



What's Culture Got to Do with it?

A report from
"Cultural Images in and of Africa" research programme
conference June 15-18, 2009

EDITOR MAI PALMBERG

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A REPORT FROM A CONFERENCE JUNE 15-18, 2009
IN UPPSALA

Organised by the "Cultural Images in and of Africa" research programme
at the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala

What's Culture Got to Do with it?

Edited by Mai Palmberg

The photographs are taken by Lene Bull Christensen, Tolu Ogunlesi and Mai Palmberg

Cover photo from the National Gallery of Bulawayo (Mai Palmberg)

Layout: Boel Näslund, Mark In AB

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ISBN 978-91-7106-663-3

Printed by GML Print on Demand AB, Stockholm 2010

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Foreword

WE ARE HAPPY TO PRESENT THIS REPORT from an international, multi-disciplinary research conference called, with an inspiration from Tina Turner, "What's Culture Got to do with it?", and held June 15-18, 2009 in Uppsala. A significant aspect of the conference was the encounter between Nordic and African researchers, many from Africa and some from the diaspora. This, and the whole conference, would not have been possible without the generous support of the Riksbankens jubileumsfond and Statens kulturråd in Sweden. The Swedish Embassy in Harare enabled the participation of three Zimbabwean scholars.

The host was the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI) research programme "Cultural Images in and of Africa", which since its inception in 1995 has brought together researchers, writers and artists. Papers were presented on all genres of contemporary culture, from different parts of Africa, united by an interest in themes that can be summarised in the words 'meaning', 'representation', and 'voice'.

Participating scholars were from 15 different countries. Counted by origin, 10 African countries were represented: Malawi, South Africa, Mali, Cameroon, Namibia, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Tanzania, Benin. The non-African countries represented (by base) were: Denmark, US, UK, Sweden, Germany, Finland, Italy, Netherlands.

We had the privilege to have as keynote speakers were Karin Barber, professor at the Centre of West African Studies at the University of Birmingham; Elleke Boehmer, Professor of World Literatures in English, University of Oxford; Stefan Jonsson, writer and critic, Associate Professor of Ethnic studies at the University of Linköping; and Associate professor at Roskilde University.

This report reproduces the keynote speeches, the opening address, a rapporteurs' report, poetry by three NAI guest writers present, and photo reminiscences from the conference days and nights.

Mai Palmberg
Research fellow

Caroline Kyhlbäck
Research administrator



Opening Speech

Monday June 15, 2009

Mai Palmberg



I WISH YOU ALL WARMLY WELCOME to this conference, which will give a conclusive answer to the question posed in the title of the conference "What's Culture Got to do with it?"

Sorry, did I not yet again slip into outdated modes of thinking from those days when a belief in one truth coloured our thinking. Correction then: We all look forward to a lively discussion where we exchange a myriad of fruitful answers and merge at a higher level of confusion.

Let us first establish the genesis of the title for this conference. We have to go back to a dark evening in November 2004 in my hometown Åbo (Turku in Finnish), where three guest researchers at NAI – Robert Muponde, Fibian Lukalo and Kirsten Holst Petersen – and I were introduced to karaoke in the downstairs part of a local pub by two local researchers, Katarina Jungar and Elina Oinas. This was our karaoke debut, and I chose to sing Tina Turner's "What's Love Got to do with it?". It is hard to sing, I was no grand success, but I did get the idea of the name for this conference. Thank you, Tina Turner.

As some participants have remarked a proper answer to the question posed in the conference title requires an understanding of what 'culture' and what 'it' stand for. I will try to contribute to this discussion by way of looking at how thoughts about this have evolved in the research programme "Cultural Images in and of Africa", which has initiated this conference.

It is often stated that the definitions of 'culture' can be counted in tens, or hundreds of ways. Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, two North American anthropologists, were the first to make a point of the inflationary flood of definitions when they in 1952 published a list of 160 different definitions of culture. Yet the definitions can actually be sorted into a few families.

We have concepts of 'culture' associated with

hierarchical. often racist ideas of development stages, through which all societies are presumed to go. The peoples and societies of the world are, in this conception, to be classified in relation to the binary

'primitive' vs. 'civilized'. A 'civilized society' has 'culture', a 'primitive society' by definition lacks 'culture'. Probably no anthropologist would use this definition of 'culture'. I mention it here because this has been one of the concerns in that part of the "Cultural images in and of Africa" programme, which studies Western and Nordic images of Africa. This is the understanding of 'culture' that evolved in the late 19th century parallel with the application of theories of evolution on societies (with Social Darwinism as one strand), and the pseudo-scientific race and eugenics theories, and continued to be influential at least until the discrediting of race biology after the collapse of Nazi Germany. The questions we have discussed are whether these views of culture, evolution, and race have disappeared or are still playing a role, either directly, or indirectly through received texts – from children's songs to missionary reports and travel literature – which still are part of the cultural heritage.

In contemporary scientific discourse we can distinguish between two ways of using the concept 'culture'. First, there is a variety of overlapping anthropological definitions, which are concerned with inherited patterns of behaviour in social groups or communities. There is a second type of definitions which sees 'culture' as a specific set of activities. The

Norwegian anthropologist Arne Martin Klausen distinguishes between 'culture' as a sector in society (schools, museums, creative activities carried out as special professions, grants etc); and 'culture' as an aspect of society. Culture as 'sector' approaches the anthropological definition, especially in such anthropologists as Franz Boas and Clifford Geertz, who include in the culture definition not only what is inherited but also the products of activities, and the symbol system resulting from but not just reproducing the inherited traditions, rules, and values.

Common to all these definitions of 'culture' is that they assume a community, or people as the primary object of study, and culture as its expression. Kirsten Hastrup, an anthropologist in Copenhagen points out a pitfall in the received anthropological definition: "---the cultural forms which the new sciences (like anthropology) were to study, were seen as entities, all with their own order" (*Det flexible fællesskab* 2004:53) . Her own culture concept – as suggested by her book title which reads 'the flexible community' – allows many co-existing meetings. Her book reads as a compendium about the concept of culture in action: as knowledge, problem, heritage, right, illusion...

In a forthcoming book from the Cultural images programme, a book in Swedish by Carita Backström and me (Mai Palmberg) on tendencies in contemporary culture in different genres in Africa, culture is understood as creative expressions, which are born in cultural contexts located in time and space but going beyond them into something new. Cultural expressions thus are seen as forms of communication.

When this conference was prepared the date of my retirement was approaching agenda (the 1st of March) but there was a question mark about the continuation of a research programme on culture at NAI. I thought the conference would show unequivocally why research into culture and dialogue with African cultural creators, artists, must continue, and give suggestions of new roads to take it further. Some parts of the dialogue programme will continue, the African writers' grant and the evening programmes called The Writers' Africa (meetings with African writers). Stefan Helgesson has been asked to be responsible for these, and has accepted. Hopefully these forum for African voices will continue a long time, although the NAI management does not want a longer com-

mitment than one year.

The research at the Institute is now being organised in so called clusters, but we know now that culture studies is not one of them. I still hope that this is not a full stop to NAI's role in promoting and conducting research on culture in Africa. Without the images research one misses the necessary continuous meta-discourse on the preconceived and sometimes not even conscious ideas behind attitudes and policies. Without the research on culture in Africa one misses important and interesting voices on Africa's past, present and future; and in repressive societies much of the critique of the way power is exercised. As there is no plan now for a successor to the Cultural Images programme, one can only hope that the active network of African, Nordic and other scholars doing research on these questions can serve some kind of continuation of the information exchange and collaboration.

Of all the workshops and conferences organised that the programme has organised over the years, this is the first international conference inviting research result on contemporary cultural production in Africa, which is not specifically genre-bound. We have held workshops on film, theatre and music research. The conference on "Playing with Identities in Contemporary Music in Africa" in 2000 was well attended by African and other scholars, and its ensuing anthology with the same name (*Playing with Identities in Contemporary Music in Africa*,) edited by Annemette Kirkegaard and me, is still used as a popular source. We have had some more generic workshops on culture production within the framework of the Nordic Africa days, for example the one in 1999, which resulted in the anthology edited by Maria Eriksson Baaz and me, called *Same and Other* (2001). A sign that we were here entering postcolonial and perhaps postmodern territory was the fact that Maria and I never agreed on what exactly we meant by the title of the book that we had enthusiastically agreed upon.

The programme's two - images of and images in Africa - do not use the concept of 'culture' in one and the same way. "Cultural images of" is about representation. Its primary research material has been school books in Nordic countries (Sweden, Finland, and in Iceland studies were made by Kristin Lofsdottir). We have also looked at ethnocentrism and racism, - and the relationship of these ideologies

to ideas and practices of solidarity. A network was set up called “The Nordic Colonial Mind”, which has continued, with its centre at the institute for culture and identity at Roskilde University Centre. Research on cultural images of Africa could in most cases fit into the discipline of history of ideas; they could also be part of mass media and communication studies, and the discipline of education, in the cases of research on school books. In actual fact the researchers come from many disciplines. We did not achieve a desired reciprocity, with African studies on the African images of Europe. But much was achieved. Many studies were produced in the Nordic languages, and I think we can say that they made an impact on public discourse, and on the production of and reception of school books.

The other part of the programme, the one in which this conference is engaged, is “cultural images in Africa”, which translates here as contemporary culture in Africa, with ‘cultural expressions’, ‘cultural production’ and cultural creativity’ as synonyms. The two parts of the programme meet in their, as we encourage discussion and research on African representations of Africa, and on the way that imagined communities are constructed and represented on lines of gender, ethnicity, religion, generation, urban/rural contrasts and connections. With identities at the centre, the research we are interested in, would be represented in a number of aesthetic disciplines, from literature to music, cinema, pictorial arts, drama, dance, communication studies, political science and anthropology.

The two aspects of studies of images of and images in Africa are thus different, but not totally separated. One might say that both types of issues of representation and cultural constructions form a meta-discourse that embrace practically all research on contemporary Africa. Perhaps one could mainstream this discourse, perhaps an independent research programme is not needed? Unfortunately, mainstreaming easily translates into burying the issues. My own views is that this very discourse is an important contribution from the humanities to the study of social change in Africa, precisely because it highlights the cultural constructions of ‘us’ and ‘other’.

The discussion of “African culture” is as interesting as the definition of culture is. If one can say that the programme has a platform it is one, which has

been developed and inspired by Mudimbe’s *Invention of Africa*, Terence Ranger’s and Eric Hobsbawm’s *Invention of tradition* (and its aftermath in the discourse), Edward Said’s analysis of sticky images maintained by the West, and Stuart Hall’s discussion on changing, multiple identities.

But to my surprise, not everybody in the network created by the cultural images programme have drifted in the same direction. This has come out in some discussions held on the electronic mailing list connected to the programme, NAI-Images list. The bones of contention have been, among other themes, what kind of museums, if any, Africa should have; and what one could understand by the statement “There is no ‘African music’”. Part of the fire has come from sentiments expressed that the colonial mind is attacking Africa, and showing no respect for its culture. But the core question is what ‘culture’ means here.

There is a paradoxical and ironical alliance between, on the one hand, those arrogant Western positions of power which arrogate to themselves to judge what is ‘authentic’ African and what is not, and, on the other hand, some African and/or Africanism positions of defending on behalf of Africa ‘authentic’ African culture against erosion and Western decadence. In both you find the view of ‘cultures’ as entities that Hastrup talked about. In both groups you find an assumption of the right to judge what is ‘really African’. In both groups you find a preference, not to say a moral imperative for purity.

The programme has embraced efforts to navigate between the Scylla and Charybdis of the arrogance of the colonial heritage and the authoritarianism of the Africanist anticolonial heritage. It is here, in the middle waters, and only here, that we can have a dialogue.

Before opening the conference, let me recognize the presence, not in body but in words, of Ama Ata Aidoo, our first guest writer at NAI. She could not come, but sent a paper, which is a strong statement for the place of culture in society and its development. We will let Ama Ata Aidoo’s opening be the opening of the conference:

Creative writing and other forms of artistic expression are the oil that keeps the wheels of human society running smoothly. What a society does in the way of the pursuit of literary and other artistic

excellence is as crucial as its members' need for basic good health, shelter, nourishment, and clothes. Until this is understood, accepted without equivocation, and incorporated into developmental philosophies, all developmental efforts, including those on behalf of the poor and the marginalised will prove sterile at best, and ultimately useless. To date, a clear understanding and appreciation of this fact has been the regrettable missing link in conventional approaches to development: especially in relation to Africa and other regions of the global South. Even where there was some awareness of the critical nature of literature, the arts and popular culture to society's growth and progress, this was never articulated with any clarity in any developmental discourse of note.

What is being proposed here is a complete paradigm shift. That rather than the status quo, we recognize that whereas social issues require forms of literary, artistic and recreational inputs to make any kind of impact on society, on the other hand, literary, artistic and recreational productions are completely valid in themselves. This means that it is not only unfortunate, but quite wrong to demand of literature and the arts that in order that they are considered relevant to any major discourse on development, or taken seriously, they deal overtly with prevailing social concerns. After all, all that literature and the arts deal with, much of the time, in most communities, are social issues.

WHAT'S CULTURE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

June 15-18, 2009

MONDAY 15 JUNE

- 13.30 Opening of the conference
Fantu Cheru, Research Director, the Nordic Africa Institute
Mai Palmberg, Research fellow at NAI, Conference convenor
- 14.00 Keynote speech A
KARIN BARBER (professor, Centre of West African Studies, University of Birmingham):
The critical power of moral examples in African popular culture
- 16.00-16.45 Opening of the exhibition of photos from Mozambique by Sergio Santimano.
Music by Celso Paco.
- 17.00-19.00 Session I: Use and abuse of culture
EVELYN LUTWAMA-RUKUNDO: *Community Theatre as a contemporary feminist tool for grassroots education and activism in Uganda*
REUBEN CHIRAMBO: *On the use and abuse of popular culture in Malawi within democratic politics*
MARIA OLAUSSEN: *Making 'IT' happen*
ANNA-LEENA TOIVANEN: *Remembering the Aching Spots of Zimbabwe – Yvonne Vera as a Witness and a Healer*
Discussants:
Siri Lange and Kirsten Holst Petersen

TUESDAY 16 JUNE

- 09.00-12.00 Parallel sessions in the morning
(A) Session II – Images to conserve, images to contest
BRANDON REINTJES: *Installing Anatsui*
RHODA WOETS: *Canvas paintings from the village of Sirigu in Northern Ghana and the quest for authenticity*
RETHA LOUISE HOFMEYR: *Assessing The Role Of Culture On The Entrepreneurial Potential Of Arts Students In Namibia*
Discussant: Gabeba Baderoon
(B) Session III – Intersecting tradition, modernity and diaspora
TAIWO OLORUNTOBA-OJU: *Location of African Culture- beyond the new Cosmopolitan Exotic*





Sérgio Santimano - Photography from Mozambique

Nordiska Afrikainstitutet 12–17 June 2009

VERNISSAGE: Friday 12 June 17.00-18.30
Kungsgatan 38, Uppsala

Sérgio Santimano

Sérgio Santimano was born in Mozambique in 1956. He works in the tradition of classic documentary and reportage photography, having worked as a photojournalist for most of the '80s. In 1988 he moved with his wife to Sweden where he worked and studied documentary photography.

After the war in Mozambique ended in 1992 he started working as a freelancer, documenting the consequences of war and the reconstruction of the country in such projects as *Mozambique – the country in such projects as Winding Road and Cabo Corumbos/The long and Winding Road and Cabo Corumbos/The long and Winding Road and Cabo Delgado – A photographic History of Africa*. From 2001 to 2005 he worked on *Terra Incognita*, a homage to the people of Niassa.

Santimano works both in Sweden and, since 1992 in Mozambique. In a first bigger project he explored, on several trips, the most northern province, Cabo Delgado. For this work he received a scholarship from Konstansnämnden, the Swedish Art Academy. As a result, the out-stander series *Cabo Delgado – A photographic History of Africa* emerged.

On his trip to the north of Mozambique Santimano always visits the Ilha de Moçambique (an island in the Indian Ocean and UNESCO Cultural World Heritage), the legendary first Portuguese base on the way to India situated on the East African coast, where he is working on another long-term project.

Since 1992, Sérgio Santimano has exhibited extensively in Africa, Sweden, Europe, India.

To Sérgio, writing is one way of presenting a story to the world; the image another.

Sergio Santimano's photo exhibit was opened with Paco Celso's music.

J.O.J. NWACHUKWU-AGBADA: *A critique of social change and individual behaviour in Abigbo Mbaise dance poetry*

DION NKOMO: *On Dictionaries and Culture, implications for Dictionary-Making and Culture-Related research in Zimbabwe*

JEAN-BAPTISTE SOROU: *New religious cultures through music, dance, gestures; new media uses by the Fon, Benin*

DRISSA DIAKITÉ: *Cultural festivals as spaces for the promotion of communal values of tolerance*
Discussant: Mickias Musiywa

13.30 -15.00

Session IV – Against the grain?

Popular culture, opposition and survival

MBECHA FERDINAND: *The anti-language of Mboko Tok and socio-political consciousness in Cameroon*

HILDE ARNTSEN: *Drawings for Change? Political Cartoons, Visual Representation and Democracy in Zimbabwe*

NELSON MLAMBO: *Urban lives and complexities of change: Cultural transformation for survival in contemporary Zimbabwean fiction*
Discussant: Reuben Chirambo

15.30-16.30

Discussion on the uses and policy relevance of cultural dialogue and studies of culture:
Carin Norberg, Director, the Nordic Africa Institute

Discussant: Siri Lange

17.00-18.30

Keynote speech B

ELLEKE BOEHMER (Professor of World Literatures in English, University of Oxford): *Everything to do with it: articulating the unsaid and the unsayable*

20.00-22.30

AFRICAN NIGHT WITH STARS

Music by Ahmadou Jarr (Sierra Leone/Sweden) and Jennifer Ferguson (South Africa/ Sweden);

Performing poetry by Shailja Patel (Kenya);
Readings by Gabeba Baderoon (South Africa/US) and Tolu Ogunlesi (Nigeria)

WEDNESDAY 17 JUNE

09.00-12.00

Session V – Translating culture: Communication and complication

MICKIAS MUSIYWA: *Hit Songs as a Record of Social Change in Post-Colonial Zimbabwe*

KIZITO MUCHEMWA: *Polarising cultures, politics and communities and fracturing economies in post-2000 Zimbabwe*

ROBERT MUPONDE: *History as Witchcraft: the Narcissism of Warrior masculinities in Edmund Chipamaunga's War and Post-War Novels*

STEFAN HELGESSON: *Translation as transformation: the examples of Mia Couto and Assia Djebar*

HILDA HÄRGESTAM-STRANDBERG: *Alternative Vistas: Literary 'Ethical Imagination' as Vehicle for Political and Ethical Debate*

SIRI LANGE & ELIAS SONGOYI: *"When Fish Cry – Freedom of expression and censorship in Tanzania*

Discussants:

Kirsten Holst Petersen and Siri Lange

14.00-16.00 Session VI – Representation and the power over memory

GABEBA BADERON: *Art and the Aesthetics in Representations of Slavery and Violence in South Africa*

RAISA SIMOLA: *The motif of survival in some old and modern master-and-slave -narratives*

CHRISTOPHER PREMAT & FRANÇOISE SULE: *Literature re-members history – the Algerian war in Belamri's and Mimouni's novels*

MONICA UDVARDY & LINDA GILES: *Museums, Media, Morality and Mijikenda Memorial Statues– Navigating African Art Repatriation in an Era of Rising Cultural Identity Politics*

Discussant: Kizito Muchemwa

16.30 Keynote speech C

STEFAN JONSSON (writer, critic, Associate Professor of Ethnic studies at the University of Linköping): *Europe through Africa, Africa through Europe: Reconstructing the relation of European integration and colonialism*



Caroline Kyhlbäck and Mai Palmberg performed a show on organizing a conference and rising for funding at the same time.

THURSDAY 18 JUNE

09.00-10.15 Session VII. Images are made of this

ANNEMI CONRADIE: *Travelling snapshots of the rain bow nation. Postcards in South Africa*

MAI PALMBERG: *Selling Africans in Uppsala. Reflections on and of Vaksala flee market*

10.30 Keynote speech D

SIGNE ARNFRED (Associate professor, Roskilde University): *Africa, Art and Gender*

13.00 And to conclude... Some observations by the rapporteurs, discussion

13:30-15.00 What next? *Exchange on continued collaboration, research cooperation and networking on issues of Images of Africa and Cultural Representations of Africa*

Moral energy and what looks like life in African popular culture *

I WANT TO SPEAK ABOUT TWO striking and interrelated features that I have noted in accounts of popular culture right across the African continent, and over a long time span of more than a hundred years. My purpose is to explore the relationship between these two features.

The first is the well-documented emergence, from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, of new styles of representation which look, at least at first sight, like “realism”. That is to say, narratives are often set in recognisable everyday life, revolve around recognisable everyday people – not gods and heroes – and unfold according to everyday logics of cause and effect, not bizarre coincidence or the operations of a *deus ex machina*. More importantly, these new styles of representation dwell on the *details* of that everyday life, using specific techniques of representation to produce lifelikeness. The emergence of this style went hand in hand with the appearance of new genres: the novel; the newspaper; rectangular two-dimensional figurative portable paintings; stage and television dramas where an extended, elaborate narrative is carried entirely through the speech and actions of the characters, not by a narrator. All these forms were new, and appeared in Africa only from the late nineteenth century onwards. And they seem strikingly similar across the continent. In Europe and America, the counterparts of these forms were all associated with realism.

Balzac inaugurated a particular tradition of discussions of realism in the nineteenth century by proclaiming, in the opening pages of *Le Père Goriot*, “Ah! sachez-le: ce drame n’est ni une fiction, ni un

KEYNOTE SPEECH
by
Karin Barber



roman. *All is true, il est si véritable que chacun peut en reconnoitre les éléments chez soi, dans son coeur peut-etre*. I’ll come back to this theme of *recognition* of the truth of the text in one’s own experience. The point for the moment is that Balzac’s apparently naive (but actually very cunning) claim soon led on to a discussion of the *artifices* of realism, the rhetorical means by which an illusion of reality is created, and the numerous ways in which this effect of reality can be combined with symbolic, archetypal or melodramatic modes.¹ Realism is a literary style - or a spectrum of related styles; like other literary styles, it makes claims about what is worth representing and what representation consists of. For my purposes, the most useful discussion is still Ian Watt’s, in his great book *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), in which he identifies as the hallmarks of realism *particularities of time, place and characterisation*: realistic novels offer specific, plausible details which seem to correspond to real experience: narratives are set, by implication,

1 It’s important to note that even the representatives of the high point of 19th century European realism incorporated strong non-realist dimensions. In drama, Ibsen’s representations of middle class life, evoked with a fidelity that astonished his audiences, nonetheless served increasingly symbolic purposes. In fiction, Henry James’s almost excruciating attention to social nuance was, Peter Brooks has argued, fundamentally melodramatic (Brooks 1976).

* Not to be quoted without permission of the author.

in a particular year, a particular city, the characters speak with the idiosyncrasies that characterise individual personal expression, not (for example) in the uniformly elevated poetic diction deemed appropriate to heroic drama. The emergence of this style has been linked, by (among others) Charles Taylor in his *Sources of the Self: the Making of the Modern Identity*, to a new Enlightenment focus on the interiority and personal experience of the individual, on the one hand, and a new interest in and positive valuation of ordinary life and the everyday for its own sake on the other.

In Africa, representations that “look like life” are well known and abound throughout the continent. Onitsha market literature’s graphic evocations of modern city life in Nigeria, depicting the lives of clerks and schoolgirls and the expansion of the cash economy; Tanzanian and Malawian popular plays, depicting the familiar predicaments of ordinary families (money worries, keeping up with the neighbours, a drunken husband, trouble with the in-laws); popular painting in Shaba, Zaire, with its meticulous attention to details of clothing, furniture, wristwatches, where a high value is apparently placed on exactitude.

The second feature, however, is at odds with the Western nineteenth-century aesthetic of realism, insofar as this concerns a positive evaluation of individual specificity and the details of ordinary life *for their own sake*. Popular culture throughout Africa is saturated with moralising. Ordinary life is not depicted because it is worthy or interesting in itself, but because it provides a vehicle of great impact and immediacy for the purpose of driving home moral lessons which the audience can appropriate and apply to their own lives. The moralising imperative is generally ignored by Western scholars of African popular culture because it is distasteful, boring or embarrassing. Yes: moralising can be tedious. But it is everywhere. Both performers and audiences insist, over and over again in relation to numerous genres, on the central place of the moral lesson that the text or performance imparts. In northern Nigeria, according to Graham Furniss, a key factor in the “dynamic, expanding, adaptive nature of Hausa culture is . . . the strength of its moral discourse” (Furniss 1996:214). In Ghana, according to Awo Ametewee, television audiences overwhelmingly assert that they watch TV

drama for the sake of the moral lesson (Ametewee 1993). And it is touching to learn that the young rap artists innovatively producing Bongo Flava in Tanzania and *le rap Dakarois* in Senegal, though outwardly modelled on the aggressive, anti-social styles of American gangsta rap, are often actually warning even younger fans of the dangers of promiscuity, or calling on public-spirited citizens to clean up the streets.

My purpose, in this talk, is to draw attention to the relationship in African popular culture between apparent “realism” and in-your-face “moralising”. This leads to the question: What difference does this mode of discourse make? What implications does it have for social, political and cultural conditions in Africa?

To develop my theme I will look at three examples. I could have drawn these from the rich and detailed documentation now being produced by scholars in all parts of Africa. As it happens, however, all three come from my own work on Yoruba print and performance genres: if only because these examples are the ones I have reflected upon longest and feel most familiar with. They date from three successive moments in the history of Yoruba oral and written textual production.

The “first” Yoruba novel

The text usually described as the first Yoruba novel stands at the head of what is now a huge, diverse written literature in Yoruba. *Itan Emi Segilola* was written by a newspaper editor-proprietor, Isaac B. Thomas, in Lagos, and published in weekly instalments in Thomas’s newspaper *Akede Eko* from July 1929 to March 1930. The full title was *Itan Emi Segilola, Eleyinju Ege, Elegberun Oko Laiye* (The Life story of me, Segilola, endowed with fascinating eyes, the lover of a thousand men). It purports to be a series of letters to the editor from an ageing and repentant adventuress or harlot. Now stricken with disease and destitution and facing imminent death, she recounts the story of her youthful exploits with glee as well as with oceans of pious regret.

The reality effect of this narrative is overwhelming: so much so, that many readers were apparently convinced that the letters were literally true and really written by an ageing seductress. Yet I.B. Thomas is

playing a cunning game of revelation and concealment, procrastination and teasing, hinting at scandalous true information which he constantly dangles and withholds.

The story is set in Lagos, then the commercial and administrative capital of Nigeria, full of immigrants pursuing trade rather than agriculture, and with an exceptionally high literacy rate and large white-collar population. Particularities of time and place abound.

First, the narrative evokes the city with numerous references to real street names, buildings, churches and local personalities. Segilola says she was born and still lives in Popo Imaro; she loses her virginity, shockingly, to a medicine man who lived “on Oke Popo road near the Durosinmi compound” (and “some of the elders who are still alive today will not fail to recall a medicine man called Olojo on Oke-Popo Road”); she got married in the Cathedral Church at Ehingbeti, and so on.

Second, the narrative is locked into real time. One of the things Lagos newspaper editors saw as a key innovation and benefit of the newspaper was its secure dating of events as they happened – as this would nail things down and provide reliable data for future historians. The temporality of Segilola's story coincides with the actual dates of publication: thus, for instance, she states that she was born on 9 September 1882, and in an episode published during the autumn of 1929 she mentions having recently passed her 47th birthday. She also teases the readers with dates: she reveals that her wedding was on 6th November, but that she cannot give the year, for if she did, lots of people, especially older people, would remember the wedding and would be able to identify her and expose her to public humiliation. However, she will give us a hint – it was ten years before a famous incident when a man called Yesufa climbed onto his roof and shot at passers-by, giving rise to a popular song “An old man becomes a hunter, a murderous hunter of human beings”.

Third, this last example illustrates another technique of I.B. Thomas's, the planting in the narrative of episodes from living popular memory. Presumably Yesufa's murderous outburst was something people did remember (this could be checked, by searching the newspapers of c.1912: something I have yet to do) and the popular song which commemorated it

was one of many such which would have been remembered by I.B. Thomas's readers, and which were often re-published as free-standing items of cultural interest in the various Yoruba-language newspapers, having been sent in by readers.

Fourth, as we have seen, Segilola continually hints that real, still-living, prominent Lagosians were involved in her sleazy tale: and threatens that if she revealed their identity she would cause a major scandal. And finally, the epistolary form itself participates in the texture of the current public discourse of the time. The newspapers were largely made up of letter-like texts. I.B. Thomas wrote an open letter to a different prominent Lagos personality each week, urging him or her to take action on various points of public concern; contributors of regular columns almost always presented them in the form of letters to the editor; there were also letters from readers. The Segilola sequence, therefore, would strike readers as the normal, and indeed main, mode of communicating information and opinion – rather than as a fictional device.

This was not the first serialised narrative in the history of Yoruba print culture – the editor of *Eletì Ofè* had produced twelve episodes of a first-person narrative in 1924, which then came to an abrupt stop mid-stream and was apparently never finished (though, tantalisingly, I have found an advertisement in *Akede Eko* for a pamphlet version of this story in 1931, which suggests that it was eventually completed). But *Segilola* was the first work of fiction to take epistolary form. It was inserted into a context where the letter – self-evidently associated with literacy and the new clerkly and professional classes emerging in Lagos – was the principal vehicle for the discussion of local on-going political, social and cultural events in the city (and, increasingly through the 1920s, in the “provinces” too).

I.B. Thomas went out of his way to reinforce the effect of reality. In an editorial of August 22, 1929, when the Segilola story was entering its seventh week, he describes how the narrative came to be published in his paper:

Awa ko fi igbakan lọ bẹ alagba obinrin yi l'ọwẹ lati ma wa kọ itan igbesi-aiye ẹ sinu iwe irohin wa yi fun gbogbo araiye ka, sugbọn funrarẹ ni obinrin na ọ wa wa l'asale alẹ ojọ *Saturday* kan ninu *Office* wa ti o si mu imoran nato wa wa lati

ma se be; anu obinrin na si se wa pupo l'asale ojo na nigbati o t'enu bo oro lati ma so ohun ti mu on lati fo ma ko itan igbesi-aiye on na sinu iwe irohin...²

We didn't at any time go to ask this elderly woman to write the story of her life in our newspaper for the whole world to read, but the woman came looking for us in our *Office* one Saturday evening of her own accord, and she was the one who proposed the idea; we felt very sorry for the woman that evening when she began to explain why she wanted to write the story of her life in the newspaper....

Moreover, he personally testifies to the truth of her story, asserting that he himself was not too young to be able to remember the days when Segilola's beauty was dazzling, "in this city of Lagos where both of us were born".

It seems that readers were taken in. One correspondent, signing herself "Jumoke" but emphasising that this was a pseudonym, states that all the details of Segilola's story were true: she can confirm this, because she too was a prostitute in Lagos before she repented and reformed. Moved by Segilola's plight she sends 10/- to the editor to pass on to her for the alleviation of her sufferings. A correspondent calling himself "D.A.L." writes an open letter to Segilola in November 1929: he takes his hat off to her, thanks her for her story, prays that God will forgive her; and observes that when the letters first began to come out, he thought the editor of *Akede Eko* was having a joke; but then he began to notice the names, places times and all kinds of other things, and this banished all his doubts and convinced him that it was all true. He has some questions for her, but they are not things that can be asked in this letter, so he would be very happy if she would allow him to meet her, if he undertakes not to reveal her name... Several other readers wrote in begging to be told the secret of Segilola's real identity. One, a well-known Ijebu popular poet, even wrote a song, pleading "Akede Eko mo be nyin l'owe k'oruko Segilola to mi lowo" (Akede Eko, I ask you as a favour to write down Segilola's name and send it to me). But I.B.Thomas reports that he

is not at liberty to divulge this information:

Aimoye awon ore wa yala ni'le tabi ni idale ni nwon to wa wa tabi ti nwon ko iwe si wa lati be wa pe awon fe lati mo oruko abiso tabi adugbo ti "Segilola Vleyin'ju Vge na ngbe ni igboro ilu Eko wa yi?

Sugbon anu nla lo se wa pupo fun pe awa to se ileri pelu ibura wa fun alagba obinrin to nko itan igbesi-aiye re na pe bi osan fe pada di oru, awa ko ni fi igbakan tuna asiri oruko abiso alagba obinrin na si eti 'gbon enikan...

Countless friends whether at home or abroad have been seeking us out or writing to us to beg us to tell them the first name or the neighbourhood where "Segilola of the Fascinating Eyes" lives in this city of Lagos of ours.

But we're very sorry to say that we promised and indeed solemnly swore to this elderly woman who is writing her life-story that even if day turns to night we will never expose the secret of her name to anyone...³

This story was a sensational success. It spawned numerous letters, commentaries, columns criticising Lagos women, and a clamour for a translation into English, which I.B.Thomas duly produced and serialised the following year. The Yoruba version, immediately after the end of its serialisation, was also republished as a book, generating further controversy and a denunciation from the conservative English-language *Nigerian Daily Times*. This novel, though long out of print, has influenced three generations of Yoruba writers, is still fondly remembered by elderly readers, and was recently broadcast in serial form on radio. The effect of reality that it pioneered was not immediately taken up by succeeding writers: D.O.Fagunwa's mesmerisingly imaginative heroic fantasies dominated the Yoruba prose tradition from the late 1930s to the late 1950s. But then the depic-

³ The question arises as to how many of these "readers' letters" were actually written by I.B.Thomas himself. This is difficult to judge. However, some of them use slightly different orthographic conventions and dialect forms from I.B.Thomas's own, suggesting independent authorship. They could still have been written at his instigation or with his encouragement – and given his energetic cultivation of correspondents all over the country, and his urgent need to make *Akede Eko* the centre of attention when he was in financial difficulties, this is certainly a strong possibility. It's unlikely, however, that he dictated the terms in which these correspondents expressed themselves, and that is the point at issue here.

² In all quotations, I reproduce the original orthography of *Akede Eko*. This rarely used tone-marks, and its conventions for word-breaks and elisions were slightly different from those of modern orthography.

tion of everyday actuality – including the seamy side of life that featured so strongly in *Segilola* – became fashionable again, and for the last fifty years has coexisted with an ever-expanding range of other modes and styles.

So this mimicry of the real was a major innovation which, at the very beginning of the history of the Yoruba novel, was extraordinarily intense – to the extent that readers were actually taken in. But that is only half the story. Equally intense is *Segilola*'s moralising. She announces in her very first letter that she is telling her shameful story “for the whole world to read” for only one reason: the hope that

emi le se ore kan silẹ nigb'ẹhin ojo aiye mi yi to kun fun osi on are nipa pe boya emi yio ri awọn ọlọgbọn diẹ, yala ninu awọn ọdọmọkunrin tabi papa gidi ninu awọn ọdọmọbinrin ti nwọn yio wo aṣẹ emi “*Segilola Vleyinju Vge*” k'ọgbọn, ki nwọn ma ba kẹdun igbẹhin ojo aiye wọn na pẹlu omi'je kikoro l'ọju wọn, gegebi emi “*Segilola Vleyin'ju Vge*” ti nke abamọ l'oni yi: sugbọn ti epa abamọ kike mi na ko tun ba oro fun mi mọ.

I may be able to do a good deed at the close of this life of mine which is full of misery and wretchedness, in that I may find a few wise ones, either among the young boys or more particularly among the young girls who will learn wisdom from the example of me, “*Segilola of the Fascinating Eyes*”, so that they do not lament in their last days with bitter tears in their eyes, as I “*Segilola of the Fascinating Eyes*” am repenting today: but in vain, for in my case the antidote of my regret can no longer neutralise the poison [of my misspent life].

And she reiterates this pious hope in virtually every episode. The impression of reality that I.B. Thomas so successfully creates does not seem to be a depiction of Lagos life and times for its own sake, as an object inherently worthy of attention and interest. Rather, it seems intended to create a vivid impact in order to impress the urgency of the moral lesson on the mind of the reader. It's real! It's true! It's horrifying! and, above all, it could happen to you if you don't mend your ways. Lifelikeness serves to make the truth of the moral example stare you in the face.

And this interpretation was warmly endorsed by all the readers and commentators who wrote about

it. In his letter, “D.A.L.”, who said the real-life detail convinced him the story was all true, added that it also convinced him “that her life-story is full of lessons – lessons for parents, both mothers and fathers – for old and young, and above all for those who call themselves prominent ladies, high-lifers, good-timers – in due course they'll be forgotten, they'll be people we look at to spit upon... a great lesson for girls and married women, and even more for our young ladies, I can't say how delighted I am with your story...”⁴ In this and other responses, the life-likeness and moral lesson seem to be absolutely inseparable.

So how do people take up these moral lessons they so eagerly identify? My second example, the Yoruba popular travelling theatre, sheds some light.

The improvised popular theatre

Modern Yoruba popular travelling theatre emerged in the 1940s from “Native Air Operas”, that is, dramatisations of Biblical stories with a predominantly or entirely sung text and stylised movements, staged by church choirs to attract people to the congregation and to raise funds for religious purposes. So successful were these dramas that enterprising actor-managers, chief among them Hubert Ogunde, were able very quickly to move out of the church and establish secular, professional, commercial travelling theatres producing plays on a wide variety of themes, ranging from folkloric tales to anti-colonial polemics and crime thrillers set in the contemporary underworld. By the early 1980s, when this theatre was in its heyday, there were over a hundred travelling theatre companies, each with a repertoire of half a dozen or more plays and a company of actors, actresses, drummers, drivers, and technicians (for the stage lights and sound system, vital to the success of any production) numbering ten, twenty or more members. In the process of secularisation and expansion, spoken dialogue gradually replaced most

⁴ Most readers follow *Segilola*'s own lead in affirming that the story contains moral lessons for everyone – men as well as women. Perhaps the lesson to men is primarily that they should avoid women like *Segilola*. But the connotations of the term *panságà*, which is the one most often applied to *Segilola*, are not confined to prostitution alone: its wider meaning includes loose living, debauchery, and womanising, and there are strong suggestions that men as well as women engaged in sex for money or other material gain in 1920s Lagos. However, the massive weight of condemnation is undoubtedly tilted towards women, whose deceitful exploitation of their sexuality is treated as both the symptom and the cause of the corruption of modern life.

of the sung text, and fluid, lifelike representations of everyday characters replaced the stylised and rather static choreographed Biblical characters.

Sêgilôla is lifelike because of her individual, urgent speaking voice, addressing the newspaper editor and, over his shoulder, the newspaper's reading public; the popular theatre was lifelike because it portrayed the interaction of characters as if their lives were conducted independently of the audience, and existed before and after the moment of the spectacle – creating the illusion of an on-going process on which the audience were merely eavesdropping. This illusionistic mode always co-existed with and was often thoroughly shot through by more presentational and openly theatrical styles, and some theatre companies developed it further than others. But all of them used the flow of natural-sounding speech to establish character and unfold the narrative, so that it seemed as if the people on stage were authoring themselves.

The Oyin Adejobi Theatre Company, one of the longest-established and most successful companies, excelled at generating a flowing, rippling stream of detail, some of which was necessary to the development of the plot, and some of which was not, but was extraneous, introduced by the improvisation of actors who drew on details of their own experience and memory to create effects resembling ordinary, recognisable local life. One of their most popular and long-lived plays, *Kuye*, which was originally created in about 1964 and which was still in their repertoire in the early 1980s, having undergone countless revisions and transformations over the years, opens with the entrance of an old woman, followed by a young boy. The old woman stops in the middle of the stage and says (my translation):

What a bloody fool I am, what on earth am I thinking of? I've gone and forgotten the very thing I was supposed to be bringing along with me. Look, Kuye, you run back home and fetch it for me. When you get there, you'll see those clothes there. Look, Kuye! Kuye!! [Barber 2000:353]

Thus the play starts right in the middle of an existing situation. Only gradually do we, the audience, deduce that the woman is the unkind aunt of the deaf and dumb orphan Kuyê, planning to sell Kuyê's

father's only legacy, his valuable handwoven robes, to an itinerant trader. This opening creates the unmistakable sense that the situation we encounter when the curtain opens pre-existed the moment of depiction. We start in the middle, and the preceding story is artfully introduced as if through the spontaneous remarks of the interacting characters. This is the effect of the "fourth wall", a central characteristic of nineteenth-century realism in the theatre, where the action unfolds as if in a private room, one wall of which has been removed so that the audience can eavesdrop. It is significant that the Yoruba theatre companies, although they also used a host of non-realist modes and techniques of presentation, always performed on a front-facing platform stage in a bicameral auditorium (never in the round), and always used space as if they were behind a proscenium arch even when the church hall or hotel yard offered no such amenity. Their fundamental mode, which they emphasised in contradistinction to the older but still thriving art of the masquerade, was the conventional representation of lifelike situations, presented in the form of a picture to an audience who sat in rows facing the stage.

Bakhtin, in a wonderfully fresh discussion of early Greek prose romances, suggested that the unreal time and featureless abstract expanses of space against which the narratives unfolded was intimately connected to the plots full of coincidences and discontinuities. Concretisation – embedding a narrative in specific time, place and culture – limits the operation of chance in the later development of the novel. The representation of "the indigenous reality surrounding one" eliminates the possibility of free-wheeling plots where effects are unrelated to causes (Bakhtin 1981:100). This suggests the possibility that the Oyin Adejobi Theatre Company set their plays in a rich environment of recognisable, everyday detail precisely to eliminate randomness and to demonstrate that every action has determinate, unavoidable effects. This made the narrative more effective as a moral example. The more specific, local and idiosyncratic the detail, the more generically the moral could be applied.

And audiences unanimously spoke of the Yoruba popular theatre as, above all, sources of moral example. Everyone said "Others may come to laugh and have a good time, but *I* come to pick a lesson I can use

in my life". Audience members took responsibility for their own edification: they did not receive wisdom so much as quarry it out of the narrative by their own efforts, and each segment of a mixed audience would extract the lesson that applied most closely to their own personal circumstances.

Thus, in a rather unpleasant play called *Oko Iyawo* (Bridegroom), the married men in the audience said that the most important character in the play was the husband (the "bridegroom" of the title) who rashly marries a second, younger, very wealthy and domineering wife whose greed and disrespect for the elders of her family leads to a catastrophic outcome for her husband as well as herself. The moral of the narrative, in the view of these men, was that one should investigate carefully before marrying a second wife, and should certainly never favour the junior wife over the senior. A young married woman told me that the most important character was Mosun, the second wife: "she is the one who makes everything happen", and that her actions embodied an important lesson for all young women: "we must respect our senior wives, and not use our husband's favour to domineer over them". A young unmarried man, however, told me emphatically that the lesson of the play for him was that one should not marry at all! Each of these respondents began their commentary by saying "The play was very important, particularly for us married men [or young wives, unmarried men etc.], and especially for *me*..."

And in this mode of moralising, the distinction between factual and fictional narrative becomes secondary, as my final example shows.

The modern Yoruba newspaper

Alaroye, one of several Yoruba-language weekly newspapers flourishing in the 1990s and 2000s, purports to be reporting factual items – accounts of things that actually happened in local communities. No doubt most of the things they reported did happen. But that does not affect the function of the narrative, which is very often, like that of *The Life-story of me*, *Segilola* and *Oko Iyawo*, to anchor a moral paradigm. A report on a fatal accident in a local school begins (my translation) "Bad times tend to pass by every day, they go round, they circulate; the prayer of

young and old is that they don't come face to face with misfortune". It continues

When Mrs Grace Adedoyin Ayankoya woke up early on Thursday morning last week, her prayer was that when she went out she should not meet trouble, that God would grant that she came back safely home. But fate and destiny never miss their mark...

The report then describes what happened: a man was mowing the grass outside the school building, watched by some of the teachers. The lawnmower was defective; a blade became detached, flew out and struck Mrs Ayankoya, killing her. Having briefly explained this, the newspaper report goes on to describe Mrs Ayankoya's husband's forebodings caused by a dream about death – but which he wrongly interpreted as applying to his mother not his wife – and his philosophical comments after the event. Thus the terrible incident reported in this newspaper item serves as the exemplification of a wider truth which applies to us all. Whether it is fact or fiction is secondary: its main function is to furnish an example.

Morals and examples

In all three cases, the effect of lifelikeness cannot be understood as "realism" in the standard sense of a representation of the quotidian for its own sake; rather, the purpose of lifelikeness is to make an example of behaviour and its consequences more telling, more incontrovertible, to anchor it more firmly in a recognisable world in order to sustain a moral interpretation of the world. In all three cases, members of the audience must produce meaning for themselves by applying the example to their own situations. This means that the lifelike specificity is first converted to a generic model and then re-specified by application to a concrete situation – like a proverb.

So what is the nature of the morality that these genres are structured to impart, and that audiences are primed to extract? At first sight, it looks like a narrowly personal morality: individuals extract it to apply to their own lives. And often it looks specifically like a sexual morality, and a conservative one at that. The trend is to blame the woman (*Segilola*

deserved what she got because she ignored her mother's advice; Mosun's greed and disrespect was what brought disaster on the whole family); to blame the poor (they deserve their poverty because they are lazy); and to counsel patient acceptance of fate (the article on the lawnmower accident, in striking contrast to the way such an accident would be reported in the British press, for example, does not ask "Why was that defective lawnmower not fixed?"). The causes of bad situations are often traced to the behaviour and attitudes of individuals, rather than to collective or structural causes such as social injustice, deprivation, lack of education or inequality.

This pattern brings to mind a distinction made by Latin American conscientisation theorists between two terms, sometimes translated as "people's" and "truly popular". People's culture emanates spontaneously from the ordinary people but is not in their true interests; truly popular culture usually needs to be catalysed by radical intellectuals from outside the community, but because it opens people's eyes to the causes of their oppression it is in their real interests. If we were to apply this distinction to the form of moral representation that I have been discussing, I don't think there's much doubt that we would place it in the "people's culture" category. Forms like the Yoruba popular newspaper and theatre – along with Onitsha market literature, the Nairobi popular novel, the Tanzanian variety show, the Ghanaian concert party and innumerable other well-documented genres – all seem to mobilise lifelikeness in order to furnish a conservative, personal morality. In this they are sharply distinguishable from those more radical, critical genres that confront power, inequality and injustice head-on and call for collective effort to bring about change: the *chimurenga* songs of the Zimbabwean liberation war, the Kamiriithu conscientisation theatre in Kenya, outright political attacks on military dictators launched by Yoruba media poets in the 1990s. Within the framework of conscientisation theory, there is quite a tradition of examining "people's" culture genres and finding them wanting – unless covert or oblique social criticism can be detected within them.

However, we may need to rethink this distinction – as we have already rethought distinctions between "traditional", "popular" and "elite" – in order to

produce a model which is more sensitive to local perceptions and usages on the ground. My impression from talking to the producers and consumers of popular cultural forms in Africa is that, almost always, the apparently individual personal morality *encompasses* the political – reminding politicians that moral standards are shared, and apply to them as much as to us, and that no one is exempt from the requirements of decency and respect. Leaders are accountable for their own actions – the blame cannot be shifted onto history or circumstances – and it is their responsibility to find the right path and follow it. James Ferguson, in his wonderful book *Global Shadows*, comments on "an idea that keeps cropping up in the ethnography of Africa": the idea "that all of the world, even the natural, bears the traces of human agency". He cites the famous example, from Evans-Pritchard's *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, of the person sitting under a granary which collapses and kills him. Of course people know that the granary collapsed because it had been eaten away by termites; but why at that particular moment? Why was this man killed and not another? "Who sent the termites?" The Azande seek a human explanation underlying the perfectly-well understood natural or mechanical causes of events in the environment. Ferguson goes on to say:

...what is true of mortal fate is also true of economic and political destinies. Not only among the Azande, but throughout the region, disparities of power and wealth, like fluke accidents, never "just happen"; they demand to be explained in terms of meaningful human agency (Ferguson 2006:74).

And this search for human causes is not confined to "traditional" settings: "Capitalist forms of accumulation and modern state economic activities are very widely understood in similar terms" (*ibid.*). Those who "eat power" and grow fat at others' expense are held responsible for their own actions.

This human-centred morality clearly has its drawbacks. Anyone who has seen road accidents consistently attributed to witchcraft will know this. Why can't people forget about the putative malevolence of their fellow-road users, and just drive more care-

fully?⁵ But at its most positive, this human-centric morality is of a piece with the determined efforts of self-development undertaken by communities who expect no support from the state – home town associations that tax their members to build a local dispensary, bridge or school. It is a “do-it-yourself”, “start-from-home” morality which says that everyone is responsible because everyone is human. And this is why there is such emphasis on the active work of the audience. It is up to them to find the lesson and apply it to their lives: they do not expect anyone else to do it for them. That is how moral examples work. Like a proverb, an example is only half the story: the other half is its appropriation and application.

Popular culture's moralising offers a perspective on the conditions in which we live which is weak on structural analysis. It is not, after all, true that corruption is purely the aggregate outcome of individual, personal moral failings: as Dan Smith has shown, it is systematic, a pervasive environment from which it may be impossible for even the best-intentioned individual to break free (Smith 2007). Living chastely will not make the state less unjust. But in British popular culture we experience the opposite weakness. In a feature on shoplifting in a national British newspaper a few months ago, a female interviewee, explaining that she wanted to provide her son with electronic games and clothes, told the interviewer, with obvious sincerity, “I'm not a thief. If the state had provided support, this would not have happened. It was a cry for help”. If blaming the individual for systemic ills is one cliché, blaming the system for individual misbehaviour is another – its mirror-image.

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5 This example also reveals a further conundrum concerning responsibility. Blaming witches for road accidents does seek a human cause, as Ferguson's argument suggests: but it shifts the blame away from another human cause – the bad driving. And it substitutes a mystical remedy (divination, sacrifice, juju) for a non-mystical one (driving more carefully).

Everything to do with it

Articulating the unsaid and the unsayable *



KEYNOTE SPEECH
by
Elleke Boehmer
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Oxford

IN THIS PRESENTATION I want to pick up on two ideas that are implicit or explicit in many of the paper titles being given here at the conference: they seem to be ideas in contradiction, but this may be a function of rhetoric, more than anything. The one is the idea that poetry, culture, writing, literature, all that aesthetic stuff, makes nothing happen, to quote Auden's well tried phrase; that it has no effect in the real world. The other is that, on the contrary, culture is what makes us. Through writing we discover what we are up to. Literature makes the political meaningful, resonant, it gives us a grasp not so much on the real world, as on the otherness, the singularity, the incommensurability, that leads us to develop an understanding of further worlds – political, social, cultural – in addition to our own.

The idea that culture - and for me specifically in this talk, literature - adds meaning, is the one I think brings us here, and it's the one I want to think about more carefully in what follows. I will aim also to acknowledge that it may not be in contradiction with the first. As we will all know, in postcolonial

as well as in area studies it is an idea that has often come under pressure. In both domains the alleged functionlessness of the literary and the aesthetic has been deemed a problem, especially in situations of deprivation, loss and hardship, where people are illiterate, and lack the means to gain access to books.

What I want to offer, to the contrary, is the thought that to see the cultural, the literary and the political as making the same kinds of meanings, in more or less the same discursive domain, is to make a category mistake. The cultural and the political denote different kinds of activities, and different kinds of meaning making that may however elucidate one another. As the cultural and the textual are my concerns here, I'd like to extend this into saying that the power of the literary – or perhaps specifically of writing, of forms of writing, or formed writing – is that it allows us to begin to conceive of meanings not yet spoken. It allows us to shadow forth significations, and configurations of ideas, perhaps not yet even thought. The literary then is not programmatic, not directive, not merely denotative.

From this it follows that the literary may be a powerful, though necessarily not purposeful tool for change. Writing as an aspect of the literary can articulate the as yet unsaid. But, in addition to this, writing allows the unsayable, the taboo, the forbidden, to be articulated, though in coded, oblique, and disguised ways. And by articulating the unsayable, writing can provide a way forward, a means to open the future, such as for those under taboo, for those who are forbidden or excluded in some way, for the wretched of the earth.

To bring these two points together. By means of what it makes possible, for example, by its joining together of oddities and incommensurabilities, by

* *Not to be quoted without permission of the author.*

its juxtaposition of the unlikelihoods, writing allows the reader/the writer, to conceive of what has not yet been conceived. It also encourages that which till now has been silenced or subdued, even when it was conceived, to be imagined. It allows the silenced to be thought in a new, perhaps digressive, evasive, oblique, yet still meaningful and memorable way (see, for example, Nussbaum 2001; Attridge 2004).

As this implies, my suggestion here is that aesthetic forms – here, the structures and codes of writing – offer us a mode of addressing, interrogating and thinking through some of the most difficult preoccupations and challenges of our postcolonial realities. As Fredric Jameson contended some time back, reality – and I would add alternative realities – can only become available to us in language (Jameson 1981). As we see from the ways in which it persists amongst us, literature offers ‘at least some degree of creative detachment from material circumstances’ (Hallward 2001: 334). And not only that. Writing is also an inventive and highly malleable, and thus adaptive, mode of thinking beyond those realities, those material circumstances. It escapes censoring and censoring, and it projects into the future. To summarise Ato Quayson in *Calibrations*, though citing him out of context, writing is a construct that is intercalated with, or calibrated with, the real world, which is however also a set of constructions (Quayson 2003). Writing therefore can through the medium of those calibrations with the real world, offer a series of more and less actual and more and less imagined constructions and reconstructions of that real world. In cultural forms – visual media, musical expression, but also textual representations – connections between peoples are forged, ventured and fantasized, and critiques made. These would be impossible outside of these forms, because of the scope for calibrated meaning and nuance they offer, and because they allow imagined alternatives and wide-ranging shades of opinion to be explored.

Writing in the sense in which I am speaking of it here does involve resistance, as we know well in postcolonial and related disciplines. But it also entails what Ahdaf Soueif in a recent review called the resisting of resistance. Writing animates an interrogation of the status quo, yet it casts beyond it also. It projects worlds beyond even those that are being resisted (Soueif 2009).

To underline this point, here is a quote from J.M. Coetzee. It will be immediately clear that the quotation is apt for the purposes of developing my case. As we know, for Coetzee writing has always been more eloquent, more pregnant with meaning, than other forms of language. In his view, writing articulates what cannot be expressed outside of writing. And that means that writing by definition will work to shift the boundaries of the known, the expected, the respectable. Coetzee in *Doubling the Point*: “Writing reveals to you what you wanted to say in the first place. In fact, it sometimes constructs what you want or wanted to say. What it reveals (or asserts) may be quite different from what you thought (or half-thought) you wanted to say in the first place. That is the sense in which one can say that writing writes us. Writing shows or creates (and we are not always sure we can tell one from the other) what our desire was, a moment ago” (Coetzee 1992: 10). In short, writing writes us; writing reveals what had not yet been thought; writing illuminates our desire, though by the time we understand it, it has vanished from us.

An interestingly related example of the reconstructive, but also constructive possibilities opened in writing – here, in particular, of the representation of gradual change set against abrupt breaks with tradition, be it oral or otherwise -- comes to us from Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) whose fascinating complexity, lightly worn, speaks eloquently in this context (Achebe 1982). Colonial history was, when Achebe’s novel was published, still highly polarised into coloniser and colonised perspectives: the heuristic focus was on the African versus the European, on manichean opposition. From this we appreciate the difficulty involved in the attempt of *Things Fall Apart* to tell the story of colonial penetration into Igbo, which is not as a straightforward historical narrative, chronologically arranged. Rather, it tells that story with regard for the refrains, loopings back, and repetition-with-a-difference of myth-based narration, and for the grey tones and paradoxes brought into play by any text. In the novel, in contrast with what the historical narrative might have represented, we have a mixed moral picture of how incursion is produced by both sides, and how Igbo society has weakened itself by having become too divided along gender-symbolic

lines. The final indictment of the colonial system is offered at the end of a long process of Igbo self-indictment, and makes the first indictment that much more powerful and iconoclastic by contrast. This is very evidently an example, though rooted in a specific context, of a resistance of resistance writing.

Now to follow through an important assumption on which rests this valorization of writing as bringing into being new meanings. The recognition of the importance of writing qua writing, whether in a postcolonial context or elsewhere, implies giving due recognition also to reading as a creative process, to the literariness and the individuality of a text, or a piece of writing, that choreographs that reading. Moreover, to spell out, it means doing so separately from attending to its socio-historical context, to which its appellation as postcolonial or African may disproportionately draw our attention. As this will suggest, I agree with Nick Harrison in his book *Postcolonial Criticism* (111) when he observes that our treatment of postcolonial literature requires us to attend to that literature as literature, as well as to what in historical terms makes up its post/coloniality (Harrison 2003: 111). The literary text, even the postcolonial literary text, is to be valued precisely because it disrupts and interrogates through the reading process the dynamics of representativity that connect a text to an identity, a country, a voice. So we attend to a Nigerian text like Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, say, not for its Nigerianness only or for the fact that it is written by a woman only (Nwapa 1966). We attend to it because its complexities ravel and dishevel such obvious and ultimately not very revealing one-to-one connections.

The writing of terror in a postcolonial context, in particular writing concerned with processing the pain and fear generated by state commandment, gives a further illustrative insight into the distancing, adaptive and transformative powers of writing, or of the literary text. Such powers emphasize for us how as-yet-unimaginable significations – in this case, terror – can often only be mediated to the conscious through metaphor, connotation, digression, distortion, implication, and what I will call unordered, as opposed to disordered, and random juxtaposition, and of all or some of these techniques working together. And this is yet another way of saying that the fictional or poetic text gives access,

though it may be aslant or deflected, to the unspeakable: to the unsaid – the expression of extreme levels of violence in a terror situation, and the unsayable – pain, sorrow, fear.

Writing, as suggested, has the power to draw attention to places of refuge and reconstruction both within and outside of the terror-stricken state. It also supplies a fuller understanding of the painful losses as well as strategic gains of such acts. So it might, for example, explore the human inwardness that inheres to situations of extreme decimation, carnage and grief, through say, off-beat, even off-colour and inappropriate humour, or through vivid, expressionist utterances of emotion. It might show, in the words of Kader Asmal *et al*, that 'humanism [travels] always with ... resistance' (Asmal 1996: 50). By narrating historical division and pain, but also recovery and endurance, writing thus powerfully posits futurity in relation to the futureless (that is: terror, necropolitics). Paradoxically, it also reminds us of colonial 'pasts', of the 'regeneration of colonialism through other means', and hence of the need to remain vigilant about and to survive such regeneration (Frankenburg and Mani 322-34). Zimbabwean Yvonne Vera's 2002 novella *The Stone Virgins*, for instance, tells in disturbingly poetic terms, of quirky, unordered juxtaposition, not only of a horrifying terroristic act perpetrated upon village-dweller Nonceba and her sister during Zimbabwe's post-independence civil war. It also tells of the restorative processes of mourning and healing which, for Nonceba, eventually follow. Moreover, the narrative casts a coldly penetrating eye into the frozen mind of the terroristic (and terrorized) soldier and attacker himself, representing him, by contrast with survivor Nonceba, as suspended in a place outside of history. Relatedly, Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* (2004) is concerned more with a family's attempts to come to terms with the 'ordinariness' of life in the post-apartheid city, and with one another, than it is with the state-inflicted act of violent rape that, years before, first distanced them from one another. In these ways postcolonial narrative maps a chronology on to the 'moment of danger', the moment-in-and-out-of time, of terror, registering through a plethora of human detail not only the past history but also the future consequences and repercussions of necropolitical acts for human subjects.

Having planted such a close focus on the culture that is writing, I'd like to query some of the assumptions underlying my prioritization. I'd then like to move on to two further examples that will illustrate my contention that writing allows new meanings to be shadowed forth through putting in play interesting attractions between unordered objects.

My first question then is to ask – and at once to concede to the contrary – whether writing necessarily articulates the unsaid and the unsayable. No it does not; it often describes the world as it is, and in factual, empirical terms. A second question, linked to this one, is to ask how, when it does articulate the unsaid and the unsayable, it goes about this. I've already suggested certain answers to this question, by outlining such techniques as implication, nuance, digression, and, in particular, as it is more random, unordered juxtaposition. In addition we might mention, the activation of double meaning, multivoicedness and a plethora of significations, or, in short, complexity. However, the reason I am returning to the question has to do with the concentration of such techniques in European modernist writing, and with how such writing was calibrated with a particularly reactionary politics in many writers. Of course since Salman Rushdie wrote that we/writers from the empire were the first modernists, modernist techniques have been widely valorised, in postcolonial criticism, as the means of writing against a colonial grain, Dambudzo Marechera, for example, has been acclaimed for the subversive potential of his juddery, sometimes incoherent, glossolalia. Yet, as is also widely known and commented on, writing of complexity, indirection and ambiguity, too -- fragmented collage writing -- has been used to express views less than progressive as much as progressive. Right-wing opinions of the early 20th century experimental modernists come to mind.

So when we speak of writing qua writing as bodying forth new meanings, do we need to think again? To confront this difficult question I suggest we need to bring the idea of silence or the unspoken, the as-yet-unsaid, back into the frame. Moreover, we may need to deflect our attention away from the *mix* of objects that we find in a modernist type bricolage, away from hybridity, and all its dynamically connotative assemblage of random objects, and towards the spaces between the objects, the interstices. We may

need to think about the spaces of possibility created by the unordered juxtaposition itself. And this is another way of saying we may need again to think differentially, to think between, to think otherness. For, as Paul Gilroy says, the exposure to otherness is creatively unsettling. And again: The repudiation of dualistic pairings ... can be accomplished via a concept of relation' (Gilroy 2004: 45, 77).

To this I would add that unordered juxtaposition suggests relationality, or in Gilroy's terms: 'complex, tangled, profane and sometimes inconvenient forms of interdependency'.

Dipesh Chakrabarty's 'Historical Belatedness as Possibility' offers the insight that it is through finding and offering broad and vague new names for the revolutionary subject of history, that the radical historian invokes a new historical agent into being (Chakrabarty 2010). Note that he says names, not just one name, but a list, which again implies suggestive spaces between the words. For Chakrabarty, the names stretch and displace the original terms of analysis, drawn from Europe. So the radical historian turns from the too-specific-proletariat, and towards the more poetic phrase, 'the wretched of the earth'. To reinforce his point, Chakrabarty reminds us of Fanon's well-known observation: 'the terms of analysis have to be stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem'. Rhetorical imprecision allows newness to come into the world.

With these ideas in mind I'd like now to move to my two closing examples, drawn from historical situations of encounter, negotiation, and the forging of interdependency, where writing or text allowed and encouraged relationality to emerge.

The first example has to do with how late 19th-century Indian travellers in London, who felt alien and displaced in its strange streets, were also aware of themselves as citizens of the empire. Though they brought to the city a set of standard expectations, articulated through received images of crowds, commotion, frenetic activity, and, above all, advanced industrial and commercial modernity, yet, far from positioning themselves as removed from that energy and modernity, they described themselves as forming part of it and blending in with the crowds, even quite criticizing its more socially derelict aspects. They located themselves as part of the unordered, creative juxtapositions that the city fostered, and not

as forces or presences accentuating London's divisions and separations, but as part of its entanglements, as a part of its complex texture. They wrote a place for themselves into London through the very process of composing their travel narratives (Ahmed, Boehmer, Mukherjee, Nasta, Stadler 2007-10)

My second example again looks at juxtaposition, yet focuses more on the spaces between texts in juxtaposition – and on how meaning is created between those jagged edges. The example has to do with the interesting question of how Nelson Mandela arrived at both his decision to negotiate with the apartheid regime, and at his techniques for negotiation. A range of different answers have been given to this question – for example, pointing to his experience of often polarized discussion in prison; and of nationalists joining together in conversation. I want to suggest in addition that Mandela came to this highly sophisticated stance in part through the chemistry between the widely differing texts that inspired him. A poem by G.A. Henty, 'Invictus', his favourite Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, and Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*, allowed Mandela to think his way out of a polarised politics, and towards his negotiating strategy of give and take, or give on the basis of a shrewd anticipation of how much the other party was prepared to give. Disparate aesthetic forms, and the interplay between them, the relations between difference, provided Mandela with a mode of thinking through reconciliation, or how to bring irreconcilables together.

Put differently, Robben Island confined Mandela to the *realm of the symbolic*, which earlier he had already learned skilfully to manipulate for the purposes of legal advocacy. Now he found it a medium in

which his political intellect could move with special facility, as when he attempted to approach others' perspectives, including his warders', on their own merits, or identified at different levels with both Creon and Antigone in an Island production of Sophocles's eponymous play, or drew his necessarily random favourite reads into juxtaposition. Among prisoner friends he was well known for his tendency to meditate on a move in chess for days at a time: his style 'deliberate', his strategy 'conservative', as he himself admitted. He was noted, too, for the patience with which he pursued discussion with an interlocutor, relying on his capacity for listening and avoiding judgement, corroborating the other speaker's position with occasional remarks, pushing them gradually to concede common ground. It was an approach in which he resisted straightforward resistance through activating the spaces between words (Boehmer 2008).

Once, when inducting the SWAPO leader Toivo ya Toivo into how argument worked on the Island, Mandela provocatively advised him to 'engage all and sundry in conversation, during which he could make political points'; that is, to put relationality into play. Particularly difficult debates, as between the ANC and PAC or, later, with Black Consciousness adherents, Mandela liked to imagine literally in 3-D, as a drama played out in a theatre. This capacity to focus at length, if anything, deepened over the years, as he learned a new sensitivity to others' needs. As in the diagram with which I illustrate this talk, Mandela's example draws our attention to how difference comes together, how life is expressed through entanglements.

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Europe through Africa, Africa through Europe

Reconstructing the relation of European integration and colonialism *

WHEN DID AVERAGE EUROPEANS first gain first-degree contact with Africans? There is much to support that this first happened in period immediately following World War One, from 1919 to 1925. More than a million soldiers born in the colonies of the European states fought on European soil in the First World War, almost all of them on the French and the British sides.¹ In the French troops that after the war continued the occupation of the Rhineland, there were thousands of soldiers from Madagascar, West Africa, Morocco, and Algeria.

The presence of non-white soldiers in the occupying forces bred strong emotions among the German public and intelligentsia. African soldiers were generally perceived as unreliable savages, who posed great danger especially for the German female and juvenile population. Newspapers were flooded with articles disseminating rumors of atrocities committed by the foreign troops. Talk about “the black danger,” “the black disgrace,” “the black shame,” and “the black peril.” was in everybody’s mouth. When Germany’s Reich chancellor Müller, the highest ranking politician of the nation and a social democrat, addressed the parliament in April 1920 he started by stating the unbelievable – “French militarism has marched across the Main as into enemy country” – and then went on, in the next sentence, to state the unthinkable:

1 Citerad i Koller, *Von Wilden aller Rassen niedergemetzelt*, 213: “Am Main ist der französische Militarismus eingerückt wie in Feindesland. Senegalneger liegen in der Frankfurter Universität und bewachen das Goethehaus.”

* *Not to be quoted without permission of the author.* This paper is part of a larger research project under the directorship of professor Peo Hansen at Linköping University. I thank Peo for having rediscovered the repressed connection between European integration and European colonialism. Thanks also to the Swedish Research Council – Vetenskapsrådet – which is supporting this project.

KEYNOTE SPEECH
by
Stefan Jonsson



able: “Senegal negroes are camping in the Frankfurt University, guarding the Goethe House.”² This was the scandal: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the very monument of the European spirit, the very proof of German superiority – now soiled and disgraced by black hands.

World War One ended with Germany’s dishonorable concession of defeat and the ensuing peace treaties of Versailles and Trianon, which forced Germany to admit being guilty for the aggressions that led to war and to carry the burden of enormous monetary retributions. In order to ensure Germany’s payment of its war debts French troops in 1923 assumed control of the strategically important Ruhr area, the major industrial region and most vital economic zone in mainland Europe. This time, the share of colonial troops was small. This did not prevent German politicians and opinion makers from feeling humiliated and even violated. That West-African and North-African soldiers presented a threat to women and children was common opinion, as was the belief that syphilis and other [sexual / venereal] diseases would follow in tracks of the African troops, or that their depraved habits corrupted the virtues and morality

2 Citerad i Koller, 2001:213, “Am Main ist der französische Militarismus eingerückt wie in Feindesland. Senegalneger liegen in der Frankfurter Universität und bewachen das Goethehaus.”

of the locals. Germany's president, social democrat Friedrich Ebert, repeatedly stated his conviction that – “the deployment of colored troops of the most inferior culture as overseers of a population of such high spiritual and economic importance as the Rhinlanders is an intolerable violation of the law of European civilization.”³

Ebert's opinion was indeed shared by all political parties in Germany of the period, with the exception of communists (KPD) and independent social democrats (USPD). Visual images of the period illustrate that Germany regarded the presence of black and colored troops as a humiliation so shameful that it rocked at the very fundamentals of national identity. One poster from 1920 shows a happy-looking black man, all naked except for the helmet usually worn by French troops, standing like a huge colossus with his legs spread wide and his giant feet crushing the cross-framed houses of a German town, at the same time rubbing against his waist and sexual organ ivory-white female bodies that he has caught in his hands.⁴ Yet another illustration is a commemorative coin, minted and sold to promote resistance against the French occupation. On one side of the coin is the facial profile of a black soldier, caricatured to look like a monkey, next to which are stamped the words “Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité” and “Die Wacht am Rhein”, “Guard at the Rhine.” On the other side of the coin we see a woman tied to a tree, the trunk of which, at closer scrutiny, turns out to be an enormous erected penis.

It is painful to look at these images today. Yet, such was the image of Africa and of the African at a time when they were transported right into Europe's fatigued and war-torn heart.

In one sense, these statements and images are just a continuation of a long history of Europe's racial stereotyping of non-European peoples. My reason for returning to them now, however, is that they are also repressed parts of the origin and beginning of a

3 Friedrich Ebert, 2001, *Schriften, Aufzeichnungen, Reden*, vol. 2 (Darmstadt, 1926), 290. Citerad i Koller, 2001:324, “Dass die Verwendung farbiger Truppen niederster Kultur als Aufseher über eine Bevölkerung von der hohen geistigen und wirtschaftlichen Bedeutung der Rheinländer eine herausfordernde Verletzung der Gesetze der europäischen Zivilisation ist, [...]”

4 Klaus Theweleit, *Männerphantasien*, vol. 1, Frauen, Fluten, Körper, Geschichte (2:a upplagan, München & Zürich: Piper Verlag, 2000), 1001.

new history, the history of inter-European cooperation and integration. For it is in this area and in this period that the story of what is today known as the EU, or the European Union, can be said to begin. This is so for many reasons. A first, more anecdotic yet nonetheless significant reason is that Konrad Adenauer, the West-German prime minister who was instrumental in the construction of the European economic community after World War Two, resided as vice mayor and mayor in Cologne during the whole Weimar period from 1919 to 1933. Adenauer's political world-view was largely shaped by the conflicts in the Rhineland during and after World War One. Another reason, as we shall see, is that the emergence of the European Union is far more intimately connected to Africa and to the question of Europe's dominance over Africa than we are led to believe by standard works on the history of modern Europe. In fact, this is a connection passed over in silence by the average historian. Thirdly, for those who first asserted the necessity of a European union, it was precisely this geographic area, the Rhineland and the Ruhr region, or the border zone between France and Germany and between Germany and the Benelux countries – that showed both the crux and proof their argument. As we know, it was the attempts to resolve the centuries-long strifes and conflicts about this region, blessed by stunning natural resources and a highly developed industrial infrastructure that initiated the first plans for a united Europe. These plans, in turn, formed the basis of what actually became the EU of today, which derives its origins from the so-called Schuman declaration of 1950, which led to the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) a year later.

I have already mentioned that France's decision to march across the Ruhr and the Rhine with colonial troops turned Germany's political emotions to boiling. However, smaller groups of intellectuals reached the opposite conclusion. In their view, France's occupation of the Ruhr area only demonstrated that the age-old animosity between France and Germany had led both states into a dead end. Henceforth, the survival of each country did not depend on its ability to defeat the other, but on the willingness and ability of both states to collaborate with one another. The best resolution of the Ruhr occupation and the sole

possibility for a lasting peace consisted in some kind of political and economic union between the two countries. Out of Germany's and France's unification, the rest of Europe would then followed.

Or so they argued. "Anfänge Europas," "Beginning of Europe," was the title of an article published in May 1923 by German writer Heinrich Mann. He wrote: "Shall Europe ever become one: then the two of us first. We form the root. Out of us, the united continent – the others could not but follow us. We carry the responsibility for ourselves and the rest. Through us there will be a state above states and that state will last. Or else, no future will be valid for us, nor for Europe."⁵

That same year, and in the similar idealistic spirit, Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi published his pamphlet *Panuropa*. Coudenhove-Kalergi was born in the Habsburg empire and inspired by its supra-national constitution. For him, too, the Ruhr occupation and the apparently irresolvable border conflict between France and Germany were causes of alarm. "Out of the terrifying crisis in which Germany and France are locked today, they will either emerge as united Europeans – or they will, biting at each others' throats, bleed to death from their mutually inflicted wounds." In order to prevent these once so powerful European states from being squashed between the growing superpowers to the east and the west, the states of Europe must unite in a paneuropean union, and the first step in this process must be taken by France and Germany, Coudenhove-Kalergi argued.⁶

Coudenhove-Kalergi's pamphlet contains roughly the same argument, but elaborated in greater detail, as did many other proposals for European collaboration presented during the 1920s. "After 1923 whole staffs of periodicals, associated pressure groups in many countries, and at least two dozen books published every year pursued this aim", writes

5 Heinrich Mann, "Anfänge Europas", *Sieben Jahre Chronik der Gedanken und Vorgänge: Essays*, red. Peter-Paul Schneider (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1994), 114: "Will Europa denn eins werden: zuerst wir Beide! Wir sind die Wurzel. Aus uns der geeinte Kontinent, die anderen können nicht anders, als uns folgen. Wir tragen die Verantwortung für uns und für den Rest. Durch uns wird ein Reich sein über den Reichen, und das Reich wird dauern. Oder keine Zukunft gilt mehr für uns, noch für Europa."

6 Richard N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, *Panuropa* [1923] (andra upplagan, Wien & Leipzig: Paneuropa-Verlag, 1926), 107-122: "Aus der furchtbaren Krise, in der sich heute Deutschland und Frankreich befinden, werden sie entweder als verbündete Europäer hervorgehen – oder aber sie werden, ineinander verbissen, an den gegenseitigen Wunden verbluten."

Walter Lipgens, one of the principal historians of the European integration process.⁷ According to Lipgens, five such proposals were more influential than others. He mentions Demangeon and Delaisi from France, Alfred Weber from Germany, Ortega y Gasset from Spain, and, most important of all, Coudenhove-Kalergi's *Panuropa*. To be sure, this Czech-Austrian thinker did not devote himself only to thinking, writing, and research, but organized a huge Paneuropean movement that opened branches in most European states and gathered influential intellectual and political support from the best and brightest of his generation, including Selma Lagerlöf, the brothers Heinrich and Thomas Mann, as well as statesmen like Winston Churchill, Konrad Adenauer and Aristide Briand, the latter serving for a long time as chairman of the Paneuropean Union.

Coudenhove-Kalergi's argument for a European union mirrors the world view of internationalists and liberal progressives of his era. A united Europe was paramount for political reasons, or simply to prevent a repetition of World War One. This was the argument for peace. A united Europe was desirable also for cultural reasons, as history seemed to indicate that Europe made up some sort of civilizational unity. This was the argument for civilization. In addition, the 1920s added a third, economic argument, for as Europeans compared their own states to the rapidly growing economies of the United States and the Soviet Union, they concluded that both enjoyed the advantage of being able to organize their economies on a continental scale, whereas Europe was torn apart and its economic dynamism suffering and lagging behind because of trade- and customs barriers, export prohibitions, and also the large scale debt owned by Germany to other states. The superpowers of the period – the British empire, the Soviet Union, Japan and China, and the United States, profited from their sheer imperial largeness. They were self-sufficient in most raw materials and had greater markets for the sale of their products.

This economic perspective then gradually turned into a geopolitical one, which touched the sensitive issue as to whether Europe would ever again be able to regain its place as a superpower on a par with the other ones. From this perspective, Africa

7 Walter Lipgens, *A History of European Integration*, vol. 1, 1945-47: The Formation of the European Unity Movement, övers. från tyskan P.S. Falla och A. J. Ryder (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 38.

was seen as a natural or necessary part of Europe's economic sphere, a part that needed to be more strongly connected to Europe, and one that needed to be exploited by united European forces in order to be properly and adequately used. As the intellectuals of the 1920s argued in favor of a European union or federation, their arguments implicitly or explicitly addressed Africa. Europe could develop its fullest economic potential only through Africa.

Africa was mainly looked upon as a great provider of natural resources and agricultural produce, but also as a reservoir for hydroelectric power. Sometimes, Africa was seen as the solution of Europe's demographic problems; it was widely agreed that Europe was overcrowded and overpopulated, and the continent would be greatly helped if surplus population could emigrate and settle in the "empty" territory south of the Mediterranean. As Coudenhove-Kalergi stated in his essay called "Africa": "Africa could provide Europe with raw materials for its industry, nutrition for its population, land for its overpopulation, labor for its unemployed, and markets for its products."⁸

What is important is that all these arguments for an assimilation of Africa into Europe then formed yet another strong argument for the unification of Europe. The common exploitation or use of Africa appeared as an aim so unquestionable, so attractive and beneficial, that it in itself would be a reason for the European states to make common cause, they simply had so many profits to harvest from it. A geopolitical calculation emerged in which two good things reinforced one other: by uniting Europe a new geopolitical sphere would emerge that thanks to its inclusion of Africa would be sustainable and prosperous; and by together developing Europe the bonds of peace and collaboration would grow stronger between once antagonistic European states. In short, a unification of Europe and a unified European effort to colonize Africa were two processes that presupposed one another. As Coudenhove-Kalergi wrote: "The African problem thus brings us back to Europe. Africa cannot be made available, if Europe does not unite."⁹

8 Richard N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, "Afrika", *Paneuropa* 5 (nr. 2, 1929), 3: "Afrika könnte Europa Rohstoffe für seine Industrie, Nahrungsmittel für seine Bevölkerung, Siedlungsraum für seine Übervölkerung, Arbeitsmöglichkeiten für seine Arbeitslosigkeit, Märkte für seinen Absatz bieten."

9 Richard N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, "Afrika", *Paneuropa* 5 (1929), nr. 2, 18: "So führt uns das afrikanische Problem zurück zu Europa. Afrika kann nicht erschlossen werden, wenn Europa sich nicht einigt."

This argument won support especially in Germany, which, through an arrangement of this kind, would regain access to its former colonial territories that it had lost in the First World War.¹⁰ A co-European colonialism was also promoted as a higher form of colonialism, all adherents agreed. This would be a colonialism not governed by narrow nationalistic greed, but by the high ideals of European civilization. A few, among them Heinrich Mann, feared that Pan-Europe amounted to a new form of imperialism, which he none the less accepted as a lesser evil than its old form.¹¹

Interwar politicians, intellectuals, and visionaries also gave a name to the new superpower that would again raise the star of Europe. The geopolitical bloc was called Eur-Africa, a notion so prevalent in these years that it is difficult, if not impossible to find out who actually coined it. Contrary to a common understanding and standard historiography of the roots of today's European Union – in which Coudenhove-Kalergi is seen as the father figure of the founding fathers – Pan-Europe was not a project limited to Europe alone, but one which included Africa in its entirety, except for its British possessions. From 1920 to 1960 the European project was launched and developed, yet it is almost always forgotten that this European project was in fact always a Eurafrikan project.

Let me make a digression here to give you a feel for the ideas and visions at stake, by looking at the Eurafrikan project of the German architect Hermann Sörgel's blueprint for what he called Atlantropa, which he considered as a better alternative than Coudenhove-Kalergi's Paneuropa. Sörgel's basic idea was to dam up and contain the net inflow of water into the Mediterranean Sea. A great dam was to be built across the Gibraltar sound and a network of huge hydroelectric plants at the outlets of all the great rivers flowing into the Mediterranean, the Nile, the Rhône, the Po, the Tiber, the Ebro, as well as the rivers going into the Black Sea, the Danube, the Dnepr, and others. These immense technical works – on the same scale or greater as Stalin's plan to redirect Russia's major rivers toward the south – would then lower the sea level of the Mediterranean and also create a

10 See till exempel Richard N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, "Reparationen und Kolonien", *Paneuropa* 8 (1932), nr. 1, 7-11.

11 Heinrich Mann, "Paneuropa, Traum und Wirklichkeit," *Sieben Jahre Chronik der Gedanken und Vorgänge: Essays*, red. Peter-Paul Schneider (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1994), 347-348.

territorial bridge between Africa and Europe. His idea was to have the sea level decrease by 0.8 meters per year for more than a hundred years, until it would be 200 meters lower than today in the eastern part of the Mediterranean, and 100 meters lower in the western parts, the two parts being separated by yet another dam, the Messina dam, stretching from Sicily to Tripoli.

The benefits of this project would be enormous, Sörgel thought. The project would create large areas of new agricultural land. For instance, to the west of Palestine a stretch of land would rise out of the waters and would be made available to Jewish settlers, thus creating a new Israel, and thus also – as we may allow to say in retrospect – preempting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The project would also provide Europe with all the energy it could use, and even more so; as the surplus energy would be used to pump water from the Congo river, led by way of a system of channels through Lake Tchad, in order to irrigate the Sahara, which would thus become agricultural land. The project would also join the continents, creating a territorial connection across which Africa's natural resources would flow into Europe, while Europe's surplus population would move into and colonize the African continent. The crowning infrastructural accomplishment would be a railroad connecting Berlin to Cape Town. Of course, the African people also figured in the equation, as a vast supply of labor for European industry. That the sovereignty over the newly created continent was on the side of Europe is signalled by its name. The unified territories of Africa and Europe would be called "Atlantropa". Sörgel's technological vision was in his view the only possible solution to the problems facing Europe: unemployment, overpopulation, lack of energy and natural resources. At one stroke, these difficulties would be resolved. Indeed, the future of the West depended on the project: "Either: the fall of the West (*Untergang des Abendlandes*), or: Atlantropa as a turning point and new goal."¹²

The Decline of Europe, the Fall of Europe – this was the ominous scenario that had to be prevented by drawing on the continent to the South. That Eu-

rope was in decline was a fact proven by the war, by the inflation, by the depression. What was needed as a remedy was something that in German jargon of those years was called "Lebensraum." This term may be properly translated into current jargon as "opportunities for investment and growth."

As I have already stressed, most people took it as self-evident that Africa could and would provide Europe with the Lebensraum – with the "opportunities for investment and growth" – that Europe needed.

Another influential exponent of this geopolitical theory is E. L. Guernier, Frechman and author of numerous works on colonialism, among them *L'Afrique – Champ d'expansion de l'Europe* from 1932. In the preface of his book, Guernier remarks that there is now a new kind of colonialism, most beautifully illustrated by the International Colonial exposition in Paris in 1931, and powerfully realized in the development of North Africa by the great French social planner and colonial administrator Hubert Lyautey. Guernier explains the idea behind this new colonialism: "Today's colonization is the synthesis of a moral and highly civilizing endeavor – the gradual elevation of the standing of life of the non-developed races – and the no less human endeavor of the continuous maintenance, if not improvement of the conditions of life of an industrious Europe."¹³ Guernier asserts that both continents stand to benefit from a thorough unification. Europe offers to Africa morality, culture, and civilization. Africa offers Europe raw materials, territory, resources, or, in short, opportunities for investment and growth. The result of Europe's expansion in Africa is not just the unification of Europe, but the emergence of a third geopolitical powersphere, that creates an equilibrium in the global world system. For Guernier, as for Coudenhove-Kalergi, the unification of Europe and the colonization of Africa, are projects that presuppose one another.¹⁴

I could go on mentioning a number of other works containing similar arguments. All of them

13 E.-L. Guernier, *L'Afrique: Champ d'expansion de l'Europe* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1933), vii: "La colonisation d'aujourd'hui est la synthèse d'une oeuvre morale et hautement civilisatrice: l'élévation graduelle du standing de vie des races non évoluées, - et d'une oeuvre non moins humaine: le maintien, sinon l'amélioration constante des conditions de vie d'une Europe au travail."

14 The correspondence between Guernier's and Coudenhove-Kalergi's ideas are underlined by the fact that Guernier publishes in Coudenhove-Kalergi's journal. See E. L. Guernier, "Afrika als Kolonisationsland," *Panuropa* 11 (nr. 1, 1935), 7-11.

12 Herman Sörgel, *Atlantropa* (Munich: Piloty and Loehle; Zürich: Fretz and Wasmuth, 1932), 106. For an analysis of Sörgel's project, see Alexander Gall, *Das Atlantropa-Projekt: Die Geschichte einer gescheiterten Vision. Herman Sörgel und die Absenkung des Mittelmeers* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 1998).

assert that Europe and Africa are two halves, each of them helpless on its own, but together forming a glorious whole, or even a new super power. However, nobody suggests that there is any symmetry between the halves, much less any equality. “Africa is the only continent without history,” writes Guernier, after which he goes on to show what Europeans must and should do in order to have primitive and isolated Africa enter the circle of human culture.¹⁵ As for Coudenhove-Kalergi, justifiably known as pacifist, internationalist, and anti-nazi, he comes across as a full-fledged biological racist when he speaks about Africa. Not only does he state that Africa should be Europe’s plantation, but also that “Africa is a tropical Europe,” and that “Europe is Eurafrika’s head, Africa its body.” Coudenhove-Kalergi explains that this is because of the inherent difference between the black and white races. “As long as the black race is unable to develop and civilize its part of the earth, the white race must do it.”¹⁶ At the same time, he states that Europe must at all costs prevent “that great numbers of black workers and soldiers immigrate to Europe.”¹⁷

We must note here that Coudenhove-Kalergi speaks of soldiers. He is probably thinking of France’s disputed use of black troops in its occupations of the Rhineland and the Ruhr region. For just as unthinkable as it was having black soldiers operate as law keepers and masters of Germany’s cities and towns, just as self-evident it was to have European physicians and engineers developing Africa. And just as natural as it was to fear these African troops for introducing disease, criminality, and vice, for raping women and children, just as natural it was to believe that Africa, if left on its own, would self-destruct. Coudenhove-Kalergi asks what would become of Africa if Europe pulled out from it: “The answer is: chaos, anarchy, misery, war of all tribes against one another.”¹⁸

15 E.-L. Guernier, *L’Afrique: Champ d’expansion de l’Europe* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1933), 55.

16 Richard N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, “Afrika”, *Panuropa* 5 (nr. 2, 1929), 5: “Afrika ist das tropische Europa” – “Afrika ist der Kopf Eurafrikas – Afrika dessen Körper.” – “Solange der schwarze rasse nicht in der Lage ist, ihren Erdteil zu erschließen und zu zivilisieren, muß die weiße Rasse es tun.”

17 Richard N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, “Afrika”, *Panuropa* 5 (nr. 2, 1929), 5: “daß schwarze Arbeiter und Soldaten in größerer Zahl nach Europa einwandern.”

18 Richard N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, “Afrika”, *Panuropa* 5 (nr. 2, 1929), 6: “Die Antwort ist: Chaos, Anarchie, Seuchen, Kampf der Stämme untereinander.”

This is where we are able to locate the deep structure of the interwar discourse on Eurafrika. It is a racist discourse that allows its user to reject African presence in Europe as an absurdity with the same ease as he affirms European presence in Africa as a necessity, without even having to consider the *possibility* that the position is self-contradictory.

All the above may strike the reader as curiosities or anecdotal history without any relevance to the present world order. However, during World War Two and after Eurafrika remained a primary and often evoked aim for many European politicians and intellectuals. Within the so-called European movement, Eurafrika emerges as the very key to the economic rehabilitation of the European continent after 1945. Programs for Euro-African unity are developed by all the political camps within the European movement, from the socialists to the conservatives – and their ideas are picked up and assimilated in the so-called Strasbourg plan, which consists of a detailed investigation of all the benefits that the European states would enjoy if they made Africa, and the development of Africa, a common European cause.

In this new situation after World War Two, as European unification begins and institutions are founded for the purpose of European inter-state collaboration, the arguments persist from the interwar era, although the importance of the demographic argument, that Africa was to be settled by Europe’s surplus population, is diminished. In many blueprints and sketches, Africa comes across as an engineer’s dream, as a science-fiction utopia, or as a new planet to be claimed and cultivated, just as has happened in the Americas, and in the great technological leaps in Mao’s China and Stalin’s and Chrushev’s Russia. For it is above all with the help of modern technology that Africa is now to be colonized and developed – or be made valuable, as the French expression has it: “la mise en valeur de l’Afrique.” Also, the political and geopolitical arguments have lost none of their appeal by the 1950s. Those writing about this issue in the late 1940s and early 1950s-see Eurafrika as the possibility of Western Europe to vie with the super powers. For them, Eurafrika means a third way – or what the British foreign minister Ernst Bevin called a “third force” – in the increasingly polarized world

order of the cold war. It is even probable that the notion of the “third world”, when it was coined by the French demographer Alfred Sauvy in 1952, did not refer to the colonized and so-called “under-developed” world, but to all states and people – including Sauvy’s own France and large parts of Europe – that were not yet aligned with either the United States or the Soviet Union.¹⁹

As I have stated a while ago, however, this idea of Eurafrica as a third sphere is not a product of the cold war, but rather of the geopolitical paradigm in a more general sense, in which the world was divided into several spheres of influence or power blocks, and in which Eurafrica already in the 1920s was presented as an entity of its own, besides the British Empire, America, the Soviet Union, and Japan/China. The post-war image of Eurafrica as a third force entails a slight transformation of this paradigm. From the left, a European-African community is now presented as a genuine alternative to the two enemies of the cold war, in the sense that it consists of independent European states along with now independent former colonies – all of this in the spirit of the Bandung conference and the non-aligned movement. From the right, Eurafrica is presented as the great opportunity for the states of Western Europe: that the European states, through a more progressive and concerted colonialism, will contain Africa in their own sphere of influence and prevent it from falling prey to pan-Arabism and communism. Regardless of its variety, the idea of Eurafrica strongly influences intra-European debate and discussion on the possible means and ends of European integration.

What modifies the discussion about Eurafrica is not just World War Two but also the decolonization process as such. In this new situation, Eurafrica becomes from a European perspective the solution of the problem as to how to accept the increasing autonomy or self-government of the colonies, while at the same time continuing to gain from them economically and strategically. To this scenario we must also add a specifically French perspective: in order to preserve its remaining empire and acquire funds for investment in the colonies, France wants the support and aid of the other European states. In reality, this means that France, around 1950, enters the negotiations on the creation of a European economic com-

munity on the explicit condition that the community should also include European collaboration in the French and Belgian colonial dominions, and also to some extent those of Italy and the Netherlands. Economic collaboration means that the other European states will get access to France’s markets, including its overseas territories and dominions, or the whole area called *Union française*. Thereby, however, France loses the economic advantage it enjoys through its monopoly position in trading with these territories, and in order to compensate for this it is only reasonable and fair that the European states will also share the costs for investing in the colonies of the French union. Some German opinion makers welcome this prospect, because there are strong economic actors in West Germany that want access to the raw materials that have been difficult to attain ever since Germany’s loss of its colonies 1919.

All of this amounts to a complex structural and long-term political process. The result is that the negotiations about the integration of Europe, the formation of the European Economic Community and its predecessors, directly becomes connected to the negotiations on how to establish Eurafrica – and in these negotiations and the talk surrounding them, many factors are involved: the future of French and Belgian colonialism, the European efforts for enduring peace, the vitalization of Europe’s economy, the effort to consolidate West-Africa as a military strategic zone, and – as a nice wrapping around all this – the effort to realize the highest ideals of European civilization by unselfishly disseminating European culture and learning to allegedly inferior peoples.

Africa is mentioned once in the so-called Schuman Declaration of 1950, which was confirmed as the foundation for the European Coal and Steel Community between France, Germany, Italy, and the Benelux countries, and which is commonly seen as the seed of the European Economic Community, or EEC, that was constituted through the Rome Treaty of 1957. The Rome Treaty, in turn, is today considered as the birth of the EU, the European Union.

Let me quote this important document by French foreign minister Schuman from 1950:

”The solidarity in production [of coal and steel]

¹⁹ Albert Sauvy, “Trois mondes, une planète”, *L’Observateur* 1952 (August 14).

thus established will make it plain that any war between France and Germany becomes not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible. The setting up of this powerful productive unit, open to all countries willing to take part and bound ultimately to provide all the member countries with the basic elements of industrial production on the same terms, will lay a true foundation for their economic unification. This production will be offered to the world as a whole without distinction or exception, with the aim of contributing to raising living standards and to promoting peaceful achievements. With increased resources Europe will be able to pursue the achievement of one of its essential tasks, namely, the development of the African continent.”

Why, we should ask, is it important to mention Africa in this document dealing with the regulation and monitoring of the production of coal and steel in six West European states? The answer, I claim, lies in the historical pattern I have sketched above. Since the 1920s, community and collaboration of Europe's states had presupposed their collaboration in Africa as well. Now, as this community of Coal and Steel was established, it was, according to the authors of the declaration important also to signal that it enabled the more far-reaching collaboration that had for long occupied debates on foreign policy and geopolitics. Thus, the Coal and Steel Community was not just the seed of today's EU, but also of Eurafrika.

People in the 1950s were well aware of this. An influential German writer on foreign policy, Anton Zischka, remarked in a book from 1951 that the Ruhr area and the Rhineland is the “kernel of crystallization” for European integration.²⁰ The process once begun there, as France and Germany realized that the future of both states depended on a mutual agreement and collaboration in the production of steel and coal, would according to Zischka seamlessly lead to a similar agreement and collaboration as regards the exploitation of Africa's resources. Africa, argued Zischka in the title of his book, is thus “Europas Gemeinschaftsaufgabe Nr. 1”, “Europe's common priority number one.” Like many political thinkers and intellectuals Zischka took it for granted that there was a direct connection between European

integration and European colonization of Africa. It was the two sides of one and the same process, with Eurafrika as the result. Moreover, Zischka asserts that Eurafrika is a force of disarmament, which will appease the nuclear combatants of the cold war. Indeed, fate and nature are on Eurafrika's side, says Zischka. The creation of Eurafrika is simply the meaning of history, it is not a question of *if*, but *when*, it will come into existence.²¹

I have made a sketch, a sketch of a political, intellectual, and academic discourse that played a considerable role in European debate between 1920 and 1960. In this debate, a future European community or union was inseparable from a common and unified colonization of Africa. This is work in progress. Our thesis is that these ideas were instrumental in the actual, diplomatic and political constitution of the EU, or of Europe as a political subject. The origins of the EU cannot be separated from the perceived necessity to preserve and prolong the colonial system. The support of this hypothesis, however, I will have to save for a different occasion. What I wanted to do here, was to give a sense of the history of the inequality that obtains still today between Europe and Africa. And the essentials remain as they were then: at least on the political level, just as self-evident that Europe must do everything to prevent African migrants from entering, just as self-evident it is that Europe feels the right to enter Africa. Let me finish, then, with a more contemporary reference. Speaking in Dakar in 2007, French Nicholas Sarkozy demonstrated that Eurafrika still remains, in the visions of the most high-ranking European politicians, the manifest destiny of two continents.

La France souhaite l'unité de l'Afrique, car l'unité de l'Afrique rendra l'Afrique aux Africains.

Ce que veut faire la France avec l'Afrique, c'est regarder en face les réalités. C'est faire la politique des réalités et non plus la politique des mythes.

Ce que la France veut faire avec l'Afrique, c'est le co-développement, c'est-à-dire le développement partagé.

20 Anton Zischka, *Afrika: Europas Gemeinschaftsaufgabe Nr. 1* Oldenburg: Gerhard Stalling Verlag, 1951), 312.

21 Anton Zischka, *Afrika: Europas Gemeinschaftsaufgabe Nr. 1* Oldenburg: Gerhard Stalling Verlag, 1951), 325.

La France veut avec l'Afrique des projets communs, des pôles de compétitivité communs, des universités communes, des laboratoires communs.

Ce que la France veut faire avec l'Afrique, c'est élaborer une stratégie commune dans la mondialisation.

Ce que la France veut faire avec l'Afrique, c'est une politique d'immigration négociée ensemble, décidée ensemble pour que la jeunesse africaine puisse être accueillie en France et dans toute l'Europe avec dignité et avec respect.

Ce que la France veut faire avec l'Afrique, c'est une alliance de la jeunesse française et de la jeunesse africaine pour que le monde de demain soit un monde meilleur.

Ce que veut faire la France avec l'Afrique, c'est préparer l'avènement de *l'Eurafrrique*, ce grand destin commun qui attend l'Europe et l'Afrique. A ceux qui, en Afrique, regardent avec méfiance ce grand projet de l'Union Méditerranéenne que la France a proposé à tous les pays riverains de la Méditerranée, je veux dire que, dans l'esprit de la France, il ne s'agit nullement de mettre à l'écart l'Afrique, qui s'étend au sud du Sahara mais, qu'au contraire, il s'agit de faire de cette Union le pivot de *l'Eurafrrique*, la première étape du plus grand rêve de paix et de prospérité qu'Européens et Africains sont capables de concevoir ensemble.

Africa, Art and Gender

Four Moments of Colonial/Post-colonial History

*An essay.**

‘AFRICA, ART AND GENDER’ IS a very broad agenda, with possibilities for widely different approaches to very different bodies of material. In this essay I will visit four moments of colonial/post-colonial history, which I find fascinating and illustrative of different conceptions of relations and intersections between Africa and Gender, Africa and Art, and Africa, Art and Gender.

The four moments are first the heyday of European colonial expansion, the very time of the Berlin Conference (1884-85) when Africa was being divided between European powers by lines drawn on maps, like the cutting of a cake. The issue here is colonial fantasies, as expressed in contemporary fiction: images of Africa in European minds. The second moment occurs some 40 years later, Paris in the period between the wars – after the First World War and before the Second, the 1920s and 1930s. Influenced by the devastating war and the general atmosphere expressed in *Untergang des Abendlandes* (Oswald Spengler 1918-22), the derogatory image of places like Africa as having no civilization was partly replaced by curiosity and fascination – maybe one could find here inspiration for renewal and revitalization of European spirits? Vibrant African-American music (jazz) and a new interest in African traditional art point in that direction. Still, however, it is all about European fantasies and ideas. Few real Africans and African-Americans appear on the (European) scene; the few who do feed into myth and magic. The general template for European thinking is still the dichotomy of us/the Other(s); where in the late 19th and early 20th centuries the colonized

KEYNOTE SPEECH

by

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Other was imagined as childish, inferior, not-yet-civilized – the civilizing quest (“The White Man’s Burden” as put by Rudyard Kipling 1901) being a major legitimization for the very act of colonization – in this period between the wars the othering turns, partly at least, to a positive othering. Africans are now imagined as a free, sensual, unchained by the burdens of a tired, destructive European civilization.

Moment one and two are both about imaginations, and thus also about art. Gender appears as sexuality, not (at all) as gender equality or as women’s rights. Such issues were only the concern of very limited groups in the context of the third moment, the late 1940s and 1950s, the period after the Second World War, when changes in the Western hemisphere (USA emerging as a world power) and political movements in colonized countries caused a general de-colonization of black African countries, from 1957 (Ghana) onwards. Among Black intellectuals (African, African American and Caribbean) invited to Paris for the First Black Writers and Artists’ Congress 1956, women only appear as wives; all delegates are men. Colonial education (however poor) and Christian missions have done their work: reading and writing in European languages are embedded in notions of male domination/female subordination as

* Not to be quoted without permission of the author.

the normal (civilized) state of affairs.

The fourth moment in this tale of intersections between Africa, art and gender, is postcolonial feminist literature, scholarship and art from the 1990s onwards. This period is characterized not only by the appearance of an increasing number of women writers, artists and intellectuals/scholars on the scene, but also by African revisions of European conceptions of gender.

Colonial fantasies 1885 onwards

By the end of the 19th century European culture was inherently patriarchal. It has not always been like that. Feminist historians writing about the so-called 'dark middle ages' (Jacobsen 1986) bring evidence of gender relations different from the male domination/female subordination, which has later been considered the 'normal' state of affairs, and against which the First as well as the Second Wave of Women's Movements in Europe and the US have been struggling. At this point in time, however, European patriarchy was only marginally questioned (the first women's unions in the likewise patriarchal labour movement had just been formed), and the colonial patriarchs could depict themselves as valiant heroes rushing to the rescue of poor oppressed women in faraway corners of the world. In the first decades of colonization, however, it was the general civilizing mission, which was emphasized as the driving force and motivation for colonization.

The colonizing enterprise was accompanied by a rich production of fantasies about colonized people and colonized lands. As is often the case in 'dynamics of Othering' (Hall 1992) fantasies of 'the Other' are characterized by projection of repressed and forbidden desires. The heyday of colonization coincided with the heyday of Victorian morality in Imperial Europe, with men (of the bourgeoisie) as staunch family heads, and women as wives and mothers, and as a-sexual Angels of the Home; sexual desire was repressed and projected to the working class, and to the colonized populations (McClintock 1995). African women and men were imagined as promiscuous, licentious, sexually inviting – and dangerous and frightening at the same time.

The fiction story, which in this section I shall use as an example of this fantasy production, is character-

ized by a projection of sexual fantasies to the act of discovery and penetration of foreign continents, *in casu* Africa.

The story *King Solomon's Mines* was written by Rider Haggard (1856-1925), published 1885, at the very time of the Berlin Conference. As a young man Rider Haggard had spent some years (1875-1882) at the bottom range of British civil service in the Colony of Natal, in present-

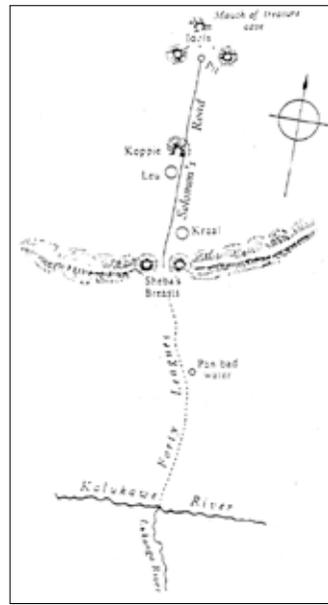


Fig. 1. Map from *King Solomon's Mines*

day South Africa. After his return to UK 1882 he never again set foot on African soil. Nevertheless, for the rest of his life as a writer Africa fuelled his imagination. *King Solomon's Mines* was the first English fiction adventure novel set in Africa. It became an immediate bestseller, and (more surprisingly) it has remained so ever since. It has been adapted to film at least, four times (1937, 1950, 1985, and 2004 as a television series) and allegedly the *King Solomon's Mines* protagonist, the British adventurer and hero Alan Quatermain, has inspired a later US incarnation, Indiana Jones. The story is about three British explorers, who set out on a journey guided by an old treasure map showing the location of 'King Solomon's Mines', an underground cavern replete with gold, ivory and precious stones. After many perilous adventures on the way they finally reach the location. The treasure is guarded by Gagool, an incredibly ancient witch (as they see her) and only after a life-and-death struggle with her (in which she dies), they manage to grasp parts of the treasure and escape.

Of interest in this context are the treasure map, and the figure of Gagool. The treasure map (*fig 1*) shows a path leading across a plain to a mountain ridge, which must be crossed through a pass between two snow-clad peaks (named Sheba's Breasts). At the other side the path continues – now called

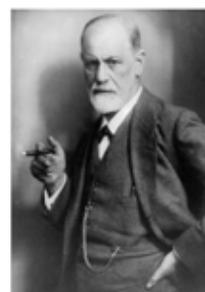


Fig. 2. 'For there... were Shebas breasts!'

'Solomon's Road' and paved by an ancient civilization – to three heather-clad hills among which the mouth of the treasure cave is located. As pointed out by feminist researchers (Stott 1989, McClintock 1995) the treasure map turned upside-down depicts the body of a woman. The woman has no head, but the arms (the mountain range) and the breasts are there, and further down, in the midst of the triangle of heather-clad hills we find the hole, the entry-point to the interior, the goal of the men's desire, but also the location of risk and danger and possible death. An illustration from a 1950s edition of *King Solomon's Mines* (fig 2) shows our heroes with their native helpers on an escarpment overlooking a vast stretch of land, beyond which we see the mountain range with 'Sheba's Breasts'. The illustration shows 'the imperial gaze': representatives of the imperial power posed in an elevated position from where the land can be overlooked and commanded. This land, which in colonial contexts and later is often named 'virgin land' is land where Europeans had not (yet) settled; virgin land passively awaiting (colonial, masculine) penetration. When eventually they reach the location where the treasure is hidden, they'll have to venture into underground caves, inhabited and protected by dark and dangerous forces in the shape of the old



Rider Haggard 1856-1925
African landscape =
female body



Sigmund Freud 1856-1939
Female psyche = dark
continent

Fig. 3. European gentlemen: Rider Haggard and Sigmund Freud

woman Gagool. She is ten generations old, maybe more, with eyes like a snake, "the mother of evil" (Haggard 1885/1994, 233). In European cultural tradition there are standard ways of demonizing female power, perceived as threatening by men; Gagool is classified as a witch.

Rider Haggard's prose in *King Solomon's Mines* (and elsewhere) is an interesting example of the ways in which colonial fantasies are permeated by sexual metaphors. Sigmund Freud, father of psychoanalysis, is Rider Haggard's contemporary (fig 3). They are born the same year, 1856, but Freud only died in September 1939, a few weeks after the start of the Second World War. Freud, too, is a child of the imperial age. The language of psychoanalysis is characterized by colonial metaphors, such as, for example, Freud's description of the female psyche as 'a dark continent' to be penetrated by the male/scientific gaze (Stott 1989). Haggard's vision of the passive, innocent (female) 'virgin land' to be conquered by the active male explorer, as a contrast to the dark and dangerous forces underground, can be read as a parallel to Freud's ideas of the orderly, rational and controlled (male) 'ego', as a contrast to the wild and undomesticated desires of the unconscious, underground 'id'.

This partial overlap between colonial fantasies replete with sexual metaphors on the one hand and the scientific language of psychoanalysis drawing on colonial, imperial metaphors on the other hand is an interesting sign of the general mood of the time. Colonialism was perfectly legitimate, there was a general faith in the superiority of Western civilization; issues of sexuality were only beginning to be conceptualized. Freud was indeed a radical and innovative thinker, his *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* about child sexuality caused scandal



Fig. 4. Pablo Picasso *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)*

when it was published 1905. But Freud too believed in colonialism, and he took the hierarchies of races, and between men and women for granted.

Black Paris of the 1920s and 1930s

During the First World War 180.000 African soldiers had been part of the French army, about 120.000 serving in Europe. For many Europeans this was their first meeting with black people; in the 1919 July 14th military parade on Champs Elysées *les Tirailleurs Sénégalais* were hailed as heroes (Wendl and von Lintig, 2006). Other black soldiers, too, came to Paris during and after the war: black regiments of the US army. “According to the French the jazz band was an equally integrated part of the equipment of the American troop transport trains as were arms of fire, and the dissemination of the new music was an equally important task for the Americans as victory over the Germans” (Blake 2006, 101).

Jazz music, brought to Europe by black Americans, broke with all musical convention. It has been compared to contemporary movements in art such as Dada. “The Great War 1914-1918 created the conditions for the breakthrough of Dada as well as for the explosion of jazz. (...) Jazz music, which was criticised for breaking all rules, and about which it was said that it was not at all music, was the musical parallel to the anti-art activities of the Dadaists (Blake 2006, 101). Paris between the wars seems to have



Fig. 5. Georges Braque in his studio

been a hotbed of musical and artistic innovations, with inspiration from Africa looming large.

African inspiration in art actually dates further back, one of the very first incarnations being Picasso’s painting *Les Femmes d’Alger* from 1907 (fig 4), where the faces of three of the ladies have been turned into African masks. As the story goes, Picasso, while working on this picture, had happened to visit the collection of African masks at the Paris Ethnographic Museum at Trocadéro. Impressed by what he had seen, he had returned to his studio and finished the painting (Wivel 1986). Picasso over the years assembled quite a collection of African sculpture, and so did his friend and fellow painter George Braque. A photo of Braque in his studio 1911 playing the accordion, shows African masks and artifacts on the studio wall (fig 5).

After the war and fuelled by jazz music, African inspirations multiplied. Into this Paris environment arrived in 1925 *La Revue Nègre*, a jazz revue from New Orleans, with musicians such as Sydney Bechet, and a young woman dancer, Josephine Baker. The revue consisted of a series of tableaux and dances, one of them *Le Dance Sauvage*, based on a fiction figure, a Senegalese seductress Fatou-gaye, from a French colonial fantasy novel authored by Pierre Loti (Jules-Rosette 2007). The novel in which Fatou-gaye appears is from 1881, titled *Le Roman d’un Spahi*. The novel was very popular in France at the time; like Loti’s other fiction books it is based on his own life (in fantasy



Fig. 6. Josephine Baker, Paris



Fig. 7. La Revue Nègre



Fig. 8. Danish satire *Blæksprutten*, 1928

edition) and like his other books it has at its center a strongly erotic, sexually attractive young woman of a different race, with whom the protagonist (Loti himself) falls in love (Hargreaves 1981). When in 1925 Josephine Baker performed this part in a wildly erotic dance dressed in an outfit of feathers and beads (fig 6) she laid Paris at her feet and became famous overnight. In her role as Fatou-gaye she somehow managed to combine the stereotype of a pre-World War 1 sexualized/erotized racially inferior African woman with a different image of a free, unfettered, attractive sexuality, an image which matched the post-War sentiment of tired European culture and civilization having come to a dead end. Josephine Baker's performance fed on old stereotypes, but transformed them into something new and exciting, in tune with jazz music and modern art. Significantly the poster for *La Revue Nègre* was designed by a well known Paris artist, Paul Colin (fig 7). The poster plays more on modernity than on the Fatou-gaye myth, its style is early jazz, but also with music hall/minstrel stereotypes (colors black, white, red; black men with big lips etc). Josephine Baker seems to have been a very clever and determined young person. Born 1906 she was barely 19 years old when she came to Paris and turned famous overnight. Three years later, in 1928, she embarked on a world tour, now with a different show (Jules-Rosette 2007). On this tour she also came to Copenhagen, enthusiastically received by the budding so-called culture-radical left, the group which spearheaded the anti-fascist struggle in Denmark, and in which the architect/designer/poet Poul Henningsen was a central force. A 1928 cartoon in the DK satirical annual review *Blæksprutten* (fig 8) titled "On the way home from school" refers to

Poul Henningsen's challenge to young Danish women that they should learn from Josephine Baker; "Why should it be considered a perversion to feel inspired by meeting the fundamentally natural human being?" Poul Henningsen is reported to have said (Graugaard 2008, 100). What the Danish as well as the Parisian left wing saw in blackness was not so much black *culture* as black *nature*. "The black bodies were marked by nature; it was in their nature to be expressive, excessive and sensual" (Jamin 1996, 34). They were perceived as having rhythm in their bodies, dance in their blood.

Josephine Baker remained a centre of radical



Fig 9. Al Brown admiring an African mask held by Marcel Griaule, head anthropologist of the Dakar-Djibouti mission, with George Henri Rivière to the left.



Fig. 10. Josephine Baker with Georges Henri Riviers

activity in Paris throughout the 1920s and 1930s. For some years she ran her own night spot in Montmartre, *Chez Josephine*, and she was close to the centre of activities in the particular Paris mix of Africa, anthropology and art. In this capacity she also participated in raising funds for the colonial anthropological expedition *Mission Dakar-Djibouti* 1931-1933. This expedition is in itself an expression of the mix of influences and trends in Paris at the time. Organizing force was George Henri Rivière, at the time vice-director of the old *Musée d'Ethnographie de Trocadéro*, in the process of being transformed to *Musée d'Homme*. Rivière played cleverly on the general Africa-craze in Paris, organizing fund-raising events for the expedition, such as a boxing match featuring the African American boxer Al Brown. Figure 9 shows Al Brown admiring an African mask held by Marcel Griaule, head anthropologist of the Dakar-Djibouti mission, with George Henri Rivière to the left.

The expedition itself was a French prestige project, with a mix of scientific, colonial and artistic, imaginary aims. The scientific aims had to do with a French interest in establishing an ethnographic tradition based on fieldwork (in this *metiér* the British were far advanced compared to the French) and

also to French colonial presence in most of the areas covered by the expedition, the route of which went from east to west of Africa just south of the Sahara, through Senegal, Mali, Niger, Cameroun and further inland through what was then French Equatorial Africa to Sudan and Ethiopia. The expedition team was a bunch of young men of different professions: anthropologists, linguists, a musicologist etc, led by anthropologist/linguist Marchel Griaule. Griaule had recruited Michel Leiris, poet, writer and previous member of the Surrealist movement, as secretary/archivist for the expedition. A woman linguist later joined the crew (Jamin 1996).

Leiris' book based on his diaries from the expedition is titled *l'Afrique Fantôme* (published 1934). *Imagined Africa, Africa of Dreams*¹. Leiris is well aware of his own double inclinations of anthropological investigation on one hand, and artistic, spiritual fascination on the other. He writes in the preamble of the book of his fascination with the fantastic, spectacular and mysterious mask processions and dances, and of his own position as a European ill at ease, who initially had stupidly hoped that this long journey to faraway places, along with the scientific

¹ *L'Afrique Fantôme* has been republished several times, latest 1996 as part of a full collection of Leiris' work *Miroir de l'Afrique*.

investigations, would also – through contact with the inhabitants of these exotic locations – turn himself into another type of person, more open and cured of his obsessions (Leiris 1996, 87). Leiris is interesting because he is aware of and acknowledges this double inclination for a desire for knowledge and a longing for revelation. He may be seen as an incarnation of the special inter-war Paris mix of ethnography and art, modernity and dreams.

The return of the expedition was celebrated in 1933 with an exposition, for the opening of which Josephine Baker was present. Figure 10 shows her with Georges Henri Riviere brandishing music instruments collected by the expedition. The expedition boasted of having brought back to Paris 3.500 pieces of artifacts, 6.000 photos, 3.500 meter film, 200 music recordings and 15.000 registered notes (Albers 2006, 171). The musicologist, André Schaeffner, had brought a travel grammophone and stacks of jazz records to play for the natives. To his disappointment there was no particular response (Jamin 1996, 31). A special issue of the art magazine *Minotaure* was published in celebration of the opening of the exposition (fig 11). The fact that findings of an anthropological expeditions are celebrated in a magazine of art is characteristic of the time and place. “As a difference compared to a scientific journal, an art magazine such as *Minotaure* (it seems to be Leiris who had established the contact) offered the possibility to give an intermediate presentation, which could do justice to the anthropological meaning and importance of the objects and photos – the aspect which Griaule emphasized – while also making possible an artistic reception, and leaving space for fascination” (Albers 2006, 171).

In the inter-war period in Paris Africa, art and gender were entangled in new ways. ‘African art’ was taken seriously as art, admired and elevated. All the same a certain prejudice remained, in as far as what was appreciated was ‘traditional art’, not pieces produced by individual artists, and thus very different from ‘European art’. Important, nevertheless, was the fact that ‘Africa’ in this period, in this context, was cast in a positive light, as a source of authenticity and ‘naturalness’ (eg Poul Henningsen) something from which Europeans could learn and draw inspiration. As for ‘gender’ nothing much had changed since the early days of colonial fantasies. Many European countries had now liberal and socialist women’s



Fi. 11. Art magazine *Minotaure* 1933

movements, in the art world you would find some active women, but very few. African women were still seen as sexual objects.

African writers male/female 1950s onwards

In Paris progressive intellectuals regained their forces after the end of the second world war. Simone de Beauvoir and Frantz Fanon were part of the same circles. de Beauvoir, a woman, writing critically about gender; Fanon, an African, writing critically about colonialism and race. While the inter-war Africa fascination had been ambiguous regarding colonialism, the post-war scene of progressive intellectuals was clearly anti-colonial. This was true also of the African cultural/political/literary quarterly, *Presence Africaine*, started in 1947 in Paris. The driving force was Alioune Diop, a Senegalese professor of philosophy in Paris, the contributors counted, among others, Aimé Cesaire, Léopold Senghor, Albert Camus, André Gide, Jean-Paul Sartre and Michel Leiris. In 1949 *Presence Africaine* expanded to include a publishing house and a bookstore (Wendl, von Lintig, Pinther 2006, 83). All of these – review, publishing house and bookstore – are still functioning.

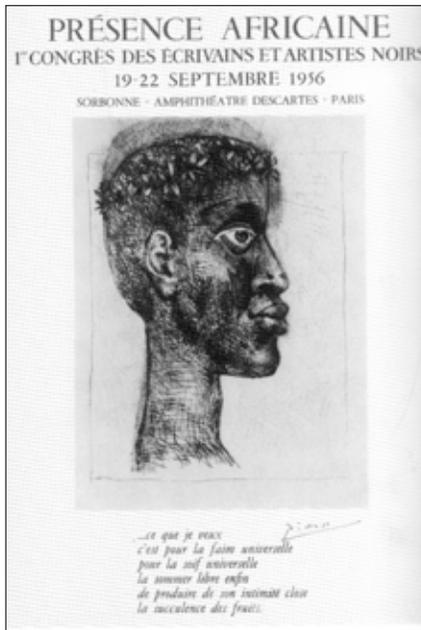


Fig. 12. Poster by Pablo Picasso, 1956



Fig. 13. The First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists

In 1956 *Presence Africaine* organized the First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists. Delegates came from the Caribbean, the US and from Africa, and included Africans from other places, who would now be known as the African Diaspora. Picasso designed the poster for the event (fig 12). At the time the issue of blackness was mainly a cultural and epistemological one, like in the *Négritude* movement, started by three young black students/poets in Paris: Leopold Senghor (1901-2006) from Senegal, Aimé Césaire (1913-2008) from Martinique and Léon Damas (1912-1978) from French Guiana in

the 1930s, with the magazine *L'Étudiant Noir* (Riesz 2006). They now joined Alioune Diop and *Presence Africaine*. Blackness was a matter of shared culture, shared ancestry and (increasingly) joint struggle against colonialism in Africa and against racism in the US.

Seen from a gender point of view it is impossible not to notice that this whole movement was all male. The more than sixty delegates to the First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists, coming from twenty different countries, were all men (fig 13). Not a single woman writer or artist². I see this as an indication, not of patriarchal cultures in Africa or the African Diaspora, but of European patriarchal culture in African mission and government schools. All of these (male) writers had gone to school, of course, and had learnt to express themselves in French, English or Portuguese – the colonial languages. European, inherently patriarchal, culture is described for instance in Simone de Beauvoir's work *The Second Sex*

The view of women in the early works of male African literature has been criticized as romantic and essentialized. According to Nfah-Abbenyi women are described in *Négritude* poetry as “the symbol of the Earth, of the Nation, as Mother Africa. (...) The African woman was spoken for; she herself was not a speaking subject” (Nfah-Abbenyi 1997, 5). African literature was a male phenomenon, and when, from the late 1960s onwards, the new women's movement appeared in US and Europe, the women of this movement were implicitly white. Early opponents to this state of affairs were black women in the US. “They rejected the hegemonic and totalizing conceptualizations of ‘Woman’ by Anglo-American feminists, as well as those presented by African American men” (Nfah-Abbenyi 1997, 1).

After this first all-male congress of black writers

² On the photograph there seems to be a woman sitting in the middle of the first row. Presumably this is Mme Yandé Christiane Diop, wife of Alioune Diop. Mme Diop has been the Director of *Presence Africaine* after her husband's death. The list of delegates for the conference is available on the website for W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research, Harvard University.

and artists in Paris 1956 it would take about a quarter of a century before African women writers would be acknowledged in their own right, as speaking and being listened to, talking with their own voices.

Across the Channel, in London, the Heinemann African Writers' Series started in 1962, in the midst of the wave of decolonization and creation of independent African states. The first published volume was Chinua Achebe's first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, originally published 1958 in a hardback edition. The African Writers Series was innovative, experimental and carried by enthusiasm. In the early 1960s it was received wisdom in British publishing houses that the only books that would sell in Africa were school textbooks; the colonial authorities saw books as a means of education of the new elite, "books for enjoyment which enhance understanding of other African's ways of love and death were not on their agenda" (Currey 2008, 2). The African Writers Series published in paperback (fairly innovative at the time) and being an offshoot from an educational publisher of British schoolbooks for use in the colonies, they were the only publisher at the time with the necessary business set-up to sell books in Africa. The African Writers Series continued to sell books for use in schools. "For the first time in history," Chinua Achebe is quoted to have been saying, "Africa's *future* generations of readers and writers – youngsters in schools and colleges – began to read, not only *David Copperfield* and other English classics that I and my generation had read, but also works by their own writers about their own people" (Achebe quoted in Currey 2008, 1)³.

Chinua Achebe's view of women in his native Igbo land has been debated by feminist African scholars. Some see him as idealizing and romanticising African women (Nfah-Abbenyi 1997, 35), while others are of the opinion that in his early novels Achebe is blind to the important roles played by women in Igbo society (Kolawole 1997, Nzegwu 2004). Yet others see him as very deliberately constructing his first novels according to the existing blueprint from Western classics: "Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* provided an avenue for his entrance into the arena of normal literary practice, allowing him to test the existing Western classics paradigm which presented the male as the authentic heroic model in the world of Chaucer, Milton, Shakespeare, Yeats, Eliot, Hawthorne, Poe

and so forth. From this viewpoint, Okonkwo's story⁴ begins the exploration of African thought from the position of a colonial heritage that emphasised and insisted on male dominance" (Kalu 2001, 70). Kalu further points out that "Achebe continues to test the issue of male dominance in Africa based on the existing and validated Western paradigm. (...) [He] is using male social dysfunction to explore possibilities for the reinstatement of the female viewpoint in the discussion of contemporary Africa's experience" (Kalu 2001, 71). Kolawole agrees regarding a kind of progression in Achebe's treatment of issues regarding women, from the early to the later novels (Kolawole 1997, 111-125).

According to Kalu, in order to understand male dominance on the African literary scene, and in African novels, Africa's colonial inheritance should be taken into consideration. Despite an overt male development story one may be able to decipher other layers of meaning with different gender connotations. This way of reading may be applied to male authors as well as to female ones. Unique female authors is, however, their possibility of "depicting women and women's experiences, women's ways of knowing in women's spaces and locations" (Nfah-Abbenyi 1997, 35). The main difference between male and female authors, Nfah-Abbenyi says, lies not only in the fact that frequently women are the centre of woman-authors' stories, but also that "we are led into her thought processes as she battles with the contradictions inherent in her life and the multiple demands that these same contradictions make of her as a wife, as a senior wife, as a mother and (...) as a mother of sons (Nfah-Abbenyi 1997, 46).

During the first twenty years of its existence the African Writer's Series publishes very few books by women authors. Of 250 titles published 1962 – 1981, only ten were written by women. Figure I4 shows the front cover of James Currey's recent book on the African Writer's Series, in which he himself was active right from the start. The number of women in the cover photo reflects the percentage of books by women authors published in the series: two out of sixteen = 12,5 %. The list of published books show more or less 370 books (between 1962 and 2003) out of which ca 43 are written by women. The chosen female faces to grace the cover are also not selected by

3 Chinua Achebe was also the first editor of the series (1962-1972)

4 Okonkwo is the protagonist of *Things Fall Apart*

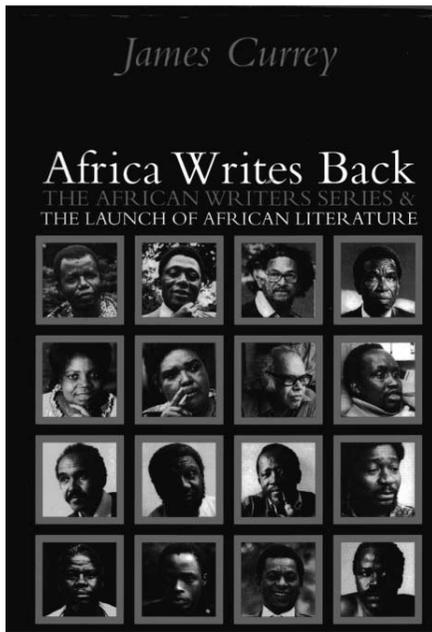


Fig. 14. James Currey's account of the African Writers' Series

chance; they are the most-published African women authors in the series. Buchi Emecheta has published 10 titles in AWS, Bessie Head 8 titles.

Women's writing was fairly late in coming. There were obstacles which had to be overcome. There was a double difficulty: on the one hand a colonial and post-colonial education system which gave preference to men, "while fewer women were sent to school or obtained university educations that have traditionally been prerequisites for the writing of African literature in European languages" (Nfah-Abbenyi 1997, 3); and on the other hand a women's movement which tended to universalize the experience of white Western women as being *the* female experience worldwide. According to Ama Ata Aidoo there is a long tradition of women's struggles in Africa; the role of African women authors is to give voice to perspectives and ideas rooted in this struggle. "African women struggling both on behalf of themselves and on behalf of the wider community is very much a part of our heritage. (...) Africa has produced much more concrete tradition of strong women fighters than most other societies. So when we say that we are refusing to be overlooked we are only acting today as daughters and grand-daughters of women who always refused to keep quiet" (Aidoo in Holst Petersen (ed) 1988, quoted in Nfah-Abbenyi 1997, 10).

Nfah-Abbenyi sees African women writers as pioneers in the formulation of perspectives and ideas

based on the experience of African women. Even before feminism became a movement with a global agenda, she says, "African women both 'theorized' and practiced what for them was crucial to the development of women, although no terminology was used to describe what these women were actively doing, and are still practicing on a day-to-day basis" (Nfah-Abbenyi 1997, 10). Thus, according to her African feminist theory is embedded in women writers' fictional texts. "After reading these texts both as 'fictionalized theory' and as 'theorized fiction', finding and naming African indigenous theory that is autonomous and self-determining, I will conclude that these women writers have used their writing as a weapon to delve into the African woman question, concurrently offering reconstructive insights into feminist and post-colonial theories" (Nfah-Abbenyi 1997, 15).

Postcolonial feminist literature, scholarship, art – 1990s onwards

From a situation in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s where African women writers and artists being non-existent/invisible due to colonial ideologies and systems of education, there was in the 1990s a breakthrough for African women in literature, scholarship and art. In this decade the women's movement in the Western world at last has an impact, much through a series of UN organized World conferences on gender-related issues⁵. The impact is ambiguous; on the one hand the conceptions of Gender-and-Development are rooted in fixed gender dichotomies and standard notions of male dominance/female subordination, which do not necessarily fit African conditions; on the other hand the international push to include gender in development issues creates a new focus on women in Africa, also on the African continent itself. In this decade many African universities opened centres for gender studies. Spearheaded by early women's fiction, questions regarding understanding of women's positions in African societies, of gender power relationships and male/female dynamics now start to be debated by (some) African (woman) sociologists,

⁵ In addition to the UN World Conferences on Women 1985 in Nairobi and 1995 in Beijing, there was also the Conference on Environment and Development in Rio 1992, the Conference on Human Rights in Vienna 1993, the Conference on Population and Development in Cairo 1994, and the Social Summit in Copenhagen 1995.

anthropologists, scholars of literature – and acted upon by creative artists.

The term 'feminism' which was initially regarded with skepticism by African woman writers and intellectuals – 'feminism' was considered too Western, too middle-class, and polarizing men and women (Nfah-Abbenyi 1997, 6-10, Ogundipe-Leslie 1994, 205-241). But 'feminism' has gradually been accepted and is now a name chosen by African feminists themselves for re-thinking basic conceptualizations regarding women, men and gender relations (Lewis 2001). Some examples: several issues of the important South African journal *Agenda* have since 2001 been devoted to discussions of African Feminisms; since 2002 the electronic journal *Feminist Africa* has been published from the African Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town (fig 15).

One of the tasks facing African feminists is a re-interpretation of so-called 'African tradition'. Western perceptions have imposed androcentric models on African literature, as discussed above in the case of Chinua Achebe. Western perceptions have also influenced ethnographic research on Africa, and in colonial and missionary interventions, 'African tradition' has been interpreted as patriarchal and oppressive of women. Such perceptions have, however, been discreetly undermined by women's fiction (Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, 1966, is an early example), and they are increasingly being questioned by African gender scholars.

These scholars acknowledge that present gender relations of power in most African contexts are patriarchal and male-dominated – but they suggest a different historical trajectory; rather than seeing the roots of contemporary African patriarchal structures in 'African culture,' these scholars point to "the new and growing patriarchal systems imposed on our societies through colonialism and Western religious and educational influences" (Amadiume 1987, 9). In their eyes, much of what is claimed by development agencies and by African leaders to be 'traditional African culture' is in fact *invented tradition*. In a certain sense, these feminists reverse the timeline. Where development discourse sees gender oppression in the past and gender equality in the future, these feminists say: No, this is not what things are like.



Fig. 15. At the African Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town

Gender oppression in its present form has been imported to Africa from the West through colonialism and Christianity, and from the East through Islam. Before these interventions, social relations were different. There was hierarchy and oppression, yes, but gender did not necessarily play an important role. Hierarchies of age, of lineage and/or along the lines of master/slave were much more important. Gender hierarchies have been imposed on these societies through Western influence, these scholars say.

Thus an important line of investigation in this context is the critique of Western *patriarchalizing* views. One has to de-construct existing conceptualizations in order to be able to come up with new ones. It has become increasingly clear to African feminist thinkers that Western interpretations of African social life and Western influences through Christian missions and colonial institutions – from educational systems to state structures, and laws – have been inherently androcentric, and patriarchalizing, in as far as they put men at the centre (standard anthropological kinship diagrams are all constructed with a male ego), all of this combined with assumptions of male dominance/female subordination. Both Ifi Amadiume as an anthropologist and Oyeronke Oyèwùmí as a sociologist have attempted, in studies of their own native societies, Igbo and Yoruba respectively, to de-gender their approaches. Instead of taking man/woman dichotomies and gender hierarchies with men at the top for granted, they pose questions regarding what gender actually means in their respective societies. They come up with slightly different but equally radical answers. Amadiume finds that in

Igbo society gender is not necessarily depending on the biology of bodies. Gender is situational; under certain conditions a daughter (biological woman) will be considered a son, a male heir; and under certain conditions a woman may turn herself into a husband marrying another woman (Amadiume 1987). Oyéwùmí finds that prior to colonization “the fundamental category ‘woman’ – which is foundational in Western gender discourses – simply did not exist in Yorubaland,” as she writes with deliberate provocation (Oyéwùmí 1997, ix). What she means is that the concept of ‘woman’ is Western thinking and everyday use is so overloaded with implications and associations, which are irrelevant and disturbing in African contexts, that analysis with ‘woman’ as a conceptual tool inevitably will lead investigations off the tracks. Meanwhile important objects of study remain unseen.

Nevertheless, over the years Yoruba society has been interpreted in male/female terms. Lists of ‘rulers’ have been read as lists of ‘kings’ – even if not all of these ‘rulers’ were men. Yoruba personal names do not indicate the gender of a person; whenever the British saw a throne they imagined a man sitting on it. It didn’t occur to them that some ‘rulers’ might have been women (Oyéwùmí 1997). Because of this type of misunderstandings a huge work of de-construction is needed. The apparently familiar must be scrutinized and questioned. Western concepts and lines of thought must be tested to see if they work.

What is needed is a development of home-grown theories, as argued by Amina Mama: “There is a pressing need for ‘home grown theory, particularly in view of the fact that the experience of African women differs so much from that of Western women. (...) While it may be incumbent upon us to draw on theories formulated elsewhere, perhaps it is necessary to re-operationalise some of the basic concepts used in women’s studies, so as to ground them in our own experience and local conditions” (Mama 1996, 67).

Women’s experience and local conditions are also the raw material of women’s fiction. In a certain sense African women’s fiction have spearheaded development of African feminist thinking, and literary analysis have played and plays an important role in the development of African feminist ideas, as many African scholars point out (cf Ogundipe-Leslie 1994, Kolawole 1997, Nfah-Abbenyi 1997, Nnaemeka 1997).

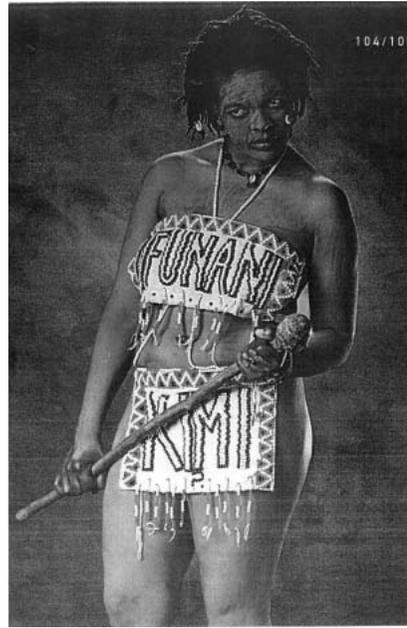


Fig. 16. Zamalo Dunywa's work *Ufunani Kimi*

African woman pictorial artists have also emerged on the scene. In the important and influential *Africa remix* exhibition, which from 2004 to 2007 toured Düsseldorf, London, Paris, Tokyo, Stockholm and Johannesburg, among 82 artists from 56 different African countries, 22 were women. Many of the women’s works (and some of the men’s) deal with gender issues. In order to wind up this essay on Africa, Art and Gender with examples of African pictorial art, I have chosen three works, which show artistic expressions matching some of the topics discussed above.

Zamalo Dunywa’s work *Ufunani Kimi* – “What do you want from me?” (fig 16) is a talking back/looking back picture. ‘Talking back’ is a term coined by African American feminist writer bell hooks. Women refuse only being talked to, talked for, or talked about; they claim position as speaking subjects. The young woman in the photograph is dressed in the Zulu maidens’ virginity costume, but she does not at all look submissive. She carries a club, and with an investigative and threatening gaze she not only looks back – she seems ready to strike back as well. Wangechi Mutu’s work *Mask* (fig 17) speaks about identities and re-interpretations of tradition. The young smart urban woman, with well manicured hands and polished nails (obviously cut from a magazine of sorts; many of Mutu’s works are collage pieces including cuttings from women’s magazines)



Fig 17. Wangechi Mutu's work *Mask*

has got herself entangled into an old African iron mask with traditionally combed hair and ugly teeth. Where does she belong? Or is she creating something new and previously unknown based on a mix of iron masks and magazines? The third picture is also a staged photograph, the artist is a man, Samuel Fosso, and the title is *Le chef: celui qui a vendu l'Afrique aux colons* (fig 18). Samuel Fosso is dressed up according to Western stereotypes of an African chief, dressed in leopard hides with heavy golden necklaces and bracelets. But he also wears a funny set of smart sunglasses, and his brand new red leather shoes are neatly placed next to his fur clad throne. In his hand he holds a bunch of huge (artificial) sunflowers. The wall behind the throne, as well as the floor, are covered with brightly-colored Afro-prints, one of these decorated with printed mirrors. The chief himself is a lean, small fragile body, almost feminine. In other of Fosso's photographs he pictures himself in drag. This is almost an inverted drag picture: a feminine man parading as a (supposedly) patriarchal chief. The picture turns stereotypes about Africa and about gender upside down a couple of times. It reflects certain expectations about what an African chief looks like (leopard hides, the throne) but then again it mocks those expectations (the feeble small feminine body, the sunflowers). Gender-wise it shows a supposed patriarch, who does not at all look like a patriarch. The mirrors in the background, some of them turned upside down, give away the key to this reading of the picture.

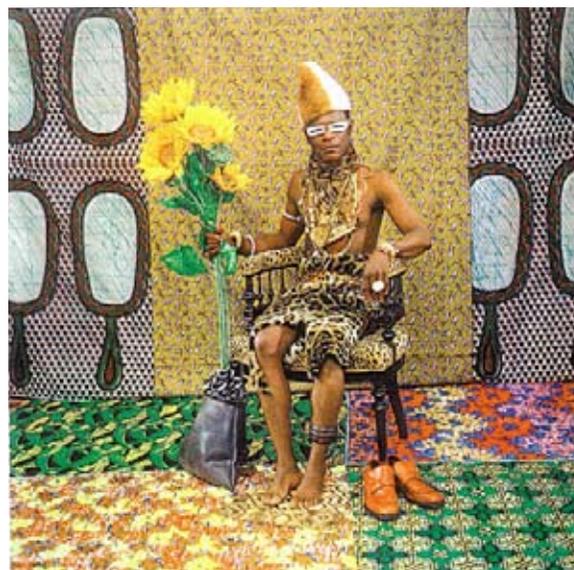


Fig. 18. Samuel Fosso, *Le chef: celui qui a vendu l'Afrique aux colon*

Conclusion

Winding up this essay on relations between (ideas of) Africa, Art and Gender, seen through four moments in history over more than 100 years – what can be said? From European art produced on myths, dreams and images of Africa (which had frequently more to do with Europe than with Africa as such) where the story line is clearly androcentric, and where women appear as incarnations of sexuality (or motherhood) under the historical conditions of colonization, it is with few exceptions only with the budding anti-colonial movements after the Second World War that the situation slowly changes to one, where African voices are heard and listened to. In the beginning these voices are still all male, and the situations they describe are seen from male points of view. African women fiction writers appear on the scene only in the 1960s, African woman pictorial artists only decades later⁶. Once African woman writers and artists do appear, however, their alternative descriptions of African social worlds are picked up by feminist scholars, laying the ground and clearing the way for African postcolonial feminist thinking about men, women, gender and sexuality.

⁶ I am in this context not counting white African writers like Olive Schreiner (born 1855), Doris Lessing (1919), Nadine Gordimer (1923), or white woman painters like Irma Stern (born 1894).

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A conference summary



Carita Backström

There were 27 papers presented at the conference “What’s Culture Got to Do with it?”, selected from a much higher number of abstracts by a selection committee consisting of Ashleigh Harris (guest lecturer, English dept., Uppsala University), Stefan Helgesson (lecturer, literature dept. Uppsala University), Kirsten Holst Petersen (assistant professor, Roskilde University Centre), and Mai Palmberg (NAI). On each of the four conference days there was a keynote speaker.

Two rapporteurs had been entrusted with the task of summarising the conference, Carita Backström (cultural editor at the Finnish radio), and Kirsten Holst Petersen (above).

This their report.



Kirsten Holst Petersen

THE FIRST KEYNOTE SPEAKER of the conference was Karin Barber whose paper *Moral Energy and what Looks like Life in African Popular Culture* included many of the major themes which were taken up by subsequent speakers throughout the conference. Starting with a description of a new, realistic

style, depicting ordinary people in everyday situations, emerging in the 19th century through new medias (newspapers, novels, market literature, pop songs, travelling theatres) Barber continues by tying this realism to what she calls ‘the moral imperative’. Contrary to European developments realism in African popular culture, or even super-realism is seen to enhance moralising by tying the action to particular and recognisable characters and particular time and place. Through three examples from Yoruba popular culture Barber shows that the morality of

these popular forms appeared as conservative, sexist rules for personal behaviour. This falls into a recognisable pattern according to which popular culture is conservative, ‘by the people, but not in their own interest’, while cultural forms instigated from outside popular culture (theatre for development, Chimurenga songs, Ngugi wa Th’iongo’s theatre) are progressive, posing disturbing questions about not only individual behaviour, but also about political and social problems. Barber, however, opposes this division, arguing that the seemingly conservative personalised view opens up by the analogy with social inequality, and because audience participation is an important aspect of art appreciation in Africa the rulers/politicians are also included in the demands for personal integrity, which are at the centre of the moralising imperative.

The issues of moralising, or ethics, the role of realism and power inequality were central themes in the conference.

Elleke Boehmer’s keynote speech *Everything to Do with It: Articulating the Unsaid and the Unsayable* responded to the question in the title of the conference (What’s Culture got to do with It?). She briefly discusses the two opposite views on culture: the one that says that culture makes nothing happen, and the other that culture is what makes us, and she opts for

the latter. This leads to the questions of what does it do? And how does it do it? To the first question Boehmer's answer is that it can articulate the unsaid, even unthought-of and the unsayable, taboos, and through that negotiate with the world of action, of politics; to the second question she offers the opinion that the newness enters in amongst other ways through 'interesting attractions between unordered objects', or 'unordered, as opposed to disordered, and random juxtaposition', and she uses Yvonne Vera's modernist style in *The Stone Virgins* as an example. To this she adds the importance of the spaces in between, and her final example is a surmise that Mandela arrived at his momentous decision of negotiating with the Apartheid regime partly through a long experience of careful listening and partly through the 'random juxtaposition' of his favourite texts among what was available to him in the prison: a poem by G.A. Henty, his favourite Shakespeare, and Nadine Gordimer. The paper thus answers the conference question with a resounding 'everything' and a surprising theory as to how.

In her keynote speech *Africa, Art and Gender – Four Moments of Colonial/Post-colonial History* Signe Arnfred discusses four moments in history illustrating different conceptions of relations between Africa, art and gender.

The first moment: the time of the Berlin Conference (1884-1885): Africa seen with European eyes featuring colonial fantasies where African women and men were imagined promiscuous and sexually inviting, also dangerous. Arnfred's example from the arts is Rider Haggard's novel *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), popular to this day and many times filmed. The story is about three British explorers searching for Salomon's Mines guided by an old treasure map. In the map turned upside-down feminist scholars see the body of a woman, and "virgin" land awaiting colonial masculine penetration. Arnfred draws an interesting parallel to Haggard's contemporary, Sigmund Freud and his description of the female psyche as a "dark continent", and the rational (male) ego as a contrast to the desires of the unconscious, underground id. Freud too was a child of the imperialist age and its fantasies saturated with sexual metaphors.

The second moment: the swinging post World War One in Paris. In 1925 a young black American dancer arrived in Paris, and with her erotic and exotic dance laid the city at her feet. Her performance "fed

on old stereotypes, but transformed them into something new and exiting, in tune with jazz music and modern art". Josephin Baker was also present at the exhibition when the French anthropological exhibition to West Africa showed some of the thousands of artefacts they had collected, a happening which was celebrated by the art magazine *Minotaur* with a special issue. Arnfred states: "Africa in this period, in this context, was cast in positive light, a source of authenticity and 'naturalness', something from which Europeans could learn and draw inspiration." But: "As for gender nothing much had changed since the early days of colonial fantasies."

The third moment, the period after the Second World War, includes the quarterly *Presence Africaine*, the negritude movement and the First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists. All of them a male business. This Arnfred sees as an indication "not of patriarchal cultures in Africa or the African Diaspora, but of European patriarchal culture in African mission and government schools". Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is seen as a blueprint from Western classics. Arnfred also takes up the double dilemma faced by (the few) women writers having to fight both the postcolonial education system giving preference to men and the monopolizing Western feminist movement.

The fourth moment dates back to the 1990s when there was a breakthrough of African women in arts and scholarship. African feminist researchers question the previous history writing; according to them gender hierarchies have been imposed on African societies through Western influence. Arnfred concludes that African women's fiction has spearheaded the development of feminist thinking in Africa: "the women strike back". Arnfred's examples here are three artistic works which turn stereotypes about Africa and gender upside-down. When finally women writers and artist appear they have alternative descriptions to the previous androcentric history. In this way the speech addresses the topics of ethics and power inequality in a feminist reading.

In his address *Europe through Africa, Africa through Europe: Reconstructing the relation of European integration and colonialism* Stefan Jonsson highlighted a repressed part of European history, namely the part that Africa played when Europe started to rebuild and unite after the traumatic experiences of World War One.

"Africa cannot be made available, if Europe does not unite". This was a central idea behind Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi's vision of a European union, put forth in his pamphlet *PanEuropa* (1923).

There were several arguments for a European integration: the argument for peace (to prevent a repetition of World War One), the argument for a civilizational unity, and the economic argument. War-torn, divided Europe was lagging behind the superpowers of the period; the British empire, the Soviet Union, the United States, Japan and China. In this perspective Africa was seen as a solution. In an essay called *Africa* Coudenhove-Kalergi put it very clearly: "Africa could provide Europe with raw material for its industry, nutrition for its population, land for its overpopulation, labour for its unemployed, and markets for its products". This new geopolitical bloc was called Eurafrica, and Stefan Jonsson states that "contrary to a common understanding and standard historiography of the roots of today's European Union (...) Pan-Europa was not a project limited to Europe alone, but one which included Africa in its entirety, except for its British possessions".

There were similar visions of the time, amongst them the grandiose project by the German architect Hermann Sörgel, a technological construction covering both continents, called *Atlantropa*.

These visions were seen as the only solution to the decline of Europe. They were fed by racist images of brutal, dangerous Africans (specifically the African soldiers in the French army) and the civilizational mission of Europe.

Stefan Jonsson shows that these visions are all but history: throughout the 20th century they have continued to influence discourse and politics and they still do. Jonsson's last quotation is by Nicholas Sarkozy in Dakar 2007, a rhetorical flower about peace and cooperation, and with Eurafrica as the grand destiny that await Africa and Europe: "Ce que veut faire la France avec l'Afrique, c'est préparer l'avènement de l'Eurafrrique, ce grand destin commun qui attend l'Europe et l'Afrique."

The address takes up the theme of power inequality, not between men and women, but between Africa and the West, a theme, which is taken up often, but particularly in the art section of the conference.

The art section

The art section of the conference consists of six papers and a power point representation, four of which take vigorous part in the ongoing discussion about the role and meaning of modern African art: they discuss the topics of traditional versus modern art and in that context the vexed question of authenticity; the power-inequality between African artists and Western art dealers and the influence of this on the artwork, the possible economic power of creative economies and the political implications and uses of modern art in Africa. There is a tendency in the first four papers to concentrate on the economic aspect of African art to the (near)-exclusion of discussions of its intrinsic artistic value, or, more crudely, they put economics before aesthetics. The paper, exemplifying this trend most clearly is *Exploring the Role of Culture in the Assessment of the Entrepreneurial Potential of Arts Students in Namibia* by Retha-Louise Hofmeyr and Gideon Nieman. As the title indicates the paper does not intend to look at the artistic content of the art produced by the students. Its premise is that 'the creative art sector has the potential to meaningfully contribute to economic growth, income generation, improvement of living standards, increased investment, wider tax revenue, technological development and job creation', and its purpose is to assess the enterprising tendencies of the students at The College of the Arts in Namibia, using the General Enterprising Test (GET), devised by the Durham University Business School. The investigation is an academic and rigorous piece of research, careful to take into account the difference between the opportunities available to the Namibian students and the English students in the original test, and it ends with a set of recommendations for teaching the students the necessary skills to survive as artists in the difficult economic environment of Namibia. Rhoda Woets' paper *Imagined Tradition: Authenticating "Cultural Canvas and Wall Paintings in Northern Ghana and the Netherlands"* continues the discussion of the beneficial effects of the creative economy, but includes an evaluation of costs in terms of artistic freedom, curtailed by the European demand for authenticity, which means tradition, frozen at a time before Western influence, a time considered primeval and therefore authentic to Africa in the European mind.

The case in point is the traditional wall paintings done by the women of the village of Sirigu in the poverty-stricken northern part of Ghana and discovered by a Dutch NGO who taught the women to transfer their wall paintings to woven strips of cotton and later to acrylic paintings. This enabled a transfer to art galleries in Europe, and this in turn created a much needed income for the village women but at the same time a demand to fulfil ‘certain stereotypical expectations of the subject and style... and a romantic demand for an “ethnic or cultural art” based



on local narratives.’ Authenticity is not seen in terms of the medium (walls and local paint), but in terms of theme and colours, both of which are transferable to European galleries. The actual tradition was communal and included copying work from each other, but modern European art expectations object to this, and so the women were instructed to sign their paintings individually. The paper highlights these ironies, but takes seriously the economic advantages to the village, which these sacrifices entail.

The paper *Installing Anatsui: The politics of Economics in Global Contemporary Art* by Brandon N. Reintjes continues the concern with economics very directly by quoting Edward Said to show that contemporary art operates politically to impact the cultural geography of cities as a result of “the possibility of its direct translation into economic terms.” The discussion is centred on the Ghanaian/Nigerian artist El Anatsui whose ‘large-scaled wall sculptures created by joining recycled aluminium distillery labels into elaborate brocades resembling *adinkra* and *kente* cloths have earned him inclusion into the Western canon of contemporary art. His success on the international art market is ascribed to ‘a unique combination of local and transnational influences’, described as ‘transvanguard’. In very practical terms its success is partly attributed to the fact that it packs up easily so that it can move around in the world, relatively unhindered, like the post-modern mindset

of its critics and buyers. Again, on the practical level, Anatsui’s impact on the local economy of Enugu where he has his workshop is discussed and praised. Locals help collect the labels and sell found objects or old tools, which are then ‘repurposed’, and they help in his workshop, connecting the thousands of pieces which go into one of his sculptures. Modern terms like flexibility and liminality are invoked, and due consideration is given both to the importance of the creative economy at the local level and the position of the artwork in contemporary art discourse in which ‘each bottle top returning as an object of contemplation has the capacity to reveal to us a more profound understanding of life than it did as a stopper.

The paper which pays most attention to the artistic qualities of the artwork discussed is Angelo Kakande’s paper *Contemporary Ugandan Art and the Critique on Corruption: A Look at Mutebi’s Strategies, Symbolisms and Symbols*. It is at the same time the paper, which is least concerned with the connection between the artist and the European market. It simply states that the aesthetic qualities of the paintings are important to survive on the Ugandan art market, as it is dependent on the ‘tourism sector’. Mutebi is said to have ‘successfully woven together the avant-garde, political activism and the non-bourgeois art economy in Uganda’. Unpacking this statement Kakande centres on the aesthetic and the political and the connection between the two. On the aesthetic level,

Mutebi uses figures and stories from traditional Buganda culture to make statements about present day political culture in Uganda, but he does this with awareness that traditional Buganda art also had a political role. The discussion thus becomes one of 'the politics of culture', carried on through, not across cultures: 'Mutebi uses traditional rituals and objects to create artworks through which he critiques bad governance and poor service delivery in Uganda'. The avant-garde nature of Mutebi's art is a result of a deliberate use of his knowledge of modern art history, and the moderately critical content of his paintings is explained as a result of his disappointment with the NRM reign under Museveni which he initially supported, but consequently was disappointed by and eventually opposed. The paper includes very illuminating analyses of individual paintings, explicating the traditional meaning of objects and figures and the partly transferred, partly new meaning in the iconography of the paintings, and setting them squarely within the 'wider debate on governance and democratisation'.

In Hilde Arntsen's paper *Drawing for Change: A view of the Zimbabwean 2008 General Elections as Interpreted by News Cartoons* the debate about governance and democratisation is central to the exclusion of the other topics dealt with in the art section. The paper concentrates on outlining the background, both politically and artistically, of its subject. Cartoons are defined as relying on 'stereotypes, excess and well-known icons' and making use of satire, and political cartoons are understood to offer a site of 'potential mobilisation' along with other 'small media' (graffiti, popular songs, slogans etc.) Zimbabwe had a culture of political cartoons before Independence, but the present media situation and the country's 'draconian media laws' have forced the cartoons into cyber space. Thematically, the drawings are seen to concentrate on ridiculing the power holders, particularly president Mugabe, and leaving out many other potentially important issues, and visually, some main icons are highlighted: Fat chiefs or politicians, a poor woman with a child on her back, representing the people.

On the one hand the section on visual art shows it to be a potential source of income, 'the creative economy', and on the other hand it shows the potential of art work to be oppositional to either oppressive

political leadership or demands for 'authenticity', seen to be out of touch with the often urban and cosmopolitan lives of the artists.

Annemi Conradie's paper *Travelling snapshots of the Rainbow nation* focused on the commodification of 'authentic' and 'traditional' in the postcard business in South Africa.

She finds that the majority of contemporary postcards resemble those from colonial times, keywords being exotic, tribal, rural, primitive, authentic. Often the pictures are taken in so-called cultural villages, already a (re)construction made for the tourist business. Frequent motifs in the Zulu villages are naked women dressed in beads and fierce Zulu warriors. The warrior images are products of both European and indigenous engineering.

A more recent form of postcards features South Africa's urban and rural poor. These images from townships and squatter camps conceal and aestheticize a social reality of dire poverty. They "cash in on yet another tribe: the post-modern tribe of the poor".

Conradie also notes the stereotypical assumptions about tourists; that they have a nostalgic longing for 'authentic' pre-colonial traditions, or a wish to penetrate the hidden and private.

During the discussion questions were raised whether there is a specific character to South African image production; does it differ from similar exotic constructions in other cultures?

Selling Africans in Uppsala was the title of Mai Palmberg's final presentation, a picturesque epilogue to the seminar. Her documentation in photographs of 'Africana' at Vaksala flea market reveals the tenacity of popular clichés. A reminder of T.S.Eliot's statement (quoted by Annemi Conradie): "even the humblest material artefact, which is the product and symbol of a particular civilization, is an emissary of the culture out of which it comes".

The music section

'Politics are about power, and pop music can be powerful'

The three papers in this section are all concerned with the 'small media' of popular songs or the 'hit song' and their interaction with the political life of

the country. Despite dealing with the music scene in three different countries (Zimbabwe, Malawi and Tanzania) the papers show a depressing similarity in the development of the song texts: from support of the Independence fight to euphoria and support for the ruling party at Independence to criticism of mismanagement, corruption etc and lament for the continuing poverty and suffering of the people. They do, however, also show differences, particularly in the degree to which the singers become directly involved in the politics of the country, and this leads to a discussion about the effect of political patronage and the ensuing wealth on the integrity of the singers.

Mickias Musiyiwa's paper *The Depiction of Social and Cultural Change in Zimbabwean Post-colonial Popular Music: A Study of Selected Hit Songs* states explicitly that it is concerned with the texts, not the music, and the paper argues that 'the dependability of Zimbabwean hit songs to provide us with an accurate picture of social and cultural change rests upon a particular musician ... to free his/her musical creativity from political patronage'. The paper follows the careers of among others the two most well known Zimbabwean musicians, Thomas Mapfumo and Oliver Mtukudzi. In the eighties *Chimurenga* music celebrated Independence, the return to traditional ways, pan-africanism and the new freedom afforded to women by education and their participation in youth brigades 'to a large extent Independence freed romance from patriarchal control', and this gave rise to new love songs. The change to the anger and disillusionment of the nineties is seen to be exemplified by Mapfumo's 1988 hit song *Varombo kuvarombo* (The poor belong to the poor), and the criticism escalated in tune with the deterioration of living conditions in the country (corruption, starvation, HIV, torture and murder), and the post 2000 era added the farm invasions and further escalation of violence and finally 'state failure'. Mapfumo moved to America, from where he, like the exiled cartoonists, can criticise the leadership in safety. Meanwhile, inside Zimbabwe, Mtukudzi continued with social criticism and risked a coded criticism of Mugabe with the song *Wasakara* (You are now old [and useless]); the government sponsored a 'third Chimurenga' style in an attempt to revive nationalist enthusiasm and justify the farm invasions, and the gospel singers ask God to intervene. The music scene reflects the

people's responses to 'state failure', with an emphasis on opposition to the ruling party.

Reuben Chirambo's paper *The Politics of Popular Music in African Democracies: The Case of Malawi* depicts a more complicated, if less severe, situation. The careers of the two musicians dealt with in the paper, Lucius Banda and Joseph Nkasa include direct involvement in politics. The point of departure is the end of Banda's regime and the onset of multi-party democracy in Malawi, and Lucius Banda's songs follow the same trajectory from praise to denunciation. However, president Bakili Muluzi's response was not to detain, but to incorporate Banda in his campaign to win a second nomination, including him on official trips abroad and buying him a car. This changed the content of the songs from criticism of the leadership to criticism of an 'abstract system of exploitation.' In the 2004 election Banda won a seat in Parliament and also campaigned for Muluzi's choice of successor, Bingu, whom he later turned against and denounced in a round of political infighting in the course of which he lost his seat and was sent to prison by Bingu's new party for 'presenting a forged school certificate for his candidature for the election'. His texts kept praising Muluzi and now denouncing Bingu. These turnabouts have sown (justifiable) doubts about his integrity.

The other musician, Joseph Nkasa, starts out as spokesperson for the people, denouncing greedy politicians etc., but he ends up supporting Bingu and writing songs for his campaign to the extent that he castigates Malawians for choosing the wrong politicians 'to annoy God they chose wrongly' and denounces protest songs 'when they [Leaders] hear songs on the radio they should be happy.' His integrity is also on the line. Chirambo explains these seeming inconsistencies by fitting them into the Gramscian concepts of hegemony and the nature of public culture to move 'between resistance and incorporation at any given moment in history'.

Elias Songoyi's and Siri Lange's paper *Political Critique through Traditional Music in Tanzania – Limits and Openings. The case of Kalikali and Mwinamila in the 1950s – 1980s.*

Taking the discussion about the relationship between popular musicians and political parties into a Tanzanian setting the paper explores a scenario with close similarities to the above. Kalikali was a peasant

singer from a rural district, singing about the plight of peasants and mainly known in his home region. Mwinamila is a well-known singer nationally; he was under the patronage of the ruling party where he enjoyed the position of 'court poet', performing at conferences and government functions. From this position he could both criticise and praise the government. Both song writers went through the change from criticism (of the colonial administration) to praise to criticism (of the elected leaders), but Kalikali received a jail sentence, after which his songs 'fell in line with the ruling ideology', while Mwinamila was incorporated into the inner circles of the ruling party, partly due to his personal friendship with President Nyerere. The paper traces this difference to the singers' different dance traditions. Kalikali belonged to the Sukuma dance/song tradition. This tradition that took the form of a song contest called for clever, witty and figurative use of language, centred on local scandal, enabling social criticism. Mwinamila is the leader of a dance group, performing at wedding receptions and leading communal dances. The texts, including critical ones, are conducted in very direct language. During the colonial period Mwinamila campaigned for TANU, thus employing the *Hiyari ya Moyo* tradition for a political purpose. The irony of the situation is that Kalikali, who was the most outspoken critic, ended up in accordance with the party line while Mwinamila was allowed to continue a critical tradition from within the ruling party. The next generation of song writers, known as Bongo Flava musicians, leave out politics and concentrate on love songs or Gospel music, both of which are much more lucrative than political protest. The end of this line is exemplified by a teacher at the Bagamoyo College of Arts who is quoted to say that 'for the artist, it is his work. We sing about CMM. If another party comes, you'll have to adapt, you'll praise them'. From political commitment to commercialism. Postmodernism or opportunism?

The literature section

This section consists of five papers, three of which deal with Zimbabwean literature. An overall theme is a concern about ethics. 'The ethical turn' of the 1990s is evidently not over. In the following papers it manifests itself as a search for, and a desire to show

responsibility in the project of nation building on the ruins of liberation ideology or civil war. This desire manifests itself in alternative readings of canonical texts or a concern with memory and healing.

Hilda H. Strandberg's paper *Alternative Vistas: Literary "Ethical Imagination" as Vehicle for Political and Ethical Debate* discusses Nuruddin Farah's two most recent novels *Links* and *Knots* through what she refers to as the 'ethical imagination' in Farah's literary moral universe. The novels feature returnees from Diaspora. The paper argues that Farah challenges post-modern perspectives on subjectivity and instead offers as an alternative a stable moral position, a relational self, interacting with the community in a shared effort to rebuild a new society. Farah's texts are also concerned with the role of women and the dislocation of Diaspora, and the two novels in turn offer a polyphonic and a monologist discussion of the moral dilemmas involved in alternative nation building.

Anna-Leena Toivanen's paper *Remembering the Aching Spots of Zimbabwe: Yvonne Vera as a witness and a Healer* contextualises the 'ethical turn' in post-colonial writing by (re)invoking the

old concept of commitment to nation building and, using Bhabha, breaking this down into the pedagogical and the performative. The paper centres on the performative aspect, arguing that 'coming to terms with the past' through breaking silences and facing unheroic or violent aspects of the past is a necessary, if painful part of building a genuine community. Yvonne Vera's authorship is inserted into this space and analysed as 'witness and therapeutic healer.' The trauma which is the main topic in all Vera's texts is the violence visited upon women in the course of the war of liberation and as a result of the Gukurahundi: rape, incest, mutualisation and murder. The paper sees *The Stone Virgins* and *Under the Tongue* as the most optimistic of Vera's novels, as they include a possibility of 'healing and recovery from the grip of a traumatic memory.' The authorship is seen as critical of the heroic, nationalist story of Zimbabwe's independence, but at the same time it argues for a close connection between the two aspects of nation building and community building. In this vein, although the novels centre on the damage done to women *The Stone Virgin* is seen to break this pattern, including an ex-fighter and murderer as victim, thus widening

the scope to go beyond the gender specific to include a wider variety of victims understood to be in need of remembrance and healing.

Another attempt at carving out an alternative to the official, 'pedagogical' interpretation of Zimbabwe's national ethos can be found in Robert Muponde's paper *History as Witchcraft: The Narcissism of Warrior Masculinities in Edmond Chipamaunga's War and Post-War Novels*. The paper positions itself in direct polemical opposition to readings like Toivanen's which are seen as 'a heightening of critical attention of trauma and violence', which produces 'self-doubt and cynicism'. Instead, the paper offers a re-reading of texts, which are normally read as canonical representations of the nation-building project. The witchcraft of the title is defined as 'something that transfixes and freezes the past', a criticism which is often directed against Chipamaunga's first novel, *A Fighter for Freedom*, but which Muponde directs at the critical readings of the novel. This reading he calls a poster reading, and through an analysis of the covers of the three novels he arrives at a reading of the novels as 'frozen' moments in the national ethos: Heroic struggle, civilian failure and betrayal by the corrupt elite. Muponde suggests a serial reading in which the first novel is seen as a founding text, establishing the ethos of narcissist warrior masculinity which in the course of the next two novels is seen to invade and pervert all aspects of civilian life, be it 'the national question, the land, democracy and sex'.

An even deeper pessimism can be seen in Kizito Muchemwa's paper *Polarising Cultures, Politics and Communities and Fracturing Economies in post-2000 Zimbabwe*. Muchemwa finds the origin of the present crisis in flaws in the nationalist movement from its beginning. These he sees as binaries haunting the nation (rural-urban, people with totems-those without, citizens-noncitizens, black white, Shona Ndebele). This polarisation leads to exclusions, the most serious effect of which is a conflation of the nation with an ethnic group, creating 'fault lines in the national imaginary'. On this background the paper outlines



a brief history of Zimbabwean literature, dividing it into moments of celebration, moments of fragmentation, elegiac moments and moments of rebirth, and it discusses the last 'moment' in greater depth. The site of fiction has moved away from the country which has been 'associated with the valorisation of nativist cultures' and into the city or the diaspora, where the texts, Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* and Brian Chikwava's *Harare North*, are seen to create new meanings in the absence of nativism and Afro-radicalism.

Mlambo Nelson's paper 'Urban Lives and complexities of Change: Cultural Transformation for Survival in Contemporary Zimbabwean Fiction' also celebrates the shift to the city and the new possibilities it offers. Analysing three short stories in *Laughing Now: New Stories from Zimbabwe*, ed. Irene Staunton. from 2007 the paper explores 'the literary representation of the ambiguous, heterogeneous and constantly shifting socio-cultural dynamics of Zimbabwean city making...'

Arguing against afro-pessimism the analysis endeavours to emphasise the 'resilience and resourcefulness' with which city dwellers overcome the almost impossible. This calls for a degree of flexibility and adaptability not usually associated with African ways of life, and the point is to show that such flexibility exists, also in Africa, and that it creates new forms of social interaction and behaviour. The three stories show ways of survival in the city at the height of Zimbabwe's economic collapse, and the paper reads

stories of economic wheeler-dealing and prostitution as success stories and sees laughter and music (pop songs) as sites of rebellion and resistance. The readings emphasise a view of culture as 'social spaces whose edges are unfixed, irregular and difficult to locate.'

Maria Olausson's paper *Making 'IT' Happen* – *approaching art for the answers to our questions* engages with the title of the conference and tries to define the 'it' in 'What's culture got to do with it?' By viewing culture as culture not as representation the two concepts of the word and the world enter into a different relationship, and referring to the German philosopher Gadamer "The world and the word for Gadamer are thus not opposed, but different moments in one deeper historical hermeneutic process – what might be termed a process of 'making' 'it' happen." The paper traces this process of trying to come to terms with, or write the present version of 'the deeper historical hermeneutic process' through two novels by Zoë Wicomb, *David's Story* (2000) and *Playing in the Light* (2006), and it pays particular attention to the idea of history as an active agent expressed in these novels. The question asked in *David's Story* is 'what kind of truth can fiction tell us?' and the answer is complicated by a reluctant narrator of his past history with untellable secrets and a writer, paid to simply record, but with her own views, and the outcome is seen as history, or the historically constituted world speaking to us, not the agents constructing history. The same result is arrived at in the discussion of *Playing in the Light*, in which the parents of the main character manage to pass as whites in apartheid South Africa, thus becoming play whites and leaving a legacy of guilt and shame to their daughter, which was exactly the fate they wanted to escape. The moral, not only in the texts, but also in the analysis, ties in with the rest of the papers in this section. The failed attempts by the protagonists at rewriting history are viewed by the critical analysis as the results of failure of healing through memory and of imitation as a means of survival, but the focus is not on the moral agency of the characters, but on history as speaking them, thus diminishing their active agency in the scenarios they take part in.

Theatre and festivals

Evelyn Lutwama-Rukundo's paper entitled *Community Theatre: A Contemporary Feminist Tool for Grassroots Education and Activism in Uganda* is the result of seven months' stay with women's performance groups in central Uganda. The members of the groups come from low-income areas, either city slum or country. The reason for this is seen to be that low income groups are more tradition-bound than higher income groups and therefore in greater need of the kind of input which community theatre can provide. The theatre groups are found to be either based solely on performances or to include other activities, like shared work, loans etc.). The subjects of the performances are either instigated by the women themselves or by the community or by outside agents, notably CEDOVIP (Centre for domestic violence prevention). The performances, often centred around issues of domestic violence and gender discrimination were both occasions for grassroots activism and grassroots education, and they worked as a cooperation between the women activists and external parties. The common goal is to effect change, which the women themselves desire.

Drissa Diakité's paper *Desert Festivals in Mali. A space for speech exchange and a factor of social cohesion* presented a festival tradition, seen as a possibility for meetings between cultures and between tradition and modernity. Yearly the small village of Essakane turns into a "global village where the Touaregs on the back of dromedaries and the globe-trotters in Bermudas get friendly", and where the "smile that lights up the faces is the real universal language of the festival". Sahara has a long tradition of contact between different people through the commercial desert routes, and in today's context of instability and armed conflicts the festivals can be seen as agents promoting peace.

The Theme of Language

Stefan Helgesson's paper *Literary Hybrids and the Circuit of Translation: the Example of Mia Couto* discussed the many and different implications of translation. The idea, which holds the different examples and situations together, is that meaning depends on context. Seen in that light Mia Couto's text gains different meanings even before it is translated

into another language by being read in the different Portuguese-speaking countries, scattered around the world. When it is translated (which it is into 23 languages) there is a choice of privileging source or target text, and after that there is a choice of domesticating or foreignising the translation, meaning whether to fit it completely into the mental, physical etc. universe of the target language or to emphasise the difference by retaining key concepts or words. The unequal power relationship between languages also plays a part in these choices. These themes are illustrated in a discussion of translation choices of unknown (here African) concepts: glossary, footnotes or nothing, and the glossary/footnote option is seen to create a split between normal and deviant, enhancing the unequal power relation between dominant and local languages. Translation is seen as an open and fluid negotiation without the possibility of a correct outcome.

In his paper *Dictionaries and culture* Dion Nkomo elucidated the intricate and not too well known task of compiling dictionaries, and what culture has to do with it. Dictionaries are not exclusively concerned with providing linguistic information. Their cognitive function also includes general cultural and encyclopaedic information and special information from different fields.

Cultural data in dictionaries range from idioms to names (one can think for instance of the onomastic practice of the Yoruba mentioned in Taiwo Oloruntoba's paper, see below), from social speech formulae to circumcision and the brewing of beer.

Focusing on Zimbabwean dictionaries Dion Nkomo mentions dilemmas arising when defining "offensive" terms or euphemisms in Shona and Ndebele societies. The cultural antisomorphism between European and African worldviews have resulted in misrepresentations, and still do.

This challenge was discussed also by Stefan Helgesson in his paper on translation.

Intersecting Tradition, Modernity and Diaspora

In his paper *Location of African Culture: Beyond the New Cosmopolitan Exotic* Taiwo Oloruntoba-Oju discusses the continued struggle for cultural survival threatened by various forces of annihilation.

He starts off by boldly questioning Homi Bhabha's concepts of "third space" and "in-between-ness" as being paradoxical; the way to survive is to forget the symbols and values that the affected groups have judged necessary for survival. Bhabha's discourse, he argues, fits too well into the "cultural overwrite", that is the old but still ongoing imperial project of suppressing other cultures and installing western hegemony – today disguised as "globalism".

But there is also an internal danger; Bhabha's advocacy of hybridity is matched by African nation builders and cultural workers, from Thabo Mbeki to the musician Lagbaja, talking about an African identity as something inherent and stable; the grand possessive: we.

Taiwo Oloruntoba-Oju accepts neither. He wants to emphasize continuity. The past lives on in contemporary culture; the shift between tradition and modernity is not a break but a renewal. And to recognize this, and defend the origins, he insists, is not the same as extreme nativism or essentialism. Instead it is a necessity if the African cultures are to remain relevant and distinct in a global world.

As a concrete example the paper highlights the onomastic practice of Yoruba culture. Yoruba believes that *oruko n ro ni*, the name affects or reports the bearer. This concept – *nomen est omen* – is more or less forgotten in the European context, but remains a treasured expression of identity in Yoruba culture, urban as well as rural, and also in the diaspora. It functions as a mark of the underlying *langue*, of *recognizance* and *continuance*.

The paper raised the crucial question about African self-negation: must the Africans in order to be considered world members negate their own culture?

In his paper *New religious cultures in Africa* Jean-Baptist Sourou gave an account of his fieldwork with the Fon ethnic group in Benin, whose marriage and funeral rites are becoming more and more spectacular.

There are special groups who animate the ceremonies. By singing and dancing they console and give hope, and they also with gestures explain the meaning of the ceremony. This can be necessary as the participants may come from different corners of the world and may have forgotten the tradition. They can use new media and they can borrow elements

from different cultures; “Hybrid rites are created for hybrid minds due to social changes”. Despite this the original meaning of the ceremonies is not changed, and the tradition is carried on.

J.O.J. Nwachukwu-Agbada in his paper *A Critique of Social Change and Individual Behaviour in Abigbo Mbaise Dance Songs* analyzed the adaptability and validity of the Abigbo dance songs in Nigeria. Abigbo songs are satirical and lampooning statements about moral lapses, both individual and social, aimed at bringing the erring individual back into the community. The dance songs have always been part of Mbaise tradition, but experienced a revival after World War II when the demobilized Igbo soldiers who had fought in Europe's war returned to their villages, noisy, brash and amoral. (This behaviour, learned and brought home from Europe, sheds an ironic light on the racist images of African soldiers in European media after World War I in Stefan Jonsson's paper).

Nwachukwu-Agbada presents a number of song texts and concludes with a confident note; abigbo songs will continue to be relished and to exert pressure on people's sense of responsibility. Because they work on the imagination they are also good art.

One could say that the papers by Nwachukwu-Agbada and Sourou supported Taiwo Oloruntoba-Oju's thesis: modernity need not be a complete break with tradition.

Representation and its power over memory

This section takes up the theme of healing through memory, which was prevalent in the literature section and it discusses both the necessity and the difficulties of this process

In her paper *Art and Aesthetics in Representations of Slavery in South Africa* Gabeba Baderoon highlights a less known part of the history of slavery, namely the trade across the Indian Ocean, and the Cape slaves called (by the Dutch) “Malays”.

In contrast to the indigenous people who were considered lazy and unreliable the Malays were considered and portrayed by the settlers as skilled, compliant, placid and exotic. The picturesque surface veiled the violence, the sexual abuse and the internalized shame.

Gabeba Baderoon introduces the word “intimacy”, a word proposed by Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael arguing against the over-determination of the political, and the preoccupation with “closure” and “borders” connected to every discourse on the apartheid society.

She then goes on to analyze this theme with examples from fiction and art.

In Berni Searle's photographic installation *Colour Me* we see the naked body of the artist covered in spices, articulating the role of the spice trade at the Cape, the unveiling of the Muslim woman, and the forced availability of the slave women's bodies. The installation also poses the question “Who is being looked at, and what is the object that draws the gaze?”

In J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* Gabeba Baderoon detects “a deep awareness of colonial discourses about sexuality”. The reception of the novel has focussed on the rape of Lurie's daughter Lucy, the white woman, but Gabeba Baderoon draws attention to his sexual relationship with Soraya, a “literary summoning of the placid and picturesque ‘Malay’ figure”, thus deepening the conception of the complexity of the novel.

Rayda Jacobs' *The Slave Book* and Yvette Christianse's *Unconfessed* both have slave women as their heroines, the latter strongly focusing on the brutality of sexual abuse. From Robben Island, where Sila in *Unconfessed* is imprisoned the Cape is seen not as a place of beauty but of tears, death and struggles.

Gabeba Baderoon's conclusion is that fiction and art articulate the suppressed and bodily history of slavery, thus also revealing contemporary attitudes about race and sexuality in South Africa, and unsettling the “picturesque mode that has shaped perspectives of the Cape since the colonial period”.

Raisa Simola's paper *The Motif of Survival in Some Old and Modern Master-and-Slave Narratives* also dealt with slavery but from a different angle that could be called “how to survive as a slave”. She looks at two personal stories, one by an American slave, Frederick Douglass, an authentic person born 1818 writing his own life, and the other a piece of fiction by the Nigerian writer Uzodinma Iwela about a child soldier, set in a nameless country in a civil war. Both try to survive in an inhuman and brutalizing situation.

The discussion after the two papers raised questions of memory, story-telling, identity, the importance of the hidden and suppressed.

Françoise Sule and Christophe Premat in their paper *Literature re-members History: the Algerian war in 'Un regard blessé of Rabah Belmari and 'La malediction of Rachid Mimouni* also touched upon questions of identity, memory and history, and there are parallels to the hidden and suppressed in Baderoon's paper.

Using Fernand Braudel's writing on the Mediterranean culture they compared the two Algerian novels, the first, *Un regard blessé*, set during the Algerian war (1962), the second, *La malédiction*, during the elections won by the Islamic Front (1991). Both deal with the historical and political situation in Algeria, characterized, according to the writers, by loss of roots, amnesia and blindness (both physical and symbolic) in relation to the history and the future of Algeria as a nation-state. The country needs a collective identity, and here literature comes in.

Sule and Premat see literature as a resilient power, which deconstructs history in the Derridean sense; it does not destroy, on the contrary: it erases and adds meaning.

In her paper called *Museums, Media, Morality and Mijikenda Memorial Statues: Navigating African Art Repatriation in an Era of rising Cultural Identity Politics* Monica Udvardy told the exciting history of how she and Linda Giles found two *vigango* (plural of *kigango*) stolen from a Kenyan family. Thus also a question of identity and memory.

To make the fascinating story short: a *kigango* is a statue erected to a deceased man belonging to a secret organization on his homestead. It incarnates the man's spirit and it is prohibited to move it. Two such statues were nevertheless stolen from a Giriama family. Many years later Udvardy and Giles by chance found the statues in two American museums, Il-



Drissa Diakitè, Mali and Evelyn Lutwama-Rukundo, Uganda.

linois State Museum in Springfield and Hampton University Museum in Virginia. The story is about how they together with their colleague from the National Museum of Kenya tried to get the statues back to their real owners and finally succeeded. It is also a story about the ambivalent attitude of Western museums to cultural property repatriation; the two museums reacting very differently, and it makes a strong point of the interest in Kenya to promote national identity.

All in all, the conference was not only well organised, but characterised by frank and lively discussion and a mixture of seriousness and enjoyment. It was a particular advantage to bring together studies on different contemporary culture genres, which in the academia are often distant from each other, in different university slots. The common issues of identities, translation, market influence, and the contributions of the arts to the discourse on the past and the future – all gained from the variety of disciplines and geographic spread. The participation of a relatively high number of African scholars, many of them based in various African countries, added to the value of the conference.

African Night with Stars

Tuesday June 16



Shailja Patel, poet/
theatre artist/
activist, Kenya.



Ahmadu Jarr, Sierra
Leone/ Sweden
with members
of the Highlight
Orchestra.



Audience participation, Tolu Olungesiin in the foreground.



Gabeba Baderoon, poet, South Africa and Jennifer Ferguson.



Jennifer Ferguson, singer/songwriter South Africa/Sweden.



POETRY BY THREE GUEST WRITERS

Inviting guest writers from Africa has been one of the projects of the “Cultural Images in and of Africa” programme, which have been both well-known, and popular. The idea came from the well-known Ghanaian playwright, poet and novelist Ama Ata Aidoo, who pointed out that a programme on culture should also enable writers to enjoy the facilities and programme of the Nordic Africa Institute. She was invited as the first African guest writer at NAI in 2000, and visited both Norway and Finland during her stay.

Unfortunately Ama Ata Aidoo could not attend the June 2009 conference, but all three subsequent guest writers came, both to take part in the proceedings, and to contribute to the public programme. Gabeba Baderoon, guest writer at NAI in 2005, from South Africa and the US, the second guest writer at NAI (who had visited Denmark, Norway and Finland). She also presented a paper. Tolu Ogunlesi, guest writer at NAI in 2008, from Nigeria (who had visited Norway, Denmark and Finland) was able to extend a European visit to Uppsala. Shailja Patel, the guest writer at the time of the conference, gave evidence of her forceful performing poetry but also her talents as master of ceremonies at the African night with stars. All three guest writers contributed with their own poetry.

The three guest writers have generously given us a possibility to reproduce the following poems from their repertoire.

Mai Palmberg

Photo above: From left Shailja Patel, Tolu Ogunlesi, and Gabeba Baderoon.

Gabeba Baderoon

I CANNOT MYSELF

To come to this country,
my body must assemble itself

into photographs and signatures.
Among them they will search for me.

I must leave behind all uncertainties.
I cannot myself be a question.

Tolu Ogunlesi

THE CHELWOOD PAPERS – poem-in-progress

I

pussy cat, pussy cat
where else have you been?

to Birmingham to stew the Queen
in questions black-hot 'n spicy.

clutching a ticket that costs too much,
on a train whose doors throw tantrums

in an accent I nod to without hearing,
and without saying 'come again',

or 'pardon me'.
perhaps without even listening.

I will not ask you to listen to me either,
not now, not ever.

but I will ask for your weak sun, your safe passage,
your discounts, and your broadband.

II

The past is a foreign country.
So is the present.

I am a citizen of the Future
but my passport's in processing.

this poem (mobile bus-stop
between song and language)

is my transit visa, homeless
like me, speaking a foreign language

like me. together we will enslave
this language, like they enslaved us;

the vowel as victim, the consonant
in dissonance.

III

I am a translated man, learning
the art of translation, that I might cast

a cold, unforgiving eye
on these pages I inhabit.

every time my pen stumbles, it will draw
blood. We will pretend it is ink.

which is thicker, it's hard to tell,
and both clot, in case you didn't know.

IV

this language is not yours
but don't let that get to you.

language is not a bank account,
on which we earn interest

even if they sometimes want us to think so;
that there are hidden charges to be incurred

for not weaving your tongue like theirs.
take this land like an unsalted burger –

both with welcoming
arms, and a pinch of salt.

you will learn, and leave;
and learn to leave your money,

and parts of your tongue,
behind. Believe me.

Shailja Patel

PLEASE DO NOT TOUCH WORKS OF ART

some day I'll start a museum
where all works of Art
are for touching

itchy fingers can sink
into sculptures
stroke grained canvasses
trace calligraphy
on manuscripts
hands can swell
with contours corners

where you can sniff
Art if you choose
wrap your arms
around it roll it
across the floor

bite into it
if so moved
dismember if provoked
kick a piece
that triggers rage lick
the ones that unleash joy

Art that stays intact
will be retired

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Uppsala with its Fyris river from the Iron bridge.

Below, left: A runic stone near the university, the only one with its inscription in mirror view.

Below right: A guided walk through Uppsala involved a visit to the university library, where Stefan Jonsson explained the origin and misrepresentation of an old Mexican map in the library exhibition.

The conference dinner was held in the Linnaeus garden. Taiwo Oloruntoba-Oju from Nigeria bestowed Mai Palmberg with a booklet containing the contents for a promise of a Festschrift (left).

Shailja Patel in conversation with Mai Palmberg (below).

Gabeba Baderoon reads from *A hundred silences*, a book of poems written in Uppsala in 2005.



Elias Songoyi from Dodoma, Tanzania speaks, Mai Palmberg listens.

Robert Muponde, a former guest researcher from Zimbabwe and now Wits, reminiscences.

Mai Palmberg buried in flowers at the end of the day.





The Linnaeus garden.



What's culture got to do with it? was the name of an international conference on June 15-18, 2009 in Uppsala, organised by the "Cultural Images in and of Africa" research programme at the Nordic Africa Institute, and funded by the Riksbankens jubileumsfond and Statens kulturråd in Sweden.

Scholars participated from 15 countries and 36 universities or research institutes, with 10 African countries represented. This report reproduces the keynote speeches of Karin Barber, Elleke Boehmer, Stefan Jonsson, and Signe Arnfred. The rapporteurs summarise the presentation and discussion of the 27 papers selected for the conference. The report also contains pictorial memories from the conference, and poetry by the three Nordic Africa Institute guest writers present.

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978-91-7106-663-3

