. This kind of relativism is a hindrance because it takes a decolonial epistemic perspective as *one of many* truths that exist in the world and not as an imperative. In chapter 3, Stein, Andreotti, Hunt and Ahenakew bring to question the futurity of a higher education that sits at the centre of a fracturing and unsustainable house that modernity built. In continuance of the book’s theme of mediations in decolonial methodology, Stein et al. (60) propose that “while we cannot imagine a substantively different approach to higher education [...] it is important to experiment with other possibilities”.

The book’s second contribution to the decolonial discourse is in providing a global perspective on the South Africa moment. The paradox that the #MustFall protests were both iconic and yet not novel is a sobering thought bravely laid out in the book. The insights are not patronising of the fallist movement but provide ways of think through the decolonial moment. The second part of the book makes vital contributions in terms of contextual and pedagogical considerations of the decolonial project. It raises an array of issues from epistemic justice, power inequalities, gender disparity considerations, the humanities, and the university’s futurity, to name a few. These issues may seem disjointed, but as was demonstrated by the multi-prongedness of the #MustFall movement, these are complex yet intersecting realities in higher education.

Decolonisation as Democratisation also makes meaningful contributions by curating indigenous archives without the pressure of immediate translation. Because an archive is an evidentiary assemblage that is used in meaning making, indigenous archives are important in making a decolonial epistemic turn. It is one thing to acknowledge that such archives exist (what Moosavi [332] calls “intellectual decolonisation”), but it is another to engage with them as Kumalo and others have done in this book. In resurrecting the work of Gqoba, the book takes a refreshing turn from paying lip service to Othered knowledge and engages it richly in meaning-making, a refreshing epistemic turn.

While the book makes important contributions to decolonial methodology, the concept of democratisation, and certainly of democracy, needs to be problematised. The protesting students placed a demand not only on the education system—they called into question the *demos* (the people) and *kratos* (power) link that the nation-project of South Africa projects. Therefore, to state, as Kumalo does in the book’s opening, that “the aim of decolonisation in South Africa can be understood in the ideal of democratising the knowledge project” (1) or that “the task of historical justice, lies in making good on the promise of democracy” (197) without a problematisation of democratisation, is an oversight.

As I close this review, South Africa sits in the wake of another wave of protests. Granted, the carnage and looting that followed the #FreeZuma protests are an unruly mimicry of the political statement mounted by students in the #MustFall protests. Still, the mimic stands as a kind of postcolonial hauntology (Coly 3) of the ideas (and perhaps ideals) of democratisation. Yet again, deep questions are raised about the marriage of decolonisation and democratisation. This makes the book put together by Kumalo even more relevant as it speaks far beyond discourses on education. Perhaps its oversight with regards to the concept of democratisation will lead to new conversations that contemporaries can pick up. Still, this is a relevant, brave, and timely academic seed.

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The Black Register.

Tendayi Sithole.

Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020. 288 pp.

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The Black Register is singularly focused on the project of world-making, as undertaken through the process of ideas (i.e. theory development). Importantly, the process of theory development, as Sithole undertakes it, is concerned with revealing the fallacies that abound in relation to Black life, what he terms “an ontological scandal” (1). This is evinced in his opening remarks, when he observes that the desire of the Black being is “to be”. In explicating the desire “to be” in an antiblack world, he notes, “[t]his means that to be is to be at the receiving end of antiblackness—to be structured in relation to the world that militates against the existences of blacks—to have one’s humanity called into question” (1).

The Black Register treats this desire by applying itself to the work of thinkers that have theorised this sense of being in the world, from the loci of enunciation of the Black subject. This is done in six chapters that are flanked by an introductory essay and a concluding essay, both of which are substantive contributions in their own right. This engagement is done without a prescriptive definitional position, for Sithole (2) is weary of assuming an intellectually hubristic position when he writes: “The black register, hitherto described and not operationalized by any mode of definition, is here what might be referred to as the ways of thinking, knowing, and doing that are enunciated from existential struggle against antiblackness, and which dwell from the lived experience of being-black-in-an-antiblack-world which must be ended”.

Let me begin by conceptually clarifying aspects that were both interesting and useful in engaging with the text. Sithole (100) uses the concept of the “ontological density of the black subject” when he asserts that “[b]lackness is the opposite of whiteness and its place is the zone of non-being. In such a place blackness cannot make demands that are similar to those of subjects who have ontological density...” I wonder if the con-

cept of “ontological legitimacy” (Kumalo 3) might not be more apt? This inquiry is predicated on Hannah Arendt’s (182) thinking, when she frames the ontological condition of politics thusly, “[i]nsofar as the capacity for acting and speaking (and speaking is but another mode of acting), makes man [sic] a political being, and since acting has always meant to set something into motion that was not there before, birth, human natality which corresponds to human mortality, is the ontological condition *sine qua non* of all politics”. Owing to this subtlety, the reader will note I capitalise ‘Black’—to indicate this very difference between Sithole’s and my understanding of Black ontology. Mine, written with a capital ‘B’ recognises the imbrication of Blackness with Indigeneity, in the sense of Black as Indigenous to the land, while Sithole decapitalises the ‘b’ in his orthography—possibly as a way of centring the lack of ontological density of Blackness.

Sithole, could—however—object to my inquiry by directing me to Sartre’s opening remarks in *Being and Nothingness*, that “[t]he essence is not in the object; it is the meaning of the object, the principle of the series of appearances which disclose it” (5). Said objection finds its justification in Sithole’s assertion that “[Sylvia] Wynter makes a constant effort to expose the systems of meaning by means of imposed signification that give legitimacy to niggerization” (45). Sithole (44) preambles this objection by suggesting that “[e]ven if there are prospects of asserting existence, the presence of the mask means that there is no face, but a mask. To be signified as a nigger is to be faceless, that which contains layers and layers of masks”. The Sartrean ‘essence’ which is the basis of my objection—as said objection is premised on the fact of human natality as that which gives meaning to the object—is obfuscated through the systematic and systemic structure of an antiblack world in which the Black being exists. Obfuscation, thus construed, is what leads Sithole to make the claim that the black register is concerned with facilitating a state of being that allows the Black to be.

In response, and in returning to Sartre (5–6), I would direct the reader to the claim: “By not considering being as the condition of revelation, but rather being as an appearance which can be determined in concepts, we have understood first of all that knowledge can not by itself give an account of being; that is, *the being of the phenomenon can not be reduced to the phenomenon of being*” (emphasis added). “Thus negation would be ‘at the end’ of judgement without, however, being ‘in’ being” (Sartre 30). Viscerally, and in disclosing the conditions under which the Black exists, Sithole takes his cue from Wynter when he elegantly demonstrates

that “[as] the rebel, Wynter refuses to be in service of the Imperial Man whose gravitas of discursive formation ‘requires those being slaughtered to *pretend to be part of the living*’” (51). Here, the reader finds a concurrence between Sithole’s description of the antiblack world and Sartre’s (31) phenomenological proposition that “[the] world does not disclose its non-beings to one who has not first posited them as possibilities”. Herein lies the justification that runs throughout the monograph, in the assertion that it is the white world, whiteness *qua* white, that creates this ontological void which ultimately reduces the Black subject to a thing, an object that is defined by lack and exists perpetually in the zone of non-being.

In rejecting servitude to the Imperial Man, “[the] manner of opposition is coined as antagonism, which then creates the figure of the enemy of the state” (116). Moreover, “[in] addition to silence, the racist state requires obedience and complicity, and this is something that Biko defied as he pursued the opposite line of the political, the outlawed, but not the outlawed that he chose, the one that the racist state attributed to him” (114). Sithole’s proposition then, is the need for the end of the world as we know it and the creation of a new world—the focus returning to the project of world-making—as “the demands of blackness [are not only] insatiable, there is no rapport and relationality in the antiblack world as the form of life dispatched to blackness is that of wanton structural violence, which necessitates nothing but death” (257). This reveals the ontological scandal that Sithole diagnoses at the beginning of the treatise, in his aptly crystallised claim that “[the] discourses of moral condemnation calling Mari-kana a horror serve the function of calling for but not wanting change” in the antiblack world (238).

This does not, however, resolve the question of the aptitude of the concept of “ontological density” as opposed to “legitimacy”. Focusing on such a distinction is deliberate, in that the concept of density might lead the reader to assume that there is—implicitly—already an ontology that is recognised by whiteness. Whereas, in my engagement with the text, and in the prognosis that “[t]here is no transition, breakthrough, or democratisation; there is a total end and a new beginning—*tabula rasa*” (240), I understand Sithole to be systematically and fundamentally defending the propositional claim that there is no recognition of the Black subject, whatsoever. Simply, and using my notion of “ontological legitimacy”, I would follow Sartre’s suggestion to “let anyone deny being whatever he [sic] wishes, he [sic] can not cause it *not to be*, thanks to the very fact that he denies that it is this or that” (39). Here, there is con-

vergence once more, in that Sithole (255), in advocating for the creation of this new world—suggests that “[b]lackness rises in its own name, in order *to be*, the subject emerges from the ruins of existence in its own register and grammar of suffering”.

Irrespective of and in response to this jostling that I have tried to ameliorate by way of wading through a process of conceptual clarification, *The Black Register* follows Bongani Nyoka’s (xi) recommendation in *The Social and Political Thought of Archie Mafeje*, wherein he suggests that we ought to transcend “the call [to decolonise] and to get into the actual business of decolonising”, which is demonstrable in how Sithole’s work gives us the vocabulary with which to understand the political instability (*de facto*, what was an act of domestic terrorism) that played out between 10 and 15 July 2021. In this respect, I go back to the Zulu aphorism that declares that *isihlahla kasinyelwa*, in giving gratitude to Sithole’s timely, erudite and systematic political thought that engages the task of developing theory that responds to our contextual realities, while advancing global disciplinary trajectories.

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Scripting Shame in African Literature.

Stephen L. Bishop.

Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021. 269 pp.

ISBN 9781800348431.

Stephen L. Bishop is an associate professor of French and the director of the International Studies Institute at the University of New Mexico. In this book he focuses on the diverse expressions of shame in African liter-

ature and on the representation of the different roles shame plays in the relationship that exists between the individual and his community. Bishop, like other scholars in the field, debunks the Western “shame-society” versus “guilt-society” dichotomy and posits that both ‘emotions’ are present in all societies. He establishes a link between shame and Africa in a way that shows how shame is pliable and requisite to understanding the changing narratives about Africa and its literature. Bishop’s work further examines the play of factors in the lack of research on shame and its functions in sub-Saharan African literature. He tries to define shame by divorcing it from its other attributes (which include humiliation and embarrassment). In his bid to do this, he uses over twenty texts (mostly French and English) as data to study the portrayal of shame in African Literature. He excellently analyses multiple relevant theories, concepts and texts by African writers and scholars.

The book consists of two parts and ten chapters. There is also a prologue and an epilogue—the monograph is structured similarly to a traditional novel. In the first part, titled “The Many Faces of Shame”, the author traces the varied definitions and concepts of the phenomenon across Africa and the world. In this section, he also looks at the relationships between shame, humiliation, contempt and disgust. It is in this section which comprises forty percent of the work, that Bishop carves out a definition of shame by recognising it as poly-thematic and dependent on dynamic social contexts. He builds on popular psychology and personality studies like the psychoanalytic theorisation of shame by Freud, the Durkheimian sociological theory of Scheff and others to explain the ‘emotion’ of shame and its nuances. The plethora of studies he draws on and his in-depth analyses makes his work rich and comprehensive.

Succeeding his definitions of shame and its attributes, Bishop expands on the perspectives of shame in African societies. He uses Gyekye’s work in *African Philosophical Thought* (1987), which is a study of Akan conceptions of shame and guilt, together with other scholarly works on African social structures from different parts of the continent such as the Congo, South Africa, Senegal, to study the diverse manifestations of shame. With reference to other scholars and their definitions and classification of the different forms of shame in African literature, Bishop identifies three predominant appearances of shame. The shame of weakness, the shame of juxtaposing the colonised’s existence with that of the coloniser, and the colonially invented states of shame in contrast with actual ‘indigenous’

shame. These manifestations of shame are summarised in Diabate’s quote which affirms that the predominant theme in African Literature is “Colonisation as a source of shame for the colonized” (26–30). Bishop’s use of studies on multiple African communities exhibits his dedication and the thoroughness of his research on the subject.

In the second part of his book, titled “Pinned in: Shame in the African Novel”, he discusses colonial and postcolonial expressions of shame as represented in the African novel. This part is made up of six chapters, the first three of which examine the concept of shame in terms of three thematic areas—the struggle against colonial expression, postcolonial disillusion, and the emergence of women’s rights—through an array of literary texts that outline the socio-evolutionary nature of shame in African literature. The rest of the chapters look at more recent examples that serve as variations on those themes while also raising new, more unsettling social questions and concerns. The selection of texts ranges from Sembene’s *God’s Bits of Wood* (1976), Bâ’s *So long a Letter* (1980), Kourama’s *The Suns of Independence* (1981) and *Allah is not obliged* (2006) and Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007). Bishop contends that some of these texts shame the continent by incorporating stereotyped Western narratives about violence, child soldiers and corruption. In my opinion, this proposition by Bishop is valid because some images of terror and inequality on the continent promote racial abuse and discrimination.

Bishop concludes his discussion on the representation of shame by drawing attention to the misrepresentation of queerness as a Western import. He posits that this is a result of misplaced anticolonial ideologies and of religious notions of morality. According to Bishop, the ability to change this erroneous narrative is solely in the hands of African writers. This assertion by Bishop is valid because subjects like women’s sexuality and pleasure were mystified until contemporary writers like Sadaawi began to write about them openly. Bishop tries to dichotomise ‘shame’ and ‘excessive shame’ by establishing that the society’s intended effect for shame could become reversed when done in excess. Even though he elaborates on the manifestations of shamelessness, he does not substantiate excessive shame as relative. In other words, there is no answer to the question “how much shame is too much shame?” I posit that a more intentional attempt is required in discussing the spectrum of shame.

Considering the fact that the subject of shame in African literature has been categorically ignored in favour of other ‘more important’ subjects, Bishop does

an excellent work by bringing this subject to light. His book is unquestionably significant and timely.

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The History of Man.

Siphiwe Gloria Ndlovu.

Cape Town: Penguin Random House, 2020. 288 pp.

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This is a novel about the depth of the ignorance of the white African, the white man who refuses to see himself for what he is: a white supremacist. It also addresses the search for the authentic expression that can lead to the belonging and love we all crave: to be at home in one's skin.

We meet Emil Coetzee as he is washing blood off his hands. He is a man in his fifties trying to make sense of his life. In order to tell his story, Ndlovu does what she did with such eloquent brilliance in her debut novel, *The Theory of Flight*: she unpacks his life story against the backdrop of his ancestry. This helps us understand how deep the struggle against ignorance lies.

Emil is the product of a love story gone wrong. As the child of parents who are naively play-acting romance, Emil is treated like a projection on a wall, his life a movie playing itself out. Part one is aptly titled "Boyhood / A walking shadow". There is only one way the story can go for a man like Emil Coetzee, and that is towards destruction—first of everything he holds dear, and ultimately, of himself and his humanity.

From the first chapter, we understand that Coetzee has a deep love for the African veld and that this guides his spirit in the decisions he makes throughout his life. His connection to the land is pure, but not shared with anyone else. He is a character that is forever becoming, always responding and sincerely trying to understand his place in the world while battling a deep loneliness. At the same time, he is guiding his ship towards becoming a "man of history". Without meaningful human connection, this becomes his life's goal—to become someone in the eyes of the world through his great deeds. This highly ambitious goal is an inheritance from the Selous Boarding School for Boys which

Coetzee graduates from with deep lessons in the structures of power. He knows what it is like to be a pawn in someone else's game. He is bullied, exploited and used by various people throughout his years at the school, and he does not wish that loss of freedom on anyone—it is not what drives his violence.

The violence at the core of Emil's humanity is a riddle faced many times in this novel, and its origin is a complex set of circumstances that ultimately convinced him that one is not allowed to love what one loves. The first time this lesson is taught, it comes in the form of his father's friend, Walter Musgrave and his relationship with an African woman, Lili, that results in a mixed-race baby. This so nauseates Emil's mother that she disrupts their entire world and Emil is removed from the veld that is his heart's home.

Then there is an incident with his father and a red hat, and again Emil has to learn that to express one's vulnerability or contradictory behaviour is to willingly give up one's power. A foolish act.

His ongoing love affair with the woman named Marion is another hard lesson in connection and attraction. Glimpsing her since childhood, when Emil finally meets this mysterious woman she is married to his school-time friend, Courteney Smythe-Sinclair. She is a free-spirited and liberated woman and perhaps this is what attracts Emil to her, though he never fully understands that. She challenges his rigid worldview and will do so all the more fiercely towards the end of the book when his own prejudice towards the "natives" is exposed.

Emil Coetzee is taught, over and over again, that as a man of the Empire one must choose between being a man who recognises the hard truths of life (such as the need for violence, the uncivilised nature of the "Native" and the other "Laws of Nature"), or a gentleman, who naively dreams of a world of equality. These are the only options available in Emil's narrative, and this gives a poignant glimpse at the restrictive nature of the Eurocentric worldview. Being a man means suppressing trauma instead of interrogating it, and allowing oneself to commit acts of violence for some greater cause in order to create a better tomorrow. On page 238 this internal battle is made clear: "When a man finds himself suddenly doing the wrong thing, he prefers to believe that he had always been capable of such an act because it saves him from having to truly investigate the when, how and why of his becoming capable". Rather hold fast to the convictions dished out by the Empire than interrogate the memories of trauma that is the source of pain.

These inherited convictions create a rift in Emil Coetzee's humanity, one he struggles to repair until the end of the book. Ndlovu's portrayal is deeply compassionate and shows a genuine intrigue with the psyche of those who hold the power to change so many things in the physical world, and yet are bound up in a web of secrets and denial that make those changes unthinkable and therefore impossible.

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The Eternal Audience of One.

Rémy Ngamije.

Johannesburg: Blackbird Books, 2019. 504 pp.

ISBN 978-1-928337-84-3.

Rémy Ngamije's debut novel contributes to a growing body of postcolonial Namibian fiction written in English, a national literary canon that remains somewhat limited in scale (Harlech-Jones 238). *The Eternal Audience of One* depicts the life of a Rwandan-born, Namibian-raised young man who studies law in Cape Town with his "friends in foreignness" (225) as they come up against the concerns of modern youth. The novel is structured into three parts, in addition to a somewhat ill-defined prologue which takes the form of an essay written by the protagonist, which describes in inexplicable detail the changing Namibian weather. Part 1 focuses on his preparations for leaving Namibia and travelling to Cape Town. Part 2 of the novel details his experiences in Cape Town as he makes sense of the intersections of race and nationality while navigating the turmoil of being a young foreign national who is desperate to escape the high expectations of his family and the broader Rwandan diaspora in Namibia. Part 3 of the novel, in an obscure denouement, presents the outcome of his journeys—both geographic and emotional—which leaves the reader slightly confused and disconnected from the character. With very little narrative foreshadowing, Séraphin ultimately finds himself working as an English teacher at a school back in Windhoek, a place where he desperately did not want to end up.

One of the strengths of the novel is the humour that underpins much of the prose. The experiences are

relatable, and the protagonist's quick-witted responses provide a light-hearted air to a novel that confronts the sometimes-harsh reality of being a foreign national in Cape Town. An example of this humour is the narrator's hyperbolic description of the long bus rides between Windhoek and Cape Town which are characterised by Christian entertainment. Finding himself in a "trapped congregation" (9) on a bus, Séraphin watches televised recordings of "pastors [who] preach against evolution, offer post-apocalyptic condolences for man's innumerable follies, and promote limited edition DVDs which, for a fee, could guarantee citizenship in the everlasting Kingdom of God" (9). These descriptions give insight into the playfulness of the character and mitigates some of the overt seriousness of some of the prose. Another comical description focuses on Maxime, a small-framed barber from the Democratic Republic of Congo who has a knack for exaggeration:

The probability of Maxime, a Congolese immigrant who lied to refugee status determination officers about throwing a stone at the president's motorcade during a protest, and subsequently being pursued by the military police from Kinshasa to Lumbubashi before escaping to Zambia, commuting by bus and truck to Cape Town, holding an entire rugby-mad Newlands restaurant hostage on the day the Springboks played the All Blacks was as ludicrous as one ant threatening to storm and take Table Mountain. The opposite was probably true. (374)

However, if not for the humorous moments in the novel, the lengthy and repetitive writing could exhaust the reader. The story of Maxime, for example, spans across an entire chapter despite doing very little to advance the narrative in a meaningful way. Similarly, what is referred to repeatedly as "The Great Séraphin Council" is an imaginary staged dialogue between different iterations of the protagonist which convenes when faced with danger or perceived threat. In the customary chapter-long account, the council of Séraphins convenes to come to a decision, in a round-about way, to terminate an unwanted pregnancy. No clear purpose of the council of Séraphins come into view: while they may ostensibly function to complicate his character, these imaginary avatars are often little more than caricatures.

The important intersecting tensions of racism and xenophobia are explored in significant detail, but sometimes it reads as if the text is overstating the point, at least on a narrative level. This is the case for much of the writing where there is frequent repetition of the protagonist's distressing experiences of prejudice.

On multiple occasions, the protagonist experiences both overt and casual racism in Cape Town, including when a security guard only asks the black and coloured people to sign in and out of a university residence; and when a white friend, Andrew, expresses surprise that it is Séraphin “of all the black guys” (439) who becomes sexually involved with his love interest. As readers of the novel, we feel somewhat disconnected from these experiences, as the novel tends towards a repetitive ubiquity at the cost of affective depth.

While the novel is not quite oppressive to women, the multiple instances where the young men refer to women in derogatory terms have misogynistic undertones. Presented as common-place amongst heterosexual male students, women are referred to as “wenches” and “concubines” (194). The first heartbreak Séraphin experiences at university was at the hands of “a bitch named Angie” (298). Perhaps describing the complicity of heterosexual men in creating sexist spaces, the one character observes that “First comes O-week [Orientation week], then comes whore weeks” (228). While the depiction of these characters may be read as *critiques* of campus culture, the assertiveness with which the protagonist and the many Séraphins ask “Did you see those tits” (242), for example, still make for an unsettling read. The protagonist’s close friend, Bianca, a lesbian woman who is outspoken about the patriarchy and racism she experiences, attempts to neutralise the misogynistic moments in the novel. While the character makes attempts to criticise the group of young men’s disparaging behaviour, this critique recedes into the background, and she later celebrates their apparent objectification of women. While the author may have been attempting to spark dialogue about misogyny among male university students, the narration seems unable to carry this burden. This leaves much of the sexism unchallenged, with Bianca’s feminist interjections sometimes seeming tokenistic.

Despite our concerns over the length of the novel, as well as its problematic representation of women, the novel is effective in depicting a rich network of Africans—including drivers from Benin, close friends from Zimbabwe, teachers from Kenya, and barbers from Congo—who come together in Cape Town. In this respect, *The Eternal Audience of One* brings together experiences and cultures from the African continent and is a truly pan-African narrative. In this, the book contributes to an important body of fiction that emphasises intra-continental experiences of African migration, and which challenge the common-place centrality of destinations in the Global North (Fasselt 70–93).

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Native Life in the Third Millennium.

Masande Ntshanga.
 Johannesburg: Model See Media, 2020, 41 pp.
 ISBN 9780620899376.

Masande Ntshanga, skrywer van twee suksesvolle romans, *The Reactive* (2014) en *Triangulum* (2019), en wenner van ’n Betty Trask Toekenning en die PEN-Internasionaal se Nuwe Stemmeprys, se nuutste publikasie, *Native Life in the Third Millennium*, is ’n kompakte (A6, 41 pp.) boekie. Dit is die eerste publikasie van sy maatskappy Model See Media. Volgens die maatskappy se webtuiste is Model See Media, of MDL See, “a public sphere intervention and the world’s first pop-up publisher of experimental literature, art and code. It operates as a fundraising platform, an education instrument, and a cultural device safeguarding experimental literature against market forces”. In die persverklaring van die boek noem hy dat alle winste aan organisasies geskenk sal word wat hulleself beywer vir rassegeregtigheid en die beskerming van die planeet aarde. Selfs die papier waarop dit gedruk is, is gemaak met groen tegnologie; die papier herwin en chloor- en suurvry. Voorop die swart omslag is ’n skets van ’n ou arkadespeletjie-masjien met byskrifte. Op die agterplat staan die frase “i remember not thinking about humankind as a species of monsters”.

Die boek bestaan uit drie dele: “native life in the third millennium vol 1& 2 [the poet’s]”, “teachers [the philosopher’s]” en “quiet earth philosophy [the programmer’s]”.

Die eerste deel is ’n lang gedig van tien bladsye, opgedeel in twee afdelings, “2009” en “2019”. In die tweedelige gedig, soos ook in die res van die boek, word die alledaagse (“i need rent and a healthcare plan” [4]) deurentyd geskets in die teken van ras- en geopolitiek (“born shattered inside the nefarious laboratories of eugenicists, to shattered progenitors, i need therapists to restore me from the nightmare imagination of whiteness to the child it made me abandon” [4]). “2019”, die tweede deel van die gedig, begin met die frase: “before covid, i remember” (6). (Die boek is tydens grendeltyd geskryf). Die res van die gedig bestaan dan ook meestal uit sinne wat begin met “i remember”; assosiatiewe herinneringe vanaf 1992 (“i remember not thinking about the anthropocene in bhisho in 1992” [7]) tot en met 2019.

Die gedig skets ’n wêreld (die jeug in die negentigs en volwasse lewe ná die millennium) voor die pandemie. Die spreker is spesifiek met die sosiale en kulturele merkers wat hy oplet en onthou—daarom resoneer die gedig so wyd.

Die tweede en derde dele van *Native Life* is kortverhale. Ook Ntshanga se prosa is dig geskryf, dikwels poëties, elke sin getimmer tot dit pas. “teachers” handel oor ’n vyf-en-dertigjarige lektor aan ’n universiteit. Die verhaal vertel van korrupsie aan die universiteit en in die omliggende omgewing. Dit spreek kwessiessooras, tuislandeendiebreërpolitiekvanSuid-Afrika aan. Dit voel egter soms of die verhaal in diens van die politieke inhoude of boodskap staan. Dit is nogtans ’n interessante leeservaring met die makropolitiek wat vermeng met die mikropolitiek van ’n jongmansbestaan van werk, bier, dagga en verliefdheid.

“quiet earth philosophy” is ’n baie goeie kortverhaal, maar ook een met die potensiaal om iets groter te word. Hierdie verhaal sou maklik kon dien as die voorwerk vir ’n fassinerende roman. Dit word in die verlede tyd vertel, vanuit die toekoms; twee ou vriende ontmoet op 6 November 2026, ’n 2026 waarin Covid-19 nog steeds voortwoed:

The streets were vacant, Masked stragglers stood marooned at different bus and taxi stops, open in their despair. Ever since the first cases of the coronavirus had leaked in from the airports, mushrooming in the population like a dye underwater, the death toll had risen unmitigated, thinning the roads. I wondered if he was contemplating it too. “Humankind has never cured impairments endemic to humankind,” he said. “Instead it’s

learned to live around them, evolving in that matter.” (30)

Soos Ntshanga self, is beide karakters gebore in 1986, die tyd van Tsjernobil en P. W. Botha se Noodtoestand (“We grew up in the ashes of a thwarted revolution” [27]). Albei werk in die *gaming*-industrie. Van kleins af was dit rekenaarspeletjies, hulle “libidinal hunger for machines” (27), wat hulle gered het van hulle daaglikse omstandighede (sien die arkadespeletjie-masjien op die boek se voorblad). Wanneer hulle weer jare later as volwassenes ontmoet, vertel die “ingenieur” vir die hoofkarakter sy teorie wat hy die “stille aarde filosofie” noem. Die hoofkarakter word geneem na die wêreld se eerste “Centre for Quiet Consciousness” (39).

Ntshanga skryf oor politiek en ras, oor transhumanisme, oor die millennial-bestaan in die Suid-Afrika van nou en oor ’n moontlike toekoms. Hy skryf plaaslik, maar sy werk sal internasionaal resoneer.

Hierdie kort boek kan gelees word as ’n intermezzo; ’n kort asemteug tussen romans, of, hopelik, sommer ook ’n digbundel of twee. Ntshanga het homself reeds as ’n hoogs talentvolle skrywer bewys, en as hierdie boek ’n aanduiding is van die rigting waarin sy werk op pad is, is hierdie leser baie nuuskierig oor waarheen hy ons volgende gaan neem.

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As die Cape Flats kon praat.

Brian Fredericks.

Kaapstad: Human & Rousseau, 2020. 228 pp.

ISBN 9780798180917.

Brian Fredericks se kortverhaalbundel, *As die Cape Flats kon praat*, is ’n eerlike en aangrypende vertelling van die daaglikse bestaan op die Cape Flats. In die nege kortverhale verken Fredericks verskillende sosiale kwesies (soos bendegegeweld, armoede en verslawing) waarteen mense op die Cape Flats daaglik sly.

Die bundel se titel is ontleen aan James Baldwin se roman *If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974). In *If Beale Street Could Talk* verken Baldwin die ingewikkelde en

intieme aard van swart romantiese liefde en swart gesinsliefde teen die agtergrond van sosiale ongeregtigheid (Woubshet). Op 'n soortgelyke wyse vertel Fredericks hier van die ingewikkelde liefdes- en familieverhoudings op die Cape Flats te midde van uitdagende omstandighede. Fredericks lewer ook kommentaar op die geweld wat ons ons eie geliefdes, hetsy romanties of bloedverwant, aandoen. Die titel van die bundel is dus uiters funksioneel, want aan die een kant kontekstualiseer dit die bundel as geheel en aan die ander kant “hoor” lesers hoe individue soos Galiema Simson (“Moenie mense judge nie”), families soos Christine en haar kinders (“Die cowboy”) en gemeenskappe soos Elsiesrivier (“Moenie mense judge nie”) “praat” oor die maatskaplike kwessies wat hulle teister.

Die eerste kortverhaal, “Die drie musketeers”, is 'n fiktiewe hervertelling van die Hannah Corneliussmoordsaak. Michael, 'n sukkelende vryskutjoernalis, ontvang 'n boodskap van Angelo, 'n vriend uit sy kinderjare. Angelo vertel vir Michael dat sy jonger broer, Emile, beskuldig word van die moord op Jessica Leigh. Hy vra Michael om vir Emile in die tronk te besoek en uit te vind of hy werklik die moord gepleeg het. Soos die verhaal ontvou, word die besonderhede van die ingewikkelde verhouding tussen die broers onthul. Die verhaal verloor egter trefkrag weens 'n onduidelike fokus—dit wissel vanaf Michael se verhoudings met sy werk, meisies en sy familie tot die onverwagse reünie van vervreemde broers teen die agtergrond van 'n moordsaak. Die verhouding tussen Angelo en Emile is dig verweef met komplekse temas soos ras, klas en proksimiteit tot witheid. 'n Ruimer verkenning van dié verhouding sou tot 'n meer boeiende leeservaring lei.

Fredericks se vermoë om geloofwaardige karakters te skets en moeilike verhoudings raak te skryf blink veral uit in die uitsonderlike verhale “Die cowboy” en “Die vierhoeke”.

In “Die cowboy” sien Nigel hoe sy ma, Christine, finansiële sukkel. Hy vra sy ma uit oor waar sy pa is, aangesien hy hom vyf jaar laas gesien het. Christine antwoord op 'n grappige wyse en sê: “Jy weet mos jou pa dink hy's 'n cowboy, my kind. Hy't die bosse in gehardloop en nie weer teruggekome nie” (147). Nadat Nigel uiteindelik sy pa opspoor, verdwyn sy pa wéér en Nigel keer verslae terug huis toe. Fredericks dui hier op hoe gereeld pa's hulself van hul verantwoordelikheid teenoor hul kinders onthef. Die gesprek tussen Christine en Nigel aan die einde van die verhaal is hartroerend en getuig van Fredericks se vermoë om 'n realistiese stem aan sy karakters te gee.

“Die vierhoeke” is 'n treffende karakterstudie en ontstellende verhaal oor 'n pa wat sy seun in die tronk

moet gaan besoek. Michael ontvang 'n oproep van Stacy, die ma van sy kinders, waartydens sy hom laat weet dat iets fout is met sy seun, Johnny, en dat hy Pollsmoor toe moet gaan om vas te stel wat fout is. Met die verloop van die verhaal kry die leser dieper insig oor wie Michael is en oor sy lewe as 'n lid van die 26-bende. Een van die hoogtepunte hier is die insluiting van Sabela—die taalregister wat voorheen hoofsaaklik deur die Nommersbende in die tronk gebruik is. Dit is uitdagend om die dialoog in Sabela te volg, juis omdat Sabela 'n anti-taal is. 'n Anti-taal word gedefinieer as die taalgebruik van 'n anti-samelewing. Halliday (570) omskryf 'n anti-samelewing as 'n samelewing wat binne 'n groter samelewing gestig is. 'n Anti-samelewing word geskep as 'n doelbewuste alternatief tot die hoofstroomsamelewing en funksioneer as 'n vorm van weerstand teen dié samelewing. Die anti-taal is 'n belangrike hoeksteen van 'n anti-samelewing, want dit word gebruik om lede tot dié samelewing te hersosialiseer (575).

In die konteks van die verhaal verteenwoordig die bende-kultuur in die tronk die anti-samelewing en van nuwe gevangenes word verwag om Sabela aan te leer om in die samelewing geïnisieer te word. Aan die einde van die verhaal volg 'n aweregse mooi gesprek tussen Michael en Johnny. Michael gee vir Johnny (kommerwekkende) advies oor hoe om by die tronksamelewing in te pas. Uit die gesprek is dit duidelik dat Michael omgee oor die welstand van sy seun, maar uiteindelik getuig dit van 'n pa wat diep vasgevang is in 'n kultuur van geweld en wie se ambisies binne die vierhoeke gesterf het en weer gebore is.

Ondanks die verskeie uitdagings wat die mense op die Cape Flats in die gesig staar, durf hulle steeds om te droom; om hoop te hê. In die verhaal “Moenie mense judge nie” lewer Galiema Simson 'n roerende getuigenis aan die gemeenskap van hoe sy deur 'n groep bendes verkrag is (103–7). Ná die voorval het sy haar skoolloopbaan voltooi en 'n nuwe werk gekry, waar sy met gemeenskappe werk wat met kwessies soos bende-geweld sukkel. In “Baksteen vir baksteen” word die hoofkarakter uit die tronk vrygelaat en hy keer terug huis toe. Nadat die karakter vomeer, as gevolg van sy angsvreëtering, troos sy ma hom. Die ma is opgewonde dat hy tuis is en sê dat hy nou haar probleme gaan uitsorteer. Dit lyk asof sy ma se verligting vanweë sy tuiskoms hom laat voel asof hy iewers nodig is. Daarop antwoord hy: “Ek sal alles nou uitsort” (227).

As die *Cape Flats kon praat* is nie maklik om te lees nie, maar dit is nodig dat dit gelees word. Soms hou jy jou asem op; ander tye moet jy net eers die kortverhaalbundel toemaak om asem te skep. Dit is 'n oor-

weldigende leeservaring wat waarskynlik 'n aantal lesers ongemaklik sal laat. Maar dit is juis wat *As die Cape Flats kon praat* so treffend maak—Fredericks skryf hier oor 'n amper distopiese of vervalde samelewing. Dit is 'n wêreld wat jou vriende, kollegas, leerders of huis-hulp daagliks ervaar. Om dit te erken, beteken jy moet jou eie gemak ontwig. So, ons kyk weg. Of ons maak die kortverhaalbundel toe. Nietemin praat die Cape Flats voort.

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Soe rond ommie bos.

Veronique Jephthas.

Pretoria: Protea, 2021. 62 pp.

ISBN 978-1-4853-1224-6.

Die dramaturg, regisseur en akteur Veronique Jephthas se digdebuut, *Soe rond ommie bos*, het 'n opvallende, aantreklike voorblad wat reeds baie aan die leser kommunikeer. Die skelpienk agtergrond met die illustrasie van bruin vroulike figure met helder turkoois hare, drywend in die buitenste ruimte, is gebaseer op 'n ontwerp van die Malawiese, Kaaps-gebaseerde kunstenaar Lambi Chibambo en trek dadelik die leser se aandag. In die verse in hierdie digbundel word daar dan ook nie om die bos gelei of in kringe gepraat nie, maar emosies soos woede en trauma word eksplisiet en sonder voorbehoud verwoord. Kwessies van vrouwees en liggaamlikheid word onmiddellik deur die omslag sowel as die gedigte geaktiveer. Ras en velkleur is ook duidelik ter sprake op die omslag soos in die verse—die een drywende vrouefiguur het byvoorbeeld die velsiekte vitiligo wat veral op bruin of swart velle wit vlekke veroorsaak. Voorts verskyn twee sterrekonstellasies op die omslag wat die sterretekens Leeu en Kreef verteen-

woordig. Binne die astrologie word die Leeu geassosieer met vuur, wilskrag en helder, deurdringende lig, terwyl die Kreef verbind word met mediasie tussen verskillende wêreldes (Cirlot 181 en 37). Hierdie assosiasies skakel dus met die tematiek gesuggereer deur die bundeltitel: In *Soe rond ommie bos* word griewe sonder omhaal gelug en uiting aan emosie gegee as 'n vorm van mediasie wat probleme kan uitwys en só kan aanspreek.

Die aktivistiese toon van die bundel blyk ook uit die gebruik van 'n aanhaling uit die roman *If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974) deur James Baldwin, as motto. Die aanhaling uit die roman van Baldwin, bekend vir tekste wat al in die vyftigerjare in die VSA kwessies soos ras, klas en seksualiteit aangeroei het, sentreer spesifiek gender en genderverhoudinge en stel dat genderstereotipering nadelig is vir vroue maar óók vir mans. Hierdie uitgangspunt is sterk feministies en talle temas in die roman skakel met die feministiese motiewe wat in 'n aantal onlangse Afrikaanse digbundels aan bod kom. Die vermeldde illustrasie op die voorblad herinner reeds aan dié van Lynthia Julius se digbundel *Kroes* (2020), terwyl Jephthas in die bedankings noem dat die digter Ronelda Kamfer 'n mentor vir haar was. Kamfer se digbundels, en veral haar nuutste, *Chinatown* (2019), roer ook soortgelyke onderwerpe as *Soe rond ommie bos* aan met dieselfde onverskrokkenheid as Jephthas én Julius. Van die vestiging van 'n postkoloniale feministiese tradisie in Afrikaans, is daar myns insiens dus al duideliker sprake.

Die kwessie van gendergeweld, een van die sterkste temas in die bundel, word reeds aangeroei met die eerste gedig waarvan die titel die naam "uyinene mrwetyana" (8) is. Mrwetyana is in 2019 op brutale wyse deur 'n poskantoorwerker in 'n poskantoor in Kaapstad verkrag en vermoor toe sy 'n posstuk gaan haal het. Dit, en 'n aantal ander opspraakwekkende misdade teen vroue in dieselfde tyd, het in 2019 aanleiding gegee tot optogte teen geslagsgebaseerde geweld regoor Suid-Afrika. Jephthas kombineer op onthutsende wyse die gendergeweld-gegewe en 'n volksliedjie "die man wat die koeie melk" in die eerste twee gedigte in die bundel. Volgens die kultuurhistorikus Burden (141) is hierdie lied een wat in verskeie variante in verskillende gemeenskappe bestaan. Sy teken onder andere die volgende variasie aan:

Die man wat die koeie melk
hy melk die balies vol
die balie loop al oor
tot binne-in die poskantoor
perdjie perdjie roer jou stertjie
op en af op en af
perdjie perdjie roer jou stertjie

op en af op en af

Jephtas gebruik die eerste vier reëls van hierdie lied (opmerklik herverwoord in Kaaps) in haar eerste gedig (“uyinene mrwetyana” 8):

die man wattie koeie melk
hy maakie balies vol
die balies loep dan oo
tot binnerie poskantoo

Sy verwerk dan die hele strofe vermeld deur Burden as die eerste strofe van haar tweede gedig, “die man wattie koeie melk” (9). In dié gedig verander sy “perdjie” na “meisie”. Die implikasie in beide hierdie gedigte is dat seksuele geweld al so algemeen in die samelewing geword het dat dit oorloop tot in oënskynlik veilige publieke ruimtes soos die poskantoor. Die skeldwoord vir die vrou, “koei”, word voorts geaktiveer en die “perdjie” wat sy “stertjie” moet “roer” kry nou ’n seksuele betekenis met ’n eksplisiete opdrag wat aan die vrou gestel word asof sy aan die man behoort, nes die perd.

In die volgende strofes van die gedig “die man wattie koeie melk” (9) verwys die digter na nog ’n volksliedjie wat Burden (149) in haar proefskrif beskryf as ’n “touspringlied” en wat ook die titel van die bundel is, naamlik “soe rond ommie bos”. Die oorspronklike lied, aldus Burden, bevat die frase “my lint is los”, wat die digter-spreker verander na “my tong skiet los”, en dan byvoeg: “ek praat ytie mond vanne meid mette warme bôs / ek praat ytie oegpunt vanne maid yt Stellenbos”. Hierdie gedig funksioneer as ’n soort programgedig vir die bundel met die digter-spreker wat aandui dat sy in dié bundel ernstig en openhartig gaan praat, dat sy kwáád is en dat sy die woord voer uit die perspektief van die werkersklas bruin of swart vrou.

Die eerste afdeling (“mettie wysheid wat nawete bring”) is die sterkste in die digbundel met die digter wat telkens van kinderspeletjies of liedjies gebruik maak om kommentaar te lewer oor die samelewing se gendergekondisioneerde en die posisie van vroue (en spesifiek bruin en swart vroue). In gedigte soos “kamma kô ma? nawt yet” (10) en “spite” (12) skryf sy oor oënskynlik onskuldige jeugspeletjies soos wegkruipertjie en “king loafer” (’n soort balspel) wat vanuit ’n agternaperspektief reeds die invloed van problematiese aspekte van die grootmensewêreld vertoon. Die kombinasie van onskuld en wreedheid wat in hierdie verse voorkom, bly die leser lank by.

Soos reeds gesuggereer, kom nie net geslagskwessies in die bundel ter sprake nie. Talle van die gedigte beklemtoon die feit dat post-apartheid Suid-Afrika steeds baie sosiale probleme het en sekere gemeenskappe nog polities en ekonomies gemarginali-

seerd is. Een so ’n gedig is die knap “born free” (15) wat dié term, wat dikwels gebruik word vir die generasie wat ná 1994 gebore is, ironiseer. In hierdie kort vers word verskeie interpretasies ontsluit in net vyf reëls. Die kwessie van politieke vryheid (as stemgeregtigde post-94) versus sosiale vryheid en ekonomiese vryheid (as enkelma en/of kind in ’n enkelouergesin wat bepaalde ekonomiese uitdagings in die gesig staar) sowel as feministiese vryheid en seggenskap, kom onder meer aan bod:

toe ek gebore was het ekkie gehylie
my sperm donor wassie daa nie
my ma was upset
ek was chilled oo my sperm donor wattie ytgestiek het-tie
nou, 24 jaa later, praat ek en hy glattie

In die tweede afdeling “issie ’n cycle nie, is life” word daar op bogenoemde tematiek uitgebrei met die eerste twee gedigte wat beskryf hoe die digter-spreker se ouma haar huis verloor het en die verreikende effek wat dit op haar familie gehad het. Die titel van die eerste vers, “12 desember 2016” (26), en die verwysing na tikgebruik en maatskaplike uitsigloosheid in die tweede vers, “krismis innie nuwe hys” (27), stel dit duidelik dat die sogenaamde nuwe Suid-Afrika nie die utopie is wat talle op gehoop het nie.

Die laaste afdeling “hie rukkie ding” spreek dieselfde temas as die vorige afdeling(s) van die bundel aan, maar op ’n meer konfronterende wyse—’n suggestie reeds geskep deur die afdelingstitel. Hier kom die kwessie van hardnekkige rassistiese sentimente in Suid-Afrika veral aan bod met gedigte soos “driving lesson” (41) (oor die digter-spreker se rylesse in ’n wit buurt in Stellenbosch) en “endgame” (45) (oor ’n wit vrou se reaksie op die digter-spreker se “hoë hare” by ’n teaterproduksie tydens die Woordfees) wat die blywende ‘apartheid’ teenwoordig in talle Suid-Afrikaners se leefwyse en denkpatrone illustreer.

Soos aangedui is die digter-spreker toenemend selfgeldend in hierdie afdeling. Selfbevestiging staan voorop met die gedigte wat telkens as ’n getuigenis of ’n soort biegskrif funksioneer waarin die digter-spreker nie net spasie vir haarself opeis nie, maar ook ’n priemende lig werp op sosiale ongeregtighede. Hierdie strategie het egter plek-plek tot gevolg dat die verse in hierdie afdeling, ironies genoeg, juis trefkrag verloor. Seksueel-gelaaide pejoratiewe terme word so dikwels gebruik dat dit impak verloor—veral aangesien daar soms té sterk daarop gesteun word om ’n bepaalde emosie of boodskap in die gedig te kommunikeer. Die gevolg is dat verse soos “femicide” (48), “ek is moeg van

suid-afrika” (50) en “assie wiel draai” (53) wat veel te sê het, nie die effek op die leser het wat dit sou kon hê en behóórt te hê nie. Die digter se slag met woorde-
konome, wat een van die bundel se sterkpunte is, sou hier met vrug ingespan kon word.

Soe rond ommie bos is ’n bundel wat sterk en minder sterk verse bevat. Die algemene indruk is egter van ’n digter wat ’n interessante en verrykende bydrae te lewer het tot die Afrikaanse poësie en hopelik vorentoe van krag tot krag sal gaan.

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Tussenganger.

Marius Crous.

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Tussenganger is Marius Crous se vierde digbundel en volg op *Brief uit die kolonies* (2003), *Aan ’n beentjie sit en kluif* (2006) en *Vol draadwerk* (2012), wat almal deur Protea Boekhuis uitgegee is. Die digter se nuutste bundel spreek van ’n digterlike selfvertroue en verg inspanning van sy leser. Dit is ’n lywige teks met nege afdelings en talle tematiese fokuspe. Daar is ’n sterk Klassieke en kerklike inslag wat deur die bundel geweef is, en die sentrale teken in hierdie verwysingsraamwerk word reeds deur die bundeltitle aangegee. Soos baie lesers ook aanvanklik sal vermoed, is die tussenganger waarna hier verwys word Maria, die moeder van Jesus Christus, maar ook die ander gedaantes van die tussenganger word met die lees van die bundel almaardeur aan die leser openbaar.

Die rol van die bemiddelaar word tematies in baie van die gedigte uitgewerk, soos in die lang gedig oor die Mariahemelvaart, “Koimisis” (41–5). Die rol van Maria as bemiddelaarsfiguur in sekere Christelike tradisies word in hierdie vers verken, erken, maar ook ontken, à la Calvyn, soos ’n voetnoot vir die reël “*stabat mater*

dolorosa” stel: “van 431 tot 1931—nee selfs 1950—word die dwaalskrifte versprei / g’n heilige g’n godsmoeder g’n opgevaarde is sy / wat maak haar ’n heilige tussenganger? / sondelose gekroonde koningin van die hemele so ewe / almal priesters seksloos gefrustreerd op soek na moederliefde wat haar so vereer / o exsecrabilis blasphemia” (44). Teenwoordig in hierdie besinning oor die heiligheid van Maria en haar rol as tussenganger tref die leser ook die spanning aan tussen enersyds die aards en bevelte, en andersyds die hemels en onbevelte. “Sacerdotalis Caelibatus” (79–81) gaan in sekere opsigte die beweerde deugde van die priesterlike seksuele onthouding tee, en bring weer die skunnigheid agter dogmatiese skyn te berde:

op ’n bed met komberse harig en skurf
maak die hand hom styf en vryf
tot hy sug en semen stort
oor die hand wat môre die hostie lig

“aan die geur en kleur van jou kom
sal jy geken word
die kwale en skete in jou jong lyf
af te lees uit die druppels”

tandepastatong in die keel
sy swartkoppeneus teen die kind se wang
hyg hy
“as jy iemand vertel van ons speletjie
gaan almal jou ’n moffie noem”

Toenemend word dit vir die leser duidelik dat die tussengangersfiguur nie net tematies in hierdie bundel bespied word nie, maar ook deur die digterstem aangeneem word. Die bundel se epigraaf, ’n aanhaling van Kenneth Goldsmith, kondig dit aan: “The function of a writer is more like being a DJ than being Jimi Hendrix”. Met ander woorde is die skrywer—hier digter—nie net die skepper van die kuns nie, maar ook interpreteerder, aanbieder en remixer om dit opnuut in ’n ander vorm en gedaante vir die leser aan te bied.

Die Klassieke tematiek betrek onder andere antieke Helleense mites in die gedigte “Achilles” (31) en “Drie weeklae vir Hektor” (32–3). Eersgenoemde behels die wrok van Achilles ná die dood van sy geliefde, Patroklos. Ofskoon die gedig vlugtig verwys na die debat rondom die aard van die verhouding tussen dié twee karakters, met Achilles wat “huil [...] soos ’n loops adolessent na sy eerste hartebreek”, slaag die teks nie daarin om die welbekende verhaal in ’n nuwe lig te stel nie. Die beskrywing van Achilles se oorwinning oor Hektor van Troje, “die priamsappel”, wat hy / [...] soos ’n vernielde sandhaai sleep / deur die seesand om die swart see”, is ’n mooi versopsomming, maar daar word

bloot te veel hier ingepers: die skakel tussen Hektor as sy vader se trots en die mitiese Goue Appel as bron van onmin tussen Hera, Athena en Afrodite (en natuurlik ook die oorsaak van die Trojaanse oorlog). Teen soortgelyke lesersverwagtinge geweeg, slaag die daaropvolgende en veelstemmige “Drie weeklae vir Hektor” wel. Op die beurt is die spreker Andromache, Hektor se weduwee, Hekabe, sy moeder, en Helena, sy skoonsuster en die minnares van Paris. Die vroue van *Die Illias* kry hier ’n spreekbeurt, met Andromache wat wys op die magteloosheid van vroue uitgelewer aan die manhaftigheid van hul mans:

ek het getreur
[...]
bitter oor jy nie kon sterf oud soos priamos
in my arms in ons bed
met die reuk van kamp harslag perdesweet
aan jou harde lyf
oorlog is vir mans sê jy
weef en lyke afwas vir ons
trotse hektor
jou bruid is nou ’n slavin
in die huis van jou kind se moordenaar

Op haar beurt bekla Hekabe die onreg van haar seun se dood deur die toedoen van Achilles, “daai verwyfde smyter van die verbronsde speer”, en hoe sy as vrou sonder gesag aangewese is op haar seun Paris om haar vir Hektor se dood op Achilles te wreek. Helena laat haar weer uit oor haar eensaamheid in Ilios, “stad van my jagse saggiesigbeminde” (Paris). In al drie weeklae, en veral in dié van Andromache en Hekabe, tree die figuur van die vrou (as eggenote, moeder, en minnares) na vore as roudraer, maar ook as aardse bemiddelaar van die rou (“weef en lyke afwas vir ons”).

Daar word verderaan in die bundel in twee treffende lykdigte mooi voortborduur op die bemiddelaarsrol van die digter in verband met die dood, afskeid en rou, naamlik “Lykdig vir Wisława Szymborska” (114) en “Bardo” (119) oor die afsterwe van ’n moeder. Hier is dit duidelik dat die digter weer die verantwoordelikheid op sigself neem om op te tree as ’n uitlêer van die oorgang na die dood.

Talle ander temas word in *Tussenganger* aange-tref—helaas te veel om in hierdie kort resensie ruimte aan hulle almal af te staan. Daar moet nietemin kortliks ook melding gemaak word van uitdagende gedigte soos “Elagabalus” (26) en “The Pozzing of Pete Crest” (28), sowel as ’n aantal gedigte met ’n ekopoëtiese inslag (byvoorbeeld “Kyrie” 51) en oor aktuele kwessies soos die #FeesMustFall-beweging (“#FMF” 84). Wat duidelik is, is dat hierdie bundel nie net van ’n digterlike

selfvertroue spreek nie, maar ook dat dit onbeskaamd hoë eise aan die leser stel. Crous se verse is dig verweef en put uit ’n ryke erfenis van verwysings uit verskeie tale, kulture en identiteite. Dit is daarom nie ’n bundel wat sonder inspanning en moeite gepak kan word nie, en dit sal om dié rede waarskynlik sekere lesers afsit. Soos egter die geval is met ander lywige bundels van die afgelope dekade, is *Tussenganger* ’n bundel wat die leser wat volhou sal uitdaag en met diepgaande verskeidenheid sal beloon.

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Duimnaelsketse.

Johann de Lange.

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In 2020 laat Johann de Lange twee bundels die lig sien, naamlik *Die meeste sterre is lankal dood* en *Duimnaelsketse*. Laasgenoemde is sy veertiende bundel (of vyftiende, afhangende watter een van die twee bundels ’n mens eerste tel) en die tweede bundel waar die digter slegs van die kwatryn as digvorm gebruik maak. *Duimnaelsketse* kan beskou word as ’n opvolg van sy eerste kwatrynbundel, *Weerlig van die ongelooft* (2011), vanweë die gedeelde temas in die twee bundels, en die verwysings na gedigitels in die 2011 bundel.

Die voorblad is ’n afdruk van Christiaan Diedericks se kunswerk “Play with me”. Soos met die ander twee De Lange-bundels wat met ’n Diedericks-werk op die voorblad pronk, is dit hier die eerste sleutel tot die lees van die bundel. Bekende temas in De Lange se oeuvre word met die voorblad geaktiveer, te wete die visuele, voyeurisme, liggaamlikheid en (gay) seksualiteit. Die visuele, en veral die blik op die manlike liggaam, word in die kunswerk beklemtoon: die blik van die figuur op die ontkledende se geslag (met behulp van rooi pyle) en laasgenoemde se blik op die leser. Die frase “play with me” versier die voorste figuur se hemp en benadruk die objektivering van die manlike liggaam.

Die titel, *Duimnaelsketse*, is die tweede sleutel wat die leser in ag moet neem. ’n Duimnaelskets is ’n vin-

nige, kort, impromptu skets, maar kan ook in die tegnologiese jargon verwys na 'n kleiner weergawe van 'n groter grafiese afbeelding (in Engels 'thumbnail'). Die titel word tweeledig en ironies aangewend. Dit verwys indirek na die kwatryn as kort digvorm wat inhoudelik net soveel gewig dra as ander digvorme; en tweedens skakel dit hierdie bundel met De Lange se vorige bundels. (In *Die algebra van nood* [2009] tref ons 'n gedigsiklus aan met die titel "Duimsketse" [21] en in *Stilpunt van die aarde* [2014] "Duimsketse by die vier seisoene in Kaapstad" [44–5]). Die titel is ironies omdat De Lange se kwatryne inderdaad nie vinnige, impromptu sketse is nie, maar eerder getuig van uitnemende digterlike tegniek en woordspeling. Dit is verder ook interessant dat 'n meerderheid van die kwatryne die rymskema abcb het. Dit wil voorkom asof De Lange besig is om hier sy eie stempel op dié digvorm af te druk.

Tematies word die bundel weldeurdag uiteengesit deur die kwatryne in ses afdelings te verdeel, elk met 'n oorhoofse tema wat aansluit by die hooftema wat regdeur die afdelings waargeneem kan word, naamlik die digter se besinning oor 'n leeftyd wat aan die verbygaan is en die naderende dood. Die openingskwatryn, "Deure" (3), wat geskryf is na aanleiding van Charles Tomlinson se gelyknamige gedig, stel die toon vir die bundel:

Daar is twee deure in een raam:
Een aansig na lamplig gekeer,
& die ander een na die maan.
Ons gaan deur deure heen, & weer.

Die deur word hier simbolies vir die sikliese aard van die lewe, en word veral in ooreenstemming met die Christelike tradisie beskou as 'n deurgang tot 'n openbaring en toegang tot 'n hoër wesenlikheid (Chevalier en Gheerbrandt 423–4).

Daar is kwatryne oor die kunste, insluitende woordkuns, beeldhouwerk, skilderkuns en die uitvoerende kunste. "Marlene Dietrich" (6) is 'n goeie voorbeeld van die kwatryn wat ingespan word om 'n visuele "optelvers" daar te stel:

Die blou engel sing wrang van lewe & dood.
Met die refrein, silwer kollig op die vloer,
gly die hermelyn van skouers wit & mals
soos brood, & sterf in 'n houpie op die vloer.

Die visuele word verder in die bundel verken met veral die oog op die natuur in die tweede afdeling van die bundel, en insgelyks ook met die blik op die manlike liggaam. Vergelyk in hierdie geval hoe die sonbaaier-figuur uit vorige bundels weer sy verskyning maak in "Drie baaiers" (70), "Op die rotse" (80) en "Sonbaaier"

(85). Alhoewel liggaamlikheid en die beleving van die seksuele bekende temas is in De Lange se werk, word dit deur 'n nuwe lens beskou, veral waarneembaar in die volgende kwatryn (71):

Hier aan die einde van dae,
sonder rent boys of wi-fi,
sonder 'n zol of 'n naai,
het ek net in riemruk 'n behae.

Hierdie gedig moet saam met die kwatryn op die volgende bladsy gelees word, met die titel "Fantas" (72), waar die spreker "aan die einde van dae" slegs masturbasie en sy verbeelding het om die seksuele begeerte na die manlike liggaam te bevredig, en slegs op gerugte leef wat deur die seebries van Sandy Bay af gebring word ("Prêt-à-porter" 83).

Die intertekstuele gesprek met ander digters word in hierdie bundel ook voortgesit, waarvan Boerneef (I. W. du Plessis) se "Die berggans het 'n veer laat val" die prominentste is. Dit word as uitgangspunt geneem vir die kwatryn "Brand" (13) oor die vernietigende brande by Wupperthal in 2018, en weer vir "Spekulum" (55). Ander figure uit die literêre wêreld word betrek: met die "Die weduwee Viljee" (48) word Opperman en Hambidge bygehaal omdat laasgenoemde in haar bundel *Indeks* (51–6) Opperman se pastiche voortsit deur nuwe en jonger digters se styl na te boots. De Lange maak in sy vers gebruik van die Persiese kwatryn, 'n vorm wat Opperman in Afrikaans vervolmaak het, om die intertekstuele verband te versterk. "WAT" (58) bring hulde aan drie groot skrywers wat onlangs gestorf het, naamlik Aucamp, Cloete en Small.

Afgesien van die intertekstuele spel met ander digters se werk, tree De Lange ook in gesprek met sy eie werk. "Selfportret op 60" (104) kan as opvolg van die kwatryn "Digter op 50" (68) uit *Weerlig van die ongelooft* beskou word. Dit is bykans 10 jaar sedert die laasgenoemde verskyn het, en in dié vers reflekteer die digter op die verouderende liggaam en digterskap. Lees ook die vers "Arme ou lyf" (29) wat hierby aansluit.

Die besinning oor die dood en verganklikheid neem 'n baie persoonlike en donker draai in die laaste afdeling van die bundel, ironies getiteld "Dood is 'n werkwoord". Hier verwoord die digter die bewuswording van sy eie verganklikheid, en die naderende dood of stilwording van die skryfdaad. Die kwatryn "Dusketyd" (95) beklemtoon dit met 'n sombere en dringende toon:

Nou gaan dié grys digter rus,
voorlopig nog ongegis.
Ek trek tot onder my ken
die vóórlaken van die mis.

Met hierdie bundel bevestig De Lange sy plek as een van die voorste kwatrynskrywers in Afrikaans en maak hy ten volle gebruik van die kwatryn as “gedig in sy eie reg [wat] op sy beste ’n bepaalde lewenshouding of -aanvoeling op pakkende, pregnante, epigrammatiese wyse tot uitdrukking bring” (Grové & Viljoen).

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Staande ovasie.

Herschelle Benjamin, Igna Botha, Veronique Jephtas en Marcel Spaumer.

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ISBN 9781485309321.

Staande Ovasie, uitgegee deur Protea Boekhuis, bevat vier eenbedrywe vir tienertoneel geskryf deur Herschelle Benjamin, Igna Botha, Veronique Jephtas en Marcel Spaumer.

Benjamin se stuk, “Ek is nie meer ’n kind nie, Ma”, handel oor die 18-jarige Adrian wat vir die naweek huis toe kom om met sy ouers oor hul egskeiding te gesels. Hy deel ook met hulle dat hy gay is. By die huis hoor Adrian dinge oor sy ouers wat daartoe lei dat hy die moed vind om oop te maak oor hoe sy huislike omstandighede hom geaffekteer het.

Wat uitstaan in hierdie teks is die natuurlike dialoog en hoe onpretensieus dit is. Benjamin weet hoe om tot die punt te kom en skroom nie weg van swaar tematiek nie. ’n Moelike gesprek oor huwelike en hoe die ouers in hierdie geval gekies het om hul seun te beskerm, vind plaas tussen ma en seun en dit is verfrissend om te lees. Adrian praat reguit met sy ma oor hoe hulle besluite hom laat voel en hom seermaak. Terselfdertyd laat die teks ’n mens nadink oor manlikheid. Die ma, Brennette, maak verskoning vir haar man se slegte gedrag deur te sê: “maar hy is ’n man. Net ’n man”. Dit herinner my aan hoe daar in die samelewing dikwels dubbele standaarde vir mans en vroue is. Ons hoor ge-

reeld “boys will be boys”, terwyl meisies geleer word hoe om hulle soos dames te gedra. Benjamin daag manlikheid uit en deur die mond van Adrian kry hy dit reg om ’n broodnodige gesprek aan die gang te sit. Dit is ’n sterk teks—al waarom ek wonder is of die pa-karakter regtig nodig is. Die pa kom teen die einde van die stuk in en teen daardie tyd weet ons alreeds alles van hom. Sy teenwoordigheid dryf nie die storie vorentoe nie, hy is ’n karakter wat geen ontwikkeling toon nie. Of dalk was dit juis nodig dat die pa daar is sodat ons kan sien hoe Adrian teen sy pa opstaan? Hoe dit ook al sy, jong spelers sal uitgedaag word deur die stuk en dit is nodig om gesprekke aan die gang te sit.

Greta Thunberg praat Afrikaans in Igna Botha se teks, “Sing oor my, ek gaan dood van die dors”. In hierdie geval is Greta ’n Sweedse uitruilstudent wat standpunt inneem teen ’n ryk familie, die Steenhoffs, nadat sy die seun Elan Steenhoff bevriend. Elan se pa, Jeroen Steenhoff, word daarvan beskuldig dat hy ’n oliepyplyn langs die Vaalrivier wil laat afloop. Die gevare van “fracking”, die verwoesting van natuurlike habitat en die misbruik van mag is van die temas wat hier aan bod kom.

Botha se teks voel gereed vir die verhoog. Ek wil my verstout deur te sê dat dit vir my as regisseur ’n plesier sal wees om die regie van die stuk te behartig. Dis buite die boks. Dis vars. Dis jong mense wat oor die omgewing praat, sonder om te preek. Dit wys die verwoestende invloed van ’n ryk man se aksies op die natuur. Dit is min dat ek omgewingsdramas lees of sien. Dis relevant. Dis edgy. Die ensemble voel te groot, maar ’n regisseur sal maklik daaraan kan sny. Die einde is treffend met ’n hoofletter T. Aan die einde is die karakters by die viering van die opening van die Steenhoffs se gholffaan. Greta, Elan en Bano (Elan se vriend) beplan ’n tipe optog wat gaan maak dat die publiek sowel as Jeroen Steenhoff se deftige kuiergaste (onder andere Meneer Magashule en Mevrouw Mkwabane [slim speling op sekretarisgeneraal van die ANC, Ace Magashule en die openbare beskermer, Busisiwe Mkhwebane]) hom gaan sien vir wie hy werklik is—iemand wat ’n veer voel vir die omgewing. Aan die einde gaan die ligte in die auditorium aan en skyn dit op die gehoor. Dit is ’n slim tegniek wat daarop dui dat die gehoor aanspreeklik gehou gaan word vir dit wat hulle sops op die verhoog gehoor en gesien het, sowel as vir hul eie koolstofvoetspoor.

Ek is bevoorreg dat ek “Hoe change hulle” deur Veronique Jephtas op die planke kon sien tydens die Toyota U. S. Woordfees in 2020. In die stuk is die 18-jarige Sheldon (of Shelly) in die tronk vir statutêre verkragting. Hy was in ’n verhouding met die min-

derjarige Hailey totdat haar pa die twee van hulle saam betrap het en vir Shelly aangekla het van verkragting. Sheldon praat oor die bruin gemeenskap, die regering en hoe kinders uitdraai wanneer hulle sonder 'n pa grootword.

“Hoe change hulle”? Op dié vraag hoop Jephthas dat jong kinders in die toekoms sal antwoord: “for the better”. Die teks is uitdagend. As leser en kyker is ek nie heeltemal seker hoe ek oor Sheldon moet voel nie. Dit voel plek-plek asof ek hom moet jammer kry, want sy lewe was moeilik, maar is Sheldon 'n betroubare verteller? Ek weet nie, maar dit maak die teks interessant. Dit smokkel met jou eie morele waardes en stel jou as waarnemer op die proef om te sien waarvoor jy Sheldon kan vergewe en waarvoor nie. Deurgaans maak die skrywer gebruik van poësie wat Sheldon in die tronk skryf. Die treffendste gedig is op bladsye 86–7 waar Sheldon skryf oor hoe hy en sy vriende “jol” toe is en een van hulle, Sietie, almal altyd verniet kon inkry. Op pad “jol” toe word die vriende aangeval en Sietie sterf.

Jephthas kry dit met hierdie gedig reg om 'n hartverskeurende storie tong-in-die-kies te vertel. Teen die einde van die stuk, veral op bladsy 91, voel dit asof die gedigte te lukraak geplaas is en as gevolg daarvan die storielyn steur in plaas van ondersteun. Sheldon eindig die stuk met 'n gedig. Ek sou verkies om direk uit sy mond uit te hoor aan die einde, want met die gedig voel dit asof hy agter sy skryfwerk skuil. Die struktuur van hierdie teks is wankelrig. Nogtans is ek dankbaar dat die teks bestaan, omdat dit leersaam is.

Marcel Spaumer se “Blaai om” is 'n identiteitsdrama waarin die hoofkarakter tydskrifte en dit wat sy in die media sien, opvreet en in die proses haarself verloor. Liggaamlike kwessies, mooiheid en maerheid en die nadelige invloed van kitsdiëte, selfhelp en mooimaak-tips is hier teenwoordig.

Ek sien my hoërskool-self in “Blaai om”. Vatbaar vir invloed. Meisie wat nie geweet het sy moes al op 17 haar beenhare skeer nie. Iemand wat raad in tydskrifte gaan soek. Iemand wat bekommerd is oor die sosiale orde by die skool. Myns insiens sal die tema van die invloed van die media altyd relevant bly. En net omdat Spaumer vroulike karakters geskep het, beteken dit nie dat dit slegs op vroue van toepassing is nie. Nadat ek die teks vir die eerste keer gelees het, moes ek eers 'n bietjie stilstaan om te dink. Die teks is dig en ryk aan beelde. Dit vra jou volle aandag. Dit is duidelik dat Spaumer tyd met sy tekste spandeer. Alles voel in plek en asof dit doelbewus daar geplaas is. Spaumer verstaan mense en hy verstaan menslike verhoudings. Spaumer verstaan teater en hoe om woorde te gebruik.

Al wat steurend is, as ek nou moet nitpick, is dat die ensemble nogal groot is (dit bestaan uit sewe meisies wat nie name het nie—hulle is net Meisie 1, Meisie 2, ensovoorts). Dit pla wanneer jy lees, maar op die verhoog sal dit nie 'n probleem wees nie.

Ek hoop dat Protea Boekhuis nog sulke eenbedrywe sal publiseer. Hierdie vier skrywers wys dat daar geen tekort aan talent is nie.

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Nêrens, Noord-Kaap.

Nico Scheepers.
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ISBN 9781485310952.

Nico Scheepers debuteer in 2014 by die KKNK as dramaturg en regisseur met die produksie *Wentel*. Ander dramas uit sy pen is *Amper*, *Vrystaat*, *Hemelruim*, *Rooivalk* en *Moedertaal*.

Nêrens, Noord-Kaap is 'n waardige toevoeging tot Scheepers se reeds indrukwekkende oeuvre. Die produksie verower die prys vir die beste nasionale debuut by die Vrystaat Kunstefees, word vir drie kykNET-Fiëstas benoem en wen ook die Fiësta vir beste ensemblewerk. Hierdie pryse en die lof wat die produksie verwerf is gegrond, aangesien *Nêrens, Noord-Kaap* wegbreek van die teaterkonvensies waarmee die algemene Afrikaanse dramaleser of teaterganger vertrou is. Die teks is poëties, modern en digverweef, maar terselfder tyd lig en onopgesmuk; met sterk karakters en 'n interessante tematiek. Met 'n gestroopte aanbieding dring dit tot die hart van die teater deur en op eg persoonlike vlak word universele temas van grootword, (wit) manlikheid, grondeienaarskap, verlies en broederskap aangeraak.

Die dramateks is ook onlangs deur Scheepers tot televisiereeks verwerk. Dit begin in Augustus 2021 op kykNET speel. Die reeks bestaan uit 13 episodes, Saartjie Botha het as teksredigeerder opgetree en dit is deur Nagvlug Films vervaardig.

Die storie van beide die reeks en die dramateks handel oor drie uiteenlopende broers wat vir hul pa se sestigste verjaarsdag weer op hul geboorteplaas,

Nêrens, bymekaarkom. Vir elke broer word die reünie 'n unieke uitdaging wat hom op verskeie vlakke uitdaag. Elkeen het sekere stereotiperende eienskappe, sodat die verhoudingsdinamiek tussen hulle 'n substraat van wit, Afrikanermanlikheid verteenwoordig. Hierdie konflik tussen die karakters dra by tot 'n spanningslyn wat regdeur die teks loop.

Die oudste is Frans, verantwoordelik en met 'n groot pligsbesef. Hy is ongetroud en woon steeds op die plaas. Ronnie noem hom die “Appel van die Adendorff-oog” (19).

Ronnie, tipies rebelse middelseun, het verskeie mislukte verhoudings, probeer ophou rook en vergryp hom aan drank op die partytjie. Hy is ook die pa van Lourens (vernoem na sy oupa), wat die volgende generasie Adendorff-mans verteenwoordig. Hy is bekommerd oor die invloed wat Lourens se ma op hom het, en noem: “Ek’s net worried oor my laaitie, man. Shannon het alles uit my uit behalwe die visitation rights, so elke tweede naweek is dit ek en Lourens, en dan probeer ek maar fix wat hulle besig is om op te fok” (18).

Die jongste seun, Andries, is avontuurlustig en kunssinnig. Hy is lankal weg van die plaas en reis en werk wêreldwyd as fotograaf (met sy ma se ou kamera). Andries is sy pa se gunsteling en word as die verlore seun terugverwelkom.

Die seuns se ma (Katja) kom oorspronklik van Nederland af en het 'n gekompliseerde koloniale verlede waarmee sy deur haar verskeie projekte met die plaaswerkers (onder andere die bou van die kerk) probeer vrede maak. Die halfgeboude kerk verteenwoordig hierdie verhoudings wat herstel moet word en word daarom 'n versoeningsruimte—eerstens, versoening tussen die plaaswerkers en die plaaseienaars en tweedens, as 'n manier om die pa se verhouding met sy seuns (en veral sy kleinseun, Lourens) te herstel. Aan die einde van die drama begin die oupa en sy kleinseun weer aan die kerk bou. Die Nederlandse woorde op die kerkgebou eggo hierdie sentiment van versoening, vrede en vreugde: “Ik bid dat de Heer je zegent en je voeten laat dansen” (57).

Die ruimtelike kontras tussen die ma se geboorteplek en die Noord-Kaapse milieu staan ook voorop. Die verskil tussen Nederland en die Noord-Kaap word soos volg beskryf: “Die dorpies daar is so naby aan mekaar, die grond kry nie kans om asem te haal nie. Maar hier by ons? In die Boesmanland, waar jy sterre in die veld sien lê? Dat is waar God komt slapen, Andries” (15).

Die teaterstyl van *Nêrens, Noord-Kaap* kan in verband gebring word met Jerzy Grotowski (21) se “arm teater” en is gestroop van die meeste dekor en rekwi-siete. Sodanige minimalisme vereis dat die akteurs

meestal staatmaak op hul stemme en liggame om die gebeure weer te gee.

Een van die mees unieke eienskappe van dié drama is die manier waarop lang monoloë en kort, kragtige dialoog afwisselend gebruik word. Die drama bestaan meestal uit lang spreekbeurte waar karakters dikwels herbesin oor die verlede en ander noodsaaklike eksposisie verskaf. Die spreekbeurte vervul ook soms die rol van neweteks/verhoogaanwysings en bevat soms ander karakters, wat nie op die verhoog verskyn nie, se woorde of die beskrywing van hul aksies. Al die karakters praat in 'n herkenbare, moderne Afrikaans, tipies van die tyd en plek. 'n Skrywersnota aan die begin van die teks neem veranderlikes in ag en laat vir die regisseur en/of akteurs plek om die teks subjektief te interpreteer.

Baie bewuste keuses is gemaak oor die musiek wat in die toneeltekste figureer. In die eerste toneelaanwysings word genoem dat musiek “spaarsamig gebruik” word en dat die “spesifieke liedjies [...] gekies is om inhoud en atmosfeer te belig” (9). Die musiekeuses dra telkens by tot die tematiek en verklap iets van die karakters se kulturele agtergrond en grootwordjare.

Musiek van Dana Winner, 'n bekende Vlaamse sangeres, word gespeel wanneer die gehoor hul sitplekke inneem—moontlik 'n verwysing na die Nederlandse afkoms van die ma-karakter. Elders word ook verwys na Maaïke Ouboter se “Dat ik je mis” (27).

The Lion King se “The Circle of Life” begin speel sodra die akteurs hul plekke inneem. Daar is ook later 'n aanhaling uit dié klassieke Disney-flik as Ronnie praat oor sy deel van die plaas wat hy eendag gaan erf en dan vir sy seun gaan gee: “Maar ek sal nie verkoop nie. My deel gaan na Lourens toe. Eendag is alles syne. Alles. *Everything the light touches*” (19). Die broers het waarskynlik grootgeword met die film en die verwysings bring hul nostalgiese jeug in verband met vader-seun verhoudings en die “heerskappy” wat oorgedra word van een generasie na 'n ander.

Daar is ook verwysings na moderne Afrikaanse musiek soos “Die Vraagstuk” van die bekende kletsrymer, Jack Parow. Die lirieke van hierdie lied word byna in geheel tydens die partytjie aangehaal deur 'n besope Ronnie en dit word 'n deurlopende motief wat die probleme rondom die moderne samelewing en die uitdagings van die jonger Afrikaanse generasie oproep. “Die Vraagstuk” kan gesien word as 'n stem van die tyd en dui op die belangrikheid van die regte vrae vra om die regte antwoorde te verkry.

Die toneelstuk sluit af met Spoegwulf se lied, “Sambreeltjie”. Die woorde en melodie van die lied eggo

iets van die onopgeloste en gekompliseerde verhoudingsdinamiek tussen die karakters.

My enigste kritiek is dat die slot van die drama effens gejaagd voorkom, maar dalk effektief die steeds moeilik-oorkombare trauma wat oor generasies heen strek suggereer, trauma wat as gevolg van toksiese manlikheid nie geverbaliseer kan word nie. Die karakters maak die oggend ná die partytjie asof daar nie regtig enige konfrontasie plaasgevind het nie en val weereens in die strik van begriploosheid as gevolg van gebrekkige kommunikasie. Die teks laat 'n diep indruk en kan gesien word as 'n kritieke, empatiese ondersoek na 'n eietydse (wit) Afrikaanse manlikheid, en suggereer die denkpatrone wat daaromtrent moet verander.

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Vin.

Lien Botha.

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In 2015 publiseer Queillerie Lien Botha se debuutroman, *Wonderboom*. *Wonderboom* word bekroon met die Eugène Marias-prys en die Jan Rabie-Rapport-prys. Dit word aangewys as die *Huisgenoot/Tempo* boek van die jaar. In Willie Burger se bespreking van *Wonderboom* verwys hy na die collage-agtige tegniek waarmee die apokaliptiese verhaal vertel word. Hy wys byvoorbeeld uit dat die roman verskeie verwysings na Suid-Afrikaanse tekste bevat, benewens verwysings na wêreldletterkunde, musiek en kunswerke. In Botha se nuutste roman, *Vin*, ook deur Queillerie uitgegee, benut die skrywer weereens hierdie verwysings na ander tekste, nie soseer om 'n apokaliptiese wêreld te skets nie, maar om voort te bou op die tema van vervreemding. In *Vin* word hierdie tegniek benut om die donker ure van die hoofkarakter, Vin Verster, se psige visueel en letterkundig uit te beeld.

Op die oog af is *Vin* 'n misdaadroman. In die proloog is kuns-kurator Vin Verster soek terwyl daar onheilspellend vertel word hoe iemand 'n oor, 'n oog, later

'n neus en uiteindelik 'n sprakelose tong—"lelik pers" (17)—versprei oor 'n dor vlakte vind. In hoofstuk 1 neem die verhaal egter 'n ander trant in—die fokus verskuif van die misdaad na die intieme binnelewe van Vin. Vin se belewenis van, onder andere, Frankryk, Mali, en die eiland Sylt tydens haar verskeie kunsresidensies word deur 'n onbekende derdepersoonsverteller gedeel. Daar word ook vertel van Vin se verbrokkelende huwelik, 'n familietragedie, en 'n verlore kunswerk deur die Nederlandse skilder, Hendrick Avercamp.

Hoewel die verhaal tog redelik chronologies is, vertel die derdepersoonsverteller van Vin se gedagtes en ervarings met 'n eienaardige intimiteit wat herinner aan bewussynstroom. Die intimiteit van die karakter se gedagtes en ervarings is kenmerkend, omdat die verhaal aspekte van 'n reisjoernaal het, maar een wat deur 'n onbekende derdepersoonsverteller oorgedra word. Volgens Viljoen (75) funksioneer dagboeke in literatuur dikwels as speëls: die dagboek is dus van nature self-reflektief. In *Vin* word hierdie eienskap van 'n joernaal egter ondermyn. Vin se geheime, gedagtes, ervarings en intieme gesprekke word weergegee, en die meerderheid van die verhaal fokus op Vin se refleksie van haar reise, tog is dit nie Vin wat haar verhaal vertel nie.

Benewens die verontrustende intimiteit, word die innerlike blik op die lewe en denke van Vin onderbreek deur passasies wat nie implisiet verband hou met die verhaal van Vin se lewe nie. Die passasies wissel tussen, byvoorbeeld, inskrywings oor feite, epitawe, advertensies vir "Mistresses and Submissives" (121) en resensies. Mens begin wonder of die passasies deel uitmaak van Vin se persoonlike belewenis—dalk inligting wat sy raakgelees het—en of die passasies leidrade is wat die misterieuse misdaad kan oplos sodat die verlore kunswerk opgespoor kan word. Hierdie passasies sluit aan by 'n verdere laag inligting wat aan die leser gegee word. Die roman open met 'n uitnodiging om "te sien wat Vin sien" deur 'n aanlyn kuns- en fotoalbum te besigtig wat beskikbaar is op die skrywer se webtuiste, www.lienbotha.co.za/vin-visual-2021.

Net soos die intimiteit waarmee die derdepersoonsverteller die verhaal van Vin benader en die skynbare lukrake passasies, dra die visuele album ook by tot die vervreemding van die leser. Aan die een kant funksioneer die album as 'n soort visuele gids wat juis die leser saam met Vin deur haar reise moet begelei. Aan die ander kant is die aanbieding daarvan, as digitale webtuiste wat apart bestaan van die boek, merkwaardig. Die visuele wêreld wat as gids tot Vin se lewe en reise dien, is verwyderd van die leeservaring. Hoewel die webtuiste in hoofstukke ingedeel is, en die foto's

en kunswerke van onderskrifte voorsien is, is die verwysings na die kunswerke nie in die boek opgeneem nie. Die leser moet dus 'n besluit neem: onderbreek die leesproses deur ook na die foto's te kyk, of besigtig die visuele teks afsonderlik, maar as bykomende bron tot die hoofstukke en/of roman in geheel.

Ek dink egter die aanbieding van die visuele teks in samewerking met die roman is doeltreffend. *Vin* is 'n roman wat, soos die voorblad ook impliseer, verskillende lae vervleg. Die verskeie verwysings na letterkundige werke en musiek dompel as 't ware die leser in *Vin* se psige in. Die roman tree in gesprek met byvoorbeeld J. M. Coetzee (53), John Miles se *Op 'n dag 'n hond* (94), en *Die ysterkoei moet sweet* deur Breyten Breytenbach (13). Op bladsy 160 is daar selfs 'n uiteensetting van die musiekalbum waarna *Vin* luister, met opnames soos Lea DeLaria se "All that Jazz" en Angélique Kidjo se "Summertime".

Vin is 'n roman wat deurgaans in gesprek tree en verbande trek tussen verskeie genres oor kunstgrense heen. Indien *Vin* interpreteer word vanuit die post-modernisme, kan daar aangevoer word dat aspekte van fragmentering, metafiksie, intertekstualiteit en pastiche benut word om die psige van 'n wit, Suid-

Afrikaanse en Afrikaanse vrou in 'n geglobaliseerde, kapitalistiese en post-apartheid wêreld uit te beeld deur middel van die genre van misdaadfiksie. *Vin* kan, vanuit hierdie raamwerk, maklik geplaas word tussen die boeke van Suid-Afrikaanse skrywers soos Etienne van Heerden, Ingrid Winterbach en J. M. Coetzee.

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