

**African Literature and Culture in the Age of Globalization and Western Culture
Dominance**

By

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Abstract

The paper examines the characteristic nature of African Literature in relation to the manifesting influence of globalization and westernization of culture. The conceptual ideological tenets of African Literature aim to promote Africanity; that is, the promotion of African culture or anything that is African. However, the actual socio-cultural practices of the people of the continent are determined by the thoughts, initiatives and products of the people of the West. If it is the duty of literature to showcase the cultural values of its host society, then a contradiction ensues if African Literature sustains its resistance of the cultural values of the rest of the world especially, the Western culture. For more than a century the Western culture has been influencing life experiences across the world. African Literature intellectuals need to reflect this in their writings. African literature should shy away from ritual themes and the claimed pride and potential as its tenets and goals. Much attention should be given to the influence of globalization and Western culture on African culture. It has become unavoidable for African literature to address universal themes such as global peace, responsible consumption and sustainable cities and environment. This will make African literary works to be inclusive and globally relevant. It will also put African literary writers in good standing to win the Nobel Prize for literature again since Wole Soyinka won it in 1986. It will also be a genuine reflection of the Continent's contemporary social and cultural realities.

Key words: African Literature, Africanity, African culture, Western culture, Globalization

Introduction

African literature and culture interlink as the former draws themes and motifs from the later. The phrase 'African Literature' is a coining conceived to designate all forms of literature essentially in the written form which address the African socio-cultural and political peculiarities. Such peculiarities vary from one region of Africa to the other. They manifested as apartheid in South Africa; as corruption and civil war in East Africa; as military takeover and tyranny in West Africa, and the implication of religion and politics in the social system of most North African nations. The peculiarities of Africa could also be marked in the matrixes of underdevelopment such as epidemics, infrastructural deficit and decay, xenophobia in the millennial age, kidnapping, sky rocketing inflation, and terrorism. All these and more have redefined the social life in Africa. However, Western culture which globalization has spread to Africa and which has become so irresistible has reshaped the African cultural and social system much more. African Literature has been attempting to answer questions relating to social vices examples of which are listed above, and the infiltration of Western culture in Africa in an attempt to proffer lasting solutions to them. It is noted that, in order to attain this, however, intellectuals of African Literature necessarily need to come to term with the irreversibility of the phenomenon of universal culture which Western culture has posted to be in the global league of cultures as examined forth.

The paper employs Robert Merton's, Structural Strain Theory whose creed is the negotiation of the interface between the goal of a culture and the means of attaining cultural aspirations. The applicability of the Merton's Structural Strain Theory is seen in the interpretation that the means through which the goal of African culture (global relevance) could be attained is the recognition of the irresistibility of the Western culture by the custodians of African culture,

such as literary writers. It is argued in the discourse that intellectuals of African Literature need to liberalize the creeds of African Literature in order to tolerate the imposing advent of globalization.

African writers' promotion of Africanity, that is, the beauty of African indigenous culture in the age of globalization will make African literature limited in reach. This is because African literature which has derived its themes from the tradition and customs will be accessed mostly by traditional Africans and perhaps Africans in Diaspora only. The continued denial of Western culture by African writers through the promotion of Africanity, even though Western culture could be seen as a universal culture will not make African literature of any essence to the rest of the world. Therefore, intellectuals of African Literature need to realise and address the irreversibility of the phenomenon of universal culture in their works.

The author has adopted the principle of qualitative research in this paper. This is because the position of the author in the paper is based on rationalism and justification. The empiricist approach is employed too. This is necessary because indices of Western culture and indigenous African culture are cited and interpreted comparatively to arrive at the conclusion that Western culture has become irresistible in Africa and should no longer be undermined by the resident contemporary African literary writers.

The Phenomenon of the Universal Culture

A culture could be explained as the 'social behaviour' of the people in a given society (Oke 96). It could also be described as that part of the environment that is man-made in which case it refers to the values, beliefs as well as behaviours of a nationalistic or ethnic group in the words of Goldstein (2000). These two perspectives could be summed up as culture being the collection or body of those things that are common to a certain group of people. To this end, it could be

posited that culture manifests in all societies of the world. If culture is found in all societies, one may want to investigate, in order to affirm, the status of the cultures of the world in relation to each other. And it is asserted that cultures could be said to be superior to one another. The superiority of one culture to another is often hinged on a number of capabilities of the societies involved such as financial resources, natural resources, diplomatic influence or charm (voodoo or juju). However, since a number of hundreds of years ago, the significant determinant of culture superiority has been science and. Technology. In that case, it is submitted that a science and technology-driven culture is indubitably superior to that culture which is devoid of the capabilities or endowments of science and technology. Where two countries possess the capabilities of science and technology, the determinant of culture superiority is the depth of endowment, stage of advancement and inception.

In specific terms, it is obvious that in Africa today there is preference for Western or Occidental culture and to an extent such preference is accorded the Far Eastern culture. But the culture of the West predominates in Africa and in the global-culture context. If assessed from the bodily beauty or sartorial outlook, the dress images of the Western root have permeated the consciousness of Africans. The art productions (for example, the rap culture and the media productions, especially, radio and television, from the West set the images and modalities for those from the Orient, especially in Africa. If weighed from the science and technology perspective, the technology and its culture from the West are considered superior to those from the Orient. This stands to validate it that all cultures of the world are not the same. One is superior to the other. The basis for the comparison of cultures hangs on globalization which is an expansion into global market or the formation of alliances with partners in the rest of the world in its modes and variants (O'Brien, James and Marakas, George, 2007), (Utin, 2016) and Utin, 2023). In the context of

African culture as a unit of globalized cultural enclave, it may be self-denial for the custodians of African culture such as African literary writers to reject the phenomenon of Western cultural supremacy and the subjugation of the African Culture (a unified body of various unit cultures) under a superior culture, particularly from the West. A rejection of culture supremacy is high proclivity and unbridled leaning towards nationalism, which is a tool of isolation, no matter the amount of patriotism emanating from such nationalistic consciousness. Much as it is incontrovertible that scientific and industrial (technological activities) 'permeate all aspects of life in the West, and increase influence on life in the rest of the planet' (LukaSiewicz 37), there would be need for African writers as custodians of African literature to acknowledge the universalism of Western culture and reflect this in their writings. 'The rest of the planet' in the foregoing definitely includes the African continent, and, as such, 'life' in the quotation above is synonymous with 'culture'. By this token, the cultures of Africa have been modified, and to this extent reduced to artistic memorabilia for memory and reminiscence and to elements for pedagogical instructions. Today, the face of Africa is a replica of the images of the White social life. Most Africans – a substantial number as it is – attempt to look like, and nearly look like their white folks. In terms of technological products, infrastructural development, language use, agricultural practices, means of communication, including the new media, manner of voting, media productions (including animatics) and so on, Africa simulates the Western or Occidental neo-culture. This is undeniable. Therefore, there is a universal culture in the connected rings (globalization) of cultures, the nationalistic narratives of Africans notwithstanding.

The dispositions of African tribal groups to one another attest to the phenomenon of the super-culture, a culture that is superior to its contending peers. There have been cases of minority groups being overrun by majority groups in history in numerous wars waged by Africans against

each other and themselves, especially before colonialism. This was a phenomenon that persists till today. The Pondo tribe and the Zulu tribe, in South Africa and Ife and Modakeke in West Africa are instances of such desire for the installation of cultural supremacy even among Africans. The conflict often occurred(s) because the conquered group would be submerged in the culture of the conqueror tribe. This is made possible by the phenomenal situation that 'No African group or culture was insulated against change brought about by contacts with other peoples' according to Falola (19). In the context of any given two contending tribes, the ways of life of the invading contender by default become the super-culture in that scenario. Therefore, in the White-Black tribal cultural dichotomy, the culture of the White is the super-culture. This is a reflectionist expostulation. Therefore, the question of polemic on the appropriateness of the position does not arise. This is a submission based on the framework of the influence of a visiting culture on its host and the embrace of the tenets of the visiting culture by the people of the destination culture. The hypothetical assertion runs valid when it is considered that royal figures in Africa do lay claim to being superior to one another in the African clime, whereas each royal figure is a symbol of a culture. That means that cultures in Africa are superior to one another.

African Literature, Cultural Inclusivity and Globalization

In the context of this discourse, the West-Eastern culture, broadly speaking, constitutes the global super-culture which has engulfed the African contemporary cultural space. And owing to this, African Literature unavoidably bears a new burden that is, reflecting the new sensibilities which accompany the infiltration (advent) of the Global Super-Culture (GSC) in African autochthonous consciousness. African Literature cannot shy away from the unstoppable, rather determined and consistent resolve of the elements of the Global Super-Culture to *endure and sustain* in the African world view. Today, the internet and its host (the computer) as well as their

products, the social networks, have brought a novel orientation hitherto considered unprecedented to the world and to Africa. The results of this situation are precocity and savvy in people across ages. The African populace is therefore smarter than ever. Evolution has complemented this for the Global Super-Culture with the breeding of a new species of Africans – *the Homosupro*. This new species constitutes the new generation of Africans born approximately in the millennium – the end of year 2000 and the beginning of year 2001.

It could be averred that this period marked the consciousness of active globalization in Africa, though the globalization consciousness had been part of the elements of the revolutionizing Western culture since 1990 (McKay, Crowston, Wiesner-Hanks and Perry 2015). The result of this development is the formation of the Global Super Culture super highway. To Africans Globalization and the Millennium were synonymous with enlightenment. This was because they now were aware of what used to be in the dark before, could do what they considered an impossible thing, and had access to innumerable opportunities. All these were because ‘globalization transformed the lives of millions of people as the technological changes associated with postindustrial society... remade workplace and lifestyle around the world (964). Owing essentially to this psychic revolution, the youth in the Millennium started querying African norms, mores, and myths. Today, the children of the millennial youth are dispelling such norms, mores and myths. The offspring of the millennial youth who fall with the age bracket of between one day and seventeen years (periodization is approximate) are precocious and inquisitive. They are daring and adventurous. This is because their parents (the millennial youth) did not train and are not training them by African traditional ethical postulations.

The concern of African Literature in terms of the issues it addresses in society compellingly needs to change. Literary authors in Africa need to intensify concentration on issues

of more social impact: the society and the psyche of the people have changed. African Literature cannot afford to still stick to the sensibility that literary productions from the continent should be about ritual, folklore, divinities, numen or geniis and the phantasmagoria of loric creativities under the guise of culture promotion. Literature of emotional nationalism and agitation cannot contribute significantly to the development of African nations. It is accepted that storytelling, singing and dance are constituents of 'African tradition and culture and invariably, the root of African literature' (Yerima 14). Ritual has also been identified as platform for the development of African Literature. However, such was the realities of the time in Africa. There were no nagging issues of continental or national integration in the mode it takes today. There was no Xenophobia in South Africa as perpetrated against Nigerians in 2016. There was no kidnapping in Nigeria. There was no migration into Western Europe from Africa and the Orient. The question of child abuse or child labour was then seen as traditional and normal. There was no clamor for the development of Africa's own technology. Capital flight was non-existent. Cyber crime was strange in the English lexis in Africa. There was no vehemence by some women with the intention of decimating patriarchy (that is, there was no feminist ideology) and there was no infrastructural deficit. But today, all these malaise do militate against Africa. They are the bane of Africa's retardation. The vices, consequently, stymie the continent's progress.

However, African literature changes in mode and responsibility as social circumstances evolve. There was a new African Literature as against another which Chinua Achebe calls 'old' which '... is aware of the possibilities available to it for celebrating humanity in our continent'. (Achebe 122). If Achebe spoke about a new African Literature a decade ago, it could then be argued that there is indeed a new(er) African Literature with a heavier social responsibility in

addition to the felicitous one Achebe ascribed to it. This is pruning the ritual contents of African Literature or flowery affairs in Africa's social life.

Practitioners of African Literature should reflect more, in fact predominantly, the ingrainedness of the creed of the Global Super Culture in our social life in Africa. To the specifics, a moderate comedy on the inability of certain individuals to operate, hence use consistently, the Automated Teller Machine as the situation is in Africa is appropriate. Such a satire needs to portray what such individuals are losing as a result of this incapability. What they lose could be efficiency in their daily affairs, self-esteem and the implication of this in the socio-economic development of the nations concerned. Breeding a populace which is not vibrant, smart and sophisticated will certainly hamper development. If such a play is written on such a subject matter, it could be performed at theatres and produced in video format by the practitioners in Nollywood or Ghanywood or both, thereby making it accessible to many of the African populace in any category. Again the question of gender law in North Africa or unimpeded women's right in religion needs additional bloc voice for prominence and due attention. It is surely not a pleasant development that in North Africa women are still yearning for '... their voices to be heard. They want their basic human rights to be respected in societies that are free and fair to all' (Naib, 2012). African Literature can do more apart from but in addition to the *lone* and *lonely* voice of Nawal el Saadawi from the region in realizing this lofty desire of the women in that part of Africa. The question of total freedom for women in North Africa, and important creed of democracy and provision of the charter of the United Nations, can be pursued collectively just as apartheid was in South Africa.

It is acknowledged that African writers have been writing about contemporary issues affecting the continent, but the focus in the discourse specifically is on the modernization of the African social system – the impact of the Super-Culture. The emphasis is on the admittance by the

intellectuals of African Literature that Global Super Culture has modified Africanity greatly, if not exterminated it. This cause has to be pursued, in whatever form it may come, at whatever cost it may do. The impact of the Global Super Culture is too massive and relevant to Africa and its development agenda, to be treated as addendum or undermined, outright. If this occupies the themes of Africa's literary productions, it is more result-oriented hence relevant than literature of rituals, the inner circle of African pantheon much of which has been heard and debated. African Literature should thus far desist from productions of rhetorical nationalism. Such is a literature of denial, betrayal and subterfuge. It takes Africa not a step forward.

Should the culture of the African autochthony be of further interest to African Literature? Indeed. To the extent that the message conveyed is the modernization of the different units of the African culture. The current plays that Ahmed Yerima produces such as *Abobaku*, *Iyase*, *Jakadiya* and *The last Grain of Wheat* are along the line of modernization of African culture. The tragedy of African culture that engulfs the entire plays affirms the irresistibility of such modernization leaning. This sets the appropriate tone. African Literature should reduce the intensity of its pro-African culture leaning. This is because the more the vitriolic the campaign against the Global Super Culture, the stronger the Global Super Culture is. Such a campaign has achieved nothing in terms of its goal of returning Africans to their 'cultural root'. The campaigners for the sanctity of African Culture need to come to terms with the realities of the state of African culture. The culture has been evolving and revolving since Africa's antiquity. Which state of the evolution and revolution of the culture therefore, should the contemporary African society return to? The hunter-gatherer period when people wore animal skin? Or the age of the formation of the ways of life of the people or the modern culture? Any one that is *returned* to, there would always be another to

still return to. This is a contradiction which signifies the futility of the campaign for a return to the *pristine* African culture.

As a result of this state of the African culture, African literature needs to arrest the mere rhetoric of the earlier (especially the pioneer) writers in their earlier works. Perhaps such colonial works such as Casely Hayford's *Ethiopia Unbound: Studies in Race Emancipation*, Herbert Dhlomo's *The Girl Who Killed to Save: Nongawuse the Liberator* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* might need to be reassessed and certain opinions by professional critics, reviewers, analysts or evaluators examined. The works glorified past African cultural practices and made the coming of the white an anomaly, rather than a balanced presentation of the two cultures – European and African, even in the bare face of the lamentation of the advent of the alien culture. The rhetoric of these texts beclouded the merit of the coming of the white. The education the white brought was embraced by most of the writers; today as has been all along, Africans are more proud of the religions the Europeans brought than the African traditional religions. One wonders what Africa would look like today if the Europeans had not come to Africa. To this end, if African Literature may concern itself with African culture, it needs be for the liberalization of the culture in line and tune with what is progressively realistic and obtainable today. The era of literature of rhetoric and nationalism is gone. It belongs to the old literature. Contemporary African writers should not be accomplices in making Africa, Africans and African culture breathe in bitter self-denial. African Literature should not be a literature of clanship. It should not proclaim cultural annihilation. It should rather reflect the irresistible imposing influence of globalization in its focus. It should therefore be a literature of inclusive cultural enlightenment.

African writers need to be conscious of the improvement in the cerebral capability of the new breed of Africans – the millennial children and the millennial youth in terms of their precocity.

Such consciousness needs to reflect in the materials of knowledge contained in their literary works. For example, the children of today's Africa would debunk most of the claims in the past African fables. Writers of contemporary African fables should therefore realize the effect of the Global Super Culture on the African children. Such literary works intended for children should not be made overt or covert advocacies for the inculcation of certain regressive traditional African ethical principles. The children have received universal empirical knowledge on Nickelodeon. Indigenizing the minds of the African child varies from one region of Africa to the other and it is divergent, but takes the form that children's minds are held in shackles. When children are taught that questioning elders is effrontery and rude, and that elders are always right; when children are trained to believe that eating egg can make them steal, such that on the rare occasion when they are allowed to eat egg, it is a rare favor. This didactic ethical sensibility inferiorizes the African child. African Literature should denounce such autochthonous consciousness as it hampers the future of Africa.

Cognitive tendencies are crucial in the comprehension of the course, mode as well as objectives of a bloc advocacy such as African Literature. It is particularly so for African Literature because of a number of factors. The first of such could be seen in the complexity of the African continent itself. Such complexity arises from such phenomena as mangled evolutionary and cultural history, advent of multi-layer imperialism, tribal infighting, multiplicity of ethnicities, obfuscated demography, as well as pro-Occidental disposition. Also, the intellectual prowess a writer necessarily needs to demonstrate to attain originality and master-piece status for the literary work emphasizes the huge space for high cognition in African Literature. Literature is literature only if it complies with and, therefore, showcases Longinus' sublimity enunciation. This is especially so when the author applies the principle about himself for himself. This time around,

the reader is not in focus – the writer, himself, is. This manifests in the writer’s deliberate search for and use of appropriate register in the execution of an idea in a given field. It is incontrovertible that to deploy the appropriate register of a profession, for example, *uncommon* words are featured. To individuals who are not familiar with the field and register, the phraseology or language of a given writer at that juncture is sublime. In the same vein, literature is a multi-disciplinary field.

The new African Literature which has been motivated by a new direction and sensibility emanating from the tenets of the millennium and globalization needs be forward-looking. Therefore, references to Africa’s past need be avoided. The circumstances of Africa’s emergence, the near primitive nature, foibles of humanity such as ego and covetousness made horrendous incidents happen in Africa's past: ‘No topic illustrates Africa’s position in international system better than slavery...’ (Falola 29). ‘Africa was partitioned, then conquered, and finally, subjected to formal European administration and rule’ (Stilwell 3). ‘Africa’s Post-independence history has been characterized by conflict and wars from the Horn of Africa to Western Sahara and East, Central and Southern Africa to West Africa’ (Adeyemo 3). ‘Ethnic politics have triggered bloody and destructive conflicts and... slowed down the process of unity and nation-building...’ (Adekunle 219). In whatever perspective they are considered, these constituents of the Africa’s historical past are unsettling. They still breed disaffection between Africans and the whites or between Africans themselves. African Literature should therefore distance itself from underscoring these as resources of its products. A literary text (of any genre or sub-genre) which still narrates tribal wars in the age of civilized psyche is opening old wound and is capable of pitching the people who were not involved in the tribal conflict at the time against each other. Unity suffers the consequence. Such should be left to mainstream history. Historical narrations are characteristically devoid of rhetoric that would spike reprisal ill will.

The new African Literature should be rendered in appropriate language. 'Appropriate' here means 'expressing the realistic'. It would be noted that a new sensibility has been instilled in the African worldview brought about by the millennial episteme. Therefore, the language choice of the new African Literature should not be replete with too many African proverbial idioms, since an idiom is 'a phrase or an expression whose meanings cannot be determined from the literal meanings of the individual words in it' (Joseph 96). It would be a huge burden on the contemporary reader to elicit the meanings of these expressions. Meaning or understanding is impeded in the process. Will literature regain its status as the chief source of entertainment in stiff competition with other sources such as video and the internet with such brand of language? Definitely not! This is because *archaicity* bellows from the text if rendered in such language. *Archaicity* comes to relevance because the contemporary reader of African Literature might not have heard many of such idioms (or proverbs) since the African languages are not being spoken by the substantial portion of the population. When the languages are spoken, it is the *modernized* (colloquial) version of the languages, that is, those that are mixed, unavoidably, with English or French that are spoken. It is the influence of the penetration of the Global Super Culture.

There is no polemic as to the propriety of the attitude of the people to the African languages. Such is not the concern of this discourse. The discourse, at this juncture, rather evaluates the state of African Literature and how it will contribute to the progress of Africa from the language perspective. The reality is English and French are world languages. They hold Africa together and make the continent (and Africans) including African Literature relevant to themselves, and to the rest of the world. Without any sense of prejudice, the two global languages (English and French) *sell* certain products to the global humanity. These products are technology and science. They provide the commodities that drive the current world. Such commodities

include, for example, air planes, ships, phones and tablets, computers, televisions, space craft as well as scientific discoveries. All of these are accessed only through the languages of the producing nations. If the current world cannot run without the commodities' as afore-listed, then Africans would be able to avoid these global languages. This emphasizes the need for the development of the means through which African technological and scientific commodities will be produced. However, pending the time when this will be a reality, when Africa's technology and science will come to fruition, African languages need be contented with the spare-use roles they play currently in the communication system on the continent. As is the situation in the current African social dispensation, African languages are merely ceremonial in functions. Or at best they perform the function of effecting family or clannish bond through references to cultural heritage. This is the unavoidable impact of the Global Super Culture on the African world view. This African Literature necessarily needs to concern itself with.

African literature has got to be consistently dynamic as the social circumstances dictate. Such dynamism derives precedence in Wole Soyinka's response to the manifesting social situation in the formulation of his literary themes as affirmed in the revelation:

In the mid-1970s, Soyinka published a number of works that collectively seemed to indicate departure from the direction and tenor of his previous imaginative works and, particularly, his critical writings. At the most apparent level, this rupture between the Soyinka of the late 1950s through the 1960s to the early 1970s, and the Soyinka who began to emerge in the mid-1970s seems so fundamental... (Jeyifo 42).

The departure that Jeyifo mentions above signifies change or adjustment. To this end, we can see a description of Wole Soyinka as writing to reflect the palpably imposing social realities as witnessed at a given period of time in society. The suggestion from this illustration is that the society is not static. Events do occur from time to time. Orientations do change rather constantly.

Belief systems do adjust according to such constant events and orientations. The literature that is produced in such a fast-moving social system should keep up with the fast pace by portraying the new orientation.

Conclusion

The readiness of writers of African Literature to constantly adjust to the changing African society, therefore, would aid in a substantial measure, the actualization and accomplishment of the social vision of the continent through a more substantial successes of African literature at the global stage. This is through cultural inclusivity and the globalization of the products of a redefined African literature which now features themes that are globally competitive and relevant. The manifesting social circumstance in the present Africa is the irremovable influence of the Western culture on the world view of the continent of Africa. It is no option that African Literature should depart from the energy-sapping trivialities arising from culture-promotion thematization which has dominated the Continent's literary epistemology. This however diverges from manifesting realities. African literature's potential resistance or outright rejection of, as well as failure to recognize, and embrace, the influence of Western culture in African literature limits the extent to which African literature will go on the global stage. Also, the continued berating of Western culture through Africinity denies the dynamism of African culture and this has taken African culture and literature to the present limited extent. Furthermore, sustaining Africinity in African literature by African writers is self-denial, disingenuous and inimical. This, ultimately, is to the disadvantage of African literature because not many people across the world will be able to embrace African literature. This therefore limits the potential of African literature. Yet, such is capable of driving the knowledge system of the African continent into retrogression and

degeneration as the whole world has shrunk into one global village where culture unification is possible through persistent interculturalism.

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