

Orature, Canonization and the New Information World Order (NIWO)

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Abstract

Nations across time, space and civilizations have evolved from Orality to written culture. Since language is the prima-facie agent of any culture in any society, orature derived from Africa should be treated along this paradigm. Part of Western epistemic violence against Africa is to relegate the status of orature. This paper sets out to deconstruct the erroneous impression of the West about African Oral Traditions. It draws its strength from the literary theory of Pluriversalism. The paper argues that with the emergence of Nobel Prize winners in Literature from the Continent, it emphasizes that African literature has come of age. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a re-evaluation and canonization of African Literature. The paper concludes on the notion that irrespective of the much talk about linguistic globalization, if welsh as an indigenous language is used as an official medium of communication in Britain, and others in the Asiatic world, then Africans must not fail to promote our oral arts and other knowledge production in the New Information World Order (NIWO).

Keywords: Orature; canonization; pluriversalism; epistemic violence; (NIWO).

Introduction

The term 'orature' is a product of Western epistemic violence against Africa. It was coined to palliate the alleged contradiction in the phrase 'oral literature'. This Eurocentric perception that associates literature with literacy perhaps informed the opinion of scholars like Louis Untermeyer and Carter Davidson, Lascelles Abercrombie and Samuel Johnson (cited in Dasylva and Jegede, 2003, p.78). Some African scholars schooled on this ideological framework echo the opinion of their mentors as noticed in Ndudim (1999, p.1), that 'the word literature is derived from the ability to read and write'. Another variant of it comes from Ngiyol (1977, p.95), who adduces that 'Literature comes from letters'.

However, none of the submissions reflects the mindset of Africa and Africans. Hence, the discordant tunes. Ajadi (2007) was quick to state that:

The definition of African Oral Literature is both paradoxically complex and simple. The definition seems to depend on the one who is doing the defining. A Eurocentric scholar would come up with the definition that takes care of his own bias and prejudices while any authentic African scholar will feel free to define the subject with the consciousness of the fact that his culture has been misconceptualized and thus erroneously misrepresented by the use of pejorative concepts such as "folktales", "folklores", "folk narratives" and so forth (p.207).

The opinion of this scholar gives us an insight into the magnitude and complexity of the subject of our discourse. Therefore, while this researcher examines the various aspects of the taxonomy of African oral literature; another scholar that has delved extensively into the etymology of orature is Isidore Okpewho. His research place emphasis on cultural identity of the subject as noticed below:

The world folklore implies much more than just the literary aspect of what the folk do. It was first used by the English man William John Thomas in a letter he wrote to the Athenaeum at a time when the study of traditional cultures was attracting a lot of attention in Britain and Europe (Okpewho, 1992, p.5).

From Okpewho's indepth analysis, it is possible to deduce what may perhaps be the source of resentment and prejudice to the concept of orature. Since to the West whatever emanates from the 'folks' presupposes uneducated, uncultured, lacks civility: therefore, such can never qualify as authentic literature or contribute to the literary/ knowledge production of the people. This is the crux of the matter. It marks a radical departure from the African view point which does not see literature as an elitist act hence the position of Osundare that captions his collection of poems as 'Village Voices' and 'Songs of the Market Place' to reflects the fact that poetry in Africa is derived from these crop of rural 'rustic' people.

Therefore, an acceptable artistic work must reflect the yearnings and aspirations of this very important segment of the society. This explains his masses/ populist approach to poetry.

Another dimension to the definition of orature is from Chinweizu et al (1998);

Oral narrative poetry, parables, fables, paradoxes, myth, legends, proverbs, poetry of tenderness, poetic celebration of laughter and joy, poetry of wits and humour, women choral poetry at naming ceremonies and puberty rites, love songs, songs of courtship, wedding songs, dancing, epics, boasts, satire, songs of praise and of abuse, songs that celebrate absences and other varied aspects of life (pp.259-261).

A cursory look at this definition reveals that poetry to the African worldview encompasses every facets of our livelihood. This is irrespective of age, gender or social status. It is for this reason that DasyIva (2017), concludes that orature is;

an exploration of shared human experiences of tangible materials, embodied in orally expressed diverse contextual lives and shades of creative skills and molds. It is actualized in rich aesthetic performance and colourful poetic language on the canvas of collective ownership (p.12).

By 'orature', the paper intends to align with Erubetine (1990, p.142), definition of orature as "man's artistic awakening to the wonders of his environment and existence, especially in pre-literate or oral traditions". However, this paper intends to stretch this imagination further to include deploying this artistry to evolve an indigenous home grown technology to provide the much needed development the continent requires today. A test case is that of the Asian tiger, Japan. Japan delve into their folklore and came up with 'good thinking, good product'. This has today become the trademark of their product-Toyota auto mobile today.

To properly conceptualize 'canonization' in the context of this paper, we need to understand it from the root word. According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, canon means "all the books that are organized as being the most important pieces of literature: the literary canon". What then is a literary canon? Bates (2013) posits that "the term 'literary canon' refers to a body of books, narratives and other texts considered to be the most important and influential of a particular time period or place". Take a 19th century American literature course for instance; one is being exposed to a version of a group of texts that has through one means or another been established as a representative of the essential authors, movements and historical events in America during the 1800s.

The concept of a literary canon originated from the Greek's ideology of a measuring device adapted to determine literary work's suitability to current trend in a society at any given point in time. Therefore, for a work to be classified as meeting the canon, it must contain certain qualities that are acknowledged acceptable to lay down rules and regulations of the body of works classified as classics. Such works must be able to serve as representative of the happenings in the socio-cultural milieu they represent. It is on this

note that we have such body of works as Biblical canon, Western canon, and Latin American canon. This paper advocates the need for an African canon because literature is culture and time specific. This implies that each literary piece is a product of its clime, time and space. Therefore, whatever emanates from Europe for instance can never be classified under American canon. Modern African Literature will not forever be an appendage of Western literary tradition because African authors still adopt the language of their colonial masters as a medium of communication for acceptability; the need for cultural identity arises. Hence, Ojaide (2009) argues that:

Since literature is a cultural production, it only follows that a people's narratives, poetry, and drama should be an expression of their culture's artistic disposition at its highest level. Failing to reflect this cultural identity will fall short of the aesthetic, which is culturally conditioned. In fact, the canon of a people's literature grows from its cultural ideals. It is not surprising therefore that Obotunde Ijimere, a British, writes with that penname to be seen as a Nigerian Yoruba; in order to validate his cultural immersion in the African people's artistic production (p.10).

This citation is an affirmation that pre-colonial Africa was never bereft of culture. A very rich, robust oral tradition, value system and black aesthetics exist in the African continent. This informs the submission of Achebe that "African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans... their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty... they had poetry and above all, they had dignity" (Achebe's interview with Serumaga; quoted in Ojaide and Obi 2002). This penchant for cultural identity and the need to be unbiased in projecting the tradition values, norms and belief system. of the black race informs the emergence of modern African literature. Some of the earlier works by authors like Senghor, Awoonor, Peters, Soyinka, Clark, Achebe, Kunene, Ngugi, Brutus, and p'Bitek takes the form of protest literature because they are couched in a manner that such works counters the earlier misrepresentations of the West as reflected in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Joyce Cary's *Mr. Johnson* among others.

Canonizing African literature would therefore involve some of the following:

1. The writer of the text must be an African who may either reside at home or in the diaspora.
2. Such work/ literary piece must project as its thematic scope African worldview. Thus, elements of our historico-political antecedents from pre-colonial era to date are expected to reflect in the text. Also, those linguistic features that serve as eloquent marker of our Africanness as noticed in our choice of proverbs, parables, riddles, jokes, story-within-story technique, songs, folklores/folktales, images and symbols of our rich oral tradition should be reflected in such works.

3. Reviews and criticism of such texts are expected to have been carried out by reputable Africans who are very much at home with the culture being projected to ensure objectivity. Also, for proper interpretation of the sub-text.

Also, 'New Information World Order' in the context of this paper is a conscious realization of the subtle measure of the western world to dominate the media. The ultimate goal is to use the media to perpetuate and spread their ideology via globalization and capitalism. This paper intends to implore African literary writers to take advantage of this medium to reposition African culture and identity. This is against the background of negative impression earlier created by the Western media as represented in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Joyce Cary's *Mr. Johnson*.

Background

In 'The politics of Post-Coloniality', Aijaz Ahmad celebrates the efforts to designate the contemporary literature of Africa as post-colonial and thus to make it available for reading according to the protocols that metropolitan criticism has developed for the appreciation of what it calls minority literature (Ahmad, 1997, p.282). Integral to Ahmad's thesis is an attempt to find common grounds between post-colonial and minority literature in the black poetry tradition in Africa. While the painful ordeal of slavery and colonization turned the black people of Africa into a nation of exiles and outcasts, the same experience brings about enormous consequences (Gohar, 2010, p.91).

Parts of these consequences are racial discrimination that has destroyed the Cultural identity of the black man anywhere in the world. It is equally noticeable in the way historical evidences, artifacts and other relics of the past are tactically distorted to suit Eurocentric perception. Also, through media imperialism, globalization and capitalism as noticed in New Information World Order (NIWO) they continue their assault, molestation and outright intimidation of indigenous languages, values, literary and creative art and knowledge production that emanates from the African space. Whereas, the West that derogatorily describes orature as 'primitive', folklore, folktales etc. because it emanates from illiterate natives; till today encourages the use of such an indigenous language in Britain of all places. This is irrespective of the towering posture of English language in African and other British colonies.

Existing studies on Orature

Many terms or phrases have been used to refer to literature that is not written. Because Europe has a book-bound definition of literature (Wordsworth definition of poetry cited in Bodunde 1999, p.263), they see oral literature as a contradiction. This informs the coinage by the Ugandan linguist, Pio Zirmu. The term was later adopted by the Kenyan writer and critic, Ngugi wa Thiongo. Contrary to erroneous impression that orature is just the verbal expression of natives: Nwangola cited in Kabore (2014, p.15), describes

orature as “an interdisciplinary aesthetics system weaving together numerous genres in the performance of a concept”. This shows the performance nature and hybridity of oral aesthetics.

Various scholars have shown their response to the definition of orature. For instance, Finnegan describes oral literature as an unfamiliar concept. This is a reflection of her Eurocentric background. Ajadi (1995, p.5) ‘calls for an incisive intellectual penetration into the various aspects of the taxonomy of African oral literature’. Okpewho (1992, p.4) subscribes that manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs and a host of others constitute the spectrum of African literature. He also asserts that verbal aspect of oral literature comprises riddles, puns, tongue-twisters, proverbs, recitations, chants, songs and stories (Okpewho, 1992, p.4). Other scholars that have contributed to this debate includes: Mazizi Kunene, S.A.Babalola, Mona Fikry-Atallah, E. Ojo Arewa, Wande Abimbola, Abdulkadir Dandatti, Olaitan Olaunde, Joel Adedeji, Austin Bukenya, Oyin Ogunba, Oludare Olajubu. (Rasheed Na’allah, 1994, p.102). Other eminent researchers as recorded by Dasylva (2017, p.12), includes: Ayo Bamgbose, Dan Izevbye, Niyi Osundare, Femi Osofisan, G.G. Darah, Ropo Sekoni and a few others. The list seems endless: this shows that the concept is an ongoing phenomenon as it serves as a symbolic representation of the African identity.

Theoretical Framework

Dasylva (2017), describes pluriversalism thus: The term “pluriverse” from which “pluriversalism” was conceptualized was first used by Janet Conway and Jakeet Singh, in their joint publication: “Radical Democracy in Perspective: Note from the Pluriverse” (2011). Pluriversalism, as opposed to universalism, was conceptualized and recently consolidated, expanded, advanced and popularized by Toyin Fabola. “Pluriversalism as opposed to globalism and universalism encourages multiple ontologies, multiple worlds to be known—not simply multiple perspectives on one world (p.21).

He further expatiate that: pluriversalism is a distinct agenda for advancing clearly defined methods and episteme for Africa’s intellectual autonomy in the world cultures and knowledge production. Beside addressing some aspects of restoring and reclaiming Africa’s lost centrality through a properly channeled, recouped energy, pluriversalism imbues Africa with the capacity of originate, adopt and adapt, invent and renew such knowledge, such that, rather than work with a handed-down “perspective”, it emphasizes the epistemic difference for creating an alternative knowledge system for interrogating the intertwined concepts of coloniality and modernity to which Africa’s fate seemed, to date, to have been cruelly and intricately consummated (p.21).

The major reason for adopting this literary theory is that, it encapsulates the philosophy behind this paper. That is the need to evolve a truly African identity by projecting and promoting Africanness from the view point of Africans. Pluriversalism negates the ideology behind such concepts like globalization,

universalism and the much orchestrated New Information World Order (NIWO). The aim is to use direct or subtle imposition, either deny or inferiorize other critical standards, especially from Africa. They insist on only Eurocentric perspective for critical analysis of all literary production, irrespective of regional peculiarities. A typical example is the case of orature and its synonyms Oral Literature, Oral Narratives, Oral Traditions or Oral Aesthetics. Pluriversalism advocates multiple ontologies (worldview), multiple worlds. This is contrary to the speculation of the West that advocates multiple ontologies, one world. Hence, the concept of the 'otherness' to represent opinions outside their mainstream submission. This is nothing but Western epistemic violence against African and her knowledge production.

Tenets of Pluriversalism

Identity Politics

In recent time, debate is going on between the West as symbolize by USA and the Third World as represented by Latin American countries, the Caribbeans and Africa. Some of the burning issues include: Can we produce a radical anti-systemic politics beyond identity politics? Can we produce knowledge beyond Third World and Eurocentric fundamentalisms? Can we overcome the traditional dichotomy between political-economy and cultural studies? This and other questions were raised by Ramon Grosfoguel (2011) in a paper titled "Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and paradigms of Political Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking and Global Coloniality". The aim of this intellectual activity is to interrogate the thinking that produces these dichotomies and to attempt a redefinition of such terms like capitalism, universalism, modernism etc. as ideologies that are racist, retrogressive and above all inimical to knowledge production from the supposed minority group which the Third World represents. This informs the concept of identity politics because before now it was assumed reasoning emanated mainly from the West. Hence the philosophies of Eurocentricism premise on the philosophy that there is only one epistemic tradition from which to achieve Truth and Universality. Pluriversality on the other hand, attempts a contrary approach to this view point.

Shifting the Geography of Reason

Shifting the geography of reason incidentally happens to be the motto of Caribbean Philosophical Association (CPA), a brain child of Lewis R. Gordon. The objective of this group is to deconstruct the concept of colonialism through the ideological framework of decolonial turn. Decolonial turn is applicable to Africa. Whether post colonialism, modernism, capitalism or globalism etc. they are all subtle terms employed by the capitalist west to continue their hegemony over the rest of the world.

Grosfoguel (2012) in his Transmodernity took us through historical perspective to illustrate how the Western thinkers had tactically destroy, obliterate facts and position their point of view as the acceptable opinion e.g.

The myth of the self-production of truth by the isolated subject is a constitutive part of the myth of modernity, the myth of self-generated and insulated Europe, which develops on its own without depending on anyone else on earth. So we can see that just like dualism, so too is solipsism constitutive of Cartesian philosophy (p.89a).

The self-acclaimed monopoly of knowledge by the Western world is currently facing criticism. Part of this is what informs the shifting of geography of reason. Critics and philosophers from other areas have reacted differently e.g. Mignolo (2005) describes it as the 'beginning of ego- politics of knowledge'. Gomez (2005) cited in Grosfoguel (2012) views it as 'zero point philosophy'. Because it is a point of view that hides itself as a point of view, or, put differently the point of view that assumes having no point of view: It may appear so because the subject that produces truth from an interior monologue with himself without relation to anyone outside him. This is to say we are dealing with a deaf philosophy.

Dussel (1994) cited Grosfoguel (2012) went as far back as the 16th and 17th centuries philosophy of Cartesian 'ego cogito' of "I conquer, therefore I am". The projection of Descartes's philosophy of Europe as colonizer, conqueror, Imperial Being gives her the self-imposed position of eye of Godlike attitude. "Therefore, the dualistic and solipsistic myth of a self-generated subject without any spatial-temporal location within global power relations inaugurates the epistemological myth of Eurocentred modernity" (p.81b). From this citation therefore, it becomes apparent that the idea of modernity, post modernism, post colonialism, globalization etc. are all calculated attempt to mislead and teleguide the thought pattern of the entire world as we have in the slogan of the world as a global village.

In same view, Kant (1998) emphatically asserts that;

Transcendental reason is predominantly male, white, and European. African, Indigenous Asian and Southern European (Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese) men and all women (including Europeans) do not have the same access to "reason". The geography of reason changes with Kant.

Undoubtedly, this portrays the chauvinistic, cockish and arrogant posture of Western philosophy. Perhaps, issues like this prompt the title of Paula Moya's paper "Who We Are and From Where We Speak" cited in Torres (2011). That the author is a woman negates Kant's submission that 'reason' must emanate from a man. It also renders inconsequential the fact that the philosopher is not from Europe but from the minority group.

She combines a perception of knowledge as always situated with the realist position that there is an independent world about which we have knowledge. For Moya, identity is not a prison, but rather an inevitable point of departure that allows us to observe, understand, and question particular aspects of the world. This means that

there is no single point of view from nowhere, and that in many cases, hegemonic point of view are not general agreements, but the imposition of a particular view, and the expression of a particular identity, that has the pretension of representing all views (p.9).

Moya's submission unequivocally debunks the thinking that produces universality. In same way it advocates the need for a multiple approach as enunciated by pluriversalism.

Epistemic racism

By epistemic racism, we are referring to the opinion of Western philosophers who see themselves as the custodian of reason. They ascribe knowledge production to be an exclusive reserve of the West as epitomized by Hegel. He saw himself as the philosopher of philosophers and as the philosopher of the end of history. No doubt this man has informed his Hegelian dialectical method cited in Grosfoguel (2012);

The Hegelian dialectical method is an epistemic mechanism that subsumes and transforms all alterity and difference into part of the same until arriving at the absolute knowledge which would be 'the knowledge of all knowledge' and which would coincide with the end of history conceived in that way because from that point onward, nothing new could be produced on the level of thought and human history (p.91).

If not egocentrism, what would make an individual conceptualize having monopoly of knowledge? Can knowledge be absolute? Assuming it is even possible to have absolute knowledge; will it reside with the giver or the taker? African mythology makes us realize that absolute knowledge belongs to a supernatural being. While man-kind is the taker. Reasoning/ knowledge is not restricted to an individual, place or race. In same view, history is a continuum, as long as human beings exist on the surface of the earth, and events continue to occur; history will continue to unfold. Therefore, for Hegel to imagine the end of history is only a figment of his imagination. It shows how parochial and ill-informed his knowledge of history is.

In fact, his case is like that of a folktale in Africa where the tortoise (the wisest animal in the kingdom) claims to have gathered knowledge, sealed it in a calabash and was prepared to take it to the top of a very tall palm tree. But in his ignorance he straps the calabash to his chest and was struggling to climb the tree with it. It took the intervention of a small almost insignificant animal to call his attention to the fact that; it may be difficult if not impossible to climb unless he places the calabash of his wisdom to his back. He tried it and it works. Out of anger he threw the calabash down because he felt all knowledge had been taken away, where did this little creature get the one he has just used? It is from this perspective that we can conceptualize Hegel's school of thought. The tortoise, like the West suffers the illusion of having a monopoly of knowledge. While, the insignificant animal could serve as a symbol of the Third World.

Hegel like Kant before him limits reason to European man and a Christian. What about other races and women are they incapable of logical reasoning? Issues like this precipitate the emergence of pluriversalism as alternative to universalism.

‘Re-centering’ of Africa

Except for those who want to distort facts, Africa had from ancient time been in the vanguard of knowledge production. Historical evidence reveals that for over 5000 years, Egyptian civilization had been in existence e.g. The Kemite/Black educational system is the first movement of civilization and was conceived out of the worldview of ancient Africans (Myers, 1998). To collaborate the fact that eminent scholars from the West actually came to Africa to seek knowledge (Malose, 2016) enumerates such notable names like Socrates, Plato, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Democritus and Aristotle are noted to have studied in the Egyptian Mystery System, after the Persian occupation. This makes Diop (1991) to assert that “a true decolonial project should actually go further and reassert Africa as the bedrock of Western knowledge and not relegate or consign it to the margins”. He emphasized that we cannot advocate for decolonization without recourse to reclaiming the primacy of Africa to the knowledge of the (Western) World. It is on the basis of this that Ngugi wa Thiong’O captures this observation in his agitation for the “re-centering” of Africa (Mbembe, 2015).

By re-centering of Africa it means the Continent will reposition herself to the centre stage of knowledge production. This, by extension will introduce the process of ‘othering’, an avenue for other opinions except that of the main stream which is against universalism. In his own contribution, Dasylva (2017, p.18) ascribed that “universalism and globalism are two concepts each of either sides of the same old coin deliberately trumped up by the West and that have helped to prop its hegemonic hold, so far, on the current direction of world cultures and literatures”. This shows his disenchantment with the monopoly of knowledge as claimed by Western scholars. Still in same temper is Falola (2016) a renowned historian and critic who remarks that:

Universalist discourses and globalist projects are grounded in a unitary ontology and imperialist epistemologies which assume that the world is one, that it is knowledge on a global scale within single modes of thought, and is thus manageable and governable in those terms (p.290).

The citation above depicts how Europe has narrowed down reasoning to a unitary ontology. It presupposes that for any perspective to be acceptable, it must align with Western induced ‘perspective’. Other African critics that have kicked against this epistemic violence include: Choik Anta Diop (1974 and 1987), Wole Soyinka (1979), Abiola Irele (1990), Biodun Jeyifo (1990), Samir Amin (1997), Archie Mafeje (2000), Ngugi wa Thiong’o (2005 and 2012), Godoni G. Darah (2005 and 2008), Kwasi Wiredu etc. cited in

Dasylyva (2017, p.20). The clarion call of these crop of writers from the continent serve as eloquent marker that the so called ‘others’ have come to stay. Same goes for those of the Latin American group. Therefore, their voices can no longer be stifled hence the call for multiple ontologies in multiple worlds. This is what Adichie in 2009 aptly describe as “the Danger of a Single Story”. Story is good. Many stories allow for better understanding of various aspects of the divide as exemplified by pluralism.

Analysis

Earlier on, this work adopts Eruvbetine’s position on orature as “Man’s artistic awakening to the wonders of his environment and existence especially in the pre-literate or oral tradition”. And equally added ‘and deploying this artistry to evolve an indigenous home grown technology’. The essence of this is that development is inevitable if the Continent must meet up with the rest of the world. But that much needed growth and development is on whose technology? No race attains greatness on foreign technology. Hence the submission of this paper that with the emergence of Nobel Prizes in Literature from the continent, it serves as eloquent marker of recognition of African Literature and by extension our cultural values. Therefore, the need has come to re-evaluate our literary cum artistic production with a view to canonizing our artistry.

Similarly, acknowledging a text or a writer’s creative work for the Nobel Prize means acceptability of that intellectual product. This by implication means it could become a brand. Since an identity has been created, it could be commodified for the international market. This is where the New Information World Order becomes effective. Though the West intends it to project their ideology, Africans too could employ it to serve as a talk back or return narrative to reflect African sensibility. A typical example is what America does with Hollywood and India with Bollywood. Through filmic discourse, these nations employ this medium to propagate the distinctiveness of their socio- cultural values. From their films, the world gets first hand contact of the language, culture, norms, values and belief system of these people. Unconsciously or consciously they let the outside world have an insight into various aspects of their countries e.g. the climatic factors for those who intend to visit. Other issues are their dress code, food, habitat, music, myth, life style etc. Nigeria’s Nollywood is in the right direction, though they need to improve on their craft to sincerely project the African identity without having to ape the West as they often do.

There is a lot of didacticism in African oral tradition. From our proverbs, oral narratives, songs, chants, incantations, invocations etc. we could deduce message that may enhance our technological development. Sakichi Toyoda the founder of Toyoda Automatic Loom Works, Limited, Japan in the process of attaining a competitive edge to meet the challenges of the new millennium, delve into the oral tradition of his people. He came up with this Japanese proverb— Good thinking, good product. Today, it has become the trade mark of Toyota automobile and a marvel amongst peers. Africa could borrow from this and come up with something original that will depict our socio-cultural milieu.

In Ojaide (2002), are some examples of proverbs;

The tree on which the sapling leaned has crashed.

The moon that freely offered light to the star's gone

Mother has departed, market closed before dusk

We miss her shade in the mean sun of the season

From proverbs like this and others, Africans could launch herself into the New Information World Order to give the universe a better understanding of how and what we are. This is better than letting the world tell our stories for us.

Africa should resist further reference of Orature as 'primitive' or folklore because it is indigenous to Africa. If Britain as a champion of linguistic globalization still allows welch to be use as official language, then our language and culture should not be allowed to be inferiorized.

Since the intellectual thrust of this paper is advocating for an end to Western epistemic violence against Africa; and advancing for the need to have multiple ontologies in multiple worlds. This is what pluriversalism represents as opposed to universalism that is self-centered and absolutely Eurocentric in perspective: It is on the basis of this that the paper believes Africa should henceforth feel free to celebrate her black value system / black aesthetics without any feeling of inferiority or stigmatization. Therefore, African Oral Literature should be given its pride of place as our own artistic contribution to knowledge production. We may need to remind the West that because it is oral does not imply primitivity, or naïve. Every tradition from Greek period till today started from oral to written as we have in Illiads, Odyssey and Beowulf. Samples of Orality can be exemplified in written poems as we have below:

Invocation

Aridon, to you I come again.

Whom else to go to when in dire need of a new song

than the divine dispenser of memorable favours?

I come to the proprietor of the house of words;

(Ojaide, 2008, p.1)

The common practice among local singers in Africa is to pay homage to ancestors and fellow singers who have made their mark in the profession. This is exactly what Ojaide has done to ward off evil eyes and

have a good performance. In another text, we can see another example from the poem “After visiting the Alhambra”;

My ancestors, the Moors,
shifted the Rio Darro for miles
to water gardens and supply baths
on the hilltop. They filled
gullies when it pleased the sultan’s fancy to cross over;

(Ojaide, 2002, p.47).

In African Oral Literature, elements of oral tradition and historicity often emerge as reflected in the situation above. Also, making categorical allusion to ‘ancestors’ is indigenously African as can be seen in the poem cited.

One very important contribution of Orature to literary creation is in the use of song motif. Before this period, poetry was not seen as a song. But because of the orality of the African socio cultural milieu, it enhances the promotion of the song motif. Hence, most poets of the modern African poetry tradition couch the poems along this paradigm as can be found in Okot p’Bitek’s Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol, Niyi Osundare’s Song of Season, Song of the Market place, and Tanure Ojaide’s In the Kingdom of Songs and I Want to Dance among others. This can be illustrated from the poem “I sing”:

I hear songs

I don’t know where they come from

& I sing songs

That possess my lips...

(Ojaide, 2002, p.36).

In the spirit of the song tradition is the image of dance as one influences the other. A typical example is in the poem ‘I want to Dance’:

With papa Wembe’s flavoured voice
Pulling everybody off their seats,
The spirit of the dance possessed her.
“I want to dance!” she cried out,
Steering wheelchair to the dance floor

(Ojaide, 2003, p.45).

The citation above portrays the captivating nature of the corpus of song on dance that even someone with disability could not hide the desire to respond to its dictate to the amazement of others.

Another remarkable contribution of African Oral literature to poetic tradition is in the projection of folklore/folktales. Although, Eurocentric critics had earlier criticized it as a form of literature that was an exclusive reserve of the natives therefore substandard; Afrocentric scholars have debunk this argument. Since most of our earlier works take the form of oral narratives; it is not uncommon to find folklores/folktales reflecting even in the written text:

Ogiso drove his victims to grow a third eye;
Agokoli, his comrade, gave a seventh serve;
the Butcher of Abuja bent his people into steel.

Contrive they would behind the eyes of the king
to spread a mat over a deep pit, then with fans
and praise chants lead him to abysmal demise

(Ojaide, 2008, p.19).

‘Ogiso’ in the worldview of this poem is a reminder of oral tradition of the Urhobo people. He was a despot king who ruled like an emperor. The image of ‘the Butcher of Abuja’ is metaphorical and symbolic of another dictator in the military junta at that time. Similarly, the following stanza is an eloquent reflection of the folklore of the tortoise and the elephant. The didacticism of it is what the persona wants us to ponder upon.

Also peculiar to Orature is the concepts of metaphysical cum spiritual transcendental believe system. Elements of this are replicated in form of myth, ancestral worship and other forms of believe system that are indigenously African as in the poem “Amulets”:

My faith told what I wore:
incisions to imbibe invincibility,
frothing baths not to be seen by evil eyes;
a cowrie necklace to be favourite of gods

(Ojaide, 1999, p.128).

To the uninformed, an amulet means nothing. At best, it could serve as costume. Whereas, to the African it connotes a lot of imbedded meaning. Hence, the persona captions it ‘my faith’. The use of ‘incisions’ too is symbolic. It is usually done for a purpose to protect the persona from ‘evil eyes’. And the use of ‘cowrie necklace’ is not just to adorn the neck for fashion and aesthetic purposes. Rather serves as a form of protection. This is the believe system of the African worldview.

Conclusively, the essence of this paper is basically to reposition the concept of orature as obloquy. African Oral aesthetics should be deployed to challenge the future with the truth of the past which the West tactically attempts to obliterate with their doctrine of universalism. Though, this paper does not completely rule out universalism as bad. But strongly advocates that the minority groups too should be given a chance to have a say in the dispensation of things. Hence, the need for multiple ontologies in multiple worlds as against multiple ontologies in one world, which is the Eurocentric perspective to continue Western hegemonic dominance over the rest of the world.

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